

REVIEW ARTICLES

A NEW WORLD LITERATURE SERIES IN WILD PEONY

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The aim of this review article is to introduce to literary comparatists, especially those interested in Western and East Asian genetic-contact relations or typological affinities, the first two volumes, published recently (1997–1998) by the University of Sydney World Literature Series.

Wild Peony is the name of a publishing house specializing mostly in the literature and culture of East Asia (China, Japan and Korea), which in 1988 started to introduce to the English reading public books (or booklets) of translations, studies, essays and textbooks connected mostly, but not exclusively, with the East Asian cultural area. The first of these books was *Shijin – Autobiography of the Poet Kaneko Mitsuharu 1895–1975* by A.R. Davis and edited by A.D. Šyrokomla-Stefanowska. Then followed nearly twenty others, among them *The Virtue of Yin. Studies on Chinese Women* (1994) by Lily Xiao Hong Lee, or *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective* (1996) by M. Elvin. Two important volumes of essays: *Modernization of the Chinese Past* and *Modernity in Asian Art*, the last being edited by John Clark, appeared even earlier in 1993.

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Mostly due to another editor, Professor Mabel Lee, in 1997 Wild Peony started the series just mentioned. Her long friendship with Professor Yue Daiyun, a well-known literary comparatist from Peking, brought her into the activities of the ICLA/AILC (International Comparative Literature Association), and she was asked to edit and to publish two volumes of conference and congress materials. The first one brings to interested readers the papers read at the International Conference on Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Misreading, Peking, Oct. 9–11, 1995, and the second a part of the papers concerned with East Asia and the West, read at the XIVth ICLA Congress, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, Aug. 15–

20, 1994. Both are welcome to the students of comparative literature, especially by those who devote themselves to the East Asian literatures.

1. *Cultural Dialogue & Misreading* was edited by Mabel Lee and Professor Meng Hua, a younger colleague of Yue Daiyun and an important activist among the literary comparatists on Chinese Mainland. The international conference was jointly hosted by the Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture of Peking University and the Chinese Comparative Literature Association on the occasion of the ICLA Executive Council Meeting, Peking, Oct. 7–8, 1995. At this occasion not only the comparatists from the PRC had the opportunity to participate, but also the highest members of the ICLA, some other earlier members of the Executive Committee, and foreigners from Canada, France, Germany, The Netherlands, USA, Austria, Australia, Denmark, Switzerland, India, Japan, Brazil, Hungary, Greece, Romania and Portugal.

The editors arranged the papers into three parts: 1) Dialogue which “explores the territories and limitations of cultural interchange”, 2) Misreading which “isolates specific texts for scrutiny to demonstrate how crossing cultural boundaries often have fascinatingly creative aspects”, and 3) Identity which “examines how cultural identity is constructed in literature” (*Foreword* by Mabel Lee).

The first part is opened by G. Gillespie, President of ICLA/AILC (1994–1997), and his paper entitled *The Significance and Limits of Cultural Relativism*. His sway is impressive and he starts by pointing out that the “European speculation on relativism can be traced as far back as Plato’s comments on Protagoras’s views in the *Theaetetus*” (p. 3). The cultural relativism which always was and still remains one of the features of all cultural identities beginning with Near Eastern, South Asian, East Asian, Graeco-Roman and later legacies, is our legitimate heritage. East and West may find their way out of the difficulties of the present age only in common communication and understanding, in the tendency towards cross-fertilization of cultures and literatures. The cultural imperialism of the era preceding our times should come to its end and we have to follow the necessity dictated precisely by this cultural relativism and attempt at mutual cultural and literary enrichment. According to Gillespie, one of the most impressive achievements in the field of comparative literature is Earl Miner’s *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Comparative Literature* (1991). The problem of cultural relativism is also a topic of the following two essays by Paul Cornea *Le Défi Relativiste et la Compréhension de l’Autre* and by Amiya Dev *Cultural Relativism and Literary Value*. Even two representatives of Peking comparatists Ding Ersu *The Tale of the Impossible: A Semiotic Critique of Cultural Relativism* and Yue Daiyun *Cultural Relativism and the Principle of Harmony in Difference*, try to deal with the same question. To me the most attractive treatment is that of Yue Daiyun who confers upon it a typical Chinese flavour. During twenty one years of “inner exile” in Maoist China, Yue Daiyun had enough time to ponder over the “eternally” valuable components of Chinese philosophy, among which Harmony in Difference (*he er bu tong*), had

a prominent place. Instead of philosopher Mencius (ca.371–ca.289), most humanistic among the ancient Chinese Confucian philosophers, to whom she devoted much *operam et oleum* in the time after her “banishment”, she preferred to quote Confucius himself (571–479), according to whom: “The true gentleman is conciliatory (*tong*) but not accommodating (*bu tong*). Common people are accommodating, but not conciliatory” (*Lunyu*, XIII, 23).¹ Yue Daiyun finds modern representatives of this kind of reasoning in B. Russell and J. Habermas.

D. Fokkema who was probably the first among modern students of comparative literature who highlighted the problem of cultural relativism in *Cultureel relativisme en vergelijkende literatuurwetenschap* (Amsterdam, Arbeiderspers 1971), and slightly later in *Cultural Relativism and Comparative Literature*, *Tamkang Review*, 3, 1972, 1, pp. 59–72, and once again more than ten years later in *Cultural Relativism Reconsidered: Comparative Literature and Intercultural Relations*. In: *Douze cas d'interaction culturelle dans l'Europe ancienne et l'Orient proche ou lointain*. Paris, Unesco 1984, chose another subject much in vogue in the last years among literary comparatists: *Western, Eastern and Multicultural Canons of Literature*. Fokkema proposed one that would be “guided by the possibility of code-switching... and focus on contrastive values, on the difference between traditions, on criticism of prevailing ideologies, and on variety of models for moral behaviour and private life. It will include texts of complex literature from all majors cultures of the world...” (p. 42).

Two papers concerned with modern Chinese literature and its contacts with European (Italian) and Latin American (Mexican) writers, are very close to my own work as a Sinologist and comparatist: R.D. Findeisen’s *Two Aviators; Gabriele d’Annunzio and Xu Zhimo* and Mabel Lee’s *Discourse on Poetics; Paz’s Sunstone and Yang Lian’s Yi*. They have much in common. Both are, to a greater or lesser extent, written under the impact of Dionýz Ďurišin’s concept of interliterary process, the topic of both is concerned with flying whether real or imaginary, and both transcend the great intercontinental distances: China and Italy, or China and Mexico. Two papers under review were written by scholars who know in detail the contexts in the different systemo-structural entities within the analysed frameworks. Through comparing *Città morta* and *La Gioconda* with Xu Zhimo and Lu Xiaoman’s play *Bian Kungang*, Findeisen discovers the decadent face of both writers, husband and wife, unknown up to now, as far as I know, in modern Chinese literature. Since Yang Lian read, according to Mabel Lee, only a “limited amount of Paz’s works” (p. 94), her paper is a piece of typological (or parallel) study. Paz’s *Sunstone* and Yang Lian’s *Yi* “have both been inspired by ancient calendars which provided in both cases symbolic and concrete confirmation for their thinking about cyclical time in human history” (p. 95). Therefore they are to a great extent similar and their comparison has its *raison d’être*.

¹ CONFUCIUS: *The Analects* (Lun yü). Trans. by D.C. LAU. Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press 1983, pp. 128–129.

In his paper *On the Use and Limits of Multiculturalism* M. Szegedy-Maszák deals with another topic, now much in vogue, to which the next XVIth Congress of ICLA in Pretoria, South Africa, in 2000 should be devoted. Multiculturalism is one of the most peculiar features of our era and its impact is visible in all aspects of social consciousness, culture, literature and art inclusive. Here the dialectic of centre and peripheries, cosmopolitanism vs provincialism, cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism, identity and *différance*, are discussed mostly within the framework of literature and music. “The world is extremely fragmented and yet the canons, highly institutionalized and based on accessibility, are very rigid,” according to the Hungarian comparatist. He calls for reorganization of all education and research, with deconstruction of the opposition between Western and non-Western cultures. A kind of vacillation is discernible both in Szegedy-Maszák’s and Fokkema’s paper: they are not clear enough in pointing to the end product – canon or canons of literature of our global age.

The second part is opened by John Boening and pays attention, as mentioned above, to misreading. In his paper *Comparative Literature, Incommensurability and Cultural Misreading*, he takes into account mostly very different and mutually distanced cultures, with multilingual, multitextual background and perspectives. Here some lesser or greater extent of misunderstanding is possible and often done. I do not believe wholly in the incommensurability of cultures, and in our case of literatures, since I think that, for example, Europeans may find different aspects of these cultures as comprehensible as their own. Most important is knowledge and experience in both fields of research and the linguistic or other equivalence, and if possible, even exactness. Often an exotic attitude is the cause of these misreadings, or political, cultural traditionalism of the receiving environment the most important cause.

The impact of a biased exotic “knowledge” may be observed in a paper by W.F. Veit *Misunderstanding as Condition of Intercultural Understanding*. The ostensible *contradictio in adjecto* present in this judgement has its reason in some cases, as that described by G. Foster’s famous travelogue *Voyage Round the World (1772–1775)* concerned with meeting of the author and his companions with a fat man who was probably the chief of the district feeding himself “by handfuls the remains of a larged backed fish, and several bread-fruits, which he swallowed with a voracious appetite” (p. 164–165). For Foster this man was a monster of laziness, frugality, of unbridled *carpe diem* completely contradictory to the views of Christian and mostly Protestant ethics of his time. Not, of course, for the aborigines who saw in such a chief the paradigm of the man in this position. Understanding is possible, if misunderstanding is overcome by more mutual knowledge. Understanding is not always identical with knowledge. Since it comes in the process of communication, hermeneutic practice should be part of it and good will to communicate and, at least a minimum of mutual sympathy between communicating agents, is necessary.

Wang Yiman in the paper *Misreading at the Meeting of Two Hermeneutics: Ezra Pound’s Invention of Chinese Poetry*, introduces Ezra Pound as a “paragon

misreader” and agreeing with T.S. Eliot, as “the inventor of Chinese poetry of our time”, he pinpointed Pound’s misreading as a method of new understanding. According to Wang Yiman, Pound unconsciously came near to the original Chinese hermeneutics, proposed concretely by Wang Bi (226–249), famous commentator and philosopher of Taoist orientation. In comparing the method of Wang Bi and Pound, he contrasts it with the structuralist methodology of Steven Owen, of Harvard University, and finds the last, although he admits distorting procedures by Pound, as equally valuable (although he does not assert it explicitly).

Tanaka Takaaki in the paper *From Short to Long Forms of Narration: Genji Monogatari and Tang Chuanqi Tales*, presents a noteworthy study from the realm of the old East Asian interliterary community. Usually the impact of Bai Juyi’s (772– 846) on later Japanese literature, his long poem *Changhen ge* (*Song of Everlasting Sorrow*) was highlighted, and later Tang *chuanqi* (tales of the marvelous) were neglected, although they are more similar to Japanese literary works. This applies especially to *Changhen gezhuan* (*The Story of the Song of the Everlasting Sorrow*) by Chen Hong. There are no positive proofs that Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 1000) used precisely Chen Hong’s work, but she often quoted Bai Juyi’s masterpiece. It is possible to assert that the last was known to her due to the use of similar narrative devices. By the way, this tale was known in Japan in the Heian period. Here, maybe, the case of hidden reading is involved, without acknowledgement of the debt, quite typical for Oriental countries before the advent of the modern age.

Quite usual, and for China just before and even after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 characteristic, is the case presented in the paper by Tao Jie entitled *The (Mis)reading of Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a novel translated into classical Chinese (*wenyan*) as *Black Slaves Appeal to Heaven* (*Hei nu yu lu*). Lin Shu (1851–1924), famous translator of his time, partly changed the content of the novel, deleted parts delineating Christianity, and presented it as book written for males who should feel sympathy towards the black slaves, just as towards Chinese workers on the Trans-Pacific Railroad who were badly treated and discriminated against. Even in 1950s and 1960s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has been “associated with racial discrimination and the struggle for freedom and independence” in Mainland China.

The third part of the book under review on identity, presents one of the most discussed and controversial issues of our decade in the humanities. It originally represented the first section of the XIVth Congress of ICLA in Edmonton and its aftermath we may feel, quite explicitly in the following papers.

Media and Nations: Global Communication and Cultural Identity by A. Kaes shows the importance of media, specifically Hollywood’s mass culture, for example, its television production on the construction and affirmation of national cultural identity on the one hand, and on its defence, on the side of non-American populations on the other. Electronic communication on the internet and fax which in some developed countries “transcends even more radically than television or movies” (p. 302) is not analysed here in more detail, but it

should be taken into account together with the “questions of movement and migration, immigration and displacement, exile and diaspora” (ibid.), which have become very important elements of cultural change and development in multicultural milieus.

The best contribution among all papers in this part of the book is R.T. Segers’ *Cultural Identity: New Perspectives for Literary Studies*. He tries to find and construct a viable methodology for cultural (and mainly) for literary studies in the time of globalization, intercultural communication and systemic approaches to literature. This paper, very probably identical with that he read at the Edmonton ICLA Congress, was written after two studies, both concerned with Japanese cultural identity, that appeared in 1992 and 1994, is a solid piece of research and speculation on this weighty and still not satisfactorily solved subject. I think that those who deliberate over the issue of cultural identity should consult the studies by Professor Segers. Where the literary identity is concerned, in my view it is a bit problematic, whether the systemic and empirical approach to literature is the most plausible of all we may use. It is probably too extensive and broad.

Meng Hua in her short contribution *Quelques Réflexions sur la Temporalité du Stéréotype* analyses quite common stereotypes of foreigners according to traditional Chinese typization, such as *hongmao fan* (Red-haired Barbarian) or *yang guizi* (Foreign Devil), used after the first meeting with European foreigners in the 16th and 17th centuries nearly up to World War II.

Tania Franco Carvalhal’s *Latin America: Cultural Dialogue from the Periphery* treats the problem of cultural identity and of (mis)reading as of intentional and creative apprehension of the read texts in the new receiving context. According to this one of the foremost Latin American comparatists of our days, “we have to consider if European heritage was transplanted it was also transformed. Out of their native context the cultural models changed because *transplantation implies transformation*” (p. 393). In the literature of the Latin American countries we have to see most of “local colour” and the transformed cosmopolitan ideas and literary values in the new receiving structures.

Song Weijie’s *Local or Global: Cultural Identity in Multicultural Contexts* presents some valuable insights, among them probably most up to point is that in this situation perhaps “the idea of universal identity (for these societies, M.G.) should be abandoned and relatively suitable identities sought in multicultural contexts. That is to say, we should reflect local and global transformations and communications and reject all assumptions based on pre-multicultural contexts, and we should not use one kind of ‘pride and prejudice’ to resist another” (p. 413). The author is sure that Mainland China is not a multicultural, but “pluricultural society”, since there allegedly the problem of ethnicity or of race, do not play as great a role as culture, religion and gender (p. 410). This is, of course, a matter of discussion.

Reconstructing Chinese Literary Discourse by Cao Shunqing closes the whole book. Cao shows that Occidentalization (according to Said’s apprehension), insulted the Chinese people with inscriptions, such as “Chinese and dogs

are prohibited”, but also brought the disturbed minds into existence. The literary works of the time after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 produced the characters presenting the images of cultural discontinuity. In our global age, certainly in the last thirty or forty years, the world become pluralistic, and China, like many Asian and African countries, could not fully follow the West, or its/their tradition/s/. It is necessary to follow the objective demands of intercultural understanding, communication and mutual exchange. The great disadvantage ensuing from the lack of contemporary Chinese literary and cultural discourse should be overcome. Too much Westernization in nearly all fields of social consciousness is in reality much more detrimental than useful. But first it is necessary to study the achievements of the traditional Chinese literature and culture and on their bases to build the new set of theoretical and practical devices for such a new discourse.

2. *Literary Intercrossings. East Asia and the West* was edited jointly by Mabel Lee and A.D. Syrokomla-Stefanowska. It is one of six books of selected papers from the XIVth ICLA Congress 1994 published under the general editors Milan V. Dimić and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek.² Chinese, Japanese and Korean literature and culture, including philosophy, aesthetics, is treated here against the background of East-West relations or affinities.

The first paper was put into the volume by a sheer mistake. Christopher Gibbin’s “*Lines of Escape*”, *Cross-Cultural Encounters and The Pilgrim’s Rules of Etiquette* as a work of the originally Iranian author Taghi Modaresi, has nothing to do with East Asia.

I find Sang-Kyong Lee’s paper *The Eastern Spiritual World and the Dramatic Works of T.S. Eliot, with Special Reference to Murder in the Cathedral*, as one of the best studies in his career. Its connection to Japanese No theatre is very clear and richly documented against the background of the contemporary literary scholarship and translational and other activities: that of Ernest Fenolosa, Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats, James Abbot McNeill Whistler and others. Its similarities as well as differences to No are richly illustrated.

The paper entitled *Hangjungnok as Historiographical Autobiography*, although it is of no comparative character and treats the literary biography of Korean dowager queen Lady Hong’s (1735–1815) family, with atrocities caused by

² 1) de Valdés, M.E., Valdés, M.J. and Young, R. (eds.): *Latin America and Its Literature. Review of National Literatures*, 1995, pp. 1–219, 2) Tötösy de Zepetnek, S. (ed.): *International Perspectives on Reading. Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism and Pedagogy*, 35–36, 1996, pp. 1–120, 3) Delcheva, R., Osadnik, W. and Vlasov, E. (eds.): *Literature and Film. Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/ Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 23, 1996, 3, pp. 637–886. 4) Beller, M. (ed): *L’Imaginaire dell’altro e l’identità nazionale: metodi di ricerca letteraria. Il Confronto Letterario*, 24, 1996, pp. 1–213, 5) Tötösy de Zepetnek, S., Dimić, M.V. and Sywenky, I. (eds.): *Comparative Literature Today. Theory and Practice / La Littérature Comparée aujourd’hui. Théories et réalisations*. Paris, Honoré Champion 1998, and 6) the volume under review here.

mental illnesses of her father-in-law and her husband killed by his father king, is a good contribution. It is worthy of attention for the literature written by Korean women educated to “be mute, deaf and blind in order to be virtuous” (p. 59) according to the demands of Confucian ethics. One may admire the author’s sincerity and courage. Usually the works of this kind were annihilated in China, which was a model for Korea during many preceding centuries.

Midori Matsui is one of two authors in this anthology who did not resist the temptation to read two papers at the congress. This is really a problematic habit, since it is somehow a bit exhibitionistic, exalting one’s own abilities, at the expense of the others, who are expected to be present and to listen. The first of them: *(De)constructing Where There is No Structure?: The Debate over Postmodernism in the 1980s in Japan and the Formation of the New Critical Trend in Visual Art*, is certainly an interesting topic, even written in a sophisticated way, but especially in its theoretical part, often beyond the possibility to apprehend its message. What does “structureless structure” mean in Japanese social consciousness? Or what is to be understood under the theory of the “eternal embrace” by Maruyama Masao? Was it Japanese totalitarianism in the form, for instance, of *yokusan* made on behalf of the unity of the Japanese people in 1940? The second one: *The Implicit Return: Kobayashi Hideo’s Failure to Achieve Modernism and the Problems Concerning His Ideological Conversion* (tenko), comes out of the same premises and is concerned with the results of typically Japanese brainwashing through the centuries up to World War II. Kobayashi Hideo, one of the most prominent Japanese literary critics, is shown here as a typical representative of this conversion. In a few years after 1933 and official sanctioning war ideology introducing wholesale totalitarianism, he departed from the propagation of literary modernism and turned back to his Japanese *kokyo* (home) and its very doubtful values of *kokutai* kind.

Two papers are connected with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blessed Damozel* and its impact on Japanese and Chinese poetry.

In the first case, Sugawara Katsuya’s *Biblical Imagery Transposed to the Japanese Tradition: The Vision of the Heavenly Spring*, analyses one motif from Rossetti’s famous poem in the work of Kambara Ariake (1876–1912), “the most representative Japanese Symbolist poet” (p. 132), Doi Bansui, Iwano Homei, and Susukida Kyukin, pointing to its *biblical* sources, but also to the Japanese parallels, which probably prepared the soil for its reception in the new literary structure. Even more interesting, and refreshingly new, is the impact of Rossetti’s poem on the works of representative romantic poets in China of the 1920s. Linda Wong in her paper *The Problem of Self: Adaptations of Dante Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel” by Xu Zhimo and Wen Yiduo*, points to the poems *Li-angdi xiangsi* (*Lovesick on Both Sides*), *Wo tenghou ni: wo kanjian ni* (*I’m Waiting for You, I’m Looking at You*) by Xu and *Li Bai zhi si* (*The Death of Li Bai*) by Wen, where Rossetti’s work is a source of creative inspiration. All three poems are good examples of indebtedness, but also valuable for their creative inventiveness. In the case of Xu it is more sentimental and romantic, and in the case of Wen it is intellectual and emotionally more controlled.

Janet A. Walker's *Futabatei Shimei's Ukigumo as a Vehicle of Cognitive and Emotional Reorientation in a Period of Cultural Change* is a good example of comparative study in Japanese-Russian literary relations at the beginning of modern Japanese literature in the second half of the 1880s. She presents her deep knowledge both of this first work of modern fiction in the Meiji era and of its Russian models, mostly I.S. Turgenev's *Rudin* and *On the Eve*, I.A. Goncharov's *Oblomov* and *The Precipice*, together with the impact of Russian "superfluous men" on the characters of Bunzo, Noboru, Osei and others.

Terry Siu-han Yip in her paper *In Quest of Identity: A Comparative Study of the Romantic Self in Chinese and Western Literature* analyses in a typological way the *Bildung* process of two important "fictional selves" Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* from 1916 and Gao Juehui in Ba Jin's *Jia (Family)* against the background of two different cultures during times of great changes and the endeavours to achieve transvaluation of values both in Europe and in China.

The most interesting contribution to this second book, for me personally, is the last one in the series: Ho-Byeong Yoon's *Baudelairean Poetic Meaning and Verlainean Poetic Musicality in the Formation of Modern Korean Poetry*. Dr. Yoon impinges briefly but efficiently upon the most important borrowings of Korean Symbolist poetry from the great French predecessors and models. This excellent essay is very probably the outcome of his PhD thesis *French Symbolism and Modern Korean Poetry: A Study in Poetic Language and Its Social Significance in Korea*, State University of New York at Stony Brook 1986, which, unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to read. It is a pity that his hope to have "another opportunity to discuss other Symbolist lines in the formation of modern Korean poetry" (p. 215), was not realized as yet.

It is necessary to mention that the covers of both books present impressive ink paintings by the well-known Chinese contemporary writer and playwright Gao Xingjian.

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The two volumes under review are the first two swallows coming to the interested readers in the spring after a period of hibernation. They are tracing the earlier footsteps of the pioneering *Critical Issues in East Asian Literature. Report on an International Conference on East Asian Literature, 13–20 June, 1983*, Seoul, International Cultural Society of Korea 1983, 295 pp., and *Chinese Literature and European Context. Proceedings of the 2nd International Sinological Symposium, Smolenice Castle, June 22–25, 1993*, Bratislava, Rowaco Ltd. & Institute of Oriental and African Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences 1994, 255 pp.

Readers and students interested in the interliterary process of East Asian countries are requested to devote more attention to this new series launched by Wild Peony Publishers.