

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

This is an illustrated cultural history of the emergence of modern literature in China from the late nineteenth century through the early years of the Chinese Republic, the 1930s, and the war period, ending in 1949. Wu Fuhui takes an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, drawing in book production, translation, popular and elite texts, international influences, and political history. Presented here in English translation for the first time, Wu argues that this was a transformative period in Chinese literature informed both by developments in China's domestic history and the dynamics of global circulation and encounter.

WU FUHUI is a scholar of the history of modern Chinese literature and has published widely on this topic. He is the former director of the Research Room of the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature, deputy president of the Modern Chinese Literature Association, and chief editor of the journal *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*.

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A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

Literary history is a unique phenomenon in modern China as a scholarly undertaking, a pedagogical vehicle, a political statement, and even a cultural industry. Particularly since 1949, hundreds of literary histories have been published on any subject one can think of. This phenomenon bespeaks not only a civilization deeply ingrained in the linkage between literariness (*wen*) and historicity (*shi*) but also a state apparatus that continuously strives to reauthenticate the meaning of past and present in narrative terms. As such, literary history has been institutionalized to embody a coherent account of canonical figures, masterpieces, mandated movements, and events, and an articulation of national characteristics and party lines. Literary history is a “history” encapsulated in literary forms.

In this context, *A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature* is an extraordinary project. In forty chapters, the book describes the dynamics of Chinese literature from the late-nineteenth century (the late-Qing dynasty), to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, a crucial time in China’s search for modernity. Its author, Professor Wu Fuhui (b. 1939), is a veteran Chinese scholar known for his encyclopedic knowledge and critical engagement. For years, Wu has explored new approaches to literary history vis-à-vis the extant paradigm; *A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature* represents his efforts at their most provocative.

For readers unfamiliar with modern Chinese literature, two aspects of Wu’s project should be noted. First, in traditional China, literature refers to a much broader spectrum of humanistic exercises, as ornament, belles lettres, scholarly discipline, cultural upbringing, and above all, civilization. Literature underwent drastic transformations in the nineteenth century to become “literature” as we understand the word to mean today. Still, the belief in literature as a manifestation of the world at large remained intact even during the radical days of socialist China.

Secondly, the Chinese “modern” refers not only to a concept of temporality in response to Western stimuli ranging from industrialization to nationalism, urbanization, and psychologized subjectivity, but also to an indigenous intervention with the global imposition of a progressive agenda. At stake here is

the political landscape that compelled the Chinese to conceive of and act out the modern in a unique manner. Especially in Chinese communist discourse, literature development is made to parallel political periodization. Thus, the “modern” era (*xiandai*) is taken to mean a time from 1911 (the founding of the Republic of China) to 1949, one that overcame the “early modern” era (*jindai*, the final decades of the Qing dynasty), and anticipated the “contemporary” era (*dangdai*), which spans from 1949 to date and presumably the infinite future.

A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature tackles these complexities. It proposes that we rethink issues such as the periodization of “modern” Chinese literature, the conceptualization of Chinese “literature,” and the feasibility of “literary history.” In the main, it ventures to view Chinese literary modernization as a long and sprawling process traceable to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Instead of a monolithic timetable, it acknowledges the arrival of the modern at any given historical juncture as a competition of new possibilities, where the result does not necessarily reflect the best or even any one of the possibilities.

Such an approach is no small feat given the environment in which Professor Wu wrote this book. Wu’s task comes as part of the endeavor of “rewriting literary history” launched by People’s Republic of China scholars in the last decade of the modern century. As his preface indicates, Wu benefited from the new models developed by fellow scholars, such as Professor Yan Jiayan’s attention to the “ecology” of literary production at both public and personal levels; Professor Chen Sihe’s consideration of the continued negotiation between avant-garde impulses and the yearning for normalcy and stabilization; Professor Yang Yi’s mapping of the “literary cartography” of modern China; and Professor Fan Boqun’s campaign for the coexistence of both elite and popular literature. Based on these models, Wu develops his own framework which highlights the tapestry-like networking of both mainstream and non-mainstream literatures, both material and textual productions.

A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature comprises four parts, each of which has a different thematic strain. Part I ushers us into the moment prior to the rise of modern Chinese literature, when the vernacular language emerged to become the dominant role in place of the classical language in literary communication, and the rising print culture changed the mode of cultural production as well as the identity of literati for good. Part II features the May Fourth movement (1919) as the main force that drastically changed the “structure of feeling” of Republican China, giving rise to a new *habitus* of literary culture in the name of enlightenment. Part III follows up by describing the golden time of post-May Fourth literature, when multiple subjects, styles, cliques, and events interacted with each other to form a polyphonic scene of articulation. Part IV focuses on the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and

the civil war (1946–1949), a time that witnessed the devastation and regeneration of literature amid foreign aggression, nationalist campaign, and communist revolution.

While Professor Wu's book may first appear to have followed the conventional format of narrative, a careful reader will quickly discover his unconventional design. For one thing, in addition to textual narrative, it is enriched with numerous illustrations, photographs, charts, chronologies, and maps. The pictorial data is presented in such a way as to direct – even distract – the reader to a different horizon of knowledge, in which the textual and the visual, the streamlined narrative and the seemingly inexhaustible statistic account, supplement as much as redefine each other's premise of intelligibility. As a result, the “master narrative” about the rise and development of modern Chinese literature has undergone a subtle shakeup. This shakeup and its critical implication can be described in the following aspects.

To begin with, Wu starts the timeline of his history not with the May Fourth era, the official harbinger of Chinese literary modernization, but with the final decades of the late-Qing dynasty. The three terms of periodizing modern Chinese history, “early modern,” “modern,” and “contemporary,” are encoded with political messages. Conventional wisdom sees the “early modern” as a moment when the old literary and political order was falling apart – a decadent, transitional period awaiting the outburst of the May Fourth. Wu disagrees. He indicates in the first part of his history that while May Fourth set in motion a series of paradigm changes, the conception, production, and dissemination of literature during the last decades of the Qing demonstrated a vigor and variety that could hardly be confined to the parameters prescribed by May Fourth discourse. The May Fourth may have discovered as many possibilities as it obscured, or even eliminated, that which had once thrived in the late Qing.

One finds equally inspiring observations in Part IV, which deals with wartime literature and its consequences. In contrast with the standard discourse that stresses a literature leading inevitably toward the 1949 revolution, Wu downplays the linear factor of history, juxtaposing instead six sites, Chongqing, Yan'an, Kunming, Guilin, Shanghai, and even Hong Kong and Taiwan in which distinct environments, ideologies, and literatures generated an unlikely heteroglossia. Only from such a perspective, Wu contends, can one better appreciate the tension between aspirations and apprehensions, historical necessity and contingency, on the eve of the communist victory.

The second aspect that distinguishes Wu's book is his emphasis on the material aspect of literary production. The first chapter starts with an overview of the print industry in late-Qing Shanghai. As Wu notes, this was a period that saw literature conceptualized, practiced, circulated, and assessed in ways unprecedented in Chinese history. Imported printing technology, innovative

marketing tactics, increased literacy, widening readership, a boom in the diversity of forms of media and translation, and the advent of professional writers, all created fields of literary production and consumption that in preceding centuries would hardly have been imaginable.

Throughout Wu's history, one comes to learn issues ranging from the economic circumstances of a professional writer to market demand versus censorship, from ideological contestations to theatrical and cinematic adaptations. Literature, as he would have it, is not so much a discursive exercise as it is a field of cultural production charged with extraliterary factors. One would have assumed that in a socialist culture these material factors should have taken precedence over those oriented to superstructure. The fact is, however, that Wu may well be among the very few who refuses to pay only lip service to the socialist formula and instead truly explores the intricate relationships between the material and the discursive circumstances. For instance, in each of the four parts in his history, Wu foregrounds a specific year (1903; 1921; 1936; 1948) with a detailed chart of events and publications of the year, thus literally illustrating the complexity of the time in discussion. The implication, to be sure, is that any given year could generate such a kaleidoscopic view of literature in relation to society.

Wu's third contribution is in presenting modern Chinese literature as a continued interplay among discourses, media spheres, and political platforms otherwise seemingly independent of, or even hostile to, each other. In other words, he is aiming an ecological vista through which the indigenous and the foreign, the popular and the elite, the hegemonic and the subversive are brought into play. In the wake of May Fourth, realism was hailed as the magic form that can expose social injustice and invoke humanist compassion. Wu reminds us that realist discourse aside, modern Chinese readers were equally drawn to the "Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly fiction" – middle-brow literature "for comfort" – and avant-garde writing in both modernist and socialist terms. More importantly, just as writers and readers alike do not always hold on to one specific trend or position, literary discourses can transgress each other's boundaries. Thus, Wu describes the way in which the poets of Nanshe utter their revolutionary zeal by composing in the conservative form of classical style poetry; popular literature in Shanghai and populist literature in Yan'an share the same ground of engaging the mass in opposition to the elite May Fourth discourse.

Last but not least, Wu contends that modern Chinese literature is part of the national and global circulation of discourses and practices of modernity. This circulation comes about through travel, both in the sense of physical mobility and conceptual, affective, and technological transmutation through space and time. Whereas late-Qing literati moved to Shanghai and other metropolises to make a living, in the May Fourth era, young writers from all over China traveled

to Beijing and Shanghai for enlightenment. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, hundreds of thousands of literati joined the exodus to the hinterland while progressive youth took the pilgrimage to Yan'an for communist baptism.

Travel leads to transculturation: the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual interactions between continents, nations, societies, institutions, and communities. The most important medium of transculturation is, without a doubt, translation, through which China and other civilizations encounter and produce new forms of knowledge, feeling, and power exchange. Throughout the twentieth century, as Wu points out, from Lin Shu's entrepreneurial, collaborative "translation" of foreign literature to Guo Moruo's leftist rendition of Goethe's *Faust*, from the wild popularity of Soviet fiction during the early years of Socialist China to the fever of consuming modernist literature in high societies, translation has been the venue where language has been refashioned and thoughts negotiated. Sherlock Holmes, *La Dame aux Camélias*, and Werther became household names. Whereas Shakespeare's plays were all translated by Zhu Shenghao in exile during the wartime, Nicolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* captured the heart of revolutionary youth in Yan'an.

To conclude, a few more words about the author. Wu Fuhui belongs to the generation of scholars who went through almost all the ups and downs of New China. He started out being a high school teacher in 1959, and did not enroll in the graduate program of Chinese literature at Peking University until 1978, two years after the end of the Great Cultural Revolution. Despite the lag of educational time, he received the best possible training from scholars such as Wang Yao and Yan Jiayan. Whereas Wang Yao published the first modern Chinese literary history after the founding of the PRC, Yan Jiayan was among the forerunners of "rewriting literary history" in the New Era of the 1980s. In other words, Wu took up where his mentors left off in the enterprise of literary history.

In 1987, together with Qian Liqun and Wen Rumin, who later became leading scholars in their own right, Wu Fuhui edited *Three Decades of Modern Chinese Literature*, a landmark of the revisionist engagement of modern literary history. All along Wu had planned to write a literary history illustrating his own critical viewpoint, and his wish was realized when the Chinese edition of *A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature* came out in 2010. The way in which Wu entered the academic sphere amid political turmoil, working with the key figures of contemporary Chinese literary studies, and becoming an outstanding figure, points to the volatile progress and surprising consequences of literary history in contemporary China. Now with the English translation of his history to be published by Cambridge University Press, Professor Wu Fuhui is finally able to share his insights of and reflections on the twists and turns of modern Chinese history with readers worldwide.

David Der-wei Wang

PREFACE

I have opened up a plot of raw land in my own academic garden: writing an experimental illustrated history of modern Chinese literature. Now I have finally finished it and present it to my readers.

For me, the journey toward the completion of this book has not been a smooth one. It started from the publication plans of two publishing houses, one in Beijing and the other in Shanghai, whose editors asked me to write a history of modern Chinese literature with illustrations closely related to text. The plans were worthy and ambitious, but in front of the harsh reality, both were put aside for reasons unrelated to me, and seemed abandoned forever. But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Unbeknown to me, after the plans were hung up, we entered a new era in which the writing of literary history is going through significant changes. If this book had been completed several years ago, it would probably have been some clichéd literary historical narrative with some awkwardly inserted illustrations and maps. It may have seemed like something new, but actually the innovations would have been very superficial. This book, although it is far from perfect and its illustrations and tables not so very remarkable, can be seen as a literary history with brand new concepts, and it might be bold to say that one can find an emergent framework of literary history writing – the future in embryo – in this book.

I discussed the emerging change of ideas of literary history with young teachers of Shanghai University, where I gave lectures last winter. Later they compiled their recording of my speech and entitled it “The New Trend in the Research of Modern Chinese Literature,” which will be included in my symposium *Through the Multifaceted Prism* to be published soon. There I have described in detail five new perceptive observations on literary history raised recently: the literary “ecology” view of Yan Jiayan (严家炎); the view of Fan Boqun (范伯群) on the “mutual development” of genteel and popular literature; “avant-garde versus normalcy” proposed by Chen Sihe (陈思和); the effort of “remapping Chinese literature” by Yang Yi (杨义); as well as my own shallow views elaborated in *Literature and Art Forum* (《文艺争鸣》) on deconstructing and disintegrating “mainstream” literary historical narratives and writing a literary history “concertedly compiled

with distinctive points of view.” These ideas are by no means discrete and unrelated to each other; on the contrary, they are interconnected and constitute mutually complementary visions, from which we can see the consensus of the “coexistence of various views” and a “broad scope of literary history.” This shows that people throughout the entire academic circle have come to the stage to rewrite Chinese literary history. Negligible and unnoticed as it is, we can see a trend that will surely make an impact on future scholars in this field of study.

Certainly, I have developed and gradually defined my own concept of literary history in the academic environment where different ideas and viewpoints interact with, argue against, and meanwhile influence each other. I remember an analogy made by Professor Wang Yao (王瑶), which he has repeated many times, that there are generally two methods of doing scholarly work. The first one focuses on a central viewpoint, like the vinyl disc circling around a single stylus on the phonograph, hence a main tune. The second method features disorganized parts, something like the front and back parts when you try to knit a woolen sweater or a scarf. Professor Wang says the first method represents an advanced standpoint, while the second one is also very important, and we cannot afford to neglect it. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, our literary history has been centered around either “revolution” or “modernity”; do we really need to write another literary history with “post-modernism” or “nation-state” as its guiding ideology? In my opinion, ever since the concept of “twentieth-century Chinese literature” was raised, we have been doing a kind of deconstructing work, and it is still not the time for summing up and drawing a conclusion. “Deconstruction” and “summing up” are traditional Chinese methodologies I am used to. Specifically, summing up would cohere literary history into an imagined complete structure, while deconstructing would challenge the existing structure and break it into heterogeneous parts. Borrowing Wang’s analogy between scholarship and knitting, I think a mosaic literary history may better suit today’s academic climate. Similarly, on the interconnection and interaction between “revolution” and “modernity” in Chinese literary history, we can bridge their antithetical relationship with such notions as “coexistence”, “transition,” and “building-up.” At the time when Chinese literature was building up modernity, motley literary expressions were absolutely necessary; and since revolution was a historical process that accelerated the modernization of Chinese literature, there were many turns and twists in the process. Such building up and transitions created an even more complex and varied literary history, and thus there were multiple literary genres, including, broadly, left-wing literature, market-oriented literature, Beijing school literature, and Shanghai school literature. None of these four dominated the literary world in any single period, for each had

its own reader group, and each fell into a distinct category: political literature, commercial literature, or belles lettres. These categories were not isolated from each other, but interconnected, with the border frequently crossed. For example, left-wing political literature relied heavily on the book market of Shanghai, and Beijing school literature disapproved of political literature but was itself not divorced from social life and social reality (not belles lettres in its truest sense). This was a multifaceted literary scene unprecedented ever since Chinese literature took form, and it was no doubt a “modern” one. No literary genre had become the truly dominating one in the literary landscape, which remains true even to this day.

I have been exploring a multifaceted understanding and writing of literary history, which is still ongoing today. Nevertheless, I have accepted the request of Peking University Press to write a new literary history, thus putting my thoughts and ideas into shape. Without much to draw on for guidance in the process, I have to learn from my contemporaries. For example, Yan Jiayan’s “literary ecology” theory suggests that a literary history cannot disregard people’s lifestyles, nor can it leave aside authors’ states of mind and the social and cultural context directly connected with such states of mind. Fan Boqun’s theory of “mutual development” of genteel and popular literature serves as both a reminder and inspiration for me, and though I don’t think popular literature and avant-garde literature can be paralleled in a literary history, I seriously considered how to integrate popular literature into urban citizen literature, which became a popular literature with an avant-garde edge when the Shanghai school emerged, so that the line between the two was not that clear-cut any more. This is the reason why Chen Sihe proposed “avant-garde” and “normalcy” as two interacting literary formats. Thus I analyzed typical avant-garde works in my literary history, and at the same time, while giving full attention to the normalcy clue of popular culture, I tried to extend the latter by including both rural popular literature and urban popular literature. Yang Yi’s view on a broader literary map helped me enrich the single-dimensional viewpoints on Chinese literature into a multidimensional, open, and networked literary landscape. In this sense, I think this literary history can be seen as a history of literary development of the period in question.

The title “A Cultural History of Modern Chinese Literature” is used to distinguish this book from literary history written by others in the past, and it is also used in memory of my personal experience. Immediately after the end of the “Cultural Revolution,” I registered for the entrance examination for graduate studies in modern Chinese literature, only to find, just one month before the exam, that Professor Wang Yao had added some questions on ancient Chinese literature. Time pressed and I had no other reference book available, so I crammed myself with Liu Dajie’s *History of the Development of*

Chinese Literature, which was “contaminated” in the late 1960s.¹ But more importantly, in writing this book, I have given full play to the sense of “development” of Chinese literature; that is, everything related to literary works and authors is put back into the ever-changing historical “context.” The release, publication, spread, reception, and evolvement of literary works are given special attention, and the social-cultural environment in which literary works took shape is given more importance than ever before. The change of literary venues, the living conditions of authors, their migration, and material and spiritual lifestyle are unfolded in detail at certain key historical points. I give an account of various literary associations and schools as well as their links with the modern mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, literary supplements, and book series, thus trying to restore the original ecology in which literature happened. Then there were extensions of modern literature, like the tentacles of an octopus, related with readers through literary criticism, with world literature of all times through translation, and with other contemporary art forms through films. And the formation and evolvement of modern vernacular and its use in literature should be considered in the close reading of works of the modern literary canon. Then I try to construct major literary periods in the book, bring readers to the literary scene of the time with something like chronicles of literary events. I certainly know the real “original ecology” is nonexistent, since either major periods or major events are choices made by me as a chronicler of literary history. But this chronological method that tries to bring us closer to the mode of creation and evolvement of literature, unexhausted as it is, plays a special role in the restoration of real literary history, which has been distorted and misinterpreted.

Since this book focuses on the development of modern Chinese literature, it shall be open-ended and ever-extending, and nobody has the right to put an end to it. I am writing a single-volume literary history, and with illustrations added, the space is quite limited. And since scholars have already expanded the literary history of this period into a much broader one, I must find some key points that may best represent each period. In this book, I consciously cut down narratives about authors and try not to cover all their literary works, but give a detailed analysis of typical representative works, in which process the lack and neglect of some major authors and works are unavoidable. Maybe this is a writing method worth trying, and this book may provide both a positive and negative experience for future scholars who try to write ever more concise and focused literary histories.

All literary histories shall be based on the results of academic research available at the time they are written, and it is by no means an easy task for a single

¹ Liu Dajie (刘大杰) revised his book in the late 1960s to suit the ideology of the “Cultural Revolution”. – Translator’s note

writer. All quotations are referenced, as well as the sources of various tables and figures. The References at the end of the book list all books I have actually referred to in writing my literary history, whose purpose is nothing but to express my acknowledgment to the authors whose books I have read. I remember when I coauthored the book *Thirty Years in Modern Chinese Literature* (《中国现代文学三十年》), we were not very confident in our textual research, and thus invited several experts from Beijing to check our manuscript, but later we found there were still some errors and omissions throughout that book. Now I have written this book independently, and besides so many quotations and references, there are such a large number of chronologies, tables, figures, and records of events, and I can imagine, with fear and awe, how many mistakes there must be in this book. I am looking forward to experts' and readers' generous criticism and advice.

Selecting illustrations was another difficulty in writing this book. Different from collecting and selecting photos of popular literature, there are too few illustrations for some literary material and too many for others. For example, I tried to select the portraits of authors produced at the same time of the publication of their representative works, and besides photos, I tried to find caricatures, self-portraits, and group photos, which are a bit harder to find. Sometimes it is also difficult to find the magazines in which the literary works were first published, as well as authors' manuscripts of their representative works. And then there are the authors' former residences and gathering places, maps, and pictures of literary characters hand-drawn by authors, the newspapers and magazines in which literary works were published as well as their advertisements, and posters or photos of scenes from various plays and films; in a word, a fine, new, and complete collection of such illustrations is not an easily accomplished task. The illustration collection and selection was especially difficult at the later stage of writing; some were not determined even after the writing was finished. I hereby express my sincere gratitude to the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature, where I have been working for a long time, for some of the illustrations it has provided, and for the help of some of my colleagues and students.

Many thanks are extended to the publishing house of my alma mater, especially to my editor Gao Xiuqin for her invitation to write this book, without which this book would never have been possible, not to say in such a great time. She allowed me full freedom in writing and revising my manuscript, including the captions of the illustrations. During the entire process while I have been so particular with text and picky about illustrations, her tremendous patience and encouragement have been invaluable. Then she agreed that the book shall be completed in 2009, so that it may finally come out at the beginning of a new decade. My thanks also go to my editors-in-charge, Zhu Jing and Ding Chao, whose generosity has been limitless, allowing me to express

my own ideas in my own style freely and independently. Their careful proof-reading and correction have ensured there is no major error in the final copy. It is my great honor that the publishing of this book has coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of Peking University Press.

This book does not intend to create a new paradigm for a new-type literary history; it is rather a “warm-up” heralding the new-type literary history, and a preparation for new possibilities open to future literary historians. In writing this book I have fulfilled one of my dreams. In the past decade, I had many dreams, some wonderful dreams and some terrible nightmares. In the former I seemed to have been rejuvenated and still have so many new plans in writing and something else, and I seemed to see our society more just and prosperous, and young people growing up lively and healthily. In the latter I seemed to have been forced back to the place I drifted in my own youth, lost and hurt. It seems that some of my dreams in literature have been fulfilled, some broken, and some reborn. This book is my dream fulfilled, despite its endless imperfections.

After all, a literary scholar cannot live without dreams.

Nov. 12, 2009, during snow in Beijing

Outside my window, the trees are covered in whiteness

This book was first produced by the Peking University Peiwin Education Company, and then went through two printings in traditional Chinese, in which process the errors and omissions were corrected. Now that the book is going through the second printing in simplified Chinese, thanks to the efforts of editors-in-charge Gao Xiuqin, Zhu Jing, and Ding Chao, and especially the detailed work by editor Huang Weizheng, there is an overall revision to the entire book, including the material, text, notes, pictures, and tables. I have always been looking forward to a complete and finer written literary history to be published on the mainland and satisfy its readers, and am so happy to see it now. Life is short, and it is never easy to accomplish something one really aspires to, be it great or small. For me, the revision of this literary history is one of my accomplishments. My heartfelt thanks to all.

Wu Fuhui

On the Chinese Lunar New Year's Day of 2015