王佐良 著

论新开端：文学与翻译研究集

A Sense of Beginning

Studies in Literature and Translation

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Preface

The word "beginning" in the title refers to a fresh start. However, my interest in beginnings is not — shall I say — archaeological, but that of a literary or cultural historian, mainly concerned with links between past and present and interactions between one culture and another. False starts, discontinuities and misunderstandings are also inquired into. Thus there are papers about why literary history as such started so late in China, why Chinese modernism, inspired by European models, achieved so splendidly and yet did not come to a full flowering, why and how Chinese readers have been attracted by some English-language poets but not others, as well as a sort of sketch map plotting the ups and downs of Shakespeare's fortunes in China.

There are also papers on translation. To my mind, nothing is more crucial in cultural contacts, not to say cultural interactions, than translation, particularly in a country that for long periods closed its door to the outside world, like China. Every translation of a literary work is a beginning. Verse translation in particular can lead to the cultivation of a new sensibility and the revivification of a language and a culture, as I have tried to show in the paper "Some Observations".

An essay on compiling a Chinese-English dictionary is also included, partly because of the translation problems involved, partly because the project was the first of its kind in the People's Republic — hence also a beginning.

Most of the papers collected here were first read before audiences at universities abroad and I have benefited from the questions and discussions that followed the presentations. Friends, colleagues and students at home have also helped with comments and criticisms. To all of them my heartfelt thanks. Most of all I owe an ever-mounting debt to my wife Xu Xu for her unfailing assistance and sweet encouragement.

Wang Zuoliang

Beijing, November 1990

Literary History: Chinese Beginnings

Presumably there is more than one tradition of literary historiography in the world. The Western tradition is, of course, familiar to scholars. Is there also a Chinese tradition? On the face of it, hardly. For the first *History of Chinese Literature*, so-called, was published only in 1904.[1] And what has happened since then seems mainly a tale of succession of foreign influences—Japanese, English, French, American and, finally, Soviet—that Chinese literary historians have been subjected to, so that to this day there is no history of Chinese literature published in China—or elsewhere in the world, for that matter—that is found generally acceptable to most Chinese scholars. Their main objection to many of these "histories" is that there is little that is distinctly Chinese in them.

This is a curious situation. For the Chinese have never lacked a historical sense. On the contrary, their historical writings have been among the most distinguished in the world. Neither have they lacked a critical sense. If anything, they have often been hypercritical, reaching a high stage of subtlety and sophistication in the 6th century, if not earlier. There have also been available other factors conducive to literary history, including para-compilations and precursors. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss some of these factors and explore a little the question why such favorable conditions did not yet reach their consummation in a Chinese literary history.

I

The survey of literary works of a past period has been an old established practice among Chinese historians, which can be traced back to Ban Gu (班固), the first-century Imperial Historiographer. He initiated the *Chronicle of Arts and Letters* (《艺文志》), a superb annotated bibliographical record, which subsequently became a regular feature of many dynastic histories. This was supplemented, or substantiated, by the "lives" of writers among the notables, also in the official histories. These "lives", resembling entries in the *DNB*, are still incorporated as appendix in nearly every standard edition of a classical author's works published in China today.

Several developments occurred at the beginning of the 6th century which were conducive to literary historiography. There was a treatise written by Zhong Rong (钟嵘) entitled *Poetic Ranks* (《诗品》) which ranked poets according to merit. Two anthologies were also compiled. One, the massive *Selected Writings* edited by the Prince Zhao Ming (《昭明文选》), was to remain the standard comprehensive anthology for a millennium and more, giving rise to numerous glosses and commentaries in the interval. The other, *New Poems from the Jade Pavilion* (《玉台新咏》) by Xu Lin (徐陵), a large miscellany of mostly love poems by princes, courtiers and court ladies, also set a fashion, being the first of many specialist anthologies to come.

Now any attempt at ranking the poets meant an act of criticism involving evaluation and classification. Zhong Rong's treatise also showed a historical sense, for the poets examined ranged from ancients down to the author's own contemporaries. It is clear that work along these lines was excellent preparation for literary history.

The connection with anthologies is also not far to seek. Many early literary histories, so-called, were really anthologies in disguise, the only difference being that the quoted passages were arranged chronologically—hence there was some attempt at periodization—and linked up with critical remarks of one sort or another.

But the work that more than anything else pointed forward to literary history was Liu Xie's *Wen Xin Diao Long* (刘勰:《文心雕龙》), a title which has been translated as *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons.*[2] It is a book of literary theory which treats systematically—as few other books have done in classical China—of nearly every aspect of literary creation. To this day Chinese and Japanese scholars, meeting at numerous symposia, wonder at its scope and depth. Literary historians will also find it a rich quarry. There is for instance a chapter entitled "Time Sequence"(《时序》) which is an admirable mini-history of Chinese literature from the earliest times to the 5th century. In it the author reviews the main literary achievements in this wide span of time, ending with the observation:

> 文变染乎世情，兴废系乎时序。
> (Literary changes are colored by the social situation, and artistic growth or decline depends on the times.)

In other words, literature evolves with society. Trite enough today, no doubt, but Liu lived at a time (c. 465—c. 520) when people's minds were still clouded by mythological and other arcane interpretations of literary works and their origins. In that context his was a surprisingly modern view. This is followed by a chapter entitled "Talented Spirits" (《才略》) which gives a rapid survey of

94 authors through 9 dynasties in an attempt to establish a relationship between tradition and individual talent, again a modern concern.

The bulk of the book, 20 chapters in all, is given over to a discussion of various types of writings. Liu is able to enumerate and comment on 33 of them, beginning with poems, folk songs, *fu*, moving on to historical and philosophical writings, ending with memorials, petitions, notes and letters. In between there are some curious types, such as pledges, oaths, jests, queries, repartees and "sevens," the last a kind of prose poem which sets out to raise seven questions or make seven points. This classification may strike us as a little too elaborate, but it also testifies to the enormous wealth of material, both in verse and prose, available at the time.

More to our purpose is the historical approach used by the author. Each of these 20 chapters contains a brief survey of important past works of the type of writing under discussion. Below is part of such a survey:

> 暨建安之初，五言腾踊。文帝、陈思，纵辔骋节；王、徐、应、刘，望路而争驱；并怜风月，狎池苑，述恩荣，叙酣宴，慷慨以任气，磊落以使才；造怀指事，不求纤密之巧；驱辞逐貌，唯取昭晰之能，此其所同也。乃正始明道，诗杂仙心。何晏之徒，率多浮浅；唯嵇 志清峻，阮旨遥深，故能标焉。若乃应璩《百一》，独立不惧，辞 谲义贞，亦魏之遗直也。(《明诗》)
>
> (By the early years of the Jian An period, five-character lines became popular. The Cao brothers, emperor and prince, rode gallantly together. Wang, Xu, Ying and Liu raced along in their wake. They all loved wind and moon,

frequented ponds and parks, gloried in honors, made merry at parties, generous of spirit, open in displaying talent, caring not for ingenious minuteness in description, striving only for clarity in expression. These were their common characteristics. Coming down to the Zheng Shi period, under the influence of Taoism, poetry became tinged with spiritual yearnings. Ho Yan and his ilk were mostly shallow, only Ji and Ruan stood out, the former with his austere purity, the latter with his great profundity. Ying Qu's cautionary poems, too, showed an independent spirit by being enigmatic in language but bold in thoughts, a legacy from the Wei era.)

Packed with names and epithets, the writing yet moves on at a great pace and has a clear line of development, mainly by grouping the writers and bringing out the contrasts between the two periods. David Nichol Smith once said, "When poets are grouped by families and clans and when their descents are traced, History is coming. "[3] Certainly here we have a history of Chinese poetry in embryo.

There are other things in Liu's work which a literary historian might study with profit.

First, his use of terms. On the whole, Liu used terms sparingly, but of the handful he did use a few were capable of expressing a whole theoretical position in one short, telling phrase, such as *fenggu* (风骨). He didn't exactly coin the phrase. Other critics had used the two words before, though generally in connection with painting or calligraphy.[4] Liu made the phrase a key term in his system, not only applied to individual literary works, but also used to denote the dominant character of the literature of a whole period.

Thus he spoke of the *fenggu* of the Jian An period (建安风骨), a judgement that was to be repeated by countless later critics. As to what *fenggu* exactly means, interpretations vary to this day. Nevertheless there can be little doubt that as applied to the writers of the Jian An period, who included the statesman-poet Cao Cao (曹操) and his sons, it stood for something akin to the Western conception of "sublimity". The interesting thing is how the Chinese critical mind preferred to think in metaphors: thus *feng*, literally "the wind", refers to uninhibited movement or imaginativeness, while *gu*, literally "backbone", denotes strength of character, or nobility. Combined, the term *fenggu* came to designate the kind of spare, sinewy, hig-toned, but nonetheless beautiful poetry associated with the warriors and eccentrics of the turbulent Jian An period.

Second, his concise way of writing. Conciseness has been a distinguishing mark of traditional Chinese critical writing up to the beginning of the 20th century, when long-winded tediousness set in. Liu managed to say a lot in a few words and these few pointedly. His comments were built into the very texture of nearly every sentence, which, besides making for great economy, also gave the writing a greater critical sharpness. Thus when he wrote concisely, mentioning two writers almost in one breath:

> 嵇康师心以遣论，阮籍使气以命诗。(《才略》)
> (In essays Ji Kang aired his stubbornly held views,
> In poems Ruan Ji gave his passions free rein.)

he was doing a lot more than merely giving the facts. Not only was there admiration behind the words, but the words were propelled by the combined force of the strong diction and the emphatic

rhythm.

Third, his extensive use of comparisons. Liu loved to place two writers or two works side by side, for comparison and contrast, as in the example cited above. He did it consistently, sentence after sentence, throughout his long book. This was partly because the antithetical style he was writing in, the *Pian Wen* (骈文) prevalent at the time, lent itself to comparisons. But his comparisons were never *pro forma*. They always made good sense and were striking, even dramatic. Sometimes he paused for an extended comparison, as in the following passage:

> 魏文之才，洋洋清绮，旧谈抑之，谓去植千里。然子建思捷而才俊，诗丽而表逸；子恒虑详而力缓，故不竞于先鸣，而乐府清越，典论 辩要，迭用短长，亦无懵焉。但俗情抑扬，雷同一响，遂令文帝以 位尊减才，思王以势窘益价，未为笃论也。(《才略》)

> (The emperor Cao Pi's talent was like a clear broad stream, yet past opinion was unfavorable, putting him a good way below Cao Zhi, his brother. This was because Zhi had a ready wit and an easy grace, so that he could effortlessly turn out beautiful poetry and brilliant essays, while Pi liked to consider things carefully and applied his strength by degrees disdaining to shine before the others. Nevertheless his *yuefu* songs are strikingly fresh and his treatise *Dian Lun* pithy and well-argued. To avoid misjudgment, the proper thing to say would be that the brothers complemented each other. Yet such is the world's custom that one word of praise or censure invari-

ably draws a thousand echoes from the vulgar crowds. Thus Pi's literary fame suffered because of his royal position, while Zhi's soared because he had been at a disadvantage at court. This cannot be considered fair.)

This is very good criticism, perceptive, judicious, common-sensical and forcefully but gracefully put.

Finally, his general literariness. We have already touched on the grace of his writing. In fact, all the specimens we have cited show this. Plain statement is generally livened up by figures. The key term *fenggu* is itself a metaphor. Contrasts and comparisons not only abound, but are invariably expressed in a pair of balanced sentences, with the two halves neatly contrasting in sound and sense, almost Popeian in poise and polish. [5] Of course, in doing this Liu was also meeting the requirements of *Pian Wen*, that curious, half-prose, half-verse style he used, that being the only learned style available to him, but he never allowed it to hamper his communication of ideas. On the contrary, he performed the feat of writing a long learned treatise throughout in this artificial style without blunting his theoretical edge or, as one can testify even fourteen centuries later, tiring out his reader.

II

Thus, in some important ways, Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* anticipated literary history.

A later development, occurring in the 8th century, contributed elements favorable to the rise of a history of a literary genre, namely, poetry.

This was the introduction of a new literary form—poetic survey of poetry—and the person who introduced it was Du Fu.

Du Fu (712-770), one of the two greatest poets in the whole history of Chinese literature, the other being Li Bai, had used verse to express his critical views before. He had written the famous lines:

清新庾开府,俊逸鲍参军。
(Pure and fresh as Yu Xin,
Spirited and free as Bao Zhao.)

More succinct and more penetrating than Liu Xie or anybody before him, the master poet showed how he could sum up a writer's whole quality in just one striking epithet. But he had meant these epithets as a compliment to a friend, for the lines appeared in a poem entitled "Thinking of Li Bai in Springtime" (《春日忆李白》), which mainly expressed his yearning for that other great poet. There had been equally quotable lines marked by great critical acumen in his other poems, but these too were isolated utterings mixed up with a lot of other matter.

In 761, however, he did something different when he wrote a sequence of "Six Quatrains Composed in Jest" (《戏为六绝句》). For these six poems were new both in matter and manner, unlike any of the quatrains written before that date, by himself or others. Wholly devoted to the discussion of poetic art, they were in fact the first sustained poetic survey of poetry.

They combined to give an overview of the poetic situation in the past two centuries. Significantly, Du started by once again discussing Yu Xin of the 6th century. But the erstwhile "pure and

fresh" poet now appeared as an old master:

庾信文章老更成,凌云健笔意纵横。
(As Yu Xin grew older, he wrote still better,
Soaring and sweeping like a true master.)

The second quatrain was a comment on current poetic taste. This was written in a vigorous, forthright new manner, something unusual for a poet hitherto noted for his Confucian gentleness:

王杨卢骆当时体,
轻薄为文哂未休。
尔曹身与名俱灭,
不废江河万古流。
(Wang, Yang, Lu, Luo wrote the style of their time,
Have since been sneered as vulgar and shallow.
Ye scoffers shall perish body and name,
While rivers pursue their eternal flow.)

The poets under discussion were "the four masters of the early Tang", active in the opening years of the dynasty. They had written a rather ornate, sentimental poetry favored by the court. By the middle of the 8th century, however, a revulsion against them had set in. People became harshly critical of their work. The point Du Fu was making in this quatrain was that the "four masters" did what was expected of them by their contemporaries and the ornateness was chiefly the legacy of a still earlier period. This was an eminently sensible view,[6] showing a historical sense that would do honor to any historian, literary or otherwise. What surprises us a

little is the forcefulness of the retort in the last two lines, which indeed have since become a kind of proverb quoted and requoted by countless people of the later times in wit combats and political controversies, not excluding the Red Guards in their heyday in the 1960s.

In the other poems of the sequence, Du Fu made two general observations, equally sensible, equally quotable:

不薄今人爱古人，清词丽句必为邻。
(Despising neither ancients nor moderns,
Chaste words and fair lines will knock at your door.)

别裁伪体亲风雅，转益多师是汝师。
(Weed out the false, cherish the pure and noble.
Learn from all, and your teachers multiply.)

When Du Fu wrote these lines, he was getting on. Like his admired Yu Xin, he too had had long years of soaring and sweeping behind him. But he was also looking ahead a little, eager to pass on his experience to the up and coming men.

Du Fu's example was followed by many poets in later ages, in a line stretching from the Song to Qing Dynasties (10th to 19th century). In fact, a tradition has since been set up within a tradition, that of poetic survey of poetry within the general canon of Chinese classical poetry. One poet in particular played an important part in carrying this tradition forward and he was Yuan Haowen (元好问, 1190-1257) of the Jin Dynasty. He also wrote a sequence of poems to discuss the state of poetic art from the Wei Dynasty onwards, but on a much larger scale—instead of Du Fu's six quatrains, he

wrote thirty, under the general title "On Poetry".

Yuan opened his sequence by announcing that his self-appointed task was to restore true poetry:

汉谣魏什久纷纭，
正体无人与细论。
谁是诗中疏凿手？
暂教泾渭各清浑。
(Han songs and Wei rhymes have been lost in strife,
True poetry looks for skilled defenders.
Where can master dredgers be found,
To separate the clean from the muddy?)

Thus determined, Yuan set out to discuss some 30 poets, from the Jian An period (which had fascinated, we remember, nearly all critics and poets, Liu Xie among them, with their quality of *fenggu*), all the way to the Song Dynasty, in a rough chronological order.

Yuan was a good poet himself and had many perceptive things to say about individual poets. Thus:

纵横诗笔见高情，
何物能浇磈磊平？
老阮不狂谁会得？
出门一笑大江横。
(Bold brushes display the force of high passion.
What can quench the bitterness in the heart?
Could there be anyone madder than old Ruan?
Laughing, he strode out to meet the river.)