

A “NEW STUDY” WITH 70 YEAR’S HISTORY

A Short Historic Survey, Present Situation and Task of Future of Japanese Comparative Literature

Kyo CHO¹

RESUMO: Este artigo é uma introdução sumária à recepção do conceito de Literatura Comparada na era Meiji, e à história da pesquisa japonesa em Literatura Comparada, depois da Segunda Guerra Mundial. Também se descreve aqui a presente situação de pesquisa no Japão, e a peculiaridade dos estudos de Literatura Comparada no Japão. Por fim, a grande causa de a corrente predominante da pesquisa comparada no Japão ser a assim chamada “pesquisa de influência” é um dos elementos-chaves apresentados.

PALAVRAS CHAVES: Literatura Comparada; História; Japão

ABSTRACT: This article briefly introduces the reception of the comparative literature concept in Meiji era, and the history of the Japan’s comparative literature research after the Second World War. Also described here are the present research situation in Japan, and the uniqueness of Japan’s comparative literature studies. Finally, the major cause of why the main stream comparative literature research in Japan is a so called “influence research”, is one of the key featured elements.

KEY WORDS: Comparative Literature; History; Japan

The birth of Japanese comparative literature in early Meiji era (1868-1912)

In Japan, the concept of comparative literature was first introduced in academic journals in the 1890’s. At the same time, a comparative literature course was opened in Tokyo Academy, the predecessor of Waseda University. The lecturer was Tsubouchi Shoyo, who was a novelist and literary critic in the Meiji period. Tsubouchi Shoyo’s lecture was based on a book named Comparative Literature by Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, published in 1886. As Japan’s modern literature was still in the stage of imitating Western literature, Tsubouchi Shoyo tried to build a new literary theory, drawing this interest to comparative literature.

Under the influences of Posnett, Tsubouchi Shoyo wrote some papers about Comparative literature, some examining the source of theme, some on parallel comparison. Shortly after that, Takayama Chogyu published books about comparative literature, focusing mainly on parallel comparisons. In 1910, a book named A Short History of Comparative Literature (1904), written by Frederic Auguste Loliee, was translated into Japanese from the English edition by an English

¹ Professor at the School of Global Japanese Studies, Meiji University, Japan

literature scholar, Togawa Shukotsu in 1906.

In 1930, a book named *A Literary Review of Eastern and Western Literature*, written by Takayasu Gekkaō, was published. This book dealt mainly with the similarities between Eastern and Western literature. Although the author did not use the term “comparative literature”, this was clearly the main topic. After that, many books about comparative literature were translated into Japanese, but because there was no university offering a comparative literature course, it was not considered as a legitimate research field.

Although the Japan Comparative Literature Association or JCLA was established in May 1943, it was only after the World War 2 did comparative literature appear as an academic research field. 10 years later, in April 1953, under the leadership of Professor Shimada Kinji, the Graduate school of Comparative Literature and Comparative Culture was established at Tokyo University. This is the first graduate school in Japan which specialized in comparative literature. In the following year, the Society of Comparative Literature in University of Tokyo (SCLUT) was established. Comparative literature was called as “new study” at that time. Other universities also followed. In June 1954, Tokyo Woman's Christian University established the Comparative Cultural Research Institute with financial support from Harvard University, and published two kinds of journals. Although these two journals used the term “comparative culture”, many papers were about comparative literature.

In October 1962, Waseda University also established a Comparative Literature Research Center (CLRC). Three years later, in March 1965, *Annals of Comparative Literature* (*Annuaire de littérature comparée*) was published by the CLRC. This journal was issued once a year, and is still publishing today.

In Japan, the terms “comparative literature” and “comparative culture” are used very similarly. This phenomenon originated in Shimada Kinji’s academic views. Shimada Kinji, the founder of comparative literature in Japan, when he established the graduate school of comparative literature in Tokyo University, said that comparative literature could not be separated from comparative culture. Comparative literature research must fall under a larger category of comparative culture in order to avoid being biased. That is why the name of the graduate school is “Comparative Literature and Comparative Culture”. In this sense, comparative literature study in Japan has its unique style.

The features of Japan’s Comparative Literature Studies

In Japan, many four-year universities offer comparative literature only in one semester. However, there is one university which has a comparative literature department for undergraduate students. This university is Osaka University, and the students who major in this field study comparative literature for four years. Because a knowledge in two or more languages is needed to study comparative literature, this is harder to achieve for an undergraduate student, compared to students enrolled in Master’s degree or Doctor’s degree courses, as is the case in most colleges. Therefore, in order to complete comparative literature as an undergraduate, higher standards are expected for those students.

In Japan, there are two academic societies of comparative literature. One is the Japan Comparative Literature Association (JCLA), and the another the Society of Comparative Literature at the University of Tokyo (SCLUT). Due to different views between the founders, the two organizations were in opposition to each other for a long time. From the 1980’s, the older generation of scholars have retired, leading the two societies to reach a compromise, yielding a

good relationship with each other. Although the members of SCLUT are limited to alumni, many of whom had made great achievements. For example, in 1973, the SCLUT had published 8 volumes of Series Comparative Literature Studies, and 20 years later, in 1993, they published 6 volumes of Series Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultures. During this period, the JCLA only edited 4 volumes of Comparative Literature Series.

In addition to these two societies, Japanese and Chinese Comparative Literature Association (Wakan Comparative Literature Association, JCCLA) is a very peculiar institute. It was established in 1983, aimed at promoting comparative literature study between Japan and China, especially in the field of classical literature. In 1985, the Council of Wakan began to issue the Journal of Wakan Comparative Literature. In 1986, they began to publish an 18 volumes of Wakan comparative literature Series, the last volume, volume 18, being published in 1994.

This concept was not something that came out of blue. In fact, in Japan, from ancient times to the Edo period, there were a lot of works written in classical Chinese (Kanbugaku), just as Latin played its role in medieval Europe. From the Meiji era, these works were called as Kanbungaku. Although Kanbungaku was written in classical Chinese, it was a branch of Japanese Literature. Since the 1980's, Kanbungaku scholars tried to study these works from the point of comparative literature. Waka Comparative Literature Series were edited under this concept, and in fact, some title of the books reflected this concept. For example, the Manyoshu and classical Chinese literature, The Tale of the Genji and Classical Chinese Literature, The Haikai Poet and Classical Chinese Literature (Haikai is a kind of Japanese poem, means playful linked verse), etc.

In Japan, there are two types of comparative literature research. One is so-called "Parallel comparison" (Heiko hikaku), another is so-called "Influence research" (Eikyo Kenkyu). "Parallel comparison" compares two works or two writers of different countries, with basically no relations between these two works or writers. The "Influence research" investigates the source of Japanese novels, short stories or poetry. Usually, the plot of a novel or a short story; the portrayal of character, or the depiction of scenery were partly imitations of foreign literature.

The main stream of comparative literature research in Japan is "influence research". In this case, most researches focus on the influence from Western literature upon modern Japanese literature. This is because of the nature of the Japanese modern literature. As previously mentioned, modern literature in Japan is the result of accepting Western literature. In particular, in the early Meiji era, some short stories and novels were the direct imitation of Western literature. In today's standards, you can even say some of these works are tantamount to plagiarism. And furthermore, there was a so-called Hon-an, which refer to adaptations of Western novels and short stories. These works of Hon-an had both elements of the translations and new creations, and the authors of Hon-ans did not hide the original work. In the Meiji era, not only the novels and short stories, but the literary theories were also brought in from Western literature. Many Japanese writers were experts of Western literature, before they became writers. For example, Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Arishima Takeo, Sato Haruo and many other novelists and poets were proficient in English or French. Noguchi Yonejiro (Yone Noguchi), a well-known poet in the Taisho era, started to write poems when he lived in the United States. He began to write poems in Japanese after he came back to Japan in 1904. Natsume Soseki was also an expert of English literature, and he even taught English literature at the University of Tokyo. Mori Ogai, another famous Japanese novelist, had a profound knowledge of German literature. They learned a lot from Western literature, and Western novels, short stories, poems gave them crucial insights. This type of writer can be easily found in modern Japan, and that is why the topics for Japanese comparative literature research are not hard to find. The existence of these writers helped comparative literature studies achieve substantial progress

in the period after the Second World War.

Another characteristic that is unique to Japanese comparative literature is that most scholars originally specialized in Western literature. Therefore, naturally, most researches have focused on comparison between Japanese literature and European literature, or American literature less so with literature from other parts of the world. This is also one of the reasons why Japan's comparative literature research emphasizes Japan-Europe and the Japan-US comparison.

Main results of the recent

As an interesting research topic, the influence of Western writers upon modern Japanese writers is still a favorite subject for Japanese scholars. In 2000, a young scholar named Keiko Hori published a paper about Ozaki Koyo (1868-1903) who was a popular writer in the Meiji era. Hori pointed out that Ozaki Koyo's well-known novel *The Golden Demon* (*Konjiki Yaksha*) (1897) was based on a book, *Weaker Than a Woman*, written by a popular writer called Bertha M. Clay (1836-1884). *The Golden Demon* is not only a representative novel of Ozaki Koyo, it is also a well-known work of modern Japanese literature. From 1980's, some scholars have strongly doubted that *The Golden Demon* may had a source used by Ozaki Koyo, but no one could prove it. Therefore, Keiko Hori's paper was a tremendous discovery. As it turned out, Bertha M. Clay's real name was Charlotte Mary Brame, who lived from 1836 to 1884. She is almost unknown in United States today, but was very popular in the 19th century. She was a British writer, but since her novels were very popular, an American publisher invited her to go to United States, where she became popular as well. Keiko Hori has achieved an outstanding result to discover a fact like this.

The post-war period can be said a Golden Age for Japan's comparative literature. Like wheat fields, the earliest scholars have harvested almost all the wheat in the first golden fall. The second generation could glean the fields. When it came to the third generation, they could only glean the wheat grain that was left. After half a century, almost all the topics were examined, and it is not easy to achieve more than before. In addition to the difficulty in finding new topics, even when you do, it is very difficult to find out the source of a novel or a short story which seems to be influenced by foreign literature, or to examine the imitation of an old Master. This kind of exploration takes a long time and involves massive material, and requires a great deal of work. Moreover, it sometimes appear that these works can be an exercise in futility. It is not hard to understand why young scholars are not willing to undertake this kind of research. The reception of Western literature in modern Chinese literature through Japanese literature still is a fresh field. In the early 20th century, there were a lot of articles introducing Western literature in many Chinese journals. These articles seemed to be sourced directly from the West, but in fact, most were adapted from Japanese articles, and some even wholly translated from Japanese books or journals. In this kind of study, you should not only be proficient in Chinese and Japanese, but also must have a good English, French or German.

In recent years another new trend has emerged, which is to focus on the relationship between modern Japanese writers and writers from other Asian countries. For example: how Japanese writers like Tanizaki Junichiro, Akutagawa Ryunosuke observed Chinese society and Chinese Culture; What is the difference between their view of old China and modern China; How Japanese writers described the Korea peninsula before and after the war; How their view of China and Korea influenced their story writing etc. As this topic finally became relevant, some books and papers have been published recently.

If we look at the past 10 years of research, the overall impression is that the topics have

decentralized, and it is very difficult to point out general tendencies. In general, compared to “influence research”, new studies are about novelists’ experience of foreign culture; How they described the Western urbiculture; or the foreign cultural setting in their works; Japanese writer’s response to European literature and American literature. In addition, the interaction between arts and literature, and the representation of foreign culture have appeared in literature and film have attracted attention.

As a traditional topic, the study on literary translation is also popular, and many papers are still published almost every year. In fact, as long as translation literature exists, the discussion on this issue will never stop. There are many conferences and symposiums every year, and a number of papers published in academic journals.

In addition, there is a popular subject of increasing concern in recent years, which is the influence of the Japanese writers overseas. This is partly related to the so-called “Murakami Haruki phenomena”. About twenty years ago, Murakami Haruki became a best-selling writer in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, The Republic of Korea and other Asian countries and regions. And later his novels were introduced into North America and European countries. When the Japanese people found out about that, Murakami Haruki suddenly became a popular topic, and his novels became best-sellers in Japan as well. In particular, when the Japanese people heard the news that Haruki was being nominated for the Nobel Prize, Japanese national self-esteem and their curiosity was piqued. The rebel against traditional Japanese culture became a hero overnight. Scholars of comparative literature became active in the trend of the times. Since they are good at foreign languages, many of them started to research why Murakami Haruki’s works are read widely all over the world. Not only Murakami Haruki, the phenomena of Yoshimoto Banana, Ogawa Yoko, Kiryu Natsuo and Nakamura Fuminori and their popularity in China, South Korea and the United States also become a trendy topic.

In 2011, JCLA edited a collection of papers and published a book named *Crossing-border Language* to celebrate 60th anniversary of its establishment. This collection contains the papers on the translation of Japanese literature overseas. The whole book is divided into the “General Studies” and “Specialized Studies”. “General Studies” is a survey of the translation of Japanese literature into French, German, Spanish, Chinese and Korea. “Specialized Studies” is divided into four chapters, “The Area of Asian Languages”, “The Area of European languages”, “The Area of English” and “The Japanese Literature in the World”. In each chapter, they mention the translations or researches of each writer in different countries, including both classical and modern Japanese literature. Some of them are the studies about popular culture. For example, “The relationship between the Changes of the concept of French poem and reception of Japanese classical poem”, “The image of ‘Japan’ in European girls’ comic”, “The reception of Haiku in Spanish-speaking countries”, “The reception of Murakami Haruki in the United States” etc. There are 37 papers in all in this book, the topics being extremely diverse. At the end of the book, there is a useful chronological table “The history of Japanese literature translations 1904-2009.”

Unlike the United States, There are few studies about literary theory in Japan's comparative literature. In this “influence research”- based field, “parallel comparison” is not highly emphasized. In particular, if you compare the authors of different countries, then it will be considered as an arbitrary interpretation of the text, and will not be accepted by academic circles. If a graduate student selects such a topic of parallel comparison for his or her thesis, the academic adviser will never allow them to submit papers for review. That is why there is almost no parallel comparison research in today's comparative literature research in Japan.

The circumstances regarding “influence research” have changed a lot in the Post-War

period. Compared with prewar days, writers pay more attention to the originality of their works. In particular, from 1980, Japanese writers reinforce the concept of copyright, and the relevant legislation has also been enacted. Nowadays, the writers and poets will never imitate or get ideas from foreign literature thoughtlessly. Therefore, it will be more difficult to study so-called “influence research”. So, the question remains: How to break a new ground is a new and important issue for all scholars of Japan’s comparative literature.

Notes

- (1) Tomita Hitoshi, *Comparative Literature in Japan (1889~1988)*. Nechigai Associates, Inc. June 1988. 2.
- (2) Haga Toru and others, *Series Comparative Literature Studies (Kozu Hikakubungaku)*, Vol.1, *Japanese Literature In The World (Sekai Ni Okeru Nihon Bungaku)*, Tokyo University Press, 1973; Vol.2, *Modern Times in the Japanese Literature (Nihon Bungaku Ni Okeru Kindai)*, Tokyo University Press, 1973; Vol.3-4, *Modern Thought and Art of Japan 1-2 (Kindai Nihon No Shiso To Gejutsu1-2)*, Tokyo University Press, 1973-1974; Vol.5, *Western Shock and Japan (Seiyo No Shogeki To Nihon)* Tokyo University Press, 1973; Vol.6, *The East-West Cultural Sphere and Literature (Tozai Bunmeiken To Bungaku)*, Tokyo University Press, 1974; Vol.7, *Various Aspects of the Western Literature (Seiyo Bungaku No Shoso)* Tokyo University Press, 1974; Vol.8 *Theory of the Comparative Literature (Hikaku Bungaku No Riron)* Tokyo University Press, 1976.
- (3) *Series Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural (Soshu Hikaku Bungaku Hikaku Bunka)*, Vol.1, Haga Toru, *Tokugawa Japan as Civilization (Bunmei Toshiteno Tokugawa Japan)*, Chuokoron Press, 1993; Vol.2 Hirakawa Sukericho, *The People Who Lived In Other Cultures (Ibuka O Ikita Hitobito)*, Chuokoron Press, 1993; Vol.3 Kamei Shunsuke, *Modern Japanese Translation Culture (Kindai Nihon No Honyaku Bunka)* Chuokoron Press, 1994; Vol.4, Keibori Keiichiro, *East-West Thought Struggle (Tozai No Shiso Toso)*, Chuokoron Press, 1994; Vol.5, Kawamoto Koji, *The Genealogy of a Song and the Poetry (Uta To Shi No Keifu)*, Chuokoron Press, 1994; Vol.6, Osawa Yoshihiro, *Discovery of the Text (Tekisuto No Hakken)*, Chuokoron Press, 1994
- (4) Nakajima Kenzo, Ota Saburo, Fukuda Rikutaro, *Comparative Literature Series (Hikaku Bungaku Kozu)*, Vol.1, *The Purpose and the Significance (Mokuteki To Yigi)*, Shimizukobundo Press, 1971; Vol.2, *Japanese Modern Poem(Niho Kindaishi: Hikaku Bungakutekini Mita)*, Shimizukobundo Press, 1971; Vol.3, *Japanese Modern Novel: From the Perspective of Comparative Literature(Nihon Kindai Shosetu:Hikaku Bungakutekini Mita)*, Shimizukobundo Press, 1971; Vol.4, *Modern criticism in Japan: From the Perspective of Comparative Literature(Nihon Kinda Hyoron:Hikaku Bungakutekini Mita)*. Shimizukobundo Press, 1974.
- (5) Wakan Comparative Literature Association, *Manyoshu and classical Chinese literature (Manyoshu To Kanbugaku)*, Wakan Comparative Literature Series, Vol.9, Kyuko Shoin Press, 1993.
- (6) Wakan Comparative Literature Association, *The Tale of the Genji and Classical Chinese Literature (Genjimonogatari To Kanbungaku)* , Ibid. Vol.12, 1993.
- (7) Wakan Comparative Literature Association, *The Haikai Poet and Classical Chinese Literature (Haikai To Kanbungaku)*, Ibid. Vol.16. 1994.
- (8) To know the Reception of the Western literature in the modern Japanese literature, the following books are useful: Saito Koki, Tomita Hitoshi, and others, *Modern Japanese Literature And West(Nihon kindai Bungaku To Seiyo)*, Surugadai Press, 1984; Tomita Hitoshi, *Catalogue Of*

Articles In Comparative Literature Study: Japanese Modern Literature And Western Literature 1945-1980(*Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyu Bunken Yoran:Kindai Nihon Bungaku To Seiyō Bungaku 1945-1980*) , Nichigai Associates, Inc. 1984.

(9) For example, Kuroiwa Ruiko's *Iron Mask* (Fusodo Press, 1893) was based upon *Les deux merles de m. de Saint-Mars* by French novelist Fortuné du Boisgobey'.

(10) About this theme, the representative results of research are as follows: Chiba Shunji & Sen Gyōha, *Tanizaki Junichiro's Experience In China And The Power Of The Story*(*Tanizaki Junichiro No Chugoku Taiken To Monogatari No Chikara*), JOURNAL OF ASIAN YUGAKU, Vol.200, Benseishūban Press, Aug.2016; Nishihara Daisuke, *Tanizaki Junichiro And Orientalism: Fantasy of China in Taisho Era*(*Tanizaki Junichiro To Orietarizumu:Taisho Nihon No Chugoku Genso*), Chuokoronshinsha Press, 2003; Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, *Akutagawa Ryunosuke As The Correspondent: What Did He See In China*(*Tokuhain Akutagawa Ryunosuke:Chugoku De Nani Wo Mitanoka*). Mainichishinbun Press, 1997; Shinozaki Mioko and Shōi, *Akutagawa Ryunosuke And Shanghai*(*Akutagawa Ryunosuke To Shanghai*), Keisenjōgakuin University Peace & Culture Institute Press, 2015.

(11) For example: Cho Kyo, *Japanese Writers' Experience In China After The Second World War*(*Shibu Oukan:Sengo Sakka No Chugoku Taiken*) . Nihonkeizaishinbun Press, 2015.

(12) The representative results of research are as follows. *The Area of Fine Arts: A Study of Modern Japanese Comparative Cultural History* by Haga Toru, Asahi Shinbun Press, 1990; *Western Sound, The Ear Of Japan: Modern Japanese Literature And European Music*, by Nakamura Kosuke, Shunjūsha Press, 1987.

(13) Japan Comparative Literature Association, *Cross-border Language: A Bridge Between Japanese Literature and the World*. Sairyūsha Press, June 2011.

(14) Ibid. 439-483.

Recebido: 07/01/2017

Aprovado: 15/04/2017