



CHINESE LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN THE WORLD

# Fusion of Critical Horizons in Chinese and Western Language, Poetics, Aesthetics

Ming Dong Gu



palgrave  
macmillan

# Chinese Literature and Culture in the World

Series Editor  
Ban Wang  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA, USA

As China is becoming an important player on the world stage, Chinese literature is poised to change and reshape the overlapping, shared cultural landscapes in the world. This series publishes books that reconsider Chinese literature, culture, criticism, and aesthetics in national and international contexts. While seeking studies that place China in geopolitical tensions and historical barriers among nations, we encourage projects that engage in empathetic and learning dialogue with other national traditions. Imbued with a desire for mutual relevance and sympathy, this dialogue aspires to a modest prospect of world culture. We seek theoretically informed studies of Chinese literature, classical and modern - works capable of rendering China's classical heritage and modern accomplishments into a significant part of world culture. We promote works that cut across the modern and tradition divide and challenge the inequality and unevenness of the modern world by critiquing modernity. We look for projects that bring classical aesthetic notions to new interpretations of modern critical theory and its practice. We welcome works that register and analyze the vibrant contemporary scenes in the online forum, public sphere, and media. We encourage comparative studies that account for mutual parallels, contacts, influences, and inspirations.

More information about this series at  
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14891>

Ming Dong Gu

Fusion of Critical  
Horizons in Chinese  
and Western  
Language, Poetics,  
Aesthetics

palgrave  
macmillan

Ming Dong Gu  
School of Foreign Languages  
Shenzhen University  
Shenzhen, China

School of Arts and Humanities  
The University of Texas at Dallas  
Richardson, TX, USA

Chinese Literature and Culture in the World

ISBN 978-3-030-73729-0

ISBN 978-3-030-73730-6 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73730-6>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Giordano Cipriani / Getty Images

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To The Memory of*  
*My Father Gu Shirong (1929–2000)*  
*My Mother Xu Hongzuo (1931–2000)*

## PREFACE

This book is a project that has taken two decades to complete. In fact, the initial idea for conceiving this project could be traced back to the late 1990s when I was completing my doctoral studies at the University of Chicago. In 2000, after the publication of an article in *Comparative Literature Studies*, I began earnestly to draw a plan for undertaking a comparative study of Chinese and Western language, literature, and poetics. As my scholarly interest broadened later on, the plan started to include topics related to aesthetics and metaphysics. Encouraged by some successes in placing a dozen articles in *Philosophy East and West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Asian Philosophy*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, and *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, I decided to finalize the plan of my research and set my objective as an effort to contribute to the fusion of critical horizons, Chinese and Western. Having a final plan is like having a blueprint for a house, but to turn the plan into a book is as complicated as building a house in accordance with a blueprint. In the past twenty years, I have been working intermittently on the book. By 2007, I had completed most of the research and written rough drafts for most of the planned chapters. For a time, I thought I would be able to bring the book to a completion in a year or two.

But alas! “Man proposes, God disposes.” Just as I was ready to devote my full energy to the book project, I changed my job and moved to the University of Texas at Dallas. The new job brought with it new challenges in terms of teaching, service, administrative duties, and research orientations. When I was a graduate at the University of Chicago, I was toying with the idea of writing a dissertation that sought to focus on a study of

Chinese and comparative literature from the postcolonial perspective, but due to various reasons, I gave up the initiative. The idea, however, never disappeared from my mind and my scholarly work has always moved in that direction since my graduate program. After moving to Dallas, a strong urge to write a postcolonial critique of China–West studies took priority over a comparative study of Chinese and Western literature and poetics. So, the present book was left on the back burner and I devoted my energy to finishing *Sinologism: An Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonial Studies* (Routledge 2013). After its publication, I thought I would be able to refocus my efforts on the book and hoped to finish it, but once again, several new projects diverted my immediate attention. Two of them demanded most of my time, energy, and devotion. One is an edited volume on comparative philosophy, which was published as *Why Traditional Chinese Philosophy Still Matters: The Relevance of Ancient Wisdom for the Global Age* (Routledge 2018). The other is even more demanding in terms of time, energy, and scope. In late 2015, I was invited by the Routledge Press to edit a handbook of modern Chinese literature. Fully realizing the heavy workload of the project, I was hesitating for a while, but finally, two eminent scholars of modern Chinese literature, Prof. David De-wei Wang of Harvard University and Prof. Xudong Zhang of New York University, and my dean Prof. Dennis T. Kratz convinced me of the value of the project and persuaded me to accept the invitation. As the project involved nearly 50 scholars from universities around the world, it occupied most of my time. Thanks to the gracious cooperation of the participating scholars, the project was finally completed and appeared as the *Routledge Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature* (Routledge, 2019, pp. 768). With the completion of this project, I vowed that I would not be distracted by any other projects. After turning down a few projects, I devoted my full energy to the present book and with the support of a few institutions I have at long last brought a 20-year scholarly project to its finish. What a sense of relief!

Richardson, TX, USA  
December 2020

Ming Dong Gu



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although this book project was relegated to a secondary place a couple of times, I have never displaced it from my mind. As I was unable to finish it at one go, I rewrote part of the drafts into articles and sent them to various journals. Some sections of Chap. 2 were taken from an article, “Reconceptualizing the Linguistic Divide: Chinese and Western Theories of the Written Sign,” in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 37. 2 (2000): 101–124. Chapter 5 appeared as a long article, “Is Mimetic Theory in Literature and Art Universal?” published in *Poetics Today* 26.3 (2005): 459–499. A substantial part of Chap. 6 appeared in an article, “Mimetic Theory in Chinese Literary Thought,” in *New Literary History* 36.3 (2005): 403–424. A few sections of Chap. 7 were published in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 42.3 (2008): 88–105. I would like to thank the editors of those journals for their permission to reuse the published materials in this book.

In completing this book, I have been encouraged and supported by many scholars, colleagues, friends, and leaders of some institutions, to whom I have accumulated a great deal of intellectual debts. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the following scholars: my mentor the late Prof. Anthony C. Yu, Carl Darling Buck Professor Emeritus in the Humanities of the University of Chicago, who read and commented on an earlier version of Chap. 8; Prof. W. J. T. Mitchell, the Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art at the University of Chicago, who read and suggested revisions for Chap. 2; Prof. Ralph Cohen, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Virginia and former editor of *New Literary History*, who

edited a long version of Chap. 6 into a succinct journal article; Prof. Meir Sternberg, former editor of *Poetics Today*, who meticulously edited Chap. 5 and generously provided enough space to publish a long article in his journal. I would also like to thank Prof. J. Hillis Miller, Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California-Irvine; Profs. Martin Powers, Sally Michelson Davidson Professor of Chinese Arts and Cultures, University of Michigan; Kang-I Sun Chang, Malcolm G. Chace '56 Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University; David Wang, Edward C. Henderson Professor of Chinese Literature at Harvard University; Ban Wang, William Haas Professor in Chinese Studies at Stanford University; Haun Saussy, University Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago; Longxi Zhang, Chair Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation at City University of Hong Kong; Eric Hayot, Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Asian Studies at Pennsylvania State University; David Porter, Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Michigan; Michael Puett, the Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese History and Anthropology at Harvard University; Thomas O. Beebee, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature and German at The Pennsylvania State University; Dennis Kratz, the Ignacy and Celina Rockover Professor of Humanities; Frederick Turner, Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities; and Nils Roemer, the Stan and Barbara Rabin Professor of History at the University of Texas at Dallas, for their stimulating ideas, sagacious insights, and warm encouragement in different ways. I need to express my special thanks to Prof. Vincent B. Leitch, George Lynn Cross Research Professor at the University of Oklahoma, who has provided valuable advice and suggestions to improve the manuscript, and Rachel Jacobe, editor of literature of Palgrave Macmillan Press for her professional advice and editing. I'd also like to thank Drs. Chen Dandan, Duan Guozhong, Peng Xiuyin, and Feng Tao of Yangzhou University for their assistance in locating research materials and proof-reading the book. Finally, I must thank some institutions including Rhodes College, the University of Texas at Dallas, Nanjing University, Shenzhen University, and Yangzhou University for awarding faculty development grants and providing various kinds of assistance to complete the book project.

## Praise for *Fusion of Critical Horizons in Chinese and Western Language, Poetics, Aesthetics*

“In this ambitious study, which should prove central to further work on these topics, Ming Dong Gu challenges the notion of a fundamental opposition between Western and Chinese aesthetics and undertakes a comparative study of a series of important issues in literary aesthetics, illuminating similarities and differences.”

—Jonathan Culler, Class of 1916 Professor of English and Comparative Literature, *Cornell University, USA*

“Professor Ming Dong Gu has offered a most comprehensive investigation of Chinese and Western studies. His latest book sets a new ground for conceptual and scholarly inquiries into China-West humanities in language, metaphor, representation, aesthetics, and metaphysics, and proposes a paradigm shift from ethnocentric criticism to global aesthetics. Both erudite and provocative, Gu demonstrates a methodology that will inspire anyone interested in comparative studies.”

—David Wang, Edward C. Henderson Professor of Chinese Literature, *Harvard University, USA*

“This is a timely study showing how to get beyond cultural nationalism in search of the most compelling values of civilizations, aesthetic values. In Chapters devoted to language, writing systems, metaphor, and mimesis, poetics and aesthetics, Professor Gu reveals the profound value of genuine dialogue, ‘with due respect paid to the distinctiveness of each tradition.’ Alongside choice insights into core aesthetic concepts, East and West, Gu offers a blueprint for a comparative method rooted in the sober recognition of a shared human condition.”

—Martin Powers, Sally M. Davidson Professor of Chinese Arts and Cultures, *University of Michigan, USA*

“Comparative studies placing Chinese cultural productions in conversation with those emanating from “the West” all too often fall into simplistic and self-serving dichotomies. The bold ambition of this rigorously argued and wide-ranging study is to historicize and ultimately transcend dichotomous frameworks in order to establish common ground for more inclusive and eclectic visionings of literary and aesthetic theory. In its thorough and systematic analysis of deep-seated methodological habits, it provides both a timely corrective and an invaluable guidepost for future comparative work.”

—David Porter, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, *University of Michigan, USA*

# CONTENTS

1	Introduction: Aesthetic Divide and Vision of Global Aesthetics	1
Part I	Language and Writing	21
2	Writing System and Linguistic Controversy	23
3	Reconceptualizing the Linguistic Divide	57
Part II	Metaphor and Poetics	93
4	Chinese and Western Conceptions of Metaphor	95
5	Metaphor as Signs: <i>Bi-Xing</i> and Metaphor/Metonymy	131
Part III	Mimesis and Representation	165
6	Is Mimetic Theory Universal?	167
7	Western Mimeticism and Chinese Mimetic Theory	201

<b>Part IV Metaphysics and Aesthetics</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>8 Divine Thinking and Artistic Creation</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>9 Lyricism and Mimeticism in Aesthetic Thought</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>10 Conclusion: Toward World Criticism and Global Aesthetics</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>315</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>333</b>



## Introduction: Aesthetic Divide and Vision of Global Aesthetics

Contemporary globalization and telecommunications have drastically shrunk the geographical distance between the East and the West and made it possible for the migration of human, material, and intellectual resources and knowledge across continents. It has greatly facilitated exchanges between different cultures and traditions and turned what Goethe had envisioned as “world literature” into a reality. David Damrosch, an eminent scholar of world literature who has written the first book to examine the ways literary works mutate and transform as they move from national to global contexts, confirms the salutary effects of globalization on the internationalization of literature and its positive role in promoting world literature beyond national boundaries.<sup>1</sup> The rise of world literature calls for the appearance of world criticism, world theory, and global aesthetics. In 2008, the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* edited by Vincent Leitch et al., changed the time-honored Western-centric editorial policy and made an epoch-making move to incorporate non-Western theorists from India, China, Japan, Arabia, Africa, and Latin America into a new edition of the anthology that used to include Western thinkers, aestheticians, and critics only.<sup>2</sup> Although the editors admit that the anthology is still Western-centric,<sup>3</sup> it should be viewed as a landmark on the road toward the fusion of aesthetic horizons. Moreover, it represents an admirable effort to challenge us to reflect on the possibility of world criticism and make concrete efforts to move toward global aesthetics.

Nearly half a century ago, when James J. Y. Liu, a professor at Stanford University, first introduced Chinese literary theory to the West in 1975, he talked about several goals of his endeavor in the introduction. Among them, the first and ultimate of his purposes is “to contribute to an eventual universal theory of literature by presenting the various theories of literature that can be derived from the long and, in the main, independent tradition of Chinese critical thought, thus making it possible to compare these with theories from other traditions.”<sup>4</sup> Although he was aware that his declared purpose might raise the eyebrows of some sophisticated scholars, he believed in his vision and went on to argue that comparison of historically unrelated critical traditions might serve the purpose if they are conducted on the theoretical rather than practical level. He also believed that “comparisons of what writers and critics belonging to different cultural traditions have thought about literature may reveal what critical concepts are universal, what concepts are confined to certain cultural traditions, and what concepts are unique to a particular tradition” (*ibid.*), plus helping us discover universal features common to all literatures around the world.

Forty years further back in time, Zhu Guangqian, a celebrated Chinese aesthetician, who was educated in Europe and became one of the founding members for modern Chinese aesthetics, expressed a similar view in 1936 by going beyond critical theory. Basing himself on his own educational background and critical experience both in China and Europe, he argued that aesthetics is not only a “science of literature and art” but may also offer global “scientific” approaches to and critical criteria for the studies of both Chinese and Western art, literary criticism, and critical theory. Furthermore, he believed that aesthetics as a “science” could locate ideas in Chinese art corresponding to its Western counterparts and help Chinese tradition make its own contributions to universal conceptions and understanding of literature and art.<sup>5</sup> I am immensely inspired by Liu and Zhu’s visions. In many ways, this book is conceived with an aim to put what they had envisioned into practice and as a concrete move toward the realization of their vision.

## STATE OF THE FIELD IN CHINESE AND WESTERN AESTHETICS

The road to world criticism, world theory, and global aesthetics is destined to be a long and tortuous march beset with different kinds of obstacles. Among the numerous obstacles, cultural differences and intellectual

inertia have determined it to be a long-term enterprise which cannot be accomplished in a short period. In the development of aesthetics in the global context, Bernard Bosanquet's ground-breaking *History of Aesthetics* (1892) is a magnum opus in the studies of philosophy of art, but regrettably it does not have any cursory reference to the ideas of beauty in the Eastern traditions, be it Indian, Chinese, or Japanese. Anticipating criticism for the "almost total absence of direct reference to Oriental art, whether in the ancient world or in modern China and Japan," he defended his omission of Eastern aesthetic ideas in several ways. Besides his professed lack of competence in Oriental aesthetic knowledge, his principal reason for eliding Eastern aesthetics is his perception that the Oriental tradition had not yet formulated "an aesthetic consciousness which had not, to my knowledge, reached the point of being clarified into speculative theory."<sup>6</sup> Although he acknowledged the influence of Oriental art on the early Greek aesthetic thought and the charm and beauty of Chinese and Japanese art, he firmly believed that the Eastern consciousness of beauty is "something apart, and not well capable of being brought into the same connected story with the European feeling for the beautiful" (*ibid.*). Bosanquet's defense imparts two messages. First, Eastern art, be it Chinese or Japanese, is exceptional to its Western counterpart. Second, the Eastern aesthetic feelings are incommensurable with those of the West. It is therefore necessary to leave it alone at best. Without doubt, Bosanquet treated Chinese and Eastern art and aesthetics as something alien to aesthetics.

Bosanquet wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, the high period of colonialism, so it is perhaps understandable that he had a low opinion of Eastern art and did not consider it worthwhile to deal with the aesthetic ideas of the East. In his defense, however, he mentioned that his "omission is not without a positive ground." By positive ground, he seemed to have meant, like most Western thinkers of his time, that Oriental art is deficient of certain fundamental features that are essential and necessary to connect Oriental art with European art: "The separation from the life of the progressive races, and the absence of a reflective theory of beauty, must surely have a fundamental connection with the non-architectural character pointed out by Mr. Morris in the art of China and Japan."<sup>7</sup> In his statement, he identified a nonsystematic character of Eastern art and attributed it to two reasons: one is the separation between Eastern and Western life, and the other is nonreflective nature of Eastern art. While we may object to his describing Eastern life as nonprogressive and Eastern art as nonsystematic, we must admit that the separation of the East and West



in both material and intellectual life indeed contributed to the vast differences between Eastern and Western art.

Today globalization has removed geographical barriers between East and West. The successes of globalization have also facilitated the comparative studies of Eastern and Western literatures and arts, especially in the field of China–West studies. A great deal of effort has been made to bring about dialogues between Chinese and Western humanities. Despite impressive achievements, however, the same striking differences between the two cultural traditions have continued to trouble scholars in the field in a similar way as they haunted Bosanquet in the beginning of the twentieth century. Though the same sense of incompatibility in Chinese and Western aesthetics has been substantially reduced in degrees of intensity, it has nevertheless generated new forms and adopted new perspectives that continue to perceive and conceive China as the antithesis of the West. In their attempt to deal with the distinctive differences between China and the West, scholars have abandoned the hegemonic discourse of Western-centrism and resorted to the anthropological theory of “cultural relativism,” which spawns a series of ideas that conceive of China as the “ultimate other” to the West. Even the irresistible trend of globalization seems unable to dampen its popularity. As cultural relativism has become the accepted paradigm for cultural and literary studies, it has become increasingly hard to find conceptual premises upon which to build bridges across different traditions and cultures. David Buck, a former editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies*, observes that cultural relativism is so predominant in East and West studies that “[c]utting across the disciplines are epistemological and methodological problems involving the issue of whether any conceptual tools exist to understand and interpret human behavior and meaning in ways that are intersubjectively valid.”<sup>8</sup> In the postmodern age, when cultural relativism turns into radical forms, the enthusiasm for contrast rather than compatibility has given rise to a trend in theoretical studies of literature and art that sees China and the West as two distinct traditions radically set apart in history, language, politics, poetics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. This is especially so in the areas of Chinese and Western poetic theories. This situation has been aptly summarized by Longxi Zhang, a well-known scholar of Chinese and comparative literature, who finds it very unsatisfying: “[T]he East and the West are so distinctly different that ways of thinking and expression cannot be made intelligible from one to the other, and therefore the knowledge of one must be kept apart from that of the

other.”<sup>9</sup> This summary surely reminds us of Bosanquet’s view of Chinese and East art and aesthetics as exceptional or even anomaly in comparison with their Western counterpart.

As a result of the perceived incompatibility between things Chinese and Western, a variety of differences between China and the West have been radicalized into a series of dichotomies in the humanistic fields including language, metaphor, literature, art, poetics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. Whether influenced by cultural relativism or Western hegemonic discourse, the general perceived incompatibility has developed into an arch paradigm of binary oppositions and differences. Under the influence of this arch paradigm, various conceptual frameworks arise in different areas of China and West studies. In the areas of literature and art, there appeared an oppositional paradigm constructed on a series of dichotomies. It has been adequately summarized by Rey Chow, an eminent critic and theorist well versed in both Chinese and Western literature and criticism: “[T]he assertion of the Chinese difference tends often to operate from a set of binary oppositions in which the Western literary tradition is understood to be metaphorical, figurative, thematically concerned with transcendence, and referring to a realm that is beyond this world, whereas the Chinese literary tradition is said to be metonymic, literal, immanentist, and self-referential (with literary signs referring not to an otherworldly realm above but back to the cosmic order of which the literary universe is part.... Accordingly, if mimesis has been the chief characteristic of Western writing since time immemorial, then nonmimesis is the principle of Chinese writing.”<sup>10</sup> In contemplating what is responsible for the dichotomous ways of conceptualization, she attributes it to “an a priori surrender to Western perspectives and categories” (ibid.).

The arch paradigm has spawned more dichotomies in other areas of Chinese and Western studies. Whereas Western language is highly abstract, Chinese language is barely capable of expressing abstraction; whereas Western literary writings are largely allegorical, Chinese literary writings are generally nonallegorical; whereas Western poetry emanates from *ex nihilo* creation, Chinese poetry grows out of immediate responses to real situations; whereas Western literature is founded on imaginative fictionality, Chinese literature as a whole is dominated by historical fidelity; whereas Western art is perceived to be the result of artificial making, Chinese art is the result of natural growth; whereas Chinese aesthetic theory is impressionistic, unsystematic, and lacking clearly defined terms, Western aesthetic theory is profound, systematic, couched in rigorous categories;

whereas Chinese philosophy is predicated on intuitive concretization and sweeping generalization, Western philosophy is rooted in thoughtful abstraction and logical analysis. Regarding the root cause for the differences, some have attributed them to cultural values. It was argued that because ancient China lacked certain cultural determinants, its cultural legacy in the domains of thought, literature, art, and aesthetics should be treated as incommensurable with or exceptional to the Western counterpart. As I will show in Chap. 5, one scholar attributes the alleged contrast between Western mimesis and Chinese nonmimesis to the Chinese lack of certain cultural determinants to be found in the West.<sup>11</sup> This view falls unwittingly in line with the Huntington thesis that there exist essential and durable differences in cultural identities and values between the West and “the Rest” and they are capable of generating cultural and civilizational conflicts and confrontations.<sup>12</sup>

What complicates the situation is that thinkers and scholars in China have subscribed to the arch paradigm and accepted openly or tacitly these perceived dichotomies as true and valid. Two examples suffice here. For the first example, Zhu Guangqian, who has a vision for universal theory of art and believes in the capability of aesthetics to locate corresponding ideas in different cultures, expresses a similar view of incompatibility between Chinese and Western aesthetic thought to that of Bosanquet. Although he vigorously defended the distinctiveness of traditional Chinese literature and art as having unique artistic value against the widespread belittlement by Westernized Chinese intellectuals in his time, he tacitly agreed that there is practically no Western-style philosophy or aesthetics in the Chinese tradition. In *The Psychology of Tragedy*, he argues that because of the simplicity of metaphysics and shallowness of religious feelings, ancient Chinese, Indian, and other non-Western traditions did not produce literary works informed by the concept of tragedy in the strict sense of the word.<sup>13</sup> His view implies that Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, if they exist at all, are incompatible with their Western counterparts.

Zhu Guangqian is not the only thinker who holds such a view. Up to the present day, there are quite a few Chinese and Western thinkers who believe that China has no philosophy in the true sense of the word. This situation is duly reflected in a statement by a scholar of philosophy at Peking University that he has, for many years, been struggling against the view that Chinese tradition has no philosophy. In an article entitled “There Is No Need for *Zhongguo Zhexue* [Chinese Philosophy] to Be Philosophy,” one Chinese scholar argues that “philosophy” is a Western cultural

practice and cannot be used to designate traditional Chinese thought unless one views it from an analogical or metaphorical perspective.<sup>14</sup> During his visit to China in 2001, Jacques Derrida also states:

There is no problem with talking about Chinese thought, Chinese history, Chinese science, and so forth, but obviously, I have a problem with talking about the Chinese “philosophy” of this Chinese thought and culture ... Philosophy in essence is not just thought... It is an ancient Greek invention... It is something European. There may be various kinds of thought and knowledge of equal integrity beyond Western European culture, but it is not reasonable to call them philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Although Derrida had no intention to belittle Chinese and non-Western thought, his line of thinking aligns well with that of Hegel who believed that “philosophy” originated from ancient Greece and Eastern thought like Confucianism and Taoism is but a form of wisdom of life that had not yet risen to the level of systematic thinking with abstract speculation and spiritual consciousness. As I will show in later chapters, this kind of belief has constituted the ontological and epistemological basis for both Chinese and Western scholars to argue that the idiosyncratic nature of Chinese philosophy has determined the antithetical nature of a series of dichotomies in the comparative studies of Chinese and Western language, metaphor, representation, and aesthetics.

For the second example, Ye Lang, an influential Chinese aesthetician, has conducted an examination of the major views on the nature and characteristic features of classical Chinese aesthetics vis-à-vis its Western counterpart and found some widely accepted views circulating among Chinese thinkers and scholars that constitute a consensus and conform to the perceived incompatibility between Chinese and Western aesthetics long conceived by scholars in the West.<sup>16</sup> The consensus consists of four major ideas. First, it holds that “Western aesthetics emphasizes ‘representation’ and imitation and therefore developed a theory of typical characters under typical circumstances. Chinese aesthetics sets store by ‘expression’ and ‘lyricism,’ and therefore develops a theory of *yijing* (idea-realm).”<sup>17</sup> Second, “Western aesthetics privileges epistemology in philosophy, preferring the unity of ‘beauty’ and ‘truth,’ while Chinese aesthetics privileges ethics, preferring the unity of ‘beauty’ and ‘goodness.’”<sup>18</sup> Third, “Western aesthetics privileges formal theorization and is endowed with analytical and systematic qualities. By contrast, Chinese aesthetics privileges

empirical exposition and is mostly random, impressionistic, and spontaneous, and endowed with qualities of intuition and empiricism.”<sup>19</sup> Fourth, “Concepts in Chinese aesthetics are generally hollow and impressionistic adjectives devoid of definable substance.”<sup>20</sup> While admitting some degrees of truthfulness in these views, Ye Lang methodically refutes the validity of each of them with solid evidence drawn from a wide range of Chinese aesthetic materials. He convincingly argues that the popular assessment of the nature and features of Chinese aesthetics in contradistinction to Western aesthetics does not stand on reasoned and solid ground and has oversimplified the complexity of Chinese aesthetic tradition.

### THE ARCH PARADIGM OF OPPOSITIONS AND DIFFERENCES

My foregoing critical review suggests that despite their different cultural backgrounds, scholars in both Chinese and Western studies of critical theory and aesthetics share one common ground, which is an oppositional and differential paradigm. Superficially, this paradigm may have risen under the influence of Western intellectual hegemony or cultural relativism, but in its deep structure, it grows out of a historical perception of the different patterns of human development and metaphysical conceptions of the differences between Chinese and Western thought. In historical development, the Chinese civilization is believed to have followed a pattern of continuity between past and present while the Western civilization is viewed as following a pattern of rupture. In modes of thinking, it is believed that while correlative thinking is predominant in Chinese thought, analytic thinking is the hallmark of Western thought. Metaphysically, Chinese thought is construed to be wholly monistic while Western thought is held to be disjunctively dualistic. While Western tradition is understood to be founded on a disjunction between nature and culture, Chinese tradition is perceived to be based on a continuum between the human and natural world. Whereas there is a creation God in the West, who is viewed as the creator of all things, it is widely believed that in the Chinese tradition, there is no creation god and Chinese religion is pantheistic, lacking religious feelings. In consequence, whereas the Western worldview displays a tragic tension between god and man, Chinese cosmology features a harmonious collaboration between the human and divine beings.

In these series of dichotomies, we encounter a great irony. Cultural relativism is meant to counter cultural universalism, which often leads to ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism, and to challenge Eurocentric

hegemony as well as to correct the imposition of Western ideology on non-Western cultures, yet as a scholar of Indian culture perceptively points out: whether in the colonialist and imperialist eras of Rudyard Kipling or in our own time of postcolonialism, those who defend the Eastern difference and those who devalue it “share the most important descriptive presumptions, differing primarily in terms of evaluation,” and even those who “see themselves as struggling against imperialism, racism, and sexism share with their professed antagonists the bulk of relevant ideological beliefs.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, radical relativism is supposed to deflate the sense of superiority in Western cultures in cross-cultural studies, but the end result often turns out to be the opposite and reinforces Eurocentrism and Western superiority.

Indeed, in the established dichotomies concerning China and the West, whether the Chinese terms are criticized as negative categories or celebrated as positive values, an implicit and sometimes even explicit bias is inscribed within their internal structure. A closer look at the series of binary oppositions reveals that they implicitly entail a hierarchy in which the Chinese term occupies the lower position. This bias is clearly seen in these typical contrasts: Western artifice, abstraction, figurative tropes, *ex nihilo* creation, transcendental spirituality, logical analysis, and rational systemacity versus Chinese naturalness, concreteness, literal fidelity, stimulus–response transcription, immanentist worldliness, random commentaries, and impressionistic generalization.

This oppositional paradigm was not consciously conceived by a single theorist or scholar or developed in a single historical period. In fact, it gradually took shape in the scholarship and metaphysical speculations by many thinkers in both China and the West including philosophers like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Johann Gottfried Herder, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Max Weber, Bertrand Russell, Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, Liang Shumin, Feng Youlan, and scholars like Gu Hongming, Hu Shi, Zhu Guangqian, Marcel Granet, Fredrick Mote, Benjamin Schwartz, Joseph Needham, K. C. Chang, Shih-hsiang Chen, A. C. Graham, David Hall, Roger Ames, Tu Wei-ming, David Keightly, and many others.<sup>22</sup> It has exerted a profound impact upon Chinese and Western studies as well as general studies of human civilizations. Though it has evolved out of historical materials and scholarship, a self-conscious urge to build contrasts and dichotomies opens the paradigm to questioning. Not surprisingly, it has aroused much controversy and has been subjected to critical scrutiny. And in due time, most of the dichotomies have been found to be problematic or simply false and untenable.<sup>23</sup> Even the

view of China's cultural legacy as exceptional in regard to Western or so-called universal values has been found problematic. Martin Powers, an eminent scholar of Chinese art and culture, employs a wide range of textual and visual evidence in political theory, literature, art, print culture, and public spaces in his most recent book, *China and England: the Preindustrial Struggle for Justice in Word and Image*, to argue that the humanly shared experience in those areas created common ground for transformative exchange between China and the West in early modern times and challenge the exceptional claim regarding Chinese cultural legacies.<sup>24</sup>

### CROSSING THE AESTHETIC DIVIDE

Although the oppositional paradigm has aroused a great deal of controversy in which many scholars have participated, the heated debates have not ended conclusively. Even those who argue against the oppositional paradigm accept its partial validity. This tricky situation cannot but compel us to consider: To what extent does the oppositional paradigm fit the real conditions of Chinese and Western studies? Is it capable of guiding us in our inquiry about the actual nature and conditions of Chinese and Western language, literature, and art? Can it offer sound theoretical frameworks for genuine dialogues between Chinese and Western humanities? And if we abandon the oppositional paradigm, what alternative paradigms can be conceived to facilitate genuine dialogues between Chinese and Western traditions? In what ways can we bring fundamental issues of Chinese language, literature, art, and thought into meaningful dialogues with their Western counterparts? Last but not least, what common ground can be located to reconceptualize differences in language, literature, poetics, aesthetics, and metaphysics from a cross-cultural perspective and move toward the fusion of aesthetic horizons East and West?

In a book, *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures*, which uncovers a wide range of thematic and conceptual similarities that unite literary and cultural traditions in the East and West, Longxi Zhang, unlike those who have subscribed to the oppositional paradigm of dichotomies, sagaciously “emphasizes affinity over difference and explores the relationship between East and West in terms of cultural homogeneity (with shared literary qualities as its signposts), challenging the traditional boundaries of cross-cultural study and comparative literature as a discipline.”<sup>25</sup> The distinctive differences between Eastern and Western cultures, however,

cannot be simply dismissed or will gradually disappear with the intensification of globalization and digital communications. Likewise, a fusion of aesthetic horizons in China–West studies will not come about naturally if we continue to accept the existing paradigms and approaches. For the fusion of aesthetic horizons, we need to locate common grounds for bridging the gap between Chinese and Western humanities and start with erecting groundwork for the fusion. We need to conduct genuine dialogues between Chinese and Western humanities and employ conceptual tools to reconceptualize the materials from both traditions, with due respect paid to the distinctiveness of each tradition. For this purpose, we must confront those dichotomies head-on and explore to what extent they are true or not true, and in what ways we can engage in meaningful comparative studies.

Since China opened its door to the outside world in modern times, Chinese and Western aesthetics have been engaged in dialogues, but the exchange of ideas has been dominated by a one-way flow with the results that are largely sinicized Western discourses in Chinese academia, where the Chinese aesthetic tradition has lost its voice due to the inundation of Western aesthetic ideas, and effectively become a *de facto* branch of Western aesthetics. As a consequence, two situations remain in place in China–West studies: (1) Chinese and Western aesthetics are totally set apart with each keeping to its own distinct frameworks and systems and having random and superficial interactions; (2) Two traditions engage in pseudo-interactions with Chinese materials mainly serving as raw data to prove the value and validity of Western ideas and theories. How can we change the existent situations and bring about a genuine two-way dialogue between Chinese and Western aesthetic discourses, which pays due respects to the distinctiveness of each tradition and produces genuine universal value? I believe that we should challenge some commonly accepted views on China and West studies and open up the old issues to new modes of thinking and expression. Moreover, we should make systematic efforts to demystify and de-marginalize traditional Chinese thought, restore it to the mainstream theoretical discourse in Chinese and comparative studies, and enable the lost voice of a time-honored tradition to be heard in the ongoing discussions and theorizations of cross-cultural studies.

For this purpose, I have been pondering the dichotomies between Chinese and Western conceptions of language, literature, poetics, and metaphysics for over a score of years, and made various attempts to locate a truly comparative rather than contrastive paradigm in Chinese and



Western studies. Having scrutinized the oppositional paradigm for so long, I have come to the realization that the root cause for the failure of genuine dialogues is a series of perceived differences, cultural, conceptual, representational, and last but not least, linguistic, which have formed an epistemological divide. To cross this divide, I have, for the past decade, conducted research to locate solid scholarship as well as new theoretical frameworks for China and West studies. This constitutes the main purpose of this book. The objective is not to expose errors in the comparative studies of Chinese and Western traditions. It is concerned with how to bring about a paradigm shift, how to devise better and more effective methodologies for comparative studies, and how to build bridges across the epistemic divide. With this aim in mind, I have decided to focus my research and disquisition on some basic issues, a study of which may yield insights and solid scholarship for building a bridge across the divide.

### SCOPE AND PREVIEW

This book covers areas of language, writing, metaphor, metonymy, rhetoric, mimesis, representation, lyricism, expressionism, aesthetics, and metaphysics. It consists of an introduction, a conclusion, and eight chapters, which are grouped into four parts, each focusing on a related thematic cluster. The introductory chapter conducts a brief survey of the present-day condition of China–West studies and discusses the nature, objective, scope, and approach of the proposed study, sets the ground for conceptual and scholarly inquiries into a series of dichotomies in China–West studies of language, metaphor, representation, aesthetics, and metaphysics, and proposes a paradigm shift from ethnocentric criticism to global aesthetics.

Part I addresses issues in the linguistic bases of Chinese and Western literature and art. It has two chapters. Chapter 2 examines the discussions and debates over the nature of Chinese language and writing in relation to Western alphabetic language. In the field of China–West studies, Chinese literature and culture have been viewed by not a few scholars as fundamentally different from their Western counterparts. The root cause of the difference has often been traced to the difference in language and writing, which has been further narrowed down to the nature of the writing symbol. By contrast, some scholars consider Chinese language not any different from alphabetic languages, because it is essentially a phonetic system of writing. In this chapter, I reexamine the debates over the nature of Chinese writing and bring theoretical discourses on the sign in Chinese

and Western thought into a meaningful dialogue so as to acquire useful insights answering these questions: To what extent is the Chinese written sign different from the Western sign? Is there a huge gap between the Chinese written sign and the Western written sign? If the answer is yes, is there a common ground that can serve as a bridge across the gap? Or is there any analytical tool that can be used to create a bridge across the gap? And last but not least, what significance do the gap and common ground have for cross-cultural studies of literature and art?

Chapter 3 reexamines the linguistic differences between Chinese ideographic language and Western alphabetic language. By conducting a study of traditional Chinese language theories in relation to Western theories of language, it provides a new way of looking at the linguistic differences. The aim of this chapter is not to systematize Chinese philosophy of language but to conduct comparison and contrast with Western theories of language. By demystifying various views about Chinese language in history and in present-day scholarship, the chapter demonstrates with evidence that despite the distinct contrast between the ideographic nature of Chinese writing and phono-centric nature of Western writing, Chinese language philosophy is not significantly different from its Western counterpart in the conceptions of linguistic sign. In addition, it explores feasible ways to reconceptualize the linguistic divide between Chinese and Western languages, especially the written signs in terms of contemporary theories of psycholinguistics and semiotics.

Part II deals with another essential aspect of the comparative studies of literature and art, working on Chinese and Western conceptions and applications of metaphor in relation to its rhetorical use in poetry and poetics. Metaphor has been recognized as an essential part of everyday language that conditions and structures the ways we perceive, conceive, and behave. It is also at the heart of poetry and poetics. In the field of Chinese and comparative literature, scholars have observed a series of differences in Chinese and Western conceptions and uses of metaphor. On the perceived differences has been constructed a dichotomy between Western metaphoricality and Chinese nonmetaphoricality in poetry. Chapter 4 probes into the controversy surrounding Chinese metaphor and answers these questions: Is the Western conception of metaphor universal to all cultures? In the comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures, is the Western style metaphor alien to the Chinese tradition? Do the Chinese conceive and use metaphor in a similar way as their Western counterparts? If there are any

differences, what are they? This chapter reconfirms the universal nature and features of metaphor in Chinese and Western poetry.

Chapter 5 recognizes one fact that Chinese metaphor in poetry does have some special features in its concept *bi-xing*, a poetic method in the Chinese tradition. By examining *bi-xing* (inspired metaphor or metonymic metaphor) as a dual concept for poetic expression, it compares and contrasts it with Western metaphor/metonymy from an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates literary analysis, rhetorical study, and conceptual thinking. With the aid of recent achievements in research on metaphor and metonymy, it reconceptualizes Chinese notions of *bi-xing* and advances a new model of metaphor for understanding Chinese *bi-xing* in particular and metaphor and metonymy in general.

Part III moves to the core issue in literary and artistic creations: mimesis and representation. Chapter 6 explores whether mimetic theory is unique to the Western tradition and whether it exists in Chinese critical discourse. Mimesis is one of the most fundamental ideas in Western poetics. Mimetic theories that grow out of it constitute a mainstream literary thought in Western aesthetics. In the comparative studies of Chinese and Western poetics, however, there exists a widely accepted opinion that views mimetic theory as a cultural invention unique to the Western tradition. This chapter reexamines the widely accepted view that while mimesis is the foundation of Western aesthetic thought, expression is the dominant mode of representation in Chinese literary thought. By examining ontological and epistemological issues concerning mimesis in the Chinese tradition in relation to conceptual insights in the West, Chapter 6 reaffirms imitation as a transcultural human instinct and mimetic theory in art as a universal thought across cultural traditions, arguing that the difference in the emphasis on mimesis and expression in Chinese and Western traditions is only one in degree, not in kind.

Chapter 7 constructs a Chinese mimetic theory so as to lend further support to the conceptual inquiry into the universality of mimesis in Chap. 6. In the first introduction of Chinese literary thought to the West, James J. Y. Liu does not think that the Chinese tradition has a mimetic theory though ideas of mimesis are not totally absent. Scholars after James Liu have radicalized his position. They have not only proclaimed that mimetic theory is nonexistent in Chinese literary thought, but have also taken elaborate moves to argue that the cultural conditions necessary for the rise of mimetic theory did not exist in the Chinese tradition. Chapter 7 does not engage in a conceptual inquiry into the necessary conditions for the rise of

mimetic theory since it has been dealt with in Chap. 6, but offers a complete system of Chinese mimetic theory that covers ideas of mimesis in the major areas of Chinese critical tradition: literary thought, poetry, drama, and fiction. From an evidential perspective, it disconfirms the view that the Chinese traditions do not possess the metaphysical and cultural determinants responsible for the appearance of Western mimetic theory and a mimetic view of literature and art.

Part IV addresses some foundational issues of aesthetics and metaphysics in the Chinese and Western traditions. Chapter 8 answers these questions: What is responsible for artistic creation? What is an aesthetic ideal in art that is likely to be accepted by different cultural traditions? Is there an ultimate standard that people across cultures employ to judge the value and achievement of a work of literature or art? By focusing on a special way of thinking characterized by Goethe as “daemonic thinking” in the West and “divine thinking” posited by Liu Xie in China, this chapter explores critical and theoretical data on the divine, divine creation, and artistic creation. Assimilating insights from Plato’s idea of art as the result of “divine madness” and Freud’s rational understanding of art as unconscious creation, it argues that (1) the aesthetic ideal of the divine is still relevant to artistic creation today and (2) the traditional Chinese notion of “entering the divine” (*rushen*) may serve as an imaginative way of artistic creation and a universal aesthetic ideal across traditions.

Chapter 9 inquires whether Chinese and Western aesthetic thought are compatible despite the consensus about the incommensurability of Chinese and Western aesthetic thought in terms of their ontological and epistemological grounds. This chapter chooses two groups of aesthetic thinkers: one group from the Chinese tradition, and the other group from the Western tradition and conducts a comparative study of such key issues as mimesis and representation, lyricism and expressionism, metaphysical foundations of art, and other topics. With both conceptual analysis and critical evidence, the chapter argues that the aesthetic consciousnesses of the Chinese and Western traditions are compatible though each tradition displays a different emphasis in the course of history and exhibits culture-specific characteristics. Through close analysis of ideas and views of the chosen thinkers and aestheticians, it has located the common ontological and epistemological foundations for the compatibility. Chinese and Western aesthetic thought are essentially the same in ontology and epistemology, differing in degrees of intensity and formal features across different historical periods.

Having examined a series of dichotomies in Chinese and Western aesthetic thought and produced a large amount of critical and theoretical evidence, I conclude in the last chapter that, in spite of the cultural and linguistic differences, Chinese and Western traditions share broad common ground in aesthetic thought. The conclusion suggests ways to further open up avenues to bridging the divide and bringing about what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls the “fusion of horizons.”

### FOR A HUMANISTIC PARADIGM OF FUSION

For the fusion of critical horizons, I think we are in need of a paradigm shift in East–West studies from an oppositional or differential one to a humanistic one. In the comparative studies of Chinese and Western traditions, there are mainly three approaches: oppositional, differential, and affinity-based. The first and third approaches occupy the two poles while the second keeps a position in between. The oppositional approach insists on incommensurability, while the affinity approach privileges commonality. The differential approach recognizes similarity but emphasizes differences and variations. Each approach has its merits and demerits, but none seems wholly satisfying. I propose a humanistic paradigm of fusion inspired by Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory.

Gadamer’s theory emphasizes a dialogic relationship between the horizon of the reader and that of the author through the interpretation of a text. Since a text is a historical artifact produced by an author having a particular aim and using a specific system of codes at a given historical time, it inscribes the author’s historicity and intentionality on his or her horizon in the text. In a likely manner, the reader’s horizon consists of his or her historicity and intentionality. As the interpretation starts, because of the difference in intentionality and distance between the two historicities, the text resists the reader’s efforts at interpretation. However, when the two kinds of intentionality meet in the encounter of reading, and when the two kinds of historicities are adequately noted, there appears a fusion of the author’s and reader’s horizons, which gives rise to an adequate interpretation.<sup>26</sup> In my proposed fusion paradigm, the two horizons are not those of the author and reader but those of two aesthetic traditions. Each of the horizons has its historical, linguistic, philosophical, and cultural dimensions. The fusion of aesthetic horizons of both traditions depends upon the merging of both traditions’ multiple dimensions concerning the fundamental aesthetic issues. It requires a full recognition of

the issues in terms of their affinities and commonality as well as differences and dichotomies. This paradigm of fusion has a common denominator, which is the human faculty for perception, conception, imagination, representation, and interpretation of the shared human experience in spite of the differences in race, class, ethnicity, and national origin. This paradigm will serve as a guiding principle for the examinations and discussions of the chosen issues in the comparative studies of the Chinese and Western traditions in the chapters to follow.

## NOTES

1. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
2. Vincent Leitch et al., eds., *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2008).
3. Vincent Leitch et al., eds., *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, p. xiv.
4. James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 2.
5. Zhu Guangqian, *Wenyi xinlixue* (Psychology of Literature and Art) (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1936), "introduction."
6. Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetics* (1892) (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. x.
7. Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. x.
8. David Buck, Editor's Introduction to "Forum on Universalism and Relativism in Asian Studies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (1991): 30.
9. Longxi Zhang, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. xvii.
10. Rey Chow, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 10.
11. Liang Shi, "The Leopardskin of Dao and the Icon of Truth: Natural Birth Versus Mimesis in Chinese and Western Literary Theories," *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 31, No.2, 1994, pp. 162–163.
12. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 19–20.
13. Chu Kwang-Tsien (Zhu Guangqian), *The Psychology of Tragedy: A Critical Study of Various Theories of Tragic Pleasure* (Strasbourg: Librairie Universitaire d'Alsace, 1933); Chinese translation: *Beiju xinlixue* (Psychology of Tragedy) (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2009).