

Li Yi, *"The Republic of China" as a Method*, Ji Nan: Shandong Publishing House of Literature and Art, China, 2015.

At the beginning of the 21th century, Professors Chen Fukang, Zhang Fugui and Tang Yize began a series of discussions on the naming of modern Chinese literature. Over the past decade, with the promoting of many scholars, such as Zhang Zhongliang, Li Yi, Ding Fan, Zhang Tangqi, and other scholars on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, the discussion and practice of the narration of the "literature of the Republic of China" and other aspects of the research methods have become more and more spectacular. The first edition of the book *"the Republic of China" as a method* was published by the Shandong Publishing House of Literature and Art in 2015 is a book with the most methodological meaning in the history and culture of the Republic of China and the study of modern Chinese literature. It is also a centralized and comprehensive interpretation of the concept of "the Republic literature".

1. The Construction of the Historical View of "Republic Literature" and Academic Breakthrough

Separated from the concepts of "New Literature", "Modern/Contemporary Literature" and "Chinese literature in 21th Century" in the history of Chinese literature, the historical view of "the Republic of China" is not an abstract theoretical generalization, but a reduction and touch of the concrete "National Historical Modality". The study of the "literature of the Republic of China" is based on the full familiarity and mastery of the historical materials of literature, and also based on the experience of "temperature" for the complexity and richness of the literary subjectivity. As the scholar Li Yi said in the first part of this book, "the study of the literature of the Republic of China should *restore* the joy and sorrow of Chinese and Chinese writers through more demonstrative demonstration." (p. 35)

The establishment of modern literature in China is accompanied by the change of political system and ideology. At the same time, "modern literature", as an independent subject, is gradually separated from "Chinese Literature" as the product of the sinicization of modern western discipline system. Whether the "21th Century Chinese Literature", or "Rewriting the history of literature", "Re reading" and other literature research methods, there is still an embarrassment in the lack of the academic position of subjectivity in Chinese literature. The historical view of the "literature of the Republic of China" is an answer to how to

make the study of modern Chinese literature out of the use of western academic thought, and how to avoid the preconceptions and priori judgment.

Starting with the real situation of national history and the actual ecology of social culture, taking the details of history and life as the primary object of study, this book tries to recomb a new narrative way of the history of modern Chinese literature. It is an ideal path for the specific academic research under the control of the historical view of the "Republic of China Literature", aiming to find a proper interpretation paradigm for the internal tension and creativity of modern literature.

## 2. The Methodological Significance and Practical Exploration of "The Mechanism of the Republic of China"

In 19th Century, Spencer, a British theorist, introduced the "system" of the academic concept into the study of sociology. The successors made theoretical exposition and research attempt on many problems of social system from different aspects. Since the beginning of the new century, most of the problems related to Chinese modern and contemporary literary system discussed by previous scholars have been based on Habermas' public sphere. Under the western academic background, the discussion of the complex interaction between literature in social public sphere and media, publication review, criticism ,as well as reader acceptance has surpassed the ideologically determinism paradigm and the theory of social reflection. However, in the last decade, the theoretical resources of the study of Chinese modern and contemporary "literary system" which influenced by the "institutional research" are largely from the western academic circles. The "mechanism of the Republic of China", which is proposed in the book, is neither a study of the institutional scope of literary evaluation from the perspective of pragmatism, nor a study of the literary production system and social structure in the sense of political sociology.

The second part of the book defines the conceptual category of the "Republic of China mechanism" of literature firstly: "the complex of the social culture and literature under the new social system which gradually formed after the fall of the Qing Dynasty." (p. 60) The synthesis of the aforementioned social forces includes not only "the support (but also some restrictions) of the formation of the enclosure of various social environments, such as economic patterns, legal forms, educational systems, etc.", but also "the unique spiritual orientation that emerges ". (p. 60) Obviously, the breakthrough of the "Republic of China mechanism" is highlighting the dynamic spiritual choice and pursuit of "man" as a participant in

literary activities in the historical space-time environment of the Republic of China and the complex relationship of coexistence, complexity and interaction with the national politics, social system, cultural environment and other historical space-time ecology on the basis of paying full attention to the external social system of literature.

How should we reenter the concrete phenomenon and problems of modern Chinese literature under the research perspective of the "Republic of China mechanism"? The third part of this book "Modern Chinese Literature in the Historical Perspective of the Republic of China" explores the "constitutional government in the late Qing Dynasty" and the development of the literary space of the Republic of China, the "Revolution of 1911" and the cultural foundation for the development of the literature of the Republic of China, the "May 4th Cultural Circle" and the initial natural formation of the cultural structure of the "Republic Mechanism", as well as Zhang Daofan and the "ambiguity" and "contradiction" of the Kuomintang's literary and artistic policies during the National War. The foregoing contents show us the way of understanding and judging known literary and historical materials through literary study. On this basis, we can approach the historical reality of the social and cultural environment of the Republic of China, as well as the spiritual world of modern intellectuals. This book shows us how the "Republic of China" as a method was applied to specific literary research practices vividly and concretely. It is not only an opening vision for the future scholars, but also a guide for the future researches.

### 3. The Contemporaneity of the Literature of the Republic of China

In the 1970s, the scholar Fan Jun put forward "the contemporary problem of the study of modern Chinese literature". Recently, there is a trend of "de-contemporaneity" in some contemporary Chinese literary studies, lacking of concern and participation for the social reality and cultural situation of contemporary China, as well as a keen perception of key literary issues and popular cultural phenomenon. At the same time, as a contemporary popular cultural boom, the emergence of popular literary works of the nature of "mystery", "gossip" and "historical tales" concerning the anecdotes of the Republic of China makes the "Republic" a popular literary refreshment enjoyed by the general audience. However, it seems that the simplicity and rationality of the academic study of the literature of the Republic of China are deconstructed because of its "contemporaneity".

In the fourth part of this book makes a thorough analysis of many hot topics and popular cultural phenomenon in modern and contemporary Chinese literature in order to "disenchant" the literature of the Republic of China as a symbol of popular culture and a carrier of popular social interest. The so-called contemporary spirit of literary research should not put the literary problems of modern China out of the current social and cultural environment, trying to return to the original condition of the complexity of historical truth on the basis of careful analysis of existing historical data. As the book says: "The ultimate purpose of the study of literature in the Republic of China is to profoundly explain the cause of literature. All outside literature information must be included in the inside literature, and the authenticity of these information also requires to be collated repeatedly". (p. 127) It should be noticed that the latter two parts of this book especially discuss the "Republic of China literature" issues in cross-strait Chinese literature, ethnic minority knowledge and language, regional literature, the historical value of local newspapers and periodicals and other "contemporary" topics. Taking "cross-strait Chinese Literature" as an example, academics on both sides of the Straits are in the macro context of "Chinese literature", sharing the same Chinese cultural tradition and national memory, with the same experience of more than 30 years of "Republic of China" environment. Although there are complex and unspeakable differences in the understanding of the "Republic of China" between the mainland and Taiwan, Taiwan's literary forces still have blood ties with the mainland literature across the straits. Ye Shitao, a Taiwanese scholar in the 1960s, called for a redefinition of the concept of "Taiwanese local literature". Some of the following Taiwanese scholars, represented by Chen Fangming and others, continued to promote the construction of the subjectivity of Taiwanese literature since the Japanese occupation. They also called for the incorporation of local writings by aboriginal writers into literary history and tried to establish a distinction between them, and an independent "Taiwan literature" which is different from mainland literature. Obviously, the times urgently require us to face the plight of cross-strait literary exchanges. In this sense, "Republic of China Literature" is enough to form the starting point of cross-strait literary dialogue.

The proposition of the topic of "the literature of the Republic of China" can greatly reverse the tendency of "self-closure in the development of modern

Chinese literature research because of its discipline maturity"<sup>1</sup>, providing new enlightenment for contemporary discussions on both literary classics and important topics.

Jiao Heran, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China. Email: [1044538176@qq.com](mailto:1044538176@qq.com).

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<sup>1</sup> He Guimei, The theory of Chinese literature in 21th Century and the discipline system of modern literature, *Journal of Modern Chinese Studies*, 2010, vol.3, pp. 28-46.