



Association of the University Professors and Heads of French+

**Small Grants 2025**

With the generous support of the AUPHF+ Small Grant, I had the opportunity to attend and present at the 2025 International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) World Congress, held at KINTEX, Seoul, South Korea, in August 2025. This conference is one of the most significant global gatherings in the field of comparative literature and brought together scholars from over 70 countries.

I presented a paper entitled “*Taoist Infinite Traveling and the Nonhuman Narrative in Gu Cheng’s Poetry*” as part of the seminar *Approaching Nonhuman Narrative in World Literature*. This paper emerged from the final chapter of my PhD dissertation, and the conference provided a valuable platform to receive critical feedback from international peers, particularly those working at the intersection of world literature, ecocriticism, and posthuman thought.

My paper responded to current conversations in literary theory—particularly those shaped by the “nonhuman turn” in the wake of New Materialism, object-oriented ontology, and ecocriticism—by offering a perspective rooted in Taoist philosophy. I proposed that Gu Cheng’s poetry, through the Zhuangzian concept of 逍遥游 (*infinite traveling*), articulates a form of nonhuman narrative that is not concerned with exterior objects or entities, but with a transformation of subjectivity itself. This resonated with broader discussions at the conference around alternative epistemologies, non-Western methodologies, and the philosophical rethinking of the human.

The experience proved to be deeply generative for both my research and future academic development. The conference offered not only exposure to a wide range of contemporary theoretical frameworks but also an occasion to develop connections with other early-career scholars and senior academics working in adjacent fields. I was particularly thrilled to meet my long-time academic idol there, Prof. Haun Saussy from the U.S., and made meaningful connection with him there.

Outside of the formal presentations, engaging in cultural immersion during my time in South Korea also enriched my understanding of East Asian literary and philosophical contexts. I had the chance to visit bookstores, exhibitions, and heritage sites in Seoul, all of which helped ground my comparative work in lived cultural environments beyond the purely textual.

This opportunity came at a pivotal stage of my PhD, as I was preparing to complete my dissertation and think about postdoctoral possibilities. Presenting my work in an international setting helped me develop the confidence and clarity to articulate its significance to a broader scholarly audience. It affirmed the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural trajectory of my research and offered a sense of intellectual community that will continue to support my transition into the next stage of academic life.

I am immensely grateful to the AUPHF+ Small Grant for supporting this experience. Without the award, it would not have been financially possible to attend the ICLA World Congress, and I am sincerely appreciative of the Fund’s role in enabling this formative moment in my scholarly journey.

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