

Parallel Studies and Hermeneutic Variation

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Abstract: To understand parallel studies from the view of hermeneutics would be a helpful way to break through their developmental predicament. Theoretically, parallel studies have clear connotation of hermeneutics. Meanwhile, the practices of seeking common hermeneutics between literary works and theories, and the hermeneutic approach highlight the essence of parallel studies. Hermeneutic variation of parallel studies caused by the heterogeneity of different cultures falls into two types: unconscious hermeneutic variation and conscious hermeneutic variation. Moreover, hermeneutic variation might cause the aphasic problems, or become the potential power of cultural innovation.

Keywords: parallel studies; hermeneutic study; the variation theory; aphasia; cultural innovation

Parallel studies are a very important research approach in the discipline of comparative literature, and in some sense have even become a synonym for the American school of comparative literature. Yet the truth is that, though laying the groundwork for the formation of the American school, parallel studies did not originate from the American school. Studies of the history of the discipline of comparative literature reveal that practices of parallel studies had already existed extensively and flourished even during the pre-disciplinary period, before the foundation of the French school, for example, the famous French romantic writer Madame de Stael and the Brothers Grimm from Germany had more or less touched on parallel studies in their research. It was due to the abundance of parallel

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studies during the pre-disciplinary period that the randomness and the confusion of parallel studies began to strike some comparative literary scholars. Hence to establish the legitimacy of the discipline of comparative literature, the French school made a very painful adjustment: they proposed that “comparative literature is not equal to literary comparison,” explicitly abandoned parallel studies, turned to the influence studies that they termed “history of international literary relationships,” and focused on factual links and empirical research. In later times, however, as the limitations of the influence studies triggered a new crisis for comparative literature, the American school reincorporated parallel studies into the disciplinary system of comparative literature, set on resuming the legitimacy of parallel studies. While making up for the shortcomings of the influence studies, this also inspired the prevalence of the “X+Y” model of analogy research, which again brought to light the potential casualness and confusion of parallel studies and placed parallel studies in a considerable predicament.

After a review of the ups and downs of parallel studies, a question might naturally arise: Why were parallel studies repeatedly doubted? Simply put, the French school paid overly rigid attention to the same-origin relationships and empirical investigations, which triggered a crisis for comparative literature and then a theoretical diversion from the American school, yet the legitimacy of the influence studies in general was rarely doubted, for the same-origin relationships based on factual links and the empirical research approach had ensured the inevitability of the influence studies. In contrast, parallel studies, which are backed by an affinity between literary phenomena, inevitably involve more uncertain factors, for affinity is usually decided by conventional or individual aesthetic tastes, and that easily arouses debates about the legitimacy of parallel studies. What’s worse, parallel studies in the past tended to ignore the heterogeneity between different cultures and civilizations, and that led to the over-proliferation of analogy research. There is another reason for the doubts about parallel studies: the deepest relationship between parallel studies and “hermeneutics” is yet to be explored by academia.

Parallel studies, as a research approach of comparative literature, are essentially a dialogue held through comparison and mutual interpretation, based on an analogical relationship between different objects. As a type of analogical comparison, parallel studies have long been recognized by academia, yet their interpretative connotations have long been disregarded, whereby their legitimacy is largely weakened. The comparisons made in parallel studies not only include seeking commonness, but also contain the process of interpretation. If parallel studies could be studied anew from the dimension of interpretation, if hermeneutic variation during parallel studies could be distinguished, then theories about parallel studies will be much enriched and the implementation of parallel studies will be smoother. This paper is to follow such a way of reasoning: first, examples will be given to prove that parallel studies are hermeneutic studies in essence; then hermeneutic variation will be discussed to further enhance the academic value of parallel studies and to strengthen the legitimacy of parallel studies in an innovative manner.

1. Parallel studies are essentially hermeneutic research

Historically, the common academic view regarding parallel studies has been limited to the sphere of analogical comparison, namely that parallel studies, contrary to the influence studies, are merely an analogical comparison between objects without factual links. It indeed specifies the special trait of parallel studies yet

fails to grasp their essential nature. Parallel studies are surely a type of comparative literary studies that are based on affinity and comparability, yet during the comparisons, the process of seeking similarities itself is also a human interpretative activity. Parallel studies are essentially a type of hermeneutic research. This is well supported by specified theories and abundant practices.

In terms of theories, Henry H. H. Remak, a key scholar and representative of the American school, gave a definition, arguably a most authoritative one by the American school, to comparative literature in the beginning of his essay *Comparative literature: Its Definition and Function*. His comment on the influence studies is also found in the same essay.

Since its deliberate effort to seek and prove a certain influence might obscure more significant factors such as artistic understanding and evaluation, the influence studies might, in interpreting the nature of a literary work, come next to those comparative studies about the author, text, genre, inclination and literature that ignore influence or don't focus on influence.^①

Though it is the influence studies that are discussed here, Henry H. H. Remak, while commenting on the loss of aesthetic considerations of the influence study, in fact indicates the fundamental characteristic of parallel studies, namely that parallel studies focus on the understanding and evaluation of literature and the relationship between it and other forms of art. That naturally requires interpretation. Regarding “comparative studies about the author, text, genre, inclination and literature that ignore influence or don't focus on influence,” Henry H. H. Remak proposed a kind of analogical comparison based on an aesthetic understanding about the research objects or the correlations between them. This aesthetic understanding only exists on one premise: researchers have reached a preliminary interpretation and judgment of the research objects or their relationships.

Moreover, just as comparison is divided into direct and indirect comparison, parallel studies can also be grouped into explicit and implicit comparison.^② The former is the generally known analogical comparison between objects without factual links, while the latter is an interpretative comparison. Yet as mentioned earlier, the establishment of an analogical relationship cannot be separated from the researchers' interpretative choice and judgment, therefore the so-called explicit comparison and the implicit comparison are in fact the same at their core. An analogical comparison is the observable trait of parallel studies, and hermeneutic research is their hidden connotation. Once parallel studies are theoretically recognized as a kind of hermeneutic research, it becomes easy to observe in specific practices of parallel studies that, the innumerable achievements of parallel studies, especially those of Chinese-Western comparative literary, all take the form of hermeneutic research.

The first example is the most common hermeneutic research by “seeking commonness,” which is represented by Qian Zhongshu's “interconnected” approach for comparative literary study. In his *On the Art of Poetry and Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters (Guan Zhui Bian)*, Qian obviously adopted hermeneutic approaches when conducting Chinese-Western comparative literary parallel studies, just as he mentioned below:

Personally, I don't think my method belongs to “comparative literature” in the usual sense of the

① Remak, 1985, p. 209

② Cao, 2005, p. 81

term. Rather, it aims to achieve “interconnection” between Chinese literature and foreign literature, between Chinese poems and novels. I started my writing career by writing novels and took such a fancy to it that I used the language of novels to interpret the language or skills of *Limited views : essays on ideas and letters*, such as pp. 67–69, 164–166, 211–212, 281–282, and 321. The psychological analysis of ancient poems (181, 270–271), the remarks on philosophers’ and literati’s distrust in language (406), the analysis of the romantic grief of men standing on the top of mountains (the essay on Song Yu, in the 3rd volume), and the exploration into travelers’ longing for home wherever they go(116), are all my attempts to achieve “interconnection” so as to create some new connotation^①.

Though Qian Zhongshu did not completely admit his research approach belonged to comparative literature, what is undeniable is that his studies are indeed marked with characteristics of comparative literary parallel studies. His studies are also highly interpretative as all his comparative literary studies take on one form: to interpret Chinese ancient works through analogical methods by extensively drawing on all kinds of scholarship from inside and outside China. His ultimate goal is to achieve the “interconnection” between literary phenomena, which he described in the preface of *On the Art of Poetry* as “both eastern and western people share the same laws of thoughts; both south and north schools share the same rule of learning.”^②

However, there are still problems with Qian Zhongshu’s “seeking-commonness” hermeneutic research, which was criticized by François Jullien, a famous French sinologist, who thought Qian’s method of “seeking commonness” was dubious, for “Qian was merely seeking affinity, an infinite affinity: one sentence should at last prove the same as another in meaning. I don’t think this kind of comparison is quite rewarding.”^③ That is, though hermeneutics by breaking through boundaries and “seeking commonness” might create some academic value, some key research could also be omitted due to the disregard of heterogeneity. Qian Zhongshu insisted on a new connotation being created through “interconnection,” while in fact the hermeneutic research that breaks through the “seeking-commonness” model could create more “new connotations,” for it stresses the heterogeneity between different research objects as well as hermeneutic variation. This aspect will be discussed later in this paper.

Apart from the aforementioned “seeking-commonness” model of hermeneutics, there is also another model of hermeneutic research—parallel studies, which use works to interpret works or use theories to interpret theories and are typically represented by James J. Y. Liu’s Chinese-Western comparative poetry. James is the author of several monographs, which include *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962), *The Poetry of Li Shangyin—A Baroque-Style Chinese Poet in the Ninth Century* (1969), *Major Lyricists of the Northern Song* (1974), *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975), *Essentials of Chinese Literary Art* (1979) and *The Interlingual Critic: Interpreting Chinese Poetry* (1982), as well as over 50 academic papers. He pioneered the research model of integrating Chinese and Western poetry to interpret Chinese literature and poetic theories. His book *Chinese Theories of Literature*, which is named “the first overseas monograph about Chinese-Western comparative poetry”,^④ in particular, is exemplary in using Western literary theories to interpret ancient Chinese literary theories. In this book, James borrowed the four main elements of art from *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic*

① Luo,1992, p. 299

② Qian, 2001, p.1

③ Qin, 1996, p.79

Theory and the Critical Tradition, authored by Meyer H. Abrams, and replaced the “artist” and “audience” with his “author” and “reader.” He arranged his four new elements in two reverse rings and divided Chinese ancient literary theories into six kinds: the metaphysical, the deterministic, the expressive, the technical, the aesthetic and the pragmatic. In some measure, James Liu matched or analogized ancient Chinese literary theories with Western literary theories and delved into Chinese the poetic system by means of Western academic discourses and theoretical frameworks. This is a clear display of using Western theories to interpret Eastern literature, or rather, a hermeneutic research implemented in the form of parallel studies.

The conviction that parallel studies are essentially hermeneutic research can also be proved by the illustrative approach of comparative literary studies familiar to scholars. The illustrative approach, as a universally applied research approach, has a long history. Even at the beginning of the formation of Chinese comparative literature, it had become a potential research model in the discipline of comparative literature, for example, several practices of Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei and Zhu Guangqian bore marks of the illustrative approach. But it was the Taiwanese comparative literary academics in the 1970s that had literally combined the “illustrative approach” and Chinese comparative literary practices, conducted a theoretical analysis of the approach for the first time and finally made it a theoretical basis for the Chinese school of comparative literature. Gu Tianhong and Chen Huihua, in the preface of *The Tap of Comparative Literature* in Taiwan, said:

Chinese–Western literary comparison during recent years exhibits a new research approach. Chinese literary is rich in implicit beauty, yet its methodology of literary studies is never systematic, and is lacking in intelligible theories that could trace its origins. Thus, the newest generation of Chinese scholars who have received training in Western literature, when turning to the studies of classical Chinese literary works or modern Chinese literature, set their eyes on Western theories and methods to excavate the treasure of Chinese literature. Since Western theories and methods were exploited, Western literature was involved, and adjustments, tests and modifications were conducted on original theories and methods, this approach could also be regarded as comparative literature. A conclusion, if it does not sound too arbitrary, can even be made that this kind of research, which uses Western literary theories and methods, testing them and adjusting them to studies of Chinese literature marks the characteristic of the Chinese school of comparative literature.

It might be said that this illustrative approach is marked with two major traits: first, it is a unidirectional interpretation of Chinese literature by means of Western literary theories and methods; second, it is distinctly cross-culture/civilization. This illustrative approach is an analogical relationship based interpretation of the East through a Western perspective. Whether it is the unidirectional illustrative approach the Taiwanese scholars advocated, or the bidirectional illustrative approach that was later developed by Chen Dun and Liu Xiangyu, the illustrative approach is undoubtedly within the sphere of hermeneutic research. What’s more, though hermeneutics is not marked with clear traces of comparison, it cannot exist without the establishment of an analogical relationship. Therefore, both the theories and practices of the illustrative approach have again stressed the fact that parallel studies are in fact hermeneutic research.

Parallel studies and hermeneutic research are essentially interconnected, both in theory and practice. The

① Cao, 2005, p.334

former, which choose specific objects and make analogical comparisons, seem to be explicit comparison, while the latter, which conducts unidirectional or bidirectional illustration between different objects, seems to be implicit comparison. Yet both aim at a better understanding or knowledge of a specific object by means of other objects. The truth is that, when the comparability is established by researchers for analogy studies, the aesthetic hermeneutics has already been unconsciously performed. The reason why the hermeneutics can be formulated is that similarities do exist between the research objects. However, it must be admitted that problems still exist in today's hermeneutic research, in theory and practice. Thus, the following is discussion on hermeneutic variation in parallel studies.

2. Hermeneutic variation in parallel studies

Variation in parallel studies is frequently doubted or even ignored by scholars, for the variation of the analogical relationship is far less obvious and less intelligible than the same-origin-based influence studies and their variation. Parallel studies are essentially hermeneutic research, and when the discourses of different cultures or civilizations are meeting or interpreting each other, due to the heterogeneity between their rules, there must be a clash, which to some extent causes hermeneutic variation. If the variation is disregarded, chances are that the real situation of hermeneutics will not be fully understood, academic confusion will be created, and parallel studies will be cornered into a predicament. François Jullien's criticism of Qian Zhongshu's "seeking-commonness" hermeneutics, mentioned above, also touches on the problem of the loss of academic value due to the disregard of hermeneutic variation. Besides Qian Zhongshu, James J. Y. Liu encountered even harsher criticism from Jullien for his research approach:

He is wrong even in the first place, for he tries to investigate Chinese poetry with a typical Western model. Nothing valuable will be gained by that. (...) He adopts the framework of M. H. Abrams, which does not suit Chinese literature (...) And the "author+work+world+reader" model he uses is not in line with Chinese traditions. In traditional Chinese literature, the concepts of "reader" and "author" have a completely different meaning.^①

What Jullien repeatedly emphasizes here is that James J. Y. Liu has ignored the hermeneutic variation under the influence of heterogeneous discourses. Such a disregard of cross-culture/civilization heterogeneity and variations during the interpretation of Chinese literature through Western theories will also place other parallel studies in a similar predicament for a long time. Therefore, identifying the interpretative connotations of parallel studies and appropriately handling the hermeneutic variations will be a key step to revitalizing parallel studies.

In general, hermeneutics variation in parallel studies mainly falls into two categories: unconscious and conscious variation. The former, just as its name implies, means that hermeneutics is an internalized behavior in specified research practices. It is easily found in the practices that use Western literary theories to construct the Chinese literary system. Is Bai Juyi a realistic or romantic poet? What exactly does "Feng Gu" mean in Liu Xie's *Wen Xin Diao Long* (*Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature*)? According to the authors of this paper,

^① Qin, 1996

the reason why such academic questions are perplexing is that unconscious hermeneutics leads to variations.

Specifically, Bai Juyi, in his poem *The Letter to Jiu Yuan*, once mentioned: “poetics—emotion is its root, language is its bud, sound is its flower, meaning is its fruit.”^① That is indeed quite similar to the Western romanticism that emphasizes imagination, emotions and longings for nature. There is, however, another thing that we must note. Bai Juyi also wrote many poems that incline to realism, such as *The Song of the Pipa Player*, (*Song of Everlasting Sorrow*) and *The Elderly Charcoal Seller*. He also proposed such a view about literature in *The Letter to Yuan Jiu* “All writings are ready for times; all poems are ready for politics.”^② Therefore whether Bai Juyi is defined as a romanticist or a realist, there is sure to be two levels of variation: first, like the other ancient Chinese poets, Bai Juyi, in the context of ancient Chinese literature, cannot be simply tagged as a romanticist or a realist that only exists in Western theories. Thus, whatever the tag, the defined Bai Juyi is a variation of the real Bai Juyi; second, if Bai Juyi’s poems are defined as romantic, then all the realistic elements in his poems have to be incorporated into the sphere of romanticism. Likewise, if his poems are defined as realistic, then realism will have more romantic connotation. In both cases, variation will occur, either to the theoretical system of romanticism, or that of realism.

As for the concept of “Feng Gu”, variation is even more complicated and diverse. Understandings of this concept seem so miscellaneous that there is barely a consensus. For example, Hong Kong scholar Chen Yaonan, in his paper *Clarification of Various Explanations of the Concept of “Feng Gu” in Wen Xin Diao Long (the Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons)* listed the existing 65 explanations for the concept “Feng Gu”. Some of the explanations were from the perspective of content and format, some from emotions and language skills, some from aesthetic standards or artistic expressions, some from literary power, some from the relationship between activity and stativity, the void and the solid, and the interior and the exterior, some from the dynamics, some from the style, and some even from romanticism and realism.^③ Each explanation seemed to make some sense, yet each also had their own problems. It was so hard to obtain a universally-acceptable definition that Chen Yaonan concluded:

In the story of “the blind men and the elephant,” the blind eyes seem to be what should be blamed. Plus, since the men are much smaller than the elephant, it is natural for them to misunderstand the whole of the elephant’s body. Yet if most of the touchers can actually see, if some of them are even clear-sighted, and if they, after decades of groping, still could not agree on what the elephant is like, then could it be that the “elephant” itself is elusive?

It seems as if Chen Yaonan was insinuating that the confusion around the definition of “Feng Gu” should be attributed to Liu Xie’s failure to specify it in the first place. Indeed, the Chinese tradition of using images to convey meanings can be discouragingly vague, yet in the case of “Feng Gu,” vagueness did not exist. In *Wen Xin Diao Long (Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature: Feng Gu)*, Liu Xie had in fact used a metaphor to explain the meaning of “Feng Gu”:

Pheasants are well equipped with feathers, yet they could not fly high, for they are carrying too much weight; hawks, dressed in humble feathers, could soar into the sky, for they are robust in body and fierce in

① Bai, 1992, p.423

② Bai, 1992, p.425

③ Chen, 1988, pp.89–97

strength. It is the same with writing. Works with “Feng Gu” yet without rhetoric are like hawks rampaging through the literary garden, while works with rhetoric yet without “Feng Gu” are like pheasants scrambling around. Only those works with rich feathers and ability to fly high can be called “phoenix” in literature.

In Liu Xie’s eyes, “Feng Gu” and rhetoric are two parallel characteristics of literary products. They do not, as is usually assumed, belong to each other or interact as cause and effect. Those pheasant-like works, which excel in rhetoric yet fail in “Feng Gu”, will end up “gaudy and overweight;” those hawk-like works, which preserve “Feng Gu” and omit rhetoric, will be able to fly. But only those works with both “Feng Gu” and rhetoric can be called phoenix-like works. Therefore, “Feng Gu” here is not a concept about “content/format,” or a problem of mere “style.” It stresses a refined style and powerful content and exhibits a “robust” character. The reason why academic doubts abound in explaining it is that scholars tend to unconsciously draw on Western literary discourses to interpret it. Or rather, it is only due to their lack of confidence in the discourse system of ancient Chinese literary theories that Chinese scholars, when interpreting “Feng Gu”, unconsciously resort to the traditional Western dichotomic discourses, such as “content/format” “emotions/language skills” and “romanticism/realism” somehow plunging the originally clearly-defined term into a confusion of variations.

To sum up, the typical practices of defining the style of Chinese poets with romanticism and realism, and the customary tendency to interpret ancient Chinese literary theoretical terms through the logic of Western literary theories, are all evident embodiments of unconscious hermeneutics. Western academic discourses have permeated into all aspects of Chinese academic systems. Imperceptibly, this “naturally formulated” model of interpreting Chinese literature with Western literary theories has intertwined different discourses of Chinese and Western literary theories and inspired cross-culture/civilization variations in meanings.

Aside from the unconscious hermeneutic variation, there is also a conscious hermeneutic variation. The difference between conscious and unconscious hermeneutics is that the former is not a subconscious internalized in concrete research practices, but is an external tendency driven by the researchers’ private will. The exotic, especially Western, theories or methods involved in conscious hermeneutics are always a deliberate choice of the researcher. Yan Yuanshu’s analysis of *Wang Rong’s poem When You Are Out with the method of New Criticism* and linguistics can count as an example of conscious hermeneutics:

When you are out,
The golden incense burner in my room was never lit.
Love-sickness is like the burning candle,
It is lonely and burning to nothing in the mid-night.

In his elucidation, Yan Yuanshu following New Criticism, which regards the text as a self-sufficient system on which the reader should focus, used linguistic perspectives and gave a meticulous word-by-word analysis, which revealed multifold characteristics and connotations of classical poems. Such hermeneutic studies may convey multiple understandings, but Yan Yuanshu’s interpreting “incense burner” and “burning candle” as a sexual metaphor is indeed questionable. Viewing “burning candle” as a symbol for men and “incense burner” as a metaphor for women as a cultural origin—is enough to raise doubts. Yan Yuanshu, in supporting his sexual metaphor theory, specifically quoted Li Shangyin’s poem: “The spring silkworms never stop making silk until their death, Candle never stops burning until it dries tears into ashes.” In his opinion, though “candle”

as an embodiment of men was not evidently backed by traditional theories, some of Li Shangyin's poems obviously fall in with his sexual metaphor theory. Yan Yuanshu's elucidation, in some sense, is literally a "revolt." Ye Jiaying once refuted this opinion, pointing out that in traditional ancient Chinese literature, the image of "candle" mainly conveys three meanings: brightness and purity of mind, tears of grief, and a heart in misery.^① To arbitrarily link the image of "candle" with men is unconvincing, and such an unconvincing result is none other than a kind of variation caused by conscious hermeneutics.

There are many other examples of variation caused by conscious hermeneutics. For example, a famous scholar from Harvard University adapted Freud's psychoanalysis to the chapter "Wu Song Kills His Sister-in-law" in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. His elucidation proved to be a very typical kind of variation. According to the scholar, the entire course of the killing is marked with unusual bloodiness and cruelty, and the violent description of the killing doubtless hides a sexual meaning.

In his effort to precisely convey the vague chemistry and tension between Wu Song and Pan Jinlian, as well as Wu's pent-up violent sexual desire for Pan, the author used violent images only in order to invoke and replace sexual images, for example, Pan Jinlian was killed on the "wedding night," her clothes were "stripped off" (a metaphor for the undressing on the wedding night) and her blood on the death scene signified virgin blood on the marital bed. Sex and death are inherently intertwined, and here the intercourse with Wu Song that Pan had long dreamed of was finally completed in her death.^②

This elucidation, however fresh it sounds, might be considered absurd. Psychoanalysis being used to interpret the motive for the killing seems to make some sense, yet the elucidation in fact deviates from the Chinese cultural context where the original text was set. Whatever the process of killing, the fundamental motive for Wu Song's killing his sister-in-law is always to take revenge for the death of his elder brother. Deliberately interpreting the act within the sphere of Western theories will inevitably incur hermeneutic variation.

Whether it is unconscious or conscious hermeneutics, all the hermeneutics constructed upon analogical relationships are essentially a convergence and clash between the different academic discourses of different countries. Since the heterogeneity between different cultures and civilizations does exist, the interactions between different discourses is sure to bring about varying degrees of hermeneutic variation. Once the formation and patterns of hermeneutic variation are identified, it will be necessary to further trace the cultural connotations that are contained in the variations.

3. Conclusion: the problems caused by hermeneutic variation and its value for innovation

Parallel studies have long existed as a comparative research model, yet doubts about them never go away. To link parallel studies with hermeneutic research and then to pay attention to hermeneutic variations will surely be an effective approach to resolve the predicament where parallel studies are now stuck. Yet to effectively enhance the legitimacy of parallel studies and promote their further development calls for a precise

① Ye, 1997

② Tian, 2003, p.260

understanding of the problem of aphasia hidden behind hermeneutic variation, as well as the opportunities for cultural innovations that come along with hermeneutic variation.

Parallel studies are essentially hermeneutic research, and hermeneutics is a dialogue between discourses. Hermeneutic variation in fact reflects the qualitative change that occurs when one discourse becomes involved in another discourse. During the mutual communication an imbalance in position is very likely to occur, thereby causing the problem of aphasia, which is the author's constant concern. As was previously revealed by several examples using Western theories to interpret Chinese literature, hermeneutic variation invariably comes from the discourses of Western literary systems overlapping Chinese literature. If hermeneutics is carried to the extreme, as Yan Yuanshu's completely Westernized interpretation of the traditional image of "candle" does, or as the Harvard scholar's Freud-style interpretation of *The Plum in the Golden Vase* does, then the overlap will change into depression, and finally lead to the problem of aphasia. Therefore, the implementation of hermeneutic research not only requires the clarification of the analogical relationships between the research objects, but also calls for serious attention to the degree of hermeneutics. Indiscriminate westernization in the interpretation of Chinese literature is never feasible, and the morbid dependence on Western discourses should also be sensibly opposed. Or else, Chinese literature will plunge into a much worse condition than the current aphasia.

Surely the problem of aphasia must not be treated from a rigid perspective. As the saying goes, "By others' faults, wise men correct their own," aphasia could also be a chance for innovation. Under depression of discourses, aphasia is indeed off the original rail and dissolves the inherent cultural context of the object that is being interpreted, but once put in a healthy overlapping relationship, it seems as if a new soundtrack were gained and a creative chord were being played. That is well demonstrated by Wang Guowei's *The Story of the Stone* and *Poetic Remarks in the Human World*. The former disregarded the heterogeneity between Chinese literature/culture and Western literature/culture, indiscriminately drew on Western literary theories to interpret the novel *The Story of the Stone* and came up with an absurd conclusion that the novel is "enormously contradictory to the real spirit of the Chinese people"^①, thereby incurring the phenomenon of aphasia. The latter that subsequently came witnessed Wang Guowei abandon his "inclination to merely one side," integrate Western literary theories and traditional Chinese literary theories, and formulate a benign interaction during the elucidation, whereby new discourse elements were also introduced to enrich the existing Chinese literary theories about *ci* poetry. It can thus be concluded that hermeneutic variation might be a synonym for aphasia, but it also could be the start of cultural innovation. What matters is the choice of the discourses and the stance.

Comparative literary theories are gaining new ground by paying attention to heterogeneity and variation. The very reason why traditional parallel studies cannot give a convincing reply to the doubting voices about their legitimacy is that it has ignored heterogeneity and variation. When parallel studies are viewed as hermeneutic research, its exclusive hermeneutic variation will be better understood. To admit and analyze different patterns of hermeneutic variation, and then deal with the phenomenon of aphasia behind them as well as the variation's potential to drive cultural innovation, will be a key step for parallel studies to enhance their legitimacy and seek their further development.

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① Wang, 2012, p.13

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