

The Construction of Chinese Literary Discourse From the *Reinterpretation**

Dong Xi

School of Humanities and Foreign Languages
Xi'an University of Science and Technology
Xi'an, China

Abstract—Starting from Tang Xiaobing's *Reinterpretation: Popular Literature and Ideology*, this article attempts to deconstruct the worship of western literary discourse by Chinese domestic scholars, and proposes that literature is a product of a certain social and historical conditions, subject to historical realities and promoted by western literary theory. The sheer literary universal value does not exist. Literature cannot exist beyond class. "Politics" is the fundamental attribute of literature. This article proposes that Chinese Literary Discourse should be constructed on the premise of respecting the "political nature" of Chinese literature.

Keywords: Reinterpretation, Chinese literature, politics

I. INTRODUCTION

Tang Xiaobing brought a new perspective on rewriting literary history in *Reinterpretation: Popular Literature and Ideology*. "How can we imagine history" was hailed as the declaration of the New Left's view of literary history. Tang Xiaobing proposed the concept of "retrospection of modernity" in his text, while idealizing and rationalizing leftist literature, he attempted to deconstruct and reread the Chinese literature of the 20th century in the light of western literary theories. Throughout *Reinterpretation: Popular Literature and Ideology*, the content and structure of the book all reflect the Western centralism. Under the halo of many Chinese domestic scholars, the discourse power of Chinese literary theory has further weakened.

II. TEXT INTERPRETATION OF THE WESTERN DISCOURSE SYSTEM AND ELIMINATION OF NATIVE FEATURES OF CHINESE LITERATURE

The establishment of the Western discourse system is a process of continuously promoting the universal value of "literariness". Following the study of the French school of comparative literature, the parallel study advocated by the American school attempts to use "literariness" as the universal standard. The *Reinterpretation* re-reading the classics is a reinterpretation of classic works based on Western literary theories. The book *Reinterpretation* fully applied the theory of deconstruction, post-deconstruction,

feminism, and post-colonialism to Textual analysis, reconstruction of characters, and historical imagination of storyline. His research tends to regard Western literary theory as a common paradigm of Eastern and Western literature.

The literary phenomenon of the symbiosis of "politics" and "literariness" is a native characteristic inherent in Chinese literature, and "politics" is the fundamental attribute of Chinese literature. The history of the development of Chinese literature has developed in political ideals. Take revolutionary literature as an example: if revolutionary literature is not political, there would have no revolutionary literature. Chinese literature in the twentieth century was an important field where literary and political conflicts took place. Modern Chinese literature originated from the May 4th Movement. The literary revolution was based on the concept that a nation has its own habits and thinking, and therefore forming its unique style to express the national characteristics.

The problem of the national form of literature is commonly encountered in the development of various nationalities in the world. Mao Dun pointed out, "The national form is an art form that is rooted in the lives of the modern Chinese people and is familiar to the Chinese people. The so-called familiarity refers to the terminology, syntax, and form of expression of literary and artistic works, as well as the tone and color of the image; and it also refers to the living habits, local colors, and characters' smiles in the works." In the 1930s, during the Left League period, the "Research Society for the Popularization of Literature and Art" (文艺大众化研究会) was established, and *Popular Literature and Art* (大众文艺) was published to discuss the language, form, genre and creative content of literary works. After the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, how revolutionary literature cooperated with national liberation War became the focus of attention in the literary world. In October 1938, Mao Zedong pointed out in the article "The Position of the Communist Party of China in the National War" (中国共产党在民族战争中的地位), "We must learn to apply Marxist-Leninist theories to specific Chinese practices, ... to create fresh and lively Chinese style that is popular with the common people." The national form of Chinese revolutionary literature is a reflection of literature on the real world during the war. It is the result of discussion

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and practice of popularization and nationalization of literature since the May Fourth Movement. The model of “combination with politics” occupies an important position in the history of modern Chinese literature and even in the history of world revolutionary literature.

However, for the symbiosis of “literariness” and “politics”, Western studies during the Cold War mostly used the “political nature” of Chinese literature as the target and criticized it. The most fundamental reason for American experts to study modern Chinese literature is the need for the US government to collect political intelligence information, which shows that Chinese literature in the twentieth century coexisted with “literariness” and “politics”, and Western academics also know that literature cannot exist independently of politics.

In the article “*How can we imagine history*”, Tang Xiaobing briefly described the “political and literariness” of leftist literature as a retrospection of modernity. It seemed to jump out of the usual “political” literary attack of the American school, but obliterated the local characteristics of the “political nature” of Chinese twentieth-century literature. Tang Xiaobing has opened the way for the universal value of American literature in many miscellaneous terminology systems in Western literary theory, and deconstructed the “political nature” of Chinese literature.

III. THE FRAGMENTED LITERARY THEORY CONSTRUCTION BY REINTERPRETATION AND THE LOSS OF CHINESE LITERARY DISCOURSE

The *Reinterpretation* reinterprets classic works by the tool of Western literary theory. The objects of rereading are not purely literary works, but texts with specific ideological connotations, such as Xiao Hong's *Life and Death Field* (生死场), Ding Ling's *In the Hospital* (在医院中), Zhou Libo's *Storm* (暴风骤雨) and the modern plays like *White Hair Girl* (白毛女). The ideology embodied in such texts is exactly the “political nature” of Chinese literature in the 20th century.

After deconstructing literary works, *Reinterpretation* was one-sided and fragmented in the reconstruction and construction of literary theory. Taking the text analysis of *Reinterpretation* as an example, He Guimei (贺桂梅) pointed out in the article *Reinterpretation: Text Analysis and Historical Deconstruction* that at the level of specific text operations, the study of *Reinterpretation* includes three methods: first, examining the same text structural methods and genre characteristics at different historical stages, to identify conflicts and break-ins of different cultural forces; second, to discuss the relationship between specific rhetoric levels and ideology; third, to reread the text in the historical context, and to explore the ideological influence on the text all covered. Although such a research idea produced a huge response in the 1990s, however, *Reinterpretation* stopped at rereading the text. After fragmenting the deconstruction or decoding of the text, no complete research idea can be constructed over the coding system of the complex literary phenomenon of Chinese twentieth century literature.

Huang Fayou (黄发有) pointed out in the article *Cross-Cultural Cognition and Multi-Interaction* that foreign scholars' comments on modern Chinese literature “coexist with sobriety and misunderstanding, intersect with new ideas and prejudice.” In discussing the so-called “Overseas Scholars 'Shockwaves’”, Cheng Guangwei (程光炜) believed that “Overseas scholars' derivation of problems is not based on literary texts, but through theoretical presuppositions and bold substitutions. In this way, sometimes the indication of conversion is difficult to persuade.” Therefore, when translating and commenting on overseas research results, China domestic academic circles should give a critically review and comprehensively consideration.

An important reason for the slow pace of Chinese literature into the world of literature is the loss of the Chinese Literary Discourse. How to solve the “aphasia” in Chinese literary theory has been a major concern in the academic circle since the 1990s. In terms of construction of Chinese literary theory, the current research guideline in academia is to rebuild contemporary Chinese literary theory by studying and connecting western thought and culture; *Reinterpretation* is a typical westernized research thinking, and its fragmentary decoding and interpretation does not bring a complete transformation to the Literary Discourse of Chinese modern and contemporary literature after the clamor of western theoretical enthusiasm receded. It could be futile to attempt to build Chinese literary theory on these Western forms.

IV. THE COLLISION BETWEEN THE “POLITICAL NATURE” OF CHINESE LITERATURE AND THE SO-CALLED UNIVERSAL VALUES

The framework of literary theory must first consider the value of literary works and how to judge those values. The “political nature” of Chinese literature and the “literariness” advocated by the American school are, in essence, the collision between the local experience of Chinese literature and the so-called universal values. The West respects the universal value of literature and believes that the universal value of works is the criterion for judging good works. However, does the universal value of literature which can transcend class, history and national spirit really exist?

Chinese literature has a tradition of “carrying political ideas” since ancient times. In feudal society, literary works praise the virtues hearts and souls, which contain the political ideas of the landlord class; Chen Duxiu proposed to overthrow the three major doctrines during the literary revolution: To overthrow carved and immortal aristocratic literature, to build easy and lyrical national literature; to overthrow outdated, extravagant classical literature, to build fresh, sincere and realistic literature; to overthrow clumsy, difficult mountain forest literature (山林文学), to build a clear, understanding, popular social literature, which was the overthrow of feudal literature and the establishment of bourgeois literature and art. In the 1930s, left-wing literature rose in the tide of the revolution. Mao Zedong made it clear in Yan'an that literature should serve millions of working people. Proletarian New Literature entered the stage of

history. Modern Chinese literature in the 20th century was produced and developed during the life and death of the Chinese nation. The turbulent years of war gave Chinese modern literature a clear political color. And like Liang Shiqiu (梁实秋), at the moment of the nation's peril, the literature of love and hatred indulging in the personal world only ended with the criticism of Mr. Lu Xun. It can be seen that the particularity of the history of Chinese society has determined that Chinese literature has evolved in the different soils of political reality in the evolution of Chinese history.

The western literary theories represented by the United States cannot deny the political local experience in universal standards. The United States is the center of modern and contemporary Chinese literature research center. In 2011, in regards of "local experience" of literature, Davis, president of the magazine *Contemporary World Literature*, pointed out that in the 1930s and 1950s, The United States launched literature work to the world, so they were also discussing issues of "local experience" of literature. The 20th-century American Nobel Prize winners of literature have shown "political implication" in their literary creations. Based on the "local experience" of the United States, these winners have reflected issues of human universality, social order and international order in the context of internationalization. In this way, the United States has gradually formed its literary hegemony, and the so-called universality is only an embodiment of the "political nature" of literature in the United States.

Secondly, should the "political nature" of Chinese literature be succumbed to the "literariness" under the universal values? Take Chih-tsing Hsia (夏志清) as an example. In the early 1960s, Chih-tsing Hsia published *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, using "pure literature" as the sole criterion for judging literary works. However, the pure literature advertised by Chih-tsing Hsia's universal literary values is essentially bourgeois literature. In the book, Chih-tsing Hsia showed insults to left-wing writers, such as talking about Lu Xun's works with a slander and contempt, and evaluated patriotic literature as shallow, documentary, and fake realism. In his argument with Chih-tsing Hsia, Jaroslav Průšek (雅罗斯拉夫·普实克) believed that literature must explore not only social issues, but also ideological and political issues. And, Chih-tsing Hsia's own political and aesthetic prejudice in the practice of literary criticism, his disregard for literary historical mission and social mission, and his reliance on Western values and Western judgment standards have precisely weakened his advertised the universality of literature, and indicated that pure literature that transcends all classes does not exist. Under the so-called "pure literature" evaluation system, the time background of the birth of modern Chinese literature was obliterated, and the link between literature and history was cut off rigidly. Under this universal standard, the social function and mission of literature in that particular period became the targets of criticism.

Taking the May 4th new literature as an example, although the May 4th new literature is the beginning of

Chinese new literature, the process of its occurrence was a forced act. It is not a native literature spontaneously generated in China, but is subject to foreign ideological trend and produced under the influence of western culture. In the May 4th New Culture Movement, although the goal of the literary revolution was to enlighten the people, it was difficult to have a substantial impact on the general public because it was not a native literature. Intellectuals during the May 4th Movement were dissatisfied with literature under the influence of Western culture. So in the 1920s, The Creation Society (创造社) and The Sun Society (太阳社) appeared, and the early writers quickly moved to revolutionary literature and eventually to left-wing literature.

It can be seen that the writers saw the alienation of the influence of foreign literature from the reality of Chinese society, so they hoped to produce literature with a more local Chinese culture through their own social practices. The popularization of the left wing is the effort of literature to return to its native territory until the Yan'an period. Yan'an literature is a reflection on the May Fourth Literature, revolutionary literature, and left-wing literature, and is a type of literature with the most "political characteristics" of Chinese native literature. It can be seen from the history of the development of modern Chinese literature that the universal values in the West cannot stand the test of Chinese political local literary experience. In China, the literary works that truly enlightens the public are those keeping with the course of Chinese historical civilization and truly reflecting the reality. Chinese modern literature has always taken the nationalization and popularization of literature as its mission. This kind of literature synchronized with the times has shown its unique literary modernity and avant-garde in the process of being closely connected with politics.

V. CONCLUSION

The discourse construction of Chinese literary theory cannot be accomplished overnight. In terms of methodology, the restructuring of Chinese literary theories should make clear the relationship between creation and imitation. All literary and artistic forms are a reflection of production methods and production relations in a certain society. The integration of Chinese literary theory is to see the huge differences between Chinese and Western heterogeneous cultures. These differences are by no means simply reconcilable by Western theories. Blind doctrine will damage the great tradition of the nation. The study of foreign theories is necessary, but on the basis of imitation, it is proved that people should have their own thinking. The uncritical hard copying and imitation of ancients and foreigners in literature is the most unproductive and most harmful literature dogmatism and art dogmatism.

In terms of academic thought, we must examine the "heterogeneity" of Chinese literature from the perspectives of "literariness" and "politics", "universal value" and "local experience". Multidimensional thinking about Chinese literature faces different and complex issues. The "heterogeneous" environment mirrors the existence, exploring how Chinese modern and contemporary literature

accumulates local experience in a gradual way, fights for the discourse of Chinese literary theory, and integrates into world literature. "Politics" is the fundamental attribute of Chinese literature. In his speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, Mao Zedong pointed out, "In the present world, all culture or literature and art belong to a certain class and belong to a certain political line. Art for art, transcendent art, art parallel or independent of politics do not actually exist." Chinese literary theory should be based on the literary and artistic national form, and the network of the world, nation, and reality should be macroscopically analyzed.

In short, the overall development of Chinese literary theory is weak, and the system is yet to be perfected. Chinese domestic scholars should comprehensively and critically review the value judgments of Western theories on Chinese literature, avoid inattention and blindness, while respecting the unique local experience of the "political nature" of Chinese literature, rationally construct Chinese literature theory discourse, and re-establish status and significance of Chinese literature in the world literary.

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