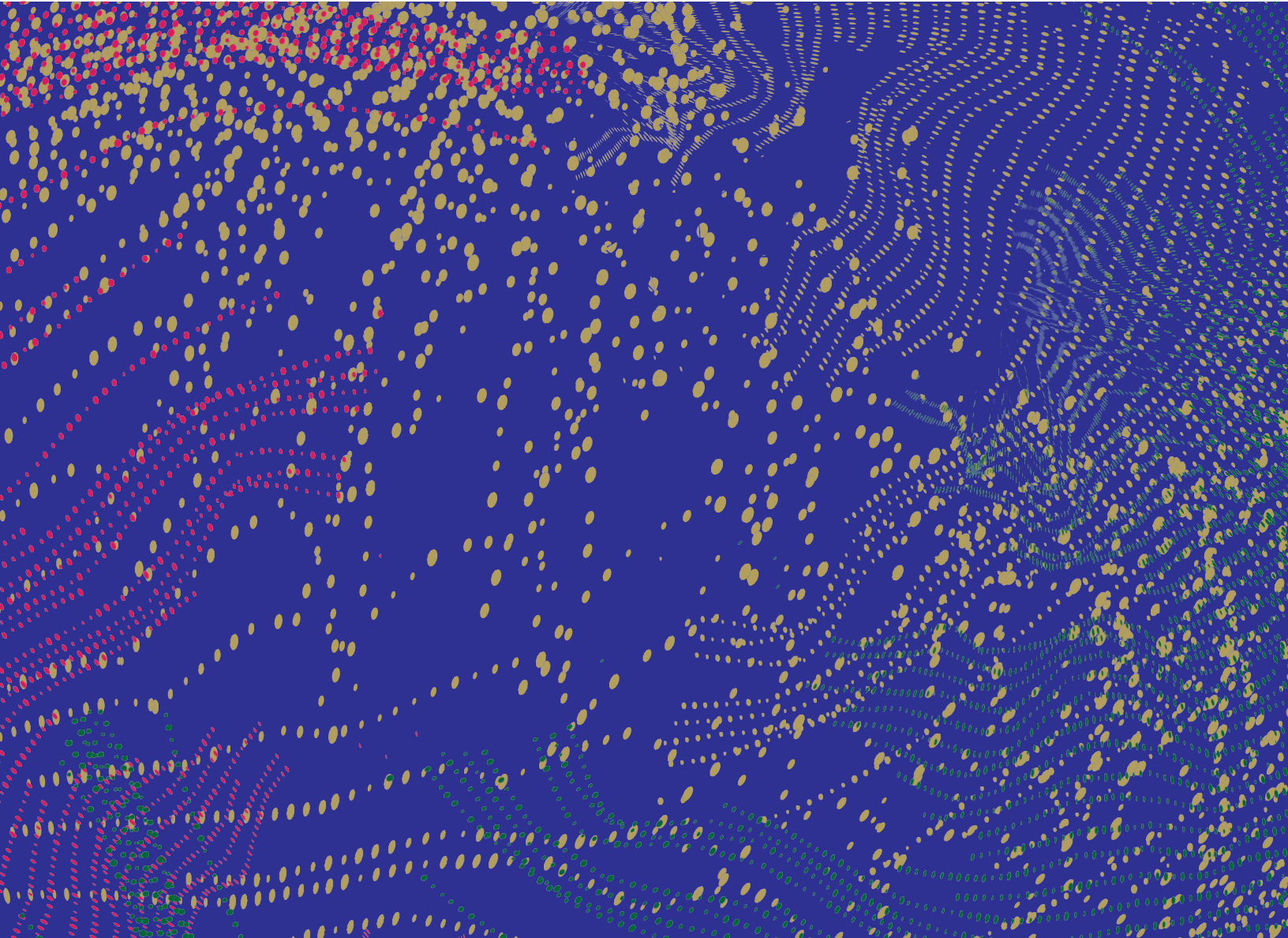


The World Humanities Report

Modern Chinese Literature

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Modern Chinese Literature

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Modern Chinese literature traditionally refers to the “New Literature” produced during the thirty-year period from the May Fourth movement in 1919 to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The establishment of this discipline began in the 1950s. The distinction between early modern (1840–1919) and modern can be traced back to Mao Zedong’s 1940 essay *On New Democracy*, which delineates the differences between the “new democratic revolution” and the “old democratic revolution” stages. From its inception, the field of modern Chinese literature did not arise as a purely academic pursuit but as a cultural and political space, doubly determined by a revolutionary movement and a national ideology. From 1950 to 1970 modern literature studies was suffused with ideology and struggle. On the one hand, this made it difficult for research to achieve “independence” and “scientificity,” even reduced it to a tool of political criticism. On the other hand, this politization of modern Chinese literature meant that it no longer participated in social life in a general way, but instead acted, with political sensitivity and tension, as an ideological resource for ordinary readers, researchers, and politicians. In fact, the May Fourth New Literature emerged in a moment of crisis in China’s modern transformation and was a product of the collisions and amalgamations of a cultural, intellectual, political, and social revolution, preserving the energy to endlessly inspire new cultural and political imaginings.

While the interpretation of modern Chinese literature in the first three decades of the PRC certainly carried a distinctly utilitarian political cast, it has continued to maintain, and even strengthen, the tension between literature and politics. It also established the study of Chinese modern literature as central to the discipline of literature and underscored its wide social influence. Since the 1950s, History of Modern Chinese Literature has been a compulsory, core course in the Chinese departments at all universities. Its position has overtaken the traditional place of classical Chinese studies as the backbone of Chinese departments, necessitating a significant growth of research and teaching staff.

After the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the chains of decisionism and instrumentalism were broken, and modern Chinese literature studies became preoccupied with recovering the “historical character” of literary history, criticizing the common practice of “leading historical analysis with established theoretical frameworks” and “letting theory take the place of history,” promoting “arguments derived from historical facts,” and forging the “scientific” character of modern Chinese literature studies. The emphasis on “scientificity” at this time, however, did not weaken the energy of modern literary studies for participating in the “ideological emancipation movement” of the 1980s. To a large degree, modern Chinese literature studies, represented by the Lu Xun studies, played a leading role in the “ideological emancipation” of the 1980s. After all, this ideological emancipation called for a return to the May Fourth movement, the origin of the modern ideological emancipation movement, under the ideals of rebuilding an Enlightenment stance and “reevaluating all values.” Topics such as understanding and elucidating of the spirit of May Fourth or the unearthing of the democratic movements in Kuomintang (KMT) ruled area during the war against Japan became hot issues of study during this time. Authors whose work involved democratic or humanistic thinking—such as Lu Xun (1881–1936), Ba Jin (1904–2005), Bing Xin (1900–1999), Mao Dun (1896–1981), Guo Moruo (1892–1978), Hu Feng (1902–1985), Hu Shi (1891–1962), Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), and Shen Congwen (1902–1988), among others—received serious attention. This rebellious, freedom-creating, and fiercely critical New Literature tradition nurtured a generation of youth who were striving for subjectivity after the trauma of revolution.

The 1980s was an age of literature and also an age of youth seeking subjectivity. Young scholars were no longer content to be prudent, discreet, and cautious, as in the previous era of collective research. They began to cultivate thinking rich in individualism and forms of expression with individual hues. During the “spring of science,” or reform and opening up, which began in 1978, institutions of higher education and of humanities and social sciences rebuilt and expanded, and, as they returned to cultivating graduate students, they produced the first post-Cultural Revolution cadre of graduate students. At one time, four generations of scholars competed on the same field,¹ reaching an apex

¹ At the “Xiandai wenxue yanjiu chuangxin zuotanhui” [Modern Literature Studies Innovation Forum], convened in Beijing in November of 1988, four generations of scholars were delineated: The first generation were the elders from the early years of the founding of the nation and the founding of the discipline; the second generation were those who graduated from

of academic research, as several generations enjoyed the period of reform and opening up and the optimism of modernization. The cooperation of differing generations of scholars led to energetic progress and an academic community of mutual aid and support.

The primary issue in renewing the academic framework was to push beyond the effect that *On New Democracy*, which carries a heavy scent of revolutionary stage theory, had had on the structural rules of modern Chinese literary history, while also pushing beyond the mechanism of judgment and rejection that led to the dividing of literary works into the politically inflected categories of “mainstream,” “tributary,” and “countercurrent.” To this end, new issues such as the use of the new category “twentieth-century Chinese literature”² and the adoption of a holistic view of Chinese New Literature arose, all part of attempts to use the inherent logic of literary phenomena to break through the dividing lines between early modern, modern, and contemporary literature. The hope was to replace political stance with “literary achievement” to reevaluate authors. The goal was to shift modern literature from a base of revolutionary history to one of literature. The areas associated with this new direction are subjectivity and the self, internally, and “world literature” and “century literature,” externally. Comparative literature and influence study then became new directions for breakthroughs.

Although the literature of the 1980s did indeed attempt to shake off political interference in search of autonomy and move with the wave of “democratization” of the time, the power within still maintained a high degree of politicized energy. Because of this, rejecting politics became a challenging political position. The “rewrite literary history” movement of the late 1980s has had such wide-ranging influence and controversy but is suffused with this paradox. The

university in the 1950s and 1960s; the third generation were the first couple of waves trained as graduate students after the Cultural Revolution; and the fourth generation were those doctoral students who graduated in the 1980s and later. “Xiandai wenxue yanjiude kunhuo yu chulu (bitan)” [Difficulties and solutions in modern literature studies (Conversation)], in *Beifang luncong*, no. 2 (1989): 39.

² “Twentieth-century Chinese literature” is a scholarly conception put forward by Huang Ziping, Qian Liqun, and Chen Pinyuan in 1986. The idea was to break through the divisions of the “late Qing,” “modern,” and “contemporary” periods of literary history scholarship in order to grasp them all as a whole. It summarized “twentieth-century Chinese literature” as having the following features: a total field of vision of “world literature”; seeing education as the transformation of the national spirit; “desolation” as its core aesthetic characteristic; and the modernization of language and modes of thinking.

part of the movement that drew the most attention was its attack on “predetermined literary history conclusions.” In actuality, the main targets of this attack were the practices of revolutionary literature, left-wing literature, and socialist literature and art that had been held up as “mainstream.” In this way, it could break down the political dividing lines that had been drawn by the starting point of the New Era, the *boluan fanzheng* [eliminating chaos and returning to normal] period. However, its gesture of challenge was to raise up the autonomy, independent value, and aesthetic quality of literature. Because literature constructed in this way was antagonistic toward politics, in seeking to exclude political elements, it “purified” and narrowed literature.³

When an end was put to the political turmoil of the 1980s, it seemed that the era of literature had disappeared as well and that what took its place was a crisis of literature. Scholars discovered to their surprise that “even in the times of literature’s most ‘sensational influence,’ what the public paid most attention to wasn’t literature, but the nonliterary things wrapped up in literature’s outer clothing.”⁴ In the 1990s the literary constructions that had been shared in public life, cultural and academic circles, and among artistic creators and commentators were under assault from the trend of political conservatism and the rise of the era of the market economy. Intellectuals who lost influence between the 1980s and 1990s hoped that the field of knowledge could become a fortress in defense of such principles as humanistic spirit, ultimate care, and rational ideals. And in the early 1990s modern literature studies suffered attacks of spiritual confusion, a decline in the status of humanities studies, and an erosion of personnel. Nonetheless, the innovative energy laid down in the 1980s continued to produce results in the field of academic research. In 1994, on behalf of the Modern Chinese Literature Association, Fan Jun issued a report, “Our Discipline: No Longer A Youth, Moving Toward Maturity,” which systematically summed up the results achieved in modern and contemporary literature since

³ One of the supporters of the “rewrite literary history” movement, Chen Sihe, maintained that literary history should not become a vassal of social, political, cultural, or intellectual history but should emphasize its artistic and aesthetic characteristics. It must, he wrote, “be taken away from under the subordination of the entire traditional education of revolutionary history and made an independent, aesthetic discipline of literary history.” *Jiaobu Ji* [The collection of footsteps] (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2010), 82.

⁴ Wang Xiaoming et al., “Kuangyeshangde feixu—wenzue he renwen jingshende weiji” [Ruins in the wilderness—The crisis of literature and the human spirit], in *Renwen jingshen xunsilu* [A record of humanist thought] (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996), 1.

the New Era.⁵ In it, he showed that each year the discipline produced dozens of monographs and thousand or so articles and over the years that means hundreds of books and tens of thousands of articles, including around three hundred monographs and six thousand articles on Lu Xun alone. The amount of scholarly production far surpassed that of any other field of modern Chinese studies. Whether in terms of quantity or quality, the ideal of establishing an academically autonomous discipline “with a scientific shape and independent character,”⁶ for which the 1980s had so yearned, had been, to a certain extent, achieved, even if the realization of this ideal had also been imperceptibly accompanied by the gradual loss of its ability to be involved and interact with political and social thought.

After the 1990s, the problematic of modern Chinese literature studies was more and more being decided by the logic of the discipline itself, such as the expansion of the scope of the discipline, the use of new theories and methods, the reevaluation and exploration of authors and texts, the translation and introduction of works from overseas scholars, the discovery of historical data and textual research, among others. These areas produced new scholarly growth. However, the promotion of academic standards aimed to construct an academic space that has true academic autonomy can resist the force of indirect and direct political and economic interference and is also able to fill the gaps created by the excessively self-confident interventions of the 1980s.

Because of this, many of the topics that academia focused on in the 1990s came focused on issues in modern intellectual and academic thought. At the same time, these were topics needing to be faced within the transformation of the state and society. For example, the introduction of notions such as “communalism,” “public space,” “critical space,” and “organic intellectuals” gave rise to a great deal of research on magazines, periodicals, public opinion spaces, publishing houses, bookstores, school education, and city spaces. This allowed modern literature studies to step beyond the framework of texts and literature and enter into the system of literary production. This type of research echoed the real trend of flourishing of mass media, public media, and publishing in the

⁵ Fan Jun, “Womende xueke: Yijing buzai nianqing, zhengzai zouxian chengshu” [Our discipline: No longer a youth, moving toward maturity], in Fan Jun, *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue lunji* [Essays on modern Chinese literature] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2006), 484.

⁶ Yan Jiayan, “Xin shiqi 15 niande zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu” [Chinese modern literature studies in the 15 years of the new era], in *Zhongguo wenxue nianjian 1994* [The Chinese literature almanac 1994] (Beijing: Sheke wenxian chubanshe, 1995), 37.

1990s, creating a new method of linking modern literature to public opinion and causing a breakthrough in the literary studies space that was able to quickly create a public product thanks to transformations in publishing and media. For example, research on writers such as Zhou Zuoren, Shen Congwen, Qian Zhongshu, and Zhang Ailing became very popular, quickly resulting in these authors being newly published. These developments in the 1990s also brought out new meaning in the social research of modern literature. Traditional Marxist analysis was thought to place emphasis on social determinism, but a distorted Marxist analysis has replaced the true Marxist method, focusing on the political inclination of the author and the work instead of seeing literary ideology as “the sum of all social relations.” According to Fan Jun, “These days, these studies [gender studies, religious studies, and regional studies] introduce important aspects of societal practice and social life combined with important issues in the sociology of art and literature into our research. And in fact, these studies uses them as a critical basis to explain and judge the occurrence and development of modern Chinese literature. This and only this is the true meaning of sociological research.”⁷ At the same time, under the influence of the cultural mood in the 1980s and 1990s, researchers stepped up efforts to see literature as a cultural vector for a multiplicity of meanings and pushed to unearth feminist consciousnesses, religious feeling, regional color, and more, especially in analysis of women authors, as this furthers the importance of the women’s liberation movement within revolutionary history. It also carries with it the “emergence on the horizon of history” of feminism after the New Era.⁸

Beyond the issues drawn from sociological point of view, a critical consideration of modernity has stirred up a deeper point of reflection in modern Chinese literature. At the end of the 1980s, with a deeper understanding of May Fourth, the ideals of modernization that had pressed for ideological reform and the desire of the thought and cultural circles to return to the May Fourth Enlightenment had begun to be questioned. Analysis of the May Fourth expression “homogeneity of attitudes” and Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” gradually came to touch on the complexity and contradictions within Chinese modernity. Of course, “modernity” has historically been expressed in terms of a goal

⁷ Fan Jun, “Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan: You yige shinian” [Chinese modern literature studies collection: Another decade], in Fan Jun, *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue lunji*, 467.

⁸ Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao—Zhongguo xiandai nüxing wenxue yanjiu* [Emerging on the horizon of history: Studies in Chinese women’s literature] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chubanshe, 1993).

of totality, but that which has been brought about in its pursuit is a series of contradictory systems.⁹ When the “modern” that was set as the goal has been returned to the problematic “modernity,” the factors that are under tension within modern thought and historical practice cannot continue to be brought into the narrative of linear teleology. Rather, their internal oppositions, contestations, and balancing must be analyzed. “Reassessing modernity” is not a new mythology or a comprehensive explanation, and it must return to function as a process of rational differentiation of the social-cultural project of “modernity.” It must analyze the knowledge systems behind it and the practical pathways of imagination. Because of this, “to reassess modernity, we must rethink the intellectual systems of modernity.”¹⁰

This kind of reflection on intellectual discourse has brought about a series of investigations tracing the genealogy of keywords such as “science,” “the individual,” “national character,” “progress,” and “literature” in modern Chinese literature studies. This move breaks through the traditional research categories of the Chinese New Literature by tracing the evolution of these discourses in modern thought and restoring their paths of “translingual practice.”¹¹ This attention to modernity and the original research trends in modern Chinese literature fused and gave birth to a popular (for a time) research model of “so-and-so-ism and Chinese modern literature.” All sorts of trends received systematic analysis in terms of their influence on modern literature: realism, naturalism, romanticism, symbolism, expressionism, modernism, existentialism, Freudianism, and so on. In this research, the influence of modernism received particular attention, such that “aesthetic modernity,” which had been relatively neglected or even suppressed in the original literary history, gained prominence. In addition, the critical review of the discourse of modernity extended to repressive and exclusionary mechanisms of the grand narrative of modernity. These topics (for example, “repressed modernities” and “without the late Qing, where does May Fourth come from?”¹²), imported from overseas scholars, have led to a further subversion of the orthodox narrative of literary history, going so far as to

⁹ Wang Hui, “Women ruhe chengwei ‘xiandaide?’” [How do we become “modern?”], *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan*, no. 1 (1996): 2–3.

¹⁰ Wang Hui, *Wanghui zixuan ji* [A collection of Wang Hui’s own choice] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1994), 2.

¹¹ Liu He [Lydia Liu], *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity (China 1900–1937)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹² David Der-wei Wang, *Xiangxiagn zhongguode fangfa* [Ways of imagining China: History, literature, narrative] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1998).

deconstruct historical narrative itself. It is a mutual affirmation of the enthusiasm that the academic circles of the 1990s had for the trend of postmodernism. It has given theoretical and methodological support for modern literary studies existing in an unbroken trend of expansion from the orthodox and mainstream toward the periphery and the alternative. It has attained continual legitimacy for the “periphery,” as well as continually producing new “peripheries,” to the point where the core concepts of “Chinese” and “modern” in modern Chinese literary studies have become unstable and constantly called into question.

Along with this deepening understanding of the multifaceted constitution of modernity, another area receiving deep investigation has been the creative transformation of tradition. In the realm of intellectual history, this area of investigation revealed the potential connection between the ideological structure behind the radical anti-traditionalism of May Fourth intellectuals and traditional Chinese thought¹³ and an “anti-modern modernity” in contemporary thought. In the realm of literary studies, it demonstrated that the dominant influence of the West and the recessive influence of tradition work together.¹⁴ In the area of academic history, the creative transformation of tradition systematically organized the modern origin and transformation of the paradigm of classical literature studies. This work broke down the perceived impression that tradition and modernity are set in opposition to each other. Scholars took modernity’s “little tradition” and placed it within the dialectical process of the “fractured continuity” of the “great tradition” to grasp it more firmly and to help in penetrating the internal logic of how Chinese tradition responded to modern challenges. In literary studies, romanticism, realism, decadence, and the like were no longer seen as imported from abroad. Rather, attention was paid to their potential connections with spiritual characteristics, trends in thought, and the traditions of the Chinese scholar-officials. Beyond this, the rise of cultural conservatism in the 1990s led directly to the reevaluation of modern trends such as the Xueheng School and the New Humanism, influential in the 1920s and 1930s.

¹³ Lin Yusheng, *Zhongguo yishide weiji: “Wusi” shiqi jiliede fanchuantongzhuyi* [The crisis of Chinese consciousness: Radical anti-traditionalism in the May Fourth era] (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1988).

¹⁴ Tang Tao, “Xifang yingxiang yu minzu fengge—Zhongguo xiandai wenxue fazhande yige lunkuo” [Western influence and national style—An outline of the development of modern Chinese literature], *Wenyi yanjiu*, no. 6 (1982): 15.

The most significant results of this new recognition of tradition, however, are concentrated within academic history. The research plan that Wang Yao and other senior scholars plotted out as the “approach to the modernization of Chinese literary studies” in 1980 had been put into genuine action by the 1990s.¹⁵ It accommodated research to trace the concept of modern literature and knowledge systems so as to examine how the modern form of literature studies had developed from the late Qing period, and, in connection, the origin and development process of new literature studies and their systems of knowledge became systematized.

Having gone through the political disillusionment at the turn of the 1980s into the 1990s, the trend toward emphasizing “literariness” and digging up the regulatory nature and rules of literary history accelerated. Formalism, structuralism, narrative studies, semiotics, and other methods were then widely used to interpret texts and in literary analysis. The “transformation in narrative modes” in fiction studies,¹⁶ semantic analysis in poetic studies (“modern poetry interpretation”¹⁷), and other “internal analyses” had tremendous results, but at the same time a type of “reinterpretation” that combined structuralism with ideological criticism brought the political point of view back into literary studies.¹⁸ Reinterpretation took a critical cultural studies stance to focus on analyzing those things that were negated or rejected in the time of “rewriting literary history”: revolutionary literature and art, works of socialist literature and art, and “popular revolutionary literature and art.” It no longer employed the traditional approach of examining works in a sociohistorical context. Rather, reinterpretation began from a “symptomatic reading” of the text. At the same time, it analyzed the revolutionary ideological systems and discourse methods in the text and in mass culture. It advanced the deconstruction of the ideological connotation of revolutionary and socialist art and literature, but it also found “modernity” and a “vanguard nature” in the creativity and productive forces of

¹⁵ Chen Pingyuan, ed., *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu xiandaihua jincheng* [Approach to the modernization of Chinese literary studies] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996); Chen Pingyuan, ed., *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu xiandaihua jincheng erbian* [Approach to the modernization of Chinese literary studies, 2nd ed.] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002).

¹⁶ Chen Pingyuan, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushu moshide zhuanbian* [The transformation in narrative modes in Chinese fiction] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988).

¹⁷ Sun Yushi, *Zhongguo xiandai jishixuede lilun yu shixian* [The theory and practice of modern poetry interpretation in China] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007).

¹⁸ Tang Xiaobing, ed., *Zai Jiedu: Dazhong Wenyi yu Yishixingtai* [Reinterpretation: Literature and art for the masses and ideology] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007).

modern Chinese literature and art, especially as represented by the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts, reversing the tendency of the "rewriting literary history" movement to see leftist and socialist literature and art as "backward" or "conservative." This new appreciation paved the way toward a renewed analysis of modern revolutionary art and literature.

Since 2000 the driving force for modern literature research has come increasingly from within the academy. In the context of the New Era, the May Fourth fiction writers' feeling of anxiety for the nation and their struggle to think through the troubles of their time are more and more remote. The resonance and inspiration stirred up by the youthful "resist despair" of the 1980s is no longer recognizable. On the one hand, public opinion (and the new literature market) and popular taste call into question the literariness of modern literature, and on the other hand, they produce popular cultural products that eliminate meaning and depth.

Meanwhile, the demands and specialization of modern literature studies have grown unabated. The ranks of scholars have grown as never before,¹⁹ and the research production in the academy has continued to increase. The administration of research at the national level, within research organizations, and at universities has become more and more regulated. Research funds from the National Social Science Fund and provincial-level social science funds have become the main method of subsidizing research, and they indirectly determine and restrict the directions of research. As research is being pushed to be more systematized and specialized, researchers lose step with modern literature resulting in a weakening of the ability to respond to great questions of society and the age. Problematics no longer come from public discussion, an awareness of social criticism, or the position of an intellectual, but from a cycle of supply and demand in the knowledge production space.

In the knowledge production orbit, "modernity" has gradually become a time frame emptied of meaning. Whether the history of modern literature is expanded to include the late Qing, to become the history of twentieth-century Chinese literature or even the recently proposed "history of Republican literature" and "historical view of great literature," the tendency is toward encompassing everything. These new rubrics bring together areas that were historically in antagonistic relationships: new literature, popular literature, classical poetics, differing positions and -ism literature, and so forth. In order to set

¹⁹ According to its own statistics, the Chinese Modern Literature Association had 2,666 registered members in 2018.

up a framework compatible with all these varied natures, academics proposed phrases like “multi-symbiotic,” “dual-wing theory,” “redrawing the map of literature,” “the vanguard and the normal,” and “joint literary history,”²⁰ and some have written general modern literature histories based on them. Other more fragmented literary histories, in annalistic styles, or histories of advertising literature, for example, have also appeared regularly.

In comparison to the earlier emphasis on ideological content, the trend that appeared in modern literature studies after the turn of the twenty-first century can be described as historicization. This theory takes the essential imagination of history as its main characteristic. Ideas such as “returning to the historical scene” or “worshipping the historical data” presuppose that history is a fixed target that can be restored. On the one hand, this makes researchers tend to be more precise and to include rich historical detail. On the other hand, it produces a mere accumulation of historical detail and an “equalized” treatment of historical elements. In recent years, attempts to analyze modern history by borrowing from analyses of modern literature (which have always existed) have created literary phenomena, that is, works of literature made into the opening lines of history. To a certain degree, this expands the space and scope of interest of literary analysis and puts it on the same level with historical research. For example, in the history of the 1924–27 Nationalist Revolution, much has been brought into modern literature studies: experience in the areas of Communist resistance, experience in areas occupied by the Japanese, borderland history, minority areas, nationalist discourse, foreign relations in many areas of research, political history, ethnohistory. Many outstanding scholars, in the process of deepening their understanding of the modern experience, are no longer content to stop at “literature” and “modernity.” They work directly in the field of intellectual and spiritual history, which bridges the ancient and the modern, as well as in the field of cultural studies, which is confronted with the contemporary situation. This interdisciplinary work will stimulate new reference points and perspectives for modern literature.

Over the years, modern literature has accumulated an extensive scholarly research edifice around it. Most modern authors have their complete works published, and the important authors have additional edited compilations, collected works, and so forth. In addition, primary research materials, research

²⁰ See Wu Fuhui, “Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu de dangjintaishi” [The present state of modern Chinese literature studies], in *Duo lengjing xia* [Under multiple prisms] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2010), 300–305.

histories, and academic histories have contributed to the specialized research space. The many discussions that emanate from these editions, collations, and annotations give modern literature a scent of classical literature studies. In the 1990s a scholar called for the “classic-ification” of modern literature studies,²¹ and this ideal seems to have already been achieved, however inadvertently, through developments in the discipline.

As for international scholarly exchange and foreign influence, the direct influence of Sinologists from the United States is obvious, as always, in terms of awareness of issues and research orientation. In recent years, several topics such as lyricism and the politics of emotion have quickly turned into popular issues domestically.²² Instead of directly adopting the theoretical frameworks of overseas Sinology as a research paradigm, Chinese academics have transformed them into localized resources to be digested in the vein of China’s own problems. What is worth examining beyond this is that in the past twenty years the links among intellectual resources in East Asia have become closer. For example, not only have Japanese postwar Lu Xun studies and Chinese modern literature studies in the 1980s been translated, but they also include case studies of one-to-one influence from the perspective of comparative literature as well as the precise evidentiary practice unique to Japanese scholars. Japanese scholarship of Lu Xun contains ideological principles and critical perspectives, particularly ones such as Takeuchi Yoshimi who says that “literary awareness was won through a struggle with politics.” Their revelation of the meaning of “modernity of resistance” in the Chinese Revolution, for the analysis of the mechanism of generating the modern self and subject, to a great extent broke through the Chinese academia’s inherent way of imagining “literature and politics” and the mechanism of generating the modern subject. It also stimulated the energy to rethink “literary nature” and “political nature” again and, together with the post-1990s criticism of “depoliticized politics”²³ and the revelation of the cultural and

²¹ Jie Zhixi, “‘Gudianhua’ yu ‘pingchang xin’—Guanyu zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu de ruogan duanxiang” [“Classic-ization” and “composure”—A brief commentary on Chinese modern literature studies], in *Xiandai wenxue yanjiu lunheng* [Critical essays on modern literature studies] (N.p.: Hehan daxue chubanshe, 2005).

²² Wang Dewei [David Der-wei Wang], *Shuqing chuantong yu xiandaixing: Zai beidade batangke* [Lyricism and Chinese modernity: Eight lectures at Peking University] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2010).

²³ Wang Hui, *Quzhengzhihua de zhengzhi—Duan 20 shijide zhongjie yu 90 niandai* [Depoliticized politics: The end of the short 20th century and the 90s] (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2008).

political challenges facing contemporary China,²⁴ renewed the bringing of a political dimension back into the field of modern literature studies. Both the interest in the Chinese Revolution and Chinese modern literature stirred up by the wave of democracy movements in post-1980s South Korea and the left-wing intellectual tradition represented by Chen Yingzhen, which had been covered up in Taiwanese histories, stimulated Chinese scholars to reexamine the twentieth-century Chinese revolutionary experience and its position in world history and in modern East Asian history.

In recent years, a re-understanding of the history of the Chinese Revolution has become a significant impetus for a deepening of modern literature studies. Originally, the basic framework of modern Chinese literature history was born from the Chinese Communist Party's historical narrative of the revolution. But the narrative of revolutionary history as a type of political theory cannot objectively and fully clarify the challenge and cognitive value of the Chinese Revolution in all of its intellectual, historical, and social aspects. After experiencing the long process of casting off the prescriptive nature of revolutionary history, modern Chinese literature studies has been equipped with the conditions for a genuinely historical, ideological, and social understanding of the modern revolutionary process. This re-understanding requires a reintegration of historical, ideological, societal, political, and cultural investigations so as to break through the isolation created by "literariness" and the trend toward historicism since the 1990s; to return to the cultural and political origin that gave birth to the Chinese revolutionary experience; and to establish a type of internal perspective that investigates the revolutionary transformation of modern China. In this conceptual framework, modern Chinese literature serves as the medium for a new ideology and a new culture, as a field to cultivate and incubate new subjective states; the trajectory of its formation, development, and evolution are all indispensable core elements in the investigation of revolutionary change in China. The tracks it creates, develops, and evolves are indispensable for investigating China's revolutionary transformation.

As early as the 1990s, there were already people suggesting that modern literature, this product of the Enlightenment, this thing born from the ideals of producing a modern subject, would face its end in the twenty-first century. Today we look back at this sort of prophecy as we do at the theory of the "end

²⁴ Zhang Xudong, *Quanjihua shidaide wenhua rentong: Xifang pubian zhuyi huayude lishi piping* [Cultural identity in the age of globalization: A historical criticism of Western universalist discourse] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005).

of history,” which predicted the arrival of an era of a universal civil society. What in fact arrived was a profound era of crisis for liberal democracy. As a product of the twentieth century’s era of crisis, Chinese modern literature contains the energy and tension of modern thought and practice. Its epistemological value is far from exhausted, and, in fact, with the arrival of another era of crisis, it is increasingly more meaningful.

Translated from the Chinese by David Hull

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