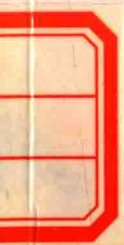


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CULTURE

LITERATURE

LI CHUNYU



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Preface:

Chinese Literature Going Global – The Significance of the Prize Won by Mo Yan to the History of Literature

On October 11, 2012, the Swedish Academy awarded that year's Nobel Prize in Literature to Chinese writer Mo Yan. For the development of Chinese literature, this event cannot be underestimated. Mo Yan became the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and ended China's history of winning no Nobel Prize in Literature. This shows that Chinese literature is going global and gradually winning attention and recognition of world literature from a special angle. The prize won this time not only made a dream of Chinese literary circles come true, but also made Chinese people treat the "Nobel Prize" calmly. Meanwhile, Chinese literature also strengthened reflection on its development. According to



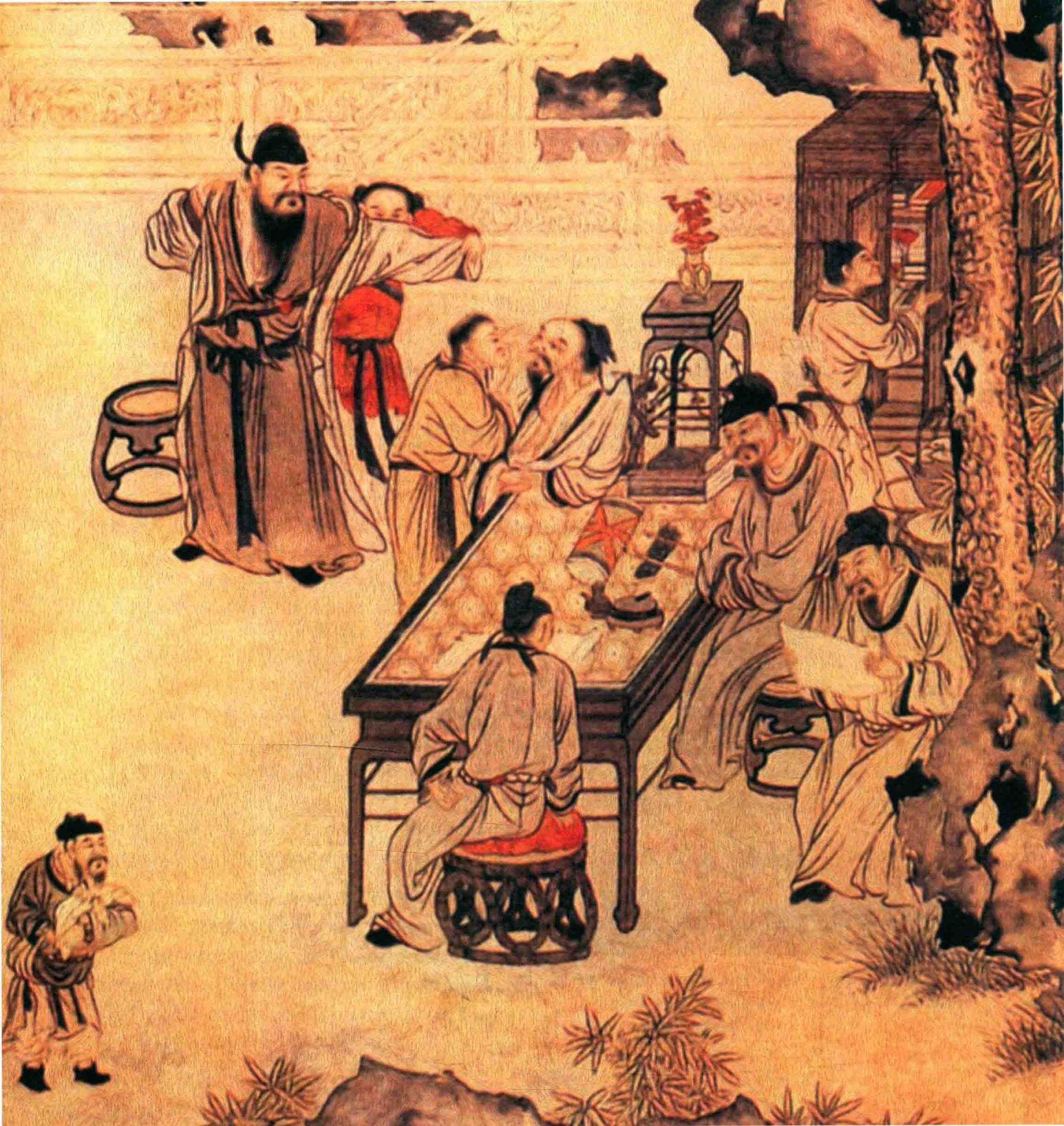
At the 2012 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony, Chinese writer Mo Yan received the Nobel Prize in Literature from the King of Sweden.

Nobel Committee's prize announcement, Mo Yan in his novels "with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary," and his reflection on history and analysis of human nature moved not only Chinese people, but also readers in other countries. This shows that the literature that can transcend time and national boundaries is the literature focusing on real life and writing about people's souls instead of the literature expressing political views or catering to the book market and consumption culture. Apart from Mo Yan, many contemporary Chinese writers with unique personalities have creative strength and potential such as Jia Pingwa, Chen Zhongshi, Wang Anyi, Yu Hua, Su Tong, Liu Zhenyun, Bi Feiyu and Chi Zijian. Their works contain different perceptions of life, and build their spiritual homes from different perspectives. There are also a lot of overseas readers of their works.


In view of the remoter history, Chinese literature can at least be traced to more than 3,000 years ago. From that time to the early 20th century, Chinese ancient literature came down in one continuous line, lasted thousands of years, nourished the souls of Chinese people of all generations, and established the Chinese nation's cultural identity. In the early 20th century, all-round transformation of Chinese literature took place, including literary concepts, contents and language and even the relationship with world literature. Thus Chinese literature entered a new stage.

In the new century, with the continuous enhancement of China's overall strength and gradual improvement of China's international status, more and more people began to pay attention to China. The deepening of China's reform and opening up also promoted exchange between China and the world, laying a good foundation for Chinese literature to further go global. As an important component of Chinese culture, Chinese literature enters the arena of world literature and merges with world culture continuously. Literature carries China's profound history, reflects the complex and changeable reality of today's Chinese society, and embodies Chinese people's dream of a better future. Literature is the best spiritual garden for communication between China and the world. Manifesting the whole world's common concerns and displaying the whole mankind's human feelings and human nature should be Chinese literature's responsibilities.

Since ancient times, this has been a tradition of Chinese literature.



Overview of the Development of Chinese Ancient Literature



Literature occupied an important and unique position in ancient China. Cao Pi, Emperor Wen of Wei (on the throne from 220 to 226), said "writing is a great cause of administering a country and a great event of eternity," thinking literature was an important matter bearing on the governance of the country and posterity. Ancient China's imperial examination system was also very important in selecting officials according to literary standards, especially the poem and article writing ability. China's literary traditions with a long history shaped unique literary concepts and artistic methods in their development, and exerted far-reaching influence on the literature of later ages. Ancient Chinese literary genres such as poems, essays, novels and dramas gradually improved and matured in different historical stages, and added numerous monumental classics to the world's literary treasure house.

Historical Course of Chinese Ancient Literature

Chinese literature has a long history. People usually take the “literary revolution” that began in 1917 as the dividing point, and call Chinese literature before 1917 Chinese ancient literature collectively. Chinese ancient literature’s development course of thousands of years can be roughly divided into three historical periods: the remote ancient times (before the 3rd century AD), the middle ancient times (from the 3rd century AD to the 16th century) and the near ancient times (from the 16th century AD to the early 20th century).

Literature of the Remote Ancient Times

The first stage of the remote ancient times is pre-Qin literature, including the historical periods of the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC–1046 BC), the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC–771 BC), the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475 BC–221 BC).

One prominent characteristic of pre-Qin literature is that literature was still within the matrix of culture and was not separated from history and philosophy. Therefore, the greatest achievements of pre-Qin literature in prose include not only historical works such as *The Book of Documents*, *Chronicle of Zuo*, *Conversations of the States* and *Strategies of the Warring States*, but also philosophical writings of the Confucian School, the Taoist School, the Mohist School and other schools of thoughts such as *The Book of Changes*, *Laozi*, *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius* and *Zhuangzi*. Another prominent achievement of pre-Qin literature is that in the field of poetry, *The Book of Songs* and *Verses of Chu* that remained glorious for generations emerged. *The Book of Songs* is China’s first collection of poems, including works of the 500-plus year period from the

early Zhou Dynasty to the mid Spring and Autumn Period. *Verses of Chu* is another collection of poems that emerged later. The literary forms, dialect and sounds of the Chu State (today's Hubei and Hunan) are used to describe local mountains, rivers, people, history and customs and express enthusiasm and romance. The main writer of *Verses of Chu* is Qu Yuan, the first great poet in the history of Chinese literature.

The second stage of the Remote Ancient Times is Qin and Han literature, including the historical periods of the Qin Dynasty (221 BC–206 BC), the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–25 AD) and the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). Against the backdrop of political and cultural unification, Qin and Han literature lost the vigor of pre-Qin literature and showed a stereotyped and stagnant style. This is fully reflected in the most representative literary form of this period – the Han rhapsody. Most contents of Han rhapsodies exaggeratedly depict palaces, cities, emperors' hunting trips, etc. with flowery language full of detailed descriptions and parallel structures. The real representative of the highest level of Qin and Han prose is Sima Qian's biographical general history *Records of the Grand Historian*, which made outstanding achievements in the art of narration and characterization. However, poetry had new vitality. Yuefu folk songs of the Han Dynasty spreading among people and *Nineteen Ancient Poems* created by scholars of the middle and lower classes both describe parting, frustration and worries about uncertainties in life with plain language and sincerity, and can still strike a responsive chord with readers thousands of years later.

Literature of the Middle Ancient Times

Literature of the middle ancient times is literature of the historical period from the Wei Dynasty (220–265) and the Jin Dynasty (265–420) through the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), the Sui Dynasty (581–618), the Tang Dynasty (618–907), the Five Dynasties (907–960), the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) to the mid Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

The first stage of the middle ancient times is from the Wei and Jin dynasties to the mid Tang Dynasty. Chinese literature entered the stage of consciousness from the stage of spontaneity, and in particular poem creation reached a peak. In several centuries, brilliant poets came forth in