

In Search of “Spectrum of Chineseness” in Chinese Literature in the New Era

Fong Keng Seng

Abstract: To better read Chinese literary texts for the sake of tracing “Chineseness,” there are various ways of studying them. The first theory is Nie Zhenzhao’s Ethical Literary Criticism, which is a theoretical effort of establishing a local Chinese literary criticism theory. The second way is to pay more attention to the Chinese Narratology proposed by Yang Yi, which aims at discovering the Chinese narrative tradition that is different from the western understanding of narrative in time, space, narrative angles and so on. Yang’s literary geography theory is also a method exploring Chineseness taking the unique geographical factors affecting Chinese literature into consideration. The third theory relates to introducing comparative approaches to Chinese literary studies, and attaches more importance to the distinctive cultural factors that can define Chineseness. The fourth theory is about the concept of “Chinese literatures” which includes all literary works written in the Chinese language in the range of Chinese literary studies, eliminating regional or political factors that hinder effective communication among scholars of the same domain. The fifth one is to pick up the traditional method of literary criticism in ancient China, poetry notes (诗话), which is to understand the writer or the poet’s thoughts and the essence of the piece of writing by epiphany (顿悟), a Buddhist way of obtaining ultimate truth. All these five that bear prominent “Chineseness” in themselves can contribute to the discovery and understanding of “Chineseness” in literature and offer inspiration to people around the world who are curious about what literature has contributed to the continuation of Chinese culture through a long history.

Key words: Chineseness; local Chinese literary criticism; ethical literary criticism; Chinese narratology; Chinese literature overseas

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标题: 探寻新世纪中国文学的“中国性”光谱

内容摘要: 为了更好解读中国文学作品以追寻“中国性”，有多种研究方法
与路径。第一种理论是聂珍钊的文学伦理学批评，这是建立中国本土文学批

评理论的理论尝试。第二种方式是杨义提出的中国叙事学，其目的是发现在时间、空间、叙事角度等方面与西方的理解有所不同的中国叙事传统。杨义的文学地理学理论也是一种探索“中国性”的方法，它考虑了影响中国文学的独特地理因素。第三种理论涉及将比较方法引入中国文学研究，并更加重视可以定义中国性的独特文化因素。第四种理论与“华文文学”的概念有关，它涵盖了中国文学研究范围内所有用汉语写作的文学作品，消除了妨碍同一领域学者之间有效交流的地区或政治因素。第五种方式是借鉴中国古代诗歌批评的传统方法，即诗话式批评，以洞悉作家或诗人的思想和顿悟，后者是禅宗领悟终极真理的方式。以上五种具有突出“中国性”的理论方法有助于发现和理解文学中的“中国性”，并有助于全世界的研究者更好领会文学对中国文化延续性所作的贡献。

关键词：中国性；中国本土文学批评；文学伦理学批评；中国叙事学；海外华文文学

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Introduction

“Chineseness” is intrinsic to Chinese literary works by nature, while, at the same time, it is one of the most subtle things that require someone who has comprehensive living experience in China and high sensitivity to the Chinese language to capture and to reveal. It might also be a particular way of understanding our world, which can be expected to offer hints about how to solve contemporary social problems such as inequality, oppression and discrimination worsening along with the process of industrialization, urbanization etc. in the modern world.

“Chineseness,” which has been discussed fervently by intellectuals for a long time even since the late-Qing period, has been paid a lot of attention to in many fields including the domain of literature. The well-known heated discussion regarding “Chineseness” generalized by Rey Chow in the 1990s demonstrated to us with a comprehensive picture how complicated and contentious this concept can be, leading to her conclusion that “Chineseness” should be viewed as an open field and is constantly in the process of construction and transformation (Chow 1-24). According to Chow, studies on “Chineseness” usually pertain to cultural identities (esp. ethnicity), nationalism, and feminism, making the issue rather political. One of the most protruding problems of this concept is that, under the influence of postcolonialism, it is largely constructed and reflected in contrast with the traits of western culture. Being authentically “Chinese” is often considered

to be instrumental in fighting against the oppression of the white hegemony and constructing a new powerful image of Chinese people. In the field of contemporary art, the study of "Chineseness" has also been attached to cultural identities issues. For instance, in Gu Pengfei's paper (published in Chinese), the National Fine Arts Exhibition has experienced three stages (from nationality to westernization and finally to "Chineseness") observed in this perspective (Gu 134-142). Nevertheless, my paper concentrates on the "Chineseness" in Chinese literature instead of being concerned with economic, political or other non-literary factors.

The current studies on Chinese literature have been mostly limited to the "western paradigm" which is theoretical, logical and systematical. Scientific thinking is usually applied to such studies, which is a great effort of making them rational and reasonable, but it also gradually pushes them onto the same way as conducting non-literary studies such as historical studies and even political studies. Cultural studies in recent decades almost reign the discipline, giving it a strong sense of political and social significance.

This situation means many scholars seem not to be interested in the taste, disposition, imagination and aspiration of Chinese culture at the core of Chinese literary works. Yu-kong Kao's understanding of the literary tradition in China as a "lyrical" one (Kao 227) also to some extent confines studies of Chinese literature in a one-sided perspective which emphasizes the difference between Chinese literature and its western counterpart, the result of which is that the rich and unique narrative skills and strategies in Chinese literature are often overlooked. Another limitation of current studies is to categorize literary works written in Chinese by region, damaging the wholeness of "Chineseness" lying in all these texts which is worth looking into through a more inclusive vision. The current situation does not mean that the wider vision of "Chineseness" in Chinese literature has not concerned the scholars. As a matter of fact, a lot of scholars have been inspired by ancient Chinese literary theories, and some scholars (as will be discussed later in this paper) have proposed their own Chinese literary theories that can attribute to the shaping of "Chineseness" as a more inclusive and more profound academic concept.

To better read Chinese literary texts for the sake of tracing "Chineseness," there are five new "Chinese" ways of studying them. The first one is Nie Zhenzhao's Ethical Literary Criticism, which is a theoretical effort of establishing a local Chinese literary criticism theory. The second way is to pay more attention to the Chinese Narratology proposed by Yang Yi, which aims at discovering the Chinese narrative tradition that is different from the western understanding of narrative in time, space, narrative angles and so on. Yang's literary geography

theory is also a method exploring “Chineseness” taking into consideration the unique geographical factors affecting Chinese literature. The third theory relates to introducing comparative approaches to Chinese literary studies, and attaching more importance to the distinctive cultural factors that can define “Chineseness.” The fourth theory is about the concept of “Chinese literatures” which includes all literary works written in the Chinese language in the range of Chinese literary studies, eliminating regional or political factors that hinder effective communication among scholars of the same domain. The fifth theory is to pick up the traditional method of literary criticism in ancient China, poetry notes, which is to understand the writer or the poet’s thoughts and the essence of the piece of writing by epiphany (頓悟), a Buddhist way of obtaining ultimate truth. All these five that bear prominent “Chineseness” in themselves can contribute to the discovery and understanding of “Chineseness” in literature and offer inspiration to people around the world who are curious about what literature has contributed to the continuation of Chinese culture through a long history. This article aims to demonstrate how literary studies have been conducted and can be conducted by using the new method of presenting the “Chineseness” of literary works as its core conception.

A Local Chinese literary Criticism Theory: Nie Zhenzhao’s Ethical Literary Criticism

Since Professor Nie Zhenzhao brought forward Ethical Literary Criticism, this profound and illuminating theory has been widely discussed and studied in China and other countries by many scholars. This literary review aims to make preliminary introduction and categorization of these discussions and studies related to the groundbreaking theory.

In “Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism” (Nie 83-101) written by Nie Zhenzhao, he outlined this new theory which places the ethical observation of literary texts in the core position of literary criticism. This paper can be seen as an original and comprehensive description of the theory. The reason why he proposed this theory is to make efforts to realize a possibility of developing “a set of critical toolkits of their own” by Chinese scholars, so that these scholars can better participate in the worldwide construction of literary theories. The way he does this is establishing a systematical theoretical mansion on the foundation of redefining the origin of literature, for which he analyzed the Labor Theory, the “literature as an art of language” theory, and the “aesthetic ideology” theory, pointing out their weaknesses in explaining the origin of literature, and proposed

his idea that literature can be traced back to its moral teaching function in the early time of human history. Nie's inspiring theory "seeks to unpack the ethical features of literary works, to describe characters and their lives from the vantage point of ethics, and to make ethical judgments about them," thus he discussed ethic taboo, ethical chaos, ethical environment etc., so as to explicate the typical way of reading literary texts with his Ethical Literary Criticism. In the last part of this declaration-style paper, "ethical selection" has been proposed and elaborated as the key conclusion of his theory that it is this kind of selection, which is in contrast with natural selection, differentiates humans from animals. This paper offers a clear and panoramic view of Nie's theory.

A series of papers have further discussed or interpreted the key points of this theory. In "A Conceptual Map of Ethical Literary Criticism: An Interview with Nie Zhenzhao" (Ross 7-14), Charles Ross inquired about the way Nie defines literature, the interchangeability of ethic and morality, how literature serves as a guidebook for living, how moral functions may change over time, how to distinguish ethical selection from natural selection, etc. Speaking of distinguishing moral criticism from ethical criticism, Nie responded: "The overarching aim of ethical literary criticism is to uncover ethical factors that bring literature into existence and the ethical elements that affect characters and events in literary works." This means that the latter only observes and discovers those "ethical factors" instead of making judgement under personal moral principles as the former does, rectifying the inverted relation between the ends and the means.

The reason why Nie tries to place "ethical factor" in the core position of his theory is because he contends that only do we reveal these factors can literature perform its ethical teaching function, which is also the way of making ethical selection, urging people to become real human beings whose reason takes control of emotion. This selection process shows why literature is indispensable in human society. Besides, In "Nie Zhenzhao and the Genesis of Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism" (Tian 402-420) written by Tian Junwu studies the genesis of the whole Chinese ethical literary criticism tradition from ancient to contemporary times, pointing out that Nie's theoretical effort is inheriting the tradition while at the same time has made its unique development in response to our time.

Several papers discussed the academic influence of the Ethical Literary Criticism. In "Fruitful collaborations: Ethical literary criticism in Chinese academe" (Baker and Shang 14-15), "The Rise of a Critical Theory: Reading Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism" (Shang, 2014), "Realms of Ethical Literary Criticism in China: A Review of Nie Zhenzhao's Scholarship, and The "Going International"

Ethical Literary Criticism” (published in Chinese) (Hao, 26-36), a general view of the theory is given and its influence in the academic circle is discussed in details. This influence mainly includes two entwined aspects: the gap-filling of “theory aphasia” of China’s literary criticism and the “going international” of China’s literary criticism. All of these papers agree that Ethical Literary Criticism has attracted fairly remarkable attention from both China and overseas countries, and that it is the first time in the history of China’s literary criticism to achieve such an accomplishment.

While appreciating Ethical Literary Criticism as an original theory by a Chinese scholar, some scholars find that it resonates with some classical literary theories. “In Universality: Ethical Literary Criticism (Nie Zhenzhao) and the Advocacy Theory of Aesthetics (Alain Locke)—Ethical Literary Criticism between China and America” (Yang 23-34), the author proposed the idea that “Nie’s and Locke’s approach to literature, which includes believing that literary texts are embedded with value oriented ethical significance, is of universal value.” In *Ethical Literary Criticism and Marxist Literary Theory: Mutual Understanding, Mutual Supporting, and Mutual Supplementing* (published in Chinese) (Fei 43-51), Fei Xiaoping argues that Ethical Literary Criticism can and should enrich itself with Marxist Literary Theory in the aspects of ethical selection, literature as the product of ethic, and the ethical teaching function of literature, since these two theories share the same ethical orientation, solicitude and judgement. Besides, in *Ethical Literary Criticism and the Construction of Humanistic Spirit* (published in Chinese) (Xu 150-155), the author explores the issue of how Ethical Literary Criticism has participated in the construction of the Humanistic Spirit, which brings the influence of this theory to a broader vision of its relation and interaction with higher level concepts and other cultural theories.

The novel theory also has been applied in the close reading of various literary texts. In the previously mentioned paper written by Shang Biwu, the author enumerates several examples of the application, like “with reference to ethical literary criticism, Shang Biwu re-reads the ‘daughter-selling’ event of Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* and decodes a set of ethical complexes in the novel, such as ethical choice, ethical identity and ethical consciousness, and thus arrives at a new interpretation of this fictional work.” In the special topic in *Philosophy and Culture*, there are several papers reading Chinese and western literary texts with Nie’s theory.¹

There are several book reviews on Nie’s books regarding his theory, like “Sea Change in Literary Theory and Criticism in Asia” (Kim, 395-400), “Striving for a

1 *Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 2015, 42(4): 1-136

New Critical Approach: Rereading English Literature in the Perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism¹, Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism by Nie Zhenzhao” (review) (Yang 149-151), etc. These book reviews show that this theory has attracted the attention of scholars from all over the world. It is worth mentioning that in Youngmin Kim’s review, the author discusses how Nie’s theory can find its joining points with western theories, and he lists the key points of Nie’s theory in a concise way.

We can conclude that currently the theory of Professor Nie has been carefully and comprehensively studied and well understood by the academic circle, and it has been applied as a useful tool in reading literary texts. Scholars also started to compare it with other literary theories in various aspects. The theory has received many positive comments and it is considered to be a brave step for Chinese scholars to conceive their own theory as well as participate in the world’s theoretical construction. These studies and reviews obviously show that the theory have a broad and bright prospect.

Nie aims to construct a literary theory with the resources mainly from the tradition of Chinese literature itself. The Ethical Literary Criticism is a theoretical response to the lacking of local theoretical resources in Chinese literary studies. Western theories might reveal some of the characteristics of Chinese literature, nevertheless, conducting Chinese literary studies with a Chinese-made theory might give us more hints on how to recognize the uniqueness of Chinese literature. “Chineseness” does not only exist in Chinese literary works, but also in Chinese literary theories. Compared with western literary theories, Ethical Literary Criticism paid particular attention to the long-standing ethical tradition that has been shaping Chinese people’s mind and behavior, and making Chinese literature a very different system from western literature. With this focus, the ethical factors in Chinese literary works might obtain more attention in literary criticism, which helps scholars better understand the writing style and the content of Chinese literature. It also offers a Chinese theoretical pattern for the reading of western literary works, spreading the conception of “Chineseness” to the western world.

Remapping Chinese Literature: Yang Yi’s Chinese Narratology and Literary Geography

A focal field at the turn of the century that is characterized by interdisciplinarity and academic innovation, literary geography has received wide attention from the

1 <https://harvard-yenching.org/features/english-literature-perspective-ethical-literary-criticism>

academic circles. In 2001, the leading scholar in Chinese Literature Yang Yi raised the profound ideological proposition of “remapping Chinese literature” (Yang 97-113). He said, “I have been harboring a dream to make a fairly complete map of Chinese culture or literature of the past thousands of years. This project will be based upon the in-depth and systematic study of the Han literature and literatures of all minorities in China. The integrity and diversity of the rich and profound Chinese national literature will be directly depicted, and the trait, nature, element, source of Chinese national literature will be pleasantly exposed as well.” Over the past decade, he delved into the basic issues of literary geography from the perspectives of essence, connotations and methods revealed in thesis publications. It reminds us that geography – the earth dimension – of literature’s occurrence and existence should not be segregated, we have to study the geographical intervention in literature from the perspective of the whole universe with three dimensions and the large-scale changes in human culture, grasping the key points of the relationship between literature and life from broad connections as well. Yang is not a scholar of rash judgments without sufficient materials and conclusive evidence. He once made a statement, which has been accepted by the vast majority of readers, “The primary principle of literary geography is to connect literature with ‘Di Qi’ (地氣) (this Chinese idiom refers to the masses, common people).” (Tian 002). This term dates back to the Confucian classic *Rites of Zhou* 2,000 years ago, annotated by Zheng Xuan in the Han Dynasty. By using it, he connects literary geography with the ontology of “Qi” (氣) in classical Chinese philosophy.

To accurately grasp the essence of “Di Qi,” Yang proposed a research pattern in which a scholar acts like a detective solving cases with footprints. In ancient China, people often used the phrase “having read more books than could be contained in five carts” to describe an erudite person. But if Yang had lived in that time, people would have had to invent a new phrase to describe his erudition, because the books he has written about the pre-Qin scholars alone would have burst five carts. For Yang, a scholar’s being erudite in Chinese literature means having obtained a panoramic view of Chinese literature and even Chinese culture. Like a detective combing through what little evidence he could find, Yang has devoted his life to studying the works of leading scholars in ancient China. Recently, he published a new book, *Genesis of Confucius’s Analects*, a weighty 1.05-million-word tome that transports the reader back to the historical scenes of thousands of years ago.

Well-versed in both ancient and modern literatures, he is hailed as “one of China’s best literary historians in the 21st century” and “one of the most original

and influential scholars in China.” Yang fell in love with Chinese literature, especially the classics. He would read his favourite books over and over again. Bound by the words that seemed to be whispering mysteries from thousands of years ago yet difficult to comprehend, he made a decision that would later shape his career path—he decided that he would devote his whole life to solving these mysteries. His latest book, *Genesis of Confucius’s Analects*, which is part of his *Genesis* series, is hailed by the academic community as a monumental masterpiece in the study of pre-Qin scholars and a landmark contribution to the study of classical Chinese literature. The *Genesis* series aims to revisit the historical contexts of the works by pre-Qin scholars and to decode the ‘cultural genes’ of their works, a process which Yang jokingly likens to “crime scene reconstruction.” “My attempt to decode these classics is like a detective’s effort to solve a case with footprints,” he says. “Their works are like the footprints they left behind, and by studying them, it is then possible to turn ancient wisdom into modern wisdom that has resonance for contemporary living.”

Yang bemoans the tendency of some contemporary scholars to take words out of context and use them to express their own opinions. “It is the scholar’s job to trace back to the genesis,” he says. “Take Confucius’s words for example. Different meanings can be inferred from the same words in different times, so it’s important to trace back to the historical context and uncover the original intended meaning of his words. Failing to do so is tantamount to calling a stag a horse or twisting other people’s words to serve your own agenda.” “Classics like *The Analects of Confucius* were written by people, so there are ‘footprints’ left behind. From a single footprint, a detective could determine the age, height, weight, and posture of the suspect and find the person. But a scholar should go one step further. Instead of being content with measuring the width and length of the footprint and its distance to the window, a scholar studying the works of intellectual giants like Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu should always remember to treat their works as a detective would measure a footprint. They must understand that no meaningful study of their works would be possible without understanding the cultural codes, lives, activities, and state of mind of the scholars in question.” he says.

Not only does Yang’s studies on Chinese literature eminently relate to the “Chineseness” dating back to the historical context, he himself was born and grew up in China, his experiences, thinking style, and disposition also bear rich “Chineseness.” A good book opens a door to a different world where one embarks on a memorable journey and has a conversation with the author. Growing up in the countryside, so he first went to college, Yang felt like a frog leaving a deep well

for the first time, dwarfed by everyone else who seemed to be better than him in every way. “Those from big cities like Beijing and Shanghai talked about books by Balzac, Tolstoy, and Pushkin, names someone from the countryside had never heard of,” he says. In his first essay assignment, he wrote, “We saw more leaves from trees than those from books,” meaning students from the countryside spent more time in the field than in the classroom. When he first joined the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Yang was mostly quiet. The library in the CASS’s Institute of Literature and the national library in Beijing were his most-frequented places. He used to read 2,000 books before starting to write one. “Like water under the ice, flowing to the east day and night unbeknown to anyone.” Perhaps these two lines from a poem by the Tang dynasty poet Du Mu are a fitting description of Yang’s quiet yet consistent progress in his academic journey. Reading keeps him young at heart and thirsty for knowledge. This state of mind, in turn, becomes a key that opens a door to a different world.

In 2009, when Yang left his position as the director of the CASS’s Institute of Literature, he received invitations from many higher education institutions to work at their institutions. But he put off making a decision because he was preoccupied with finding a way to be a ‘matchmaker’ between the works of pre-Qin scholars and the literature of Hong Kong and Macao. Then he thought of Matteo Ricci. “But the problem is that he has already been extensively studied in Macao, and discussing him in Macao would be like teaching fish how to swim,” he says. Finally he found an angle related to classical literature—‘when Matteo Ricci meets Siku Quanshu’ (Siku Quanshu means Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature, which was compiled in the Qing dynasty) “How is Matteo Ricci treated in Siku Quanshu? This is a new angle from which we could explore how the two cultures interact with each other,” he recalls, excitement barely containable. After he joined University of Macau in 2010, he established a research team in Chinese literature, and within two years, he and his team published more than 900,000 words and seven long papers on pre-Qin scholars. “Macao is neither at the centre nor on the margins of the academic scene. Rather, it is at the forefront. The advantage of being at the forefront is that you get to be the first to be exposed to new academic trends and you also get to be the first to carry out academic innovation,” he says. And he thought he will usher his academic studies into another golden age.

Prof. Yang Yi’s book, *The Illustrated Treatise on Chinese Literature of the 20th Century*, was the first book in the field to present history with illustration. In this book, his effort in remapping Chinese literature and revisiting the historical context of pre-Qin scholars is an academic practice of the methods that present

"Chineseness" in novel ways. He also looked into the narrative characteristics of Chinese literati in the process. In his publications, Yang demonstrated how to conduct Chinese literary studies in these ways, exploring the unique "Chineseness" and presenting it to the academic circle. His personal learning and research experiences also are very different from western scholars. As he says about himself, the learning conditions he had were very tough. Taking a close look at his life helps us to better learn about how Chinese scholars have pursued their academic career and how their style of life and work can affect literary writing and criticism in China in a distinguished way.

After knowing about Yang's personal experiences in studying Chinese literature, it is not extravagant to say that few scholars can be as passionate and enthusiastic as him in this domain. The deep love for Chinese literature is an indispensable factor in demonstrating "Chineseness" in Chinese literary studies. This emotion per se should be taken into the consideration of the theoretical construction of "Chineseness." Yang's remapping project is built on the basis of his decades of diligent learning. Therefore, he is able to trace the trajectory of the literati in history and to conclude how the literary structure changed in China through different times (Yang 97-113). In this process, he also pays attention to the power propelling these changes. These methods are extremely broad in vision and a lot of factors should be taken into account. Yang's theory is also fairly ambitious, which tries to display the panoramic view of Chinese literature with a dynamic map that combines visual arts and literature. It is all-encompassing, attempting to break the barriers of time and space. What Yang is working on is to make the "authentic literary scene" reappear in the present world (Long 102-106). This method aims to offer a real environment for people to feel and understand Chinese literature. In this environment, readers can get immersed in the world of Chinese literature and touch the beauty of it personally. It does not only require the scholars who create this environment to be extremely knowledgeable and talented, but also calls for abundant cultural resources and advanced technologies. This holistic way of thinking is a prominent characteristic of "Chineseness."

Following the ideas of this method, the aim of Chinese literary studies can be viewed as to construct a timeless space that is theoretically the same as the literary scenes existed in history, and to read literature means to "live" temporarily as a Chinese with literary accomplishment in that space (it is like visiting a very delicate museum with incredibly rich collections to some extent). If this aim can be achieved, the experiences to be immersed in such spaces can definitely increase the "Chineseness" of the readers. The revivification of pre-Qin scholars series is

a practice of Yang's theory. These monographs are acclaimed that these scholars' lives authentically reappear through Yang's studies (Dai 211-216). Dai deems that Yang's practice is motivated by the desire of returning to the parent body of the Chinese people searching for mental power and original wisdom. Dai did not elaborate these two objectives in the paper, but he did emphasize the "holographic" approach applied to Yang's studies. What I understand from it is that Yang has created the "holographic" images of these pre-Qin scholars, which, to some extent, successfully bring them back to life, so that living people can "communicate" with them like interacting with real persons and are able to touch their souls. A lot of pendent questions can be (and a lot have been) solved by this approach, such as Zhuangzi (莊子)'s origin and Hanfeizi (韓非子)'s identity. Dai repeatedly mentions that Yang's method is different from the western approaches in his paper.

Yang predicts the future development of the research in this field, suggesting that more efforts be made to solve such problems therein as the theoretical tardiness, the insufficient empirical studies, the vagueness in research priorities, the weak basis of literature, and the lack of an effective system for academic exchanges.

A Comparative View on Chinese Literature: Kang-i Sun Chang's Literary Studies

Kang-i Sun Chang (孫康宜), the inaugural Malcolm G. Chace 56 Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University, is a scholar of classical Chinese literature, with an interest in literary criticism, comparative studies of poetry, gender studies, and cultural theory/aesthetics. Chang is the author of *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry*; *Six Dynasties Poetry*; *The Late Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung*; and *Journey Through the White Terror*. She is the co-editor of *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (with Ellen Widmer), *Women Writers of Traditional China* (with Haun Saussy), and *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (with Stephen Owen). She has also authored books in Chinese, including *Wenxue jingdian de tiaozhan* (Challenges of the Literary Canon), *Wenxue de shengyin* (Voices of Literature), *Zhang Chonghe tizi xuanji* (Calligraphy of Ch'ung-ho Chang Frankel: Selected Inscriptions), *Quren hongzhao* (Artistic and Cultural Traditions of the Kunqu Musicians), *Wo kan Meiguo jingshen* (My Thoughts on the American Spirit), and *Cong Beishanlou dao Qianxuezhai* (On Shi Zhecun, 1905-2003). Her current book project in English is tentatively entitled "An Immigrant's Story."

With her strong background in Chinese and western literatures, Chang has applied her unique comparative approaches to her study of literature and culture.

In particular, she has explored questions of gender, genres, and critical concepts in Chinese literature, as well as issues regarding the rewriting of Chinese literary history. Her innovative interpretation of the Chinese literary devices such as "mask," "voice," etc. has been widely quoted and well respected in the field. The following is a summary of her scholarly accomplishment in several main areas:

(1) Pioneering work in gender studies within the field of Chinese literature:

Chang has been known as a pioneer who integrated gender studies into the context of classical Chinese literature. The two collections on Chinese women writers which she compiled and co-edited—namely *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, 1999) and *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997)—have become required texts in many American and European universities, and have played a key role in opening up gender studies in western sinology. In addition, her numerous scholarly works on gender-related topics have provided great insight into the mutual relationship between men and women. Apart from refuting the conventional "victimization theory" regarding women, Chang has introduced to the field several new ideas—such as the concepts of "moral power," "feminine style," "cross-voicing," and "androgyny"—which have all become important topics for discourse in the field. On the whole, Chang not only brings new perspectives to gender studies but also creates new ways to "canonize" women's literature in traditional China.

(2) Using comparative approaches to re-examine and trace the literary Developments within the Chinese lyrical tradition:

An expert in classical Chinese poetry and song lyric, Prof. Chang has already published several solid and insightful books that focus on the study of Chinese poetics. Her book, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry: From Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton, 1980) traces the first 250 year history of the ci 词 development, by demonstrating both the importance of the genre's (文类) development and the individual poets' style (文体). Her *Six Dynasties Poetry book* (Princeton, 1986) uses "expression" and "description" as the books' nucleus around which Chang discusses the stylistic development of five major poets during the Six dynasties period, a period that has been known for political upheavals, rapid social changes, and fervid literary activities. In the above two books, the comparative approach has been integrated throughout the discussion. But in her book *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crisis of Love and Loyalism* (Yale, 1991), Prof. Chang adopts a different methodology, by establishing a connection between literature and history. According to Chang, many of Chen Zilong (Ch'en Tzu-lung)'s poems reflecting loyalist emotion also build upon themes and strategies

of his love poetry. Thus, the allegorical connection between loyalism and love has broader implications for tracing the evolution of the late Ming cult of qing 情, or feeling.

(3) Rewriting Chinese literary history by exploring the notion of Chinese literary culture:

Chang has long focused her research on the writing of literary histories, with an aim to fill the gaps and correct biases in the history of Chinese literature. During the last fifteen years, she has edited (with Stephen Owen of Harvard University) the monumental 2-volume set of *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, which consists of chapters by 15 sinologists from the West (including Prof. Chang herself). For this History (both in the original English edition and the Chinese editions), Chang contributes her chapter on Early and Mid-Ming literature. In general *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, which traces the development of Chinese literary culture over three millennia, adopts a new methodology and a new narrative approach. First, it attempts as much as possible to get away from the conventional division of the field into genres and move toward a more integrated historical approach, in the sense of cultural history or the history of literary culture. Issues of genre do need to be addressed, but the larger historical contexts of a genre's appearance and its transformations clarify the role of genre. In particular, looking at literary culture as an integral includes not only print culture, but also reception history, literary societies, anthology making, gender relations—as well as other multicultural aspects. As a new history of Chinese literary culture, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* has now become a demanded text for many people in the field.

(4) Offering a new interpretation of Chinese authorship:

In her most recent work, “Chinese Authorship” (in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, edited by Ingo Borensmeier, et al, 2019), Chang reconsiders the history of Chinese authorship from a vast chronological and conceptional range. It traces from topics such as authorship in Confucian classics, biographies, and poetry, to issues concerning women's authorship and “Western sinologists' detective work on authorship.” It indeed offers a multi-layered interpretation of authorship, which defines a very important element of Chinese literature and culture.

As an influential scholar both in China and Western countries, Professor Chang's studies in the domain of Chinese literature have a broad view of comparative literature along with the perspective of history-literature relationship. Yang's path traces back to the historical context and takes geographical factors into

consideration, revealing “Chineseness” from the local cultural and natural sources of Chinese literature, while Chang places Chinese literature in the coordinate system of the whole world and its history, exploring “Chineseness” through comparing Chinese literary works with their western counterparts. The comparison between two literary systems with different characteristics might reveal each other’s uniqueness, and their dialogue might generate inspiring ideas beneficial to our knowing the world and understanding different cultures.

One thing I would like to mention here is that Chang’s interest turned from western literature to traditional Chinese literature after entering Princeton University (Li 37-44). The reason for this transition is, according to herself, to obtain the competence in making substantial comparison between Chinese literature and western literature. This remark evidently reminds us of the assumption that traditional Chinese literature is different from western literature, which leads to the concept of the “Chineseness” in literature that makes Chinese literature distinguishable. Chang’s studies undoubtedly relate to her cultural identity. She was keen on correcting the errors and stereotypes regarding Chinese literature so as to acquire better, or modern interpretation of it so as to present more of its positive qualities. According to her studies, Chinese literature is not less readable than western literature, and modernity can be found in it.

Her studies echo with Yang’s in this way: both of them are striving to reappear the “authentic” literary history and to reveal “Chineseness” in Chinese literature in a livelier way. The difference might be that Yang had always been a scholar who loves Chinese since his childhood, while Chang had not realized the necessary to be a Chinese literature devotee before entering Princeton University. Yang’s awareness of “Chineseness” is more original, while Chang gained it with a pre-existed vision of western literature. It might be inferred from Chang’s academic experiences that “Chineseness” is what makes Chinese literature enchanting (as mentioned above) and can possibly change a scholar’s attitude towards literature. To know and to study “Chineseness” contribute to one’s perception of literature, and will attract people to read more Chinese literary writing.

Writing in Chinese and Studying Chinese Literature Overseas: Laifong Leung’s Academic Efforts

Laifong Leung, a sinologist of Chinese origin living in Canada, has made important contributions to the field of Chinese literature. She was born in Taishan County in Guangdong province which is home for many overseas Chinese. She attended

elementary and secondary school in Hong Kong and obtained a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Calgary (1972) with a major in Geography. She continued to pursue her Master of Philosophy Degree at the University of British Columbia, studying classical Chinese poetry under the guidance of the prestigious scholar Professor Florence Chiaying Yeh 叶嘉莹 with whom she has maintained a long-term connection. The book *Liu Yong jiqi ci zhi yanjiu* 柳永及其词之研究 (Joint Publishing Co, 1985), based on her thesis "A Study of Liu Yong and His Lyrics" (1976, 357), was the first comprehensive study of Liu Yong in English. She reconstructed the life of the controversial poet based on gazetteers, scholarly notes, and prompt-book stories. Inspired by James Liu's numerical approach and Barbara Johnson's theories on poetic closure, she explored Liu Yong's use of tune patterns, themes, imageries, rhythm and structure. Her empirical methodology had opened up a new approach to the study of Liu Yong and lyrics at large. Its combined Chinese-English version, prefaced by Professor Yeh, will be published by the Zhongyi Press in Beijing.

Professor Yeh's deep interest for the cultural rejuvenation in China after the Maoist era had made an impact on Leung. After Yeh's first visit to China in 1974, Leung embarked on a two-month-long trip in 1976 to China with a delegation from Vancouver, an experience that would later change the path of her scholarly pursuit. In 1979, through the recommendation of Professor Yeh, Leung volunteered to take on the task of compiling three anthologies on Taiwan literature—short fiction, essays and poetry for the People's Literature Press. The anthologies appeared in winter 1979 and became the first to introduce Mainland Chinese readers to Taiwan literature. To those Zhiqing writers who had just begun to write, as Leung was later told, it was an enlightening experience.

Leung was among the earliest group of sinologists in North America to watch closely the development of the Chinese literary scene after Mao. Her doctoral thesis "Images of Youth in Post-Mao Fiction" (1986) was very likely the first in the West to deal with "Zhiqing Fiction 知青小说," that is, the fictional works by former "Zhiqing" 知青 (educated youths) who were mostly Red Guards exiled to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. It deals with themes on Red Guard violence, love and marriage, departure and return, and reflections on rustication. In 1987 and 1988, through the China-Canada bilateral cultural exchange program, she went to China to interview writers of the Zhiqing generation. In 1994, she published the book *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation* (M.E. Sharpe Co; Routledge Press; paper and electronic version). The Chinese version was published in Hong Kong (Tianyuan Press) and Taiwan

(Huahan wenxue shiye gufeng youxian gongsi). Both versions were received with enthusiasm. The English version, particularly, was significant because it was the first scholarly book to introduce a large number of Zhiqing writers to the west. These writers, 26 in total, include Liang Xiaosheng, Mo Yan, Shi Tiesheng, Wang Anyi, Tie Ning, Zhang Chengzhi, Zhang Kangkang, Zheng Yi, etc. Before each dialogue, she provided an accurate and insightful evaluation of the writer. For instance, she recognized the potential of Mo Yan who later won the 2012 Nobel Prize in literature. These writers have continued to play a significant role in contemporary Chinese literature. Her approach was to let the interviewees speak but asking relevant questions based on detailed knowledge of their works, the Chinese literary scene, and the socio-political environment. The interviewees thus felt free to speak and trust her. The result was a poignant record of a fervent, disillusioned and awakened generation. In the early years of the 21st century, she continued to explore the literature by this generation by publishing several articles which dealt with the rise of Zhiqing writers, collective memory and cultural shock as revealed in Zhiqing memoirs, and the intentional avoidance of the Red Guard experience in Zhiqing Fiction. These articles had made an impact in the study of Zhiqing.

Leung's recent book *Contemporary Chinese Fiction Writers: Biography, Bibliography and Critical Assessment* (Routledge, 2017; paper and electronic versions) is a larger project compared to *Morning Sun*. The book aims at introducing to English readers the most representative writers since Mao's death (1976). So far, this is the most comprehensive book of its kind. The arrangement of the writers (80 of them in total) is user friendly, first in alphabetical order and secondly in the order of birth year. In view of the fact that Chinese writers were affected in various ways by political campaigns, the second arrangement would serve to provide the reader a generational perspective. The list of translations of the works by the writers in each entry is very helpful to readers in future reading and research. Each entry, ranging from 3000 to 7000 words, contains three parts: life and works, list of works translated into English, and notes. The inclusion of the source for the fictional works not only provides the time and place of publication, but also is helpful in the understanding of career path of the writer.

Leung's approach to this vast project is empirical and humanitarian, but not dictated by particular theories. Her familiarity with contemporary Chinese literature allowed her to make cross references to other writers. She combined the unique life experience and career path of each writer, pointed out the characteristics, analyzed the representative works, and made critical assessments according to

the large literary and historical background. She used four criteria in selecting the writers. First, those who have played a historically significant role (Liu Xinwu, Lu Xinhua); those who are innovative in style (Wang Meng, Can Xue); those who are controversial (Bai Hua, Dai Houying); and those who have broadened the scope of subject matter and theme (Zhang Xianliang, Liu Cixin). Considering its breadth and depth, the book will remain an important contribution to the field of contemporary Chinese literature many years to come.

In 2009, Leung was invited to take charge of editing and co-authoring the book *Zhongwai wenxue jiaoliushi: Zhongguo-Jianada Juan* 中外文学交流史：中国－加拿大卷 (*History of Literary Interactions between China and Foreign Countries: the China-Canada Volume*), which would become one of the 17-volumes to be published by the Shandong Education Press (2015). Besides the introduction, the book contains four parts: Sinology in Canada (Chapter 2), Canadian literature in Chinese (Chapters 2 & 3), Chinese Canadian literature in English (Chapter 5, 6), reception of Canadian literature in China (Chapter 8) and Chinese Canadian literature in French (Chapter 9, 9, 10). Leung contributed chapters 2, 3, and 4. As the first book in this field of study, she had to largely rely on first-hand material such as interviews, family letters, newspapers, community records, reports, and literary works. Her approach is that the history of literary interaction is inseparable from the history of migration. It is on this basis that Chinese Canadian literature developed in Canada. She did a detailed study of Canadian Sinology with emphasis on Chinese literature and cultural exchange. She traced the activities of the Chinese cultural community in Canada from the late 19th century to the present. She built the framework for the study of literature written in Chinese in Canada by identifying and exploring the first and second waves of writers from Hong Kong, Taiwan as well as Mainland China, respectively, and discussed the reception of their works in China. The role of literary associations in cultural interactions was also discussed.

In 1987, Leung initiated and co-founded the Chinese Canadian Writers' Association (CCWA, see: www.ccwriters.com) and currently serves as its executive chair. Since its founding, through her effort, the association has invited over one hundred writers and scholars to Canada, and mostly from China. This exchange program has benefited many contemporary Chinese writers who, until recently, would have very little chance of visiting abroad.

Leung is also keen in teaching Chinese as a second language. She is the author of the language book *Early Spring in February: A Study Guide to the Film* (1998, 2004) which was based on the May Fourth writer Rou Shi. She also published

the courseware Concise Interactive Chinese (2013). In the 1980s and 2000s, she participated in the writing of the first curriculum guide to teaching Chinese as a second language in public schools in British Columbia, and the bilingual program in public schools in Alberta, respectively.

As a scholar grew up in Hong Kong and obtained her degree in Canada, Leung turns back to observe her homeland in a trans-cultural background. The "Chineseness" she discovers in her studies is different from the scholars discussed above. She concerns herself with the Zhiqing group that is closely related to contemporary Chinese history. Her work on promoting communication among writers from China and Canada also gives us a new knowledge on what scholars in literary studies can do for the whole literature circle. The interaction between her and Zhiqing writers is also a method that can present "Chineseness" in a more direct and lively way.

Literary Writing Inspired by Epiphany: Gong Gang's Neo-Hsinglingism Studies

According to Gong Gang's paper on *Neo-Hsinglingism Poetics* (Gong 56-62), this new theory construction proposed by Gong Gang is the inheritance and the transformation of the core proposition of Hsingling School of the Ming and Qing Dynasty. It is the integration of excellent elements from Chinese and western poetry of all times. In order to proactively participate in modern lifestyle and integrate itself into modern aesthetics, it has gradually established a basic theoretical framework. *Neo-Hsinglingism Poetics* contends that Hsingling is the combination of deep learning and profound epiphany which leads to the natural acquisition of the heaven's secret. The poetic style of Neo-Hsinglingism is an illumination like the flash of the lightening and the lyric of calmness with philosophical connotation. Neo-Hsinglingism sees Hsingling as its tenet, and values the spirit of individuality; what is more, it advocates patriotism, concerns itself with people all over the country, and breaks into the deep layers of life, letting all feelings attack the poet's soul. As a trend of literary creation, Neo-Hsinglingism advocates epiphany and philosophic spirit, proposes the constraint of wisdom over emotion, and promotes the literary effect of jumping high and falling lightly; as a trend of criticism, it advocates criticism of miraculous epiphany style on the basis of comprehensive study.

The construction of Neo-Hsinglingism is based on the literary activities of the "Seven Swords" (seven poets), who pursue distinctive individuality and concern themselves with the people, the nation and the world in a swordsman spirit. Neo-

Hsinglingism School is an open group with no partisanship, and is actively writing literary works as well as engaging itself with the construction of modern poetics. In their poem-writing practice, several principles have been developed. Firstly, they advocate that Hsingling is something obtained through diligent learning on the basis of inborn talent. Secondly, the poetic wisdom of expressing complicated ideas and emotions with precise words and void-solid combination is something of real value and worth going after. The last principle is a literary technique of “cold expression of emotions” which distinguishes Neo-Hsinglingism from the passionate Romanticism.

This new method of poetic criticism¹ relates itself to a lot of traditional Chinese poetic theories. Yan Yu’s poetic criticism emphasizing “Chan” or “zen” (禅), Yuan Hongdao’s expressing Hsingling without the constraint of existing rules (独抒性灵, 不拘格套), Wang Fuzhi’s poems as a way of conveying disposition (诗以道性情, 道性之情也) etc. all inspired this new method. Hsingling itself is a concept originated in China, a synthesis of traditional Chinese values, philosophy, aesthetics and writing skills. To conduct literary criticism with this method can reveal the “Chineseness” rooted deep in the Chinese cultural tradition and Chinese literary works.

Theoretically, this approach is originated from the ancient learning principles that require scholars to be erudite in Chinese culture, mingling with the passion of Romanticism from the west and the mysterious insight from the “chan” tradition. This method mainly reminds us of the high-literature standards. Poets that can meet the standards usually has to be a scholar, so as to be sophisticated in literary theories and cultural knowledge. This arouses the nostalgic of the brilliance of the ancient Chinese poetry, while at the same time exploring a modern landscape of Chinese poetry imbued with the “Chineseness” that includes all the quintessence of Chinese and western literature. It is a fairly ambitious method still being constructed, and the details of the theoretical system will be specified in the future as its advocates are already working on it.

Currently, Neo-Hsinglingism poetics is mainly practiced in the poem writing of the “Seven Swords” and their friends. In *Anthology of Seven Swords*, a large part of poems were written under the above-mentioned principles. With the impressive multi-erudition of the scholars who are in favour of this theory and its excellent academic potential, the Neo-Hsinglingism School is unleashing new waves of poetic creation.

1 *Poetry Hall Issue II, Gong Gang’s What Are the Main Features of Neo-Hsinglingism?* p. 1-2

Conclusion

"Chineseness" is one of the issues that concern scholars interested in Chinese literary studies. Having discussed the above scholars' academic achievements, some new methods and theories to present "Chineseness" through literary studies are revealing themselves. The emotions expressed in Chinese literature also mirror these principles. The "Chineseness" discussed here partly originates from Chinese ethical tradition, which have been largely influencing the life style of Chinese people. Reading the Chinese literary writing in light of Nie's theory is supposed to be helpful in gaining empathy with Chinese literati. Only on this empathetic basis is touching "Chineseness" in a more profound way possible.

If Yang and Chang are both pursuing the "authentic" lives of Chinese literati, then Nie's theory should not be neglected, since the Chinese ethical principles formed the basic structure of Chinese people (especially those living in the ancient times). Nie Zhenzhao's efforts in constructing the Chinese local literary theory is a brave attempt that opens a new field for "Chineseness." Yang Yi's Chinese Narratology and literary geography offer new perspectives for viewing Chinese literature, drawing our attention to the unique cultural and natural characteristics in China. Kang-i Sun Chang brings a very broad and modern view of Chinese literary studies, integrating Chinese literature into the map of world literature, highlighting "Chineseness" in the comparative vision. Laifong Leung as a sinologist combines contemporary Chinese history and literature, discovering "Chineseness" in the present time, trying to find out the hidden clue of the evolution of "Chineseness" connecting different times from literary writing. Gong Gang aims to revive the Hsingling tradition that widely and deeply influenced Chinese poetry, placing this important concept under the modern society, so as to develop a more comprehensive and profound theory for modern Chinese poetry, enriching it with western ideas as well as maintaining its "Chineseness."

Let me refer back to the "spectrum" of "Chineseness." All of the five theories mentioned in this article are moving in a certain place in the spectrum, while at the same time expanding it. I shall try to draw a small conclusion about what "Chineseness" in Chinese literature is here with the inspiration of the five theories. It is something irreplaceable and embodied in the long tradition of Chinese literature. Chinese people cherish it with affection. For Chinese literati, or similarly Chinese scholars and writers in the modern sense, "Chineseness" is the quintessence they are pursuing to understand and describe for the whole life. It is not possible to accurately define it, however, its existence is undoubtable. We can

find it in Chinese literary writing of all times, and it is the deep-rooted resource of the beauty of Chinese literature. The more we know about China, the more Chinese writing we read, we get closer to the “Chineseness” permeating Chinese culture. This is a process of exploration, and even a pilgrimage. I suppose the way to arrive at the upper end of the spectrum of “Chineseness” is a long but pleasant journey. “Chineseness” in Chinese literature is an open concept and is still in construction, however, no matter how it changes, it should be positive, beautiful and inclusive.

The Chinese pattern of literary theory is a synthesis of tradition Chinese literary conceptions, Chinese way of thinking, and Chinese literary style. Chinese literature has attracted more and more attention all over the world, and “Chineseness” should also be presented so as to become a world-wide theoretical resource, participating in the co-efforts of knowing our world and tackling with the various problems threatening the existence of all human beings. “Chineseness” is a contribution to the world that is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, which has a long and brilliant history and should never be neglected by all of us. What does these five new approaches contribute to understanding “Chineseness” in Chinese literary studies? As these five scholars are all of Chinese descent (three of them have Chinese Nationality), we can at least say that, most of these research approaches can be called “down-to-earth” (接地氣 Jie Di Qi).

It is inevitable in the trend of globalization that they are more or less affected by western literary theories, nevertheless the Chinese brilliance emanated from them is not negligible. Although it is a fairly tough task, I shall try to define that the “Chineseness” presented in the five methods mentioned in this paper conforms to the following features to a large degree: 1. The scholars who proposed the approaches grew up in a Chinese family; 2. The scholars are native speakers of Chinese and are erudite in Chinese literature; 3. Ancient Chinese literary theories and thoughts are an indispensable factor of these approaches; 4. These approaches show that these scholars deeply love China and Chinese culture; 5. These approaches try to make manifest the beauty and nobility of Chinese literature. Wang Gunwu proposed the concept of “cultural spectrum” in analyzing how “Chineseness” has been constructed in different places around the world, noting that in the spectrum “the Shanghai Chinese would be at one end and the Singapore and San Francisco Chinese at the other” (Wang 131-144). I do not plan to observe “Chineseness” in the way Wang does, since my paper is on Chinese literature while Wang’s is of historical and political concern. However, the concept of “spectrum” inspired me that when we talk about “Chineseness” in Chinese literature, probably we can understand it as a spectrum. One end of this spectrum is

the ideal "Chineseness" in Chinese literature that Chinese people have been longing for since ancient times, while on the other end it is the fundamental "Chineseness" that can be obtained through basic knowledge of Chinese literature like reading a translated Chinese poem or novel. The former end has been always in the progress of construction along with the passing of time. Ancient Chinese literati contributed a lot to it, and modern people also have been making efforts to specify and expand the connotation of this ideal "Chineseness."

The ideal "Chineseness" is a monolithic notion that encompasses the positive elements and successful practices of Chinese literature of all times and all over the world. Positive elements in western culture and other cultures have been constantly absorbed into this "Chineseness." In this sense, we may say that nowadays Chinese writers and scholars are all striving to describe this ideal "Chineseness" and to develop it. With the notion of the spectrum, we may say that the five new approaches mentioned here are, to a large extent, all dealing with "Chineseness" in Chinese literature, and they are all moving towards the ideal end of the spectrum as well as attempting to make it more substantial through theoretical efforts. They all give us a more positive, inclusive and aesthetic perception of Chinese literature.

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