

The Origin of the “Cultural Strategy” Perspective in Yan’an Literature and Art Research

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The field relationship of literature in the Yan’an period is the first thing worthy of attention. In order to become an independent literary history, the literature of Yan’an period must be able to be distinguished from “Sui literary literature” and “new Chinese literature”. The complex field relationship in the Yan’an period makes the “cultural strategy” an indispensable perspective for studying literature in this period.

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Introduction

For the literature of the “Yan’an period” (1936-1948), the academic community used to call it “the literature of the Liberated Areas”. Regardless of whether the naming method is scientific or not, the origin of this naming has already determined the academic perspective and vision of literature in this period. To some extent, the answer for the problems and dilemmas of literary research in this period can be found in this naming scheme.

A Review of the Related Concepts of “Yan’an Literature”

The origin of “Liberal Literature” can be traced back to the report of Zhou Yang’s National Congress of Literary and Artistic Workers (known as “the first literary congress” in July 1949). At this meeting, Zhou Yang, Mao Dun, and Fu Zhong respectively delivered the keynote speeches in the conference as representatives of the Liberated Areas, the Kuomintang District, and the literary and artistic workers. Zhou Yang’s report, “New People’s Literature and Art”, used the concept of “Literature of the Liberated Areas”. The existence of the concept of “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” laid the foundation for later scholars to use the “Liberal Literature” in their research. In the first “literary congress”, “liberation zone” and “Kuomintang ruled zone” were concepts of a specific period: “The liberated zone” appeared in the war of liberation; the title of “Kuomintang ruled zone” appeared earlier, but it was only used after the outbreak of the war of resistance. In 1949, when the war of liberation was not over, in the first “literary congress”, based on the origins of the delegates, the use of the concepts of “the literary and art of the Liberated Areas” and “the literary and art of the Kuomintang ruled area” was understandable, but that it was directly translated into the concept of academic research, especially to refer to the literary history of a period of time, lacks actually the necessary rigor. The problem of “literary art of the Liberated Areas” lies in the fact that the “Liberated Areas” exist for a short period of time. Although while using this concept Zhou Yang advanced the starting time to 1942 for the sake of

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tracing to the source, it was still impossible to refer to the literature between 1936 and 1942. Today's scholars have placed it in the extension of “Literature of the Liberated Areas”. The problem of “the literature and art of the Kuomintang ruled area” is more obvious. From a literal point of view, the history of modern Chinese literature can be said to be “the literature and art of the Kuomintang ruled area” because most of its time and most of the regions are “ruled by Kuomintang”. If this is the case, then this naming loses meaning.

However, scholars later used the concepts of “literature and art of the Liberated Areas” and “literature and art of the Kuomintang area” to refer to the literary history of a period. It is not simply blind faith in authority. At this meeting, the two concepts were given new connotations. These new connotations require the academic community to use these two concepts when studying the corresponding literary history. The original intention of the first “literary congress” was to prepare literature and art for the upcoming birth of a new China. The future direction of the new Chinese literature and art was specifically included in the reporter's attitude towards the evaluation of “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” and “literary and art of the Kuomintang area”. Therefore, after the “literary congress”, “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” and “literary and art of the Kuomintang area” are no longer simple literary allegations, but also a “coordinate” that guides the direction of the new Chinese literature and art, and these “coordinates” cannot be arbitrarily changed. As far as the “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” is concerned, its “coordinate” significance to the new Chinese literature and art lies in the development direction of the “new people's literature and art”, i.e. the “orthodox” of the new Chinese literature. This status also determines the methods and perspectives of academic research related to it.

The phrase “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” represents the developmental direction of “the new people's literature and art”. The specific meaning of “literature and art of the Liberated Areas” here is worth exploring. From a macroscopic point of view, the status of the “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” is mainly related to the orthodoxy of the “literary and art of the Kuomintang area”, but, even so, the “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” that can guide the direction of the new Chinese literature and art is not the whole of the literature and art in the Liberated Areas. This is clearly reflected in Zhou Yang's report and the many trends in new Chinese literature and art. In Zhou Yang's report, he elaborates on the characteristics and successful experience of “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” from three aspects: “new themes, new characters, new languages, new forms”, “cultural and artistic activities of the workers, peasants and soldiers”, and “the transformation of old dramas” (Zhou, 1950). The number and types of the literary works, literary trends, and literary activities in these three aspects are obviously the simplification of the literary and artistic reality in the Liberated Areas. Matching the content of the Zhou Yang report, in order to provide more direct guidance to the new Chinese literature and art, the “Chinese People's Literature and Art Series” edited by Zhou Yang is also based on the literary works of the Liberated Areas, but it is more a great simplification of the actual creation of the Liberated Area. The study of literary history itself has the function of “sifting the true from the false” and “discarding the dross and selecting the essential”, but Zhou Yang's simplification of literary art in the Liberated Areas has its own characteristics. Firstly, its simplification standard is based on the need to construct national ideology, not from the perspective of literature and art. Secondly, the purpose of its simplification is to guide future literary creation, rather than directly explaining the characteristics of literature in this period. These two tendencies were also retained in the study of the “Liberal Literature” in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

From the perspective of reflection, the academic circles have already completed the reflection and criticism of the first tendency, namely, to get rid of the perspective and method of studying the literature of the

“liberated area” from the perspective of constructing the national ideology. In line with it, the new research paradigm is also initially established; the “rewriting the history of literature” that appeared in the 1980s completed this work. However, the reflection of the second tendency in academic circles rarely appears. This tendency can be referred to as “the study of traceable literary history”, i.e. in order to explain the characteristics of the literary history of the latter period, to do a traceable study of the literary history of the previous period. Zhou Yang’s analysis and evaluation of the “literature and art of the Liberated Areas” is tracing from the perspective of guiding the practice of new Chinese literature and art. Current scholars have begun to study the “literature and art of the Liberated Areas” in order to explain the trend of contemporary literature, and it is also a kind of “study of traceable literary history”.

Contemporary Research on “Yan’an Literature”

“All history is a contemporary history”. It is understandable to bet on contemporary perspectives in historical research. However, if you understand a literary history entirely for traceability, there may be endings of drawing a conclusion from incomplete data. There are two problems in the “traceable literary history research” that are prone to occur: One is used to essentialize history, while the other is that the pre-set traces are quite obvious. From the perspective of historical research, these two issues are contradictory: Trying to make history essential, first of all, we should start from historical facts, rather than standing on a certain position to presuppose history. In other words, understanding history from a pre-determined perspective can reflect one aspect of history, but it cannot be considered as the “essentialization” of history (Ren, 2020). However, both of them often appear at the same time in the result of the “traceable literary history study”, because history has become a tool in this kind of research. In order to prove or criticize a certain cultural concept, it is necessary to essentialize history in order to be more convincing. Imagine that when Zhou Yang regards the “literature and art of the Liberated Areas” as the direction of “the new people’s literature and art”, if the academic circles do not think that it represents the “essence” of the Liberated Areas literature and art, then it is a powerful refutation of this view. In fact, the academic refutation of Zhou Yang’s point of view was realized in this way. In the movement of “rewriting the history of literature”, through the “reinterpretation” of the literary and artistic works in the Liberated Areas, the academic circles completed the change of understanding of literature and art in the Liberated (Zhang, 2020). Both are from the same materials, but they have arrived at very different conclusions. This makes us reflect on the shortcomings of the “traceable literary history research” and whether our change in the understanding of the nature of history is a deepening of historical understanding, or just a transformation of the contemporary culture environment.

According to postmodern theory, the problem of “traceable literary history research” is well explained. The so-called history is just a narrative; the so-called essence is just a kind of construction. Postmodern theory has a very important guiding significance for rethinking “the traceable literary history research”, especially the practice of constructing grand narratives, but it also gives the reason for the rational existence of “traceable literary history research”. If all history is narrative, then any essence is nothing but construction and everyone has the power to describe and construct. So what is the understanding of the “literature of the Liberated Areas” is not important; the key is what we need. Today, the study of literature in the Yan’an period is difficult to break through. To a certain extent, it is just that man cannot get out of the thinking mode of “traceable literary history research”, and the foundation of this mode of thinking is laid precisely at the time when the “literary and art of the Liberated Areas” is named.

That the literature of Yan'an period is regarded as “left-wing literature” is also a kind of “traceable literary history research” in its overall thinking (Le, 2020). The concept of “left-wing literature” appeared in the 1930s; it referred in particular to the left-wing literary movement that emerged during this period. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, “left-wing literature” was used to refer to the revolutionary literature from the 1930s to the founding of the People's Republic of China, mainly based on their similar political demands, theoretical pedigrees, and some literary features, as well as the rough practice, that the academic circles divide the modern literary trend into three categories: “Left”, “Medium”, and “Right” according to political tendency. Literary trends are obviously not suitable for direct division by political standards. Moreover, the complicated modern literary trends only regarded as three kinds of tendencies are a great simplification of literary history. According to such a simplified division, it is more difficult to reveal the complexities of history by understanding the specific historical facts of literature.

So how can we get out of these problematic “narrative” and “constructive” circles? In my opinion, the easiest way is to “split”, that is to say, to separate the literature of the Yan'an period from the current literary trends, thereby making it an independent literary history. In the study of humanities, when studying a piece of literary history, it is impossible to completely abandon the influence of the current trend of thought—to reach an absolute “zero-degree perspective”. The so-called “split” is actually to avoid reducing the study of literary history to be a tool for reflection on the current literature and art trends, thereby demonstrating its inherent complexity and richness. In my opinion, there is a causal law in the process of historical development, but the development is not solely based on the law of causality. From one point in history to another, we can find the factors that are interrelated, but we can also find many factors that counter this connection. As far as the literature of the Yan'an period is concerned, it eventually developed into the form we see. There are inevitable factors, but we should also see that there are various possibilities in the literature of Yan'an period, which are contrary to its final trend. This complicated historical connection can only be accomplished by “split”, which excludes the pre-setting.

From the perspective of “split”, the field relationship of literature in the Yan'an period is the first thing worthy of attention. In order to become an independent literary history, the literature of Yan'an period must be able to be distinguished from “Sui literary literature” and “new Chinese literature”. After the Central Red Army arrived in northern Shaanxi, it began to change gradually its attitude toward the Kuomintang. With the realization of the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the relationship between the border area of the CCP and the Kuomintang area, and the relationship between the “Su area” and the “White Area” have changed dramatically during the period of workers and peasants separatist regime. Because of these changes, the literary and artistic positions, the literary and artistic policies, and the composition of the writers in the border areas have undergone substantial changes (Liu, 2020). These changes have determined the basic characteristics of literature in this period. Throughout the Yan'an period, the pattern of border areas (hereafter referred to as “the Liberated Areas”), the Kuomintang area, and the enemy-occupied areas existed most of the time, in particular, the subtle interactions between the border areas (the Liberated Areas) and the Kuomintang area throughout this period are the facts the Chinese Communist Party must face; they also have a profound impact on the direction of literature in this period. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, although the confrontation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party still exists, the contrast between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party and the way of the confrontation have changed. The Communist Party of China has actually gained control of the whole of China and its literary practice is bound to change.

Conclusion

The complex field relationship in the Yan'an period makes the “cultural strategy” an indispensable perspective for studying literature in this period. In the war years, the fundamental relationship of the field was a kind of war relationship. Although there was cooperation in different regions and at different times, it did not change the essence of confrontation between each other. In this situation, it is difficult to avoid complicated strategic considerations behind the literature and art of “public space”. According to the Chinese Communist Party's understanding of literature and art, they have always been regarded as a tool for political and military struggles. This view of literature is closely tied to literature and its strategic intentions. The study of literature in this period is inseparable from the consideration of cultural strategy.

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