



A New Direction in the Studies of Comparative Literature

Sumiyadi Sumiyadi*, Nunung Sitaresmi, Memen Durachman, Encep Kusumah

Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Corresponding author. Email: sumiyadi@upi.edu*

ABSTRACT

Comparative literature is the comparison of literary works with other literary works or the comparison of literary works with other forms of human expression. The definition comes from two schools of comparative literature, the French school and the American school. The French school is also called influence studies, while the American school is called parallel studies or comparative art studies. Many scholars of comparative literature consider the American school to be a development of the French school. Both schools aim to find homogeneity of the objects being compared. However, over time, a new school of thought emerged, named the Chinese school. This school focuses on the variation or heterogeneity contained in literary works and developed in Asia, including Indonesia. This paper aims to explore the existing theories of comparative literature in Indonesia. The results are expected to explain the Chinese school of thought, which is based on variation theory and cross-civilization studies. Furthermore, the paper gives an example of the application of the Chinese school of comparative studies to Indonesian literature.

Keywords: *American school, Chinese school, comparative literature, French school.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the borders of a single country and the study of the relationship between literature on the one hand, and fields of knowledge and belief, such as art [e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture, music], philosophy, history, social sciences [e.g. political science, economics, sociology], natural sciences, religion, and so on, on the other. More specifically, comparative literature is the comparison of one literary work with another, or the comparison of a literary work with other forms of human expression (Remak, as cited in Stallknecht & Frenz, 1961). This definition is based on two schools of comparative literature, the French school and the American school. The French school is also called influence studies, while the American school is called parallel studies or comparative art studies (comparing literature with other arts) and interdisciplinary literary studies (comparing literary works with other disciplines).

Many scholars of comparative literature consider the American school to be a development of the French school. Both schools strive to find homogeneity (similarity) of the objects being compared. However, Shunqing (2000) considers that the French School and the American School are unlikely to make prominent achievements in literary comparison transcending the heterogeneous cultures as represented by the East and the West respectively. It does even apply to the establishment of a theoretical system of comparative literature on cross-cultural grounds. Therefore, a different school of thought emerged, named Chinese school.

This school focuses on the variety or heterogeneity contained in literary works, and developed in Asia, especially in China (Shunqing, 2013). The French and American schools do not talk about stage struggles and emphasize that the study of world literature in the work of comparative literature is nothing but a matter of comparing work from one culture that is projected by the other in another culture (Nugraha, 2021). The emergence of the Chinese school of comparative literature is seen as an acceptance of cultural diversity and an acknowledgment of the variety of dialogues and exchanges in comparing and contrasting Eastern literature, including Indonesian literature, with Western literature. This is precisely what is needed in the discipline of comparative literature to seek other perspectives not only in cross-cultural contexts but also across civilizations.

Comparative literary studies in Indonesia at the beginning of its development tended to follow the French school. For example, Jassin's introduction in the book entitled *Chairil Anwar Pelopor Angkatan 45* or *Pioneers of the 45th Generation* (1983; first printing in 1956) discusses issues of plagiarism and the influence of European and American poets, such as H. Marsman, J. Slauerhoff, Conrad Aiken, and Archbald Macleish on Chairil Anwar's poetry (Jassin, 1983). Furthermore, in 1974, Subagio Sastrowardoyo wrote a comparative literature article in *Majalah Budaya Jaya* with the title "Rendra-Lorca Personal Confusion". His article highlighted W.S. Rendra's poems in the poetry anthology *Ballada Orang-orang Tercinta* or *Ballad of the Beloved Ones*, which he considered to be heavily influenced by the poetry of Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca (Sastrowardoyo, 1983). Unlike the American school which compares literary works with those transformed into other artistic media, the French school of comparative literature studies with an emphasis on "influence" will be very convincing in evaluating the originality of literary works since the comparison is made between Indonesian literature and foreign literature that uses the source language (not translated literature). Therefore, it is natural that in recent years, the American school has gained more popularity in the studies of Indonesian comparative literature.

Is this third school of thought relevant to comparative literature studies in Indonesia? This paper attempts to answer this question by exploring theories of comparative literature. It aims to explain the Chinese school of thought, which is based on variation theory and cross-civilization studies. Furthermore, a case example of a comparative study of the Chinese school of literature on Indonesian literature will be given.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. The Concept of Comparative Literature

Concepts are "ideas or notions abstracted from concrete events outside of language, and which the intellect uses to understand things" (KBBI Editorial Team, 2017). Concepts refer to abstract or mental entities, or expressions of ideas (thoughts) regarding the principle of a thing, problem, event, or set of objects. (Koentjaraningrat, Budhisantoso, Danandjaya, & Suparlan, 1984; Mullins, 1971; Rand, 2003; Sudarminta, 2002). That concept not only refers to mental phenomena but also has a reference to reality. An example is the concept of "human". This concept can be used in the same sense to refer to names, such as Rizal or Maryam.

In building a theory, a scientist uses concepts to shape it. A new theory can be built if the main elements are available and formed. The elements in question are concepts, postulates, assumptions, and models (Salim, 2006). So, if we relate it to the concept of comparative literature, then it can be interpreted as ideas that have been abstracted about comparative literature, allowing the formation of a complete and comprehensive theory of comparative literature.

There are several concepts of comparative literature, but this study uses Remak's concept. According to Remak (as cited in Stallknecht & Frenz, 1961), there are three concepts of comparative literature: namely (1) comparative studies of literary works with other literary works outside the borders of one country, (2) comparative studies of literary works with other arts, such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, and (3) comparative studies of literary works with fields of science, such as philosophy, history, politics, economics, anthropology, and sociology. The French school follows the first concept of comparative literature, while the second and third concepts belong to the American school. More specifically, the French and American schools are described by Shunqing (2013) in Figure 1.

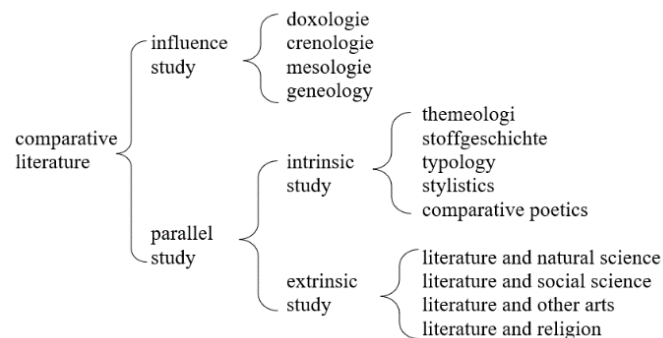


Figure 1 French and American Comparative Literature (Shunqing, 2013).

The French school of thought uses positivistic methods to study the history of international literary relations, including doxology, mesologie, and crenologie, all of which are based on homogeneity studies. Doxologie studies the journey and influence of a literary phenomenon on foreign literature. Mesologie studies the function of intermediaries

and transmitters, such as translators, reviewers, critics, scholars, travelers, or media such as books and journals. Crenologie considers writers as recipients and then traces the sources of influence they receive.

Furthermore, Shunqing (2013) also explains that the American school with its advocacy of parallel studies and interdisciplinary approaches is the second phase of theoretical development of the discipline. Different from the “historical relativism” and “factualism” advocated by the French school, the American school advocates “artistic interpretation and evaluation”. Therefore, the American school promotes the study of analogy; it is actually more concerned with the internal study of literature, that is, literary study. Shunqing (2013) asserts that homogeneity rather than heterogeneity is what is sought under the terms of comparative literature theory, both in Europe and America.

2.2. New Directions in Comparative Literature Studies

The French and American schools of comparative literature were criticized by a Chinese comparative literature expert in a book written by Shunqing Sunqing entitled *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* (Shunqing, 2013). In the book, Shunqing proposed an additional school, the Chinese school. Although this book did not directly influence the theory of comparative literature in the world, international comparative literature experts must know about it because the book was co-authored by Douwe Fokkema who was once the President of the International Comparative Literature Association. In the preface of the book, Douwe Fokkema -a former President of the International Comparative Literature Association), comments that variation theory is a response to the French school’s one-sided emphasis on influence studies and the American school’s focus on aesthetic interpretation, inspired by new criticism, which ignores literature in non-European languages. Fokkema agrees with Chinese comparative literature scholars, who see the shortcomings of the former schools. The three schools are summarized by Shunqing (2007) as shown in Figure 2.

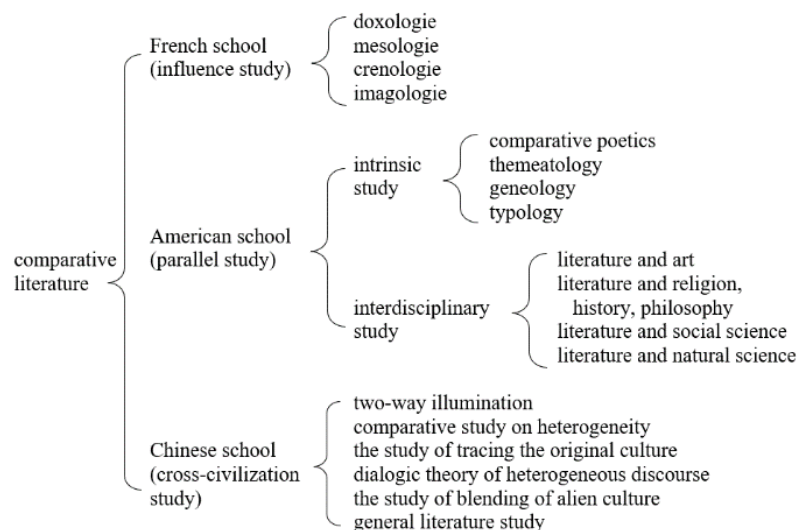


Figure 2 French, American, and Chinese Comparative Literature (Shunqing, 2007).

Figure 2 suggests that this three-stage evolution of comparative literature is a rippling structure. It means that the growth of comparative literature disciplinary theory is cascading and progressive rather than the replacement of the previous theory by the current one. In the third stage, this spiral development has provided a wealth of theoretical materials for Chinese comparative literature studies.

Of course, we cannot dismiss the effect of the French School and the counterpart study of the American School, both of which have constituted the history of this discipline. The latter is said to be founded on the earlier theory. Parallel research, for example, seeks to transcend the sociological tendency of influence study while seeking the site of literariness in comparative literature, but it does not contradict influence study at the same time. Chinese comparative literature research sees the cross-civilization study as the approach in the third stage due to its own historical and cultural context and knowledge structure. We do not, however, abandon the relatively developed paradigm of research in the discipline of comparative literature that has been built during the preceding two stages. As a result, the discipline theory will be improved.

The Chinese school of thought is a critique of the two established schools. Shunqing and Wang (2005) criticize that the comparative literature of different civilizations has never been confronted and investigated in depth by the French

and American schools because both are in the same European cultural circle originating from Ancient Greco-Roman culture. Shunqing and Wang (2005) assert that Westerners have never faced the tremendous clash between Chinese (Eastern) and Western cultures and the violent cultural crisis. Shunqing (2013) also criticized two previous schools that the basic feature of the French school is to emphasize the empirical and positivistic approach. The French school believes that in the study of comparative literature, importance should be attached to empiricism and positivism and all studies should center on the history of international literary relations.

Whether influence studies or analogy studies (parallel studies), the aim is to “find common ground.” Homogeneity, a common identity of origin, and analogy, similarities between literature from different countries, or between literature and other subjects are the focus of influence studies and analogy studies respectively. According to Shunqing (2013), both schools believe that differences cannot be compared and that it is meaningless to compare differences. However, the theoretical model of “seeking similarities” is flawed because in influence studies by the French school and analogy studies by the American school, there are actually many heterogeneous factors that are often more influential than the factors of “homogeneity” and “analogy”.

Shunqing (2013) asserts that the biggest flaw of the French school is the neglect of research on variation in influence studies. In fact, “seeking variation” is not only ignored by the French school but also by the American school. Variation is a common fact in the process of communication between different literatures and cultures. Moreover, it is also a basic law for the interaction, integration, and development of cultures and civilizations. In his journal article, Shunqing (2010) explains that the keyword of variation theory is variability. Variability is not only an indisputable fact of cultural communication but also a basic law for cultural fusion and creation. Influence studies do not focus on variability and according to Shunqing (2010), it is a serious flaw of the French school.

Shunqing (2013) argues strongly for variation theory. According to him, so far more and more attention has been paid to difference, which has become a cutting-edge issue of contemporary scholarship, for example, deconstruction is its most typical representative. Many scholars believe that deconstruction is the continuation and development of structuralism, but they do not know there is an important difference between the two. Structuralism is “seeking common ground”, and deconstruction is “seeking differences”. According to Shunqing and Zhuang (2014), the germination and embryo of variation were already visible when China Sinicized Buddhism so Buddhism in China has its own distinctiveness when compared to Buddhism from its origin, namely Nepal.

In addition to deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and other contemporary Western literary theories are all characterized by deconstructing the center, highlighting difference, and embracing diversity. In addition, in recent years there has been an emerging interest in cross-civilization studies. Huntington (2011), director of the Harvard Institute of Political Studies, put forward the theory of the “clash of civilizations” and regarded it as the defining force of the post-Cold War world. As he puts it, the main conflicts of global politics will take place between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations.

In this regard, the Chinese school refers to Said’s (1978) postcolonial theory. Said believes that the East in the eyes of Westerners is not really the East, but a distortion and misunderstanding of the East from their own perspective, which is the result of Western cultural hegemony. Said’s view is emphasized by Meir’s culturalist, Hassan Hanafi with the concept of occidentalism. Hanafi (Al-Hamdi, 2019) states that occidentalism is a counter-study that can be developed in the Eastern world to study the Western world from the perspective of the non-Western world. The goal of occidentalism is to liberate oneself from the influence of others so that there is equality between the Islamic and Eastern worlds in general, and the European and Western worlds in general.

We can see that difference has become a core issue in academic research today. The understanding of this concept multiplies according to various theories, such as structuralism, deconstruction, hermeneutics, and translation studies. To illustrate, traditional translation theory emphasizes the process of translating as accurately as possible to the original source, despite the variety of translation errors and misreadings in this process. However, the “creative betrayal” emphasized by medio-translatology refers to the creation of new meanings during the translation process. The development from traditional translation theory to medio-translatology reflects the change in thinking from “seeking similarities” to “seeking differences”, which is also the new trend in today’s academia.

Shunqing (2013) emphasizes that when we introduce Western theories, they should not be treated as absolute truths, whose heterogeneity with Chinese culture cannot be ignored. As we all know, the practical significance of the interaction between heterogeneous civilizations lies in the fact that they complement and refer to each other. Therefore, highlighting heterogeneity is very conducive to carrying out communication and integration between different civilizations and building a “harmonious world without uniformity”, which is the ultimate goal of the study of variation theory.

According to Shunqing (2007; 2013), the scope and purpose of variation theory are 1) the variation of literary phenomena in different countries. A typical example is the study of image variation, also known as imagology; 2) the variation of literary phenomena in different languages. It mainly refers to the whole process of literary phenomena traveling through translation, crossing language barriers, and eventual reception by the recipient. A typical example is medio-translatology; 3) variation at the level of literary texts. Typical examples are cultural misreading and literary reception. Since the literary text is the starting point of comparative literature, the possible variations of literary texts in circulation can be the object of the discipline. Literary text variation refers first of all to the phenomenon of literary reception in actual interaction; 4) variation at the cultural level. A typical example is cultural filtering. Cultural filtering refers to changes such as selection, deletion, and innovation made by the receiver, based on his own cultural background, towards the original literature; 5) civilization-level variation. Typical examples are dialogue between civilizations and discourse variation. For literary works, “theory” is “discourse”, and literary theory is the discourse of literary works. Therefore, traveling theories can be applied to the interpretation of “discourse variation”. Yi (2017), concluded that the study of variation which is Shunqing’s idea can be categorized into translatology, imagology, receptionology, thematology, genology, and misunderstanding of literary reading and cultural filtering.

In the context of different civilizations, when one culture meets another, the receiving culture of the communication will adopt, select, and filter the source culture, which is inevitably marked with traces of the receiving culture. A concrete example in Indonesia is the Mahabharata epic which in Indonesia is used as the basis for wayang stories. In the Mahabharata epic, Drupadi is the wife of the elder brother of the five Pandavas (Yudhistira, Bima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sadewa). However, in Indonesian wayang stories, Drupadi is only the wife of Yudhistira. Cultural filtering occurs because in Indonesia there is no tradition of polyandry or a wife marrying more than one man or husband. This is also the case with the punakawan characters (Semar, Petruk, Gareng, Bagong, Togog, and Bilung) that appear in the Mahabharata or Ramayana plays. According to the Senawangi Authors (1999), the Punakawan characters are not found in either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana. Thus, the Punakawan character is an addition to wayang stories in Indonesia to change the concept of pure Hindu religion and philosophy into Javanese religion and philosophy.

Foreign civilizations that enter Indonesia and undergo the process of assimilation and acculturation need not be understood as a superior culture that colors Indonesian local culture. Shunqing and Wang (2005) assert that to advance communication across civilizations, we must recognize that all types of civilizations are equal and coexist.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on Shunqing’s theory of variation characterized by heterogeneity and cross-civilization, the prospects for comparative literature studies and comparative literature education in Indonesia will become clearer and we can set a direction in accordance with our own identity, both with regard to national civilization and educational goals. The adaptation of the Mahabharata epic into the Indonesian context is an example of how local culture is recognized as part of comparative literature. So, the Chinese school can be expanded into the Asian school and we can internalize it into our own school that shows the variety of Indonesian literature and civilization

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