

The Second International Conference on Modern Slavic Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics

Liu Dan

Beijing Language and Culture University

Abstract

This is a report of the Second International Conference on Modern Slavic Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics jointly held in Guangzhou from June 25th to 26th, 2016 by the Research Council for Foreign Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics in China, the Research Center for Literary Theories of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese National Association of Comparative Literature and Literary Theories, the Bachtin Research Center in China, the Center for Foreign Literature and Culture of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and the Faculty of European Languages and Culture of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.

Keywords

Modern slavic literary theories, modern slavic comparative poetics; Russian Formalism, Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukařovsky Boris Eichenbaum, Michail Bachtin

Contacts

dliu201212@126.com

The year 2016 marks the 130th anniversary of the birth of and the 120th anniversary of the birth of Roman Jakobson, two outstanding scholars of Russian Formalism. Meanwhile, this year also witnesses the 100th anniversary of the founding of Society of the Study of Poetic Language and the 90th anniversary of Prague Linguistic Circle. In commemoration of these renowned scholars and important events, “The Second International Conference on Modern Slavic Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics” was held in Guangzhou from June 25th to 26th, 2016. About 90 scholars and researchers from Russia, America, Switzerland, Poland, Estonia, Czech, Italy, and China gathered together in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies to carry out discussions on Slavic theories and comparative poetics themed “Trans-lingual, Trans-Cultural, Trans-disciplinary”.

After introduction of participants and guests, Professor Zhong Weihe, the President of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies made a welcome speech, followed by the remarks by some renowned scholars from home and abroad, expressing their appreciation and consensus on the value and significance of the conference. They also expressed their sincere wish that the conference would be a great success.

1. Key-note Speeches

Three keynote speakers delivered their speeches after the opening ceremony. The first speech was delivered by Professor Zhou Qichao from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His paper discussed the historical genetic happening of Modern Slavic theories and their contributions by citing Roman Jakobson and *defamiliarization* as two case-studies. From the point of view of the pedigree of the major trends, branches, and schools in the

history of ideas and theories of literature in the 20th century, modern Slavic literary theory could be regarded as an active factor producing extensive impact and radiation, which represents a case of the interdisciplinary and trans-cultural operations of literary theories.

Professor Peter Steiner from the University of Pennsylvania focused on Roman Jakobson's experience in Interwar Prague. Based on detailed primary archival documents, he discussed Roman Jakobson's political stand at that time. Professor Steiner details Roman Jakobson's complex and often contradictory relations with trio of the political institutions within whose orbit he was moving during his interwar stay in Czechoslovakia: 1) the Ministry of Interior; 2) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 3) and the Soviet Red Cross Mission (morphing in 1921 into a Commercial Delegation, upgraded in 1922 to a de facto Political Representation) .

The third Keynote speaker was Professor Tomáš Glanc from University of Zurich. Based on two articles by Roman Jakobson, namely, "On National Self-Determination" and "The Beginning of National Self-Determination", he discusses Jakobson's interpretation of National Self-Determination and the circumstances from which this concept was emerged. His research can be regarded as the deepening and expansion of Jakobsonian research.

2. Research on Russian Formalism and Structuralism from Historical perspective

Most participants presented papers on formalism and structuralism. Some traced the origin of Formalism, whereas others followed the development of Formalism into Structuralism, and even into Post-Structuralism. The former could be represented by the paper presented by Professor Oleg Kling from Moscow University, who centers his talk on Andrej Belyj's formalism and holds the idea that Russian Formalism and Avant-garde thoughts, to a greater extent, originated in Belyj's Formalism. Just as other initiators of new thoughts, Belyj was not only a practitioner but also a theorist. Theoretically, his ideas could be traced in his paper entitled "Artistic Form" written in 1902. For him, the abundance of literary contents was not only decided by the quantities, but also by the qualities of literary text. Simplicity as a very important feature of arts indicates that generalization is better than repetition. Thus, compared with content, form gained its prior position, and this became a guideline for the Avant-garde, which was named by Bely as "material form" which could be traced in his early pioneering creations. Thus the paper concludes that Andrei Bely should be considered as a formalist before the Russian Formalism was formally gained its stage in literary research field.

Michail Lotman from Tallinn University in Estonia titled his paper "Poetic Prose Theory: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism". In his talk he adopted concepts borrowed from Post-Structuralism and studies poetics from the perspective of modern semiotics. It has proposed a new method to solve the problems of the first and second symbolic systems, regarding poetics as the second symbolic system. The research shows that poetic theory has both cultural and semiotic significance. To be more specific, some of the major statements that the paper involved are: (1) Poetic theory reveals many contradictions in the Russian formalist paradigm. On the one hand, poetics have gained dominating position in the formalist study, and on the other hand, some of the more important findings of the formalists were related to prose theory. (2) Although there is no unified theory of formal-

ism, still the formalists have made significant achievements on poetic researches. (3) Jakobson's theories, though with a clear Russian formalism feature, are actually not formalism. They mainly concern with a structuralist concept, but not formal features of language. (4) Structuralist poetics not only inherit the tradition of formalism, but also amend some of its theories, which involve poetic language and poetics.

Bohuslav Zhilko, from University of Gdansk, Poland, has studied schools in Russian Literary theory in the 20th century. Among many of the schools of Russian literary theories in the 20th century, the following four points were the object of his report: (1) Formalist schools (Poetic Language Research Group, Moscow Linguistics Group), (2) Semantics--ancient logic school, (3) Bachtin Group, and (4) the Tartu-Moscow Semantic School. The report attempts to define the aesthetic (poetic) scholarly models provided by the above-mentioned groups by typological contrasting their theoretical-methodological platforms. Meanwhile, the main problems of the European humanists raised by the so-called anti-positivist at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century would be the standards of such typology. Another purpose of the report is to establish internal relations between them. Ultimately, a cross intelligence network that illustrates the academic development of Russian literary research in the last century could be revealed.

Professor Ondřej Sládek from Czech Academy of Sciences has turned his attention to the Prague Linguistic Circle in the Times of World War II. Despite the decrease of publication possibilities and censorship in the first years of the WWII, the activities of the Circle did not substantially change: meetings and lectures went on and “Slovo a slovesnost” (*The Word and Verbal Art*) was published in 1943. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that “a certain decrease of activities” appeared in 1944. In general, during the WWII the Circle was one of few centers of Czech scholarly effort and thanks to it several key individual works of V. Mathesius, J. Mukařovský, B. Havránek, V. Skalička etc. and the collective works published at that time “substantially contributed to the continuity of the tradition of the Prague School’s functional structuralism which was especially important for the further development of Czech linguistics, literary criticism, aesthetics, and theater studies”.

3. Researches on Lenin’s Language

Besides tracing the origin and the development of Russian Formalism, some scholars have studied in detail the formation of Lenin’s language, exemplified by Professor Il’ja Kalinin from Saint-Petersburg State University and Professor Stefania Sini from University of Piemonte Orientale, Italy.

Kalinin’s paper, “How Lenin’s Language was Made: Russian Formalists on Material of History and Technique of Ideology”, studies the formation of Lenin’s language. In 1924, *Lev* magazine published a special issue under the title “The Language of Lenin”, which was contributed by the representatives of the OPOJAZ and the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The Russian Formalist Scholars delineate the language of Lenin from the perspective of discovering the laws of language in poetry (literature), which provides a possibility for the members of OPOJAZ to extend their theory of literary evolution into the whole field of social history. Kalinin holds that the notion of “device” reveals the “made-ness” of literary works and found its application in the analysis of ideology (bourgeois ideology). The analysis of the magazine’s article points out that Lenin's main tool for denying and criticizing opponents is to reveal the rhetorical structure hidden behind the ideology’s opponent’s language (as Viktor Šklovskij puts it: “Lenin’s disputes with his opponents, whether with

enemies or party comrades, usually begins with a dispute ‘about words’, [...] with the declaration that ‘the words have changed’”). The orientation towards expressivity coincides with an orientation on ideological efficacy. The formal requirements that literary language must satisfy in order to fulfil its aesthetic function turn out to be identical with the formal requirements of political language.

Another paper devotes to the study of “Lenin’s language” was presented by Stefania Sini. Her paper, entitled “1924, “Lenin’s Language”: Russian Formalism at a crossroads between self-defence, delimitation and extension of research territory”, focuses on the writings published in *Lef* magazine in 1924. By examining the analysis of Lenin’s language and rhetorical style proposed by Viktor Šklovskij, Boris Ejkhenbaum, Jurij ynianov, Boris Tomaševsky, Lev Iakubinskij, and by the classical philologist Boris Kazanskij, the paper discusses the significance of this publication “not only as a strategic reaction to the attacks received by OPOJAZ during that period, but also as the theoretical evolution which Formalists are elaborating towards a delimitation of the territory of the literary theory with respect to the linguistic discipline, which in the meantime in Moscow is imposing its theoretical supremacy”. She thus concludes that “this delimitation is both an extension of the research field, because by reference to rhetoric it opens towards extra-literary facts and it precludes to subsequent Formalists’ studies on literary *byt*.”

4. Researches on Roman Jakobson

Roman Jakobson’s poetics, linguistic theory and semiotics became a focal point in the panel discussion on June 25. There were 7 papers devoted to these areas of studies. Zhang Jin discussed the significance of the *Otherization* of Jakobsonian poetics and its paradigmatic value. He maintained the idea that Jakobson’s poetics appeared as “a shift of paradigm in literary theory, which contains all of the dimensions and directions of ‘otherization’ and ‘theory travel’”. The paper then demonstrated Jakobsonian poetics “embodied the trialectics of territorialization, deterritorialization, and absolute deterritorialization, in which otherization and absolute deterritorialization has been an essential vector”. The paper concluded that in the new century, a critical return of the “other” of “literariness” is a universal appeal, and there will be “a revival and a further otherization of Jakobsonian poetics”.

In his paper titled “A Criticism on Jakobson’s Poetic Theories as Methodology”, Chen Kaiju focused on Jakobson’s theories of poetic studies, and criticizes the methodology of structuralism, with an effort to clarify the achievements transitional function and limitations of this approach.

Yang Jianguo talks about Roman Jakobson’s theory on metaphor and the discourse of aesthetic modernity. As key terms in Jakobsonian poetics, metaphor and metonymy had been rigidly divided, pushing metonymy from the side of figurative language to that of non-figurative language. Consequently, Jakobson’s concept of the poetic function is biased for verse and against prose. Yang Jianguo’s paper regards this as a major drawback of such classification. However, viewed from the perspective of aesthetic modernity, such division could also show new meaning of Jakobson’s metaphor theory. On the one hand, Jakobson’s theory provides theoretical support for the concept of poetic function; on the other hand, it is also a theory of modernity, which not only divides two important cultural types of enlightenment modernity and aesthetic modernity, but becomes a discourse of aesthetic modernity as well.

Liu Dan introduced the Chinese Translation of Jakobson's poetics and further explored some future research perspectives. Adopting medio-translatology as its theoretical framework, her paper discusses the current situation of the Chinese translation of Jakobson's poetics. Compared with the translation of Jakobson's writings on linguistics, few of his publications on poetics have been translated into Chinese. She then explored the possible reasons that contribute to the current situation and put forward two main factors involved, which may include the difficulty of understanding and translating Jakobson's poetics and the translator's awareness of its significance and applicability. The paper then discusses some future research perspectives so as to promote the translation of Jakobson's poetics and then the transmission and acceptant of Slavic literary theory as a whole.

Jiang Fei approaches Jakobson by sharing with the audience the debate between Jakobson and Riffaterre & Culler to discuss the becoming of literary significance. Michael Riffaterre and Jonathan Culler successively introduce the criticisms of Jakobson, the former holding the theory of "reader-response" and the latter, reader's "literary competence". Jakobson instead focuses his research on "Poetry of Grammar" and "Grammar of Poetry", refuting from such perspective as that of linguistics, reader, the rationality of research grammatical structure, the dominant of poetic function, and the objectivity of the analysis of poetics.

Hu Tao discussed Jakobson's theory, and particularly the concept of "Literariness". He holds the idea that people ignore the research on the origins of the concept "literariness". Careful reading of the originated text could easily help find that "Jakobson did not present the concept deliberately, and Russian Formalists did not accept it extensively." The relationship between the concept and *defamiliarization* was constructed by later researchers. Our current usage of *literariness* is "more originated from the usage on it in Chinese in 1930s, and the selective mistranslation in introduction of Western literary theory".

5. Researches on Lotman, Šklovskij, Eichenbaum, Bachtin and others

Another panel discussion held on June 25 centered on other important figures, Lotman, Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, Bachtin, to name just some, in the Russian Formalism School and modern Slavic Literary Theories' circles. Zhang Bing's paper focuses on the position and significance of discourse Poetics of M. Bachtin's circles. Bachtin's poetics of discourses come from V. N. Vološhinov's doctrine of "social poetics" and both of them have their foundation of discourses. The research targets of the former are the discourses in people's everyday life, practical, and active, which have been excluded out of the range of research until Bachtin's poetics of discourses.

Li Dongmei explores Eichenbaum's view of literary system. As a representative of Russian formalism, Eichenbaum put forward the idea that "literature is an independent system science" and analyzed it in detail. He put forward the original opinion, supplemented the early poetic view of the formalism and enriched the poetics of Russian Formalism.

Sun Ye studied the feature of Y. Tynjanov's theoretical thinking and explores the "Antinomy" of the Russian Formalism. The "antinomy", a major feature of the Russian Formalism, was explored since "formalism" and "scientificness". It is not only embodied in the antithetic and bilateral logical thinking, but is also embodied in their diverse poetical pursuit and dynamic academic orientation. Jurij Tynjanov's theoretical works and critical articles exhibit the thought of "antinomy" distinctly and his fundamental model of theoretical construction indicates Avant-garde deconstruction, contradictory analysis and dynamic construction.

Gao Shubo explored the originality of Mukařovsky's thinking and states that he absorbs from formalism, linguistics, phenomenology and logical positivism to reflect the basic problem of literature – “literariness”. He emphasizes the aesthetic function and value of literature as a symbolic fact and a social fact, and the semantic structural characteristics of literature, thus differs himself from the subsequent French structuralism and vulgar Literature Sociology; he was deeply influenced by the methodological principle of Marxism. As such, some of his ideas are rather forward looking.

6. Research from the Perspectives of Linguistics

Some researchers in the discipline of linguistics demonstrated their understanding from the perspective of linguistic studies. Professor Qian Jun from Peking University analyzes three aspects concerning the history of the Prague Linguistic Circle (or the Prague School), i.e. its historical developmental stages, its members, and its relations with its contemporary linguists. The findings suggest that “the Prague Linguistic Circle is not a duplicate of the Moscow Linguistic Circle or Russian Formalism, it is not a geographical or ethnic concept, and it is not a self-closed community.”

Another paper from the perspective of linguistics was presented by Dr. Qu Changliang, in which he studies the Prague School and the establishment of Paradigmatic Phonological Unit by tracing the early concept of distinctive features in multilingual texts. Based on the works written by Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Vachek and other circle members during 1931 to 1939 in English, French, German and Czech, his essay reveals “how Prague School contributed to the idea of paradigmatic phonological unit, and how it improved the limitation of Saussure's view of linguistic symbol.”

Zhang Chi studied the correlation between the Formalist literary theory and Saussure's linguistics. He holds the viewpoint that in search of the scientific literary studies, the young Russian theorists have found their theoretical base in the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. They applied in literature the distinction between the language and speech to urge the researchers to pay greater attention the structure of the literature as a language system, but not to satisfy the explanation of the thought in the works. Taking literality as the object of the literary studies, they gave a shock to the literary studies in which the works were ignored.

7. Researches from the Perspectives of Semiotic Aesthetics

Semiotics is another aspect that scholars touched upon in their research. Fu Qilin discusses György Lukács' Marxist semiotics and aesthetics of form. On the basis of his critical analysis of formalism, Lukács probes into Aristotle's rhetoric, Kant's thought about the normative aesthetic form, Hegel's model of logic structure, and Marxist mechanism of structure about identification of subject and object. The paper discusses “Lukács' specific and innovative Marxist semiotics and aesthetics of forms from three dimensions, that is, paradoxes of modern form, semiotic mechanism of aesthetic reflection and philosophy of history of form and reveals his normative significances to Marxist semiotics”.

Zhu Tao studied the literary semiotics of Jan Mukařovsky to discuss the intentionality and unintentionality in art. As he put it, “intentionality and unintentionality in art is a pair of central conceptions in the last period of developments of Jan Mukařovsky's thought”. The former came from Phenomenology, whereas the latter was a new conception derived

from the former. Mukařovsky creatively attached new meanings to this pair of conceptions and radically illustrated the ontology of art by these two concepts. Simply put, “intentionality in art is the semantically unity of art works, while the unintentionality is a kind of resistance to this unity.” The paper concludes that “the former is rooted in the semiotic character of art, while the latter is given by the ‘thing’ of art.” The charm of art lies in the fact that it is not only a sign, but also a “thing”.

Zheng Wendong explored the dialogic mechanism of text in cultural communication. She first defines semiosphere as “a tool language for describing culture”. Lotman named the carriers of all cultural symbols as cultural texts. As long as a cultural text carries the information, it becomes a carrier with full meaning and function of the whole. The symbolic domain plays a decisive role in the meaning of the cultural text, which is derived from the mechanisms of the symbolic thinking in the symbolic domain. The semiotic thinking mechanisms within a semiosphere include transmission, innovation and dialogue. The basis of the dialogue mechanism is also the mechanism of transfer or translation. “Dialogue means asymmetry, which firstly refers to the differences in the structure of the participants’ symbols (Language), and then is the direction of the information flow”. Therefore, observing cultural history, we can find the existence of dialogue in each historical period. We can also observe the traces of accepting other cultures in each cultural text (i.e., in every cultural fact), and analyze the process of the dialogue with other texts.

In general, the more than 30 papers presented during the two-day conference have approached modern Slavic literary theories from different perspectives, which well define the themes of the conference: trans-lingual, trans-cultural and trans-disciplinary. The papers presented have covered various disciplines, including poetics, linguistics, semiotics and aesthetics, focusing on the historical events and representative figures on Russian Formalism and Structuralism. The conference was featured by heated discussion on new findings, from the new angles, with new research methodologies. Scholars from different nations, with different working languages have analyzed the movements of literary theories in diverse contexts, some from comparative angles, and some from detailed readings of first-hand materials. The two-day conference carried on very successfully with the collaborative efforts from the conference participants and organizers. During the brief closing ceremony, Professor Zhou Qichao and Professor Zhang Jin summarized the conference and praised the great services provided by the organizing committee and teacher and students working as the receptionists, translators, interpreters and technical support.

The Second International Conference on Modern Slavic Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics, Guangzhou, 25-26 June, 2016

Liu Dan



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

References

- Chen, Kaiju. "A Criticism on Jakobson's Poetic Theories as Methodology".
- Fu, Qilin. "On György Lukács' Marxist Semiotics and Aesthetics of Form".
- Gao, Shubo. "The Reception of Mukařovsky's Theory in China".
- Hu, Tao. "Jakobson and the Concept of 'Literariness'".
- Jiang, Fei. "Becoming Of Literary Significance: A Review of the Debate Between Jakobson and Riffaterre & Culler".
- Kalinin, Il'ja. "How Lenin's Language was Made: Russian Formalists on Material of History and Technique of Ideology".
- Kling, Oleg. "Andre Belyj's Formalism before Formalism".
- Li, Dongmei. "On Eichenbaum's View of Literary System".
- Liu, Dan. "On Chinese Translation of Jakobson's Poetics and Future Research Perspectives".
- Lotman, Michail. "Poetic Prose Theory: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism".
- Qian, Jun. "Some Aspects of the History of the Prague Linguistic Circle".
- Qu, Changliang. "The Prague School and the Establishment of Paradigmatic Phonological Unit: Early Concept of Distinctive Features in Multilingual Texts".
- Sini, Stefania. "1924, 'Lenin's Language': Russian Formalism at a crossroads between self-defence, delimitation and extension of research territory".
- Steiner, Peter. "Which Side Are You on? Roman Jakobson in Interwar Prague".
- Yang, Jianguo. "Roman Jakobson's Theory on Metaphor and the Discourse of Aesthetic Modernity".
- Zhang, Bing. "The Place and Meaning of Discourse Poetics of M. Bachtin's Circles".
- Zhang, Chi. "The Correlation between the Formalist Literary Theory and the Saussure's Linguistics".
- Zhang, Jin. "On the Otherization of Jakobsonian Poetics and its Paradigmatic Value".
- Zheng, Wendong. "Dialog Mechanism of Text in Cultural Communication".
- Zhou, Qichao. "A Case about Interdisciplinary and Cross-cultural Literary Theories: On Modern Slavic Literary Theory".
- Zhu, Tao. "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art. A Tentative Study on the Literary Semiotics of Jan Mukařovsky".