

# Introduction

## A. Owen Aldridge: A Profile for Taiwan

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### ABSTRACT

A. Owen Aldridge, after a distinguished career in the West as a comparatist turned his attention to East-West literary relationships largely as a result of invitations from academic organizations and universities in Taiwan. Devoting his scholarly career to both literature and history, he assumes that these disciplines represent complementary aspects of the same intellectual enterprise. Literature consists of intellectual communication partaking of emotional and esthetic elements; while history involves the recording and interpretation of everything that has taken place in human experience. Both are based upon (1) the written word as reflecting the actual course of events in the world of reality, (2) the recording of these events along with those of the imagination, and (3) observations on the way in which the recording process takes place.

### KEY WORDS

Aristotle  
Jacques Bénigne Bossuet  
Auguste Comte  
Dante  
history  
interpretation  
discourse

Sigmund Freud  
Karl Marx  
Otto Ranke  
Mme de Staël  
literature  
imagination  
comparative literature



A. Owen Aldridge has been an invited speaker at seven international conferences on comparative literature at Tamkang University and the same honor has been extended to him at four meetings of the English Teachers' Association of the Republic of China. Beyond this he has served as visiting professor at National Chen Chi University and visiting chair professor at National Tsing Hua University. Over the years he has also lectured extensively at various other institutions of the Republic of China, including Soochow University and the Graduate School of Foreign Literature and Languages, Fu Hsing Kang College. Twenty of his articles on Chinese-Western literary relations have been published in Taiwan in addition to those published in the United States, Canada, France, and England.

Aldridge did not devote his attention to Chinese and other East Asian literatures, however, until relatively late in his career. Born in Buffalo, New York, 16 December 1915, he attended a local public grammar school affiliated with a teachers' college. Greatly impressed by the student teachers who occasionally sat in the rear of his classroom as observers, he decided at an early age to dedicate his own career to pedagogy, a decision-making process he has frequently recounted to his own students. His first university degree, therefore, was a B. S. in Ed., which he obtained at Indiana University in 1937. He had originally intended to major in history (one of the reasons why the theme of the present special issue is particularly appropriate), but because of the influence of a remarkably capable professor of French, he decided to pursue literature instead, eventually graduating with four majors (English, French, history, and education).

Since this was a period of economic depression and little demand existed for teachers of French, he continued his work in graduate

school with an English major and a history minor. He received his M.A. from the University of Georgia in 1938 and his Ph.D. from Duke University in 1942. After passing in five years from instructor to associate professor at the University of Buffalo, he went as full professor to the University of Maryland in 1947. His extensive publications on English and American literatures earned him a Fulbright Fellowship to France in 1951-1952, during which he taught at the universities of Toulouse and Clermont-Ferrand and enrolled in the comparative literature program at the Sorbonne, receiving a *Docteur de l'Université* degree in 1955. His thesis on Benjamin Franklin and his French contemporaries has been published in both French and English. After resuming his duties at the University of Maryland, in 1963 Aldridge established the journal *Comparative Literature Studies* and shortly after moved with it to the University of Illinois. Here he published one of the earliest manuals in the comparatist discipline, *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method* (University of Illinois Press, 1969), reprinted in Taiwan by Bookman Books in 1979.

Retiring from the University of Illinois in 1986, Aldridge during the following year occupied the Will and Ariel Durant Chair at Saint Peter's College in Jersey City, and in 1988 served as visiting professor of comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University. In 1988 he went to Korea as Fulbright Distinguished Professor, lecturing at both Seoul National University and Korea University.

Aldridge's invitation in 1971 to attend the first Tamkang conference on comparative literature came because of the organizers' desire to make the meeting truly international by the presence of two or three comparatists from the Western hemisphere. They asked the advice of Wai-lim Yip of the University of California at San Diego, who, after consulting one of his colleagues, Claudio Guillén, recommended Aldridge. At this historically significant conference Aldridge delivered one of his most notable studies, "Voltaire and the Cult of China," which was later published in the *Tamkang Review* 3 (1972): 149-63 and in a later collection of Aldridge's East-West essays, *The Reemergence of World Literature* (University of Delaware Press, 1986). At the Tamkang meeting Aldridge was asked to compose a critical summary

of the entire conference, which he delivered there orally and later published in the United States in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* under the title "Comparative Literature East and West: An Appraisal of the Tamkang Conference" 21 (1972): 65-70. Aldridge delivered similar recapitulations at the next five conferences, each one appearing in the succeeding volume of the *Tamkang Review*. He later interwove the highlights of these synopses into a chapter of his book *The Reemergence of World Literature*. Aldridge was an invited speaker also at the maiden meetings of comparative literature associations in England, Spain, and Mainland China.

Aldridge has been one of the most active members of the American Comparative Literature Association [ACLA]. In 1976 he organized a special meeting of the group in Philadelphia to commemorate the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence of the American nation, and in 1977 he organized a triennial meeting of the ACLA, which took place on his own campus, the University of Illinois. Aldridge served on the advisory board of the International Comparative Literature Association from 1970-1978 and on the advisory board of the ACLA from 1965-1971 and 1974-1977. He was elected to serve for a three-year term as vice-president of the ACLA in 1977 and for a three-year term as president in 1980. The ACLA and the journal *Comparative Literature Studies* have jointly established the A. Owen Aldridge Prize for the best article published each year in *CLS* by a graduate student.

Three separate Festschriften have been published in Aldridge's honor. The first of these, *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment* (University of Delaware Press, 1987), edited by J. A. Leo Lemay, draws attention to his books and articles on eighteenth-century America and England; the second, *Aesthetics and the Literature of Ideas* (University of Delaware Press, 1990), edited by François Jost with the assistance of Melvin J. Friedman, celebrates his contributions to the discipline of comparative literature; and the third *Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West* (University of Delaware Press, 1997), edited jointly by Masayuki Akiyama and Yiu-nam Leung, honors his publications on East-West relations.

Aldridge's major accomplishment in the latter area is *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment* (Wayne State University Press, 1992), a work that had its genesis as a plenary paper at the fifth Tamkang conference in 1987. It is reviewed as the final essay in the present collection. A bibliography of Aldridge's writings on East-West relations up to 1996 may be found in *Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West*. Articles published after that date include: "The Vindication of Philosophical Optimism in a Pseudo-Confucian Imitation of Voltaire's *Candide*," *Asian and African Studies* 6 (1997): 117-125; "Globalization, Localization, and *This Culture of Ours*: An Introduction," in special issue "Sinology and Cross-Cultural Studies," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 24 (1997): 797-806; "An Eighteenth-Century Parallel between China and England," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 24 (1997): 807-818; "Lin Yutang and the Genre of Cultural Utopia," *Asian Culture Quarterly* 26 (1998): 53-62; "Irving Babbitt and Lin Yutang," *Modern Age* 41 (1999): 318-327; and "Preface" to Pu Ning's *Flower Mirror* (Dumont, New Jersey: Homa & Seka Books, 1999).

Although many former students and colleagues from Taiwan and other parts of East Asia have profited in large measure from Aldridge's dedication to East-West studies, the relationship has been reciprocal. He has publicly acknowledged his debt to his Asian students in the following statement reprinted from a special issue of *Publications of the Modern Language Association* celebrating the hundredth anniversary of that organization.

During a half century of full-time university teaching, my most rewarding experience has involved students from the Far East. My first contact came through a married couple from Japan enrolled in my seminar in eighteenth-century literature. These students and a host of others from Asia not only introduced me to unfamiliar cultures and corrected mistaken notions of customs that I had not previously understood, but helped me to look at Western literary works from new points of view. My personal life has

also been greatly enriched by enduring friendships with Asian colleagues and former students, physically manifest by oriental porcelain and other artifacts in my living room. Even more important, these contacts have made me cognizant of national histories and entire literatures about which I was previously totally ignorant. Although this acquaintance supplemented by the reading of translations and by more or less lengthy visits to Far Eastern universities is in one sense highly superficial, the experience as a whole has, nevertheless, greatly expanded my awareness of universal history, philosophy, and literary themes. I originally became involved with comparative literature in the period before the discipline generally endorsed the concept of universal literature and long before my first visit to Asia. Although comparative literature has recently shifted its emphasis toward theory and problems of multiculturalism, thanks to my Asian students I am still able to engage in comparisons on an international scale, tracing the influence of individual Asian authors and themes upon Western culture and letters. (2043)

Aldridge's former Ph.D. students now teaching in Asian universities include one in Japan, one in Korea, three in Hong Kong, and seven in Taiwan. Aldridge has also had close personal and professional ties with senior scholars in these countries, including Masayuki Akiyama in Japan, Seong-kon Kim in Korea, Heh-hsiang Yuan in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the late Limin Chu in Taiwan.

Although Aldridge has never professed to have any particular expertise in literary theory as distinguished from literary criticism and history, he published as far back as 1982 in *Clio: A Journal of Literature, History and the Philosophy of History* an essay on "The Interplay of History and Literature." The remainder of this introduction will summarize his comments.

As a primary step, Aldridge defines the two disciplines: literature "consists of communication by written words or symbols when the

purpose of communication involves some degree of emotional or esthetic response as well as mere transference of information;" history "examines, analyzes and interprets the surviving remains and records of everything that has happened to mankind."<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, everything that exists or has taken place in the world belongs to either literature or history. Both are based upon the written word as reflecting (1) the actual course of events or the world of reality, (2) the record of these events or those of the imagination, and (3) observations on the way in which real or imaginary events are recorded (262).

History changes the interpretation of literature and literature changes the interpretation of history. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example, has had completely different meanings in the Renaissance, the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. History has encountered similar shifts in interpretation: Bossuet and many of his fore-runners believed that history reveals the divine will; Voltaire, that history reveals the manners and morals of nations; Freud, that history reveals the influence of childhood on later life, and Marx, that history reveals a dialectical process leading toward collectivist societies. Mme de Staël published a treatise examining "the influence of religion, manners and laws on literature and the influence of literature on religion, manners and laws."<sup>2</sup> Carrying this sociological perspective even further, many historians and literary critics today maintain that society is composed of competing factions based on ethnicity, culture, and gender.

Aristotle considered history and literature as separate disciplines, history describing that which has happened or the particular, and literature that which could happen or the universal. It may be objected, however, that history "looks at the past in terms of generalities; literature concentrates on individual protagonists and individual situations" (264). Northrop Frye observed that the historian arranges his data without subjecting them to "informing patterns until his research has been completed; whereas the poet imposes his patterns deductively upon his subject matter."<sup>3</sup> Four major theorists of the nineteenth century, Droysen, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Croce, however, "suggested that the historical process represents an amalgamation of Aristotle's no-

notions of poetry and history” (267). It cannot be denied, moreover, that the creation of literature is part of history and the creation of history part of literature. Histories of literature may be considered as belonging to either history or literature and the same duality exists in regard to national histories written with exceptional literary skills such as those of Voltaire and Gibbon. The history of ideas and intellectual history may also be considered as either history or literature. Extreme practitioners of these genres such as “formalists and structuralists strenuously maintain that it is legitimate to treat literary works completely abstracted from their authors and even to ‘decompose’ and reconstruct them” (265).

Historians who believe in the possibility of a high degree of objectivity, Otto Ranke, for example, have been termed positivists, the term deriving from the sociologist Auguste Comte. “The aim of positivist-oriented history like that of realist fiction is to recreate things as they were, but most historiographers and literary critics maintain that the effort is futile. The past can never be reconstructed or even described, in the famous phrase of Ranke, ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen.’ History, nevertheless, must be related to life, that is, to actual experiences and events in the lives of actual people” (268).

We may safely conclude, I believe, that students of literature and students of history are engaged in a joint enterprise, the interpretation of the record of the past, or, perhaps more specifically as Toynbee says, the attempt to make sense of the past. Both historians and literary critics, according to the French historian Michelet, explain to past ages ‘their own enigmas which they could not understand’ in order to teach them the meaning of their own words and their own acts. . . . Literary criticism, for example, has adopted from history its basic method of scholarship, including rules of evidence and techniques of verification. Despite the formalists, a knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding most literary texts is, moreover, absolutely fundamental to their interpretation. As the his-

torian Gibbon remarked about Virgil, for example, 'it is impossible to feel the plan, the art, and the details' in his work 'unless one knows thoroughly the history, laws, and religion of the Romans, the geography of Italy, the character of Augustus, and the singular and unique relations of the prince to his senate and his people.' The novelist Balzac introduced into one of his novels a detailed discussion of the political situation in France in the previous generation and explained in terms similar to Gibbon's that his novel could not be properly understood without this background of historical knowledge.

The contribution of literature to history may be less apparent, but it is nonetheless just as substantial. Literature provides, first of all, rules of rhetoric or methods for effective communication. It also provides copious illustration and pertinent quotations, which both aid in interpreting events and enliven the style. Marx, for example, quotes literature more abundantly than statistics. Historians also draw upon past writings for their actual substance. Literature is the major source, for example, of knowledge of the conventions of chivalry in the Middle Ages. (269)

The studies by Aldridge's friends and admirers in the present collection illustrate the principle that nearly all written discourse contains elements of both history and literature. The essay by Barbara Maggs most closely resembles conventional chronological history as it summarizes the accounts of Western travelers to Vietnam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I-chun Wang portrays contemporary Vietnam as an example of cultural history in an incisive interpretation of the British hit musical *Miss Saigon*, which paradoxically has more to say about the culture of the United States than about that of Vietnam. Cecile Chu-chin Sun's interpretation of the translation process from Chinese poetry into English seems on the surface to be anti-historical in that it begins as a synchronic exercise—comparing texts without reference to the times in which they were written. Its ingenious conclu-

sion, however, explains some of the fundamental aspects of English linguistics by tracing them to classical and Biblical origins. She legitimately ascribes differences between Chinese and English conceptions of the world order to historical backgrounds, particularly in the Western pre-romantic and romantic periods. Biblical translations are likewise the source of Marián Gálik's erudite combination of linguistic, historical, and critical scholarship in his survey of Chinese literary portrayals of Jesus. John J. Deeney's analysis of the personal reflections of Rousseau and Shen Fu uncovers various logical and emotional patterns. These and other autobiographical works are often viewed as types of personal history conveyed in an esthetic frame. Hsin-ya Huang combines biography, gender, and ethnic culture as the essential elements in a rigorous analysis of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Shuei-may Chang also draws on theories of gender in a depiction of Lu Hsün's "Regrets for the Past" as related to Ibsen's character Nora and the May Fourth movement. Koon-ki Tommy Ho analyzes Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* in relation to Bai Hua's *There Was a Country of Women Far Away*, both of which demonstrate that idyllic or utopian visions are more likely to be realized through love than through revolution. Eugene Eoyang Chen's highly visionary essay on "The Advent of a Traditional Future," a notable example of post-modernism in the literal sense, dramatically foretells the part history will play in the globalization process in the years to come. Kevin J. Hayes examines the literary reputation of Balzac at the end of the nineteenth century and in early twentieth century and explains the reasons why some of the writings by this French author enjoyed their fortune in America. The collection appropriately concludes by returning from the future to a review of Aldridge's 1992 publication of *The Dragon and the Eagle* and Masayuki Akiyama's and Yiu-nam Leung's 1997 edition of *Crosscurrents of Asia and the West: Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Both of these definitions appeared originally in the *Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, the first by Aldridge himself, the second by Boyd C. Shafer.

<sup>2</sup> *Literature considered in Its Relations with Social Institutions* (Paris, 1818) 1: 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963) 53-54.

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