

Foreign Literature Studies in China and the Construction of a Chinese Intellectual System Since the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: Since the dawn of the 21st century, bolstered by the growing cultural confidence of the Chinese nation, the field of foreign literature studies in China has undergone a significant paradigm shift, marking a departure from the uncritical veneration of Western theories and discourses toward an emphasis on sinicization—decentering Western-centrism to foreground Chinese characteristics and actively constructing a Chinese intellectual system. This transformation in the new era is a historical inevitability, rooted in solid theoretical frameworks, historical precedents, and contemporary realities. The achievements of this shift can be summarized in three dimensions: first, the innovation of literary theory to contribute to a Chinese theoretical framework; second, the emphasis on Chinese characteristics in building a diversified system of foreign literature scholarship and discourse; and third, a commitment to mutual civilizational learning to foster the theoretical and practical systems of a Chinese School of Comparative Literature. In the future, Chinese scholars of foreign literature studies must uphold a Chinese standpoint to further dismantle Western-centrism, strengthen the innovation of indigenous theoretical systems, and enhance China's international discursive influence in foreign literature research.

Keywords: Chinese intellectual system; mutual civilizational learning; Chinese standpoint; international discursive influence

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标题: 21 世纪以来中国的外国文学研究与自主知识体系建构

内容摘要: 21 世纪以来, 随着中华民族文化自信的日益增强, 中国的外国文学研究逐步发生转型, 由过去的盲目推崇西方理论和话语转向强调中国化、摆

脱西方中心论，努力凸显中国特色，并建构中国自主知识体系。外国文学研究在新时代发生转型拥有理论支撑、历史渊源和现实基础，因此是历史的必然。新世纪中国的外国文学转型与自主知识体系建构取得的成果可以概括为三个方面：创新文学理论，为构建中国自主理论体系作出贡献；凸显中国特色，着力构建多元的外国文学学术和话语体系；重视文明互鉴，努力构建比较文学中国学派的理论和实践体系。未来中国的外国文学学者还需继续坚守中国立场，进一步去除西方中心论；进一步加强本土理论和话语体系的建构与创新；进一步争取外国文学研究的国际学术话语权。

关键词：自主知识体系；文明互鉴；中国立场；国际话语权

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Since the start of the 21st century, underpinned by the burgeoning cultural confidence of the Chinese nation, the study of foreign literature in China has undergone a profound paradigm shift. This transition marks a departure from the erstwhile uncritical veneration of Western theories and discourses toward an emphasis on sinicization—a concerted effort to dismantle Western-centrism, foreground Chinese characteristics, and construct a Chinese intellectual system. This transformative evolution in the new era is a historical inevitability.

At the theoretical level, since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee, represented by General Secretary Xi Jinping, has attached great importance to cultural confidence, emphasizing its significant practical importance for enriching socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, promoting excellent traditional Chinese culture, enhancing national cultural soft power, and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This actually reflects the practical needs of the Chinese nation's gradual movement toward the center of the world stage, and serves as a strategic guide for how Chinese culture should manage its relationship with the world's diverse cultures—considerations that are particularly important for foreign literature scholars.

On May 17, 2016, in his important speech at the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Sciences, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out the need to “focus on constructing philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics, fully embodying Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese ethos in terms of guiding ideology, disciplinary system, academic system, and discourse system” (376). On April 25, 2022, during his inspection at Renmin University of China,

General Secretary Xi Jinping further pointed out that “accelerating the construction of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics ultimately means building a Chinese intellectual system” (Xinhua 1). General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speeches have pointed the direction for the development of China’s philosophy and social sciences, and have also prompted further transformation in foreign literature studies.

The essence of the transformation of foreign literature studies in the new era is to achieve the Sinicization of foreign literature research. So-called Sinicization means that Chinese scholars engaged in research on foreign literature should employ China’s own perspectives and vision, treating and handling foreign literary materials as research objects in a realistic and truth-seeking manner, while striving to manifest Chinese qualities and characteristics in these materials.

From a historical perspective, the Sinicization of foreign literature studies has been the persistent pursuit of Chinese scholars for a century. The older generation of scholars well-versed in both Chinese and Western learning—such as Qian Zhongshu, Zhu Guangqian, Wang Zuoliang, Yang Zhouhan, and Chen Jia—achieved outstanding academic accomplishments. Although their works were inevitably influenced by the political discourse of their time and contained certain biases and partialities, they all practiced, to varying degrees, a problem-consciousness oriented toward Sinicization in their writings. For instance, Mr. Qian Zhongshu’s *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters (Tan Yi Lu)* and *Pipe and Awl (Guan Zhui Bian)* stand as exemplary works that uphold a Chinese academic standpoint and implement the principle of mutual interpretation and elucidation between Chinese and Western cultures. Lu Xun’s “doctrine of ‘taking over’” (*nalai zhuyi*) embodies both a global vision and adherence to national cultural subjectivity, fully manifesting his profound cultural confidence as a pioneer of modern Chinese culture.

From a practical perspective, as China’s national power has gradually strengthened, Chinese scholars have developed an increasingly self-conscious awareness of the Sinicization of foreign literature studies. Whether in scholarly research, various project funding programs, or journals and publishers, there is a growing emphasis on grounding foreign literature research in contemporary Chinese needs, manifesting a distinct Chinese standpoint, and articulating Chinese scholars’ voices.

This article will summarize the achievements in the transformation of foreign literature studies and the construction of a Chinese intellectual system in the new era from three aspects: first, innovating literary theory and contributing to the construction of a Chinese theoretical system; second, foregrounding Chinese

characteristics and striving to construct a diverse academic and discourse system for foreign literature studies; third, emphasizing mutual learning among civilizations and endeavoring to construct the theoretical and practical system of a Chinese School of Comparative Literature. The works discussed are primarily those from the past decade or so that have been selected for the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Library of Achievements, received the Higher Education Outstanding Scientific Research Achievement Award from the Ministry of Education, or been funded as major projects by the National Social Science Fund of China.

I. Innovating Literary Theory: Constructing a Chinese Theoretical System

In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, constructing a Chinese intellectual system has become an important component of the national cultural strategy. In recent years, Chinese foreign literature scholars have consciously adopted Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as their action guide, and based on the national cultural development strategy, have endeavored to foreground their distinctive features and disciplinary strengths, contributing to the construction of philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics.

Foreign literature scholars generally recognize that “constructing a Chinese intellectual system for foreign literature research and advancing contemporary Chinese scholarship and Chinese discourse to the forefront of international academia represent the new mission and responsibility that the new era has bestowed upon foreign literature researchers” (Jiang 16). In my view, a Chinese intellectual system can be understood in both narrow and broad senses. In the narrow sense, it refers to “a Chinese theoretical system.” Concerning the discipline of literary studies, a Chinese theoretical system contains the following elements: first, it is an innovative literary theoretical system proposed by contemporary Chinese scholars; second, it possesses independent problem-consciousness and, particularly, develops innovative conceptual frameworks that form a theoretical system; third, this theoretical system has extensive explanatory power, influence, and universality, capable of both explicating Chinese literature and applying to the analysis of foreign literature. In the broad sense, a Chinese intellectual system for foreign literature refers to foreign literature and comparative literature research with distinctive Chinese characteristics conducted by Chinese scholars. For foreign literature and comparative literature scholars, it is necessary to embody Chinese perspectives and a Chinese standpoint in foreign literature research, engage in Sino-foreign dialogue on the basis of mutual civilizational learning, and thereby gradually form a research system with Chinese

characteristics. Whether in the narrow or broad sense, a Chinese knowledge system cannot be achieved overnight; it requires long-term accumulation and continuous development to reach maturity gradually.

For a considerable period, foreign literature scholars in China have been accustomed to employing Western theories and discourse systems, even harboring a worshipful mentality toward Western theory. However, this situation has been undergoing transformation since the new era. Chinese foreign literature scholars have made substantial efforts in constructing a Chinese theoretical system and have already achieved a number of gratifying results. These breakthroughs in specific research domains have resonated strongly both domestically and abroad, leading and promoting interactive discussions in the international academic community, and injecting vitality into international comparative literature and world literature theoretical research.

1. Marxist Literary Theory and Criticism

Since entering the new era, Chinese scholars have endeavored to construct the theoretical form and discourse system of Marxist literary theory with Chinese characteristics, presenting to the world the spiritual qualities and core values of the Chinese path. Chen Zhongyi published a series of articles titled “A Reflection on the Marxist Outlook of Literature” in *New Perspectives on World Literature*, arguing that cultural consumerism has caused the destruction and subversion of literary classics, emphasizing that revaluing the classics is the primary task of current comparative literature and literary studies as a whole. From the Marxist perspective of literature and art, he critiqued various maladies in literary creation that are divorced from real life, stressed the importance of viewing the relationship between ancient and modern, Eastern and Western literature historically and dialectically, while also responding to certain biased understandings of cultural confidence. The major National Social Science Fund of China project “Research on the Sinicization and Contemporization of Classical Marxist Literary and Artistic Thought” led by Duan Jifang, through in-depth theoretical research on the canonical nature, systematicity, and scientific character of Marxist literary theory, highlights the theoretical trajectory and relationship from the classical form to the contemporary form of Marxist literary and artistic thought, addressing current problems in Marxist literary theory research such as neglecting classical texts, mechanically applying concepts, confused theoretical methods, and the failure of critical practice.

The book series “Research on the Chinese Form of Marxist Literary Criticism,” the concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China with Hu Yamin as chief editor, offers pioneering summaries and

constructions of the Chinese form of Marxism, presenting new explorations in research paradigms, research methods, and research approaches. The series possesses both theoretical depth and practical relevance, manifesting the distinctive features and theoretical contributions of Chinese Marxist literary criticism. Among the volumes, *Contemporary Construction of the Chinese Form of Marxist Literary Criticism* received first prize in the Ninth Higher Education Outstanding Scientific Research Achievement Award. The book received high praise in a lengthy book review titled “Hu Yamin’s New Book on Chinese Marxist Literary Criticism” published on January 13, 2025, in the prominent American media outlet *People’s World*. According to the book review, “Hu positions Chinese Marxism as historically and ideologically distinct from Western Marxism, challenging the idea that Western theoretical models can be universally applied to all societies. Instead, she contends that Chinese Marxist literary criticism has developed unique problems and frameworks separate from Western thought that no longer qualify as simple adaptations. Chinese Marxist literary criticism possesses its own identity” (Wendland-Liu). Currently, Hu Yamin is leading another major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, “Recasting and Contemporary Development of Marxist Literary Criticism.” These achievements all contribute to advancing the construction of the academic and discourse system of Marxist literary theory with Chinese characteristics, creating a Chinese intellectual system that is indigenous to Chinese civilizational traditions, oriented toward Chinese practice, addresses Chinese problems, and possesses universal value.

2. Ethical Literary Criticism

As a literary criticism theory and method originally created by a Chinese scholar, ethical literary criticism stands as one of the representative achievements in the construction of a Chinese theoretical system. Ethical literary criticism was founded by Nie Zhenzhao in 2004 and, after more than two decades of development, has successfully constructed a theoretical and discourse system with distinctive Chinese characteristics and Chinese style through its features of originality, contemporaneity, and national character. Nie Zhenzhao’s *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* was selected for the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Library of Achievements; *Studies on Ethical Literary Criticism* (five volumes), with Nie Zhenzhao and Su Hui as chief editors, received first prize in the Ninth Higher Education Outstanding Scientific Research Achievement Award from the Ministry of Education; Su Hui’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of China “A Study on Theoretical Resources and International Dissemination of Ethical Literary Criticism” and Yang Gexin’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of

China “The Compilation, Translation and Research of Literatures on Contemporary Western Ethical Criticism” are both grounded in Chinese issues and strive to provide research exemplars for resolving universal problems of global significance.

Ethical literary criticism has also achieved remarkable results in international academic dialogue and exchange. It has not only generated considerable momentum domestically but has also received high praise in the international academic community, and is capable of leading international academic discourse, “providing an exemplar for Chinese scholarship going global and competing for international discursive influence” (Su 36). Influential international academic journals in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Estonia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan (China), Hong Kong (China), and mainland China have successively launched special issues or columns on “ethical literary criticism,” publishing related articles by internationally renowned scholars and attracting the attention of the international academic community. In 2015, *The Times Literary Supplement*, the most authoritative international humanities magazine, published an article titled “The Fruit of Collaboration: Ethical Literary Criticism in Chinese Academia,” led by William Baker, a renowned international literary theorist. The article highly praised ethical literary criticism, viewing it as Chinese academia’s response to the Chinese Dream proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping and as representative of “the rise of Chinese discursive influence” (Baker and Shang 15). This article changed the long-standing situation in which *The Times Literary Supplement* had rarely reviewed Asian original humanities theories for decades, providing powerful proof of ethical literary criticism’s recognition by the mainstream international academic community. Galin Tihanov, member of the Academia Europaea and Chair Professor at Queen Mary University of London, pointed out in the preface to the Russian edition of *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*: “Professor Nie Zhenzhao is undoubtedly an outstanding literary scholar and one of the few Chinese scholars in the humanities who have gained an international reputation. [...]His ability to offer different perspectives on literature and to bring Chinese literary scholarship on par with Western and Russian literary scholarship is clearly demonstrated by this work, which is a testament to this originality” (15-17). Shin Inseop of Konkuk University in South Korea believes: “Ethical literary criticism not only stands out distinctively in literary criticism, forming its own school, but is also becoming a social trend of thought. Reviewing the development of Chinese ethical literary criticism, one cannot help but feel exhilarated for Eastern scholars. Ethical literary criticism has allowed the contemporary East, this dwarf in literary criticism and theory, to regain confidence,

and through ethical literary criticism, to have a place of its own in the club of literary criticism and theory dominated by the West” (197).

3. Research in Narratology and Semiotics

Shen Dan’s *Narrative Theory in British and American Fiction*, published in 2018, and her concluding achievement of a project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *A Study of Dual Narrative Progression*, propose the original theories of “covert progression” and “dual narrative progression,” demonstrating Chinese scholars’ theoretical and discursive innovation in narratology research. These works represent one of the exemplary achievements in the construction of a Chinese theoretical system and have been recognized by experts as “a breakthrough not only for Western narratological theory that has been prevalent in China and abroad over the past half-century, but also for traditional literary criticism and literary theory.” They are “significant evidence of Chinese literary theory, especially narrative poetics, establishing itself in the world and transcending Western scholarship.” Some Western scholars believe that “Shen’s contribution takes a step beyond the heritage of Aristotelian poetics in that it diverges from the traditional emphasis on plot to explore textual undercurrents running parallel to and sometimes counter to the plot development” (Pier 123).

Fu Xiuyan was the first to propose studying “Chinese narratology” from a comparative perspective. *Chinese Narratology* analyzes the gains and losses of Western narrative theory with a strong dialogic consciousness, conducts in-depth research on Chinese narrative traditions, and outlines the genealogy of Chinese narrative traditions. The concluding achievement of Fu Xiuyan’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *Comparative Research on Chinese and Western Narrative Traditions* (seven volumes), systematically compares the differences between Chinese and Western narrative traditions, “adhering to the principle of equal comparison ‘using the West to reflect upon China,’ combining ‘point-line-plane’ to construct a complete comparative system, and contributing rich original achievements to ‘a Chinese knowledge system of narratology’” (Lu 169).

In the fields of narratology and semiotics, many other scholars are also conducting deep cultivation: Shang Biwu’s *Research on Contemporary Western Post-Classical Narratology* and the concluding achievement of his major project of the National Social Science Fund of China *Translation and Research on Cutting-Edge Theories of Contemporary Western Narratology* (nine volumes) have substantially enriched the theoretical resources of domestic narratology research and built an important platform for exchange and dialogue between Chinese and Western narratology. Tang Weisheng has published works such as *Research on*

Thing Narrative and is leading the major project of the National Social Science Fund of China “Research on Western Thing Narrative.” Long Diyong’s *Research on Spatial Narrative* constructs a theoretical system of spatial narratology, while his *Research on Intermedial narratology* explores the creative patterns and internal logic of transmedia narrative. Zhao Yiheng’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, “Semiotic Research on the Current Cultural Situation and Development in China” studies contemporary cultural issues from a semiotic perspective. His *Philosophical Semiotics: The Formation of the World of Meaning* represents an ultimate pursuit and answer to how signs generate meaning, and has generated considerable response in both domestic and international academic circles.

4. Research on Foreign Literature Principles

Chen Zhongyi’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of China “A Study of Foreign Literature Principles” reflects upon and examines Western modern and contemporary literature, literary principles, and certain important theories, criticisms, concepts, and methods, establishing a set of literary principles that both deconstructs and constructs, both inherits and innovates, providing a discourse system that can serve as reference for the healthy development of Chinese literature. Chen Zhongyi points out: “Reshaping literary principles in the new era is not only necessary but also urgent” (“One Arc of Discourse” 128). The greatest problem in Chinese literary principles research is that there is much introduction but little analytical criticism; much Western learning but little self-affirmation; frequent citation of texts, and even many who follow Western authorities blindly. Chen Zhongyi’s article “Variables and Constants in Literature: ‘Extrinsic Research’ and ‘Intrinsic Research’” published in *Social Sciences in China*, directly targets the popular literary “undefinability” thesis and the “text-only theory” that negates “external research,” as well as its extended or derived extreme formalism, nihilism, and anti-essentialism. The article reviews and analyzes relevant concepts and methods, investigates their causes and reasons, rectifies a series of dialectical relationships, and proposes basic solutions to problems on the basis of the new era, such as redefining the basic constants and variables of literature, the external and internal, inheritance and innovation, etc. This demonstrates that the series of questions raised by this project regarding basic literary principles and critical practice are all devoted to changing the current theoretical chaos and prompting literary criticism to return to the right path. The author points out: “Raising the issue of variables and constants in literature is not only conducive to advancing the construction of the disciplinary system, academic system, and discourse

system of literary theory with Chinese characteristics in the new era along the spiritual dimension of ‘not forgetting our origins, absorbing what is foreign, and facing the future,’ but also beneficial for clarifying some basic literary principles. Reconstructing literary principles must return to the basic standpoints, viewpoints, and methods of Marxism, rather than simply listing theories and juxtaposing concepts” (“Variables and Constants in Literature” 98).

II. Foregrounding Chinese Characteristics: Constructing a Diverse Academic and Discourse System for Foreign Literature Studies

In his speech at the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Sciences, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “In accordance with a strategy that is rooted in China while learning from abroad, digging into history while grasping the contemporary, and caring for humanity while facing the future, we must strive to construct philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics” (376).

1. Holistic Research on Foreign Literature

As the concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *A Review of Post-WWII World History and the Development of Foreign Literature* (4 volumes) by Wang Shouren, et al., analyzes the relationship between post-war social existence and the occurrence and circulation of foreign literature from historical and aesthetic perspectives, reexamining the evolutionary process of post-war foreign literature in historical context and grasping the developmental trends of foreign literature in the new century. Wu Di’s concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *Studies in the Formation and Dissemination of Foreign Literary Classics* (8 volumes), takes the Chinese standpoint of foreign literature research and employs interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and transmedia research methods to conduct thorough theoretical exploration of the formation and dissemination of foreign literary classics, while providing detailed textual investigation and analysis of the formation and dissemination of numerous ancient and modern foreign literary classics.

2. Foreign Literature Studies from the Perspective of Area Studies

Area Studies, approved in 2022 as a first-level interdisciplinary discipline, is “not only a field serving national strategy and great power diplomacy, but also a field serving mutual learning among civilizations and global governance, and a field of university learning serving government, industry, academia, research, and media” (Peng 10). In the contemporary era, “promoting the systematic restructuring of foreign literature research under the guidance of area studies is not only an inevitable path for internal disciplinary development, but also an important

expression of proactive engagement by national cultural strategy within the global discourse system” (Zhou 71). Foreign literature studies from the perspective of area studies both continue and innovate upon traditional foreign literature research methods.

2.1 Literature of Specific Countries as Samples for Area Studies

Foreign literature studies in the new era emphasize using the literature of specific countries as samples to deeply explore issues such as national identity, language politics, and historical memory. For instance, Yin Qiping’s concluding achievement of a major National Social Science Fund of China project, *British Literature Midst Changes in the Idea of Culture* (6 volumes), examines the formation, circulation, and evolution of literary classics within the historical evolution of British cultural concepts, excavating the important shaping role of literary classics in national imagination, public culture, and the core value system of the nation, providing reference from the academic perspective of foreign literature research for building a great socialist culture in China and constructing a human community with a shared future. Jiang Hongxin’s concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *The Study of 20th-Century American Literary Thoughts* (5 volumes), promotes mutual learning and exchange between Chinese and American literary cultures through systematic, comprehensive, and profound research on twentieth-century American literary thought. Fang Weigui’s *Essays on Twentieth-Century German Literary Thought* examines literature within the context of Germany’s distinctive philosophy, history, and social transformation, deeply exploring the intellectual trajectory and aesthetic transformation of German literature in the process of modernization. Peng Qinglong’s *Australian Literary Criticism Since 1901* systematically reviews and analyzes the writings on literary creation and literary research by important writers and critics since the federation of Australia, comprehensively discussing the social consciousness, ideological viewpoints, and aesthetic standards embodied in Australian literary theory criticism and practical criticism, and exploring its localized characteristics and cross-cultural interactions in the context of globalization.

2.2 Holistic Regional Literary Studies in Service of National Strategy

Many scholars position the literature of specific regions within the global geopolitical landscape, systematically studying their history, culture, and values to serve national strategy and mutual learning among civilizations. Jiang Chengyong’s *Classical Reassessment and Innovation of Western Literature Research Methods* advocates a problem-oriented approach and a perspective of Sino-Western dialogue, not only conducting systematic reflection on Western literature research methods

but also embodying Chinese scholars' consciousness in constructing academic subjectivity in the context of globalization. Jiang Chengyong's concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *Research on Nineteenth-Century Western Literary Trends* (6 volumes), takes the important issue of the reception of nineteenth-century Western literary trends in the development of modern Chinese literature as the foundation for investigating nineteenth-century Western literary trends, conducting genealogical analysis and reflecting on the value of these trends for contemporary literary research. The book series "Studies on Oceanian Literature from the Perspective of Multiculturalism," with Peng Qinglong as chief editor, "comprehensively and systematically reviews and explores the developmental history and characteristics of Oceanian literature under the dual perspective of world literature and area studies, [...] achieving significantly innovative research results in Oceanian literature studies, [...] which helps further strengthen the exchange and mutual learning between the people of China and Oceanian countries, further develop mutually beneficial cooperative development building upon the Belt and Road Initiative, and jointly construct a human community with a shared future" (Liu 18).

In terms of the selection of research subjects, for a considerable period in the past, foreign literature research in China has consistently centered on European and American literature, marginalizing the study of literature from regions such as Asia and Africa. In the context of the new era, foreign literature research in China places greater emphasis on grasping foreign literature as an integrated whole, not only paying more attention to non-Anglophone literature, especially Asian and African literature, but also fully embodying the exchange and mutual learning between Eastern and Western literature, and among the literatures of different regions and countries.

Liu Jianjun's *Byzantium: A Literary History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, unlike the cursory treatment of Byzantine civilization from traditional Eurocentric perspectives, systematically traces the millennium-spanning literary lineage of Eastern Rome, revealing the unique contributions of this long-underestimated civilization in the literary field. This work is not only an important milestone in Chinese Byzantine studies but also provides crucial textual evidence for reunderstanding Eurasian civilizational exchange. The book was selected for the 2024 National Philosophy and Social Sciences Library of Achievements.

Wang Lixin's *Literary Studies of the Hebrew Bible in the Context of Ancient Jewish History and Culture* systematically studies the *Hebrew Bible* as literature within the historical, cultural, and social context of its formation. It is a monograph

of milestone significance in the field of biblical literary studies in China and was awarded first prize in the Eighth Higher Education Outstanding Scientific Research Achievement Award from the Ministry of Education. Chen Ming's monograph *Indian Buddhist Mythology: Writing and Transmission* adopts a cross-cultural perspective to systematically trace the textual genealogy, narrative characteristics, transmission pathways, and cultural impact of Indian Buddhist mythology, revealing the formation and evolution of Buddhist mythology in India and its surrounding world, and providing new pathways for research on the cultural and literary history of Indian Buddhism. Zhong Jikun's *History of Arabic Literature* (four volumes) traces the historical development of Arabic literature over more than a thousand years, encompassing all literary genres and forms, and will play a role in promoting Sino-Arab civilizational dialogue and facilitating humanistic exchange under the Belt and Road Initiative.

African literature studies have emerged as a rising new force. Numerous domestic universities have established research institutes dedicated to African studies, and the field is progressively deepening its scope—transitioning from a traditional focus on “post-colonial studies” toward a more comprehensive “Area Studies.” Zhu Zhenwu, leading a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China “The History of African Literature in English,” has explicitly proposed the concept of “African Literatology.” This initiative seeks to break through the long-dominant Western academic paradigms and evaluation standards, advocating for the construction of a “coordinate system” for African literature grounded in Chinese scholarly perspectives and indigenous African cultural contexts. Zhu has proposed an analytical framework including the “Three Kinds of Diaspora” theory and the “Africanness” theory for systematically explicating African literature, with the ultimate goal of establishing an independent critical discourse and theoretical system for Chinese scholars—thereby advancing mutual civilizational learning and the diversity of world literature.

Research on Caribbean literature in China has developed rapidly, although it started relatively late. The field is currently transitioning from a phase of translation and fragmented research to a new stage characterized by systematic and theoretical construction. In 2021, Zhou Min received approval for the major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, “Research on the History of Caribbean Literature (Multi-volume),” which aims to construct a history and poetics of Caribbean literature from a Chinese perspective. The Caribbean Studies Center at Hangzhou Normal University has emerged as a vital research platform within this burgeoning field.

3. Research on Important Foreign Writers and Literary Genres

3.1 Research on Foreign Drama

Dong Xiao's monograph, *The Comedic Nature of Chekhov's Drama*, selected for the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Library of Achievements, takes the comedic as its entry point to holistically examine the dramatic creation of the Russian classical writer Chekhov, exploring the comedic essence that marks Chekhov's unique comic spirit and the characteristics of his artistic world. He Chengzhou's major Arts project of the National Social Science Fund of China "Research on Cutting-Edge Issues in Contemporary European and American Theatre Theory" focuses on frontier issues in contemporary European and American theatre theory, covering foundational theory, theatrical practice, cultural theory, and performance studies, powerfully promoting the interdisciplinary development of theatre theory, Sino-Western theatrical theory dialogue, and the construction of a theatrical research discourse system from a Chinese perspective.

3.2 Research on Foreign Poetry

Zhang Ziqing's *History of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (three volumes), using the evolution of literary movements as its framework, systematically traces the developmental trajectory of twentieth-century American poetry and received the second prize in the Second "Wang Zuoliang Award for Foreign Literature Research." Dong Hongchuan's *Anglo-American Modernist Poetry and Aesthetic Modernity*, integrating the context of twentieth-century sociocultural transformation, systematically examines modernist poetry's critical reflection on the problems of capitalist modernity, contributing to the reconstruction of the cognitive coordinates and humanistic values of Anglo-American modernist poetry within literary history.

3.3 Research on Important Foreign Writers

Foreign literature scholars emphasize contemporary interpretation and analysis of classic foreign literary writers and works. For instance, Jiang Hongxin's work *T.S. Eliot's Literary Thought*, selected for the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Library of Achievements, systematically distills Eliot's system of "literary thought" and adopts a paradigm of Sino-Western mutual learning to conduct comparative research between traditional Chinese literary theory and Eliot's thought, promoting a paradigm shift in Eliot studies and is regarded as a milestone in the history of Eliot scholarship. Yang Jincai's monograph *Herman Melville Reconsidered: A New Interpretation* reexamines Melville's creative work from a contemporary academic perspective, systematically investigating Melville's thematic ideas, characterization, narrative methods, and their connections to American society and cultural traditions, employing cultural studies theory to reveal Melville's contradictory worldview,

demonstrating an Eastern perspective, and advancing the deepening and expansion of Melville studies.

4. Research on the Academic History of Foreign Literature Studies

Since the new era, Chinese comparative literature and world literature scholars have completed a series of historical and theoretical works summarizing Chinese foreign literature research, representing important achievements in research on foreign literary exchange and dissemination. Major representative achievements include: the “Research on the Academic History of Foreign Literature Studies” series edited by Chen Zhongyi, divided into two series: “Research on the Academic History of Foreign Classic Writers and Works” and “Collected Studies on Classic Writers and Works,” with over twenty monographs on the academic history of classic writers and works and accompanying collections of academic history research already published. *60 Years of Foreign Literature Studies in New China* (6 volumes in 7 books), edited by Shen Dan and Wang Bangwei, and *The Academic Course of Foreign Literature Studies in China* (12 volumes), edited by Chen Jianhua, both represent writings on the academic history of foreign literature research, comprehensively displaying the vision and achievements of China’s foreign literature research. Wang Yong’s major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, “The Development and Application of the Index for Chinese Foreign Literature Research,” has actively explored new research paradigms based on bibliographic databases and corpora. This effort has led to the publication of *The Yearbook of Foreign Literature Studies in China* (6 volumes, 2017-2022).

5. Foreign Literature Research from the Perspective of Comparative Literature

Within the field of comparative literature, the pursuit of a Chinese perspective on foreign literature research stands as a significant hallmark of the paradigm shift in the new era. In terms of scholarly publications, the 17-volume series *History of Sino-Foreign Literary Exchange*, edited by Qian Linsen and Zhou Ning, is particularly representative. This set of books relatively comprehensively reflects the multilateral and multifaceted aspects of literary exchange between China and foreign countries, providing important materials for further research. Liu Jianjun’s concluding achievement of a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China, *A Series of Investigations on the Process of “Sinicization” of European and American Literature in the Past Hundred Years* (6 volumes), comprehensively examines the entry of European and American literature into the Chinese literary scene over the past century and holds important implications for how foreign literature research should uphold a Chinese standpoint.

While we emphasize the Chinese perspective and standpoint in foreign

literature studies, we must also guard against nationalism in a narrow sense. Instead, we should uphold the position of “open nationalism” (Hu 98), recognizing that the concept of the “nation” in a globalized context exhibits characteristics distinct from those of the past. Different nations are inherently interconnected, and the “national” itself contains elements of the “universal.” On the premise of fully acknowledging the heterogeneities of national literatures and cultures, we should adopt a critical approach—assimilating the essence while discarding the dross—and strive to establish organic links with our own national culture. Ultimately, this process should reflect the deep-seated consciousness of the nation, fostering a field of foreign literature research that possesses a distinct national character.

III. Prioritizing Mutual Learning Among Civilizations: Constructing the Theoretical and Practical Systems of the Chinese School of Comparative Literature

“Civilizations are made colorful through exchange, and enriched through mutual learning” (Xi 228). Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly elaborated his views and propositions on civilizational exchange and mutual learning. Continuing to promote cultural prosperity, build a great socialist culture in China, and build a modern civilization of the Chinese nation at a new historical starting point represents our new cultural mission in the new era. Over the past several decades, Chinese scholars have continuously innovated in comparative literature and world literature theoretical research, gradually advancing from cross-cultural perspectives toward the theoretical construction of a Chinese School of Comparative Literature, forming theoretical and practical achievements with the nature of a Chinese knowledge system.

1. From Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Trans-Civilizational Research to the Rewriting of World Civilizational History

Yue Daiyun, as the second president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association and a leading figure in Chinese comparative literature since the new period, is the foremost representative of cross-cultural dialogue theory. She was among the first in the humanities to emphasize the vital importance of cultural diversity, advocating that comparative literature should serve as a bridge of communication between diverse cultures. Through initiatives such as editing the bilingual (Chinese-French) book series *Proche-Lointain* and founding the journal *Dialogue Transculturel*, she significantly advanced the exchange and mutual understanding between Chinese and foreign cultures. Yue Daiyun’s collected works *A Bridge Across Cultures* includes over forty essays on her teaching and reflections

on cross-cultural and interdisciplinary literary research, demonstrating her profound thinking on the relationships among literature, culture, tradition, and modernity.

Yang Huilin, as the third president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, has also proposed many important perspectives on cross-cultural dialogue theory. He advocates resolving the “dispute between ancient and modern, Chinese and Western,” transcending civilizational barriers and singular discourse models. His 2025 anthology, *Correlation In-between: Selected Essays in Sino-Christian Studies*, features a title that encapsulates his core methodology: seeking correlations and spaces for dialogue “between China and the West, between the past and the present, and between diverse academic principles.” His English monographs, such as *China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture*, have also garnered extensive international acclaim. These works complement his theoretical constructions in Chinese—particularly in areas such as “bidirectional hermeneutics” and the “logic of correlativity”—together constituting a comprehensive system of intercultural research.

Cao Shunqing, as the fourth president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, proposed the theory of trans-civilizational research since the new century, advocating research that transcends cultural differences between East and West to promote mutual learning among different civilizations. Zhang Hui, the seventh president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, proposed the theory of “hermeneutic circulation and breakthrough,” emphasizing the breaking of unidirectional transplantation in Sino-Western poetics dialogue, and achieving localized transformation and re-creation of theory through “intertextual reading” and “contextual reconstruction.”

In recent years, Cao Shunqing has proposed the initiative of “rewriting world civilization history,” which centers on critiquing Eurocentric views of civilization history and, through dialogue between Chinese and foreign scholars, reshaping the global view of civilization from the perspective of “mutual learning among civilizations,” thereby promoting the construction of a Chinese knowledge and discourse system. Since 2023, Cao Shunqing has established the column “Civilization Writing and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations” in the *Journal of Sichuan University*, attracting participation from many renowned scholars from institutions such as Harvard University and Peking University, forming an open international academic dialogue arena. Furthermore, as the editor-in-chief of the book series *Mutual Learning Among Civilizations: China and the World* book series (the first collection has been published, and the second has been initiated), he emphasizes the rewriting of global civilization history based on the principles of

“civilizational equality and mutual learning among civilizations,” aiming to break the Eurocentric narrative and construct a Chinese discourse system of civilization.

2. Variation Studies of Comparative Literature

Based on trans-civilizational research, Cao Shunqing uses the transcendence and literariness of comparative literature as a fulcrum to construct the variation theory of comparative literature. “The research focus lies in seeking the comparability of ‘difference,’ and the research scope includes transnational variation studies, interlingual variation studies, cross-cultural variation studies, trans-civilizational variation studies, and studies of the foreignization of literature” (Cao 57). His English monograph *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* was published overseas and attracted considerable attention in the international academic community. In the preface to the book, Douwe Fokkema writes: “The Variation Theory is an answer to the one-sided emphasis on influence studies by the former ‘French school’ as well as to the American focus on aesthetic interpretation, inspired by New Criticism, which regrettably ignored literature in non-European languages” (V). This work represents Chinese comparative literature research’s response to the theoretical construction of the world comparative literature discipline, which is conducive to breaking Western academic hegemony and of exemplary significance for building a “Chinese School” of comparative literature. The Chinese version *From Southern Oranges to Northern Trifoliate Oranges: Professor Cao Shunqing on the Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* and Wang Chao’s *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* also provide systematic expositions of the variation theory.

3. Research on Globalization, World Literature, and World Poetics Theory

Wang Ning, the fifth president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, was among the early scholars to engage in the field of international globalization research and has made unique contributions to globalization theory research. He not only promptly introduced cutting-edge Western theories to the Chinese academic community but also combined them with China’s specific practices, publishing articles in Western languages in international journals and engaging in direct dialogue with international peers.

In recent years, Chinese academia has actively participated in discussions of the new constructivist trend in world literature, fostering deep-level dialogues between China and the West. Building upon the foundations of comparative poetics and world literature, Wang Ning has proposed the theoretical paradigm of “World Poetics.” His extensive publications in both Chinese and English—including *Comparative Poetics*, *Cognitive Poetics*, and *the Theoretical Construction of World Poetics* and *From World Literature to World Poetics: A Theoretical Construction*—have exerted

a broad international influence. “World Poetics” offers a critical reflection on the issues arising from the long-standing practice of treating literary theories developed within Western contexts as universally applicable. By anchoring itself in the study of world literature and the methodology of comparative poetics, this framework strives to construct a truly universal system of “World Poetics” that can be applied to the research and interpretation of global literary and theoretical phenomena.

The essay collection *Ideas and Methods: World Literature Between the Local and the Universal*, edited by Fang Weigui, shares significant content with the English anthology *Tensions in World Literature*. Both volumes feature representative essays from leading global experts in world literature. The simultaneous publication in two languages and the inclusion of scholars from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds underscore the profound Sino-Western dialogic character inherent in contemporary world literature studies. Liu Hongtao was also among the earliest Chinese scholars to engage in the theoretical and practical study of world literature. By tracing the historical trajectory of world literature as a discipline in China and excavating indigenous theoretical and practical resources, Liu advocates that world literature should play a more pivotal role in constructing a theoretical system for comparative literature with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, he explores the application of the world literature paradigm to the study of the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

4. Research on the “Oriental Discourse” of Comparative Literature

In the mid-to-late twentieth century, scholars such as Ji Xianlin and Jin Kemu pioneered the “Oriental Discourse” research approach in comparative literature. In recent years, the construction of “Oriental Discourse” has become more theoretically and systematically self-conscious with the guidance of the national strategy of the “Belt and Road.” This is exemplified in two major projects of the National Social Science Fund of China: “Research and Documentation of Important Categories and Discourse Systems in Ancient Eastern Literary Theory,” led by Cao Shunqing, and “Eastern Literature and the Construction of an Eastern Literary Disciplinary System from the Perspective of Silk Road Culture,” led by Li Yuejin. Additionally, Yin Xinan leads a key project on “Research on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.” The successful advancement of these projects not only facilitates the systematic organization of “Oriental Discourse” but also holds significant practical implications for “East-West” trans-civilizational dialogue in an era of globalization and diversity.

In the field of East Asian civilizations and comparative literature, research has focused predominantly on intercultural comparative studies of Sino-South Korea and Sino-North Korea. The representative figures and achievements are

exemplified by three major projects of the National Social Science Fund of China: “Documentation and Research on the History of Sino-Korean Modern Literary Exchange” and “Compilation and Research on the History of Brush Conversations Among Modern East Asian Scholars,” both led by Jin Bingmin, as well as “Documentation and Research on Twentieth-Century East Asian Anti-Japanese Narratives,” led by Niu Linjie. These projects conduct empirical influence studies on literary relations within the East Asian cultural sphere. In the field of Japanese Sinology, Wang Xiangyuan has further deepened the disciplinary construction of “Japanese Sinology” established by Yan Shaodang. He leads the major project of the National Social Science Fund of China “Construction of an Oriental Studies System and China’s Oriental Studies Research.” Work in this field largely involves locating, organizing, and compiling rare editions of Chinese classics both domestically and abroad, holding significant value for comparative literature and philology.

5. Literary Anthropology: A New Paradigm

Over the past thirty years, the Literary Anthropology Research Branch of the China Comparative Literature Association has made unremitting efforts to construct a comprehensive set of theories and interdisciplinary methodologies, namely the Quadruple Evidence Method and Cultural Text Theory. Under the leadership of Ye Shuxian, the sixth president of the China Comparative Literature Association, the research team has completed three major national projects over the last decade. Their representative works—*A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization*, *Jade Myth and Belief and the Chinese Spirit*, and *Black Jade Age: New Evidence of 5000-Year History of China*—have all been selected for the Chinese Classics Translation Project of the National Social Science Fund of China. With a total of 20 editions published in various languages, including English, French, Russian, and Korean, these works have become a paradigm for the internationalization of Chinese scholarship. The “Quadruple Evidence Method,” exclusively advocated by literary anthropology as an interdisciplinary methodology, has provided an operational solution to the scholarly bottleneck in the major national research projects on tracing the origins of Chinese civilization through twenty years of practice. It fully utilizes transmitted texts, excavated documents, oral traditions, and intangible cultural heritage as living culture, as well as excavated artifacts and images, forming an intermedial and multimodal cultural interpretation paradigm. In 2025, this methodology was selected for the third volume of the *Blue Book on a Chinese Intellectual System* as one of the “Original Research Methodologies in Chinese Philosophy and Social Sciences.” Furthermore, the seminal work *Quadruple Evidence Method* has been published in both English

and Russian editions.

6. Interdisciplinary Research in Comparative Literature

By its very nature, Comparative literature inherently encompasses interdisciplinarity, and interdisciplinary research has become a crucial pivot in the development of many disciplines. As early as 1989, Le Daiyun and Wang Ning authored *Research on Supradisciplinary Comparative Literature*, establishing the methodological foundation for interdisciplinary research. In recent years, this field has witnessed a surge of brilliant highlights and prominent achievements.

In the field of digital humanities, Chen Yuehong's article "Change and Innovation: Iterative Development of Artificial Intelligence and the Future of the Humanities" argues that constructing a Chinese intellectual system in the humanities requires open participation from abroad and comprehensive organization through AI intelligence. However, it depends even more on autonomous exploration by China's domestic scholarly community. Vigorously promoting the organic integration of these two aspects can open new paths for the future construction of the humanities. *Introduction to Digital Humanities*, co-authored by Peng Qinglong and Du Lanlan, is an academic textbook responding to the convergence of digital technology and the humanities. Based on new liberal arts education principles, the book aims to cultivate students' ability to conduct humanities research using digital technologies through interdisciplinary methods.

In the field of literature and cognitive science/cognitive poetics, major projects include Xiong Muqing's National Social Science Fund project "Research on Cognitive Poetics in Anglo-American Literary Studies" and her 2020 major project of the National Social Science Fund of China "Cognitive Poetics Research and Theoretical Landscape Reconstruction," as well as He Huibin's key project "Cognitive Research on Dramatic Performance and Spectatorship."

In addition, numerous innovative achievements have emerged in fields such as literary geography, literary sociology, and interdisciplinary studies between literature and economics, law, and ecocriticism. Notable works include Mei Xinlin's two-volume *Principles of Literary Geography* and Guo Fangyun's *Literary Cartography*, both of which represent significant milestones in the interdisciplinary research of literature.

Further Discussion

The aforementioned achievements demonstrate that, since the arrival of the new era, scholars of foreign and comparative literature have made significant strides in constructing a Chinese intellectual system. Nevertheless, the "Sinicization"

of foreign literary studies remains a task of great magnitude and long-term commitment. Further expansion and development should be pursued in the following dimensions:

First, uphold a Chinese standpoint and further eliminate Eurocentrism. We must transcend source language contexts. Foreign literature researchers, due to their long-term immersion in the languages and texts of their target countries, often unconsciously succumb to the influence of those cultures, falling into their cultural paradigms without self-awareness. We should strive to overcome this cognitive bias by partially detaching ourselves from the source language context and conducting objective, multi-dimensional interpretations from the perspective of our own national culture. Furthermore, we must engage in reflection, questioning, and critique of Western literature and culture. Chinese scholars should maintain a Marxist standpoint, employing dialectical and historical materialism to examine research subjects. It is particularly crucial to maintain a healthy intellectual distance from foreign works involving religious or political themes, approaching them with a spirit of critical inquiry. We should also avoid the mechanical application of Western theories. Instead, we must flexibly utilize new theories, methods, and perspectives to study foreign authors and their works. This involves critically analyzing various contemporary theories and critical methods to select and synthesize those perspectives most suited to the specific research object.

Second, further strengthen the construction and innovation of indigenous theories and discourse systems. In future theoretical and methodological research in comparative and world literature, we must continue to expand and deepen existing frameworks, including Marxist literary theory and criticism, Ethical Literary Criticism, the theory of “Dual Narrative Progression,” Chinese narratology from a comparative perspective, principles of foreign literature, the Variation Theory of comparative literature, World Poetics, and Literary Anthropology to amplify their domestic and international influence. Simultaneously, we must construct new indigenous theories and discourse systems by excavating local theoretical resources while judiciously drawing upon foreign intellectual contributions.

Third, further advance international discursive influence in foreign literature studies. The CPC Central Committee, with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core, has consistently emphasized strengthening international communication capacity. This involves innovating external communication methods and building robust discourse systems that “develop new concepts, categories, and expressions integrating Chinese and foreign perspectives, tell China’s stories well, and amplify China’s voice,” thereby enhancing international discursive influence (Xi 147-151).

As global comparative literature increasingly turns toward the East and China, Chinese scholars must strengthen indigenous theoretical discourse while cultivating a sense of a human community with a shared future. Through more effective dialogue and exchange with the international academic community, Chinese scholars should secure international discursive influence and guide global research directions, injecting new vitality into world literature studies.

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