

# Postclassical Narratology in China: Receptions and Variations

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## Abstract

Chinese narrative theory has been largely influenced and inspired by its Western counterpart, yet its particular contributions to narratology are beginning to catch the eye of Western academia and helping to ‘redefine the field’. As a rejoinder to such narratologists as David Herman, Ansgar Nünning, John Pier and Bronwen Thomas, this article attempts to take a close look at the fate of narratology, postclassical narratology in particular in China. It mainly pursues three major goals: to revisit the distinction between classical narratology and postclassical narratology; to review the translations and interpretations of postclassical narratology in China and to present Chinese scholars’ contributions to postclassical narratology. The article concludes with some tentative suggestions for future development of Chinese narratology along the postclassical line.

**Keywords:** *postclassical narratology, classical narratology, Chinese narratology, narrative poetics, narrative criticism*

In *Narrative: The Basics*, Bronwen Thomas observes that ‘[w]hile narrative theory largely started out as a European and an American affair, today scholars from China and Australia are helping to redefine the field, and also to challenge the tendency to focus on Anglo-American narratives.’<sup>1</sup> It is true that Chinese narrative theory has been influenced and inspired by its Western counterpart, yet it tries to engage with international arena of narratology with reference to Chinese narrative tradition and is thus helping to ‘redefine the field’.

I agree with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, who argues that ‘[a] reconsideration of narratology has become a genre of its own.’<sup>2</sup> Along this line of thinking, John Pier examines a French version of postclassical narratology<sup>3</sup> and Guoqiang Qiao proposes a Chinese version of narratology.<sup>4</sup> Drawing inspiration from the insightful works by Pier and Qiao, I would like to take a close look at the fate of postclassical narratology in China and pick up on what I have already demonstrated in my earlier essay ‘Reception and

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<sup>1</sup> Bronwen Thomas, *Narrative: The Basics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 135.

<sup>3</sup> John Pier, ‘Is There a French Postclassical Narratology?’, in *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. Greta Olson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 97-124; reprinted in this issue, 65-90.

<sup>4</sup> Guoqiang Qiao, ‘On the Possibilities of Developing a Chinese Version of Narratology’, *Neohelicon* 42.5 (2015): 639-55.

Variations of Classical Narratology in Chinese Scholarship'.<sup>5</sup> Along this line of thinking, this article attempts to reconsider the classical/the postclassical distinction before examining the translation, interpretation, and extension of Western narrative theory by Chinese scholars. I will conclude the essay by outlining some future directions for Chinese narratology along the postclassical line.

## Reconsidering Classical and Postclassical Narratology

The past several decades witnessed an explosive interest in narrative studies, which are now officially addressed as narratology, a term proposed by Tzvetan Todorov. In his 1969 book *Grammaire du Décaméron*, Todorov coined the French concept *narratologie* in parallel with biology, sociology and so forth to denote 'the science of narrative'.<sup>6</sup> Narratology is generally defined as 'a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation'.<sup>7</sup> According to Gerald Prince, narratology falls into three general categories in terms of their objects of analysis: studies of the 'nature, form, and functioning of narrative (regardless of medium of representation)'; studies of 'narrative as a verbal mode of representation of temporally ordered situations and events'; and studies of 'given (sets of) narratives in terms of narratological models and categories'.<sup>8</sup> As a critical theory, narratology took Saussurean linguistics as its pilot science and was established by French structuralists such as Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Todorov, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Claude Bremond, who viewed 'particular stories as individual "narrative messages" supported by a shared semiotic system whose constituents and combinatory principles it was the task of narratological analysis to bring to light'.<sup>9</sup>

Though 'narratology came under fire long before the structuralist analysis of narrative texts had been worked out in detail', 'there is definitely a classical structuralist and a post-classical phase'.<sup>10</sup> It is David Herman who has initiated the distinction between classical narratology and postclassical narratology. In his article 'Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology', Herman proposed the distinction between classical narratology and postclassical narratology, claiming that '[r]ethinking the problem of narrative sequences can promote the development of a postclassical narratology that is not necessarily poststructuralist, an enriched theory that draws on concepts and methods to which the classical narratologists did not have access.'<sup>11</sup> In particular, Herman points out that '[p]ostclassical narratology contains structuralist

<sup>5</sup> Biwu Shang, 'Reception and Variations of Classical Narratology in Chinese Scholarship', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16.6 (2014):1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Décaméron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> Jan Christoph Meister, 'Narratology', in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid and JörgSchönert (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 329.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University Nebraska Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>9</sup> David Herman, 'Structuralist Narratology', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 571.

<sup>10</sup> Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 103.

<sup>11</sup> David Herman, 'Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology', *PMLA* 112.5 (1997): 1049.

theory as one of its “moments” but enriches the older approach with research tools taken from other areas of inquiry.’<sup>12</sup> The term postclassical narratology was popularized in Herman’s edited collection *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, in which he argues that ‘narratology, with its forbidding terminology and mania for taxonomies, stands as a monument to the scientific aspirations of a high structuralism whose day has long since passed’.<sup>13</sup> In the 1980s, ‘other trends in literary and cultural theory (poststructuralism, feminism, ideological critique) gained prominence; what began as a self-styled science of narrative, was, in the space of just a few years, stigmatized as obsolescent’.<sup>14</sup> Seeing ‘the contrast between classical and postclassical physics as a possible analogue for the contrast between structuralist narratology, as practiced by Barthes, Greimas, Genette, Todorov, and others, and approaches to the study of narrative that draw on frameworks for inquiry that were either inaccessible to or ignored by the structuralist theorists,’<sup>15</sup> Herman argues that ‘narratology has moved from its classical, structuralist phase – a Saussurean phase relatively isolated from energizing developments in contemporary literary and language theory – to its postclassical phase. Postclassical narratology (which should not be conflated with poststructuralist theories of narrative) contains classical narratology as one of its “moments” but is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself’.<sup>16</sup> Though Meir Sternberg<sup>17</sup> and Guoqiang Qiao<sup>18</sup> find Herman’s classical/ postclassical narratology distinction unsatisfactory, this terminology has been widely adopted and popularized by Ansgar Nünning, Gerald Prince, Dan Shen, Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, Biwu Shang and many other scholars. It is not an exaggeration to claim that classical/ postclassical distinction has become a dominant paradigm in today’s narrative studies.

When attending the differences between classical narratology and postclassical narratology, Herman observes that ‘[t]he root transformation can be described as a shift from text-centered and formal models to models that are jointly formal and functional – models attentive both to the text and to the context of stories’.<sup>19</sup> In the same vein, Ansgar Nünning attempts to highlight the differences that distinguish postclassical narratology from its classical predecessor within which ‘narratology proper’ operated. In doing so, he draws the following figure:

<sup>12</sup> Herman, ‘Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology’, 1057.

<sup>13</sup> David Herman, ‘Introduction: Narratologies’, in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, ed. David Herman (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Herman, ‘Introduction: Narratologies’, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Biwu Shang and David Herman. ‘New Developments in the Study of Narrative: An Interview with David Herman’, *Amsterdam International Electronic Journal for Cultural Narratology*.6 (2011); available at [http://cf.hum.uva.nl/narratology/a11\\_an\\_interview\\_with\\_david\\_herman.htm](http://cf.hum.uva.nl/narratology/a11_an_interview_with_david_herman.htm) [accessed 7 Oct. 2019].

<sup>16</sup> Herman, ‘Introduction: Narratologies’, 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Meir Sternberg, ‘Reconceptualizing Narratology: Arguments for a Functionalist and Constructivist Approach to Narrative’, *Enthymema* 4 (2011): 35-50.

<sup>18</sup> Guoqiang Qiao, ‘Should Narratology Be Split into Classical and Postclassical?’, *Neohelicon* 45.2 (2018): 401-13.

<sup>19</sup> Herman, ‘Introduction: Narratologies’, 8.

<b>structuralist ('classical') narratology</b>	<b>new ('postclassical') narratologies</b>
text-centered	context-oriented
narrative (narrative <i>langue</i> ) as main object of study	narratives (narrative <i>parole</i> ) as main object of study
main focus on closed systems and static products	main focus on open and dynamic processes
'features', 'properties' of a text as main object of study	the dynamics of the reading process (reading strategies, interpretive choices, preference rules) as main object of study
bottom-up analyses	top-down syntheses
preference for (reductive) binarisms and graded scales	preference for holistic cultural interpretation and 'thick descriptions'
emphasis on theory, formalist description, and taxonomy of narrative techniques	on application, thematic readings, and ideologically-charged evaluations
evasion of moral issues and the production of meaning	focus on ethical issues and the dialogic negotiation of meanings
establishing a grammar of narrative and a poetics of fiction	putting the analytic toolbox to interpretative use as main goals
formalist and descriptivist paradigm	interpretative and evaluative paradigm
ahistorical and synchronous	historical and diachronous in orientation
focus on universalist features of all narratives	focus on particular form and effects of individual narratives
a (relatively) unified (sub)discipline	an interdisciplinary project consisting of heterogeneous approaches

**Figure 1. Main features of structuralist ('classical') narratology vs. new ('postclassical') narratologies<sup>20</sup>**

However, highlighting the differences between classical narratology and postclassical narratology does not mean to overlook their mutually-benefiting relationship. When addressing the issue 'why contextual and formal narratologies need each other' (the main title of her 2005 article), Dan Shen observes that

- (1) new decontextualized structural models are developed for contextual criticism; (2) the theoretical contributions may both depend upon and expand classical narrative poetics; (3) contextual criticisms draw on classical structural tools, which, in turn, helps classical narrative poetics to gain current relevance.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ansgar Nünning, 'Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term', in *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 243-4.

<sup>21</sup> Dan Shen, 'Why Contextual and Formal Narratologies Need Each Other', *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.2 (2005):164.

Despite the fact that postclassical narratology is now approaching its second phase of development,<sup>22</sup> James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz firmly believe that classical narratology is ‘still an enormously vital area of study, and it is still producing illuminating work, though nowadays its claims tend to be more modest – about “most narratives” or “narratives of a certain historical period” rather than about “all narratives”’.<sup>23</sup> To extend Phelan and Rabinowitz’s argument further, given its global context, the influence exerted and vital role played by classical narratology in global narrative studies can never be neglected. When writing the history and development of classical narratology, Monika Fludernik tells a story that ‘starts with early beginnings in Todorov, Barthes, and Greimas; finds its climax in Gérard Genette (with a few adjacent peaks taken up by F. K. Stanzel, Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Gerald Prince and Susan Lanser); and thereafter plunges to a decline’.<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, classical narratology has not only enjoyed great influence on narrative studies in Europe and North America but has also exerted a wide-scale and profound impact in East Asia, China included. To complete Fludernik’s telling the story about the development of classical narratology, I’ve already mapped the warm reception, wide application and significant variation of this discipline in a changing Chinese critical context in my early work.<sup>25</sup>

However, it needs to be pointed out that the boom and flourish of today’s Chinese narrative studies is largely attributed to the introduction of postclassical narratology to its territory. To further reveal the dynamic interplay between Western narratology and its Chinese counterpart, I’d like to draw a sketch of the travelling and acceptance of postclassical narratology in China, which will be done from three perspectives, namely introductions, translations, and practices. In doing so, my article endeavours to examine the rise of Chinese narratology in postclassical context.

## Postclassical Narratology in Chinese Academia: Translations and Interpretations

It needs to be pointed out that one of the highlights of narrative studies in China in the new Millennium is the introduction of Western postclassical narratology. In 2002, Dan Shen edited a collection of translated works of postclassical narratology. They are David Herman’s *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* translated by Hailiang Ma,<sup>26</sup> James Phelan’s *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*

<sup>22</sup> Biwu Shang, ‘Toward a Second Phase of Postclassical Narratology’, *Style* 49.3 (2015): 363-77; Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, ‘Introduction’, in *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 1-31.

<sup>23</sup> James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, ‘Introduction: Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Narrative Theory’, in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Monika Fludernik, ‘Histories of Narrative Theory (II): From Structuralism to the Present’, in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 36.

<sup>25</sup> Biwu Shang, ‘Reception and Variations of Classical Narratology in Chinese Scholarship’, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16.6 (2014):1-8.

<sup>26</sup> David Herman, *Xin Xushixue* [New Narratology], trans. Hailiang Ma (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002).

translated by Yongguo Chen,<sup>27</sup> Susan Lanser's *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* translated by Bikang Huang,<sup>28</sup> Mark Currie's *Postmodern Narrative Theory* translated by Yizhong Ning<sup>29</sup> and J. H. Miller's *Reading Narrative* translated by Dan Shen.<sup>30</sup> In the preface to the new series of, Shen forcefully contends that 'due to our limited knowledge of classical narratology, it was reasonable and necessary to translate and investigate classical narratology in the past, but we should broaden our horizon to translate and study postclassical narrative theory from now on.'<sup>31</sup>

Spurred by Dan Shen's proposal, there emerged a new wave of translating postclassical narratological works in China since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, either in the form of monographs or in the form of articles. The consequential significant translations are James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz's *A Companion to Narrative Theory* translated by Dan Shen *et al.*<sup>32</sup> and Marie-Laure Ryan's *Avatars of Story* translated by Xinjun Zhang.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the publishers, some Chinese journals also joined the line of translating Western postclassical narrative works into Chinese. Among those translated articles are Brian McHale's 'Beginning to Think about Narratives in Poetry',<sup>34</sup> James Phelan's 'Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*'<sup>35</sup> and Gerald Prince's 'Classical and/or Postclassical Narratology'.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the Chinese version of the journal *Narrative* has also played a significant role in importing and translating newest Western narrative theories into China. Since its launch in 2009, it translated 47 articles – most of which had appeared in *Narrative* – related to major strands of postclassical narratology, such as rhetorical narratology, feminist narratology, digital narratology, unnatural narratology, cognitive narratology, and corpus narratology. These translated essays, together with the introductory works, have made a substantial contribution to the develop of Chinese narratology.

Among all the Chinese narratologists, Dan Shen has made the single most effort to introduce postclassical narratology to Chinese academia. Apart from publishing numerous articles in journals, she authored and co-authored two books on Western

<sup>27</sup> James Phelan, *Zuwei Xiuci de Xushi* [Narrative as Rhetoric], trans. Yongguo Chen (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Susan Lanser, *Xugou de Quanwei* [Fictions of Authority], trans. Bikang Huang (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Mark Currie, *Houxiandai Xushi Lilun* [Postmodern Narrative Theory], trans. Yizhong Ning (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Miller, *Jiedu Xushi* [Interpreting Narrative], trans. Dan Shen (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Dan Shen, 'General Preface', trans. Yongguo Chen, in *Narrative as Rhetoric*, James Phelan (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>32</sup> James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Dangdai Xushi Lilun Zhinan* [A Companion to Narrative Theory], trans. Dan Shen *et al.* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, *Gushi de Bianshen* [Transformation of Story], trans. Xinjun Zhang (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Brian McHale, 'Guanyu Jiangou Shige Xushixue de Shexiang' [A Proposal for a Narratology of Poetry], trans. Biwu Shang and Xiaoling Wang, *Jiangxi Social Sciences* 6 (2009): 33-42.

<sup>35</sup> James Phelan, 'Shuyuanxing Bukekaoxing, Qiyuexing Bukekaoxing ji Luolita de Xushi Lunli' [Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*], trans. Biwu Shang, *World Literature Review* 2 (2008): 294-302.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald Prince, 'Jingdian/Hou Jingdian Xushixue', trans. Biwu Shang *Narrative* [Chinese Edition] 5 (2013): 147-54.

narratology, postclassical narratology in particular, namely *English and American Narrative Theories of Fiction*<sup>37</sup> and *Western Narratology: Classical and Post-classical*<sup>38</sup> in both of which Shen explicates and illuminates Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative, Herman and Ryan's cognitive narratology, Lanser and Robyn Warhol's feminist narratology, Miller's anti-narratology as well as some other strands of narrative theory, such as non-verbal narratology.

Apart from Dan Shen, there are some other Chinese scholars introducing Western postclassical narrative theories to China, such as Weisheng Tang and Biwu Shang. In *Text, Context, and the Reader: Contemporary American Narrative Theories*<sup>39</sup>, Tang examines the contextual, interdisciplinary and transmedial features of postclassical narratology and takes feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology and cognitive narratology as particular case studies. In a similar vein, in his *Contemporary Western Narratology: Postclassical Perspectives*,<sup>40</sup> Shang systematically explores the dimensions of postclassical narratology and its major sub-strands such as feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology, cognitive narratology, corpus narratology and unnatural narratology; he also reconsiders the major narratological concepts like unreliable narration, implied author and focalization in a postclassical context. Some other works need to be mentioned are Xinjun Zhang's *Possible World Narratology*<sup>41</sup> and Wanmin Zhang's *A Study of Cognitive Narratology*.<sup>42</sup>

From the very beginning of its introduction to China, postclassical narratology has been considered not as a replacement but as an essential supplementary to classical narratology. About the correlation between classical narratology and postclassical narratology, Dan Shen argues that

Classical narrative poetics is the very basis of postclassical narratology. If classical narratology encounters difficulties or experiences slow development, postclassical narratology cannot develop well either. In other words, postclassical narratology can quicken its steps of development if classical narratology develops well, while classical narratology can extend its scope of research and sharpen its tools of analysis with the development of postclassical narratology. Thus, classical narratology and postclassical narratology complements each other.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, Junqiang Tan holds that postclassical narratology inherits and supplements classical narratology.<sup>44</sup> That said, in Tan's view, postclassical narratology does not aim to replace classical narratology and opens up a brand-new direction. Instead,

<sup>37</sup> Dan Shen, Jiaming Han and Liya Wang, *English and American Narrative Theories of Fiction* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Dan Shen and Liya Wang, *Western Narratology: Classical and Postclassical* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Weisheng Tang, *Text, Context, and the Reader: Contemporary American Narrative Theories* (Shanghai: World Publishing Corporation, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Biwu Shang, *Contemporary Western Narratology: Postclassical Perspectives* (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Xinjun Zhang, *Possible Worlds Narratology* (Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Wanmin Zhang, *A Study of Cognitive Narratology* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Shen, Han and Wang, *English and American Narrative Theories of Fiction*, 221-2.

<sup>44</sup> Junqiang Tan, 'Development and Coexistence: Classical Narratology and Postclassical Narratology', *Jiangxi Social Sciences* 2 (2007): 27-33.

it means to modify the existing narratological paradigms, which in turn brings a new momentum for the development of narratology in general. Weisheng Tang explores the relations of co-existence between classical narratology and postclassical narratology. Specifically, he argues that when doing narrative analysis at the level of interpretation, postclassical narratology borrows the critical terms of classical narratology, while constructing postclassical narrative poetics, postclassical narratology supplements and even overtakes classical narratology.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike classical narratology which takes the structural linguistics as its pilot science, postclassical narratology endorses a plethora of new critical approaches including feminist theory, rhetorical theory, cognitive science and many others. As a result, postclassical narratology is used in the plural sense. That said, in addition to the discussion of interrelations between classical narratology and postclassical narratology, it is also necessary to investigate correlations between the sub-strands of postclassical narratology, which has caught the attention of some Chinese scholars. For instance, Tang examines the correlation between rhetorical narratology and cognitive narratology, claiming that rhetorical narratology mainly focuses on multi-level communication between author, text and reader, while cognitive narratology aims to reveal the comprehension process in the reader's minds. In his view, both cognitive narratologists and rhetorical narratologists place much weight on the reading process, they are different in the sense that the former focuses on reader's interpretation of and reaction to narrative while the latter on the cognitive process of reader's comprehension of narrative; while the former is mainly the study of specific meaning generated by narrative structure, the latter of narrative structure and the cognitive basis responsible for the meaning arising from it. In Tang's view, rhetorical narratology and cognitive narratology cover a common ground in terms of describing the process of reading narrative, though they differ greatly with regard to research framework and objective. Moreover, cognitive narratology as poetics can offer many useful categories for its rhetorical counterpart in examining various rhetorical relationships in narrative.<sup>46</sup> In a similar vein, in 'On the Exclusivity and Complementarity of Postclassical Narratology', Biwu Shang points out that different sub-strands of postclassical narratology are both exclusive and complementary to each other. While an examination of its exclusivity sheds light on its complementarity, the insight into the latter enables a broader critical perspective, which encompasses postclassical narratologies with different methodologies, reading positions and research focus. It is by weakening exclusivity and strengthening complementarity that different branches can better work together.<sup>47</sup>

Concerning the current development of Western narratology, Dan Shen offers an account of the challenges presented by transdisciplinary potential and irrational narratives and she advocates in narrative criticism a comprehensive examination not only of what is

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<sup>45</sup> Weisheng Tang, 'Towards Interpretation or Poetics: Revisiting the Relationships between Classical and Postclassical Narratology', *Journal of Foreign Languages* 6 (2008): 74-81.

<sup>46</sup> Weisheng Tang, 'Reading Effects or Psychological Representations? On the Differences and Similarities between Rhetorical Narratology and Cognitive Narratology', *Foreign Literature Review* 4 (2008): 35-44.

<sup>47</sup> Biwu Shang, 'On the Exclusivity and Complementarity of Postclassical Narratology', *Contemporary Foreign Literatures Studies* 1 (2008): 27-34.



inside and outside the text but also of what is in between the texts.<sup>48</sup> Biwu Shang not only touches on the transnational, transmedia and transdisciplinary direction of Western postclassical narratology, but also points towards certain important paths it is going to take on the basis of his elaboration on its two phases.<sup>49</sup> These paths include the revisit to and reflection on the transdisciplinary development of narratology, the ‘diachronic turn’ and ‘transnational turn’ in narrative studies, the focus on a certain narratologist’s own scholarly trajectory, and the coordinates of different sub-strands of postclassical narratology.<sup>50</sup> What is mentioned above fully shows that Chinese narratology almost catches up with its Western counterpart and is at the forefront of international scholarship.

As Chinese scholars have been endeavouring to introduce and illuminate Western postclassical narratology, they do not lose interest in classical narratology in the slightest. Since the new millennium and especially recent years, there appears to be a new wave of translating classical narratological works. Many of them have been translated into Chinese and enjoyed a warm reception, such as Genette’s *Collective Essays of Gérard Genette* translated by Zhongyi Shi, Joseph Courtés’s *Introduction à la sémiotique narrative et discursive* translated by Yu Huai, Greimas’s *Sémantique structurale* by Zihua Jiang, Paul Ricoeur’s *La configuration du temps dans le récit de fiction. Temps et récit Tome II* translated by Wenrong Wang, Greimas’s *Du Sens* translated by Hongmiao Wu and Xuejun Feng, Todorov’s *Poétique de la prose* translated by Yinghua Hou, J. Lothe’s *Narrative Fiction and Film* translated by Qiang Xv, Seymour Chatman’s *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* translated by Qiang Xv, Prince’s *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* and *The Grammar of Stories* translated by Qiang Xv, Genette’s *Métalepse, de la figure à la fiction* by Kangru Wu in 2013, Garrett Stewart’s *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* translated by Xi Chen and Chun Yang and Robert Scholes *et al.’s The Nature of Narrative* translated by Lei Yu. Besides, three important works of reference in Western narratology also stepped into Chinese territory by means of translation, namely Gerald Prince’s *A Dictionary of Narratology*<sup>51</sup> translated by Guoqiang Qiao and Xiaodi Li in 2011, and his *A Grammar of Stories*<sup>52</sup> and *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*,<sup>53</sup> both of which are translated by Qiang Xu. Alongside with translated works, Chinese scholars have also published a few monographs on classical narratology, such as Xiaoying Dong’s *Narratology*, Zhanchun Geng’s *Narrative Aesthetics*, Yang Wang’s *On the Art Form of Fiction: A Narratological Study*, Fei Ge’s *On Fictional Narrative*, Guosong Zu’s *Narrative Poetics*, Feixiong Fu’s *On Paul Ricoeur’s Philosophy of Narrative: Ricoeur’s*

<sup>48</sup> Dan Shen, ‘Current Issues in Contemporary Narrative Studies’, *Foreign Languages in China* 5 (2009): 60-5.

<sup>49</sup> Biwu Shang, ‘Tendencies and Features of Western Narrative Theory in Postclassical Context’, *Foreign Literature* 1 (2019): 111-8.

<sup>50</sup> Biwu Shang, ‘Current Trends in the Second Phase of Postclassical Narratology’, *Contemporary Foreign Literature* 3 (2012): 33-42.

<sup>51</sup> Gerald Prince, *Xvshixue Cidian* [A Dictionary of Narratology], trans. Guoqiang Qiao and Xiaodi Li (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Gerald Prince, *Gushi de Yufa* [A Grammar of Stories], trans. Qiang Xv (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Gerald Prince, *Xvshixue: Xvshi de Xingshi yu Gongneng* [Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative], trans. Qiang Xv (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2013).

*Narrative Explanation Concerning the Issue of Time* and Liangmei Chen's *Contemporary German Narrative Theories*, to name just a few. What needs to be pointed out is that Liangmei Chen's *Contemporary German Narrative Theories* pioneers a systematic study of German narrative theories and to some extent fills the gap in Chinese scholarship in this area.

The past several years witnessed a new upsurge of translating Western postclassical narratology in China. For instance, David Herman *et al.*'s *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* was translated by Junqiang Tan.<sup>54</sup> A big translation project is now in progress in Biwu Shang's team, who will bring out in Chinese James Phelan's *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*, Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan's *Intermediality and Storytelling*, Jan Alber, Henrik Skov Nielsen and Brian Richardson's *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative*, David Herman's *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* as well as Susan Lanser and Roby Warhol's *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*. Without any doubt, the translation and publications of the works mentioned above will add much momentum to the future development of narrative studies in China.

### The Rise of Chinese Narratology in Postclassical Context

It is worth noting that some Chinese scholars have shown an increasing awareness of innovation and the domestication of Western narratology, in the process of which they have generated a series of original insights. Apart from the aforementioned concept of 'overall close-reading' proposed by Shen, there is also the idea of 'comparative narratology' advanced by Junqiang Tan. Such a proposal emphasizes 'a comparative study of narrative theories and works in different linguistic and cultural systems,' and is 'dedicated to exploring the differences and similarities between narrative theories and works in different linguistic and cultural systems and further to an investigation of the deep causes in terms of social, psychological, customary and cultural aspects.'<sup>55</sup> While proposing comparative narratology, Tan is also committed to what he calls 'aesthetic-cultural narratology'. In *Narrative Theory and Aesthetic Culture* and *Aesthetic-Cultural Narratology: Theory and Practice*, Tan attempts to establish aesthetic-cultural narratology on the basis of his elucidation of Western narrative theory. Aesthetic-cultural narratology 'departs from the traditional inquiry of pure form and attempts to integrate form with such factors as context, history, culture, aesthetic judgments and aesthetic values', with its focus on 'the cultural forms or products with aesthetic cultural characteristics and values'; in terms of methodology, it 'emphasizes the "aesthetic study" of objects and is devoted to judging the aesthetic values of objects'; moreover, it lays stress on 'multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies.'<sup>56</sup>

Since the new millennium, spatial narrative has caught unprecedented attention in

<sup>54</sup> David Herman *et al.*, *Xvshi Lilun: Hexin Gainian yu Pipingxing Bianxi* [Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates], trans. Junqiang Tan (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Junqiang Tan, 'On Comparative Narrative Studies', *Thinking* 6 (2010): 38.

<sup>56</sup> Junqiang Tan, *Aesthetic-Cultural Narratology: Theory and Practice* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2011), 40-8.

Chinese academia. Among all Chinese narratologists working along the line of spatial narrative, Diyong Long has made the most notable contribution. In his 2003 article ‘On the Spatial Narrative of Modern Novels’, Long insightfully notes that novel is a kind of spatial existence, so fictional narratives must follow a certain logic of space. Many modern novelists not only take space as where stories happen and as scenes indispensable for narratives, but also mobilize it to express time, to arrange the structure of a novel and even to drive the whole narrative progression. For decades, Long has explored narrative studies with his keen academic insight, but also analysed and organized a considerable number of first-hand resources of domestic and foreign narrative texts and phenomena. With an examination of spatial narrative from a critical constructivist perspective, he makes significant contributions to narratology as a discipline and its theoretical basis. His new book, *A Study of Spatial Narrative*, is the only work about narratology that has been selected into ‘National Achievements Library of Philosophy and Social Sciences’, the most notable collection of scholarly works in social sciences and humanities in China. It revolves around spatial narrative and its operating mechanism, investigates in detail the spatial elements in various types of narrative and the way in which they function, and delineates a rather complete conceptual and analytical framework of spatial narratology, which all make it a remarkable work for perfecting current narrative theories and analysing relevant works from a spatial perspective. One example showcasing his originality will be the concept of theme-juxtaposition narrative. In his view, theme-juxtaposition narrative normally has four features:

- (1) The theme serves as the soul or link of this kind of narratives and many texts are even theme-oriented.
- (2) In terms of the form or structure of a text, there is often the juxtaposition of multiple stories or multiple plotlines.
- (3) There is neither specific causal connection nor clear chronological order between the stories or plotlines that compose the text.
- (4) The order of the plotlines or the ‘sub-narratives’ that compose the text can be reversed, and there will not be any essential difference brought to the text.<sup>57</sup>

By investigating the configuration of theme and plot, Long uses the notion of theme-juxtaposition narrative in analysing not only the story space and discourse space of narrative works, but also their thematic concerns. In this way, the exploration of a work as a whole can be realized by probing into its narrative structure and thematic concerns. In addition to theme-juxtaposition narrative, Long also advances such notions as complexity, fractal narrative and spatial representation method, which enrich the current framework of narratology.

As one of the pioneering Chinese narratologists, Yiheng Zhao attempts a construction of ‘general narratology’ from a semiotic perspective. In the fifteenth chapter of ‘Semiotic & General Narratology’ in *Semiotics: Principles & Problems* (2011), Zhao initiates an account of general narratology and offers a definition of ‘minimal narrative’.<sup>58</sup> He believes that any semiotic text that meets two requirements is a narrative: on the one

<sup>57</sup> Diyong Long, *A Study of Spatial Narrative* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2014), 176-7.

<sup>58</sup> Yiheng Zhao, ‘Semiotic & General Narratology’, in *Semiotics: Principles & Problems* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2011), page range of this chapter to be added.

hand, changes participated by characters form plots and are organized into a semiotic text; on the other hand, the semiotic text can be interpreted by its receiver as possessing temporal and significant dimensions.<sup>59</sup> In *A General Narratology* Zhao proposes a more thorough theoretical framework of general narratology, including categories of narrative, basic ways of constructing narrative, time and plot, conflicts between subjects in narrative texts. As for why he constructs such a branch of narratology, Zhao explains that

since narrative is the most complex among all semiotic texts, narratology has long been and will inevitably be an independent discipline, which is what will definitely become of it as a branch of semiotics. And once narrative is studied from a semiotic perspective, it is necessary to cover narrative as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

Thanks to Zhao's efforts, general narratology exerts growing influence on Chinese academia. In 2014, Center for Narratology Study in Jiangxi Normal University, School of Literature in Nankai University, School of Literature in Jiangxi Normal University and National Center for Narratology Study in Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences co-held the forum 'Narrative Sign and Symbolic narrative – Forum of General Narratology,' in which the basics of narrative theories, acoustic narrative, spatial narrative, graphic narrative and new media narrative were under discussion.

Other pioneering studies also include an exploration of narratology from the perspective of symbolic logic by Liu Yang,<sup>61</sup> autobiographical narratology proposed by Dejing Xu,<sup>62</sup> narrative ethics explored by Maoguo Wu,<sup>63</sup> possible-worlds narrative theory established by Xinjun Zhang,<sup>64</sup> and transmedial narrative studies conducted by Diyong Long.<sup>65</sup>

Similar to their Western counterparts, Chinese scholars of postclassical narratology also follow two paths: one is to introduce new approaches and explore new areas for narrative studies, the other is to re-examine the basic concepts. As mentioned earlier, the first path has been taken by Dan Shen, Junqiang Tan, Diyong Long and Yiheng Zhao. Since the basic concepts are the building blocks of the whole edifice of narratology, probing into these notions is an important trend both at home and abroad. Chinese scholarship on narratology mainly focuses on implied author, unreliable narration and focalization, which are thrown into relief in Shen's *Narrative, Style and Subtext: Rereading Classical Anglo-American Short Stories*. Shen adopts a postclassical perspective in re-examining such concepts as implied author, unreliable narration, narrative perspective, which further clarifies previous confusion. Other reiterated concepts encompass 'metanarrative' and 'metafiction', which are complex and confusing

<sup>59</sup> Yiheng Zhao, *Semiotics: Principles & Problems* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2011), 327.

<sup>60</sup> Yiheng Zhao, *A General Narratology* (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2013), 6.

<sup>61</sup> Yang Liu, *Studies of Narrative Logic* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Dejin Xu, 'Autobiographical Narratology', *Foreign Literature* 3 (2004): 44-51.

<sup>63</sup> Maoguo Wu, *From Narrative to Ethics: Theory and Practice of Narrative Ethics* (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Xinjun Zhang, *Possible Worlds Narratology* (Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Diyong Long, "'Andersstreben" and Cross-media Narrative', *Theoretical Studies of Literature and Arts* 3 (2019):184-96.

and dealt with by Liya Wang,<sup>66</sup> and ‘narrative beginnings’ by Jie Yu.<sup>67</sup>

## Forward Thinking: Future Prospects on Postclassical Narratology in China

Chinese narratology is now at its climax: both narrative poetics and narrative criticism have made important progress. For its future development, I would like to propose the following directions.

Firstly, there is a constant need for translating and introducing Western narratology to China. Admittedly, Chinese scholarship of narratology and postclassical narratology in particular, still lags behind its Western counterpart. Against this backdrop, the translation and introduction of Western narrative theory will enable Chinese scholars to see a larger picture of both the traditions and cutting-edge work of narrative inquires in the West. It has been more than a decade since the launch of the translated series of new narrative theory at Peking University Press, it is now necessary to update the series by focusing on such sub-strands of postclassical narratology as rhetorical narratology, cognitive narratology, feminist narratology, unnatural narratology, and corpus narratology.

Secondly, it is important to detect the limits and deficiencies of Western narrative theories through a comparative and transnational perspective. In ‘On Imposed Interpretation and Chinese Construction of Literary Theory’, Jiang Zhang points out such limitations in contemporary Western literary criticism:

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Western literary-critical theory has stepped onto the historical stage, revolutionizing modernity’s ancient Greek inheritance and deconstructing literary interpretations on a historically unprecedented scale. However, as impressive as literary criticism’s advances have been over the last century, we must not shy away from recognizing the basic but essential problems that diminish the effectiveness of contemporary critical doctrines. These include, to briefly summarize, cutting off the connection between history and tradition, denying the advantages of adjacent schools, going from one extreme to the other, ignoring or deviating from literary practice, and rigidly applying methods, doctrines, and discourse dogma.<sup>68</sup>

As an important sub-strand of contemporary Western literary theory, narratology shares some of the aforementioned problems. For example, classical narratology relies heavily on structural linguistics as its pilot science, attempting to reveal the universal structure underlying all narrative works disregard of their context of creation and reception, while postclassical narratology eagerly embraces the ‘narrative turn’ and radically penetrates into almost all realms of humanities and social sciences, and thus dilutes and loosens its status as a powerful approach to literary studies.

Thirdly, there is a need to domesticate Western narratology in Chinese academia. As Xiuyan Fu notes,

<sup>66</sup> Liya Wang, ‘The Differences between Metafiction and Metanarrative and Their Impact on Interpretation’, *Foreign Literature Review* 2 (2008): 35-44.

<sup>67</sup> Jie Yu, *Narrative Beginnings* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Jiang Zhang, ‘On Imposed Interpretation and Chinese Construction of Literary Theory’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 79.3 (2018): 269.

while exploring the universal narrative principles, Chinese scholars should not confine themselves to the Western narrative works as the only research object. Instead, they should strive to gear their research to the “essence” of the oriental atmosphere, with a view to developing their research into a discipline with the style of “comparative literature”.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, the theoretical frameworks and critical concepts of narratology will meet against problems of translation and applicability when travelling to the Chinese critical territory given the differences in narrative traditions, language, culture and mode of thinking, etc. For example, the term ‘narratology’ and ‘narrative’ themselves have two different translated versions, which to some extent has caused confusion. As a critical theory rooted in Western tradition, narratology needs to adapt to the Chinese scholarly environment after its arrival.

Last but not least, Chinese scholars are to be warned against indiscriminately borrowing experience from their Western counterparts’ critical practice. Due to its accessibility and applicability, narratology has won the favour of many Chinese scholars and has been frequently employed in critical practice. However, ‘[c]ontemporary Western literary criticism’, including narratology, ‘grows in the soil of Western culture, which differs from Chinese culture in terms of language, ethics and aesthetics; which causes some limitations in its critical practice.’<sup>70</sup> That said, Chinese scholars are suggested to be aware of both strengths and weaknesses of Western narratology and to make it in better service to critical practice and produce insightful conclusions.

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<sup>69</sup> Xiuyan Fu, ‘From Western Narratology to Chinese Narratology’, *Comparative Literature in China* 4 (2014): 1.

<sup>70</sup> Jiang Zhang, ‘Current Issues in Contemporary Western Literary Theory: Towards a Reconstruction of Chinese Literary Theory’, *Social Sciences in China* 5 (2014): 4.

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## **Naratologia postclasică în China. Recepția și variațiile acesteia**

### **Rezumat**

Teoria narativă chineză a fost în mare măsură influențată și inspirată de echivalentul său vestic, însă contribuția ei la naratologie începe să primească recunoașterea internațională meritată și să ajute la „redefinirea” acestei discipline. Completând teoriile lui Nünning, ale lui John Pier și ale lui Bronwen Thomas, acest articol intenționează să privească mai îndeaproape evoluția naratologiei, în particular a naratologiei postclasice în China. Scopul articolului este triplu: rediscutarea distincției dintre naratologia clasică și cea postclasică, recenzarea traducerilor și interpretărilor din naratologia postclasică din China și prezentarea contribuțiilor cercetătorilor chinezi la naratologia postclasică. Articolul oferă în concluzii câteva modeste sugestii pentru dezvoltarea naratologiei în China conform cu evoluțiile din domeniul naratologiei postclasice.