Modern Developments in Chinese-Western Comparative Literature Studies: A Golden Decade (1977-1987) for the "Chinese School"

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In the beginning of this essay, "Retrospective Look," I will briefly make a quick review of some of the distinguishing characteristics of comparative literature in the Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China Mainland areas as they have developed *historically*. Then, in the second section, "Future Prospects," I will examine some of the ways the "Chinese School" has been described *ideologically* by comparatists from the first time the term appeared over a decade ago.

I. Retrospective Look at Chinese Comparative Literature Developments

In describing some of the special features of comparative literature in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the China Mainland, we can appropriate Wai-lim Yip's useful "models" concept of intersecting circles to describe what the East and West have in common and what makes them different. Taking China as representative of the East, let us modify Yip's "Eastern" circle, by adding a set of three smaller intersecting circles in order to represent what Taiwan, Hong Kong and the China Mainland have in common (the shaded areas) and what makes them different (See Figure 1).[1]

Actually, these neat circles do not combine as conveniently as the diagram illustrates; in fact, each circle more closely resembles a blob of ever-expanding, ever-contracting protoplasm that defies abstract analysis.

What I wish to call the reader's attention to here, however, is that the

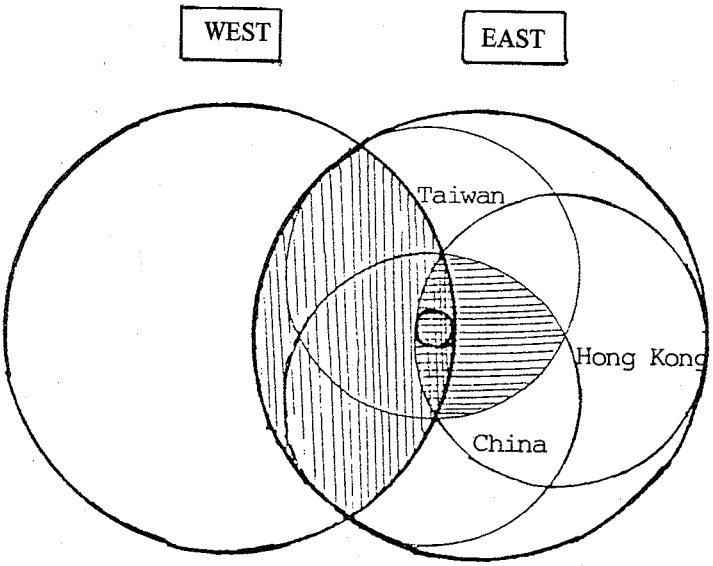

Figure 1.

unshaded areas of *differences* considerably exceed the shared areas of similarity. The former are relatively undefined and unexplored *terrae incognitae* and, therefore, are far more interesting and challenging for comparative studies than merely locating areas which can be held in *common.*

In an earlier essay, I have traced some of the obvious things Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the China Mainland have in common under the general categories of "Academic and Research Institutions," "Meetings and Associations," and "Books and Journals."[2] Cutting across these categories is the insistence from all three geographical areas that comparative literature studies should not remain a monopoly of the West but should also be investigated from a Chinese perspective. This premise is followed by two hopeful consequences and benefits: comparative literature studies from the Chinese perspective may be of considerable use in re-vitalizing the native literary tradition itself (for instance, in the selected application of alternative approaches to Chinese works), and these studies may also be instrumental in enriching world literature by contact with China's long literary heritage (for instance, in Chinese-Western comparative translation studies). This Chinese perspective also has international implications inasmuch as the

hitherto dominantly Western, pseudo-internationalist coverage of the world's literatures, must give way to a more balanced representation of non-Western literatures in what I have referred as "New Orientations for Comparative Literature."[3] But what are some of the distinctive characteristics of each of these three geographical areas where comparative literature has prospered so strikingly in recent decades? I have chosen to juggle the usual chronological order of development somewhat because I wish to conclude with Hong Kong as, perhaps, the best crossroads where a meeting of minds can be reasonably expected to take place.

A) China Mainland

After efforts made by outstanding individuals in the early part of the 20th century, the late 70s saw a sudden, unprecedented enthusiasm among China Mainland scholars for comparative literature studies. This individual enthusiasm promises to continue, though tempered to some extent by well-organized and active national and local associations which collaborate in a wide variety of projects. But the single, almost unique, feature which sets the China Mainland apart from Taiwan and Hong Kong is the immense diversity of languages and literatures which its literary scholars command. While Chinese-Western comparatists in Taiwan and Hong Kong have, for all practical purposes, restricted themselves to *Chinese-English* teaching, research, and publication, their counterparts in China have extended the number of literatures covered to all parts of the world. Not only have China Mainland scholars been comparing Chinese literature with that of French, German, Spanish and other West European languages, but also with Russian, Indian, Arabian, Iranian, Japanese, and Korean! And this is to say nothing of the wide range of languages and literatures represented by China's many minority populations. Therefore, China's range of activities and the sheer force of its scholarly numbers (howsoever the quality of their output is evaluated), is likely to have a strong influence on the way the "Chinese School" is perceived by the rest of the world.

On the other hand, the majority of China's outstanding literary scholars are quite old and it is questionable how effectively middle-aged scholars, to say nothing of the less well-trained younger generation, will be able to carry on the high scholarly achievements of the older generation. This is particularly true in the case of classical Chinese literature which has been one of the biggest cultural casualties in the course of China's various 20th

century modernizations. The unfortunate likelihood of an entire generation losing touch with its cultural roots is a crisis of national proportions. The present policy of trying to re-tool middle-aged literature scholars and to train junior scholars by giving them opportunities to go abroad for further research and advanced degrees (usually in modern Western literatures) could, in the long term, be counter-productive inasmuch as the demanding task of studying foreign literatures might alienate them farther from their own classical tradition.

Added to the problem of insufficiently-trained personnel, is the serious liability of so many institutions which lack adequate research tools because of depleted or decimated library resources (much of which was caused by the Cultural Revolution). Although progress has been made of late, building up a balanced collection of up-to-date library resources is probably still the most urgent of academic needs throughout most of the country.

Another handicap for many new comparatists in China is their over-reliance on translations. Although translation work can certainly be an important way of doing comparative literature, too frequently the comparisons are superficial. Many of them are based exclusively on Chinese translations of the literatures under study or on an inadequate knowledge of the original sources. One cannot help suspecting such comparisons are made by those too eager to climb on the latest literary band wagon. Qian Zhongshu, acclaimed as one of China's greatest living scholars of classical Chinese and Western literatures, has been particularly harsh in castigating this phenomenon, largely because in-depth comparisons cannot be based exclusively on translations.[4] On the other hand, the long-term future of comparative literature in the China Mainland will certainly be assured if more and more qualified members of Chinese departments continue their research in collaboration with scholars from Foreign Literature departments.

The single most important feature, however, which distinguishes China Mainland comparatists from those in Taiwan and Hong Kong, is the Marxist ideology which more or less permeates the whole system. As the driving force behind Chinese modernizations, Marxism seems to favor twentieth-century literary output over many forms of traditional literature. More will be said about Marxism below (see letter E under "Future Prospects").

B) Taiwan

While much of the comparative literature world has been impressed by

the China Mainland's active re-emergence into the world of letters after the fall of the Gang of Four, it should not be forgotten that comparative literature as an academic discipline began in Taiwan in the early seventies. This gave Taiwan a headstart but it also exposed comparatists there to the problems connected with being pioneers: inexperience, false starts, and time-consuming experimentation about what might or might not work. But working out solutions to these problems continues to bring about a great variety of exciting results, so amply illustrated by Taiwan's numerous publications in Chinese and English. Very important too are the increasing numbers of reprints of China Mainland publications as well as articles and books on the China Mainland, which are now being sold in Taiwan bookstalls and book stores.

Although comparative literature in Taiwan began – and continues – for all practical purposes, in Foreign Literature departments, Chinese departments have been cooperating from the beginning. Having a solid grounding in the scholarship of traditional Chinese literature is certainly essential to further the "Chinese School" of comparative literature. To be sure, there is some room for grafting of non-native elements, but it is the native stock that must be nurtured and strengthened by the soil of China in order for any graft to take place. In this sense, the skepticism and even antagonism manifested by some traditional scholars of Chinese literature against certain forms of Chinese-Western comparative literature studies, can be a healthy pull back to one's native roots in order to assure healthy growth. The future of the discipline will undoubtedly depend a great deal in maintaining and developing this delicate and tenuous inter-departmental relationship between scholars of Chinese and foreign literature. Ironically, many conference papers, theses, and publications prepared under a "comparative" title are straight Chinese literature with little or nothing that could be called comparative.

The emphasis in Taiwan is certainly on preserving the tradition even while the island continues its successful modernization program. The educational system retains a strong humanities component, even though science and technology remain the prestigious subjects. There is a much greater openness in allowing the Taiwan reading public to have access to literature written in the China Mainland from the 30s to the present from which they had been cut off since 1949. Students are also taught English from middle school through college, and are exposed to much Western history, philosophy, etc., particularly through American textbooks.

Nevertheless, much effort is expended to preserve a sense of one's Chinese identity through courses and programs related to cultural history. Thus, there is an on-going process of integrating the traditional with the modern, national characteristics with non-Chinese innovations.

Because so many of Taiwan's literary scholars have been trained in America, it is quite natural that their exposure to the "American School" of comparative literature has conditioned them favorably towards a broader view of what constitutes the subject. One of the special characteristics of Taiwan's comparative literature make-up is the strong emphasis put on literary theory and criticism, especially by those who have been trained in America during the past decade. The many references to Western critics peppered throughout academic publications in Taiwan is truly remarkable. Literary theory has become a virtual academic industry on its own, and there are even those who would confer upon it the status of a separate literary genre. We will see more about this below when we discuss the "Chinese School" and Western criticism (see "Future Prospects," letter D).

C) Hong Kong

In the 60s and early 70s, apart from Hong Kong University's occasional comparative literature course including Chinese subject matter, sustained support for Chinese-Western comparative literature studies, literally arrived when Professors Yu Kwang-chung and Yuan Heh-hsiang left Taiwan to teach at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the mid-70s. Cosmopolitan Hong Kong, with its crossroads access to multi-cultural contacts, its many bilingual students, and its ability to attract an extraordinary concentration of trained Chinese comparatists, soon became very solid ground for the further development of the "Chinese School."

Hong Kong, like Taiwan, has its share of serious literary theorists, but attention has also been given to implementing the theories through a variety of concrete methodologies. This can be seen specifically and concretely by examining the way the Chinese University of Hong Kong's master's degree program has been set up.[5] In other parts of the world, some comparative literature programs do not stress specific courses in comparative literature methodology at all but, at the Chinese University, through the initial insights of Yuan Heh-hsiang and his colleagues, as well as the later input of Wai-lim Yip, an explicitly methodological approach to the field

is insisted upon from the very beginning.

Hong Kong is a cultural "free port" and, therefore, has access to recent theories and methodologies through the constant stream of the printed word and visiting scholars; moreover, the common use of both Chinese and English in Hong Kong's academic circles makes it an ideal venue to communicate with the scholarly world at large. (This bilingualism can be a drawback, however, if it tempts comparative literature scholars to restrict themselves to only these two languages). In short, Hong Kong comparatists are actively engaged in operating a kind of international "switchboard," linking all comparative literature groups interested in fostering Chinese-Western literary studies. This "free port" is particularly well located to pool together resources of scholars and publications from all over the world.

I should like to conclude this section by mentioning some caveats about Chinese-Western comparative literature developments in the China Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Although many of these friendly warnings were written almost ten years ago, I have since revised them and I believe they are still worth referring to today. For instance, how can the comparative literature problems peculiar to China be articulated as it faces the cultural confrontations to come (particularly, as critical differences arise between East and West)? What is distinctively indigenous to China's literary tradition and what do these special characteristics contribute to the study of other literatures of the world in a comparative way? Is there a sufficient sense of Chinese self-identity in order to make fruitful comparisons? Are Chinese comparative literature scholars in danger of becoming locked into Western mind-sets and conceptual categories and critical terminology which confine and cripple what is creatively and distinctively Chinese? Are Chinese-Western comparative literature studies, to date, too Western, either carbon copies of Western theories and methodologies or weak imitations of Western practice? If Western approaches are truly helpful, how can they be applied to Chinese literature and how are the traditional custodians of that literary heritage to be persuaded of the efficacy of these approaches? Is there a Chinese alternative to Western approaches and can its theory and methodology be made accessible in a more systematic and comprehensive way?

Granting the validity of these difficult questions, we can nevertheless still be fairly optimistic about future prospects, because there have been a plethora of "answers" to many of the points I have made. At the very least, these active responses show an intense interest and admirable willingness to face the problems head on. The most convenient way of discussing these

"answers" is by referring to the rich variety of interpretations of what constitutes the "Chinese School."

II. Future Prospects for the "Chinese School"

What follows is a description of some representative interpretations of the "Chinese School," plus my personal critique of them. I will also include a restatement of my earlier "middle-of-the-road" interpretation in somewhat modified form.

A) The "When" Interpretation

The "When" interpretation of the "Chinese School," can actually be sub-divided into three approaches: a) the "established-long-ago" approach; b) the "not-yet-established" approach; c) the "never-has-been-and-never-will-be established" approach.

The "established-long-ago" approach claims that the "Chinese School" can be traced back decades (to Lu Xun, for instance), or even millenia.[6] Although the great precursors of comparative literature unquestionably deserve our praise and gratitude, their initial struggles and efforts should not be confused with comparative literature as an established academic discipline having institutional support and, therefore, stability as well as continuity.

Many well-known scholars of comparative literature hold that the "not-yet-established" approach best describes the current comparative literature scene.[7] To counter this view, I would argue that the discipline of comparative literature has been clearly institutionalized, a phenomenon which I have traced through its development in universities, associations, and publications (see note 2). These facts should leave no one in doubt that comparative literature is very much in the process of being firmly established. The only point in question is the direction it is taking and the quality of this ever-changing and developing phenomenon.

The third category in this "When" approach includes those who simply scoff at the whole idea and say that there "never-has-been-and-never-will-be" a "Chinese School." Wu Ningkun of the Beijing Institute of International Relations states frankly that the so-called "Chinese School" is as irrelevant and non-existent as "Catholic Physics."[8] I agree that there is no such thing as a "Catholic Physics," but only physicists who happen to be Catholics.

But when referring to a "school of comparative literature," surely one's national literary heritage should influence one's interpretation, not only from the point of view of the nature of Chinese literature but also, in the case of the China Mainland, for instance, the role of Chinese Marxism in the uses of comparative literature.

According to Y.H. Zhao, there are also those who go to the opposite extreme of the "When" interpretation and anticipate that the "Chinese School" will replace other schools of thought. But Zhao misinterprets, perhaps, the supporters of such a "Chinese School," when he states: "In recent years, among Chinese scholars both home and abroad, there has been much talk about the possibility of 'establishing a Chinese school of comparative literature' to *take the place of* the 'French School' or the 'American School' " (underscoring mine).[9] In my reading of publications which discuss this issue of a "Chinese School," I have not come across anyone who makes a claim for the "Chinese School" to "take the place of the 'French School' or the 'American School'." If such a claim about replacing one school with another exists, I would be the first to agree with Zhao that such chauvinistic posturing is, in his words, "more patriotic than academic." As will become clearer in my attempted synthesis of these approaches at the end of this essay (see letter F below), far from one school replacing another, I wish to see a balanced synthesis of all their strengths.

B) The "Where" Interpretation

Just as the "When" interpretation discusses the "Chinese School" in terms of time, so the "Where" interpretation discusses it in terms of space, that is, in terms of national or cultural boundaries. This interpretation also lends itself to three sub-divisions: a) the "not-just-the-West" approach; b) the "other-Eastern-literatures" approach; and c) the "minorities-and-overseas-Chinese" approach.

The "not-just-the-West" approach is simply another way of saying that comparative literature studies must go beyond their conventional Western boundaries in order to include more Eastern literatures. From the time when comparative literature first became a serious object of study for scholars of Chinese literature, they have all agreed that China has not been sufficiently represented in international comparative literature circles. This dissatisfaction indicates a negative aspect of the "Chinese School" inasmuch as it protests against what should *not* be. To offset this neglect of a major

world literature, Chinese comparatists insist that the "not-just-the-West" approach to the field must be cultivated more by Western comparatists and gradually become accepted by scholars universally. There is no need to document such a widening of geographical horizons, since virtually all the publications of those engaged in comparative literature studies from a Chinese perspective are based on this assumption.

More interesting than the above approach, however, is emphasis on "other-Eastern-literatures" (e.g., China, Korea and Japan's literary relations) which many comparatists have been insisting upon. For instance, this approach is included as one of the projects of the Peking University Comparative Literature Association.[10] On the other hand, Y. H. Zhao points out that there are some problems about locating the "where" of comparative literature studies in the East. As a matter of fact, most studies to date have concentrated on Chinese literature in Western contexts so, when talking about the "Chinese School" of comparative literature, we are actually talking about Chinese-Western comparative literature. Zhao is describing what he perceives as the *de facto* situation in China; namely that "nearly all the comparatists in China" are "scholars of Euro-American literature" and that the same is true in other Asian countries. Although Zhao may overestimate "the distance between two major Eastern cultures [as] much greater than between two Western cultures," and underestimate the ability of both Chinese and Western scholars to expand their "sphere of expertise to include more than one Oriental literature," there is no denying the "considerable difficulty."[11] On the other hand, mastery of any language (Eastern or Western), requires a life-time commitment. Nevertheless, while humbly admitting limitations, the more adventurous type of comparatist will be stimulated by the rewards of learning more Eastern languages and literatures.

The third category, "minorities-and-overseas-Chinese," enlarges the scope of comparative literature beyond its conventional definition and is certainly the most controversial. But this kind of research is well worth doing for, as in the case of the first group, "minorities" in China often mean millions of enormously important peoples. There are fifty-five ethnic and religious minorities, occupying approximately 60% of China's land mass, many of whose literary traditions have yet been explored systematically, let alone in a comparative way. Furthermore, investigating these literatures comparatively may eventually shed some light on the origin and development of Chinese literature itself. As Yuan Haoyi has said,

> Conducting comparative studies between literatures of China's minorities and Han [Chinese] and foreign literatures will allow a greater understanding of Eastern literatures and contribute to the growth of comparative literature in Asia. Moreover, these new developments may force a reconsideration of the boundaries of comparative literature. . . . Chinese literature [Han literature and the literature of China's minorities] is pluralistic and can only be manifested plurally in its transcendence of nationality, language, and cultural system. In other words, comparative studies of literature can be conducted within one nation.[12]

When turning to the second group in this third category, namely, the Chinese dwelling overseas, more exciting vistas are opened up. It would be enormously instructive, for instance, to compare literary works published in the China Mainland with works written (in Chinese) by Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other overseas locations. The comparison would be analogous to Henry Gifford's position on comparing British and American literatures[13] since, particularly in recent decades, the sensibilities – both aesthetic and otherwise – developed within each area have been so different. Studies could also be made of overseas Chinese writers, in Asia or the West, for instance, who write in a language other than Chinese but with varying degrees of a Chinese sensibility. In both cases, comparative literature methodology would be extremely useful in pointing up distinctive features of writing by Chinese throughout the world. Although I obviously approve of this tendency, I must confess I would be hard put to include it within a strict definition of comparative literature as an academic discipline.

C) "Internationalization vs Sinification" Interpretation

There is no contradiction between these two terms, especially if internationalization is understood to include the emerging Eastern as well as Western literatures. But this is still not the case in fact. It is easy enough for certain Western comparatists to say that the concept of comparative literature "schools" is *passé* and to advocate abandoning all such nomenclature in the name of an abstract internationalism. But, it is my contention that attainment of this international ideal, cannot occur until all the major literatures of the world – East and West – are first recognized and represented. Otherwise, the focus of comparative study will remain on

Western works, and Eastern literatures will be forever "emerging" and neglected. On the other hand, if internationalism means a more balanced representation of all the world's major literatures and their distinctive features, then, the more "schools" the better.

Yuan Haoyi is probably the most ardent Chinese advocate of the internationalization aspect of the "Chinese School," understood as an invitation to all comparatists of the world for greater collaboration. He writes:

> Comparative literature, by its very nature, demands the cooperation of Chinese and foreign scholars for work on theory. . . . If we really desire to create a Chinese school, we must create it in an atmosphere of cooperation with the rest of the world.[14]

Across the straits in Taiwan, a panel discussion was held on March 2, 1985, entitled "Sinification of Comparative Literature."[15] The expression, "Sinification of Comparative Literature," however, might have some unfortunate implications which were unintended by the organizers. Rather than suggesting that China wished to swallow up the whole world of comparative literature, the panelists probably wished to suggest proposals for making the study of comparative literature less foreign and something more indigenous to China. Although there was no consensus about what the expression meant, the panel chairman, Professor Yeh Ch'ing-ping of Taiwan University's Chinese Department, interpreted "Sinification" as part of the continuing process of a developing "Chinese School."[16] Another panelist, Professor Chang Ching-erh, suggested that the "Sinification" notion be interpreted to include the benefits and contributions comparative literature has brought to the study of Chinese literature.[17] Some outsiders might interpret such statements as an unfortunate tendency in sub-ordinating comparative literature to Chinese literature and leading to a kind of Sinocentrism and uni-lateralism. But the panelists would undoubtedly agree that there should be an openness on the part of Chinese comparatists regarding their cultural responsibilities to make contributions to world and/or comparative literature rather than just gaining something from it. Otherwise, the result could be a kind of literary trade imbalance which might lead to mutually harmful protectionist barriers.

Ulrich Weisstein, on the other hand, in a speech at the Comparative

Literature Conference in Guangxi University (Nanning) in May, 1984, warned against Sinocentrism as much as Europocentrism. He first referred to a statement he had made in his *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory* (1973):

> I hesitate . . . to extend the study of parallels to phenomena pertaining to two different civilizations. For it seems to me that only within a single civilization can one find those common elements of consciously or unconsciously upheld tradition in thought, feeling and imagination which may, in cases of a fairly simultaneous emergence, be regarded as signifying common trends.

Then, after quoting Van Tieghem and Brunetière about limiting comparative literature studies to European and subsequently to Western literature, he went on to say:

> This is a view that has long prevailed in comparatist circles and to which I myself have, from hindsight regrettably, clung in my handbook [See quotation immediately above]. It took Etiemble's militant comparatism to bully us into abandoning the seemingly ingrained Europocentrism. . . . Yet there remains one source of apprehension: in some of the 'exotic' countries newly prominent in the ICLA, the justified pride in their national heritage has so far prevented the formation of an unbiased supranational point of view, with the result that where *franco-centrisme* once reigned *sino-*, *indo-*, or *Africocentrisme* have reared their heads.[18]

A recent book published in China manifests a more balanced view about the relationship between Chinese and comparative literatures and approves the two-way cultural traffic that should flow between China and the rest of the world's literatures under the auspices of the "Chinese School." To paraphrase Professor Liu Xianbiao, the establishment of a school of thought is of great importance to the development of scholarly studies and research. A "Chinese School" of comparative literature would not just be founded for the sake of establishing something new. Its aim would be to develop further the civilizations of China and the world. The approach to comparative literature studies would then be mutually beneficial: from the

world to China, as well as from China to the world.[19] In short, Liu seems to take a more sensible approach to the question of a "Chinese School" and he insists that this school is a means, not the end. From Liu's point of view, it would serve to develop further research on comparisons between Chinese literature and other literatures of the world.[20]

If the "internationalization" approach can sometimes lead to over-dependence on the West for guidance and direction, the other extreme of "Sinification" holds the opposite danger of remaining Sinocentric and self-contained. Even when probing more deeply into the nature of national identity, one must never neglect the wider cultural context which binds one as a citizen of the world.

D) "Western Criticism vs Chinese Criticism" Interpretation

Probably no other issue has aroused more controversy than the role of theory and methodology – be it Western criticism or Chinese criticism – in describing the nature of the "Chinese School." In fact, there is a double problem that must be addressed: can Western theoretical and methodological models be applied to the Chinese literary tradition (or vice versa) and to what extent is this acceptable in a comparative literature context?

One has only to peruse the comparative literature publications from Taiwan to get an idea of the extent and sophistication of applying Western critical theories and methods to Chinese literature. For some, the "Chinese School" of comparative literature means the wholesale application of Western theories and methods to Chinese literature. For instance, Ku Tim-hung and Chen Hui-hua, in the Preface to their book on Comparative Literature, after noting China's lack of a systematic approach to literary analysis and the relative scarcity of comprehensive literary theories, assert the following: "*We boldly claim that this adoption of Western literary theories and methods ... in the study of Chinese literature, constitutes the Chinese School of comparative literature.*"[21] But as Simon H. H. Wong notes about some of these attempts, the crux of the problem lies not so much in the impossibility of applying a Western literary or aesthetic theory to Chinese literature as the fact that it is often more crucial to know the limitation of the theory than to adapt and modify it in order to fit it for a new literary context."[22] In fact, the role of "Western criticism" was one of the most debated issues in the "Sinification" panel referred to above. Professor Chu Limin insisted upon the preeminence of the literary work over pure theory, especially

Western theory, at least with reference to Chinese literature.[23] In the China Mainland, there are also those who oppose the application of Western theories to Chinese literature and even consider it a distortion of the "Chinese School."[24] But, in a more neutral tone, Yuan Haoyi raises the question of "core theory" as related to the "Chinese School." Among the important tasks outlined by Yuan, the first is "to re-analyze existing theories of comparative literature in the light of the realities of China." He then continues:

> Existing theories of comparative literature in China have been formed primarily on the basis of developments of the discipline in the modern West that have gradually found their way to China. Yet the question remains – what aspects of these Western theories have remained valid through their trans-time-space importation into China?[25]

Huang Baosheng, Deputy Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Foreign Languages, also endorses the importance of theory. He concurs with Zhang Longzi that what is needed is an East-West poetics which is truly comparative:

> The state of analogy studies abroad and the practical needs of literary and artistic theory study in China seem to indicate an emphasis on "comparative poetics." As Zhang Longxi says, "Not only Chinese literature but also Chinese literary theory constitutes a rich heritage going back thousands of years. The considerable discrepancies between the basic concepts and modes of expression of classical Chinese and Western literary theory not only help us pinpoint the peculiarities of classical Chinese literary theory and clearly define its concepts and technical terms, they also provide us with a comparative basis on which to explore universal laws within the sphere of world literature."[26]

Clearly, the "Chinese School" must beware of becoming drawn into the vortex of Western literary theory and losing its own identity. If too much foreign interference is allowed to continue uncritically, the articulation of Chinese characteristics will be further delayed and/or obfuscated. Theory must be dealt with, of course, but it must also be viewed comparatively,

engaged on Chinese terms, and integrated into the Chinese tradition. In a review of a collection of essays on comparative literature, the late James Jo-yu Liu pointed out, rather harshly but tellingly, some dangers inherent in the uncritical acceptance and facile application of Western critical methodologies to Chinese-Western comparative literature studies:

> First, what is the point of comparing Chinese and Western literary and critical works if the comparison does not throw much new light on either of the works compared? Second, before applying any particular Western critical concept or method to Chinese literature, should one not first consider how necessary or fruitful it may be? Finally, is it too much to ask that a comparativist be thoroughly competent in the languages involved? Ironically, although most of the contributors to this volume are Chinese, some of them appear more familiar with current Western critical jargon than with Classical Chinese. Is it too quixotic to plead that before comparing Chinese literature and criticism with their Western counterparts, one should first immerse oneself in the former for a few years, without necessarily losing touch with the fluctuating stock market of the Western intellectual world?[27]

A more sustained critique of the whole trend of using Western critical methods in reference to Chinese literature is by Cecile Chu-chin Sun. She suggests: Instead of treating Chinese literature as merely something beholden to the West in order to facilitate better self-reflection or as a passive recipient for Western theorists to use as grist for their respective mills, comparatists should look to Chinese literature as something worthy of study in its own right, something which can actively challenge and enrich some of the West's most basic assumptions about the nature of literature.[28] Sun also insists that there are certain key terms in Chinese poetics which are as central to the Chinese tradition as, for instance, *mimesis* is to much Western theory.

The emphasis on Chinese literary criticism in some of the above paragraphs, is not meant as a replacement for Western criticism. Such an exaggerated Chinese emphasis would be in danger of becoming as lop-sided as the current Western practice. On the contrary, suggesting that Chinese literary theory has a role to play should be simply an attempt to indicate how "Chinese" alternatives -- in reversing Western practices and challenging some Western assumptions – can help to balance and enrich the "Chinese

School."

E) "Marxist" Interpretation

Marxism is a further complication regarding theory in the context of the "Chinese School," particularly as it has developed in China. Special attention must be paid to its role in Chinese comparative literature and to its relationship to literary theory as interpreted by both Chinese and non-Chinese theorists. Zhao's report on the First Sino-American Comparative Literature Symposium concludes:

> One question asked by Prof. Dong Hengxun of CASS [the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] caught the attention of the entire hall: "Is comparative literature compatible with Marxist literary theory? If yes, what should be their relations with each other?" Prof. [Earl] Miner, after a short discussion with his American colleagues, provided an answer: "The sphere of comparative literature is large enough to contain any critical approach." ... Since the Symposium had to end, no Chinese scholar had a chance to comment. But I am sure that their answer would be the reverse of Miner's: The sphere of Marxist literary criticism is large enough to contain any specific discipline.[29]

When we actually try to enter the "sphere of Marxist criticism" in China we run into difficulties. Peking University's distinguished Professor Ji Xianlin has observed: "Naturally, Marxism is our guide, but writers on Marxist classics have not left us with systematic treatises on the theory of literature and art. What would the results be if their thinking was linked up with China's literary traditions?"[30]

Not only Chinese-Western comparatists around the world await a more detailed development of these ideas, but also all literary scholars who are of this persuasion and take Marxism seriously. They will not be satisfied with *pro forma* references, exhortations, or generalities about dialectical materialism and historical materialism, the dialectical inter-connectedness of all things, or the inter-penetration of opposites. On the other hand, there are more serious attempts to relate Marxism and comparative literature. Yuan Haoyi touches on some recent developments and his comments are worth quoting at length:

> In "A Summarization of the Theoretical Basis for Chinese Comparative Literature," by Sun Jingyao, published in 1983, the author pointed out that the West was still unable to solve the "crisis" in comparative literature and that a Chinese school would have to develop in accordance with Marxist theories. He mentioned that "Marxism provides a guide, a theoretical base, not only in terms of basic epistemology and universal principles of literature and arts, but also in the concrete and characterisitic [sic] principles of comparative literature." Zhao Shuangzi also noted that the founders of Marxism not only possessed a knowledge of comparative literature, but also put that knowledge into practice. As for the crises in the French and American schools, he feels the former is due to the limits of positivism, and [the] latter due to [the] overflow of the New Criticism while both schools are based on idealism. The emerging Chinese school, he urges, must take historical materialism and dialectical materialism as its bases.[31]
>
> Referring to Structuralism, Chinese scholars confirm its features that attach importance to the context of the work and contribute to the restoration of objectiveness and accuracy of literary analysis, while at the same time consider that the theory overly stresses the changes of quantity within the organization of the work at the expense of quality. Attempts have been made to re-expound the basic category of structure by means of dialectical materialism and historical materialism.[32]

Non-Marxist comparatists, however, often object to these kinds of statements. The following is from a review of the first issue of China's comparative literature journal, *Cowrie*:

> As traditional comparative literature studies (parallels, myths, the artist and his problems) these essays are all fairly informative and interesting. But all lack theoretical sophistication, a fact which is noted by the authors themselves. . . . The editors and authors refer often to comparative literature as a "scientific theoretical system" (p. ii), which is developing "in accord with certain theoretical laws" towards a "world literature" (p. 85). These optimistic statements ignore a great deal of recent history in which an open, international trend in literature had been an anathema to those in power on the mainland. . . . We may have our doubts about the assertion that "the interchange between

> cultures is a worldwide historical *certainty* (p. 89, my italics), but nonetheless the atmosphere of internationalism is palpably present in this volume, and one can only lend a note of encouragement to their efforts to determine what a "Chinese school" of comparative literature would be like in terms of this avowed internationalism, beginning with the "realities of China" (p. 122) as it is today.[33]

Theorists in China could render a tremendous service by publishing a bibliography on Chinese Marxist views about literary theory and literature as well as translating into Western languages and publishing representative essays on the subject. And, for the benefit of Chinese-Western comparative literature studies, an on-going critical dialogue between Marxists and others should help scholars to formulate theoretical generalities more pointedly as well as to document them in comparative contexts.

F) "Middle-of-the-Road" Interpretation

A "middle-of-the-road" explanation of the "Chinese School" of comparative literary served as the Epilogue to the first edition of my book. *New Orientations for Comparative Literature* (1978).[34] In the seond edition (1982), I enlarged considerably on the historical aspects of the "Chinese School," and concluded:

> As the great wise man of the West, Socrates, and of the East, Confucius, have both said: We must "steer a middle course," learning from both extremes and taking just that proportion from each which makes the best "mix" for each individual culture.[35]

In the context of this "middle-of-the-road" interpretation, I would like to conclude with a few further comments on what I think the idea and the ideal of the "Chinese School" is as well as to add a few words on the continuing appropriateness of the nomenclature. I have toyed with the idea of completely abandoning the term "Chinese School" because of misunderstandings about, and actual opposition to, the expression. I have even tried some possible substitutes, such as "Chinese Perspectives," "China Complex," or the "China Dimension," in an attempt to neutralize the hostile tone of

opposing camps (French School vs. American School vs. Chinese School vs. Russian School, etc.). But I have decided to hold on to the term for a number of reasons.

As I understand the term, there is absolutely *no nationalistic or political implication*; rather, it simply stresses an important and, hitherto, unacknowledged *supplementary alternative* – not replacement – to the prevailing Western notions and methodologies, be they "French" or "American." In this sense, the more schools there are the better, as long as they can be mutually enriching. In order to extend beyond the hitherto Western monopoly of the field, my emphasis is on a comparative literature *academic frame-of-mind which is truly international*, rather than one which focuses narrowly on a particular national identity or Western mind-set. I must also repeat that by "middle-of-the-road Chinese School," I do not mean to ignore the many other important literary activities going on around us. On the contrary, my interpretation of the "Chinese School" welcomes many positive aspects of other ways of thinking as long as these complement each other, are consistent with a Chinese perspective, and can be readily assimilated. In short, the five interpretations discussed in this essay all have good points which can and should be related to the "Chinese School."

(1) *The "When" Interpretation.* Although there is something to be said for the "not-yet-established" opinion, I would rather qualify this assertion by distinguishing between what has been clearly established versus what needs to be further developed. The existence of the "Chinese School" of comparative literature is already well established, as so many learned organizations and abundant publications exploring all issues of the discipline from a Chinese perspective amply testify.

(2) *The "Where" Interpreation.* All the approaches which fall under this interpretation are valuable for the full development of the "Chinese School." While the "French School" and the "American School" have long lost their geographical distinctiveness and are understood as methodologies, the "Chinese School" partakes of both. Geographically, the "not-just-the-West" approach insists upon a fairer recognition of Eastern literatures. Methodologically, the "other-Eastern literatures" as well as the "minorities-and-overseas Chinese" approaches, use a comparative *method.* Strictly speaking, however, they would probably not fall under the cross-cultural academic discipline of comparative literature. But all of them are useful in helping to specify and articulate what is distinctively "Chinese" in comparative literature studies. The relatively new emphasis on comparing

Chinese literature with other Eastern literatures might very possibly lead to a fresh kind of cultural unity. Without being confrontational, Eastern literatures might then be able to articulate a common cultural solidarity for the East which could be compared as a whole to the notion of "Western Civilization." While recognizing the need for a healthy diversity among the cultures in Asia, attention to some of the common features of "Eastern Civilization" could prove most enlightening, not only to China and its Eastern neighbours but to their Western counterparts as well.[36]

(3) *The "Internationalization vs. Sinification" Interpretation.* Without leaving off the essential importance of viewing comparative literature studies from a Chinese perspective, I would favor placing the emphasis on the "internationalization" aspect over the "sinification." There is not much danger of a culture as old as China's losing its self-identity, although equating modernization with Westernization as suggested by some, seriously dilutes and dissipates the cultural legacy. Ironically, much of the strength and stability of the "Chinese School" lies in its openness to outside influences. Unlike the extreme closed-door policy of recent decades, a comparative approach (in literature and politics), enables China to keep one foot close to home while exploring strengths and weaknesses among other cultures.

(4) *The "Western Criticism vs. Chinese Criticism" Interpretation.* It is obvious that mutual understanding through some kind of an on-going "comparative poetics" exercise is at the heart of how comparative literature will thrive between China and the rest of the world. I would like to see a de-emphasis on the theoretical aspects of Western criticism, and far more attention paid to traditional Chinese literary criticism. In any case, the literature itself must not be subordinated to excessive theorizing and there must be a thorough integration of Western criticism into the Chinese tradition if China is to maintain its cultural identity.

(5) *The "Marxist" Interpretation.* Important as Marxism is in the world, regarding the realm of letters, a great deal of work has yet to be done on what its contributions are to the field of comparative literature. While some seem to think the system of thought has very little to say positively about aesthetic considerations, it is up to Marxist literary theorists from China and the rest of the world to prove that this is not so or that there is something more significant to offer.

Other ideas and ideals I wish to incorporate into an enlarged description of the "Chinese School" include:

(a) Comparative literature is not merely a methodology but also – and

more importantly – a habitual attitude of mind and an academic discipline.

(b) The remarkable institutionalization of Chinese-Western comparative literature studies as an academic discipline must continue in order to assure long-term continuance and continuity but, at the same time, avoid over-centralization and fossilization.

(c) There can be no long-term hope for the "Chinese School" unless there are scholars trained, not only in the theory, methodology and practice of comparative literature, but also in classical Chinese literature and criticism.

(d) What is crucial is the need to go beneath the surface of comparative literature studies and, taking the Chinese literary experience as one's point of departure, to challenge Western assumptions, concepts, terms, and definitions (prescriptive or descriptive) about what constitutes literature in all its aspects (the "international" canon, "universal" genres, literary movements, etc.).

(e) To stress a point made at the beginning of this section, the "Chinese School" does not consist of a static, privileged rootedness in some "Middle Kingdom," but steers a dynamic "middle-of-the-road" course for, in the words of George Steiner, "No men inhabit a 'middle kingdom'; all are each other's guests."[37]

(f) Comparative literature can have a double advantage for Chinese literature inasmuch as it can suggest new approaches to re-invigorate an ancient literature as well to assist non-Chinese to appreciate what is distinctive about China's literature.

(g) The importance of Chinese Marxism in almost every field (political science, economics, sociology, philosophy, etc.) makes it all the more imperative for Chinese comparatists to stress the interdisciplinary (not forgetting the ascetic "discipline" amidst all the "inter"!), for literature is to be understood as an inseparable but distinct feature in the development of the whole person, realizing his or her potential not merely as an individual but as a responsible member of society.

(h) Far more attention has to be given to the "Russian School" of comparative literature vis-à-vis the "Chinese School," not only because of the strong Russian presence which affected so much of its development in the 50s, but also because a great deal of China's thinking (to say nothing of many other East European countries) derives from a common Marxist-Leninist source (howsoever differently interpreted).

(i) Contrastive literature, as opposed to the more conventional emphasis on similarities in many studies of comparative literature, finds research into

differences (more different, perhaps, than even Derrida's "*differance*" ever envisioned!) more interesting and challenging than common points. Such an approach may help us transcend accidental similarities in order for us to discover far more substantive issues.

(j) Theoretically speaking, one might expect comparative literature to be the main way of bringing the world to a study of "literature" as a totality rather than to this or that particular national literature; but even though such an idealistic process is useful, the "Chinese School" would insist that each national literature highlight and retain its distinct and unique features, to assure that a study of the world's literatures would never dissolve into some common-denominator poetics where a single, universal theory of literature would dominate all the world's national literatures.[38]

(k) Practically speaking, there is now a sufficient corpus of critical works in Chinese and English which needs to be culled in order to illustrate, systematically and comprehensively, exactly what are those unique features which characterize and distinguish the "Chinese School" of comparative literature from other Western approaches. Following upon this will be an articulation of the underlying theory and methodology of the "Chinese School."

Conclusion

As we move towards – not a common but – a *composite* approach to fostering the building up of the "Chinese School," a certain amount of compromise is necessary. Compromise means a willingness on all sides to view objectively alternative ways of developing what is best for the "Chinese School" in itself vis-à-vis Western dominance in comparative literature. This attitude tries to put aside personal preference or pique and works towards the common good. I also opt for a "composite" type of poetics which is, indeed, the best word to describe the "Chinese School" as a combination of many complementary factors.

But "composite" does not have to be an uncritical or uncreative form of mere juxtaposition or eclecticism. I rather interpret it as a movement towards ideal *synthesis*. "Composite," as I understand the term, also includes Eisenstein's sense of *montage*, where image F (let it stand for the "French" school) plus image A (let it stand for the "American" school) do not merely equal FA, but can evolve into a new, even startling, creative expression C (let it stand for the "Chinese" school).

This explanation of "composite" stresses the dynamic interplay and fusion of ideas rather than mere juxtaposition of the many components. The above explanations can be illustrated best, perhaps, by referring back to the diagram mentioned at the beginning of this essay, where the abstract geometric circles are meant to give way to a dynamic and organic interacting protoplasm. This approach necessarily qualifies any conventional idea of "synthesis." "Composite," then, should not mean a homogenization of all ideas mixed up into some indecipherable mass, but a dynamic "composite-synthesis" notion where different ideas vie with each other, often informing and enriching each other by a free exchange and resulting in the formation of a viable "Chinese School."

Notes

1. See Yip's "The Use of 'Models' in East-West Comparative Literature," *Tamkang Review*, 6.2/7.2 (October 1975 – April 1976): 109-126. Another interesting up-date of Yip's critical ideas can be found in his "The Framing of Critical Theories: A Reconsideration," *Studies in Language and Literature*, 2 (Octover 1986): 1-10. This journal is put out by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of National Taiwan University. Perhaps another mini-circle should be included in our diagram to represent the small but influential group of ex-patriates (from the China Mainland, Hong Kong, or Taiwan) like Wai-lim Yip himself, William Tay (Cheng Shu-sen), and the late James Jo-yu Liu. Although these scholars have settled in the West, they have had much of value to say about Chinese-Western comparative literature studies.
2. "Historical Sketch of Chinese Comparative Literature Studies." *Tamkang Review*, 17, No. 3 (Spring 1987) pp. 197-219.
3. See my *New Orientations for Comparative Literature*, 2nd ed. (Taipei: Linking, 1982), passim (In Chinese).
4. Private interview with Qian Zhongshu on May 11, 1985. Although it is obvious that one must have a good knowledge of one's own literary classics as well as the foreign languages and literatures under comparison, there is still an important role for translation in the study of comparative literature.
5. The original English description of this MA program can be obtained by writing to the English Department, Graduate Division, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong. In a recent article, Stephen Chan Ching Kiu finds comparative literature in Hong Kong adversely affected by an educational system which over-emphasizes English to the neglect of Chinese and does not sufficiently encourage critical thinking. See his "Criticism, Institution, and the Prospect for Comparative Literature" in *Con-Temporary Monthly* (Taiwan), 219 (1 September 1988): 20-29 (In Chinese).
6. See Liu Xianbiao's *Comparative Literature and Its Development in China*, (Nanning: Guangxi People's Press, 1986), pp. 79-84, passim (In Chinese). A thorough study should be done on the many forerunners of comparative literature studies in China and should be undertaken before these scholars pass from the

scene.

7. In varying degrees, Lu Kanghua and Sun Jingyao (China), Yeh Ch'ing-ping (Taiwan), Yuan Heh-hsiang (Hong Kong), Eugene Eoyang (USA) and Douwe Fokkema (Netherlands), all hold this view.
8. This remark was made to me by Professor Wu on the occasion of a Hong Kong comparative literature conference in 1985.
9. See "Comparing the Comparatists," *Modern Chinese Literature*, 1.1 (September 1984): 134.
10. See reference to Yue Daiyun quote in note 2 above, n. 18. In a special 1988 Supplement issue of *Comparative Literature in China*, the editors have devoted a major section to a recent Oriental Comparative Literature Conference which traces China's literary relations with Japan, Korea, Burma, Vietnam and India. The fourth number of *Cowrie* (1987) also devotes the whole issue to ethnic and folklore essays (e.g., minorities, India, Malay, etc.).
11. Zhao, 134.
12. Yuan, "New Stimuli – Review of Developments in Chinese Comparative Literature from 1984-1985." *Cowrie*, 1.3 (1986): 122-23.
13. Henry Gifford, *Comparative Literature: Concepts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1969), last chapter. The University of Sussex also offers an M.A. in Anglo-American studies and the "curriculum explores the complex historical relationship and the common ground and differences of British and American culture and society, challenging easy generalizations and raising critical questions of method and interpretation" (from flyer advertisement).
14. "Survey of Current Developments in the Comparative Literature of China," *Cowrie*, 1.1 (1983): 123.
15. Compiled by Hu Shao-chen and Ku Chia-yen, *Wen Hsun*, 17 (April 1985): 54-76 (In Chinese).
16. Hu and Ku: 55 and 64.
17. Hu and Ku: 67.
18. This speech was published as "D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?: the Permanent Crisis of Comparative Literature," *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 11.2 (June 1984): 175 and 178.
19. Liu: 293, 296-97.
20. Liu: 292-93.
21. See Ku T'ien-hung and Chen Hui-hua, *Breaking Ground in Taiwan for Comparative Literature*, (Taipei: Tung-ta, 1976), Preface, n.p. (In Chinese).
22. "Theory of Genres and Chinese-Western Comparative Literature, *Studies in Language and Literature*, 2 (October 1986): 83-84.
23. Hu and Ku: 56-57.
24. Lu and Sun: 327-331.
25. "First Steps – Survey of Current Developments in Comparative Literature in China – January 1982 to July 1984," *Cowrie*, 1.2 (1984): 88.
26. "Founding a Chinese School of Comparative Literature," *Chinese Literature*, 3 (Autumn 1986), 180.
27. Review article of *China and the West: Comparative Literature Studies*, ed. William Tay, et al. (Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1980) in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18.2 (June 1981): 199.
28. "Problems of Perspective in Chinese-Western Comparative Literature Studies," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 13.4 (December 1986): 531-547.

Another critique by Li Han-hsiang entitled, "An Investigation into the Development of Comparative Literature and the History of Western Theories in Taiwan," appeared in *Con-Temporary Monthly* (Taiwan), 219 (1 September 1988): 48-59 (In Chinese).

29. Zhao: 135.
30. *Beijing Evening Daily*, 24 Dec. 1984: 2 (In Chinese).
31. "First Steps": 89. The Sun article referred to can be found in the *Guangxi University Journal*, 1 (1983): 8-12 (In Chinese).
32. "New Stimuli": 118. Yuan gives the following source for the ideas contained in this paragraph: Chen Jin and Zhang Xiaoqiang, "An Outline of Exploration of Six Approaches in the Study of Literature and Arts in Recent Years," *Studies of Literary and Artistic Theory*, 3 (1985): 14 (In Chinese).
33. William Touponce, "Review," *Tamkang Review*, 13.4 (Summer 1983): 420-421.
34. *New Orientations*, 1st ed. 265-270. There is an English version available under the title, "New Orientations for Comparative Literature," in the *Tamkang Review*, 8.1 (April 1977): 227-236.
35. *New Orientations*, 2nd ed. 307.
36. Intra-Asian efforts are timely and increasingly important. More such efforts should be made among Eastern countries to meet regionally in order to better understand their cultural inter-relatedness and, incidentally, to prepare for the International Comparative Literature Association Congress scheduled to meet in 1991 in Japan (the first time the ICLA will have met in the East). By this date, more and more Westerners – through economic necessity, at least – will have discovered the increasing importance of the entire Pacific Rim and international interdependence. Comparatists at the ICLA congress who are interested in Asian literatures should try and demonstrate to the assembled delegates in Japan the matching importance of cultural infra-structures for social super-structures. John Boening, editor of the *ICLA Bulletin*, invites such a dialogue:

    > Our 1991 Congress in Japan will be in one sense merely a visible sign of the new global dimensions of our organization and, perhaps more significantly, a signal of our intention to incorporate a new, genuinely worldwide perspective into our definition of Comparative Literature itself. The 1991 congress will thus mark both an end (to our historical Eurocentrism) and a beginning.

37. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 116.
38. As Ulrich Weisstein notes, "some nineteenth-century scholars . . . expressed the hope that one day mankind would boast of an undifferentiated body of truly cosmopolitan world literature. To destroy the parts in view of the whole would obviate the need, so wisely emphasized by Goethe, for harmonizing *Weltliteratur* with regional literature by means of a mediating *tertium comparationis*." In "D'où venons-nous?": 176-177.