

Asia as Spiritual Home and Habitat of the Soul: Asian Elements in German Literature from Romanticism to the Twentieth Century

Chien-Chun Lin

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University
E-mail: chingchunglin@ntu.edu.tw

Abstract

During the early nineteenth century in Europe, a “Eurocentric” atmosphere dominated. Goethe’s lyrical poem, the West-Eastern Divan, was regarded as entering into dialogue with Asian culture, declared representatively and clearly the equality and interdependency of Eastern and Western cultures in the history of German literature. After the Enlightenment, Western civilization had a major impact on social change in Asian countries. The richness, diversity, and multicolor of Asian cultures also left clear traces on Western art and literature, encouraging its aesthetic transformation from the traditional to the modern. Through the analysis and interpretation of representative works, this paper explores, from the perspective of German literary history, the reception and reference of Asian ideas and cultures in German literary works from the Romantic period through to the 20th century, and more generally how Asian culture has inspired Western society and civilization.

Key Words: cross-cultural studies, Goethe, aesthetic modernity, taoism, zen