

Research Trends

Zhang Peiheng's *A New History of Chinese Literature* and Its Japanese Translation

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Before dawn on June 7, 2011, Zhang Peiheng, the most liberal Chinese scholar of the history of Chinese literature, passed away at the age of seventy-seven in Shanghai. Only a month earlier, Kansai University Press published the first volume of the Japanese translation (*Chūgoku bungaku shi shincho*) of his last and most influential work, the three-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi xinzhu* (*A New History of Chinese Literature*).

Zhang was from the same hometown as the famous early-twentieth-century Chinese writer Lu Xun. He was born in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, in January 1934. Though as early as May 1949 he became a member of the Communist Party, he engaged in scholarship throughout his life, took Lu Xun as his role model, and sought individual liberty and freedom of expression. After he graduated from the Department of Chinese at Fudan University in January 1954, he never left this well-known university, the only university in Mainland China whose school song hails “independent scholarship and freedom of thought.” The last position that he held was director of the Research Institute of Chinese Classics at Fudan University. Most of the contributors to *Zhongguo wenxue shi xinzhu* were professors who held concurrent positions at this institute or young scholars who graduated from this institute with doctorates.

Compared with *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (*A History of Chinese Literature*), coedited by Zhang Peiheng and Luo Yuming and published in 1996, this is a completely new work. More than half of the text was written by Zhang himself, and the main views of the rest of the text sprang from him. He also revised the text several times. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that he authored this work himself.

This work, from a broad perspective, gives expression to Zhang's view, acquired through many years of research, of the evolution of Chinese literature, namely, that the literature of the New Culture Movement was an inevi-

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table development of prior Chinese literature. The influence of Western culture merely accelerated this inevitable development of Chinese literature and did not alter its course. A prelude to contemporary literature seeking a liberation of the human spirit had already begun in the early modern literature of the late Jin (1115-1234) and early Yuan (1279-1368) dynasties. Later the vanguard literature of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) strove to free itself from the strictures of the Rational School of Neo-Confucianism [under Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi,] and to display all the complexities of human nature in the realms of material cravings and spiritual yearnings.

On the basis of the above perspective is constructed another special feature of the present work, namely, its rejection of the conventional practice of similar works of discussing Chinese literary history in terms of dynastic periods. Rather, it divides all of Chinese literature, from the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE) to 1900, into ancient literature, medieval literature, and early modern literature. And each of these stages of literature it further divides into several periods.

To give a concrete example, the book breaks early modern literature down into a period of reversal, a period of revival, and a period of wavering, under which it mostly discusses Ming-period literature. This portion of the work, nearly entirely written by Zhang, contains a discussion of Ming poetry, with much that has gone previously unnoticed. In a detailed discussion of Ming works of literature, Zhang did not follow the usual path of literary history. For example, he wasted little ink on the Jingling School (early 17th cent.), since he thought that it did little more than carry one step further the regression after Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610). But he praised the late-Ming love poet Wang Yanhong (1593-1642) for his outstanding displays of human nature, though prior histories of Chinese literature invariably excluded him. Especially interesting is the fact that the theoretical point of departure for Zhang's praise of Wang Yanhong is the explanation of love found in Karl Marx's work. Also arousing interest is when the present work informs us that the Japanese novelist Nagai Kafū (1879-1959) praised Wang Yanhong, comparing his poetry to that of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, in his work *Hatsusuzuri* (Calligraphy for the New Year).

The main difference between the Japanese translation published by Kansai University Press and the Chinese original is that Zhang wrote a preface, at the beginning of volume 1, for Japanese readers. In this preface he systematically elaborates, for the first time in writing, his own independent view of the periodization of modern Chinese literature. He thought that the beginning period of modern Chinese literature was from 1901 to 1917, and that the first decade of the new Chinese literature was from 1918, when there occurred a revolution in Chinese literature, to 1927. He gave this first decade a high appraisal,

saying, "It was a period when authors of Chinese literature could best manifest the demands for the free expression of human nature and the spirit of humanity, when the individual was the standard, and when authors were stylistically their most creative (boldly absorbing foreign influences and striving to make form express new content)." In the next decade, from 1928 to the first half of 1937, he noted that though a Chinese revolutionary Proletarian literature movement sprang up, mainstream literature continued to maintain and develop the basic cultural geist of the new literature of the first decade. Worth noting is that he did not think highly of the literature of the relatively long period after 1937. He thought that from the latter half of 1937 to 1947, the new literature regressed, in that literature then sought mainly to support a higher authority. And the thirty years from 1948 to 1977 was "a frightful period in the development of modern Chinese literature," for this was "a period when modern Chinese literature continuously regressed until it reached a point of hopelessness." In 1978, according to Zhang, Chinese literature began its return to the main tradition of the new literature of the first and second decades. By familiarizing ourselves with the contents of the text of the present work, we can see that Zhang endeavored to present his independent views on the history and present state of Chinese literature.

Also in this preface, Zhang clearly states that in "China, the establishment of the discipline of the history of Chinese literature was modeled on Japanese research of the history of Chinese literature." Citing Lin Chuanjia's *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (A History of Chinese Literature, 1904) and a series of other histories of Chinese literature published from 1905 on, Zhang explains that from then "to the first half of the 1930s, every respected history of Chinese literature published in China has to some extent been influenced by Japanese scholarship. This influence declined in the latter half of the 1930s, but it did not die out. And from the 1980s, this influence gradually revived." Obviously, in present-day China, acknowledging such historical facts requires not only a broad perspective, but also an open mind.

The translators of volume 1 of the present work were Inoue Taizan, professor in the Faculty of Letters at Kansai University, and his doctoral student Hayashi Masakiyo. The other two volumes are being translated by Inoue and two other students of his: Gotō Yūya and Shikata Michiko. Judging by volume 1 of the translation, the translation will be faithful to the original, and will take into consideration the needs of contemporary Japanese readers in that the original literary Chinese of premodern literary texts quoted are all translated into Japanese and the Japanese reading of Chinese characters is indicated right above the relevant characters. One can imagine what a great undertaking this is.