

A Study on the Origin, Evolution and Development Track of Modern Chinese Literature

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Abstract. Modern Chinese literature, evolving since the early 20th century, reflects social changes and influences thought trends, from the May 4th Movement to wartime and social transformations. This thesis systematically explores the origin, evolution and development track of modern Chinese literature. Through in-depth analysis from multiple dimensions such as historical context, cultural integration and social changes, it reveals the internal logic of its formation and development. The study finds that modern Chinese literature is rooted in traditional culture and has achieved transformation under the impact of Western literary trends. At key historical nodes such as the May 4th New Culture Movement and the war years, the literary form has undergone profound changes. Social politics, economic development and cultural trends together constitute the dynamic mechanism for its development. The research conclusions provide an important theoretical reference for understanding the uniqueness of modern Chinese literature and promoting contemporary literary creation and cultural inheritance.

Keywords: Modern Chinese Literature, Origin and Evolution, Development Track, Traditional Culture, Western Literary Trends

1. Introduction

Modern Chinese literature is an important milestone in the history of Chinese literary development. Since its emergence in the early 20th century, it has undergone tremendous changes over a century. In this historical process, modern Chinese literature has not only innovated the expression paradigm of literature, but also profoundly reflected the changes of the times and exerted a far-reaching impact on the evolution of social trends of thought. Starting from the literary revolution of the May 4th New Culture Movement, and going through different historical stages such as the war years and social transformation, modern Chinese literature has always been closely linked with social development and has become an important window to observe China's social changes in the 20th century.

An in-depth exploration of the origin, evolution and development track of modern Chinese literature is not only helpful to reveal its development laws, but also can show the grand changes of Chinese society in the 20th century from a literary perspective. By analyzing the process of its gestation in the collision and integration of traditional culture and Western culture, as well as its tortuous development and evolution in the complex social, political, economic and cultural

environment, we can clearly insight into the interactive relationship between literature and various social elements. This research is of great significance for enriching the literary theory research system and exploring the social value of literature, and can also provide valuable historical experience for contemporary literary creation and cultural inheritance.

Although the academic circle has achieved fruitful results in this field, there is still room for further exploration in sorting out the internal logical relationship of each development stage and systematically integrating and analyzing multiple influencing factors. The academic circle has formed a systematic research on the development process, representative writers and genre changes of modern Chinese literature. Representative achievements include Mao Dun's Night Reading Notes for the theoretical combing of realistic literature, Wang Yao's A Draft History of Chinese New Literature for the classic interpretation of the literary development context, Qian Liqun et al.'s Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature for the systematic analysis of the characteristics of literary stages, etc [1-3]. On the basis of previous studies, this study adopts an interdisciplinary comprehensive research method, combines the perspectives of literary theory, history, sociology and other disciplines, and extensively excavates first-hand literary historical materials. It strives to comprehensively sort out the origin and evolution of modern Chinese literature, deeply explore its development track, and open up a new path for the study of modern Chinese literature.

2. Exploration of the origin of modern Chinese literature

2.1. Foundation of traditional culture

Chinese classical literature is an important foundation for the development of modern literature and provides it with profound cultural nourishment. In terms of literary genres, although modern poetry has broken through the metrical constraints of classical poetry, its internal sense of rhythm can be traced back to the level and oblique tones, rhyming and rhythmic parallelism of ancient poetry. For example, Xu Zhimo's Farewell to Cambridge Again is presented in the form of free verse, but the arrangement of its lines and rhythm skillfully integrates the rhythmic beauty of classical poetry, forming a unique musicality [4]. In the field of novel creation, the chapter-based structure and legendary narrative techniques of ancient novels also provide important references for modern novels. Zhang Henshui's The Story of the Golden Powder takes the rise and fall of a family as the main line and shows the ways of the world through multi - line narration, which is in the same line as the narrative tradition of ancient social novels. Its modern transformation of the narrative logic of the chapter - based "telling two things separately" has been analyzed in detail in Fan Boqun's A History of Modern Chinese Popular Literature [5].

In terms of expression techniques, modern literature has inherited and developed the metaphor and association techniques of classical literature. Ai Qing, in I Love This Land, uses "bird" as a metaphor for himself. Through the lines "Why are my eyes always full of tears? Because I love this land deeply...", he integrates personal emotions with the feelings of family and country, which is an innovative application of classical metaphor and association techniques. This creative feature can be confirmed in Yuan Xingpei's History of Chinese Literature on the "modern continuation of the metaphor and association tradition" [6]. In terms of aesthetic concepts, the pursuit of artistic conception beauty and implicit beauty in classical literature has also been continued in modern literary works. Shen Congwen's Border Town depicts the purity and beauty of the western Hunan world with poetic strokes, creating an artistic conception like a paradise, which reflects the inheritance and development of traditional aesthetic ideals. Ling Yu's Biography of Shen

Congwen reveals the internal connection between Shen Congwen and the aesthetic tradition of Chu culture through the analysis of the writer's creative psychology [7].

2.2. Impact and integration of Western literary trends

From the late Qing Dynasty to the May 4th period, with the opening of the country and the introduction of Western learning to the East, Western literary trends poured into China like a tide, exerting a profound impact on the formation of modern literature. The romantic trend of thought, with its pursuit of individual liberation and emotional freedom, has inspired Chinese writers' attention to individual values. Guo Moruo's *The Goddess* is full of the romantic spirit of stormy advance. The praise of self and yearning for freedom in the poetry not only echo the style of Western romantic poets such as Byron and Shelley, but also integrate the unique perception of nature and life in Chinese traditional culture. Li Helin's *History of Modern Chinese Literature* has a specific interpretation of this "integration of Chinese and Western" characteristic [8].

The realistic trend of thought has prompted Chinese writers to turn their attention to social reality and pay attention to the suffering of the bottom people. Mao Dun's *Midnight* shows the struggle of the Chinese national bourgeoisie and the contradictions among various social strata in the 1930s with a grand narrative. It draws on the creative methods of Western realistic literature that focus on detailed description and creating typical characters in typical environments, and combines with the specific national conditions of Chinese society to conduct an in-depth analysis of the social and economic structure and class relations. The internal connection between this creative practice and Lukács' "totality" theory in *Problems of Realism* is discussed in Wen Rumin's *Study Guide for Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature* [9].

The new creative techniques brought by the modernist trend of thought, such as stream of consciousness and symbolism, have also injected new vitality into modern Chinese literature. Li Jinfa's symbolic poetry *Light Rain* uses strange symbols and obscure images to express complex inner emotions and unique cognition of the world. For example, in his *The Abandoned Woman*, "The hidden worries of the abandoned woman are piled up in her actions. The fire of the setting sun cannot turn the boredom of time into ashes and fly away from the chimney", which uses images such as "setting sun" and "ashes" to metaphorize the desolation of life. Although it caused controversy in the early stage because it was too Westernized, it promoted Chinese writers' bold exploration in form and content. Sun Yushi's *Introduction to Modern Chinese Poetry* has a detailed interpretation of the text expression of its symbolic techniques [10].

3. Key transition periods in the evolution process

3.1. The May 4th New Culture Movement and literary revolution

The May 4th New Culture Movement is an important turning point in the development of modern Chinese literature, which thoroughly criticizes old literature and advocates new literature as its core goal. The rigid classical Chinese form and outdated ideological concepts in old literature were regarded as shackles hindering social progress and ideological emancipation. As an important part of the literary revolution, the vernacular movement transformed the literary language from obscure classical Chinese to easy-to-understand vernacular, which greatly expanded the audience of literature, made literature truly accessible to the public. Hu Shi's *History of Vernacular Literature* systematically discusses the historical significance of this language reform [11].

Hu Shi's *A Proposal for Literary Reform* systematically put forward the propositions of literary reform, including advocating vernacular Chinese, opposing classical Chinese, and advocating the diversification of literary forms, which laid a theoretical foundation for the development of new literature. Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*, as China's first modern vernacular short story, exposed the essence of feudal ethics "eating people" with sharp writing, and was pioneering in narrative methods, character shaping, theme expression and other aspects. The diary form it adopted, which examines society from the perspective of a madman, broke the narrative structure of traditional novels and has a foundational significance in the development of modern novels. This pioneering value is emphasized in Xia Zhiqing's *History of Modern Chinese Novels* [12]. In addition, Hu Shi's *Trial Collection* made bold attempts in new poetry creation. Among them, *Butterfly* adopted a free verse form, but still followed the classical poetic flavor in image selection and rhythm processing, showing the transitional characteristics of "new wine in old bottles", which reflects the complexity of form exploration in the early stage of new literature. This transitional characteristic has been accurately summarized in Zhu Ziqing's *Introduction to the Collection of New Chinese Literature · Poetry* [13].

3.2. Literary turn in the war years

During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the Liberation War, Chinese society was in a critical stage of life and death and drastic changes, and literature also underwent a profound turn, closely serving the era's themes of national salvation and social transformation. The literary themes shifted from focusing on individual emotions and social issues before the war to focusing on national destiny, war sufferings and revolutionary struggles. Tian Jian's anti-Japanese war poems, with passionate rhythms and short and powerful lines, such as "If we don't go to war, the enemy will kill us with bayonets and point to our bones and say: 'Look, this is a slave!'", inspired the people's anti-Japanese enthusiasm and became a powerful weapon to boost morale. The creative characteristics of such "drumbeat-style" poems are analyzed in Tang Tao's *A Brief History of Modern Chinese Literature* [14].

During this period, the literary style also changed from relatively gentle and delicate to impassioned, simple and vigorous. Literature has become more closely connected with politics and social reality, and has become an important tool to publicize revolutionary ideas and unite national strength. Many literary societies actively participated in the anti-Japanese national salvation movement. For example, the All-China Association of Literary and Art Circles for Resisting the Enemy united a large number of literary and art workers to speak for the war of resistance. The relevant historical background is recorded in detail in *Selected Historical Materials of the All-China Association of Literary and Art Circles for Resisting the Enemy* [15]. In the liberated areas, Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* established the direction of literature serving workers, peasants and soldiers, and a group of writers such as Zhao Shuli, who paid attention to farmers' lives and reflected rural changes, emerged. Zhao Shuli's *Xiao Erhei's Marriage*, with its easy - to - understand language and vivid rural stories, was loved by the majority of farmers and promoted the popularization of literature. The relationship between the formation of his "yam egg school" creative style and the needs of the times is specifically explained in He Jingzhi's *On Zhao Shuli's Creation* [16].

4. Diversified forms in the development track

4.1. Development and evolution of literary schools in different periods

In the development process of modern Chinese literature, many literary schools with their own characteristics have emerged, which together constitute a colorful landscape of modern literature. The Literary Research Association, as the first literary society in the history of modern literature, upholds the literary proposition of "for life", emphasizes the social utility of literature, and pays attention to the description and criticism of social reality. Ye Shengtao's *Ni Huanzhi* reflects the social changes from the 1911 Revolution to the first domestic revolutionary war period through the description of the life experience of the intellectual Ni Huanzhi, showing the realistic creative style of the Literary Research Association. The connection between this creative proposition and work practice can be confirmed in Mao Dun's Declaration of the Literary Research Association and related comments [17].

The Creation Society held high the banner of "art for art's sake", emphasizing self-expression and emotional expression, with a strong romantic color. Guo Moruo's poems and Yu Dafu's novels all show the unique creative style of the Creation Society with strong subjective emotions and bold self-exposure. Zheng Boqi's Introduction to the Third Collection of Novels in the Series of New Chinese Literature systematically summarizes the creative characteristics of the Creation Society [18]. The Crescent School pursues the "three beauties" of poetry, namely musical beauty, painting beauty and architectural beauty. Xu Zhimo's *Farewell to Cambridge Again* and Wen Yiduo's *Dead Water* are typical representatives of this proposition. In *Dead Water*, Wen Yiduo depicts the stagnant and stinking water to ironize the darkness of the times, and shows the structural consciousness of architectural beauty in rhythm and line arrangement, reflecting the poetic concept of "unity of form and content" of the Crescent School. This poetic proposition is echoed in the relevant discussions in Bian Zhilin's *Chronicle of Carving Insects* [19].

Different from the "Crescent School" which pays attention to the beauty of artistic form, the Beijing School literature returns to the traditional Chinese local culture and emphasizes the humanistic spirit and natural aesthetic of literature. The Beijing School literature focuses on human nature beauty and natural beauty. Shen Congwen's *Border Town* depicts the purity and beauty of the western Hunan world, far from the hustle and bustle and utilitarianism of the city, reflecting the Beijing School literature's pursuit of the independent value of literature. The characteristics of this school are deeply analyzed in Wu Fuhui's *History of the Debate between Beijing School and Shanghai School* [20]. The Shanghai School literature is famous for its keen capture and unique description of modern urban life. Mu Shiying's *Fox Trot in Shanghai* uses modern techniques such as stream of consciousness and montage to show the prosperity and degradation, desire and struggle of Shanghai, a modern city. These literary schools rose, developed and declined in different periods, influenced and learned from each other, and promoted the continuous innovation of modern literature in ideological connotation and artistic form.

4.2. Formation and transformation of writers' individual creative styles

The formation and transformation of writers' individual creative styles are not only affected by their personal life experiences and ideological concepts, but also closely related to the development of the times and the changes of social trends of thought. Lu Xun's early works, such as *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*, criticized social reality with cold writing and profound thoughts, revealed the weaknesses of national character, and aimed to "expose the sufferings and arouse the attention of

treatment". In his later period, after experiencing social changes and ideological changes, his essay creation became more combative, closely combined with social and political struggles, stabbing at the enemy like a dagger and a spear. This transformation reflects the profound influence of the times on writers' creation. Li Zehou's *On Modern Chinese Intellectual History* has an in-depth analysis of the historical background of Lu Xun's ideological evolution [21].

Guo Moruo's early creations were full of romantic passion. The enthusiastic praise of self, nature and freedom in *The Goddess* showed the stormy spirit of the May 4th period. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, his creative style turned to historical dramas. For example, *Qu Yuan* expressed his criticism of the Kuomintang rule and his promotion of patriotic spirit by shaping historical figures, using the past to satirize the present. This transformation is not only due to the needs of the times, but also related to the development of his personal thoughts and the enhancement of social responsibility. Relevant analysis can be found in Wang Furen's *Collected Essays on Guo Moruo Studies* [22].

Mao Dun's early works, such as the *Eclipse* trilogy, truly reflected the spiritual state and ideological contradictions of young intellectuals before and after the Great Revolution. With the deepening of social understanding and the influence of Marxist thought, his later works such as *Midnight* paid more attention to the analysis of social and economic structure and class relations, showing a grand social and historical narrative style. The connection between this creative transformation and Marxist theory has a unique interpretation in Lan Dizhi's *Modern Literary Classics: Symptomatic Analysis* [23]. Ba Jin's early works such as *Family* took the feudal big family as the background, expressed criticism of the feudal system and praise of youth awakening, full of passion and rebellious spirit; his later works such as *Cold Night* paid more attention to the delicate portrayal of the survival state of small people struggling at the bottom of society, and the style tended to be cold and depressed. This style transformation is systematically discussed in Chen Sihe's *A Study of Ba Jin* [24]. Lao She's creation has always been rooted in the life of Beijing citizens. From the early humorous satire such as *The Philosophy of Old Zhang* to the later *Camel Xiangzi* and *Four Generations in One Hall*, he integrated his thinking on social changes into the description of the life of the bottom citizens, and his style gradually became deep and heavy. This creative track is specifically presented in Shu Yi's *Lao She's Literary Map* [25].

5. Conclusion

5.1. Social and political changes

Since modern times, China has experienced many major social and political changes, which have profoundly affected the development direction of literature. The 1911 Revolution overthrew the feudal monarchy, brought new ideas and creative themes to literature. Some literary works began to pay attention to the construction of a new social order under the concept of democracy and republicanism, and the criticism of feudal ethics became more in-depth. Relevant literary phenomena are discussed in *Collected Essays on Literature in the Period of the 1911 Revolution*. The May 4th Movement was not only an ideological emancipation movement, but also an important opportunity for literary development. It promoted the modernization of literature, made literature closely combined with social changes, and gave birth to a large number of works reflecting youth awakening and social struggle. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, with the intensification of the national crisis, literature assumed the social responsibility of saving the nation from subjugation and ensuring its survival, and a large number of novels, poems and dramas with the theme of the War of Resistance appeared, forming distinct wartime literary characteristics.

The founding of New China marked that Chinese society entered a new historical stage, and literary creation also underwent major changes. Literature began to vigorously eulogize socialist construction and the new life of working people. For example, Liu Qing's *The History of Entrepreneurship* depicted the struggle process of farmers during the period of rural socialist transformation, showing the spiritual outlook of the people and the development and changes of the times under the new social system. The era value of this work is highly evaluated in Feng Mu's *On Liu Qing's "The History of Entrepreneurship"*. At the same time, literature also plays an important role in social and political changes. It spreads new ideas and new cultures through literary works, stimulates the people's patriotic enthusiasm and sense of social responsibility, and promotes social progress and development.

5.2. Economic development and urbanization process

Economic development and urbanization have injected new vitality into modern literature. With the development of the urban economy, the citizen class has gradually grown, and urban culture has emerged, giving birth to new literary themes and forms. Represented by the Shanghai School literature, its works depict urban prosperity, commercial activities, citizens' lives and emerging urban cultural phenomena in a large number. Modern urban elements such as dance halls, cafes and cinemas frequently appear in the works. Eileen Chang's novels delicately depict men's and women's emotions and lifestyles in Shanghai, showing the complexity of human nature and the helplessness of life against the background of urban culture. The relationship between her creation and Shanghai urban culture is classically analyzed in Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern: A New Urban Culture in China 1930 - 1945*.

Economic factors also have an important impact on writers' creation and literary communication. On the one hand, economic development provides writers with a relatively stable creative environment and living security, promoting the prosperity of literary creation; on the other hand, the formation and development of the literary market make the spread of literary works more dependent on market demand and commercial operation. The development of the publishing industry and the rise of newspapers and magazines have provided a broad platform for the spread of literary works, and at the same time, they have prompted writers to consider readers' preferences and market demand when creating, promoting the popularization and popularization of literature. The relevant historical background is recorded in detail in *Historical Materials of Modern Chinese Publishing*.

5.3. Promotion of cultural trends and academic thoughts

Cultural trends and academic thoughts in different periods are important driving forces for the development of modern literature. The spread of Marxist thought enabled many writers to observe society and analyze problems from a Marxist perspective, creating a large number of works reflecting social class contradictions and paying attention to the destiny of the proletariat, such as Jiang Guangci's revolutionary literary works, which brought new ideological connotations and creative directions to modern Chinese literature. The influence of this trend of thought on literature has a cross-national perspective interpretation in Takeuchi Yoshimi's *On Modern Chinese Literature*.

The liberal trend of thought emphasizes the independence of literature and the free expression of individuals, which to a certain extent affects writers' creative ideas and encourages them to pursue the artistic value of literature and the display of personal style. The cultural conservatism trend pays attention to the inheritance and protection of traditional culture. In the development process of modern literature, it urges writers to explore the value of traditional culture while absorbing the

essence of Western literature, so as to realize the integration of traditional culture and modern literature. The game between these two trends of thought is deeply analyzed in Xu Jilin's *On Modern Chinese Intellectual History*.

Academic research results have also had a positive impact on literary creation and literary criticism. The development of literary theory has provided writers with new creative ideas and methods. For example, the research on creative techniques such as stream of consciousness and symbolism in modernist literary theory has inspired writers' innovative practice in creation. The development of literary criticism has provided scientific standards and methods for the evaluation and analysis of literary works, promoted the improvement of literary creation quality and the healthy development of literature. Relevant discussions can be found in the analysis of the influence of the Chinese translation of Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* on modern Chinese literary criticism.

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