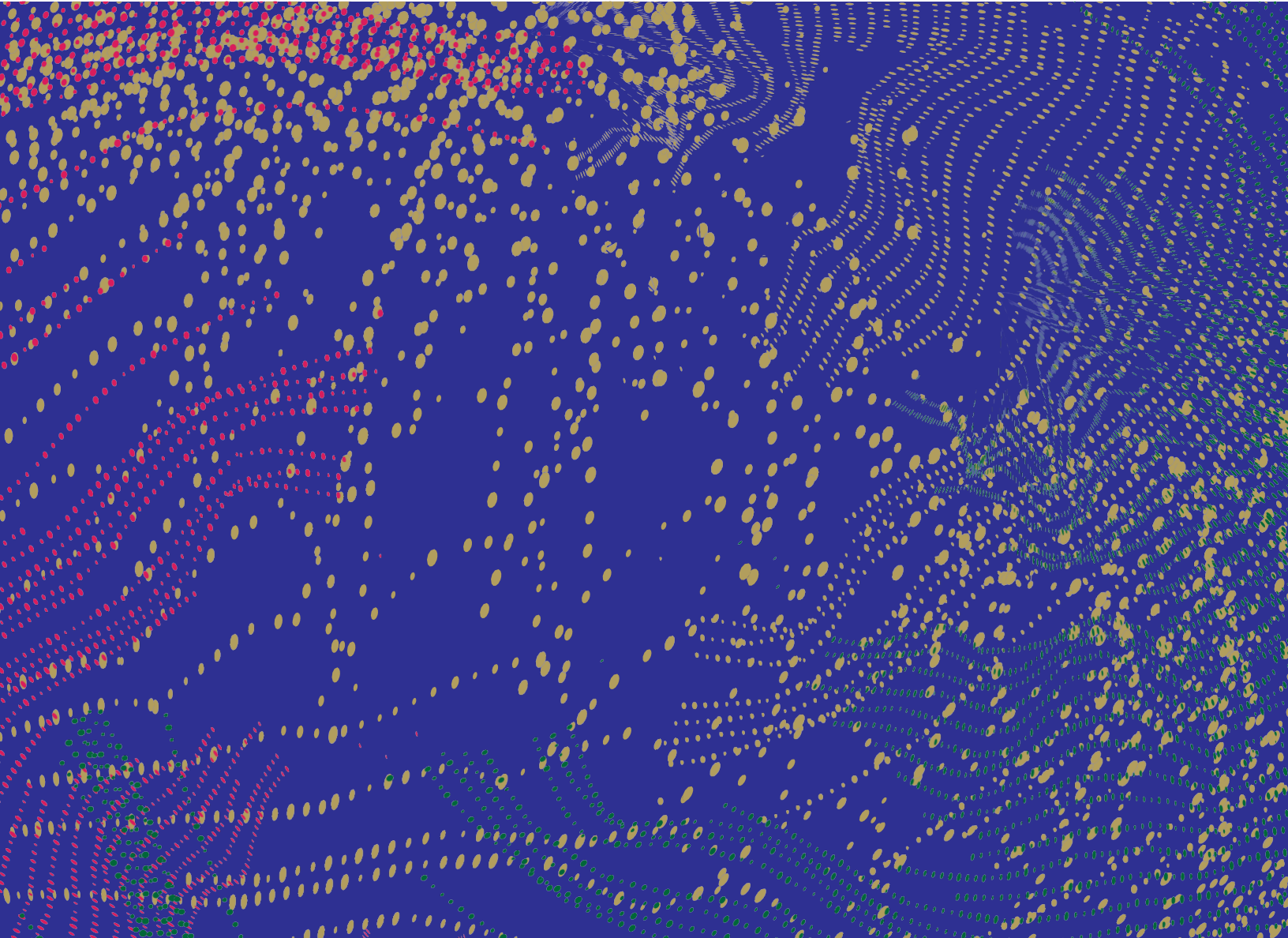


The World Humanities Report

# Classical Chinese Literature

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# Classical Chinese Literature

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Research in the field of Chinese literature now faces challenges arising from economic globalization and the pressures of the market economy, as well as from competition driven by information technology. Some contend that all things in the past were only a prelude to the age of big data. This claim is not completely unfounded. Historical experience tells us that changes in the means of textual transmission invariably lead to fundamental changes in reading practices, research methods, and schools of thought. When paper replaced bamboo and silk [*zhubo*], access to texts and the breadth of culture expanded. In the rapid pivot from the New Texts school of philology to the Old Texts school, the former was deemed to be outdated and the latter superior.<sup>1</sup> The onset of woodblock printing and the invention of moveable type in China, in particular, made reading increasingly more accessible. Because of this, people ceased to venerate erudition and broad learning, and new schools of study emerged and flourished—just as today, where information technology celebrates disruption, and all forms of media are continually outdated and replaced. These trends have sped the onset of new literary phenomena and new topics for research. How can Chinese literary research build on this momentum, and how can it survive in the marketplace? How can competition set a course for future development? Can we transform pressure into momentum and turn challenges into opportunities? These are questions that urgently need to be addressed now and in the future.

The 2011 Index of Degrees Conferred and Disciplines for Developing Talent released by the State Council Academic Degree Committee and the Ministry of Education established thirteen departments of study at the university level. Literature is a major department, encompassing three primary disciplines; these are Chinese language and literature, foreign languages and literatures, and journalism and communication studies. Chinese language and literature

<sup>1</sup> The New Texts school reconstructed the Confucian classics from fragments. In contrast, the Old Texts school regarded texts discovered intact after 200 BCE as the authoritative versions.—Trans.

encompasses eight fields of study: (1) linguistics and applied linguistics, (2) Chinese linguistics and orthography, (3) literary arts, (4) classical Chinese texts and philology, (5) classical Chinese literature, (6) Chinese modern and contemporary literature, (7) Chinese ethnic minority languages and literatures, and (8) comparative literature and world literature.

Originally, art was part of literature, among major disciplines at the university level. However, art is now an independent discipline, comprised of five primary (*yiji*, or “first tier”) fields of study. Among them, art theory overlaps to a large degree with the secondary field of literature and arts in the departments of Chinese language and literature. Early on, this subdiscipline was called literary theory, but it later expanded in scope and became the study of aesthetics, which is comprehensive in nature and has always had a preeminent position. Of course, the Ministry of Education established the various disciplines with the aim of training students who will serve as teachers and researchers. In contrast, the array of disciplines at research institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, regional academies of social sciences, and the National Foundation for Social Sciences is primarily based on national strategy designed to meet the needs of academic development and does not necessarily follow the plan of the Ministry of Education.

Since 1990 the scale of university education has continued to expand. Figures for the numbers of graduates in literature in years 1990 and 2018 are shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** Numbers of graduates of literature programs with bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees

Year	Bachelor’s degrees	Master’s degrees	Doctoral degrees
1990	19,286 <sup>i</sup>	1,313	71
2018	370,471 <sup>ii</sup>	29,704	1,940

Source: *Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjian* [Educational statistics yearbook of China] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991 and 2019).<sup>2</sup>

Notes: <sup>i</sup> This is the total number of students who studied “humanities.”

<sup>ii</sup> This is the total number of students earning bachelor’s degrees in literature; 199,428, or 53.8 percent, studied foreign languages.

<sup>2</sup> The yearbooks are compiled by the Development Planning Commission of the Ministry of Education.

In 2018 the number of teachers and researchers in the field of literature totaled 222,650 in Chinese, foreign languages, and journalism and communication studies (128,321 of this number teach foreign languages and literature.) Senior faculty in the field numbered 17,812 (including 7,490 faculty devoted to foreign languages), and associate and junior faculty numbered 60,357 (including 32,706 faculty in foreign languages).

Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, studies of Chinese literature lacked organization and coordination. Each individual and each institution governed their own research agenda, beset by negligence and uncertainty. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, and especially since the reform era of the 1980s, under the unified leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the government, research in the field of Chinese literature has focused its efforts on organization and configuration [*jianshe*] and has sought to consolidate academic strengths, forming three major research systems over this time. The first of these systems is in the Academy of Social Sciences, centered in the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The regional branches of the Academy of Social Sciences each draw on the cultural characteristics of their region to define the discipline and research strengths unique to that particular area. For example, the Jiangsu Province Academy of Social Science focuses on study of the Ming Qing novel; the Shanxi Province Academy of Social Science researches the statesman and poet Liu Zongyuan (773–819). The Academy of Social Sciences in Zhejiang Province conducts research on the literature of Zhejiang; the Gansu Province Academy of Social Science researches the literature of city of Dunhuang (written Tun-huang in earlier sources).<sup>3</sup> The Jiangxi Province Academy of Social Science carries out research on the literature of the Song dynasty (960–1279).<sup>4</sup> The Hebei Province Academy of Social Science researches Red classics [*Hongse jingdian*].<sup>5</sup> The Academy of Social Sciences of the Inner Mongolia Self-Governing Region focuses its research on ethnic integration. The second tier of research is

<sup>3</sup> Dunhuang is a city in western Gansu Province. In 1900 a caretaker found administrative records, Buddhist manuscripts, poetry, and textiles dating from the fifth to tenth century. It was a military outpost, located strategically on the Silk Road for trade and along pilgrim routes from India to Persia and Tibet to Mount Wutai.—Trans.

<sup>4</sup> The Jiangxi Academy founded the Song dynasty literature research group in 2007, with focus on literary geography [*wenxue dili xue*], in part to trace the important alliance between Jiangxi elites and the state.—Trans.

<sup>5</sup> The term “Red classics” generally refers to works from the revolutionary period and ideas promulgated by Mao Zedong.—Trans.

within institutions of higher education, centered in major universities under the Ministry of Education. These include the Research Center for Chinese Classical Texts at Peking University, the Research Center for Chinese Ancient Literature at Fudan University, the Research Center for Literary Arts at Beijing Normal University, the Research Center for Modern Chinese Literature at Nanjing University, and the Research Center for Literary Theory and Aesthetics at Shandong University. The third tier are other organizations such as the Wenlian (an abbreviation for Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe lianhe hui, All-China federation of literary and art workers), Zuoxie (an abbreviation for Zuojia xiehui, Writers association), and various research offices and teams, as well as news publishers, all of which operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. Both the united conference of the Chinese Literature and Arts Council and the Chinese Writers Association contain research divisions. The Writers Association had a classical literature department from the time of its founding in 1953 until September 1956 and took part in research projects on classical literature during that period. The editorial office of *Wenxue yichan* [Literary heritage] was initially part of the Classical Literature Department of the Writers Association at the time of the department's founding in 1956. The China National Academy of Arts, which is part of the Ministry of Culture, includes research institutes such as the *Dream of the Red Chamber* Research Institute, the Traditional Drama Research Institute, and the Culture Research Institute among others whose work is intrinsically related to Chinese literature.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, book publishing developed rapidly, and collated editions of classical works and book-length studies to disseminate and critically evaluate the classics were published, purposefully advancing research on Chinese literature. The state-level publishers Renmin wenxue chubanshe [Peoples literature publishing house], Shangwu yinshuguan [Commercial press], Zhonghua shuju [China books], and Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe [Chinese social sciences press], as well as regional publishing houses, renowned university presses, and imprints for the professions, arranged to publish sets of collated works [*congshu*, also called series] and monographs in rapid succession. Many editors at these presses are also scholars who are active in literary research.

On the one hand, print technology has steadily advanced, and scholarly publications have thrived over time. Collated editions of major literary works of various historical periods have been systematically reissued, and a large number of studies based on these publications have emerged. Among them are

works intended to popularize and spread knowledge of classical literature: selected annotations, selected translations, and topical essays and lectures. Over the past seventy years, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, Zhonghua shuju, Shanghai guji chubanshe [Shanghai classics publishing house], and others have led the efforts to compile a number of large-scale literary compendia, reference works, and literary materials.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the growing number of academic journals provides a public forum for scholars to communicate their findings in China and abroad. These journals achieve balance between shaping critical discussion of literature and disseminating major research findings. The major

<sup>6</sup> Classical literary works have been reissued, and large compendia of literary texts or classical works have been or soon will be published. *Quan Shanggu, Qin, Han, Sanguo, Liuchao wen* [Prose works of the early period, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua, [1930] 1965); Lu Qinli, ed., *Xian Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Nanbeichao shi* [Pre-Qin, Han, Wei, and Northern and Southern Dynasties poetry] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954); *Quan Tang shi* [Tang dynasty poetry] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960); Gao Dong and Ge Lao, eds., *Quan Tang wen* [Tang dynasty prose] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, [1983] 1990); Fu Xuancong and the Peking University Chinese Department, eds., *Quan Song shi* [Song dynasty poetry] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993–98); Zeng Zhaozhuang and Liu Lin, eds., *Quan Song wen* [Prose of the Song] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988); Zeng Zhaomin, ed., *Quan Tang Wudai ci* [Song lyric of the Tang and Five Dynasties period] (Beijing: Zhonghua, [1986] 1999); Tang Guizhang, ed., *Quan Song ci* [Song dynasty song lyric] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965); Tang Guizhang, ed., *Quan Jin Yuan ci* [Jin and Yuan dynasty song lyric] (Beijing: Zhonghua, [1979] 2018); Xu Zheng and Yang Lian, eds., *Quan Yuan shi* [Yuan dynasty poetry], 68 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2013); Li Xiusheng, ed., *Quan Yuan wen* [Yuan dynasty prose] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2005); Sui Shusen, ed., *Quan Yuan sanqu* [Yuan dynasty vernacular songs (*sanqu*)] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1964); *Quan Ming shi* [Ming dynasty poetry] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990–94); Xie Boyang, ed., *Quan Ming sanqu* [Ming dynasty vernacular songs (*sanqu*)] (Shandong: Qilu shushe, 1993); Nanjing University Chinese Department, eds., *Quan Qingci* [Qing dynasty song lyric] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002); as well as (Liang) Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan* [Selections of refined literature] (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2020); Li Fang, ed., *Wenyuan yinghua* [Refined selections from the garden of literature], 1,000 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1997; first typeset edition published by Hualian chubanshe, Taipei, 1965); Meng Liefu, Qian Bocheng, and L. N. Menshikov, eds., *E cang Dunhuang wenxian* [Literary materials from Dunhuang in Russian collections] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe and Nauka, 1992–); *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang xiyou wenxian* [Literary materials from Dunhuang and the western regions in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe and the National Library of France, 1994–); Institute of History of the Academy of Social Sciences, eds., *Ying cang Dunhuang wenxian* [Literary materials from Dunhuang in British collections] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, 1990–2010). Some of these compendia have new punctuation [to parse phrases and reinterpret the meaning—Trans.], and others are systematically collated.

Communist Party–affiliated newspapers, such as the *Renmin ribao* [People’s daily], *Guangming ribao* [Guangming daily], and *Wenhui bao* (titled *Wen Wei Bo* overseas), launched special feature pages on art and literary criticism, all of which have national circulation and a broad following; these include commentary features such as Literary Commentary, Literary Heritage, Studies of Literature and Art, Studies of Literary and Artistic Theories, and the magazine *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue lilun congkan* [Studies of modern Chinese literary theory], featuring in-depth research articles. A number of journals are devoted to creative writing: *Renmin wenxue* [People’s literature], *Shi yuekan* [Poetry monthly], *Dangdai* [Contemporary], *Shiyue* [October], *Shouhuo* [Harvest], *Zhongshan* [Bell Mountain], and *Huacheng* [Flower City].<sup>7</sup> Further, research institutions and universities issue scholarly journals, and every province and major city publishes a humanities and social science magazine.

Comprehensive and professional associations for literature studies have been established one after another. Some of these are comprehensive organizations for scholars, such as the Association for Study of Sources for Literary History of China, Chinese Association for Overseas Chinese Literature and Art Criticism, Association for Chinese Literature and Art Critics, Association for Studies of Chinese Literary Criticism, and Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature. Yet others set their focus on a particular literary genre, such as the Association for Studies of Chinese Song Lyric or the Association for Chinese Prose Studies. Still others focus on a particular time period, such as the Chinese Association for Tang Dynasty Literature Studies, the Association for Early Modern Chinese Literature Studies, the Association for Study of Modern Chinese Literature, and Association for Study of Contemporary Chinese Literature. Others are dedicated to a particular region, such as the Chinese Association for Literatures in Chinese. Still others were established with focus on an author, such as the Chinese Association of Qu Yuan Studies, the Chinese Association for Du Fu Studies, Chinese Association for Li Bai Studies, the Chinese Association for Lu Xun Research. Additionally, some groups focus on a given literary work, such as the Chinese Association for *Wen xuan* Studies and the China Association for *Dream of the Red Chamber* Studies, among others. Many of these research

<sup>7</sup> The creative writing magazines each have a distinct regional focus. *Huacheng* was founded in 1979 in Guangzhou (Canton); *Shouhuo* was originally founded in 1957 by novelists Ba Jin and Jin Yi in Shanghai; and *Zhongshan*, founded in 1978, is run by the Nanjing Writer’s Association [Zuoxie]. The other magazines listed here, *Dangdai*, *Shiyue*, and *Shi yuekan*, are published in Beijing.—Trans.



conferences have created their own journals; for example, the Association for Modern Chinese Literature Studies issues *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* [Modern Chinese literature studies], and the Association for Lu Xun Studies issues the *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan* [Lu Xun research monthly].

The development of new media has also followed an increasingly rapid trajectory. At the time of the May Fourth New Culture movement, radio and film emerged in the wake of new opera, called *wenming xi* [civilized plays, or new drama], and challenged the authority of the traditional print media, which had been the only media form with national distribution up to that time. An “audible” literary revolution spread very fast to complement the “visible” literary revolution. Today, the sight and sound of literature continue to share the spotlight. According to a 2018 national survey of peoples’ reading habits, at least one third of the Chinese public habitually listen to books. With the arrival of a new wave of technology, the internet, studies of literature began their exit from an age defined solely by the medium of print. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Office of the National Social Sciences Foundation jointly launched the National Philosophy and Social Science Journals Database and are engaged in efforts to negotiate terms to enable resource sharing to serve the larger reading public.

Currently, with the transition from digital technology to artificial intelligence, the information revolution is fundamentally altering the existing scholarly ecosystem, and momentous changes have come about both in methods of research and dissemination. In the future, research must prioritize multimedia configurations and the development of media that can link to other modalities for the study of Chinese literature. This is a new direction for communicating the Chinese literature research findings of the past seventy years.

## Research on Classical Chinese Literature

In the forty years since reform and opening up,<sup>8</sup> the mission of Chinese classical literature research has sought direction from classic works, derived strength from tradition, accumulated experience from innovation, and triumphed by returning to the past.

<sup>8</sup> The term “reform and opening up” refers to economic directives introduced after December 1978 under Deng Xiaoping and marks the beginning of the new era [*xin shiqi*], which is also called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and the “socialist market economy.” In 2018 Xi Jinping marked the fortieth anniversary with a speech to reaffirm economic reform and set a focus on “national rejuvenation” to mark the start of a New age [*xin shidai*].—Trans.

In the 1980s research in classical literature gradually shifted away from political leanings to return to a literary orientation. In the early part of the decade art criticism was the hot topic of the era, at a time when everyone had recently set aside the strictures of common social sciences methodologies, which were rigid and mechanistic, and began to ceaselessly explore and absorb new ideas. Returning to mainland China from abroad, Ye Chia-ying (Ye Jiaying in pinyin) used Western aesthetic theory in a nuanced analysis of the artistic characteristics of traditional literature. Yuan Xingpei also emphasizes “the aesthetics of Chinese poetry” in his research. Their scholarly discoveries were like streams of clear water entering the field of Chinese classical literature. The publication of Fu Xuancong’s *Tangdai shiren congkao* [Collected studies of Tang poets] helped young scholars to discover the appeal of traditional scholarship.<sup>9</sup> In the late 1980s new theories and theoretical methodologies swept the country, and a trend to discuss literature from a macro perspective gathered force and directly inspired several major works of literary history. It also prompted a move to establish the historiography of Chinese literary history as a discipline of study.

The 1990s was a transitional period characterized by relative stability in the field. At the start of the new millennium, growing pressure to “return to literary sources and go beyond tradition” emerged in the field of classical literature. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, economic reforms and opening up further deepened, and overall national strength has grown. Thus, efforts to sum up past achievements and shortcomings in retrospect naturally lead Chinese scholars to think about the past seventy years of history since the founding of New China and the past hundred years of history, or even one thousand years before our time, to compare China with the West and put them in perspective, with a relatively balanced attitude, for an objective appraisal.

### Establishing Academic Structure

Since the new historical era of economic reform and opening up, studies of classical Chinese literature have seen activity at a scale that is unprecedented, with unparalleled expansion of research teams, academic hierarchies that are well established, and new people who are prepared to carry on scholarly research. To similar ends, comprehensive professional research associations have been established to continue this work.

There have been three broad phases of development in research on classical

<sup>9</sup> Fu Xuancong, *Tangdai shiren congkao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

Chinese literature: First, from the start of the new era in late 1978, when the economic policies of reform and opening up were launched, to the early 1980s; second, the mid- and late 1980s, when the cohort of students who entered master's programs in 1978 and 1979 gradually took leading roles in the field; and third, the late 1980s to early 1990s, when scholars who began undergraduate study in 1977 and 1978 started entering the academic field.

In the early 1980s the core academic strength rested in the older generation of scholars and the second generation, who graduated from university before the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Scholarship was in serious straits in the early 1980s; academic work had been set aside as useless and awaited renewal, while no one was sufficiently trained to undertake new research. In effect, new crops lay fallow, with no one to harvest them. To quickly remedy the situation, editing and publishing the research findings of the previous seventeen years—or even the past fifty years—was made the first priority in the field of Chinese classical literature. In this way, countless literary masterpieces and scholarly studies were reprinted within a short period of time and filled a gap in research from that period.<sup>10</sup> The Institute of Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences edited a three-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi* [History of Chinese literature].<sup>11</sup> Together with the four-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi* [History of Chinese literature] by You Guo'en, *Chatu ben zhongguo wenxue shi* [Illustrated history of Chinese literature] by Zheng Zhenduo, the *Zhongguo wenxue shi cankao ziliao* [Reference materials for the history of Chinese literature] edited by the Department of Chinese in Peking University,<sup>12</sup> and several scholarly monographs, it played the critical role of inheriting knowledge from the past to form a bridge to future generations. The older generation of scholars carried a tremendous burden as they immersed themselves in editing literary studies from

<sup>10</sup> The seventeen-year period includes the Cultural Revolution, 1966–76, together with the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1958–65. The fifty-year period extends back to the 1930s, when scholars trained in classical literature, thought, and religion, such as Zheng Zhenduo, Guan Dedong, and Fu Xihua, turned their attention to vernacular literature and its relationship to regional culture and ritual practice.—Trans.

<sup>11</sup> Institute of Literature, comp., *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (Beijing: n.p., 1982).

<sup>12</sup> You Guo'en, *Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 4 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963); Zheng Zhenduo (also written Cheng Chen-tuo in Wade Giles), *Chatu ben zhongguo wenxue shi*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxing she, 1959); Pu Jiangqing, ed., *Zhongguo wenxue shi cankao ziliao* (Peking University mimeograph, 1956–57); Peking University, Classical Literature Teaching and Research Office, *Zhongguo wenxue shi cankao ziliao jianbian* (abbreviated ed.) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe and Xinhua shushe, 1988–89).

earlier eras, while they painstakingly followed hidden threads to write and publish new works. Meanwhile, new printings of the *Tanyi lu* [On the art of poetry] and *Guan zhui bian* [Limited views] by Qian Zhongshu, a towering figure among scholars of his generation, took classical Chinese literature studies to new heights.<sup>13</sup>

Under the strict and effective guidance and mentorship of the previous generations of scholars, the third generation of students rapidly matured. Many of this generation, such as Ge Xiaoyin, Li Jianguo, and Yang Yi,<sup>14</sup> were dissatisfied with existing research methodologies and began to search for their own academic path. Later on, there was lively discussion of perspectives on literary history and macrohistorical approaches to literary history that was the necessary outcome of thinking of the time. This reflects the desire of newcomers to the academic field to surpass themselves and rise above the previous generation.

By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the first few cohorts of students to enter university after the reinstatement of the higher education examinations (that is, the fourth generation of students) had earned their doctoral degrees. They carefully absorbed the erudition and rigor of scholars who guided them, while exercising the advantage of their youth, to broaden their perspective and actively draw on research findings from China and abroad, to ground their own research on a solid foundation. Doctoral theses published in those years, such as Liu Yuejin's *Yongming wenxue yanjiu* [Yongming literature], Jiang Yin's *Dali shifeng* [The poetic style of the Da Li (mid-Tang reign period, 766–790)], and Guo Yingde's *Ming Qing wenren chuanqi zonglu ji yanjiu* [Index and studies of Ming Qing literati *chuanqi* romantic comedies],<sup>15</sup> among others, surpassed the

<sup>13</sup> Qian Zhongshu, *Guan zhui bian*, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979–80). Qian Zhongshu, *Tanyi lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, [1948] 1985) treats Chinese poetics across time and language. Qian's breathtaking erudition is best illustrated in *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*, sel. and trans. Roland Egan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Ge Xiaoyin, *Han Wei Liuchao wenxue yu zongjiao* [Literature of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties and religion] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005); Li Jian'guo, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi* [The history of tales of the strange and supernatural before the Tang dynasty] (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1984); Yang Yi, *Chonghui Zhongguo wenxue ditu* [Redrawing the map of Chinese literature] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003). See also Yang Yi, *Zhongguo xushi xue* [Chinese narrative] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Liu Yuejin, *Yongming wenxue yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1992). Liu completed his dissertation in 1991, graduating from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Jiang Yin, *Dali shifeng* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992); Guo Yingde, *Ming Qing wenren chuanqi yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1991; reprinted Beijing Normal University Press,

general standards for critical works or articles that revisit previous scholarship, by investigating their respective topics in depth.

Among the ranks of researchers in classical Chinese literature in the new era, a large number have been a steadying force and command respect for the way in which they serve as a bridge to connect past scholarship to the present. The majority of these scholars graduated in the 1950s and 1960s and lived through successive shifts in political ideology; they have also borne the heavy burden of serving in senior roles. Together with their teachers, scholars such as Tan Jiajian in his *Xian Qin sanwen gangyao* [An outline of pre-Qin prose], Cao Daoheng's *Zhong gu wenxue shiliao congkao* [Studies of literary materials of the Middle Period], Xiang Chu's *Dunhuang wenxue congkao* [Studies of Dunhuang literature], and *Sui Tang Wudai wenxue shi* [A Literary history of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties] by Luo Zongqiang and Hao Shifeng,<sup>16</sup> created a new face for classical Chinese literature. Their works variously opened up new areas of research, devised new research methodology, and compiled works by earlier scholars, serving as models for future generations. Each and every point that has advanced the field of classical Chinese literature was achieved through the painstaking efforts and dedication of this generation of scholars.

Additionally, professional associations for literary studies provide a platform for interaction among scholars and dissemination of their research findings. Some of these research associations are comprehensive, while others focus on study of a literary genre, on a particular time period, on a region, or an author. Many of these associations issue scholarly journals to share their discoveries, such as the Beijing Association for Studies of Cao Xueqin, which publishes *Cao Xueqin yanjiu* [Studies of Cao Xueqin].

## The Rising Standards of Scholarship

Through the efforts of four generations of scholars, Chinese classical literature research has seen new expansion in depth as well as breadth. Research methodologies are diverse and not constrained to a single mode, while scholars continue to forge ahead into new areas for research, and constantly producing new

1992). Guo Yingde completed his PhD in 1988 under the direction of Qi Gong and Deng Kuiying and is currently a professor in the Humanities Institute, Beijing Normal University.

<sup>16</sup> Tan Jiajian and Zheng Junhua, *Xian Qin sanwen gangyao* (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1991); Cao Daoheng, *Zhong gu wenxue shiliao congkao* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2003); Xiang Chu, *Dunhuang wenxue congkao* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2019); Luo Zongqiang and Hao Shifeng, *Sui Tang Wudai wenxue shi* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1990).

research findings. Although some scholarly studies are lackluster and ordinary, there is a considerable amount of strong, thorough, and well-grounded scholarship. Below, I shall describe three aspects of this scholarly output.

First, traditional research topics have witnessed a renaissance of sorts, resulting from the discovery of new textual materials and use of new research methodologies. This trend is most obvious in research into the traditional field of study of the *Wen xuan*, or *Selections of Refined Literature*.<sup>17</sup> Studies of the *Wen xuan* (exploring authorial genealogies, imitation, and innovation) were prevalent during the Tang (648–968) and Song (968–1280) dynasties, but were declared “monsters and demons” and denounced during the May Fourth period.<sup>18</sup> From 1949 to 1978, fewer than ten articles on the *Wen xuan* were published in mainland China. In 1988 the first international conference on the *Zhaoming Wen xuan* [Refined selections of literature] (compiled by Crown Prince Zhaoming) was convened in Changchun, and the second and third scholarly conferences were convened in 1992 and 1995. Seventy or eighty scholars participated in each of these international conferences. The *Zhaoming Wen xuan* has witnessed a revival that has been spurred, in part, by the discovery of new editions and related materials in China and abroad. The Chen Balang edition with Five Scholars’ annotation and the edition in the Kyujanggak Archives (also written Guizhangge in Chinese; the royal library of the Joseon dynasty founded in 1776) in Korea, among others, have drawn increasing attention from scholars.

The second trend is the opening up of new research areas. First, there has been relatively more innovation in studies of Dunhuang literature. The “Dunhuang yanjiu zuotan hui” [Discussion of Dunhuang studies], convened in Gansu in 1982, was the first seminar on Dunhuang literature and academic studies of Dunhuang. The Chinese Association for Dunhuang Turfan Studies was established the following year, and a year after that a new branch devoted to the study of Dunhuang and Turfan language and literature was established in Hangzhou. Springing from these established research groups, a series of

<sup>17</sup> The anthology, compiled by Xiao Tong (501–531), is the most important collection of poetry from the seven centuries preceding the sixth century and has had enormous influence on Chinese poetry of later ages. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, trans. David R. Knechtges (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982–96). Three volumes of a planned six-volume set are completed.—Trans.

<sup>18</sup> “Monsters and demons” [*yaonie*], a term originally from Buddhism, was used during the Cultural Revolution to refer to all enemies of the revolution.—Trans.

influential research works appeared. The first of these were the newly founded journals *Dunhuang yanjiu* [Dunhuang research] and *Dunhuang jikan* [Journal of Dunhuang studies], among others.<sup>19</sup> A variety of essay collections, compilations of source materials, and scholarly monographs that touch on classical Chinese literature were subsequently published and became a focal point for scholars for a time.

A second new area of research has yielded important findings through the systematic study of the literature of the Northern Dynasties. Cao Daoheng and Shen Yucheng coauthored *Nanbei chao wenxue shi* [A history of the literature of the Southern and Northern Dynasties],<sup>20</sup> centering on the literature of the sixteen states and Northern works that developed from them, which have long been viewed as literature that has virtually disappeared. The two authors analyzed the stages in the development of Northern literatures and proposed a new and influential model, based on comparative study of both chronological and synchronous development. By this method, they collated materials and arrived at a framework for studying Northern Dynasties literature. Their findings are the culmination of the past ten years of study of Middle Period literature.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, research on Qing dynasty literature has advanced in important ways. Qian Zhonglian was the facilitator and the core of a sizeable group of scholars at Suzhou University who have undertaken to collate and arrange a large quantity of material. Studies of Qing dynasty fiction and drama are particularly active, and studies of the novel *Honglou meng* [*The Dream of the Red Chamber*] are the most promising avenue for new research. The Series of Early editions of Classical Chinese Fiction, projected to include 200 volumes edited by Liu Shide, Shi Changyu, and Chen Qinghao, has had extensive impact in China and abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, the use of literary materials from archaeological excavations for research on the *Chu ci* (also written Ch'u-tz'u; Songs of the South) enabled scholars to arrive at important new discoveries. Tang Bingzheng and Liu Xinfang

<sup>19</sup> *Dunhuang yanjiu* has been published by Lanzhou Antiquities Research Institute since 1981. *Dunhuang jikan* was founded in 1980 by the Lanzhou University history department.

<sup>20</sup> Cao Daoheng and Shen Yucheng, *Nanbei chao wenxue shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> The Middle Period (100–1500) is neither at the formative beginning of the imperial period nor at the end. Chinese historians have carried out digitizing projects that make primary sources available and firmly established the importance of the Middle Period.—Trans.

<sup>22</sup> Liu Shide, Chen Qinghao, and Shi Changyu, eds., *Guben xiaoshuo congkan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987–).

have incorporated new materials gleaned from archeological excavations; their close attention to this group of materials has made a valuable contribution to studies of the *Chu ci*.<sup>23</sup>

For many years, the profession of literary history has been defined progressively more narrowly, to such an extent that the lively historical record has been carved forcibly into lines and squares. This manner of separating things, in lines and squares, divides up the profession, much as if one has cut a mountain in two. The field of literary studies has long been relatively isolated from archeological findings, and this imposed limits on the scope of scholarly research; these are limitations of our own design. Since the new era of reform and opening, with increasing attention to comprehensive research, this situation has begun to change.

### The Historical Trend of Returning to the Classics

At a time when literature is growing more marginalized by the day and classic literary works are being discarded, should people who are engaged in serious literary research go along with the masses and concern themselves with literature for entertainment? Is the only way forward for literature to appeal to an urban reading public, as a mode of leisure and consumption? Are literary masterworks still meaningful and relevant? These questions are important topics of discussion in the twenty-first century. Certainly, the prevailing view among scholars is to recognize the presence of classic works and sustain their belief that this type of literature transcends time and place and has enduring and universal value. Literary classics are significant because they capture the structure of human psychology and a universal beauty common to all humankind. In other words, the main reason certain works are regarded as literary classics is that the work itself captures human emotions in writing that are true to experience; these emotions are the key to differentiating humans from animals, and they resonate with people.

<sup>23</sup> See Tang Bingzheng, “Cong Bao shan Chujian kan *Li Sao* de yishu gousi yu yixiang biaoqian” [Viewing the aesthetic structure and imagery of the *Li Sao* in light of the bamboo strips excavated in Bao shan], *Wenxue yichan*, no. 2 (1994): 4–10; Tang Bingzheng and Liu Xinfang, “Bao shan Chujian shen ming yu *Jiu’ge* shenzhi” [The names of deities in the bamboo strips from Bao shan and honorifics for deities in the *Jiu’ge* (Nine songs)], *Wenxue yichan*, no. 5 (1993): 11–16. For an English translation, see *Ch’u Tz’ü, the Songs of the South, an ancient Chinese anthology*, trans. David Hawkes, ed. Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).



For these reasons, rereading the classics can open up a potentially vast space to restore history, revive culture, entertain diverse readings, and strengthen aesthetic analysis in particular. How can the study of Chinese classical literature help to interpret the characteristics of Chinese traditional culture and convey the aesthetic spirit of the Chinese people? This pressing question needs to be addressed.

Historical development is subordinate to change in the foundation of society. Any explanation we offer about the environment in which individuals live or how humankind progresses should follow from this premise. However, when we get into the specifics of research, we concern ourselves solely with the author's creative spirit or psyche—perhaps because of the way subdisciplines are drawn within the field—and ignore the economic factors underlying the work.<sup>24</sup> At the start of the new millennium, the journals *Wenxue pinglun* [Literature review] and *Wenxue yichan* [Literary heritage]—both published by the Institute of Literature—organized a series of conversations centered on the relationship between economic life and literary creation in traditional China and were joined by several university research centers. The discussions sought to gradually correct flaws in past studies that diverged from the circumstances of material life and engaged in empty investigation of literature.

Time and space are the formal coordinates of material existence. Progress and change in society can only take place in time and space. Studies of history and literature cannot be isolated from time and space, or they would be nothing but castles built in thin air. A series of attempts to situate historical events and personages in time and space, through studies of literary chronology, literary geography, the history of an author's psychology or psyche, and research on the material lives of authors, among other topics, also seek to further restore [our knowledge of] the past. Ultimately, the goal is to step into the inner world of a historical figure or literary personage and to ensure that our research findings will be concrete and reliable.

Many authors of literary masterworks discuss questions of class structure and

<sup>24</sup> Bertrand Russell notes in the preface to his *History of Western Philosophy*, “My purpose is to exhibit philosophy as an integral part of social and political life: not as the isolated speculations of remarkable individuals, but as both an effect and a cause of the character of the various communities in which different systems flourished.” He continues, “This purpose demands more account of general history than is usually given by historians of philosophy.” Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945), ix. From this one can see that this kind of oversight is not unique to China.

change in social class and frequently revisit these issues. The cultural needs and desires of people of different social classes or social levels naturally differ, and these conditions produce literature with distinct formal orientations. In each historical era, distinct types of change took place in social structure and the family, and literature offers a sharp and sensitive reflection of the interactions between social roles and status and of their evolution. Literature can also model and modulate the change in value systems wrought by various forms of social interaction. Literary research requires a sociological perspective and also needs to draw attention to the ways in which literature mirrors changes in social class and social level—as well as considering the literary demands of this task. At the beginning of the twentieth century, after the discovery of the literary materials at Dunhuang, the literature of the common people commanded a high level of scholarly attention.<sup>25</sup> In the 1930s Zheng Zhenduo completed his *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* [History of Chinese vernacular literature], where he broke with the long-standing notion that the history of Chinese literature should concern itself solely with elite literature and suggested new areas for literary research at the same time.<sup>26</sup> Over the past forty years, materials found in archeological excavations, such as the *Shen niao fu* [Rhapsody on the divine bird] and the Tianzhang story inscribed on bamboo and wood strips, have profoundly enriched the contents of Chinese literary history.<sup>27</sup> Many have noted the unprecedented reorientation within Chinese cultural and intellectual circles, as these materials have reshaped our view of the lives of common people and the secular culture of Eastern Han and Jian'an literature that arose from that time.<sup>28</sup> The experience

<sup>25</sup> In 1900 a Daoist abbot, Wang Yuanlu, found a sealed “Library Cave” (Cave 17) in the Dunhuang Mogao cave complex. In a 1907 expedition, Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) purchased manuscripts, paintings, and textiles. The next year Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) purchased materials now in France. See footnote 6.—Trans.

<sup>26</sup> Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938). Zheng was a writer, editor, translator of Sanskrit, founding member of the Crescent Moon literary society, and taught at Peking University.

<sup>27</sup> Fragments of the Tianzhang story were found among Dunhuang manuscripts dating to the Han dynasty. The paleographic discoveries suggest the story circulated earlier than the tale that is found in the *Soushen ji* [In search of the supernatural], attributed to Gan Bao (d. 336). Qiu Xigui discusses the texts of Tianzhang and the *Shen niao fu*. Qiu Xigui, *Zhongguo chutu gu wenxian shijiang* [Ten lectures on ancient Chinese textual materials from archeological excavations] (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2004), chap. ten.—Trans.

<sup>28</sup> One common way to define the Jian'an style in literature is a literary group primarily composed of the “Masters of Jian'an” that served as literary attendants to their lord during the reign (196–220). These writers were immortalized in an essay by Cao Pi and in the *Wen xuan*

of history tells us that literary form, themes, and literary thought also inevitably have their source among the folk.

The preceding points are some basic principles that classical authors affirmed and demonstrated long ago, and we are only now rediscovering their value. The classic works of China's cultural tradition face the task of being understood anew and evaluated once again. Chinese classical literary works contain uniquely rich traces of the essence of traditional culture.

Each academic discipline has its own classic texts. For instance, classical Chinese literature has “Xuan xue” (studies of the *Wen xuan* anthology) and “Hong xue” (studies of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, also known as “Redology”). Yet if we press further into the past, in fact, there was no meaningful distinction among disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy, since they all attend to the same classic works—*Liu jing* [Six classics].<sup>29</sup> The Confucian classics are the foundational canon in the Chinese tradition. They transmit a certain shared sense of values. For instance, the core value for the Chinese has always been ethical morality [*lunli daode*] and seeking truth, good, and beauty as a harmonious unity. When contemplating an issue, one is concerned with the totality of a thing and the close connection among people or things, and the emphasis is on harmony that unites people with others, with society, and with nature; that is markedly different from modern science—which is concerned more with “truth” than “good,” more interested in practicality and less concerned with consequences. These ways of thinking pervade classical literary works and imperceptibly influence, silently nourish, and profoundly shape the Chinese people's sense of value, their view of the world, and their attitude toward human life. In a sense, a “return to the classics” brings renewed attention to the classic works and to China's cultural tradition. Appreciating how this experience is inscribed in classical literature is fundamental to enabling studies of Chinese classical literature to fully develop forty years after reform and opening up.

## Framing the Notion of Literatures in Chinese

For a long time, most studies of the history of Chinese classical literature have

anthology and had seminal influence on later authors. On the *Wen xuan*, or *Selections of Refined Literature*, see footnote 20.—Trans.

<sup>29</sup> The Zhou (1047–772 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasty rulers were instructed in *Liu yi* (Six Arts): the songs [*shi*], documents [*shu*], rites [*li*], music [*yue*], changes [*Yi*], and Spring and Autumn Annals [*Chunqiu*]. In the Tang dynasty (618–906), the number of classics expanded to seven, and the Song dynasty (960–1279) established thirteen classics.

taken the literature of the Han Chinese people as their subject and largely overlooked the actuality of Chinese literature as it has developed among diverse ethnic nationalities. The broad framework for literary history primarily informed by Western notions is at odds with traditional Chinese literature in many respects. Moreover, Chinese literature has not only absorbed elements of foreign cultures, but also constantly and actively disseminated its own culture overseas.

The renowned literary historian Zheng Zhenduo wanted literary history to link the past and present and to include diverse literary genres. More important, he wanted to show the splendor of China's many ethnic literatures. His vision became a reality when Yu Guanying, Qian Zhongshu, and Fan Ning compiled and wrote a three-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi* [History of Chinese literature],<sup>30</sup> Tang Tao edited *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi* [A History of Modern Chinese Literature], and Mao Xing led the editorial team for the *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue shi* [A history of Chinese minorities literature].<sup>31</sup> In the wake of economic reforms and opening up, colleagues in the Institute of Literature also completed the *Zhongguo minjian wenxue shi* [History of Chinese folk literature] and *Zhongguo wenxue tongshi* [General history of Chinese literature]<sup>32</sup> under the guidance of the former director. A work that deserves special mention in this regard is the *Zhonghua wenxue tongshi* [Comprehensive history of the literatures of China].<sup>33</sup> For the first time, this ten-volume work investigates in a single study ancient, modern, and contemporary literature together with various non-Han ethnic nationalities through history. This literary history is a step toward realizing what many scholars hope to see: a comprehensive vision of ancient and modern literary history, encompassing diverse literary genres, as well as comprehensive study of the literatures of the many ethnicities, or *san*

<sup>30</sup> Yu Guanying, Qian Zhongshu, and Fan Ning, comp., *Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 3 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962). This first systematic history of classical Chinese literature was composed under the auspices of the Institute of Literature.

<sup>31</sup> Tang Tao, ed., *History of Modern Chinese Literature*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1980). For an abbreviated, revised version, see *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue jianbian* (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue chubanshe, 1991). Mao Xing, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue shi* (Changsha: Hunan Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983).

<sup>32</sup> Qi Lianxiu and Cheng Qiang, eds., *Zhongguo minjian wenxue shi* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999); Zhang Jiong, Deng Shaoji, Lang Ying, et al., eds., *Zhongguo wenxue tongshi*, 12 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Zhang Jiong, Deng Shaoji, Fan Jun, et al., eds. *Zhonghua wenxue tongshi*, 10 vols. (Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 1997).

*tong* [three connections]. The Institute of Literature established a research office devoted to the literature of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao very early on, and the Association for the Study of Historical Literary Materials of China followed suit. The Association has established a branch for the Study of Ethnic Literary Historical Materials and plans to establish a Group for Study of Historical Materials for Overseas Literature in Chinese, in addition to the existing branches for the Study of Classical Literary Materials and the Study of Early Modern and Modern Literary Historical Materials. The goal is to develop a more expansive study of Chinese literature by positioning it in time and space and to foster new avenues of development.

After an extended period of investigation, the scholarly world devised the timely notion of “literatures in Chinese,”<sup>34</sup> which has continued to be enriched in definition and scope. Scholars universally acknowledge that “Chinese literature” does not only refer to the simple aggregate of China’s many ethnicities defined laterally in space, nor is it restricted to the Chinese mainland or to the literatures of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and overseas literature in Chinese. More crucially, the notion of “literatures in Chinese” is based on the literary history of Greater China [*Da Zhonghua*] and should function both as a discipline (or interrelated fields of study) that is relatively independent and as a system of scholarly disciplines and discourse; in both regards, this notion offers a real solution to problems of scholarly practice and a far-reaching response to theoretical issues.

### *Efforts to Return to the Sources of Chinese Literature*

The Chinese people have a long literary tradition, and Chinese literature has changed and renewed itself over many centuries but within a relatively self-contained geographic space. Following the demise of the examination system

<sup>34</sup> On March 16, 2015, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences organized a meeting of scholars under the auspices of the journals *Wenxue pinglun*, *Wenxue yichan*, and *Minzu wenxue yanjiu* [Studies of ethnic literature] to discuss “advancing literatures in Chinese, integrating and strengthening related disciplines.” They focused on the term “literatures in Chinese” and its theoretical significance, leading to active discussion of the notion, as well as the essential features of literatures in Chinese, the process through which they took shape, and how its meaning might change as it expands outward. Literatures in Chinese manifest various features in each different historical period, and the integration of these features with the spirit of the ethnicities over the course of Chinese history had great impact. Following this, *Wenshi zhishi* [Chinese literature and history] began a column on Literatures in Chinese and invited specialists to contribute their views on these topics.

in 1905 and the rise of the New Culture movement, a shared goal emerged among intellectuals: to build a new culture and speed the destruction of old and exhausted traditions. The essay that Hu Shi published in 1917, titled “Tentative suggestions for reform in literature” [Wenxue gailiang chuyi] was the prelude to the literary revolution. In both the political and cultural arenas, the loudest and shrillest slogans called for toppling the Kong family shop.<sup>35</sup> In the area of literature, “the monsters and demons who study the *Wen xuan* and the bad eggs of Tongcheng”<sup>36</sup> were objects of vilification in speeches and written manifestos.<sup>37</sup> From that time onward, traditional literary studies progressively declined, as they were forced to go along with policies to discard the old and embrace the new.

The first reform was to introduce divisions among the traditional disciplines of study. In order to display their strengths and to put distance between them, literature, history, and philosophy parted ways. In addition, within the discipline of Chinese literature, language and literature became separate paths, and fine distinctions were introduced between classical, modern, and contemporary literature. Classical literature continued to distinguish pre-Qin, the Eastern and Western Han dynasty, Wei, Jin and Six Dynasties, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasty literature. The specifics of an era, such as the Tang dynasty, distinguish early Tang, high Tang, mid-Tang, and late Tang; studies of early

<sup>35</sup> The slogan “topple the Kong family shop” refers to eliminating the culture, ethical morality, and notions of sage governance shaped by Confucian teachings and the state. The second half of the slogan was to “rescue Confucius” [*jiuchu Kong fuzi*] from the culture that was advanced in his name.—Trans.

<sup>36</sup> The anthology *Wen xuan*, or *Selections of Refined Literature* was central to the study of authorial influence, imitation, and the evolution of literary style from the third century on, as discussed above. Tongcheng refers to scholars based in Tongcheng, Anhui Province, whose erudition and mastery of classical Chinese prose gave them renown. Figures such as the essayist Yao Nai (1732–1815) and philosopher Fang Bao (1668–1749) were particularly influential in the mid-Qing dynasty (1645–1911).—Trans.

<sup>37</sup> The News [*Tongxun*] section of *Xin Qingnian* [New youth], vol. 3, no. 5, published a letter from Qian Xuantong to the editor Chen Duxiu, which read: “It is precisely Six Dynasties prose that the Demons of *Wen xuan* studies praise, and Tang and Song dynasty prose emulated by the bad eggs of the Tongcheng [school] that we have absolutely no need to study.” The term *yaonie* [demons] also appears in a letter by Chen Bin (d. 217), “Wei Yuan Shao xi Yuzhou” [Advice to Yuan Shao on Yuzhou]: “Commander Cao Cao’s grandfather died in service as attendant [to Emperor Heng]. [Cao] Peng, along with Zuo Guan (?–165) and Xu Huang (?–164) acted like demons, with reckless gluttony, they damaged social mores and mistreated common folk.” See footnote 21.

Tang literature again mark “the Four Talents of the Early Tang” and Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen,<sup>38</sup> among studies of the “Four Talents.” Then one again must choose among Wang Bo, Yang Jiong, Lu Zhaoling, and Luo Binwang. To put this simply, the divisions among academic disciplines are increasingly small and specialized, so that one cannot see the forest for the trees. Even if many of the trees are not full grown or uneven in height, only fragments are visible. The living stuff of history has been chopped into a bunch of odds and ends so that the richly varied colors of literary history resemble individual telephone poles standing one next to the other.

The second reform in classical Chinese literature was to reorganize and group literary genres together. Originally, the *Zhaoming Wen xuan* and *Wenyuan yinghua* [Refined selections from the garden of literature] arranged works by genre, numbering almost forty literary genres; besides *shi* poetry and *sao* [laments], most genres were some form of prose. At least in the pre-Qin and Eastern and Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), the majority of literary works are *wen* [prose or pattern] in a broad sense. Near the beginning of the twentieth century or shortly after, classical Chinese literary works were categorized into four genres: *shige* [poetry and song], *xiju* [drama and opera], *xiaoshuo* [fiction], and *sanwen* [essays], influenced by Western notions of “four classes” of literary genre. The first three categories composed the mainstream, but the largest category of literary works was paradoxically accorded a lesser status.

Evaluating the role of the authors was the third area of reform in classical Chinese literature. The orthodox view of literature, as expressed in Liu Xie’s *Wenxin diaolong* [The literary mind and carving of dragons] and by Xiao Tong in the *Wen xuan*, locates the origins of Chinese literature in the *Wu jing* [Five classics of the Confucian canon]. Many of those engaged in study of the classics of the Confucian canon are regarded as authors. Yet according to the standards of modern literature, many of these authors are excluded from the sphere of literature. A comparable situation can be seen in studies of the literary history of the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties.

Viewing the past hundred-odd years in the history of the study of Chinese literature in retrospect, we see enormous accomplishments, yet it is hard not to

<sup>38</sup> The poets Shen Quanqi (656–ca. 714) and Song Zhiwen (ca. 656–ca. 712) both gained fame as court poets. After their fall from favor and exile, both wrote occasional poetry. Most famously, Song Zhiwen described his garden and personal feelings about life as a commoner.—Trans.

feel a sense of regret at how far-removed research on Chinese classical literature is from the reality of Chinese literary history and that literary studies have continued to follow paradigms established in the early twentieth century. One important reason for this lies in the theoretical ideas we use as criteria—most of which were constructed with reference to Western language and philosophy. It is difficult to accommodate the whole of Chinese literary history or to explain the complexity and mutability of form, idea, and phenomena in Chinese literature with this theoretical apparatus. In recent years, research on genre studies and textual sources and philology<sup>39</sup> have been in great demand in the field of Chinese literature, while general education has also become a subject that everyone in our profession discusses with great relish. This attests to the realization shared by many scholars that research in the past was biased. One hopes that our studies of literary history can hew more closely to the actual circumstances of Chinese literary history and, beyond that, return to the origins of Chinese literature to build a theoretical framework for Chinese genre studies and narrative studies.

### *Recognizing the Style and Identity of Chinese Literature*

To my knowledge, literature departments at the nationalities universities and schools require their students to fulfill courses that read the literary classics of the Han, in addition to reading the literary classics of their own ethnic nationality. Students are introduced to the Shi[jing] [Classic of songs], [Li]sao [Encountering sorrow], the poets Li Bai (also known as Li Bo, 701–762), Du Fu (712–770), Yuan Zhen (779–831), Bai Juyi (also written Po Chu-yi; 772–846), Han Yu (768–824), and Liu Zongyuan (773–819). In contrast, if we look at the requirements of Chinese departments in universities with comprehensive curriculum, it appears that courses on the literary classics of non-Han ethnicities are rarely on offer. In this regard, the substance of the Chinese department does not correspond to its name. The literary classics of each of the ethnic nationalities in China are an important component of Chinese literature and reasonably ought to be subjects of research in a department of Chinese language and literature. A work such as the eleventh-century Uyghur classic *Qutadğū Bilig* (also

<sup>39</sup> Zeng Zaozhuang, *Zhongguo gudai wenti xue* [Ancient Chinese literary genres], 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2012). Zeng Zaozhuang separately published a compendium of materials on literary genres from pre-Qin to the early modern period. A series Chinese Classical Genre Studies by Zhongshan University faculty from 1997 was reprinted and expanded by Peking University Press from 2011 on.



written *Kutadgu Bilig*; Wisdom of the royal glory),<sup>40</sup> the thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols* [*Menggu mishi*], or the three epic poems of China's national minorities: *The Epic of King Gesar* (also spelled Kesar; an epic cycle of Tibet and Central Asia, believed to date from the twelfth century), the Jangar Epic (an oral epic poem [or *tuuli*] of the Mongols), and the Epic of Manas (a traditional epic poem of the Kyrgyz people), among others. A considerable number of these works still circulate in the nationalities regions today. This is the definition of living literature. The influence of these works crossed national borders long ago and is a source of pride in Chinese culture for all ethnic nationalities. These are the best textbooks to promote the culture of China's nationalities.<sup>41</sup>

We recognize that there is much work to do to research the unity of the diverse sources of China's culture as symbiotic elements that draw from a common source, and to gain scientific understanding of the important role of the diverse literatures of the ethnic nationalities in the formation of Chinese cultural history. Based on the current state of research, the most urgent task is to carry out systematic, in-depth analysis of historical sources. We need to accurately describe the historical process of various ethnic nationalities gathering and their integration in different periods of Chinese history. In recent years, the national Philosophy and Social Science Fund has supported some important large-scale projects, addressing the practicalities of attending to the language and literatures of China's diverse ethnic nationalities. At the same time, this funding agency has initiated systematic compilation of materials and research in order to demonstrate fully the complexity and diversity of Chinese literature. These efforts will doubtless contribute to advancing the construction of a theoretical framework for Chinese literature.

### *Transforming the Nation through Culture*

For nearly a century, the influence of foreign culture in modern China has drawn significant attention, while China's influence on bordering nations, the

<sup>40</sup> The work is written in Middle Turkish, with an influx of vocabulary from Arabic and Persian.

<sup>41</sup> See Li Binghai, *Minzu ronghe he Zhongguo gudian wenxue* [Ethnic integration and Chinese classical literature] (n.p.: Xibei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997); Liu Yahu, Deng Minwen, and Luo Hantian, *Zhongguo nanfang minzu yu wenxue guanxi* [A history of South Chinese nationalities and literature] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2001); Lang Ying and Zha Laga, *Zhongguo ge minzu wenxue guanxi yanjiu* [The relationship among the literatures of China's various ethnic nationalities] (Guilin: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2005).

broader region, and even the world has been largely ignored. Over the past several years, some institutions of higher education have established research institutes to document Chinese classics located in overseas collections, and the Ministry of Culture has organized a Global Chinese Classics compilation project to comprehensively collect and edit Chinese classic texts and document editions located overseas. The literature of China has not only nourished the children of Hua Xia,<sup>42</sup> but has also been a major influence on bordering nations as well as Europe and the United States. It holds an important place in the treasury of world culture. For instance, the Confucian classics *Shijing* [*Book of Poetry*], *Shangshu* [*Book of History*], *Chunqiu* [*Spring and Autumn Annals*], and others were transmitted to the Korean peninsula early on, where the classics had active influence in educational advancement, the examination system, Confucian political concepts of “rule by moral virtue” and “benevolent governance” and moral ethics couched in terms of loyalty, filial piety, restraint, and righteousness. The contents of modern Korean bibliographies such as the *Index of Chinese Works in the Kyujanggak Archive* (edited by Seoul University, Korea) allow us to see the footprint left by Chinese books in the Korean peninsula.

The “Account of Eastern Barbarian Tribes” in the *Book of Tang* [*Jiu Tang shu*] records that Japan sent ambassador missions to China numerous times “to request Confucian scholars to instruct the classics.” Many of them “scoured the marketplace for books and crossed the sea with them,” carrying a large quantity of Chinese books to Japan. Early Japanese indexes and monographs like the ninth-century manuscript *Riben guo jian zai shummu* [Bibliography of (Chinese books) seen in Japan], reprinted in the *Gu yi congshu* [Compendium of rare classical books], also preserve a rich imprint of history.<sup>43</sup>

Modern archeological evidence suggests that exchanges between China and the West must have taken place earlier than the Han dynasty [imperial envoy] Zhang Qian (ca. 164–114 BCE).<sup>44</sup> Traditional Chinese culture spread to Europe through the Silk Road early on. In his book *Zhongguo wenhua xichuan Ouzhou*

<sup>42</sup> Hua Xia is a historical concept of the Chinese nation and civilization. Some link Hua Xia to Huaxu, mother of the originators of the cosmos, who paved the way for the Xia, the first hereditary dynasty.—Trans.

<sup>43</sup> Fujiwara Sukeyo, *Riben guo jian zai shummu*. The manuscript is available in facsimile reprint. (Qing) Li Shuchang, comp., *Gu yi congshu* (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangli guji keyin she, [1884] 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Zhang Qian was imperial envoy to the Western regions. Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE) tasked him to form alliances and establish trade. His trip is said to have charted the Silk Road.—Trans.

*shi* [A history of the spread of Chinese culture to Europe], French scholar René Etiemble tells us that libraries in England, France, Germany, and Italy have collected Chinese books and manuscripts since the seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup> At that time, set-phrases, anecdotes, and literary works captured the imagination of Western scholars. Forward-looking scholars discovered that Eastern culture could transform their national spirit, nationalistic ideals, sense of social responsibility and search for moral refinement into an individual awareness—an internalized set of values—that could erase the divisions among people and the gulfs between individuals and society, as well as humans and nature. These values could also work to bridge the divisions within nation states, races, and families, to help dissolve dangerous conflicts, and to integrate social strengths. This thinking still has practical significance today.

Literature is the best medium to help people grasp the quintessence of traditional Chinese culture, to understand the significance of modern China's core values, and by doing so to truly establish the image of China as a great cultural nation in the world. This is a turning point in history that Chinese classical literature research can spread widely forty years after economic reform and opening up.

### Approaches to Arranging Textual Sources across Time

With the nation's growing economic might and the onset of the digital age, the number of compendia, facsimile editions, and thoroughly collated editions of classical works from China and abroad have increased.<sup>46</sup> For more than forty years, publishers Zhonghua shuju and Shanghai guji chubanshe have taken the lead in printing large-scale literary collections, reference works, and

<sup>45</sup> René Etiemble, *Zhongguo wenhua xichuan Ouzhou shi*, trans. Geng Sheng (Beijing: Shangwu, 2000; first published in French, *L'Europe Chinoise: De la Sinophilie à la Sinophobie* [Europe and Chinese influence: From being enamored of China to Sinophobia], Paris: Gallimard 1988).

<sup>46</sup> Nan Jiangtao, "Gaike kaifang sishi nian lai de guji yingyin chuban" [Facsimile editions of classical works in the forty years since economic reform and opening], in *Zhongguo chubanshi yanjiu*, no. 1 (2018): 76–90. Nan Jiangtao and Jia Guirong, *Xin Zhongguo guji yinyin congshu zongmu* [An index of compendia of facsimile classical books done in New China] (Beijing: National Library, 2016). Between 1949 and 2010, a total of 443 new compendia have been published, containing fifty thousand entries by or about philosophers. Specifically for the fortieth anniversary of market reforms (i.e., 2018), more than 1,000 classical compendia (based on one method of calculation), classics in the Confucian canon, category books, and reference books have been published, and contain 60,000 entries related to ancient philosophers.

compilations of source materials—all of them systematically dated and collated; these provide rich and comprehensive materials for research on Chinese classical literature and have spurred the overall development of studies of classical literature. Both the assembling of textual sources and studies of historical sources are enjoying an unprecedented historical moment.<sup>47</sup>

If we survey the development of methods for scholarship in China, there are three approaches to assembling and interpreting literary sources. The first involves relatively simple annotation and getting the text to flow. One example is Zheng Xuan's (127–200 CE) annotations to the classics of the Confucian canon in the latter part of the Eastern Han dynasty; this represents the most basic arrangement of texts and is the most important form. The second approach is to systematically arrange and group materials, which often involves *variorum*. This may involve assembling a corpus, or combining annotations, as seen in the Six Scholars annotations [*Liu Chen zhu*] for the *Zhaoming Wen xuan*, or the collation of the thirteen classics by Qing dynasty scholars. The third method is to mediate the sense of a Chinese text, which adds a component of intellectual history. An example is Guo Xiang's (ca. 252–312 CE) *Zhuangzi zhu* [Annotated *Zhuangzi*] from the Wei Jin period or the *Zhou Yi zhu* [Annotated (book of) *Change of the Zhou dynasty*] by Wang Bi (226–249). Their approaches are very different from the kind of collation and scrupulous attention to the sense of each word that is the basis for traditional annotation, and in reality they make inferences about the argument and interpret the thinker or school of thought.

The three methods of arranging textual sources are all important; there is no distinction in status or value, nor could one differentiate which is in favor

<sup>47</sup> The 2000s were an important turning point in studies of modern Chinese literary historical sources after the 1990s. In December 2003, Tsinghua University, Peking University, Henan University, the Chinese Modern Literature Museum, and the Beijing Lu Xun Museum jointly organized discussions “The Question of Textual Sources for Chinese Modern Literature.” In October 2004, the Henan University Humanities Institute joined with the editors of *Wenxue pinglun* and Luoyang Normal University Department of Chinese to hold a scholarly conference “The Question of Textual Sources for Modern Chinese Literature—New Discovery of Historical Material and Reexamination of Chinese Literary History.” *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* [Modern Chinese literature papers] published a special issue on historical sources for modern Chinese literature in 2005. The same year, Xinhua [New China books] published Liu Zengren et al., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue qikan shilun* [On the history of modern Chinese literature journals], and in 2014 the Chinese Academy of Sciences published Xu Pengxu's study *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue wenxian xue* [Textual sources for modern Chinese literature].

and which is out of favor. Yet if there were not people trained in amending words and phrases, or punctuating paragraphs and chapters, and able to identify historical place names and administrative officials throughout history, most classical texts would be incomprehensible to the ordinary reader. Without this first level of annotation, there would be no basis to speak of a “corpus variorum,” or a scholarly elucidation of the argument in a classic text. Thus, pure annotation of the text remains the most important form of arranging sources.

Of course, each era presents new forms of learning and new opportunities. In our time, large-scale facsimile editions of Chinese texts are the most obvious scholarly accomplishment. At present, many efforts to arrange textual materials are still fairly careless, and some scarcely show any sign of an arrangement and simply present a pile of textual material. If we continue to limit ourselves to the traditional domain of knowledge of textual material, it will be difficult to go beyond our predecessors. In 1925 Wang Guowei gave a lecture “The major discovery in Chinese scholarship of the past ten years” at the National Learning Academy of Tsinghua University.<sup>48</sup> He argued that all new learning is facilitated by new discoveries. Over the past forty-odd years textual materials found in archeological excavations, sources located in collections outside China, and digitized electronic sources have greatly increased the content of traditional literary materials and best show the special characteristics of arranging sources in our time.

Learning values discovery and it also values invention. The discovery of new materials is inspiring. Yet at the same time, putting emphasis solely on new materials while neglecting traditional learning makes it difficult to see what value this material has. The superiority or inferiority of learning is not only based on having more new material in hand; the hard part is discovering new questions within existing materials. This requires scholarly expertise. When the renowned Qing dynasty scholar Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) organized people to collate and arrange the thirteen Confucian classics, he raised another consideration: to preserve the product of Qing dynasty learning in a concrete, yet miniscule print, using a form of display that orders all the various comments sequentially. The way in which the modern scholars Qiu Xigui edited the *Changsha Mawangdui hanmu jianbo jicheng* [Compendium of texts on bamboo

<sup>48</sup> Wang Guowei (Wang Kuo-wei) belonged to the “watershed generation” of 1890s scholars who could see no future for classical learning. He contributed to the study of epigraphy and Shang history, philosophy, and literary criticism, and created a conceptual framework for Song and Yuan drama and *ci* (song lyric), using a hybrid of Chinese and Western learning.

strips and silk from the Han dynasty tomb at Mawangdui, Changsha] and Li Ruohui compiled and wrote *Laozi jizhu huikao* [Textual criticism of the collected commentaries on the *Laozi*]<sup>49</sup> amply reflect the special characteristics of learning in our time. Their works systematically assemble textual materials that bear on the canon in formats designed to summarize earlier commentators' contributions, to reflect the special characteristics of the age. Forty years after economic reform and opening up this is an important foundation for Chinese classical literature research to make new scholarly gains.

### Recovering Strength in Theoretical Studies

Research on textual materials is not an end in itself—it is a type of method and a route forward. It resembles the roof of a house: literary historical materials are the clay tiles, but without an architect's plan, the house cannot take shape. The history of literature is a multistory building that calls for material to reinforce the structure, but requires an overall plan still more. This is the only way the raw material, which is uninteresting and lifeless, can glow and come to life. This is where theory needs to follow up.<sup>50</sup>

More than forty years ago the discussion of truth as a standard was initially no more than a philosophical issue, and yet it later turned into a visible and palpable material force. That discussion significantly advanced the course of economic reforms and opening up. Of course, only theory that goes to the root of things has such a strong logical force and material possibility. The historical experience of Chinese literature research tells us that renewing scholarly ideas is the basis for moving the profession of literature studies forward. If we said the foundation of textual materials is bone and sinew, then the conceptual aspects of literature are its lifeblood. The two combine to form outer and inner layers, which mutually inform each other; one without the other will not suffice. In doing the work of research, we often engage one aspect and lose the other, or emphasize one and neglect the other, dividing the two, or even view them as opposing forces, since our consciousness does not accommodate both aspects.

There is no taboo on saying that we have been trained that theory leads the way, and we have habitually borrowed concepts to interpret the subjects of our

<sup>49</sup> Qiu Xigui, *Changsha Mawangdui hanmu jianbo jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014); Li Ruohui, *Laozi jizhu huikao* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> See the translators' preface to R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* [*Lishi de guannian*, in Chinese], trans. He Zhaowu and Zhang Wenjie (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1986), 23.

research and that has led us to pursue a one-sided approach to the ways in which concepts take shape and change. In the past we also revered modes of research with which the Soviet Union indoctrinated us and sought for underlying principles or laws, and we became absorbed in mechanistic methods of social science. To an even greater extent, we fetishized modern Western learning and used it to “purify” our tradition. For a time, *lao san lun* [the old three theories] and *xin san lun* [three new theories],<sup>51</sup> modernism and postmodernism, and various new methods and theories entered the arena in turn. “Students of literature have become amateur political scientists, uninformed sociologists, incompetent anthropologists, mediocre philosophers and overdetermined cultural historians,” as the American scholar Harold Bloom observed.<sup>52</sup> At the start of the millennium, a dense miasma of sorts lifted, and we suddenly discovered that the notion that we could use theory from anywhere around the globe to interpret our sources was a boondoggle from the beginning. Faced with this change and the ensuing chaos, it appeared that students of Chinese classical literature had failed to think through the issues and lost direction—as if everyone had been at a festival celebrating, while they disassembled the classical canon and overturned tradition. Some turned to traditional study of textual sources or immersed themselves in source studies—pursuits that have weight and value. Objectively speaking, studies of classical literature returned to textual materials and emphasized the concrete issues of evidential learning,<sup>53</sup> which certainly had more value than empty debates in which language fails to express ideas. Yet the return to textual sources holds an undeniable element of risk, for if things were to continue this way it would certainly reduce our interest in exploring theoretical frameworks, and that would ultimately impede breakthroughs in the study of classical Chinese literature.

This returns us to an issue raised earlier: when literary studies faltered and did not move forward, a return to the classics became a conscious choice in the academy. Yet certainly, in a time of development, traditional notions of the

<sup>51</sup> The “old three theories” refer to systems theory, cybernetics, and information theory—schools of thought that took shape in the 1940s and 1950s. The “new three theories” date to the late 1970s and were relevant largely to the sciences: dissipative energy theory, synergetics or functionalism, and catastrophic change.—Trans.

<sup>52</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 487.

<sup>53</sup> On *kaozheng xue* [evidential learning], see Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1991).

classics should advance with the times. The complexity and multifaceted nature of history far exceeds our imagination. In the past several years, theories of cultural memory, oral history, and studies of manuscript culture have all advanced along various channels—all in an effort to get closer to the truth of history. Friedrich Nietzsche said there are no facts, only interpretation.<sup>54</sup> The “post-truth” era prompts us to reconsider issues such as the forms of representation of historical actors, the sources of classical materials, and the relation between historical imagination and literary imagination. For a long time, our treatment of historical materials has been relatively simplistic, resorting to two ambiguous extremes: there are sources suspected to be authentic, and those with probable insinuation of classical material. We could also posit a middle ground, that is, glosses that interpret the classical text; then we could proudly proclaim we are “emerging from the age of doubt” [*Zou chu yigu shidai*].<sup>55</sup> Yet the essential question is whether we trust the veracity of historical material or not. In fact, the historical materials now in existence derive from various sources. Some materials credibly originate in a given historical period, while some passages were later interpolated. In such a case, neither dismissing the value of a work due to lingering doubts about some aspects nor accepting the authenticity of a historical text while ignoring discrepancies are plausible options. To seek truth based on the facts by analyzing the specific features of a particular source work is the only form of theory that will help future studies of Chinese classical literature continue to develop.

### The Appeal of Classical Literature

The power of literature lies in its ability to stir and move its readers. Ye Chiaying has said, “Scholars who dedicate their lives to serve the country are too numerous to count, yet no one could ever forget the *Book of Songs*, *Encountering Sorrow*, Li Bai, and Du Fu.” Her book *Du Fu Qiuxing ba shou jishuo* [Commentaries on Du Fu’s Autumn Meditations] situates Du Fu’s (712–770) poetic compositions in his particular time and place, to help us see them in historical perspective, as if looking down from a lofty vantage point. Her work allows us to appreciate how closely linked Du Fu’s literary accomplishment is to his time and how it is inseparable from the people, and still more enmeshed with his

<sup>54</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 267.

<sup>55</sup> This phrase echoes the title of an influential book by Zhu Weizheng, *Zou chu Zhong shiji* [Emerging from the Middle Period] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009).—Trans.



sublime intellectual conception. In recent years, Ye Chiaying has devoted herself to sharing the tradition of chanting and singing classical song lyric and promoting widespread knowledge of these things. Through her words and example, she has inspired some people to go into scholarly research; others have fallen in love with poetry and song through her influence and, seeing the appeal of classical song lyric, have become interested in reading and chanting it aloud. On November 28, 2020, the documentary film on Ye Chiaying's contributions to Chinese song lyric, titled *Ju shui yue zai shou* [Scooping the water, the moon is in my hand],<sup>56</sup> was awarded the 33rd Annual China Film Golden Rooster Award for Best Documentary in the Educational Film category. This shows the extent to which classical song lyric and literary studies have gained public recognition.

The ability to show the significance and value of literary studies depends on the researcher's aesthetic realm. If one sees scholarly research as a means to satisfy their curiosity or earn a comfortable living, the endeavor is lifeless. Truly outstanding researchers need to choose a historical vantage point that lets them thoroughly grasp the ideals and pursuits of the common people and keenly observe temporal change and social development. Scholars need to relate their research to the needs of the common people and the fate of our nation, as the only means to sustain themselves and to raise the quality of learning. The renowned scholar Jiang Liangfu was badly shaken by the so-called September 18 incident.<sup>57</sup> He also felt extremely angry and then decided to investigate the national character and the special characteristics of national culture. He was searching for "what the people contribute and also a way forward for the present and the future." In his book *Xia Yin Minzu kao* [The Xia and Yin people], he first observed the motif of the "dragon" totem.<sup>58</sup> A number of scholars took up his efforts, and the carved dragon figure became linked to the ideal of China's people rallying together to save the nation. Jiang Liangfu widened his scholarly perspective and founded a broad area of study, whose research findings are profoundly popular because he was brave enough to dedicate himself to the

<sup>56</sup> The title borrows from a five-syllable quatrain *Chunshan yeyue* [Viewing the moon at night from the hill in springtime] by Tang dynasty official Yu Liangshi (n.d.).—Trans.

<sup>57</sup> The Mukden incident on September 18, 1931, also called Nine-One-Eight, marks the surprise attack by the Japanese army, after they faked sabotage of the train line, to occupy the northwest city of Shenyang.—Trans.

<sup>58</sup> Jiang Liangfu, *Xia Yin minzu kao* (Shanghai: Shanghai minzu yuekan she, 1933). The Xia is the first historical dynasty, and the Shang (also known as Yin) succeeded them to rule the Yellow River valley in the second millennium BCE.

national effort. His research demonstrates how such work can truly play a role in guiding people's minds and consolidating strength. This is the most profound spiritual inspiration handed down to us by the previous generation of scholars.

### The Normalization of International Exchange

Reaching a state of equilibrium among nations has been a forceful call within the academic community. While we have advanced outstanding works of Chinese classical literature and research findings overseas, at the same time we have also absorbed some of the more impressive research findings by foreign scholars; an increasingly large number of scholars see this type of exchange as important.

The journal *Wenxue yichan* has made significant efforts in this respect. It has promoted inquiry into the potentially boundless content of Chinese traditional literature—both its enduring features and its new potential. But it has also sought to broaden the vista of scholarly research and constantly seeks to introduce research news and related materials from abroad.<sup>59</sup> Building on this foundation, they strategically arranged to publish articles by overseas scholars, including Shimizu Yoshio's essay "Shipin' shi yi ziwei wei zhongxin ma?" [Does the *Shipin* (Grades of Poetry) really center on taste?] and Takeda Akira's "Yi Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi de yanguang du Han fu" [Reading the Han dynasty rhapsody through the perspective of the history of fiction].<sup>60</sup> Shimizu's essay aptly comments on a problem that pervades academic circles in mainland China, while Takeda shifts his research perspective to evaluate historical uses of

<sup>59</sup> "Zicheng yi pian fenghua jingxiang" [To compose a graceful panorama], no. 2 (1992) is an evaluation of three studies of Han dynasty rhapsody [*fu*]; "Taiwan jin sishi nian Shijing yanjiu gaikuang" [The state of the field of Shijing (Book of Poetry) studies in the past forty years in Taiwan], no. 4 (1994) is an exhaustive introduction to research on the *Book of Poetry* on both sides of the Straits, that allows the reader to share the insights of one people of one race and shared roots. In addition, the journal published "Shishuo xinyu zai Riben de liuchuan yu yanjiu" [The transmission of *Shishuo xinyu* (New account of tales of the world) in Japan and relevant studies], no. 4 (1994); "Zhong Rong *Shipin* zai yuwai de yingxiang ji yanjiu" [The influence of Zhong Rong's *Shipin* outside China and related studies], no. 4 (1993); and "Han'guo yanjiu Liuchao wenlun de lishi yu xianzhuang" [The history of Korean studies of Six Dynasties literary theory and the state of the field], no. 4 (1993), as well as works offering rich materials and threads for scholars in the field.

<sup>60</sup> Shimizu Yoshio, "Shipin shi yi ziwei wei zhongxin ma?" *Wenxue yichan*, no. 4 (1993): 37–45; Takeda Akira, "Yi Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi de yanguang du Han fu," *Wenxue yichan*, no. 4 (1995): 14–20.

the rhapsody [*fu*] in the Han dynasty using criteria of fiction research. At the same time, the journal has published well-received articles that use textual materials and sources found overseas.<sup>61</sup>

*Wenxue yichan* started a special feature Conversations with Foreign Scholars that featured exclusive interviews with scholars who specialize in various topics and methods. The aim of this feature was not only to introduce a certain scholar's accomplishments, but more importantly to introduce research news and trends. For instance, a 1997 interview with the American Tsu-lin Mei (also written Zulin Mei) notably had this kind of impact.

In the publishing field, we can look at the example of Shanghai guji chubanshe, which published the series Works by Foreign Sinologists. The titles in this series all had significant influence, including *Meiguo xuezhe lun Tangdai wenxue* [American scholars on Tang dynasty literature], edited by William H. Nienhauser; Obi Kōichi, *Zhongguo wenxue zhong suo biao xian de ziran yu ziran-guan* [Nature and views of nature found in Chinese literature]; Yu-kung Kao (also written Yougong Gao) and Tsu-lin Mei's *The Aesthetic of Tang Poetry: Structuralist Criticism of Poetic Language*; Stephen Owen's *Remembrances*; Tanaka Issei's *Zhongguo de zongjiao yu xiju* [Chinese religion and drama]; and Boris Riftin's study, *The Relation between Chinese Historical Romance and Folk Literature Traditions*; among others. The variety of this series was an effective way to communicate new developments and intensified exchange between scholars in China and abroad.

## Critical Issues

Research on Chinese classical literature has a long and glorious history, and over the centuries historians have devoted untold effort, sweat, and toil to understand it. When we survey Chinese learning, all those who have made important contributions possess a kind of erudition and intellectual cultivation. They did not adhere to prevailing scholarly ideas or stand still and refuse to abandon old practices, nor did they restrict themselves to any one aspect and refuse to investigate

<sup>61</sup> An article by Ding Yongzhong unearthed an eighth-century song written by a monk Liang in the Liu Song period (420–479) from an eighth-century Japanese book *Shengwu chenhan zaji*, noting similarities between the Buddhist verse and Tao Yuanming's poem "The Return" [*Gui qulai xi ci*]. This discovers concrete and nuanced evidence for the view that the poems of Tao Yuanming reflect a confluence of metaphysical thinking and Buddhism in his time. Ding Yongzhong, "Gui qulai xi ci [The Return] and the Buddhist song 'Gui qulai,'" *Wenxue yichan*, no. 5 (1993): 17–27.

literary history more broadly; they did not neglect close analysis of the particular work, nor did they steer away from in-depth understanding of the cultural background of that given time period. We should acknowledge that the path forged by their scholarship continues to offer critical inspiration.

We might tie all these concerns to one point: How might we inherit and build on the outstanding works of our predecessors, while continuing to develop and innovate under new historical conditions? Those of us engaged in the study of classical Chinese literature frequently err in this pursuit. Problems occurred mainly at two extremes. On the one hand, some overlook the cumulative weight of learning and present lofty views without evidence, but since they rest on an unstable foundation, they have nothing to say. When new methodologies were popular in the 1980s, this type of essay flooded the journals in our field. At the time, people well established in the field did not bother to read many articles, while people who were not established could not make any sense of them. Circumstances have changed with the passage of time, and very few articles from that time still hold value. The fashionable topics now are *ru* [Confucian scholars], *shi* [Buddhist monks], *dao* [the Way], and the cultural tradition of China. Some scholars specialize in the literary thought of Confucian authors. Some explore the ways in which Daoist aesthetics bear on Chinese culture. With topics this vast, and essays that are so short in length, we arrive at a paradoxical situation that might be resolved by acting boldly and perceptively, like a heavenly steed soaring in the skies, to seek an overview of the entire situation. Though eminently practical, this would not resolve any issue, just help us reach conclusions that would suit any time period.

At the other extreme, we split hairs, and that inevitably yields findings that are partial or biased. Many articles get entangled in issues that are difficult to resolve, and they argue the point and debate, as if bisecting a circle through different points—the more one tries to mark out a position, the greater the distance between that and other possible solutions. If one addresses a single point, it seems we might have a glimpse of a finding, but a comprehensive investigation will show there is absolutely no basis for the claim. If a scholar uses only one or two isolated examples to infer the meaning of a word, it is out of context. Without basic training in philology, they are likely to understand the word from its superficial meaning, which can easily lead to misreading. When people do something similar in studies of the history of literature, the practice of looking at the surface to determine meaning is more serious and consequential.

These issues reflect the volatility and mood of impatience that linger in the

field of classical Chinese literature research, with relatively serious consequences. These two tendencies—to push for new findings that will have an impact or to look for short-term results to demonstrate one’s merit—can only do harm to the sound development of research on classical literature.

### Concluding Remarks

Research on Chinese classical literature in the new era has progressed for forty years on a path that has been hard-earned and brilliant, and has accumulated a wealth of experience. After the strenuous efforts of planting the seed for the field, the Chinese academic community has now established a relatively strong foundation and has nurtured several new generations of scholars. We are no longer content with the pursuit of a shallow sense of art and place greater value on a massive and concrete sense of history; we are no longer content to use ready-made theory indiscriminately and place greater importance on accumulating and layering textual sources. At this moment, the aim and emphasis of scholarly research have grown progressively clearer and more concise: to strive for historical perspective in order to gain a deep understanding of the ideals pursued by the common people; to closely observe the vicissitudes of time and historical change; and to seek a theoretical framework for Chinese literature research. That framework will provide a route and method for establishing an ordering for research in the field of classical Chinese literature and for hastening the establishment of academic disciplines, systems of learning, and systems of discourse with Chinese characteristics.

*Translated from the Chinese by Kathryn Lowry*

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