

Studies of Chinese Diaspora Literature

华文流散文学论集

Rao Pengzi (饶芃子)



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On Status Quo and Other Issues Concerning the Study of Overseas Chinese Literature in China

The study of overseas Chinese literature commenced in the mainland from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Twenty years has elapsed since “the First National Symposium on Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature” was held at Jinan University in 1982. Over the past two decades, quite a number of academic exchanges between scholars and writers from the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau and those from overseas, and as many as 12 national conferences and international symposiums were held in the mainland. During each of the symposiums, new topics for discussion were raised and lots of achievements were made. As a result, the research area of overseas Chinese literature was constantly expanded. The subjects under discussion for the symposiums include such major issues as the “naming” of overseas Chinese literature, the defining of its scope for research, the exploration of its history, status quo and its regional characteristics, the source-tracing of its relation with Chinese culture as well as the issue of how to compile its literary history. Later, the subjects for the subsequent symposiums turn to focusing on the comprehensive study of the global Chinese literature and the compilation of overseas Chinese literary history, and the reflection on and inquiry into various theoretical issues from the cultural and aesthetic

perspectives.

In China, focusing on the study of overseas Chinese literature are four key journals, including *Gangtai Wenxue Xuankan* (*Selected Works of Hong Kong and Taiwan Literature*, sponsored by Fujian Association of Literary and Art Circles), *Huawen Wenxue* (*Overseas Chinese Literature*, sponsored by Shantou University, Guangdong Province, now served as the *Journal of China Association of the World Overseas Chinese Literature*), *Shijie Huawen Wenxue* (*World Chinese Literature*, sponsored by Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing Co. Ltd. In Beijing), *Shijie Huawen Wenxue Luntan* (*World Chinese Literature Forum*, sponsored by Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences). Besides, such influential academic journals as *Chinese Comparative Literature* offer irregularly special columns on overseas Chinese literature. The monthly journal of *Research on Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature* published by Renmin University of China has provided lots of relevant photocopied theses. All these prove that the overseas Chinese literature study has been given close attention and has exerted a significant impact on the academic and social circles in China.

In late 1970s, it was the scholars in the coastal provinces, such as Guangdong and Fujian, who first showed solicitude for and initiated the study on Taiwan and Hong Kong Chinese literature. In 1979, Mr. Zhen Minzhi's essay, "A Glance of the Chinese Literature in Hong Kong, Macau and Southeast Asia", the first of its kind on the overseas Chinese literature in the mainland, was published in the first issue of *Huacheng Magazine* in Guangzhou. In early 1980s, more and more essays introducing overseas Chinese writers were published, but they mainly focus on Taiwan and Hong Kong literature. The Chinese Language and Literature Departments in Jinan University, Sun Yat-sen University and Xiamen University

were among the earliest to conduct the study on overseas Chinese literature. Owing to the lack of references, the pioneers of this research field usually began with the accumulation of primary sources, and often picked up the most handy materials for research, hence the phenomenon of “the blind men sizing up the elephant — taking a part for the whole”, or biased reading and misreading. Later, along with the implementation of our “open-door policy” and with the increase of cultural and literary exchanges between different countries and regions, scholars in this field were able to obtain more first-hand resources, and Taiwan and Hong Kong literature study thus came into view of the Chinese scholars. In order to promote this study, in 1982, “the First Academic Symposium on the Study of Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature” was held in Jinan University. It was co-sponsored by the Association of Contemporary Chinese Literature Studies, Taiwan, Hong Kong Literary Studies Institute, Taiwan Affairs Research Institute of Xiamen University, Academy of Social Sciences of Fujian Province, Fujian People’s Publishing House, Sun Yat-sen University, Jinan University and South China Normal University. After this conference, the national or international symposium on overseas Chinese literature was held once every two years. The first conference held in Jinan University (1982) and the second in Xiamen University (1984) mainly dwelled upon Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature. Some scholars from Taiwan delivered speeches on Chinese writers sojourning in North America, such as Yu Lihua, Bai Xianyong, OuYang Zi, to name just a few. The speeches were made chiefly from the angle of the students studying abroad. And the collections of essays from the two symposiums were given the title of *Selected Essays on Hong Kong and Taiwan Literature*. In 1986, the third symposium was held in Shenzhen University, in which a large number of overseas

Chinese writers and scholars showed up and most theses submitted dealt with Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature, but still some others touched upon American Chinese, Singaporean Chinese and Thai Chinese literature. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's *The Theme of Marriage in American Chinese Novels* was the first paper dealing with American Chinese literature from the thematic perspective. Such being the case, the symposium was renamed "International Conference on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Overseas Chinese Literature". The renaming indicates that scholars have come to realize the differences between Taiwan, Hong Kong literature and Overseas Chinese literature. The 4th symposium held in Fudan University, Shanghai in 1988 continued using the new name. It was not until 1991 when the 5th symposium was held in Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province that the symposium was renamed once again because five scholars from Macau participated in the symposium and contributed their papers dwelling on Macau Chinese literature. This time the symposium was given the name of "International Symposium of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Overseas Chinese Literature". It was up to this point that the mapping of Chinese literature outside the mainland was accomplished and overseas Chinese literature began to come into the vision of scholars and become the target for research within this academic field. Since then, the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th symposiums were held respectively in Lushan (Jiangxi Province), Yuxi (Yunnan Province), Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), Peking, Quanzhou (Fujian Province), Shantou (Guangdong Province). Many writers and scholars in and outside China came for these symposiums and a lot of new essays on overseas Chinese literature were published by each and every symposium except the 10th. Among these, what is worth special mention is that, in 1993, as

there was a “Chinese fever” worldwide and Chinese literature had become a world literature, the Preparatory Committee of the World Association of Overseas Chinese Literature was set up during the 6th symposium held in Lushan, which indicated that a new academic concept has been introduced into the mainland academia. Like English, French, Spanish and Arabic literature, Chinese literature has formed a system all over the world. Therefore, it is a must that we Chinese scholars should develop an overall idea of overseas Chinese literature, i. e. we should study Chinese culture and Chinese literature in the context of human culture and world literature; and no matter whether we are doing research on mainland Chinese literature or overseas Chinese literature, we need to regard them as an integral whole. The diversity of Chinese literature in different countries of the world has made it clear that Chinese literature has been ushered into a new stage, which calls for our common effort to see it as an organic whole and to strengthen its cohesive force. Only by so doing, can we unite the scholars of Chinese literature study in different countries all over the world and promote mutual exchanges, cooperation and integration in the study of Chinese literature, thus, finding new starting point and creating a new bright prospect.

On the basis of all the previous conferences and after eight years of preparation, the Chinese Association of Overseas Chinese Literature of the World was set up in Jinan University in May, 2002. It is of great significance for the improvement on the study of overseas Chinese literature, especially for the promotion of the exchanges and flourishing of Chinese literature worldwide. Then the 12th Annual Conference on Overseas Chinese Literature was held in Shanghai in October 2002, which was the first international conference after the setting up of the association. In this

conference, "the Influence of Economic Globalization on Overseas Chinese Literature" was one of the most important subjects under discussion, and some long-neglected issues such as the "new immigrant" literature in our previous study had been settled. Facing the new situation, the representatives of the conference had reached a consensus that efforts should be made to step up the cultural studies in this field and to expand the scope of the influence of Chinese culture all over the world, so as to reveal the breadth of dissemination and extension of Chinese culture all over the world, its transformation and its vitality of fusion with other cultures for coexistence. Only in this way, can we achieve more in improving the "quality" of overseas Chinese literature.

In addition to the above conferences, another one worth mentioning is "the Joint Conference of Overseas Chinese Literature Institutions" held from June 23rd to 24th in 1993. It was co-sponsored by the Center of Modern Chinese Literature Studies of Lingnan University (Hong Kong) and the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Jinan University. Present at the conference were twenty-five representatives from seventeen mainland institutions, and four representatives from three academic institutions of Hong Kong and Taiwan. We pooled our experience and exchanged ideas on the important issues such as the development of overseas Chinese literature, its history and future, the literary theories and practices, time and space, alienation and integration, conflicts and transformation, its linguistic evolution, etc., in order to boost the disciplinary and literary value of overseas Chinese literature in the new historical period. The significance of this conference lies in the scholars' awareness and self-consciousness of taking overseas Chinese literature study as an independent discipline, and the questions discussed in the

conference were in keeping with the new world situation. After the conference, the *Collected Essays of the Joint Conference of Overseas Chinese Literature Institutions* was compiled by the Center of Modern Chinese Literature Studies of Lingnan University and was published in November 1993.

Thus far, great achievements have been made in overseas Chinese literature studies. The publications over the past twenty years can be roughly divided into the following six genres. The essays introducing overseas Chinese writers and writings fall into the first category. Among 435 collected essays from 12 conferences held in China, 134 are covering a lot of works and writers. And some critical biographies on some writers are also included, such as Long Bide's *Critical Biography of Luo Fu* (Nanjing University Press, May 1995), Liu Jun's *Critical Biography of Bai Xianrong* (Huacheng Publishing House, April 2000), Xu Xue's *The Dragon's Chanting in the Fire: Critical Biography of Yu Guangzhong* (Huacheng Publishing House, May 2002), Zhang Jun's *Forlornness in the Moonlight: Biography of Zhang Ailing* (Huacheng Publishing House, Jan. 2001), and Nie Hualing's *The Most beautiful Color: Autobiography of Nie Hualing* (Menghua ed., Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House). The second category includes works of "Introduction", "General Summary", "Survey" and "Preliminary Study" on overseas Chinese literature, etc., such as *A General Survey of the New Literature in Taiwan* (Huang Zhongtian et al., Lujiang Publishing House, June 1986), *Contemporary Literature in Taiwan* (Wang Junmin, Guangxi People's Publishing House, October 1986), *Preliminary Study on Schools of Novels in Taiwan* (Feng Zhusheng, Fujian People's Publishing House), *An Introduction to Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature* (Pan Yatun as chief editor, Higher Education Publishing House, September

1990), *A Survey of Macau Literature* (Liu Denghan ed., Lujiang Publishing House, 1998), *The Outline of World Chinese Literature* (Gong Zong as chief editor, People's Publishing House, June 2000), etc. Monographs and collections of essays on overseas Chinese literature belong to the third category, such as *Beyond the Native Land — On the Marginalized Modern Chinese Literature* (Rao Pengzi, Fei Yong et al., Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, December 1998), *The World Chinese Literature in the Context of Cultural Transformation* (Huang Wanhua, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, October 1999), *The History and the Current Situation of Overseas Chinese Literature in North America* (Gu Shenghao & Qian Jianjun ed., October 1999), *On the American Chinese Literature* (Huang Wanhua as chief editor, Shangdong Literature & Art Publishing House, May 2000), *The Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese Literature in Twenty Years After World War II* (Su Fei, Jinan University Press, August 1992), etc. The fourth category embraces various essay collections on overseas Chinese literature, especially the essay collections published by each of the twelve annual conferences, such as: *Collection of Essays on Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature* (Fujian People's Publishing House, October 1983), *Anthology of Essays on Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature* (September 1985), *Collection of Essays on Taiwan, Hong Kong and Overseas Chinese Literature* (Haixia Literature & Art Publishing House, March 1993), *Towards the New Century* (The People's Publishing House, November 1994), *Multiple Perspectives on World Chinese Literature*, Yunnan University Press, April 1996), *The World Literature at the Turn of New Century (Reviews and Studies on Taiwan, Hong Kong and Overseas Chinese Literature, Supplementary Issue, September 1996)*, *Expecting for the Transcendence* (Huacheng Publishing House, November 2000),

New Exploration, New Horizon (Fudan University Press, October 2002), etc. From the essay collections listed above, we can see the skeleton of overseas Chinese literature studies in China, including the history and the status quo, the achievements and the inadequacies of our studies. The fifth category consists of literary histories on overseas Chinese literature criticism, such as *A Concise History of Overseas Chinese Literature* (Chen Xianmao et al. ed., Lujiang Publishing House, December 1993. Its revised and enlarged edition in four volumes titled *A History of Overseas Chinese Literature* is published in August 1999.), *A Literary History of Taiwan Literature* (Liu Denghan ed., Haixia Literature & Art Publishing House, Volume I published in June 1991 and Volume II in January 1993), *A Literary History of Hong Kong Literature* (Liu Denghan ed., Hong Kong Writers Publishing House, August 1997), *A History of Contemporary Taiwan Literary Theory and Criticism* (Gu Yuanqin, Wuhan Publishing House, 1994), *A History of Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese Novels in the Past Century* (Shandong Literature & Art Publishing House, September 1999), *A History of Philippine Chinese Literature* (Wu Yiqi & Zhao Shunhong eds., September 2000). Finally dictionaries of various types go under the sixth category. The largest and the most complete dictionary is *The Dictionary of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Overseas Chinese Literature* (Qin Mu, Rao Pengzi and Pan Yatun as chief editors, Huachen Publishing House, October 1998). It contains one million entries and was compiled by more than 200 scholars in and outside China. From the above achievements, we find that Taiwan and Hong Kong literature studies in China began earlier than any other overseas Chinese literature study. And from the mid 1980s onwards, American Chinese literature, Southeast Asian Chinese literature and European Chinese

literature have by degrees come into Chinese scholars' horizon. However, owing to certain reasons, the development of our studies is very much unbalanced, leaving something to be desired. It seems that we have paid much more attention to the Chinese literature in Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia than to that in the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. Over the past three years, Australian Chinese literature has also been drawing Chinese scholars' attention, and Qian Chaoying has published his monograph *The Death of "the Poet": A Metaphor of an Age — the Identity Crisis in the Australian Chinese literature from 1988 to 1998* (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, March 2000). Moreover, a number of reviews and essays on Australian Chinese literature have also been published in magazines and newspapers.

Over the past two decades, from hundreds of essays and literary reviews, especially from the essays submitted to the annual conferences in recent years, we find the following three obvious changes in overseas Chinese studies. First, scholars have a new understanding of the connection between the Chinese literature and the world. They are trying to perceive literary phenomena and problems in the context of human culture and world literature. They begin to regard Chinese literature as an integral whole, and show greater solicitude for the destiny of the Chinese literature in the overall framework of world literature, for its realistic values derived from its conflicts and integration with different cultures in different countries of the world, their different historical contexts, as well as their cultural and aesthetic values. Secondly, scholars' perspectives and methodologies have seen new development and are becoming more and more diversified. For example, the introduction of cultural studies, comparative studies, feminist criticism, identity criticism, imagologie and cultural anthropology into overseas