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## **Towards a Comparative Literary Geography**

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**Abstract:** The rapid global development of literary geography has rendered comparative studies of literary geography between nations increasingly imperative, while also enabling the establishment of comparative literary geography as a distinct subfield. With respect to the current research landscape in Chinese and English-language academia, there appears to be a dearth of systematic discourse on the theoretical exploration or disciplinary construction of comparative literary geography. This paper thus endeavors to develop an academic system of Comparative Literary Geography (CLG), with a focus on exploring the following three aspects. First, the disciplinary positioning of CLG, particularly its nexus with comparative literature, (human) geography, and the “New Literary Geography” (NLG) proposed by MEI Xinlin. The paper argues that the CLG constitutes an interdisciplinary realm at the intersection of comparative literature and (human) geography, embodying the dual attributes of both disciplines. Moreover, it aligns with the academic tenets of the NLG and functions as a subfield and research direction thereof. Second, the research paradigm of the CLG, encompassing its theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and key concepts. The paper posits that the CLG features a “comparative” dimension spanning both literary and geographical scholarship: it entails comparative analyses of literary geography between different nations and regions, as well as geographical inquiries into comparative literature, such as the geographical routes and regional variations of transnational literary dissemination, and the transnational geographical distribution of genres, intellectual trends, and motifs. Third, the primary research domains of the CLG, including regional literary studies, genre-spatiality studies, spatial thematic studies, (comparative) literary cartography, and (comparative) geopoetics, and other related domains.

**Keywords:** comparative literary geography; New Literary Geography; disciplinary positioning; research paradigm; comparative geopoetics

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**标题：**比较文学地理学构想

**摘要：**文学地理学在全球范围的快速发展，使得不同国家之间文学地理学的比较研究变得日益重要，而且建立比较文学地理学这一分支领域也成为可能。就中文和英文学术界的研究现状而言，似乎还没有关于比较文学地理学学术体系或学科建构的系统讨论。因此，本文尝试建构比较文学地理学学术体系，将探讨以下三个方面问题。其一，比较文学地理学的学科定位，尤其是与比较文学、（人文）地理学和梅新林提出的“新文学地理学”之间的关系。本文认为，比较文学地理学属于比较文学与（人文）地理学的交叉学科，具有这两个学科的双重属性；而且将坚持新文学地理学的学术理念，并构成其分支领域和研究方向。其二，比较文学地理学的研究范式，包括理论框架、研究方法、重要概念等。文章指出，比较文学地理学具有文学与地理两个学科的“比较”维度：既包括不同国家和地区文学地理（学）的比较研究；也包括比较文学的地理学研究，如文学的跨国传播的地理路线和地域变异，文类、思潮、母题的跨国界地理分布等。其三，比较文学地理学的主要论域，包括区位论、空间主题论、文类空间论、（比较）文学绘图论、（比较）地理诗学等。

**关键词：**比较文学地理学；新文学地理学；学科定位；研究范式；比较地理诗学

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Since the nineteenth century, literary geography has gradually evolved into a relatively independent interdisciplinary field, with a vast body of scholarly publications that have continued to grow explosively. In a 1953 address titled “Le problème et les problèmes de la géographie littéraire” which was later included in the Chinese translation of his *Géographie Littéraire* (2025, originally published in French in 1946), André Ferré noted that, just as geography is conceived as an integrated field of study, literary geography has, to a significant extent, evolved into an independent discipline (2025, p. 91). In the late twentieth century and especially in the 21st century, a number of Chinese scholars—such as YANG Yi (杨义) in *The Syncretism of Literary Geography* (2013) and MEI Xinlin (梅新林) in “An Introduction to Chinese Literary Geography” (2006) and *Principles of Literary Geography* (2017), among others—have also advocated for the establishment of literary geography as a formal (sub-)discipline. While the literary geographies rooted in the two “parent” disciplines of Geography and Literature diverge significantly in their theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches, with distinct yet overlapping and mutually referential research foci, the global proliferation of literary geography has rendered comparative studies of literary geography across national contexts increasingly imperative. Concurrently, this proliferation has made feasible the establishment of comparative literary geography as a subfield.

Based on the scholarly works in Chinese and English accessible to the author, there seems to be no systematic theoretical construction for comparative literary geography, not to mention the efforts to make it a new academic field or sub-discipline. Only a small number of articles have addressed topics that can fall within the purview of comparative literary geography studies. For instance, Martin Leer (1990) conducted a comparative research on the literary geographies of Canada and Australia and referred such research as “a comparative literary geography”; Laurence Publicover’s “Drama and Performance”—included in the section of “Forms and Genres” of *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Geographies* (Alexander, 2025, pp. 347-357)—examines how European plays and performance construct geographical sites, and this analysis implicitly constitutes a comparative study of “drama geography” of different European countries (the United

Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany); Sheila Hones's article "Relational Literary Geographies" included in the same book (pp. 30-39) exemplifies a kind of theoretical construction of literary geography conducted at a scale that transcends national boundaries; and in discussions concerning the relationship between literary geography and comparative/world literature, certain topics pertaining to comparative literary geography are addressed (see e.g., Laachir et al., 2018; Domínguez, 2011).

With respect to disciplinary development, MEI Xinlin and GE Yonghai (葛永海) (2017), in their work *Principles of Literary Geography*, proposed that literary geography should be established as a new interdisciplinary program in institutions of higher education (pp. 251-304), and conceptualized comparative literary geography as one of its sub-fields (p. 299). However, they did not provide a more profound discussion of the core issues pertaining to this sub-field/academic system.

Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to develop an academic system for Comparative Literary Geography (CLG), with a focus on exploring the following three aspects: First, the disciplinary positioning of CLG, including the inquiries into its disciplinary affiliation, intellectual lineage, disciplinary boundaries and nature; second, the research paradigms of CLG, mainly its theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and key concepts and critical terms; third, the primary domains and topics of CLG, such as the regional literary studies, spatial thematic studies, genre spatiality studies, literary cartography, geopoetics, and other related domains.

### Disciplinary Positioning of Comparative Literary Geography

Ferré argued that "comparative literature, having emerged as a distinct subject, can already be situated within the disciplinary framework of geography" (p. 61). This observation reveals that comparative literature inherently entails geographical factors and perspectives and may even adopt geographical theoretical frameworks. In other words, comparative literature bears, to a certain extent, the characteristics of literary geography; conversely, research of literary geography should incorporate cross-national and cross-linguistic comparative approaches, all of which constitute core elements of comparative literary geography (CLG). Ferré's insight thus foreshadowed the formation and construction of CLG as a formal academic system. In contrast to Ferré, MEI Xinlin (2017) explicitly pointed out the positioning and core tasks of CLG within the discipline of literary geography: "CLG primarily refers to comparative studies of literary geography that transcend national and linguistic boundaries. . . . From the perspective of World Literary Geography, its tasks include fully illuminating the unique emergence and development processes of literary geography in and across different countries, regions, and ethnic groups, exploring the internal laws governing the evolution of literary geography, and even uncovering the fundamental laws of human cultural development." (p. 299)<sup>1</sup> Building on and inspired by the work of Ferré and MEI, this section intends to examine the disciplinary positioning of CLG, including its disciplinary affiliation, intellectual lineage, disciplinary boundaries, and disciplinary nature.

In terms of its disciplinary affiliation, CLG is an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of comparative literature and (human) geography, embodying the dual attributes of both parent disciplines. CLG research

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1. The quotation in Chinese is "主要是指跨越国界和语言界限的文学地理的比较研究……从世界文学地理的角度着眼,充分揭示各个国家、各个地区、各个民族文学地理所特有的发生、发展的过程,探索文学地理发展的内在规律,乃至人类文化发展的基本规律是比较文学地理学的任务。" (Elipsis added by the author.)

should integrate the theories, methodologies, and thematic concerns of these two disciplines, while intersecting, overlapping with, and collaborating with such sub-disciplinary areas as geocriticism, geopoetics, spatial humanities, spatial criticism, and environmental criticism, among others. CLG maintains close connections and even overlaps with comparative literature, (human) geography, and literary geography, even to some extent subsumed under these three fields. Thus, it is imperative to first examine CLG's relationships with these three fields/disciplines.

**The relationship of CLG with Comparative Literature.** In a sense, world literature and comparative literature largely fall within the scope of literary geography studies. The CLG explored in this article not only constitutes a novel domain and direction within comparative literature but also enriches, innovates, and transcends comparative literature while also standing as a relatively independent field. This field will integrate the theoretical systems, academic lineages, and research methodologies of comparative literature, adopt its comparative methods and spirit, and adhere to a cross-linguistic, cross-nation, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary research model.

**The relationship of CLG with (Human) Geography.** Human geography shares an inherent affinity with literature in research issues and scholarly values, serving as an inexhaustible source of theoretical insights and conceptual references for literary geography, including CLG. In *Literary Geography*, Sheila Hones (2022) argues that “[h]uman geography today is characterised not so much by a particular subject matter as by the way it approaches a wide range of topics and activities by reference to concepts such as space, scale, mobility, representation, process and performance” (p. 2). Hones's observation discloses that the core of human geography lies in a suite of spatial concepts and their associated theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Drawing on this insight, this article posits that CLG should, while upholding a literature-centered orientation, draw intellectual sustenance from (human) geography. Specifically, it ought to integrate theories, knowledge, and methodologies from geography, particularly human and cultural geography, and adapt the discipline's conceptual frameworks, analytical perspectives, thematic foci, core concepts, and research approaches to interrogate literary phenomena. CLG places particular emphasis on the interplay between geographical spaces and literature of different nations. In such inquiries, the methodological tools and analytical lenses of (human) geography can provide critical support and inspiration for CLG.

**The relationship of CLG with “New” Literary Geography.** In “The Construction of Academic System in New Literary Geography”, MEI Xinlin (2017) articulated the conceptual framework of a “New” Literary Geography (NLG) and conducted a systematic exploration of the core issues inherent to this academic realm. The “newness” of MEI's NLG lies in its transcending the frameworks and constraints of traditional Chinese literary geography and Western literary geography; and in that it aims to systematically construct a novel theoretical system, explore innovative research methodologies, and carve out new academic domains, with a dedicated focus on establishing literary geography as a discipline in institutions of higher education. The CLG addressed in this essay will adhere to the theoretical logic and academic ideals and tenets of the NLG proposed by MEI, largely serving as one of its subfields and novel exploration in new directions. It is noteworthy that CLG employs comparative perspectives and methodologies, thereby expanding the research boundaries of NLG and forging new research trajectories.

With the disciplinary affiliation of CLG clarified, this article proceeds to outline the pathways and steps for the disciplinary establishment of Comparative Literary Geography. First, it is proposed to offer CLG-related courses in universities, such as elective courses for graduates explicitly titled as “Comparative Literary

Geography”, or a module of “Comparative Literary Geography” included in such courses as “Literary Geography” or “Spatial Literary Studies”. Second, prior to the formal establishment of Literary Geography as a discipline, CLG may be positioned as a domain within the secondary discipline of Comparative Literature and World Literature, contributing to and enriching its development. Once the discipline of Literary Geography is formally established, CLG can then be designated as an independent domain or subfield under this discipline.

### **Research Paradigm of CLG**

As previously noted, Comparative Literary Geography (CLG) is an interdisciplinary field that integrates the attributes and features of both comparative literature and (human) geography. In essence, CLG embodies the “comparative” dimensions and perspectives inherent in both disciplines. On one hand, it undertakes research of inter- and cross- national literary geographies through comparative methodologies, encompassing transnational comparative studies of literary landscapes, writers’ biographical cartographies, and geopoetic concepts, or comparative inquiries into geographical imaginations and spatial ideologies of different nations/regions. On the other hand, it offers geographical interpretations of comparative literature, namely, conducting research on comparative literature and world literature from a geographical standpoint and within a geographical framework, such as investigations into the geographical routes and regional variations of transnational literary dissemination, as well as analyses of the transnational geographical distribution of literary genres, trends, movements, and motifs and their divergences across different nations and regions. It should be noted that there is a considerable degree of overlap between these two aspects. Making such a distinction is merely for the convenience of discussion, and CLG is not simply the sum of these two aspects but rather an integration of the two disciplines, two respective research paradigms, and methodologies. Therefore, when conducting such research, one should not be preoccupied with whether CLG belongs to literary studies or geographical studies. Instead, they ought to integrate the strengths, theories, research questions, and methodologies of these two disciplines and related fields to illuminate literary phenomena, the interplay between literature and geography, and the relationship between human existence, literature, and geography.

Ferré argued (2025) that literary geography should not function as a deductive discipline but should provide a framework for classification (p. 96). He proposes that the linguistic framework should be prioritized, followed by those of nations, races, and social groups. Inspired by Ferré, this article argues that CLG can draw on and integrate the research frameworks of comparative literature and (human) geography. First, it should borrow the framework of literature, such as that of literary trends, schools, genres, theories, themes, and images, with particular emphasis on the framework of comparative literature. Notably, core domains and topics in comparative literature research (including imageology, thematology, genology, and the like) inherently contain elements relevant to literary geography, all of which can contribute to the formation of CLG’s primary framework. Simultaneously, CLG should also reference geographical frameworks, such as cultural regions, linguistic regions, nation-states, subnational geographical regions, and urban spaces. Additionally, it may employ other theoretical frameworks from spatial studies, including scales, spatial typologies, mobility, and cartography. By integrating the aforementioned frameworks and classifications, CLG can focus on several major research areas that simultaneously engage literary studies, geographical space,

and comparative inquiry and that collectively form a multi-dimensional, stereoscopic framework system. This paper proposes the following domains: regional literary studies, spatial thematic studies, mirror-space studies, genre spatiality studies, studies on overseas literary dissemination, (comparative) literary cartography, and (comparative) geopoetics, among others. Several of these domains will be further elaborated in the third section of this paper. In the geographical dimension, these research domains exhibit a spectrum of scales and interconnections spanning macro to micro levels: vertically, from the global space and cultural regions, down to nations, cities, and even specific geographical phenomena or information; horizontally, including comparisons on the same hierarchical level and of complex connections across different levels. In the literary dimension, the focuses lie on several topics and perspectives with significant geographical relevance, each with distinct emphases yet overlapping in scope. Overall, no matter what specific domain or topic CLG centers on, it must concurrently account for the frameworks of comparative literature and geography, as well as the dynamics between these two disciplines, rather than merely using one discipline to explicate or validate the other.

In addition to research frameworks, CLG should also integrate knowledge, theories, topics, and methodologies from multiple disciplines and fields including literature, comparative literature, geography, and spatial studies, while drawing on, synthesizing, and reinterpreting relevant concepts and terminologies. In terms of critical terminologies, concepts meriting such engagement include geographical gene, myth of the homeland, literary landscape, literary pilgrimage, spiritual magnetic field, transmission route, geographical distribution, writer geography, text geography, internal space, external space, narrative space, metaphorical space, place, mobility, contrapuntal reading, nomad, deterritorialization, among others. For research methodologies, comparative studies that transcend national, regional, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries serve as the foundation. Concurrently, it should integrate influence studies and parallel studies from Comparative Literature, alongside geographical methodologies such as cartography, statistical analysis, thick description, and fieldwork, as well as approaches from other disciplines.

### **Major Domains and Topics**

The CLG, to be conceived as a relatively independent as well as an interdisciplinary field rooted in or deeply connected with multiple disciplines, is characterized with its own distinct problematic, that is, the study of the relationship between literature and geography on a scale transcending national boundaries. This overarching problematic involves, or “generates”, a series of closely related problems and topics, which can be classified into several major domains. This paper attempts to propose and discuss these domains and their topics by integrating the knowledge structures, theoretical frameworks, major areas and topics of comparative literature and human geography and by always adopting a cross-national-border comparative perspective and combining the perspectives of literature/aesthetics and geography/space.

Based on the common classification of literature, literary geography can be roughly divided into writer geography, reader geography, text geography, geography of literary genres, geography of literary theory, geography of literary dissemination, literary cartography and so on. As another major source of thought and supporting discipline for CLG, comparative literary geography, Comparative Literature mainly includes imageology, thematology, genology, comparative poetics, translation studies, study of literary trends, comparative studies of literature and other disciplines, and the like. As such, the essay tentatively proposes

the research domains of the CLG such as regional literary studies, spatial thematic studies, genre spatiality studies, geography of literary dissemination, comparative geopoetics, comparative literary cartography, and so on.

### **Regional literary studies**

The concept “region” here not only refers to the geographical areas or administrative division within a nation, but also denotes a territory that transcends national boundaries and goes beyond the scope of individual countries, a territory including different countries that share similar cultures, languages, ideologies or political interests, such as the Caribbean region, the Global South, and the like. As such, the regional literary studies in CLG mainly focus on macro-regional literary studies, that is, the differentiation laws and structural features of literature within the global or continental scope, as well as the comparative studies on regional literature among nations. Take as an example, research on the geographical distribution of different languages and writers in Caribbean literature and the differences of spatial imagination in different areas, or a comparative study of Southern United States Literature and the literature of Chinese South in the twentieth century.

The regional literary studies in CLG are related to the division of the global literary map as well as to the examination of the relations and communication of the different parts of this map. By different standards and on different scales, the global literary map can be divided into Global South literature and Global North literature, Oriental literature and Occidental literature, and Asian literature, European literature, American literature, African literature and Oceanian literature; American literature can be further classified into North American literature, Latin American literature, Caribbean literature, and so on. The division of literary regions can also draw on the concepts of cultural circles and cultural regions (MEI & GE, 2017, p. 317), as well as the larger-scale concept of civilization circles. Thus, the global literary map can be viewed as including Latin-Christian literature, Islamic literature, Confucian-East Asian literature, Pacific literature, and African literature. It can also be observed by a more general separation of continental literature versus maritime literature. While listing various types of division, this article does not insist on a unified classification principle, but rather advocates that regional literature studies in CLG should adopt a global perspective (or even a planet view) and an inter-and-cross-national comparative approach. More significantly, the regional literary studies in CLG are intended to remap world literature and re-examine its composition, facilitate the exchange and mutual understanding between literatures of different nations and regions, and further advance the struggles for peace, understanding and anti-hegemony in the world.

### **Spatial thematic studies**

Common spatial themes in literary geography include the mythic space, memory space, home, hometown, foreign land, Eden, Arcadia, capital city, exotic imagination, literary landscape, and some spatial oppositions with structural significance in theme, such as center and periphery, at home and away from home, hometown and foreign land, settlement and on the move (adventure, wandering, drifting), and so on. The spatial thematic studies in CLG adhere to a macro perspective and comparative studies of spatial themes in different national literatures, such as comparative studies of mythic spaces in the East and the West, research on spatial archetypes in world literature (such as home, Eden, wilderness, corner), comparative studies of exotic imagination in Euramerican and Chinese fiction in a specific historical period, or a contrastive analysis of the writing of capital cities in Chinese and British, or British and French, novels in the nineteenth century. Another

example is the frontier as a significant spatial theme. In comparative literary geography studies of the frontier, one can examine the distinct characteristics exhibited in the representations of frontier landscapes and the human-frontier relationship in the frontier narratives of different nations.

The research of literary landscapes has become a pivotal topic in literary geography and forms an essential dimension of the spatial thematic studies examined in this article. Given that literary geography investigates both intratextual spaces and extratextual real world, literary landscapes can be categorized into intratextual and the extratextual landscapes—namely, landscapes depicted within literary works and “cultural sites” in the real world. Extratextual landscapes can be further subdivided into the static and the dynamic: The former includes famous and “sanctified” literary sites like Shakespeare’s birthplace or Lu Xun’s residence in Shaoxing, while the latter encompasses literary activities associated with cultural sites, such as literary tourism and “literary pilgrimage” discussed by Ferré (2025, pp. 57-60, 92, 102). These activities themselves represent a distinctive form of literary landscape. The study of literary landscapes within a single nation-state typically centers on historical investigation and the cultural significances inscribed in literary landscapes themselves, or else serves tourism development and local image construction. By contrast, the CLG foregrounds cross-nation literary landscape studies. It conducts comparative research on literary landscapes in the literatures of different nations, interrogates the underlying differences in their literary history and culture, and investigates the potential mutual influences between the literary landscape writing in different national literatures.

### **Genre spatiality studies**

John Frow (2006) conceptualized genre as “relatively bounded and schematic domain of meanings, values, and affects” (pp. 85-86), a definition that implicitly underscores the spatiality of genre. Indeed, the typological properties of genre are often manifested and determined spatially, that is, different genres typically employ distinct modes of spatial organization and exhibit unique category-specific characteristics in terms of spatial representation and spatial construction. In *Spatiality*, Robert T. Tally Jr. (2013) discusses Frow’s definition of genre and thereby proposes that “genre is itself a sort of map, since the generic parameters help to establish the projected ‘world’ of the story” (p. 55). Beyond analyzing the affinities between genre and cartography, Tally further posits that “the genres can be understood in relation to their organization of space and time, among the other elements of a narrative” (pp. 55-56). Taking Gothic romance as an example, Tally observes that its unique architectural style renders the characters’ movement in this space inevitably different from the activity patterns in an allegorical epic or a picaresque satire. Tally’s discussion reveals that a given genre often possesses its own unique spatiality—including narrative settings, characters’ spatial behaviors, and the spatial dynamics of plot progression, among other elements—and that the spatial features of a genre often constitute its defining traits. Following Tally’s line, we can take the Bildungsroman as an example. It not only features a specific plot pattern but also a certain spatial organization pattern: The protagonist left their familiar place, then after venturing into the unfamiliar, experiencing a series of spatial movements, encountering various spatial experiences and emotional geography, gained new knowledge and even “epiphany” because of the new spaces and the people and events associated with them, thereby achieving “growth” (FANG, 2024, pp. 305-306). Similarly, adventure narratives, maritime novels, frontier narratives, diaspora literature, detective fiction, utopian novels, fantasy narratives, urban fiction, and the like, all possess their own genre-specific spatial characteristics, which often hold significant implications for literary geography research.

Comparative literary geography can examine the historical origins and development changes of the spatiality of different genres on a transnational scale, as well as the distinctive features of a certain genre in the literature of different countries, especially conducting comparative studies on their spatial differences. For instance, within the perspective of comparative literary geography, the study of the picaresque novel can explore how the spatial patterns, characters' movement trajectories, and the main spaces of the genre have changed in their development across different countries, such as from the 1554 Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* to the subsequent picaresque novels in other European countries (for example, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens). Additionally, within the scope of world literature, one may investigate the development and mutual influences of the distinct characteristics of spatial representation and spatial structure in utopian novels, including dystopian works. Science fiction, as a subcategory of utopian literature, is particularly well-suited for analysis through the lens of comparative literary geography. For example, what divergences exist between contemporary Chinese science fiction and its Western counterparts in terms of spatial scales, typology, and contradictions? And what insights do these divergences offer regarding the differences in temporal-spatial concepts, cosmologies, and philosophical traditions between China and the West?

Mikhail Bakhtin's research on the chronotope stands as a paradigm for inquiries into the spatiality of literary genres as his discussion reveals the distinct categorical traits of the spatial construction (and temporal arrangement) of different genres. As Bakhtin (1981) explicitly asserted, "The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions. . ." (pp. 84-85) Taking this as a point of departure, Bakhtin conducted a diachronic examination of the evolving chronotopic features of major narrative genres in Europe, spanning from ancient Greek romance, ancient Roman novels, chivalric romance, the carnivalesque fiction of François Rabelais, and to the 19th-century European novels. It is safe to say that Bakhtin's studies on chronotope can be incorporated into the realm of comparative literary geography. This is not only because he undertook a diachronic investigation of the development of chronotope in novels, but also because his discussions encompassed novels from European contexts including ancient Greece, Spain, Italy, France, and Russia. In other words, his work can be conceptualized as a geographical investigation of the chronotope in the realm of world literature, and it offers profound insights for comparative research into the divergent spatial characteristics of the same genre across the literary traditions of different nations, namely, for the genre spatiality studies in the realm of CLG.

### **(Comparative) literary cartography**

Ferré's monograph *Géographie Littéraire* is widely recognized as the world's earliest theoretical and systematic exploration of the field of literary geography, which has included 23 maps centered on the writer's information that fall under the rubric of literary cartography. While Ferré can be regarded as a pioneer in the study of literary cartography, Franco Moretti and Tally stand as two leading contemporary scholars in this realm, both having helped catalyze its rapid emergence as a prominent academic focus within global literary studies. Moretti has conducted abundant cartographic research of literary texts, genres and even a "new literary history"; in contrast, Tally has formalized the theoretical framework of literary cartography, and he mainly uses literary cartography as a metaphor to refer to the writer's writing, and the figure of map to a literary work. MEI Xinlin, a preeminent contemporary Chinese scholar of literary geography, has put forward the concept of cartographic criticism (地图批评), integrating Tally's literary cartography, Moretti's research on literary

maps and graphs, and China's time-honored tradition of *wenxue tuzhi* (文学图志, map-illustrated literary histories). Grounded in the long-established field of Chinese Literary Geography, MEI argues that cartographic criticism should entail the mapping of both internal textual spaces and external real-world spaces, thereby forging multifaceted connections and interactions between the verbal text and the cartographic text. Drawing on the perspectives of Ferré, Tally, Moretti, MEI, and other scholars, the (comparative) literary cartography proposed in this article encompasses writer maps, text maps, literary form maps, literary consumption maps, and literary dissemination maps, among others. Here, the terms "map" and "cartography" are employed both literally and metaphorically. Furthermore, the cartography in this study extends beyond conventional maps to include abstract data visualizations such as charts, tables, and schematic diagrams.

The writer map refers to a cartographic representation of life experiences and literary creation trajectories of the writer. It may take the form of a biographical map that encompasses key life events and places of residence throughout the writer's lifetime, or a map focused on their specific life stages or critical literary activities—such as a map of overseas sojourns or a map of locations associated with their major works. It can be an overview map covering their entire life, or a collection of maps concerning different aspects of their life and literary creation. These maps can mark the sites including the writer's birthplace, residences, place of death, and primary living locations, thereby delineating their travel itineraries and literary activity trails (which may further include sites of their major work writing, locations of exchanges with other prominent writers, and venues of activities related to the same literary school, among others). Comparative literary cartography emphasizes maps of the writer's life experiences in foreign/overseas contexts, while also focusing on comparative research of biographical maps, travel maps, and creation maps of the writers of different nationalities. For instance, in *Literary Geography*, Ferré (2025) included and analyzed maps such as those of Charles-Pierre Baudelaire's journey to the East (pp. 31-33) and Michel de Montaigne's travels in Italy (pp. 37-38), which fall within the research purview of comparative literary cartography.

Literary text maps encompass two primary categories: first, geographical information maps of literary works, including cartographic representations of key locations, landscapes in the text, and their correlations with real-world geographic data; and second, characters' cognitive maps and itineraries of their activities. Comparative research on literary cartography between comparable works of different nations not only falls within the purview of comparative literature but also constitutes a core component of comparative literary cartography. Literary form maps refer to the statistical analysis and cartographic representation of the distribution of language, literary genres, and forms. CLG investigates such distribution and evolution on a transnational scale. For example, mapping the global distribution of overseas Chinese-language writers and their works offers an intuitive demonstration of the international dissemination and radiating influence of Chinese culture. Another case is the cartography of sonnets in Europe and its global distribution and circulation. This not only reveals disparities in European countries' enthusiasm for sonnets (and their temporal shifts across historical periods) but also highlights that sonnet production remains quite limited in East Asia and Southeast Asia and there are even vast blank spaces in certain regions on the global sonnet creation map.

Literary consumption maps can help examine readers' reception of specific works, writers, or genres, as well as the impacts of underlying economic, cultural, and ideological factors on the reception. From the CLG perspective, such research may focus on the regional characteristics and cross-regional disparities embodied in literary consumption. Literary dissemination maps are closely related to, and even partly overlap with, literary form maps and literary consumption maps, but this category diverges from the other two in their core

focuses. Here, the emphasis lies on the dissemination routes of specific works, writers, theories, or intellectual trends, as well as the regular patterns of change they exhibit across historical periods. For instance, in *The Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (1998) and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005), Moretti looks at how novels or other literary forms “circulate in space, through a literary marketplace and the various geographical domains (e.g., local, regional, national) in which reading and writing occur” (Tally, 2013, p. 100). Moretti’s discussion of the circulation of literature, especially his observation through drawing graphs, diagrams and maps, stands as a paradigmatic example of literary cartography. When such inquiry transcends the boundaries of a single nation-state, it falls within the purview of comparative literary cartography.

### **(Comparative) geopoetics**

It is generally acknowledged that the concept of “geopoetics” was first put forward by French philosopher Michel Deguy in the 1960s. Later, together with Kenneth White, he expanded the influence of this concept and its literary and philosophical propositions. According to Michel Collot (2014), the geopoetics they advocated serves to emphasize that the relevant criticism is a response to a specific state in literary creation, a state in which significant weight has been given to geographical space and related inspirations (p. 232). Subsequently, numerous scholars have engaged with geopoetics as a theoretical framework. For example, Collot’s geopoetics refers to the research on the interrelations between space, literary form, and literary genre, so as to establish a poetics of creative potential and a theory of literary production (2014, p. 233). Collot conceptualizes geopoetics in two dimensions. On one hand, it denotes the study of literary form, concerned with the construction of imagery of place; on the other hand, it functions as a poetic theory (*poïétique*), centered on reflections on the relationship between literary creation and space (p. 242). While there has been a considerable body of scholarship on geopoetics, the majority of these works focus on examining geopoetic issues pertaining to specific writers (see, e.g., Smith, 2015; Cresswell, 2017) or literary trends such as Rebecca Walsh’s *The Geopoetics of Modernism* (2015). *Geopoetics in Practice* is a breakthrough book which examines dynamic intersections of poetics (mainly in the sense of poetry studies) and geography and observes “how poets engage with geographical phenomena through poetry and how geographers use creativity to explore space, place, and environment” (Magrane et al., 2020, title page). To date, there appears to be a dearth of theoretical inquiries into comparative geopoetics, and even less a systematic treatise on the subject.

In their monumental work *Principles of Literary Geography*, MEI Xinlin and GE Yonghai (2017) conceptualized geopoetics as the core component of their literary geography system, with a focus on theoretical construction that provides foundational support and intellectual guidance for the entire discipline of literary geography (p. 21). This paper aligns with their viewpoint, regarding geopoetics as the inquiry into and systematic construction of theories, concepts, terminology, and methodologies pertaining to literary geography. On this basis it conceives Comparative Geopoetics as trans-national comparative research on geopoetics, encompassing comparative analyses of the overarching characteristics, theoretical systems, theoretical categories, terminological concepts, and related dimensions between different nations. Instances of such research include a comparative study of YANG Yi’s literary map, MEI Xinlin’s cartographic criticism and Tally’s literary cartography, or of Tally’s geocriticism and Bertrand Westphal’s *La géocritique*, or of the spatial criticism in China and the geocritique in the West, or more generally, of Chinese Literary Geography and the literary geographies in other nations. This research places particular emphasis on the comparative

research, mutual validation, cross-referencing, and complementary synthesis of differences between different nations in their geopoetic studies.

Within existing literary theories, particularly in the realms of spatial literary studies and literary geography, a number of concepts may be subsumed under the purview of comparative geopoetics. Examples include YANG Yi's concepts of "scene of life" (生命现场) and "peripheral vitality" (边缘活力), MEI Xinlin's "spiritual magnetic field" (精神磁场) and "ultimate space" (终极空间), Fredric Jameson's cognitive mapping, Edward Soja's "thirdspace", Gilles Deleuze's nomad, Tally's *topophrenia*, literary cartography and geocriticism, and the concept of "archipelagic" (as employed in archipelagic time and Archipelagic Literary Studies) put forward by scholars such as Édouard Glissant, Maria Reyes and Alex Taek-Gwang Lee<sup>1</sup>, among others. These concepts not only draw on the methodologies and theories of geography or spatial studies but also embody a world literature horizon and a comparative lens, thereby enabling them to constitute, or be reconstructed as, the terminological and theoretical underpinnings of comparative geopoetics.

The concept *La géocritique* put forward by Westphal and his geocritical explorations furnish comparative geopoetics with a wealth of theoretical and practical resources. The geocentric method he employs—centering on a specific place (such as a neighborhood, a city, a region) inscribed with historical and cultural significance, and comparatively analyzing the spatial representations of this place by diverse writers (including those of different nationalities), as well as the spatial imagery and spatial imaginaries provided by non-literary texts—bears, to a large extent, the characteristics of comparative literary geography (as well as comparative literature and world literature). Accordingly, it is reasonable to argue that his geocriticism can be incorporated into the poetic system of CLG, many of his geocritical practices may fall within the purview of CLG, and his methodologies are of considerable referential and heuristic value for CLG research. Another theorist worthy of discussion is Edward Said. To a certain extent, Said may also be regarded as a literary geographer, as many of his studies offer multifaceted insights for comparative literary geography. For instance, his research on Orientalism inherently embodies a world literature perspective and can be reconstructed as a concept of comparative geopoetics, thereby providing a critical tool for comparative literary geography. Furthermore, his notion of "contrapuntal reading" which connects different regions of the world—the imperial centers and colonized or peripheral regions—can serve as a reference for comparative geopoetics, functioning as a pivotal critical concept and research methodology.

It should be noted that the research scope of CLG is not confined to the five domains discussed above. For instance, literary dissemination geography constitutes another worthy area worthy of inquiry. Within the framework of CLG, this subfield primarily investigates the spatial and geographical dimensions of transnational literary circulation and dissemination, including its modes, directions, routes, scales, and structural characteristics (such as the literary importing and exporting nations across historical periods, as well as the relatively fixed components embedded in dissemination processes and routes). While comparative literature and world literature also address literary dissemination or circulation, CLG distinguishes itself by emphasizing the geographical factors, spatial patterns, and dissemination cartographies of international literary circulation. This research encompasses the overseas dissemination of literary works, the transnational travel itineraries of individual writers, the clustering geography of writer communities abroad, and the travel

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1. This issue includes Maria Reyes's article "Archipelagic Literary Studies and Spatial Formation" and Alex Taek-Gwang Lee's "On Archipelagic Temporality".

geographies of literary theories and intellectual trends. Research in this field often involves the utilization or creation of diagrams, charts and maps, which to some extent overlaps with the study of comparative literary cartography. Therefore, this article does not attempt to elaborate in detail on literary dissemination geography.

## Conclusion

This article presents a tentative conception of CLG, with the hope that it may arouse academic interest in relevant issues, stimulate further discussions, and promote continuous expansion of this subfield. It is emphasized that CLG research should embrace an open, equitable, globally—and even planetarily—oriented perspective on literature, geography, and space. It is also important that CLG should uphold the new notion of space emerging with the “spatial turn”, that is, rather than a void container, a mere setting or backdrop, space should be viewed as social, productive, and constructive, carrying fluid, complex, and multi-dimensional meanings, as Henri Lefebvre and other scholars have suggested. Equally critical is that the “comparative” lens of CLG must maintain a local stance, rooted in the characteristics of the national language and culture. As MEI (2017) put it, truly meaningful explorations and productive studies often involve both the rational absorption of Western theories and a grounding in the realities of Chinese literature and its cultural traditions (p. 117). This embodies a locally rooted stance that is informed by a global vision and the integration of Chinese realities and foreign theories and methodologies. This viewpoint is applicable to the research of literary geography in almost any country.

This article proposes comparative literary geography with the following goals and prospects. First, to reposition Chinese literary geography in the global academic landscape and promote its development through comparative studies. Second, to rewrite the history of world literature from a geographical/spatial perspective, re-examine the characteristics and contributions of literary geography research in various nations and languages, and explore issues such as cultural status, national identity, and national image on the scale of the world literary map. Third, CLG should emphasize geopolitical investigation and serve objectives including national strategy, cultural dissemination, and mutual learning among civilizations. Fourth, it is hoped that research in CLG will facilitate cultural exchanges and in-depth dialogues among nation-states, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and inclusivity. The above may appear idealistic, yet they constitute goals worthy of pursuit. It is thus anticipated that more scholars will engage with this ambitious academic vision and endeavor.

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