The Concept of Literature of the Republic of China in Chinese Modern Literary History Studies: A Speech at Princeton University

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ABSTRACT
In the last decade, the most noteworthy phenomenon is the bringing forward of the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” and a series of relevant discussions triggered afterwards in mainland China’s modern literature research. This concept of literary history, like the concept of the twentieth-century Chinese literature advocated in the 1980s, has the goal of literary development according to its own traditional political ideology, and at the same time shows the reflection and review of the separation from the historical context of China’s reality in previous research. Through academic debate and discussion in recent years, the misunderstanding of the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” as a literary criticism method has been further clarified. The concept, showing the unique value of “the Republic of China as a method,” can not only broaden the scope of Chinese modern literature studies, but also form a better atmosphere of the conversation with other current research topics such as “Taiwan literature” and “Chinese literature.”

1. Literature discipline closely connected with political ideology

In the last decade, the popularity of Chinese modern literature research in the mainland has gradually cooled down and entered a quiet state of development. In the 1980s, this discipline has experienced a sort of cacophony. In the period of stillness, there are noteworthy phenomena, the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” and a series of relevant discussions triggered afterwards.

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For overseas researchers, including foreigners and those from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, the history of Chinese modern literature has naturally been divided into two periods: the period of the Republic of China and of the People’s Republic of China. This schism of literary history has been naturally accepted as historical description and has been used to meet different needs in the following derived concepts, such as Modern Chinese Literature, Chinese Modern Literature, Chinese Literature (during the period of the Republic of China), Chinese Literature (during the period of the People’s Republic of China). There are differences in thought or esthetic ideology, but basically no serious political confrontation and conflict. From the perspective of overseas Sinologists, they will feel confused about the necessity of earnest elucidation and discussion of these terms. No matter if it’s modern literature or the literature of the Republic of China, they constitute merely an appellation in the literary history.

I will now discuss how to understand the pattern of modern and contemporary literature discipline in mainland China. Actually, in the strict sense of discipline, the concept of “modern and contemporary Chinese literature” was not established in the period of the Republic of China before the year 1949. Although at that time “modern Chinese literature” was introduced to higher education, and a series of “Chinese modern literature” books or courses were published, most lecturers and authors (such as Ziqing Zhu (朱自清)) taught the course as their personal choice without a complete, systematic knowledge structure and full education pattern. In 1949 after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, a consciousness of the discipline construction appeared. At the same time, political ideology was included in the “Chinese modern literature” discipline through syllabus compilation, published boilerplate textbooks, self-criticism, and censorship by brainstorming. Therefore, to discuss any problems about “modern Chinese literature” subject from content, structure to language, concepts, might be regarded as serious “state affairs,” and anyone who came up with new designs or adjustment in this discipline had to deal with political ideology and to answer questions about ideological unity and a series of conventionalized conclusions with not only the wisdom of academic innovation, but greater courage and determination to make political breakthroughs.

Looking back at mainland China, since the new period, every concept about literary history raised was accompanied by such wisdom. To take the most influential concept, twentieth-century Chinese literature as an example, it was not the time division of the late Qing dynasty, modern and contemporary, which was not a commonality seeker from the different historical stages, but was instead geared to break the political shackle of literature.

The “modern” concept in “modern Chinese literature” belonging to the product of a kind of political ideology is already greatly different from the concept at the beginning of May 4, 1919. As is known to all, the earliest modern or recent concepts both come from Japan, and the recent concept was adopted more frequently than the modern concept before the 1930s. At that time, the Chinese “modern” concept keeping pace with the basic framework of understanding in the outside world took the “present time” of shaking the sealing structure between the development of capitalism and the traditional world as “modern.” After 1949, the “modern” concept in “Modern Chinese Literature” followed the pattern of the former Soviet Union which was different. The book, A Concise Course on the History of the Soviet Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (The
Central Ad Hoc Committee of Soviet Communist Party (Bolsheviks) 1975) personally reviewed by Stalin, examined by the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee, edited by the Soviet Communist Party Central Special Committee, and the multivolume book, *The General History of the World* collectively written by the Soviet Union historians during 1955–1979, rediscovered the meaning of history and the way of segmentation. Under the guidance of the above two books, the evolution of the five social forms was regarded as the theoretical basis of history; the British bourgeois revolution in 1640, due to the limitation of “class,” as the incomplete “modern” event, could only be described as the beginning of the “recent time,” and the great victory of the October Revolution (1917) should be referred to as the major point in the “modern” evolution. The ideological agenda of China’s historical period division copied the pattern of the Soviet Union. Thus the Opium War (1840) was regarded as the beginning of the “recent time.” The “May Fourth” Movement, which marked the appearance of the working-class in the stage of Chinese history, and the beginning of the introduction of Marxism, was treated as “modern.” Because the Chinese Communist Party had not yet been established at the time of the May Fourth Movement, “contemporary” was adopted after the year 1949 so as to manifest the political victory in China just like the October Revolution in the former Soviet Union, and to show the arrival of the socialist or communist society; thus, the pattern of Chinese recent/modern/contemporary literature was clearly determined with no more fuzzy segmentation, more exact ideological connotation, and more cultural, historical quality: The division of Bourgeois Literature (the Old Democratic Revolution Literature), the New Democratic Revolution Literature, and Socialist Literature represents the transformation of recent, modern, and contemporary literary history.

To seek the law of literature itself, the concept of “Chinese literature in the 20th century” is the product of academic consciousness in Chinese literature studies, of efforts to eliminate influence from the former Soviet Union. Some scholars such as Huang, Chen, and Qian once stated:

The period division in the Chinese literary history directly copied the pattern of the social political history. Taking the recent time of literary history as example, more than half a century from the Opium War (1840) to the Reform Movement (1898), it seems that there wasn’t any great achievement in the literature, nor any remarkable change according to that type of history. (36)

Since the development of politics and literature didn’t share the same process, the culture collision between the East and the West, the modernization of literature, Chinese participation in the world literature and art, and the law of literature itself should be considered to achieve the more reasonable and accurate literary historical studies. (36)

The concept of the 20th century Chinese literature began to show the literary independence from the pattern of social politics, to realize the main object of literary studies as the integrity of the occurrence and development of literature itself. (25)

Since the concept of the 20th century Chinese literature opened the historical road to rewriting literary history, the studies of modern Chinese literature with academic innovation and the courage for political breakthroughs insisted upon respecting the law of literature and tried to go back to the reality of history. Here we can also say, the
2. Modernity: the questionable concept

Of course, this approach also reflects a kind of reflection of past literature research. The historical architecture of “the 20th century Chinese literature” of great academic value, obviously until today, still exerts the biggest impact on the concept of Chinese literary history. However, in view of the “literature of the Republic of China,” there is a problem to overcome. Has this concept already obtained the stability of the discipline? For example, in the 21st century, if many concepts elucidated under the structure of “20th century Chinese literature” are still applicable today, the basic nature, mission, or problems of literature in the new century will have little difference from the twentieth century. Then the connotation and extension of the concept itself requires scrutiny. For the core concept of the “20th century Chinese literature,” the pursuit of literary modernity was adopted to escape the yoke of political ideology. Since the mid-1990s, the word “modernity” gradually evolved into our literature research and entered into the basic vocabulary, a series of problems and the contradictions implicit to the concept have appeared.

In the new era, “modernization” and “modernity” have mainly manifested in an effort to try to break through the closed social situation out of a desire to join the tide of the outside world. At that time, moral light and emotional power of the “modern” surpassed the reasonable and complete knowledge. We did not ask the source of the concept or question the significance and limit of knowledge because calling upon literature modernity was taken as god’s truth like the construction of “Four Modernization” carried out in mainland China. In the 1980s, Hui Wang (汪晖) raised a question to Tao Tang (唐弢) concerning what “modern” meant, and Mr Tang, the leading authority of this discipline, just answered this was a very complicated problem (Wang 1). In the 1990s, Chinese scholars began to enter the system directly from the western ideological circle and began to catch up with the abundant knowledge of “modernity.” After a short period of time by accepting “the End of Modernity” theory,
Chinese scholars quickly raised the banner of “unfinished modernity” with western academic encouragement, examined and analyzed various cultural phenomena. According to statistics from the most abundant and convenient China journal net, CNKI, academic papers after 1979 about “modernity” in each year are illustrated below.

According to the data above, we know that from 1979 to 1987, for nine years, there was no single piece of paper on the subject of “modernity” in the humanities and social science academic studies; then two articles in 1988, but quickly disappeared; it was not until 1993 that a series of argument and analyses about literary “modernity” appeared again. The representatives of these included “对“现代性”的追问——90年代文学的一个趋向” (“To Make an Inquiry About Modernity: A Literature Trend in 1990s”) (Tianjin Social Sciences 13.4 (1993)); “现代性终结——一个无法回避的课题” (“The End of Modernity: An Unavoidable Task”) (Strategy and Management 2.3 (1994)); “重构现代性与汉语书面语论争——一个90年代文学的新命题” (“Revaluation of Modernity and the Chinese Written Language Argument: A New Topic of Chinese Literature in 1990s”) by Yiwu Zhang (张颐武) (Literary Review 36.4 (1994)); “关于‘现代性’与‘现代化’” (“About Modernity and Modernization”) by Yuhai Han (韩毓海) (Academic Monthly 38.6 (1994)); “第三世界的现代性痛苦与毛泽东思想的双重含义——兼说中国当代文学” (“The Pain of Modernity in the 3rd World and Double Meaning of MAO Tsedong’s Thought: Related to the Chinese Contemporary Literature”) by Yuhai Han and Xuyuan Li (李旭渊) (Strategy and Management 2.5 (1994)); “传统与现代性” (“Tradition and Modernity”) by Hui Wang (洪辉) (Academic Monthly 38.6 (1994)); “20世纪中国文学：寻找和创造现代性” (“The 20th Century Chinese Literature: To Seek and Create Modernity”) by Dingan Peng (彭定安) (Social Science Journal 16.5 (1994)); “后现代性与当代社会思潮” (“Post-modernity and Ideological Trend in the Contemporary Society”) by Zheng Wen (文征) (Social Sciences Abroad 17.2 (1994)); “超越的循环——前现代性、现代性和后现代性的循环关系” (“The Cycle of Transcendency: The Circular Relations Among Pre-modernity, Modernity and Post-modernity”) by Dunhua Zhao (赵敦华) (Marxism & Reality 5.4 (1994)), etc.

Academic consciousness leads to the refinement and reflection of the concepts and their importance. According to the academic norms of the Chinese academic journals, the adoption of key words listed by the authors gradually became a sort of tradition after 1992. Key words were not used in Chinese academic papers in the 1980s. It also brought us difficulty in showing the refinement of the concepts by Chinese scholars; but even so, with the help of the analysis in the above tables showing the growth of the modernity topic according to the names of papers and the key words, we can still be very clear. Since 1993, more and more Chinese scholars have paid attention to the topic of modernity, and more and more academic texts have talked about the concept of modernity, till 1995 modernity completely “stands proud.” In the first decade of the new century, modernity, as a key word, both in thesis or terminology, has reached an unprecedented scale. Tracing the meaning of modernity in western culture has already become our academic habit. At the same time, modernity almost became the basic term of modern Chinese literature and culture studies covering ancient and modern Chinese culture and literature. By 2004, statistics fully showed the important historical changes that the critical discourse of modernity has realized in the displacement of a series of basic concepts in the 1980s.
The introduction of western literary theories and cultural theories helped to accomplish such replacement. After the mid-1990s, postmodernism, deconstruction, postcolonial criticism, and western Marxist theory have been active in the mainstream among Chinese scholars, and modernity is one of the core concepts of the theories. With the aid of the input of western theories, the Chinese modern literary world had the opportunity to absorb the complete knowledge of “modernity.” In this knowledge system, concerning the meticulous discrimination of modernity and modernization, modernism reached an unprecedented depth, and the literary view won exciting and immeasurable prospects, and modern Chinese literature so far has been worthy of the name “modernity” or became literary narrative in the modern sense.

In the 1990s, the recognition of “modern” knowledge for our study of literary history founded an interpretation platform more capable of integration. With the helpful knowledge of the archeological Foucault type, we sorted out all kinds of scattered modern, modernity, and modernization concepts and ideas, formed a complete and clear system, and found the exact location in the development process of the human spirit. In the last ten years, “modernity” is not only a key word in Chinese theoretical circles, but also a strong point of modern and contemporary literature research.

On the other hand, the route of Chinese modern history is covered with some embarrassment. Tracing the era of “modernity” theory in Chinese history, we will find an interesting twist: in the early 1990s, some of the claims (postmodern criticism of social modernity) caused our doubt and denial of the value of modern literary existence, but in the mid- and late-1990s, when foreign theory itself also split and entered a state of conflict (such as Habermas’ affirmation of modernity), we once again were encouraged to prove the value of modernity of Chinese literature by following western theory. Was the meaning of Chinese literature unexpectedly so fragile and unstable, only relying on western modern theory?! It is enough to remind us to what extent the introduction of these theories came out of the Chinese literary experience? Similarly, in the perspective of “modernity” in modern Chinese literature studies, many phenomena were involved in common topics in the globalized era, such as “two kinds of modernity,” “national theory,” “public space theory,” “the third-world cultural theory”, and so on. Overcoming the vast difference in the historical context, must Eastern and Western literature share a common need? Can the theories of the other really solidify our literary interpretation once and for all? Can’t modern Chinese literature pave a unique road with richer details?

Compared to the direct connection with the western narrative way of “modernity,” the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” tries to express above all the desire of getting rid of a priori theory and of getting back to the relatively pure historical scene.

Fukang Chen (陈福康) in 1997, with the aid of the concept of the historiography circle, recommended that the calling of modern/contemporary Chinese literature might as well retire, and be replaced by the name of the literature of the Republic of China/literature of the People’s Republic of China. Later, Fugui Zhang (张福贵), Yize Tang (汤溢泽), Buyang Zhao (赵步阳), and Dandan Yang (杨丹丹) have successively put forward a renaming problem. I prefer to call this way of renaming as the way of returning to the original condition. It indicated that the concept of nation and society
was not borrowed from the west including the borrowing of meaning and time. As the real name in China’s own survival period, with the help of such a specific national and social framework, it might be possible for our literary history narration to find out more historical details ignored in the past, so as to promote the studies of Chinese literary history.

After many years of the complicated theory deduction, Chinese literature studies’ needs render itself up in a relatively simple description of the history.

3. Possibilities in the studies of literature of the Republic of China

The concept of “literature of the Republic of China” is not without controversy and question, which reflects prejudice interfering with our thoughts and putting tangible or invisible pressure on our freedom to explore against the concept of “the Republic of China.” The advocators of the new concept lingered for such a long time in the analysis of the concept itself, and did not make sufficient detailed studies of the literary history, so the distinctive glamor of the new research has not been fully shown, nor has the vast thinking space of the new way been revealed.

It might help to clarify the following questions on the research of the “literature of the Republic of China”:

(1) “Literature of the Republic of China,” referring to the modern literature during the period of the Republic of China, can cover the vast majority of modern literary phenomena including the deeper explanation of the newly formed tradition of modern literature, old-style literature, popular literature and so on under a higher mental framework to understand the complicated dialogue between the ancient and the modern, the east and the west, and not only can include the literary phenomenon from the Beiyang government- and Kuomintang government-controlled area, but also can effectively explain especially for the Red Soviet literature and Anti-Japanese War literature in the liberated areas. Both of them also occurred in the overall history of the Republic of China, so the concept of literature of the Republic of China can not only explain them, but can also expand the new way of thinking in the academic research. Taking itself as the defender of the ideal of the Republic of China, culture in liberated areas survived and eventually won a “universal” reputation through criticizing the Kuomintang regime not by refusing the ideal of “the people’s country.” For the traitor, Jingwei Wang (汪精卫) also dared not easily abandon the title of “the Republic of China” which showed the tension between the designated name and the essence of the Republic of China and affected the rule of writing in the Nanjing puppet government. Furthermore, we can conclude that the literature in north China, Mongolia, especially in the northeast occupied areas where Japan and puppet Manchukuo cultures prevailed, belonged to the Japanese or Manchukuo literature? Of course not, literature studies about the occupied areas in recent years found that there was a deep “China complex” existing in colonial literature. The culture of the Republic of China, as a form of modern Chinese culture, still played a deep-rooted role in people’s spirit, especially in the colonial areas. The perspectives in
the study of literature of the Republic of China are still effective, even though the “literature of the republic of China” adopted in the study of literature in the occupied areas was not perfectly justifiable.

(2) “Literature of the Republic of China” itself is not a political concept, just like the “Republic of China” not only refers to the political regime, but also covers the connotations of nation and community. As an integral part of the spiritual culture, “literature of the Republic of China” has a rich meaning space transcending politics. The more in a modern form of the state, the more restricted coercive power is, and the greater a social force of culture is. Thus the social spiritual culture including literature and art in the period of the Republic of China presents its own independence and autonomy. Therefore, “literature of the Republic of China” is not the same as the literature of the Kuomintang. Liberalism literature and left-wing literature are also important parts of the literature of the Republic of China, the resisting and critical spirit embodied by the leftist literature becomes the main value orientation at that time, and the critique of the Republic of China is the basic theme of “literature of the Republic of China.” Once, some mainland scholars worried that the idea of “literature of the Republic of China” would again lead Chinese modern literature research into a political dead end. On the contrary, some Taiwan scholars could not accept the deliberate separation between literature and the political system in the studies of “literature of the Republic of China.” I think the above opinions from the two sides seem to vary, but both display cognitive deficiency of literary independence and autonomy. Literature in the Republic of China itself constitutes the embodiment of the intellectuals’ pursuit of political freedom. Yearning for political freedom, of course, would help our spirit out of the trap of political despotism. Fundamentally not coming from the gift of rulers, some concessions and compromise on the literary policy in the regime of the Republic of China were just the result of the developing social forces, vigorous folk forces, and continuing struggle. Accompanied by the appearance of modern countries, the most precious place in cultural development is that the pattern of “monarch” and “virtuous minister” culture gradually died out (although liberal and rational politicians are still in need). At the same time, concerning the newly formed cultural tradition, the growing social strength and the continuously strengthened folk force became the most worthy of attention. Only in the fully analysis of the above force, to grasp various historical characteristics of the political system, would be possible.

(3) “Literature of the Republic of China” study actually is different from the mass culture, popular culture under the “heat” of the Republic of China involving allusion, fashion, education in that era and the so-called “style of the Republic of China.” As the backwash effect on the Republican era once went through rough treatment for a long time, “heat” of the Republic of China has been popular in mainland China for years. Not hard to understand, “heat” of the Republic of China is relatively positive and retains more factors of self-reflection. The “heat” of the Republican era in contemporary Chinese society belongs to the tide of popular culture, while the “literature of the Republic of China” is the result of Chinese academic exploration for years and also the
historical tendency in literary research. The two are fundamentally different. In fact, based on the spirit of seeking truth from facts, China’s academic circles have been trying to respect the history of the Republic of China and to avoid replacing the objective historical data with subjective comments. In mainland China, for political reasons, the Republican era once contained some political taboos, but in general, except during the extreme authoritarian period, the Cultural Revolution, the focus on this period and on relative research has not been interrupted. The editing work of *A History of Republic of China* can be traced back to half a century ago, earlier than the written plan of *The Cambridge History of China*. In 1956, in the boom of “March to Science” and of “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, a Hundred Schools Contend,” the research plan of the history of the Republic of China has been included in 12-year science development planning. In 1961, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the victory of the 1911 Revolution, Biwu Dong (董必武) and Yuzhang Wu (吴玉章) proposed the study of the history of the Republic of China. In 1971, at the national publication conference, under the support of Premier Enlai Zhou (周恩来), compiling the history of the Republic of China was placed on the national publication planning, organized and implemented by the Institute of Modern History, the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences today). The famous historian Xin Li (李新) was responsible for the overall writing plan. With the limitation of the “Cultural Revolution,” the writing work didn’t really begin until 1977, yet it was still always a national publication project there. Later in the New Period, a series of the history research in the Republican Era was published. The first volume of *Biographies in the Republic of China* was published in 1978. In 1981, the first volume of *A History of Republic of China* was published by Zhong Hua Book Company. More works and studies on the history of the Republic of China will be forthcoming.

Literature research of the Republic of China should be emphasized to strengthen consciousness of academic research and distinguish itself from the interest of popular culture, but also should not deliberately refuse the precious feelings from the folk society. Valuable research with abundant social feelings can always draw strength from the concerns of reality and contribute wisdom and strength for the healthy and positive development of China’s contemporary culture.

(4) “Literature of the Republic of China” research can form a beneficial dialogue with the whole research of Chinese literature. It is likely to encounter new problems when the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” spread out of mainland China. The concept of “the Republic of China” has different meanings today in different areas. In mainland China, the historic concept of the Republic of China ended in 1949. Without special instructions, our literature research of the Republic of China refers to the period from the building of the Republic of China in 1912 to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Using the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” might step into an awkward dilemma with a wary “Two Chinas” political issue. Accordingly, across the strait in Taiwan the title
of “Republic of China” is still used. Taiwan literature is in the process of the Republic of China; however, after Japanese colonial rule, Kuomintang rule, the Post-Martial Law Era, Party alternation and ideological trends of de-Sinification, in an atmosphere of the post-republican era, to discuss the Republic of China also bears the pressure of political incorrectness. That is to say, in the largest Chinese world on both sides of the strait, “literature of the Republic of China” has considerable entanglement and contradictions. How to solve this embarrassment? I think the trains of thought in two dimensions can be adopted.

First, the discussion can be focused on the period without controversy which refers to the period from the Republic of China established in 1912 to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the typical period of literature of the Republican era. As for Taiwan, after the Restoration in 1945, especially after the Kuomintang government moved to Taiwan, the transplant and construction of the culture and literature of the Republic of China of course was also completed. However, the situation has greatly changed, compared with the typical period of literature in the Republican era since the lifting of martial law in Taiwan, localization tendency has been increasingly strengthened, the inherent culture of the Republic of China experienced variation, conversion, and cover-up, so we should first sort out the typical culture of the Republic of China, then we might discover the existing Republic of China. At present, academic circles on both sides have reached a consensus on the idea of the studies about literature of the Republic of China during the typical period.

Then highlighting the unique research method of literature of the Republic of China can follow the conversation with other academic trends of literature in the Chinese language. Research of the so-called “literature of the Republic of China” is a general term referring to all possible attempts to make an innovative explanation of modern literature phenomena by use of this concept, and it includes at least two directions. One is to systemize and interpret the new problems appearing in the development of the period of the Republic of China. The other is to find out the modern pursuit of Chinese intellectuals, to keep the originality and independence of Chinese academic research, not to totally follow western logic based on the common sense of taking the Republic of China as one of the modern forms, and thus make a unique form of the Chinese modern spirit. Behind these efforts, the profound academic goal for spiritual subjectivity, which is the special value of the Republic of China as a method, has been set up. For the emphasis on this kind of cultural subjectivity, we can see into the academic mainstream of Taiwan literature and can also see this in Chinese language literature advocated by Shu-mei Shih (史书美), David Wang (王德威) and others, so the dialogue is worth exploring.

Taiwan literature once consciously maintained segregation from Chinese literature for its own independent space, but the writers in Taiwan have to face the fact that they are actually staying in the period of “the Republic of China.” “The Republic of China” and “Taiwan” are really entangled with continuation, penetration, transformation, and mutation in the evolution of their history. Now more and more scholars in Taiwan seem to have accepted the idea that without the history and reality of literature in the Republican era, the context and background of Taiwan literature cannot be fully illustrated. Taiwan literature researchers such as Fangming Chen (陈
芳明] and Mei’e Huang (黄美娥) have participated in seminars on the literature of the Republic of China several times held by both sides and presented important theses on the relationship between literature of the Republic of China and Taiwan literature.

Chinese language literature (sinophone literature) is the most representative of Chinese literary studies. Despite the differences about some concrete ideas among its advocators, such as Shu-mei Shih, David Wang, and Jing Tsu (石静远), their common pursuit is to make a break from Sino-centrism and to set up cultural independence and subjectivity in the Chinese world standing side by side with the other diversified language systems like Anglophone, Francophone and Spanish language (Jing 331–333). They think that,

many kinds of organizations, conferences in the mainland China for discussion of overseas Chinese literature all cling to a bottom line that a large, unified Chinese heritage exists and becomes a symbol of the universal authority among the Chinese literature all over the world. Many overseas scholars feel this idea out of date, old-fashioned and merely the extension of traditional imperialism, then put forward the term of the Chinese language literature against the idea. (Li 202)

So the basic pursuit of Chinese language literature (sinophone literature) is to talk about global literature by getting rid of western-centric doctrine and power discourse. Chinese language literature all over the world, which is living and developing in the state of liquidity, localization, mutation, and reconstruction, should no longer be regarded as the discrete groups from some nature of one single Chinese literature. Fortunately, the concept of “literature of the Republic of China” supports the idea of a cultural subjectivity and the academic constructing subjectivity, and apparently these two concepts have found their common intention, which makes the dialogue possible.

However, in the constant expression of slipping the leashes of the western theoretical model, some sinophone literary scholars at the same time have spearheaded a directive against Chinese-ness and Chinese culture. Shu-mei Shih even resisted the idea that sinophone literature should be part of Chinese literature. A problem arises requiring serious discussion: do obstacles for the construction of spiritual subjectivity in the modern Chinese literary world stem mainly from “China,” or from the more powerful Europe and the United States? Or, in the pattern of “modernity” commonly dominated by European and American culture, it is the lack of possibilities for all forms of various experiences of modern Chinese culture to inspire, learn from, and support each other. If by considering the narrative mode of modernity mainly dominated by Europe and the United States, the overall Chinese literature areas are still under cultural pressures. Although the respective structures of unique experiences in the overseas Chinese world are important, it is also indispensable to seek our common experience and to reconstruct the identity and subjective value of Chinese language literature. Studies on the experience of literature in the Republican era are in fact the foundation of the modern identity in the Chinese literary world and the basis of Chinese literary subjectivity. The Republic of China needs to be refined on the basis of such common culture experience.
There are common traditions of Chinese culture and the national memories that are participating in the process of global modernization under different conditions. The background of literary development has also experienced the historical process from the agricultural civilization, industrial civilization, postindustrial civilization and also encountered the transformation from authoritarianism to modern democracy.

In terms of literature itself, although because of the intervention of political ideology, the different ways of understanding or acceptance of Chinese new literature tradition, stepping into the era of modern vernacular literature, the literature in the mainland China taking the left-wing literature as orthodox and the literature in Taiwan and other regions preferring to Shi Hu’s (胡适) liberalism, all share some sort of common identity as the literary experience in the broad sense with the foundation of Chinese classical literary accomplishment and accumulation.

To seek subjectivity is not to split the ethnic group from the other groups, but to reach a deeper understanding of self, to find out the value of self, and to finally better communicate and coexist with the Other. It is understandable for overseas Chinese literature researchers to be wary of China-centered inclination in mainland China, but they should not take the mainland Chinese culture as a rival, or “the Other,” and should at least take it as “the Other” offering self-challenge and self-motivation to overseas Chinese literature. In fact, the stress from the mainland Chinese literature cannot replace the stress from the dominant culture of Europe and the United States. In other words, mainland Chinese literature is not the only stress or threat to the literature in Taiwan and other regions. The growth and development of the regional literature in the Chinese language also constantly bears continuous extrusion and challenges from other cultural powers. If we can face the fact, then, we will find that the common experience is still effectively shared in the Chinese literary world, which is still important, and still deserves further investigation. In the Republic of China, modern cultural forms were established jointly by all the Chinese and became the cherished heritage with spiritual value. As David Wang realizes,

In my opinion, to put the mainland Chinese culture on the opposite side of overseas Chinese culture is the self-limited practice […] if only emphasizing the voice abroad is simply standing on the opposite, the same as all kinds of practice made by the mainland, the overseas Chinese literature (Li 202).

For separatists, I think the concept of Chinese language literature is also applicable […] if you don’t know what China is like, you have what kind of energy and confidence to declare your own literature of an independent state, no matter holding either political or literary point? (203)

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