

## **A Review on Domestic Studies on Western Rhetorical Criticism: After 1990s**

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**Keywords:** Rhetorical criticism; Western rhetorical criticism; Western rhetoric.

**Abstract.** Rhetorical criticism has a history of more than 100 years in the west, while it just started in domestic field in the 1990s. This paper aims to make a review of such fields as the introduction of rhetorical criticism theories, the contrastive analysis of Western and Chinese rhetorical criticism, and the application of rhetorical criticism in China. It has been shown that the relevant domestic research fields have made some considerable progress in those areas mentioned above but still has a long way to go in systematicity of rhetorical criticism research. It is suggested that a proactive integration with international research should be carried out on the basis of the original research in order to reconstruct the system of rhetorical criticism research and improve the national public diplomacy programs and images.

### **Introduction**

It has been for nearly a hundred years since Wichelns created the study of rhetoric criticism in 1925. In the field of rhetoric, especially in the U.S., a great many scholars and relative academic achievements came into existence, among whom some influential researchers, such as Foss and Campbell are still active in the academic field of international rhetorical criticism. Domestic research on western rhetoric criticism started relatively late. Western rhetoric criticism mainly refers to rhetoric criticism based on western classical rhetoric and new rhetoric theory. The domestic research on western rhetoric criticism is mainly the introduction and application of western rhetoric criticism theory. It is found that since the 1990s, the research on rhetoric criticism in China and in the west has gradually been on the rise. Combed and summarized western literatures on rhetoric criticism in China, this paper analyzes the research situation for the purpose of exploring new ideas of future rhetoric criticism studies.

### **Terminology Analysis: Rhetorical Criticism, Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Criticism**

The analysis of the domestic and western rhetoric criticism is inseparable from the definition of terms. Rhetorical criticism in the modern sense originated in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. In the study of rhetorical criticism, scholars at home and abroad do not agree on its definition. Foreign scholars such as Hendrix & Polisky, Campbell, Foss, and Hart & Daughton have defined rhetorical criticism in different ways. Campbell believes that rhetorical criticism was "the description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the persuasive language"[1]; Foss thinks that rhetorical criticism is "a qualitative research method for systematic analysis and investigation of symbolic behaviors and artifacts in order to understand the rhetorical process"[2]. Compared with foreign scholars generalized definition of rhetorical criticism, Chinese scholars like Wen Kexue, Cong Laiting, and Xu Luya define it in a narrow sense as rhetorical text, words or products. For example, Wen Kexue Scientific refers to rhetorical criticism as "explanation and evaluation to the rhetoric text and rhetoric expression ". Meanwhile, Cong Laiting and Xu Luya regard criticism is "to survey, evaluate or criticize to the speech ACTS, and language products (i.e., words or discourse) according to standard of the rhetoric standard"[3]. The differences between the definitions of rhetorical criticism in domestic and foreign academic circles are mainly due to the differences in their academic backgrounds and their interpretation of western rhetoric.

Literary criticism is closely related with rhetorical criticism. *Literary Criticism of Speech* is Wichelns' pioneer work of rhetoric criticism, which has brought rhetoric criticism and literary criticism together. In fact, the Chinese rhetoric circle has also conducted many in-depth discussions on rhetoric criticism from its own perspective (mainly from the perspective of literature). In Chinese rhetoric academic circles, Tan Xuechun's theory of rhetorical criticism is unique and influential, whose research focuses on the rhetoric interpretation and evaluation on the literary text. Furthermore, he extends it to a broader field of vision, such as the interaction between rhetoric theory and rhetorical criticism, the interaction between expression and reception. As far as Gao Wanyun is concerned, rhetorical criticism is to "explore the rhetorical behavior and operation mechanism of literature with the help of a specific rhetorical theoretical system, and make rhetorical interpretation of literary text"[4]. Similarly, Mao Xuanguo also points out that rhetorical criticism, as the most important form of literary criticism, is closer to rhetorical criticism in ancient Chinese literary theory. Although Wichelns does not provide a definitive answer to the relationship between literary criticism and rhetorical criticism, Theresa Enos believes that contemporary literary criticism should be called rhetorical criticism[5]. Generally speaking, western rhetorical criticism not only has the literary criticism, but also has the criticism to the speech debate. Scholars with foreign language background in China are mainly devoted to discussing rhetorical criticism from the perspective of western rhetoric, which can be collectively called western rhetorical criticism.

Another term associated with rhetorical criticism is rhetoric criticism. The word rhetoric criticism highlights the connection between rhetoric and criticism. Eleven related papers on the theme of "rhetorical criticism" were published in the column of A Great Vision of Rhetoric in the Sixth phase of 2011 and the second and fifth phases of 2012 in Journal of Fujian Normal University (Social Science Edition). According to the published papers, the use of rhetoric criticism is mainly based on academic considerations that are parallel to the terms "linguistic criticism" and "discourse criticism". Actually, as early as the end of 1998, Chang Changfu employed the term "rhetoric criticism" in his introduction to *Contemporary Western Rhetoric: Critical Models and Methods*. In this paper, the term is used interactively with "rhetorical criticism". In introducing the theoretical system of rhetorical criticism, Cong Lating and Xu Luya also used "rhetoric criticism"[6]. In view of the research needs, we use rhetorical criticism uniformly in this paper.

## Research Trend and Classification

In cnki from 1990 to 2014, we can retrieve 121 journal papers, 18 doctoral dissertations and 26 master's theses with the key words rhetorical criticism. After careful review and discrimination, 33 journal papers, 6 doctoral dissertations and 9 master's theses are discarded, in which rhetorical criticism is rarely mentioned. Among other relevant papers, there are 72 articles of introduction, review and theoretical discussion, accounting for more than half of the total number. After re-screening, the paper on western rhetoric criticism accounts for about 60% of the existing research papers. Because rhetorical criticism is rooted in western rhetoric theories, domestic scholars cannot get rid of the route of introduction and "foreign for domestic use" in the study of rhetoric criticism. In the early 1990 s, Chang Changfu and Gu Baotong's *Contemporary Western Rhetoric: Speech and Discourse Criticism* and *Contemporary Western Rhetoric: Mode and Methods of Criticism* gave a good overview of the theoretical methods of western rhetorical criticism and contribute to the study of domestic rhetorical criticism. Since then, many scholars like Hu Shuzhong and Wen Kexue have devoted a specific chapter in their works to discussing rhetorical criticism in their works, and the study of rhetorical criticism has gradually formed a certain academic climate. At present, more and more universities are recruiting postgraduates of western rhetoric. With the larger academic group engaged in rhetorical criticism, the research coverage will become wider and the penetration will become deeper. In general, the studies on western rhetoric criticism in China can be divided into three aspects: introduction and review of theories, comparison between China and the west and application of theories.

## Theoretical Introduction and Review

Introduction to and review on the theory is of vital importance to the study of western rhetorical criticism to take root and sprout in China. The theoretical system of western rhetoric is extensive and profound. Based on the differences between Chinese and western cultures, there is no fertile soil for the development of rhetoric argumentation in China, which needs to be transplanted slowly. Many scholars have made great contributions in introducing western rhetoric criticism theory. In accordance with the content of introduction and criticism, it can be divided into two types of reviews: Introduction and commentary of rhetorical criticism theory and Research review on rhetorical criticism model.

**Introduction and Commentary of Rhetorical Criticism Theory.** Rhetorical criticism originated in the second half of the 20th century, an important academic sign of the development of western rhetoric in the 20th century. Although rhetorical criticism has been in existence for nearly a century, it was late in the Chinese academic circle. Chang Changfu and Gu Baotong compiled some classical works on *contemporary western rhetoric: Speech and discourse Criticism*, such as Wichelns's *Literary Criticism on Speech* and Bitzer's *Rhetorical Situation*. It is an early introduction to western rhetorical criticism theory, which has played a valuable role in the study of rhetorical criticism in China[7]. Wen Kexue introduces the American rhetorical criticism system in twentieth Century. In chronological order, this paper comprehensively combs the history of rhetorical criticism in the 20th century, trying to show readers a clear concept, but failed. Subsequently, many rhetorical scholars explain their viewpoints on the basis of the definition of rhetorical criticism given by western rhetoric scholars. The rhetorical criticism theories mentioned in these studies are obtained from inference and induction. Due to different perspectives, the definitions of rhetorical criticism in different versions have their limitations. Some definitions limit rhetorical objects to persuasive texts, others to pure texts or texts. As mentioned above, rhetorical criticism is defined in a broad sense and a narrow sense. The definition by Wen Kexue, Cong Laiting, Xu Luya and Lanc Chun etc. belong to the category of narrow sense, because they regard rhetorical discourse, speech products and rhetorical texts as the target of criticism. On the other hand, the definitions given by Yuan Ying, Chai Gaiying and Li Qing belong to the broad category, for what they have in common is that they take rhetoric phenomenon as the object of systematic analysis.

In China, in addition to the introduction, digestion and absorption of the western classical rhetoric criticism theory, some scholars have also made a commentary on some controversial rhetoric criticism theories. Lai Qinfang once gives a proper assessment on Paul de Man's rhetorical criticism theory. Paul de Man is a controversial figure, active in the 1960s and 1970s, and a critic of American literature. Lai analyzes the characteristics of Paul's theory, and points out that Paul's rhetorical criticism of literary semiotics theory is deeply rooted in France, mainly based on the literary text analysis. Of course, this paper is also too bound up in the theory of Paul himself, and does not fully place his theory into the western context. Consequently, it is difficult to fully present its theoretical value.

**Review on Rhetorical Criticism Model.** Rhetorical criticism is a general concept. To recognize its features, we must examine the specific analysis model. New rhetoric and post-modernist rhetoric have brought various critical perspectives to the acceptance and dissolution of various theories. In the first decades of the 20th century, there was only one rhetorical criticism model, namely, the neo-Aristotelian criticism. After nearly a century of development, the number of rhetorical criticism (mainly American) has increased to 60. Every academic treatise on western rhetorical criticism theory would introduce and comment on the model. Although the emphasis is different, the four modes that appear most frequently are neo-Aristotelianism, sociology, postmodernism and critical dramatic rhetoric criticism. In *contemporary western rhetoric: Speech and discourse Criticism*, Chang Changfu and Gu Baotong introduce the four modes in detail. After that, Hu Shuzhong provides the readers with theoretical interpretation of rhetorical criticism and two operational examples. Wen Kexue, Cong Laiting, Xu Luya, Chai Gaiying and Li Qing all made a detailed introduction to the common rhetorical criticism pattern. In addition, Wang Zhiewei also further

discusses the contemporary western rhetorical criticism model of diversification, and points out that the diversification mainly comes from the rhetoric criticism of borderline, interdisciplinary, universality and ambiguity.

Deng Zhiyong is an outstanding scholar in model study, who brought the mode and theory of American rhetorical criticism into China in 2007. He published more than 10 papers in this respect in core journals home and abroad, in which he discusses such modes of rhetorical modes as dramatist, feminism, ideology, social sports and metaphor, etc. Deng expounds at great length the advantages and disadvantages of each model, and clearly indicates the operation steps of each model, which has made a significant contribution to the study of rhetorical criticism.

Of course, mere introduction is not enough. Some scholars have also improved or created new rhetorical criticism models on the basis of western rhetorical criticism models, which further enriches the theoretical framework of rhetorical criticism. On the basis of fully demonstrating the classical rhetoric theory and the new rhetoric theory, Yuan Ying constructs a clear and detailed rhetorical criticism mode in his doctoral dissertation *Research on the Construction of New Pattern of Rhetorical Criticism*. Tu Jiajin attempts to form a new model by bringing argumentative theory into rhetorical criticism in his doctoral thesis. Li Ke in his dissertation applies the theory of rhetorical criticism to the analysis and evaluation of metonymy, and leads the elements like diction, rhetorical situation, rhetorical motivation, ideology, identity rhetorical, etc. to construct a rhetorical criticism model of critical metonymy analysis.<sup>[7]</sup> These models greatly enrich the theoretical system of rhetoric criticism and is a powerful supplement to the traditional rhetoric criticism model.

### **Comparison and Comment on Chinese and Western Rhetorical Criticism**

Due to the differences in the academic background of the researchers, Chinese rhetorical criticism and western rhetorical criticism also take different routes. The research of Chinese rhetorical criticism mainly tends to literary criticism, and this has been going on till now. At the beginning of this century, Tan Xuechun, Gao Wanyun, Mao Xuanguo and other scholars paid more attention to literary criticism. Tan Xuechun's theory belongs to the category of general rhetoric, while Gao Wanyun has given an analysis to the theory of rhetorical criticism of Chinese literature in the 20th century. Mao Xuanguo expounds the contemporary value of rhetorical criticism to ancient literary theory.

To a large extent, the introduction of the theoretical system of western rhetoric criticism has led to the rise of rhetoric criticism in Chinese literature. The introduced theory is bound to be contrasted to the existing theory. Based on their own academic structure, many scholars have made an in-depth analysis. Gao Wanyun has compared the differences between Chinese and western literary rhetoric criticism, and pointed out that in literary rhetoric criticism, western scholars pay more attention to persuasion and acceptance while Chinese researchers attend to performance and expression[8]. Wen Kexue believes that, from the traditional point of view, Chinese rhetoric criticism attaches importance to the appreciation of literary texts, which is to some extent a history of literary criticism while western rhetorical criticism is more of a history of persuasion and debate. Yuan Ying points out that both Chinese and western rhetorical criticism have their origins, but contemporary American rhetoric criticism has exerted a significant influence on the Chinese academic Wang Zhiwei systematically studies the intercrossing and coalescence between Chinese rhetoric criticism and western literary criticism. After comparing the works by Chinese and Western scholars, he concludes that western rhetorical criticism emphasizes the systematisms, effectiveness and pertinence of critical methods and its critical objects cover a wide range and have many critical perspectives[9].

It can be seen from the above discussion that both the Chinese and foreign circles have made in-depth studies on the comparison between Chinese and western rhetoric criticism, and their views have something in common. Chinese and western rhetorical criticism have their own characteristics, but there are also crossover. We should not simply judge the Chinese and western rhetorical criticism which is better and which is inferior, but to promote the theoretical innovation in a spirit of mutual absorption.

## **A Review on the Application of Rhetoric Criticism**

Theory must be rooted in critical practice to be more vigorous. Most western scholars of rhetoric criticism are aware of this and have done a lot of research on the application of rhetoric criticism. There is still a gap between the number of domestic and foreign researches in this field. According to the data at present, there are only over 10 articles in applied journals and 4 papers of *Pegatron*. These studies fall broadly into three categories. (1) An analysis of the text based on a certain rhetorical criticism model. This kind of analysis idea is quite clear, that is, to analyze the text reasonably according to the steps of the selected model. Yang Jie and Deng Zhiyong made an in-depth analysis of Arnesen's speech at the Gulf Emergency Summit on the basis of narrative rhetoric criticism model. According to this model, Yuan Ying and Jiang Yan also analyzed the election speeches of Hong Kong's new chief executive, Liang Zhenying. Other rhetorical criticism models have been used sporadically. Liu Xuemei used the ideological rhetoric criticism to understand and read the "Desert Comfort Action". Sheng Jiahong employed rhetoric of fantasy theme to analyze the public service advertisement of CCTV "Caring for the Old". Han Yun made use of feminist criticism to understand the way of proof appeal in English political debate. (2) General choice of rhetorical criticism to analyze a certain kind of rhetorical text. Such studies rely on the macro-theoretical framework of rhetorical criticism rather than specific models. Taking rhetoric criticism as the framework, Li Ke made a systematic analysis and evaluation of metonymy by taking the steps of description, interpretation and evaluation, supplemented by the concepts of rhetoric screen, rhetorical situation, rhetorical motivation and persuasion[10]. Based on the theory of rhetorical criticism, Yuan Wei researches cosmetics ads at the micro level, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence construction, speech rhetoric etc. Meanwhile, this paper discusses at the macro level the layout strategy of cosmetics advertisement, the reasonable appeal strategy and the role selection strategy of communicators. Jiang Donglin analyzed the *Fortress Besieged* by Qian Zhongshu from the view of rhetoric criticism, and made a critical study from three aspects: rhetorical consciousness, rhetorical strategy and rhetorical skills. This kind of research is relatively macroscopic, and it is hard to avoid criticism on specific analytical steps. (3) Relatively new research areas. In recent years, the research object of rhetoric criticism has been expanding, and there have been some studies on religious texts. Liang Gong sorted out the rhetorical criticism theory of the new testament and expounded the influence of modern rhetoric theory on rhetorical criticism of the new testament. Combing western rhetoric theories, Wang Caili and Yuan Ying discussed the problems existing in the study of Buddhist rhetoric in China in terms of steps and methods. Although there are few studies on this aspect, it provides research ideas for further exploration in the future.

## **Research Prospects**

Throughout the study of western rhetoric criticism in China since the 1990s, theoretical introduction and comments account for a large proportion, while comparative and applied studies are few, which also testifies the reality of relatively backward development of western rhetorical criticism in China. Combined with the current research status, we believe that we can continue to strengthen the research of western rhetorical criticism in China from the following three aspects.

### **Strengthen Theoretical Thickness and Promote Methodological Research**

At present, the introduction to western rhetoric criticism has been fully carried out in the domestic academic circle. Conversely, simple introduction is inadequate. We need construct theoretical thickness to the existing on the thickness of the theory of western rhetorical criticism theory of construction, namely to strengthen the fit between various criticism mode, on the basis of the introduction. Of course, in this aspect, some domestic scholars have already started, such as the new rhetorical criticism model constructed by Yuan Ying and the critical metonymy analysis model constructed by Li Ke. Meanwhile, we should realize that corpora and data statistics and other empirical research methods is a trend in today's academic circles, and in this respect, the western

rhetorical criticism research relatively lags behind, thus affect the equal dialogue with other languages. Therefore, the study of rhetorical criticism methodology is an important aspect that needs serious consideration in the academic field. Only with rigorous research methods can the study of western rhetorical criticism have a new lease of life.

### **Continue to Strengthen Comparative Studies**

The purpose of comparison is to exchange needed goods and develop together. The differences between Chinese and western rhetorical criticism are caused by the different soil in which they live. Presently, the comparative studies in China mainly focus on the theoretical basis, methods and forms of expression between literary criticism and western rhetorical criticism. The systematic contrast between the two is relatively lacking. In terms of connotation, the comparison between Chinese and western rhetorical criticism concepts has been relatively systematic, while there is still room for research on the comparison between the respective functions and critical modes of Chinese and western rhetorical criticism. In terms of extension, the comparison between the analytical procedures of Chinese and western rhetorical criticism is still rarely mentioned. Therefore, the comparative study of Chinese and western rhetorical criticism should be deepened.

### **Promote the Localization and Internationalization of Western Rhetorical Criticism**

As noted by Wayne booth, rhetoric has always lacked due interest in the real, serious problems and challenges posed by contemporary rhetorical practice due to its inherent internal orientation<sup>[10]</sup>. Booth's criticism was very pertinent. Contemporary western rhetorical criticism also has such problems. Western rhetorical criticism theory is extensive and profound, which can make a reasonable interpretation of all-encompassing symbolic behavior. Although some progress has been made in applied research in China, it is far from the scope and depth of rhetorical criticism. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen the applied research of rhetorical criticism. On the one hand, it is feasible for domestic academic circles to take the road of localization according to the national conditions. It is very realistic to make a scientific interpretation of the relatively familiar domestic rhetoric practice by using western rhetoric criticism theory. For example, wood to Britain, LiQing ever based on the argument of rhetorical criticism theory of Zhejiang university students' English writing level has carried on the thorough analysis, reading the argumentation of the student composition mechanism, it is helpful for the domestic college English writing teaching. On the other hand, taking the path of internationalization, namely in the use of western rhetoric criticism theory of western countries related rhetoric practice to explain the system, and to reveal its marking hidden aspects such as rhetorical motivation of speech. This aspect of research is relatively few and needs to be further explored.

The research on western rhetoric criticism has become increasingly profound and extensive in domestic academic circles, but there is still a long way to go. In the west, rhetorical criticism plays an indispensable role in interpersonal relations, social harmony, government decision-making, consultation and cooperation, but these have not attracted enough attention in domestic academic circles. Therefore, it is of great importance to strengthen the research in this field, which is of great significance to the construction of China's rhetorical criticism research system and the improvement of China's external publicity work and national image.

### **Acknowledgement**

(1) Mudanjiang Normal University Project of Social Science (No.YB201618); (2) Mudanjiang Normal University Project of Educational Reform Project (No. 17-XJF19032)

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