

# Efforts to Return to the Scene of Literary History

## Taking Li Jiefei's "Typical Trilogy" as an Example

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**Abstract**—"Typical Trilogy" includes "Typical Literary World", "Typical Copywriting" and "Typical Year", which shows the attempt in writing style from literary history to the history of spirit and ideology, revealing the gradual deepening of the author's thinking in the process of intervening in the study of Chinese contemporary literature. The "Typical Trilogy" aims at the return and presentation of the literary history scene, starts from some problems in the history of Chinese contemporary literature, and broadens the view of historical writing and research through the reference of Braudel's "total history" and Huang Renyu's "macro-history concept" in the writing paradigm, and becomes a beneficial attempt to write the history of Chinese contemporary literature.

**Keywords**—"Typical Trilogy"; literary history writing; annual history; macro-history concept

### I. INTRODUCTION

The "Typical Trilogy" refers to the three historically significant works that Li Jiefei has published since 2008, focusing on the "contemporary" of Chinese literature. They are "Typical Literary World" in 2008, "Typical Copywriting" in 2010, and "Typical Year" in 2013. From "literary world" to "copywriting" and to "year", this shows Li Jiefei's efforts to explore the effective paradigm of historical writing on the basis of exploring, excavating and organizing historical materials, thus forming his unique writing concept of contemporary literature and history.

Since the concept of "Chinese contemporary literature" was put forward in the 1950s, the historical writing of Chinese contemporary literature has become a debate in the research community. It can be said that the writing of almost every literary history reflects the author's personal evaluation criteria and principles for Chinese contemporary literature in the selection of historical materials and the formation of frameworks. At the moment when the writing of contemporary literary history is becoming more diversified, the emergence of Li Jiefei's "Typical Trilogy" has a special significance, reflecting his efforts to return to the historical scene of Chinese contemporary literature.

### II. THE CONCEPT OF "TYPICAL" AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The "typical" word of "Typical Trilogy" comes from the theory of "realistic representation of typical characters in a typical environment" proposed in "To Ma Hackneys" by

Engels, which is based on the problems existing in the novel "City Girl" by Hackneys. Engels pointed out: "In my opinion, realism means that in addition to the truth of the details, it is necessary to truly reproduce the typical characters in a typical environment." [1] Li Jiefei ever said: "The writing of the 'Typical Trilogy' originates from Engels's 'typical theory'... Introducing the 'typical' concept as a perspective for studying the history of contemporary literature is my personal solution to the problem of how to choose... For the history of contemporary literature, the so-called 'typical' is contemporary, that is, those that truly embody and reflect the characteristics of contemporary literature." [2] The "typical" of the "Typical Trilogy" lies in its concern. It is the "this one" that exists in the history of contemporary Chinese literature. The presentation of personality has become the starting point of writing, but the close connection between the individual and the environment makes the individual performance inevitably be linked to the whole age environment.

In "Typical Literary World", Li Jiefei chose several characters that are typical of Chinese contemporary literary world. In the historical exploration of their literary experiences, it found the interaction between environment and characters. For example, in the "Long Songs and Vicissitudes — Zhou Yang Theory", Li Jiefei discovered the process of Zhou Yang's change in the development of human beings and literature in several different historical periods through the combing of historical materials. Zhou Yang's life is a variation. In fact, there are four Zhou Yang, namely, Zhou Yang of China League of Left-wing Writers, Zhou Yang of Yan'an, Zhou Yang of 17 years and Zhou Yang lived after the Cultural Revolution. The Zhou Yang of each of the above periods is not the same, or even very different". [3] Through the description of Zhou Yang's personal destiny, Li Jiefei reveals the organic interaction between characters and the environment.

The typical creation theory of Marxism believes that the unity of commonality and individuality must be based on individuality, that is, commonality must be reflected in real, specific and unique personality. In the "Typical Literary World", Li Jiefei's practice of character-centered approach extends to the excavation and exploration of people, events, and history in the "Typical Copywriting". Starting from the characters, he enters the sorting out of the historical common features with points and areas. In the section "A Work and the Destiny of a Person" in "Typical Copywriting", it wrote

that Xiao Yemu's "Between Couple" became the first work to be criticized at the beginning of the People's Republic of China. Also, it described Xiao Yemu's experience of being convicted and tragic death. This book is a representative representation of the era of politics controlling the literature. The fate of intellectuals is often manipulated in the "invisible hands". The ever-changing political situation has become a barometer of the success or failure of intellectuals.

Chinese contemporary literature has caused debates such as "whether contemporary literature can have history" because of its "contemporary" and "timeliness" different from ancient literature and modern literature. For Chinese contemporary literature, the time distance from the writing object is too close, and it is easy to produce the loss of emotion and value judgment. However, from another point of view, it retains a large amount of historical data because of its "timeliness", including many memoirs and oral history materials of important historical figures that have experienced the history of contemporary literature. The richness of this historical material has brought great convenience to the writing of contemporary literary history. The writing of contemporary literary history with many different appearances has benefited to a certain extent. Li Jiefei's "Typical Trilogy" is based on the possession of a large amount of historical materials, and it presents a detailed analysis of the face of Chinese contemporary literature and contemporary history.

### III. BREAKING THE "ANNUAL HISTORY" STYLE OF LINEAR TIME SERIES STARTING FROM THE PROBLEM

Most of the writings of traditional Chinese contemporary literary history use the sequence of chronicles, ordering the chronologically arranged writers, works, literary phenomena, etc., or using the coordinate system to combine vertical and horizontal, time and characters, and events to delineate the writing path of literary history. Attempts to reflect on this long-standing traditional literary history writing practice and new literary history styles have emerged. The "One Hundred Years of Chinese Literature" edited by Xie Mian broke the traditional way of managing contemporary literature on a broader subject level. "He is not considering how to linearly describe the diachronic state of Chinese literature in a hundred years, but to encourage participants to ask literary questions in the context of a hundred years. Instead of describing another kind of history in a 'structural' way again, it focuses on important social, literary events and eras through close-ups." [4] Similar to Xie Mian's philosophy of treating history, Li Jiefei consciously started from the problem consciousness in the writing of the "Typical Trilogy", broke the traditional historical writing style, and made a new attempt to write a paradigm.

In "Typical Copywriting", Li Jiefei named the period from the founding of the People's Republic of China to the end of the "Cultural Revolution" as "the era of Mao Zedong", and named the short period of 1959-1962 as "Zhou Enlai Time". At the first national literary conference in 1949, Zhou Yang and Mao Dun respectively made a summary speech on behalf of the two traditions of "Yan'an Literature" and "Literature of Kuomintang-controlled areas", highlighting

the diversified existence of Chinese contemporary literary discourse before the founding of New China. To a certain extent, Zhou Enlai is one of the leaders of the "literature of Kuomintang-controlled areas". He had actively participated in the decision-making and deployment of many major events in the literary and art circles since the founding of the People's Republic of China. From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the three or four years that Li Jiefei called "Zhou Enlai Time", Zhou Enlai conveyed his new thinking of the direction of literature and art development after the founding of the People's Republic of China through his speech at the "New Overseas Chinese Conference" and "Talk to Drama, Opera, and Children's Playwrights in Beijing". These constructive and forward-looking new ideas, which focus on the literary democracy, intellectual issues, and writers' creative personality, are only short-lived, and are suppressed by absolute authority shortly after they are proposed. However, the complex political implications are still conveyed through Zhou Enlai's brief literary statements.

Under the Chinese contemporary literary system, literature has lost its historical position of independence and self-sufficiency, and has always been entangled with political and ideological issues, and even has become the vane of political struggle in most cases. The literary effect of the short "Zhou Enlai Time" was only expressed in the literature of the new era after the "Cultural Revolution". Li Jiefei even asserted: "If Mao Zedong actually dominates the literature of the People's Republic of China in the first 30 years, the practice has proved that the art after the 'new period' is mainly developed along the path of Zhou Enlai... For 'Zhou Enlai Time' of 1959-1962, it is only three years, but it is connected with the forties and the eighties, constituting and announcing a great historical process and a great tradition." [5] After discovering and naming the "Zhou Enlai Time", Li Jiefei showed the mutual presentation of the policy changes of Chinese contemporary literature and the changes of Chinese contemporary political structure. At the same time, he also stated that in the Chinese contemporary literature, the literature of liberated areas oriented by the spirit of Mao Zedong's speech had occupied a dominant position in the literary world since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and there also had another possibility in Chinese literature, that is, the tradition of the "literature of Kuomintang-controlled areas" in the 1940s. Although it was suppressed after the founding of the People's Republic of China, it was still evolving in a subtle way until the 1980s, and then it became one of the spiritual resources of "literature of the new era".

In "Typical Year", the six annual nodes selected by Li Jiefei show that he is concerned with the historical context of literature rather than the political events, and the emergence of literary phenomena is closely related to the occurrence of political events. However, it is not completely consistent, and it often has the characteristics of lag. In 1968, polyphony and variation took place in the third year after the "Cultural Revolution". In 1978, the "New Table and New Opening" occurred in the third year after the fall of the "Gang of Four". The above two years have avoided the step-by-step trend of

political events, but focused on the emergence and growth of the undercurrent of the literary forces under the surface of the "cultural desert" in 1968, and the cultural and historical context with a new atmosphere of great openness after the arrival of the "Deng Xiaoping era" in 1978. In 1986, "Time's Triangular Prism" starts from the change of artifacts in daily life, and sees the moment when the whole society changes radically from material civilization to spiritual civilization, the awakening of Chinese national consciousness and the prominent public society. Mass culture began to come to the forefront of history, which brought cultural diversity and richness, and many deep problems in the reform began to emerge from the hidden.

#### IV. THE REFERENCE TO THE "MACRO-HISTORY" CONCEPT AND THE "TOTAL HISTORY" WRITING CONCEPT

"Typical Year" begins with a statement of past history by selecting the annual node. This method of writing the annual history can be traced back to the historical expression under the guidance of Huang Renyu's "micro-history" concept in his book "A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline".

The "macro-history" concept is the first historical writing theory put forward by Huang Renyu in "A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline" published by Taipei in 1985. It is a philosophical position and governance put forward in the face of Chinese history and human history research. It focuses on a concept of history, a philosophy of history, a method and attitude for observing history, not a historical figure and historical events" [6]. Huang Renyu once admitted that the concept of "macro-history" came from Braudel, the second generation leader of the French Yearbook School, and he was deeply influenced by "total history" view and the "three periods". By dividing the time of world history into geographical time, social time and individual time, namely, long time, medium time and short time, Braudel constructed the "total history" framework of the trinity of nature, society and events. This study of "total history" broadens the horizon of historical research, focuses on presenting all the situations concerning human survival and development, intervenes in historical research with macro-inductive methods, and strives to outline the total history based on extensive historical data.

Li Jiefei's "Typical Trilogy", especially the writing attitude and method of "Typical Year" is based on Braudel's "total history" and Huang Renyu's "macro-history" concept, expanding the horizon of literary research to the spiritual thoughts of human life and even the daily life. With the support of thick details, it is convenient to grasp the long period of history from a macro perspective. In the section "The State and the Revolution" of "Typical Year", it presents a great shock to the Chinese society in the "September 13". It revealed this special historical node through the unfolding of historical materials. Zhou Enlai was entrusted with a mission at a critical and difficult moment, began to fight against the extreme "left" trend of thought in the economic and diplomatic fields, and strived to normalize China's economy and society, which had been stalled since the cultural revolution. More importantly, the author also

revealed that this incident brought a spiritual fission impact to the Chinese from the level of psychology. Li Jiefei borrowed from Braudel's "three period" theory and placed 1972 in the sequence of China's social development causal chain to examine the significance of this year in the history of social events. "The 1970s, which looked like a pool of stagnant water, hid extremely dramatic spiritual changes... In the publicly visible side of the 1970s, the mental state was like a stagnant medieval, but it hid the other side of the lurking, but it is completely in the secular humanities of the great liberation of the Renaissance atmosphere. This was the biggest personality trait of the 1970s. It was indeed dead, but at the same time it was full of turbulent desires." [7]

In the "Typical Trilogy", Li Jiefei turned his attention to historical events and historical phenomena and combed the history. Based on his personal deepening historical understanding in the research process, "literature is tightly tied to politics and ideology; the power of the system is very strong; the individual is insignificant; and writing what and how to write are the prescribed actions, depending on the literary policy and deployment. The big things are almost accidental and isolated, and the whole situation is complicated, and there is a complicated and profound background. [8] Before the writing of the "Typical Trilogy", Li Jiefei had made a preliminary understanding of the particularity of Chinese contemporary literature in his works such as "The Way of Literature Production in the People's Republic of China" and "Interpretation of Yan'an: Literature, Intellectuals and Culture". It is revealed that the "Typical Trilogy" continues this historical thinking and explores the complex entanglement between contemporary literature and political system and ideology through the technical investigation of "mystery tracking".

#### V. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of literary history writing, Li Jiefei's "Typical Trilogy" is a "special" historical writing. He starts with Engels' "typical" theory and carefully combs and summarizes the complicated historical materials of contemporary literature. It will incorporate the biographical writing of personal experience and destiny into the investigation of the current situation. It will not be moral or not, but only emphasizes the historical presentation, and strives to do the basic work of Chinese contemporary literature and historical writing. In the process of combing history, the comprehensive generalization of historical materials is carried out from the perspective of "total history" and the perspective of "macro-history", and the historical writing of contemporary literature is transferred to the level of event history, phenomena history and social history. It wraps contemporary literature into the overall development and evolution of China's contemporary history from a macro perspective, while giving attention to the "thick description" of specific historical details. Through the numerous historical materials, such as dialing the clouds and seeing the historical truth under the cover of historical clouds, it is Li Jiefei's attempt and effort in adhering to his consistent philosophy of history in the "Typical Trilogy". The efforts to return to the literary history scene have enriched the depth and thickness

of Chinese contemporary literary history, and also clarified the historical context for the cognition and evaluation of specific literary creation.

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