

The Nationality and Cosmopolitanism of Modern Chinese Literary Tradition

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Abstract: Since the twentieth century, Chinese literary theory has manifested strong cosmopolitanism and nationality, presenting a modern tradition different from the classical literary tradition. The direction of literary tradition is an important path to continue the tradition and build a modern tradition of literary theory. Based on the world perspective, tracing the historical lineage of aesthetic research and literary practice, and scrutinizing the complex changes of Chinese literary theories in the world's literary theories are important content for the genesis of national literary theories nowadays. On the one hand, it is important to carefully review and sort out the discourse system on which the Chinese literary tradition has been based for the past one hundred years, so as to continue the essential spirit of the literary tradition. On the other hand, it is important to re-explore the way of occurrence of the literary tradition and the vitality in the discourse paradigm, so as to provide impetus for the modernization and internationalization of the modern Chinese literary theory.

Keywords: Literary tradition; Cosmopolitanism; Nationality; Language

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1. Introduction

The development of modern Chinese literary theory is closely related to medium, time, language, and national identity, and is a complex process of continuous development and evolution through constant contact with foreign literary theory. How to realize the modern transformation of Chinese literary theories in the cultural fusion of the ancient and the modern, the internal and the external, is not only an important path for the innovative development of the Chinese nation, but also a requirement of the times to face the international competition in the world. Since the 20th century, Chinese scholars in the construction of literary theories have, on the one hand, emphasized the research and influence of Western “human”-oriented literary criticism theory and aesthetics theory; on the other hand, they have been comparing and interpreting Chinese and Western literary theories, and looking at the Chinese literary theories and the world's literary theories with objective and dialectical eyes^[1].

2. Controversies in modern literary theory

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China continued to learn from the West, from artifacts to institutions to spirituality, and more and more theorists realized the correlation between literary change and social change. Scholars specializing in the translation of literary theories appeared relatively late in China, and more theoretical scholars like Wang Guowei and Liang Qichao took the initiative to translate and disseminate the literary theories of other countries, and to actively learn from the Western-centered literary theories of the world.

The modern Chinese literary theorists, represented by Wang Guowei, have fully embodied their literary and artistic theories that transcend the origin of Chinese culture in specific texts. Wang Guowei's idea of "breaking down Chinese and foreign views" is essentially a challenge to the linear view of the past and a dismantling of the barriers between Chinese tradition and Western modernity. The development of Chinese literary theories is constantly derived from the process of practice, and at the same time, it is also a continuation of the literary theories of its predecessors. The influence of Western literary theory on China is not only theoretical, but also manifested in practice. The modern Chinese intellectuals represented by Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, and Xia Zengyou reconstructed the ancient Chinese traditional culture from the modern concept of the nation-state, and created such national literary concepts as "Chinese novel" and "Chinese literature." This set of concepts was derived from Western learning and Japanese cultural contexts, and is intrinsically and closely related to Western concepts of literature and its categorization. This concept is widely recognized, on the one hand, as being founded in the roots of traditional Chinese culture, and on the other hand, as the emergence and establishment of the modern concept of the nation-state. It is thus clear that his attitude towards world literary theories and cultures was open, equal, friendly, and complementary. This fully illustrates the consensus of literary theory researchers at that time on the ownership of Chinese culture, i.e., Chinese literature and Chinese literary theories belonged to the Chinese nation and at the same time to world literature.

During the same period, the "Guo Min Jing Shen", "Guo Cui", and so on, were further emphasized by scholars, and in 1902, Huang Jie published "The Preservation of the National Essence", which was echoed by Zhang Taiyan, Liu Shipei, and others. In the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun and Hu Shi emphasized the need to distinguish between national essence and national dregs with a critical attitude and scientific spirit, so as to sort out the existing theories and realize the purpose of inheriting the spirit of classical literature and art in traditional academics. In 1911, Liang Qichao's "Zhong Guo Qian Tu Zhi Xi Wang Yu Guo Min Ze Ren", based on his support for Yan Fu's "Drumming up the people's power, opening up the people's wisdom, and renewing the people's morality", revealed that "national essence" was the most important principle of China's future. In 1911 Liang Qichao's "Zhong Guo Qian Tu Zhi Xi Wang Yu Guo Min Ze Ren" supported Yan Fu's idea of "Gu Min Li, Kai Min Zhi, Xin Min De", exposed the four weaknesses of China's national character, and put forward the idea of national character, and emphasized the need for the people to "Jian Lie Xia Zhi Gen Xing" and develop "Wan Cui Zhi Pin Ge."

The development of literary theory and criticism in the early 20th century was mainly characterized by the conflict and fusion of the dichotomy between the political and religious centrism and the aesthetic centrism. These two values not only reflect the distinctive characteristics of traditional Chinese literary criticism but also the profound influence of Western literary theory systems, aesthetic thought, and humanism. Of course, these two critical concepts, related to the specific social conditions and social culture of the feudal era, have a specific significance for the times. Whether from the perspective of disciplinary construction or from specific theoretical and practical activities, it is not difficult to see that Chinese literary theory draws on the world's excellent literary

theories. In addition, Cai Yuanpei's "Digestion of Civilization" and "Combination of Eastern and Western Cultures", Liang Qichao's "Record of the Heart of European Travels", and Lu Xun's "Moro Poetry and Power" and other writings on literary theories are not a simple substitution of China for the West, or of the West for China, let alone of China plus the West. On the contrary, in the process of learning from the West, their literary theories emphasized the fusion, innovation, and regeneration of the East and the West, led by the Chinese national spirit. The concept of pure literature that emerged in China during this period reflects the fact that the interpretation of world literature based on the paradigm of modern Western literary theory was greatly utilized in the Chinese literary world. It also illustrates that the entry of foreign doctrines in the process of globalization produces a multitude of new perspectives, which, despite certain contradictions and exclusions, can always complement each other in specific cultural contexts and work together to promote the understanding and creation of cosmopolitan literary theories.

3. The beginning of modern literary theory

In 1919, a linguistic movement similar to that which took place at the beginning of the formation of certain major modern Western nation-states, the vernacular language movement, took place in China, which was a thorough and intense linguistic movement of anti-traditional gestures. This movement was not a complete abandonment of the original written language, nor was it simply the use of dialectal colloquialisms for writing, but rather the creation of a new written language based on the absorption of elements of literary and colloquialisms, which was then popularized and made into the common language of the nation. This is profoundly reflected in the fact that the script retained the beauty of ancient images while absorbing foreign phonetic systems, meeting the requirements of simplicity of expression in the modern sense.

The change of literary language from classical Chinese to vernacular language, ancient poetry to modern free verse, and Peking opera to drama marked the end of the classical Chinese form of literary theory and criticism. To put it simply, this linguistic change prompted Chinese literary theory to gradually abandon its past metaphorical criticism and fragmented writing style, and to use more of the holistic research methods of modern Western science. Along with the change in literary language and style, there was also a change in literary concepts, i.e., a shift from the traditional lyrical concept of literature to the realistic and narrative concept of literature. On the basis of the accumulation of literary change, more and more Western literary theories and aesthetic ideas were introduced into China.

The "Creation Society" represented by Zhou Zuoren and Guo Moruo discussed the nature of art, i.e., whether it is pure or purposive, and whether the beauty of art can achieve the realization of human nature. The appearance of Zhu Guangqian's monographs such as "Poetry" and "Psychology of Literature and Art" during this period shows that modern Chinese intellectuals have not been completely hostage to Western literary theories and ideas, and that the memory of the traditional Chinese culture to a certain extent counteracted the European-centered construction of the literary world. He wrote in "Poetry in the Words of Zhi" that "the importation of Western culture has changed our idea of 'history' and our idea of 'literature'." [2]. He puts the concepts of "Shi Yan Zhi", "Bi Xing", "Shi Jiao", and "Zheng Bian" in the context of a larger historical view for examination, reflecting classical Chinese compositional theory. Zhu Ziqing's modern interpretative poetics is a reflection of the classical Chinese theory of creativity, which embodies the concept of "all-embracing." Zhu Ziqing's modern poetic thought is gradually accomplished through the two-way absorption and fusion of modern Western criticism and traditional methods of poetic interpretation, which is a modern reconstruction of theoretical methods and a dynamic new form

of literary theory.

From 1919 to 1949, before and after the founding of China, various trends of literary theory developed rapidly in the process of controversy, and were characterized by “pluralistic modernity.” Intellectuals at this stage, on the one hand, were deeply imbued with classical culture and had great enthusiasm for traditional Chinese literary theories; on the other hand, they also actively accepted the influence of foreign literary and artistic thoughts and had a deep understanding of foreign cultures, showing a tendency to transform classical aesthetics into modern aesthetics. Influenced by other literature, paintings, movies, music and theater, they not only pursued Western modern literary ideas, such as free thinking, aestheticism and other literary trends, but also integrated traditional Chinese classical literary ideas, such as harmony, rhyme and other traditional aesthetic pursuits, and ultimately created modern literature and art with Chinese characteristics.

The special logic of the literary world is to ignore ordinary geographical and political factors to define literature as a unified world field (or a world field on the way to unification). It is difficult to realize the construction of the national literary theory through the rapid transplantation and application of foreign theories, and it is also impossible to realize the real meaning of mutual interpretation in different language expressions when the fence of cultural contexts cannot be broken down^[3]. Chinese literary theory has great inclusiveness, and the translation and application of foreign theories, such as the theories of sublimity and magnificence, embodiment and acquiescence, beauty and taste, blankness and rhyme, etc., have been widely and deeply researched in modern Chinese literary theory. The use of foreign literary theories, especially Western literary theories, gave rise to a more profound reflection in the late 1990s on the generalization and meaninglessness of Chinese-Western mutual interpretations caused by differences in cultural contexts.

Literary theory from 1919 to 1949 was both a theoretical reflection on literary works and, at the same time, a theoretical achievement of hyperliteracy. The emergence of Marxist-guided literary theories with Chinese characteristics during this period not only rapidly became a mainstream voice in China, but was also translated in large numbers to Japan, the United States, Germany, Italy, and other countries, exerting a significant influence on Western scholars such as Nick Wright, Pushcock, and Dubney, and facilitating exchanges and interactions between Chinese and Western literary theorists. In the process of research, foreign scholars found that a large number of literary works were involved, which indirectly promoted Western scholars’ understanding and research of classical Chinese literature and art. These literary theories are the theories of individual scholars, as well as supra-individual literary theories. The process of literary theory development is not a simple westernization of the transformation of traditional culture, but a fusion of tradition and modernity, China and the world. Shen Congwen’s “Impressionistic Criticism”, Li Changzhi’s “Biographical Criticism”, and Li Jianwu’s “Essayistic Criticism” have implanted modern Western critical discourse on the outside, but creatively inherited and developed ancient Chinese literary theories on the inside. Inheriting and developing the ancient Chinese literary criticism styles, this stage of scholars’ “Western” road is actually the “Eastern” road; the process is complex and continuous^[4].

4. The complex development of modern literary theory

From the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, China’s national consciousness was further established, and the future direction of Chinese literary theory was basically laid down. The development of Chinese literary theory in this period went through three main stages: first, the development at the early stage of the founding of New China; second, the literary controversy from the 1950s to the mid-1960s; and third, the decade of the Cultural Revolution at the end

of the 1960s and 1970s. The theoretical discussions of Li Zehou and Qian Zhongshu laid the foundation for the development of Chinese literary theory, with the continuation of national beliefs and traditional characteristics as well as the tendency to participate in world literature; the practice of overseas Chinese literature and art by Xia Zhiqing and Zhang Eiling broadened the path for the later study of Chinese novels; and the translation and dissemination of the theory of modern Chinese literature and art around the world with Mao Zedong as an example, fully embodied the literary world's internal The globalization of literary theory and its structure.

The globalized development of literary theory and structural ethnocentrism draws on the discussion of the interaction between the individual and society and its internal changes, which are extremely obvious in the metaphorical nature of language. The transformation of Li Zehou's literary thought in the context of globalization reflects the co-temporality of historical events influencing the historical trajectory of literary theory development in an entangled pattern.

In the face of the richness and variability of the literary world, Qian Zhongshu's *The Collection of Seven Embellishments* is based on the subjectivity and independence of literature, emphasizing the dialectical unity of the relationships between the East and the West, borrowing and innovation, tradition and modernity, inheritance and development, and so on, so as to achieve a state of open and tolerant development. He pointed out that "pain is more capable of producing poetry than pleasure" is a common phenomenon in both Chinese and Western literary traditions, which illustrates the interoperability between the East and the West. With his typical global perspective, he blends the East and the West, the past and the present, and provides a paradigm for the interpretation and acceptance of Chinese and Western literary ideas, concepts, and methods, which is still of great significance to the construction of modern literary theories nowadays. Qian Zhongshu skillfully utilizes palimpsests and proverbs from many countries, such as England, France, and Germany, etc., and takes all human literature as the object of his examination with a broad cosmopolitan vision and a distinctly modern stance, not only assembling the outstanding classical works of national literature, but also embodying a cosmopolitan outlook that is different from that of Western-centrism. The readers of the world are mainly dominated by the official languages of the central countries. Therefore, Qian Zhongshu, who was in a non-central language, was bound by the ruling regional language of literature, English, in his specific practical activities.

In short, in terms of modern literary thought's acceptance of Western literary thought and literary tradition, both content and form began to shift from pluralism to monism. More importantly, this process of transformation, which no longer favored the interaction of European countries with themselves, but with Soviet or other regions and countries, was orienting the construction of modern world literary theory. At the same time, clarifying such important issues as local and global, national and world, classical and non-classical is of great significance for further research on the theory of national and world literature.

5. Recognition and reconstruction of modern literary theory

Against the background of globalization in the development of the literary world, literary theorists and countries, civilizations, and collectives do not develop in isolation, but are related to each other. Along with China's reform and opening to the outside world, the process of marketization and aesthetic daily life has brought about the gradual emergence of Chinese contemporary literary theory in the global literary world. The national and local tradition of literary criticism exists "a priori" in the collision and fusion of Chinese and Western literary discourses, and has formed a hidden or visible expression in the development of Chinese literary theory. Zhou Youguang puts

forward the theory of “biculturalism”: “The era of globalization is the era of biculturalism. People of all countries ‘co-create, share, and common’ international modern culture, while preserving and renewing the traditional culture of the region”, which also includes “the two-way process of specialization of universality and universalization of particularity”^[5-6]. In the process of modernization and development with Chinese characteristics, the development of Chinese literature and art is a new quality of literary theory formed under the double fusion of traditional-national literary theory and contemporary-worldly literary theory vision.

In the 1980s, the connection and flow between China and the world became closer, and the relationship between the individual, the state, the market, the intellectuals, and the public became intertwined, presenting a different landscape from the past literary import. China’s cultural community, formed under the influence of thousands of years of history and tradition, will not easily lose its strong centripetal force and independent thinking. Even if, in order to further realize the renaissance of China, Chinese scholars translate and introduce a large number of foreign literary theories, Chinese scholars are still able to consciously choose and take the initiative to cater to the national expectations of the world’s literary theories in these two or more heterogeneous cultures. On the basis of constant comparison and interpretation with the established literary theories, the ways of deleting, replacing, simplifying, reconstructing, and even hijacking the established literary theories show the independence and creativity of Chinese scholars’ understanding of literary theories. In the controversy of theories, disintegration and reorganization were carried out in the course of development, and division and combination, antagonism and unification alternated and mixed with each other, which jointly promoted the national literary theories to the world.

During this period, creators coincidentally changed from the “big narrative” to a personal “small narrative”, emphasizing more on the aesthetic criticism of personal feelings. New ideas, new spirit, new methods, and new forms were presented in the context of the new era. Literary theories showed the same mechanism of change as culture, paying more attention to similarities than differences in circulation. Chinese literary researchers living in different regions adhere to the principles of purely literary objectivity and truthfulness in the selection and study of writers and works. In the words of Panofsky, this instinctive response is the “literary habit” of the space he has been bending^[7]. The creator’s love for the world of literature forms a specific “literary habit”, i.e., inheriting the artistic expression of traditional literature, in order to achieve inner conviction. Maintaining a Chinese and Western knowledge structure and a broad multicultural vision is one of the ways to reach the peak of art.

Since the twentieth century, Chinese literature has evolved from the political and religious demands of lyricism to the realistic choice of awakening the people, and then to the market demands of being based on the people and satisfying the aesthetic psychology of the masses, causing a great uproar in the literary world. Xia Zhiqing, who has long insisted on the study of the pure world of literature, has developed a writing perspective that is different from that of the early Japanese and Western “history of imaginary Chinese literature.” From his literary practice and theoretical criticism, on the one hand, their expectation of fairness in the literary world can be seen; on the other hand, it also shows that the development of modern Chinese literary criticism will not march in the way of “homogeneity”, but rather expresses the pursuit of world plurality and the thinking of ethnicity in various possibilities. It can be said that the tradition of modern Chinese literary criticism has been deeply integrated with the atmosphere of dialogue between the Chinese self and the foreign Western other in the era of “China of the World”, forming a specific discourse system and its uniqueness^[8].

The content of modern Chinese literary theory has actively absorbed another literary system, and has continuously attempted to circulate its works in other literary systems. In this process, Chinese literary theory

involves not only the classical literary theories that have been imbued with the local culture, but also the ideological connotations beyond the linguistic components of the global literary theories that have been “embraced.” Facing the requirement of revitalizing Chinese contemporary literary theory, in the impact of the fusion of Chinese local and foreign cultures, creating a national literary theory that is not identical with the pilgrimage and pursuit of the Western-centered literary world as seen in the West is not only a basic requirement for the development of literary theory, but also a practical need for the nation to gain the right of literary discourse.

In short, there is incommensurability between cultural externals, and so is the study of literary theory. In contrast to the distinction between universal and portable “national forms” and the specific cultural representations of “national forms” at the theoretical level, Chinese scholars have been deepening their understanding of the meaning of the term “nation” and the way it is practiced, and they have been able to understand the meaning of “nation” and the way it is practiced, as well as the way it is practiced. Chinese scholars have continued to deepen their understanding of the meaning of the term “nation” and the way it is practiced, placing them in a global context. Modern Chinese literary theory, as an important component of the overall construction of global culture for the future of mankind, has made the transition from purely national culture to the aesthetic culture of each body in the sense of the overall aesthetic culture of mankind, and in the process of adhering to the trend of historical development, and with the humanistic spirit as a guideline, it has truly realized the fusion of the aesthetic culture of the general public with the vision of the elegant culture, and the fusion of the traditional national culture with the vision of contemporary global culture and contemporary cosmopolitan culture.

6. Conclusion

World literary theory has a wide scope, the internal flow of the literary world is extremely complicated, and there are many external factors influencing the development of literary theory. The changes in Chinese literary theory cannot simply be applied from the model of economic globalization to the examination of national literature in the context of globalization. The nationalism and popularity required by modern Chinese literary theory reflect the “encapsulation” of foreign cultures, and the constant application of foreign theories, or even new methodological practices inspired by misinterpretation, is extremely different from the theoretical context of the cultural system to which it belongs. Faced with the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, millions of scholars consciously incorporate the excellent foreign theories into the historical and cultural memory of the nation, realizing the internalization and regeneration, and at the same time demonstrating the inheritance and promotion of the national factors. Putting the development of modern Chinese literary theory in the world’s perspective shows China’s enthusiasm in communicating and exchanging with the world, and also illustrates the entanglement and connection between Chinese literary theory and the world’s literary theory. In the process of theoretical practice and construction, Chinese scholars have always insisted on treating the achievements of world literary theories with a global vision and an open multicultural perspective, leaving the imprint of their own research tradition and influencing the present.

The emergence of different literary phenomena in the world literary theory is not a rigid copy of the Chinese literary theory, but is created, changed, and exchanged. The traditional critical style of Wang Guowei’s commentary, Zhou Zuoren’s critical principle of daily life, and Li Jianwu’s critical method of beautiful writing not only show the national imprint and personal charm of literary criticism in a specific historical period, but also fully reflect the worldwide development of literary theory. Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Li Zehou, Zhu

Guangqian, and so on, who had both a sense of rootedness in tradition and a very deep origin in Western learning, invariably adopted a cosmopolitan vision to re-examine classical Chinese culture.

Linguistic changes and economic reforms have brought about a pluralistic modernity in the discussion of literary theories. Among them, language has profoundly influenced the modernity and cosmopolitanism of modern literary theory development. With the long historical imprint of the Chinese nation, a short period of foreign cultural impact cannot completely overthrow the traditional culture of the past. The rise of China has prompted China to rethink its own national consciousness, and in the past two decades, China no longer tends to rush to foreign literary theories, but thinks about how to link the excellent world literary theories with its own nation in the real situation. Emphasis on rationality will lead to the over-expansion of instrumental rationality, and the traditional literary discourse in the past is not the same as that in the contemporary “globalized industry”, “information age”, “image age”, or “post-emotional age.” How to realize the symbiosis between traditional literature and art in the “Gao Shan Yang Zhi”, “Jing Hang Hang Zhi”, “Ji Mu You You”, and “Mei Jie Cheng Wu” needs to be solved urgently. In the process of building the modernity of Chinese literary theory, the act of treating and instrumentalizing literature and art only as tools can no longer be continued in the past practice, but should also focus on the combination of instrumental rationality and humanism to realize the construction of national, aesthetic, humanistic and individual modernization theories.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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