

## Editorial Foreword

### Moving Boundaries: From “Scriptural Reasoning” to Inter-disciplinary Studies in Chinese Context

GENG Youzhuang

Over the past few years, the term Scriptural Reasoning (SR) has appeared frequently in Chinese academic conferences, journals and activities. Moreover, due to the active participation of Chinese scholars in this movement, SR has gone beyond the disciplinary boundary of Religious Studies and has entered into the field of Philosophy and Comparative Literature, making it widely recognized by both Chinese and international academics. However, it remains necessary to explore some of its questions, such as the possibility and value of SR entering into a Chinese context, the value of SR between China and the West, and the relationship and implications between SR and comparative literature as well as other disciplines.

I believe that the above questions can be answered only within the context of changes and adjustments in related disciplines, with broader cross-cultural exchange and communication as the background. The most interesting and important developments include: the rise, once again, of Traditional Chinese Learning or *Guoxue* (国学, also called National Learning) with a great deal of controversy; a renewal or revival of Sinology or *Hanxue* (汉学) in the world, including in China, following a long decline; the challenges and crises faced by Comparative Literature (比较文学) as it looks for new outlets; and the reconstruction of so-called World Literature (世界文学) in an age of globalization. These phenomena show that most traditional disciplines have been facing a range of problems, and the boundaries between different disciplines have been moving as a result of reflection on, and

reaction to, this situation. At the same time, the establishment of some new disciplines and projects is worthy of notice. For instance, the establishment of Chinese Classical Studies (中国古典学), promoted by professor Liu Xiaofeng from Renmin University, and the project of Confucian Studies Hermeneutics (经学诠释学), led by Professor Yang Naiqiao at Fudan University, are related to interdisciplinary comparative literature studies, and the so-called “Sino-Christian Studies” has had some remarkable changes in recent years.

The recent rise of *Guoxue* (Traditional Chinese Learning) in Chinese academia is notable. The concept of *Guoxue* was first used by Deng Shi (邓实) in 1906, bequeathing a history of over one hundred years. Because of the New Culture Movement (1919) and the introduction of Western Learning or *Xixue* (西学), Traditional Chinese Learning has not yet achieved much. Even though it has recently been enjoying great support from the State, it has still not produced significant results. However, the rise of Traditional Chinese Learning in recent years has, unexpectedly, advanced the development of Sinology. Faced with the rise of Traditional Chinese Learning inside China, overseas Sinology studies began to reflect on its own position and role. As one French sinologist stated, “Sinology will hopefully measure, appreciate and evaluate its own contribution to a ‘real’ knowledge of some ‘real’ China. It is obvious that the rise of Traditional Chinese Learning will bring challenges to ‘Sinology’. Previously, the Chinese themselves were represented in the field of Sinology only as individuals and not as some kind of an institution in terms of what Traditional Chinese Learning means. In this sense, the rise of Traditional Chinese Learning, in its modern shape, constitutes in itself an important event in the history of Sinology.”<sup>①</sup> Moreover, Chinese Studies as a whole has been altered to incorporate a real co-existence of Traditional Chinese Learning and Sinology. Liu Dong, a professor from Tsinghua University, has correctly pointed out:

---

<sup>①</sup> Pierre-Henri de Bruyn, “Strategic Contributions of Sinology in the Exchanges between China and the World and Particular to the so-called ‘Chinese Soft Power’,” *World Sinology*, vol. 12(2013):12.

[A]t the moment when modern *Guoxue* studies took their form, *guoxue* and Sinology (汉学, *Hanxue*) started to interact with each other; They were even closer in terms of the morphology of knowledge than the classification of disciplines in later times. ... *Guoxue* as an academic discipline, which attempted to explain Chinese culture internally, was determined to distinguish itself from an external “Sinology” and later “Chinese Studies” (中国学). Together they developed into the major components and schools of today’s “China learning” (中学, *zhongxue*). Because of the awareness of each other’s existence, neither *guoxue* nor Sinology could manipulate the knowledge and discourse on China.<sup>①</sup>

As a matter of fact, even *Xixue* (Western Learning) as a whole has been affected by the rise of Traditional Chinese Learning and the revival of Sinology. *Guoxue* is a discourse on China formed in China, while *Hanxue* (Sinology) is a non-Chinese discourse on China developed mainly by people living outside of China. Each has its own tradition: the former carries on the classical tradition of China, and the latter follows a tradition of Western learning. However, these two disciplines have by no means been in a state of non-relationship with each other from the outset and now have a closer relationship than ever before. Sinology is now widely recognized and acknowledged by Chinese scholars and has engaged in deep communication and dialogue with Traditional Chinese Learning. As a result, not only are more and more Chinese scholars becoming interested in the history, development, achievement and significance of Sinology, but overseas sinologists have found in China a real place of acceptance, where their works and achievements are highly valued. I once argued for the term “World Sinology and the Sinology World”, meaning that, from whichever perspective, “world sinology” has already incorporated Chinese academia into itself, and this “sinology world” is made up of

---

<sup>①</sup> LIU Dong, “National Learning (*Guoxue*): Six Perspectives and Six Definitions,” *China Scholarship*, vol. 32 (2012): 300-301.

both Chinese and Western scholars alike. In a sense, it is the revival of Traditional Chinese Learning that has stimulated the “rebirth” or “revival” of Sinology – that discipline which originated in China but was developed in the west – in contemporary China, this is the reason we have the so-called “New Sinology” (新汉学) and “the return of Sinology” (汉学回家).

For various reasons, Traditional Chinese Learning as a discipline has not made significant progress since it was first established a hundred years ago. Many Chinese scholars have reflected on this and tried to find new approaches. One of the outcomes has been the Chinese Classical Studies program advanced by Professor Liu Xiaofeng. In his “Why Should Chinese Classical Studies be established?” he claims:

We should establish a discipline of Chinese Classical Studies, to replace the “Traditional Chinese Learning”, which has been popular since the May Fourth Movement. The term, “Traditional Chinese learning” has in any case been difficult to communicate to outsiders., Japan and Korea have had cohorts of scholars doing solid research in disciplines studying China’s traditions; in Japan this is called “Shina Studies” (支那学), in South Korea it is called “Chinese Studies”, and in the West, Sinology. If we label research into Chinese traditions “Chinese Classical Studies”, then we not only avoid this communication difficulty, but, more importantly, we can revert from competition between China and the West to competition between traditional and modern learning<sup>①</sup>

It is perhaps questionable whether competition between China and the West can be avoided with just a change of name. But the suggestion to replace ‘Traditional Chinese Learning’ with ‘Chinese Classical Studies’ is a good one, which would, at a minimum, reduce much of the hassle in communicating. Moreover, this formulation itself implies an integration of the classics of China and the West.

---

<sup>①</sup> LIU Xiaofeng, *Poetica Classica Retractata* (Beijing: The Huaxia Press, 2010), 7.

No matter which name is ultimately used, the greater part of ancient Chinese Learning has had its own connotations and content, that is, Confucian Studies or *Jingxue* (经学), with a tradition of over two thousand years. Confucian Studies denotes an exercise in reading, commenting on and interpreting Chinese classics, especially the Confucian classics, performed by Chinese scholars across the dynasties. Recently, Professor Li Xueqin from Tsinghua University restated the idea that “the main stream of Traditional Chinese Learning is Confucianism, and the core of Confucianism is Confucian Studies.”<sup>①</sup> On the surface, there is a great deal of similarity between Confucian Studies and SR, and the two can learn from each other. Firstly, beyond the theological basis or dimension of SR, there are connections and correlations between SR and Chinese Confucian Studies in the above. Most obviously, the interpretative activities initiated by Confucius and carried on by generations of later Confucian scholars, are quite similar. Confucian scholars developed a set of reading and interpretative techniques/methods within the tradition, which include *zhu* (注, commentary), *shu* (疏, annotation), *jian* (笺, notes), *zhengyi* (正义, correction), *zhangju* (章句, punctuation), *xungu* (训诂, exegesis), *jieshuo* (解说, interpretation), and the like, which are very similar to those of the so-called “textual reasoning”. Secondly, the activities of reading, understanding and interpreting by Confucian scholars were closely related to the cultivation and elevation of an individual’s morality. From the time of there-editing and compilation of the Six Classics, until the so-called “New Confucianism” of modern times, there has been a purpose behind such activities: through reading and interpreting the classical texts, one could raise one’s personal morality and, eventually, manage well the country and contribute to society (“*jingguo zhishi*”, 经国治世). This may prove the fact that in Chinese traditional Confucian studies we can easily find something similar to SR.

The “theological basis or dimension in SR” has, however, created

---

<sup>①</sup> LI Xueqin, “The Main Stream of Traditional Chinese Learning Is Confucianism, and the Core of Confucianism Is Confucian Studies,” *China Reading Weekly*, August 4, 2010.

a critical question regarding the possibility of Chinese Classics, especially Confucian classics, being used in SR activities between China and the West. Can Chinese classics, especially the Confucian classics, be counted as Scripture, and qualify, or be justified as, the object of Chinese SR or an SR between China and the West? We all know that in SR, Scripture has clear and definite connotations, referring to the sacred books in the three religions of the Abrahamic tradition. The reading and interpretation of these scriptures constitutes the foundation and main content of SR activities. In the Chinese tradition, however, the so-called *jing* (classics) primarily refers to the Confucian classics, but might also connote Daoist classics, or Buddhist sutras, and could include classics from other religious and philosophical traditions. In this sense, *jing* in China is closer to the western word “canon”. It is true that China has a long tradition of studying the Confucian classics in comparison with other schools of thought or philosophy. However, the so-called “five classics”, “six classics” and “thirteen classics” all have clearly defined Confucian Classics in their corpuses. With regard to authority and sacred status, they can be counted as equal to Western “Scripture”. But, most scholars, with the exception of a small minority, agree that the tradition of Confucian Studies was not established on any theological foundation, and has no religious content. The young sinologist Ralph Weber has discussed this question in detail in his article “Limits of Scripture and Limits of Reason: On Confucianism and ‘SR’”. According to him, “[T]o put it in logical terms, it seems that all scripture is *jing*, but not all *jing* is scripture. The relation between the two terms is for that matter deeply lopsided, which is by itself not an astonishing discovery, but it is something that is easily forgotten in claims of equivalence.”<sup>①</sup> There is, regardless, still the possibility of communication, and learning from each other, through and between SR and Chinese Confucian Studies, in terms of hermeneutics. This is the reason why I think the work of Prof. Yang Naiqiao and his

---

<sup>①</sup> Ralph Weber, “Limits of Scripture and Limits of Reason: On Confucianism and ‘Scripture Reasoning’,” trans. NANGONG Meifang, *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*, vol. 26, no.2 (2011): 171.

colleagues at Fudan University may have some value for SR in China.

Let us now turn to the possible relationship between SR and Comparative Literature. Like the other disciplines I have mentioned, Comparative Literature is also facing a crisis, as embodied in the appearance of *Death of a Discipline* by Gayatri Spivak, and the various debates surrounding it. This indicates that, under assault from post-colonialism and feminism, Goethe's "World Literature" might be just a utopian ideal. In order to resolve these difficulties, scholars in the field of Comparative Literature have put forward various different theories and methods. Of them, the ideas and writings of Professor David Damrosch from Harvard University and Professor Haun Saussy from the University of Chicago are particularly noteworthy – and it is not insignificant that both of them have very close relationships with Chinese academics. According to Damrosch, it is only with the advent of the age of globalization that World Literature is changing from a utopian ideal into an aesthetic reality. Today's World Literature is no longer based on National Literatures, and is no longer defined within a common definition of the classics followed by different national literatures. Rather, it is meant to be the production, translation, and circulation of literary works in the space of the whole world.<sup>①</sup>

Professor Saussy has also put great effort into promoting comparative literature studies between China and the West, and has presented a unique interpretation on the tendency and orientation of Comparative Literature and World Literature in his two books, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (2001) and *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006). But, to my eyes, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (1993), an earlier book based on his doctoral dissertation, is more interesting. To a certain degree, it can be seen as a model of SR and Comparative Literature. In this book Professor Saussy reads in detail the history of commentary on *The Book of Odes* (诗经), one of the ancient classics in China. Alongside a reading of the poems, Professor Saussy discusses the debates on

---

<sup>①</sup> See David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-36. Especially "Introduction: Goethe Coins a Phrase."

translation among European missionaries in the 17th and the 18th centuries, especially the arguments between Matteo Ricci (利玛窦) and Nicolas Longobardi (龙华民), and Leibniz's and Hegel's images of China. With such a reading, Professor Saussy has actually reconstructed the interpretative mode of *The Book of Odes* in Chinese Confucianism. Thus, this demonstrates his own point, that is, for the development of Comparative Literature and the realization of World Literature, the real basis and precondition is an interaction at the levels of semantics and culture through literary translation and cross-cultural interpretation. There may lie in this a possibility of relating, learning, and influencing each other between SR and Comparative Literature. The key is how to approach it.<sup>①</sup>

Prof. Yang Huilin and his team developed a unique perspective when he began to introduce and promote SR in China: taking the reading, translating, interpreting and understanding of Chinese ancient classics done by early missionaries, together with Chinese scholars' re-understanding and re-interpretation of missionaries' activities, and from this forming or establishing a kind of SR between China and the West. This is without doubt a good perspective and a respectable aim. Another significant project Yang is leading, called "A Collected Exegetical Interpretation of English Translations and Commentaries of Chinese Classics", can also be regarded as taking inspiration from SR. With an increased interest in Chinese culture and tradition, there has been a call for re-translating the Chinese ancient classics. Instead of just offering new translations, Prof. Yang and his team undertook to study carefully the translations and commentaries of Chinese classics done by early missionaries many years ago, because they epitomize the encounter of different cultural and religious elements in these texts. At the same time, to speak about the SR between China and the West implies a religious and theological dimension in study and research, which is obvious when we turn to the so-called Sino-Christian Studies. This may also serve to explain a phenomenon present both in China

---

<sup>①</sup> See Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).



and abroad in recent years: there has been a growing interest in, and a new focus on, the thoughts, writing, and social and political activities of native theologians in China, especially those who were active in the time period before and after 1949.

These ideas are explored in this current issue. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben starts from a theological and ecclesiological event, the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, relating it to the contexts and theory of contemporary democratic politics. Agamben likes to begin his discussion with certain key terms or concepts, and then move forward to analyze in detail the historical and current issues hidden within and behind the terms. For instance, through analyzing “orthodoxy/legitimacy”, Agamben points out that the confusion and imbalance in these two ethical political principles has caused many crises in society today. This leads to his reflection on the theological discussions on the dual nature of goodness/evilness of the Church, especially the impact and significance of the so-called evil or dark sides of that Church. In this light, Agamben touches upon eschatological issues. He emphasizes that the messianic time for Apostle Paul was never the “end of time” but the “time of the end”. The prophesy of *Revelation* also refers to the intermediate state between the two comings of Christ, which is also the historical time in which we dwell. Society, like the Church, bears a dual character or nature as Body. In this way, Agamben highlights the issue of justice in our lives by putting it into a theological and ecclesiological context. Truly, for Agamben, theology and ecclesiology, politics and judicial procedures, have already crossed beyond their boundaries.

The first lecture which British theologian Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, gave after announcing his resignation, was on “Idol, Image and Icon,” adding a touch of contemporary significance to the theological or religious issue. For Williams, to discuss these terms together is to bridge the absent and the present. To properly differentiate between these three terms is to find the one that can maintain a subtle balance between the present and the absent. As a result, in various representations, there have

appeared different images of divine presence. These may either allow us to see what we want to see and find some pleasure or comfort, or may shock or challenge, leading us to look beyond to something transcendent and alien to us. In a similar light, Benjamin Morgan from the University of Oxford discusses Heidegger and Eckhart. For Morgan, when a modern philosopher and a mystic thinker from the Middle Ages discuss the question of “being”, human actions and human relations in the real world become a critical issue because they are related to the choice made, and form a shared practice. In order to explain this, Morgan studies a text in the collected works of Meister Eckhart, “‘Sister Catherine’ Treatise”. What is most outstanding here is that Morgan uses several literary works as examples for his philosophical argumentation, which is indeed an example of shared practice.

David Jasper from the University of Glasgow and Andrew Hass from the University of Stirling apply a similar approach in their papers. Jasper notices the connections between the theological thinking of the contemporary thinker Žižek and the philosophical thinking of the ancient Chinese thinker Zhuangzi. Or, as we might say, the interpretation of Zhuangzi by the religious thinker Thomas Merton and the sinologist A. C. Graham, and the ideas reflected in the detective stories by Žižek’s favorite British novelist, G. K. Chesterton, may enable us to realize that an urgent task for our time is the revival or recreation of theological thinking between East and West. Hass employs Hegel’s ideas of negation or *Aufhebung*, Jean-Luc Nancy’s interpretation of Hegel, and the deconstruction of Christianity to discuss issues related to SR, especially SR in a Chinese context. According to Hass, Hegel’s idea of *Aufhebung* must lie within the system built by Hegel because its spirit of negation will inevitably lead to its opposition; while Nancy tells us that negative thinking is not only used in philosophy but also can be found within the structure of Western religious structures, especially in Christianity. Hass ends with his analysis of Hölderlin’s poem “The Only One”, because for him, the negation of religion will be a theological turn of religion to poetics.

Roland Boer from the University of Newcastle, Australia, reflects

on the tradition of Western Classics as a discipline in his paper “On the Myth of Classicism”. He argues that the Western Classics were established in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, a move which greatly upgraded the ancient Greek civilization and degraded the Eastern civilizations, such as ancient Egyptian, Indian and Chinese civilizations. Superficially the establishment of the Western Classics in ancient Greek was an inevitable result of the secularization of Western society and the independence of Western disciplines. In fact, it was a result of its integration with western theology. Boer concludes that the Western Classics comprise a political myth, and the truth behind this myth is that the basis of Western European and Western culture lies outside itself. Boer, as a Western Marxist scholar and theologian himself, received his first degree in Classics, and therefore his reflections deserve more attention, especially at a time when Chinese Classical Studies is being newly established. A young scholar from King’s College London, Clemens Sedmak, makes Boer’s discussion even more poignant in his paper “Hannah Arendt and Philosophy after Auschwitz”. By exploring Arendt’s ideas, Sedmak illustrates the change and meaning of three paradigms in contemporary Western political philosophy when dealing with the issue of evil. Eric Ziolkowski from Layette College engages with issues in Comparative Literature in his paper “Axial Age Theorizing and the Comparative Study of Religion and Literature”. Studies of the Axial Age tell us again that the major ancient civilizations appeared at almost the same time, and they were not absolutely separated from each other. Ziolkowski traces the history of Comparative Literature and Comparative Philosophy in the West and the ever-moving interactions between these two disciplines.

Chinese scholar Li Xinde from Wenzhou University explores a question situated between Sinology and theology in his paper “Studies on the Interpretation of Daoist Culture by Western Protestant Missionaries during the Late Qing Dynasty”. Li has read widely and clarified the translations, understandings, and interpretation of Daoist cultures done by western missionaries. His paper pays special attention to the different translations of some key terms by Joseph Edkins, James

Legge, John Chalmers and other missionaries. Li also offers a detailed explanation on the different understandings behind the different translations. Chloë Starr, a theologian and sinologist from Yale University Divinity School, presents an excellent example of the recent turn in Sino-Christian studies towards Republican-era native Chinese theologians in her paper “Reading *Jing*: the Relevance of Republican-era Theology Today”. The paper takes the examples of Zhao Zichen and Wu Leichuan to explore the question of how Chinese theologians in the republican era applied Chinese ancient texts to explain or illustrate Christian scriptures and doctrines. Starr offers detailed analysis of the content, form and style of selected texts as a basis for her arguments on the characteristics of the theological thinking and practice at that time. Starr also points out that the way of “reading *Jing*” in 1930s by these republican-era theologians presages the Chinese “Scriptural Reasoning” called for by scholars in today’s China. Another scholar, Li Wei from Henan University, echoes Starr’s essay in certain aspects in her paper, “The Identity Anxiety and Ideological Struggle of Chinese Christians during the Sino-Japanese War: An Analysis of the Interaction of the Social Gospel and Pacifism in Wu Yaozong’s Thought”. Unlike Starr’s paper, however, Li Wei’s research is not based on a close reading, but is directed towards Wu Yaozong’s ideas and the practices of his ideas in the Chinese historical context. Reading these two papers together, one finds that the two scholars are concerned with one common question: How can a Chinese Christian define his/her identity in a specific social context?

The papers in this issue prove the point that no matter what the specific academic background or research area of the author, no matter what specific question the paper touches upon, a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural way of thinking and research is an approach now widely accepted and recognized. At least in studies in the humanities, fixed disciplinary boundaries no longer exist. Almost a century ago, Qian Mu (钱穆), a representative of New Confucianism, pointed out: “Academia has no national boundaries. The name ‘traditional Chinese learning’ is not inherited from the past, and nor will it probably be

valid in the future. It is a term for a particular time period.”<sup>①</sup> This is true not only for *Guoxue*, but for all other disciplines in the humanities and liberal arts too.

---

<sup>①</sup> QIAN Mu, *Guo xue gai lun* [An Introduction of Traditional Chinese Learning] (Beijing: The Commercial Press, reprinted 1997), 1.