

On Variations of Classical Chinese Literary Theory for a Framework of Global Literary History

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Abstract: In "On Variations of Classical Chinese Literary Theory for a Framework of Global Literary History" Peina Zhuang discusses texts of classical Chinese literary theory as a reservoir for philosophical reflections on literary art. The aesthetics of Chinese literature originate in Confucianism and Taoism and hence represent an important background for any discussion of ancient, modern, or contemporary Chinese literature and literary history. Zhuang analyzes texts of classical Chinese literary theory within such a framework of a literary history and aims at furthering Chinese literature to become an integral part of world literatures. Further, Zhuang argues that "history" and "literary history" present a different picture of works on classical Chinese literary theory owing to the variation caused in representing their literary and aesthetic features. Zhuang also posits that the translation of Chinese literary texts to Western languages, while relevant and important, is not enough to advance Chinese literature from a peripheral status to a status of recognition hence the importance of scholarship with regard to literary history specifically.

Keywords: Classical Chinese Literary Theory; Literary History; Aesthetics; Variation Theory

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL CHINESE LITERARY THEORY

In classical Chinese literary history, the term "literary theory" is different from the term's modern sense where the context means research of theoretical perspectives and reflection on literary issues. It is introduced from the West and almost similar to the term "literary theory and criticism." Owing to the overlapping tradition between classical Chinese literature and history, there is a lack of classification between literature and texts of literary theory. Thus, there is no such thing as "literary theory" similar to the Western counterpart in ancient China since "the philosophical reflections on literary art produced in traditional China cannot be accurately described as literary criticism and literary theory" (Wang 529). These discussions and thoughts on literature accumulated in

the long years of literary practice are scattered in various historical books, presented in dialogues between writers, or hidden in monographs about literary texts. If one applies the standards of Western literary theory in the analysis of classical Chinese literary theory, the exercise leads to a dead end: "Thus, if a study on Chinese literary criticism is to be undertaken, the first concession modern scholars have to make is to drop the notion that 'criticism' has to be 'formal' and accept the fact that in the Chinese tradition, critics do not usually adopt a serious attitude in discussing literature and most of the extant 'critical' writings are far from being systematic explorations of literary criticism" (Ngan 185). Therefore, if one wants to study classical Chinese literary theory, first we need to clarify own characteristics both in form and content and stay resist the idea of reading and applying classical Chinese literary theory based on concepts of Western literary theory.

A quick look at the history of classical Chinese literary theory shows that the period of pre-Qin and Han dynasties is the basic stage in its development when literary theory mostly existed in works of various schools of thought at that time such as 诗言志 ("poetry expresses ambition") (Guo and Wang 30). The Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties constituted the golden period in classical Chinese literary theory when monographs in this regard made their debut including 文心雕龙 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon), 文赋 Wenfu (Prose on Fu), and 诗品 Shiping (Verse on the Rankings of Poets). Compared with previous dynasties, theoretical thinking paid more attention to the aesthetic value of literature. The Tang and Song dynasties witnessed the deepening development of classical literary theory. For instance, Han Yu's literary philosophy and Sikong Tu's 二十四诗品 *Twenty-Four Verses on Appreciating Poetry* were both deeply influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, while Yan Yu's 沧浪诗话 (Book on Theory and Aesthetics of Poetry) exhibits more Zen influence. One of the significant characteristics of literary theory in the Ming and Qing dynasties were commentaries on novels and dramas and Jin Shengtan's criticism on 水浒传 (The Outlaws of the Marsh) is one of the outstanding representatives whose brilliance equals that of the novel itself.

Thus, despite the lack of strictness and systematics with regard to the set-up of different specialties in modern literary theory, classical Chinese

literary theory, like classical Chinese literature, had experienced a transition from less aware to more aware levels of the exploration of the aesthetic value of literature and this is related to the development of literature itself. Therefore, scholars and critics believe that classical Chinese literary theory as a discipline is both old and young: "Its antiquity is due to the long history of China and the history of Chinese literature, and its youth arises from the lack of a clear sense of discipline. So, the establishment of a systematic and rigorous discipline can only be realized in modern times" (Li 1). This process, to a great extent, depends on the introduction and influence of the Western literary theory, a system as I say earlier different from classical Chinese literary tradition. We can try to understand classical Chinese literary theory with and within perspectives of modern literary theory or even Western literary theory in order to rejuvenate classical Chinese literary theory. However, if we ignore its specific cultural context and pursue "modernity" and neglect its inherent essence, we cannot really understand it, let alone make it develop in the current context or even realize the dialogue and elucidation between different cultural literary theories. As suggested above, there was no clear concept of "literary theory" in the modern sense in ancient China and it was often impromptu literary creations with strong aesthetic quality and value. They are also important literary texts produced in the cultural background of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism hence included in the history of literature, since some of the most distinctive and influential voices in Chinese literature are expressed through literary theory.

Further, it is not the first time in literary history to include works of literary theory into a "historical" vision. For example, Torao Suzuki's *The History of Chinese Poetry Theory* is the first monograph on the history of Chinese literary criticism. Similar works of literary theory have exerted a great influence on later studies of Chinese literary criticism. However, many issues need to be considered as to such texts include the general history of a nation's literature, selection criteria, the mode of analysis, and the key points of commentary. Based on an overview of works on the classical Chinese literary theory in the selected English-language versions of literary history and their respective characteristics and limitations in presenting works of classical Chinese literary theory, I argue that the characteristics of texts of literary theory should be analyzed within the

vision of a literary history, that is, the literariness of these texts under the guidance of the concept of a "history" and not just its theoretical thought on literature and literary creation and the Taoist view of literary theory.

WORKS OF CLASSICAL CHINESE LITERARY THEORY UNDER A FRAMEWORK OF "HISTORY"

The versions of English-language versions I discuss are *A History of Chinese Literature* (Giles 1901), *Chinese Literature: A Historical Introduction* (Chen 1961), *Early Chinese Literature* (Watson 1962), *A History of Chinese Literature* (Lai 1964), *An Introduction to Chinese Literature* (Liu 1966), *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (Mair 2010), *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (Chang and Owen 2010), and *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Knight 2012). The presentation of works on classical Chinese literary theory in texts listed here can be categorized into the following.

First, emphasis not diverted into literariness nor theoretical essence of these works, but into their translation as manifested in H.A. Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature*. Giles includes Sikong Tu's *Twenty-four Poems on Appreciating Poetry* in the first chapter of the fourth volume with a simple introduction to the author's life and also references to the influence of Taoism. Giles writes that "The following philosophical poem, consisting of twenty-four apparently unconnected stanzas, is admirably adapted to exhibit the form under which pure Taoism commends itself to the mind of a cultivated scholar" (179). One feature of Giles's approach is the full translation of Tu's text, but Giles does not present an analysis of its literariness and theoretical perspectives. Giles presents only the work itself or more precisely, the "translation" of Tao's text. Chen Shouyi's *Chinese Literature: A Historical Introduction* offers a more detailed introduction to Chinese texts on literary theory. There are three sections devoted to this aspect. First, Chen summarizes Lu Ji's literary views into three points in Chapter Ten "The Period of Wei-Jin literature," that is, "equal emphasis to the content and the form of literature, equal stress to imagination and emotion, and championing a new note in creative literature by advocating the futility of imitation" (159) followed by a short analysis of Ge Hong's view of literary evolution: "counteracting the over-emphasis laid by Confucianists on the moral integrity of the writer at the expense of the

literary technique" (160). In Chapter Twelve "The Age of Disunion" Chen analyzes the literary achievements of the Southern Liang Dynasty: "the effective leadership taken by its emperors, many of the important court ministers being excelled in literary writings, and the prolonged peace at that time" (227). Chen chooses Liu Xie and Zhong Rong, and gives a brief overview of the general literary characteristics and content of 文心雕龙 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon*) along with discussions on Zhong Rong's literary theories against the use of allusions and the traditional standards of phonology. And in Chapter Nineteen "Literature in Song Dynasty: Traditional Poetry" Chen summarizes Yan Yu's view which criticizes song poetry and praises poetry in 'Tang and Wei and Jin dynasties, but without introducing Yan's works.

Different from the earlier literary histories, the literary history of the period around the 1950s began to highlight the characteristics of "theory" dimension of these works. But such a development of emphasizing "theory" in these works goes to another extreme that constitutes the second feature of presenting works of classical Chinese literary theory under a "historical" framework at the expense of sacrificing the analysis of literariness of these works which runs counter to the original intention and aim of compiling a literary history. Owing to the tradition of integrating literature, history, and philosophy, classical Chinese literary theory does not own an independent status as a genre, but is scattered under works of literature, history, and philosophy in the form of letters, prefaces, and postscripts. Take *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon* as an example: a bibliographical investigation of this work shows its inclusion under categories such as 总集 (zongji, category comprising the anthology of writings of the same kind by different writers) and 别集 (bieji, a subcategory under Ji [Jing, Shi, Zi, and Ji are four first-level categories in the book 四库全书 Imperial Catalogue) the anthology of a certain writer's works in subsequent different periods. Therefore, such literary theory works are also deemed excellent literary works while also the research objects of modern literary theory: "So, they can not only be read as theoretical works, but also be appreciated as literary works. This is the very exquisiteness of Chinese literary theory" (Wu 39).

The literariness of these texts is decided by the identity of the subject that creates the text's theoretical perspective. The author does not aim at

putting forward systematic literary theories, but at expressing feelings after creation, which are mostly thoughts on literary aesthetics and judgment in profound, simple, poetic, and vivid words. Therefore, different from Western literary theorists who only have the identity and vision of scholars and critics and comment for the sake of criticism, Chinese literary theorists are interested in thinking and exploring literary theory, but not interested in professional literary criticism in the Western sense: "Different from the Aristotelian mainstream of western literary theory in the form of treatise, the 'theory' dimension in classical Chinese literary theory is rather weak, which is often found in philosophical quotations, prefaces and postscripts, and letters. What can best embody the poetic characteristics of the text of the classical Chinese literary theory is the direct adoption of literary genres such as parallel prose and poetry" (Li and Zhu 134). The reason that Chinese practitioners of literary theory attach great importance to the discussion of literary issues while neglecting the evaluation of literary works lies in the culture's natural and social environment owing to the fact that "Chinese culture originates from the cold upper reaches of the Yellow River. The economic supply is relatively limited. Therefore, it is an embryonic culture, which emphasizes the use more than the knowledge, where the pursuit of the good is more important than the pursuit of truth" (Luo 16).

Further, the literariness of classical Chinese literary theory scattered in notes, letters, philosophical sayings, prefaces and postscripts, and biographies also has a lot to do with its discourse, which is usually short, concise, and poetic. Even the seemingly systematic book *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon* is written in the highly aesthetic form of parallel prose. And 二十四诗品 (*Twenty-Four Verses on Appreciating Poetry*) selected in the English versions of the history of Chinese literature is nothing but poetic and picturesque descriptions and extremely mysterious expressions. You may not get a clue of what it is all about after reading it several times: "But for the word 'poetry' in the title of this book, we cannot even guess the specific referent of these mysterious verses. It is just the strange crux of the book" (Owen 331). Such poetic wisdom is the embodiment of the aesthetic nature of the classical Chinese literary theory corresponding to the views expressed by Hegel: "Yet while art prevails on all sides with its pleasing shapes, from the crude decorations of savage tribes up to the

splendors of the sacred shrine adorned with every conceivable beauty of design, none the less such shapes themselves appear to fall outside the real purposes of life, and even where the imaginative work of art is not impervious to such serious objects, nay, rather at times even appear to assist them, to the extent at least of removing what is evil to a distance, yet for all that art essentially belongs to the relaxation and recreation of spiritual life, whereas its substantive interests rather make a call upon its strained energy" (5).

In terms of specific skills, classical Chinese literary theory is good at using the techniques of antithesis and analogy and pays attention to the connection and comparison between the "personification" of the object and the natural scenery in order to realize the integration of scenery and emotion, the exchange of feelings and things, and the concretization of the object of discussion, that is, the realm of "creating images to exhaust the meanings." This kind of random and empirical description, rather than analytical and logical description, is not lack of its own unique logical thinking and aesthetic value: "Generally speaking, the classical Chinese literary theory is for quick thinking minds, and the argument is clear and concise. On the contrary, western literary theory is for people who are slow to respond. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate and analyze the principal arguments among them" (Rickett, preface; trans. Peina Zhuang). Adele Rickett's comment demonstrates the high aesthetics and literary features of Chinese literary theory, although excluding those used to guide literary reading and teaching purposes such as ancient manuals with writing techniques and skills for exam-oriented learning: "Before the eleventh century, Chinese literary theory and criticism were mainly found in 'high-level' genres (letters, essays, prefaces, and poetry), or sometimes in lower-level genres such as technical manuals. Many theoretical works on poetry, which are regarded as masterpieces by modern people, do not belong to the inferior genre of critical discourse" (Owen, 395). And the status and value of this manual as a guide to writing cannot be compared with those of "advanced" genres often included in the history of literature.

To sum up, it is reasonable to include texts of literary theory in a literary history, but the key point should focus on their literariness and the influence of such literariness on the later generations' literary development and creation. These histories should treat them as literary works rather

than on the elaboration of their literary theoretical thoughts as manifested by most of the English versions of literary history which are focused on literary theory directly under the poetry or prose chapters of a certain period, but without any discussion of its literary and aesthetic features. For example, the Cambridge version of literary history places works of literary theory under chapters titling poetry and prose, so as to use them in analysis of literary trend in certain periods. If so, it can borrow from the practice of Chinese versions of literary history to use titles such as "literary criticism," "literary theory," "critical literature," or "Sikong Tu's Poetics" which point out that the selection of such works is to explain and analyze the trend of literary development or the change of literary thought in the period. That is, its focus is its theoretical aspect rather than "literariness." For instance, Liu Dajie *An Introduction to Chinese Literature* is about the construction of literary theory and criticism in the chapters "Literary Trends in the Wei and Jin Dynasties" and "Literary Trends in the Southern and Northern Dynasties and Sui Dynasties." Zheng Zhenduo in his Chinese literary history sets up three chapters -- "The Origin of Critical Literature," "The Resurrection of Critical Literature," and "The Progress of Critical Literature" -- in order to sort out the history of the development of classical Chinese literary theory. The presentation and arrangement of texts deemed theoretical in You Guoen's edition are similar where the development of literary criticism is discussed in the chapter "Literary Criticism in Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties."

A common feature of these Chinese literary histories in presenting works of literary theory is to apply literary theory in explaining literary characteristics and trends of development with focus on the theoretical thought in these works. Thus it would be more advantageous to integrate theory with the object or objects of analysis (for instance, a specific text of an author) rather than just offering a list of these texts which include theoretical perspectives. Otherwise it still seems to equate literary theory with literature, thus theory replacing the literariness in discussion. For example, in the section of "Jin Shengtan's Novels" in Zhang Peiheng's and Luo, Yuming's *A New History of Chinese Literature*, Jin's commentaries on *The Romance of West Chamber* and *The Water Margin* are placed in the introduction of these two works, but the stress should be on the analysis of the artistic characteristics and techniques of the comments themselves

rather than the content of the two commented on texts. Such tendencies of neglecting the literariness of the texts is more obvious in English versions of Chinese literary histories compiled before the 1950s and that usually place texts which include theoretical perspectives and combine the analysis of these works with other poems or prose. In my view, it appears this is a misguided approach precisely because the literariness of these is understood without attention to their theoretical perspectives and aspects: "The history of literature, as a kind of humanistic narrative style, is essentially an integration of historical logic and literary spirit that embodies specific values and cultural traditions" (Han 89). The logic of history is the "historical" dimension of literary history and the spirit of literature is the attention paid to the aspect of literariness, including the exploration of writers, texts, and the cultural background, etc., while at the same time effectively combining aspects of "history" and the "literature" in narration.

I argue that texts of Chinese literature which include aspects and perspectives of literary theory can be included into the compilation of literary history in the following two ways. One is that the compiler can use it to analyze specific literary phenomena, that is, to provide theoretical support and bases for historical perspectives: "The history of literature is the history of the state of human life through the discovery of representative spiritual activities in literary works. It is only in works worthy of being called 'literature' that the human mind appears" (Xu 3). Works worthy of being called "literature" should be the guidance for English literary history in presenting works on literary theory. If so, it is obvious that the focus should be on the discussion of literary and artistic features rather than the repetition of the theory or thoughts in the work itself. Otherwise, the title of "A History of Literary Theory" would be more appropriate, at least for the situation at the current state. For instance, in *Chinese Literature: A Historical Introduction* Chen Shouyi only discusses Zhong Rong's opposition against the use of allusion and the traditional standard of rhyme without any reference to the feature of using the natural scenery scene in his literary criticism with high poetic lines. The discussion of 诗话 (notes on classical poetry) in the Cambridge literary history is only a brief overview of writer and his work, but does not discuss the poetic characteristics of comparing poetry to Zen in the works of Yan Yu and other writers. The Colombia one, although more detailed, does

not escape such defects, which is almost a miniature history of classical Chinese literary criticism owing to its thematic framework. Such trends also exist in Chinese literary history. For example, the section of "Sikong Tu's Poetry Theory" summarizes the artistic characteristics of the poems only with a short line "beautiful words, but not easy to understand" (Zhang and Luo 154).

Besides the lack of analyzing literariness, the second feature of presenting works of literary theory in these histories lies in the relatively simple and short introduction of commentaries on the texts. Literary theory is closely related to the development of literature. The emergence of each new literary genre will inevitably result in corresponding literary criticism. For example, the classical novel criticism started in the Song Dynasty and became more mature in the Ming and Qing Dynasties that witnessed great development of Chinese opera novels, accompanied by a large number of novel and opera reviews. These comments and reviews not only summarize the content of literary works, but also contain highlighting criticism of details in novels and dramas, all being great literary theorists at that time. However, compared with the works of literary theory on classical poetry and prose, the selected English versions of literary history I discuss here lack a sound introduction of literary theory on novel and drama commentary as a whole, especially in the early literary histories where none has been mentioned or discussed. Even in the recent Owen and Sun Cambridge literary history, they are still placed under the chapter of the object of their comments, thus being rarely discussed as literary works. To a certain extent, the Victor Mair's Columbia edition of literary history has made up for this deficiency, but its thematic framework to a great extent serves a big discount to this breakthrough. Although Victor H. Mair writes in the section of literary theory that "the most prominent development of Chinese literary theory in the Qing Dynasty was the emergence of such literary prodigy as Jin Shengtian and Li Yu, who took novels and operas seriously and created a wide range of related comments, a huge change in the history of Chinese literary theory. Before that, the commentary object of literary theory was only aimed at poetry" (938), the Columbia version does not develop a specific analysis of the above-mentioned critics, but puts the literary theory of drama under section 41 "traditional drama literature" while section 46 "traditional novel

review" makes a more detailed introduction to the origin, history, development, and types of novel criticism. It is the only history that offers special sections to the discussion on this type of literary theory.

I believe that the phenomenon described above is closely related to the characteristics of literary criticism, especially the criticism of novels, which can be summarized into external and internal factors. First, externally, novels and operas have always been on the edge of traditional Chinese literature and been regarded "unqualified" in the hall of literary elegance. Philosophers and historians have long belittled the role and function of novels. For example, the philosopher Ban Gu (32-92 A.D.) holds that the novelists are usually inferior officials and novels are nothing more than street talk, which clearly demonstrates the status of novels and novelists in literature (Ban 1745): because in Chinese literature lyrical literature is regarded as the orthodox school and does not attach great importance to narrative literature and dramatic literature, this results in the development of classical literary theory on poetry and not for the novel and drama (see, e.g., Lai 5). It was not until the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of Qing Dynasty that this phenomenon began to change. This is not only related to the development of society and culture at the time, but also to the emergence of critics of the novel and their praise of novels and opera literature and these critics discussed novels, dramas, poetry, and prose without any bias to a certain genre. However, compared with poetry, novels and operas were far away from having the status of classics at that time. One reason is that the history of this genre is not as long as that of poetry and the other is that ancient literati used to seek the basis for the emergence of a genre from tradition, which obviously, novel and drama lack: "Poetry originated from *The Book of Songs*, and prose, from *The Book of Document*, but there shows no evidence for the origin of the novel" (Lin 97). Unlike the ancients, we have no bias for each of them when we look at the genre today. Therefore, if without discussing the commentary on novels and operas from the level of literariness, we should at least point out its important role in the development of Chinese literary history.

Second, from the perspective of internal factors, this has to do with the form of novel and drama criticism featuring its dependence on literary works. In terms of form, comments usually appear along the parallel or

upper side of each part of the literary works unlike criticism of poems and essays originating from the traditional annotation study: "Books under Jing, Shi, Zi and Ji (four first-level categories in the book *The Imperial Catalogue*) all have annotations, and even the book *Er'ya*, one of the thirteen Confucian classics, is itself a book of annotation. So do ordinary citizens and rural people read novels with notes? The answer is yes, the so-called 'comment' is a bright new school and new practice formed by the introduction of annotation to popular literature" (Tan 82). The early works of classical literary theory also have such characteristics. That is, literature and theory are not separated where the "theory" part is usually placed at the beginning or the end of the literary work. However, compared with the form of commentary on drama and novel, it has more independence and can be extracted from the commenting object. Classics such as *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon* can be completely independent from commentary and regarded as literary classics with the authors' reflections on literary imagination, origin, and function. Thus, to a certain extent, the separation of literary theory from literature is realized. However, if the original text is taken away, the novel and drama commentaries become fragmentary. The form of commentary also causes its dependence on the object criticized: "The most obvious characteristic of novel criticism is its attachment to the novel text, which originated from the traditional Chinese annotation that makes novel criticism have strong communicative and practical function" (Tan 82). Even the creative activities of the scholars and critics to make the text more valuable and attractive cannot exist alone without the text itself and where lies the literary value of novel itself.

Moreover, social criticism embodied in these comments sometimes obscures its own literary artistry, usually combined with real life and having a critical function. Unlike the previous works of literary theory on poetry and prose whose authors paid attention to the discussion of the nature of literature, Li Zhi's and Jin Shengtan's comments on *The Water Margin* illustrate such features of the novel commentary: "Jin Shengtan's love for *The Water Margin* is not only because of its high artistic value, but also that it says what he wants to convey in his heart" (Li and Zhu 254). Therefore, readers usually focus on the content of their comments and ignore the artistic flavor therein. But this cannot deny its literary value: "Jin

Shengtan's criticism of praising the previous creations of novelists with elegant diction can really make the readers excited; and his empathy for the fate of the characters in the books, such as talented people, beautiful women, loyal officials and righteous people can move readers who cry with these characters" (Zhou 12). The effect of the strong resonance with readers in these comments just embodies its literariness. Hence such seemingly scattered commentaries can be discussed separately in terms of their literariness. Moreover, not all the literary theories of novels and operas appear in the form of comments. Some are also systematic works that can occupy an independent position and be analyzed as literary works in literary histories.

Another feature of presenting works of classical Chinese literary theory refers to more space given to the Taoist view of literary theory other than the Confucian one. Western literary theory is rooted in the philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome, while the Chinese counterpart, in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Therefore they differ either in content or diction. For example, in terms of length, classical Chinese literary theory is usually short and concise where the authors even use one to two lines to express a view on literature. However, in the history of Western literary theory, one may find now and then long discussion about literature: "The short length makes it difficult to establish a rigorous and complete theoretical and academic theoretical system. However, it is flexible in timely summarizing the experience of writers' works, and also promoting or reversing the creation fashion, thus influencing literary creation and giving full play to the role of literary criticism" (Yang and Lu 77). Moreover, owing to the tradition of the subject-object dichotomy in Western philosophy, literary theory has a clear object, thus attaching great importance to criticizing for the sake of criticism, which makes the terms in Western literary theory more clear and accurate, while the classical Chinese literary theory pays attention to "the unity of man and nature" and the "implied and hidden meaning" with focus on the understanding and experience of readers (which puzzles Western scholars). Thus, William Yip comments that "perhaps it is because the Chinese traditional aesthetic vision is beyond analysis and deduction at the beginning since our earliest aesthetic thinkers advocated that 'those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know' and ask to 'express most with the

least diction' ... Different from Western literary criticism after Aristotle that regards literature as a logical structure, it has developed a sophisticated criticism based on the law of causality and the structure of 'statement-proof' (Yip 3; trans. Peina Zhuang). Therefore, generally speaking, Western literary theory is more logical, while Chinese literary theory more poetic. But they are not completely different.

Influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, classical Chinese literary theory presents two different trends. Confucian culture adheres to the literary theory of "乐而不淫, 哀而不伤, 婉而多讽" (full of joy but not licentiousness, of sadness but not grief) (Confucius 36; trans. Lai Bo) pointing out that language should express reality and emphasize the social and political purpose of literature with a strong utilitarian function. However, Taoist culture pays attention to governing by doing nothing, trying to get rid of the utilitarianism of literature in order to achieve a carefree state. Zen believes that the reality of the real world is not the final real "reality" and stresses the insight of the cultivator. Thus, classical Chinese literary theory as a whole presents two orientations of "artistry" and "utilitarianism" based on which in *History of Chinese Literary Criticism* Luo Genze classifies them into the "school of carrying Tao" and the "school of expressing emotions." Although being unable to reflect accurately the content and characteristics of classical literary theory in a specific period, such classification shows the general trends in different periods: "ancient Chinese literary theory has distinct national characteristics. On the one hand, it displays the utilitarian orientation with political ethics as the center and self-cultivation as the purpose; on the other hand, it shows the highly poetic way of expression in literary theory" (Li and Zhu 134).

As to the two orientations in both Chinese and Western literary theories, the English versions of literary history show a certain inclination towards the Taoist view of literary theory other than the Confucian one. For example, in *Chinese Literature: A Historical Introduction* Chen's discussion on Zhong Rong's poetry is more detailed than Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind of the Carving of Dragon* and uses the latter's point of view to highlight the former's argument. All English-language histories have introduced the book *Twenty-four Verses on Appreciating Poetry* (except for Chen Shouyi's version). This does not mean that the literary nature of the works of

Confucian view on literary theory is inferior to the Taoist one. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon*, composed of parallel prose, is sufficient to illustrate this, but has a certain connection with the development of Western literary thought since the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Since the nineteenth century, trends of thought in European literatures and art attach importance to the aesthetic quality of literature and tries to avoid the influence of politics, society, and ethics. The author of *Twenty-four Verses on Appreciating Poetry* outlines twenty-four artistic styles by creating twenty-four different poetic environments, which makes readers appreciate and comprehend the meaning by themselves. It is full of aesthetic feeling of art tinted with a strong sense of Taoism. However, there is no special discussion on the educational function and political function of literature. It is not only an excellent text of literary theory, but also an excellent collection of poems. The author's creative style leaves endless possibilities for later generations to interpret his poems. In the twentieth century, focus of literary theory begins to shift from the former two to the latter two among the four most important elements, that is, world, writers, works, and readers pay attention to the discussion of the form of the work itself and the readers' interpretation of the text thus giving rise to literary criticism such as formalism, new criticism, and reception aesthetics. It seems that scholars and critics no longer care about what the writer wants to express through his/her text, but pay more attention to the expression of the text itself and the textual meaning presented in this way instead of the writer's intention (assumed by the readers or expressed by the writer himself/herself).

In addition, the active role of readers in the construction of the meaning of the text is also discussed, holding that the text is an open rather than closed system and that the generation of meaning is in a dynamic state completed through the readers' interpretation. This is especially true for literary works tinted with a Taoist flavor. As a result, the study of literature in this period began to turn from the "external" to the "internal" side of literature with focus on the analysis of the structure, syntax, rhythm, and other aspects of specific literary works so as to display the significance of the works. In conclusion, "Literature" and "history" are the two dominant elements in the compilation of literary history, the principle

of which also applies to the inclusion of works of literary theory under such a framework. Otherwise, the compilation can at most be counted as a history of literary criticism. Further, the features of presenting texts of literary theory in the history of literature also reflect and cater to the taste and characteristics of the literary trend during certain times, which demonstrates that there is not only the literature of one era, but also the literary history of that era. The writing of the latter is always in an unfinished state and a reflection of the feature of literature and literary theory of that era.

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