



The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature

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Seeing the restrictions of former studies in Comparative Literature and aiming to amend these deficiencies, the author of this book mainly discusses the major theoretical significance and academic value of the Variation Theory in the whole process of the development of Comparative Literature in the world. In China the seminal comparative study of literature among different cultures can be dated back to ancient China, while the founding of comparative literature as a distinct academic discipline has to be largely owing to the influence of the West. The modern Chinese study of comparative literature formed its uniqueness under Western influence. The direct influence of the translation of western theories into China is remarkable. However, in the course of translation and reception of Western theories, Chinese comparatists and intellectuals have been encountering various problems, and solving them with an alternative method accordingly different from the traditional methods proposed by the French School and the American School. Therefore, in this book, modern Chinese study of comparative literature is put in a historical context with regard to the theoretical issue of the discipline in China through the entire 20th century. At present, many scholars in China and in other countries agree that, with the influence study proposed by the French School and the study of analogy advocated by the American School, the entire theoretical system of Comparative Literature is well built. However, when the comparative study of literature between East and West is concerned, the theory of Comparative Literature is far from perfect. It is not only because many problems still exist, but there are significant defects in their theoretical bases respectively. Many researches have proven that even with the influence study and the study of analogy, we still can not solve many problems in the practice of studies in comparative literature. This does not mean that we have no respect for the contributions of the French School and the American School; we just want to attach importance to literary variations, which is a phenomenon that has long been neglected. The purpose of putting forward the Variation Theory in Comparative Literature is to provide new perspectives, new methods and new theory to the study of comparative literature, which may be a major breakthrough in the international arena of Comparative Literature. The neglect of literary variation is mainly because all the previous theories about comparative literature start off in search of similarities but not differences. Accordingly, in 1990s heterogeneity as a premise of comparability was put forward. And later, the variation theory was further advanced. It is not only the important phenomenon in literary communication, but also the most valuable research object in Comparative Literature. Still, it will be an important path to cultural innovation. The Variation Theory may make up the major flaws of theories by both French school and the American School since it focus on heterogeneity and variability in cross-cultural literary events, especially the ones of inter-civilization which will be a new course for comparative literature. Throughout the history of literature and the history of literary communication, collisions between different civilizations have always been producing new literary events which make the heterogeneity of different civilizations and variability traceable. The higher stage of literary communication may mean dialogue and blend between different cultures. The overarching concerns of this book include different levels of variation in literary communication and the studies of different objects. The introduction begins with a literature review of major achievements made by the French School and the American School with pointing out what they have neglected. The body of the book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Chapter 1 deals with the major contributions of influence study and its weaknesses. The origination of comparative literature in most of European countries is reviewed first, and then the major contributions of the French School are listed to point out its merits and weaknesses. The author discusses the relation between Influence Study and the Variation Theory and the importance of the French school in theoretical development of comparative literature is stressed too. Chapter 2 offers a critical introduction and reflection on the study of analogy . Both its major contributions and

weaknesses are made clear to further illustrate the relationship between interpretation and the Variation Theory. And the discursive variation is discussed. Part II is a transitional part with only one chapter that gives a clear account of phenomenon of variation from international perspective. Part III consists of four chapters. Chapter 4 offers a detailed description of The Variation Theory in cross-languages context. Chapter 5 deals with cross-cultural variation in homogeneous circle of civilization. Chapter 6 discusses the variation among heterogeneous civilization. For a long period of time the theoretical study of comparative literature in China has largely been confined to the Chinese academic arena, thus has long been neglected. On one hand western comparatists have gradually realized the importance of a non-western perspective in the study of the discipline; on the other hand, few books are available to introduce the recent development of comparative literature study in China. Compared with the enthusiastic reception of the theories of the French School and the American School, the theories of Chinese comparatists receives relatively little attention in western countries. In this sense, the proposed book attempts to challenge the myth of monolithic theories of comparative literature, trying to construct an alternative theory of the discipline.

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