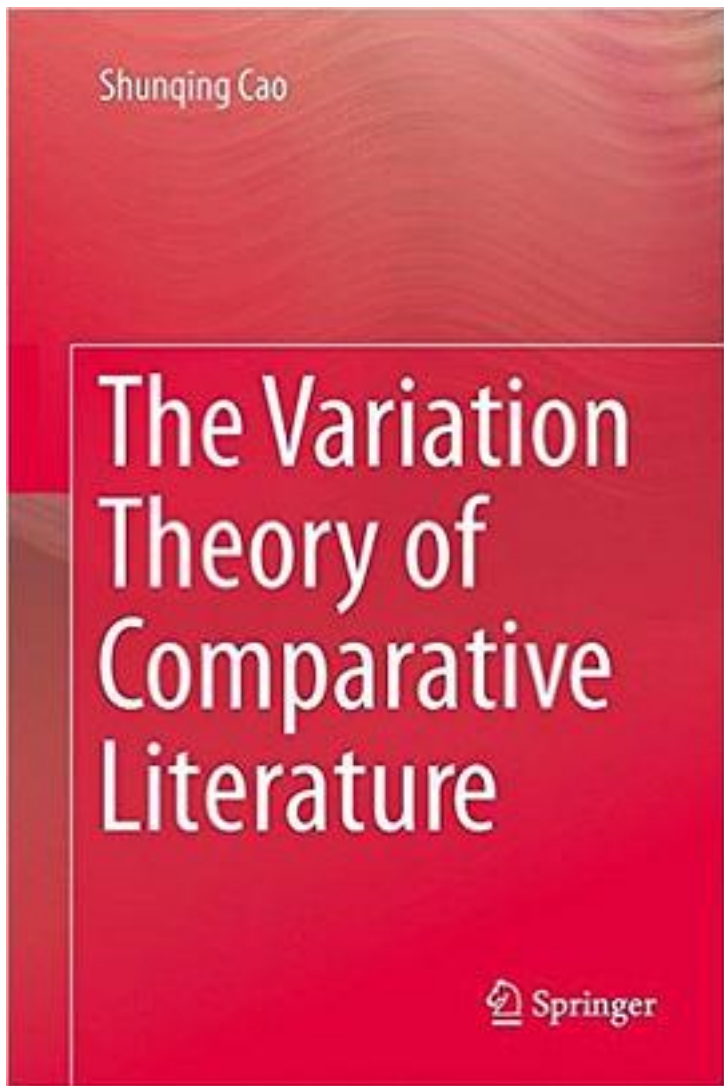


# The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature



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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.

#### 作者介绍:

Dr. Shunqing Cao, who was born in 1954 and graduated in Fudan University in 1980 and was awarded his Ph.D. degree in Sichuan University in 1987, is a visiting scholar of Harvard University and Cornell University in the United States (1992–1994); he was also invited to be guest professor at Nanhua University, Tamkang University, and Fo Guang University (1999, 2001) in Taiwan; now he is a professor

and Ph.D. candidate supervisor at Beijing Normal University. He is also an eminence professor (enjoying the treatment of Research Fellow of Chinese Academy of Social Science) of Sichuan University and the dean of the college of literature and journalism at Sichuan University. In addition, he is the winner of Huo Yingdong Education Funds, the specially invited professor of Changjiang Scholar Awarding Program for Comparative Literature by the Ministry of Education of China, and a national distinguished teacher. Additionally, he has been distinguished as one of the remarkable scholars with a Ph.D. degree who has made a special contribution and therefore is the expert enjoying the special government allowance. Meanwhile, he is a counselor of the Academic Degree Commission under the State Council, the evaluation committee of The National Social Science Foundation. At the same time, he is also vice-president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, vicepresident of the Chinese Ancient Literary Theory Association, and vice-president of the Chinese-Foreign Literary Theory Association.

He has published several books and articles including *The Comparison of Chinese and Western Poetics*, *Anthology of East Literary Theories*, *Discourse of Literary Theories of Ancient Chinese*, *A Comparative History of World Literature: An Evolution*, *Theories on Comparative Literature*, *The Course of Comparative Literature*, and *The History of Chinese-Foreign Literary Theories: A Comparative Study* and academic papers such as “The Discourse of Chinese Literary Theory and the Dialogue Between Western and Chinese Literary Theories” *Journal of Multicultural Discourse*, UK, 2008(3:1); “Reconstructing Chinese Literary Discourse” Wild Peony Press, Australia, 1997(6);

and “Chinese School: 30 Years of Development 1978–2008” Comparative Literature: East and West, China, 2009(11).

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## 评论

也许是曹顺庆写的书里面系统性最强的一本（？  
全书的结构应该也经过重新组织了，至少已经超越了国内一般教材的编撰框架（也包括曹自己之前瞎编的书），从影响-平行研究到跨语言-跨文化-跨文明研究，层次变得逐渐宏大起来，这条线索还是清楚明白的……  
顺便一开始还想吐槽一下曹的中式英语来着，不过读完以后发现这种英语对中国人来说理解起来还挺方便的……(摊手

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完全赞同柱子君的评论。我觉得这本比国内的教材好。  
（不知道为什么，脑子里忽然冒出一句话：“出口转内销”。x)

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## 书评

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