



# The Contemporary Construction of the Chinese Form of Marxist Literary Criticism

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YAMIN HU

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# Introduction

In contemporary China, the proposal of constructing the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism, as a form distinctly differed from Russian Soviet and Western Marxist literary criticism after classical Marxist literary criticism, is a pioneering attempt in the study of Marxist literary criticism in China. Does the Chinese form really exist? How does one construct the Chinese form? What are the theoretical qualities of the Chinese form or what are its contributions to the global literary studies? These questions are of great theoretical value and practical significance, and thus, demand answers from Chinese Marxist literary criticism in its research.

## 1 RATIONALE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHINESE FORM

In global academic criticism, the usage of “form” or “paradigm” to interpret Marxist literary criticism has become one of the most important lenses to study Marxism. Terry Eagleton has classified various forms of Marxist literary criticism: “Very schematically, it is possible to distinguish four broad kinds of Marxist criticism, each of which corresponds to a certain ‘region’ within Marxist theory, and also (very roughly speaking) to a particular historical period. These are the anthropological, political, ideological and economic-modes which in their various intricate permutations go to make up the corpus of criticism recorded in this book” (Eagleton 1996, p. 7).

Specifically, the first is anthropological Marxism, represented by Georgy Plekhanov (Георгий Валентинович Плеханов); the second is political Marxism, represented by György Lukács; the third is ideological Marxism, represented by Louis Althusser; the fourth is economic and cultural Marxism, represented by Raymond Williams and, broadly, British Cultural Studies. Francis Mulhern also emphasizes the “paradigm” aspect of Marxist literary criticism, but, unlike Eagleton’s horizontal and blocky delineation of the form of Marxist literary criticism, he distinguishes three stages of the development of Marxist literary criticism vertically. Mulhern argues, with such cautions kept in view, it is possible to mark a classical or scientific-socialist phase, initiated by Marx and Engels, continuing strongly throughout the later nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth; a self-styled critical phase originating in the 1920s, maturing and diversifying over the next three decades and establishing a “norm of heterodoxy” by the 1960s; and then a phase at first pledged to a critical classicism announced in the early 1960s and vigorously propagated in the succeeding decade, but then rapidly and variously redefined under such spacious headings as “materialism” and “anti-humanism,” in a process that continues today (Mulhern 2013, pp. 2–3).

While Mulhern’s anthology describes the latter two phases focusing on Britain and America, what we intend to construct now belongs to another “paradigm” or “phase” of Marxist literary criticism, namely the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism that differs from the above-mentioned forms.

### 1.1 *Existence of the Chinese Form?*

There are two outlooks in the academic community regarding the existence of the Chinese form right now. One view is that Marxist literary criticism has long existed in Chinese literary studies, which is a fait accompli. The other view expresses doubts about the existence of the Chinese form, arguing that classical Marxist literary criticism is nothing more than “broken chapters and stray paragraphs,” so how can Chinese Marxist literary criticism be regarded a “form” (Lu 1991)?<sup>1</sup> Before discussing and constructing the Chinese form, we need to debate these views.

<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, Chinese scholars debated whether Marxist literary criticism was systematic (Lu 1991).

In response to the first view, we may ask: if Chinese Marxist literary criticism has a self-evident existence, what are its valuable results? What are the substantive differences between Chinese Marxist literary criticism and general literary criticism? Apparently, it is difficult to give a lucid answer. In China, the study of Marxist literary criticism has lagged behind Marxist research in other disciplines such as philosophy, politics, and economics, has not yet developed clear problematic awareness, and lacks both an overall outline of Chinese Marxist literary criticism and an in-depth study and clear proposal of its theoretical qualities; in some cases, it even equates classical Marxist literary criticism with Chinese Marxist literary criticism. This uncertainty directly affects the development of Marxist literary criticism in China and limits the global reach of Chinese Marxist literary criticism. Thus, proposing the construction of the Chinese form can clarify its overall characteristics as well as highlight the contemporary value of Chinese Marxist literary criticism.

For the second view, a more specific discernment is needed. Scholars at home and abroad have discussed whether there is a comprehensible system of classical Marxist literary criticism. Lukács, one of the founders of Western Marxism, in his “Introduction to the Writings on Aesthetics of Marx and Engels” published in 1945, begins by discussing the “peculiar literary form” of Marx and Engels’ literary essays, pointing out that although Marx and Engels never had a monograph on aesthetics or literary art, this in no way means that they did not have an “an organic and systematic view” (Lukács 1971, p. 61) on literary art or aesthetics. René Wellek, who holds a New Criticism position, also argues that, “The body of pronouncements on literature by Marx and Engels is scattered, casual, and far from conclusive. It does not amount to a theory of literature or even to a theory of the relations between literature and society. But the pronouncements are not thereby incoherent. They are held together by their general philosophy of history and show a comprehensible evolution...” (Wellek 1965, pp. 238–239). Wellek is emphasizing the historical materialism that Marx created and upheld in his study of literary issues. Chinese scholars have come to similar conclusions, as represented by Li Zhongyi’s monograph, *The Marxist-Engels System of Literary Theory*. Starting from Marx’s different ways of mastering the world by human beings, he reveals the characteristics, laws, and systems of literary and artistic thought of classical Marxist writers (Li 1994).

### 1.2 *Chinese Form of Marxist Literary Criticism Versus Sinification of Marxist Literary Criticism*

The Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism and Sinification are categories that are related but distinct. The Sinification of Marxist literary criticism (hereinafter “Sinification”) is the foundation and historical context for the formation of the Chinese form, and it is in the pursuit of Sinification that the Chinese form is proposed and constructed. However, as a theoretical framework, the Chinese form differs distinctly from Sinification on many fronts.

The Chinese form differs from Sinification in the nature of the subject. Sinification appears as a receptive, passive subject, while the subject of the Chinese form embodies a more active nature. The former, as the accepting party, focuses on the absorption, digestion, and practice of classical Marxism; its relationship with classical Marxism is one of influencing and being influenced, and in the process of acceptance, it applies Marxist theory to Chinese social reality and literary practices. Surely, variations and transformations are bound to exist, but the basic standpoint is acceptance and application. On the contrary, the latter, as the constructive party, inherits the principles of Marxism, creatively interprets the history and reality of Chinese social and literary activities, and posits theoretical views and propositions rich in their own unique characteristics. The latter’s relationship with classical Marxism is one of creative variation and development, and its subject adopts a constructive posture.

In terms of the type of research, Sinification is developed in the historical process. The research on Sinification emphasizes sorting, analyzing, and summarizing its development process, and the research trajectory is mainly linear, showing the results of different periods in stages. However, the study of Chinese form is a type of theoretical construction presented as a holistic framework, with its specific theoretical foundation, problematic awareness, and theoretical categories. It is primarily done at the logical level, with constructive characteristics, embodied in theoretical exploration and theoretical creation, and this theoretical form is not constant and fixed, but always in the dynamic adjustment of various relationships.

## 2 THE PATH OF CONSTRUCTING THE CHINESE FORM

Although scholars at home and abroad have seen the intrinsic connection of classical Marxist literary criticism and made positive conclusions, it is one thing to point out that classical Marxist literary criticism has a relatively complete thought system, and it is another thing to theorize the “form” or “paradigm” of Marxist literary criticism. This task is especially challenging now that the object of research is not only classical Marxist literary criticism, but also the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism which has evolved over a hundred years and has undergone various tests in China.

To construct the Chinese form that is both Chinese and universal, it is essential to update the research concepts, call for deductive constructions, and broaden research horizons, that is, to compare the similarities and differences of various forms of Marxist literary criticism in the context of globalization. As such, the choice of research paths and methods becomes the starting point for the study of the Chinese form.

### *2.1 Questioning Historical Descriptions and Generalizations*

It is necessary to reconsider the existing research concepts and methods when exploring the Chinese form. Looking back at the study of Marxist literary criticism in China, scholars primarily adopt the research model of literary sociology, through historical description and induction, to sort, analyze, and refine the development process of specific objects. This method has historical clarity and possesses abundant materials, but it is limited to the level of empirical study, a kind of ongoing summary, drifting with the tide and not knowing where to go. While reviewing the materials, we feel strongly that it is difficult to get the whole picture of Chinese Marxist literary criticism by describing its development process only in terms of temporal dimension or diachronic studies; therefore, it is imperative to update the method of studying Marxist literary criticism, that is, to go beyond empirical description, to place the Chinese form in the context of contemporary Marxist knowledge, and to make an overall and holistic systematic examination at the theoretical level with the core categories as the cornerstone. In this way, it will be possible to grasp the nature and characteristics of the Chinese form and to develop an overall differentiation that distinguishes it from other forms. The theoretical construction of the Chinese form can supplement and strengthen the refinement of a

series of universal theoretical concepts, which will make it possible and feasible for the Chinese form to dialogue with the world. The value of theoretical research also lies in its ability to not only review the past, but also guide the present, and even plan for the future.

Admittedly, the theoretical abstraction of the research method does not indicate that Chinese literary criticism has never been constructed. As early as 1958, Zhou Yang (周扬) proposed “constructing China’s own Marxist literary theory and criticism system” and expressed his desire to systematize Chinese Marxist literary theory, but this proposition was overshadowed by the long-standing authority of Soviet Marxist literary theory in Chinese theoretical circles. After the 1980s, Chinese scholars began to propose a variety of theoretical ideas about the systematization of Chinese Marxist literary criticism from different logical starting points and perspectives (e.g., literature theory of reflection, literature theory of practice, literature theory of art production, “Literature, It is the Study of Man,” etc.).<sup>2</sup> These theoretical frameworks conceived by Chinese scholars have provided valuable references for the construction of the Chinese form.

## 2.2 *The Chinese Form and the Study of Differences*

Chinese form cannot be produced in an enclosed space. It needs to be constructed through comparison and distinction with other forms of Marxist literary criticism around the world. The study of differences therefore becomes the ideal choice for the Chinese form. Without doubt, the basic principles and knowledge systems of Marxism have imposed a fundamental constraint on every form of Marxist literary criticism, both in China and abroad. Such commensurability constitutes the common basis for the study of differences. The reason why people call some different forms of literary criticism “Marxist literary criticism” is that they all inherit the tradition of Marxist literary criticism to varying degrees. They all wield the basic principles and knowledge system of Marxism as the theoretical basis for discussing literary issues, and use the theoretical views and methods of Marxism to interpret literary activities. At the same time, due to different socio-historical conditions, people are bound to have differing choices and areas of emphases when understanding and applying Marxism

<sup>2</sup> See Lu Guishan (陆贵山) (2000), Dong Xuewen (董学文) (1989), Lu Meilin (陆梅林) (1994), Tong Qingbing (童庆炳) (2004) and Lai Daren (赖大仁) (1999).

to meet the realistic requirements of social practice and literary activities, thus developing a variety of forms of Marxist literary criticism with respective and distinctive characteristics.

*The Chinese Form and Classical Marxist Literary Criticism*

As mentioned earlier regarding the relationship between the Chinese form and classical Marxist literary criticism, they are related but at the same time distinct. On the one hand, the Chinese form inherits the basic principles and research methods of Marxism; in particular, the classical Marxist idea of human liberation makes up the very core and soul of the Chinese form; on the other hand, the Chinese form is no longer the Marxism of the nineteenth century, the current atmosphere and the problems China faces today differ greatly from those of Marx's time, and the way in which literary activities are produced has also substantially changed.

The Chinese form emerged in China's specific historical context, carrying the weight of Chinese people's life experiences and dealing with China's realistic problems, while today's social and literary activities are far from being encompassed by theories such as realist literature and "typicality" of characters. The Chinese form needs to take into account the current status of Chinese literature and culture, rethink the issues that seem to have been settled and the ones that are actually not yet addressed, or even touched by classical Marxism, and foster new developments. For example, regarding the relationship between the superstructure and the economic base, Marx argued, "The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure" (Marx 1987, p. 263). Today, however, the superstructure, including ideology, may probably be way ahead of social change. In addition, the seemingly distinct division between economic base and superstructure is no longer clear-cut today, and science and technology can have a simultaneous dual function, that is, as both productivity and ideology. Another example is that in today's market economy, literature, especially the literary activities integrated into the culture industry, is backed by or relies on capital, and therefore, the Chinese form should face up to the relationship between literature and capital when re-interpreting and redefining the nature of literature. Today's literary activities as a process of production have both aesthetic and commodity properties, while the control and profit-seeking nature of capital often contradicts and conflicts with the criticalness and transcendence of art. This requires maintaining vigilance against the hegemony of capital and pursuing



the contradictory unity of aesthetic value, social benefit, and economic benefit, while fully considering market factors and understanding market mechanisms. The difference in time and space has changed the specific problems the Chinese form faces as well as the relationship between such problems, and thus has brought about a difference in its overall structure. Therefore, the Chinese form cannot develop without the overall specificity that distinguishes it from classical Marxist literary criticism.

*The Chinese Form and Western Marxist Literary Criticism*

The Chinese form and Western Marxist literary criticism are quite different. In an era of globalization, both China and the West confront similar problems, and the problems studied by Western Marxist literary criticism can be enlightening in the context of China. However, there are also striking differences between Chinese and Western Marxist literary criticism due to the contrast in social systems, historical conditions, cultural conditions, and other factors.

Western Marxism emerged and developed in Western capitalist societies, whose inheritance and revision of Marxism constitute a “break” from classical Marxism.<sup>3</sup> Western Marxism shifted the focus of its research from class and revolution to culture and technology, with cultural criticism as its core concept. Western Marxist literary critics have conducted in-depth examination and analysis of Western social ideologies and cultural phenomena, and their theoretical views are often profound and unique, cautioning people against and to be vigilant of contemporary Western capitalist society. Besides, the critique of Western Marxism is full of redemption, and some Western Marxists have a strong utopian complex, which are important differences between them and postmodernist theorists. In Western Marxism, literary criticism becomes a thought weapon to shatter “the permanent validity of things as they are” (Engels 1995, p. 357).

Although Chinese Marxism is in the same era as Western Marxism, China’s specific historical traditions and social patterns are far beyond the ability of Western Marxist literary critics to appreciate and grasp. The Chinese form has to focus on and address new problems happening in the ground of China. To study the cultural development of contemporary Chinese society through the lens of Western Marxist criticism

<sup>3</sup> The “break” here is not a complete break, but a change in the focus of research. It is because of the “break” that different forms can emerge.

would be like trimming the feet to fit the shoes, and it is inevitable that some cultural or literary activities with unique local characteristics may be excluded because they do not conform to Western theoretical guidelines. In this sense, the Chinese form is more subjective and inclusive compared to Western Marxist literary criticism. In China, Marxism, as the dominant discourse of mainstream ideology, plays a leading role in social, political, and cultural activities. Chinese Marxism is always open to different discourse systems and knowledge, enriching and improving itself through dialogue and exchange with heterogeneous theoretical discourses. Moreover, Chinese Marxism takes a constructive attitude toward social problems, often approaching the problems with a positive outlook. However, it is necessary to be alert to the fact that the mainstream ideological status of Marxism may in some cases also make Chinese Marxist literary criticism lose its proper insight and sensitivity to social phenomena as well as its pungent critical strength, failing to create necessary and positive tension between Marxist literary criticism and some social and literary phenomena.

### 3 THE “PROBLÉMATIQUE” AND OVERALL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHINESE FORM

In the history of Chinese Marxist criticism, the theoretical formulation of Marxist literary criticism varies greatly in academic circles. Not only does it encompass different understandings at different stages, but also different understandings and interpretations of the same concept and category. Therefore, it is not easy to refine and construct the theoretical qualities of the Chinese form on the basis of these theoretical formulations. Furthermore, it is vital to find the appropriate entry and structure of the study to establish the internal connections of the Chinese form as a whole and to grasp the research objects and problems.

### 3.1 “Problématique”

To strengthen the inner connection of the Chinese form, we borrowed the concept of “problématique”<sup>4</sup> and gave it a unique interpretation to explore the organic unity of the structure of the Chinese form.

The term “problématique”<sup>5</sup> is used to express “the particular unity of a theoretical formation and hence the location to be assigned to this specific difference...” (Althusser, 1969, p. 32). Borrowing this term, the Chinese form highlights three methodological properties. First, a problématique has an overall specificity, and it is a systematic way of asking the world questions. In a problématique, several questions constitute inter-related problem clusters, and each problem is considered in the context of the problématique as a whole. Moreover, a problématique has a standardizing and constraining effect on a particular theoretical form, that is, “everything depends on a question which must have priority over them: the question of the nature of the problematic which is the starting-point for actually thinking them, in a given text” (Althusser 1969, p. 68). This holistic differentiation is what is sought by the organic nature inherent in the construction of the Chinese form. Second, a problématique is a form in motion, and it emphasizes the complex connection between the problem and the historical process, and does not exclude the study of the specific environment and generation mechanism within which the problématique arises. In other words, a problématique is not limited to unfolding at an abstract level, but is also profoundly grounded in the

<sup>4</sup> In China, the translation of the Althusserian term “problématique” is not uniform. Gu Liang (顾良) translated it as “general problem” in the Chinese version of *For Marx* (Commercial Press, 2010), while other translations include “theoretical framework” (Xu Chongwen 徐崇温), “problematic framework” (Yu Wujin 俞吾金), “problem setting” (Du Zhangzhi 杜章智), “problem structure” ([Japanese] Imamura Hitoshi), “problem style” (Zhang Yibing 张一兵), and “difficulty” (Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵). In my opinion, the translation of “general problem” is likely to cause misunderstanding and make people think of a collection of various problems; the translation of “theoretical framework” highlights the theory but lacks the key word “problem”; and the translation of “problematic framework” or “problem structure” tends to draw people’s attention to the form and ignore the connotation. Therefore, it is suggested that problématique be translated as “problem domain” for two reasons: first, it highlights the “problem” rather than the others; second, it emphasizes the specific environment and generation mechanism of the problem.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of “problématique” is taken from Althusser’s *For Marx*, which he borrowed from his late friend Jacques Martin for his analytical study of Marx’s thought (Althusser 1969, p. 32).

historical context, and the problématique is generated as a result of the combined force of external and internal factors of literature. This thus distinguishes the problématique in Chinese form from formalism and structuralism that emphasize only internal and synchronic studies. Third, in a problématique, the distinguishing features that make up different theoretical forms are original, and such original research is what makes the construction of the Chinese form valuable. Therefore, the introduction of “problématique” establishes a correlation between the various questions within the Chinese form, and by virtue of this concept, not only can a sense of integrity be obtained in way of thinking and research, but also a clear understanding of the theoretical qualities and structural features of the research object. Furthermore, the introduction of “problématique” affords a discursive tool for distinguishing among various forms of Marxist literary criticism, which is conducive for understanding the overall characteristics of these forms more clearly.

### 3.2 *The Overall Characteristics of the Chinese Form*

In the following research, many theoretical propositions with Chinese characteristics will be presented, such as the “people,” “nation,” “politics,” and “praxis,” as well as “technology,” “capital,” and “value judgment” that are closely relevant to today’s reality. These basic categories and realities echo and constrain each other. The “people” constitute the starting point and the destination of the Chinese form; “nation,” “politics,” and “praxis” are all related to the “people”; “nation” and the “people” are in the same structure; the greatest “politics” is to satisfy the material and spiritual cultural needs of the “people”; and the “value judgment” of writers, texts, and their creation tendencies is also based on safeguarding the fundamental interests of the people. All these above issues are interrelated and refer to each other. There is an intricate and intertwined relationship between “nation” and “politics,” “politics” and “praxis,” “praxis” and “technology,” as well as “technology” and “capital.” These concepts and issues coexist within the Chinese form in the form of question clusters, constitute the problématique of the Chinese form with the aim of achieving the happiness of the “people” and the revitalization of the “nation,” and present the overall theoretical qualities of the Chinese form.

The overall characteristics of the Chinese form should also include its practical character and dialectical spirit. The practice here is not focused

on the philosophical level, but emphasizes its execution. The Chinese form is not ivory tower scholarly activity, nor is it merely academic discourse; it emerges from the tide of social change in China and is tested by the concrete social practice. The practicality of the Chinese form is manifested in its guiding and leading functions in literary and aesthetic activities, and even spiritual production as a whole. Also, the Chinese form introduces integrity and dichotomy into literary criticism. It not only inherits the Chinese traditional spirit of harmony, incorporating relevant perspectives, methods, and concepts of literary activities into its problématique, but also views the unity of opposites in a dialectical and rational way of thought, notably emphasizing the mutual transformation of opposites, thus forming a holistic vision and an open, critical vantage point to look at literature.

The construction of the Chinese form is characterized by its unfinished character. Needless to say, in the course of historical and present development, the Chinese form has encountered obstacles and errors, and the ability to correct them demonstrates the wisdom and courage of the Chinese form. Additionally, the unfinished character is also reflected in the exploration of the future of Chinese literary criticism. The Chinese form is established on the land of China and oriented to the future, and it will unceasingly adjust itself and produce new theories and categories as society develops and the times change.

Last but not least, it should be emphasized that the Chinese form should be a unified form of universality and particularity, and that its theoretical achievements should manifest both its own national characteristics and global universality, because particularity without universality is simply meaningless. In the global literary world, instead of being restrictive or exclusive, the Chinese form will be compatible and interweaved with other forms of Marxist literary criticism. Marxist literary criticism in the world today is a mixed bunch. Chinese scholars shoulder a greater responsibility to show the world the actual achievements of the Chinese form, to participate in the world literary dialogue through the construction of the Chinese form, and to convey the answers of Oriental scholars to those major theoretical questions put forward by Marxist literary criticism. To pursue a higher goal, the Chinese form should provide a more reasonable model of criticism, and to this end, we will make unremitting efforts.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# People: The Starting Point and the Destination of Literary Criticism

In the theoretical construction of the Chinese form, the theoretical conception of the “people” deservedly constitutes the primary and focal point. Admittedly, throughout the history of Marxist literary criticism, the people is not unique to the Chinese form; however, it is in the Chinese literary criticism that it becomes one of the most frequently used terms. In the system of Chinese Marxist literary criticism, the concept of the people is simultaneously the starting point and the destination of the Chinese form. It is the pivotal concept that best presents the theoretical qualities of the Chinese form, and thus can be regarded as the contribution of the Chinese form to global literary criticism.

What is “the people”? It is a concept that seems to be clear on the surface but gets complicated when inquired into more deeply. This vital concept has not been systematically probed in Marxist theoretical studies, perhaps because the classical Marxist writers prioritized the issues of class and ideology. However, for constructing the Chinese form, we should clarify the concept of the people, in order to understand and grasp its rich and concrete connotation in the development of Marxism.

### I CLASSICAL MARXIST VIEW ON PEOPLE

Even though Marx and Engels did not extensively discuss the concept of the people in their revolutionary career, it does not mean that Marx and Engels did not deal with this issue. In fact, they mentioned this concept



many times in their works. In 1843, in his “Introduction to ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’,” young Karl Marx wrote: “The people must be taught to be terrified at itself in order to give it courage. This will be fulfilling an imperative need of the German nation, and needs of the nations are in themselves the ultimate reason for their satisfaction” (Marx 1975b, p. 178). The concept of the people is mentioned three times in this passage, and the awakening of the people is presented as the decisive force for the realization of their realistic needs. Subsequently, Marx and Engels defined and explained the connotation of the people with various dimensions in the same period.

### 1.1 *Marx and Engels on the People*

In the Western tradition, the concept of the people was used in the writings of Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece, as well as those of Cicero in ancient Rome. Cicero put forward a famous slogan—“To them the safety of the people shall be the highest law” (Cicero 1998, p. 284). However, by the people they meant mainly slave owners and free people, not including slaves. The modern concept of the people emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was used by Milton in England, Rousseau in France, German Romantic theorists, and Russian anarchists. Milton refuted Claudius Salmasius’ “Defense of the King” with his book *A Defense of the People of England*:

Or if God gives people into slavery whenever a tyrant is more powerful than his people, why may he not likewise be said to set them free whenever a people are more powerful than their tyrant? Shall the tyrant claim his tyranny as something received from God and we not claim our liberty likewise from him? (Milton 1991, p. 117)

Here, he affirmed the right of the English people to fight for their liberty. And Rousseau and others had a dual view of the people, claiming that, on one hand, all power comes from and belongs to the people, and on the other hand, seeing the problems of blindness, ignorance, or weakness of will in the common people.

#### *Marx and Engels’ Connotation of the People*

The meaning of the concept of the people has evolved after the eighteenth century, and some European statesmen began to notice the role and force

of the people in historical development. Marx and Engels endowed the concept of the people with fresh nuance, and they defined and explained the connotation of the people at different levels and scopes. In 1847, Engels clearly pointed out the composition of the people in his article “The Communists and Karl Heinzen”: “...the people, in other words to the proletarians, small peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie” (Engels 1976, p. 295). This suggests that Engels had already seen that the people were constituted by multiple classes. In 1871, Marx had high praise for the magnificent feat of the people of Paris in “The Civil War in France”: “The self-sacrificing heroism with which the population of Paris—men, women, and children—fought for eight days after the entrance of the Versailles, reflects as much the grandeur of their cause...” (Marx 1986a, p. 348). The people here means the revolutionary masses opposed against the old rulers, who not only belong to the majority of society, but are the main body of the revolution, and they are engaged in the great cause of overthrowing the old world and creating a new one. Marx refers to the concept of the people several times in this article:

That the revolution is made in the name and confessedly for the popular masses, that is the producing masses, is a feature this Revolution has in common with all its predecessors. The new feature is that the people, after the first rise, have not disarmed themselves and surrendered their power into the hands of the Republican mountebanks of the ruling classes, that, by the constitution of the Commune, they have taken the actual management of their Revolution into their own hands and found at the same time, in the case of success, the means to hold it in the hands of the People itself, displacing the State machinery, the governmental machinery of the ruling classes by a governmental machinery of their own. (Marx 1986b, p. 498)

In “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” published in 1884, Engels reviewed the organization of the “The popular assembly” of the ancient Greek clans and tribes. He wrote: “...that the people, men and women, stood in a circle around the council meetings, taking an orderly part in the discussions and thus influencing its decisions” (Engels 1990, p. 209). The notion of people here refers to society as a whole and the rights they possess. The Chinese Marxists’ interpretation of the concept of the people is quite close to Engels’ interpretation of the people as aggregation of classes in “The Communists and Karl Heinzen.” In this article, Engels also made a distinction among and analysis of the status of

various classes of people in light of the history of revolutions in various countries, and the peasantry were “First and foremost to the small peasants, to that class which in our day and age is least of all capable of seizing a revolutionary initiative ...The industrial proletariat of the towns has become the vanguard of all modern democracy; the urban petty bourgeoisie and still more the peasants depend on its initiative completely” (Engels 1976, p. 295). It was the proletariat that Engels affirmed, while the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie were merely fellow travelers in the revolution. Overall, Marx and Engels expounded on three dimensions of the people: the first was aggregations of classes, the second was the mass of laborers distinct from the ruling class, and the third was all people in society. Moreover, Marx and Engels occasionally equated the masses with the proletariat, as in *The German Ideology*, “For the mass of men, i.e., the proletariat...”(Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 56).

As the class camps became clearer, the concept of the people was gradually replaced by the mainstay of the revolution, the proletariat. According to Marx, “The people, or, to replace this broad and vague expression by a definite one, the proletariat...the status of a recognized party” (Marx 1976, p. 222). The reason why Marx replaced the “broad and vague expression” (Marx 1976, p. 222) of the people with the proletariat was due to a special historical background. Marx was living in a time when the class camps were quite distinct: “Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 485). Reinforcing the power of the proletariat, Marx says, “Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class” (Marx 1989, p. 88). Therefore, to use the concept of “the people” would obliterate class boundaries and undercut the leadership of the working class (Marx 1989, p. 89).

Fredric Jameson once uncovered the reason why Marx and Engels placed more emphasis on the status of the proletariat. Jameson stated that in Marx’s era “It was a world in which social conflict was sharpened and more clearly visible, a world which projected a tangible model of the antagonism of the various classes toward each other, both within the individual nation-states and on the international scene as well” (Jameson 1974, p. xvii). Also relevant was the performance of the peasants in their struggle for power in that era. In “The Peasant War in Germany” Engels

analyzed in depth the reasons for the failure of the German peasant revolt and the economic situation of the different classes among the peasants. He concluded,

...that the agricultural population, in consequence of its dispersion over a great space, and of the difficulty of bringing about an agreement among any considerable portion of it, never can attempt a successful independent movement; they require the initiatory impulse of the more concentrated, more enlightened, more easily moved people of the towns. (Engels 1979, p. 12)

Another reason for Marx to replace the concept of people was that it was often used in the rhetoric of politicians. He propounded, “the German king in regard to the world which has come into being when he calls the people his people as he calls the horse his horse. By declaring the people his private property the king simply states that the property owner is king” (Marx 1975b, p. 187). Marx pointedly exposed the practice of the ruling class of treating the people as their private property. The people here are reduced to the ruler’s subjects, merely the property or instruments of the ruler, just like the king’s horses.

Marx and Engels emphasized that the proletariat comprise the mainstay of the revolution, but they also pointed out that the proletariat represents the interests of the vast majority of the people. In “The Communist Manifesto,” Marx and Engels declared: “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 495). Here, Marx and Engels highlighted the relationship between the proletariat and the overwhelming majority of the people, and made working for the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people the creed of the proletarian struggle. However, since the proletariat did not take power at that time, it was impossible for Marx and Engels to think in depth and practice about the relationship between the ruling party and the people.

Admittedly, the classical writers of Marxism have said less about the people than the class theory, but the historical materialism upheld by classical writers lays a theoretical foundation for the Chinese form of the concept of the people. Marx and Engels revealed that history is created by the people, since “together with the thoroughness of the historical action,

the size of the mass whose action it is will therefore increase” (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 82). In addition, their distinctive people’s scale in the evaluation of historical events and literary works has also profoundly affected later literary criticism.

*The Scale of the People in Marx and Engels’ Literary Criticism*

Marx and Engels’ revolutionary activities began with a concern for the vital interests of the people. In 1842, the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, in the interest of the forest owners, legislated the act of picking up dry wood by the poor as the act of theft of wood. In response to this incident, Marx defended the poor people in the *Rheinische Zeitung* (*Rhenish Newspaper*) in the name of “a Rhinelander” (Marx 1975c, p. 263). He first distinguished between the act of picking up dead branches and the act of stealing forest trees, and then, he stated that the law should safeguard the general interests of the people, while the state of Prussia and its Council used it as a tool for the ruling class to rule, plunder the people, and protect their own private interests. Marx revealed the essence of the problem is that the law protects the special interests of the forest owners, that is, the feudal aristocracy, the privileged class. Marx wrote, “...what is your basic principle? It is that the interests of the forest owner shall be safeguarded even if this results in destroying the world of law and freedom” (Marx 1975c, p. 256). Marx thus stood firmly on the side of the poor people and expressed his support for the rights of the “lowest, propertyless and elemental mass” (Marx 1975c, p. 230).

Therefore, from the position of historical materialism, Marx and Engels argued that literary works should express the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the people in a certain historical era, and further stressed that the people are the concrete, historical people. The young Hegelians were criticized by the classical writers in that they failed to gain insight into the historical nature of the category of the people and regarded the people merely as an unchanging group. “There is just as little difference, in the eyes of Absolute Criticism, between the ‘from the start’ of the sixteenth-century mass and the ‘from the start’ of the nineteenth-century mass as there is between those masses themselves” (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 80). On the contrary, literary creation should recognize and truly represent the life and spiritual identity of the people in a given, concrete historical situation.

When examining the literary phenomena of their time, classical Marxist writers especially underlined the importance of participation of the people

in literary activities. In his letter to Lassalle, Marx suggested that he should focus on the literary representation of ordinary peasants and urban revolutionaries:

The aristocratic representatives of revolution—behind whose catch-words of unity and liberty there still lingers the dream of the imperial past and of club-law—ought not in that case to monopolise the interest as you make them do; rather the representatives of the peasants (of these in particular) and of the revolutionary elements in the towns should provide an altogether significant and dynamic background. (Marx 1983, p. 420)

Engels praised the style of fiction writing in England and France at the time as “(the style of novel writing has undergone) a complete revolution during these last ten years; that instead of kings and princes, who formerly were the heroes of similar tales, it is now the poor, the despised class, whose fates and fortunes, joys and sufferings, are made the topic of romance; ...this new class of novel writers, such as G. Sand, E. Sue, and Boz, is indeed a sign of the times” (Engels 1975a, p. 415). Engels was pleased to see “the poor, the despised class” as the protagonists of literary works, calling it “a complete revolution.”

In literary works, the ordinary people should not only be the protagonists, but also show their strength and resistance. Based on this notion, Marx believed that Eugène Sue’s novel “The Mysteries of Paris,” despite depicting the underclass from a sympathetic standpoint, mistook religious and moral salvation for the recipe of social change, ignoring the fact that the people themselves could act as a revolutionary force. In a letter to Harkness, Engels expressed a similar view:

In the “City Girl” the working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even making any attempt at striving to help itself ... in 1887 to a man who for nearly fifty years has had the honour of sharing in most of the fights of the militant proletariat. The rebellious reaction of the working class against the oppressive medium which surrounds them, their attempts—convulsive, half-conscious or conscious—at recovering their status as human beings, belong to history and must therefore lay claim to a place in the domain of realism. (Engels 2010, p. 167)

The working class in the late nineteenth century was no longer a class in itself, but a class for itself, and literature should not be written as if “All attempts to drag it out of its torpid misery come from without, from

above” (Engels 2010, p. 167), but rather as if it were a conscious demand of the working class.

As for the achievements of writers and the qualities of their works, Marx also deemed that they should be judged by the people: “...the people, which hitherto has been the sole judge as to which writer has ‘authority’ and which is ‘without authority’” (Marx 1975a, p. 177). Only works that have withstood the test of the people and offered them beauty and profound enlightenment are deemed excellent works. Engels provided a model for the use of the people-scale with concrete critical practices. When evaluating “German Volksbuche,” Engels measured the “poetic value” and the “popular value” of folktales to examine “what do the people want with it?”, whether they “deserve to circulate among the people” and whether they should be sent out “among the people.” Engels appreciated “Siegfried the Invulnerable” because it “has the most exuberant poetry written sometimes with the greatest naivety and sometimes with the most beautiful humorous pathos,” and it “has character, a bold, fresh, youthful spirit.” And thus “every young wandering craftsman can take as an example,” and “the people have also shown themselves grateful for it.” Therefore, Engels insisted that these folklore books should be circulated among the people, so they can “restore the legend in its old language, add other genuine folk legends to make a complete book, send this out among the people, and it would keep the poetic sense alive.” Engels also criticized “The legends of Faust” and “Der ewige Jude,” suggesting that “not as products of the free imagination are they conceived, no, as children of a slavish superstition” and “incapable of offering any poetical enjoyment,” instead, in their present shape, “they are bound to strengthen and renew old superstitions.” Engels further emphasized that, “...I believe I have shown, even in these few notes, how inadequate this literature appears, when judged according to the interest of the people and not the interest of poetry” (Engels 1975b, pp. 32–39).

### 1.2 *Lenin on the People*

The notion of the people became a much clearer political concept for Lenin. Subsequently, the people became an important measure for distinguishing between friend and enemy, as well as a major supporting force for the proletarian revolution. Lenin’s discourse on the people directly informed the later Chinese Marxist view of the people.

*Lenin's Connotation of the People*

Lenin often referred to the people in his writings, but more often he used the people as an important concept to distinguish between friend and enemy. This distinction enabled him to scope out the supporters and advocates of the revolution. Lenin shared Marx's basic view that "the proletariat and the peasantry are the chief components of the 'people'" (Lenin 1962a, p. 136), and that "...the Bolsheviks have at all times and invariably spoken about the capture of power by the masses of the people, by the proletariat and the peasantry and not by any 'politically-conscious minority'" (Lenin 1962c, p. 370). In addition to the "proletariat and peasantry," Lenin extended the scope of the people to the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, and soldiers, in a word, all the forces that can drive historical progress in a given period of time. Lenin, however, posited a specific historical interpretation for such people. He argued that whether the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, and soldiers belong to the camp of the people depends on their attitudes toward the old regime. If they support the old regime or compromise with it, they obviously walk toward the opposite side of the people. Here, the idea of the people is no longer a question of identity, but a question of political stand, which is related to individuals' attitude toward the old and new regimes.

As for the attitude toward the people, Lenin enthusiastically eulogized the substantial contribution of Russian people in the Russian Revolution:

And yet all the freedom that still exists in Russia was won only by the "crowd," only by the people, who heroically came out into the street, who made countless sacrifices in the fight, and who with their deeds supported the great watchword: freedom or death. All these actions of the people were the actions of the crowd. The whole new era in Russia was won, and is being maintained, only by popular passion. (Lenin 1962c, p. 398)

It was also on the basis of his attitude toward the people that Lenin exposed the vacillating nature of the bourgeois parties: "Have not the Cadets shown a thousand times already that they, too, are striving both to lean on the people and to check its revolutionary upsurge?" (Lenin 1962c, p. 359). Furthermore, just like Marx, Lenin was particularly wary of the deceitful nature of those bourgeois parties that, in the name of "the people," are in fact contrary to the interests of the people, and he bitterly satirized those who were subservient to the ones at the top. Lenin said:



If we are representatives of the people, we must say what the people are thinking and what they want, and not that which is agreeable to the higher-ups or some sort of “political conditions”. If we are government officials, then I am perhaps prepared to understand that we shall declare in advance that anything is “impracticable” which the powers that be have given us to understand is not to their liking. (Lenin 1962a, pp. 284–285)

Here, Lenin raised a critical question that still exists today: Whether the representatives of the people truly represent the interests of the people? Or are they subservient to the source of power?

Moreover, Lenin saw the problems among the people themselves as well. “ In Europe, there is no ‘honest’ revolutionary defencism like we have in Russia, where the people have handed over the power to the bourgeoisie through ignorance, inertia, tradition, and the habit of suffering the rod” (Lenin 1962d, p. 145). This indicates that not all people are inherently revolutionary, and that even those being exploited and oppressed need publicity and education. Some questions Lenin raised about the notion of the people still carry a warning today.

#### *Lenin on the Relationship Between Literature and the People*

Lenin inherited and carried forward the excellent literary tradition of Russian revolutionary democracy. According to Vissarion Belinsky, “Their literature has always been a true reflection, a mirror of society, has always gone hand in hand with it, oblivious of the mass of the nation, for their society is the supreme manifestation of their nation spirit, their nation life” (Belinsky 1958, p. 13). Nikolay Dobrolyubov further suggested that literature should reflect not just ordinary life, but “the life of the people, the aspirations of the people” (Dobrolyubov 1983, p. 187). Lenin made an even clearer statement on the relationship between literature and the people, in his “Party Organisation and Party Literature” published in 1905, where for the first time he resolutely put forward the slogan that literature should “serve the millions and tens of millions of working people” and that free writing will not serve “some satiated heroine” nor “the bored ‘upper ten thousand’ suffering from fatty degeneration,” but serve “the millions and tens of millions of working people” (Lenin 1962b, pp. 48–49).

In the wake of the victory of the October Revolution, Lenin further elaborated on the premise that “art belongs to the people” based on the new historical conditions:

Art belongs to the people. It must have its deepest roots in the broad mass of workers. It must be rooted in and grow with their feelings, thoughts and desires. It must arouse and develop the artist in them. (Zetkin 1929, p. 14)

Therefore, for the first time in the global history of art that the affiliation of art was clearly stated. Lenin also argued, in light of the situation in Russia at the time, that the first thing needed to be done for literature and art was to popularize it. Lenin said, “Are we to give cake and sugar to a minority when the mass of workers and peasants still lack black bread?...We must keep the workers and peasants always before our eyes” (Zetkin 1929, p. 14).

Lenin’s concept of the people and his theories on the relationship between literature and the people directly impacted Chinese Marxists. Mao Zedong (毛泽东) repeatedly cited Lenin’s statements in his “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” citing in particular Lenin’s statement that literature and art should “serve the millions and tens of millions of working people” (Lenin 1962b, pp. 48–49), and underlining the importance of serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers. When talking about the relationship between literature and the revolutionary cause, Mao also borrowed Lenin’s metaphor that literature and art should become “gears and screws” of the revolutionary machine. Additionally, when talking about the direction of the popularization of literature and art to serve the people, Mao also cited Lenin’s statement that “It must have its deepest roots in the broad mass of workers. It must be rooted in and grow with their feelings, thoughts and desires” (Zetkin 1929, p. 14).

## 2 THE CHINESE FORM’S VIEW ON PEOPLE

In terms of literature and art, the people, as the subjects of literary activities, are both the subjects of literary representation and literary acceptance. The relationship between literature and the people constitutes the cornerstone of the construction of the Chinese form. The Chinese form has presented some distinctive and creative theoretical views on whom to serve and how to serve, and has scientifically answered these questions. These views are of great guiding significance for the development of Chinese literature and art.

## 2.1 *The Connotations of People*

Considering classical Marxism as the basis, the people's view in Chinese form has undergone a process of constant construction, revision, and supplementation and has gradually developed its own characteristics. As Mao Zedong suggested, "The concept of the people varies with different countries and with different historical periods of the various countries" (Mao 1957, p. 311). In different periods of China's revolution and construction, the concept of the people has been endowed with different connotations at different times to meet the needs of China's revolution and construction and the shifts in classes and strata.

### *The People as the Aggregation of Classes*

The Chinese form's definition of the people as the aggregation of classes is a choice made in light of China's actual conditions. China has long been an agrarian society with a self-contained small-scale peasant economy dominating the society, which makes it vastly different from Marx's nineteenth-century Western European society. In modern times, with the rise of national conflicts, class and national conflicts have been intricately intertwined. The lessons of the Chinese revolution have made people gradually realize that in order to win the revolution, it is imperative to expand the allies and win the support and advocacy of the broadest masses of the people. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the Chinese Communists' concept of the people became increasingly sophisticated. In 1945, Mao Zedong gave a report on "On the Coalition Government" at the Seventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, analyzing the proportion of China's population when expounding the basis for the coalition government:

This is because it has been winning the approval of all possible people among, first, millions of industrial workers and tens of millions of handicraft workers and farm laborers, and, second, among the peasantry, who constitute 80 percent of China's population, that is, 360 million out of a population of 450 million, and, third, among the large numbers of the petty bourgeoisie, as well as the liberal bourgeoisie, the enlightened gentry, and other patriots. (Mao 2015, p. 782)

While the urban industrial proletariat was relatively small in number in the twentieth century, the peasants "accounted for eighty percent of China's population, i.e., 360 million out of 450 million." These figures afford the

historical reasons why Mao extended the leading force of the revolution from some classes to the people of all classes, represented by workers, peasants, and soldiers.

In accordance with the specific characteristics of various classes in Chinese society and the needs of the current revolution, Mao corrected the slogan of “Literature for the Common People (Pingmin Wenxue 平民文学)” put forward in the May Fourth Movement: “...in fact the ‘common people’ then could only refer to the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois intellectuals in the cities, that is, the so-called urban intelligentsia” (Mao 2005, p. 361). Literature and art should serve a broad range of working masses, and “It should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up more than 90% of the nation’s population and should gradually become their very own” (Mao 2005, pp. 368–369). In his famous “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art (1942),” Mao specifically discussed the components of the people: “The broadest section of the people, who constitute more than ninety percent of the total population, are workers, peasants, soldiers, and the petty bourgeoisie....These four kinds of people constitute the largest sector of the Chinese nation and the broadest popular masses” (Mao 1943, p. 65). Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the concept of the people has taken on new connotations with the changing times. “In the period of constructing socialism, all classes, strata, and social groups that approve of, support, and participate in the endeavor to construct socialism fall under the rubric of the people” (Mao 1957, p. 311). Thus, it can be seen that Chinese Marxism does not exactly repeat Marx’s concept of the people, but offers a matter-of-fact interpretation of the concept of the people considering the actual conditions of Chinese society, where the people become a revolutionary aggregation of classes with broad common interests and an association based on but also transcend class. By expanding the Marxist concept of class to the incorporation of all classes of people, the Chinese form of the concept of people acquires a novel quality and embodies the spirit of Chinese Marxism of seeking truth from facts and the characteristics of the theory of the people.

The Chinese form of the people is not only a historical and economic concept, but more significantly, a political concept. Mao pointed out in “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People” that “To acquire a correct understanding of these two different types of contradictions, [i.e., the contradictions] between the enemy and ourselves and [the contradictions] among the people, we ought first make clear

what is meant by the people and what is meant by the enemy” (Mao 1957, p. 311). The people are always opposed to the classes, strata, and social groups that hinder historical development, and the political connotation of the notion of the people always varies in different times. For instance, during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, all classes, strata, and social groups that resisted the Japanese aggression fell within the scope of the people; during the period of socialist construction, all social classes and groups that favored, supported, and participated in the cause of socialist construction, including all patriots who safeguarded the integrity and unity of the motherland, belonged to the scope of the people. In this sense, the concept of the people in China is neither a mere aggregation of the majority, nor is it divided by the degree of possession of the means of production. Rather, it represents a revolutionary aggregation of classes on the basis of political interests in a specific era of Chinese society. The people are the fundamental historical force of the Chinese revolution, as well as the main body that undertakes the important task of pushing forward history and national liberation. The concrete historical and political essence of the aggregation of classes or strata of the people adds a singular color to the Chinese form of the concept of the people.

### *The People Are the Creators of History*

Do heroes make history or do slaves make history? This question is constantly mentioned and debated in academic circles. Marx and Engels clearly stated that history is created by the masses of the people, and that “Together with the thoroughness of the historical action, the size of the mass whose action it is will therefore increase” (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 82).

The Chinese form imbibed this view and insisted that the people are the creators of history. Mao made it clear that “The people, and the people alone, are the creative force of the world” (Mao 2015, p. 761). In the course of history, the people, as the subjects of practice, are not just the creators of material wealth, but also of spiritual wealth, and thus constitute the decisive force for social change.

In terms of literary creation, ordinary workers have the right to be the main object of their literary and artistic representation. As early as 1919, Mao Zedong in his “Declaration on the Founding of ‘Xiangjiang Review (湘江评论)’” (July 14, 1919) enthusiastically praised the new changes brought about by the May Fourth Movement to the Chinese

literary circles: “In literature, the literature of the aristocracy, classical literature, dead literature, has given way to literature of the common people, contemporary literature, a literature imbued with vitality” (Mao 1992, p. 318). After watching the Ping opera (Pingju 评剧) “Forced to Join Rebels,” Mao was even more passionate in praising the cast for depicting the people as the main descriptive objects of the work, sending a letter to the choreographer:

History is created by the people, but on the stage of old opera (and all the old literature and arts that were divorced from the people), the people were but the dregs of society, and the stage was dominated by nabobs, rich wives, and young masters and misses. You now have reversed this inversion of history and have restored history’s true face. (Mao 2015, p. 483)

Mao saw the problem of traditional Chinese opera and therefore advocated turning the history once dominated by the emperors and generals into the history of the people, reversing the reversal of history. In fact, this phenomenon exists not only in traditional opera, but also in ancient Chinese historical novels. Lin Shu, in the “Preface of ‘The Conscript: A Story of the French War of 1813’,” has compared the depictions of the Chinese and Western wars:

I read through the Chinese history of the recorded battles. It only described the strategy of the military master, the convenience of the terrain to win, and the momentum of victory and defeat, but did not describe the life and death of the soldiers in the army, as well as the sadness and complaints of conscripted husbands and lovesick wives... Between the lines, it described in detail that in the wake of the defeat in Moscow, Napoleon raised or enlarged an army, fought hard with Lippincott, and was defeated at Waterloo. What is interspersed is the story of Joseph the Cripple, the love affair with his wife Gosselin, and the bitter battle between the military alliances of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Switzerland and the French army. All military matters, whether important or trivial, can be well known. (Lin 1990, pp. 49–50)

The Chinese historical novel (演义小说) mainly delineates the astuteness and resourcefulness of the military counselors and the invincible might of the generals, while the soldiers are only the foil and embellishment of the war. Readers cannot identify with their personal images, nor their family

origins or mental activities. This differs from the emphasis on those microscopic scenes of war in Western war novels (Hu 1988). Literary works should thus express the joy, anger, and sorrow of the ordinary people, shape the heroic image of the people, and show the spirit of the people in the pursuit of their ideals and free life, which is precisely the embodiment of the Marxist historical materialism in literary activities.

*Adherence to the Centrality of the People*

Adherence to the centrality of the people distinguishes the Chinese form from either “the people are the foundation of the state (民为邦本)” maxim of traditional Chinese culture or the “masses” theory of Western Marxism. The view of the people in the Chinese form differs from the traditional Chinese idea that “the people are the foundation of the state” and “the people are more valued than the ruler(民贵君轻).” Although the adage, “the people are the foundation of the state,” emphasizes the importance of the people, it aims to consolidate autocratic rule with the aid of the power of the people, reminding the ruler that “the water that bears the boat is the same that swallows it up.” As Chen Duxiu (陈独秀) stated:

The so-called “Emperors sees as the people see; Emperors hears as the people hear,” “the people are the foundation of the state, ” and “the people are more valuable than the ruler,” all take the ruler’s state (i.e., the ruler’s ancestral property) as the principal. Such people-centered principles as be benevolent to the people, love the people, and for the people, fundamentally abolish the individuality of the people, and the people-oriented democratic politics with the people as the main body is by no means the same thing. (Chen 1993, p. 187)

The Chinese form of the people is also different from the idea of the masses or citizens discussed in Western Marxism. Western Marxism aims to criticize and reflect upon capitalism, and the masses or citizens are mainly the objects of their salvation, while the Chinese form emphasizes the people as the masters of society. The people are not only the subject of the Chinese revolution, but also the subject of today’s modernization. The ever-advancing developments and extraordinary achievements of contemporary China rely just on the great practice of the Chinese people.

“All for the people, all relying on the people, and serving the people wholeheartedly,” has become the fundamental purpose of the ruling party, including the Chinese form. As Xi Jinping (习近平) proposed: “We must ensure the principal status of the people, and adhere to the Party’s commitment to serving the public good and exercising power in the interests of the people. We must observe the Party’s fundamental purpose of wholeheartedly serving the people, and put into practice the Party’s mass line in all aspects of governance. We must regard as our goal the people’s aspirations to live a better life, and rely on the people to move history forward” (Xi 2017, p. 21). The view of the people in the Chinese form is an inheritance and improvement of the classical Marxist view of the people. It embodies the historical materialism of Marxism, and moreover, it is the fruit of the combination of Marxism and the practice of the Chinese revolution, which demonstrates the collective political wisdom and pragmatic spirit of Chinese Communists.

## 2.2 “People First” in Literary Criticism

In the history of Chinese and foreign literary criticism, the relationships between literature and the world, literature and writers, as well as literature and readers, have constituted a crucial dimension of literary theory and criticism, but the relationship between literature and the people has not gained as prominent a position as it deserves. The Russian revolutionary-democratic critics once mentioned “peopleness” in the development of literature, and it was Lenin who explicitly proposed that literature and art should serve the people. But because Russia was in the midst of a stormy revolutionary struggle, for Lenin, as Mao found, “This is in fact not the case, since many comrades have certainly not found a clear and definite answer to this question” (Mao 1943, p. 63). Theoretically and practically, the establishment of the relationship between literature and the people historically fell on the shoulders of Chinese Marxist literary critics.

### *The Principle of “Literature and Art for the People”*

The question “for whom literature and art should be” is a “fundamental question, a question of principle” that needs to be solved by the Chinese form. During the May Fourth Movement, this issue was brought to the attention of the young Chinese Communists. Yun Daiying (恽代英) wrote that the new literature should “stimulate the spirit of the people and make



them engage in the movement for national independence and democratic revolution” (Yun 1984, p. 390). Shen Zemin further elaborated:

Is there any literary work that can fill its genre with the majestic vigor of an awakening generation of people? Is there any literary work that painfully depicts the lives of the majority of the people in modern China and suggests their background and prospects? Is there a work that is extremely full of youthful spirit and can represent the new generation to speak of their divine aspirations and sorrows, strengths and weaknesses? If there can be such a work, I think it is the literature we need. (Shen 1997, p. 53)

In the 1930s, with the development of the left-wing literary movement, the discussion about the popularization of literature and art continued to intensify. Lu Xun clearly proposed that literature and art should not be isolated from the people, and that the development of literature and art should be diversified to meet the needs of different groups of people: “Literature and art should have been appreciated not by only a few of the best, but something that cannot be appreciated by only a few of the innately imbecile.” He further suggested that, “in the present society with unequal education, there should still be a variety of literature and art of varying difficulty to meet the needs of readers of all levels” (Lu 2005, p. 367). Zhou Yang also proposed that the popularization of literature and art should be based in reality: “If one ignores the low general cultural standard of the toiling masses in China at present and talks about raising the level of the masses to appreciate real, great art, that is actually a refusal to serve the masses, a kind of abolitionism!” (Zhou 1984, pp. 28–29). The masses discussed by the Chinese left-wing mainly referred to the oppressed toiling masses, and their advocacy of popularization laid the foundation for the view of the people in the Chinese form.

In 1942, Mao gave a comprehensive exposition of the relationship between literature and the people in his well-known “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art.” Considering the reality of revolutionary literature and art in China since the May Fourth Movement, especially in response to the problems that arose in the literary movement in the revolutionary base areas during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, Mao clearly asserted that “Our literature and art serve the popular masses, primarily workers, peasants, and soldiers; they are created for workers, peasants, and soldiers and are used by them” (Mao 1943, p. 73). As for literary creation and criticism as well as literary

policies, the above clearly defines the fundamental orientation of literature and art to serve the workers, peasants, soldiers, and literature and art to serve the people. Furthermore, the tension between popularization and enhancement, the dialectical unity of motivation and effect, etc., which Mao talked about in his “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” were all based on the needs and interests of the people. Only by clarifying the question of literature “for whom” can we discover the basis and criteria for popularization and enhancement, and motivation and effect. The telos of Mao’s proposal to critically preserve the heritage of Chinese and foreign literature and art is also to incorporate them as a part of serving the people. In a manner of speaking, once the fundamental problem of serving the people is solved, other problems will be smoothly solved, and vice versa, “and unless the fundamental question is settled, it won’t be easy to settle many other questions either” (Mao 1943, p. 67).

In the new era after China’s Reform and Opening up (1978), Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) adhered to and also developed Mao’s idea that literature and art serve the people. In his “Speech Greeting the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists,” he repeatedly highlighted that “our literature and art belong to the people” and fondly compared the relationship between the people and literary and art workers to that of a mother and her children: “It is the people who nurture our writers and artists. The creative life of all progressive writers and artists is rooted in their intimate ties with the people. Creativity withers when these ties are forgotten, neglected or severed” (Deng 1995, pp. 209, 211).

Today, with the progress of society and material prosperity, there is once again a highlight on the relationship between literature and the people. Xi Jinping further pointed out in his “Speech at the Symposium on Literary and Art Work” that “Putting people at the center means that we must make satisfying the people’s spiritual and cultural needs into a starting point and stopover point for literature and art, and literature and art work, make the people into the subjects of literature and art expression, make the people into connoisseurs and critics of literature and art aesthetics, and make serving the people into the vocation of literature and art workers” (Xi 2015, pp. 13–14). The Chinese form takes the relationship between literature and the people as the fundamental value of literature and art, which is unprecedented in the history of literature both in China and in other parts of the world.

*Adherence to the Direction of People-Centered Creation*

Literary creation should be centered around the people. To accurately portray the people as the main object in literature and art, one needs to walk toward the people and be among the people; otherwise, it is difficult to create real and emotionally evocative artistic images. Mao Zedong said: “Revolutionary Chinese writers and artists, the kind from whom we expect great things, must go among the masses; they must go among the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers and into the heat of battle for a long time to come, without reservation, devoting body and soul” (Mao 1943, p. 69). After Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art” in 1942, a number of masterpieces emerged and still retain their artistic charm today, which is directly the result of writers and artists of that time living with the people and obtaining sources of artistic creation from them. In addition to going to the grassroots and exploring their lives in depth, emotional identification is even more important if writers and artists adhere to the direction of people-centered creation. Xi Jinping indicated, “Deeply loving the people isn’t a slogan, it requires profound rational knowledge and concrete practical action” (Xi 2015, p. 18). In terms of not only the integrating the people with the “body,” but also with the “heart” and “feelings,” Xi declared: “There will be no lasting literary inspiration and creative passion in the ivory tower. Literature and art will become rootless duckweed, disease-free groans, and soulless bodies without the people. All aspiring and pursuing literary and art workers should follow the footsteps of the people, step out of every inch of the world, read the whole world, and let their hearts always beat with the hearts of the people” (Xi 2016, p. 11). In other words, writers and artists should establish contact with ordinary persons to feel the joys and sorrows of their life, to experience the true love and truth and to feel the greatest love and Tao (道) of the world from the persons and stories around them. Xi went on to say, “whether or not excellent works can be produced, depends most fundamentally on whether or not they are expressed for the people, express emotions for the people and express concern for the people” (Xi 2015, p. 16). Thus another characteristic of the Chinese form is the emphasis on the emotional connections between the people and writers and artists.

Based on the “people-centered” principle, the people should become the content, the subject, and the destination of literary creation. The image of the people, mainly the workers, peasants, and soldiers and their historical creativity and initiative to transform reality become the focus of

Chinese form. In his “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” Mao affirmed that literature and art should express “new characters and the new world” and that writers should enthusiastically celebrate “the proletariat and the masses” (Mao 1943, p. 85). This was Mao’s demand for literary creation from the perspective of a politician, and it also indicated Mao’s critical attitude toward the old culture. The “new characters and a new world” was opposite to the “emperors and generals” in the old novels and operas, and Mao hoped that literary and art workers would pay attention to the rank and file, to represent the suffering masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, and to discover and construct new characters for the Chinese literary circles. In his “Speech Greeting the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists,” Deng put forward the fundamental requirement of portraying new men in socialism: “We must portray the new features of the pioneers in the modernization drive, their revolutionary ideals and scientific approach, their lofty sentiments and creative ability, and their broad and realistic vision.” Besides, Deng Xiaoping also mentioned that “the deeds of heroes, the labour, struggles, joys and sorrows, partings and reunions of ordinary people, and the life of our contemporaries and of our predecessors — all these should be depicted in our works of literature and art” (Deng 1995, pp. 202–203). Noticeably, the heroic figures here should be regarded as those representatives emerging from the people. They rely on the power of the people and also giving voices for the people. Since some film and television works are inundated with images of emperors, generals, queens, and concubines, it is quite pertinent to reiterate that “new characters and a new world” are portrayed with the people as the protagonists. The Chinese form’s view that literature and art should express both the heroic performance of the people and the joys and sorrows of ordinary workers is truly an inheritance from and development of Marxism.

The relationship between literature and the people involves various external relationships as discussed above as well as many other factors including the text. The Chinese form’s emphasis on literature’s concern for the people doesn’t equal to a lack of concern for the text itself. In fact, the writers’ artistic pursuits and even the formation of their linguistic style are also subject to the fundamental question of literature and art, namely whom it should serve. The people-centered approach requires a relentless exploration of artistic forms, a heartfelt effort to create works and characters that satisfy the people, and thus in “how to write” also fully expresses the writer’s love and respect for the people. Therefore, writers and artists

should “consciously draw source material, themes, plots, language and poetic and artistic inspiration from the life of the people and be nourished by the dynamic spirit of the people, who make history” (Deng 1995, p. 204) and express the wishes, interests, and demands of the people using exquisite artistic methods to meet their diverse aesthetic needs.

*The People as Recipients of Literature and Art*

The masses of people should not cease to be the main object of literary works, but also have the right to enjoy all the culture created by history. In the history of human development, due to the division of labor in society and the emergence of classes, art was once owned and appreciated only by a selected few and became the specialized activity of some special members of society, while the masses of working people were excluded from the temple of art. The people are indeed the creators of material wealth, and yet, they have long been denied access to the fruits of spiritual labor. As Marx said, “labour produces wonderful things for the rich — but for the worker it produces privation” (Marx 1975d, p. 273). Therefore, the explicit inclusion and staging of the people as the recipients and consumers of literature and art is also a characteristic of the Chinese form.

Mao suggested when talking about “the question of for whom we are writing”:

In the Shanghai period, the audience for revolutionary works of literature and art consisted primarily of students, office workers, and shop assistants. ... The audience for works of literature and art here consists of workers, peasants, and soldiers, together with their cadres in the Party, the government, and the army...Once they are literate, cadres of various kinds, soldiers in the army, workers in factories, and peasants in the countryside want books and newspapers, while people who aren't literate want to see plays, look at pictures, sing songs, and listen to music; they are the audience for our works of literature and art. (Mao 1943, pp. 59–60)

In this regard, in her “Introduction” to the translation of “Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art” in 1980, Bonnie McDougall stated that “...it was Mao who brought the audience to the forefront of the discussion in China” (McDougall 1980, p. 15). Mao not only introduced the concept of “recipients,” and more importantly, his concept of “recipients” connotes workers, peasants, and soldiers, and this is exactly

what distinguishes him from other Western critics and Western Marxist critics.

Mao also discussed the dialectical relationship between the improvement and popularization of literature and art based on people's acceptance of it. In the early 1940s, the situation of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression was quite grim, and the purpose of literature and art at that time was not to satisfy high-brow aesthetic needs with sophisticated art, but to resort to the power of literature and art to mobilize the masses to strive for victory and national liberation at the earliest. Also, the masses of people at that time were generally illiterate and were unlikely to accept high-brow works. Therefore, "The first step for them is not a question of 'pinning flowers on brocade' but 'sending charcoal in the snow'" (Mao 1943, p. 71). Considering this situation, literature and art must be popularized as the basis and focus in order to make literature and art truly serve the people. Certainly, with the improvement in the educational level of the people as the recipients, their demand for art will grow on a yearly basis. "The people demand material that can reach a wide audience, but they also demand higher standards, standards that continue to rise month by month and year by year," because neither popularization nor improvement can "stay constantly on the same level month after month and year after year" (Mao 1943, p. 71). This shows that making the people the "recipients" of literature and art does not mean lowering the standard of art to accommodate them. The people, as "recipients," also have a spirit of initiative and creativity, and they will raise their standards to appreciate and distinguish quality literary and artistic works, as their level of appreciation increases. The proposal that the people become the recipients, and even creators of literature and art, is a substantial contribution of the Chinese form to the history of literary reception.

In terms of the standards of literary criticism, the Chinese form also highlights the people-centered value orientation. Whether a work is excellent and valuable depends on whether it represents the interests of, and is recognized by, the people. Deng Xiaoping said, "It is for the people to judge the ideological and artistic value of a work" (Deng 1995, p. 205) which exactly accords with Marx's earlier assertion that "the people, which hitherto has been the sole judge as to which writer has 'authority' and which is 'without authority'" (Marx 1975a, p. 177). The measuring line to evaluate artistic forms of works must also be based on the needs of the people, and "a new and vital Chinese style and manner, pleasing

to the eye and to the ear of the Chinese common people” (Mao 2004, p. 539) is also advocated. In addressing the literary and artistic heritage, it is important to “distinguish between works of literature and art from past ages by first examining their attitude towards the people and whether they have any progressive significance in history, and determine their own attitude accordingly” (Mao 1943, p. 100).

All the above elaborations form a unique part of the theoretical construction of Chinese forms. Undeniably, due to historical limitations and evolution with time, the Chinese form still needs improvement in terms of the relationship between literature and the people. However, in general, this is the first time in the history of Marxist literary criticism that the issue of the relationship between literature and the people has been theoretically and practically delineated in such a clear and systematic manner, as the concept of “literature and art serving the people”<sup>1</sup> proposed by the Chinese form is still highly relevant to today’s reality.

### 3 THE IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION OF THE CONCEPT OF PEOPLE

Although it is quite clear that the concept of people is central and fundamental to the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism as discussed above, some issues remain. Specifically, the relationship between literature and the people needs further exploration and expansion with in-depth analysis.

#### 3.1 *A Reflection on the Relationship Between Literature and People*

In contemporary literary creation, the relationship between literature and the people is not as satisfactory as it should be. Some literary works have deviated in their attitude toward the people, primarily in two aspects: first,

<sup>1</sup> Further explanation is needed regarding the question of the relationship between writers and the people. It can be said that writers and artists, as creators of spiritual wealth, are naturally members of the people. However, because of the division of labor in society, writers and artists are more like explorers of spiritual culture, while the main body of the people consists of the masses of workers engaged in the production of material goods and ordinary workers of all classes. Writers and artists should serve the masses of the people. Therefore, the people are both the subject of social practice and the object to be served, and the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism, with regard to this issue, needs further exploration.

looking down upon the people as a result of a messianic mentality; second, pandering to the people with the tendency of commodity fetishism—namely, the problem of “people cult” proposed by Marx. To allow the relationship between literature and the people to play a greater role under the new historical conditions, it is necessary to examine and correct these problems.

*Looking Down Upon the People as a Result of a Messianic Mentality*

In China, despite the high status of the people and the fact that no one openly denies the relationship between literature and the people, there still are some literary works in which the people are not supreme, and even in those that depict and sympathize with ordinary workers, there are some problematic issues. Some “subaltern narratives” in contemporary novels seem to depict the hardship and difficulties of migrant workers and other characters, and the authors do show some sympathy for their plight. However, the whole work is suffused with a certain sense of the author’s “superiority” (perhaps unconscious expression), as if the narrator and the author occupy a higher position than the characters in the story, looking at the world and the people with a compassionate attitude and lamenting their grim fate. As Engels propounds, the narrator, with a touch of limited sympathy, recounts the plight of “the poor man” and “little man” who cannot help themselves (Engels 1977, p. 235).

One major issue that needs to be confronted in the literature is the appropriate standpoint and attitude through which to depict the people. Whereas Western Marxism adopts the attitude of redemption, the slogans of the May Fourth Movement in China are “enlightenment” and “renovate the citizens.” Thus, the Chinese form clearly advocates approaching and assuming the viewpoint of the people, and discovering their beauty of humanity through empathy. Some people might think that ordinary people, especially those at the bottom of the social ladder, lack intriguing stories and rich emotions because they are overwhelmed with their difficult lives. However, everyone has a story, their own pursuit and splendor, and what literary creation lacks is the eyes to discover and reveal. The bell-ringer, Quasimodo, in Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* is ugly in appearance, but the brilliance of his humane actions makes him memorable to the readers. In contemporary China, there are also many excellent works about ordinary people, in which the resilience and struggle of simple men and women are evident between the lines, allowing readers to feel for their strength and kindness. An American professor once told



me that she was studying novels about American cab drivers and she felt the joy of being cab drivers as depicted. Her field of study and research position are inspiring. In China, writers and artists should not only take ordinary workers as the subjects of expression, but also recognize the inner world of ordinary workers to truly understand their good qualities. The “attitude toward the people” is, thus, indeed the core measure for the evaluation of a literary work.

Adopting the outlook of the people does not mean not depicting suffering. On the contrary, the belief that needs to be held is that when depicting suffering, the works should transcend suffering, instead of blindly selling it to gain sympathy. In his review of Ye Zi’s work, Li Jianwu uses a striking image that is unforgettable—“a charred young tree.” He goes on to say, “Ye Zi’s novels are always like the charred young tree, without the emotion of *Life and Death*, without the vividness of language of *Eighteen Hundred Quintals*, and without any rich gestures, but standing in the wilderness, showing the prickly trunk, and giving people the feeling of a thriving but unfortunate young tree in late spring that has been electrocuted. It has a symbol. Here, we see nothing but suffering, and the will to move upward beyond the suffering. We might as well describe it as solemn and stirring” (Li 1984, p. 517).

The image of “nothing but suffering and the will to move upward beyond the suffering” can be regarded as a symbol of the Chinese national spirit.

#### *Commodity Fetishism and People Cult*

Another paradoxical attitude toward the people is the “deification” of the people. In today’s consumerist society, people have become the gods in the consumption chain. In order to gain profits, some literary works and films or TV series have resorted to violence and pornography to attract readers and viewers; thus, these works, instead of being in the name of the people, are actually in the name of capital, and the people have become the incarnation of capital (we will discuss this issue in Chapter 7). Literature and art need to meet the needs of the vast majority of people, but there should be an aesthetic bottom line. As Xi Jinping pointed out in his “Speech at the Symposium on Literary and Artistic Works”: “Vulgarity is not popularity, desire does not represent hope, pure sensual pleasure is not equal to spiritual pleasure. Literature and art must win the people’s approval, this will not work through showy but impractical skill, opportunism, fishing for fame and compliments, self-praise or ‘a big sedan chair

where people carry people” (Xi 2015, p. 10). In other words, excessive pandering and accommodating behavior is actually irresponsible for the people, since it belittles both the art and the people, and is therefore contrary to the real interests of the people.

Additionally, it is also worthwhile to go forward alone when exploring new forms. How can the popularity of literature be combined with its originality needs further consideration.

### 3.2 *The Complexity of the Concept of People*

The definition of the people has been understood differently in Chinese and foreign academia. Some regard the people as an abstract concept and consider the people as an “empty signifier,” whereas others assert that the phrase “the people” has turned into a sense of hegemony, and that the concept has become the legitimate representative of discourse and instruction, synonymous with heroes (Lyotard 1984, p. 30). Therefore, when introducing the concept of the people, Chinese Marxist literary criticism should particularly examine the concreteness and diversity of the concept of people and avoid its abstraction and homogenization.

#### *The Concreteness of the Concept of People*

Although the concept of people is universal and general in nature, it is by no means an “imaginary designation.” As a designation, the phrase “the people” goes beyond the description of experience and becomes a term of collection. However, the people are by no means absent. As a historical category, the people are composed of millions of real individuals participating in a given historical activity, and this is where the concreteness of the concept lies. Without each living individual, the concept of the people would have no foundation, and yet it displays dependence on the individuals and the assertion of their will. Considering the people as a whole will ignore the meaning of individual existence under the influence of the changing social tide, and “serving the people” will become an empty phrase.

The concept of the people, however, does not refer to a single individual, but to many individuals. When studying the relationship between the people as a whole and the individual, it should be placed in a specific historical context. On the one hand, a single individual cannot represent the people; the people, as a collective term for the majority, should be the greatest common denominator of many individuals, and it is the

convergence of many individuals that demonstrates the power of social reformation. This is exactly the difference between the concreteness of the people and the individuality of the people. On the other hand, as individuals are part of the people, caring for the development and progress of individuals and satisfying everyone's aspirations and pursuit of a better life constitute the proper, integral meaning of serving the people. Therefore, when studying the concept of people, it is essential to prevent absolute abstraction or limiting it to a single individual, not to mention suppressing the individual with the whole. Literary works are the vehicles that best embody the concreteness of the concept of people. The characters expressed in a work are not only specifically "This One" as put by Hegel (Engels 1995, p. 356) but also represent the characteristics of the context and the aspirations of the people. The men, women, and children in Gaomi Township in Mo Yan's novels and the herdsmen in Mongolian yurts in Zhang Chengzhi's novels are characters from different eras and nations who have staged a magnificent living drama in China. Through the portrayal of these vastly diverse characters, literary works demonstrate the incredible richness of the nuance of the people.

#### *The Non-homogeneity of the People*

In relation to the concreteness of the people, the people comprise many different kinds of individuals, as opposed to a "homogenous" group of uniform and undifferentiated people. Therefore, when discussing the concept of people, it is necessary to prevent the homogenization of the people so as to fully appreciate and recognize their differences and contradictions. Marx had long been aware of this problem, and in his essay "The Class Struggles in France," he stated that "Universal suffrage did not possess the magic power which republicans of the old school had ascribed to it. They saw in the whole of France, at least in the majority of Frenchmen, citizens with the same interests, the same understanding, etc. This was their cult of the people. Instead of their imaginary people, the elections brought the real people to the light of day, that is, representatives of the different classes into which it falls" (Marx 1978, p. 65). Lenin inherited this view from Marx and posited, "In using the word Marx did not thereby gloss over class distinctions, but united definite elements capable of bringing the revolution to completion" (Lenin 1962e, p. 133). On a similar note, Chinese leftist scholar Feng Xuefeng (冯雪峰) propounded, "an aggressive side and a backward side, a bright side and a gray side, and a struggling side demanding emancipation and

a side still bound by feudal consciousness” (Feng 1983, p. 169). Especially in modern China, the connotation of the people has been constantly adjusted, differentiated, and expanded, highlighting the complexity of the concept of people.

The non-homogeneity of the people opens the door to diversity in literary and artistic creation and in serving the society. Today’s people are an aggregation of multiple differences. Therefore, adhering to a people-centered creation guide requires in-depth observation and analysis of the differences and contradictions inherent in the people, not only to uncover the conflicts and compromises among individuals, and between individuals and groups, but also to reveal the inner beauty of individuals and the inferiority of human nature. In this way, the portrait of the people becomes richer and more real. Moreover, the non-homogeneity of the people demands respect for the diversity and differences of readers in the reception process. As we live in an age with endless choices, it is important to create literature that is as luxuriant and varied as possible to serve the many lowercased, plural “people.” As far as literary criticism is concerned, respect for difference and tolerance of diversity should be the consensus of criticism.

It should be noted that when we talk about the concreteness and diversity of the people, we are not denying the wholeness of the concept. The people constitute exactly individuals with differences. In addition, these individual differences are established none other than on the basis of a certain consensus and make up the main body that facilitates social progress. Particularly when the concept of people is theorized and applied to the practice of literary criticism as the core concept of Chinese form, it transforms from the abstract to the concrete.

### *3.3 The Interaction and Mutual Shaping of Literature and People*

In the past, we focused more on literature for the people, but in the future, the relationship between literature and the people will not be unilateral but bilaterally interactive, and it is with this interaction and mutual shaping that the people and literature and art will evolve further.

*“The People Need Art, and Art Needs the People Even More”*

Deng Xiaoping proposed that “the people need art, and art needs the people even more,” which can be seen as the basis for establishing a new relationship between literature and the people. “The people need

art” because they need art to express themselves and to satisfy their rich and colorful spiritual life, and, in a higher sense, they need to be sublimated and edified by art. “Art needs the people even more” highlights the dependence of literature and art on the people. Max Dessoir, a German philosopher of aesthetics, held a negative attitude toward this approach and said, “It is often said that art will deteriorate once it is separated from the masses. But I instead think that art is destroyed once it is dedicated to the people” (Dessoir 1987, p. 429). This statement is reasonable if used to criticize kitsch, but it is entirely absurd when viewed in the context of the relationship between literature and the people.

The people are the mother and the source of art. The dependence of art on the people not only manifests in the richness and diversity of the people in real life, which provide the creation of literature and art with contemporary inspiration in content and forms, but also in how people desire change, which becomes the driving force for continuous innovation in literature and art. The ability to create excellent works to meet the spiritual needs of the people is related to the rise and fall of literature and art, as well as to their survival. In this interactive process, literature and art will increasingly move toward the people, which is a historical necessity.

#### *Literature and “People to Come”*

As we deeply explore the concept of the people, we realize that the image of the people differs from its original, having become more active and open. Deleuze staged the concept of “People to Come” and believed that writing means to invent a people “who are missing,” namely a people to come (Deleuze 1998, p. 4). Thus, Deleuze works to “invent” not the existing people, but a new “people,” a “people” with endless possibilities. For Deleuze, the true writers are always those who offer the world new possibilities, breaths, and vitality.

The proposal of “People to Come” enriches the concept of “people,” and the image of people in Chinese form will be expanded in two ways: on the one hand, not only does literary creation need to face the existing people, but also express transcendent artistic ideas through the display of new feelings and imagery, summoning the “People to Come.” On the other hand, the “People to Come” will no longer be limited to some certain occupation, but will live their lives in both labor and art, as simultaneously consumers and creators of art. This prophecy, which had already

appeared in Marx/Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, is becoming a reality today. The multiple identities of Deleuze's "People to Come" echo the diversity of identities in the future society as Marx once envisioned.

The impact of this new type of people on literature is far-reaching and may reveal some new trends. The multiple identities of the "People to Come" make the identities of the subjects of creation and the subjects of reception rotate and blur, and bring novel experiences and styles to literary creation and reception. In future literary history, we will see a variety of unprecedented characters and worlds. People and literature will also draw closer in the future and their interaction will lead to harmonious companion.

In short, the introduction and refinement of the concept of people have provided "living water" or momentum to the Chinese form, which, together with the concepts of nation and politics, will become the basic essence of the Chinese form and a distinctive mark that distinguishes it from other forms of Marxist literary criticism.

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## Nation: A New Dimension of Literary Criticism in the Context of Globalization

The “nation” and its related issues constitute frontier problems that cannot be circumvented nowadays, and therefore, introducing the national dimension into the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism is inevitable and necessary.

The national dimension of the Chinese form is being proposed and examined because of challenges due to globalization. During the process of global integration, the trend also faces resistance. Reflections on the problems brought on by globalization and vigilance against cultural and linguistic colonization highlight the significance and urgency of national issues under the new historical context of globalization. As a matter of fact, the construction of contemporary Chinese literary criticism has always struggled between seeking assimilation in resistance and maintaining resistance in assimilation. While Chinese critics are eager to participate in the global dialogue, they care more about their cultural identity and intellectual background. “Looking for the way home” has become a self-conscious search for most Chinese literary critics in the twenty-first century. In this sense, the return of a national consciousness is a product of globalization.

Among the various paradigms of contemporary Chinese literary criticism, the social, historical, political, cultural, and formal dimensions of literary works have in turn become the approaches to literary criticism. In contrast, the national dimension has been ignored and downgraded,

overshadowed by other dimensions such as society, culture, and politics.<sup>1</sup> This is another crucial reason to propose the national dimension. The absence of a national dimension in contemporary Chinese literary criticism may be attributable to how the concept of nation has been understood and evaluated. The concept seems plain and simple, but it has many pitfalls. Moreover, the understanding and perception of the concept have been inconsistent and confusing for a long time. As the French scholar Gil Delannoi wrote: “A nation is more elusive than a state or market, especially because it appears to be natural but is in fact unintelligible” (Delannoi 2005, p. 19). Charles Tilly, an American sociologist, described it as “one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon” (Tilly 1975, p. 6). Nevertheless, to construct the national dimension of Chinese criticism, we need to re-examine and dialectically study the nation and its related issues.

Although the concept of nation is rather vague, national elements have never been absent from Chinese literary writing and criticism, offering the literary basis for proposing the national dimension. Over the past couple of centuries, initial efforts in “救亡图存” (save the nation, struggle for existence) provided the soil for the germination of a national consciousness, which was etched profoundly in Chinese literary writing and criticism of that time. Many excellent literary works expressed the fervent hope of national rejuvenation through the themes of enlightenment and national salvation. In literary criticism, there were ceaseless heated debates over national issues, such as the disputes about the proposal of “中体西用” (Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application) and discussions about the national forms of literature and art. More recently, many controversies in literary writing and criticism could also be directly or indirectly attributed to the nation and its related issues. Thus, it would be difficult to understand Chinese history and literature over the past couple of centuries without considering elements of the nation.

<sup>1</sup> The concept of nation has been adequately discussed and continuously debated in disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, and political science. The issue of nationality in literary criticism was also examined frequently by European Romantic literary critics and Russian revolutionary democratic critics. Therefore, the author here is mainly concerned about the absence of a distinctive national dimension in contemporary Chinese literary criticism.

## 1 THE DISCRIMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF NATION

In order to put forward the national dimension of the Chinese form, a more precise definition of the term nation is required for differentiation and analysis. In other words, clarifying the boundary between different terms is the premise of studying the national dimension of the Chinese form.

### 1.1 *Nation and Its Related Concepts*

In contemporary Chinese, the word 民族 (*minzu*) is a translation of the English word “nation.” The character 族 (*zu*) contains 矢 (*shi*), which means “to defend.” In ancient Chinese, the character *zu* is associated with certain orthodox concepts, such as “天下” (*tianxia*, land under heaven), “华夏” (*Huaxia*, Cathay), “中土” (*zhongtu*, Central Land), and “炎黄子孙” (*yanhuang zisun*, Descendants of the Yellow Emperor), to distinguish the Chinese from 狄 (*di*) and 蛮 (*man*) whom were deemed barbarian ethnic groups. As translation of the English word “nation,” the term 民族 now refers to something quite different from the original meanings of *zu* and *Huaxia*, though the term is related to them to a certain extent.

#### *The Concept of Nation*

The word “nation” was derived from the ancient Roman word *natio*, which came from *natus*, the past participle of the Latin *nasci* “to give birth.” The Old French word *nacion* played an intermediate role.<sup>2</sup> According to Chinese ethnologist Huang Xianfan (黄现璠), and others in the West, after the Protestant Reformation and the 1640 Puritan Revolution, the religious “citizens under social contract” and the secular “new citizens under social contract” gathered to form the Nation (the national community) (Huang 2008).

Since the introduction of the concept of the nation, Western scholars have proposed various understandings and interpretations of this widely-used term. However, the term basically means the modern nation, which is a product of modern history. Classical Marxist writers believed that the concept of nation was conceived in the Middle Ages. At the same time, events such as the Industrial Revolution, Protestant Reformation,

<sup>2</sup> For the etymology of “nation” and the evolution of its connotation, see Shi (2002, p. 173), Zernatto (1944, pp. 351–366) and Greenfield (1993, pp. 6–9).

and bourgeois revolution facilitated the formation of the nation as a new form of organization. They also assumed that although the nation would continue to exist for a long time, neither the nation nor the state was the ultimate form of the history in the future.

Friedrich Engels revealed the process of the historical formation of the modern Western nations in his essay “Collapse of the Feudal System and the Emergence of Nation States.” He connected the emergence of modern nations with language: “Once their boundaries had been fixed (disregarding subsequent wars of conquest and annihilation, such as those against the Slavs of the Elbe) it was natural for the linguistic groups to serve as the existent basis for the formation of states; for the nationalities to start developing into nations” (Engels 1990b, p. 560). Based on a further explanation of the relationship between languages and nations, Engels affirmed the contribution of the Middle Ages to the formation of nation-states with the vision of historical development: “linguistic boundaries and national frontiers were far from coincident throughout the Middle Ages, but every nationality except perhaps Italy was represented by a separate big state in Europe, and the tendency to form national states, which becomes increasingly clear and deliberate, constitutes one of the Middle Ages’ most considerable levers of progress” (Engels 1990b, p. 560). Compared to the city-state, nation-state formation is undoubtedly a great leap forward, turning a new page in world history.

### *Nation Versus Race and Ethnicity*

In the term “modern nation,” the English word *nation* is related to but also different from race<sup>3</sup> and ethnicity. Distinguishing among the three concepts will help discern the misuse of the Chinese term for *nation* and further clarify its boundaries.

Race mainly refers to a group of people who share physical characteristics, such as yellow, white, and black skin. It can be either larger or smaller than a nation in scope. One race can encompass multiple nations, and one nation can contain different races. While “nation” has cultural and political implications, most studies of race focus on genetics.

Ethnicity is mainly derived from consanguinity within groups in ancient primitive societies. This concept is more complex and ambiguous.

<sup>3</sup> Since the World War II, the word “race” has had mostly negative connotations.

According to Engels, ethnicity is based on consanguinity and develops gradually on the basis of family and tribe "...the blood-ties, on which here as everywhere the entire national structure was based..." (Engels 1990c, p. 58). However, "It is not an ethnic community because, despite some overlap in that both belong to the same family of phenomena (collective cultural identities), the ethnic community usually has no political referent, and in many cases lacks a public culture and even a territorial dimension, since it is not necessary for an ethnic community to be in physical possession of its historic territory" (Smith 2010, pp. 209–220). Nowadays, in nations, especially in those with immigrant populations, blood ties among different groups have gradually worn off.

Since ethnicity implies cultural heritage, it can be regarded as the embryonic form of the nation. In the contemporary era, "ethnicity" mainly refers to different ethnic groups in national states. For example, ethnic minorities in the Chinese nation can be deemed "ethnicities," highlighting the difference between "nation" and "ethnicity." However, considering the history and current status of the ethnic minorities in China, it would be more appropriate to transliterate the term for ethnic minorities in Chinese directly as "*minzu*."<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 *Nation and the Chinese Nation (中华民族)*

The modern meaning of nation was defined after the end of the Middle Ages. In contrast, for China, "中华民族" (*zhonghua minzu*, Chinese nation) emerged as a concept when a preliminary national consciousness surfaced with the feudal dynasty about to collapse. China's modern national consciousness resulted from the transformation of the traditional ethnic consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century influenced by Western nations.

#### *The Proposal of a "Chinese Nation"*

In 1901, Liang Qichao (梁启超) published an essay, "Commentaries on Chinese History (中国史叙论)," in which the concept of "中国民族"

<sup>4</sup> The word "nation" is not appropriate for ethnic minorities, nor is the word "ethnicity" or "race." For example, the Minzu University of China 中央民族大学, formerly the Central University of Nationalities, has changed its official English name to avoid the misused term "nationalities." In contrast, many other *minzu* universities in China still include the term "nation" or "nationalities" in their names.

(*zhongguo minzu*, China's nation) was proposed for the first time, and the evolutionary history of China's nation was divided into three periods. "The first is the upper era, from the Yellow Emperor to the Qin Dynasty's unification of China. During the period, China related only to China, or China's nation developed, competed, and united on its own terms." "The second is the middle era, from the unification of China by the Qin Dynasty to the end of Emperor Qianlong's reign of the Qing dynasty. In this period, China related to Asia, or China's nation interacted frequently and competed the most intensively with other nations in Asia." "The third is the pre-modern era, from the end of Emperor Qianlong's reign to the present day. This is the period in which China related to the world. China's nation together with all the Asian nations interacted and competed with the West" (Liang 2015a, pp. 471–472). The division into these three eras shows the extent of the perception of culture and space in China and how the nation of China gradually became an integral part of the world system.

In 1902, Liang Qichao used the term “中华” (*zhonghua*, Chinese)<sup>5</sup> in his book *On the Major Trend of Changes in China's Academic Thought*: “Who is the largest nation in the largest continent among the five continents? Our Chinese. Who has the population that is one-third of the world? Our Chinese. Who has a history of more than four thousand years without any interruptions? Our Chinese” (Liang 2015a, p. 577). Liang Qichao indicated that the Chinese nation in his essay mainly referred to the Han nationality, which had been developing continuously since the Xia and Shang dynasties. Chinese was used instead of “Han” because Han was a later dynasty, which could not represent “the name of our whole nation” (Liang 2015b, p. 580). In one of his later essays, Liang Qichao further pointed out the “pluralistic mix” of the Chinese nation. He wrote: “I could squarely declare that the Chinese nation was not a single ethnic

<sup>5</sup> According to the textual research of Wang Shumin (王树民), the word “*zhonghua*” was originally used in astronomy, comparing the world palace to *tiangong* (天宫, literally: heavenly palace) structure. The east and west sides of *tiangong* had three gates, the middle was named by combining the first characters of “中国” (*zhongguo*, China) and “华夏” (*huaxia*, beauty and grandness) as *zhonghua*, while the side gates were named as *taiyang* (太阳) and *taiyin* (太阴). According to *Book of Jin: Astronomical Records* (《晋书·天文志》), *Astronomical Stars* (《天文经星》) was written by imperial astronomer Chen Zhuo in Wei and Jin period, so the word “*zhonghua*” could be traced back to that period. In reference to the names of the heavenly palace, the rulers of the period usually chose “*zhonghua*” as their palace gate (see Wang 1985, pp. 6–16).



group from the beginning, but a mixture of many ethnic groups” (Liang 2015b, p. 7300). Although Liang Qichao here has not yet abandoned the Han framework, he has recognized the potential of ethnic integration. Furthermore, regarding the difference between “*Zhongguo*” and “*Zhonghua*,” Wang Shumin wrote, “the wide use of the term ‘*Zhonghua*’ implies that the meanings expressed by the users may vary according to their different intentions. The same goes for the term ‘*Zhongguo*,’ which generally refers to the whole territory of China but sometimes refers to the Central Plains of China. Notably, the term ‘*Zhonghua*’ not only refers to a certain region but also a certain culture and people with this culture. The later connotations are absent from other terms” (Wang 1985, pp. 6–16). Although it is his personal opinion, it is inspiring.

#### *The One and the Many of the Chinese Nation*

In 1931, when Japan invaded northeast China and began to expand into north China, the consciousness of Chinese national identity surged. The construction of the nation’s anti-Japanese united front became the consensus of this era: “As the Chinese people have arrived at their most perilous time, every person is forced to expel his very last cry. Arise! Arise! Arise!” In 1938, China’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression entered its most challenging period. During this period, Gu Jiegang (顾颉刚) published the article “Chinese Nation United as One (中华民族是一个)” in *Yishi Daily: Frontier Weekly*, which he had founded. His argument helped develop a definition of the Chinese nation. Gu stressed in the article that there was only one Chinese nation. Referring to China’s Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan ethnicities as “nations” was a strategy and conspiracy by the imperial forces to divide and disintegrate China. Gu’s argument reflected the cordial patriotism of scholars at that time. It was very political with distinct characteristics of its time. Meanwhile, Gu was aware of the strong inclusiveness of Chinese culture, given its historical development and offered a more precise concept of the “Chinese nation.” Fei Xiaotong (费孝通), who had just returned to China after studying anthropology in the UK, wrote that there was no need to deny the existence of groups of different cultures, languages, and systems within China. The key was that “all members of a country should enjoy equality” (Fei 1939). Gu wrote two articles specifically to address this proposition. In 1993, Fei returned to this debate in his article “Centenary Celebration for Gu Jiegang,” “Mr. Gu certainly could argue for his points. Unfortunately, I could not consult him in person. I believe that

if I could talk with his soul, he would not be offended about discussing the old issue again. The development of history has presented the answer to the question we debated at that time. The answer is that the Chinese nation is united as one body comprising diverse elements. The oneness and pluralism are not two exclusive concepts” (Fei 2009, p. 270).

In short, if Liang Qichao was the first to propose the concept of the Chinese nation, then the concept is just over a century old. Since then, some historians have attempted to reconstruct the historical system of the origin of the Chinese nation from the perspective of a unified multi-ethnic China by highlighting a historical context in which all ethnic groups were integrated.<sup>6</sup> It can be said that the concept of the Chinese nation, which has materialized since pre-modern times, is a concept with a modern national consciousness. “The formation of the Chinese nation coincided with the historical process of the economic-political construction of the modern nation-state. It marks China’s progress in politics, economy, science, and technology, as well as its corresponding historical process. More importantly, the quality and style of social existence, the ideological system, the individual-group mentality structure, and the corresponding cultural system have fully articulated with modernity. At the same time, it marks that the Chinese nation has been integrated into the world system under the general trend of modernization” (Xu 1998, p. 129). Thus, the Western concept of nation corresponds with the unified, multi-ethnic Chinese nation.

Therefore, the concept of nation in Chinese form refers specifically to the Chinese nation. The national dimension of the Chinese form involves the spiritual products and its related issues of the Chinese nation.

## 2 MARX AND ENGELS ON NATION

Most people believed that Marx and Engels advocated internationalism and disapproved of nationalism in their theories of social liberation based on a slogan in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The workers have no Fatherland.” Some Western Marxists also had a negative perception of the

<sup>6</sup> An early example of this research paradigm was represented by Wang Tongling (王桐齡)’s series of articles in the *History of Chinese Nation* (see Feng 2015).

theories of nationalism proposed by classical Marxist writers.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Marx and Engels thought deeply about national issues. Moreover, they left a wealth of literature on the concept of the nation<sup>8</sup> and many scholars have studied their theories (Hua 1998, pp. 72–76). Given the disputes in understanding and interpreting Marx and Engels’ national theories, I only summarize essential arguments on the relationships between nation and class, as well as nation and internationalism to highlight their positions and methodologies in order to respond to the controversies about their national theories.

### 2.1 *Nation and Class*

The classical Marxist writers’ research on the nation is also based on the standpoint of historical materialism. In terms of the relationship between nation and class, although Marx and Engels emphasized the dominant role of class, their dialectical interpretation of the relationship between nation and class is useful in understanding the relationship of nation, state, and culture in the era of globalization.

#### *Class Issues Dominate National Issues*

Based on the position of the proletariat, Marx and Engels believed that the national issue would weaken the class struggle to some extent, so they primarily related them to class.

Marx and Engels observed that rulers often used national issues to cover up class contradictions and social problems. For example, on

<sup>7</sup> As Robert Wistrich wrote in a book review: “Marxists have tended to deny nationalism any real staying power, to relegate the nation state to a mere transitional phase between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. Marx and Engels, for example, paid little attention to the role of religion and ethnicity, of a common language, culture and history in forging national consciousness. Despite having witnessed the 1848 revolutions in Europe, they failed to grasp the potency of national myths, symbols and sentiment as historical factors. Lenin and Stalin, though more aware of the tactical uses of nationalism for Communist revolutionary strategy, continued to think in universalist Marxist categories of class struggle. Marxist internationalists like Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg were the most vigorous of all in their insistence that any concession to ‘bourgeois’ nationalism would forever corrupt the new socialist dawn, embodied in the revolutionary proletariat” (Wistrich 1998). American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, whom I consulted, said that he had not systematically studied Marx’s national theory and refused to comment further.

<sup>8</sup> The focus here is on related issues addressed in writings of Marx and Engels on the nation rather than the differences between them.

the one hand, the bourgeoisie often used nationalism to legitimize the exploitation of domestic workers and to oppose foreign competitors on the other “...the ruling classes of the old society who can only maintain their own power and the exploitation of the productive masses by national conflicts and antagonisms” (Marx 1989b, p. 819), thus perpetuating the rule of the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, Marx also criticized the provincial, outdated, and false national views of the German bourgeoisie and exposed their duplicity: “The genuine patriotism of the bourgeoisie...has faded into a mere sham consequent upon the cosmopolitan character imprinted upon their financial, commercial, and industrial enterprise” (Marx 1986, p. 501). Since the bourgeoisie was born from the impulse of global expansion, Marx and Engels believed that the bourgeoisie used the national problem as a smokescreen. Moreover, some nationalisms worked against the tide of history, such as the pan-Slavic coalition against revolutionary Austria, on which Engels stated that “Pest itself is obviously the goal” (Engels 1977b, p. 231). In particular, when the nation-state constituted an obstacle to the international union of the proletariat, the nation became “a reactionary, backward thing.”

For the interests of the proletariat, Marx and Engels advocated that class issues should outweigh national issues and placed class interests above national ones. In the *Communist Manifesto*, they pointed out: “Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 495). The first and foremost thing the proletariat must do is to take on the domestic bourgeoisie. Only when class liberation is achieved can national liberation be achieved. In “Draft of the Civil War in France,” Marx stated plainly, “...the government of the working class is, in the first instance, necessary to save France from the ruins and the corruption impended upon it by the ruling classes, that the dislodgment of these classes from Power (of these classes who have lost the capacity of ruling France) is a necessity of national safety” (Marx 1986, pp. 500–501). He emphasized, “the government by the working class can only save France and do the national business, by working for its own emancipation, the conditions of that emancipation being at the same time the conditions of the regeneration of France” (Marx 1986, pp. 500–501). The liberation of the working class is the premise and condition for national revival. In other words, “... so the victory of the proletariat over

the bourgeoisie is at the same time the signal of liberation for all oppressed nations” (Marx 1976, p. 388).

Additionally, based on this idea, Marx and Engels put forward the famous slogan “the working men have no country” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 502). Specifically, “The working men have no country” was proposed in response to the accusation that the “the Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 502). The working class has no special interests and therefore, no national prejudice. “But the proletarians in all countries have one and the same interest, one and the same enemy, and one and the same struggle. The great mass of proletarians are, by their very nature, free from national prejudices and their whole disposition and movement is essentially humanitarian, anti-nationalist. Only the proletarians can destroy nationality, only the awakening proletariat can bring about fraternisation between the different nations” (Engels 1976, p. 6). Therefore, Marx and Engels turned their attention to the proletariat for the emancipation of humankind, and they believed that only the proletariat could eliminate this segregation.

#### *Complex Relationship Between Nation and Class*

When studying the relationship between national conflicts and class struggle, Marx was soberly aware of the complexity of this relationship and provided a far-sighted analysis.

In some particular contexts, Marx believed that nationalism should be recognized; for instance, Ireland’s resistance to the British Empire was justifiable. His suggestions included “self-government and independence from England” and “protective tariffs against England” (Marx 1987, p. 486). Obviously, Marx’s views are based on the position of the oppressed, and he is asking for justice for the weak.

Marx also had the genius to foresee competition within the working class, that is, the competition between the working class of one nation and that of another. When Great Britain enslaved Ireland, Marx expressed, “All industrial and commercial centered in England now have a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the ruling nation and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He harbors religious,

social and national prejudices against him. His attitude towards him is roughly that of the poor whites to the niggers in the former slave states of the American Union. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of English rule in Ireland” (Marx 1988, pp. 471–472). In this letter, Marx not only revealed the intricacies of the relationship between nation and class but also realized the competition within the working class, an increasingly critical issue in the era of globalization.

## 2.2 *Nation and Internationalism*

While studying the international situation of the time, Marx and Engels increasingly and unequivocally realized the correlation between the national problem and the cause of human liberation. Their discussion on the relationship between nations and internationalism is also dialectical. Marx’s views on the independence and unity of nations and the union of all nations based on equality and freedom have theoretical relevance and practical significance for the comprehension of international relations in the context of globalization.

### *Criticism of National Chauvinism*

The criticism of national chauvinism is another aspect of the arguments on national issues put forward by Marx and Engels. It can be seen in their criticism of Jews and Germans. As a Jew, Marx criticized the Jews’ self-important national view, “But the Jew, too, can behave towards the state only in a Jewish way – that is, by treating it as something alien to him, by counter posing his imaginary nationality to the real nationality, by counter posing his illusory law to the real law, by deeming himself justified in separating himself from mankind, by abstaining on principle from taking part in the historical movement, by putting his trust in a future which has nothing in common with the future of mankind in general, and by seeing himself as a member of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people as the chosen people” (Marx 1975a, p. 147). Describing Germany, Marx charged that it “asserts its narrow-hearted essence before it has been able to assert its magnanimous essence” (Marx 1975b, p. 185). Engels offered biting satire on arguments proposed by theorists like Ernst Moritz Arndt, who put the German nation above all other nations in the world suggesting that “In its infinite self-consciousness [it] places itself above

the nations and expects them to kneel at its feet and implore it for enlightenment, [and] only shows by this caricatured Christian-Germanic idealism that it is still up to its neck in the mire of German nationalism” (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 177). He said that the nationalism of petty citizens in the guise of “false universalism and cosmopolitanism” was “more disgusting” than overt national parochialism.

At an international conference in London to mark the 17th anniversary of the Polish Uprising of 1830, Engels famously made this observation about Germany’s partition of Poland, “A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations” (Marx 1976, p. 389). For ties between nations founded on oppression, slavery, and plunder breed hatred: “Germany will liberate herself to the extent to which she sets free neighboring nations” (Engels 1975b, p. 166). “Otherwise the fetters with which we have chained other nations will shackle our own new, barely prescient, freedom” (Engels 1975b, p. 166). Moreover, the enslavement of other nations can cause enslavement within the nation itself. On the fantasy of a nation seeking to lead the world, Engels asserted that “The time has passed for ever where one nation can claim to lead all the rest” (Engels 1975b, p. 166). This slogan lay the theoretical foundation for the world’s opposition to hegemonism.

#### *Arguments on Colonization*

In the article “The Future Results of British Rule in India,” Marx talked about the renovation of India’s infrastructure and the promotion of material production by colonization. Because of this article, post colonialists have accused classical Marxist views on colonization of being inappropriate. These views need to be understood in a specific context. At that time, India was extraordinarily underdeveloped and people lived an “undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life” (Engels 2004, p. 12). The construction of infrastructure and commercial exchanges of British colonists in India indeed promoted India’s social development. The British colonists not only connected the Indian states through railway construction but also linked India with the Western world through trade, “and has revindicated it from the isolated position which was the prime law of its stagnation” (Marx 1979a, p. 132). Marx recognized this progress from the perspective of historical development. The British colonists acted as “the unconscious tool of history” for their own interests (Marx 1979b, p. 218).

Marx also expressed his sympathy for the Indian people's suffering and his criticism of the colonizers in this article. Marx emphasized that what the British bourgeoisie in India "... may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people" (Marx 1979b, p. 221). That is, the British colonists did not bring genuine benefits to the people. For the people to truly reap the benefits, there needs to be a transformation in the relations of production. In addition, Marx also mentioned the rivalry and inversion of the civilizations of the conquerors and the conquered: "the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects" (Marx 1979b, p. 218). This thesis reveals some laws and characteristics of the development of civilization and has profound historical significance.

Therefore, we need to comprehensively examine Marx's views on colonial issues. The key is to grasp the position and methodology Marx maintained or used in his research, and the analysis should be carried out considering the context. Admittedly, Marx's own ideas also underwent a process of transformation and maturity.

#### *The Relationship Between Nations and Internationalism*

Classical Marxism also made an incisive and dialectical interpretation about the relationship between nations and internationalism. The independence and equality of nations shape the world landscape and are preconditions of internationalism. Engels made it clear: "true Internationalism must necessarily be based upon a distinctly national organisation" (Engels 1988, p. 155). In the case of Poland, "only when Poland has re-conquered its independence, when it once again exercises control over itself as a free people, only then can its internal development recommence and will it be able to take part in its own right in the social transformation of Europe" (Engels 1989, p. 57). "Without restoring autonomy and unity to each nation, it will be impossible to achieve either the international union of the proletariat, or the peaceful and intelligent co-operation of these nations towards common aims" (Engels 1990a, p. 366). There can be no genuine international cooperation and peace without the independence and unity of all nations. Marx and Engels also further emphasized national independence and autonomy by opposing false internationalism. Engels proposed: "If members of a conquering nation called upon the nation they had conquered and continued to hold down to forget their



specific nationality and position, to ‘sink national differences’ and so forth, that was not Internationalism, it was nothing else but preaching to them submission to the yoke, and attempting to justify and to perpetuate the dominion of the conqueror under the cloak of Internationalism” (Engels, 1988, p. 155). These arguments explicitly reflect classical Marxist thought on national independence. The phenomenon of false internationalism exposed by Engels continues to exist today, and people of all countries should recognize it and be vigilant against it.

Marx and Engels also offered the insight that genuine internationalism requires tangible development within nations. “The relations of different nations among themselves depend upon the extent to which each has developed its productive forces, the division of labour and internal intercourse” (Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 32). The premise of national unity lies within the internal development of each nation. On the one hand, “this theory of universal fraternal union of peoples, which calls indiscriminately for fraternal union regardless of the historical situation and the stage of social development of the individual peoples” (Engels 1977a, p. 366), is not advisable. On the other hand, national independence and internationalism presuppose each other. Independent nations need to relate to each other, “each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others” (Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 49). Nations need to communicate as their isolation could inevitably lead to their decline. Human emancipation “... presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them” (Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 49). Although revolution may result in one country’s victory, considering today’s globalization, which implies countries are inextricably intertwined in politics and economy, it is difficult for a single nation to realize Marx’s social thoughts alone.

Internationalism is built on the foundation of the independence, unity, and autonomy of all nations. The exchange and communication of all nations is the driving force for the continuation and development of human civilization. It can be said that this internationalism is human liberation in its ideal form for Marx and Engels: the free association of independent nations. It is fundamentally different from cosmopolitanism.<sup>9</sup> Internationalism is “inter-national” instead of a kind of equivocal holism.

<sup>9</sup> Cosmopolitanism is a political concept that requires all people to reject the narrow notions of nation and state, to regard all human beings as their own compatriots, and

Marxist classical writers' theories on national issues are illuminating as they constitute the theoretical guidelines for the national dimension of Chinese form. This is because some national theories posited by Marxist classical writers still have realistic pertinence today. They could help us discern and resist the global infiltration of capitalism. More importantly, their historical and dialectical perspective toward national issues offers valuable guidance on methodologies for today's research on national issues. This indicates the contemporary significance of Marx and Engels' theories on the nation. In an evolving context, we can better describe Marxism as "the unification of theory and practice." Marxism itself is open, and its national theories also need to be developed. With its revolutionary, critical, and dialectical power of thought, Marxism has the vitality to continuously renew itself.

### 3 NATIONAL VIEW IN THE CHINESE FORM

Confronted by the harsh reality of the proletariat revolution, Marx's theories on the nation were not fully evolved, leaving room for the national study of the Chinese form. For Chinese Marxist literary criticism, the concept of nation (which means Chinese nation 中华民族) is a vital issue in the Chinese revolution and construction. As Terry Eagleton put it, "If Marxism lent its support to national liberation movements in the so-called Third World, it did so while insisting that their perspectives should be international-socialist rather than bourgeois nationalist" (Eagleton 2011, p. 217). The Chinese form needs to locate national issues within its specific historical conditions to further establish its own national position and notions, and engender the national concept with new theoretical characteristics and connotations from a historical and logical perspective.

#### 3.1 *The Restoration of the Reputation of the Concept of Nation*

"Nation" is a word that has appeared frequently in modern culture and literature. It is also a concept that is often misunderstood. The understandings of the nation and practices related to the nation are diverse. While proposing the Chinese form, we need to clarify the concept of the nation from the perspective of Marxism.

to achieve permanent peace by directly belonging to a single federal state, free from unnecessary wars caused by issues such as national and racial discrimination.

*The Nation Is Not About Self-Seclusion*

Independence is frequently referred to as the foundation of national existence. However, independence by no means implies isolation or closure. As an independent community, the nation is established in contrast to and reference with the “others” in the world. The nation always exists in relation with other nations. Without the other, there would be no nation. Therefore, as a relational concept, a nation needs the reflection of the other and also needs to communicate with the other.

The emergence of the modern concept of nation in China did not happen in isolation, but is a result of the Chinese people’s increasing awareness about the world. The national consciousness among Chinese women and men was stimulated after being humiliated by Western powers, and their purpose of pursuing national self-improvement is to stand abreast with other nations rather than confronting them.

With the cross-border flow of capital and global access to the Internet, the world has become interconnected. It is almost impossible for any nation to stay out of the game. Although there are contradictions and conflicts among different nations, nations have to learn to live with confrontation and interdependence. Many problems can no longer be solved by one country or one government alone. In terms of national development, openness has become indispensable for the existence and continuation of a nation.

*The Nation Is Not About Going Back to the Good Old Days*

The nation cannot be associated with retrograde or regressive movements. Some people believe that national rejuvenation is merely about discovering and preserving traditional skills or restoring traditional costumes. Unquestionably, a nation cannot develop without history and, indeed, a national culture has its virtues. However, as things change over time, a nation anchored in its bygone past has no hope. For the sake of prosperity, a modern nation needs to break away from its past while honoring traditions. Only by abandoning some obsolete things that are incompatible with social development can we move forward easily.

National rejuvenation necessitates the preservation of traditional culture. Nevertheless, how to approach traditional culture remains a problem. Understanding and evaluating traditional Chinese culture is far more complex than a simple affirmation or negation. Traditional Chinese culture does have some excellent characters and genes. “The Chinese nation has cultivated and formed unique ideas and moral norms

in long-term practice. It values benevolence, people, integrity, dialectic, concordance, and general coordination, as well as traditional virtues, such as ceaseless self-improvement, diligence and sociability, righteousness, readiness to help those in distress, fighting for what is right, and filial piety” (Xi 2015, pp. 25–26).

These ideas can withstand the test of time. Literature and culture researchers bear a responsibility to refine and pass on the desirable genes of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, many propositions in Chinese traditional culture are antinomies with both advantages and disadvantages. For example, Laozi’s “non-contention (不爭),” Zhuangzi’s “effortless action (无为),” Taoism’s “purity (清淨),” and Buddhism’s “letting go (放下),” as well as relevant “a contented mind is a perpetual feast (知足常乐)” and “accommodating oneself to circumstances (隨遇而安),” should be subject to dialectical analysis. We “should choose the good aspects to follow and should know the bad aspects and then correct the similar ones in ourselves (擇其善者而从之, 其不善者而改之)” (*The Analects of Confucius*: Shu Er).

While studying traditional culture, it should be noted that the extant ancient books were compiled by rulers, historians, and scholars of the time. The recorded historical materials were basically the products of modifying or redacting some lively and marginal things. Therefore, we need to look beyond the text, as many things may have been omitted, distorted, or deleted. For example, we need to verify the texts against folk practices, oral culture, and even archeological finds regarding the intangible cultural heritage. Even the extant ancient texts are too formidable to explore. We should discern their authenticity. In fact, Chinese culture comes from multiple sources, including the inheritance of Han culture and the changes in Han culture when it was integrated with other ethnic cultures. Therefore, while inclusiveness is a prized characteristic of the Chinese nation, we need to distinguish between the positive influence of external cultures and their distortion of Han culture. However, the latter has not yet attracted much attention and thought. In the history of Chinese civilization, some inherent flaws in traditional culture might be associated with the erosion by alien cultures.

When dealing with the relationship between traditional culture and the present, the national view of Chinese form emphasizes not only the present and but also the future. Xi Jinping suggested: “Inheritance of Chinese culture is not simply restoring past traditions nor blindly exclusive. We need to take a dialectical approach to absorb what is valuable from the ancient and foreign nations while discarding negative elements

of Chinese traditional culture, and ‘opening our new field according to the rules of the ancients,’ thereby achieving creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese culture” (Xi 2015, p. 26). The vitality of tradition lies in “creative transformation and innovative development”; otherwise, tradition is dead. Fredric Jameson also proposed: “We will no longer tend to see the past as some inert and dead object which we are called upon to resurrect, or to preserve, or to sustain, in our own living freedom; rather, the past will itself become an active agent in this process and will begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us, on the social formation in which we exist. At that point, the very dynamics of the historical tribunal are unexpectedly and dialectically reversed: it is not we who sit in judgment on the past, but rather the past, the radical difference of other modes of production (and even of the immediate past of our own mode of production), which judges us, imposing the painful knowledge of what we are not, what we are no longer, what we are not yet” (Jameson 1979, pp. 41–73). The national view of the Chinese form cannot preserve the past as an antique, let alone unconditionally accept what is retained by history. Past culture influences the present culture to some certain extent, serving as a reference and a spur, prompting us to re-examine our present.

Nationality and modernity are not entirely opposite and incompatible. Undeniably, modernity has indeed impacted some timeworn aspects of nationality, but modernity may renew nationality. Throughout China’s modern history, in most cases modernity has not excluded nationality. National self-improvement is intertwined with modernization, and it is in the process of modernization that new China is achieving national rejuvenation. Even in today’s era of globalization, while national development may encounter some headwinds, the exchanges or even confrontation among nations may also be transformed into opportunities and driving forces for the economic or cultural advancement of a nation-state.

### *The Nation Does Not Imply the Collective’s Suppression of Its Individual Members*

The inherent collectivity of the nation is another topic of contention. The relationship between nation and individual should be concretely analyzed. When the country is in peril, given the common fate of individuals and the country, the nation’s interests should be put before its individuals.

Throughout history, many Chinese revolutionaries with lofty ideals sacrificed their lives for national dignity, writing chapters capable of evoking great emotion. In a turbulent time, an individual cannot live a secure and happy life, as “when a bird’s nest is overturned, no egg can remain intact.”

In the concept of the nation of the Chinese form, the collective and the individual are not incompatible like fire and water, nor is the group a tool for coercing or suppressing individuals. The prosperity of a nation should be dependent on the prosperity of its people. The individual rights of value, dignity, freedom, development, and self-fulfillment are essential to a modern nation. The struggles of each individual are the basis of national rejuvenation. Completely ignoring the existence of individuals, or even suppressing or harming them will not sustain the development and prosperity of the nation. On the contrary, the nation should demonstrate respect for individual life and protect individual rights and interests. In this way, individuals will have a more robust national identity while pursuing their own interests, thereby forming a mutually supportive relationship between the collective and the individuals. When necessary, individuals may do everything for their nation, even sacrifice their lives.

### 3.2 *New Interpretations of National View*

To further clarify the connotation of the concept of nation, the Chinese form needs to absorb classical Marxist thought while considering the characteristics of Chinese society and the evolution of Chinese society, thereby exploring and framing the new connotation of nation theoretically.

#### *Nation Is a Historical Concept*

Benedict Anderson proposed a widely-used definition of nation when discussing the issues of nationalism; that is, a nation is “an imagined political community” (Anderson 1991, pp. 5–6). He adopted a novel approach to combat the dilemma of defining the concept of a nation. Perhaps the “imagined” means that the community is constructed by the power of collective identity, rather than suggesting that the national community is fictitious. Despite discussing in detail how a nation was initially imagined, how it was then shaped and remodeled, and the historical preconditions preceding the imagination, he focused on the means and channels through which an imagined nation-state was constructed. According to him, nations are “cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (Anderson 1991,

p. 4) or the narrated text. This concept was met with severe challenges. British ethnographer Anthony Smith classified the modern definitions of the nation into objective and subjective ones. He objected to Anderson's subjective theory of "invented" or "imagined." Instead, he stressed that the nation could not be constructed out of nowhere, and it could only be "reconstructed" on the basis of original ethnic traditions. He wrote: "Typically, where the modern nation claims a distinctive ethnic past, as so often happens, 'invented traditions' turn out to be more akin to 'reconstruction' of aspects of that past. The latter acts as a constraint on 'invention'. Though (the past can be 'read' in different ways, it is not any past, but rather the past of that particular community, with its distinctive patterns of events, personages and milieux. It is not possible to appropriate or annex the past of another community ...in the construction of the modern nation" (Smith 1991, p. 358).

For Marxists, the nation has always been a historical existence rather than an imagined construction. Even as a historical existence, a nation can be narrated differently depending on people's different positions and views. However, in whatever way the nation's origin and formulation are imagined, the nation's gene is always present. Lineages, languages, territories, traditions, and religions comprise the foundation of modern nation-states. Moreover, in the long run, different nations have formed different histories and national memories preserved in literary works such as myths, folktales and legends, historical documents, and even poems. Although these myths and legends are narrative stories, they are more than just wild imagination but are based on the life history of generations of people. A nation is indeed a community of people formed over the course of its history. As Vladimir Lenin put it: "...but 'nations without a history' cannot find models or patterns anywhere (apart from utopias) except among historical nations" (Lenin 1962, p. 125). A nation is an embodiment of the social relations of group identity formed over the course of history. We cannot understand the nation purely based on imagination. The narrative of this historical phenomenon needs to be changed.

National historicity is also reflected by the fact that forming a nation is a continuous process, and group identification is realized gradually rather than overnight. Moreover, since the nation has had its rise, it must also have its fall. In today's globalized world, with immigrants moving all over

the world, future nations are bound to show heterogeneity and convergence to a certain extent. Nevertheless, whether or not nations disappear in the future, diverse cultures will remain.

### *Nation and Culture*

Engels listed several essential elements of a nation in his article “Democratic Pan-Slavism,” “all the other Slavs lack the primary historical, geographical, political and industrial conditions for independence and viability” (Engels 1977a, p. 367).

Joseph Stalin systematically summarized the elements of “nation” in “Marxism and National Issues”: “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin 1953, p. 307). This definition has been considered the classical Marxist definition of a nation. Arguably, these elements did effectively make up the connotations and scope of the nation. However, nowadays, languages, races, and even economic lives could not function as fundamental criteria to distinguish nations (Anderson 1991, p. 46). The question is, which of these elements is the most fundamental? As early as the nineteenth century, it was suggested: “The criteria for distinguishing nations are neither race nor language. When people form a group with the same thoughts, interests, feelings, memories, and hopes, they feel at heart that they belong to one nation” (Delannoi 2005, p. 204). This deeper, empathetic interconnectedness is none other than culture.<sup>10</sup>

It is the culture that maintains a nation. There are many definitions of culture, especially in terms of values. As a symbol of the bond of a nation, culture is manifested as a set of shared ideals, values, and codes of conduct of a group, playing significant roles of exchanging ideas, communicating emotion, and enhancing cohesion among its members. The power of culture can even transcend ethnicity or race. In a nation-state, people of different races or colors can live in a shared space. It is culture and shared values that hold them together. In this sense, culture obviously outweighs blood ties. Although there is heterogeneity within each nation, with the coexistence of cohesion and rejection, centripetal

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the German scholar Max Weber also believed that neither blood nor language suffice to define a nation. Therefore, he turned from culture to politics, believing that the final destination should be politics (Gerth 1946, pp. 172–176).



force and centrifugal force, identification and dissension, as the crystallization of long-term accumulation, each nation's dominant culture is distinguishable from those of other nations. For example, the Gothic churches in Spain are quite distinct from the Forbidden City in China. They represent two different national cultures. Like genes, culture is embedded in the minds of its members and passed down over generations. In the age of globalization, the identity anxiety of those who move to different countries is essentially the anxiety of cultural conflicts.

Thus, it can be said that cultural identity is the foundation for the existence of a nation. The absence of culture and national memory could foretell the extinction of a nation.

### *Nation and the People*

Antonio Gramsci coined a new phrase “national-popular” when studying the dissemination of literature. In the early sixteenth century, the word “nation” experienced an extension of its conceptual meaning in England, and it became almost synonymous with “people” in some modern European languages. Liah Greenfeld has described this extension in her exploration of the evolution of the word “nation” (Greenfeld 1993, pp. 6–9). Gramsci put forward this concept mainly because Italian readers were fond of popular foreign novels and turned a cold shoulder to contemporary national works. He regarded “nation” and “people” as semantically similar concepts. He emphasized “national-popular collective will” (Gramsci 1971, p. 131), and thus correlated the two, proposing that people's education and cultivation are the very premise of national development. Meanwhile, Gramsci's “national-popular” concept is also related to his concept of “cultural hegemony.” Given the relatively weak status of the Italian proletariat in numbers, to assume cultural hegemony, the proletariat must combine forces with farmers and other middle-class groups making them aware of shared interests. This way, leadership could radiate outward from the Communist Party and the working class into the collective “national-popular” will.

In the Chinese form, the correlation between the nation and the people is the outcome of Chinese revolutionary practices. If Gramsci's “national-popular” is mainly a theoretical concept, the correlation between the nation and the people in the Chinese form has become a tangible reality. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the nationalization of literature and art went hand in hand with the popularization of literature and art in China. This combination reflected the consistency

of the nation and the people. In contemporary society, the realization of the correlation between the national and popular was a necessary and inevitable consequence. The convergence of national rejuvenation and popular welfare reflected this combination. Remarkably, people are the main body of the nation. The liberation of the people is tantamount to the liberation of the nation, and people's welfare defines the direction of national development. This proposition by the Chinese Communists breaks away from the classical Marxist writers' view that class interests override national interests and constitutes a transcendence of Lenin's theory of "two national cultures." The national view of the correlation between the nation and the people is another key theoretical characteristic of the Chinese form.

#### 4 THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NATIONAL DIMENSION

The national dimension of the Chinese form is simultaneously a theoretical construction and a practice of criticism. The national dimension will bring a novel perspective to literary criticism, offering a rational analytical tool for analyzing the locality and globalism of literature and the Sino-West relationship. This dimension of criticism is rather different from postcolonial criticism, which aims to guard against and criticize the colonial tone in literature. Instead, it tries to discover and discern the national elements in literary works and build a beautiful spiritual home through the mutual shaping of literature and national spirit.

##### 4.1 *The Research Standpoint of the National Dimension*

In China, the standpoint of "open nationalism" has its own historical and realistic contexts. The modernization of Chinese society involved an excruciating transformation under tremendous amount of external pressure and even dire threats. Regarding literary criticism, without sufficient preparation in terms of thoughts, notions, and theories, China has had to develop itself on the basis of learning and drawing from external critical theories. Since the beginning of the 1980s, with the reopening of China's literary world, there has once again been a large scale of translation and a surge of Western theories of literary criticism. After a while, people gradually realized that the power of discourse was hidden in the dissemination of Western culture and literary criticism. If it continues, Chinese literary

criticism will lose its egalitarian quality in communication with the West. It can be said that the proposition of “open nationalism” is the product of Sino-Western relations, and it always contains an “other” for dialogue.

Throughout modern times, the world of Chinese literary criticism has faced a persistent dilemma in the relationship between China and the West. On the one hand, suppose Chinese literary criticism does not absorb new foreign theories and ideas, and does not communicate with the Western world, it will be difficult to achieve self-renewal and establish a dialogue with the world. On the other hand, if Chinese literary criticism does not transcend Western barriers, it cannot satisfactorily explain China’s unique literary practices. Amidst this anxiety and reflection, the position of open nationalism becomes a choice of national dimension for the Chinese form in the context of globalization.

### *Open Nationalism*

To clarify the position of open nationalism, we need to explain nationalism concisely. The concept of nationalism is paired with the concept of nation, but it is a word that is even more castigated. Some scholars suggest that the term nationalism did not appear in social texts until 1844. Its basic meaning was loyalty and devotion to a nation, especially a specific national consciousness, that is, the belief that one’s own nation is superior to other nations, with the particular emphasis placed on the promotion and enhancement of its own culture and interests to counter the culture and interests of other nations (Xu 1998, p. 40). The term’s appearance in discourse is subject to further investigation, but the explanation above generally contains the primary description of nationalism. Nationalism has long been associated with narrow-cultural tribalism characterized by blindness and self-seclusion, denial of dialogue, ignorance of advanced ideas, and a less-developed culture. We need to take a dialectical approach to this assertion. After all, in the context of globalization, to reject nationalism altogether is to abandon the chance of resisting cultural homogeneity.

Nationalism has its specific national connotation and consciousness in different periods, including national chauvinism and also anti-colonization nationalism, which need to be dismissed. It is generally believed that nationalism has both detrimental and reasonable sides. The detrimental aspect is the potential danger of blind arrogance in nationalism, which tends to feed racism and xenophobia. The interwoven national inferiority

and arrogance will lead to an extremely narrow nationalism. In his reflection on the disasters suffered by the Jews, Ernst Hans Gombrich quoted and agreed with Popper in his later years: “If I may close with the words Popper used: ‘I consider any form of nationalism to be criminal arrogance, or a mixture of cowardice and stupidity. Cowardice, because the nationalist needs the support of the crowd - he does not dare to stand alone - stupidity, because he considers himself and his ilk to be better than others’” (Gombrich 1997, p. 40). Gombrich has a keen insight into the dangers of nationalism. Narrow nationalism tends to be generalized into a kind of intense emotion, which could include violence. This extreme nationalism directly led to Fascism, such as the German Fascist genocide of Jews during World War II. It can also easily cause terrorism in today’s world—acts of terrorism are disastrous for humankind. One should be wary of someone using the banner of nationalism to deceive the public.

Despite its inherent problems, nationalism will not become a thing of the past as long as the modern nation-state exists. From the struggle for independence of various countries, it can be seen that nationalism played an essential role in national liberation and the end of colonial rule. Even in contemporary times, nationalism, as a banner against hegemony, still has strategic significance in resisting global assimilation. This is the rationale of nationalism. Nationalism, as a cohesive collective consciousness, can arouse people’s sense of identity and sense of belonging to the nation, stimulate people’s national self-esteem and self-confidence, form an atmosphere of living upward, and self-improvement within the nation, and stimulate the potential for conflict. Meanwhile, we also find that although some Western countries express their disdain for the word “nationalism” or claim that “nationalism” has been liquidated, they still put their national interests first in their actions. Therefore, an appropriate attitude toward nationalism is that we should not discard nationalism entirely while staying vigilant against all kinds of nationalist trends of thought in globalization.

#### *The Fundamental Connotation of Open Nationalism*

“Open” and “nationalism” seem contradictory, but this paradoxical combination constitutes mutually constrained tensions. “Open” is an attribute of “nationalism,” a rhetorical term for “nationalism,” and it is the driving force for national development. Additionally, “nation” is the anchor of “open.” Without “nationalism” based on the concentric circle of “nation,” “open” will become rootless. Their mutual restriction and

interdependence constitute the unique quality of “open nationalism.” Of course, open nationalism does not mean transcending the state or nation, but only strengthening the interdependence between states or nations.

National difference is a pillar of open nationalism. It is necessary for national development and essential to avoid the homogenization of the world. It has become the academic consciousness of the Chinese form to guard against the substitution of global discourse for local discourse. However, the stress on differences does not necessarily lead to cultural conflicts and confrontations. From the perspective of academic ecology, the coexistence of heterogeneous elements can make the world more harmonious. Marx talked about the role of particularity or difference in the development of a language. He said: “although the most highly developed languages have laws and categories in common with the most primitive ones, it is precisely what constitutes their development that distinguishes them from this general and common element” (Marx 1989a, p. 23). Different countries have distinctive histories and cultures, and it is these differences from the “general and common element” that makes society (and language) rich. Adhering to national differences also includes exploring and promoting the nation’s core values that still have vitality, including Chinese experiences and problems. Core values constitute the most profound part of the spiritual world and values pursued by a nation. Many traditional virtues and values in Chinese traditional culture should be preserved and transmitted. This traditional culture constitutes an important source of socialist core values currently cherished in China. Moreover, the insistence on national differences should be based on the reality of Chinese literature and criticism and should put forward research topics to solve current problems.

The most significant difference between open nationalism and ordinary nationalism is openness. That is, we should listen to the voices of other nations and absorb their strengths. “We should not only base ourselves on national realities but also conduct research open to the outside. We should absorb and use the theoretical views and academic achievements that are beneficial. However, we should not take a single theoretical view and academic achievement as the ‘only criterion,’ nor should we attempt to use a single model to reshape the whole world. Otherwise, it is easy to slide into the mud pit of mechanical theory” (Xi 2016, p. 18). In fact, the central source of today’s communication is not limited to a particular country or a specific cultural background. The emergence of each school of literary criticism embodies the co-creation of scholars from all over the

world. For example, although structuralist literary criticism was prevalent in France, it contained contributions by Ferdinand de Saussure (Switzerland) and by Vladimir Propp and other Russian formalists. In addition, Western culture is also good at absorbing foreign cultural elements. For example, Western poems, paintings, clothes, and even theories have been inspired by the East to a certain extent. Contemporary Chinese literary criticism thus needs to break the vicious circle of binary oppositions such as “margin/center” and “Western/local,” transcend the East-West hierarchical order and narrow national sentiment, and absorb factors beneficial to its own development from heterogeneous cultures to the maximum extent. Open nationalism particularly values this tolerance of “greatness lies in the capacity.” If a nation’s culture protects a kind of national departmentalism forever, then the nation certainly cannot stand abreast with other nations.

Based on open nationalism as a particular position of Chinese form’s national dimension, the questions of how to view Chinese traditional culture, how to judge the culture of other countries and nations, how art and culture could join the quest of building a community with a shared future for humankind, and how to formulate literary criticism that simultaneously embodies the national personality and has world-wide significance should be discussed further from the national dimension.

#### *4.2 The National Dimension and the National Spirit of Literature*

In China and in the West, the nationality of literature had once been the focus of literary criticism. Especially among the European romantics and Russian revolutionary democrats, the nationality of literature served as an important metric to evaluate literary works. However, as “‘nationality’ became the highest criterion and touchstone for measuring the value of all poetic works and the integrity of all poetic honors,” its meaning was so broad that “it lost all connotations” (Belinsky 1980, p. 161). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the national dimension in literary criticism has been overshadowed by formalistic criticism that emphasizes the self-autonomy of literature to the extent that it is barely recognizable. Re-introducing the national dimension into literary activities, setting relatively specific connotations for the national dimension, and discerning and commenting on the national elements in literary works and cultural phenomena in activities of criticism have become the characteristics and contributions of the national dimension in the Chinese form.

### *National Dimension and National Identity in Literature*

The discussion of national consciousness in literary works relates to national identity. The core of national identity is to find one's own identity and sense of belonging, which are especially prominent in the current globalized era. The values being reflected in literary works, and whether they play a role in unifying national consciousness in national revitalization, have become essential metrics for considering a national dimension.

From the perspective of the national dimension, it is evident that excellent literary works often express profound national emotion and national self-consciousness. Lu Xun's words, "While offering my blood to the Yellow Emperor ("On a Photograph of Himself")," show such an ideal and passion. "Why are there tears in my eyes? Because I love this land deeply" (Ai Qing's *I Love the Land*) is a poignant read. Even in novels about personal desires and inner conflicts, such as Yu Dafu's *Sinking*, "Motherland! Motherland! I am dead because of you! Get rich and strong!" its inner sentiment is still intertwined with the nation's destiny, reflecting the deepest affection for the nation. Contrariwise, in some contemporary works, national emotion is not strengthened with the growth of national strength but weakened and degraded. Some works focus on personal sensual pleasure and the expression of desire, but lack conviction and enthusiasm for the current problems and future development of China. Certain other works show the undesirable side of the nation, catering to Westerners' curiosity with their characters' dullness and suffering. These phenomena should deservedly be criticized from the perspective of the national dimension of the Chinese form. Of course, national identity is not equivalent to the unquestioning acceptance of national culture without any reflection. The sense of danger and crisis and criticism of inherent national flaws shown in some literary works also serve to maintain the national spirit, reflecting a sense of social ownership and responsibility. As Marx put it: "the shame must be made more shameful by publicizing it" (Marx 1975b, p. 178). For example, from Wen Yiduo's *Dead Water*, we can obviously sense the fire with its greatest despair containing greatest hope.

When emphasizing national identity, the national dimension should also guard against national chauvinism or populism in literature. The foolish arrogance of some works has aroused disgust and criticism. Answering the question of how to coexist with the world, literary works

should and can provide a way for other countries to understand the Chinese nation through literary characters and images.

*National Dimension and the National Characteristics of Literature*

The evaluation of literature from the perspective of the national dimension involves emphasizing the national identity as well as revealing the national spirit and national features. Mao Zedong greatly appreciated Lu Xun's works. He said that Lu Xun understood foreign and Chinese cultural artifacts, but he did not despise China. "Lu Xun was for a national style" (Mao 1992, p. 102). After absorbing the art forms of Chinese and foreign novels was Lu Xun able to create a new style that deeply reveals the soul of Chinese people.

At present, people have a misconception about national characteristics, which they often associate with national customs or local colors. In fact, what is more important in national characteristics is "the unique way of thinking and feeling of a certain nation" (in Belinsky's words). Literature, as a spiritual product, is the embodiment of the national spirit. The national dimension should investigate the thoughts and emotions embodied in literary works that contain national characteristics as well as contribute to human development. Works of some of the literary giants have been preserved and passed down for generations and have become the symbol of national spirit. An important reason is that they contain profound thoughts. For example, Pushkin is known as the "Sun of Russian Poetry," and Lu Xun is associated with the "National Soul," as their works represent and magnify the national culture.

In addition to searching for value in intellectual thought, the investigation of national characteristics also includes identifying distinctive national forms in works. During the Yan'an period (1935–1948), promoting the national form or folk form was a priority. The widely-sung Yangge (秧歌) operas such as *Brother and Sister Opening the Lands* and northern Shaanxi folk songs had distinct folk forms. This advocacy of national or folk forms is not only an important measure for the Chinese form to reach the people and explore the popularization of literature and art but can also be regarded as a corrective measure for elitism and Europeanization tendencies.

The history of China has witnessed many distinctive national art forms. However, with increasingly deep Western influences, some traditional national art and folk forms have dwindled to the point of needing reclamation. Today's emphasis on the protection of intangible cultural heritage



(including literature) in national forms in essence involves the inheritance and transformation of Chinese traditional culture and dealing with the relationship between Chinese and Western culture. However, the protection of the national form is not limited to the reformation of the original old form. Perhaps it is more significant to facilitate the generation of new national forms in literary works. The formation of this new national form requires the creative transformation of traditional forms as well as the exchange with and learning from other countries' literature and art. In his "Speech at the Work Symposium on Literature and Art," Xi Jinping suggested that innovation in national form "does not exclude learning from the world's outstanding cultural achievements. For socialist literature and art to flourish, we must be eager to learn from the excellent literature and art created by other nations. Only by adhering to the principles of serving China with the foreign, pioneering innovations, and absorbing both Chinese and foreign elements can Chinese literature and art develop and flourish" (Xi 2015, p. 26). Through the national dimension, we analyze literary works to learn how to create novel national forms, thereby demonstrating a new style of integrating local and foreign, and traditional and modern elements unique to China.

From a higher standard, the national dimension of literary criticism should also study the question of "What nationality should be embodied in literature?" The answer could motivate literary works to demonstrate the ideal model of national spirit. "Lu Xun said that to transform the spiritual world of Chinese people, literature and art should be the first priority. Raising the flag of spirit, setting up the spiritual pillar, and building the spiritual home depend on literature and art" (Xi 2015, p. 6). Open nationalism calls for the mutual shaping of literature and national spirit. On the one hand, it requires literature to lead and construct a national spirit. Writers should compose the new epic of the Chinese nation by enhancing the cultural implication and artistic value of their works and leveraging the power of literature to stimulate people's national emotions. On the other hand, brilliant national culture and values provide a spiritual foundation for literature, enabling the possibility of achieving synergy and a mutually supportive relationship between literature and national spirit.

#### *National Dimension and the World*

Attaching great importance to the connection between literature and the world is another crucial aspect of the national dimension of Chinese form. Literature is the most cosmopolitan medium of communication. Not only

do people of all countries need economic exchange but also sustaining communication. “Literature and art are also the best way for different countries and nations to understand and communicate with each other,” “since literature and art is a world language. It is, in fact, about society and life. It is the easiest way to understand and communicate with each other” (Xi 2015, p. 8). This is the strength and value of literature.

While advocating for the expression of the national personality through literary works, the national dimension is associated not only with the pursuit of specificity but also with the discovery of universal value in literature. As early as during the May Fourth period (1915–1921), young Mao Zedong, in the “Establishment and Promotion of National Health Association,” dissected the idea of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application”—the most representative proposal of China’s modern Westernization Movement (洋务运动). He argued that it was in essence an “arrogant” thought, an “empty” thought, a “Confucius-centered” thought, and a thought of “new learning while maintaining old morals.” Under the guidance of this proposal, China could not learn the essence of Western culture, but only get superficial knowledge, therefore would have no chance to change an outdated culture. Later, in his “Talk to Music Workers,” Mao Zedong elaborated his idea further: “some people advocate ‘Chinese learning as the substance, Western learning for practical application’. Is this idea right or wrong? It is wrong. The word ‘learning’ in fact refers to fundamental theory. Fundamental theory should be the same in China as in foreign countries. There should be no distinction between Chinese and Western things in fundamental theory” (Mao 2020, p. 364). Belinsky also said: “Nationality should be the first but not the only requirement. For a poet, the wish of being acknowledged for genius is universal, not just the acknowledgment of only one nation. Besides being national, poets are also universal. In other words, the nationality in the works must be part of the forms, frames, flesh, appearance, and character of the invisible spiritual world of human thought” (Belinsky 1958, p. 93).

Brilliant literature must contain multiple voices, in which not only the individual can be heard but also the national cry and echo of humankind. Engels, commenting on Shakespeare’s work, said that he had written “Merry England” (Engels 1975a, p. 100). Shakespeare’s odd country bumpkins, clever schoolteachers, and lovely and perverse women are all English, and such scenes can only happen under English skies. It is also the case for the environment and characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

(红楼梦), in which the author portrayed the Qing Dynasty as “suddenly like a tower leaning with dim lamps about to be exhausted.” Their works have a cosmopolitan and universal value precisely because of their unrepeatably national content. In this sense, we might as well conclude, “In fact, the more the universality of literature is stressed, the more it may have a national function: asserting the universality of the vision of the world offered by Jane Austen makes England a very special place indeed, the site of standards of taste and behavior...” (Culler 2000, p. 37). “The internationalization of a nation is the inherent necessity of the development of national culture” (Feng 2014, pp. 150–151). If a nation’s literature does not delve deep into the depths of human nature, it is difficult for it to be classified as world literature. This pursuit of universality reflects the confidence of Chinese literary criticism.

While opening the door to the world, the study of Chinese literature also has the responsibility to bring Chinese culture and literary theories to the world and participate in literary circles and their dialogue so that people in other countries can better understand China. In the follow-up and research of Western literary criticism, we found that Chinese literature and criticism have been marginalized and otherized. Western literary criticism, including textbooks, rarely mentioned the literature and criticism of China. Except for a tiny minority of scholars, most Western critical theorists know little about China, especially Chinese literature and literary theories, which are substantially characterized by falsification or distortion. For example, one important reason some works of art have gained fame in the West is that they cater to Westerners’ curiosity about the East to some extent. Of course, they also expose some Western scholars’ prejudices against Eastern culture. Therefore, reversing the suppression and marginalization of Chinese literature and criticism is one of the critical tasks of the national dimension of the Chinese form. The Chinese form should assume a more active position in literary criticism and find the value and characteristics of Chinese literature and criticism through discussion and dialogue, thereby blazing a new trail for exchange and communication.

In short, the reinterpretation of the nation and the introduction of the national dimension constitute the essential characteristics of the Chinese form, distinguishing it from other forms of Marxist literary criticism. As for the theoretical construction and practical application of the national dimension, there are still many problems to be considered and studied.

Also, the national dimension is only one of the dimensions of literary criticism, and it is a dimension which needs vigilance and cannot be abused. Peace and development are the general trends in today's world. Chinese culture has the characteristic of "greatness lies in the capacity," which pursues cultural integration rather than cultural confrontation, and it is the responsibility of the Chinese form to contribute to world civilization while rejuvenating the Chinese nation.

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## The Political Dimension of Literary Criticism

“Politics” occupies a special and prominent place in Chinese Marxist literary criticism and is an essential element of the Chinese form. Moreover, the relationship between literature and politics runs through the entire historical process of Chinese Marxist literary criticism and has become another major dimension.

### I MARX AND ENGELS ON POLITICS AND LITERATURE

The concept of politics, one of the most fundamental relational aspects of human civilization, has undergone an evolutionary process. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476/403 BCE) of China, Guan Zhong of the State of Qi said, “Politics is about righteousness. Those who are righteous determine the fate of all things.” In *The Analects of Confucius*, Yan Yuan says, “Politics is about being righteous.” In the ancient times, “politics” focused on people’s conduct, emphasizing the importance of being righteous as a person or an official. In modern times, the meaning of “politics” corresponds to the English word Politics. The word Politics originates from Polis (the ancient Greek city-state), whereas Polites (citizens) in Polis leads to Politikos (politics), the governance of the city-state. In his book *Politics*, Aristotle does not make a clear definition of politics but links it to taking part “in the constitution” or participation in the activities of the city-state (Aristotle 1995, p. 38). The meaning of politics has been interpreted differently in different times and



by different statespersons. Thomas Hobbes, a British political philosopher in the seventeenth century, defined politics as an activity of the battle for power (Hobbes 1998, pp. 70–72). Dr. Sun Yat-sen also interpreted politics similarly: “Political affairs are the affairs of the masses, governance is management, and the management of the affairs of the masses is politics” (Sun 2011, p. 719). All these are interpretations of politics from the management side above, which differ from Aristotle’s political concept of “group interaction.” Daniel Bell, in his book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, gives a modern interpretation of politics: “The polity is the arena of social justice and power: the control of the legitimate use of force and the regulation of conflict (in libertarian societies within the rule of law), in order to achieve the particular conceptions of justice embodied in a society’s traditions or in its constitution, written or unwritten” (Bell 1978, p. 11). Here, he emphasizes fairness and justice. The British scholar Andrew Gamble explains the meaning of politics in three ways: “However small the ‘court’ around the site of power, there will still be a struggle to control that power, to determine its policy and to speak on behalf of it...But to concentrate too much on politics as power neglects the other dimensions: politics as identity and politics as order” (Gamble 2000, pp. 99–103). Politics, thus, encompasses power, identity, and order. Then, how the concept of politics is regarded in Marxist tradition? And how Marxist interpretation of this concept informs us?

### 1.1 *Classical Marxist View on Politics*

Marx and Engels did not make a specific and systematic study of politics; however, all the concepts delineated in their writings, such as state, republic, commune, and political party, involve politics. We can sum up a threefold meaning of the concept of politics for classical Marxist writers: (i) politics as a component of the superstructure in the social structure; (ii) politics as class interests and class struggle; (iii) politics as human emancipation—the pursuit of human ideals. These three meanings have their own focus and yet interconnected, and together, they constitute the political view of classical Marxism.

#### *Politics as a Component of the Superstructure*

Marx’s study of political attributes is based on a critique of Hegel’s philosophy, which is synchronized with the change in Marx’s understanding of Hegel. From the standpoint of materialism, Marx discovered the material

relations at the root of civil society in his critique of religion and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Subsequently, he turned from his study of Hegel's philosophy of state to the study of political economy. Eventually, he put forward the famous argument positing that politics is a part of the superstructure built on the economic base in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*—written in 1843—Marx revealed the nature of religion and the German philosophy of state and right, implying that they were “an upside-down world.” According to Marx, Hegel was the master of German philosophy of state and right, and “The criticism of the German philosophy of state and law, which attained its most consistent, richest and final formulation through Hegel” (Marx 1975a, p. 181). Further, he indicated that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was still “...abstract extravagant thinking on the modern state, the reality of which remains a thing of the beyond, if only beyond the Rhine...” (Marx 1975a, p. 181). For Hegel, the temple of philosophy builds on the external manifestation of the absolute spirit, and the state is the reality of ethical concepts, the image, and reality of reason (Hegel 2005, pp. 194, 271–272). The concepts and spirit become independent subjects, “The idea is made the subject and the actual relation of family and civil society to the state is conceived as its internal imaginary activity” (Marx 1975a, p. 8). Consequently, there is an “upside-down” in Hegel's philosophy:

The concrete content, the actual definition, appears as something formal; the wholly abstract formal definition appears as the concrete content....Philosophical work does not consist in embodying thinking in political definitions, but in evaporating the existing political definitions into abstract thoughts. (Marx 1975a, pp. 17–18)

In his critique of Hegel's philosophy, Marx discovered civil society and the political state, which originated in the “material relations of life,” and thus returned from the ideological world to the real world. In his “Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” Marx, for the first time, briefly explained economic base and superstructure as well as their interrelationship, locating politics within the social structure:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of

production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. (Marx 1989, p. 263)

Marx divided the social structure into the economic base and the superstructure, where the superstructure comprises the state apparatus as the “legal and political superstructure” and the “forms of social consciousness” arises (Marx 1989, p. 263). As such, Marx positioned politics in the social structure, saying, “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life” (Marx 1989, p. 263). In other words, the economic base determines the superstructure, and politics, as a component of the superstructure, is no exception. Marx also specified the components of “ideological forms,” including “...the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic...” (Marx 1989, p. 263). Therefore, according to Marx, politics has two aspects within the superstructure: (a) the institutional aspect, such as political organizations and institutions; (b) the form of ideology, such as political thoughts and ideas. Literature is related to both aspects—it is subject to the constraints of political organizations and institutions; however, it also has a closer connection with political thoughts and ideas—a form belonging to ideology. Additionally, these two aspects interact with each other—“Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But each of these also reacts upon the others and upon the economic basis” (Engels 2004, p. 265). In the case of literature, political institutions restrain literature by orienting political thoughts and ideas. Nevertheless, literature is able to affect the institutional aspect by influencing people’s thoughts.

Thus, Marx’s discussion of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, and even his prescription of politics as an ideology, did not come out of nowhere but were based on historical materialism and the assimilation as well as the critique of Hegel. As Marx was targeting Hegel’s idealist system, he emphasized especially the decisive role of the economic base. Engels further elaborated upon it in his

later years to prevent distortion of the Marxist doctrine of the interrelationship between the economic base and ideology. He indicated that the determinant of the historical process is ultimately the production and reproduction of real life and that the development of politics, law, philosophy, religion, literature, and art is founded on economic development. However, economic factors are not the “sole” decisive factors. There are various other elements in the superstructure, such as religion and philosophy, which are “more rarefied ideological fields” (Engels 2001b, p. 61) than the political and legal systems. As Engels also pointed out, the superstructure and its various forms of ideology, while subject to the economic base, “reacts in its turn on the economic base and may, within certain limits, modify the same” (Engels 2001b, p. 61). Forms of ideology, as dynamic forces, can influence each other and react to the economic base in a direct or indirect, positive or negative way. In short, the course of history results from the interaction of various factors. Nevertheless, the determinant is the contradiction and conflict between the forces and relations of production.

Ideology is not a monolith block. Generally,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 59)

In the superstructure of the social structure, the ideology of the ruling class as the dominant ideology can domesticate the ideology of the ruled class. However, the repressed and shadowed elements in the thoughts of the ruled class are also potentially rebellious and raise some objections from time to time. Ideology exists as the medium in which “men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (Marx 1989, p. 263), and literature visually mirrors the contradiction of ideology as a whole with its vividness. Therefore, the study of the politics of literature requires a return to a specific historical context to grasp the complexity of its ideology.

Marx and Engels did not discuss which of the various forms of ideology played the dominant role. Although Engels recognized that economic factors were not the “sole” decisive factors, he failed to recognize the question of the pioneering role of the superstructure. Marx and Engels

have left us with a significant blank in this issue. Lenin added to the status of politics in light of the nature of his time, arguing that “politics is a concentrated expression of economics” (Lenin 1962a, p. 83) and plays a vital role in the forms of the superstructure. Mao Zedong raised politics to a pivotal position in the realm of ideology and mentioned it along with economy, arguing that politics, like economy, plays a major and even determining role in culture and other ideologies.

### *Politics as Class Struggle*

Another reference to the concept of politics by classical Marxist writers are class interests and struggle as a result of the increasingly acute struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. The connotation of politics here is a continuation of its ideological nature and is reflected in the struggle between classes over the central issue of the ownership and mastery of the ruling power. In his “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy,” Marx, while criticizing Hegel’s philosophy, introduced the concepts of “class” and “proletariat”: “As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapons in philosophy” (Marx 1975a, p. 187). With the study of political economy, Marx examined the class problem from the relations of production and regarded the class struggle as the main driving force of social development.

In Marx’s view, labor and division of labor gave birth to classes:

Labour and the division of labour are essential...conditions of life of every human society. In Egypt there was labour and division of labour—and castes; in Greece and Rome labour and division of labour—and free men and slaves; in the Middle Ages labour and division of labour—and feudal lords and serfs, guilds, social estates etc. In our day there is labour and division of labour—and classes, one of which owns all means of production and all means of subsistence, while the other lives only so long as it sells its labour, and it sells its labour only so long as the employing class enriches itself by purchasing this labour. (Marx 1977, p. 259)

Class antagonism is displayed in the differences in the control of the instruments of production and means of subsistence. In this sense, class

is a product of the relations of production, which leads to the contradiction and struggle between classes.<sup>1</sup> In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels indicated that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 482). They proceeded to say, “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 482). The bourgeoisie and the proletariat have their own characteristics as inevitable outcomes and historical forms of capitalist social production. This “has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 485).

The emergence, differentiation, and antagonism of classes give rise to the class struggle to win interests and attain power for the class. The essence of class struggle is the struggle for power or domination so that “...every class struggle is a political struggle” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 493). This political nature is evidenced at every stage of bourgeois development (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 486). Engels explained as follows:

Now Marx has proved that the whole of history hitherto is a history of class struggles, that in all the manifold and complicated political struggles the only thing at issue has been the social and political rule of classes of society, the maintenance of domination by older classes and the conquest of domination by newly arising classes....and in the same way the conceptions and ideas of each historical period are most simply to be explained from the economic conditions of life and from the social and political relations of the period. (Engels 1989, pp. 191–192)

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Weydemeyer in 1852, Marx said the following: “Now as for myself, I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them.... My own contribution was 1. to show that the existence of classes is merely bound up with certain historical phases in the development of production; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society” (Marx 1983a, pp. 62–65).

In a class society, politics embodies the economic, social, and cultural contradictions and struggles of different classes, strata, and groups. However, in Marx's time, it concentrated on the contradictions and struggles between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the first step of the class struggle is to raise the proletariat to the level of the leading class.

Lenin and Mao inherited and developed the classical Marxist view of class struggle. Lenin demonstrated that "Politics means a struggle between classes; means the relations of the proletariat in its struggle for its emancipation, against the world bourgeoisie" (Lenin 1962b, p. 371). Mao said, "politics refers to class and mass politics and not to the small number of people known as politicians" (Mao 1943, p. 75). Mao integrated politics with the fundamental interests of the masses. Different classes or political groups, to protect and expand their interests, often adopt certain strategies, means, and forms of organization to deal with their internal relations or those with other classes, nations, and countries.

### *Politics as Human Emancipation*

The third meaning of politics points to the total emancipation of human beings. The link between politics and human emancipation is consistent for Marx through his writing of different period. In 1843, in "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy: Introduction," he proposed to "overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being" (Marx 1975a, p. 182). In other words, the ultimate goal of politics is found in all aspects of social life related to the free development of the human spirit. In his critique of the Young Hegelian Bruno Bauer's "The Jewish Question," Marx, referring to the question of "what kind of emancipation," underlined that "All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself" (Marx 1975b, p. 168).

Class struggles in the past were all about the replacement of political power. Regardless of whether it was the overthrow of the slave owner class by the feudal landlord class or that of the feudal landlord class by the bourgeoisie, they were all about the overthrow of the previous ruling class for the benefit of their own class. Moreover, they did not fundamentally eliminate exploitation and oppression per se but only replaced the old modes of exploitation and oppression with new ones. Engels explained this problem in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State*:

Since the exploitation of one class by another is the basis of civilisation, its whole development moves in a continuous contradiction. Every advance in production is at the same time a retrogression in the condition of the oppressed class, that is, of the great majority. What is a boon for the one is necessarily a bane for the other; each new emancipation of one class means a new oppression of another class. (Engels 1990b, p. 275)

According to Marx and Engels, only the proletariat can achieve the complete emancipation of man because proletarian politics, unlike all class politics in the past, has the long-term goal of the full emancipation of man, and the proletariat can liberate itself only by liberating all humankind. Therefore, the proletariat has to break this historical loop, terminate the old relations of production, and achieve real and complete emancipation through revolution. “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 506). Marx’s vision of proletarian politics represents not the interests of partial masses but the ultimate and highest goal of all humankind. The pursuit of full human emancipation is the ultimate implication of Marx and Engels’ political outlook. The supremacy of the people as held by the Chinese Communists today can be viewed as a major part of the transition from Marxist class politics to the politics as human emancipation.

### 1.2 *Marx and Engels’ Political Criticism*

The extension of Marx and Engels’ study of politics to the understanding and evaluation of literature and art constitutes the political dimension of Marxist literary criticism. Classical Marxist writers have always been paying close attention to the development of literature and art in the practice of proletarian revolution and struggle. The characteristics of the political dimension of Marxist literary criticism can be clearly outlined through the discussions in Marx and Engels’ political essays and letters. Marx and Engels highly praised the value of knowing the world and social criticism function of literary works, encouraged writers and artists to come to face-to-face the society, and explicitly proposed to write about the life and struggle of the proletariat. They claimed that literary works should be “Shakespeareised” rather than “Schillerised” when discussing the relationship between authenticity and inclination in literature and art.



*Raising Doubts About the “Eternity” of the Bourgeoisie*

Marx and Engels, as proletarian revolutionaries, emphasized the political function of literature in their evaluation of literary works. They saw the importance of literature in promoting social change, highlighting the role of literature in understanding and transforming social reality.

Critical realism in the nineteenth century provided fertile ground for the practice of political criticism by classical Marxist writers. In 1854, in his essay “The English Bourgeoisie,” Marx spoke highly of the work of a group of outstanding novelists in modern England, represented by Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë. This was because “the present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together” (Marx 1980, p. 664). Marx considered these realist works superior to those by “all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together” (Marx 1980, p. 664) because the details contained in these novels demonstrate widely various social scenarios far more vividly than some textbooks. The political significance of literature is that it restores the historical context, provides fine details, and demonstrates the complexity of the historical ideology of the time, which is exactly the appeal of literary images.

The political element of realist works is prominently presented in the rebellion against capitalist society. Engels once praised the German painter Hübner’s painting reflecting the life of Silesian weavers, believing that it “...has made a more effectual Socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets might have done” (Engels 1975, p. 230). Literary works revealed the ugliness of capitalist society through authentic, vivid images and raised doubts about the “eternity” of capitalism. In a letter to Minna Kautsky, Engels wrote as follows:

If the novel of socialist tendency wholly fulfils its mission if, by providing a faithful account of actual conditions, it destroys the prevailing conventional illusions on the subject, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world and inexorably calls in question the permanent validity of things as they are, even though it may not proffer a solution or, indeed, in certain circumstances, appear to take sides. (Engels 1995, p. 357)

That is to say, Marx and Engels fully recognized the value of literature in the perception of the world and the important role of realist works in promoting social progress.

*“The Courage of the True Artist”*

In terms of writers’ creation, Marx and Engels encouraged artists to confront society and show “the courage of the true artist” in their critical practice—namely, they should dare to speak for the proletariat and depict the reality of social life.

In 1844, in his article “Rapid Progress of Communism in Germany,” Engels praised Heinrich Heine’s poem “The Silesian Weavers” and translated it into prose, regarding it as “one of the most powerful poems” (Engels 1975, p. 233). Engels stated that many of Heine’s political lyric poems disseminated socialist ideas. Georg Wirth, a famous German proletarian poet, was close friends with Marx and Engels. Marx considered Wirth’s death “an irreplaceable loss” (Marx 1983b, p. 374). Engels called him “the first and most important poet of the German proletariat” (Engels 1990a, p. 110) and praised his creative achievements, considering that “his socialist and political poems are indeed far superior to Freiligrath’s in terms of their originality and wit, and particularly in their fervent passion” (Engels 1990a, p. 110). In the “Preface” to the 1893 Italian edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels voiced his hope that a new Dante would emerge to herald the birth of a new era of the proletariat.

In his letter to Margaret Harkness, Engels, despite slightly disapproving of her failure to write about the resistant spirit of the protagonist, fully affirmed the different position she took in her writing from that of the “revolutionary swells” of the time. Engels said the following:

What strikes me most in your tale besides its realistic truth is that it exhibits the courage of the true artist. Not only in the way you treat the Salvation Army, in the teeth of supercilious respectability, which respectability will perhaps learn from your tale, for the first time, why the Salvation Army has such a hold on the popular masses. But chiefly in the plain unvarnished manner in which you make the old, old story, the proletarian girl seduced by a middle-class man, the pivot of the whole book. (Engels 2001a, p. 167)

The courage Engels spoke of was shown first by Harkness’s portrayal of the Salvation Army as “in the teeth of supercilious respectability” (note:

namely, some leaders of the British socialist movement) who portrayed themselves as “revolutionary swells” but were indifferent to the workers’ living conditions and did not do any practical work. It undoubtedly took courage for Harkness to touch upon in her novel the prejudices and misguided tendencies of the socialist movement of the time. Harkness also demonstrated courage through her insistence on a realistic approach to life in her novel “A City Girl,” which depicts a stereotypical story of a proletarian girl named Nelly being seduced by a bourgeois man in a “commonplace character of the plot under heaps of artificial complications and adornments” and “simply telling it truly.” The loyal depiction of the living conditions of the English workers reveals the hidden class antagonism in the story.

*“Sings...of the Proud, Threatening, and Revolutionary Proletarian”*

“Sings...of the proud, threatening, and revolutionary proletarian” (Engels 1977, p. 235) was the new demand put forward by Marx and Engels for proletarian literature. It was a prominent embodiment of class politics in the field of literature and art. The attitude toward society and the proletariat became a significant measure of Marx and Engels’ works, which can be perceived in the letters of the classical writers to Lassalle, Minna Kautsky, and others.

Every era or class has its own ideal characters, which are the embodiment of social and aesthetic ideals under certain historical conditions. In *The German Ideology*, the classical Marxist writers took whether one had the intention and ability to change the social environment as the fundamental marker to distinguish the “new people” from those who remain “as of old” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 214). The image of the “new people” of the proletariat is “new” because they are no longer the passive masses who are dull and insensitive. They are the protagonists who are determined and motivated to make progress in history. Marx and Engels wanted writers and artists to represent the “new man,” the new force in society. Engels made this point even more explicit in his “German Socialism in Verse and Prose.” In his evaluation of Beck’s “Songs about the Poor Man,” Engels used a mocking tone for his bitter criticism. The paper begins with the following: “‘Songs about the Poor Man’ begins with a song to a wealthy house” (Engels 1977, p. 235). To create a “kingdom of love,” Beck started with abstract humanism and philanthropism, portraying his characters with rather limited pity

and sympathy. “Beck sings of the cowardly petty bourgeois wretchedness, of the ‘poor man,’ the pauvre honteux with his poor, pious and contradictory wishes of the ‘little man’ in all his manifestations, and not of the proud, threatening, and revolutionary proletarian” (Engels 1977, p. 235). These pathetic “poor man” who cannot help themselves and the humble “little man” who are full of vulgarity have no class self-consciousness, lack revolutionary demands to change their social environment, and become servile, pathetic characters who are subservient to the dominant power. Such a depiction was sharply condemned by Engels. He explicitly proposed that proletarian literature “sings...of the proud, threatening, and revolutionary proletarian” (Engels 1977, p. 235). Such an advanced social force represents the future of humanity and embodies the trend of historical development. It was in this sense that Marx criticized Lassalle’s Franz von Sickingen for not accurately reflecting class relations in sixteenth-century Germany and inappropriately representing “the diplomatic error of regarding the Lutheran-knightly opposition as superior to the plebeian-Münzerian” (Marx 1983b, p. 420).

The proletariat, as the creator of history, deserves to have their lives and struggle depicted in literature. Marx and Engels’ idea of shaping the image of the new proletariat is of epoch-making significance. And Mao’s idea that literature and art should portray new characters and exhibit a new world can be viewed as a continuation of the literary thought of the classical Marxist writers.

*“The Tendency Should Spring from the Situation and Action as Such”*

While Marx and Engels’ critical practice was focused on serving the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, they did not advocate sloganeering when discussing inclination in their works. As proletarian revolutionaries with profound knowledge of literature and art, Marx and Engels stressed the need to “Shakespeareise” literature rather than “Schillering” it when discussing the relationship between literature and politics. In a letter to Minna Kautsky in 1885, Engels clearly expounded the political inclination and authenticity of literature as well as the relationship between them in the context of Minna Kautsky’s novel “Die Alten und die Neuen” and other works in the history of European literature. Engels stated the following:

I am not at all opposed to tendentious poetry as such. The father of tragedy, Aeschylus, and the father of comedy, Aristophanes, were both

strongly tendentious poets, as were Dante and Cervantes, and the best thing about Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* is that it was the first politically tendentious drama in Germany. The Russians and Norwegians of today, who are producing first-rate novels, are all tendentious writers. But I believe that the tendency should spring from the situation and action as such, without its being expressly alluded to, nor is there any need for the writer to present the reader the future historical solution to the social conflicts he describes. (Engels 1995, p. 357)

Here, Engels indicated that the inclination should spring naturally not as a blunt, flat, and dry expression. It should neither be a megaphone of the spirit of the times nor a subjective indication of the future, but a realistic depiction of life, revealing the trend of historical development. Engels even felt that “the more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art” (Engels 2001a, p. 167). Thus, the command the writer “has over his creatures” (Engels 1995, p. 357) involves having a good command and skillful use of various artistic techniques.

Regarding the question of authenticity and inclination, Engels gave a dialectical explanation in his evaluation of Balzac. In *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac “gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French ‘Society’, especially of le monde parisien describing, chronicle fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles” (Engels 2001a, p. 168). Engels affirmed the authentic loyalty of Balzac’s portrayal, “in a chronicle fashion” (Engels 2001a, p. 168) while pointing out that, in the face of historical developments, “...Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate” (Engels 2001a, p. 168). The writer’s depiction of social development, whether cheering or longing, angry or critical, nostalgic, or even elegiac, depends on whether the writer grasps and judges the necessity of historical development and whether the work they create conforms to it. Balzac’s works faithfully express the necessary trend of French social and historical development and conform to the laws of historical development. This is why Engels called him “a far greater master of realism than all the Zolas passées, présents et à venir” (Engels 2001a, pp. 167–168). Those who are content “with producing an arid and boring catalogue of isolated instances of misfortune and social cases” can “provide no opportunity to relate the individual facts of the narrative

to general conditions and thus bring out what is striking or significant about them” (Engels 1977, pp. 244–245). Works that depict singular events in isolation, even if they generate some success, can hardly reveal the underlining trends of the times. It is in this sense that the classical Marxist writers stress that “the chief protagonists in the action are representative of certain classes and tendencies, hence of certain ideas of their time, and derive their motives not from the petty appetites of the individual but from the very historical current by which they are borne along” (Engels 1983, p. 442). Thus, Marx and Engels, through their correspondence with the writers, elaborated their views on the organic unity of class consciousness, the edifice of the times, and historical development in literary works. Moreover, Engels hoped that the brilliant literary works would be “the complete fusion of greater intellectual profundity, of a consciously historical content, with Shakespearean vivacity and wealth of action” (Engels 1983, p. 442) which, in fact, involves the relationship among the philosophical, historical, and aesthetic aspects of literature. The greater artistic vision of classical Marxist commentaries on specific works is directly related to their profound artistic culture.<sup>2</sup> The classical Marxist writers’ deep affection of literature laid a solid foundation for their study of literary issues. Although Marx and Engels later chose to devote themselves to the cause of the proletarian revolution, they demonstrated their interest and fondness for literature and art throughout their lives.

Marx and Engels’ political criticism was aimed mainly at realist works, and some of their views may be somewhat outdated due to vicissitudes in literary trends and creation. However, their insights into the relationship between literature and politics are instructive for the analysis of the value and function of literature today. Today, we still face the same issues, such as the cognitive function of literature and its relationship with disciplines such as historical and moral studies, the responsibility and conscience of writers and artists, what to write and how to write, and especially how to properly handle the relationship between authenticity and inclination in a

<sup>2</sup> Marx read extensive classical literature as a teenager and was extremely fond of literature and poetry. From 1835 to 1837, Marx wrote four books of poetry, a fragment of a humorous novel, and several scenes of a play. Only after entering the University of Berlin did Marx turn his main attention to the study of philosophy. Engels began writing poetry and novels in high school, organized a literary group, and later experimented with various genres, writing short stories and plays in addition to poetry and novels. He was highly skilled in literary criticism and political writing.

text. The views of classical Marxist writers supplement the basic principles and positions of research issues in literary criticism and open up space for further exploration of Chinese Marxist literary criticism.

## 2 LITERATURE AND POLITICS IN THE CHINESE FORM

The realities of each era put forward different tasks for theoretical research. The political dimension of the Chinese form has undergone some adjustments and transformations based on the inheritance of political outlook of classical Marxism. Further, the emphasis on the ideological function of literature has become a distinctive characteristic of the Chinese form.

### 2.1 *Mao Zedong's View on Art and Politics*

The relationship between literature and politics occupies a prominent position in Mao's system of literary and artistic thought. Mao viewed literature and art from the perspective of the overall situation of the Chinese revolution and determined their status and role considering the characteristics of the Chinese revolution and the tasks it faced. Therefore, when discussing the relationship between literature and politics, Mao focused on issues such as the direction and policies of literature and art, not on specific literary phenomena or characteristics.

#### *Mao on Politics*

Mao's view of politics, an inheritance of classical Marxism, is defined by its own characteristics. As a Marxist, Mao also spoke of the superstructural nature of politics in terms of social structure and indicated the class attributes of politics in class society. Emphasizing the importance of class, Mao said, "Politics, both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary alike, concerns the struggle between classes" (Mao 1943, p. 75). He highlighted that the purpose of politics is to serve the majority and that politics represents the fundamental interests and wishes of the broadest masses of the people, which are in line with the political views of classical Marxist writers. Moreover, Mao put forward a new interpretation of politics according to China's national conditions, which, to a certain extent, reflects the uniqueness of the political outlook in the Chinese form.

Based on the Marxist doctrine of economic base and superstructure, Mao, considering the history and reality of the Chinese revolution, made

a specific and unique elaboration of the locus and role of politics within the social structure and its relationship with the economy:

Any given culture (as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economics of a given society, and the former in turn has a tremendous influence upon the latter; politics is the concentrated expression of economics. This is our fundamental view of the relationship of culture to politics and economics and of the relationship of politics to economics. (Mao 2005, p. 331)

Mao recognized that material things determine spiritual things in the process of general historical development and highlighted the reactive role of the spirit to the material. Moreover, Mao argued that politics is often central and dominant within the superstructure and ideologies and directly linked politics with economy, believing that politics is the concentrated expression of economy and that both factors act upon culture. In Mao's exposition, politics is endowed with a special nature, and he has shown foresight on the inosculation of the economic base and the superstructure.

Another characteristic of Mao's political outlook is the combination of class politics along with the national conditions of China and the particular age. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, opposition to Japanese imperialist aggression was the primary politics of the period; therefore, class politics expanded into national politics. Mao stated, "The first and fundamental problem in China today is resistance to Japan" (Mao 1943, p. 76). The mentality of the society then inevitably had a strong political overtone of unity against Japanese aggression. The politics during different periods embody the characteristics of the times, and it is impossible to make a definite judgment about politics without considering a specific period of time. Thus, class politics and the overall politics of the times are interweaved. Mao extended class politics to the wider politics of the masses and further combined it with the contemporary age. He also underlined that the economic interests of a certain class and the masses can be duly guaranteed only by certain politics. As he said, "because class and mass needs can only be expressed in a concentrated form through politics" (Mao 1943, p. 75). Politics represents the voice of the people, and the utmost purpose of politics is to serve the people.



After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mao stressed the significant influence and reaction of ideology in light of the reality of the Chinese revolution and construction of the Chinese nation. "It is man's social being that determines his thinking. Once the correct ideas characteristic of the advanced class are grasped by the masses, these ideas turn into a material force which changes society and changes the world" (Mao 2021, p. 17). Another principal aspect of Mao's thought on literature and art is the estimation and the emphasis on the function of the "significant influence and reaction" on the superstructure, such as culture and literature. Among the classical Marxist writers such as Marx and Engels, Mao was the politician who attached the greatest importance to the ideological initiative of literature and art.

*Mao on the Unity of Literature and Politics*

Regarding the relationship between literature and politics, Mao expounded, "In the world today, all culture or literature and art belongs to a definite class and party, and has a definite political line. Art for art's sake, art that stands above class and party, and fellow-travelling or politically independent art do not exist in reality" (Mao 1943, p. 75). Mao made a universal judgment here using "in the world today" and "all culture or literature and art." As an ideology, literature and art necessarily reflect the needs, wills, and aspirations of a certain nation, era, or social group and reform the world in accordance with the aforementioned aspirations and demands of certain social groups and its members. Mao incorporated literature and art into the entire revolutionary cause. He praised the significant role played by the May Fourth Movement: "For the last twenty years, wherever this new cultural force has directed its attack, a great revolution has taken place both in ideological content and in form (for example, in the written language)" (Mao 2005, p. 359). In China's national liberation struggle, literature and art also played a crucial role: "Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution" (Mao 2005, p. 369). Chinese people's struggle for liberation requires both civil and military fronts, relying on both the army with guns and the army with pens. As Mao emphasized, "If literature and art did not exist in even the broadest and most general sense, the revolution could not advance or win victory" (Mao 1943, p. 75).

Mao, who wrote both *On Contradiction* and *On Practice*, also observed the dialectical relationship between literature and politics. In his “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” he said the following:

We do not support excessive emphasis on the importance of literature and art, nor do we support their underestimation. Literature and art are subordinate to politics, and yet in turn exert enormous influence on it. (Mao 1943, p. 75)

Mao deemed that good works should achieve the unity of the following:

What we demand, therefore, is a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible. Works of art that lack artistry, however progressive politically, are nevertheless ineffectual. We are therefore equally opposed to works of art with a harmful content and to the tendency toward the so-called “slogan style,” which is only concerned with content and not with form. (Mao 1943, p. 78)

This discourse is extremely dialectical and theoretically discusses the relationship between politics and art as a unity of opposites.

As literary and artistic works embody the unity of ideological content and artistic form, the standards of literary and artistic criticism are characterized by two aspects. “There are two criteria in literary criticism, the political and the artistic” (Mao 1943, p. 77). In judging literary works, Mao saw “the unity of politics and art” on the one hand; on the other hand, he emphasized the priority of political criteria—“political criteria are always placed ahead of artistic criteria” (Mao 1943, p. 78) which is related to Mao’s identity as a politician. Mao also attached considerable importance to the social impact of literary and artistic works and advanced the theory of “the unity of motive and effect.” Good literary works should display aesthetic ideals in a realistic depiction of real relationships and achieve the purpose so as to unite and educate the people.

#### *“Literature and Art for Politics”*

Specific analysis is needed with regard to Mao’s proposals: “literature and art are subordinate to politics” and “literature and art for politics.” First, these slogans have their own specific historical background and relevance. At a time when national conflicts were bitter and revolutionary wars were

frequent, the emphasis on literature and art serving the revolutionary struggle could indeed produce a strong realistic combative role for literature and art. In fact, numerous excellent works reflecting the combat life of workers, peasants, and soldiers emerged. Second, Mao is first and foremost a politician, not a literary critic. His views on literature and art were presented from an overall strategic perspective, and the problem he wanted to solve was the relationship between revolutionary warfare and literature. The slogan “literature and art for politics” is a product of combining Chinese literature and art with Chinese revolutionary practice. Furthermore, Mao’s political view of literature and art finds its origin in the traditional Chinese concept of “Literature is the vehicle of ideas or truth (文以載道).” This concept has existed for thousands of years and needs special study.

From today’s perspective, the slogan “literature and art for politics” is obviously inappropriate because it turns the relationship of mutual influence between the ideologies of the superstructure into a subordinate one, which makes politics the purpose of literature, creating an extreme and one-sided relationship between literature and politics. Additionally, this slogan has, to a certain extent, fettered the prosperity of literary and artistic creation. This is because attributing the entire objective and fundamental purpose of literature and art to serving the politics tends to simplify and vulgarize them. As the stormy nationwide class struggle came to an end, the task of the Party and the state shifted from revolution to the development of the productive forces, and the ideological nature of literature and art changed accordingly. In response to the country’s urgent need for rapid economic and cultural development, Mao proposed the “Double-Hundred Policy”: “The principle of letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend is a principle to promote the development of the arts and progress in the sciences; it is a policy to enhance the flourishing of the socialist culture in our land. Different forms and genres of art can develop freely, and different schools of sciences can contend and debate freely” (Mao 1957, p. 330). The introduction of the “Double-Hundred Policy” was a fruitful exploration in the field of cultural sciences. In particular, since the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, China has ushered in a new period of historical development, and the slogan “literature and art for politics” is in urgent need of correction. In this new historical period, the ideological nature of literature

and art, their development, and changes need to be re-addressed and re-explored.

## 2.2 *Literature and Politics in the New Period*

The rectification to restore order in literature and art in the new period began in the relationship between literature and politics. In the spirit of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts, Deng Xiaoping, based on a careful summary of the lessons gleaned from history, proposed that literature and art should no longer be “subordinate to politics” but “for the people and socialism” (the “Two-For” approach). This was based on the premise that literature and art should not be “divorced from politics,” making adjustments and improvements to the ideological nature of literature and art in keeping with the laws of historical development.

### *Correction and Adherence to Politics*

In the late period of the Cultural Revolution, the relationship between literature and politics was seriously distorted. Literature and art became political appendages, turning literary criticism into a political tool, which led to the desolation of the literary and artistic garden. People began to realize that, in this new historical period, the slogan “literature and art are subordinate to politics” was not conducive to the prosperity and development of literature and art. In 1979, the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers was held, and dealing with the relationship between literature and politics became an urgent issue. In his “Message to the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers,” Deng implied that the Party’s leadership “doesn’t mean handing out administrative orders and demanding that literature and art serve immediate, short-range political goals. It means understanding the special characteristics of literature and art and the laws of their development and creating conditions for them to flourish. That is, it means creating conditions that help writers and artists to improve their skills and to produce fine works and performances truly worthy of our great people and era” (Deng 1995a, pp. 205–206). In the following year, on January 16, 1980, Deng made it even clearer: “we will drop the slogan that literature and art are subordinate to politics, because it is too easily used as a theoretical pretext for arbitrary intervention in literary and art work. Long practice has proved that this slogan has done more harm than good to the development of literature and art” (Deng 1995b, p. 236).

Not mentioning that literature serves politics does not signify that literature is unrelated to politics; in fact, literature is inseparable from politics. In this regard, Deng thoroughly expressed the following: “Every progressive and revolutionary writer or artist has to take into account the social effects of his works and the interests of the people, the state and the Party” (Deng 1995b, p. 236). Literature cannot be detached from politics because of its position in the social structure. Literature as a part of ideology cannot be completely divorced from society. Depicting social life is the mission and responsibility of today’s socialist literature; thus, it is impossible for literary works to play a positive social role without being involved in politics. Moreover, the political implication of literature has changed enormously in the new period, and the concern and love for the people have become the most significant political tasks today.

*The Proposal of “Literature and Art for the People and Socialism”*

The “Two-For” approach is a new general slogan for literary and artistic work considering the new historical situation. On February 21, 1980, Zhou Yang gave a new interpretation of the relationship between literature and politics in his speech at a symposium on playscripts:

We say that literature and art should serve the people and socialism, isn’t this more appropriate and broader than saying that they should serve politics alone? The meaning of socialism includes not only politics but also economy and culture. In the Fourth Literary Congress, it was raised that our literature and art should cultivate new socialists, promote the improvement and development of a socialist society, broaden the spiritual realm of the people, and meet the growing cultural needs of the people. Isn’t this the main content of literature and art for the people and socialism? (Zhou 1981)

The politics expressed through literature and art should reflect the real-life occurrences and practices of the people—the politics that affects thousands of households and concerns everyone’s vital interests and even their future and destiny.

On July 26, 1980, the *People’s Daily* published an editorial titled “Literature and Art for the People and Socialism,” which formally put forward the “Two-For” approach: “The general slogan of our literature and art work should be Literature and art for the people and socialism.” The meaning of “literature and art for the people” is to serve the broadest

masses—workers, peasants, and soldiers. The meaning of literature and art for socialism is to serve the fundamental needs of the political, economic, cultural, and military aspects of socialism. The editorial also made a historical and comprehensive assessment of the pros and cons of the slogan “literature and art for politics” as follows:

In the past, for a considerably long time, we have put forward the slogan ‘literature and art for politics.’ This slogan reflects an important mission of literature and art and has played a positive role in history. ... However, we cannot help but see that this slogan has been inappropriately exaggerated and absolutized.

Additionally, the editorial implied, “The slogan ‘for the people and socialism’ summarizes the general task and fundamental purpose of the work of literature and art, which includes serving politics but is more comprehensive and sounder than mentioning serving politics in isolation” (“Literature and Art for the People and Socialism,” *People’s Daily*, July 26, 1980).

Hu Qiaomu (胡乔木) further explained the “Two-For” approach and argued that literature and art “for the people and socialism” are “more essential than those “for politics.” The scope of the former is much broader than that of the latter because “the people and socialism are the fundamental goals. They include politics, but they do not reduce it to politics alone. They are the ends of politics, and political correctness is ultimately measured and guaranteed by the interests of the people and socialism” (Hu 2012, pp. 560–561). Politics is no longer viewed as an end but as a means to achieve and serve the interests of the people, who are ultimately the subjects of socialist modernization. Thus, the people and socialism are essentially unified. In this sense, the “Two-For” approach is a sound positioning of the ideological nature of contemporary literature and art.

### 3 THE EVOLUTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND POLITICS

The relationship between literature and politics has been revisited in the Chinese form primarily for the following reasons. First, there is still an incorrect understanding of the relationship between literature and politics. Some people have not completely freed themselves from the inertia

of the ultra-left, and they can threaten to use their power, making political criticism look abominable. Others, out of fear of past politics, show their alienation from and aversion to politics. Therefore, it is essential to reflect on this kind of cognitive inertia. Second, the political factor exists in literature all the time. As long as literature is connected to society, it is impossible to completely avoid or ignore the potential influence of specific political and historical contexts on individual lives and literary creations, and depoliticizing or staying away from politics is only wishful thinking. Third, in the view of Chinese Marxist literary critics, literature should have its own responsibility and commitment—to express the destiny of human beings and reveal various phenomena and problems of society. Literature should face society, intervene in reality, and even lead people's life. The existence of literature will become dubitable if it does not lead people to face society and reality. As such, the relationship between literature and politics needs to be re-examined based on the classical Marxist view of politics and China's national conditions. If the issue of politics is avoided, it may directly affect the healthy development of China's literary creation and criticism under new historical conditions.

### 3.1 *Literature and "Re-politicization"*

China's literary theory and criticism have been innovative, and innumerable new ideas have emerged since the twentieth century. However, the relationship between literature and politics has not been properly examined, especially the lack of sufficient reflection on the relationship between literature and politics in the last century. It is necessary to make a brief historical outline of the relationship between literature and politics to develop the political dimension of the Chinese form, which is the starting point of our research question.

#### *Historical Overview of the Relationship Between Literature and Politics*

China has a tradition of "Literature is a vehicle of ideas or truth," and the sentiments of the scholars, including the scholar-bureaucrats, of serving the society and the nation, are the cultural basis for the relationship between literature and politics. I have explored the influence of "pain" on literary creation in my textbook *Comparative Literature* and found that the connotation of "pain" in Chinese and Western poetry varies dramatically. The pain of Western poets is primarily due to love and affection,

while that of Chinese poets is “the worry about the nation and the age,” the grief and indignation of “The road is as wide as the blue sky, and I am the only one who can’t find a way out,” and the chagrin due to the unfulfillment of their political ambitions (Hu 2016, pp. 182–183). Ancient Chinese literary criticism has its own characteristics such as “the theory of poetry following from emotions (缘情说)” and “taste theory(滋味说).” However, “Poetry as an expression of aspirations (诗言志)” is more dominant, and traditional literary criticism pays more attention to the edifying role of literature and “Xing Guan Qun Yuan (兴观群怨)” (Association, Observation, Gregariousness, and Resentment, i.e., the social, political, and moral function of poetry). In *Mao’s Prefaces to the Book of Songs* (毛诗序), there is a passage that proposes the following:

Emotions arise from the sound, and the sound becoming a text is called voice. If the voice of ruling the world is peaceful and happy, its government is harmonious; if the sound of troubled times is resentment and fury, its government is inharmonious; if the voice of a conquered nation is mourning, its people are stranded. Therefore, to face gains and losses, move the heaven and the earth, and touch the ghosts and gods, there is nothing better than a poem. The deceased emperors in former times used poetry to bring the ways of husband and wife into normalcy and make the children filial to their parents, human relations pure and honest, education satisfactory, and customs change. (情发于声, 声成文谓之音, 治世之音安以乐, 其政和; 乱世之音怨以怒, 其政乖; 亡国之音哀以思, 其民困。故正得失, 动天地, 感鬼神, 莫近于诗。先王以是经夫妇, 成孝敬, 厚人伦, 美教化, 移风俗)

This shows from one side that the connection between literature and politics is deeply rooted in the historical tradition and culture of China.

In modern times, numerous Chinese scholars, such as Liang Qichao, have studied literature from a political perspective. Liang Qichao’s notion that “if one wants to renew the people of a country, one must first renew the novels of a country” elevated novels to the level of offering wisdom to the people and highlighted the role of literature in enlightenment and revolution. During the May Fourth Movement, enlightenment and revolution became major themes in literature and criticism, and the works of realism and romanticism prevalent during that period also possessed a strong political tone. Mao Dun (茅盾) stated at the time that writers should depict the real society, “indicate implicitly the hope for the future and instill new ideals and new beliefs in people’s hearts,” and “guide the



bored to the path of light so that the new ideals will resonate in their hearts” (Shen 1921). In his book *Transmutation: Chinese Literature from the Xinhai Revolution to the May Fourth Movement*, Liu Na reveals the dual role of politics in literature at the time: “Politics pushed literature onto a new path, and moreover, politics was obstinately bound to literature, encroaching on and changing its character as an art category” (Liu 2010, p. 247).

In the 1930s, when the Chinese nation was in a crisis of saving itself from subjugation and ensuring its survival, left-wing literature and art, such as movies, novels, operas, and operetta, highlighted the political mobilizing function of literature. Left-wing literary criticism also emphasized the intervention of literature in social reality. The reason why impressionistic and semantic criticism from abroad did not take hold was that there was no room for such leisurely criticism at a time of national crisis. In Yan’an, revolutionary literature served the workers, peasants, and soldiers with a clear stand. Zhou Yang clarified that “if literary criticism does not pay attention to the ideological content of works, cannot distinguish between good and bad tendencies in works, and does not fight for the correct direction of creative development, such criticism is of little value” (Zhou 1990, p. 30).

*Politicization (Over-Politicization), Depoliticization to Repoliticization*

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the relationship between literature and politics has undergone a process of politicization (over-politicization), depoliticization, and eventually repoliticization, which is a process of negation of negation.

The emphasis on the ideological function of literature is a “double-edged sword.” Although the emphasis on politics played the role of “uniting the people and fighting the enemy” during a specific historical period, this trend has evolved into the sole criterion of politics, wherein literary criticism judged works using only political concepts and class analysis instead of artistic analysis, and politics was misinterpreted and distorted as struggle. The criticism of Xiao Yemu’s “Between a Couple” in the early 1950s can be taken as an example. The novel is about the emotional entanglement of a couple. Li Ke, an intellectual husband, and Zhang Ying, a wife of worker or peasant origin, had a good relationship during the war years, although their personalities and experiences differed enormously. After moving to the city, the husband felt “as if he

has returned to his hometown” in a new environment, but the wife was not used to carpets, sofas, dancing, etc., and interfered with her husband’s dancing and smoking. Despite his dissatisfaction with his wife’s behavior, Li Ke did some self-reflection and finally came to a mutual understanding. The work was initially well received and admired when it came out, but after a year and a half, criticism rose to the surface. It was pointed out that there were serious problems with the characterization of this work and that Li Ke was an “untrue and distorted image” that “obliterated the glorious historical facts of the long-term arduous reform of the revolutionary intellectuals under the leadership of the Communist Party.” The portrayal of his wife, Zhang Ying, was also “a serious distortion of our cadres who have been trained for a long time and have learned from good urban policies.” Regarding the novel’s content, some people accused the author of writing about trivial private life instead of the political movements such as the drastic land reform, the war to resist US aggression and aid Korea, and the suppression of counterrevolutionaries, making the subject matter the only condition to determine the tendency of the work (Yu and Chen 1989, pp. 257–266). Such criticism can hardly make a fair evaluation of works like this one. At that time, some critics put forward different views on taking literary criticism as a tool of class struggle. For instance, Qian GuRong(钱谷融) noted in his article “Literature, It is the Study of Man” that “the depiction of human beings is a tool and a means in literature as well as the purpose and task of literature” (Qian 2013, p. 9). However, these voices were extremely weak and even criticized. In the 1980s, “From the angle of theoretical criticism, amid the tidal wave of ideological emancipation, the first thing that literary theorists reflected on was the relationship between literature and politics” (Zhang 2009, pp. 102–107). Owing to the antipathy to the long-standing ultra-leftist trend of thoughts, as well as emancipation of mind and the influx of Western literary criticism since the Reform and Opening Up (1978), a trend of “depoliticization” emerged in the Chinese literary circle. With the introduction of various schools of Western literary criticism over the past century, especially the twentieth-century formalist criticism schools represented by Russian formalism, British and American New Criticism, and French structuralism, contemporary Chinese literary criticism turned its attention to the text and the form and discovered a world that had long been forgotten or obscured. People embraced the ideas of formalist criticism, such as advocating the self-autonomy of the text and starting with the language and form of the text first when doing literary criticism, to

achieve objective and scientized criticism, etc. Despite the emergence of reflective “Scar Literature” and “Root-Seeking Literature” in the 1980s, literary criticism resolutely showed its detachment from politics. The suggestion that color of literature “never reflected the color of the flag which waved over the fortress of the City” (Trotsky 1925, p. 164) is a slogan of Russian formalism, a symbol of the “depoliticization” of literary criticism in this period.

In the Chinese literary world at the end of the twentieth century, the gap between literature and politics was narrowed, and literary criticism took a turn back to history and ideology. This repoliticization is a reflection of Chinese and foreign scholars on literary criticism in the twentieth century under new historical conditions. Scholars and critics gradually realized that any practice of detachment from politics is merely a cover-up, which ultimately hurts us and our social environment which we are dependent on. As Terry Eagleton said, “All criticism is in some sense political” (Eagleton 1996, p. 184). Even the schools of literary criticism that claim to be scientific or self-autonomous, such as Russian formalism, structuralist criticism, and deconstructive criticism, cannot escape from the penetration of politics into literary criticism. The core concept of Russian formalism, “defamiliarization,” is to shock people and produce profound political meaning by presenting a sharp contrast between images and reality. As long as the binary opposition advocated by structuralism is given a semantic meaning, it cannot avoid political factors either. The decentralization in deconstructionism is also a political act. Feminist criticism, postcolonial criticism, new historicism, and other strongly ideological schools of criticism in the West gradually move from the periphery to the center. Moreover, with the spread and promotion of postmodern trend of thought and cultural studies, power discourse and cultural hegemony have become hot topics within Western literary criticism. With the impact of globalization, national rejuvenation has become the self-consciousness of Chinese literary criticism, and nation and its related issues have become the frontier and realistic topics of literary criticism. Gender, race, ecology, and nation have now become the starting points of contemporary criticism.

In contemporary China, repoliticization is of special significance. Repoliticization is not a simple return to politics. Instead, it embodies a realistic concern and shows the responsibility of literary criticism to society, the people, and the nation. Repoliticization is also a resistance to excessive entertainmentization, and the rational element embodied

in politics is undoubtedly complementary to aesthetic sensibility. In a consumerist society of material prosperity, value imbalance, and capital flooding, the repoliticization of literary criticism suggests that we must be wary of the perverse prosperity of literature caused by excessive entertainment. The blind pursuit of language labyrinths and sensory gratification suppresses and obscures the political elements in texts and dents people's political enthusiasm for the real society in entertainment. More importantly, repoliticization does not intervene in literature via an external force but by reshaping human's sensory and spiritual worlds. Repoliticization is closely related to aesthetics, helping people develop new views of the world through reshaping new feelings and forms. This fusion of politics and aesthetics is exactly the value of repoliticization and the theoretical basis for a new relationship between literature and politics.

### 3.2 *The Contemporary Transformation of the Forms of Politics*

The relationship between literature and politics has undergone a process of negation of negation over time, and politics has gone through a transformation in terms of its presentation. Owing to the turbulent economic and political dynamics and the volatile class relations in contemporary times, the end of politics has been mentioned by Western scholars after by the end of classical politics as proposed by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and others. In his book *The End of Politics*, Carl Boggs expressed his disappointment with the decline of American politics, although he said the end of politics was only metaphorical and hoped for its revival (Boggs 2001, pp. vii, 8). According to the development of social history, politics has never come to an end but has constantly transformed, and this transformation is where the vitality of politics lies. In the new historical context, the connotation and extension of politics are changing quietly and permeating all aspects of social life. It is the responsibility of Chinese Marxist literary criticism to provide new descriptions and explanations of the political situation in light of the new circumstances.

In China and the world, politics today no longer constitutes merely class struggle or party politics but becomes a much broader concept. The principal action in the political sphere has shifted from a few political leaders to the general public, and the mode of influence in political life has shifted from the social collective to every real individual. The expression

of political ideas no longer appears in a condescending position but transforms from explicit to hidden consciousness and even becomes a “political unconscious.”

*From Class Politics to People’s Politics*

In the past, politics was mainly about the conflicts and struggles among different classes, and certain politics was supposed to safeguard the interests of certain classes. Today’s politics is not limited to class struggle or party politics but extends to the broader masses. Politics does not pursue only the interests of a certain class anymore but the true interests of all people and justice for the vast majority. The Chinese form of people’s politics is not intended to completely replace or cancel class politics but to show that the people, as an aggregation of classes, have a broader representation. People’s politics is the transition from class politics to politics as human emancipation as predicted by Marx, and it expands the political connotation in such a stage of history. In the framework of people’s politics, class divisions have not disappeared; instead, class differences and antagonism still exist. However, the differences and antagonism are not as explicit and distinct as they were in the nineteenth century. Today, workers and bosses can enjoy the same television programs, wander through the same scenic spots, and both drive Cadillacs (Marcuse 2006, p. 10). The wealth of society is not created exclusively by certain singular class, but all those who create it are entitled to claim their share and can speak of their particularity. The concept of people’s politics has significantly expanded the connotation of politics. People in China and the world, living amid change, are searching for their place and value, and experiencing a redefinition of their identity. The proposal of people’s politics has also clarified the target audience for literary creation and literary criticism, and the people have become the subjects of literary representation and reception.

The Chinese form of people’s politics differs from the identity politics proposed by Western scholars. People’s politics is the dominant and mainstream discourse in contemporary China. However, identity politics highlights the marginalized communities of people by gender and race, which is, in a sense, the discourse of the minority, a manifestation of the resistance of the disadvantaged. People’s politics proposes group and even national identity and simultaneously cherishes individual specificity and differences—“The people are not abstract symbols but an aggregation of concrete people, each of whom has flesh and blood, emotions,

love and hate, dreams, and inner conflicts and sorrows” (Xi 2016, p. 12). Therefore, the abstract group consciousness is rendered into concern for the subsistence of concrete and diverse individuals, and this concreteness provides a space for literary creation and criticism to display their capabilities. The focus of literary creation and criticism is to find the particularity in the universality and pay attention to living circumstances, joy, and sorrow of ordinary people.

*From Macro-politics to Micro-politics*

While macro-politics refers to the state system,<sup>3</sup> international interactions, and social changes, micro-politics permeates all aspects of our daily life. The two most important keywords within the arena of micro-politics are “daily life” and “individual life.” People’s attention is now more focused on the reality of human existence and their daily life.

The rise of micro-politics is closely linked to today’s cultural studies, where learning is no longer limited to the “ivory tower,” and politics is embedded in everyday life, permeating media, shopping malls, bodies, and dwellings. The struggle for contemporary ideological influence is not primarily through daggers drawn and sabers rattling but through culture or consumption that shapes people’s views on everyday life and influences and changes their perceptions. The change from macro-politics to micro-politics does not mean that macro-politics is completely neglected but that micro-politics has become another major aspect of political life. Macro-politics and micro-politics cannot be completely separated. On the one hand, macro-politics may influence and constrain micro-politics. On the other hand, the role of micro-politics cannot be underestimated, as people often express their concerns and comments on various events in real life through social media. Some subtle events, like the flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil, can give rise to a big storm over time. In this regard, the attention to micro-politics can promote macro-politics.

Considering the relationship between macro-politics and micro-politics, the political dimension of the Chinese form needs to notice this

<sup>3</sup> In *Modernity and Self-identity*, Anthony Giddens refers to the “Emancipatory politics” as a reference to macro-politics. Giddens defines “emancipatory politics” as follows: “1. the freeing of social life from the fixities of tradition and custom; 2. the reduction or elimination of exploitation, inequality or oppression. Concerned with the divisive distribution of power/resources.; 3. Obeys imperatives suggested by the ethics of justice, equality and participation” (Giddens 1991, p. 215).

shift in focus, examine the political meaning of everyday life, and grasp cultural hegemony in giving voice to everyday life. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the negative impact of micro-politics and insist that ideals and beliefs should be integrated into everyday life.

*From Explicit Politics to Implicit Politics*

The first generation of Western Marxist theorists, such as Lukács and Gramsci, mainly talked about explicit politics. Their political thought was about capitalism and socialism, bourgeoisie and proletariat, nation and revolution, and their own reality. Nowadays, the overt and fierce class struggle and violence are no longer a common form of politics, and “on the heels of the wind,” politics “slips secretly into the night; silent and soft, it moistens everything.”<sup>4</sup> It now becomes invisible in all kinds of narratives and discourses of daily life and literature, thus becoming a type of “political unconscious.”

With respect to literature, the existence of implicit politics is a universal historical fact. The relationship between literature and politics is often unclear at first glance in most cases, and some works of literature that are so politically oriented that they are not easily well-received by readers. Most literary works, in both ancient and modern times, in China or elsewhere Chinese, all contain political elements either implicitly or explicitly, including those labeled as “pure literature” or “leisure literature.” The verses “While picking asters’neath the Eastern fence, my gaze upon the Southern mountain rests” (Tao Yuanming)<sup>5</sup> seems to be leisurely and light of heart, but a wise reader still can glean the dissatisfaction with reality and the hope for an ideal life between the lines. The same is true of the British Lake poets, who were resistant to the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The self-autonomy of art seems to have nothing to do with politics. However, the autonomy itself is actually a kind of politics, since it confronts reality in a decided, sober, and clear way. Karl Liebknecht propounded views about the nature of “true art”: “From a historical and aesthetic point of view, the ‘non-discriminatory’ ‘true’ art is a myth” (Liebknecht 1987, p. 73). As the ideology of language has been studied in depth, the idea that literature as a language art cannot be completely

<sup>4</sup> Here quotes the verses of “Welcome Rain One Spring Night” written by Du Fu, a poet from Tang Dynasty. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang.

<sup>5</sup> Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang.

free from political influence has become more widely accepted. The main task of the political dimension of Marxist literary criticism is to reveal the ideological conflicts inherent in literary texts, identify class, gender, and racial oppression in texts, and divulge the resistance of the oppressed.

In short, the political dimension in literature is present to varying degrees of intensity, depth, and conspicuousness, but it is never absent. More often than not, politics is submerged in literary texts, reflected in the thought inclination of the work or the attitude of the writer. To quote and re-phrase Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* on the relationship between literature and politics, we can say that in literature, politics may appear in varying disguises, but it cannot choose to disappear.

### 3.3 *The Tension Between Aesthetics and Politics*

Given the special context of contemporary repoliticization and the transformation of political forms, the ideological nature of literature and art has also changed in terms of connotation and extension. Therefore, the Chinese form needs to examine and foster a new type of relationship between literature and politics according to the changing times.

The concept of politics today reveals the deep connection and tension between aesthetics and politics. The relationship between literature and politics is such a big topic. Instead of discussing the relationship in general and abstractly, we will focus on the literary activity itself and explore the relationship between politics as an ideology and literary texts. Politics, as a type of ideology, must reflect the needs, wills, and wishes of any nation, age, or social group and transform the world in accordance with the wishes and demands of the same. Literature as an ideology also needs to reveal the truth with vivid images and must possess cognitive value. The similar position and nature of literature and politics within the social structure forms the theoretical basis for their intrinsic connection.

#### *Aesthetics as Politics*

There has been a view that the relationship between literature and politics belongs to the "extrinsic approach" to the study of literature as René Wellek famously suggested. This statement holds true from the perspective of politics as a policy and institution, but it needs to be scrutinized if it is based on literary texts. This is because whatever enters literary text is no longer "extrinsic" but an "intrinsic" part of it. In other words, aesthetics and politics in literature coexist in literary texts. Even within literary texts,



aesthetics and politics are not always contradictory and antagonistic but are intricately related. In addition to antagonistic side, the two are also intertwined, interpenetrating, and even transforming each other—“In a true poetic work, ideas are not abstract concepts expressed in a dogmatic way but are the soul of the work that overflows in it, like light in a crystal” (Belinsky 1958, p. 51). Inquiring into the interweaving and transformation of aesthetics and politics within literary texts will shed light on the nature and function of literature as an expression of human thought and emotion. Consequently, the political dimension of Marxist literary criticism eliminates or blurred the boundaries between extrinsic and intrinsic criticism.

Moreover, aesthetics itself contain political elements. As soon as aesthetic categories, such as sublime, metaphor, irony, and salvation, enter the concrete level, they stir up certain ideological clouds, either explicitly or implicitly, and their political factors are expressed not through certain discourse but by their own characteristics. If we further associate politics with the all-round emancipation of human beings, the entire aesthetic process is none other than political. As far as aesthetic experience is concerned, its feelings, imagination, and even emotions are related to the emancipation of the human senses. Besides, aesthetics is not only about cognitive judgment—truth, but also about value judgment. In particular, the freedom and transcendence embodied in aesthetics all contain the pursuit of ideals, which often coincides with politics. For instance, Fredric Jameson specifically discussed pleasure as a political issue in *The Ideologies of Theory: The Syntax of History*.

Aesthetic forms are also related to politics. Contemporary artists break the shackles of daily experience to recode or reshape the world through creative deformation, and this “otherworld” is implicitly political. However, this manifests itself not through drastic action but primarily through the formulation of new ways of seeing, thinking, talking, and being. This is strongly felt in the exaggeratedly distorted Cubist painting *Guernica* (1937) by Picasso, which was a representation and indictment of the German bombing of Guernica, Spain. Aesthetic forms reshape people’s needs, desires, sensations, and imaginations and transform the world through the transformation of people’s aesthetic consciousness, thereby urging the possibility of social change.

*Aesthetic Antinomy*

According to Kant's antinomies, behind everything, there is a seed of transformation to the opposite. In the aesthetic process, aesthetics and politics constitute such an antinomy, in which they reverse each other—each transforming to its opposite. From the perspective of aesthetics, the self-reflexivity of aesthetics is highlighted in its transformation into politics. Literature and art, through the pursuit of artistic ideals and the innovation of art forms, renew people's imagination and emotions and realize the “negation of the realistic-conformist mind” (Marcuse 1978, p. 9) and their revolutionary nature exists exactly in aesthetics. As literature and art are full of imagination and possibility, the freedom and transcendence expressed by aesthetics imply the nature of human emancipation. Thus, aesthetics becomes a prerequisite for social change. Human emancipation must include the emancipation of the sensuous, and aesthetics thus returns from politics to itself, realizing a negation of negation.

The self-reflexivity of aesthetics is also demonstrated in its dual nature—the affirmation or maintenance of reality and the negation of reality coexist in literary works. Some excellent works contain both a certain criticism and compromise with reality. Such attachment to and transcendence of reality have existed throughout literary history, and contemporary literature and art are no exception. “As part of the established culture, Art is affirmative, sustaining this culture; as alienation from the established reality, Art is a negating force. The history of Art can be understood as the harmonization of this antagonism” (Marcuse 2007, p. 143). While the aesthetics of literature transcends reality, it is limited by the existing tastes, standards of behavior, and experience, failing to achieve complete freedom. This phenomenon is particularly evident in classical works. In a sense, the history of literature and art is a process of opposition and fusion of the two.

The mutual transformation of aesthetics and politics is based on the fact that both are part of a similar social structure. Moreover, their fundamental internal connection is the shared ultimate goal of the emancipation of human beings. Both aesthetics and politics comprise a concern for human nature and a consideration of the living conditions of human beings and the world order.

The politicization of aesthetics, however, should be limited; otherwise, going beyond the limit is as bad as falling short (see Hillach et al. 1979). When studying the relationship of aesthetics and politics in texts, we should not forget the harm done to literature by radical or vicious

political ideas in history. Further, we should be wary of problems such as “amusing ourselves to death” caused by the complicity of aesthetics and politics in literary texts because such complicity can weaken people’s concern for and reflection on society. As such, the relationship between literature and politics calls for constant consideration and adjustment.

#### 4 A PERSPECTIVE ON THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

In view of the new interpretation of literature and politics, the political dimension, which was once neglected or snubbed in contemporary literary criticism, has resurfaced. Examining ideological factors in literary texts, grasping the nature and function of literature as an expression of human thought and emotion, and revealing the political nature of literary texts in a new dimension are the differences between the political dimension of the Chinese form and previous political criticism.

##### 4.1 *The Research Objects of the Political Dimension*

The political dimension of the Chinese form confronts a literary text that is not an independent, self-contained world but a confluence of historical, cultural, and social factors. This view of literature within the political dimension of the Chinese form is dramatically different from the various formalist views of texts. Literary texts as discursive practices contain complex power and social relations. Literature is in a social network and it is full of political elements within itself.

##### *Ideological Nature of Literature*

The ideological nature of literature, a topic of concern today, is determined by the basic properties of literature. Literature is the artistic manifestation of language, and language cannot be separated from ideology; whenever one speaks, it is subject to the constraints of power discourse of a certain period of time. Literature as a language art thus cannot be free from the influence of politics. The rhetorical devices of language, such as ambiguity, irony, and metaphor, also have some political overtones. The common linguistic practice of changing the everyday meaning of language in new contexts, or even reversing it, also has political implications. Marcuse noted that “It is a familiar phenomenon that subcultural groups develop their own language, taking the harmless words

of everyday communication out of their context and using them for designating objects or activities tabooed by the Establishment” (Marcuse 1971, p. 35). This is also the case with online language. The ideological nature of literary language is the foundation of the political dimension of the Chinese form.

Regarding the author’s creation, the description and reproduction of social life in literature are a kind of imaginative reconstruction. As Chinese ancient critics, Liu Xie (刘勰) stated, “When one concentrates on thinking, their thoughts connect the past and the present, and they feel that their eyes can see different landscapes thousands of miles away.” The author’s imaginative reconstruction of reality is not ordinary but imaginative with ideological undertones. The reason why some works have attracted attention and caused sensation is exactly because the authors have incorporated their own emotions, imagination, and views into the creation of these works, tugging at the heartstrings of readers and, thus, influencing people’s perceptions of society and life. Non-fiction texts nowadays also depict the author’s perspective and experience, and some are even more politically concerned. According to Eagleton, Marxist criticism “is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies—the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times” (Eagleton 1976, pp. xii–xiii). Literature is an artistic realm within which the author provides a virtual solution to the politics of reality through imaginative reconstruction.

In terms of its social function, literature must be ideological. Literature can help people understand society and experience life, and it can also intervene in life. For those authors who have a strong sense of mission for society and life, their works are of stronger political flavor. In his work *What is Literature?* Sartre stated that writing is intervention and that “...concrete literature will be ...a Project, as an outline of a future order” (Sartre 1949, p. 159). Writers seek to achieve or deny something through the art of imagination. Moreover, by constructing “an entirely different and opposed reality” (Marcuse 1972, p. 103), the writer can show the public new possibilities and alternatives, influence people’s perception of reality, and defend or question certain social structures, thereby influencing or even transforming society.

#### *Scope of the Political Dimension*

If literature expresses human destiny and thought, it must deal with human life, which is the destiny of literature. As Bennett stated, “The

politics of literature, on this construction, are inseparable from the politics of criticism. Marxist criticism has hitherto proceeded on the assumption that every literary text has its politics inscribed within it and that the role of Marxist criticism is to enunciate this politics, to give it voice by making it explicit” (Bennett 2003, p. 136). As for literary texts, the political element can be embedded in the ideal character of the work or hidden in the twists and turns of the plot. The specific circumstances presented in a novel can also be given a political meaning, such as the case of the image of the ocean in Joseph Conrad’s work, which can become an allegorical image of capitalist penetration abroad. For feminist critics, gender politics can be implicit in some of the fairy tales children often read—stories in which girls are described as always hoping to be ultimately rescued by a prince. Politics can also manifest via symbols, metaphors, and even gaps or blanks between lines, especially in silences, contradictions, and even paradoxes of literary texts. One of the examples is the tragic end of the Liang Shan warriors who accepted amnesty and surrendered in *Water Margin* (水浒传), which is a denial of “loyalty and righteousness.” All these works require critics to uncover hidden political connotations and latent ideological conflicts through symptomatic readings as Pierre Macherey proposed.

Over the course of history, the potential impact of politics on individual life is enormous and complex, and almost no one can break free from it. In literary creation, it is especially important to pay attention to the fate of the individual, and literary works depicting the potential complexities of individual life constitute exactly the politics. We can understand and grasp the struggles and sorrows of the characters from some excellent literary works. In Lu Yao’s novel *Life*, Gao Jialin was extremely lofty-minded and said that “everyone wants to go to the United Nations”; however, in the end, they return to the yellow earth. It is through the fate of each character that literature shows the ecology of society. We can understand and reflect on life and history from the perspectives of different characters and ultimately build a better society.

The focus on the politics of everyday life is a new requirement for the political dimension of the Chinese form. As a matter of fact, politics’ influence on life is omnipresent, and people’s perceptions of politics are often shaped by food, clothing, and housing. Benjamin’s revelation of urban planning and business alliances in his *The Arcades Project* is none other than a reflection of politics. The marriage of capital and politics is also implicit in cultural studies, which include film, television, and

even clothing design. The study of the relationship between consumption, desire, and politics will become a new approach to the political dimension.

The political dimension should also maintain a certain degree of foresight and creativity, guiding literature to plan the blueprint of a reasonable future or what Jameson calls “the utopia” that “resonates a Marxist perspective on the future” (Jameson 1981, p. 224). All these needs are to be interpreted creatively in practice.

#### 4.2 *The Political Analysis of Literary Texts*

Inquiring the relationship between aesthetics and politics based on the texts is an attempt to examine the political dimension of the Chinese form. The political dimension is not generalized political criticism; it focuses on the complex, hidden, and dialectical relationship between aesthetics and politics in literary texts. This section investigates the relationship between aesthetics and politics in literary texts using the keywords “narrative” and “desire,” which appear in twentieth-century literary criticism, to examine the operation of the political dimension in the practice of literary criticism.

##### *Politics in Narrative*

Although the term narrative was not invented by structuralism, it was structuralist narratology that pushed it to the center of twentieth-century literary criticism. Narrative, as a fundamental way for humans to confirm identify and express themselves, is far more than merely a form of behavior or rhetoric; it is inextricably linked to politics. Jameson defined narrative as “a socially symbolic act” (Jameson 1981, p. 1) and regarded it as an imaginary projection or resolution of the contradictions of social reality. He argued that all narratives contain a political unconsciousness—they imply the ideological aspirations or political fantasies of certain social groups or classes.

In the late twentieth century, there was a growing awareness that literary “narratives” could be by no means neutral. Through the political dimension of the Chinese form, the perspective and tone of narrative works, the gaps in the narrative, the structure of the plot, and even the O. Henry-esque endings can all convey political implications. For example, the perspective from which a story is observed demonstrates the position of the observer, and many examples show how the same story has different interpretations and conclusions depending on the

concrete perspective of the observer. Another example is that the narrator's position and attitude are consciously or unconsciously displayed in what content and how much the narrator or character is willing to tell—which is told first, revealed later, explained in detail, shared briefly, and left unsaid. Even the inner monologue is often characterized by the society to which they belong. Some women writers use narrative strategies such as building a female genealogy and narrating women's inner experiences to rebel against oppression and evoke women's autonomy. The narratives of marginalized people also seek to reinterpret their identities, reject the stereotypedness of their groups, and regain social recognition. In this sense, narratives function as “identity reconstruction” and as a way of communication between different social groups as well. The narrative time and narrative rhythm can also exhibit the author's craftsmanship. In Tolstoy's novel “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” a considerable part of the narrative is devoted to compression. The narrator concisely recounted the life of Ivan Ilyich and his family history, unsuccessful marriage, and rise and fall in officialdom. It is not until the last days of Ivan Ilyich's life that the narrator slowed down the duration or the rhythm. Only when Ivan Ilyich lay on his sickbed did he begin to question the decent life that he had sustained and supported. “...Everything seemed to him weird and unnatural” (Tolstoy 2011, p. 125) and he developed a sense of reflection and nostalgia for life. The novel's fast-paced narrative creates a feeling of “Life, ...flies quicker and quicker to its end, to the most terrible suffering” (Tolstoy 2011, p. 63) and the control of the narrative pace here is considerably meaningful. Form IS meaning, and this reflection on life itself is imbued with political implications.

The characters and plots in the story are also inseparable from politics. An anonymous mini-novel, *The Taste of Mineral Water*, is about a father who worked outside the home all year round and brought his son a bottle of mineral water when he returned home and proudly told his son that he drank it every day in the city. Later, the father got cancer, and his son asked him what he wanted. The father's wish was to drink that bottle of mineral water, so the son went to buy a bottle. His father took a sip and told his son, “Fooled! This water doesn't taste like anything!” This is the power of narrative. It is concerned with individual life and the destiny of ordinary people. The narrative shows the current situation and history of society through every individual's encounters. In philosophy, sociology,

political science, and economics, individuals often become an emotionless number, and the vivid representation of these living and sensuous individuals is exactly the strength of literature.

### *Desire and Politics*

Desire is related to narrative but focuses more on the activity of the human conscious. In both Chinese history and Western history, the concepts of desire and politics have been viewed as opposites. The public and rational nature of politics is opposed to the private and irrational nature of desire. Desire, as a personal unconscious, seems to be excluded from politics. Plato, in *Republic*, cast out the poets because they fostered inferior lust in humans and made people lack an indomitable will. The kind of open lust encouraged in the Middle Ages in the West was considered sinful and suppressed in the Protestant era. The concept of “Knowing the truth, exterminating the desire,” put forward by the Neo-Confucian during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in China, also put the two in an incompatible position. In the twentieth century, Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis was directed at the suppression of instincts by reason in modern civilization, highlighting the sensuous aspect of human beings and making desire the object of literary criticism.

Reason and desire are the two wings of human development, and it is best to understand them as interrelated, mutually constraining, and inseparable activities of consciousness. This forms the foothold to reconsider the relationship between desire and politics within the Chinese form. Throughout the history of Chinese and foreign literature, there has never been a lack of depiction of desire in literary texts. Therefore, the understanding and control of human desire are a matter for both psychologists and writers and literary critics. In literary texts, politics and desire are often wonderfully intertwined, with desire for sex, wealth, and power mostly referring directly to politics. For instance, sexual desire is often about the revolution of the body and gender equality. Some of today’s utopian novels are also intermediaries between politics and desire. Whether utopian or anti-utopian, their anxieties about reality and their hopes for the future both imply some kind of criticism and warning. Additionally, political factors in the text can be manipulated, repressed, or diverted by characters and plot occurrences to achieve certain intentions and obtain a certain calm. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in popular culture and media. For instance, through certain utopian desires and impulses, people are intoxicated by their visual



images, replacing thought with the eyes. Therefore, the political dimension can start from the desires expressed in literary texts, discover the hidden connection between desires and political factors, reveal their inner revolutionary needs, and recognize the special social function of literature.

In literary criticism, the task of the political dimension is to reveal whether there are political elements in literary texts and, more importantly, consider whether they are reasonable and contribute to the development of society and the integrity of humanity. Some people believe that incorporating politics into literature will hinder its free development. Although some stiff slogan politics, especially those contrary to the interests of the people, are indeed harmful to literature, not all political manifestations are detrimental to literary works. Many excellent works have an everlasting appeal precisely because of their profound ideas. In addition to its artistic form, a work's greatness can be attributed to its profound and complex ideas. The works of Shakespeare, Balzac, and Tolstoy have become classics because of their profound insights about society. Their works record the waves and folds of the times and leave people with endless thoughts. It is the mission and responsibility of literature and art to pursue social justice and the free development of human spirit.

In literary criticism, the political dimension is not the sole but one of the most important dimensions that aids the understanding of literature. The Chinese form must adhere to the political dimension because, without it, it would not be Marxist literary criticism. Additionally, the political dimension of the Chinese form needs constant expansion, and the practice of and reflection on political criticism will inevitably run through the Chinese form. The ideal politics should involve the pursuit of truth and the struggle for creative social transformation, and its ultimate goal is the complete emancipation of human beings. Along with politics, literature will serve as a carrier to realize the ideal and create a better life.

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## The Praxis Dimension of Literary Criticism

Practice, a pivotal category of Marxist historical materialism, holds a similar prominent place in the Chinese form. While inheriting the Classical Marxist view of practice, the view of practice of the Chinese form further explores the nature and scope of practice, and provides a new critical dimension for the Chinese form to intervene in literary works by introducing practice into literary criticism.

### 1 MARX ON PRACTIS

The classical Marxist discourse on practice, based on the practical activities of human beings, finds its lineage in the Western philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Kant. Marx's extensive research on practice is based on both ontology and axiology or theory of value, and can be found in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *Theses on Feuerbach*, and *The German Ideology*.

#### 1.1 *Marx's Concept of Praxis and Western Traditions*

Marx's concept of practice developed on the basis of Western ideological and theoretical traditions and background. Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Fichte directly influenced Marx's view of practice, which was supported by the whole classical cultural tradition from ancient Greece, and not just by classical German philosophy, classical political economy, or scientific

socialism. It is upon this solid foundation that Marx's view of practice developed, which then became the thought resources of Marxist practical materialism.

### *Aristotle's View of Practice*

In the history of Western philosophy, Aristotle was the first person to incorporate the concept of practice into his philosophical thinking, and his thoughts on practice originated from the negotiation and planning of the political life of the Greek city-state. Aristotle's research on practice is mainly found in his *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the *Metaphysics* (Volume VI), Aristotle divided the sciences into three categories: (1) the theoretical sciences (mathematics, natural sciences, and first philosophy [i.e., metaphysics]); (2) the practical sciences (ethics, politics, economics, and rhetoric); and (3) the productive science (Aristotle 2016, pp. 98–100). With a comparison of these three main forms, we can understand Aristotle's concept of practice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as follows:

Theoretical contemplation is the activity of thinking about what is immutable and necessary or about the nature of things; it is the activity of inaction. Practice or producing, on the contrary, is the activity of acting on something that can be changed by one's own efforts for some good purpose. Therefore, practice or producing is for things that are within our power, i.e., things that may be in one state or another for our reasons. Producing is the activity of bringing something into being, the purpose of which is the product of something other than the activity. Practice is a moral or political activity, of which the purpose can be either external or practical. Practice expresses the Logos (reason), the nature (quality) of man as a whole. (Liao 2003, p. 11)

A theoretical science has two characteristics: First, it is concerned with universal and eternal unchanging being. Second, it is contemplation with the aim of seeking truth. In contrast, practice deals with things that can be changed with effort, and it is primarily an action for the good and benevolent. The science of practice differs from the science of production. Production is the activity of bringing something into being and aims at something external. Practice is an activity characterized by virtue, aiming at the act itself, and primarily the moral and political actions of human beings.

With respect to the connotation of practice, Aristotle advocated for action. He believed that we possess virtue, not by contemplation, but by practice—“...a person is practically wise not only by knowing, but also by being disposed to act” (Aristotle 2004, p. 135). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he proposed, “...we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions” (Aristotle 2004, p. 23). The view of practice as action is, again, linked to purpose. According to Aristotle, practical activity always points to a certain purpose, and in *Metaphysics* he says, “these [movements] are not cases of action, at least not of complete action, since none is an end. But the sort in which the end belongs really is an action” (Aristotle 2016, p. 148). This purpose is to achieve good governance and good life. As such, Aristotle’s practice is linked to ethics. The highest good on earth lies in practice, which involves the core Aristotelian concept of wisdom (also interpreted as “practical wisdom”). Aristotle states, Wisdom is “a true and practical state involving reason, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being” (Aristotle 2004, p. 107). Aristotle intended to raise wisdom to the level of the ultimate purpose of ethical goodness, so that human behavior and activities are in line with moral and rational decisions. It is difficult to define goodness in the abstract sense. As Aristotle indicated:

But this we must agree on before we begin: that the whole account of what is to be done ought to be given roughly and in outline...and the spheres of actions and of what is good for us, like those of health, have nothing fixed about them. Since the general account lacks precision, the account at the level of particulars is even less precise. For they do not come under any skill or set of rules: agents must always look at what is appropriate in each case as it happens, as do doctors and navigators. (Aristotle 2004, pp. 24–25)

Thus, action, purpose, and the highest good constitute the inner logic of Aristotle’s practice—(ethical) virtue leads us to the right purpose, that is, to the purpose by virtuous action.

Aristotle’s elevation of practice to a fundamental way of being had a powerful influence on Marx’s concept of practice. While Aristotle’s practice refers mainly to political and ethical life, Marx’s practice covers political life, but the practice of material production is its dominant and core part, and only through the practice of material production can people



live a real human life. This is the fundamental divergence between Marx and Aristotle's concepts of practice.

### *Kant on Practical Reason*

Kant was the first philosopher who elevated practice to the position of practical philosophy in a real sense and planted the seed for a new and modern view of practice. Kant's thoughts on practical philosophy are primarily embodied in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, one of his three major critiques. Following Aristotle's inclusion of practice into the field of political ethics, Kant gave careful consideration to the philosophy of practice. He viewed practical reason as a rational faculty of the subject that aims at humans themselves, thus distinguishing it from speculative reason that seeks to know a priori objectified principles. Moreover, in arguing for the primacy of pure speculative reason and pure practical reason, Kant highlighted the primacy of practical reason saying, "in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not contingent and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore necessary" (Kant 2015, p. 98). In response to the transgression and arrogance of reason, Kant proposed to demarcate the capacity of reason and to correct it with practical reason, which demonstrated his theory that the moral practice of man out of free will is superior to pure cognition. He advocated correcting pure reason through practical reason, thus placing practical reason above pure reason. This challenged the epistemological view of practice which opposes reason to practice and cognition to practice held by philosophers such as Descartes, and foreshadowed the further development of Marx's theory of practice.

Over the course of the history of Western practical philosophy, Kant played a role in carrying the past and paving a way for future. The distinctive turn to practical subjectivity in Kant's philosophy was of great significance to Marx's understanding of human life from the viewpoints of subjectivity and sensibility.

### *Sublation of Hegel and Feuerbach in Marx's Concept of Practice*

Hegel and Feuerbach had a considerable influence on Marx's view of practice, and yet Marx went beyond them because his notion of practice is largely grounded in the course of history.

In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx noted:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man—true, because real man—as the outcome of man's own labour. (Marx 1975a, pp. 332–333)

Marx affirmed the thought that “Hegel regards the self-production of man as a process” and suggested that the “real man” is “the result of his own labor,” that is to say, the subject is the result of practice.

On the concept of the subject, Marx changed the connotation of Hegel's dialectics on the basis of abstract mental substance:

Whenever real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, posits his real, objective essential powers as alien objects by his externalisation, it is not the act of positing which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of objective essential powers, whose object, therefore, must also be something objective. (Marx 1975a, p. 336)

The “man” here is no longer a derivative of Hegel's “absolute idea,” but “real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 36). In this way, Marx brought about “German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 36) and asserted that study of practice is no longer built on what is imagined or thought, but on “real, active men” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 36), consequently, practice becomes the objective activity of man.

In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx criticized the old materialist viewpoints, including Feuerbach's, for observing object things apart from the practical activities of human beings and for not recognizing that social life is practical in its essence. He clearly expressed his view of practice:

The chief defect of all previous materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was set forth by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity

as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. In *Das Wesen des Christentums*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the significance of “revolutionary”, of practical-critical, activity. (Marx 1975b, p. 4)

Starting from intuitive materialism, Feuerbach, who was unaware of the subjective initiative of practical labor, looked at human society through a static lens, and limited himself to revealing the alienation of man only in the religious sphere. Marx was not satisfied with this and believed that in the presence of nature, man is not only passive, but also active and motivated. This is reflected in the fact that man, through his free and conscious activities, not only satisfies his biological needs, but also transforms nature, making it a product of man, a humanized nature, a confirmation of his own essential power, and an object of the objectification of his essential power, where the subject “sees himself in a world that he has created” (Marx 1975a, p. 277).

### 1.2 *The Connotations of Marx’s View on Praxis*

The inclusiveness of practice allows for different dimensions of understanding and interpretation. Marx also focused on different aspects in his study of practice. In the case of practice as an “objective activity,” the unity of subject and object lies exactly in practice, which already has an ontological meaning. If materially productive labor is taken as the basic form of practice, and if the alienation of the subject and its social transformation as a result of labor are examined from the perspective of the labor for material production, such study is inclined toward axiology. However, both the objectified activity and the practice of material production are intrinsically connected as both are founded on the relationship between human beings and reality, and both are embodied in the objectification of man’s essential powers.

#### *Practice as an “Objective Activity”*

In European philosophy, the subject-object category is generally understood and used in the sense of thinking and being, consciousness and matter. Marx also used the subject-object category in the sense of thinking

and being in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*. It was only in his works such as *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that Marx demonstrated the connotation of practice at the ontological level, interpreting practice as a sensuous and objective activity, and arguing that the subject transforms the external world in the same process by which the subject transforms itself. The relationships between human beings and the world and among human beings themselves are seen as practical resulting in a new elaboration of the subject-object category.

In Marx's view of practice, practice is an "objective activity," and only in objective activity can reality become the reality of man's essential powers such that he can confirm his own being in reality Marx elaborated, "it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man's essential powers—human reality, and for that reason the reality of his own essential powers—that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, become objects which confirm and realize his individuality, become his objects: that is, man himself becomes the object" (Marx 1975a, p. 301). Such an understanding of practice as a process of objectification is conducive to breaking away from the habitual dichotomy of subject and object such that the mutual transformation and shaping of subject and object constitute a process of continuous objectification.

### **Formation and Development of Subject and Object**

Practice, as a process of objectification, is the bidirectional movement of "objectification of the subject" and "subjectification of the object." The objectification of the subject is to project oneself into the object so that one's own essential power is realized in the object, whereas the subjectification of the object is to make the object change from being-in-itself to being-for-itself through one's practice and to leave marks of the subject on it. In this way, through practice, human beings turn the existence outside themselves into the object of their own activities, into their own object. Therefore, the subject is the objectified subject and the object is the objectification of the subject, and the unity of the two lies nowhere other than in practice. In this sense, the subject cannot equal to consciousness, since the subject is formed in practice instead of merely in mental activities. Moreover, the object cannot equal to being. The object is not a "thing-in-itself" in the Kantian sense, but the objectification of the subject. In a word, both the subject and the object are the products of human practice.

With respect to the objectification of the subject, Marx stressed that only through the objective relationships between human beings and object, and between subject and object, can one behaves and confirm oneself as a real person, a true human being—“man does not lose himself in his object only when the object becomes for him a human object or objective man” (Marx 1975a, p. 301). Human beings must objectify their essential power into “real, sensible objects,” “create a world of objects,” and express and confirm their essential power through the realistic relationships between themselves and objects, between subject and object. Hence, it is impossible to form the completeness of subject and object without practice, thus, “The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man’s species-life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created” (Marx 1975a, p. 277). From the point of view of practice, self-consciousness arises from the otherness of reality, and the subject can only reflect on himself in the world he has created. Marx also suggested that human sensations also arise in the process of objectification:

...in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, human sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanised nature. (Marx 1975a, pp. 301–302)

The aesthetic capability of human beings takes shape precisely by engaging in objectified practical activities, and one’s aesthetic experience is the result of practice, even if there exists a certain genetic accumulation of talent.

While Marx emphasized the subjective initiative of human beings in practice, he also pointed to the objectification of the object in practice. Although nature pre-existed human beings, and although laws of the nature do not depend entirely on human beings’ will, no relationship can be established without human activity or without activity external to human beings. Engels and Marx in *The German Ideology* propounded, “He (Feuerbach – author’s note) does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and,

indeed [a product] in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations..." (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 39). The environment and nature in Marx's view are the result of objectification and cannot be detached from human activity. The object of human cognition is not an eternal or established thing but a product of human beings' own historical activity, that is, the objective world can be transformed in principle and, vice versa, the subject realizes itself in the process of transforming the object.

Both subject and object form and develop in practice. Without practice or without the activity of objectification, there would be no subject or object, and it would be impossible to promote the process of history. As Marx indicated, "a non-objective being is an unreal, non-sensuous thing—a product of mere thought (i.e., of mere imagination)—an abstraction" (Marx 1975a, p. 337). Consequently, in practice there is no unchanging subject or object, and both are transformed simultaneously in the activity of objectification, which is precisely the dialectics of practice. The history of human practice is at the same time the history of the development of human society, and practice, as a founding point, becomes a historical activity that dialectically unifies the relationships between subject and object, and their limitation and transcendence.

### **Materiality of Subject and Object**

When studying the relation between subject and object, Marx never deviated from the materialist position he had always held. In his letter to Engels, Marx stated, "As long as we really observe and think, we can never escape materialism" (Marx 1988, p. 183). The reason why the subject and the object can create or form the object is that the subject and the object as well as the human and the object, are objectifying, and they are all natural beings in "nature." As Marx implied:

Since the real existence of man and nature has become evident in practice, through sense experience, because man has thus become evident for man as the being of nature, and nature for man as the being of man, the question about an alien being, about a being above nature and man—a question which implies the admission of the unreality of nature and of man—has become impossible in practice. (Marx 1975a, pp. 305–306)

The prerequisite for practice is the existence of nature and the realistic human being, and Marx defined the activity of the subject as an objectifying activity while affirming “the priority of external nature” (Marx 1975a, p. 40). He said, “The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labour is realized, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces” (Marx 1975a, p. 273). What is particularly emphasized here is the materiality of the subject. According to Marx, human being “only creates or posits objects, because he is posited by objects—because at bottom he is nature” (Marx 1975a, p. 336). However, what is special about the matter that makes up the human body is that it has unique creativity and expressiveness, including the human consciousness. As for the process of objectification, consciousness is not some unfathomable, mysterious phenomenon, but something that we can see, hear, and handle, that is, the materiality of consciousness. In this sense, the subject is also the object. This is another perspective in which Marx surpasses Hegel.

Marx defined the term “materialism” by “the relationship between cause and effect” (Marx 1988, p. 183) rather than relying only on “the nature that preceded human history” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 40). As such, Marx regarded his “new materialism” (Marx 1975b, p. 5) as being “practical materialist” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 38).

### *Practice as Material Production and Alienation*

What is related to and distinct from practice as an “objectified activity” is Marx’s study of practice from the perspective of material production. Marx elevated material production to the core element of practice, and among all practical activities, material production is the basic form of practice. This is significantly different from the contempt for the labor of material production by thinkers since Aristotle. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx gave a fundamental and primary position to the practice of material production, which makes one what one is and which makes history what it is; “the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labour” (Marx 1975a, p. 305). At the social level, material production plays a decisive role in the development of human society and even in the whole superstructure, and “religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only particular modes of production, and fall under its general law” (Marx 1975a, p. 297).

### Practice and Alienated Labor

For Marx, true human productive labor is a free and conscious activity as he elaborated in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

An animal forms objects only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty. (Marx 1975a, p. 277)

Marx defined the concept of practice as “the free and conscious life activity of man,” namely, the activity of confirming one’s essential power through the objectification of human essence.

Alienated labor runs counter to human nature and to man’s free and self-conscious creative activity. Regarding this type of labor, Marx clearly stated, “not merely in present conditions but insofar as its purpose in general is the mere increase of wealth—that labour itself, I say, is harmful and pernicious” (Marx 1975a, p. 240). Marx mostly associated his critique of alienated labor with his discussion of practice. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx devoted a large part of his indictment to revealing the phenomenon of alienated labor as a universal reality in capitalist economic society:

We proceed from an actual economic fact. The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things. (Marx 1975a, pp. 271–272)

Marx went on to precisely delineate the alienation of the worker:

the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labour becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more ingenious labour becomes, the less ingenious becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature’s servant. (Marx 1975a, p. 273)



The relationship between the workers and the product of his own labor is an alienated one, and the material wealth of society is not proportional to the happiness of human beings, which is precisely alienation.

The issue of alienation in practice is not just peculiar to productive labor. It exists in all dimensions of human society, including artistic and aesthetic activities. Later, the issue of alienation has been fully expounded in Western Marxism.

### **Practice as the Real Material and Revolutionary Force**

Marx started with alienated labor to reveal the problems in social development. While condemning alienated labor, he saw the necessity and significance of the phenomenon of alienation in history, and deduced the theory of communism with “positive sublation of alienation” at its core. Sun Bokui (孙伯阁) and Zhang Yibing (张一兵) in *Into Marx* mentioned:

Marx began to study economics at the end of 1843 and was soon influenced by Hess’s view of the history of economic alienation. According to Hess, the existing society was a society of economic alienation, which was deeply exhibited in the alienation of money. He gathered that the only way to get out of this alienated society was to act, so he put forward a philosophy of action. Hess said that Feuerbach proposed a theoretical humanism, but he himself proposed a practical humanism. Although the actions Hess spoke of had ethical shock, his emphasis on transforming the world through action had a direct influence on Marx. (Sun and Zhang 2012, p. 120)

Inspired by the philosophy of action embedded in Hess’ view of the history of economic alienation, Marx’s analysis of the relationship between alienated labor and private ownership led to the famous proposition of liberating the working class and all mankind as a whole:

From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it follows further that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation... (Marx 1975a, p. 280)

In this way, the state of alienation becomes a necessary condition for human beings to move toward complete freedom and full development,

and alienated labor will eventually revert to free human activity. Such “actual communist action” (Marx 1975a, p. 313) is practice. It is only through practice that the sublation of private property and alienated labor can be achieved.

Marx held the view that revolution and emancipation should take place not only in the realm of consciousness, but also in real life—“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Marx 1975a, p. 8). Practice is to take part in the real struggle in order to transform society. As Engels and Marx, in *The German Ideology*, propounded, “We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Marx 1975b, p. 49). They went on to discuss, “for the practical materialist, i.e., the communist, it is a question of revolutionizing the existing world, of practically coming to grips with and changing the things found in existence” (Marx and Engels 1975, pp. 38–39), and that in order to “achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 56). It was also from this position that Marx deemed that Feuerbach “does not grasp the significance of ‘revolutionary’, of practical-critical, activity” (Marx 1975b, p. 6). Marx highlighted:

We see how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of man. Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of understanding, but a real problem of life, which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as merely a theoretical one. (Marx 1975a, p. 302)

Therefore, we can conclude from the above that, only practice is indeed the real material and revolutionary force.

## 2 THE CHINESE FORM’S VIEW ON PRAXIS

The study of Marxist practice has been much discussed in Chinese academia, and it has been heatedly debated in philosophy, aesthetics, and literary theory, with notable achievements in the study of practical aesthetics. It has been indicated that “Practical aesthetics is not only one of the few in-depth theories that can take a place in the history of Chinese thought in the twentieth century, but also one of the rare contributions that Chinese thinkers in the twentieth century have made to the international aesthetic community and even to the history of human thought,

leaving a historical mark” (Wang 2006, p. 863). However, the debate has also left some questions for further study. In the case of Chinese literary criticism, there are a few connections with the category of practice, and also the application of the practical dimension to illuminate and interpret literary works is lacking. It is this lack that inspires our passion to study the category of practice from the perspective of literary criticism. The introduction of the concept of practice into the Chinese form, and the creative interpretation and application of practice in accordance with the development of society, is a necessity for Chinese Marxist literary criticism.

### 2.1 *The Nature of Praxis*

The concept of practice in the Chinese form builds itself on Marx’s theory of practice, and further examines it in terms of its nature and scope, forming an ontological view of practice in the process. However, the Chinese form rarely talks about practice from the perspective of exchange or alienation, instead, it emphasizes subjective and spiritual aspects, and stresses the primacy of practice from an angle of opposing dogmatism, thus giving the view of practice in the Chinese form an idealistic spirit.

#### *Material and Spiritual Activities of Human Beings*

As far as practice is concerned, the labor of material production is the most elementary and fundamental meaning of the concept of practice. Considering the practice of material production as a central part of practical activity is where Marx surpassed Aristotle.

Productive labor is a fundamental part of practice, and in the process of transforming nature, human beings change society and history, and ultimately themselves. However, Marx did not exclude other practical activities, and he mentioned two types of production, namely material and mental production. In his *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx listed several approaches in which the human mind has mastered the world, such as artistic, religious, and practical-spiritual mastery. Today, with the enrichment of human activities, the scope of practice has once again expanded, extending to the realities of human activities such as politics, ethics, and religion, as well as the mental labor of human work such as art, aesthetics, and scientific research. In 1937, Mao Zedong pointed out clearly in “On Practice”:

Man's social practice is not confined to activity in production, but takes many other forms—class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits; in short, as a social being, man participates in all spheres of the practical life of society. Thus man, in varying degrees, comes to know the different relations between man and man, not only through his material life but also through his political and cultural life (both of which are intimately bound up with material life). Of these other types of social practice, class struggle in particular, in all its various forms, exerts a profound influence on the development of man's knowledge. (Mao 1965a, p. 296)

While Marx's view of practice focuses on the material production of human beings, practice in Chinese Marxism has more connections with politics and culture. This type of practice differs from the practice of material production, but it is regarded as an objectified activity, which is common to all practical activities. It is Chinese Marxism's contribution that explicitly extends human practice from material production to political, cultural, and even artistic activities.

Today, with the rapid advancement of technology, heavy physical labor is gradually decreasing, and more time is available for leisure; consequently, the scope of objectified activities will keep becoming wider. Jiang Kongyang (蒋孔阳) once stated, "What labor creates is not only material products, but also the realization of such essential human powers as thought and feeling, intelligence and wisdom of the laborer" (Jiang, 2014, p. 524). In the sense of the realization of the essential power of human beings, practice covers the material activities of human beings, as well as their spiritual and even emotional activities. If practice is understood as the free creation of human beings, freedom is then connected with aesthetics, which includes the emotional aspect of practice, free will, and creativity. As such, one's artistic and aesthetic activity is also part of one's practical activity. Since the free spirit of the subject embodied in practice is closely interwoven with art and aesthetics, the practical dimension goes into literary activity as it should.

### *The Initiative of the Subject*

Influenced by Kant, Marx, while recognizing the reality of the object, stressed the fundamental position of the subject in practice, especially highlighting the importance of the subject's senses, "because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers", and "just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear" (Marx

1975a, p. 302). The Chinese form, on the basis of Marx's understanding of the object and reality from the perspective of the subject, has its own unique characteristics in understanding the activity of practice from the aspect of the subject. Its emphasis is on the initiative and execution of the subject, and objectification is understood as the initiative, practical or historical activity of the human being, in which the experience and ability of the subject are extremely important.

First, this is manifested by the fact that the subject is not a material appendage and has free will and passion for life. The subject is able to objectify its essential power because it has the ability to create objects. With respect to literary activity, "the raw material of literature and art in popular life undergoes processing by revolutionary writers to become literature and art in conceptual form, which serve the popular masses" (Mao 1943, p. 72). In this process, the creative subject is active and purposeful, and only through the active role of the subject's free feeling and aesthetic pursuit can the subjectivized transformation of the object be realized. Second, the subject is not an appendage of history. The essence of history is that it is the product of human activity, and there is no "purely objective law" without human subjects. Within the Chinese form, the subject in the concept of practice is not a metaphysical and speculative, objectified subject, but a people composed of each concrete individual, who will transform in the process of changing the environment and thus create history. In the process of objectification, the initiative of the subject of the Chinese form changes not only the economic and social structure, but also its own spiritual life.

This creativity of the subject does not come out of nothing, nor behave at will—it only realizes itself in the process of practice. Creation is a process of objectification and is generated within relationships. Any type of activity, including literary work, is a process of interaction between subject and object, and it is impossible to practice without any object at all. Moreover, while affirming the transcendence of the creative subject, it is also necessary to see the historical stipulation of the creative subject and be wary of the weakening of the externalization of the object caused by the expansion of the subject. The subject's excessive desire for control needs to be curbed. Freedom in practice is a kind of autonomy of choice, and the ideal practice should be the unity of the transcendence of the subject and the historical prescriptiveness.

### *Primacy of Practice*

The primacy of practice, as affirmed by the Chinese form, is in the context of human activity as a whole, and not just in terms of the relationship between theory and practice, nor is it in the Chinese traditional sense of “knowledge” and “action.”<sup>1</sup> If practice is defined as the activity that confirms itself through the objectification of the essential power of human beings, then all activity is practice, including theory itself. On this issue, Louis Althusser put it in a similar way when he stated, “theory is a specific practice which acts on its own object and ends in its own product: a knowledge” (Althusser 2005, p. 173). In his view, the relationship between theory and practice is not understood as one between two opposing concepts, but one in which both are practical activity, except that theory is a particular kind of practice that belongs to the realm of knowledge. In this way, all levels of social being belongs to different fields of practice, including economic, political, ideological, technical, and scientific practice.

The Chinese form’s reverence for the primacy of practice is motivated by a backlash against theoretical dogmatism. Mao Zedong criticized the erroneous tendency, “They can only cite odd quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin in a one-sided manner,” “Such an attitude towards Marxism-Leninism does a great deal of harm” (Mao 1965b, p. 19). In view of the lessons learned from the blind adherence to certain creeds in history, Mao pointed out in his “On Practice” that “Marxists hold that man’s social practice alone is the criterion of the truth of his knowledge of the external world” (Mao 1965a, p. 295). The “criterion for testing truth,” is an embodiment of the primacy of practice. In social change, the primacy of practice is expressed in the revolutionary function of changing the status quo. To achieve the all-around human emancipation, “actual communist actions” (in Marx’s language) are required. These actions can take place in political, economic, and ideological spheres, and all of these issues need to be addressed through practice.

The primacy of practical activity emphasizes not only an empirical fact, but also a grasp of the “rich totality of the object with many stipulations and relations.” As Marx suggested, “The concrete is concrete because it

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese tradition emphasizes the “unity of knowledge and action (知行合一),” which focuses on no empty talk and the consistency of words and actions without seeing the interpenetration and transformation between subject and object.

is a synthesis of many determinations, thus a unity of the diverse” (Marx 1989, p. 38), and only by taking into account the multiple aspects of the concrete object can practice not become absurd. The primacy of practice is consequently the totality of the concrete, that is, what Marx called “the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete” (Marx 1989, p. 38). Practice has primacy when using thought to master the concrete. The “truth” in the “seeking truth from facts” advocated by the Chinese form is the approach of rising from the abstract to the concrete, which is a comprehensive consideration of many factors. In this process, the primacy of practice is inseparable from reason and methodology.

## 2.2 *The View on Literature from the Dimension of Praxis*

The Marxist sphere of practice is ontological in nature, showing a transcendence of the old materialism and idealism. As Marx pointed out, “Here we see how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both” (Marx 1975a, p. 336).<sup>2</sup> This ontological and practical intervention provides a novel theoretical reference for the construction of the Chinese form, and prompts us to ponder over the nature of literature, to re-examine previous theories and criticism, and to enrich our understanding of literary activity through reflection.

### *Literature Arises from the Relationship of Objectification*

With regard to practice as objectification, literature is not a mere copy of life with a preference for the object. It is neither a creation of the writer’s mind with a sole focus on the subject, nor is it a formalist system independent of society and the author. Literature, as the embodiment of the essential power of human beings, is the product of the objectification of the subject and object. It arises from the relationship of objectification, which is reflected in the mutual transformation and construction between the creative subject and the object.

The creative subject and social life are in an interdependent and mutually shaping relationship in the process of practice. Without the creative subject, social life cannot become the source of creation; vice versa, without the creative materials and objects, the creative subject will lose

<sup>2</sup> What Marx then stated about the consistency between naturalism and humanism, although expressed in Feuerbach’s terms, suggested a new philosophical direction.

its support and cannot confirm itself. In the practice of creation, the creative subject has the characteristic of initiative and drives one's inner potential to create literary works with aesthetic value and thought significance, leading to one's own transformation. Social life is not a fixed coordinate, instead, it will assume varying complexion under the action of the creative subject, thus forming a two-way reconstruction process between the creative subject and social life. In addition, the writers and their work also form a process of objectification. Literary works are the objectified products of writers. In the process of creation, not only the creative subject creates the work, but also the subject itself changes quietly and creates a new self.

*Critical Theories Under a Literary View of Practice Theory*

The subject of creation, social life, and literary works exist in an objectified interrelationship. Neglecting the relationship between them or overemphasizing any single part of them will lead to vulgar materialism or idealism, which is the greatest inspiration from the practical dimension of Marxist literary criticism. Bringing the perspective of practice into literary theory and criticism, and reflecting on the problems of these theories can help us re-examine and correct biases in terms of epistemology and modern linguistic theories.

**Reviewing the Theory of Literary Reflection from the View of Practice**

Since the 1950s, under the influence of Soviet literature and art, the dominant literary theory in China has been the model of active theory of literary reflection. It focuses on the relationship between literature and social life, stages the cognitive value of literature, and stresses the initiative of the subject and the role of literature as an ideology in promoting social progress. It calls on writers and artists to participate in and experience the lives and struggles of the people, to understand and familiarize themselves with all kinds of people, and to strive to pursue new lives. These concepts have played a major role in promoting the development of Chinese literature and art. The epistemology-based literary theory of reflection constructs a relatively complete theoretical system, because it builds on a materialist ontology and asserts that literature is a reflection of social life and that literature needs to reflect real life with literary images. From a point of view of practice, however, there are some inherent contradictions in the theory of literary reflection.



First, the theory of reflection is founded on the dichotomy between subject and object. The theory of reflection separates the subject from the object. With the writer as the subject and social life as the object, the subject should and can only create valuable literary works by going deep into social life. In this description, the subject-object relationship is a relationship of knowing and being known, or a relationship of depicting and being depicted. However, this distinction is essentially a mechanical materialism based on the dualism of the division of subject and object. Regarding the emphasis on the subject-object dichotomy, materialism and idealism are not entirely opposed to each other since both recognize the existence of subject and object. The difference between them lies only in the former's emphasis on the object and the latter on the subject. Aesthetic predecessors<sup>3</sup> have offered pioneering studies and contributions to such reflection.

Second, the theory of reflection has a partial grasp of the object. The theory of reflection regards social life as an enriched mine, an object to be explored in depth. From a point of view of practice, this understanding lacks an objectifying observation of social life, because the object does not exist outside the subject but is formed in the very process of objectification of the subject. The function of literature is not only the search for truth, but also the integration of emotions and ideals, expression of thoughts on life, and transcendence of reality. In artistic creation, social life presents various styles and colors under differentiated subjects' writing which is precisely the expression of individual subjects' free emotions and aesthetic pursuits in the objectification. This is the result of the objectifying observation of social life and the transformation of social life into the subject.

Third, although the theory of reflection highlights the initiative of the subject, it is based on the subject and its role and does not note the opposition, interaction, and mutual shaping between the subject and the object. The emphasis on the subject from the point of view of practice

<sup>3</sup> Zhu Guangqian (朱光潜)'s "beauty is the unity of objectivity and subjectivity," Li Zehou (李泽厚)'s "beauty is the unity of objectivity and sociality," and Jiang Kongyang's practical creationist aesthetics all seek to break the dichotomy between subject and object, not only by not relying entirely on the natural properties of things, but also by not looking for the source of beauty in human subjective emotions, highlighting the creative relationship between human and reality. These theories are different and not entirely consistent with each other, but their research has made significant academic contributions to the construction of Marxist aesthetics with Chinese characteristics.

differs from that of the expressionist idea in literary theory, which advocates that art is the expression of the artist's subjective spirit, in that the projection of the subject needs to be subjected to the constraints of objectification: the constraints of real life as objectification cannot be ignored. From the point of view of practice, the relationship between social life and literature is not merely one of source and creation, nor of background and writing, but rather a transformation of opposites. The aesthetic process is an objectified spiritual creation in which the subject and object are transformed, reshaped, and enhanced through constant proximity, resistance, adjustment, and adaptation.

The meditation on the theory of reflection is not to deny epistemology completely, let alone to replace it with a view of practice. Admittedly, epistemology has its own rational and profound points, and it is an important aspect of literary activity. However, from the perspective of updating critical theory and research paradigms, the practical viewpoint is more historical and open, because the objectification of the subject and object not only constitutes the history of the construction of the subject and object, but also, the dynamics embodied in the practical process can lead to a rich variety of possibilities for the development of literary activities.

### **The Perspective of Practice and Linguistic Ontology of Literary Criticism**

Since the 1980s, the Chinese literary world has been impacted by the modern Western linguistic turn. In the field of modern literary criticism, the role of language has changed from a medium or tool to an ontological attribute of literature, being rewarded and even worshiped by literary theory and criticism. Linguistic ontology highly symbolizes everything. The world is then divided by language, the subject is constructed in a series of signs, and meaning thus arises merely from the relationship between signs. This formalist criticism, which uses linguistic ontology as a theoretical weapon, is also problematic when viewed from the perspective of practice.

Formalist criticism, based on linguistic ontology, completely symbolizes the world and constructs both subject and object with signs, thus eliminating the boundary between subject and object. This indicates the rejection of the subject. The writer's creative process and passion are excluded from formalist literary criticism, and literary creation is no longer about writers as subjects writing books, but about "scriptors" in Roland Barthes's language. New Criticism, which flourished in American colleges

and universities in the 1940s, was even more extreme, treating literature as an impersonal system. Wimsatt and Beardsley's "intentional fallacy" and "affective fallacy" excluded not only the author but also the reader from the realm of criticism when measuring the value of literary art. These criticisms were originally intended to counter positivist criticism and romanticist criticism in the nineteenth century, but ended up being overkill. The total disregard for the existence and the initiative of the subject does not correspond to the reality of literary criticism, and the criticism engaged in by these new critics is already and always a practical activity, and has the dynamism of the subject.

Another problem with formalist criticism based on linguistic ontology is that the subject and the object are both vitiated and bleached. Although formalist criticism focuses on the inner relations of the text, it emphasizes that the text is only words. Thus, in the process of symbolization, the materiality of all objects is quietly canceled, and literary criticism is reduced to a word/sign game in which different people have different perspectives. The process of materiality and objectification advocated by pragmatism can be seen as a corrective to this formalist criticism dominated by linguistic ontology.

### 3 THE DIMENSION OF PRAXIS AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES

After discussing the theoretical characteristics of the practical sphere, the practical dimension of the Chinese form becomes "concrete"<sup>4</sup> again, and it is another exploration of the Chinese form to integrate the perspective of practice into literary criticism.

#### 3.1 *Literary Criticism in the Process of Objectification*

As a form of practical activity, literary criticism is also a relational whole that unites the objectification of human creativity. However, the practice of literary criticism has a particular nature, because its object, literary activity, is a "free life activity" full of sensibility and imagination. The dimension of practice the Chinese form emphasizes the initiative

<sup>4</sup> The "concrete" here is the concrete of the various totalities.

of the subject of literary criticism in the process of criticism, thereby transforming literary criticism.

*The Dimension of Practice and the Subject of Literary Activity*

The subject of literary activity includes both the creative subjects and the subjects of appreciation and reception. These subjects will change the world and realize themselves in the process of creation and reception through a creative spiritual activity. In the dimension of practice, the critics must carefully identify how the subject of literary activity relates to reality and thus to the text itself, how it projects its aesthetic passions and values into the text, and how the subject and the object interpenetrate and transform each other in a series of intricate relationships.

Since the creative subject of literary activity has more aesthetic freedom and transcendence than other subjects, the active role of the creative subject is the principal aspect to be concerned with in the practical dimension. The creative subject has aesthetic transcendence and the power to reshape society in the process of objectification. As Shelley said, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (Shelley 1910, p. 359). This is a great affirmation of the creative subject. The subjective emotions and value choices of creative subjects in literary activities have a profound influence on human emotional demands and the guidance of realistic behavior. Although the creativity of creative subjects is not directly objectified into the material practice of transforming reality, the influence of their excellent works on people is subtle and immeasurable. Moreover, literary creation, as an activity of practice, is not only production and expression, but also a process of self-realization. The creative subject can be painful, moved, and even excited when creating, and is later purified in this process, as many writers feel when they talk about their experiences of creation.

The receiving subject is also creative. The creativity of the receiving subject is first expressed in the interpretation of and discoveries in the text in the reception, that is, revealing those things that are ignored and obscured in the text. When reading Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary,” people mostly saw that the madman used the cry of “cannibalism” to express his accusation against the feudal society, but they hardly realized that the madman was simultaneously reflecting on himself. Someone found the line “Have I eaten my own sister’s flesh” and interpreted it in a new way—feudal society was a “cannibalistic” society, in which many people, including the “madman” himself, became “cannibalistic”

members. This is a profound reflection with great relevance. With the discovery and interpretation of the object by the receiving subject, the text takes on a new meaning. The creativity of the receptive subject is also expressed through the productive character of the interaction between receiving subject and the text, that is, the generation of a new text, as in the case of Barthes' reinterpretation and fragmentation of Balzac's *Sarrasine* in *S/Z* (Barthes 1975). As an objectifying activity, the "structure-of-appeal (Appellstruktur)" (Wolfgang Iser) within a literary text can also stimulate and impact the receiving subject, so that it can be transformed or purified in the process of literary appreciation. In addition, we also need to recognize the differences of the receiving subjects. A reader with rich reading experience and a child who is ignorant of the world will obviously have very different interpretations of Cao Xueqin's *A Dream of the Red Mansion*. The richness of the subject determines to a certain extent the meaning and value of the object, that is to say, the subject actually participates in the construction of the object.

The subjects of literary activity are also compound, being both individual and social. This is because any individual's activity is always carried out under certain historical conditions and in certain social relations, thus the individual subject inevitably bears the traces of a social subject. Moreover, individuals are always in history. She/he is placed in the context of history, and the self-realization of subjectivity often has the imprint of the spiritual characteristics of certain era or nation. Thus, the subjectivity of literary activity is a unity of the subjectivity of the individual and the social subject, individual self-realization, and the spirit of the nation of the time. By studying the subject within the practical dimension, we can not only better grasp the changes of the subject itself, but also understand the vicissitudes and development of society.

#### *Practical Dimension and the Text as a Spiritual Product*

The text, the object of literary criticism, is a particular spiritual product and a multifaceted, colored aesthetic object. With the introduction of the practical dimension, the literary text will no longer be regarded as a mere object, but as the objectified creation of the human beings that are concentrated in it. As an aesthetic creation, it has more aesthetic freedom and transcendence than other objectified creations and is also a specific and individual aesthetic object.

Text as a special spiritual product raises higher demands to the subject of criticism. The subject of criticism under the practical dimension, when

confronted with a text, instead of just appreciating or evaluating the text, projects and devotes himself or herself to the text. The text is thus no longer a formalist system completely independent of society and the author. It becomes an ongoing process of externalizing meaning. On the one hand, the subject of criticism injects one's own emotional experience and ideals into the text and realizes itself in the textual analysis; on the other, the text is constantly externalizing its meaning with the critics' observation and gives a unique appearance. Moreover, this objectification cannot be done all at once and the subject of criticism cannot grasp all the meanings of an excellent text in one go. One needs to make new discoveries and interprets multiple meanings to the text with readings in many times. Also, in dialogue with the same text, different subjects of criticism can also discover, enrich, and differentiate the meaning of a work, thus giving it multiple meanings.

The nature of the interaction between literary criticism and the text is diverse and not limited to ethical or political aspects, but also offers aesthetic pleasure and philosophical reflection. In each time of reading, the subject of criticism and the text complete a mutual reflection. It is in those times of objectification that the subject of criticism completes its own shaping, consequently making the text richer. In this process, literary criticism and the text are actually shaped and elevated by each other.

It has to be noted that the mutual shaping of literary criticism and text in the practical dimension is done by the subject of criticism and the text. While enjoying the process of objectification with insight and vividness, the critics may fail to have an overall grasp of the literary activities.

#### *The Dimension of Practice and Ideal Way of Being*

While the dimension of practice in literary criticism forms an objectification relationship between critics and the text, the practical character of Marxism determines that literary criticism always points to society and reality, which is a distinct characteristic of Marxist literary criticism. The objectification study of the subject and text in the practical dimension is ultimately a reshaping of society through practice. Therefore, the practical dimension of literary criticism will not and cannot be entirely "literary" criticism. It will resort to literature to ultimately point to something "beyond" literature, and through the text as an intermediary, it will build a relationship with the real world.

The practical dimension of literary criticism can use the anti-alienation nature of literary works to promote the development of the real world in

a direction that is more congruent with human needs. As Wang Yuanxiang (王元骧) affirmed, “We see the practical nature of art as a dual creation that not only creates the work, but ultimately transforms the world through the transformation of human beings” (Wang 2002, p. 58). However, this transformation of the world is through the revelation of literary works that reshape the social ethos and ideals while also influencing people’s outlook on life and values. Moreover, the purpose of practice is not only self-affirmation, but also making every individual happy. Thus, the practical dimension of literary criticism combines the observation of literary works with human beings’ way of being in their everyday life.

Literary criticism has a reshaping and reciprocal relationship with literary works and social life, in which the subject transforms the object through the active role of free emotion and aesthetic pursuit. Correspondingly, social life is not only reshaped by literature in the process of creation, but also by literary criticism, that is, literary criticism reformulates social ethos and ideals through its comments on literary works.

### 3.2 *An Inquiry into Praxis*

The notion of practice is a historical concept that develops all the time, and thus the reflection on itself forms a part of it. Reflection is also a unique ability of human beings. In a sense, practice without reflection is always incomprehensive. As society develops and times change, the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism will continue to adjust and deepen its view of practice, and will continue to reflect on issues related to practice. Such constant reflection and dialogue should become the norm of the dimension of practice in Chinese Marxist literary criticism.

#### *Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Practical Activities*

Practice is ordinarily considered to be a human activity with a goal, meaning, and value, but whether human unconscious activity should be included in practice needs to be discussed.

On the title page of *Die Eigenart Des Asthetischen* (*The Specificity of the Aesthetic*), Lukács quotes from Marx’s *Capital*, “We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it” (Marx 1996, p. 85)—and devotes a chapter to discussing the rhythm, proportion, symmetry, and decorative patterns in primitive societies from the perspective of aesthetic genesis. The mechanism of the formation of this sense of form actually already involves the

aesthetic unconscious. According to Freud, “The first of these unpopular assertions made by psychoanalysis declares that mental processes are in themselves unconscious and that of all mental life it is only certain individual acts and portions that are conscious” (Freud 1989, p. 45). By the unconscious, Freud refers to the repressed or forgotten mental states hidden within us, including dreams and latent desires in literary works. If these phenomena are dismissed merely as animal instincts, then many human mental activities, including the political and the ethical unconscious, are all excluded from practice. Moreover, the boundary between conscious and unconscious activities is blurred, as the unconscious is inhibited by reason or consciousness, but at the same time it is very active, and when reason is lax, the unconscious can throw off the bond of rationality and enter the realm of consciousness. Many human artistic practices often lie in the space between the conscious and the unconscious, and therefore human artistic practices will modify the current existing view of practice.

This brings up the question of whether practice, as an objectified human activity, is always purposeful. This is not always the case. Although the purpose of practice is to make the real world conform with human needs, most activities involving human beings have mixed benefits and drawbacks, and what one gains in the process of objectification is comparable to what one loses. It is debatable that wrong activities do not belong to practice. The process of objectification does not mean that all practices are absolutely error-free, and some practices may even have the opposite purpose and result to their original intention, bringing alienation or even distress to human beings. However, even a failed practice is not entirely meaningless; it offers some experience or lesson, as well as reflection, and human beings will achieve a new self-affirmation through self-negation. In addition, some practices may seem purposeful at a time, but later there will be unexpected problems and limitations. Kant suggests that, given the transgressions and arrogance of reason, it is necessary for practical reason to delimit and correct the capacity for reason. Who, then, will correct practical reason? Perhaps only practice itself. As the free activity of human life, practice should be a kind of experimentation and exploration. In the process of exploration, there are bound to be problems and mistakes, and therefore practice should be allowed to be error prone. In this way, practice is endowed with another kind of ability—error correction capability. Therefore, Chinese Marxist literary criticism with the spirit of practice will inevitably adapt with the development of society and changing times, and



produce new theories and categories in this process. The ability to correct mistakes also reflects the wisdom and courage of Marxist literary criticism.

To conclude, we may say that practice is a free, but not necessarily self-conscious activity. The unconsciousness and purposelessness of practice will challenge continuously the definition of practice.

### *Finiteness and Infinity of Practice*

The relationship between the finiteness and infinity of practice is also examined by the objectification activity. Human practice always falls under certain historical conditions and cannot go beyond the era. The constraints on practical activity come from the potential constraints of the object, that is, the “thing-in-itself,” and also from the constraints of the subject’s own conditions, which are not always omnipotent and may lead to destruction if one completely ignores one’s own limitations. In addition, it is necessary to consider the constraints of internal and external factors in the process of objectification, so it is necessary to set limits in the process of mutual transformation, which must also involve mutual respect, between subject and object.

The finite and infinite nature of practice necessarily involves the problem of alienation. Alienation is present in practice, or rather, practice itself constitutes alienation. Although the phenomenon of alienation today is quite different from the alienation in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, there is no fundamental difference in its essence. The horrific scenario of uncontrolled human expansion shown in contemporary science fiction films is a good warning to us. The excessive pursuit of scientific research and social development may bring disastrous consequences. The state that “The flowers are not in full bloom and the moon is not yet full” described by a poet Wang Anshi of Song Dynasty may be the ideal scenario. Practice cannot be unrestrained, and this is what many literary works have left us to think about. However, the escape of alienation should not be at the cost of stopping exploring, which is like “decapitation just to heal the head.” Looking back the history, we may find that progress can be achieved in alienation. Capitalist society has caused the alienation of workers, but in the process of alienation, workers created great material wealth, which laid the very foundation for the progress of society. This is precisely the dialectic of alienation. The paradox of life is everywhere, and we can return to ourselves only through alienation, or in other words, realize our return to ourselves through alienation.

The finite and infinite nature of practice is also related to the ideal. The charm of the ideal lies precisely in its infinity and inaccessibility, just like absolute truth, which is always ahead and inspires people to strive for it. But the ideal is often unattainable, and what we can do is to form a trajectory to the infinite and the ideal through countless finite objectification processes. The practical dimension of literary criticism is to inspire every individual to develop in accordance with human needs with the help of works of literature and art. The emphasis on the historicity and open nature of practice constitutes another main characteristic of the practical dimension of Marxist literary criticism.

In short, the value of the Chinese form's acceptance and application of the practical dimension is that literary criticism must always grasp literature in the context of objectified relationships, rather than merely focusing on literature and one or another aspect of it. Ultimately, the Chinese form of praxis will lead people to achieve a complete emancipation through literature. Marx famously said in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "...the perceptible appropriation for and by man of the human essence and of human life, of objective man, of human achievements—should not be conceived merely in the sense of immediate, one-sided enjoyment, merely in the sense of possessing, of having" (Marx 1975a, p. 299). This phrase has several meanings. First, it emphasizes the "appropriation" of human essence and life, instead of alienation or total alienation. Second, how to achieve this "appropriation" is "by man," that is, through human practice. The third is "for man" which is the purpose of practice, that is, to achieve the full and free development of man, which is the fundamental task of the practical dimension of the Chinese form.

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## Marxist Literary Criticism in the Hi-Tech Era

The relationship between literature and science and technology is tied to the current circumstances faced by the Chinese form. With China's unprecedented transformation toward industrialization and modernization, the profound changes brought about by high technology become one of the burning issues. High technology refers to the modern scientific theories and technologies that have emerged since the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> In the present era, modern technology has invaded all aspects of human society, including literary activities. Traditional literary research could ignore this issue because technology had not been applied in people's

<sup>1</sup> Science and technology are originally two separate concepts: science is a theoretical form whose purpose is to advance knowledge, and technology is a practical relationship between humans and nature whose purpose is to transform existing existence (see Ladrière 1977). The technology referred to in this chapter is modern technology directly related to modern science, rather than to technology in general. Modern science and technology are interdependent: science is the basis for the emergence and formation of technology, technology is the application and practice of science, and the improvement of technology promotes the development of science. This means that the development of technology provides material support for further scientific activity, while the problems encountered in the development of technology become the driving force for the development of science. Both science and technology are historical categories, whose connotations are constantly enriched and updated with the development of social history. Today, the boundaries between science and technology are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, the plasma gas pedal itself is both science and technology. In short, the relationship between science and technology is distinct and mutually supportive, and the boundary between the two is now relatively blurred.

everyday lives at the time, and its role was obscured or suppressed back then; besides, people have still not attached enough importance to the impact of science and technology on literary activities. With growing might, science and technology has now penetrated every aspect of social life, even the fields of literature and art, literary theory, and Marxist literary criticism. Therefore, for literary criticism, research on the relationship between literature and science and technology is particularly indispensable and urgent. The influence and impact of science and technology on literature, literary criticism, and how Marxist literary criticism responds to such an impact have become new issues requiring serious study.

The study of the relationship between literature and science and technology should be conducted drawing on a wide range of intellectual resources. Marx and Engels' position and insight on the study of science and technology provide a theoretical basis for the study of the relationship between literature and science and technology in the Chinese form today. Western Marxism's reflections on the problems arising from high technology can also serve as beneficial references. More importantly, the Chinese form should also put forward targeted critical theories and perspectives based on in-depth studies of newly emerging literary creation and reading phenomena, and engage in new interpretations of the relationship between literature and science and technology in the Chinese form through constant adjustment and sublation.

## I MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The study of science and technology occupies a prominent position within the ideological sphere of Marxism. Although Marx and Engels were primarily concerned with capital and the proletariat class, their intellectual thought necessarily involved surplus value and the transformations in the relations of production brought about by large-scale industrial production, particularly by science and technology. Marx and Engels' discussions on science and technology and its relationship with literature and art can be found in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy Manuscripts of 1857–1858*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *Capital*, *Anti-Dühring*, *Dialectics of Nature*, and *Machinery, Utilisation of the Forces of Nature and of Science*. Starting from the status quo of capitalist

society at that time, the classical writers analyzed the relationship shared by scientific and technological development and social production in the era of large-scale mechanized industry as well as the various changes in society thus caused.

### 1.1 *Marx and Engels on Science and Technology*

Marx and Engels examined the nature and development of science and technology with the basic principles of historical materialism and dialectics. Unlike classical German philosophy, which is confined to theoretical speculation, Marx and Engels, in their criticism of capitalist society, attached great importance to natural and technical sciences, highlighting the development of science and technology and its application in material production. The Dutch scholar Schulman indicated that “any study of technology and the future would be incomplete without a consideration of technological development from the perspective of Marxist philosophy” (Schuurman 1980, p. 260).

Engels’ “Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx” noted:

Science was for Marx a historically dynamic, revolutionary force. However great the joy with which he welcomed a new discovery in some theoretical science whose practical application perhaps it was as yet quite impossible to envisage, he experienced quite another kind of joy when the discovery involved immediate revolutionary changes in industry and in historical development in general. For example, he followed closely the development of the discoveries made in the field of electricity and recently those of Marcel Deprez. (Engels 1989a, p. 468)

Whenever he witnessed the development of science and technology, Marx experienced “quite another kind of joy” because it had a direct impact on the transformation of relations of production and productive forces. Additionally, the issues and changes in capitalist society could not be clearly deciphered without sufficient sensitivity to the considerable progress of material productive forces and the massive application of science and technology.

*Science and Technology and Society*

Marx and Engels had profound insights and predictions about science and technology and its relationship with society. In *Capital*, Marx explicitly regarded natural science and its corresponding technology as a major component of the productive forces:

This productiveness is determined by various circumstances, amongst others, by the average amount of skill of the workmen, the state of science, and the degree of its practical application, the social organisation of production, the extent and capabilities of the means of production, and by physical conditions. (Marx 1996a, p. 50)

The “state of science” and the “degree of its practical application” are a part of the productiveness. Based on their observations of the capitalist society at that time, the Marxist classical writers examined the relationship between scientific and technological development and social production in the era of large-scale mechanized industry, and thus defined the social attributes of science and technology.

Marx and Engels realized the dependence of science and technology on society, and they believed the emergence and development of science and technology stems from the needs of modern society. Discussing the history of the development of science and technology, they mentioned that it originated from the needs of real life and production, and that the occurrence and development of science was determined by production. Engels said, “If, as you say, technology is indeed largely dependent on the state of science, then how much more is not the latter dependent on the state and the requirements of technology? If society has a technological requirement, the latter will do more to promote science than ten universities” (Engels 2004, p. 265). In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels also uncovered the social reasons behind why science developed in the fifteenth century. He stated:

If, after the dark night of the Middle Ages was over, the sciences suddenly arose anew with undreamt-of force, developing at a miraculous rate, once again we owe this miracle to production. In the first place, following the crusades, industry developed enormously and brought to light a quantity of new mechanical (weaving, clockmaking, milling), chemical (dyeing, metallurgy, alcohol), and physical (spectacles) facts, and this not only gave enormous material for observation, but also itself provided quite other



means for experimenting than previously existed, and allowed the construction of new instruments; it can be said that really systematic experimental science now became possible for the first time. Secondly, the whole of West and Middle Europe, including Poland, now developed in a connected fashion, even though Italy was still at the head owing to its old-inherited civilization. Thirdly, geographical discoveries—made purely for the sake of gain and, therefore, in the last resort, of production— opened up an infinite and hitherto inaccessible amount of material of a meteorological, zoological, botanical, and physiological (human) bearing. Fourthly, there was the printing press. (Engels 1987b, p. 466)

Science emerges and develops from society, yet it is abstract to some extent when compared to reality. That is, although science arises out of social needs, it is not always dependent on the society; it develops into an independent force, gradually detaching itself from the real world and becoming powerful and abstract. And the process by which science becomes abstract and independent is illustrated by Engels in *Anti-Dühring*:

Like all other sciences, mathematics arose out of the needs of men: from the measurement of land and the content of vessels, from the computation of time and from mechanics. But, as in every department of thought, at a certain stage of development the laws, which were abstracted from the real world, become divorced from the real world, and are set up against it as something independent, as laws coming from outside, to which the world has to conform. (Engels 1987a, p. 37)

That is to say, once science and technology has been developed, it can, in turn, contribute to production and society. Marx and Engels pointed out that science and technology, as a potential productive force, is the most fundamental and most active factor. It acts directly on the productive forces, bringing about changes in the structure and accumulation of capital, and then acts on the relations of production, changing the economic base, and thereby, the superstructure and ideology. In this sense, science and technology is revolutionary in nature and an important force for social development and progress.

Followed by France and Germany, England was the first country to conduct and complete the Industrial Revolution. In the 1750s and 60s, the transition from manual to machine production and from workshop crafts to machine industry began in the major industrial sectors of

England. The use of new tools (such as Spinning Jenny), new sources of energy (such as coke), new technologies (such as the use of blower equipment to remove sulfur and impurities in ironmaking), and new power (such as steam) greatly promoted the development of productive forces. By the 1820s and 30s, the prospects presented in England were considered to be “beyond the reach of reason” (Kuczynski 1984, p. 50), and industry was nothing short of a miracle. Marx and Engels highly appreciated the science and technology emerging in England and France and exclaimed about the great achievements of industrial civilization:

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour? (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 489)

Marx observed the momentum of science and technology and the new industrial machinery to capitalist production, and the resulting great leap in social productive forces.

Science and technology not only intrinsically promotes the development of productive forces, but also produces many changes in the mode of production, means of production, object of labor, and market pattern. In his *Economic Manuscript Of 1861–63*, Marx mentioned that, “Here the correct sequence of events is correctly expressed. The ‘MECHANICAL INVENTION’ first. Thereby there was CREATED a ‘REVULSION IN THE MODE OF MANUFACTVRE’ (mode of production) and HENCE in the relations of production, HENCE the SOCIAL RELATIONS and ‘EVENTUALLY’ in the ‘HABITS OF THE OPERATIVES’” (Marx 1994a, p. 468). Engels, in his Letter to Borgius, also noticed the role of the technology of production and transport in the relations of production and said, “As we see it, that technology also determines the manner of exchange, likewise the distribution of products and hence, following the dissolution of gentile society, also the division into classes, hence the relations of rulers and subjects, and hence the state, politics, the law, etc.” (Engels 2004, p. 264). In this way, technology is no less impactful to society than the French Revolution: “Whilst in France

the hurricane of the Revolution swept over the land, in England a quieter, but not on that account less tremendous, revolution was going on. Steam and the new tool-making machinery were transforming manufacture into modern industry, and thus revolutionizing the whole foundation of bourgeois society” (Engels 1987a, pp. 248–249). Marx also made the point in his essay “The British Rule in India” that it was the Indian railroads that really changed the structure of Indian society. In the sense that science and technology drove social progress, it is the construction of the railroad system that connected the Indian small states and ultimately helped transform the nature of Indian society.

*The Capitalist System and the Alienation of Science and Technology*

While Marx and Engels saw the revolutionary changes produced by science and technology as productive forces in society, they also soberly recognized the alienation of science and technology in the capitalist system. Marx assimilated Hegel’s idea of the alienation of labor by technology,<sup>2</sup> “science appears as a potentiality alien to labour, hostile to it and dominant over it” (Marx 1994b, p. 34). In *Capital*, Marx compared the handicraft industry with the machine industry:

In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage. (Marx 1996b, p. 425)

Science and technology increased efficiency with the great division of labor, but that obscured the miserable lives of the working class—“In short, with the introduction of machinery the division of labour inside society has increased, the task of the worker inside the workshop has

<sup>2</sup> Hegel stated: “Through this division, the work of the individual [des Einzelnen] becomes simpler, so that his skill at his abstract work becomes greater, as does the volume of his output. At the same time, this abstraction of skill and means makes the dependence and reciprocity of human beings in the satisfaction of their other needs complete and entirely necessary. Furthermore, the abstraction of production makes work increasingly mechanical so that the human being is eventually able to step aside and let a machine take his place” (Hegel 1991, pp. 232–233). This actually touches on the technological alienation caused by the development of industry and technology.

been simplified, capital has been concentrated, the human being has been further dismembered” (Marx 1976, p. 188). Due to the division of labor, each person’s labor was only a part of the whole and “No one person could say of them: ‘I made that; this is my product’” (Engels 1989b, p. 308).

The greatest disadvantage of large-scale industrial production is that it leads to the one-sidedness of human beings, which is exactly what Marx was trying to criticize—“The machinery of modern industry degrades the labourer from a machine to the mere appendage of a machine” (Engels 1987a, p. 278). Not only that, but such large-scale industrial production in the capitalist system also limits and even injures both the intellectual and physical strength of human beings:

At the same time that factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity. The lightening of the labour, even, becomes a sort of torture, since the machine does not free the labourer from work, but deprives the work of all interest. ...The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the “master”. (Marx 1996b, pp. 425–426)

Workers became appendages of machines, and labor became contentless. And this is precisely the alienation of human beings brought about by large-scale machine production. “The yarn, the cloth, the metal articles that now came out of the factory were the joint product of many workers, through whose hands they had successively to pass before they were ready” (Engels 1987a, p. 308). Regrettably, this phenomenon still persists today, as science and technology humanizes and embodies this theory of machine division of labor to make workers unconsciously and automatically identify with the capitalist setting of technological rationality, shaping a negative subjective form that is heterogeneous and yet also isomorphic to the capitalist mode of production.

In his study of science and technology, Marx pointed the finger directly at the capitalist system. He argued that alienation was not the fault of science and technology, but of the capitalist system. In *Capital* he wrote:

The contradictions and antagonisms inseparable from the capitalist employment of machinery, do not exist, they say, since they do not arise out of machinery, as such, but out of its capitalist employment! Since therefore machinery, considered alone, shortens the hours of labour, but, when in the service of capital, lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital, heightens the intensity of labour; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of Nature, but in the hands of capital, makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital, makes them paupers... (Marx 1996b, p. 444)

Taking the use of gunpowder as an example, Marx believed that those who mastered science and technology were the ones to blame, and that “the way in which machinery is exploited is quite distinct from the machinery itself. Powder is still powder, whether you use it to wound a man or to dress his wounds” (Marx 1982, p. 99).

Despite the objective nature of science and technology, it is the destiny of science to have social properties as long as it is used by human beings. Once science and technology is mastered by human beings, they take on a certain ideological character, and “the development of science alone, i.e. of the most solid form of wealth, both product and producer of wealth, was sufficient to dissolve this community. But the development of science, this notional and at the same time practical form of wealth, is only one aspect, one form, in which the development of human productive powers, i.e. of wealth, appears” (Marx 1989, p. 464). Here science as “notional wealth” indicates that the scientific achievements in each era are backed by scientific ideas, and that particular scientific ideas demonstrate the knowledge of nature in a particular era. Marx’s idea of science and technology as “notional wealth” and the following exposition of the paradox of science and technology have become the precursors of Western Marxism on the ideological nature of science and technology, which deserves further study and elucidation.

*The Paradox of Science and Technology*

The development of science and technology and the application of large machines have caused huge changes in the structure and the accumulation of capital. While promoting the development of capitalist industrial production, they have also caused various contradictions that are difficult to resolve.

One of the obvious contradictions is the paradox of division of labor. On the one hand, science and technology has led to an increasingly fine division of labor, and “a radical change in the mode of production in one sphere of industry involves a similar change in other spheres. This happens at first in such branches of industry as are connected together by being separate phases of a process, and yet are isolated by the social division of labour” (Marx 1989, p. 386). On the other hand, the division of labor requires closer cooperation. Since changes in each part of the division of labor inevitably lead to changes in the structure of the whole, they trigger new collaborations or combinations in production, “unite branches of production previously independent of each other” (Marx 1994b, p. 34). The fundamental paradox is that of endlessness and finiteness formed by the spirit of scientific inquiry. There is no “stop” in the development of science and technology; scientific research does not stop exploring. As Marx propounded in *Capital*,

Modern industry never looks upon and treats the existing form of a process as final. The technical basis of that industry is therefore revolutionary, while all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative. By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually causing changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the labourer, and in the social combinations of the labour process. At the same time, it thereby also revolutionizes the division of labour within the society, and incessantly launches masses of capital and of workpeople from one branch of production to another. (Marx 1996b, p. 489)

Such a Faustian spirit of modern science not only leads to the everlasting pursuit of efficiency and continuous revolution in the means of production, but also poses a major threat to nature as well as human beings themselves. Looking at the booming development of science and technology in the twentieth century and the problems it has brought, people have started wondering whether they should reflect on the Faustian spirit of eternal, insatiable pursuit.

Marx recognized the value of science as an independent force, while seeing the alienation it produced:

Knowledge thus becomes independent of labour and enters the service of capital; this process belongs in general to the category of the attainment of an independent position by the conditions of production vis-à-vis labour. This separation and autonomisation, which is at first of advantage to capital alone, is at the same time a condition for the development of the POWERS OF SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE. (Marx 1994b, p. 57)

Marx predicted that the surge of wealth due to the development of science and technology would gradually become the material basis for the burial of capitalism; science and technology, while causing changes in human beings' daily lives, would also lay the foundation for the complete emancipation of humankind. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx mentioned,

But natural science has invaded and transformed human life all the more practically through the medium of industry; and has prepared human emancipation, ...natural science will lose its abstractly material—or rather, its idealistic—tendency, and will become the basis of human science, as it has already become—albeit in an estranged form—the basis of actual human life. (Marx 1975, p. 303)

A tremendous increase in productive forces with the flourishing of science and technology will eventually transform human society into a harmonious society of the association or community of free individuals and facilitate the complete emancipation of man.

### 1.2 *Marx and Engels on the Relationship Between Science and Art*

The classical Marxist writers' research on the relationship between science and technology and literature has also been conducted within the general framework of historical materialism and material dialectics. They not only see the inexorable trend of historical development, but also realize the contradiction and non-synchronicity between the two, with the latter showing the wisdom and profundity of classical Marxism.

*The Influence of Science and Technology on Literature and Art*

With regard to the relationship between science and technology and literature, Marx and Engels thought that philosophy, history, and literature could never develop separately. Discussing classical German philosophy, Engels stated the influence of science and technology on philosophy:

But during this long period from Descartes to Hegel and from Hobbes to Feuerbach, the philosophers were by no means impelled, as they thought they were, solely by the force of pure reason. On the contrary, what really pushed them forward most was the powerful and ever more rapidly onrushing progress of natural science and industry. (Engels 1990, p. 368)

As such, the ideas of these thinkers, from Descartes to Hobbes and to Feuerbach, were not limited to their philosophical heritage, but were stimulated by “the powerful and ever more rapidly onrushing progress of natural science and industry” that “really pushed them forward.” In the past, we have examined philosophers’ sublation from within the history of philosophy, ignoring the broader context that philosophers were perhaps not really inspired by philosophy itself, but by gifts from outside philosophy—science and technology in particular. What Engels’ words tell us today is that the study of literature should look not only at the inheritance and innovation within literature, but also at the profound influence of factors outside literature, including science and technology. Today, science and technology has become the material basis for the existence and transformation of literature. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels cited the flourishing of art, specifically painting, during the Italian Renaissance as an example of how the artistic achievements of the Renaissance were correlated to the technological advances of their time—“Raphael’s works of art depended on the flourishing of Rome at that time, which occurred under Florentine influence...Raphael as much as any other artist was determined by the technical advances in art made before him, by the organization of society and the division of labour in his locality, and, finally, by the division of labour in all the countries with which his locality had intercourse” (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 393).

Facing the impact of rapid scientific and technological progress on human society in all aspects, literature and art could not be out of it. Marx indicated in *The Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that the advancement in science and technology would destroy the imagination of childhood, and that certain forms of art of



great importance were only possible at a specific stage of social underdevelopment. “Is the conception of nature and of social relations which underlies Greek imagination and therefore Greek [art] possible in the age of SELF ACTORS, railways, locomotives and electric telegraphs? What is Vulcan compared with Roberts and Co., Jupiter compared with the lightning conductor?” (Marx 1989, p. 47). With the advent of technological advancements, such as the steam engine and the telegraph, the old literary genre or forms were bound to disappear. With the progress of technology, the basis of existence of some imaginations and fantasies of our ancestors was lost, and the myths and epics of ancient Greece based on them could not be continuously created under the new historical conditions.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Non-Synchronicity Between Science and Technology and Literature*

When dealing with the unbalanced relationship between science and technology and literature, the classical Marxist writers always adhere to historical materialism. As Engels wrote,

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final analysis, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. ...The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, namely constitutions set up by the ruling class after a victorious battle. (Engels 1995, p. 368)

The classical Marxist writers, while insisting on the ultimate dominance of economic development in literature and art, also valued the complexity of various factors that contribute to social development. There are indeed multiple factors at work in social development; the relationship between material and spiritual production is thus not simply one of pure determination and dependence, or domination and subordination. There is a difference between the material wealth created by material production and the “immaterial value” created by spiritual production, because they are not governed by the same law. When it comes to the unbalanced

<sup>3</sup> On this issue, we have a new view, in which science and technology has indeed extinguished the imagination of people to some extent, but at the same time given rise to new forms of imaginations and myths.

relationship between social development and literature, Marx famously said:

As regards art, it is known that certain periods of its florescence by no means correspond to the general development of society, or, therefore, to the material basis, the skeleton as it were of its organization.... this is the case with regard to the different arts within the sphere of art itself. (Marx 1989, pp. 46–47)

Here, Marx implied two types of imbalances: one is the imbalance between literature and the general development of society and the material base, and the other is the imbalance in the “relationship between different art genres within the realm of art itself.” This corresponds to the intricacies of historical development and the concreteness of history itself.

The non-synchronicity of social development, including the material base and artistic production, has already been evidenced by the history of culture and literature. In ancient Rome, people wore satin and spent inordinate sums of money, but its entire artistic achievement fell far short of that of ancient Greece, which produced unparalleled art in a rather barren land. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the material production of Norway and Russia evidently lagged behind that of England, France, and the United States, but Norway witnessed a boom in theater, spearheaded by Ibsen, and Russia saw a “splendid group” of novelists pioneered by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. China witnessed something similar, where literature flourished in the midst of social and political darkness; this is what is meant by “The misery of the state leads to the emergence of great poets.” In other words, it is entirely possible for material life to be abundant but artistic spirit to be pale. This shows that “the economy is determinant, but in the last instance. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes” (Althusser 2005, pp. 112–113).

### *The Permanent Charm of Art*

Marx once made a famous proposition, quite worthy of consideration, on the permanent charm of art—“certain important creations within the compass of art are only possible at an early stage of its development” (Marx 1989, pp. 46–47). For example, the flourishing of mythology and epics in ancient Greece could have only happened when productive

forces were underdeveloped and social development level was low. Additionally, these ancient forms of art, produced in underdeveloped social conditions, are extremely splendid in spiritual implications, and they do not lose their artistic appeal with the changing times. Marx proposed in *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858*, “the difficulty lies not in understanding that Greek art and epic poetry are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable model” (Marx 1989, p. 47). The myths, tragedies, and comedies of ancient Greece not only reached their artistic peak in a past time, they also continue to provide us with tremendous artistic enjoyment and serve as an unattainable model even for today.

Then why is classical art so enduring? How can this seemingly nonhistorical literary phenomenon be explained? Marx answered:

An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does not the naivete of the child give him pleasure...? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm as a stage that will never recur? (Marx 1989, pp. 47–48)

The nostalgia and yearning for one’s childhood is a universal human emotion. From this perspective, perhaps, this type of art is not in contradiction with the underdeveloped social stage out of which it grew. Moreover, since capital, by its very nature, is somewhat hostile to art, the ground for such art is no longer available in a capitalist society. Furthermore, we can also find part of the answer from Engels’ elaboration of the complex relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. In a given period, art has its own laws, in addition to the constraints of social development.

Marx’s idea that “the concept of progress is not to be taken in the usual abstract form” (Marx 1989, p. 46) also provides new approaches to understand and answer this question. This view is more prominent in the humanities, especially in literature and art. To explain the enduring charm of classical art, we need to go back to literature itself, while considering that historical stages will “never recur.” The charm of literature lies exactly in the non-repeatability of literary works, the non-imitability of talented writers, and even the non-recurrence of their artistic forms. These characteristics thus make it difficult to measure the classics in literary history

in terms of “progress.” As such, our perspective moves from the historical level to the value level, where both literature and art are products of history and can both be directed beyond a particular history into the future. This transcendence implies a certain universality in literature and criticism that overcomes the limitations of time and space, and such invaluable transcendence is precisely the goal of literary creation and criticism. This was perhaps the important inspiration of what Marx called the “an eternal charm” (Marx 1989, p. 48).

In addition, Marx and Engels were talented enough to foresee that the development of science and technology would provide more people with leisure and tools, thus greatly contributing to a wider production and consumption of literature and art. Since science and technology “in general the reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, to which then corresponds the artistic, scientific, etc., development of individuals, made possible by the time thus set free and the means produced for all of them” (Marx 1988, p. 91). Engels foretold that in the post-Industrial Revolution future, “given a rational division of labour among all, of producing not only enough for the plentiful consumption of all members of society and for an abundant reserve fund, but also of leaving each individual sufficient leisure so that what is really worth preserving in historically inherited culture—science, art, forms of intercourse, etc.—may not only be preserved but converted from a monopoly of the ruling class into the common property of the whole of society, and may be further developed” (Engels 1988, p. 325). This is how classical Marxist writers envisioned a future society in which science and technology would be highly developed.

Due to the restricted level of productive forces at that time and the fact that Marx’s main concern was the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels did not pay more attention to science and technology, especially the relationship between literature and science and technology. They highlighted the nature of science and technology in the era of machine industry during the primitive accumulation of capital, and thus in their discussion of the relationship shared by literature and science and technology, they mostly examined the limitations and negativity of science and technology and its impact on literary creativity. However, the historical materialism and relevant theoretical perspectives held by classical Marxist writers about science and technology and its relationship with literature are still of tremendous methodological significance for contemporary research.

### 1.3 *Western Marxism's View on Technology and Literature*

Western Marxist studies on the relationship of science and technology and literature directly inherited Marx's views on science and technology in large-scale industrial societies; however, they incorporated Marx's legacy in a reflective manner within a Western cultural context. In contrast to the historical context of early capitalist societies such as the one in which Marx lived, Western Marxism, including the Frankfurt School, was situated in advanced industrial societies, where the boom of science and technology impacted upon the material, spiritual, and political life of the West. Therefore, while witnessing the progress initiated by high technology, they were more concerned with the problems that accompanied the advent of high technology. They seriously worried about the damage that the rapid progress of technology would cause to literary creation and even to human integrity, but they weren't aware enough of the revolutionary influence of technology on literary creation.<sup>4</sup> Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, Benjamin's *A Short History of Photography* and *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Marcuse's *The One-Dimensional Man* and *The Aesthetic Dimension*, and Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* are all unique explorations that critique and analyze literature and science and technology with depth.

#### *Technology and Alienation*

Western Marxism drew on Marx's view on the alienation of human beings by science and technology in large-scale industrial societies, and investigated it in greater depth. They believed the development of modern science and technology had ironically turned into the opposite of itself by being transformed into an instrument for ruling human beings and even becoming a threat to the survival of human beings. Lukács, the pioneer of Western Marxism, made reification (alienation) the central issue of his critique of capitalism and argued that the critique of reification was what made the communist movement so attractive. In *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*, Lukács conducted a comprehensive study of the theory of reification, which can be taken as a rediscovery

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin was one of the few Western Marxists in the twentieth century who noticed the impact of the advent of photography and film on traditional art and affirmed its revolutionary impact.

and reinterpretation of Marx's theory of alienation. According to Lukács, reification, though also present in other social forms, is not prominent. Only in a capitalist society has it become a peculiar, pivotal issue specific to modern capitalism with the mechanized division of labor, especially with the transformation of everything into a commodity, extending to all aspects of capitalist society.

Reification thus becomes the focus of Lukács' critique of capitalist society. Lukács implied that the role of man in the labor process is not essentially different from that of a screw in a machine. He said:

Neither objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already preexisting and self-sufficient; it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not. (Lukács 1999, p. 89)

He went on to say, "there is an even more monstrous intensification of the one-sided specialization which represents such a violation of man's humanity" (Lukács 1999, p. 99). Lukács also extended Marx's theory of alienation to all other aspects. For example, he inherited Marx's view of the "alienation of things" such as land: "Private property alienates not only the individuality of men, but also of things. The ground and the earth have nothing to do with ground-rent, machines have nothing to do with profit. For the landowner ground and earth mean nothing but ground-rent; he lets his land to tenants and receives the rent - a quality which the ground can lose without losing any of its inherent qualities such as its fertility; it is a quality whose magnitude and indeed existence depends on social relations that are created and abolished without any intervention by the landowner. Likewise with the machine" (Lukács 1999, p. 92). Land originally has its basic properties, such as fertility for growing crops, but in a capitalist society, it is used only as a form of rent and loses its true physical nature. Lukács also discussed various kinds of reification in society, among which the reification of human consciousness, that is, human beings' psychological traits, is particularly chilling and alarming. As reification is "rationalized" and abstracted, it then has a certain calculability, in the sense that everything can become a calculated object, even including "love." Lukács' critique of reified reality based

on modern science and technology had a great influence on the Frankfurt School, and traces of Lukács' thought are also evident in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno deemed that the high degree of unfreedom of human beings due to the development of science and technology has led to the increasing alienation of modern people. Science and technology shapes workers on the basis of a mechanical principle, Taylorism,<sup>5</sup> and a mathematical division of labor, which not only factually causes a certain atomized and fragmented status of existence of human beings, but also embodies the machinic division of labor with human flesh. This leads to workers to unconsciously identify with the capitalist value setting of technological rationality and ultimately acquires a passive subject form that is both heterogeneous and isomorphic to the capitalist mode of production. Classical Marxism and Western Marxism offer quite different solutions to avoid the alienation of human beings. Marx advocated proletarian revolutions, while Western Marxism's proposals include aesthetic salvation, interaction theory, and new sensibility. Fromm even expressed a preference for a return to the handicraft era, and believed that in handicraft societies the handicraftsmen were the center of productive activities, deciding how and how much to produce. Modern man, instead, "while becoming the master of nature ... has become the slave of the machine which his own hands built" (Fromm 2002, p. 4). He also argued that "the alienation of work in man's production is much greater than it was when production was by handicraft and manufacture" (Fromm 1980, p. 51). In the mechanized production of capitalist society, it is not the machine that surrounds the man, but on the contrary, the workers in factories surround the machine, merely as a form of capital, all day long, without thinking or creating; everything is planned and arranged by the manager, and the workers only have to move their hands automatically. Admittedly, such a view of retreat is only wishful thinking, not the mainstream view of Western Marxism.

<sup>5</sup> Taylorism is a method of work for measuring time and studying movements created by the American engineer Frederick Taylor. It became popular in the United States and Western European countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its basic content and principles are: scientific analysis of the mechanical movements of workers in labor and the study of the most economical and productive "standard method of operation."

*Ideological Nature of Science and Technology*

Another contribution of Western Marxism is revealing the ideological nature of science and technology. In his “Notes on Science and the Crisis,” Horkheimer clearly asserted that science and technology is also a form of ideology. Habermas further developed Horkheimer’s view, and in “Technology and Science as Ideology,” Habermas argues that science has become both “the primary productive force” and “ideological” (Habermas 1971, pp. 81–127). This means science and technology has a dual function, both as a productive force and as a form of ideology. In Habermas’ discussion, science and technology is primarily regarded as a negative ideology because science and technology, should have been the tool and means, eventually become the telos in itself. In this way, people become slaves to technology, and the human spirit becomes increasingly empty and repressed.

This ideological nature of science and technology is first manifested in the defense of the existing system through science and technology, which makes it becomes thus an accomplice to the capitalist system. In capitalist societies, while people enjoy the convenience of technology, they also tacitly approve the legitimacy the existing capitalist society. As Lukács says, “This rationalization of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man’s physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalization of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of—formal—laws” (Lukács 1999, p. 101). By satisfying people’s material needs, modern technology has led them to settle for the status quo and gradually lose their ability to transcend the capitalist reality. It is in this sense that Horkheimer considers science and technology to be ideological, because it takes on a particular form that prevents people from discovering genuine social crises, “every human way of acting which hides the true nature of society, built as it is on contrarities, is ideological” (Horkheimer 2002, p. 7). Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* is a sharper critique of this problem. The rapid growth of science and technology has integrated people’s mentality and thought with the existing capitalist system, and technology has achieved domination over human beings, controlling and manipulating their consciousness—“A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress” (Marcuse 2006a, p. 4).

The ideological nature of science and technology is not only reflected in its complicity with and defense of society, but also in the clamping



down on literary creativity. In a capitalist society, under the manipulation of science and technology for the benefit of the bourgeoisie and instrumental rationality, not only is labor regulated through calculability, but everything that cannot be calculated is either discarded or not recognized. Furthermore, science and technology restricts the imagination and free expression in literature and art. In *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse stated that transcendence is inherently a principal feature of art. The development of modern technology has tamed the transcendence and estrangement of art in terms of capitalist society, and the transcendent literary image, imbued with romantic imagination and dreams, is being eliminated by modern technology. It is in this sense that he strongly called for the emergence of new sensibility and new technologies.

The ideological nature of science and technology is also expressed in its emancipatory potential, and noticeably, emancipation itself is ideology. This is another aspect of the ideological nature of science and technology. Benjamin was the first to recognize the revolutionary subversion of artistic activity in the age of mechanical reproduction and its emancipatory potential and paradoxes in *A Short History of Photography* and *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. He believed that mechanical reproduction made art accessible to the masses and that technology-based art forms, such as film, broke the old perceptions and imaginations and renewed people's senses. Marcuse even called for the emancipation of science and technology, for "Such a society presupposes throughout the achievements of the existing societies, especially their scientific and technical achievements. Released from their service in the cause of exploitation, they could be mobilized for the global elimination of poverty and arid toil" (Marcuse 1971a, p. 23). In other words, science and technology should be liberated from all types of bondages and serve the future of the society. As Marcuse said, "The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal" (1971a, p. 24).

Western Marxism has deeply inquired into the relationship between literature and science and technology, but the focus has primarily been on criticism and reflection, and the theoretical perspectives have often been contradictory or dualistic. Nevertheless, the research on the relationship between science and technology and literature is inspirational for

the Chinese form and provides a handy reference to explore the relationship between literature and science and technology, while leaving room for further discussion.

## 2 THEORETICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE HI-TECH ERA

China, a country where industrialization started late but has been developing steadily and rapidly, differs to some extent from the Western post-industrialized society where Western Marxism emerged. It is necessary for the Chinese form to understand the relationship between literature and science and technology in an in-depth, dialectical way, in light of contemporary Chinese literature and cultural phenomena. There is an urgent need to rethink those issues that have been settled or not yet probed into by previous Marxist criticism, and to sort out, summarize, and conclude the new literary and artistic reality by forming and inventing new critical concepts, theories, standards, and terminology, so as to respond to, promote, and guide the new development of literary activities. This will provide new ideas and wisdom for examining the relationship between contemporary Chinese literature and science and technology.

### *2.1 View of Science and Technology in the Chinese Form*

The development of science and technology in China goes hand in hand with the process of Chinese modernization. The Chinese Communists have fully recognized and performed historical dialectical analysis of the nature, status, and role of science and technology, and put forth some ideas and views with Chinese characteristics, which have become the theoretical cornerstones for the study of the relationship between high technology and literature in the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism.

#### *Science and Technology and the Dream of a Strong Nation*

The importance of science and technology in modern China relates closely to the liberation and rejuvenation of the nation. Traditionally, China valued agriculture and belittled commerce, while neglecting science and technology. In the modern era, China has witnessed waves of learning modern Western science and technology, and it has become the common aspiration of a generation of people with lofty ideals to make

the country stronger through science and technology. During the May Fourth Movement, the New Culture Movement, represented by the *New Youth*, welcomed “Mr. De,” namely “Democracy,” and “Mr. Sai,” namely “Science,” with astonishing enthusiasm; the concept of science and technology was increasingly recognized by intellectuals, including the public; and “Mr. De” and “Mr. Sai” became major contributors in the early stages of China’s modernization. Hence, it was precisely because of the tremendous pressure of modern science and technology from the West and the anxiety of saving the nation when its very existence was at stake that Chinese society was gradually transformed and modernized.

During the Chinese revolution and reconstruction of the nation, Chinese Marxists openly advocated a strong desire for science and technology. Confronted with this impoverished and weak China, Mao Zedong summarized the important reasons for China’s lagging behind:

From the 1840s to the mid-1940s, a total of 105 years, almost all the large, medium, and small imperialist countries in the world have invaded and fought against us. Except for the last war, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, which ended in the surrender of Japanese imperialism for various reasons at home and abroad, there was not a single war that did not end in our defeat and the signing of a treaty that humiliated our country. The reasons for that were, first, the corruption of the social system and, second, the backwardness of the economy and technology. (Mao 1999, p. 340)

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Mao, aiming high and thinking ahead, attached great importance to science and technology, especially to cutting-edge technology for national defense from the perspective of national security. It was Mao’s successful strategy that led to China’s outstanding achievements in science and technology, which established China’s status as a great power and laid the foundation for national defense and China’s economic take-off.

It was Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of Reform and Opening up of the economy policy, who brought science and technology to the forefront of the social structure. In March 1978, at the opening ceremony of the National Science Conference, Deng emphasized that “the key to the four modernizations is the modernization of science and technology” (Deng 1984, p. 102). Through his observation of and reflection on the development trends of the world economy, he noted that “What

has brought about the tremendous advances in the productive forces and the vast increase in labour productivity? Mainly the power of science, the power of technology” (Deng, 1984, p. 103). At this conference, Deng famously asserted, “science and technology is a productive force” and “intellectuals are part of the working class.” Therefore, in the wake of the National Science Conference, China ushered in a new era, a “spring of science.”

Reviewing the discourses of the Chinese Communists on science and technology, it is quite clear that science and technology is closely pertinent to the prosperity of the country and the happiness of the people, and that science and technology significantly supports and drives the national economy.

### *Science and Technology as the First Productive Force*

Deng not only proposed science and technology as a productive force, but also placed it in a prominent position in national economic construction, highlighting that “science and technology is the first productive force.” He clearly said, “China cannot advance without science” (Deng 1993a, p. 183). On September 5, 1988, when Deng met with President of Czechoslovakia, Husak, he elaborated on the importance of science and technology:

The world is changing, and we should change our thinking and actions along with it. In the past we pursued a closed-door policy and isolated ourselves. How did that benefit socialism? The wheels of history were rolling on, but we came to a halt and fell behind others. Marx said that science and technology are part of the productive forces. Facts show that he was right. In my opinion, science and technology are a primary productive force. For us, the basic task is to maintain socialist convictions and principles, expand the productive forces and raise the people’s living standards. To accomplish this task, we must open our country to the outside world. Otherwise, we shall not be able to stick to socialism. In the 1950s, for example, the gap in technology between China and Japan was not great. Then we closed our doors for 20 years and made no effort to compete internationally, while during the same period Japan grew into an economic power. (Deng 1993b, p. 269)

Science and technology is the “primary productive force,” or “first productive force” is a scientific assertion made by the Chinese Communists based on the development trends and current situation of contemporary science and technology, and is a theoretical extension of Marx’s “scientific power” or science and technology as a productive force.<sup>6</sup>

On the issue of “science and technology is the first productive force,” Deng made it very clear that “We should make joint efforts to develop science and technology. Without science the hopes of mankind will not be fulfilled. Without science the people of the Third World countries cannot cast off poverty. Without science world peace cannot be maintained” (Deng 1993a, p. 184). First and foremost, in terms of the relationship between society and science and technology, the development of society and people’s happiness are directly related to the growth of wealth, and in the growth of social wealth, the role of science and technology has been increasingly important: it has become the paramount driving force of economic growth. Second, the promotion of science and technology in the economy inevitably promotes the development of spiritual culture, which improves people’s spiritual quality of life while raising their material living level. This helps change their spiritual outlook and daily life, thus, promoting the overall development and progress of society. Finally, as for maintaining world peace, the sword of national protection created by science and technology is a guarantee of peace, and the development of science and technology in various countries becomes a counterbalancing force among them.

#### *Ideological Construction Function of Science and Technology*

There are different opinions on the ideological nature of science and technology in China. When being viewed in isolation, science and technology does not seem to be ideological, but it must be admitted that “technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put” (Marcus 2006a, p. xlvii) and that science and technology is inseparable from the people who control it, because it cannot exist independent of people. As long as

<sup>6</sup> See Gong Yuzhi (1997, pp. 107–108). Hu Qiaomu (胡乔木) quotes from Marx’s “Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft of 1857–58)”: “In *fixed capital*, the social productive power of labour is posited as a property inherent in capital; the *SCIENTIFIC POWER* as well as the combination of social forces within the production process, and finally the skill translated from immediate labour into machines, into lifeless productive power” (Marx 1988, p. 100).

science and technology is used by people, it will naturally play an ideological function. While Marx proposed to distinguish gunpowder from the people who use it, he also regarded science and technology as “notional wealth.” Western Marxism is soberly aware of the ideological nature of science and technology, and yet holds a mainly negative perception about it.

In studying the nature of science and technology, we should see both science and technology as productive forces along with their ideological properties, and pay attention to the mutual-transformation between the two. From a historical perspective, science and technology as a revolutionary productive force embodies the deconstruction of the land-based feudal society and the deconstruction of feudal values and mindset. As such, science and technology is not only material, but also has a revolutionary nature and historical value. With regard to social development, science and technology, as an alias of modernization, has contributed enormously to the transformation and development of society, which shows its revolutionary nature as well. Moreover, “science and technology is the first productive force” is in itself ideological in nature, as it demands the realization of its dominant position in social life. The revelation and transformation of the dual nature of science and technology from historical and dialectical perspectives are an exploration and development of the view of science and technology in the Chinese form.

The ideological nature of science and technology today has new characteristics. Science and technology has not only moved from the machine age to the digital age, but has also permeated into all aspects of life, playing an increasingly important role. Science and technology has become something opposed to ordinary labor, and its control over human being is pervasive, from people’s work to their leisure, and even to their feelings and thoughts. Postman, in Foreword to *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, worried that if all work were done by machines, humans would become stupid and numb under the pleasure of technology. Moreover, because the development of technology makes people’s work easier, they will have more and more leisure time, and they will give up thinking in comfort. The postmodern novel “Lost in the Funhouse” written by John Barth is a metaphor for this phenomenon, in which people live in the Funhouse but lose their way. The lifestyle provided by modern technology has caused people to lose the desire to strive further. Guarding against the negative pitfalls of the development of modern science and technology, and preventing it from being transformed into an instrument

of domination or threat to the subsistence of humankind, are issues of particular concern to Western Marxism and a warning to China today as well.

## 2.2 *Modern Science and Technology and the “Survival” of Literature*

While people cheer for the new life brought about by high technology, they also deeply recognize the impact of industrialization and informatization threatening the subsistence of literature and art, as well as infringements on individuals. Joseph Needham once stated, “when at the Scientific Revolution the final cause of Aristotle was done away with, and ethics chased out of science, things became very different, and more menacing” (Needham 1985, p. 11). Nowadays, when science and technology is developing rapidly and entering an era of total control, the excessive promotion of instrumental and technical rationality may cause society to fall into the trap of “material prosperity and spiritual suffering.” The relationship shared by literature and science and technology has become a realist problem that needs to be examined and refined theoretically. It is difficult for everyone who engages in literary and artistic creation and research to stay away from it.

### *The Challenge of Digital Technology to Literature*

The development of science and technology today varies from that in Marx’s time. If machines were used to control people mainly in factories, contemporary technology not only controls people’s work and life, but also penetrates into all areas of social life. Here, the focus is put on digital technology, which is closely related to literature. Negroponte, the author of *Being Digital*, divided the world into an atomic world and a bit world (Negroponte 1995, p. 11) that is, “a society constructed by the real physical world made of atoms and a digital media culture based on digital technology” (Li 2012, p. 8). This is the major difference between the industrial and high-tech age.

Digitalization has quietly changed the spiritual life of people including literature and art. With the extension of digital technology, high technology has become more closely connected with people’s lives and their feelings. For instance, “this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality. Mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual, and industrial psychology” (Marcuse 2006a, p. 12). The public and private spheres have been unknowingly integrated.

Faced with the impact of digital technology, especially virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI), the basic attributes of literature and art are seriously challenged, and the survival of literature in the high-tech era becomes a problem.

VR is a computer-generated immersive and interactive experience that uses computer graphics, photoelectric imaging technology, and sensing technology to create a virtual environment incorporating multiple human senses such as sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. People are immersed in it using various devices, and the interaction produces experiences and feelings similar to those produced in the real environment. By wearing a pair of VR glasses and holding a controller, people can view different spaces from different positions and feel the different moods and rhythms as if they were present in that environment. Multisensory perception also falls within the scope of VR. In addition to the visual perception of three-dimensional images generated by computer graphics technology, VR can provide sensory experiences—such as hearing, touch, and even smell and taste—to people. Artificial world landscapes such as the flow of water, the twitter of birds, the fragrance of flowers, the appearance of giant beasts, and monstrous floods also arouse people's comfort, excitement, or panic. In VR, the physical world is absent and, thus, the relationship between literature and real world and the resultant problems need to be reexamined.

AI too has a serious impact on literary activities. AI is the simulation of the information process of human consciousness and thought through symbolic computation. Although the term “artificial intelligence” emerged only in the middle of the twentieth century, it has developed at a startling pace, expanding its fields of application, so much so that machines are beginning to perform complex tasks that would normally be performed by humans, and some important decisions are also being made with the aid of big data. Today, AI poses a major challenge to literature as writing with computers has become a common reality (Hu, 2004, pp. 183–186). In 2017, the robot Xiaoice learned modern poems by 519 poets written since 1920, and after 100 hours and 10,000 training sessions, it was able to compose modern poetry by simulating the human creative process through deep neural networks and other technical means. Given just a few hints, such as a picture or a few keywords, it can find the right words to compose appropriate letters and words from tens of thousands of poems, and the poems it writes out of the words can be really like the ones written by human beings.



Also in 2017, the Chinese writer Han Shaogong published an article in magazine *Discovery*, “When Robots Set Up Writers’ Associations,” claiming that robot writing is no longer a figment of the imagination (Han 2017). However, Han is still confident that only humans have emotions and thoughts. On this point, Pascal also had said, “A human being is only a reed” (Pascal 2008, p. 72) in which “thought” becomes a noble and essential characteristic of human beings. However, today’s research on AI does not stop there, as robots are beginning to select, learn, and transform themselves on the basis of big data to behave creatively, especially since the next goal of researchers is to see how robots can have both IQ and EQ, as envisioned in the films *Artificial Intelligence* and *Ex Machina*. When a robot with advanced intelligence emerges and when it (he or she) can not only think but also feel and be emotional, “thought” and “emotion” will no longer be the preserved “patent” of humans. In this way, the definition of human being will need to be rewritten, and the nature of literature will also be reconfigured, thus posing a threat to humanity.

Derrida once lamented that science and technology are more powerful than politics in terms of impact on literature—“Neither can philosophy, or psychoanalysis. Or love letters.....” (Derrida 1987, p. 197). It is because politics can be managed by humans, whereas the power of technology cannot be completely controlled by humans. Technology is like Pandora’s box, which is quite difficult to retrieve once it is opened. The blind development of technology may probably produce terrible prospects and even bring destruction to humankind. Therefore, whether there is a need to set limits and draw boundaries for AI and other high technologies has become an important topic in the contemporary discourse around science and technology.

### *Symbiotic Relationship of Literature and Science and Technology*

The history of art is full of questions about “the end of art.” Early in the first half of the nineteenth century, Hegel had predicted that, as the development of the spirit inevitably overtakes the material and the expansion of rational content inevitably breaks through the sensuous form, art, after its symbolic, classic, and romantic stages of development, would necessarily decline and be replaced by an abstract conceptual way of perception, philosophy. Thus, from his historical view of limited development, Hegel described a quite bleak future for art.

Is high technology truly a nightmare for literature? To answer this question, people often turn to J. Hillis Miller's statement "Will Literary Study Survive the Globalization of the University and the New Regime of Telecommunications?" to demonstrate the dilemma of literature. Miller's thought actually needs to be fully explained, as Miller opens with a quote from the protagonist in Derrida's *The Post Card*, "an entire epoch of so-called literature, if not all of it, cannot survive a certain technological regime of telecommunications (in this respect the political regime is secondary)" (Miller 2015, p. 50). However, in contrast to Hegel's predicted notion of the end of art, Miller himself expressed this concern and viewed it as the norm, "literature is never just in time." This is confirmed by the development of literature, which has never been the lucky few or progressed smoothly, and yet has always faced various challenges. As Miller described, "Literature is potholes in the Information Superhighway, black holes in the Internet Galaxy. 'Literature' as survivor, will continue to demand urgently to be 'studied'" (Miller 2015, pp. 69–70).

As a "survivor" of high technology, literature has its own reasons for tenacious persisting. Regarding human's spiritual needs, literature cannot disappear, because people's feelings, senses, and imagination need to be projected. As John Hollowell said, "since the beginnings of the novel in the eighteenth century, of course, it has periodically become fashionable for critics to speak of the form's imminent death" (Hollowell 1977, p. 3). Barthes claimed, "the death of the author," or Gasset asserted "the decline of the novel," but the development of the history of literature is still moving forward in constant alternation and innovation. We are convinced that the literature of the future may change in appearance, but its qualities remain, and that it will always be the homeland of human imagination and passion.

Referring to Adorno's work on the history of music, Jameson made an unusual new point about the relationship between literature and science and technology: "scientific and technological invention is at one with artistic construction" (Jameson 1990, p. 190). He thought that modern, advanced technology can drive the constant renewal and development of art, and that there exists a certain "synchronicity" in their development. Jameson's argument for such synchronicity is justified by the fact that modern technology can indeed provide strong support for aesthetic activity, and that two parallel lines can be vaguely but positively discerned

in the course of history. However, in a particular context, Jameson's "synchronicity" needs revision. In some cases, the development of art and technology may not coincide; the spiritual content of art may not necessarily be enriched and developed in an age of high technology; literature and art may even be lost or confused; and the peak of literature may not be ruled out at a time when technology is underdeveloped. However, although science and technology and literature have different tracks, they indeed intersect from time to time, and literature continues to march along its route stubbornly. Therefore, the fact that literature and science and technology move toward each other should be in accordance with the law of historical development.

The relationship between literature and science and technology also presents the problem of dichotomy. Modern technology always attempts to suppress people's literary imagination and fiction from their instinct of life, but the latter always resists, criticizes, reflects, denies, and surpasses the former. Such resistance, in turn, facilitates the development of literature. This suggests that questioning, resisting, and criticizing science and technology can promote the emergence of new literature and art.

### 2.3 *The Inner Connection and Mutual Shaping of Literature and Technology*

It is true that modern science and technology and literature occupy different positions in the whole social structure, and in terms of the four ways of appropriating the world mentioned by Marx, literature and science and technology are also different ways of mastering the world. The boundary between science and technology and literature may have been relatively clear in Marx's time, but it is no longer so in our age of high technology. While art needs the support of technology, technology also needs the nourishment of art, which is reflected in the routinization and aestheticization of technology. In some sense, the mutual shaping between art and technology has shaken the boundary between economic foundation and superstructure, or we can say, the boundary between the two needs to be revisited.

#### *The Inner Connection Between Literature and Science and Technology*

The fields of modern technology and literature share a common foundation. From the point view of practice, as both a form of human practice,

science and technology and literature are all the reification of the essential power of human beings, in which people can discover and confirm their own essential power, thus producing beauty and poetry. In a dialogue between Yang Zhenning, the winner of Nobel Prize in physics, and Mo Yan, the winner of Nobel Prize for Literature, Yang said that both science and literature reveal their structural, expressive, and intellectual beauty in their own ways. According to many scientists, aesthetic criteria are also the highest criteria of science. Mo said that although science and literature explore in different ways, both essentially search for truth and order, and gain insight into the mysteries of the universe and the human heart. Thus, both are pursuing the truth via different means. The scientist and writer have often stated their thoughts with the words in each other's field: Yang said science is aesthetic, while Mo said literature is in search of truth and order (Yang 2013).

The most fundamental basis of science and technology and art is that they both pursuit beauty and liberty. Marcuse said, "from the beginning, science contained the aesthetic Reason, the free play and even the folly of imagination, the fantasy of transformation" (Marcuse 2006b, p. 233). All of the physicists' theories of natural phenomena, including the "laws" they describe, are the products of the mind and, to some extent, of fictitiousness. For the ultimate purpose, the mission of literature is to seek and provide a spiritual and emotional home for human beings, and the future of science and technology is to look for a more suitable living space for human beings. The two thus strive for the same goal using different means. Therefore, both science and art are basic needs of human beings. The study of the commonalities between literature and science does not aim to eliminate their differences, but rather to enrich and complete the life of human beings today.

#### *The Aestheticization of Technology and Technicization of Literature and Art*

The aestheticization of technology and technicization of literature and art have been mentioned by Western Marxists. In the present context, this mutual assimilation has become a trend. Art becomes a part of technology, and technology bolsters artistic creation. This presents itself as an important phenomenon in the development of technology and literature in the high-tech era.

The aestheticization of technology is expressed in the fact that technology has an aesthetic element, or rather, aesthetic elements have been

added to technology. The technology of the information age is qualitatively different from the technology of the industrial age in that the latter was used to transform the objective world and emphasized the instrumental aspect of technology, whereas the former is getting closely linked with day-to-day life; in order to be more competitive, producers often put great efforts into aesthetic symbols. Some products are just like artistic works. For instance, the design of some cell phones and cars has a strong sense of aesthetic form, especially those virtual display spaces that bring people unprecedented shock: these displays themselves reflect an artistic nature. The art of technology is not only the adoption of a certain form of beauty, but more importantly, the addition of value to technology, so as to maximize humanistic care, which is a phenomenon Marcuse called “new technology,” as he propounded, “a guiding force in the reconstruction of reality- reconstruction with the help of a *gaya scienza*, a science and technology released from their service to destruction and exploitation, and thus free for the liberating exigencies of the imagination” (Marcuse 1971b, p. 31). Science and technology overturns the instrumental and technical rationality of the old technologies by assimilating the freedom and transcendence inherent in art. Such “new technology,” varying from the old, is free from the science and technology serving for “destruction and exploitation” and realizes the value and meaning of science and technology in a joyful way, with humankind itself being the ultimate purpose of the work, instead of degrading humankind as an instrument of technology. Thus, technology possesses “the features of art” (Marcuse 1971b, p. 24).

Likewise, the technicization of literature and art suggests that in contemporary society, technology has become a major component of art. Not only does technology provide the material for art and its specific media, such as hyperlink technology in today’s digital literature, but art can also use science and technology to bring about the imagination of possibilities that have not yet been realized, such as a boundless sea and sky of virtual worlds. Art can even enter daily life directly through the dimension of design, turning reality into art, and so on. To do so places higher demands on the creators.

To conclude, as the wings of contemporary society, literature, and art, as well as science and technology, are indispensable. Without the development of high technology, it is difficult for a nation to stand on its own feet; without the enhancement and prosperity of literature and art, society

will become sick or deformed. Mutual assimilation and shaping of the two will be the future of the development of literature and technology.

### 3 LITERATURE WRITING IN THE HI-TECH ERA

From the historical materialist standpoint which regards science and technology as a productive force, the development of contemporary science and technology is profoundly changing not only the edifice of society, but also people's way of thinking, values, and behavior; it is also nourishing and shaping new culture and literature. In studies on literature and science and technology, people highlight the problems posed by high technology, but, perhaps, they are not aware enough of the revolutionary impact of high technology on literary creation. While changing people's daily lives, high technology also creates new experiences, including new ways of perception, imagination, and fiction, and reorganizes and reshapes writers' experiences and perceptions in the new environment. What kind of changes high technology causes to the nature and properties of literature and literary creation, how to promote the renewal and development of literature in an age of high technology, and how to systematically tackle the relationship between literature and high technology are questions that need to be explored and studied.

#### 3.1 *The Revolutionary Impacts of High Technology on Literature Writing*

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens described the nineteenth century: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity....." (Dickens 2006, p. 3) Today's high technology has also created such a most destructive yet also most creative environment for literary creation. In the relationship shared by literature and science and technology, researchers have focused on the problems caused by high technology, with an insufficient understanding of the revolutionary influence of high technology on literary creation. And yet creative practice shows that the impact of high technology on literature and art is of a dual nature, as it undermines the old literature while promoting the evolution of the new.

In today's creative practice, the relationship between literature and science and technology is a simultaneous process of "destruction and

compensation.” On the one hand, high technology dismantles the content, structure, and expression of traditional literary texts; on the other hand, it provides new opportunities for literature, and reorganizes and reshapes the way writers perceive and experience, urging literature to change its original structure and means of expression and present itself to people in a new light. This dual relationship of “destruction and compensation” shared by literature and science and technology is an important inspiration for exploring how high technology can accelerate the progress of literature and art.

*Refreshing the Understanding of the World*

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, many discoveries and inventions were made in the natural sciences, including the discovery of the X-ray and electron, the establishment of the electron theory, and the establishment of quantum theory. The publication of Einstein’s “Theory of Relativity” in 1905, especially, revolutionized the realm of physics. These explorations and discoveries of the world, nature, and the universe revised or rejected some previous scientific conclusions and theorems that had previously been considered irrefutable truths, broadened people’s understanding of the world and themselves, and directly or indirectly affected the study of the humanities and social sciences, such as the relationship between literature and the world.

In the past, people regarded time as linear, ever-expanding, and irreversible, and novels often represented characters or events in a certain time sequence; even if there were analepses or flashbacks and prolepses or flash-forwards, the temporal trajectory of the story could be outlined by sorting out the plot development. In Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, however, time is related to human movement and position, and there are different times at different speeds. This theory fundamentally transformed people’s sense of space–time and triggered a revolution in the way of thinking—“the theory of relativity requires us to put an end to the idea of absolute time!” (Hawking and Mlodinow 2005, p. 20), and people discovered the mystery of time travel, which was presented in literary creation, most prominently in the unbridled treatment of space–time.

In the literary and artistic works of the twentieth century, time could not only be frozen, but also traversed at will, and reality and non-reality were magically intertwined. We can appreciate this even more when we look at the distorted and grotesque sculptures of time created by the

Spanish painter, Salvador Dalí. As Daniel Bell wrote, “it is this response to movement, space, and change which provided the new syntax of art and the dislocation of traditional forms” (Bell 1978, p. 48). Quantum mechanics, which along with relativity forms the basis of modern physics, reveals the motion of particles in the microscopic world. This differs from the laws of classical physics. According to Bell,

The history of physics has been the search for the ultimate unit of matter; but in the end it may turn out that there is no such entity, but only a set of relationships which change with the position of the observer, or with the different rates of decay of the particles themselves, as a function of their changing relationships. We may, then, end, as Anaximander did, only with the “boundless,” not the bounded. (Bell 1978, p. 98)

Inspired and stimulated by these scientific discoveries, writers and artists became skeptical and confused about the world and the human self, and embarked on a series of artistic adventures. They strove to explore areas and worlds that had never been realized or set foot in by any predecessors, leading to changes in the structure, expression, and even perception of the world in literature and art. Absurdist theater, with its uncanny scenes, is a strong expression of skepticism about the current phenomenal world and life.

So to speak, almost all truly innovative scientific and technological inventions and creations contain new philosophical ideas, ways of thinking, research methods, etc., and the most important of them is the spirit of negation. In *Conjectures and Refutations—The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, Popper suggests that the spirit of science is not to reveal irrefutable truths, but to find them in the process of persistent criticism. Science is characterized by critical thinking, and the spirit of criticism and inquiry, without superstition or blind obedience, is the essence of science (Popper 2010, pp. 264–267). Falsification and negation are the greatest gifts of science to literary creation, which also needs to be explored and innovated. This philosophical meaning or methodology is crucial to the role of high technology in literature.

It should also be noted that the development of modern technology has brought not only clarity, verifiability, and cognizability to the world, but also transcendence, uncertainty, and unknowability. As Neil Postman stated, “Or not wholly disbelieve it, since the ways of technology, like the ways of God, are awesome and mysterious” (Postman 1993, p. 58).



Consequently, modern physics has become somewhat intentionally associated with Eastern mysticism. This aspect of the development of modern scientific theories has also profoundly impacted configurations of literary creation.

### *Creating Novel Aesthetic Experiences*

In the era of high-tech, the aesthetic experience of people is evidently different from that in the agricultural and the industrial era. In agricultural society, people were close to elements of nature; seasons such as spring, summer, autumn, and winter; and phenomena such as sunrise and sunset. In the industrial society, the traditional agricultural society as depicted by Ouyang Xiu, a poet in Song Dynasty, “The moon above a willow tree, Shone on my lover close to me”<sup>7</sup> gradually disappeared, and people’s judgment of time and distance relied more on physical objects and measures, such as clocks and kilometers, respectively, rather than on sensory experience. The emergence of a technological society therefore made the pre-technological experience of the world obsolete (Marcuse 2006a, p. 61). In *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical reproduction*, Benjamin quoted Valéry: “Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign” (Benjamin 1999, p. 219). While people in the industrial age were close to practical existing objects, the development of network technology, AI (artificial intelligence), and VR (virtual reality) based on computer technology and communication technology has already enabled people to live in the digital, virtual space. Modern technology, as an “extended bodily organs” and “an extension of our bodily powers” (Eagleton 2011, p. 230), is shaping people’s overall aesthetic perception as well as the inner experience. Various original aesthetic experiences, including those of sensuality and imagination, have been weakened in the new technological environment, while new sensations and experiences are being constantly created.

The VR mentioned above, as an artificial scenery, is no longer the real, physical world. It can be said that with VR, what disappears is not

<sup>7</sup> Translated by Xu Yuanchong.

only the “aura” as Benjamin described, but also the real existing environment. However, from the perspective of the relationship between VR and human senses, the alternate-reality environment created by information technology can also make people feel pleasure and provide them the experience of actually being in a magical world, causing a shocking impact. In addition, VR can also overcome the restrictions of time and space, enabling people to experience and feel scenes that are impossible to experience in the real world. As such, VR influences and expands people’s perception of art, impacting and renewing people’s aesthetic perception and pleasure. Thus, this new relationship between VR and aesthetics will lead us to a new interpretation of the genesis and production of aesthetics.

Fragmentation is another kind of impact on the aesthetic experience. In the age of the Internet, the world has been fragmented into countless pieces of information, as described by the futurist Toffler: “On a personal level, we are all besieged and blitzed by fragments of imagery, contradictory or unrelated, that shake up our old ideas and come shooting at us in the form of broken or disembodied “blips.” We live, in fact, in a ‘blip culture’” (Toffler 1989, p. 166). Those temporal and logical connections established through ancient narratives and the resulting continuums of experience are disappearing, and high-tech has greatly enriched the human senses. People are now confronted with colorful symbols and images every day, especially with the introduction of mobile instant messaging applications such as Whatsapp, Line, and WeChat, which allow them to send and receive texts, voices, pictures, and videos quickly through their cell phones. This fragmentation has directly changed the way people perceive and created a disorienting euphoria. The fragmented world is not always pleasurable, but may cause people to lose focus in a dizzying fog of information that is indistinguishable between true and false, causing inevitable anxiety and emptiness. The question of how to view aesthetics in the midst of fragmentation needs to be addressed, and in our research, we have suddenly discovered that it may be human beings themselves who need to change.

### *Stimulating Novel Literary Imagination*

Whether high technology has weakened the literary imagination or stimulated and strengthened it is another question to be considered. Since high technology has enhanced people’s ability to understand and grasp the world, the increasing clarity and certainty about the external world has curbed certain imaginations and made myths absurd. For instance, after

man landed on the moon, the story of Chang'e (the Chinese goddess of the Moon) was naturally destroyed; the development of communication eroded chances for the survival of "clairaudience" and "clairvoyance" after Newton, the magnificent rainbow could be analyzed by spectrum, and so on. At the same time, the prevalence of visualization also dissolves the vagueness and non-certainty of literature, thus limiting people's imagination. In these contexts, the development of high technology has, to some extent, eliminated the fictional and fantastical elements of literature.

Nevertheless, the principle of "destruction and compensation" of literature and science and technology as discussed above is still valid here. Taking mythology as an example, modern technology, while suppressing or destroying people's original illusions and imaginations and dissolving traditional myths, still offers new possibilities for writers and artists to understand the world by providing new technical conditions and imaginative spaces. In other words, while science has rejected the myths of the past, it has compensated by creating new technological conditions for new perceptions, imaginations, and fictions of the outside world, and stimulated the imagination and sense of wonder of writers and artists to generate new creations. In this way, it has renewed the original ways of fictional storytelling and given rise to new myths with modern significance. For example, the film *Star Trek* is directly related to the "wormhole theory."<sup>8</sup> The cosmological term "wormhole" that provides a shortcut for interstellar voyages caught the screenwriter's attention. It may take a journey of four light years to travel from one planet to another, but only a few hours to travel through a wormhole. The film *Star Trek* shows the human activity and affections supported exactly by this high-tech theory. As the film's premise goes, in the not-too-distant future, the Earth's climate is deteriorating rapidly, and there will be a severe food shortage; thus, the protagonist Cooper and others are chosen as part of a plan to save the future of humankind and travel beyond the solar system to find a planet suitable for human habitation. For this reason, Cooper sadly bids farewell to his daughter and starts a journey of interstellar voyage.

High technology has also promoted greatest freedom for writers and artists to create fiction and bolstered their imagination. They are shaking

<sup>8</sup> The concept of wormhole was proposed by the Austrian physicist Ludwig Flamm in 1916 and refined by Albert Einstein and Nathan Rosen in 1935; hence, the term "wormhole" is also known as the "Einstein-Rosen Bridge," which means a narrow tunnel connecting two different space-times in the universe.

off from the constraints of reality and can create “hyperreality” or “the Imaginary” (Jameson 1991, p. 195; p. 52) with the help of VR technology. Examples of this can be found in *Inception* directed by Nolan and *Ready Player One* directed by Spielberg, which provide people with unimaginable fantasy scenes. The imageries of nature have been replaced by industrial and technological imageries. In contemporary science fiction films, in place of the previous horses or carts characteristic of old stories, there are colossal objects and spaceships. Using digital technology, artists have also created on the silver screen superhuman figures such as “Spider-Man” and “Avatar,” which have become the mythical heroes of a new era. Once art has the wings of technology, it opens a door to the future.

In addition, some science fiction works are even ahead of reality, becoming the leader and pioneering of reality and technology, and even becoming the object of imitation of reality conversely, including technology. For example, some wise writers and artists have designed new plots and stories to guide the development of science and technology, and such pioneering works can be said to have begun at the inception of science fiction. Of course, admittedly, there are plenty of other writers and artists who express their worries about the future of technology through their works.

### *Innovative Literary Styles and Structures*

The “destruction and compensation” relation between literature and science and technology is also manifested in the structure and style of literature. On the one hand, high technology has led to the rejection and elimination of some ancient art forms and structural methods; on the other hand, it has provided preconditions to develop literary fiction at a higher level to bring new literature and art forms with modern significance.

In the high-tech era, some old literary styles and forms have been suppressed. The easy access to transportation and electronic communication extended in all directions has made “being with each other though far apart” the norm, making “poems of boudoir grievances,” once an important genre in classical Chinese poetry, yesterday’s flower or a has-been, and the epistolary novel, an ancient narrative style, obsolete, considering the convenience of modern transportation and the decline in post offices. Moreover, new literary styles and forms are constantly forming and emerging on the bedrock of modern technology. The hypertext novel created through online technology is a special literary style in the Internet

era, and its emergence has not only impacted and changed the intrinsic elements of literature such as the nature essence and structure of narrative, but also demonstrated a transgressing of the literary territory. Even though the story can show the spatialization of time, the printed text, restricted by page number of the paper, still implies a linear order in its writing and reading, while online technology can completely overthrow this order through technical practice, manifesting genuinely non-linear and disorderly characteristics. Furthermore, with the linking capabilities of computer technology, works can shift between words, images, and even freely browsable archives. Frequent intertextuality, collage of content, and fragmentation of plot are the distinctive features of hypertext. The real completion of this type of hypertext novel thus requires and invites the participation of the reader, that is, the interaction between the author and the reader. The author sets up the nodes and their relations during the creation of the novel, and the reader activates certain particular segment by clicking on a link. It is the author's settings and the reader's clicks that fulfill the different aspects and plots of the story, thus leaving the structure of the text open.

The development of modern technology has also added great expressiveness and spectacle to art. A Brazilian scholar said of Zhang Yimou's movie *Hero* that when she saw "people's bodies fly, warriors walk on water, leaves turn from yellow to red in seconds, snow falls out of nowhere," and lamented, "in this sense, technology is the true hero of the film, it is what conducts and motivates each take" (Cevasco 2006, pp. 49–50). This scholar was looking at the invasion and control of art by technology critically; however, at the same time, this also places a higher demand on creators to grasp the relationship between art and technology. Today's writers and artists still need to maintain a certain degree of independence when using high-tech tools. This is because "technological resources take them into unknown territory, which it is up to them to explore" (Diani 1992, p. 129).

### 3.2 *The "Thought" and "Poetry" of Literature Writing in the Hi-Tech Era*

In the relationship shared by literature and science and technology, on the one hand, high technology influences the creation of literature from multiple dimensions; on the other hand, literature, as the "other" of

science and technology, also acts as a driving force for science and technology. Facing the development of high technology, literature can remain reflective and transcendent through its own unique attributes and advantages. It is the mission and responsibility of the contemporary literary creation to be vigilant to prevent modern technology from becoming an instrument to rule and control people or a negative factor that threatens the survival of human beings.

### *Literature's Warning Against Science and Technology*

Literature has long been reflecting on and warning against science and technology. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is considered the first modern science fiction novel in the West, set in the early nineteenth century during the Industrial Revolution, when various new inventions and discoveries renewed people's perception of nature and the human self. The main character, Frankenstein, grows up interested in science and technology, starts his research at the age of 13, and creates a giant as an adult. The giant has the ability to learn and desires affection, but when his desire for a female companion is not met, he exacts a wild revenge. Instead of bringing pleasure to his creator, the giant brings disaster. This early work expresses concerns about technological alienation. At the end of the nineteenth century, another famous British science fiction writer, Herbert George Wells, also reflected on the dual nature of technology in his science fiction novels, such as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and *The Invisible Man*, and presciently showed the threat of human mutation brought about by science and technology.

Nowadays, the fear of being controlled and manipulated by technology haunts humankind like a nightmare. Whether nuclear weapons will destroy the Earth, whether AI may one day take control of human beings, the relationship between clone technology or even the replication of "human" and human dignity, and even the impact of "sperm banks" on traditional family relationships and human reproductions, are all reasons for us to be worried. In response to a series of challenges posed by science and technology to contemporary society, literary creations have expressed resistance to science and technology. A wide variety of bizarre science fictions and sci-fi films have shown people the tragic prospects they face when science is alienated into a force beyond human control, and reminded them to stay alert to the negative effects of science and technology by creating and simulating a shock through fictional situations.

The film *The 6th Day*, starring Schwarzenegger, presents a hair-raising picture. Years into the future, a number of “blank” embryos are created, and by injecting any person’s physical characteristics and memories into a “blank” embryo, the “blank” embryo could become a perfect replica of him or her. In this way, even if some desperadoes are severely punished, they continue to have a spare body to continue their evil deeds. The film also raises another serious question: which of the two exact “Schwarzeneggers” is more deserving of owning the family and wealth as a genuine “human being?” Genetic technology is also a hot topic of contemporary technological development. If human beings completely crack the genetic code and master the mystery of birth, aging, sickness, and death, will there be a new identity discrimination? The film *Gattaca* raised this question. The genes were taken out of hair, and people were divided into two categories, healthy “nobles” and defective “inferiors,” with the healthy “nobles” being the only ones who could hold the superior jobs. Other science fiction works further reveal the conspiracy of technology and politics, which can bring about the strangling and alienation of humanity. These works of science fiction mainly represent a dark, crisis-ridden future, and the seriousness of the crisis revealed in these works gives people the necessary warning to care for their homeland and curb blind development. The world needs a more humane and rational model of social development.

### *Poetic Dwelling in an Age of High Technology*

How to achieve the status of poetic dwelling in the Heideggerian sense in an age of high technology is the ultimate question that should be explored as well as answered by literary creation. Human beings are eager to exchange their emotions, and emotions are precisely the basic attributes and advantage of literature. According to Tolstoy, art originates from the need for emotional communication. Literature is needed precisely because it can meet the needs of people’s aesthetic emotions, and such emotional needs constitute a precious element in the high-tech era. The reason why some Western Marxists emphasize and call for human sensibility is also based on the lack of emotional dimension of contemporary people. Today’s literary creation can not only comfort the digitally dulled mind by revealing the genuine feelings on the earth of human being, but also awakening and presenting the emotional experiences obscured by technological elements with emotional factors in the depiction of the surreal

world. As we can see, the film *Star Trek* not only involves the “worm-hole theory” at the forefront of physics and the magnificent scenes of the universe using high technology, but also shows the beauty of human nature through the hyperspace of a father looking over his daughter, thus realizing the interplay of science fantasy and human emotion. This is what makes the film so touching for us.

In order to achieve the state of poetic dwelling, literature needs creativity, that is, originality in the aesthetic observation of concrete images. Writers and artists can fully mobilize their imagination and add more brilliant color to the world with original ideas and artistic conceptions according to their own ideals. It should be said that the works of China’s contemporary literary world have not yet blossomed in radiant splendor; we realize this lack of creativity when we, for instance, watch those similar landscape and light shows in tourist attractions. Calling for dreams and spirituality constitutes the basic desire of poetic dwelling in the high-tech era.

Poetic dwelling cannot be realized without the contemplation and transcendence instigated by literature. In response to a series of challenges posed by science and technology to human beings, especially the tendency to turn human beings into mathematics or physical equations, literary creation needs to inherently express resistance to science and technology. Milan Kundera once quoted a Jewish maxim: “Man Thinks, God Laughs.” This aphorism demands that humankind be humble in front of God and that thinking is a ridiculous act; but imagine that if humankind did not think at all, it would be reduced to an even more pathetic situation. At the same time, this “thinking” is also expressed in value orientation. The imagination and possibilities of literature not only embody some universal human emotions, but also imply the uncontrolled potential of human nature. It is human nature to worry about and look forward to the future, and thus good literature cannot be satisfied with being a footnote to reality; it should strive to express thoughts about the universe and life through the creation of new worlds and characters, and maintain the perfection of human nature in an alienated society. In addition, literary creation should influence the development of science and technology through the imagination of future society, show the multiple possibilities and paths of social development, and promote the care of the human in science and technology to the greatest extent possible, so as to promote the harmonious development between human beings, nature, and society. The new mission of literature is to pursue the beauty of art



and love of life in the technological environment and generate brilliance of both poetry and philosophy. The direction of literary creation in this age of high technology should be the realization of poetic dwelling and facing the meta-question: “Where humanity is heading?”

At this point, I would like to add that high technology has not only renewed the environment of literary creation, but also converted the process of creation and social functions of literature, which will certainly and inevitably lead to a restructuring of literary concepts. The traditional definition of literature is already losing its effectiveness in the explanation of today’s literature and art, and Benjamin saw this problem early on. When people were still debating whether photography was an art by traditional standards, he made it clear that, “though commentators had earlier expended much fruitless ingenuity on the question of whether photography was an art without asking the more fundamental question of whether the invention of photography had not transformed the entire character of art” (Benjamin 2008, p. 28). For literary creation in the high-tech era, what we need to do is not to classify new literary genres into traditional categories; instead, we need to adjust the existing outlook of literature, re-examine literary creation in the high-tech environment, and explore new ways of literary development with a more inclusive attitude.

#### 4 THE STUDY OF READING IN THE INTERNET AGE

In the twenty-first century, with the booming of information and communication technology and constantly updating computers and cell phones, digital media have increasingly penetrated contemporary daily life. As for reading,<sup>9</sup> if the second half of the twentieth century saw a shift from the era of “text reading,” involving the reading of printed materials, to the era of “picture reading,” accompanied by the explosion of images, another new era has now begun: an era of “Internet reading” in which all people read digitally. Such “Internet reading” (including computers and cell phones) is no longer just a change in the sense of media tools and reading methods, but has become an integral component of daily life, and even a way of life for every person. For instance, on the subway, at the dinner table, and even in between sending New Year’s greetings to friends and relatives, people are swiping their mobile phones, and

<sup>9</sup> With the expansion of the boundaries of literature, the term “reading” here refers to texts of a literary nature, including literary works, news, history, essays, and anecdotes.

“Internet reading” has become a national activity, among young students, white-collar workers, and even retired women. For literary reading, the dream of “putting the library in your pocket” is coming true. E-book reading is on the rise, and e-book readers such as the Kindle are gaining popularity among readers. In contrast, brick-and-mortar bookstores have shrunk dramatically, and some paper journals have begun to transform, for example, by using Twitter accounts and public websites to expand the readership and increase the amount of reading. The Internet is thus shaping a new culture, including new modes of reading, and therefore people’s thinking, values, and behaviors are being changed in a super invisible and nuanced way by the tapping of keyboards and the touch of fingers. How to regard and respond to reading in the digital media era has begun to attract the attention of critics in China and abroad, and the Chinese form should not be absent from this study.

#### 4.1 *The Characteristics of Internet Reading*

The new era of “Internet reading” is quite different from the era of paper as the medium and the period of communication media represented by television and movies. Paper works and film art are different sources of media, and their presentation methods are different from those of text and images. However, they have one thing in common, that is, both readers and viewers can only be called receivers (at present, the reception method of TV is changing, but it is still not enough to completely change the passive acceptance of viewers). The medium of communication in the “online reading era” is the Internet, which enables readers to be more initiative, and provides space for readers to participate, thereby making literary creation and criticism interactive in essence. The changes that have occurred in the “online reading era” have provided new topics for research on reading and readers in literary criticism.

##### *Convenience of Reading*

The convenience of reading in the age of digital media is obvious to all. The Internet’s ability to store and disseminate information greatly satisfies people’s desire for information, and whenever you switch on your cell phone, all kinds of information will come to you, and you will be able to know about everything that is happening in the world without leaving home. In particular, the Internet has a powerful search engine that makes other media unparalleled, so that people can get what information

they desire with a simple movement of their fingers. Besides, the growing number of online databases that bring together documents from different eras or locations do so in an “effortless” manner, which not only saves a lot of time for reading and research, but also relegates the collection of historical materials to the margins.

This convenience has also broken through the limits of hierarchy, and information in general is no longer the privilege of a specific group of people, but has become the right of every individual who has access to a cell phone or computer. In the era of digital media, the privatized public space and the publicized private space exist in parallel and interpenetrate each other. The instant communication platforms that are now prevalent, such as Twitter, Facebook, or WeChat, and the socialized shared reading represented by GoodReads, LibraryThing, or WeChat “moments” and “official accounts” have created one mania after another. To a certain extent, this satisfies the desire for personal expression and presentation. Since these desires are presented on a public platform, there is no need to feel shy or ashamed. The most important feature of “online reading” is that it is not constrained by time or space, and people can read and communicate instantly wherever the Internet can be extended. Interestingly, people today may not feel uncomfortable because of homesickness, but they feel anxious when their cell phones are not with them.

### *Multidimensionality of Perception*

Digital media have not only changed readers’ reading habits, but are also quietly changing readers’ perception and thinking habits, as multimedia breaks the aesthetic dominated by words and languages and brings people multiple aesthetic experiences. On the Internet, netizens can read words, listen to music, and browse images at the same time, which is more interesting than just reading words and languages to some. On Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, netizens can see attractive scenes of food and beauty, as well as hilarious anecdotes and sharp short articles that criticize the current ongoings in the world; these bring people stimulation, shock, and excitement. Especially the realism of virtual technology exerts a new sensory impact along with poetic and picturesque scenes. Watching the flowing scrolls of history intertwined with each other, one feels a sense of movement through the channel of time and space.

Digital technology is also reshaping the form of literary expression, and the digitization of books is becoming the norm. Downloaded books of all kinds are condensed into a mini, portable device so that they can be

read at anytime and anywhere. QR codes for readers to scan are even put in some newly published paperbacks, and therefore make reading them more intriguing. The combination of literature with images and sounds is significantly changing the written language *per se*, and the emergence of QR codes can lead readers out of the paper book and into a new web page with videos or audios related to the particular content of some paragraphs through cell phones, providing a kind of flipped reading experience. In this case, the medium ceased to be simply a vehicle and tool for conveying information, knowledge, and content, but also a vessel of restructuring the content of the information itself. What people get through the process of reading is no longer linear browsing, but a multidimensional, intersectional, or even leaping and bounding aesthetic experience.

#### *Immediacy and Interactivity of Criticism*

Literary criticism in the “Internet reading era” also displays new characteristics. In the past, readers or viewers were silent in the process of receiving or accepting new information, and evaluation often lagged behind. Nowadays, with the convenience of the Internet, the threshold for creation has been lowered and that for criticism is almost non-existent, so the general public can voice their concern or opinions at any time while receiving information. For example, bullet screen, a common form of commentary and criticism on the Internet in recent years, occasionally appear on the screen when the video is played; these contain immediate and instant thoughts or comments, some of which even have little to do with the content of the video. However, these bullet screens show the most genuine feelings of viewers, and they have not only become a new style of commentary, but can also have the effect of “watching the rise and decline of customs,” and sometimes so much so that attract a mass of onlookers and create quite a stir.

These comments are instantaneous and interactive, and the identities of authors and readers are transformed and constantly interchanged all the time. The Internet provides a platform for people who are willing to write, as well as giving them the opportunity to comment online. On the Internet, everyone can be a producer in Benjamin’s sense, publish their works online at their will, and comment or modify them as they wish. As a result, works on the Internet no longer exist in a stable manner, but are always fluid and unfinished. As creation moves from professionalism to popularization, the boundaries between author and reader become

increasingly blurred, or in Benjamin's words, "the distinction between author and public is about to lose its axiomatic character.....Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized higher education but on polytechnic training, and thus is common property" (Benjamin 2008, pp. 33–34).

Consequently, when literary reading becomes a public good, literary criticism ceases to be the privilege of scholars. For instance, in the commentary of netizens, a variety of creative and even stylistic variations emerge from time to time, and many comments are brilliant and evocative, so that the absence of literary criticism in the "Internet reading era" is made up by netizens to some extent. In the comment chains of these follow-up posts, netizens consciously or unconsciously become the new producers. What needs to be admitted is that these comments are generally random and fragmentary, often with arguments and debates, sometimes too radical or even biased, and thus mostly fleeting, and rarely having a lasting impact.

#### 4.2 *The Symptoms of Internet Reading*

Although the Internet has brought a revolutionary impact on reading and has certain constructive functions, it should not be applauded blindly. We should notice the paradox of the "online reading era" while soberly seeing the historical inevitability shown by the transformation in media. On the one hand, the "Internet reading era" has brought us new ways of reading and aesthetic experiences, but on the other hand, it has also brought new problems and dangers to people's lives. The drawbacks of digital media are likely to dissolve the humanistic spirit and artistic character of literature, and aggravate the spiritual crisis of contemporary literature. From the perspective of "cultural pathology," it is advisable to make a preliminary diagnosis of the "Internet reading era," which is a symptomatic representation of current society, and to identify and analyze the various symptoms of contemporary reading.

##### *Labyrinth of Fragmentation*

"Fragmentation" is a figurative term that describes the contemporary social phenomenon. It has always existed as a social phenomenon, but has become more prominent in the Internet era, because "one of the internal logics of social and cultural development is the increasing departure from totality and the tendency to fragmentation" (Zhou 2014).

People today are surrounded by all kinds of information, and they can browse a lot of fragmented information with their computers or cell phones every day; they can also send and receive voice, video, pictures, and text quickly through their computers or cell phones. Additionally, Facebook and Instagram or WeChat moments transmit a wide variety of information every day, and people with different identities and geographic locations bring their own views and thoughts to the social networking apps. These messages flood people's senses and make them lose their sense of direction. In the Internet era, the world has become a labyrinth and everything is fragmented. People receive contradictory, conflicted, irrelevant, and fragmented images every day, and it is almost impossible to obtain a complete and whole picture of any one thing or topic.

In such sharing and linking, the multiplicity and scattering caused by fragmentation pose a challenge to linearity and centralization, and people get a kaleidoscope of information that is constantly changing. Specifically, when people are confronted with fragmented gamelike narratives, they may doubt the logic of the traditional narratives, and start to question the way of existence and the meaning of literature. Admittedly, the scattered nature of narrative, while leading to fragmented reading styles and habits, also creates conditions for the liberalization of reading activities and the choices of readers.

### *Reading and Forgetting*

Forgetting is another sequel of reading in the "Internet reading era." There are two main reasons for forgetting: one is the forgetfulness caused by the flood of information; the other is that the convenience of the Internet makes it almost unnecessary for people to remember knowledge.

Forgetting is first and foremost related to the dynamic nature of the Internet. Information on the Internet is constantly being refreshed and scrolled, and what was just fresh is quickly overshadowed by the information that follows, pushing it out of sight. On the Internet, there is little that lasts forever, so people often forget their way back. It seems that the information function of the new media is to help people forget: "The role of the mass media today is not to make events 'memorable' in the traditional way, but to destroy them and help people forget them as they come at us in a dizzying array of events" (Jameson 1997, p. 318). The real role of the new media, represented by the Internet, is to banish these recent historical experiences to the past as quickly as possible. These new modes of disseminating information, in fact, act as agents of historical amnesia.

Furthermore, the vast databases available on the Internet create conditions favorable for forgetting. With the increasing power of Internet search engines, the ease of finding information renders the memory of knowledge unnecessary, which accelerates the process of forgetting.

### *Weakening of Deep Thinking*

The “Internet reading” weakens the memory and leads to the degeneration and even the loss of human desire and ability to think. Due to the inundation of information and irrelevance, speedy browsing has become a basic feature of the “online reading era.” Nowadays, people’s attention to text is getting shorter and shorter, forming a kind of “euphoria” of reading. It is “for the purpose of understanding information, leisure and recreation, without much thinking, pursuing a brief visual pleasure and psychological pleasure, showing the characteristics of fast food, browsing, randomness, jumping, and fragmentation” (Zhang 2011). People are used to reading online information within minutes or even seconds, and lack patience for papers that take a little longer. In general, once the mouse is scrolled, they find it of great length, and if they are not particularly interested in the content, they tend to ignore it. Not many people can finish reading a long paper on the Internet nowadays. The traditional Chinese literati’s state of reading, where they repeatedly recited appreciated and savored the nuance of poetry, seems to have left us for good, along with the leisurely and tranquil state of mind in that state of reading.

While this kind of reading allows people to obtain information without much effort, it also weakens their ability to think independently. The information on the Internet today is not only excessive and fragmented but is also a mixture of the good and the bad. The information occupies people’s brains while making their state of mind impatient, and people seldom think further about the information being presented to them; as such, the lack of depth becomes another major symptom in the “Internet reading era.” Nicholas Carr in his article “Is Google Making Us Stupid” raised an important question: Has the Internet sacrificed our facility that makes deep reading possible? (Carr 2010, p. 78).

### 4.3 *The Reading Strategies of the Chinese Form*

There are many problems in reading in the era of digital media, but it does not mean that people in the “Internet reading era” can only be confused and at a loss, nor does it mean that all the information in the

“Internet reading era” is of low quality and there are no in-depth accounts or fine products. The key to the problem lies in how people read in the “Internet reading era.” This is the problem that needs to be addressed and valued. In China, a country with the largest number of netizens and cell phone users in the world, Marxist literary criticism has a unique research foundation and opportunity. In light of the current cultural and reading situation in contemporary China, some useful suggestions and strategies for reading in the age of digital media are proposed, and this is the value and vitality of the Chinese form by intervening in the most critical problems in the online reading era.

### *Emphasis on Reader Autonomy*

The most fundamental strategy to deal with the shortcomings of the “Internet reading era” is the shaping of the reading subject. As netizens, readers have various identities, experiences, and levels of understanding: many of them conceal their identities, gender, and race through virtual images, and some have different avatars online as opposed to their real personalities in real life. People’s aesthetic interests have also become more diverse and personal. However different the readers’ identities and interests are, as in the “Internet reading era” readers’ autonomy or initiative is the basic and primary requirement, and thus such autonomy is the strong guarantee against the various drawbacks of online reading.

The reader’s autonomy manifests in many ways. The three most important ones are, namely, the reader’s competence to choose, critical ability, and productive capacity.

Choice-making constitutes the basis of people’s lives, and all reading phenomena, including traditional paper reading, deals with various choices. However, faced with the vast amount of information on the Internet, the reader’s ability to discern and select becomes more prominent. In the process of “Internet reading,” how to free oneself from the overwhelming flood of information and how to effectively discern what is good and what is bad on the Internet is a critical problem that every netizen needs to think about. That is to say, choice is the premise of reading, and it is directly related to the quality of reading.

Although choice itself includes thinking, it is not sufficient, and the quality of reading is directly related to critical thinking. This ability is not unique to the era of “online reading,” but because the Internet contains much more diverse information than any other media and is more personal in the micro age consequently, it is essential to discern and



reflect independently, and critical questioning becomes vital. The “technological hegemony” of digital media carries certain value tendencies that have a potential impact on readers. Derrick de Kerckhove pointed out from the perspective of the influence of electronic culture on people: “Our psychological reality is not a “natural” thing. It is partially dependent upon the way our environment, including our own technological extensions, affects us” (Kerckhove 1998, p. 4). In the age of “Internet reading,” the reader’s critical faculties are primarily a matter of questioning and rejecting in the reception of ideas and knowledge, resisting by substituting one’s own judgment for the thinking and analysis of the information publisher. In his essay on Shelley’s “The Triumph of Life,” Paul de Man suggested that reading is “to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat” (De Man 1984, p. 122). This is especially true and applicable to online reading, where even some intellectual entries need to be scrutinized and cross-checked. Wikipedia no longer has the authority of a traditional encyclopedia. Since the platforms are open to all registered netizens, whenever these people have opinions and insights, they can define an entry according to their own understanding and interpretations. The ranking of the various interpretations is dynamically adjusted according to people’s approval and support (in terms of “pin-on-the-top” or citation rate). The loss of authority and skepticism of information have become a prominent expression and characteristic of the Internet era. Only knowledge and opinions that have been considered and questioned can be better understood and grasped. Therefore, the critical ability of readers is a significant weapon to resist forgetting.

The further expansion of readers’ autonomy is manifested in their productive nature. Becoming cocreators of the text in the reading process is the most beneficial role for readers in the “Internet reading era.” Facing the explosion of information, we need to adjust our knowledge and understanding of reading in the digital media era, and in this process, what should change may be the readers’ way of thinking and their ability to respond critically. Reading in the age of “Internet reading” no longer involves passive perception, but becomes an active and creative activity. Readers with autonomy can give full play to their own creativity, construct correlations among things from the complicated and chaotic information, reveal multiple dimensions of things in objectified relationships, and make the reader another producer in the continuation, expansion, and even interrogation of the text. Readers in the “Internet reading era”

can also piece together a new world through this creation and find their personal position in their understanding society from a multidimensional perspective. Thus, the concept of “readers’ autonomy” is a theoretical contribution of the Chinese form to reading in the digital media era.

### *The Call for Excellent Texts*

Another pivotal element for improving reading quality in the “Internet reading era” is to call for excellent texts. The value of a good book lies in its ability to nourish people’s soul, to make them gain some peace in the midst of anxiety and restlessness, and to help them become enriched and wiser. If the quality of the text is poor, even the best Internet speed will not help. Therefore, in multimedia, language is still the most basic medium in the “Internet reading era,” because only language can explain the process of events more lucidly and comprehensively.

It is undeniable that the works on the Internet are of uneven qualities, and some of the prevailing texts are too entertaining or too radical, with a low artistic quality, and lacking in timelessness and profundity. Therefore, reading the classics should be on the agenda. Schopenhauer said,

There is for the mind no greater relaxation than reading the ancient classics. As soon as we have taken up any one of them even for only half an hour, we at once feel revived, relieved, purified, elevated, and strengthened, as if we had enjoyed drinking at a fresh rock-spring. (Schopenhauer 1974, p. 560)

This is exactly the charm of the classics, because they have survived through the ages. They constitute the essence of humanity and testimony of history. Thus, advocating reading the classics is also a substantial part of reading in the “Internet reading era.” The primacy of advocating for reading the classics does not mean avoiding other works of literature, as some classic texts also need to be reexamined for their value from a contemporary perspective.

In addition, from time to time, we hear calls for a return to paper-based texts. Reading paper-based texts introduces a rather different feeling compared with reading electronically, and it is more conducive to retrospection and reflection for us. However, a complete return to paper as older days is not realistic. Today’s e-book libraries have become the first choice for many people, especially young people. Their richness and

convenience far exceed those of paper, and e-readers are being technologically redesigned to simulate the environment of paper reading. What is feasible now is that paper and electronic texts coexist and play their own roles.

Thus, it can be predicted that “Internet reading” will continue exerting impact on reading. There are many issues to be studied and faced in future. Reading, as a spiritual need, can be diverse. The depth of reading should not be the criterion for evaluating the appropriateness of reading; rather, reading in the “Internet reading era” can be informative browsing, appreciative viewing, cognitive research, and even productive creation. Here, we can agree with Nietzsche’s “The Gay Science” and advocate reading for pleasure, so that reading becomes enjoyable. Therefore, instead of a single correct mode of reading, there can be appropriate and enriching reading to various extent, whatever kind of reading it is, the ultimate goal is to serve people’s spiritual needs and enhance their mental well-being. To make today’s people both satisfied with material needs and open-minded, a deeper integration of science and technology with humanities is needed. The Internet calls for a new kind of humanism. Thus, further research on reading will demonstrate the creativity of researchers and thus add a new quality and essence to literary criticism.

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## Literature and Capital in a Market Economy

In the current consumerist society, the question about capital cannot be evaded when studying the development of contemporary literature and art. Chinese tradition believed in “The gentleman knows what is right; the small man knows what is profitable.” In addition, influenced by Kant’s notion of “purposiveness without purpose” (Kant, 2007, p. xviii), Chinese modern literary research has maintained a certain distance from money and capital, seldom touching the nature and laws of capital. However, with the advent of consumerist society, especially the rise of cultural industries, literary activities are intertwined with capital in depth inevitably, and capital has entered the vision of literary criticism research. People are gradually realizing that only by understanding the nature and role of capital in contemporary literary activities can they cope with the huge impact of consumerism on Chinese literature and culture and participate creatively in the development of China’s cultural industries. Thus, Marx’s examination of capital is particularly relevant to literary criticism.

### 1 MARX’S VIEW ON CAPITAL

The study of capital and the criticism of capital began since the emergence of capitalism in the West. Before Marx, capital has already been studied by bourgeois economics (including mercantilism, physiocraticism, British classical economics, vulgar economics, etc.) and by Hegel, the master as well as epitome of German classical philosophy. Marx contributed



mainly by elaborating upon his new understanding of the nature of capital from his critique of the theories put forward by classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo (the so-called national economists or political economists), and to endow capital with a vital role in the proletarian revolution.

### 1.1 *Marx's Concept of Capital*

Capital is a core concept in Marxian economics, and Marx's research on capital has profoundly revealed the laws governing the functioning of a capitalist society, including its chronic problems. From *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, to *The German Ideology*, *Wage Labour and Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858*, and the first two volumes of *Capital*, an inherent logical evolution of Marx's views on capital can be found—from regarding capital with the view of alienated labor, to analyzing capital with the duality of labor and the two factors of a commodity, and finally proposing the theory of surplus value, revealing that the essence of capital is the endless pursuit of surplus value and the appropriation and control of workers' labor without paying for them. Marx's concept of capital is substantial in its implication; here we go through only a few of his representative points on the nature of capital to examine its characteristics and concept, as well as its operation and the related issues in literary activities.

#### *Capital and Money*

Historically, capital first appeared in the form of money, but noticeably there is an essential difference between the two. Marx gave a specific description to the difference between them, and this comparison of the similarities and differences between capital and money initially reveals the characteristics of capital.

Marx uncovered the relationship between money and capital in *Capital*. “As a matter of history, capital, ...invariably takes the form at first of money; it appears as moneyed wealth, as the capital of the merchant and of the usurer....All new capital, to commence with, comes on the stage, that is, on the market, whether of commodities, labour, or money, even in our days, in the shape of money that by a definite process has to be transformed into capital” (Marx 1996, p. 157). Capital starts with money, and by a definite process, money can be transformed into capital. However, “... the mere existence of monetary wealth, even its conquest of

a sort of SUPREMACY, is not sufficient for this dissolution into capital to occur” (Marx 1989a, p. 430). In 1847, Marx pointed out in *Wage Labour and Capital*, “while all capital is a sum of commodities, that is, of exchange values, not every sum of commodities, of exchange values, is capital” (Marx 1977, p. 212). In *Capital*, Marx delineates the double-faceted nature of money—money as money and money as capital. In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858*, Marx wrote, “by the mere accumulation of money does not yet imply the relationship of capitalization,” and “money as capital is a determination of money that goes beyond its simple determination as money” (Marx 1989a, p. 182).

What is the difference between money as money and money as capital? First, the value of money as money does not change in circulation, whereas the distinguishing feature of money as capital is its value increment. Second, “The simple circulation of commodities begins with a sale and ends with a purchase, while the circulation of money as capital begins with a purchase and ends with a sale” (Marx 1996, p. 159). Specifically, money as money is bought and sold mainly for use value, to satisfy needs; it does not increase in value and ends when it is bought; money as capital means buying goods for the purpose of selling it after it has increased in value in the future, and the money used for appreciation is thus money as capital, which needs to be sold to realize its value. Therefore, money bought for use is money as money, and money bought as an asset to be sold when it appreciates is money as capital, or as Marx proposed in *Capital*, “The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement” (Marx 1975b, p. 246). Money as capital seeks “the expansion of value” rather than merely use value. Marx also mentioned that a certain minimum amount of money is needed for it to constitute capital; otherwise, transforming money into capital becomes difficult. By comparing and distinguishing between money as money and money as capital, Marx put forward the nature of the appreciation of value of capital in its motions.

### *Attributes of Capital*

In his investigation, Marx analyzed the definition of capital and its instinct and essence to reveal the complex social relations of production and exploitation hidden by the capitalist mode of production.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx defined “capital” as follows: “...capital, that is, of private property in the products

of other men's labour" and "Capital is stored-up labour" (Marx 1975b, pp. 246–247). Obviously, this definition was deeply influenced by Adam Smith. According to Smith,

...when he possesses stock sufficient to maintain him for months or years, he naturally endeavors to derive a revenue from the greater part of it, reserving only so much for his immediate consumption as may maintain him till this revenue begins to come in. His whole stock, therefore, is distinguished into two parts. That part which, he expects, is to afford him this revenue, is called his capital. (Smith 1981, p. 279)

Adam Smith has already dealt here with the issue of income from surplus wealth: that is, appreciation of value. In *Capital*, Marx clearly stated that "...capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus value" (Marx 1996, p. 241). The purpose of capital is not for production, let alone for people, but for its own value added. Marx proposes, "...self-expansion of capital is its only purpose" (Marx 1998, p. 240); capital can increase its value only in motion, in flow, without which it would lose its soul. The essence of capital is the insatiable, endless pursuit of surplus value: that is, the value that is gratuitously possessed by capitalists in excess of the value of labor.

Unlike general economists who studied the allocation of production resources, Marx raised the concept of capital from the material level to the level of social relations. He inquired into the capitalist mode of production and the relations of production that correspond to it and highlighted that capital is not purely a thing but a relation, or more concretely, a relation of production. Marx rejected some economists' views of his time—that capital was simply a factor of the production—citing that "The stupidity of this procedure, whereby a definite social relation of production, which is expressed in things, is taken as the material and natural quality of these things, strikes us forcibly when we open the nearest textbook of political economy, and read on the very first page..." (Marx 1994b, p. 405). For this reason, Marx presented scathing critiques of the prevailing economic views of the time. In *Wage Labour and Capital*, he proposed, "Capital, also, is a social relation of production. It is a bourgeois production relation, a production relation of bourgeois society" (Marx 1977, p. 212). Marx criticized economists such as Ricardo and Sismondi because "...they do not conceive capital in its specific determinateness of form, as a relation of production, reflected in itself, and

think only of its physical substance, raw material, etc.” (Marx 1989a, p. 235). Marx believed that socialists such as Thomas Hodgkin and John Francis Bray made similar mistakes, as according to them, “Capital is conceived of as a thing, not as a relationship” (Marx 1989a, p. 189). Marx affirmed Adam Smith’s definition of “productive labour as labour which is directly exchanged with capital,” noting that “These definitions are therefore not derived from the material characteristics of labour (neither from the nature of its product nor from the particular character of the labour as concrete labour), but from the definite social form, the social relations of production, within which the labour is realized” (Marx 1989b, pp. 12–13).

Capital, when related to the relations of production of bourgeois society, is a social relation between human beings that is mediated by objects. The main purpose of Marx’s *Capital* is not to describe the laws of economic development under capitalist conditions but to reveal the human relations that are fostered beneath this shroud of objects. Capital inherently contains the contradiction between the capitalist and the worker, namely the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist. As Marx put it:

...the capitalist, ...appropriating living labour for himself—obtains two things free of charge: firstly, the surplus labour ...secondly, the quality of living labour which preserves the previous labour materialised in the component parts of capital and thus preserves the previously existing value of the capital. (Marx 1989a, pp. 289–290)

As a result, the study of capital shifts from the relations of production to the social relations between human beings, and from the social relations between human beings to the opposition between capital and labor, namely, between capitalists and workers. In a capitalist society, the purpose of capital is not for the survival and development of human beings—“Right from the start, capital does not produce for use value, for immediate subsistence” (Marx 1989a, p. 508). As Lenin indicated, “Where the bourgeois economists saw a relation between things (the exchange of one commodity for another) Marx revealed a relation between people” (Lenin 1963, p. 26).

### *Capital and Its Internal Contradictions*

Situating the study of capital from the viewpoint of historical materialism, Marx discovered the inevitability of the historical development of the bourgeoisie accompanied by capital as a product of a certain historical condition. He regarded capitalist production as a mode of production for a specific historical period, a historical necessity, and as well as a type of progress. At the same time, in this historical process, Marx also indicated the evils of capital and uncovered the mystery of the capitalist exploitation of workers from the perspective of surplus value. He also saw the inevitability of the capitalist mode of production, namely its historical nature or historicity. Capitalist mode of production is a specific mode of production with particular historical prescription: "...capitalist production itself...that it is relative, that it is not an absolute, but only a historical mode of production corresponding to a definite limited epoch in the development of the material conditions of production" (Marx 1998, p. 258). The capitalist mode of production is progressive under certain historical conditions. This progressiveness is evident through the fact that capital creates preconditions for employment, thereby producing free people. As Marx propounded in *Capital*:

The historical conditions of its existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It can spring into life, only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence meets in the market with the free labourer selling his labour power. And this one historical condition comprises a world's history. Capital, therefore, announces from its first appearance a new epoch in the process of social production. (Marx, 1996, p. 180)

The employment relationship is essentially a contractual relationship, which differs widely from the relationship between the peasant and the land in a feudal society, where the peasant has nothing when he leaves the land, whereas the worker who sells his labor is free. In this sense, Marx stated:

It is one of the civilizing aspects of capital that it enforces this surplus labour in a manner and under conditions which are more advantageous to the development of the productive forces, social relations, and the creation of the elements for a new and higher form than under the preceding forms of slavery, serfdom, etc. (Marx, 1996, p. 806).

Additionally, during the creation of surplus value, capital contributes to a great increase in the forces of production and creates much more material wealth than the whole sum of previous societies, thus bringing the strong impulse to innovate, which is determined by the nature of capital. The pursuit of greater profit requires constant cost savings as well as equipment and procedure updates in order to increase efficiency and multiply profits, which promote the growth of forces of production. Marx was soberly aware of the cosmopolitan and unstoppable nature of capital. Capital “compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 488).

Marx admitted that capital did play an important role in history, but he fiercely criticized capital in the interests of the proletariat. In *Capital*, Marx sharply indicated the evils of capital: “Capital comes into the world with a congenital blood stain on one cheek, capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx 1996, p. 748). The primitive accumulation of capital is a process of “blood and fire” by means of violence and plunder, and the essence of capitalism is the insatiable extraction of surplus value from workers. Since capital is profit-oriented, its logic is to maximize profits. Hence, the excesses from capital’s endless expansion inevitably lead to economic crises, and “this entire development proceeds in a contradictory way” (Marx 1989a, p. 465). However, “...by both positing a limit specific to itself (capital) and on the other hand driving beyond any limit, it is the very embodiment of contradiction.... it necessarily repels itself from itself” (Marx 1989a, p. 350). This intrinsic contradiction of capital is the paradox of its prosperity and hideousness, hope and despair, and rationality and irrationality. Marx’s analysis of the immanent contradiction of capital is crucial to understanding the root of capitalist economic crises and for investigating the present and future of capitalism.

The innate and insatiable greed of capital, while driving innovation in modern society, has also led to economic crises and even to the loss of emotion and the depravity of ethics in society. The voracity indwelling in capital dehumanizes people, leaving them on the edge of insanity. Marx wrote about the inhuman nature of capital:

In every stock-jobbing swindle everyone knows that some time or other the crash must come, but every one hopes that it may fall on the head of his neighbor, after he himself has caught the shower of gold and placed it in safety. *Après moi le deluge!* is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Hence Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society. To the outcry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of overwork, it answers: Ought these to trouble us since they increase our profits? But looking at things as a whole, all this does not, indeed, depend on the good or ill will of the individual capitalist. Free competition brings out the inherent laws of capitalist production, in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist. (Marx 1996, pp. 275–276)

Capital is “the most extreme expression” of the inhumanity (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 82). Capital exposes human greed, and in order to make money and profit, the capitalists are entirely indifferent to workers’ health and life. Such indifference of human beings is due to the essence of capital. Marx’s incisive revelation about capital remains persistently relevant even today.

Marx’s penetrating and dialectical analysis of the contradictions and problems of capital is highly pertinent for examining the nature of capital as well as the weaknesses of human nature. Despite the new changes in contemporary labor–capital relations, the essential attributes of capital are stubborn and resistant to change. Additionally, Marx accurately prophesied the future changes of capital—the capitalist class would withdraw from the production sphere and become a class of rentiers, and financial capital such as stocks and bonds would become the new forms of capital, thus dispelling the illusion of “the universal permanent capital.” The reality and facts of contemporary social development has confirmed Marx’s predictions.

### 1.2 *Marx’s View on Literature and Art and Capital*

When exploring the relationship between literature and capital, Marx placed special emphasis on historical concreteness. Further, the artistic production he discussed is primarily the artistic production that has “direct exchange with capital” during the capitalist period: that is, the specific historical period when literary and artistic products entered the process of capital operation. In refuting the anti-historical attitude

of the bourgeois political economist Henri Storch on the relationship between material and spiritual production, Marx responded with the classic statement:

In order to examine the connection between intellectual production and material production it is above all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category but in definite historical form. Thus for example different kinds of intellectual production correspond to the capitalist mode of production and to the mode of production of the Middle Ages. If material production itself is not conceived in its specific historical form, it is impossible to understand what is specific in the intellectual production corresponding to it and the reciprocal influence of one on the other. (Marx 1989b, p. 182)

The “definite historical form” and “special historical form” mentioned here fully imply Marxist historical consciousness and methods. Only by examining artistic production in a specific historical period can its thesis not fall into “empty abstraction.” Always examining a specific, concrete historical period forms the basis for understanding Marx’s theory on the relationship between literature and capital.

*Capital Provides the Material Basis and Conditions for the Progress of Literature and Art*

As discussed earlier, from the standpoint of historical materialism, Marx recognized the positive effects of capital in history. The enormous social wealth created by the tremendous growth of the productive force of capitalism provides the necessary material means and technical support for the development of spiritual production, including artistic production.

Capital creates material conditions for the formation of the artists’ true free personality. Under the capitalist mode of production, personal dependence no longer existed, and poets and artists, deprived of the care and patronage of the court and nobility, had to use their labor to make “...direct exchange with capital” in order to survive, thus developing “personal independence based upon dependence mediated by things” (Marx 1989a, p. 95). Marx noted the positive side of wage labor: “Likewise, all so-called higher kinds of labour, intellectual, artistic, etc., have been turned into articles of commerce and have thereby lost their old sanctity. What a great advance it was that the entire regiment of clerics, doctors, lawyers, etc., hence religion, law, etc., ceased to be judged by anything but their



commercial value” (Marx 1976, p. 436). Although the transformation of the artist into a wage laborer by capital has hindered and restricted free artistic creation to certain extent, “...certainly this objective connection is to be preferred to the lack of any connection or to a purely local connection based on primitive blood ties, nature, and relationships of lordship and bondage” (Marx 1989a, p. 98). The artists can now exchange their labor and the artistic works they create can be circulated. The notion of exchange is also implicit in the specialized division of labor and artistic autonomy, since both “division of labor” and “self-discipline” are in the operation of the market. Therefore, capital provides material conditions for the development of artists.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Hostility Between Capital and Literature and Art*

Given that the command and profit-seeking nature of capital inevitably contradicts and conflicts with the critical and transcendental nature of art, Marx examined the relationship between literary activities and capital, not only from a historical perspective but also from the value of human emancipation, indicating the hostility of the capitalist production system toward art.

He (Henry Storch) cannot get beyond meaningless general phrases. Consequently, the relation is not so simple as he presupposes. For instance, capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of intellectual production, for example, art and poetry. If this is left out of account, it opens the way to the illusion of the French in the eighteenth century which has been so beautifully satirised by Lessing. Because we are further ahead than

<sup>1</sup> I used to think that the progress of capitalist society compared with feudal society lies in its replacement of dependence between humans with dependence with material, thus allowing human beings to gain some freedom. Recently, I reread Marcuse, and he stated that “harnessing their bodies and intelligence for profit was considered a natural activation of freedom...The sale of labor power is supposed to occur due to the poor man’s own decision. He labors in the service of his employer, while he may keep for himself and cultivate as a sacred preserve the abstraction that is his person-in-itself, separated from its socially valuable functions” (Marcuse, 2009, pp. 85–86). This analysis by Marcuse is profound and leads me to reconsider the progressive nature of capital. This substitution of dependence of humans with material for dependence between humans is perhaps a way of saying “I am my own” merely in the name of freedom, but in reality “dependence of humans with material” remains a heavy shackle that binds man, because “inner freedom abolishes itself by turning into outer unfreedom” (Marcuse 2009, p. 94).

the ancients in mechanics, etc., why shouldn't we be able to make an epic too? And the *Henriade* in place of the *Iliad*! (Marx 1989b, pp. 182–183)

Here, Marx demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between material and spiritual production over the course of history. Since all relations in capitalist society are subject to an abstract monetary relation, “As long as the power of capital lasts, no *equality* between landowners will be possible, and any sort of ban on the purchase and sale of land will be impossible, ridiculous and absurd. Everything, not merely the land, but human labour, the human being himself, conscience, love, science—everything must *inevitably be for sale as long as the power of capital lasts*” (Lenin 1962, p. 298). This fetishism of money led directly to the alienation of human beings and art. Artists were forced to create art according to the demands of the market, as dictated by the capitalists, and “all passions and all activity must therefore be submerged in *avarice*” (Marx 1975b, p. 309).

Art and aesthetics are free in their nature, but in a capitalist society, literary works that should be the “expression of his own nature” (Marx 1994b, p. 136) are reduced to commodities. Therefore, according to Marx, the capitalist system of production is not a fertile ground for art, and the fundamental cause of the “hostility” of capital toward art lies in the contradiction and opposition between the nature of capitalist wage labor and the freedom that characterizes spiritual production.

*The Aesthetic Character of Artistic Production in the Capitalist Mode of Production*

Marx not only discovered the hostility of capital toward literature and art but also explored the survival and resistance of literature and art in the capitalist mode of production, as well as the possibility of aesthetic activities breaking through the limitations of capital in the capitalist mode of production. Marx's view has left profound revelations for artistic production today.

In 1842, in “Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly (First Article),” Marx stated his thought in an uncompromising tone:

The writer, of course, must earn in order to be able to live and write, but he must by no means live and write to earn...The writer does not at all look on his work as a means. It is an end in itself; it is so little a means for

him himself and for others that, if need be, he sacrifices his existence to its existence. (Marx, 1975b, pp. 174–175)

Although Marx recognized the exchange nature of literary activities, he did not consider it the ideal form of literary existence in terms of value judgments—“The true poet’s labour could remain—in Milton’s time at least—unalienated to the extent that he took no account of market value. Such a poet writes what he has to, from the centre of his being, and leaves it to others to convert his poem into a profit-bearing commodity” (Praver 1976, p. 312).

When Marx discussed the “non-material production,” he also made a significant but usually neglected point: “Here capitalist production is only applicable to a very limited degree” and “Here too the capitalist mode of production only occurs to a slight extent...” (Marx 1994a, pp. 143–144). In this way, capital’s dominative power over artistic production can be limited to a certain extent. From another point of view, we might as well consider that art, as free spiritual production, can resist capital and tenaciously maintain its independence even in realms where capital rules over everything. For Marx, “one of the great virtues of art,...was precisely that through its very mode of being it offered resistance to such ‘fetishism’; just as a genuine artist would still, even under modern conditions, resist transformation into a wage-slave of the dominant social group” (Praver 1976, p. 313).

The capitalist mode of production cannot completely erase the aesthetic character of art. Thus, literary activity can, to a certain extent, break free from the capitalist mode of production and embody an aesthetic character. In the appendix of the first volume of *Theories of Surplus Value*, “The Production Process of Capital. The Distinction Between Productive and Unproductive Labour,” Marx concretely analyzed the aesthetic characteristics inherent in artistic production in the capitalist mode of production. First, during the process of artistic creation, artistic production takes the form of individual labor; the intensive nature of capitalist production is not completely effective in terms of artistic production, thus enabling artistic production somewhat to get rid of the rule of capitalist mode of production. Second, the aesthetic characteristics are displayed in works of art that can exist separately from the artists. On the one hand, these works of art circulate as commodities in production and consumption, realizing the commodity mission of material exchange; on the other hand, they realize the value of human spiritual

sharing as works of art. Third, for the audience, artistic production satisfies their aesthetic needs and brings enjoyment of art. For instance, when employed by the theater owner, the singer is a production worker, because the owner exchanges his or her capital for the singer's labor capability and thus gains a fortune. For the audience, however, the singer's singing is an active and creative activity, a free expression of her or his life, and a realization of her or his natural endowment and spiritual purpose (Marx 1994a, p. 136). It is in this sense that Marx distinguished between the piano maker and the piano player; although the latter produces music, her or his labor is not labor in the economic sense (Marx 1989a, p. 231). Thus, literary activities do not, to a certain extent, operate in full accordance with the laws of the capitalist market. The domination of capital over literary activities can be limited within a certain sphere, and literature and art can resist this domination and gain a certain degree of freedom. This view lends theoretical support for the resistance of artistic production to capital in today's market economy.

## 2 CAPITAL AND CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ACTIVITIES

The mode of production and operation of literature and art in today's market economy in China is quite close to the artistic production with commodity characteristics that Marx described as creating value for capital. Marx's research on literature and capital remains particularly pertinent today. Under the new historical conditions, Marx's views on capital are of instructive and guiding significance for comprehending, recognizing, and analyzing contemporary literary activities. The Chinese form should be expanded on the basis of Marx's theorization of capital, in order to soberly evaluate the impact of today's consumerism on literature and culture and facilitate the progress of contemporary literature and art by the force of the market.

### 2.1 *The Expansion of the Concept of Capital*

Today, the concept of capital has expanded far beyond the realm of production to all levels of society, and has acquired a new essence in people's interpretation. Is Marx's theory of capital still alive and vibrant? What are the forms of capital in different fields today? All would require careful investigation.

*Marx's Theory of Capital Is Not Obsolete*

Amidst the winds of change in the twentieth century, Daniel Bell raised the well-known idea of “The End of Ideology.” Some Western scholars believe that Marx’s capital and capitalism in *Capital* are demodé and even obsolete, and that the relationship between capitalists and workers has fairly improved in the twentieth century. As Michel Beaud put it:

Above all, Capital’s interpretive framework for understanding capitalism grew from observation of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, which for Marx was the “true capitalist mode of production.” This framework was less useful for understanding other forms of capitalism—mercantile, banking, and manufacturing—and it became less and less adequate for analyzing the industrial capitalism of the twentieth century. (Beaud 2001, p. 127)

They argue that today’s capitalist system has undergone many positive adjustments and is no longer what Marx portrayed it to be in his day.

It is true that today’s society is far more developed than it had been in the nineteenth century, but does that make Marx’s concept of capital out of date? The answer is obviously no. Today, as Marx stated, “the necessary tendency of capital at every point to is subject the mode of production to itself, to its domination” (Marx 1987, p. 115). Around 2008, major financial crises broke out one after another in the United States and Europe. The financial credit bubble and the wide disparity between the rich and the poor brought Marx’s work on capital back into focus. A great many of Western scholars have been rereading *Capital*. One of them, Elma Altefat mentioned, “In this context, Capital has been revisited because it lends useful theoretical support for concrete analysis in the present. ... The Marxist theoretical system helps to analyze the current financial and economic crises, as well as the relationship between real accumulation and financial markets” (Altefat 2013). Or as Thomas Piketty proposed in *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, “Modern economic growth and the diffusion of knowledge have made it possible to avoid the Marxist apocalypse but have not modified the deep structures of capital and inequality” (Piketty 2014, p. 1). The inequalities due to the power of capital have not disappeared at all, and in some places they have dramatically intensified. According to Terry Eagleton, “The income of a single Mexican billionaire today is equivalent to the earnings of the poorest seventeen millions of his compatriots” (Eagleton 2011, p. 8). Or, as David Harvey mentioned,

“So none of the predatory practices that Marx identified have gone away, and in some instances they have even flourished to a degree unimaginable in Marx’s own times” (Harvey 2010, p. 309). The American director Michael Moore’s film *Capitalism: A Love Story* unflinchingly portrayed the plight and misery of the lower and middle classes of American society in the wake of the financial crisis. While re-examining capitalism, people discover Marx’s immense foresight and sagacity when he studied the capitalist system at his day, and hope to find a solution to the current problem from Marx’s critique of the system.

In 2011, following the financial crisis, Yale University Press published Terry Eagleton’s book *Why Marx Was Right*. It is written in an argumentative style, listing and refuting ten common denials of Marxism. Eagleton criticized the fact that “He (Marx) is accused of being outdated by the champions of a capitalism rapidly reverting to Victorian levels of inequality” (Eagleton 2011, p. 3). The exit of Marxism from the stage of history presupposes the end of capitalism, but at present there are no legible signs of its rapid decline; thus, Marxism must continue to exist. Eagleton also indicates that Marxism will not die out as long as the capitalist system exists. He playfully said that “...Marxism is finished would be music to the ears of Marxists everywhere” (Eagleton 2011, p. 1), because the goal of Marxists is to make Marxism obsolete.

With the rapid advancement of technology and the expansion of the consumer market, capital has proliferated so extremely that Jameson describes its pervasive presence:

The purest form of capital yet to have emerged, prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas. This purer capitalism of our own time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way. One is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious. (Jameson 1991, p. 36)

Jameson once believed that there were two enclaves worldwide where capital could not enter: agriculture and the human subconscious. However, he realized that capital had obliterated the existence of enclaves and that capital had not only infiltrated nature through “green agriculture” but had also penetrated into human desire through commodity consumption.

*Bourdieu and Cultural Capital*

Scholars never stop at Marx's study of capital. With today's highly developed information technology, capital is no more a concept that can be summarized simply by a sweatshop. Some important theorists in the West have further considered and advanced Marx's concept and theory of capital in light of the current new conjunctures, broadening the territory of capital.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of Marx's discussion of economic capital, different concepts of capital have emerged, including Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital," which provides a fresh theoretical perspective for explaining cultural studies and literary activities in China.

The concept of "cultural capital" is an extension of Bourdieu's theory of capital based on Marx's theory, and yet it is a non-economic interpretation of capital. Some people disagree with this concept and consider it a mere metaphor, but the nomenclature of the concept has realistic pertinence. The most important reason for Bourdieu to introduce capital into the study of culture was that he noted that culture and profit were not disconnected or opposed to each other, on the contrary, the two are deeply interweaved. The concept of cultural capital enables one to look at the differences or inequalities of a capital nature that are shielded by cultural phenomena. In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu distinguishes capital into three basic forms: economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Cultural capital, in Bourdieu's words, is defined as any tangible or intangible asset related to culture and cultural activities, including cultural competence, products, institutions, and systems. Specifically, cultural competence encompasses the knowledge and self-cultivation embodied in a person under the influence of one's family environment. Cultural products are manifested in the form of cultural commodities such as "pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc." (Bourdieu 1983, p. 243), and cultural capital exists in this objectified form. Cultural systems exist in an institutionalized form, such as recognized academic certificates or educational qualifications.

Although the three types of capital proposed by Bourdieu—economic, social, and cultural—belong to different domains and have different real

<sup>2</sup> Such as Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*; Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital*; David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*; Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*.

and fictitious characteristics, they all have in common the attribute of capital: that is, they all have added value. In addition to economic capital, social capital, including various social relationships, also generates added value, and “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” (Bourdieu 1983, p. 21) has the potential to add value. The value added of cultural capital should not be taken lightly today. The brand of a commodity exactly is capital: The price of a silk scarf with the label “Hermès” suddenly increases dozens of times. Parents’ investment in their child’s education can also be considered cultural capital, for they are investing in their child’s future success. These forms of capital are eventually transformed into symbolic capital that demonstrates people’s social status and power.<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu’s elaboration of different forms of capital reveals the utilitarian nature of the actor’s pursuit of different symbolic capital, showing his wisdom and critical spirit of today’s culture.

## 2.2 *The Power of Capital*

In China, the connotation of cultural capital has moved beyond Bourdieu’s ambit, and capital is playing an increasingly vital role in contemporary Chinese literary activities. It has penetrated all aspects of culture, so much so that some literary and cultural products are directly branded as economic. In today’s world, culture and capital are so closely intertwined that it is difficult to say whether folk crafts in tourist attractions are commodity or culture. Further, economic, social, and cultural capital are mingled and have formed a cyclic process of mutual support and transformation. In film and television activities, economic capital can be transformed into social capital. With heavy investment in the establishment of film and television companies, the products of film and television companies become cultural capital; cultural capital can also be transformed into economic capital, with investors and consortia reaping the profits. As a result, video production has become a confluence of economic, social, and cultural capital. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to apply Marx’s historical and dialectical perspectives and methods when studying capital in the context of contemporary literary activities.

<sup>3</sup> “Symbolic capital” is another concept by Bourdieu, which mainly refers to the useful resources of individuals in terms of credit, fame, and social recognition.



*The Alliance Between Literature and Capital*

In contemporary China, the prominent feature of literary activities is the alliance between literature and capital. Contemporary literary activities are mostly subject to the logic of commodity, and the domination of capital is widely evident. Literary activities, especially the cultural industry, are integrated into the production and consumption system of the entire society, and writers, artists, critics, planners, and even collectors are involved in the production and consumption of culture. Further, “not only the production but also the reception of cultural goods is already governed by the law of value” (Marcuse 2009, p. 96). This market-oriented approach and mechanism of cultural management has brought about fundamental changes to the Chinese literary and artistic activities.

With regard to the way literature is produced, it is no more merely the mechanic reproduction and mass production described by Benjamin; rather, the entire mode of production and operation has been converted. The control of capital over literature is evident in the planning of literary activities. The popularity of some television programs or cultural products relies heavily on planning and hype, in which capital investment plays a large role. Some writers no longer write novels based on sudden inspiration or accumulated experience, but rather on prior contracts based on market demand, much like the French writer Balzac. The past phenomenon of “poring over the book for ten years” as Cao Xueqin did and “hiding writings in famous mountains and passing them on to like-minded people” as Sima Qian mentioned is pretty rare. Tradition and history have also become consumer goods, and it is not alarming that over-consumption of traditional culture can lead to the death of cultural resources.

Enormous and subversive changes have taken place in the relationship between supply and demand of literature, which is rapidly becoming more consumer-oriented. Literary or cultural products have become a part of production, where the output determines the input and cost-effectiveness is a primary consideration. For a book or a play, the selling point has to be considered before commencing work on it. Intimidated by the power of capital, the pursuit of aesthetic meaning and personal creation have become profit-oriented. Authors have to take into account the market demand and selling points to ensure a balance between input and output. Film production, in particular, requires financially strong investors, and the main consideration of the producer is, as Marx said, money as capital, which is invested in order to obtain greater profit.

There is also a qualitative and substantial change in the way literature is accepted today. In the face of colorful literary or cultural products, the act of consumption has replaced the act of appreciation, and what consumers consume is no longer “art” but “fashion.” For instance, the so-called “fan economy,” in which a certain number of fans and admirers are created through planning and packaging to increase attention and attraction, is garnering popularity at the expense of undermining the cultural literacy of the nation, with the worst outcome being an overall reduction and degradation in the ability to create and consume literature.

### *Capital Impairing Literature*

As the market intends to turn everything into a commodity, the threat of capital to literature is obvious. First and foremost, the purpose of literary creation is seriously distorted: Wealth has become the sole goal of people, “writing books to make a living,” and aesthetics have become a means of profit. Some writers and artists, to cater to the market and attract attention, are willing to downgrade their work, producing some vulgar and even nasty works; thus, artworks have lost their most basic attributes. Marx’s incisive critique that “labour itself, not merely in present conditions but insofar as its purpose in general is the mere increase of wealth—that labour itself, I say, is harmful and pernicious...” (Marx 1975b, p. 240) has thus become highly relevant today.

Another damage accruing from capital’s entry into artistic production is that it leads to the suppression of the author’s creativity—“Inasmuch as he produces works of art destined for a market that absorbs them, the artist cannot fail to heed the exigencies of this market: they often affect the content as well as the form of a work of art, thus placing limitations on the artist, stifling his creative potential, his individuality” (Wolff 1981, p. 18). In this way, the author faces the fact that “you can’t always do as you like,” and his creative personality and critical stance are almost diminished. These conditions also restrict the healthy growth of contemporary literature and art in China or elsewhere in the world.

Related to this is the practical application of evaluation criteria, which have changed considerably under the influence of capital, with ratings, box office value, and sales becoming the main criteria for measuring the success of works. When the degree of consumption is used to measure literary works and when literature, culture, and even human beings themselves become calculable and sellable objects, the entire society may encounter a situation in which “bad money drives out good money,” and

some not so talented people can make a lot of money in the market. The emergence of these problems is related to the manipulation of capital on the one hand, and calls for improvement in the market mechanism on the other.

*Capital Supporting and Safeguarding Literary Activities*

Capital is a “double-edged sword” for literary activities; they are both hostile and supportive to each other. Unlike the Frankfurt School, which took a completely negative stance toward the “cultural industry,” the Chinese form inherited Marx’s idea of the progressive role of capital in history. In studying the issue of literature and capital, it can, on the one hand, make full and best use of capital and, on the other hand, remain vigilant against the encroachment of capital on culture.

Spiritual production in a society requires a certain material basis to ensure the survival of artists and the necessary material conditions for artistic creation. In contemporary times, it is especially tough to engage in the production and reproduction of literature and art without basic economic support. Capital is needed for the development of literature and art, or it can even be a strong impetus for literary activities. The proposition of “aestheticization of everyday life” is itself linked to the growth of social material wealth. Imagine, without the support of capital, can people see blockbuster movies, street gardens, interweaving traffic, and colorful neon lights? All these are the inevitable consequence of the operation of capital. As such, material wealth needs further development, and capital is the material force behind today’s growing aesthetic demand.

The role of capital is also presented in the promotion of innovation in the literary activities. Innovation comes first from the development needs of literature and art itself, but it is also integrally correlated to capital. To strengthen market competitiveness, some film and television productions often join hands with capital (including capital-backed technology). This revolutionizes film production through the use of high technology and brings unprecedented novel types of sensory pleasure to audiences. Creative industries, in particular, are inseparable from the injection of capital, and they have become the preferred targets for capital appreciation. Additionally, artistic innovation is also linked to the consumer market. The ever-increasing cultural demand by consumers promotes the revamping of literature, and literary works can be made more attractive

only through the creation of new artistic styles and means of expression. The works of those who do not care about market demand may go unappreciated, unviewed, and obscure at last.

From the perspective of art consumption, capital has transformed art from the domain of an elite minority into something that the majority of the masses can enjoy, and has even made it a way of life for the masses. This would not have been possible without the full emergence and abundance of materials. As Eagleton discussed:

The first historical act, Marx writes in *The German Ideology*, is the production of the means to satisfy our material needs. Only then can we learn to play the banjo, write erotic poetry or paint the front porch. The basis of culture is labour. There can be no civilization without material production. Marxism, however, wants to claim more than this. It wants to argue that material production is fundamental not only in the sense that there could be no civilization without it, but that it is what ultimately determines the nature of that civilization. (Eagleton 2011, pp. 107–108)

When considering the dissemination of literature and art, the power of capital can also not be underestimated. Whether a work is widely circulated depends first on the quality of the work, but the breadth and depth of dissemination also depends on the operation of the market. Only with the help of the market can the product be understood and accepted by more audiences and the artistic value of the product fully realized. If dissemination is ignored, even the best works can only be “hidden in the mountains and unknown to people.”

Noticeably, when literature and culture are exchanged for capital, literature should resist and transcend when taking advantage of capital. The classical Marxist writers’ criticism of and resistance to the “fetishism” of money is a warning for today’s artistic production. A great effect of art lies precisely in its resistance to all kinds of “fetishism” through its own mode of existence. A true artist, even under the conditions of the modern market, has to resist turning himself into a wage laborer for the dominant group. Chinese literary artists should realize their detachment from and confrontation with capital through free and conscious labor. Constructing the land beneath their feet as a locus of resistance to alienated labor, and even, if necessary, choosing to “sacrifice their own survival for the survival of their works,” has made Chinese literature and art a counterweight front to alienated labor.

### 3 MARKET ECONOMY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE

In contemporary China, the relationship between literary activities and capital has been staged prominently, and while there have been more opportunities for literary activities, they have also been subject to the tremendous impact of commercialization. It has been difficult or even invalid for the traditional view to explain and adapt to the current situation and development of literature, and thus it is critical to re-examine and redefine its attributes. In China, understanding clearly the impact of the market economy on literature, enhancing the spiritual and cultural construction in the market economy, and promoting the harmonious development of the artistic value of literature and market demand have become urgent issues to be inquired and answered in theory and practice. This directly involves the issue of cultural hegemony in Marxist literary criticism.

#### *3.1 A Re-examination of the Attributes of Literature*

The attributes of literature have broadened and evolved over time. It is generally believed that literature is a product of aesthetics, characterized by sensuality, passion, and imagination; it is an art expressed in images. Therefore, aesthetics is the most important attribute of literature. However, aesthetics is not the sole attribute. The aesthetic function of literature has not always existed in the history of literature, as Aristotle considered literature ethical and edifying; the aesthetic function of literature was primarily advocated for by German philosophers and aestheticians. Nowadays, the aesthetic connotation, scope, and function of literature have been quietly changing, and in Jameson's words, aesthetics has become "garish cultural self-indulgence" (Jameson 1998, p. 86). There is also a process of recognizing the ideological attribute of literature. Although literature as a carrier of ideas and values has been realized for a long time, it was only with the emergence of Marxist literary criticism that the ideological attribute of literature was explicitly put forward. Eagleton stated: "The question of how to describe this relationship within art between 'base' and 'superstructure', between art as production and art as ideological, seems to me one of the most important questions which Marxist literary criticism has now to confront" (Eagleton 2002, p. 69).

These two attributes of literature are now accepted and do not have to be repeated.

Whether literature is a commodity is a question that some people engaged in literary theory and criticism may not want to confront directly or answer squarely. In fact, it is difficult or impossible to completely separate aesthetics from capital in a market economy. The study of the multiple attributes of literature, especially the ones related to its commodification, is not only necessary for explaining contemporary literary and artistic activities, but it also leads to the generation of new understanding about the nature of literature.

*The Commodity Attribute of Literature and Art Production*

According to Marx's capital theory, the commodity economy constrains and changes the nature of labor of writers, artists, and all spiritual workers. Their labor is no longer just to meet their own needs. Its fruits contribute to the economic operation mechanism of society, becoming a spiritual production labor "in direct exchange with capital." Therefore, the greatest difference between the production of literature and art under market economy conditions and the literary and artistic activities in the past lies in its commodity attribute.

In the wake of capitalism, the commodification of literature or the attribute of literature has become inevitable. Although some Modernist works promote artistic autonomy and take a decisive stance to show their rejection of and resistance to commodities, the commodity factor, the "Other" of Modernist literature and art, has become a shadow they cannot get rid of, and the underlying tone of artistic self-discipline is the tense confrontation with any external factors, including capital. Post-modernism is turning back and directly re-connecting with the market, and "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (Jameson, 1991, pp. 3–4). Moreover, Jameson pointed out that, not only "artistic works are becoming commodities, but even theories per se are becoming commodities" (Jameson 1986, p. 148). The New Historicist Hayden White also suggests that aesthetics and economics are now tied together. Literary activities are now inclined to be marketed and industrialized, especially film and television, whose commodity value is

increasingly rising. In a market economy, aesthetic activities are mostly backed by capital, and the production of some theories is also controlled by capital; what they do is endorsing and serving capital, thus capital becomes the basis and precondition for the production of aesthetics and even theories.

The lack of understanding of the commodified nature of literary activities in the past has led to bias and errors in creative practice and theoretical criticism. Some writers and artists, to cater to the market, are willing to downgrade, and literary works tend to be vulgar or even nasty. The other extreme is a complete disregard for the laws and role of the market, to persist in one's own way, or even to go off the beaten track, resulting in the loss of readers and thus the decline of literature. These extremes have not only reversed aesthetic tastes but also caused the resentment and even resistance of consumers, and if these phenomena are not taken seriously, literary criticism will be on the verge of losing its voice in the contemporary literary world. Therefore, understanding and precisely comprehending the commodity attribute of literature is essential in guiding the healthy development of contemporary Chinese literary activities.

Acknowledging the commodity attribute of literature and art is necessary for the construction of Marxist literary criticism theory; it also adds a bit of alarm to writers, artists, and literary critics:

The question is only whether one can remain highly alert to the inducements of the market, and whether one can soberly prevent oneself from straying from the academic track and falling into the trap of the market. (Jia 2006, pp. 5–6).

To propose and analyze the commodity attribute of literature is not to wave the flag to cheer for the commercialization of art. By understanding the commodity attribute of artistic production, we can effectively widen the living space of literary and artistic activities, and be alert to the threat of capital to art, preventing it from killing the nature of art in the process of maximizing profit.

#### *The Organic Unity of Literary Aesthetics, Ideology, and Commodity*

In literary works, many attributes of literature are often interlaced, and they are characterized by a type of mutual tension. These attributes do not contradict each other in an ideal literary work. From the perspective

of the law of value, the aesthetic and commodity attributes of literature are not incompatible with each other as fire and water. The higher the aesthetic value of a work, the higher its commercial value. Likewise, the commodified nature of a work does not completely exclude its aesthetic nature, as it circulates as a commodity in consumption. Also, the price of a work also reflects its aesthetic value. Additionally, the ideological attribute of literary works has a rectifying effect on the overemphasis of commercial value in China's cultural industry today. The reason why some excellent works of art have achieved good social and economic benefits is that they carry profound ideas and strong emotions. In this way, the attributes of aesthetics, ideology, and commodity are unified in practice. Theoretically, the equal exchange right of the market can also make literary creation a truly "free spiritual production," and this organic unity has partly restored the aesthetic nature of literary creation.

In today's world, literary criticism should pay particular attention to the problem that the commodity attribute of literature and art overwhelms the aesthetic attribute of literature and art, and therefore we should prioritize the aesthetic attribute because aesthetics constitute the unique, irreplaceable feature that distinguishes literature and art from other forms of material production; it is also the prerequisite for maintaining and enhancing the spiritual character of literature and art. The purpose of literary activities is not only to meet people's material needs but also to meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs, especially their sensorial needs. It is clear that literature cannot be fully in accordance with industrialized methods and standards. Through its unique production methods, it gives rise to diversified, personalized, and emotional art products. After all, literary consumption differs from ordinary material consumption, for it is a type of spiritual enjoyment and creation, seeking the spirit of the aesthetic object and aesthetic taste. Therefore, while fully considering the market factors and understanding the market operation mechanism, we should raise the artistic standard and create works with higher aesthetic value, which is the purpose of studying the attributes of literature.

The emphasis on the spiritual nature of literature and art does not oppose people's exploration and innovation of artistic forms. As a special mode of production, literary activities require maximum use of human ingenuity, along with more innovation and openness. Free and self-conscious creativity is a fundamental characteristic of human beings, and the constant creation of new artistic styles and means of expression



provides people with exquisite artistic products. Not only does this make literary works more attractive, but consequently the competitiveness of the market is also objectively increased.

To sum up, literature is a compound of aesthetics, capital, and politics, which is a contemporary expansion of the Chinese form of literary view, and this view will, to a certain extent, lead to the end of the artistic autonomy paradigm. The study of multiple attributes of literature will also add new content to the nature of literature in textbooks of literary theory for college students.

### 3.2 *Market Economy and the Spiritual Quality of Literature*

The prosperity of the cultural industry does not equal the prosperity of culture. Maintaining the spiritual character of literary activities in the market economy is both a challenge and an opportunity for contemporary writers and artists. Xi Jinping pointed out in his “Speech at the Symposium on Literary and Artistic Works”:

A good work should be one that can withstand the evaluation of the people, the evaluation of experts, and the test of the market, one that puts social benefits in the first place, and one that unifies social and economic benefits. ... Excellent works of literature and art are preferably both thoughtfully and artistically successful, and also popular in the market. It is important to adhere to the aesthetic ideals of literature and art, maintain the independent value of literature and art, and reasonably set quantitative indicators reflecting market acceptance, such as distribution, ratings, click-through rates, box office revenues, etc. We can neither ignore and deny these indicators, nor can we make them absolute and be led by the market (Xi, 2015 pp. 21–21).

This speech clearly and dialectically explains the relationship between literary and artistic creation and capital. Today’s literature and art is supposed to achieve both social and economic benefits; at the same time, they should not be limited by it. Dealing with the relationship between aesthetic value, social benefit, and economic benefit, and promoting the harmonization of the artistic value of literature and market demand are issues that require both theoretical argument and further exploration in practice.

*Adherence to the Spiritual Character of Literature in the Market Economy*

Considering the particularity of spiritual production, even in a market economy, literary works should still insist on the characteristics of spiritual products, which are determined by the basic nature of literature. We should attach importance to the market, but we cannot degenerate into a slave to the market. Improving the spiritual character of literary products and enriching people's spiritual life are crucial responsibilities of contemporary literary activities.

Despite the emergence of influential, high-quality works in the Chinese literary world, it is an undisputed fact that the spiritual dimension of literary activities has weakened, and there are not enough works with profound insight and reflections. Even for some works with huge investment, behind the magnificent and splendid scenes, the content is disproportionately pale and empty, giving audiences a sense of wonder and shock but leaving little to aftertaste and ponder. There is even less attention paid to human existence, especially to the living conditions of ordinary people, and some works even use gags to mock the underclass. This needs serious self-reflection.

A true artist should hold on to his social responsibility and transcend the limits of money to pursue his or her ideals and give people spiritual solace and inspiration. Despite his money troubles, Balzac displayed perseverance in his writing, saying: "In all professions, the artist has an insurmountable pride, an artistic feeling, an indelible human conscience about things. You cannot corrupt this conscience, nor can you ever buy it" (Balzac 1958, p. 157). Moreover, as special forms of production, literature and art, with their innate quest for freedom and urge for pleasure, constitute a negative force that drives them to resist and even transcend capital. People need ideals, and so does society. A Chinese scholar Jiang Yin once stated, "Even if literature dies, I will be the last graveyard keeper of literature. When death comes knocking at the tomb door, I will answer, 'I am here.'" This is a quite touching and solemn statement expressing the precious perseverance as mentioned above. In literature, writers can incorporate their singular experiences and ideas into the creation of literature, give people faith and hope while touching their hearts or bringing them pleasure, and realize their own salvation through a certain kind of transcendence of reality. Although many factors are involved in the creation of

great art, its kernel lies in the ideas contained in it, as well as in the reflection on and answers to the grand philosophical and existential questions raised by each era.

The creation of excellent works is the key to maintaining the spiritual character of literature and art in a market economy. Longinus expounded five major sources of sublime style in his work *On the Sublime*:

The first and most powerful is the power of grand conceptions...and the second is the inspiration of vehement emotion...But the other three come partly from art, namely the proper construction of figures—these being of course of two kinds, figures of thought and figures of speech—and, over and above these, nobility of language, which again may be resolved into choice of words and the use of metaphor and elaborated diction. The fifth cause of grandeur, which gives form to all those already mentioned, is dignified and elevated word-arrangement” (Longinus 1995, p. 181).

The aesthetic character of literary creation requires and deserves these elements. In addition to “the power of grand conceptions,” the author should also generate mysterious thoughts, incorporate one’s own unique existential experience of life and ideas into the process of creating literature, express one’s understanding of society and one’s emotions in a profound and graceful way, and display the inner vitality and strength of character of his works, so that people can contemplate and experience faith and hope while being moved or delighted.

#### *Market Economy and the New Masses*

With the change in art mechanism and communication media, literary activities are no longer the domain of an elite few but incorporating hundreds of millions of ordinary consumers. Therefore, the issues of popularization and raising standards raised at Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an conference on literature and art” is not obsolete today. What kind of masses does literature need? This is a critical question which needs to be examined minutely. According to Marx’s proposition that “Production is directly also consumption”, literature and art are charged with the task of shaping and elevating consumer subjects through their products, and they should “create a public that has artistic taste and is capable of enjoying beauty” (Marx 1989a, p. 30).

It is undoubtedly true that the purpose of literature is not to cultivate standardized and stereotyped masses. What is equally true is that literature does not need fanatical and blind masses. In *The Work of Art in the*

*Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, Benjamin mentions two tendencies of such blind masses: first, a fascist tendency, in which film capital “uses the revolutionary opportunities implied by this control for counter-revolutionary purposes” (Benjamin 2008, p. 33). That is, to stimulate blindness and hostility in the masses through fanaticism and violence; second, the tendency to lose oneself in the chase of celebrities and stars, to eliminate the class consciousness of the masses through the worship of so-called idols, and to cause degradation of the masses. The two hints to the public show the profundity and pertinence of Benjamin’s argument, and also calls for people to rethink about fan culture and fan economy. Literature should cultivate the masses who can understand, appreciate, and create beauty through the creation of exquisite works of art; it should allow the masses to develop certain capability of criticism and reflection through the exposure to art, so that they can acquire spiritual freedom and independent personality.

The quality of literary works is not just the root for maintaining their aesthetic spirit; it is also the guarantee for improving the cultural literacy of the public. For consumers, the true enjoyment of culture comes from reading works with intellectual and aesthetic connotations and deep thoughts. As such, writers and artists should go beyond capital while being constrained and dominated by it, and guide the nation’s healthy cultural consumption through their excellent works, and satisfy the growing spiritual needs of consumers as well as enhance people’s aesthetic ability and cultural literacy by creating greater works—in quality and quantity. In fact, many consumers are willing to spend more money to enjoy good works, as evidenced by the reprinting of classical works and the difficulty in obtaining tickets for high-class concerts. As the level of artistic cultivation of the consumer public increases, the market demand for creative and personalized spiritual products will also increase.

#### *Coordinated Development Between Market and the Laws of Art*

The contradictory movement of artistic production and consumption in a particular era is precisely the inner impetus for literary transformation. The process of resolving the above-mentioned contradictions is not only the process of promoting the development of literature but also the process of generating new theories. How can the coordinated development of the artistic value of literature and market demand in a market economy be promoted? The study of this issue can help strengthen the

interpreting capability of the Chinese form in the contemporary literary world.

It is indeed no easy feat to balance the laws of art and that of the market, but it is not completely impossible. Contemporary literary production practices have produced a number of excellent film and television works that have both high artistic value and good market response. Artists have succeeded in presenting works with aesthetic implications to readers and audiences in a form that is quite agreeable to consumers. These works demonstrate the compatibility of the laws of art and that of the market, showing that good works of art can both enhance people's aesthetic sensibilities and generate good economic benefits.

The exploration of the charm of cultural classics is another significant measure to explore the integration of the laws of art and the laws of the market. Despite the large amount of contemporary literary works, the classics still take up half of the contemporary mass media context and have lucrative economic benefits. These classics, with their long-lasting artistic appeal and global influence, are still an important food for thoughts or source of spiritual nourishment for people, and furthermore, cultural classics are the origins of contemporary literary activities, with some excellent writings and film adaptations deriving from them. The unity of cultural classics and popular culture revitalizes the classics and enhances the spiritual character of literature.

Fully recognizing the constraints of art consumption on literature and the effective role of the market in the production and dissemination of literature are another measure to achieve coordination between the laws of art and the ones of the market. In contemporary Chinese literary activities, the consumption process has increasingly exerted its potential dominant and manipulative power. Valuing the function of art consumption, participating in the operation of the cultural market, and the planning of art products with a proactive attitude and fresh concepts are becoming the necessary paths for contemporary literary activities. Notably, some excellent works have been well received in the market because their marketing teams have a clear market positioning and pragmatic marketing strategies, and they have an accurate grasp of the survival mentality and appreciation interests of readers or audiences in transformation. Paying attention to market forecasts and market-led consumer demand, and striving to win a wider audience, has become the condition for literature and art to flourish in the market economy.

### 3.3 *Artistic Production in the Future*

Today's literary activity has become artistic production in Marx's sense. The scale and position of artistic production have changed considerably compared with those of Marx's time. We attempt to divide the transformation of artistic production into three stages: The artistic production of Marx's time belongs to the first stage. Based on the theory of the law of surplus value, Marx defined artistic production as mental labor in exchange for capital in the middle of the nineteenth century. At that time, artistic production was subordinate to the bourgeois mode of production, and the value added to capital depended mainly on industrial production. The second stage, from the mid-twentieth century onward, witnessed considerable changes in the entire production process and mode of operation of artistic production—especially the emergence of artistic production represented by the cultural industries, with their standardized and industrialized production methods and the ideology they represent. Despite the fierce criticism of Western Marxism against cultural industry, especially the Frankfurt School, artistic production has marched to the historical forefront, becoming the mainstay of popular cultural life and one of the pillars of contemporary socio-economic development as the fastest-growing industry in terms of wealth. Art production will usher in a new stage onward. With standardized production model gradually being abandoned, art production in the future will be characterized by personalization, and diversification will become the new growth point of the market.

#### *Personalization and Artistic Production*

With continuous improvement in the level of artistic cultivation of consumers, the market demand for original, creative, and personalized spiritual products continues to increase; today's artistic production is facing the "new masses," or "numerous minorities." These groups have various aesthetic pursuits, and considering the purpose of artistic production and the relationship between artistic production and the market, art producers must reinforce their observation of market patterns and their research of cultural fashions, and strive to provide rich, diverse, and personalized products that meet the spiritual needs of people at different levels. It can be said that precise positioning of artistic production is a rite of passage for its development.

In the case of contemporary China with a vast area and unbalanced economic development, the demand for art products is plural and distinct for people of different social status, aesthetic concepts, and artistic tastes. In fact, art production is already experimenting with peer-to-peer service. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping advocated in his “Speech Greeting the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists” that

All creative works—whether epic or cameo, serious or humorous, lyrical or philosophical—should have their place in our garden of literature and art, so long as they help to educate and enlighten the people while providing them with entertainment and aesthetic pleasure. The deeds of heroes, the labour, struggles, joys and sorrows, partings and reunions of ordinary people, and the life of our contemporaries and of our predecessors—all these should be depicted in our works of literature and art. (Deng 1984, p. 203)

This passage highlights the way to the prosperity of culture and the individualization of artistic production. Spiritual products are the richest commodities in the world, and breaking the shackles of standardization and mass production while developing individualized artistic production is the norm for future societies.

#### *Comprehensiveness and Artistic Production*

Unlike traditional art creation, artistic production is a comprehensive production activity. In terms of production itself, although artistic production retains some of the characteristics of individual production, team collaboration has become a major trend with the operation of best-selling books, the planning and broadcasting of films and dramas, and especially creative industry companies. In the Internet era, information technology-based artistic production has a profound impact on art creation and reception. This greatly promotes the dissemination and popularization of art. As art and the Internet go hand in hand, art creation increasingly becomes a way of life for the masses, and the identities of producer and consumer begin to blur and overlap; each individual’s production has become a production of a certain social nature—“His manifestations of life—even if they may not appear in the direct form of *communal* manifestations of life carried out in association with others—are therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*” (Marx 1975b,

p. 299). It is no longer possible for an isolated individual to complete the entire process of artistic production.

In the case of literary criticism, when artistic production becomes an important mode of production, its operation mechanism will not only be reflected in the industrial chain formed by distribution and flow but will also enter a broader and comprehensive study. Art and culture, art and technology, and art and trade will enter the research vision of artistic production. The sound development of artistic production will be constrained or promoted to some extent by the way these relationships are handled.

### *Public Interest and Artistic Production*

In today's society, the types of capital and the scope of profitability have expanded greatly, and cultural capital, as a new type of capital, has become the market favorite. For literature and art to prosper, it is necessary to make good use of the market mechanism to enhance the vitality of artistic production while avoiding the blindness and chaos of the market; innovation, especially of institutions and mechanisms, is requisite to cultivate a sound and mature cultural market so that while artistic production is constrained by the market, it can still transcend it. In this process, the public interest aspect of artistic production is put on the agenda. Some elegant or serious artistic products that are "too refined to be popular" need to be supported by public finance. The policy-making authorities should encourage and fund serious and creative artistic production activities, giving courage, confidence, and opportunities to the creators, especially for some masterpieces that require sufficient patience and the artists' long-term dedication and commitment. Additionally, the state and related institutions should also provide financial support to non-profit cultural sectors such as museums and libraries to improve the cultural literacy of audiences through the popularization of public cultural facilities. Accordingly, the Chinese form should actively participate in artistic production activities, use a new aesthetic concept to reckon with the nature and development of artistic production in the market economy, promote a virtuous cycle of artistic production and consumption, and use the "power of criticism" to influence and guide people's judgment of literary and artistic phenomena.

The rapid growth of high technology and the popularity of the Internet have offered a broad platform and space for people to freely develop their talents and interests. If the production of art in the capitalist mode of



production is at the expense of human alienation, the ideal artistic production would aim at the complete emancipation of human beings, so that artistic ability becomes one of the multifaceted abilities of individuals. It is conceivable that when the division of labor ceases to be compulsory, and when more and more people can enjoy the full display of their talents in the field of art, the capitalistic attributes of literature will gradually fade away; this will be linked to the complete emancipation of human beings, as envisaged by Marx, which is precisely the goal and the intended development direction of contemporary literary activities.

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## A Study of Value Judgment

The value judgment of literary criticism lies in the evaluation of literary works. It is both an innate mission of Marxist literary criticism and a necessity for the social and cultural construction of contemporary China. To exert its influence on reality, literary criticism needs to express views to the society through the evaluation of literary works, helping the public reflect on itself in the process of refiguring social ideals.

The “value” in value judgment is related to Marxist philosophy and political economy (classical Marxism, in its study of value, involves the relationship between subject and object, which expresses the preference in value selection), but its meaning is closer to Marx’s etymology of value, which is “respectable, precious, dear, estimable.”<sup>1</sup> The reconstruction of value judgment in the Chinese form is centered around the complete emancipation of human beings and explores the multiple value dimensions of literary works. Through the study of value judgment, we hope to develop value judgment dimensions for the Chinese form based on Marx’s social ideals, so as to better safeguard and promote the smooth development of Chinese and global society and culture.

<sup>1</sup> Marx examined the etymology of the word “value” in various languages: Value (English), Valeur (French), Wert (German), etc., and found that the word “value” is expressed differently in different languages. The word “value” (Wert) was first associated with the Sanskrit “Wer.” The German, English, Dutch, Lithuanian, Gothic, Old German, and Anglo-Saxon variants derived from “Wer” mean “respectable, precious, dear, estimable.” (Marx 1989, p. 429).

## 1 LITERARY CRITICISM CALLS FOR VALUE JUDGMENT

In the contemporary Chinese literary world, the value judgment function of literary criticism has been seriously challenged, and Chinese literary criticism once faced the confusion of value anomie and anxiety over discourse power. The reconstruction of the value judgment of literary criticism has become another unavoidable concern in Chinese literary criticism.

### 1.1 *Weakening and Loss of Value Judgment Nowadays*

Although the value judgment of literary criticism is crucial and ubiquitous, it is an indisputable fact that the value judgment function of literary criticism in the contemporary literary world has weakened or even is lost, which is delineated in the following three situations.

#### *The Current Weakening and Loss of Value Judgment*

The absence of value judgment is reflected in merely focusing on the entertainment aspect of literature while value judgment continues to be voiceless, or literary criticism has voluntarily given up the revelation and pursuit of spiritual level of literary works. As Neil Postman proposed in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,

For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death. (Postman 1986, pp. 3–4)

Even in the face of works that completely ignore human dignity, such as some films and so-called performance art that display a mockery of the underdog or violently grotesque and graphic scenes, literary criticism seems to be complicit in the market by avoiding the sublime and eliminating rational values. If the public does not distinguish between good and bad and if they lose their ability to think and judge values critically, the society as a whole is bound to degenerate.

### *Anomie of Value Judgment*

While the absence of literary criticism is mainly at the mercy of money and thus yields to entertainment, the second case—the failure and anomie of the value scale—is not absent but in flood. This is seen in the evaluations of works that are distorting facts and expressing ridiculous arguments, which have lost the basic ethics of criticism. Due to the convenience of today's self-media or we media, every netizen can be a critic, which has both the advantage of making literary criticism more popularized and the disadvantage of causing more difficulties in differentiating the good and the bad. Some people make sensational statements on the Internet just to garner attention, and their comments on works can actually be absurd and ridiculous. Some comments are irresponsible and far-fetched, with basic values being deconstructed or turned upside down; while some comments are even political and moral coercion.

### *Weakening of Value Judgment*

In contrast to the second, in the third case, literary criticism appears as a positive preacher, but its commentary is often not sufficiently convincing and its ability to clarify practical issues is weakened, or it gives the impression of being weak, pale, or even false. Some commentary seems to be strong and powerful, but is hollow in essence, while other sermons are not only uninspiring but often objectionable.

All these cases suggest that our literary criticism is losing its ability to cast value judgment toward literary works. If the judgment of literature is abolished, not only is the whole literary world failing in discriminating between good and bad, but the legitimacy of literary criticism per se is also jeopardized.

## *1.2 The Realistic Context of the Lack of Value Judgment*

The problem of the lack of value judgment must be considered in a contemporary context. Since the 1980s, Chinese literary criticism has been confronted with radically different social realities and literary and cultural patterns than in the past. With the influx of various Western critical approaches and the material temptations of the market economy, value judgment in literary criticism was once banished, and many problems occurred in the evaluation of writers' works, which need to be re-examined and analyzed.

*Primacy of Interpretation and Avoidance of Value Judgment*

From the perspective of critical theory, the functions of interpretation and value judgment are the two most basic and important functions of literary criticism. In the late twentieth century, out of aversion to previous critical paradigm of vulgar sociology and the influx of numerous Western methods of literary criticism, textual interpretation was once highlighted as the most prominent function of literary criticism, and a “carnival of interpretation” emerged in Chinese literary criticism. However, the primacy of interpretation has led to the ignorance and avoidance of value judgment.

A prominent feature of various Western schools of literary criticism in the twentieth century was the primacy of interpretation. Although these schools of criticism do not agree over their critical claims and methods, they all show a strong interest in language and a preference for interpretation from different perspectives. New Criticism, for example, promotes semantic analysis and highlights the interpretive function of criticism. This is epitomized in the analysis of the polysemy of poetic language in William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Freudian psychoanalysis is another mode of criticism that fully interprets the latent unconscious and sexual desire of a writer’s work, but there is little place left for moral, historical, or social evaluation in the interpretation of the writer’s unconscious, especially the sexual instinct. Deconstructive criticism, moreover, uses interpretation as its banner, and all it does is take the text as its axis of never-ending, insatiable interpretation. Miller once said: “‘Deconstruction’ is neither nihilism nor metaphysics, but simply interpretation as interpretation” (Miller 1991, p. 153). Literary criticism has thus become a Derridean “dissemination” and “trace” with no end in sight. Even New Historicism, which advocates a return to the historical dimension, argues that, given the fictional nature of any language, history is the result of interpretation and narration rather than objective discovery.

In addition to highlighting the interpretive function of literary criticism, these critical approaches also constitute different dimensions in which literary works can be observed and analyzed, thus creating, to a certain extent, a multiplicity of literary value judgment. For instance, New Criticism, with its emphasis on semantic analysis, is dedicated to the semantic exploration of poetic language; Structuralism aims to examine the deep structure beneath the text; Feminist criticism highlights the advantages of female gender and women’s resistance against patriarchy; The Reception Aesthetics and Reader-response criticism give the authority

and the right of creating meaning to the reader; and New Historicism advocates plural and minor historical narratives, etc. These schools and their approaches to literary criticism reflect different aspects, shades of a literary work like a prism, contributing to the diversity and even uncertainty or ambiguity of the meaning of a text. This displays of the multiple meanings, in fact, causes the confusion or chaos in the value judgment of literary criticism.

Are these methods and schools of criticism really far removed or even detached from value judgment? The answer is negative. If we look at them carefully enough and analyze them in-depth, we can find that each method of criticism inherently contains and suggests certain value judgment. Let alone Feminist Criticism, New Historicism, and Postcolonial Criticism, which are schools of criticism with clear ideological stances and appeals, let's focus on the Psychoanalytic criticism. It explicitly claims that it only interprets texts and does not make any value judgment, and yet implies a position and attitude immanent in itself. Psychoanalysis even realizes its critical ideas through the overturn of reason and morality. In Freud's words, the propositions of the unconscious and the sexual instincts are in conflict with "an intellectual prejudice" and "an aesthetic-moral one," and therefore, "With two of its assertions, psychoanalysis offends the whole world" (Freud 1920, p. 7). Even Structuralist and Deconstructionist criticism, which boast of the self-sufficiency and self-autonomy of texts, are not entirely free of value judgment. The former is an escape from reality, being criticized with "Structures don't take to the streets!" It is a demonstration of detachment from reality by returning to the "ivory tower" of language, while the latter expresses resistance to reality by deconstructing everything. In this sense, interpretation itself contains value judgment; as Hirsch put it: "the only unavoidable judgments of value in literary commentary are those which are necessarily implied in interpretation" (Hirsch 1986, p. 329). The different meanings and variations in the texts that emerge from various critical approaches suggest that all of these interpretations contain judgments in one way or another, and the only difference lies in that some are more reasonable and acceptable than others. It is precisely on the basis of the current actuality of literary criticism that the construction of a dominant as well as compatible system of value judgment becomes an urgent, vital task for the Chinese form.



*The Impact of Multiple Values on Value Judgment*

In addition to the multiplicity and ambiguity of value judgment caused by literary criticism itself as discussed above, the market economy and Post-modern thoughts have also had a major impact on the value judgment of literary criticism. In today's society where money fetishism is prevalent, people's value pursuit and psychological conditions are undergoing changes. The pursuit of economic and material life has, to some extent, exceeded the intellectual and spiritual pursuit, and earning money by any means is taken for granted. Furthermore, the development of the market economy is changing society's cultural needs and patterns. With the rise of popular culture and the commercialization of the cultural industry, the contemporary literary world has tended toward entertainment-based cultural consumption, with the emergence of values originated from variety shows that highlight sensory and public opinion effects. Under the influence of Western postmodern thoughts, in particular, traditional moral ideals and aesthetic standards have been dismantled gradually. For example, there are often different value orientations in the treatment of love, marriage, and family relations. While "growing old together" is a love legend passed on with approval, is it really moral to be "unhappy but not separating?" or "neither close nor separated?" These "cultural symptoms" in contemporary society inevitably spread to literary criticism, leading to a dilemma in the value judgment of contemporary Chinese literary criticism.

Nevertheless, is it true that literary criticism cannot make value judgment about literary works under the condition of a market economy? It is a question that also requires specific and dialectical analysis. Although the worship of money in a market economy is averse to spiritual production, the market economy also creates the conditions for artistic production, in addition, a developed market economy can even regulate people's value judgment. Therefore, the weakening of values in literary creation and criticism cannot be attributed entirely to the market economy. In the same vein, it would be unfair to attribute the imbalance in value judgment entirely to the impact of postmodern thoughts. The pluralism and equality advocated by the postmodern era have offered people freedom of choice and, to a certain extent, respect and liberation. Therefore, in the face of multiple values, the key lies in the concrete judgment and choice of the subject, and not in the multiple values themselves.

In the final analysis, the demands for the subject become the prerequisite for value judgment. The lack of value judgment is related to the

weaknesses of human nature, especially the loss of conscience during the period of primitive capital accumulation, which, in Lu Xun's words, calls for a reflection on the problem of "national character." The focus of constructing value judgment in literary criticism is to establish a type of supreme "goodness" that conforms more to the human nature, to help the nation reflect on its own way of being, and to form an orderly mechanism of self- and mutual restraint.

### 1.3 *The Necessity of Rebuilding Value Judgment*

In view of the lack of value judgment and the anomie in contemporary literary creation and criticism in China and the rest in the world, we have to face the necessity of value judgment in literary criticism once again. While there are many reasons for the decline and anomie of value judgment of literary criticism, Chinese literary critics also need to reflect on themselves, for the lack of value judgment is also related to the fact that literary critics have not paid much attention to the value of literary criticism. With the rise of popular culture, the difficulties of integration brought about by the diversification of critical approaches, and the impact of cultural studies on traditional literary criticism paradigms, the Chinese form needs to establish new critical concepts and research standards in order to improve its ability to meet challenges of reality.

The value judgment of literary criticism is a way for the practice to realize its own existence and value. Value judgment is the due and proper function of literary criticism, without which the literary criticism would not be effective. Determined by the nature of Marxist literary criticism that the Chinese form holds, Chinese Marxist literary criticism, in particular, needs value judgment. As a type of criticism closely related to society, the value judgment of literary criticism suggests that we should not focus too much on the methodological innovations of literary criticism, but rather on its innate sense of mission and responsibility.

Rebuilding the value judgment of literary criticism is also a necessity for cultural construction today. Value judgment guides literary creation and is directly related to the development of current society and culture. It is thus no longer confined to the scope of literary criticism, but enters the realm of cultural construction. Literary works not only offer people spiritual pleasure, but also subtly and quietly change their spiritual world. The most important function of the value judgment of literary criticism is to

promote and disseminate spiritual and cultural production and consumption, to enable people to better understand the world and themselves, and to inspire their pursuit of goodness. Value judgment in the Chinese form is also necessary for national rejuvenation. Literature has an inescapable responsibility to improve the cultivation of the nation. I strongly agree with the view that China's modernization seeks to not only enrich the country and strengthen the nation, but also rebuild its core values and enhance its cultural spirit. In this regard, making appropriate value judgment of literary works will greatly influence and guide people's thought and behaviors.

In short, insisting on the value judgment of literary criticism is of great significance to promote the cultural traditions of the nation, boost cultural identity, enhance national pride and cohesion, and improve the cultural quality of people of all ethnic groups. Avoiding pale or odious value judgment requires theoretical thinking, which is precisely the meaning of value reconstruction.

## 2 MARX AND ENGELS' SOCIAL IDEALS AND VALUE JUDGMENT

Due to the lack and anomie of value judgment in contemporary literary creation and criticism, it becomes necessary to rebuild the value judgment of literary criticism. The construction of value judgment is directly related to social ideals. If social ideals were absent, it would directly lead to confusion of values in literary creation and criticism, and even the degradation of society as a whole. Therefore, what kind of social ideal should be constructed is not only a pertinent question for literary creation and criticism, but also a soul-searching inquiry for the whole society.

Social ideals generally refer to plans and aspirations for a better future. Over the course of history, Chinese and foreign wise philosophers have designed various ideal states of human society in search of human happiness. Plato established "The Republic," More shaped a "utopia," Tao Yuanming in ancient China envisaged a "The Peach Blossom Garden," and in modern times, people with lofty ideals aspired to a "world of universal harmony." These thinkers and writers ignited hopes and visions for the future, but some of their designs were too idealistic and illusive, mostly confined to abstract blueprints, and there are few practices of transforming reality based on these social ideals.

To discuss social ideals, we need to go back to classical Marxism. Marx and Engels transformed socialism from a fantasy into a science, and their social ideals embodied a value-based stance. Marx and Engels' views on the social ideal are to be found in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology*, *The Holy Family*, and, above all, in *The Communist Manifesto*, where their social ideals were developed and articulated in the context of debates with those from other schools of thought such as "true socialism" (Engels 1990, p. 365). In contrast to the theoretical claims that are condescending and out of touch with reality, Marx's social ideals are closely linked to the ultimate goals of the proletariat and the practice of revolutionary struggle—"in Marxism there is a visionary element, connoting value-assumptions and ultimate aims; in concrete terms this is to be defined as freedom, happiness, the good society, communism" (Berki 1988, p.10). The forthcoming discussion of the reconstruction of values is based precisely on the social ideals of classical Marxism, that is, the critique of the capitalist system and the quest for the future and, especially, the perfection of humanity.

### 2.1 *The Criticism and Transcendence of Capitalism*

The social ideals of classical Marxism have a clear historical dimension, and also were historically situated as well as formed and developed on the basis of a critique and transcendence of capitalism. During his temporary stay in Paris, Marx read the political and economic writings of the leading thinkers from Britain and France, and in particular, he accepted the thoughts of Saint-Simon and Fourier, based on which he posed the basic question of "Where are human beings going?" In his later work, Marx further studied the establishment of the ancient Greek city-states to restore a future society already suggested in ancient Greek thoughts.

#### *Critique of the Capitalist System*

Marx and Engels' social ideals were expounded from the opposite side of capitalism, namely from the standpoint of criticizing capitalism. And "the critical spirit of the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx and Engels, 1975a, p. 49) is a major component. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels pointed out that:

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the

real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise. (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 49)

In other words, the social ideals of classical Marxism are based on the reality of society and presuppose a critique of the "...presupposed the existence of modern bourgeois society, with its corresponding economic conditions of existence, and the political constitution adapted thereto..." (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 512) of the time. That is to say, a new world should be introduced through the critique of capitalism.

In *The Holy Family*, Marx indicated that capitalism had deprived the proletariat of everything and that the proletariat had to revolt:

Since in the fully-formed proletariat the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent, no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative need—the practical expression of necessity—is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation. (Marx and Engels 1975b, pp. 36–37)

Since capitalism deprives "even of the semblance of humanity," the proletarian revolution becomes inevitable. Furthermore, Marx's critique of the "inhumanity" of capitalist society remains inspiring for us to reflect on our own conditions of existence nowadays.

The question of alienated labor is related to this above notion. Although Marx had different interpretations of the nature of labor at different stages, he believed that capitalism turned labor into wage labor, which is one-sided or inhuman labor, that is, alienated labor. Marx sharply exposed and criticized this dehumanizing and alienated labor, hoping to replace wage labor with free, creative human activity and eliminate alienation to achieve labor liberation. The critique of alienated labor became an integral part of classical Marxist social ideals.

### *Dialectical Transcendence of Capitalism*

Based on the critique of the existing capitalist system, the social ideals of classical Marxism manifested in a dialectical transcendence of capitalism. Marx and Engels inferred and foretold the advent of a communist society from the reality of capitalism and the trend toward its globalization. As a matter of fact, a communist society can only be based on all the material conditions created by capitalism. Although, in its initial stages, it often bears traces of the older society from which it was born—“Such a society presupposes throughout the achievements of the existing societies, especially their scientific and technical achievements. Released from their service in the cause of exploitation, they could be mobilized for the global elimination of poverty and arid toil” (Marcuse 1971, p. 23).

With the greatest advance of productive forces and the emergence of great wealth in future, the old pattern of labor division, which led to the one-dimensional development of human beings, is expected to be eliminated, and people are expected to be free from the shackles of lifelong fixation on a certain occupation, thus achieving all-around development. Engels, in his *Principles of Communism*, described communism as:

The general association of all members of society for the common and planned exploitation of the productive forces, the expansion of production to a degree where it will satisfy the needs of all, the termination of the condition where the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of others, the complete annihilation of classes and their antagonisms, the all-around development of the abilities of all the members of society through doing away with the hitherto existing division of labour, through industrial education, through change of activity, through the participation of all in the enjoyments provided by all, through the merging of town and country—such are the main results of the abolition of private property. (Engels 1976, p. 354)

The future society Engels propounded was quite thrilling. However, the social ideals of classical Marxism cannot be realized by empty slogans. Marx and Engels saw communism as a “real movement” that would require the constant efforts of generations. Happiness is earned through struggle, and it is social practice that makes social ideals truly relevant to people. It is only when social ideals are embraced and practiced by the majority of people that society becomes cohesive. In this process, “the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 519).

## 2.2 *Marx on the All-Round Development of Human Beings*

The kernel of Marx and Engels' social ideal is the emancipation and all-around development of human beings. When discussing private property and communism in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx stated that communism seeks to enable "Man [to] appropriate his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a whole man" (Marx 1996a, p. 299). Later, in *Capital*, he explicitly indicated that communist society is "a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle" (Marx 1996b, p. 588).

### *Human Beings as the Ensemble of Social Relations*

According to the basic principles of historical materialism, Marx and Engels' study of human beings lies not in their natural attributes but in their social attributes. In *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx pointed out that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relation" (Marx 1975b, p. 4). Individuals cannot exist in isolation; they are always integral to complex webs of real relations—"the development of an individual is determined by the development of all the others with whom he is directly or indirectly associated, ...the history of a single individual cannot possibly be separated from the history of preceding or contemporary individuals, but is determined by this history" (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 438). To understand the nature of individuals and the value of literature, it is necessary to start from reality and presuppose a good understanding of social relations. As Marx proposed, "Human being is not an abstract dormant being outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society" (Marx 1975a, p. 176). Thus, "Marx's studies on humans, but not from the perspective of the individual, it is instead from the perspective of social relations" (Yuan 1996, p. 17).

In addition, an individual is a social being; even when the individual is connected to the nature, there is still a social relationship, because the struggle against nature is also based on the strength of society, that is, the relationship between one individual and another is formed for the purpose of realizing the relationship between human beings and nature. As Marx said:

The human aspect of nature exists only for social man; for only then does nature exist for him as a bond with man—as his existence for the other and the other’s existence for him—and as the life-element of human reality. Only then does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence. (Marx 1996a, p. 298)

Some people discussed the issue of females from a biological perspective, considering them as “sex issues” instead of social issues. However, Engels noted that such a woman is a “‘woman’ from whom all that is ‘historically evolved’ has been removed” and said in a mocking tone: “...may Mr Bahr take her to bed with him,’ purely tangible and perceptible’, together with her ‘natural instincts’” (Engels 2001, p. 505). Thus it can be seen that Engels argued that the issue of women is influenced by economics and history as well.

In light of the various relationships between human beings and society, freedom, within classical Marxist social ideals, is a freedom within social relations, that is, one needs to have a corresponding contract in their relations with others. In Marx’s words, “it makes every man see in other men not the realization of his own freedom, but the barrier to it” (Marx 1975c, p. 163). That is, human freedom is not a freedom to do whatever one wants, but is based on the premise of rules and contracts. Marx’s discussion explained the dialectical relationship between human freedom and social contract, in which individual freedom presupposes that one does not hinder the freedom of others.

### *“Each” Instead of a Person*

An individual as a social person means such an individual is always specific and concrete—a person who engages in practical activities in certain social relations. This is an important difference between classical Marxism and Hegel. When Hegel spoke of human beings, he “does not mean the concrete, but the abstract, the idea, the spirit, etc.” (Marx and Engels 1975b, p. 40). In contrast, Marx and Engels clearly stated: they are “setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process” (Marx and Engels 1975a, p. 36). Individuals are with social attributes:

Above all we must avoid postulating "society" again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His manifestations



of life—even if they may not appear in the direct form of communal manifestations of life carried out in association with others—are therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. (Marx 1996a, p. 299)

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx made the well-known statement:

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 506)

There are two meanings here. First, it is emphasized that “each” forms the basis of “all,” and there would be no “all” without “each;” second, “each” needs to form a “a community of free individuals (Marx 1996a, p. 89),” and as a product of society, an individual cannot exist in isolation, just as one single number has no meaning by itself. The social ideals of classical Marxism presuppose the free development of each individual, which is integrated to the free development of all individuals. It is vitally important to emphasize that “each” person here is not “a person,” and Marx’s passage in *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law* can serve as a footnote to this point: “The fact that Greece had a Scythian<sup>2</sup> among its philosophers did not help the Scythians to make a single step towards Greek culture” (Marx 1975a, p. 180). A Scythian cannot take the place of all her or his people to Greek culture. Marx’s theory that “each” person is not a person needs further exploration.

*The All-Around Emancipation of Human Beings Cannot Be Separated from Sensuality*

Marx’s all-around emancipation of human beings is not just the replacement of wage labor with free and creative human activity, but the realization of all-around emancipation of all human beings. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx implied that human emancipation

should not be conceived merely in the sense of immediate, one-sided enjoyment, merely in the sense of possessing, of having. Man appropriates his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting,

<sup>2</sup> A character in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.— Citing quote.

acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being. (Marx 1996a, pp. 299–300)

This means that human emancipation is not limited to the transformation of unjustified social relations, the possession of material goods, and the acquisition of freedom of existence. Nor is it limited to liberation from mental bondage and repression and the possession of free will. Human emancipation must include the liberation of the senses, that is, “the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities” (Marx 1996a, p. 246). Human beings need to experience not only the richness of the world of objects, but also the richness of the senses that correspond to it, to recognize and affirm themselves within the reality of sensual life.

In today’s world, which is “dominated by considerations of calculation, measurement, profit, and the like” (Jameson 2006, p. 217), the emphasis on the liberation of the senses is of realistic pertinence. Living in a roaring and impetuous society influenced by wealth and power, people tend to neglect their inner cultivation, which is more critical. Emphasizing the richness of human senses does not mean letting emotions spread unchecked and desires run amok, but rather renewing one’s sensual activities and truly achieving the harmony between mind and body.

In order to create “the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses” (Marx 1996a, p. 302), Marx also put forth the idea that “Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty” (Marx 1996a, p. 277), which are thus linked profoundly to aesthetics. As an aesthetic activity, literary activity is of vital importance in terms of the liberation of humans’ senses. Literary activity “plays a role that nothing else can replace in developing the spiritual life of human beings, in perfecting the construction of human nature, and in promoting the ‘restoration of human beings’” (Tong 2000, p. 246). It enables people to acquire “a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form” (Marx 1996a, p. 301) through creative and pleasant work. The freedom and pleasure that the aesthetic process embodies are the primary prerequisite for the realization of whole mankind as Marx anticipated.

Although Marx’s articulation of the social ideal is from different perspectives, it shares a very distinctive feature, that is, the vision of the all-around emancipation of mankind. Some people think that Marx’s social ideals are an unrealizable “utopia,” but this opinion needs further discussion. Marx’s social ideals are based on a critique of the capitalist system that looks ahead to potential social trends and are embedded in a strong

sense of reality. This is what distinguishes Marxism from the previous “Utopian” tradition which only focuses on the future illusoriness. Moreover, the ideal itself is an absent presence, wherein exactly lie its appeal and glamor. When Marx talked about the “the realm of freedom” in Volume 3 of *Capital*, he also located it on the “next world” of the sphere of material production, so that it can serve as a guide to encourage people to strive upward. It is precisely because the classical Marxist social ideal is distant from reality that there is an urgency for reflection and endeavor. The social ideal of classical Marxism is both a theoretical presupposition and a vision for the transformation of society, and it can also guide and be translated into human historical creation. This is what distinguishes the true Marxist from those Marxists who seek change primarily in the cultural or linguistic spheres. As such, Eagleton clearly stated that Marxism is not outdated (Eagleton 2011, p. 9).

The full realization of the ideal is a long process, and since the restoration of human nature is a realistic process of continuous pursuit of its perfection, its imperfection is, in a sense, absolute and unconditional. Human nature has many weaknesses that need to be exposed and tackled, and this is precisely where the value judgment in the Chinese form requires particular attention and scrutiny. Since the perfection of human nature is a never-ending process, the emancipation of human beings always exists in the questioning of the meaning of life and living.

### 3 THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DIMENSION OF VALUE JUDGMENT

The social ideals of classical Marxism not only reveal the trend of historical necessity of development of human society, but also provide theoretical support for value judgment in the Chinese form. Although the social ideal of classical Marxism points to the future, it is still constrained and influenced by the historical context at that time or before. Today, China is developing rapidly, and its social structure has transformed fundamentally. As Xi Jinping stated, “The main contradiction in our society has been transformed into the contradiction between the people’s growing need for a better life and unbalanced and insufficient development” (Xi 2017, p. 11). This transformation of the principal contradiction has become an opportunity for the development of Marxist social ideals in the Chinese form. Nowadays, the call for the construction of value judgment of literary criticism has become stronger and more urgent. The Chinese form

has great potential, which is reflected in the construction of critical theory that is, making new conceptions and interpretations of value judgment dimensions.

### 3.1 *Three Dimensions of Value Judgment*

Many scholars have conducted specific research and exploration, and listed multiple levels and dimensions of values in literary works. However, it is an extremely broad and complex field of study if all aspects are to be covered. To be more concrete, the reconstruction of value judgment in the Chinese form will take Marx and Engels' social ideals as the kernel and criteria, and examine the validity and legitimacy as well as qualities of the value of literary works in terms of whether they meet the spiritual and cultural needs of the people and masses, whether they are conducive to promoting the all-round development of human beings, and whether they conform to the trend of social development. Specifically, the value domain of value judgment is divided into three basic dimensions, namely the human, social, and aesthetic dimensions, with a hope to extract universal value factors from its core elements and form a dominant and compatible system of value judgment.

#### *Human Dimension*

The values of literary works, the main object of literary criticism, is a compound with multi factors, but its core factors are human beings and their lives. The reconstruction of human dimension of value judgment centers on human activities from the starting point to the destination, because it aims to highlight “human” in literary criticism. However,

literature may change with the political, economic, cultural, linguistic, artistic, and technological changes of society, and may constantly emerge in all kinds of unprecedented forms and styles, but one thing remains unchanged: literature is created for the sake of human beings, and exists and develops for the purpose of improving human beings' self-knowledge, their state of existence, and spiritual status. (Di 2009, p. 51)

It is essential to reiterate that “human” in the human dimension is neither a capitalized, abstract person nor simply an “individual,” but “a community of free individuals.” Further, the “human” here is a real, concrete person with flesh and blood and with emotions and feelings. Kundera

claimed that “philosophy and science have forgotten about man’s being” (Kundera 1988, p. 1) while literature is the remedy for highlighting the existence of human beings. Therefore, we can conclude that in the human dimension of value judgment, literary works are evaluated by whether they contribute to the self-awakening and self-reflection of human beings.

The human dimension examines, first and foremost, the respect for human life, the maintenance of human dignity, and the pursuit of justice. These are all related to the value of life and meaning of human existence, where the critics should draw the bottom line. As Eagleton claimed, “there seems to be something in humanity which will not bow meekly to the insolence of power” (Eagleton 2011, p. 100) which is none other than the human dignity. Some great literary works have enduring value and transcendence precisely because they highlight the preservation and exaltation of human dignity. If a literary work completely ignores human life and dignity and has no reverence for them, it should rightly be criticized or even resisted.

For example, in terms of respect for life, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s “Manifesto for the Colonial War in Ethiopia,” a Futurist right-wing representative, should be denounced for its glorification of war. This is how he described war:

War is beautiful because—thanks to its gas masks, its terrifying megaphones, its flame throwers, and light tanks—it establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machine. War is beautiful because it inaugurates the dreamed of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine-guns. War is beautiful because it combines gunfire, barrages, cease-fires, scents, and the fragrance of putrefaction into a symphony. (Benjamin 2008, p. 41)

Whatever the position of Futurism in the history of literature and art, and however powerful the role of war in promoting scientific and technological progress, glorious tributes like this are difficult to accept as appropriate given that they have no regard for the living lives of millions of people. Additionally, Marinetti blurred the distinction between justice and injustice in his salute to war, confusing the lofty with the despicable. Some films which promote or glorify murder are on the rise, turning a headshot into a “fireworks bloom,” and some even use Thanos-like characters to maintain the balance of the universe by randomly eliminating half of all the creatures. These films lack the minimum respect, compassion,

and reverence that should be accorded to life, and should be boycotted if measured against the human dimension of the Chinese form.

Consideration and reflection on the human condition are another important aspect of the human dimension, which centers on the human survival status and examines whether the depiction of human beings in literary works is reasonable and whether it expresses the promotion and upholding of human nature, or merely the suppression or even distortion of human nature. Some works reveal the resilience and benevolence of human nature under adverse circumstances and inspire people's dream of a better future; some works, despite the display of absurd life, prompt people to become self-aware and reflect. Some works, instead, make fun of the disadvantaged groups merely to get a laugh, and such works thus will not be recognized with such dominant values.

The higher pursuit of the human dimension is the all-around emancipation of the human being. According to Marx's social ideals, the all-around emancipation of the human being includes social, spiritual, and sensory emancipation, which demonstrates the transcendence of the critic's approach to society and literature. It is the sacred, unshakable duty of literature and literary criticism to cultivate people's noble sentiments and enhance their aesthetic interests. In the case of literary criticism, the critics can influence people's sentiments and improve their aesthetic qualities and abilities by judging the value of the work. In Marx's view, only the spiritual and sensory liberation can be true liberation. Especially in today's world, material abundance alone is not enough to live a life of dignity, of dream.

These constitute the main aspects of the human dimension of value judgment. Whether a work has value involves many factors. The value of a literary work varies from style to style and from idea to idea, but fundamentally lies in examining how it treats human beings and life. Any literary work that contributes to the all-around development of human beings deserves recognition and praise, while any work that does not contribute to the all-around development of human beings needs to be examined and even criticized.

### *Social Dimension*

The social dimension of value judgment is to link literary works with social history. "Social" in the social dimension is not an abstract concept. It refers to the social life of a specific, concrete historical period. The main aspects that need to be examined include how a literary work depicts

social life, whether it is profound, whether it reveals the necessity of historical development, and whether it contributes to the progress of society.

Investigating works through the lens of social dimension requires that the literary work be placed in the context of a particular era and socio-historical connection to examine whether it depicts realistic relationships and whether it has “profound grasp of reality” (Marx 1998, p. 44). In his 1945 essay “Good Bad Books,” George Orwell criticized those escapist literature and argued that some writers, though first-rate in their artistic skills, do not remain prominent in literary history, while works that depict the life of a particular era may last longer. He claimed, “I would back Uncle Tom’s cabin to outlive the complete works of Virginia Woolf or George Moore, though I know of no strictly literary test which would show where the superiority lies” (Orwell 1968, p. 22). This is clearly an evaluation from the social dimension of value judgment, which shows that Orwell as a writer valued the cognitive function of literary works that facilitated us to have better understanding of social life.

The social dimension of value judgment emphasizes that literary works cannot escape or be detached from social life, but more importantly, it examines how literary works depict social phenomena, and express valuable ideological content and the philosophy of life. As Dobrolyubov said:

But while truth is a necessary condition for a literary production it does not yet constitute its merit. We judge its merit by the breadth of the author’s views, the correctness of his understanding, and the vividness with which he depicts the phenomena with which he deals. (Dobrolyubov 1956a, p. 572)

Both the “breadth of the author’s view” and “his understanding” in society are exactly within the scope of value judgment. If a literary work does not present any valuable ideas other than violence and entertainment, it will be greatly diminished in terms of value judgment. It was from this angle that Dobrolyubov sharply criticized some undesirable tendencies in the Russian literary world at that time:

there are authors who devote their talent to describing voluptuous scenes and dissolute adventures; they depict voluptuousness in such a way as to make it appear that it alone constitutes true human happiness. It goes

without saying that such a deduction would be absurd, although, of course, there are people who, due to the degree of their development, are incapable of conceiving of any other kind of happiness... There have been other writers, still more absurd, who have extolled the virtues of the warlike feudal barons who shed rivers of blood, burned down cities and plundered their vassals. There was no downright falsehood in the descriptions of the facts that were performed by these robbers, but they were presented in such a light, and were so highly praised, that it is clearly evident that the soul of the author who extolled them lacked the sense of human truth. Thus, all one-sidedness and exclusiveness prevents the artist from fully conforming to truth. (Dobrolyubov 1956b, p. 237)

The problems identified by Dobrolyubov also exist to varying degrees in the Chinese literary world, and thus Chinese literary criticism should resist works that promote violence and display pornography. In contemporary society, readers not only want to see a concern for reality reflected in literature, but also wish literature to be a remedy of their own spiritual predicament and sufferings.

The social dimension of value judgment necessarily involves the tendencies in writers' creation, who, whether cheering or longing, angry or critical, and nostalgic or even elegiac, should take the interests and benefits of the people as their basic value orientation. Although many factors are involved in making a work classic, the pivotal and most fundamental are the ideas contained in it and its thoughts and answers to the crucial questions raised by each era, including the deep understanding of human suffering, fervent love of life, profound contemplation of history, and passionate pursuit of ideals. Works that come out of nowhere, negating or subverting all the past and tradition, or even deliberately avoiding the sublime and ones that show their paranoia like elegies by clinging to the spiritual values of certain traditions that have been or will be lost all need to be examined with the criteria of the social dimension. It is through these aspects that the necessity of value judgment is revealed.

Additionally, the defects as well as merits of the writers' ideas embodied in their works also require specific analysis. In his analysis of Pushkin's work, Belinsky affirmed that Eugene Onegin "could be called an encyclopedia of Russian life, and a supremely national work" (Belinsky 1956, p. 294), but at the same time, he pinpointed the limitations of the poet's ideology, which strangely combines the tendencies of the common people and aristocracy. Naturally, the understanding and evaluation of life in literary works are usually embedded in concrete images, some of which



even the writer is not aware of. Zhou Yang, commenting on Gogol's *Dead Souls*, said that progressive intellectuals in Russia at the time saw the horrific reality of the relationship between landlords and serfs (as depicted in *Dead Souls*) and felt that it was urgent to abolish the whole serfdom system that hindered Russia's development. Herein lies the value of Gogol's text, and perhaps Gogol himself did not fully realize the social power and influence of his work.

### *Aesthetic Dimension*

The aesthetic dimension is also a significant part of the reconstruction of value judgment, and helps literary criticism differ from other humanities and social science activities. The aesthetic dimension is not referring to a purely personal aesthetic interest, nor is it a so-called interest and taste are indisputable principle that avoids distinguishing superiority from inferiority, but a comprehensive judgment of the aesthetic value of literary works made by the subject of criticism, namely the critics, based on comprehensive elements such as cultural traditions, ideologies, and characteristics of the times. The aesthetic dimension examines whether the literary work has artistic attraction and aesthetic value, including whether the work has an appealing structure and form, as well as the aesthetic psychology and creative spirit of the writer and artist. In addition, the expressiveness of the language, novelty of the thought, diversity of the techniques, and distinctness of the style are all integral with the aesthetic observation.

Different from the political and social evaluation of literary works, the aesthetic dimension focuses on conveying the beauty of literary works. This invites the critic to experience, perceive, and imagine when evaluating a work in order to convey her or his own feelings about the work to the reader. This contributes to and increases the intensity and depth of the recipient's aesthetic pleasure. Moreover, critics also need to maintain a certain psychological distance and control their emotions in terms of literary works. Yu Pingbo (俞平伯) said in the preface to *Poetic Remarks on the Human World*:

To make literary criticism, first, one must be able to appreciate, and second, to transcend. One must be immersing oneself within the situation, since only insiders in the situation could know the sweetness and bitterness; and one must also be outside of the situation, since only outsider of the situation have a fair opinion.

This is known as emotional and psychological distance as discussed above. The task of literary criticism is to help the reader fully appreciate and feel the artistic value of the work through the analysis of its philosophical implications, structural techniques, writing style, sentiment, and other defining elements. In ancient China, critics often used metaphors and imagery as well as depicting aesthetic conceptions to translate the aesthetic implications of a work and the critic's perception of beauty into a palpable, visual image. For instance, Xie Lingyun's poems are described "as natural and loveable as the lotus just out of water," while Yan Yanzhi's poems are regarded "as delicate and gorgeous as carving," which are precise and proper.

For another instance, after the publication of Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*, which did not attract much attention in the literary world at first, Mao Dun published an article entitled "Reading 'The Scream'," in which he talked about the beauty of the novel with concrete imagery and subjective perceptions when he read this novel, and this made readers have new feelings toward this novel. He said,

I only felt a painful sting, as if one who had been in darkness for a long time suddenly saw the glorious sunlight. The hard-boiled sentences and the stern tone in this astonishing text, along with the subtle and half-spoken meaning and the light symbolism, is a bizarre style, which makes readers feel the pleasure of unspeakable sorrow at first sight. This pleasure is just like the feeling of 'the spicier the better' felt by those who love spicy food. (Shen 1923)

Besides guiding people to appreciate beauty, literary criticism also needs to identify the aesthetic features of literary works, make judgments about the beauty or ugliness of works, and help people develop a sound aesthetic taste. A French literary critic said of rational criticism: "What is the role of criticism? Criticism should be the interpreter of beauty, and at the same time lead the reader to distinguish it better and to love it deeper" (Fayol 2002, p. 250). The novel critic Jin Shengtian (金圣叹) once said, "I hate it when people whenever they read, ignore the text and only remember certain stories, and then they are considered to have done reading a book" (Jin 1985, p. 22). This phenomenon still persists. The aesthetic dimension should improve readers' aesthetic appreciation by analyzing and evaluating literary works, so that readers can enjoy what is truly beautiful and inspired to have an enthusiasm for creating a better

life. Meanwhile, aesthetic value judgments can counteract an undesirable or unrefined aesthetic taste, such as the pursuit of sensual stimulation through romance or violence in texts. Literary criticism should provide necessary hints to such works from the perspective of aesthetic ideals, so that readers can break through the entertainment based on sensuality and purify and sublimate their aesthetic interests.

Contemporary aesthetic value judgments have been severely challenged from many aspects, and the aesthetic dimension has to be adjusted accordingly. For example, some Western Modernist works, such as some French novels and stream-of-consciousness works, tend to break temporal and spatial conventions and appear to be multidimensional and geometric in their narrative techniques, like Picasso's portraits of women, in which several facets of the women are presented in a close-up of this same figure. These practices often cause discomfort and even aesthetic repulsion among ordinary audiences. Actually, there are profound social reasons and specific artistic pursuits behind these works. The aesthetic dimension of value judgment needs to be explored to alleviate the tension and repair the relationship between audiences and the works. The evaluation of these works also poses a challenge to the aesthetic dimension of value judgment, which is investigated in the analysis of specific works.

The human, social, and aesthetic dimensions each have their respective distinct responsibilities, but they are inseparable and profoundly intertwined. There are both social and aesthetic dimensions in the human dimension, and similarly, the social and aesthetic dimensions also comprise the other two dimensions within themselves. The purpose of the distinction among these three integral dimensions is only to reconstruct the evaluation system of value judgment from different dimensions. Admittedly, these dimensions are not perfectly set up, and there are some inconsistencies and gaps. These include, for example, how to solve the problem of universality and specificity in human nature, how to evaluate works that transcend the content and form of art in a particular society and are still deemed as "classics" today, and whether there is a superiority or inferiority in the different aesthetic interests of different national cultures. These issues afford opportunities for further reflection on the reconstruction of value judgment in the Chinese form.

### 3.2 *Value Judgment and the Related Issues*

Value judgment exists not only in synchronic forms, but also in the diachronic process of history. If the human, social, and aesthetic dimensions constitute the consensus part of the reconstruction of value judgment system, then, when entering the practice of literary criticism, we will find the particularity and complexity of value judgment, along with the problems of relativity and paradoxes of value. Therefore, when making value judgments on literary works, it is necessary to concretely analyze specific problems in concrete historical contexts. On this issue, Marx pointed out in Volume 1 of *Capital*: we “must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch” (Marx 1996b, p. 605). The distinction made by the classical Marxist writers between “human nature in general,” and “human nature as modified in each historical epoch” forms the methodological basis for solving the problems related to value judgment.

#### *Relativity of Value Judgment and Value*

The relativity of literary values is a problem that must be dealt with, and this relativity is determined by multiple factors, including the subject of evaluation, the historical period, the cultural environment, and especially by the ambiguity of the literary works per se. In value judgment, the subjects, who generally get the dominant position may make different evaluations of a literary work based on different stances and literary mentalities, and thus multiple evaluations coexist. In particular, critics from different cultural backgrounds tend to make varied value judgments due to differences in their historical traditions and ideologies. People’s perceptions of literary works from different eras may also vary, leading to differing value judgments. It is not unusual in literary history that the same literary work rise to fame and disappear from the scene due to vicissitudes in circumstances or stances of critics or readers. In addition, literary works always embody a variety of values and features. Particularly, classical works are often interpreted inconsistently by critics from one era to the next, and while new implications inherent in the work are being discovered, there may also be a certain degree of subversion of the previous, fixed understanding of the work. The greater the work is, the more frequent such subversion appears. Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* is characterized by depicting the tough guy spirit of “A man can be destroyed but not defeated” and the sense of futility

of illusory and futile self-justification, that is, the frustration and absurdity of the pile of fishbone trash obtained by gambling with one's life. Different societies and cultures may make ambiguous and diverse value judgments about certain literary works like *The Old Man and Sea* due to their varying histories and traditions, which pose considerable difficulty for value judgment.

In making value judgments on literary phenomena, we must consider the diversity of critical subjects, the specificity of historical contexts, and the richness of literary works. The value judgment of any work needs to be combined with a specific historical period and critical practice. Some works may be judged alternatively when viewed merely in isolation or abstractly, but after entering a specific, concrete context, it is completely possible and feasible to distinguish the good from the bad. As such, the value judgment of literary criticism needs to always start from a specific, concrete context.

#### *Value Judgment and the Value Paradox*

Another problem of value judgment in the Chinese form is the paradox of the values embodied in literary works; in other words, there are antinomic factors inherent in the values embodied in literary works, that is, the coexistence of affirmation and negation. Marx uncovered this problem early on, "In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary....All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force" (Marx 1980, pp. 655–656). It is true that while people today rejoice in the new life brought by high technology and enjoy its convenience and comfort, they also show a strong dependence on technology and thus a serious degradation of various abilities.

A prominent example of the value paradox in literary criticism is ecocriticism. As a criticism that explores the relationship between literature and the natural environment, ecocriticism reflects anxiety and criticism against modern ways of development and existence, but if taken to extremes, it may also contradict its original intent. Behind Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which initiated the modern environmental movement, we see the death of tens of millions of children in Africa from malaria due to the ban on DDT. Opposing elements always germinate within the same seed, and thus the phenomena of everyday life, including literature, are paradoxical ever since their existence; also, the oft-repeated

ethics and morality are not eternal and unchanging, so the value paradox will always exist.

### *Universality of Value Judgment*

Although some intricate and tangled problems have arisen in value judgment of the Chinese form, the inherent universal values still need to be upheld. A civilized society should have certain social conventions that need to be observed and also a basic value scale of right and wrong, good and evil, and beauty and ugliness. The same should be true of literary criticism. Although literary works can evoke diverse opinions of all sorts, there are still some basic consensuses. The reason why the classics can be recognized by and appealed to different eras is precisely that the transcendence of such literary works lies in the universality of value judgment of human beings and that these classics contain and highlight those wonderful things of humanity. Value judgment in the Chinese form thus needs to seek, among the differences, those values that are recognized by the vast majority of society.

This universality of value judgments is not only synchronic, but is also in the diachronic historical process. The essence of the construction of the socialist core value system is the construction of value consensus, and the concepts of fairness and justice have never been the preserve of the bourgeoisie, but the achievements of civilization made by all human beings.

In conclusion, value judgment of the Chinese form is the unity of universality and particularity as well as the unity of consensus and difference. Though with different aesthetic styles and target audiences, classic works and popular culture have a lot in common in their basic value orientation, which is the respect for human beings. The most fundamental criterion for judging the value of a work is to examine whether the work is conducive to the all-round development of human beings. In this regard, different cultures are not completely incompatible at all.

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## Conclusion

The study of the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism is a challenging task. As the contemporary construction of the Chinese form, this book focuses on and aims at theoretical elaboration rather than interpretation and analysis of cases. In view of the ossification and habituation of previous theoretical frameworks of literary criticism, this book does not intend to make systematical construction, but adopts a new approach to explore the theoretical characteristics of the Chinese form by starting with concrete concepts and issues.

### I

Concepts, which show the features of the theories and help identify them, are the cornerstone of theories. When a school or a theorist is mentioned, some representative concepts would come naturally to mind. For instance, Lukács comes to mind when “totality” is referred to, and Jameson is always associated with the “political unconscious.” In the case of the Chinese form, the core concepts of people, nation, politics, and practice refined and promoted in this book naturally become the core and representatives of the Chinese form. Although these concepts are not unique to the Chinese form, they have become its inseparable and integral part because they have been used extensively for such a long time in Chinese modern literary criticism and thus have been profoundly imbued with the Chinese spirit.

For a long time, in the field of Marxist literary criticism, concepts such as people, nation, and politics have often been perceived as merely

commonsensical terms and been rarely discussed or questioned. However, these important propositions are rich in connotations, and there are many issues that need to be examined and resolved. In the theoretical construction of the Chinese form, this book adopted an abstract-to-concrete approach by first refining the theoretical connotations of these concepts and describing and explaining them clearly, and then using them as important dimensions of critical practice to view literary works so as to update and enrich the Marxist approaches to literary criticism. Through a vertical as well as horizontal study of these basic concepts and their relationship with literary activities, the basic framework of the Chinese form is established and consolidated. Therefore, one of the features of this book is the preliminary and systematic discussion of the core concepts of the Chinese form.

Facing the reality, identifying the issues and problems, and proposing solutions to deal with them is a major and vital task of the Chinese form. Unprecedented changes have taken place today. While the literary phenomena studied by classical Marxist literary criticism were mainly works of literary realism that emerged in the era of industrialization, what we are facing today is a full range of literary activities influenced by capital and high technology. The vitality of Marxist literary criticism lies exactly in keeping up with the times. If ignoring today's ongoing literary activities, Marxist literary criticism would lose its interpretative and guiding capabilities. Due to the long-standing influence of Kant's "Purposiveness Without a Purpose," issues about capital have rarely been seriously examined in previous literary theory textbooks, and the relationship between technology and literature has also been outside the scope of traditional literary studies. These issues constitute opportunities for theoretical creation. This book selects contemporary issues that urgently need solutions in theory and practice, such as literature and technology, literature and capital, and literature and values, and provides timely and persuasive explanations and guidance on these contemporary issues from the perspective of the contemporary Chinese reality. We endeavor to participate in the construction of contemporary literature and culture, instead of pursuing the unworldly "ivory tower" approach of academics off the ground. Thus, another contribution of this book is to show the theoretical presence and visibility of the Chinese form in today's literary activities.

Regarding the structure of this book, the first four chapters put forward and expound on several core concepts of the Chinese form, whereas the last three chapters examine new issues that have arisen in

contemporary literary activities. When completing the manuscript, I have connected the theoretical and practical issues throughout the book and discovered that they all point to one purpose—all-around human emancipation. That is to say, the Chinese form has always been constructed for achieving the ultimate goal of all-around human emancipation, which is the universality of the Chinese form among its many differences.

## II

The research position and attitude of this book is clear and consistent. The study of differences is the research position and strategy proposed by the book in dealing with the relationship between Chinese and Western literature to cope with the impact of globalization. Under the different times and contexts, the Chinese form necessarily differs from the classical form of Marxist literary criticism and the subsequent Russian Soviet and Western forms of Marxist literary criticism, and it is exactly these differences that open up the possibility and feasibility of constructing different forms. However, the emphasis on the differences of the Chinese form varies from the absolute “differences” proposed by Western post-structuralism and postmodernism. Differences in the Chinese form do not imply confrontation or conflicts; instead, it provides the basis for dialogue by highlighting differences. Certain common trends and problems in social development occur in the context of globalization; however, Marxist literary criticism under the influence of different cultural traditions and national conditions will make different choices. The core of the study of “difference” is to discover and generate theoretical discourses with distinct local features, and what the Chinese form most need. However, it must be noted that the study of differences does not exclude universality at all. The goal of differentiation is to produce a theory of Chinese Marxist literary criticism that accommodates deep emotions regarding the nation and has universal, global significance as well.

Western Marxists are primarily holding a purely critical stance in terms of contemporary social issues, while the coexistence of being critical and being constructive can be found in the Chinese form. The construction of the Chinese form possesses distinctly problem-awareness, as it can identify timely problems in contemporary Chinese literary activities. Additionally, instead of stopping at recognizing or pointing out the problems, the Chinese form explores ways and strategies to resolve them while emphasizing the pioneering or leading and constructive nature of the theory. For instance, regarding the relationship between literature and science and technology, Western Marxism tends to provide a cautionary note

and pure critique of high technology, but the Chinese form emphasizes its revolutionary impact on literature and the ideological construction of science and technology, and thus performs a forward-looking analysis of future society.

Notably, the construction of the Chinese form is inclusive and accommodating, and adheres to the concept of “Scholarship should not be classified into eastern ones and western ones” when incorporating different systems of discourse, demonstrating the cultural confidence of the Chinese form. Such confidence is not only reflected in its theoretical construction, but also, and more importantly, in its theoretical reflection. The Chinese form adjusts and develops the concepts or notions of classical Marxism based on the specific conditions of China. Furthermore, it reflects on Western Marxism from the Chinese standpoint. It investigates and criticizes Western Marxism on its reconstruction and overshadow of classical Marxism, thus attains certain transcendence over Western Marxism, and then becomes an interlocutor and promoter of global Marxist literary criticism.

### III

The study of the Chinese form is just in the beginning stage, leaving many questions to be answered. The study of classical Marxism itself is a process of continuous discovery. The Marxist classics are so vast and profound that they seem to be a book that has just been opened. Many wonderful things that have been overlooked or missed in past readings; even when some parts have been read many times, new experiences and feelings emerge when they are reread. Marx and Engels’ diagnosis of the pathologies of modern capitalism and their prediction of the realistic path and the inspiring prospect for human liberation have become an ideological and philosophical weapon for us to reflect on history and reality as well as a theoretical guide for us to think about the future of human society.

The Chinese form also involves a process of continuous discovery and construction. Although the “Chinese Form” is named as a whole, it has various internal complexities and thus is an existence full of tension. Each concept or issue, including people, nation, politics, practice, technology, capital, and values, is ambiguous and has gaps to some extent even after the detailed discussions of this book. Or I would rather humbly admit, these concepts or issues proposed might provoke even more reflection than has been elaborated by this book. China is now facing new challenges and problems every day, many of which have global relevance, that is,

Western problems are affecting China and Chinese problems also have a global impact. These problems and challenges form a huge theoretical field, and there is considerable room for theoretical exploration of how the Chinese form of Marxist literary criticism tackles these problems in the future.

As Althusser once stated, theory has two meanings for practice: one is directly related to practice, and the other is directed to areas that have not yet been put into practice, namely that theory can be future-oriented. The Chinese form thus has two responsibilities, one rooted in the present and the other pointing to the future. I might as well conclude this book with this quote from Althusser: “like any other scientific discipline, Marxism did not stop at Marx any more than physics stopped at Galileo who founded it. Like any other scientific discipline, Marxism developed even in Marx’s own lifetime. New discoveries were made possible by Marx’s basic discovery. It would be very rash to believe that everything has been said” (Althusser 2005, p. 63).<sup>1</sup> Marx was not the terminator of the seeking of truth but paved the way for it. After Marx, a long-term, arduous, and persistent exploration is required regarding how the Chinese form carries the torch of Marxist literary criticism and how to generate theories that have an impact on the world or the contemporary times to answer the questions of China, questions of the world, and questions of our times.

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