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Western Theory and the Study of Classical Chinese Literature in North America

Zhang Wanmin*

Abstract: In the second half of the 20th century, humanistic studies in the West witnessed a “theory explosion”. Unlike traditional European Sinology, American Sinology borrowed the latest Western theoretical approaches and formed a unique feature. The emerging Western theory also influenced the study of classical Chinese literature in the USA, with each Sinologist exhibiting a different tendency. In the context of the development of American Sinology and Western theory, this paper examines the Sinologists’ change of attitudes in different development stages to unveil the characteristics and tendencies of the study of classical Chinese literature in North America.

Keywords: American Sinology, classical Chinese literature, Western theory

In the second half of the 20th century, Western humanities and literary studies witnessed a “theory explosion.” Unlike traditional European Sinology, American Sinology borrowed the latest Western theoretical approaches and formed some unique features. Beyond doubt, to a large extent these emerging theories shaped the basic features of the study of modern Chinese literature in North America (Ji & Yu, 2017). What was it like in the study of classical Chinese literature in North America? At the turn of the 21st century, a call for the “end of theory” appeared in the West. How was such a background reflected and echoed in the study of classical Chinese literature in North America?

In 1992, William Tay, then professor at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) published essays to introduce how various Western theories (New Criticism, parallel study of comparative literature, archetypal literary criticism,

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psychoanalysis, feminism, Russian formalism, structuralism, phenomenology, deconstructionism and sociology of literature)(Tay, 1992) were applied to the study of Chinese literature in North America. Tay's essay only covered works on the study of both classical and modern Chinese literature from the 1960s to the 1980s. Anne Birrell, a British scholar published an essay "Postmodernist Theory in Recent Studies of Chinese Literature" in 2000, reviewing 74 works and 15 essays (the majority of which were written by American Sinologists) published between 1986 and 1999. She summarized a variety of emerging theoretical concepts as an umbrella term "postmodernist theory" and placed them into 11 categories, which respectively were: a. liminality, rites de passage, marginality, boundaries; b. inscribing the self; c. the representation of self; d. narratology; e. desire and disenchantment; f. gender as a category of literary analysis; g. reading and the reader; h. myth studies and literature; i. art and literature; j. translations and editions; k. anthologies (Birrell, 2000, pp. 3-18). Compared with William Tay's essays, Birrell's essay was a more comprehensive update of the Sinological works introduced. But most of her reviews only touched in passing; besides, many of the works mentioned did not necessarily have any direct connection with postmodernist theory (Birrell, 2000, p. 15).^①

Zhou Faxiang, a Chinese scholar did a more comprehensive and detailed examination of this thesis in his work *Western Literary Theories and Chinese Literature*. From the perspective of Chinese readers, he emphasized the significance of such an examination, "(It) evaluates and summarizes Western Sinologists' numerous attempts to transplant Western theory and provides references for the development of Chinese literary theories and criticism in the new historical era" (Zhou, 1997a, p.3). Zhou extensively touched upon Western literary theories in this work, ranging from Ezra Pound's Chinese-character poetics, linguistics, image studies, New Criticism, Baroque-style studies, oral creation studies, archetypal literary criticism, structuralism, genology, narratology, comparative literature, psychology, semiology and thematology, to stylostistics. Zhou also noticed some issues which had been overlooked, such as Sinologists' different responses to Western theory but somehow did not go deeper (Zhou, 1997a, p. 18, pp. 420-421; Zhou, 1997a, p. 401; Zhou, 1997b).^②

This paper does not aim to further update the aforementioned works based on its examination scope, or make a comprehensive review of the specific applications of recent Western theory to the study of classical Chinese literature in North America. Rather, in the context of the development of American Sinology and Western theory, this paper is to examine American Sinologists' different responses and attitudes to Western theory through the case studies of James J. Y. Liu, Edward Hetzel Schafer, Jonathan Chaves and Stephen Owen. Such an examination is expected to present certain trends and characteristics of the process in which the study of classical Chinese literature in North America gradually accepted the emerging Western theory.

① For example, in the 10th category- "Translations and Editions", the author says, "Although the books in this section do not adopt postmodernist methodologies of literary criticism, they do, in the main, express the spirit of postmodernist criticism."

② Only in the first and last chapter, Zhou Faxiang argues, "Regarding the transplantation of emerging Western theory, there are different views in the circles of Sinology." "Western literary theories are rooted in Western literature and culture. Whether they can fit in with the study of Chinese literature is a much-talked-about topic among Sinologists and researchers of comparative literature." Yet, Zhou only gives a passing comment on this "hot topic" and optimistically points out Western Sinologists' two major Western theory-based approaches to Chinese literature. One is to adjust Western theory to fit in with Chinese literature; the other is to combine Chinese and Western theoretical methodologies.

“Referring to the West” and “Western beauty”

It was an irresistible trend to borrow Western theoretical frameworks to study the history and culture of ancient China in the 20th century. Back to the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and at the beginning of the Republic of China era (1912-1949), native scholars in China had already made a variety of attempts. In the *Elements of Chinese Classic*, the author Qian Mu particularly mentioned that the application of Western philosophical theories by Zhang Taiyan, Hu Shih and Liang Qichao to the study of Pre-Qin philosophies exerted a significant impact. According to Qian, “Scholars in the Qing Dynasty also spared some time to research Pre-Qin philosophies while focusing on the study of Confucian classics. With painstaking efforts they harvested little. By contrast, recent scholars have shifted their focus to Western philosophies and applied them to the verification of classical Chinese works. In this way, Pre-Qin philosophies are made much clearer. Zhang Binglin (also known as Zhang Taiyan), who is from Yuhang, Zhejiang province, was the first to apply Buddhist doctrine and Western theory to the interpretation of various Pre-Qin philosophies, bringing new insights to the philosophies of Mozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi and Han Feizi. His pioneering exploration was followed and extended by Hu Shih from Jixi, Anhui province and Liang Qichao from Xinhui, Guangdong province. Thus, the study of Pre-Qin philosophies became a fashion of the time” (Qian, 1997, pp. 322-325; Qian, 2001, p. 6).^① In the study of classical Chinese literature, there were a number of scholars, represented by Wang Guowei, Zhu Ziqing and Wen Yiduo, attempting to borrow Western theoretical approaches for reference.

Regarding such attempts for reference, most Chinese scholars would reiterate the importance of being Chinese nation-based. In 1934 Chen Yinke wrote in the *Examination Report on Feng Youlan's A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (vol. 2), “In my opinion, from this day on, even if China can faithfully introduce thoughts from North America or Eastern Europe, the outcome will be similar to Xuanzang's cittamatra (consciousness-only theory). In the intellectual history of China, the imported thoughts cannot expect to top the Chinese intellectual circles and will eventually fade away. To form a truly independent and accomplished intellectual system, China must introduce and absorb foreign theories and at the same time adhere to the dominance of domestic scholarship” (Chen, 2001, pp. 284-285). In the same year (1934), Zhu Ziqing argued in *Introduction to the Department of Chinese Literature, Tsinghua University*, “(Literature appreciation and criticism should) of course draw on Western theory for reference, but we should not forget the very essence and roots of our own” (Zhu, 1993, p. 416).

Regarding the combination of Chinese and Western academic theories, some scholars were quite optimistic about it. In the essay “On the Basic Trends of Chinese Intellectual Change” published in 1902, Liang Qichao said, “China, our great motherland, may remain unaffected by any foreign learning; once it accepts foreign learning, it will surely carry the learning forward and form a unique style.” Liang even compared the Chinese civilization's acceptance of the Western civilization to “tying the knot”. He said,

^① Qian Mu's personal academic purport was in fact against the tide. He attempted to apply “newly emerging learnings” to the discussion of Chinese tradition in different categories. Qian stresses, “Without the classification of learnings, the Chinese scholarship would return to the old track, which preferred knowledge integration to differentiation.”

“The 20th century is to be marked by the marriage between the two civilizations. Our compatriots should actively prepare for a grand traditional ceremony to hail the bride’s arrival. Our beautiful bride from the West will soon give birth to and raise children to prosper our nation” (Liang, 1989, p. 12). Such an imaginary relationship between Chinese and Western civilizations and corresponding subject-positions have already been analyzed by some scholars in an in-depth way (Liu, 2000). Liang Qichao’s optimistic argument unintentionally concealed the tension between Chinese and Western discourse. And it is precisely such a tension that has been much discussed by many scholars in recent years.

When reviewing Zhu Ziqing’s view that “(literature appreciation and criticism should) of course draw on Western theory for reference, but should not forget the very essence and roots of our own,” Zhang Jian cautiously argued, “The relationship between ‘drawing on Western theory for reference’ and ‘the very essence and roots of Chinese literary theories’ has remained a core issue facing the study of Chinese literary theories over the past one hundred years, during which Chinese scholars have been drawing on the experience of the West, although their specific targets vary, and have been striving to explore the very essence and roots of Chinese literary theories. Until this day, how to effectively combine the two remains a challenge to be tackled (Zhang, 2011). Luo Gang acutely pointed out that many of Wang Guowei’s concepts, such as “realm” (*jingjie*), “nature” (*ziran*) and “undivided” (*buge*) essentially originated from modern Western aesthetics, are separated from and opposite to the inherent poetic tradition of China. According to Luo, the so-called integration of Chinese and Western poetics is in fact a contention for semiotic meaning in a knowledge-power relationship under a particular historical context; it eventually obscures and suppresses the important value of traditional poetics and exposes the inequality between the Oriental culture and the Western culture (Luo, 2017, pp. 66-183).

Compared with the aforementioned Sinologists in China, overseas Sinologists have been more directly placed in a context filled with various Western theories and are therefore more likely to be influenced by those theories. Regarding how to apply Western theory to the study of classical Chinese literature, those overseas Sinologists exhibited contradicted views, which seemed similar to those of domestic scholars at first glance. For example, according to Wong Siu-kit, James Robert Hightower (1915-2006) emphasized the contribution of *Selections of Refined Literature* (also known as *The Wen Xuan*) to the genre theory; his emphasis to some extent made sense but was profoundly influenced by Northrop Frye’s theory; Sinology studies should avoid narrow-mindedness, which was for sure, but it remained debatable that to what extent popular Western theories should be applied to the study of a non-Western literature (Wong, 1983, p. 155). Another example is J. D. Frodsham. In the 1960s and 1970s when Western literary theories began to thrive, Frodsham optimistically anticipated a new vision of Chinese literary studies and advised to apply then popular methodologies (those concerning linguistics, critical stylistics, formalism, myth criticism, existential criticism, psychological criticism and Marxist criticism) to the study of Chinese literature (Frodsham, 1970). Yet, Frodsham’s associations of Romanticism with Taoism, and Western Baroque with Buddhism were criticized by John J. Deeney as being imprudent (Deeney, 1985, p. 604). It is worth mentioning that the critic Deeney was the very initiator of the Chinese school of comparative literature, which aimed to adjust Western literary theories and apply them to the interpretation of Chinese literature.

Essentially, overseas Sinologists' application of Western theory and methodology to the study of classical Chinese literature was similar to that of their counterparts in China. Both of their practices were the outcomes of academic modernization. Yet, Western Sinologists were different from Chinese Sinologists such as Liang Qichao, who considered such an application as "Chinese civilization's marriage to a Western beauty". Besides, those overseas Sinologists (except a few overseas Chinese Sinologists) did not have any nation-based anxiety of "drawing on the experience of the West for reference". In this sense, it is of special significance to examine the response of Western Sinologists. This is particularly true of the Sinology circles in the USA, which were under the more striking impact of various Western theories. Such an impact was closely related to the context of Sinology transformation.

The paradigm shift of Sinology and its methodology

American Sinology extends and transcends European Sinology. Chen Jue, a scholar from China's Taiwan, described the evolution from European Sinology to American Sinology as a "paradigm shift". He said, "Around WWII, the mainstream of overseas Sinology witnessed a shift from a European paradigm to an American paradigm." More specifically, until the end of the 19th century, "Sinology remained a branch of Oriental studies and it paralleled other disciplines such as the classics under the same academic category of humanities." However, as time went by, relevant disciplines further developed. "During the Post-WWII era, humanities and social sciences at American universities were restructured. During this process, Sinology, a once unpopular spin-off of the classics, was abruptly transformed to 'Chinese studies', a trendy discipline under regional studies. These 'Chinese studies' featured complex interactions with departments of history, sociology, politics, art history, comparative literature, geography and religion. And its coverage went far beyond the scope of humanities and into the wider area of social sciences. 'Regarding the targeted era, 'Chinese studies' gradually shifted its research focus from the previous 'ancient period' to 'both the ancient and modern period', and even to the 'modern period' only" (Chen, 2009).

American Sinology's abrupt transformation from an unpopular spin-off of the classics to a trendy discipline under regional studies was completed in the context of frequent interactions and gradual integration with modern disciplines in the West. In March 1964, at the 16th annual conference of the Association for Asian Studies, there was a symposium themed "Chinese Studies and Disciplines" with the presented essays later published in *The Journal of Asian Studies*.^① Centering on the name and nature of Sinology and its future development, those essays proposed to lift Sinology out of the traditional barriers and integrate it into the various disciplines of modern social sciences.

Regarding this 1960s debate in the circles of American Sinology, Yu Ying-shih commented during an interview some years ago, "It was not just a debate over the name, but over a major change in research orientation." More specifically, "In the past, Sinology was alienated from the mainstream scholarship in

^① *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23. 4 (1964, Aug.) included a series of essays themed at Symposium on Chinese Studies and the Discipline respectively written by Joseph R. Levenson, Mary C. Wright, G. William Skinner, Maurice Freedman and Frederick W. Mote, as well as comments by Rhoads Murphey and Benjamin Schwartz. Later, two more comments by Denis Twitchett and Kung-Chuan Hsiao were published in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 24. 1 (1964, Nov.).

the West and was only attached to the so-called Oriental studies.” However, “ever since the 1960s, the academic trends have changed, with the study of pre-Qing Chinese culture and history incorporated into the mainstream of Western humanities and social sciences and old-school Sinology gradually fading away amid the new tide.” In general, “in terms of the research approach, giving priority to theories has become a marked new tendency. Over the past two to three decades, new theories have kept emerging in the circles of Western humanities and social sciences and particularly in the circles of literature” (Chen, 2012, pp. 79-80).

Yu Ying-shih’s call for “giving priority to theories” concerns the methodology behind Sinology’s paradigm shift. Incorporating modern disciplines and applying their theoretical approaches is arguably a defining feature of American Sinology and the timely absorption of emerging Western theories has become an important characteristic of American Sinology since the paradigm shift.

Yu Ying-shih specially pointed out that new theories just kept emerging “particularly in the circles of literature”. By contrast, Zhang Longxi, from a perspective of literary studies, described the interactions between Chinese literary studies in North America and Western theories during the Sinology transformation. Zhang argued, “Since the 1960s, literary studies at American universities have been without doubt under the influence of various critical theories, which were based on the philosophies of different schools on the European Continent, particularly those in France.” It is precisely in this dominant academic atmosphere that American Sinology “underwent a gradual transformation, which was primarily characterized by breaking the closed circle of some specialized scholars, enriching the significance of Chinese literary and cultural studies, and attracting more attention to such studies.” Such a transformation, to a large extent, originated from the challenge of “external theoretical pressure” (Zhang, 2004, pp. 17-18).

During the Sinology’s paradigm shift in the 1960s and 1970s, the study of classical Chinese literature in the USA also underwent a fundamental transformation, which was relatively slow due to the conservatism of classical Chinese literature. One of the representative figures of that transformation was Hans H. Frankel (1916-2003), who, in his student Stephen Owen’s words, was a “gentle revolutionary”. According to Owen, He (Frankel) made his students realize that this research area should also give considerations to major European and American literary critics and theorists, apart from key Sinologists (Owen, 1995, p. 7). In his representative work *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*, Frankel broke through the limitations of traditional Sinology and frequently borrowed Western thematic studies and prototype theories to facilitate dialogue between classical Chinese literature and European literary traditions.

James J. Y. Liu (1926-1986), who was among the earliest scholars to have noticed the challenge of Western literary theories and who actively responded to this challenge in the circles of American Sinology, had more interactions with emerging Western theories. In an essay published in 1975, James J. Y. Liu summed up then Chinese literary studies in the West and concluded four major trends as follows: First, the most obvious trend in Chinese literary studies in the West was the remarkable growth of the field. Second, there was a growing tendency to recognize Chinese literary studies as a discipline in itself, rather than part of Sinology. Third, there was increasing diversity of the interests in terms of genres and periods. Fourth, literary criticism was accorded unprecedented attention. Of the four trends, the second and the fourth one mattered most. According to Liu, the study of Chinese literature was no longer dependent on philology and

historiography, which traditional European Sinology had relied on, and turned to the study of the intrinsic characteristics of Chinese literature. This judgment happened to be in line with the overall direction of the American Sinology transformation. Liu also applied various critical approaches, i.e. various emerging literary theories in the West to this transformation. In the essay, James J. Y. Liu also argued that the application of emerging Western theory to the study of Chinese literature generated three beneficial effects. First, “it has brought fresh insights to Chinese literature.” Second, “it has placed Chinese literature in a broader perspective.” Third, “it has made Chinese literature more accessible to non-specialists.” Liu further added, “(It is due to the efforts of comparativist students of Chinese literature that) scholars in Western literature and comparative literature have recently become more aware of—and interested in—Chinese literature” (Liu, 1975, pp. 28). James J. Y. Liu himself maintained close contacts and interactions with then Western scholars active in literary theories. Among those scholars were Mikel Dufrenne, a French philosopher, aesthetician and author of existentialism and Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, a German scholar of hermeneutics. Liu sent his essay drafts on the study of Chinese literature to them for reading and was open to their criticism and advice.

Responding to emerging Western critical theories could make Chinese literature “more accessible to non-specialists” and “make scholars in Western literature and comparative literature more aware of—and interested in—Chinese literature.” This could be the hidden motive of many Sinologists. As a Chinese Sinologist, Liu had some anxieties of his own in addition to that motive. He used to admit a double anxiety he felt when he attempted to interpret traditional Chinese literature to Western readers. First, he was a Chinese critic who wrote in English. Liu held that French or German critics writing in English could assume a shared cultural heritage with their readership without feeling a break-up with their native culture; while Chinese critics writing in English could not assume any shared knowledge, belief and attitude concerning literature, life, society and reality among the authors whom they attempted to interpret, they themselves as critics (and also readers and writers), and their readership. Second, he was also an American Sinologist far from China. Given the tremendous social, political and cultural changes taking place in China over the past decades, he just could not identify himself as being part of the cultural phenomena of contemporary China (Liu, 2006, pp. 210-211).

First, Liu was concerned that as a Chinese critic writing in English, he might not be able to create a shared knowledge background and cultural belief between his research and Western readers. Second, Liu was also concerned that as an American scholar outside the contemporary Chinese culture, he might not be able to substantially relate his study to the actual China. Through the application of Western theory to the interpretation of Chinese literature, Liu built more confidence in overcoming such a double anxiety. According to Liu, such critics were still entitled to the entrée to Chinese culture in the past; moreover, their incorporation of certain Western culture allowed them to pronounce their contribution to Chinese culture (Liu, pp. 210-211). The application of Western theories enabled more Western readers to discover hidden cultural ties in his research works and could also prove his contributions to the promotion of Chinese culture.

Embracing Western theories brought a new perspective to Chinese literary traditions but could also risk twisting Chinese traditions, which gave rise to a new anxiety. Liu reiterated his cautious attitude towards the application of Western theories to the interpretation of Chinese literature. According to him, entirely applying the criteria of criticism purely originated from Western literature to Chinese literature should be avoided,

which was supposed to be self-evident (Liu, p.6). Nevertheless, Liu's *Chinese Theories of Literature* was severely criticized by J. D. Schmidt as the outcome of "Eurocentrism". Suffering multiple anxieties, Liu was highly sensitive to such criticism. He immediately wrote to the relevant editor, explaining that he only wished Chinese literature to be read, handled, studied and appreciated just like Western literature and criticism in the West and that he hoped to introduce Chinese literature and criticism to English-speaking readers in a way they preferred (Zhan, 2005, p. 183).

J. D. Schmidt represented another stance of North American Sinologists. Many Sinologists studying ancient China were cautious about applying Western theories. Having studied the traditional research methodology of Sinology (methodology of philology) and laid an academic foundation thereby, those Sinologists were skeptical of emerging literary criticism. Edward H. Schafer (1913-1991) was a representative figure among them. In 1982, Schafer delivered *What and How Is Sinology?*, an inaugural lecture for the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature, University of Colorado. Schafer recalled that when he was appointed editor of *Journal of the American Oriental Society* in the 1950s, he proposed in an open letter to abandon the words "Sinology" and "sinologist" because they tended to confound quite different disciplines under too broad a rubric and because more and more people tended to correspond "Sinologist" to "China watcher", a term covering related journalist, critics, as well as anyone commenting on modern China. In the 1980s, however, Schafer turned to advocate preserving the term "Sinology" and using it in "its original sense of the study of the Chinese language, and especially the study of early texts written in that language".

This change took place in the context of the influence of Western theories on Sinology and its resulting anxiety. Schafer emphasized that Sinology is philology which studies the early texts written in the Chinese language. He criticized the new trend in the circles of American Sinology, which, according to him, consisted of three major directions: China studies by experts of social history, China studies by litterateurs, and China studies by experts of humanity history. The second direction, i.e. China studies by litterateurs was filled with a "flaccid estheticism". He considered it a strange belief that scholars in humanities should study "beauty", "soul" and "expression" which are all abstract words. He argued that humanists should pay attention to the concrete, not the abstract, and the individual, not the universal; and that philology could help access literature, particularly classical literature. Regarding literary criticism, he thought it inseparable from philology. Yet at the same time, he also held that literary criticism was basically a criticism of literary documents. Given that, literary criticism in his words is a type of philology. In Schafer's opinion, no progress was made by Sinologists in Chinese literary studies, although there were many elaborative and often trendy research activities, particularly those conducted in the USA and Japan (Schafer, 1990-1991, pp. 23-44).

Schafer and Liu represented two opposite sides. Schafer strove to safeguard the established status of traditional Sinology, highlighting philology as the basis of Chinese literary studies while Liu was against the research methodology of traditional Sinology. He even said, "there has been a growing tendency (at least in the USA) to recognize the study of Chinese literature as a discipline in itself, rather than part of Sinology. To avoid any misunderstanding, let it be made clear that those (including myself) who prefer to think of themselves as literary critics or literary historians specializing in Chinese literature rather than as Sinologists do not belittle the importance of other disciplines (such as philology and history) that have

traditionally also been covered by the term Sinology.” Liu also sharply argued, “Philologists, historians, and others are, of course, free to use literary works as sources of information, but their works do not constitute literary studies” (Liu, 1975, p. 22). Emphases on the value of the “study of literature” itself and on the value of Western literary criticism was more and more accepted by Sinologists in North America. For example, when reviewing Anthony C. Yu’s study, Li Sher-shiueh said, “Even in such a seemingly ‘Qian-Jia’-style essay as ‘Narrative Structure and the Problem of Chapter Nine in *Hsi-Yu Chi*’, Prof. Yu focused more on verifying his observations with the concept of Western criticism than textual research on a given version.” “The organic theory, first proposed by Aristotle, is without doubt an invisible guiding ideology behind the essay. It does not matter so much whether the story of Chen Guangrui was included in the original version of *Journey to the West*; what Prof. Yu cared about most was the completeness of the “narrative structure” and the author’s exceptional attention to detail”. Li Sher-Shiueh held that “(Anthony C. Yu’s) perception as a critic outshined his exploration as a scholar of edition studies” (Li, 1989, pp. 10-11).

Thus it can be concluded that for classical Chinese literary studies in the circles of North American Sinology, the dispute between traditional Sinology and literary studies was essentially about different methodologies. Traditional Sinology adopted a philological approach, while literary studies preferred an emerging literary theories-based approach. Evidently, the philological approach excels at linguistic and documentary work but overlooks esthetic dimensions, for which it is prone to result in lengthy collections of materials; the literary theories-based approach provides a novel perspective but risks overlooking relevant documents and drawing a forced analogy.

Theory explosion: From deconstructionism to post-colonialism

The second half of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of various literary theories. As Yu Ying-shih put it, “Over the past two to three decades, new theories have just kept emerging in the circles of Western humanities and social sciences and particularly in the circles of literature.” This was even truer in the 1970s and 1980s in the USA when a diversity of literary theories emerged one after another including deconstructionism and other French theories. Thus, Gerald Graff vividly described that period as an era of “theory explosion” (Graff, 1987, p. 3). Also, Hazard Adams gave it a similar description as “an age of wall-to-wall theories” (Adams & Searle, 2005, p. 7). The “theory explosion” and “wall-to-wall theories” gave rise to a growing number of literary theories whose research scope extended from particular literary themes to all basic issues of humanistic studies. In a work on literary theories, Jonathan Culler held that the scope of the word “theories” already evolved from a particular literary theory to a plain and overarching theory. He said, “In literary and cultural studies these days there is a lot of talk about theories — not theories of literature, mind you; just plain theories.” Thus, it was no longer just a particular literary theory that changed the landscape of literary studies. Theories, we are told, have radically changed the nature of literary studies, but people who say this do not mean literary theory, the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods for analyzing it.” Culler defined this plain and overarching theory as a theory whose “impact has been to expand the range of questions to which literary works can answer” (Culler, 1998, p. 1, p. 3). The *Theories’ s Empire: An*

Anthology of Dissent, published in 2005, places theories into three categories, which respectively are “theories” as one approach among many, “theories” as a system of concepts employed in the humanities and “theories” as an overarching “practice” of our time (Patai & Corral, 2005, p. 1).

Those various literary theories, which have combined to form an “explosive” effect in the USA since the 1970s, invariably criticized basic Western values (those concerning reason and truth) and represented the tendency of post-modern theories. Accordingly, in her essay on how Western theories were applied to Sinology, Anne Birrell borrowed terms such as “explosion” and “post-modern theories” to conclude various emerging theories and concepts. Birrell argued, “The past decade has seen an explosion of Sinological interest in the application of postmodernist theoretical approaches to a variety of works in the Chinese literary tradition. This reflects the shift in Western literary studies away from the traditional humanistic disciplines of philosophy, rhetoric, and aesthetics, toward the human sciences of sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and linguistics.” The evolution of these disciplines constituted a break, or rupture, with the past. “This shift in perspective and this rupture with tradition is generally known as Postmodernism, and in its current expression it derives from the theoretical writings of the Paris School of the Human Sciences since the 1970s. The most influential among these writings has been Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, Lacan’s psychoanalytical theories of the self, and Derrida’s textual deconstruction.” In general, “Numerous recent studies by Sinologists who specialize in literary studies have shown a remarkable willingness to engage with the theories, concepts, approaches, and terminology of Postmodernism” (Birrell, 2000, pp. 3-4).

Jonathan Chaves also called these emerging theories “Postmodernism”. Concerning the impact of these theories on the study of classical Chinese literature in North America, Chaves said, “By training and profession, I am a scholar of classical Chinese poetry. . . . But I can say that my field, like all others in the humanities today has been infiltrated by the approaches to literature that may have originated in departments of English but are now universal. The most influential of these modes of literary criticism have been Deconstructionism, New Historicism, feminist criticism, and the sexual and ‘body’ criticism of Michel Foucault.” His personal experience was a testimony of that history. In the early 1970s, during his years as a post-graduate student and later a young scholar, he began to read Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida under the influence of his fellow graduate students. Yet, Chaves expressed the most fiercely possible objections to the literary theories of Foucault and Derrida, considering them to be a “worldview of relativism and nihilism” (Chaves, 2002, pp. 828-830).

At the 1990 roundtable of the Association for Asian Studies, Chaves further specified his objections and severely criticized the application of deconstructionism by Pauline Yu and Stephen Owen to the study of classical Chinese literature. According to Chaves, the fundamental problem of Yu and Owen lay in an excessive bias in their studies, exhibiting an “overtly urgent desire to assert or prove the correctness of a certain theory”. Thus, he wrote at the beginning of the essay, “Increasingly we meet only ourselves.” Chaves held that Pauline Yu’s book *The Reading of the Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* was less concerned with imagery than with metaphor and allegory. Or rather, “Her real preoccupation has little to do with literature as such; she is a philosopher or metaphysician manque.” Pauline Yu placed excessive emphasis on the dichotomy—Chinese monism vs. Western dualism, which was part of the general flight from metaphysics that is characteristic of modern intellectuals. Chaves said pointedly that Stephen Owen’s

Mi-low: Poetry and the Labyrinth of Desire “has thrown open the portals of Chinese poetry studies to the gremlin progeny of Derrida’s febrile brain.” It is true that nowhere in the pages of this volume is there a single example of the repulsive jargon driving so many away from deconstructionism. Yet, his ideas are those of this influential school of criticism, presenting a virtual textbook of the basic dogmas of deconstructionism. Eventually, “We have now left the realm of literature for that of philosophy, not openly but covertly” (Chaves, 1991, pp. 77-82). Thus it can be seen that the study of classical Chinese literature in North America was increasingly influenced by emerging theories. “The scene of demon invasions and a strong anti-theories sentiment (created by Chaves in his work) precisely demonstrated that Chinese literary studies was under the influence of ‘theory explosion’” (Zhang, 2004, p. 27).

Yet, the works of scholars such as Stephen Owen exhibit a paradox. That is, on the one hand, they were based on Western theories; on the other hand, they tried all means to erase the traces of Western theories.

Stephen Owen studied and taught at Yale University, the base of deconstructionism, for which the influence of deconstruction theories on him is beyond doubt. As Pauline Yu put it, “Not only Owen is wrestling with the same questions of reading and interpretation addressed by such theorists as Gadamer, Fish, and Iser, but the deconstructive urge is very much in evidence throughout” (Yu, 1987, p. 357). However, Chaves discovered that no deconstructionist term or concept could be found in any of Stephen Owen’s works although his basic ideas and methodologies practically all came from deconstructionism. In fact, this unusual phenomenon had already been pointed out by James J. Y. Liu, according to whom, the theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida were applied to Owen’s work *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*, but their names were not mentioned in the work. Liu even advised Stephen Owen to compile a bibliography of those Western theories (Liu, 1986, pp. 579-580).

Stephen Owen himself used to openly object to borrowing Western theories to interpret Chinese literature and tried to disassociate himself from deconstructionism, holding that the conceptual vocabulary of Western poetics could twist Chinese poetics in a subtle and serious way, and claiming that he gave no support to “semiotics, structuralism and deconstructionism” at all (Owen, 1983-1984, pp. 434-464). Owen’s statement happened to be in stark contrast with that of James J. Y. Liu in the 1970s. Liu strove to prove that the reason why Chinese literary studies could separate from traditional Sinology and become an independent discipline lay in its adoption of the methodology and perspective of modern literary criticism. Consequently, Liu often specially acknowledged his communication and exchanges with Western literary critics and aestheticians.

Although trying all means to erase the traces of the influence of Western theories, Stephen Owen knew that was a mission impossible. He thus attempted to describe such an impact as an unintentional, unexpected and spontaneous process. He took his own teaching experience as an example to explain such a spontaneous process. Owen recalled that when he taught at Yale University, there was one semester in which he taught two courses, i.e. the history of Western literary theories and Chinese literary theories precisely on the same day. Originally believing it sensible to understand a text in the context of its own tradition, Owen always tried to dismiss the lecture he had just completed from his mind as soon as possible when he was on his way to the classroom of the next lecture. But eventually he discovered that now that the two traditions were taught by the same person, himself, he had no way to build a wall to separate the two in his mind. Complete separation was

impossible. Although he did not insist on making any comparisons or presenting any ideas, his understanding of each traditional text was inevitably influenced by the other. Based on this discovery, Stephen Owen argued that some unexpected relations and associations came into being due to certain forced studies in a broad area... and that what he said was not about “comparative literature” but about the spontaneous generation of unexpected views. He considered such a spontaneous generation an ideal way, which, when at its best, could provide novel points of view for Chinese literature, and held it neither bizarre nor far-fetched. Stephen Owen also stressed that his study was not about “comparative criticism” or about the “application” of Western theories to Chinese traditions, which is probably a form of cultural imperialism (Mo, 1994, p. 3).

In an interview, Stephen Owen emphasized again that he was promoting a spontaneously-generated Chinese-Western fusion, rather than studying Chinese literature from a Western theoretical perspective. He said that there were some American scholars attempting to apply Western literary theories to Chinese literary studies, which he was not sure was either effective or successful. As for himself, he was not aware of whether he adopted a Chinese or Western perspective when examining Chinese literature. He identified himself as a mix of the two cultures. He found it interesting that Chinese scholars, having read his works, always held that he viewed Chinese literature from a Western perspective; while scholars in American and European poetry studies believed that he conducted relevant research from a Chinese perspective (Zhang, 1998). In this way, Stephen Owen depicted his position somewhere between China and the West: For Chinese readers, he is from the West, while for Western readers, he stands for China. There was no such anxiety tormenting overseas Chinese Sinologists like James J. Y. Liu in Owen’s depiction. Yet, Stephen Owen’s intentional emphasis of this process as a spontaneously generated mix may be understood as another sign of anxiety.

James J. Y. Liu used to express his anxiety in a concise way. He said that entirely applying the criteria of criticism, which purely originated from Western literature, to Chinese literature should be avoided, which was supposed to be self-evident. More than two decades later, Stephen Owen, under changed circumstances, gave a quite different account. As aforementioned, Owen considered the application of Western theories to Chinese traditions to be a probable form of cultural imperialism. In fact, behind such an account lay post-colonialism, which stimulated Western academic circles to re-examine the East-West relations on a more profound level.

Due to such a stimulus, Pauline Yu also made a similar statement against cultural imperialism. According to Yu, with the introduction of New Criticism, most Western approaches to literary criticism could hardly find correspondence in traditional Chinese criticism, as those approaches were based on entirely different philosophical and literary presuppositions; those approaches, when applied to Chinese literature, could expect to be considered “irrelevant” at best and “cultural imperialism” at worst; consequently, a thorough examination could uncover the fact that the so-called literary “universality” was almost equal to the universality of Western literature (Yu, 1988, p. 163). In fact, Pauline Yu, who was a student of James J. Y. Liu, followed Liu’s approach to the study of classical Chinese literature from a perspective of comparative literature and maintained close interactions with emerging Western theories. However, the change of theoretical context later impelled Yu to deny any relevance between emerging Western theories and the

① Pauline Yu used to insist on the connection between Chinese and Western tradition in the 1970s but strongly denied such a connection in the 1980s and since.

traditions of Chinese literature (Zhang, 2014, pp. 176-183).^① Such an attitude of total negation itself originated from the new trend of Western theories, namely, a re-thinking on and criticism against the universality of Western cultural hegemony and the oppression of Western civilization.

The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* was immediately responded to by the circles of Orientalism and Sinology in the USA. For example, *The Journal of Asian Studies* issued a special issue (vol. 39, 1980) to discuss Orientalism. Also, John Timothy Wixted, who had persisted with traditional approaches to Sinology, quickly joined in the discussion of Orientalism. At the "1985 Conference of the American Oriental Society, Western Branch", Wixted delivered a speech entitled "Reverse Orientalism". Wixted held that Said's theories were based on Michel Foucault's discussion on the relationship between power and knowledge and that Said's theories were helpful for the reflection of China studies (Wixted, 1989, pp. 17-27). Wixted soon accepted the theories of Foucault and Said probably because he considered their theories enabled disciplinary reflection.

In short, post-colonial thinking quickly influenced the study of classical Chinese literature in North America. The younger generation claimed that they, as scholars studying otherness (in terms of time, space and ethnicity), could not naively ignore the questions put forward by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (Connery, 1998, p. 13). German Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin even considered post-colonialism to be the mainstream of American Sinology. Kubin said, "There has been a mainstream in the study of Sinology in the USA. Those excluded from the mainstream have no hope at American universities. One of the impressive and horrible mainstreams should be post-colonialism, which has almost completely ruined American Sinology" (Kubin, 2013, p. 13).

Kubin's argument may sound somewhat exaggerated. Yet it is precisely the prevalence of post-colonialism and criticism against cultural imperialism that triggered a new anxiety among Sinologists who borrowed Western theories with optimism. On the one hand, they closely followed and absorbed the latest developments of Western theories (so much so as to invite severe criticism from Jonathan Chaves). On the other hand, they denounced the application of Western theories to Chinese traditions as cultural imperialism, trying to describe the enlightenment from the West with words such as "unintentional" and "spontaneous". As a result, they excessively emphasized that the system of Chinese literary traditions was entirely different from the Western system and that it therefore could not be explained by any Western theories. In fact, the Chinese system did not necessarily accord with the true features of Chinese literature, for it was a perfect equivalence which was shaped according to Western literary traditions and characterized by a far-fetched "man-made color".

After the "end of theories"

Entering the 21st century, those theories, which used to sweep across the Western humanities, began to receive more skepticism. Some even advocated the "end of theories" mainly because those theories gradually replaced literature itself and transformed literary studies into abstract philosophical discussions, ideological criticisms and cultural studies. That is to say, "It was the tendency among many academics to spend less time discussing what at least used to be called 'literary texts' and more time debating theories." (Adams & Searle, 2005, p. 6) Literary scholars began to reflect and call for a return to literary texts. Under such circumstances, slogans such as the "end of theories" and the "death of theories" came into being. Vincent B. Leitch specified

the “theories” in the “death of theories” in five aspects, with the first being the “death of theories as poetics and literary criticism at the hands of various non-literary tendencies (feminism, race studies, post-colonial criticism)” (Leitch, 2003, p. vii).

As the “theories fever” faded away, Sinologists seemed to be able to deal with Western theories more calmly. When summarizing the early study of Chinese literature in North America, Martin Kern said, “Compared with the study of Chinese literature in the Ming and Qing dynasties and modern times, and even the study of middle ancient Chinese literature in recent years, the study of early Chinese literature is perhaps relatively more conservative.” Kern’s comment was in fact a step back in order to move forward against an already changed academic backdrop. “The inferences, which were drawn by scholars of comparative literature and structuralists from the 1960s to the 1980s, reflected their wish to apply Western theoretical modes and thinking paradigms to Chinese literary studies. . . The appeal of those research methodologies, however, is fading away.” With confidence, Kern continued to argue, “By contrast, the Sinology in Chinese literature is characterized by its focus on philology and historiography, which is still the most influential approach to this research area.” In short, “The study of early Chinese literature remains largely away from the influence of the latest Western literary theories” (Kern, 2010, p. 583). Kern’s conclusion could be regarded as a response to Edward H. Schafer’s *What and How is Sinology?*. Yet Kern did not exhibit any anxiety arising from the impact of emerging theories as Schafer did. Perhaps Kern was right in claiming that the appeal of emerging theories “was fading away.”

Kern’s emphasis on traditional philology has a lot to do with his European background, as well as the discipline of early Chinese literature. Born in Germany, Kern completed his BA and PhD education before he went to the USA. He once argued that there were “significant differences in academic traditions” between European and American scholars. According to him, Europe has a “continuous and profound tradition of philology” while the USA, having undergone a transformation in the mid 20th century, may still have some supporters of the philological approach, who, however, “can only be considered individual voices, not part of the vast academic tradition” (Kern, 2011, p. 26).

Nevertheless, time has changed. Although Kern emphasized philological traditions, his research was quite different from those of traditional Sinologists. He did not touch upon any theories but placed particular emphasis on methodology (Kern, 2011, 2014). For him, emphasis on methodology means borrowing the latest perspectives and methods of Western civilization from Western scholars. Gregory Nagy, an American professor of classics at Harvard University admitted that he was influenced by Michel Foucault’s *What is an Author?* when he studied the author’s ideas in Homer’s epics (Nagy, 1996, p. 19). Nagy’s work to some extent inspired Kern’s study of early Chinese textuality and writing. Kern also borrowed Foucault’s theories in discussing the notion of authorship in *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, holding that the author was not the text’s initiator, but the text’s function. In other words, by defining the author, a text is given specific meaning and its possibility of being interpreted is restricted (Kern, 2016, p. 26).

Behind such an indirect and zigzagging influence still lie the theories. In fact, the “end of theories” does not mean complete abandonment of theories. In the work *After Theories*, Terry Eagleton argued, “Those to whom the title of this book suggests that ‘theories’ is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age

of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 1). Culler even said, “We are inexorably in theories, whether we champion or deplore it” (Culler, 2007, p. 96). To put it another way, many new issues and methodologies, brought up by emerging theories, have been incorporated into the study of Western humanities.

How to deal with the relationships between the methodology of traditional Sinology and the methodology of emerging theories continues to create a faint anxiety for Sinologists of the younger generation. When reviewing the study of middle ancient Chinese literature in North America, Tian Xiaofei said, “Although scholars of the younger generation disdain ‘Sinology’ in a traditional sense, they often lack the disciplinary training for literary studies. Therefore, the biggest challenge so far facing the study of middle ancient Chinese literature in North America is how to think outside the box to overcome the weakness of traditional Sinology (lack of profound thinking and theories, inability to ‘see the forest from the trees’) and at the same time retain the rigorous text-based scholarship of senior scholars. By doing so, the younger generation can expect to reach the required basic theoretical level to communicate with foreign literary researchers on the same discourse platform.” Transcending the methodology of traditional Sinology and reaching the required basic theoretical level make it unlikely to circumvent post-modernism, a theory which once influenced the humanities. Tian Xiaofei’s solution was to consider the philological methodology of traditional Sinology to be another way to the same destination of post-modernism and another access to in-depth theoretical understanding. “Real philology is in fact not that far from post-modernism, for it questions and challenges many ‘common sense’ views and beliefs” (Tian, 2010, p. 603, p. 607).^①

The continuation of such an anxiety is directly related to the status of Sinology in the entire system of Western scholarship. Martin Kern clearly unveiled this fact. He highlighted methodology as much as vision, “To understand classical Chinese literature, one must have a more distinct comparative perspective.” After all, he wrote for Western readers, among whom were Western Sinologists and, more importantly, scholars in other humanistic areas. Therefore, he had to “build his theses on a unified standard of knowledge and theories” and introduce new ideas and even cultural theories from Europe and North America. “Those theories have been accepted as part of our humanistic tradition.” Above all, “it is through the common discourse of such a cultural tradition that we can speak to our audiences.” Regarding the actual situation of Sinology as a discipline, Martin Kern stressed, “The department of East Asian studies does not exist in a void. . . We have to explain the significance of our work to our colleagues specializing in other areas and relevant administrative divisions. . . We have to speak the same language of knowledge and methodology. . . Otherwise, we will have nothing to say to them, which means we will be faced with a major crisis of self-marginalization” (Kern, 2014).

Anxieties and enlightenments

Overall, the relationship between Western theories and the study of classical Chinese literature

^① The so-called “questioning and challenging many ‘common-sense’ views and beliefs” is arguably the quintessential spirit of post-modernism. Culler used to say, “The nature of theory is to undo, through a contesting of premises and postulate, what you thought you knew.” Culler, 1998, p. 18

has triggered a variety of anxieties in the North American circles of Sinology primarily because of the development and disciplinary orientation of Sinology itself, as well as the resulting internal contradiction and dilemma. Sinology, a discipline born in Europe, was originally a branch of Oriental studies. It focused on the study of historical language and mainly relied on the methodology of philology, in which German and French scholars were skilled. The study of Chinese literature was not at the core of European Sinology (Honey, 2001). With the center of Sinology shifting to North America from Europe, North American Sinology attempted to go beyond the tradition of European Sinology, breaking through the limitations of Oriental studies step by step and integrating itself into the modern disciplinary system. Thus, the study of classical Chinese literature secured a new disciplinary orientation and had to deal with the theoretical issues proposed by Western literary studies. "In the context of Western scholarship, traditional Sinology has remained a small and marginalized discipline. Although there are some achievements made by experts in this area, Sinology, being a highly specialized academic area, has been estranged from mainstream literary and cultural studies in the West." After Sinology's paradigm shift and adjustment in disciplinary orientation, "if Sinology is completely isolated from other literary studies and restricted to its specialized study without touching upon any theoretical issues of universal significance, it will always remain a small and marginalized discipline in a larger academic scope" (Zhang, 2004, p. 17). The dilemma and anxiety facing such a "small and marginalized discipline" impelled North American Sinologists to attach increasingly more importance to the latest development of a Western theoretical approach and academic discourse.

However, the gap between the object of classical Chinese literary studies and the latest Western theoretical approach formed an unavoidable internal contradiction. Yu Ying-shih argued, "The new-generation scholars are better at putting forward incentive questions with possibly more attraction. Yet if their texts are not based on a solid ground, or their theories are divorced from original data, they can get into the trap of absurdities" (Chen, 2012, p. 80). Many Sinological works in pursuit of fancy theories exhibited the malpractices of "prioritizing theories" and "twisting historical documents". Meanwhile, in Western theoretical circles, post-colonialism, which criticized the unequal discourse and power relations between the East and West, became popular. Thus, many Sinologists naturally reflected the relationship between Western theories and Chinese literature from such a perspective. These studies, however, ostensibly emphasized that it was impossible to apply Western theories to the study of traditional Chinese literature; in nature, however, they followed the pattern of Western scholarship to shape China as their imaginary opposite side. This Sino-Western opposition met the expectations of the hegemony of Western discourse and therefore exhibited the malpractice of "prioritizing theories". The history of Sinology development in North America reveals a fundamental dilemma: the examination of whether the study of classical Chinese literature could borrow emerging Western theories formed the initial anxiety; the forced emphasis on Western theories for the purpose of disciplinary development gave rise to a new anxiety, i.e. how to balance the relationship between Western discourse and Chinese traditions. After all, excessive highlighting of Chinese literary tradition's uniqueness could fall into the trap of post-colonialism's preconception. In general, most of the truly excellent Sinological works tried to combine the traditional philological methodology with emerging theoretical perspectives to incorporate philology-based textual criticism and the "consciousness of question" of Western

theories.

The study of classical Chinese literature in China is quite different from that in the West but is faced with a similar dilemma. In China's humanistic circles, the study of classical Chinese literature has never been a "small and marginalized discipline". Without the anxiety that has troubled North American Sinologists, Chinese sinologists have always maintained the authority of traditional literary criticism and their occasional application of Western theories does not seem to cause any stir. It is beyond doubt that Chinese scholars in this regard have made tremendous achievements and won the respect of overseas Sinologists by adopting traditional methodology. Yet, not troubled by any "small and marginalized discipline"-caused anxiety, Chinese Sinologists may lack a sense of crisis and pay little attention to new theories and approaches, and are prone to be limited by conventions. American Chinese scholar Chang Kwang-Chih once said, "Without any China-related training, one cannot expect to give an in-depth lecture on Chinese knowledge; yet without a global perspective, a lecturer will be limited by a narrow view and will never make a comprehensive and thorough analysis" (Chang, 1983, p. 3). Chang's account, though sounding harsh, attached equal importance to traditional China-related training and a global perspective of scholarship, which is indisputable. Zhu Guangqian expressed the same idea in different words, "In modern times, one who only reads Chinese works inevitably develops a narrow and limited view. Besides, one's dedication to Chinese readings does not necessarily guarantee a profound understanding. Scholarship, just like all other matters, can only be assessed through comparison and can only generate new things through stimulation" (Zhu, 2012, p. 100). The so-called "global perspective" and "assessment through comparison" do not mean applying comparative studies to all academic topics, but paying attention to issues of universal significance in a wider academic context.

Nevertheless, modernization was the fundamental law of the 20th century and the study of classical Chinese literature in China is also based on modern Western disciplinary classifications, whose primary system and methodology were shaped during the the spread of Western learning to the East since the early 20th century (Chen, 2017). Today, an increasing number of researchers of classical literature are following the latest development of Western academic theories and have been inspired by those emerging theories. Gender studies, new cultural history and other theories and approaches keep stimulating classical literary studies. Against such a backdrop there is also a dilemma, i.e. the more closely (Chinese scholars) follow the development of Western theories, the more likely they will be troubled by the malpractices of forced analogy and "scratching an itch from outside one's boot".

Consequently Chinese academic circles have begun to reflect on the relationships between Chinese literary traditions and Western disciplinary classifications and academic discourse. For example, many scholars hold that the Western division of romanticism and realism has twisted the construction of the history of Chinese literature and that "pure literature", a modern concept imported from the West has disguised the very essence and root of classical Chinese literature. A variety of emerging theories are of course the outcome of a Western context. In short, Western theoretical approaches are not necessarily of universal significance. When reviewing the Sinology development in North America, we find it important to reflect on the relationships between Western theories and Chinese traditions, while excessively emphasizing the uniqueness of Chinese traditions may lead to an absolute Sino-Western opposition.



Perhaps a wise attitude towards Western theories should be “Never look down upon theories, or dance with a new theory. It all depends on whether a theory can cast a light on the special phenomena I have observed in a large number of texts” (Chen, 2012, p. 80). In this “end of theories” era which requires reflection on discourse and hegemony, however, how to find a “new life” for the study of classical Chinese literature from a global perspective through “new incentives” (emerging theories, methodologies, approaches) will be an unavoidable question for all relevant scholars both in China and abroad.

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