# Discussion on mode of initial "Social Pattern" of modern literary history narration

Oliver Johnson<sup>1, a</sup>, Hannah Scott<sup>1, b, \*</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Bloomsbury Publishing, Flat 1, 123 High Street, London, SW1A 1AA, UK a.oliver.johnson1204@outlook.com, b.h.scott\_123@yahoo.com \*Corresponding Author

**Abstract:** The narration of "social pattern" literary history is an important form in initial modern literary history narration. The external factors such as times, society are often used to interpret modern literary history, while "annalistic style" narrative mode of literary history is often used in literary history narration. The narrative "social pattern" literary history narration has a strong ideological nature compare with the mode of "literary genre pattern" literary history narration. Therefore, it is easy to cause the loss of literary independence and aesthetics, and the narration of literary history will lose its objectivity, reality, and become insular at last.

**Keywords:** Initial modern literary history narration, social pattern, narrative mode of literary history, ideology

### 1. Introduction

The narration of literary history originates from the objective reality of literary phenomena and events, but the final formation of literary history writings comes from the depiction of the literary historians, which carries subjective characteristics of the narrator. Due to the differences in the literary concepts of the authors, their historical narration of a certain period of literature, the selection and depiction of literary historical events, present different forms. This was the case with the narration of new literary history before the 1950s. Due to the differences in the literary concepts of the authors, such as the understanding of the meaning of new literature, the selection of new literary historical events, and the depiction of new literary writers' works, may all reflect differences, which make the early narration of new literary history show the following two types of forms: one can be called the "social type" literary history narrative form, mainly using external factors of the times and society to narrate the history of the development of new literature; the other can be called the "stylistic type" literary history narrative form, mainly using the "noumenon" characteristics of new literature to explore the history of the evolution of new literature. This paper refers to the narration of new literary history before the 1950s as the early narration of new literary history, mainly to specifically explore the "social type" new literary history narrative form.

## 2. Era and social factors in early literary history

Mr. Tao Dongfeng once categorized the narrative modes of literary history into "autonomy theory" and "heteronomy theory" models. By "autonomy theory," he refers to the separation of literature from non-literature and the distinction between literary and non-literary discourse, considering the driving force of literary development to come from its own factors, that is, the particularities of literary forms, structures, languages, etc. On the other hand, the "heteronomy theory" model advocates for the particularity of literature and argues that its development is not self-formed but determined by factors outside of literature. When examining the early narratives of new literary history, the prototypes of both "heteronomy theory" and "autonomy theory" modes are well integrated into the "societal type" and "stylistic type" literary history narratives. Mr. Tao Dongfeng once regarded the "sociological" literary history model as a representative of the "heteronomy theory" literary history model. In his view, this type of literary history narrative is the one with the longest history, the greatest influence, and the strongest changes among all literary history narratives, and it has always played the most important role on the stage of our country's literary history.

Slightly different from Mr. Tao Dongfeng, this text refers to the important literary history narratives that focus on the era and external social factors before the 1950s as the "societal type" literary history narrative. In fact, this literary history narrative mode extends throughout the entire 20th century Chinese literary history narrative. This differs from the "stylistic type" literary history narrative mode, which at the time only focused on the "ontology" characteristics of literature and narrated the development history of new literature in "stylistic" forms. This type of literary history narrative believes that literature is a reflection of the era, society, politics, economy, and other external forms. Therefore, the related era, society, politics, economy, culture, and even religion, philosophy, and national character are important factors in narrating the history of literary development. A comprehensive view of the "societal type" literary history narratives before the 1950s shows that politics, economy, and culture related to the era and society are its main influencing factors.

Taine once said: "To understand a work of art, an artist, or a group of artists, one must correctly imagine the spirit and customs of the era to which they belong. This is the ultimate interpretation of the work of art and also the fundamental cause that determines everything. This point has been confirmed by experience; one only needs to look through the important eras in the history of art to see that a certain type of art appears and disappears simultaneously with certain spiritual and customary conditions of the era."[2] Hegel also said: "Every work of art belongs to its era and its nation, each with a special environment, dependent on special history and other concepts and purposes."[3] It can be said that the factors of nation, era, and environment represented by Taine can all be summarized as era and social factors, which have a significant influence on the narrative of new literary history before the 1950s. Therefore, in the early narrative of new literary history, the external characteristics of the era and society are important factors. Chen Zi Zhan said when discussing the literary revolution: "This movement is not accidental, nor is it entirely fabricated by a few people out of thin air; it has its historical and era significance." He regards the literary revolution as the natural trend of literary development, the stimulation of foreign literature, the influence of the ideological revolution, and the need for national education, among other social factors. Regarding the natural trend of literary development, he believes: "Literature is the highest expression of the spirit of the era. Each era has its own spirit, so each era has its own literature. Without the era, it loses its life and its value."[4] As for the influence of the ideological revolution, he follows the viewpoint of historical materialism, mainly that there has been a significant change in economic conditions, which is the oppression of the Eastern agricultural economy by the Western industrial economy. Chen Zi Zhan closely links the development of literature in the nearly thirty years since the "Wu xu" period with the era and society at that time: "The Chinese society of the past thirty years has been in a period of dramatic change. Literature, which reflects social life, has undergone dramatic changes with the dramatic changes of the era and social life, and will become a sign of the new era and new society in the future, which is not accidental. In the future, when analyzing the changes in various aspects of literature during this period, one can only investigate from the traces of its own changes and evolution, and may not be able to touch its background at any time, which is considered to be a preliminary introduction here."[5] Regarding the reasons for the emergence of the literary revolution, he cites Luo Jia Lun's "Changes in Modern Chinese Literary Thought" for explanation: first, the change in economic life; second, the influence of the World War; third, the disappointment of domestic politics; fourth, the gradual contact with academia. The above four factors he proposed in "Changes in Modern Chinese Literature," the natural trend of literary development, the stimulation of foreign literature, the influence of the ideological revolution, and the need for national education, are also important reasons he explains for the literary revolution.[5]

In analyzing the emergence of the literary revolution movement, Wu Qiyuan's "An Overview of the Chinese New Culture Movement" also discusses the development of new literature in terms of social, political, and economic factors. In his view, the emergence of an academic idea is not a random result, "but is nurtured by the structure of the economy and the shift of thought" [6]. The new cultural movement, the literary revolution, and the development of new literature are no exception. Therefore, the literary revolution movement and the new cultural movement are narrated against the backdrop of "social change and ideological movement" of the time, and he narrates the political, economic, and cultural factors in China since the Opium War, as well as the impact of international political, economic, and cultural factors on the literary revolution. Wang Feng yuan's "A Critical Review of the Chinese New Literature Movement" also

narrates the history of new literature based on the reasons of the era and society. For example, the literature begins with the "new trend of literature after the Wu xu Coup" as the background of the new literary movement, and also depicts the influence of the "May Fourth" Movement on the development of new literature. This kind of era and social factors also further affect his evaluation of writers, such as the description of "May Fourth" realism writers: "China's petty bourgeoisie, under the oppression of imperialism and feudal forces, is indeed very painful; however, they do not have a firm consciousness to resist, and at the same time, they are unwilling to fall behind, so their attitude towards reality is dissatisfaction. In consciousness, they are wavering, hesitating, and indecisive. Reflected in literature, they can only depict a tragic life, showing a dark society, and expressing more or less dissatisfaction with reality. This kind of attitude of complaining is produced from the standpoint of humanism." [7] This description has risen to the level of evaluating writers from a political and class perspective, and Mr. Huang Xiu ji has pointed out that this literary history has a class analysis color: "Whether it is the literary movement or the writer's work, the author clearly reveals its class essence." [8] For example, this literary history evaluates Lu Xun by pointing out: "Lu Xun's class stance is that of a petty bourgeoisie." [7] The evaluation of Yu Da fu's novels "reflects the ideology of the declining gentry class" [7], and so on.

Wang Zhepu's narrative context for the development of new literature is based on factors such as the era and society. He said: "Every movement in the world, whether it is political, social, economic, religious... revolutionary movement, must have a certain background and reason, and the new literary revolution movement certainly cannot be an exception." [9] In his view, the emergence of the new literary movement has both distant and recent causes. Looking at the distant causes, the first is the evolution of folk literature. Folk literature created in vernacular language, which is fresh, lively, and full of vitality, has a long history in China. It is an important force in the evolution and stimulation of new literature, a concept clearly influenced by Hu Shi. The second is the introduction of Buddhism. The influence of Buddhism on new literature is mainly manifested in the process of its introduction, "in order to make Buddhist scriptures widely spread among the people, they translated the teachings into popular language. By the Tang Dynasty, the masters of Zen Buddhism used ordinary vernacular in their lectures, and their 'threads of speech' became the ancestors of vernacular prose, which greatly helped the construction of later vernacular literature. Moreover, Chinese literature has always lacked imagination, while Buddhist literature is most imaginative and has also had a significant impact on Chinese literature." [9] This view of the influence of religious factors on new literature is obviously influenced by Taine. In his view, the opening of the sea ban brought external stimulation, which not only brought political reform but also literary improvement, such as the new style of political essays advocated by reformers like Kang You Wei and Liang Qichao, which has a potential stimulating force on the new literary movement. The abolition of the imperial examination system and the decline of the eight-legged essay provided opportunities for the rise of folk vernacular literature, all of which are distant causes of the new literary movement. The introduction of Western culture, the import of foreign books, the dispatch of students abroad, the advocacy of the national language movement, the prosperity of newspapers and magazines, and the influence of political revolution are the recent causes of the emergence of the literary movement.

All of the above factors are external stimuli and important conditions for the emergence of the literary revolution. Compared to other literary histories, Wang Zhepu's literary history unfolds more within the grand era and social factors. This is not only reflected in his analysis of the causes of the literary revolution but also in his narrative of the process of the new literary revolution movement, and even in the periodization of his literary history. For example, he takes the May Thirtieth Movement as a watershed in the development of new literature, which carries the idea that literature is a reflection of the times and society. He believes: "Literature is a product of the era and a reflection of society; therefore, whenever there is a drastic change in society, the literature associated with it must also undergo great changes." In his view, new literature, starting from the May Fourth Movement to the May Thirtieth Incident, was mostly a pastime for the petty bourgeoisie, with content mostly about love affairs, depicting the lives of students, landlords, ladies, young masters, and young ladies, which had little to do with the majority of the common people. However, the May Thirtieth Incident brought about a change in new literature:

The May Thirtieth Incident struck like a spring thunder, awakening the Chinese nation from its deep slumber, and made clear the ferocious face of various imperialisms and the sins of capitalism. At the same

time, the revolutionary forces of China took advantage of the situation to march northward, advancing like a whirlwind sweeping away the decayed and rotten, capturing more than ten provinces in just a few months. With such changes in politics and society, literature also began to show a new aspect. Initially, there was the revolutionary literature of the Creation Society, followed by the mass literature advocated by Yu Da fu and others, then the proletarian literature promoted by left-wing writers, and finally the nationalism literature advocated by the nationalist faction. The debates on the literary scene also joined the fray, truly a dazzling array of colors and a spectacle of the extraordinary. [9]

This is a typical example of using political events and class characteristics within the era and society to explain the development of the history of new literature. This approach, which takes the era and society as important factors in the narrative of literary history, is also reflected in the depiction and narration of literary phenomena. For instance, the narrative from "literary revolution" to "revolutionary literature" is, in Wang Zhepu's view, a significant change. Before the "May Thirtieth" incident, Chinese literature, although it had broken free from the shackles of old literature and strived to create a new realm of literature, did not achieve astonishing development due to the short time. "It was not until the 'May Thirtieth' tragedy in Shanghai in 1925 that it shook the 'complacent and oblivious' populace of China like a huge wave, and at the same time, the Chinese literary scene, affected by this intense external shock, underwent significant changes. The previously lukewarm and tender works were no longer suitable for the needs of the times; what was needed was revolutionary literature full of passion, blood, and tears... The 'literary revolution' advocated by Hu Shi and others has now transformed into revolutionary literature" [9].

Similarly, Wu Wenqi's "An Outline of New Literature" mainly uses external factors such as the era and society to narrate the history of the development of new literature. The book begins by stating: "The changes in literature are often related to the changes in politics and economy. Therefore, when we study the new literature since the 'May Fourth' movement, on the one hand, we must understand the evolution of literature before the 'May Fourth', and on the other hand, we must explore the reasons for the changes in modern literature from the changes in politics and economy." [10] Looking again at his discussion of the May Thirtieth Movement: (Note: The translation was cut off due to the length of the original text. If you need the complete translation, please provide the full text, or let me know to continue from where it was cut off.)

The "May 30th" Movement had a significant impact on literature. Stimulated by the "May 30th" incident, it awakened some literati from their dreams, leading them to leave their ivory towers and go to the crossroads of society. Another group of authors, who were also warriors against old ideas during the May Fourth Movement, were restricted by their own class and could not keep up with the times; as a result, they developed a kind of antipathy towards the new writers, similar to how Lin Qin nan opposed Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu during the May Fourth era. When a writer is out of tune with social life, they often retreat to the island of art supremacy. Thus, some advocated for new metrical poetry, exhausting their efforts in the meticulous refinement of every word and sentence, while the content became more distant from reality; some closed their eyes to create symbolic poetry that no one but the author could understand; some promoted humorous essays that make people laugh; and some even turned back to write five-character and seven-character poems and rigorously regulated ci poetry. In short, after the "May 30th" incident, writers generally took two different paths: one went to the crossroads to fight, and the other hid in the ivory tower to dream. [10]

The above observation of the development of new literature from the perspective of era, society, and other external factors shares similarities with Wang Zhe's narrative of the history of new literature. From this, we can see the manifestation of era, society, and other external factors in the initial narrative of the history of new literature.

Compared to the aforementioned literary history, Li Helin's "A Discussion of Literary and Artistic Trends in China Over the Past Twenty Years" is a more typical "social-type" narrative model of literary history, where political, economic, and class factors of the era and society become the main threads of his narrative of the evolution of literary and artistic thought from the literary revolution to the beginning of the war over nearly two decades. In particular, political factors play an important role in his literary history narrative. He believes that there are three important political landmarks in the changes of literature over the past twenty years: the "May Fourth" Movement, the "May 30th" Movement, and the "September 18th" Incident. These three landmarks divide the literature from 1919 to 1937 into three periods. [11] This is a

typical historical view of literature development through political events. He also uses the "class nature" to observe the development of literary and artistic thought over these two decades, "From 1917 to 1927 was the era of the development of bourgeois literary and artistic thought and the germination of proletarian literary and artistic thought." [11] Looking again at his specific differentiation of the "strata" of literature during the new literary movement: "Reflected in the new literary movement based on the insufficient and prematurely aborted Chinese capitalist economy, there was first the attack of Lin Shu, the Xue Heng faction, and the Jia yin faction, representing the feudal ancient literary forces, and then the surrender of the leading figures of the new literary movement, with Hu Shi and others 'sorting out the national heritage'. This division within the new cultural movement camp: one faction went on the road of sorting out the national heritage, and the other faction stepped forward on the broad road of a scientific worldview, representing two forces of social strata: one was the bourgeoisie that surrendered to the feudal forces, and the other was the progressive petty bourgeois intellectuals (they were naturally still of bourgeois ideological consciousness at the time). The power of the working class was only raised after the May 30th incident." [11] It can be seen that the political factors in the narrative of literary history are very obvious.

# 3. Chronological literary history narrative mode

Literary history is the history of the spatial-temporal display of literature. The "social-type" literary history narrative form pays more attention to the temporality of literary development, that is, the chronological sequence of literary development. This leads to the adoption of the "chronological" literary history narrative mode in literary history narration—arranging the structure of literary history according to the sequence of time, starting with the causes of the emergence of the new literary movement, followed by the literary revolution, literary debates, literary schools, and the narration of specific literary forms: novels, poetry, prose, drama, etc. For example, Wu Wenqi's "Outline of New Literature" includes the following content: Chapter One, Introduction, discusses the reasons for the new literary movement; Chapter Two, "May Fourth" Movement and Literary Revolution; Chapter Three, The Echo of the Literary Revolution; Chapter Four, Literary Research Association and Creation Society; Chapter Five, The Impact of the "May 30th" Movement on Literature. The following chapters mainly narrate the historical development of various literary forms.

Wang Zhe's narrative of the history of new literature covers about fifteen years of history from the beginning of the literary revolution to the time when the book was written. From the structure of this literary history, the book, with nearly five hundred pages, narrates the history of new literature during this period from various aspects such as literary movements, literary trends, literary creation, translation of foreign literature, organization of traditional literature, and introduction of writers. The specific arrangement of chapters is as follows: Chapter One, What is New Literature; Chapter Two, The Causes of the New Literary Revolution Movement; Chapter Four, The Chinese Literary Scene Over the Past Fifteen Years; Chapter Five, The First Phase of New Literary Creation; Chapter Six, The Second Phase of New Literary Creation; Chapter Seven, Translated Literature; Chapter Eight, Organizing National Heritage and Children's Literature; Chapter Nine, Biographies of New Literary Writers; Chapter Ten, Appendix.

Zhu Zi qing's "Outline of Chinese New Literature Research" has a structure and system that are roughly as follows: Chapter One, Lecture on the background of the emergence of new literature, that is, the internal and external causes of the new literary movement; Chapter Two, The Process of the Emergence of New Literature; Chapter Three, The Influence of Foreign Literature on the New Literary Revolution and the Division of the Entire New Literature; The following chapters mainly narrate the historical evolution of various literary forms such as poetry, novels, prose, and drama according to the sequence of time.

Looking at the early "social-type" new literary history narratives, they often use external factors such as the era and society to explain the historical development of new literature. The structure of literary history is woven with new literary historical events according to the chronological sequence of time. Literary history is the re-enactment of literary space and time, weaving new literary events according to the chronological sequence of the development of new literature, pursuing the original ecology, objectivity, and authenticity of the history of new literature. For example, Wang Zhe's history of new literature appears cumbersome, but

its important historical value still has significant reference significance to this day. Therefore, this type of literary history narrative obviously has its rationality and has become the potential foundation for the early narrative of the history of new literature. However, its shortcomings are also obvious. This "social-type" literary history model emphasizes that literature is a reflection of society and the era, especially emphasizing the decisive role of external factors such as the era and society in the development of literature, thereby causing the loss of the independence and, especially, the aesthetic nature of new literature. After all, literature is literature, and it is not a vassal of the era and society. Some people say that Taine's "view that works of art are not isolated but belong to a larger whole is correct because he saw the dependence of the individual artist on his era; but he exaggerated this dependence to the point of mechanical determinism, and the uniqueness of the individual spirit and talent of the artist's creation was neglected undeservedly." That is, "he only saw the commonality of various writers and works of the same era but did not see or at least ignored their uniqueness."

This is the overall grasp of the history of new literature in the early narrative of the history of new literature, such as the reasons for the "literary revolution," the specific process of the "literary revolution," and the overall historical process from the "literary revolution" to the "revolutionary literature" can be relatively complete; on the contrary, the narrative of specific literary phenomena, literary events, and specific writers' works cannot be well grasped. More importantly, this literary history narrative model shows a strong ideological nature in the selection of literary historical events. For example, the subjectivity and one-sidedness shown by the excessive reliance on social and social utilitarian literary preferences may lead to the exclusion and suppression of other literary historical events. Wu Wenqi's "Outline of New Literature" shows this kind of preference. In this literary history, the metrical poetry advocated by the "New Moon School" represented by Xu Zhi Mo and Wen Yi duo, and the essay writers of the "Yusi School" represented by Zhou Zuo ren and Lin Yutang are all regarded as objects of negation for evading reality; modernism is also regarded as a literary phenomenon of evading reality and is negated. Looking at the author's citation of Forch's evaluation of symbolism:

Symbolism, in essence, is nothing more than the expression of lyric poetry by Impressionism in the aestheticism movement. Therefore, the Symbolists, on one hand, are also pure aestheticists and supporters of the slogan of pure art. In their own poetry, they do not demand any utilitarian subjects from themselves. Social and political motives are entirely unrelated to their poetry. They only strive to discover their own self, but their self is completely individualistic... The Symbolists are unconditional aestheticists who do not recognize anything other than art, and they are also Impressionists. The task of their poetry is to express the unclear, instantaneous feelings and states of the nervous system in language. These unclear, instantaneous, and highly personal experiences, of course, cannot be naturally expressed in clear images and concepts. [10]

Looking again, he also commented on the Chinese Symbolist poetry school as follows: "This school of poetry is mysterious and difficult to understand, and it was once popular in China for a while, with representative writers including Li Jin fa, Wang Du qing, Feng Nai chao, Dai Wang Shu, Yao Peng zi, Hu Ye fen, and others. But later, Wang, Feng, Yao, Hu, and others took the path of revolutionary literature and no longer wrote that kind of inexplicable poetry. Now, although there are still a few people writing, it has already failed to attract people's attention." [10] From the above narrative, it can be seen that this literary history narrative mode that focuses on the era, society, and other factors, its ideological nature in literary history narration can easily lead to the loss of the independence and aesthetic nature of new literature.

Li Helin once said: "Literary and artistic works not only reflect the ideology of a certain class, but they also reflect the objective reality and the objective world." [12] Naturally, the narration of literary history should also be based on the true history of literary development, not just on ideology. In fact, his "A Discussion of Literary and Artistic Trends in China Over the Past Twenty Years" mainly relies on Marxist theory for the narration of literary history, with political and economic factors being the main elements in his observation of literary development, especially the introduction of "class nature," which gives his literary history a strong political ideological nature. A complete literary history should not only include the literary movements, literary trends, and literary debates of a period but also the literary schools of that period, especially the writers and works of that period; however, Li Helin mainly narrates the literary and artistic trends of the past twenty years, and due to the author's main value bias towards proletarian literary trends, the structure of the entire book is unbalanced, with the second decade having a larger proportion of chapters

than the first decade. Speaking of literary trends alone, this actually loses the objectivity, authenticity, richness, and completeness of the literary trends of the past twenty years. Li Helin's spirit of literary history narration had a negative impact on the literary history narration of Cai Yi, Ding Yi, Liu Shu song, Zhang Bi Lai, and others in the 1950s and after, as well as the expansion of class struggle in the 1960s, turning literary history into a "revolutionary history" and "struggle history," which led the literary history narration onto a narrow path.

### 4. Conclusion

It should be said that the narration of literary history is pluralistic. The "social-type" literary history narrative, as an important form of the early new literary history narrative, uses external factors such as the era and society to explain the history of the development of new literature in literary history narratives. The narratives often adopt the "chronological" literary history narrative mode, pursuing objectivity and authenticity in literary history narration. However, when the literary history narrative focuses on certain external social factors, it can easily lead to a reversal of priorities in the literary history narrative, causing it to lose its objectivity and authenticity. In fact, this form of literary history narrative has had a serious negative impact on the new literary history narratives on the mainland and Taiwan after the 1950s, that is, the intervention and regulation of the mainstream ideology of the times on literary history narration, which ultimately turned literary history into "revolutionary history" and "struggle history."

Of course, the development of literature cannot be separated from external factors such as the era and society, but literary history is, after all, the history of "literature." Therefore, when focusing on the external factors of literary development, it is essential to focus on the "noumenal" characteristics of literature, which is the foundation of literary history narration.

## 5. References

- [1] Tao Dongfeng. Philosophy of Literary History [M]. Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1994.
- [2] Taine. Philosophy of Art [M]. Translated by Fu Lei. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1963.
- [3] Hegel. Aesthetics: Volume One [M]. Translated by Zhu Guang Qian. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1979.
- [4] Chen Zi Zhan. Changes in Modern Chinese Literature [M]. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1929.
- [5] Chen Bing Kun. A Thirty-Year History of Chinese Literature [M]. Pacific Bookstore, 1937.
- [6] Wu Qiyuan. An Overview of the Chinese New Culture Movement [M]. Modern Bookstore, 1934.
- [7] Wang Feng yuan. A Review of the Chinese New Literary Movement [M]. Bei ping Xin Xin Society, 1935.
- [8] Huang Xiu ji. A History of the Compilation of Chinese New Literary History [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007.
- [9] Wang Zhe. A History of the Chinese New Literary Movement [M]. Bei ping Jie Cheng Bookstore, 1933.
- [10] Wu Wenqi. An Overview of New Literature [M]. China Cultural Service Society, 1936.
- [11] Li Helin. Preface [M] // Li Helin. A Discussion of Literary and Artistic Trends in China Over the Past Twenty Years. Life Bookstore, 1938.
- [12] Li Helin. A Discussion of Literary and Artistic Trends in China Over the Past Twenty Years [M]. Life Bookstore, 1938.0