

Zheng Zhenduo and the writing of literary history in Republican China (1920-1940)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the institutionalization and practice of literary historiography in Republican China through the writings of Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1956). On the basis of a careful reading of Zheng's three book-length histories of Chinese and world literature, written from the early 1920s to late 1930s, the thesis questions the characterization of Republican literary historical scholarship as simply iconoclastic (*vis-à-vis* Chinese tradition) or derivative (*vis-à-vis* the West). It shows that Zheng's literary historiography was actually comprised of multiple and sometimes contradictory approaches to the past. These approaches were shaped, on the one hand, by the demands of a professional discipline that was constructed on the ideal of a universal literature but also faced with the task of integrating the Chinese people into history; and, on the other, by a confrontation and creative negotiation with earlier readings and valuations of Chinese literature.

Abstrait

Cette thèse examine l'institutionnalisation et la pratique de l'historiographie littéraire en République de Chine à travers les écrits de Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1956). Sur base de l'analyse des trois ouvrages que Zheng a consacré, entre le début des années 1920 et la fin des années 1930, à l'histoire de la littérature chinoise et de la littérature mondiale, le présent travail interroge la définition des recherches académiques républicaines en historiographie littéraire en tant que phénomène purement iconoclaste (par rapport à la tradition chinoise) ou dérivatif (par rapport à l'Occident). Cette entreprise montre que l'historiographie littéraire de Zheng comprenait en réalité des approches multiples et parfois contradictoires du passé. Ces approches étaient déterminées, d'une part, par les exigences d'une discipline professionnelle qui s'érigait dans une visée d'universalité tout en ayant pour tâche d'intégrer le peuple chinois à l'histoire, et, d'autre part, par la confrontation créatrice avec les interprétations antérieures de la littérature chinoise.

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Introduction

The literary histories written in Republican China (1911-1949), despite their profusion, often appear either derivative or out-of-date; many are openly modeled on the works of Japanese or Western scholars, and their judgments on or narratives of Chinese literary history rely on literary theories that have outlived their usefulness or been discounted. All of this creates the appearance of a massive project whose grand scale serves only to proclaim with greater vigor its ultimate futility. However, this characterization might be unfair, perhaps our neglect of these works is simply a matter of taste; we find the baldness of their ideology unpalatable, and their measurements of literary value forced.

Labeling a work “ideological” is too convenient a way of discounting its value for historical study. I contend in this thesis that we can read Republican-era Chinese literary histories seriously rather than dismissively, and that by doing so we can begin to understand something of the dynamics that shaped literary history as an academic discipline and practice in this period. This begins by remembering that ideology is applied to realities that always threaten to reveal its inadequacy. It will become evident in the course of this thesis that whatever theories of literary history were espoused, the works produced on their basis rarely comprised a perfectly sustained application. One of the realities faced by ideology is institutional. Ideologies are not simply detached ideas, but are understood by people who belong to and pursue their practice within institutions such as universities, literary associations, and publishing houses. These institutions sanction and perpetuate certain approaches to a question and thus limit the ways or extent to which an ideology can be applied. Departments of literature, for example, mandated in their curricula a literary historical practice that was global in conception but restricted by temporal or spatial national boundaries, and governed by an ideal of disinterested scholarship but limited by the imposition of a naturalized category of literature and concept of progressive change. In the first chapter, I will look briefly at some of the institutions and institutionalized ideas that shaped literary historical practice in the Republican period. Another reality is the raw literary material from the past that is to be shaped into a modern literary history. In China, this material was manipulated in a variety of ways to fit

universal structures, but at the same time it was resistant to complete assimilation. Thus, even while these structures provided new insights into Chinese literature and validated the study of areas that had been marginalized in traditional scholarship, they often failed to bestow on Chinese literature an immediate or satisfactory commensurability with other national literatures. The presence of all these things meant that literary historiography was never a singular practice; even within the writing of one scholar, the interaction of various institutional and textual realities inhabited in different ways every literary author and text that was brought into history.

Given the very limited constraints of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the writings of one well-known but little studied (in the West) literary historian of the Republican period: Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1957). Zheng's collected works comprise a rather intimidating twenty-volume compendia published recently by a small university press in Hebei. Many of his more influential works have gone through several re-printings and are readily accessible in other forms. His corpus includes works of fiction, poetry, literary theory, and social commentary; diaries and personal letters; studies of Greek, Roman, and Chinese mythology; and, of course, literary history. The latter comprise the largest portion of his writings, and include both essay-length studies of particular genres and works as well as four book-length histories of national and world literature. One of these four, a history of Russian literature, I will not discuss. I will look at the other three, published between 1924 and 1938, in the second chapter of the thesis. This thesis is not an intellectual biography, and I will not attempt to explain Zheng's writings through the lens of his personal experiences unless these seem directly relevant to the direction of his literary historical practice. In part, this is to respect his intentions. He came to imagine himself, whether correctly or not, as a participant in a larger project in which the subjective self had to be erased in favor of the professional object, a new history of Chinese literature. Of course, it is also to reduce his agency. Suffice it to say in his defense, if Zheng pursued the ideal of objective scholarship, he was also actively engaged, like many other intellectuals, in the major political issues of his day. His fictional writings and prose frequently address these problems. His academic writings, particularly his second and third

literary histories (published in 1932 and 1938), also borrowed their justification from the needs raised by pressing political issues. However, as I will show in the second chapter, they are more appropriately viewed within the context of the increasing professionalization of Chinese academics through the 1920s and 1930s.¹

A close reading of Zheng's full-length literary histories, rather than of only the theoretical writings that often provide our understanding of Chinese literary historiography in the Republican period, will begin to show the complexities of literary historical practice. A simple binary of traditional and modern, based on the notion of May Fourth as iconoclastic is not particularly useful in understanding a practice that was never limited exclusively to the particular antimonies of May Fourth intellectuals toward a monolithic "Chinese tradition." Through the 1920s and 1930s, these and other intellectuals participated in overlapping fields, some bounded by the locale, others by the nation, and some situated globally. If iconoclasm was sometimes demanded and frequently proclaimed, it was tempered by the need to construct a historical Chinese literature that could have status as a national (and, therefore, also global) literature. Rather than ending with a demonstration of complete incommensurability, the literary historical project was both a detaching and attaching of the past to the present and the national to the global.

This thesis is divided into two chapters. In the first, I review some of the recent literature that has examined the phenomena of literary historiography in Republican China and then go on to outline some areas that have been ignored or misinterpreted in this literature. The second chapter is divided into three sections, each of which focuses on one of Zheng's three major literary histories. The first, *Wenxue dagang* 文學大綱 (Outline of Literature) is a history of world literature. It speaks to the concern for the discovery of a Chinese literature that could take its place as one of the great world literatures. The second, *Chatu ben Zhongguo wenxue shi* 插圖本中國文學史 (hereafter referred to as "Illustrated History"),

¹ Arif Dirlik has noted that even Marxist historical scholarship was largely depoliticized and professionalized in the 1930s. See his, *Revolution and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 221-225.

reveals the increasing professionalization of literary history in the early 1930s. Explicit questions of political mission and global adequacy have been replaced by a close examination of the particulars of literary change in pre-modern China. The third, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中國俗文學史 (History of Chinese Popular Literature), despite its title, was not designed to enlighten a popular audience, but is an extension of an important development in the *Illustrated History*—the equation of the nation, or society, with the Chinese people.

Chapter 1

Approaches to Republican Literary Historiography

A. Literature review: Chinese-language studies

Few Western sinologists have studied the phenomenon of literary historiography in Republican China. As Milena Doleželová-Velingerová comments in her recent essay, “Literary Historiography in Early Twentieth-Century China (1904-1928): Constructions of Cultural Memory,” this lack of interest is surprising given the number of literary histories produced in the first fifty years of the twentieth century. According to one study she cites, the number of general histories of literature written during this period totaled one-hundred and twenty-four. If Western sinologists have shown little interest in Republican-era histories of literature, the same has not been true in China. The “Rewriting Literary History” (*chongxie wenxue shi* 重寫文學史) movement in the late 1980s and 1990s brought about an increasing interest in literary histories of all sorts, but particularly in those that had been written before the founding of the People’s Republic (1949). Literary histories written after 1949 were increasingly seen as “ossified” (*jianghua* 僵化) works reflecting a “simplified framework” based on political, class, and revolutionary characteristics.² In an attempt to break out of this political framework, the movement stressed the importance of the aesthetic as a foundation for the assessment and periodization of traditional literature.³ Thus, writers who had been elevated in the orthodox Communist literary historical narratives—Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), for example—were reassessed not in terms of their political rectitude, but their literary value.⁴ The search for a less doctrinaire literary historical tradition led many scholars of this movement to reexamine the literary histories of the Republican period. Several of the best-known works, including those of Zheng Zhenduo, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), Lu

² A useful discussion of this movement is provided by Zhou Jing and Zhang Linlin in their article, “‘Chongxie wenxue shi’ zongshu,” *Hengshui shizhuan xuebao* 6.3 (September, 2004).

³ Zhou and Zhang, “‘Chongxie wenxue shi,’” pp. 56-57.

⁴ For a debate on the value of Lu Xun’s writings see Chen Shuyu, “Tiaozhan jingdian,” *Wenxue pinglun* 5 (2001). In the course of his discussion, he engages in a particularly vitriolic refutation of Ge Hongbing’s 葛红兵 reassessment of Lu Xun’s canonicity as put forward in two articles published in 1999 and 2000: “Wei ershi shiji Zhongguo wenxue xie yi fen daoci” and “Wei ershi shiji Zhongguo wenyi lilun pian xie yi fen daoci.” Both are, or were, available on the internet.

Xun, Liu Jing'an 劉經庵 (fl. 1930s), Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946), and Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), were reprinted; and numerous monographs and articles were dedicated to the topic.

Dai Yan's *Wenxue shi de quanli* is one of the most informative discussions of Republican literary historiography to emerge from this movement.⁵ In addition to specific examinations of the major writers of literary history during the late-Qing and Republican periods—including Lin Chuanjia 林傳甲 (fl. 1900s), Hu Shi, Lu Xun, and Zheng Zhenduo—Dai deals briefly with the relation between literary historiography and the formation of a discipline of literary history. Appealing to Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, she also touches upon the position of literary histories within the larger nationally-oriented historiographical enterprise in Republican China. Like other historians in the movement, she notes the increasingly doctrinaire tendency of literary histories written in the late Republican and Communist periods. Unfortunately, the breadth of Dai's study (covering literary historiography over the entire twentieth century) precludes a careful examination of the many literary histories that she mentions in passing. In the second chapter of the thesis, I will attempt to address this with a more careful examination of three literary histories written by Zheng Zhenduo.

Many of the Chinese studies of literary history written during this period have focused on individual Republican literary historians. Less studied than eminent figures such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun, Zheng Zhenduo is still well-represented in this sort of academic research.⁶ The most extensive biography of Zheng was written in 1994 by Chen Fukang.⁷ Unfortunately, the author's concern

⁵ Dai Yan, *Wenxue shi de quanli* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002). On Zheng Zhenduo, see pp. 59-65. She comments that Zheng's literary histories were characterized by two important features: the first was a greater focus on materials that had previously been neglected in literary histories, including the materials found at Dunhuang, and various types of popular literature; the second was his belief that popular literature and foreign literature were the most important forces behind the development of Chinese literary history.

⁶ Some of the numerous articles include: Huang Yonglin, "Lun Zheng Zhenduo su wenxue de lilun tezhen yu shijian qingxiang," *Shougao riqi* (August 15, 1994); Zhu Wenhua, "Zheng Zhenduo dui 'Wu si' xin wenxue yundong de lilun gongxian," *Wenxue pinglun* 6 (1998); Liu Xicheng, "Zhongguo minjian wenxixue shi shang de su wenxue pai," *Guangxi shifan xueyuan bao* 25.2 (April, 2004); Wang Chaohong, "Zheng Zhenduo de gudai xiqu yanjiu chengjiu," *Nantong shifan xueyuan xue bao* 17.1 (March, 2001); Yang Yuzhen, "Zheng Zhenduo yu 'shijie wenxue'," *Guizhou shehui kexue* 193.1 (January, 2005).

⁷ Chen Fukang, *Zheng Zhenduo zhuan* (Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1994).

with demonstrating Zheng's relationship to the Communist Party leads to a number of tendentious conclusions. His trip to London, for example, is framed as a pilgrimage to the former residences of Marx and Engels; his relationships to iconic figures such as Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) and Lu Xun are foregrounded throughout the work; and the question of his failure to join the Communist Party prior to the 1949 revolution receives no mention. A briefer work by Zheng Erkang, Zheng Zhenduo's son, is less concerned with demonstrating Zheng's ideological purity, and provides a useful summary of the major events in Zheng's life.⁸ Zheng Zhenwei's book *Zheng Zhenduo qianqi wenxue sixiang* describes Zheng's early writings on literary history (both Chinese and global), children's literature, myth, and Russian literature.⁹ The author is particularly interested in tracing Zheng's intellectual affiliations with his Chinese contemporaries and foreign writers such as Caleb Winchester and Richard Moulton.

Though valuable in their own way, few of these studies have followed Dai Yan's lead in examining how Zheng's writings might be situated within larger academic or political developments of the period, whether national or global. Most take a descriptive approach, either detailing Zheng's life, or outlining his theoretical views on literary history and tracing the influences of his Chinese contemporaries and foreign scholars of literary history. In this thesis, I am not primarily interested in summarizing all that Zheng said, nor do I aim to prove or disprove the significance of his writings—both of these points have been adequately covered in previous studies, and the former is readily accessible to anyone willing to spend some time perusing his collected works¹⁰—but rather in discussing the ways in which his works, both his theoretical writings and his literary histories, were organized and articulated in ways that emerge out of and sometimes reveal the contradictions of certain concepts and institutions of his day. Over the course of this chapter and the one that follows I will attempt to show that Zheng's writings need to be understood from three perspectives broadly construed: the development of globally-positioned academic institutions and disciplines; the

⁸ Zheng Erkang, *Zheng Zhenduo* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

⁹ Zheng Zhenwei, *Zheng Zhenduo qianqi wenxue sixiang* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2000).

¹⁰ *Zheng Zhenduo quanji* [ZZDQJ], 20 vols. (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1998).

imagined relation between the Chinese nation and its people; and the role of the intellectual as an intermediary between these two spheres (the academic or elite and the public), and an agent of change.

B. Literature review: English-language studies

First, however, it is necessary to review English-language scholarship on the question of Republican literary historiography. Before looking at the two studies that touch directly on my topic, I will review several recent works that deal indirectly or in a limited way with the question of literary historiography in the Republican and late-Qing period. I have divided these into two groups, one dealing with literary history and historians in particular, and the other dealing more generally with questions of historiography.

One of the best recent works related to literary historiography in the Republican period is Patricia Sieber's study of Yuan dynasty drama, *Theaters of Desire*.¹¹ Sieber's study is important to my own study because it demonstrates the degree to which Republican Chinese understandings of Yuan drama were situated within both global and local fields of literary historiography. The centrality of 'tragedy' (*beiju* 悲劇) in European literary theory became the basis on which European writers marginalized Chinese drama, increasingly seen as a non-tragic form. The paucity of tragedy was recognized by Chinese intellectuals through the prism of earlier European characterizations, and ultimately inspired a re-examination of Chinese dramatic history that took as its primary goal the discovery of an indigenous tradition of tragedy. While I do not deal specifically in this thesis with Yuan drama, Sieber's study broaches two questions that are central in my reading of Zheng's literary histories. The first, is Zheng's anxiety to understand Chinese literature and literary history according to universal literary standards; the second is related to the elevation of Yuan dynasty literature. The Yuan, governed by the foreign Mongols, became a privileged space of literary change and the production of a more realist or natural literature. My reading will similarly show the importance of the foreign or liminal in Zheng's conceptions of Chinese literary historical development.

¹¹ Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

I have not attempted to produce an intellectual biography of Zheng Zhenduo, but several intellectual biographies of figures involved in the writing of literary history or definition of the field of literary studies have been important in conceptualizing this thesis. Susan Daruvala's study of Zhou Zuoren makes a substantial contribution to the ongoing attempts to move beyond narrow conceptions (i.e. May Fourth-centered) of literature, and literary history (i.e. iconoclastic) during the Republican era.¹² Her discussion of Zhou Zuoren's version of Chinese literary history, developed in his *Zhongguo xin wenxue zhi liubian*, is especially important for my understanding of conceptions of change in Republican China, an issue that I will return to in the second chapter. Zhou's conceptions of the historical construction of the Chinese nation, particularly the influence of outside forces (eg. Buddhism) and the local, are echoed in Zheng Zhenduo's writings. Another biography, Tang Xiaobing's biography of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), has directed me to look carefully at the place of the global in literary historical practice.¹³ Tang examines Liang Qichao's views of Chinese history and history-writing in terms of Liang's relationships to a global modernity. Tang uses the notion of space, here referring primarily to a global, international, and synchronic space, to incorporate the non-Chinese into a study of China while refusing these external factors a purely deterministic role in China's modernization. Tang shows that the global space offered new potentials which Liang, like other Chinese intellectuals, adapted selectively and creatively rather than uncritically or passively. The concept of space is used to explain Liang's ideas of historical progress in which history was moved forward by a "generative territorial tension" and racial hierarchy (historical races, races belonging to a geographical nation were superior to the non-historical races). We will see that these ideas re-emerge in Zheng's conceptualizations of change in his *Illustrated History*. Also relevant to my study is Tang's discussion of Liang's critique of traditional historiography. Tang suggests that Liang saw history as a tool whose value lay primarily in its ability to influence the nation. Traditional

¹² Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).

¹³ Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

historiography, by focusing on the dynasty rather than the nation, the individual rather than the collective, and description rather than interpretation, was not an appropriate model for inspiring public excitement.

Michel Hockx's *Questions of Style* provides important contributions to and suggests new directions for the study of modern Chinese literature that move away from the individual writer.¹⁴ Hockx is less interested in showing how our understandings of Republican literature have been circumscribed by rigid notions of canonicity than in addressing an underlying lacuna in our approach to the study of modern Chinese literature in general. To put it simply, he suggests that there has been a tendency to study literature—both canonical and non-canonical—without any real understanding of the “literary field” in which that literature was first produced and evaluated.¹⁵ Drawing primarily on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Hockx argues that if we are to understand the literary field in Republican China, we must adopt the role of literary sociologists. That is, we must center our studies on the institutions that create literary (“symbolic”) value rather than the texts to which value is ascribed. While I have not attempted to apply Bourdieu's theories to my own study, I agree with Hockx that an understanding of literary production within an institutional context provides a more satisfactory image of this production or research than does the notion of the writer as an entirely free agent.

Turning now to general works on historiography in Republican period, my understanding has benefited from several works, most notably Laurence Schneider's study of Gu Jiegang, Arif Dirlik's study of Marxist historiography, and Edward Q. Wang's recent review of liberal historiography.¹⁶ It is important, I think, to see Republican literary historiography not only as the evaluation of traditional Chinese literature with modern literary standards, but as a part of a larger historical enterprise. Schneider's study shows that Gu Jiegang, while not

¹⁴ Michel Hockx, *Questions of style* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁵ Though, as Hockx points out, several recent studies are moving in the right direction. In particular, Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern* (1999), and Lydia Liu's *Translingual Practice* (1995).

¹⁶ Laurence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History*; Edward Q. Wang, *Inventing China Through History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

exclusively a literary historian, dealt like Zheng with pressing questions of the historical profession: how to deal with popular historical sources, how to achieve a balance between social history and biography, the relationship between textual sources and historical reality, and the evolution of textual sources. Dirlik's study of Marxist historiography is important for its consideration of the role of the political in professional historiography. I have largely followed his argument that the 1930s saw an increased de-politicization of historical practice. Edward Q. Wang's book, *Inventing China Through History*, is the best overview of non-Marxist historiography during the Republican period. In addition to his very useful summary of the historiography of a large number of Republican historians, his analysis of the "contrary interests" of liberal historians—between the desire to construct a national history and the need to meet the demands of an objective 'science'—is particularly useful. The distinction Wang draws between the two may be somewhat absolute, but it does point to a struggle that underlay all of Zheng's writing, a negotiation between the demands of a universal discipline and the exigencies of the Chinese tradition.

Having reviewed these works, I want to look in somewhat greater length at the two recent English-language studies that deal specifically with the writing of histories of traditional Chinese literature during the Republican period. Because both provide rather pessimistic accounts that discourage further investigation into the topic, I will attempt to show the shortcomings of their approach and offer what I think is a more fruitful alternative. The book in which Doleželová-Velingerová's essay appears, *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Project* (2001),¹⁷ is among the few English-language works to deal at any length with Republican literary historiography.¹⁸ Two chapters are particularly relevant to my thesis. Doleželová-Velingerová's examines several of the earliest Chinese histories of literature: Lin Chuanjia's *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (1904), Huang Ren 黃人 (1866-1913) and Zeng Yi's 曾毅 works of the same title

¹⁷ Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and Oldřich Král eds., *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001).

¹⁸ Yingjin Zhang also discusses literary history in Republican China, but focuses only on the writing of histories of modern Chinese literature. See his, "The Institutionalization of Modern Literary History in China," *Modern China* 20.3 (1994): 347-377.

(1905 and 1915, respectively), and Hu Shi's *Baihua wenxue shi* (1928). Stephen Owen's "The End of the Past: Rewriting Chinese Literary History in the Early Republic," again looks at Hu Shi's history of vernacular literature, this time in comparison to Zheng Zhenduo's *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*.

Doleželová-Velingerová finds little of value in Lin Chuanjia's work, but she writes approvingly of the histories written by Huang Ren and Zeng Yi. She argues that they demonstrate a firm grasp of Chinese literature and appropriate use of Western methodology; their structures are innovative and choice of materials balanced. Hu Shi's history of Chinese vernacular literature, on the other hand, is characterized as doctrinaire and distorted: for all its claims to objectivity, Hu Shi failed to adopt "Western methods of objective scrutiny of historical facts and detachment from traditional dogmas."¹⁹ Even worse, this subjective interpretation of Chinese literary history—for no other reason than Hu's skill as a writer—soon became established as a new orthodoxy. As she puts it, "Hu Shi's ahistorical construction of China's cultural past, later disseminated as historical truth in countless histories of Chinese literature, contributed to the impoverishment of twentieth-century Chinese culture."²⁰ In general, then, she sees a gradual ossification of literary historical narratives; the early creativity of Huang Ren and Zeng Yi is displaced by conformity to the narratives designed by Hu Shi and other like-minded writers.

Owen spends most of his essay pointing out the errors, anachronisms, and ideologically-determined readings that plague the works of both Hu Shi and Zheng Zhenduo, and then concludes with an assessment of the current state of classical literature in China which echoes Doleželová-Velingerová's. He writes in the conclusion to his essay, "The degree to which the May Fourth reinterpretation of classical literature has become an unquestioned standard tells us that the past is indeed over."²¹ Owen's argument has two parts: first, he argues that Republican literary historians distorted the literary past by imposing an ideologically-

¹⁹ Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, "Literary Historiography in Early Twentieth-Century China (1904-1928)," p. 151.

²⁰ Doleželová-Velingerová, "Literary Historiography," p. 158.

²¹ Stephen Owen, "The End of the Past: Rewriting Chinese Literary History in the Early Republic," p. 189.

determined narrative that foregrounded vernacular or 'realist' literature; second, he suggests that these readings have become a new orthodoxy into the present. Owen looks back on the past with an obvious fondness: the pre-modern is a period of literary diversity and a refreshing absence of dogmatism, whose public had ready access to a wide range of competing literary anthologies and interpretations. In stark contrast, the current Chinese "reading public" has access to only a narrow range of histories and anthologies, nearly all of which parrot the selections endorsed by May Fourth literary historians. Owen does admit that the hegemony is not absolute, but any diversity is limited to academia: "such topics tend to be done apologetically or as pure scholarship, without a claim to significant intrinsic merit that would conflict with the judgments of the May Fourth critic."²² Because his essay differs little from Doleželová-Velingerová's in its assessment of Republican literary histories, I will focus my critique on Owen's discussion, using this as a point of departure for the rest of the chapter.

First, it should be noted that the vehemence of Owen's criticisms stems from his belief that these distorted narratives became an unquestionable orthodoxy in twentieth-century China. However, he does not examine the process through which this occurred. This is important, because if the literary histories were somehow mechanically or necessarily linked to a later oppressive reality—as his argument suggests—they might well be criticized.²³ However, if they were misappropriated, if the methodologies or narratives they propose could have led just as easily in some other direction, toward greater tolerance or more meaningful intellectual pursuit, for example, then our criticisms should not be directed at the texts themselves, but at the political agendas that lay behind their eventual elevation.

Unfortunately, Owen does not take this approach. Instead, he simply conflates lacunae in the texts with what he feels to be lacunae in Chinese literary study throughout the twentieth century. This effectively turns his essay into a critique of canon formation in which the Republican histories of literature are of

²² Owen, "The End of the Past," p. 189.

²³ Doleželová-Velingerová's argument that the nature of the texts themselves, in particular the quality of their writing, led to their later canonization is an example of this sort of mimetic view of the relationship between text and society.

interest only insofar as they line up with later misjudgments of literary value. Judgments of literary value are a subjective thing; so, we learn more about Owen's own ideals than about the literary histories themselves. It becomes apparent that he values a canon that is diverse but respectful of the judgments of traditional literary critics. This is not necessarily a bad thing, except that he does not deal seriously with the question of how or why this literary canon is more valuable than the one that he rejects as ideologically determined and artificially restricted. His essay suggests only a vague nostalgia for a past diversity. This is also troublesome, because he does not demonstrate that the twentieth century public has, in fact, had less diverse contact with the Chinese literary tradition (he does not discuss, for example, the question of how a rise in literacy may have increased access to traditional literature, how printing in the pre-modern and modern periods may have placed restrictions on the amount or type of work published, etc.), nor does he mention the ongoing debates in China over even the most canonical figures such as Lu Xun.²⁴ Third, his dismissal of Republican histories of literature is based primarily on what he perceives as their ideological agenda; his fixation on the resulting exclusions or lacunae precludes a serious study of why and in what context these histories were written. His comment that the elevation of Yuan *sanqu* in some Republican-era histories was "a pure act of ideological will" is typical of the way in which he wields this sort of accusation.²⁵

If Republican literary historiography is to be studied, it is clearly necessary to depart from Owen in all these regards. First, while I will not enter into the extensive debates on canon formation, I am in basic agreement with Frank Kermode's observation regarding literary canons: they are not canonical because they contain a timeless and intrinsic value that has been recognized once and for all by some hoary literary critic, rather, "institutions confer value and

²⁴ See, for example, the debate between Chen Shuyu and Ge Hongbing over the classical status of Lu Xun. Chen Shuyu, "Tiaozhan jingdian," *Wenxue pinglun* 5 (2001).

²⁵ Owen misses the fact that Zheng himself admits that the *sanqu* were not considered important in traditional criticism, and that the ones he chose to include—particularly those that dealt with social issues—were in the minority. His reasons for elevating this type of *sanqu* was not to distort the tradition, but to insert the people (though, whether he was successful is another question): he wanted to recover those works that described "the plight of the people in plain language." Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 374.

privilege upon texts, and license modes of interpretation.”²⁶ This means that a work canonized by an earlier generation of literary critics can be entirely unsuited to a contemporary literary canon, something made evident by John Guillory in his discussion of Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard.”²⁷ The fact that the literary past is somehow restricted or bounded also need not be a cause for pessimism: as Kermode also points out, neglected works can reenter the canon, and restriction itself, both in terms of sanctioned texts and modes of reading, can be a source of creativity. Therefore, instead of criticizing literary histories for forcing a distorted and myopic view of the Chinese literary past onto a twentieth-century Chinese public—this is, after all, the effect of any boundary drawing—it may be more enlightening to consider why these narratives were drawn the way they were, and why they seemed natural or proved satisfying at the time (or, why they seem unnatural and unsatisfying to the modern Western sinologist). This requires more than simply measuring the degree to which they preserve a traditional canon or reflect an idealized image of the past. Part of the answer, I think, lies in understandings of the formation of disciplinary knowledge in Republican China, a question that I will pursue further below.

Second, I take it for granted that literary history was and remains a discourse largely restricted to the elites. To return to the question of canon, this leads me to believe that some of Owen’s criticisms are misplaced. In particular, his assumption that the canon or literary taste of what he calls the “general reading public” is coterminous with or determined by that of the elites in either modern or pre-modern China seems a bit optimistic.²⁸ The “academic” diversity that he acknowledges in recent scholarship may be all the diversity that the field of historical literary studies ever had and can ever hope for. At the same time, I think it is important to note that the writers of Republican literary histories, unlike

²⁶ Frank Kermode, “Institutional Control of Interpretation,” *Salmagundi* (Winter, 1979): 86.

²⁷ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chp. 2.

²⁸ “The restriction of most students and the general reading public to books published in simplified characters and the increasing dependence on vernacular annotation and translation give the academic scholarly establishment the power to shape and control access to the Chinese past.” Owen, “The End of the Past,” p. 190. On the degree of literacy in imperial China, see Evelyn Rawski’s, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch’ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979); also see John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), pp. 204-206.

earlier literary critics, were writing national literary histories that reflected their understanding of the Chinese state as fundamentally *of* rather than only *for* the people. The reactions to this ideal could range from Zhou Zuoren's nuanced view that a "literature of the common people" (*pingmin wenxue* 平民文學) was not only literature to be read by commoners (i.e. written in a simple vernacular), but all literature that took seriously the concerns of the common people,²⁹ to Hu Shi's sometimes rigid adherence to a narrative of vernacular literary development. But, in either case, the public—in both professional and more overtly political discourse—somehow had to be incorporated into the construction of the national literary past. While some might see this ideal of popularization as a strategy typical of "successful ruling ideology,"³⁰ I would suggest that this ideology reflected sincerely held (if sometimes ineffectual and misconstrued) beliefs in the need to construct a nation that served more than elite interests. Whatever the case, a Republican-era history of Chinese national literature restricted to texts reflecting the concerns or agendas of the traditional elite—even if these concerns and agendas were diverse and well-articulated—would have failed to meet the discursive demands of the day. If the literary histories can be shown to reflect a contemporary logic, it can also be argued that their ideology must have been more than simply an individual act of will, perhaps rather a necessary adaptation to or correspondence with certain larger structures. I do not want to suggest that these structures were rigidly deterministic, that individual applications of ideology were entirely unconscious, but only that understanding requires more than labeling one individual an ideologue and others his or her victims. I suggest that Republican histories of literature were formed through and delimited by the application of an institutionally and politically adequate language, not a language that was more intrinsically distorting than any other. I will discuss further later in this chapter how an understanding of the 'people' (in its various permutations) of the Chinese

²⁹ Zhou Zuoren, "Pingmin wenxue," in *Yishu yu shenghuo* (1918; rpt. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), p. 5.

³⁰ As Eagleton points out, one characterization of a successful dominating ideology is that it must somehow meet the perceived needs of the people it dominates. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 58.

nation was important in the writing of literary history, and how this understanding was institutionally, and often politically, grounded.

Third, instead of viewing Republican literary historical narratives only in terms of their distorting relation to Chinese tradition, it is necessary to discuss how they were situated within (at least) two concentric fields: the emergent field of literary historiography in China, and the larger field of global literary historiography. The former includes the establishment of departments of literature in which literary history was a central part of the curriculum. This created a demand for textbooks that told the literary history of a nation;³¹ these texts had to correspond to a nation that was geographically bounded, inclusive of all people within these boundaries, and transcendent of dynastic cycles. In addition to increasingly standardized curricular demands, ready access to published works (journals and monographs) as well as personal educational experiences unified and defined understandings of literary history as a bounded discipline.³² In terms of the latter, I will argue that Chinese literary historians were not simply influenced or disoriented by foreign literary histories (i.e. the impact-response paradigm), but that these histories, both as authored works and narratives, became a port of entry into the larger global discourse of literary history. In terms of both, if we criticize the practice of Chinese literary historiography, our criticisms must be politically situated.³³ Because grounds of possibility that were opened through the establishment of an ideal of 'objective' literary history were occasionally closed for political reasons.

C. Institutions, ideologies, and literary history

1. Objectivity

In an essay written in 1927, Zheng Zhenduo describes traditional modes of literary criticism in Chinese imperial history. He sees their readings as

³¹ It is important to note that a large number of literary histories—particularly those that traced the nation's literary history—were written in response to curricular demands. These works include most famously Lu Xun's history of *xiaoshuo*, Hu Shi's history of vernacular literature. More on this below.

³² It is evident, for example, that definitions of literature were not simply the creation of individual authors, but almost invariably were responses to earlier definitions: both traditional Chinese, Western, Japanese, modern Chinese. One clear trend was a narrowing of the definition of literature.

³³ Edward Wang raises this point in his book on historiography during the Republican period.

disintegrative, fixated on words and brief phrases, and lacking in serious study of textual formation and influence.³⁴ For Zheng, underlying these defects is subjectivity, wallowing in literary appreciation (*jianshang* 鉴赏) or reading merely for entertainment rather than submitting to the rigors of scientific historical study (*yanjiu* 研究).³⁵ This, he suggests, prevented an understanding of the development of a national literature; works were chosen only for a perceived intrinsic merit, not for their role in moving forward a certain genre or inspiring another. As Zheng pointed out, an objective approach—what he referred to as *yanjiu*—was needed to correct this bias. An approach to the Chinese literary past based on *yanjiu* meant, for example, that works subjectively excluded (i.e. because a later editor or critic didn't enjoy them as literature) could now be incorporated into histories of literature because of their important role in literary development. As he points out elsewhere, while any history of literature should try to incorporate the most notable and timeless works, "there are many literary works which, though without much important content or value in and of themselves, are the ancestors of many later great works; if we are to follow the flow to the source, we must discuss these works."³⁶

I will discuss the success of Zheng's advocated approach in the next chapter, however, for now I will simply make an obvious observation: the most fundamental criticism—i.e. a lack of objectivity—raised by the two modern Western sinologists is the very same as that raised by Hu Shi and Zheng Zhenduo. For Owen and Doleželová-Velingerová, as for Hu and Zheng, literary history requires a disciplined practice, and this discipline is particularly important given the fact that literary sources are unusually susceptible to subjective readings. Furthermore, the effect of their criticisms is basically the same: a broadening of the gap between the writer (the enlightened and free scholar of the present) and the target of criticism (the subjective and ideologically over-determined scholars of the past [or non-West]).³⁷ The fact that the same criticism can be applied so

³⁴ Zheng Zhenduo, "Yanjiu Zhongguo wenxue shi de xin tuijin," (1927; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 5), pp. 288-289.

³⁵ Zheng Zhenduo, "Xin wenxue guan de jianshe," *Wenxue xunkan* 37 (May 11, 1922).

³⁶ Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, p. 6.

³⁷ Underlying my argument is the belief that modern scholars in the West have not moved far from the approaches and ambitions outlined in these early histories. The problems that seem apparent in

liberally may raise some doubts as to whether the term “objective” simply signifies a sanctioned polemical stance vis-à-vis the deluded past or non-West; whether it, in fact, has any use in describing the particular methodologies of literary historians in early twentieth-century China or twenty-first century North America. Looking a little deeper, it is apparent that the appeal to “objectivity” actually masks two rather different polemics: for Zheng, traditional Chinese scholars are erroneous, but basically ignorant of their own delusion; for Owen and Doleželová-Velingerová, the delusion of Republican historians is willful, an intentional misreading of historical evidence. The faults of Hu, Zheng, and others are not traced back to their different institutional backgrounds, but to their apparently intentional distortion of the sorts of disinterested knowledge their (Western-derived) institutions were designed to create. The resulting criticisms come across as either a scolding: “as putatively modern scholars, they should have known better;” or a condescending implication that Chinese scholars would have been better off sticking to ‘traditional’ Chinese modes of literary history where questions of objectivity didn’t really matter anyway.³⁸

The focus on narrowing and exclusion distracts attention from the fact that many scholars in the Republican period were themselves engaged deeply in the problem of how to slough off the particularity of traditional Chinese historiography and move toward the universal forms of knowledge that were the concern of the newly formed academic disciplines.³⁹ They were committed and institutionally mandated, as Arif Dirlik has pointed out, to the necessity of a

the works of these writers may also be present in our own writings, albeit now more cleverly masked.

³⁸ In fact, both critiques hark back to imperial-era characterizations of the Chinese people as intrinsically dishonest. Jonathan Spence’s book, *The Chan’s Great Continent*, includes this quote from George Anson: “Indeed, thus much may undoubtedly be asserted, that in artifice, falsehood, and an attachment to all kinds of lucre, many of the Chinese are difficult to be paralleled by any other people” (p. 53). Shu-mei Shih makes a similar criticism of Frank Dikötter for his assertion that the Chinese intellectuals “simplified” and “deformed” Western thought. See Shih, *The Lure of the Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 131-132.

³⁹ This was not unique to the study of literary history, but was important in many studies of the time. Hu Shi’s influential *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang*, for example, begins with a definition that demarcates the appropriate disciplinary boundaries of philosophy: “All scholarship that studies the essential questions of human life, beginning with a consideration of the fundamentals and looking for a fundamental resolution is referred to as ‘philosophy.’” The Chinese reads: 凡研究人生切要問題，從根本上着想，要尋一個根本的解決，這種學問，叫做哲學。See Hu Shi, *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang* (1919; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), p. 1.

universal history (*tongshi* 通史) for the Chinese nation.⁴⁰ Understanding the ways in which these disciplinary boundaries were drawn may allow for an understanding of Hu and Zheng that does not simply condemn them for willful ideological distortion, but rather locates them within institutions whose construction, partly borrowed and partly shaped, demanded the writing of certain types of history.

2. Disciplines and claims to total knowledge

Doleželová-Velingerová points out that Hu Shi claimed his history of vernacular literature is “‘in fact a history of all Chinese literature’.”⁴¹ She takes this as a sign of Hu’s deceptiveness. If this sort of claim was unique to Hu, we might concur with her judgment, but an examination of other literary histories and historiographical works from the period shows that claims to totality were frequent. Zheng Zhenduo, for example, writes in the preface to his *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*, that his work, like other Western works of history written since the nineteenth century, is intended as a complete (*zheng* 整) record.⁴² The primary distinction he draws between his work as a modern historian and the work of traditional historians is centered on the contrast between partiality and totality:

Scholars [since the nineteenth century] have all admitted that a History is certainly not only a book that records mutual slaughter, and, furthermore, is not a collection of the biographies of the heroes and notables of the past; rather, it is the history that has been created by all the people (*renmin qunzhong* 人民群眾). That [history] is living, not dead; it is a record of the past of all humans, or of an entire nation (*minzu* 民族).⁴³

Similarly, Zheng Binyu 鄭賓于 argues in his *Zhongguo wenxue liubian shi* (1936), that the reader of a literary history must be offered a complete (*zheng*) and

⁴⁰ Dirlik, *Revolution and History*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Doleželová-Velingerová, “Literary Historiography,” p. 157.

⁴² Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, Preface and pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, pp. 2-3. For a brief discussion on the ambiguity of terms Zheng uses to refer to the ‘people’, see f. 189.

systematic (*xitong* 系統) understanding of literary history,⁴⁴ and Luo Genze 羅根澤 (1903-ca.1960) argues that his work is intended to tell all (*quanbu* 全部) of Chinese literary history.⁴⁵ The contrast drawn by Zheng was not unique to literary historians: Liang Qichao, for example, also notes that traditional histories “regardless of their structure or school” were always focused on the concerns of the aristocracy. He goes on to blame the narrowness of this focus for the fragmentation of the Chinese nation.⁴⁶

In other words, while the totality can be imagined in different ways—as inclusive of the people, as a coherent system, as covering an entire national history—the mission of history as imagined in Republican China was a more complete understanding of the past; and talk of this mission was not merely a rhetorical or ideological flourish, but an expression of belief in the necessity to reorient and expand the historical project to include subjects that had been outside the parameters of traditional historiography en route to making a Chinese history that could compare to other national histories. Of course, if we were to read these historians ironically, we might say that their talk of totality, like their talk of objectivity, was only a way of distancing their studies from their predecessors or a mawkish parody of Western scholarship. However, to understand this idea at face value, we need to examine how the ideal of totality expressed itself in institutions and writings of the time, or, to put it another way, how and why academics went about achieving the expressed ideal of comprehensiveness. I will argue below that the possibility of a complete history was made possible by a growing acceptance of disciplinary knowledge: the vision of a complete knowledge required for these intellectuals first a narrowing or specification rather than a broadening of academic pursuit. Disciplines were not imagined as a way to impose artificial or ideological limits on knowledge, but as a way to create a system of logical allocation of scholarly effort.

⁴⁴ Zheng Binyu, *Zhongguo wenxue liubian shi* (1936; rpt. Zhengzhou: Zhongguo guji chubanshe, 1991), preface, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Luo Genze, *Yuefu wenxue shi* (1931; rpt. in *Minguo congshu*, Series 3, 1949). He notes apologetically, that the first section—including only Yuefu—had to be printed before the entire work was completed because of demands from the printer.

⁴⁶ Liang Qichao, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa* (1921; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), p. 31.

A couple of examples may be helpful in illustrating this. He Bingsong's 何炳松 (1890-1946) discussion of the evolution of the relation between totality and division is revealing of the ways in which the possibility of universal knowledge was closely linked to disciplinary knowledge. He observes in his work *Tongshi xinyi* that analysis always emerges out of synthetic knowledge. In ancient India and Greece, this natural curiosity to grasp together the origins of everything had resulted in the elevation of metaphysics. Metaphysics was only finally overcome when this curiosity about the universe was answered not by misguided spiritual conjecture, but by the establishment of "specialized sciences (*zhuanmen kexue* 專門科學)" in which the "chaotic method was abolished, each type of science developed uniquely and never became mixed up with neighbouring sciences."⁴⁷ He goes on to apply these ideas to the human sciences (*renlei kexue* 人類科學), describing how historical study is founded on a broad knowledge of the entire expression of human actions and material conditions⁴⁸ from which proceeds a division into several larger categories—such as language, art, religion, lifestyles, legal systems, government—which can be studied separately (*fenbie yanjiu* 分別研究). He sees historiography as divisive, but only for the sake of a new synthesis. Muddled totalities are abolished in favour of logical fields of academic pursuit, but each field is ultimately meaningful only when understood as contributing back to a total understanding.

He's notion of 'separated study' (*fenbie yanjiu*) reflects what Immanuel Wallerstein, in his study of the origins of the social sciences, refers to as "sectorializing thought," the idea "that there are separate, parallel paths for the different 'sectors' of knowledge, reflecting separate, parallel processes in the real world."⁴⁹ It also hints at the universalizing vision which held "that by starting with the description of empirical reality one could by induction arrive at the formulation of abstract laws, truths that held over all of time and space."⁵⁰ The notions of language, art, religion, lifestyle, law, government were intentionally

⁴⁷ He Bingsong, *Tongshi xinyi* (1930; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991), p. 218.

⁴⁸ He writes, "人類活動之全部表示，及人類生活之全部物質狀況。"

⁴⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 191.

⁵⁰ Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science*, p. 191.

non-specific to the Chinese context; these terms opened up the possibility of participation in global comparative research.

To give one more example of the importance of these criteria we can look briefly at the hostile reaction of many academics in the Republican period to the rise of “guoxue” (國學; i.e. Sinology).⁵¹ The reaction was based largely on the perception that Chinese sinologists misunderstood the rules of disciplinary knowledge. First, instead of formulating or attempting to contribute to the understanding of universal, abstract laws, sinologists were characterized as obsessed with the specificity of the Chinese experience.⁵² Secondly, the formation of a discipline of *guoxue* rejected sectorializing knowledge in favor of a politically-defined and particularistic unity: the Chinese nation. The problems with this approach came into particularly stark contrast when compared with global academic trends. As He Bingsong pointed out, none of the Western nations had institutionalized equivalent disciplines (French studies, German studies . . .), rather sinology was the sort of discipline that was imposed on ‘dead’ civilizations (thus, Egyptology); it was a sign that these states no longer had to be studied in comparison to living states, but could be studied in isolation, as relics with some intrinsic interest but little extrinsic relevance. The grounds for global academic relevance lay in the decision to arrange the study of one’s own nation around categories that had demonstrated universal applicability. In other words, these categories were not simply distortions, but became a ground of commensurability, a proof that China had also had what every nation had to have.

3. Disciplining literary history

Returning now to literary history, the formation of a discipline of literary history required several developments: the first was the institutionalization of literary history; the second was the creation of a definition of “literature” that would be appropriate to a discipline that had been created as the local incarnation of a universal reality; the third was the development and refinement of methodologies

⁵¹ Similar to this was the decision of Cai Yuanpei and Yan Fu to abolish the Classics Department established by Zhang Zhidong at Beijing University. Instead, they decided that the various Chinese classics should be reallocated to departments of literature and history. See Timothy Weston, *The Power of Position* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 83.

⁵² Zheng Zhenduo, “Qie mantan suowei ‘guoxue’,” *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 20.1 (January 10, 1929): 8-13; He Bingsong, “Lun suowei ‘guoxue’,” *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 20.1 (January 10, 1929): 1-7.

for writing literary history. I will examine the first two of these below, the third will be covered in the next chapter.

In a way similar to Arif Dirlik's observation that Communism in China originated with organizations rather than ideology,⁵³ the creation of literary history as a discipline in China occurred without an entirely clear understanding of what it meant to study the history of literature in the modern sense. In high schools, literary history was part of the curriculum announced by the Nationalist government in 1914. According to this curriculum, literary history was to be one component of the National Language Class (*Guowen ke* 國文課).⁵⁴ This demand led to the publication of a large number of literary histories.⁵⁵ However, the object of study—*wenxue*—was still somewhat amorphous. One of the early textbooks, Wang Mengzeng's 王夢曾 *Zhongguo wenxue shi*, did not provide a definition of *wenxue* but stated unequivocally that no literature had surpassed the Six Classics (*Liu jing* 六經).⁵⁶ At the same time, the design of these textbooks indicates that the authors had absorbed several lessons in the writing of history: they were expressly concerned with showing development and change through time, and they linked their histories to the nation.

The institution of literary history at the university level had occurred even earlier. All of the early plans for structuring the curriculum of Beijing University (founded in 1898)—those of Sun Jia'nai 孫家鼐 (1827-1909), Zhang Baixi 張百熙 (*jinshi* 1874), and Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909)—included departments of *wenxue* that included a literary history component.⁵⁷ Lin Chuanjia's *History of Chinese Literature*, generally regarded as the first Chinese attempt at a literary

⁵³ Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵⁴ Wang Mengzeng, *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (1936; rpt. 1991, Zhengzhou: Zhongguo guji chubanshe, 1991), preface.

⁵⁵ For a list of these books see Zheng Zhenduo, "Wo de yi ge yaoqiu," (1922); rpt. in *Zheng Zhenduo gudian wenxue lunwen ji* [ZZDGWLJ] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), p. 36.

⁵⁶ The Six Classics, formed in the Warring States and Han dynasty, formed the basis of the civil-service examination system until they were largely displaced by Zhu Xi's *Four Books* (*sishu*) in the late imperial period. Christopher Reed's book *Gutenberg in Shanghai* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004) shows that rapid changes in the curriculum often meant high profits for publishers but not necessarily progressive content in textbooks. See, for example pages 197, 230-231, 242, etc.

⁵⁷ Timothy B. Weston, "The Founding of the Imperial University and the Emergence of Chinese Modernity," in Karl and Zarrow eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), p. 119.

history, was expressly written for Lin's class on Chinese literary history at Beijing University. Literary history gradually became dominant in departments of literature. The reasons for this are similar to those in England where, in the nineteenth-century, departments of English literature had fused the formerly denigrated "belles lettres" with the "scientificity" of philology through the practice of literary history.⁵⁸ In England, the establishment of literary history had been of great importance because it made possible the study of vernacular literature as more than simply belles lettres (literary criticism) or a model for composition (grammar), neither of which seemed to contain much trace of science.

Literary history in China was likewise linked to science. This connection was generally clear insofar as literary history was held to be one branch of a larger historical discipline. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), for example, regarded literary history as one of the major components of the historiographical field. Therefore, it was both a beneficiary of the "scientific methods of scholarship introduced from the West" and a participant in the logical division of the past into exclusive realms that would ultimately come together to form a synthetic image of the Chinese past.⁵⁹ The connection between literary history and science was often explicitly drawn. Jin Donglei points out in his history of English literature, for example, that "literature is not science, literary history, however, is science."⁶⁰ We will later see that Zheng Zhenduo drew a similar distinction between the enjoyment and creation of literature and the study of literary history, with the latter being the exclusive domain of the trained professional historian who could bring an objective methodology to bear on the literary text.

Because of its characterization as a more objective and scientific approach to literature, literary history soon became the dominant approach in university

⁵⁸ John Guillory, "Literary Study and the Modern System of the Disciplines," in Anderson and Valente eds., *Disciplinary at the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 32. Guillory writes, "The very coexistence of language and literature within the same departmental structure created soon enough the possibility for a fusion of the two disciplines of belles lettres and philology, for a *philological study of literature*. . . . Literary history provided even those who were not trained in philology with topics for 'research'."

⁵⁹ Gu Jiegang, *Dangdai Zhongguo shixue* (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), p. 2, chp. 4.

⁶⁰ Jin Donglei, *Yingguo wenxue shi* (1937; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991), p. 3.

departments of literature. Curricula for literature departments in the late-Qing, such as that of Zhang Zhidong, had included the study of Chinese literary history,⁶¹ but they continued to place greater emphasis on the study of literature as a way to improve one's own writing, and were based on a 'broad' understanding of literature rather than the 'narrow' definition that governed nearly every history of Chinese literature written by the 1920s.⁶² Dai Yan notes that by 1913 there had been a marked shift in the importance attributed to literary history. In that year, three of thirteen classes offered in the department of Chinese literature at Beijing University were on literary history: history of Chinese literature, history of Greek and Roman literature, and history of modern European literature. Predictably, these show also the increasing importance of understanding Chinese literature as a development parallel to other global literatures. Later in her book Dai Yan shows that from the 1910s to the 1940s, courses on Chinese literary history occupied an ever larger part of the core curriculum of Chinese literature departments.⁶³ The turn to literary history, in company with an understanding of Chinese literary history as a development that paralleled that of other national literatures, demanded the creation of definitions that could be applied to all literature, regardless of its national provenance.

Reflecting the ambiguous understandings of literature in early curricula, the first literary history textbooks showed little interest in definitions of *wenxue*. For the next generation of literary historians, this disregard was an indication that the authors of these works simply had no understanding of what it meant to write literary history. Zheng Zhenduo writes of Lin Chuanjia's work: "Even though it's called *Zhongguo wenxue shi* [History of Chinese Literature], its contents make no

⁶¹ One of the classes Zhang included for the literature curriculum was called "Lidai wenzhang liubie." He suggested that the curriculum for this class could be modeled after the *History of Chinese Literature* already available in Japan. See Chen Guoqiu, "Jingshi daxue tang zhangcheng yu wenxue," *Hanxue yanjiu* 23.1 (June, 2005): 380.

⁶² Chen Guoqiu, "Jingshi daxue tang," pp. 381-382. He points out that the curriculum designed by Zhang, for example, included the study of the *ji* section of the *Siku quanshu*, and the writings of the early Chinese political thinkers and philosophers. Zhang also argued that "all those who major in *wenxue*, in addition to studying how to read and talk about literature, must also frequently practice their own composition . . . those majors who know the origins of literature (*wenzhang*) must also be able to write *shi* and *fu*."

⁶³ Dai Yan, *Wenxue shi de quanli*, pp. 83-85.

sense! Some say that he has copied the language of the *Siku tiyao*,⁶⁴ actually, it's even more bizarre; he doesn't even seem to understand the format of a literary history."⁶⁵ If the early literary historians were deemed naively undiscerning in their application of the term *wenxue*, literary historians beginning in the 1920s showed an obsession with providing highly refined definitions of the term that would provide a solid basis for historical research and literary historiography. I have included three definitions of literature of various length:

Zheng Zuomin (1934): "In the past, not only was philosophy considered literature (*wenxue*), all learning (*xueshu* 學術) was also included. Definitions of literature in Europe and America are numerous; naturally, it is difficult to find one that is entirely suitable. If we look in a dictionary for definitions of *wenxue*, the term is used to refer to everything that is written. According to this definition, *shi* 詩 and *ci* 詞 are certainly literature,⁶⁶ news reports are also literature, even advertisements along the street are literature. Actually, literature is not something this broad. Posnett writes: 'literature includes all prose and poetry, not only does it express reflections, it also expresses imagination; its purpose is not only to educate citizens (*guomin* 國民) and bring about practical results, but also to give them a sort of joy.' . . . there are two reasons for the creation of a literary work: (1) when one experiences discontent (*laosao* 牢騷) or feeling (*ganchu* 感觸), when emotions are excited, then there is a product that comes out naturally from one's heart; (2) when one has a heart (*xin* 心) to describe or expose some aspect of social reality or circumstance, this is a work that is created through the use of artistic methods."⁶⁷

Liu Jing'an (1935): "The narrow meaning [of literature] is . . . works that describe human life, express emotion, have a beautiful flavor, raise in the reader feelings of empathy. Great works of literature can be read over and over . . . are filled with the author's individual character and personality . . .

⁶⁴ The *Siku tiyao* is an index to the *Siku quanshu*, a massive collection of texts sponsored and sanctioned by the Qianlong emperor in the Qing dynasty.

⁶⁵ Zheng Zhenduo, "Wo de yi ge yaoqiu," pp. 36-37.

⁶⁶ *Shi* and *ci* are both traditional poetic genres.

⁶⁷ Zheng Zuomin, *Zhongguo wenxue shi gangyao* (Shanghai: Hezhong shudian, 1934), pp. 3-4.

[and] have a universal nature . . . Even though the time and place are different, the feeling we get after reading is the same whether in the past or present, here or somewhere else.”⁶⁸

Hu Huaichen (1931): “When emotions contained in peoples’ hearts are expressed by artistic or natural methods, this is called literature. The tools used are not limited to written language.”⁶⁹

These definitions share at least two important features: first, they narrow the semantic range of a term (*wenxue*) that had traditionally been used broadly to refer to writing or study in general; second, they show an interest in creating a definition able to adequately signify all literature, regardless of its time or place of production.

In accord with Wallerstein’s description of universalizing thought, the definitions that many literary historians created were considered adequate to cover an entire sphere of human production because they were founded on a certain set of universal laws. We might derive several related laws from the three definitions above, “all people experience a similar reality, they respond with a similar range of emotions, these emotions are expressed orally or in writing, all who later hear or read these expressions will understand these to be the result of universal human emotions.” These universality of these laws meant that Chinese writers could derive their own definitions directly from those produced by writers across the globe: Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Americans are cited regularly, and in no cases were special dispensations deemed necessary for the Chinese context. This universality also made it theoretically possible to produce histories and compendiums of global literature that reduced particularity to a thin veil that could be removed through effective translation.⁷⁰

As will become apparent in my examination of Zheng’s *Wenxue dagang* in the second chapter, Zheng was particularly enchanted with the notion of a universal literature that was the common inheritance of all people, regardless of

⁶⁸ Liu Jing’an, *Zhongguo chun wenxue shi* (1935; rpt. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), Introduction.

⁶⁹ Hu Huaichen, *Zhongguo wenxue shi gaiyao* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1931), p. 3.

⁷⁰ For Zheng Zhenduo’s very optimistic take on the possibility of perfect translation, see his lengthy article, “Fanyi wenxue de san ge wenti,” (1921; rpt. ZZDQJ, vol. 15), pp. 49-94.

national boundaries.⁷¹ He writes, for example, “The goal of the new literature is certainly not to help each national people (*minzu* 民族) to preserve their national essence (*guocui* 國粹), but to transcend national boundaries, to allow the circulation of humanity’s highest spirit and sentiment.” This vision was only possible if literature was understood in a ‘scientific’ way: i.e. as a natural, almost biological, reaction of the human species to various sorts of external stimuli. Thus, even realist literatures were not irredeemably particular, but as Zheng put it, more real than the real.⁷² In Zheng’s later works, this notion of a universal literature was supplemented by the notion of science as objectivity. However, as we will see, this notion of objectivity, though offering the potential to revalue crude works that had little power to affect the reader as well as those works in the Chinese context that failed to match universal standards, was also a reaffirmation of certain universals.

Importantly, the narrowed definitions of literature were justified not on the basis of epistemology or expediency, but on taxonomies of knowledge. These definitions of literature were almost always accompanied by references to the concurrent formation of other academic disciplines. The definition of literature could be universal only because its creators had identified a discrete “sector” of knowledge to which a universal law could be applied, and outside of which were present other equally universal and distinct bodies of knowledge. Thus, the definitions are almost always accompanied by rationale for their narrowing: this does not necessarily mean that these definitions were deemed more adequate in mapping out some reality, but that the definitions were defined to prevent one

⁷¹ On this topic, see also Zheng Zhenduo, “Xin jiu wenxue de tiaohu,” (1921; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 3), p. 488; and his discussion of Richard Moulton’s notion of global literature in “Wenxue de tongyi guan.” Interestingly, in the latter essay he went beyond Moulton in espousing a world literature that ultimately paid no attention to national boundaries. This accords well with Shu-mei Shih who writes: “even as nationalism was part of the original motivation for May Fourth Occidentalism, the intellectuals’ rhetoric was filled with the language of denationalization. Yu Dafu called nationhood a ‘prison’” Cai Yuanpei, the reputable educator, asserted that truth had no national boundaries; and Chen Duxiu called ‘respecting the nation’ the third most harmful practice after ‘respecting the saints’ and ‘respecting the ancients’.” See Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, p. 131. What she does not note is that this idea of a universal truth—especially as espoused by the educator Cai Yuanpei—was not only ideological, but also embodied in the very structure of the university.

⁷² Zheng Zhenduo, “*Shijie wenku fakan yuanqi*.” The Chinese text reads: 比現實的人生更現實.

area of study from encroaching on another. Liu Jing'an, writes, for example: "those who pursue the study of literature should abandon the broad definition of literature and take up the narrow definition, so that [literature] does not get lost in unwieldiness and complexity, or encroach on the territory of other academic disciplines." In a similar vein, Zheng Zhenduo writes in the introduction to his *Illustrated History*, "Our first order of business is to sweep away all the works that are not literature, and remove them from within the boundaries of literary history, returning them to their own territories of economic history, philosophical history, or intellectual history."⁷³

4. *The people and literary history*

The last topic to be covered in this chapter is the relationship between literary history and the people. In his discussion of the literary field in modern China, Michel Hockx supplements Bourdieu's discussion of the literary field in France by introducing a "third principle," the people. According to Hockx "the most acclaimed literary producers [in China] are those who seemingly effortlessly combine 'literary excellence' with political efficacy and economic success, while never giving the impression that they sacrificed the first principle for the other two, or the second for the third."⁷⁴ Hockx's framing of intellectual concern for the wellbeing of the people and country may be overly functionalist, but his point is basically valid: for Chinese scholars the people could not be ignored, no matter how apparently obscure their area of research.

The question of how to actually go about incorporating the people into popular or mass literature was hotly contested by Marxist and leftist academics throughout much of the Republican period. Despite the apologetics of his major biographer and his close relationship to Qu Qiubai, the most ardent critic of the pseudo-popular literature created by the May Fourth academics,⁷⁵ Zheng's stance on the question was never entirely unambiguous. In an article on the need for

⁷³ Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1 (1932; rpt. Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1959), Introduction.

⁷⁴ Michel Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), p. 12.

⁷⁵ For a summary of Qu Qiubai's views on this topic, most famously expressed in his 1932 essays, see, for example, Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 26-27.

mass literature (*dazhong wenxue* 大眾文學) he argues that much Chinese literature in the past had been produced by and restricted to the elite, both because of its abstruse language and myopic concern with the world of the literati.⁷⁶ The solution, according to Zheng, was a reorientation of literature to the masses (*dazhonghua* 大眾化), which meant “taking the production of literature out of the hands of a minority and placing it in the hands of a majority.” Yet, his advocacy of a popular mass literature concealed a continued distrust of the populace: in order for a popular literature to be produced by the masses, they had to first be educated. Furthermore, his views on popularization were accompanied by his participation in an increasingly professionalized literary historical discipline—his last literary history, a history of popular literature, was actually the least concerned with the mission of literature (*wenxue de shiming* 文學的使命), a mission that was based on the potential of great literature to evoke an emotional response in its readers. In his historiography, both these tendencies are apparent; even as he struggled to find spaces for popular participation in literary development, the schemes that he adopted frequently led to their marginalization.

The difficulty Zheng experiences in arguing for mass participation in the formation of the national literature demonstrates a general difficulty met by all idealist conceptions of this process, not only, as Hockx seems to suggest, that of Chinese intellectuals. One of the problems was related to the possibility of transforming, either ideologically or practically, the illiterate masses into qualified literary adjudicators while still preserving the privileged position (and literary taste) of the current cultural elite.⁷⁷ If we take a look at the history of the formation of national literatures in Germany and England, very similar problems and two general solutions emerge: to find the role of the people in their unrealized potential (a potential that is actually always already embodied by the enlightened elite) or to envelope the people in a national historical ‘time’ that served to obscure their real and problematic presence as historical actors. Both these strategies will appear in my discussion of Zheng’s histories in the following

⁷⁶ Zheng Zhenduo, “Wenxue dazhonghua wenti zhengwen,” (1934; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 3), pp. 481-482.

⁷⁷ This problem, as can also be seen in Zheng’s revolutionary short stories (which make for an interesting read), pervaded much of his writing.

chapter. In Germany, liberal theory prior to the revolution in 1849 was characterized by a great optimism regarding the role of the people (*Volk*). Liberal theorists felt that the *Volk* could (and, indeed, must) be incorporated into literary culture; attempts were made to do just this through the establishment of book clubs, the production of reading material for broader levels of society, and the development of cultural associations for craftspeople.⁷⁸ However, these ideals broke down with the rise of class differentiation—by the mid-nineteenth century, liberal intellectuals were forced to grapple with “a mass of landless country dwellers that had not existed earlier.”⁷⁹ The choice was clear: one either had to accept the possibility of a literature that could retain the aesthetic qualities of ‘pure’ literature while still providing sufficient entertainment value to attract the masses, or concede that authentic literature really was the exclusive domain of the educated. Hohendahl discusses Prutz’s attempt to follow the former path: Prutz argued that “Serious literature (*Hochliteratur*), aimed at the literati, had to reach a broader public by freeing itself of reflection and returning to entertaining material.”⁸⁰ Of course, as Hohendahl points out, though Prutz’s vision aimed to embrace all of German society, in reality, the most disenfranchised (the largely illiterate proletariat) were still excluded. The latter choice led to two visions: the first, based on utopian liberal notions of a classless bourgeois society, portrayed education as the great social-leveler, a tool through which the poor could be enculturated (in the “high cultural” sense) and rescued from their ignorance-induced misery; the second, which was actually implemented in the second half of the nineteenth century, viewed education as a tool for the state – those of the lower classes would receive an education that equipped them for practical work, while those of the elite would be trained for national leadership.⁸¹ In other words, the idealistic elevation of the people was ultimately sacrificed for professional functionality.

⁷⁸ Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Building a National Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 272.

⁷⁹ Hohendahl, *Building a National Literature*, p. 273.

⁸⁰ Hohendahl, *Building a National Literature*, p. 276.

⁸¹ Hohendahl, *Building a National Literature*, pp. 265-270.

In eighteenth century England there were similar divergences of opinion over the role of the people. Some, such as Shaftesbury, privileged “aristocratic taste” above both the “pedantry” of the scholar and the common people. Others like Samuel Coleridge and David Hume had somewhat less plutocratic visions of a ‘clerisy’ of scholars to preserve the national heritage, or a group of critics whose “education, travel, property, and absence of interested prejudice” had made them uniquely endowed with good taste.⁸² However, while the best taste was the exclusive privilege of those with the proper educationally or socially derived tools, there remained a sense among all of these writers that the people (albeit as an abstract, potential category) somehow had to be incorporated into the judgments of literary value. It was not enough for the elite to say that they liked this literature and therefore it should be elevated. Rather, there was always an attempt to show that the taste of the elite was inclusive of the people’s unrealized potential.

A second problem, evident particularly in the composition of literary histories, was that the truly popular literature of the past had often been an oral, and therefore unrecorded, literature. The traces that remained in the present were almost always somehow attached to the literati: in a few cases, works of popular literature had been intentionally recorded in a relatively unaltered form; however, in many cases, the historian of popular literature had to simply assume the operation of a process in which popular literature was always the motive force for innovation within elite literature.⁸³ To find popular literature, it was necessary to go back to the origins of each form of literati literature, the point at which the inspiration of the people was still relatively unmediated. This strategy was useful in a variety of ways. First, it meant that popular literature of the past could be idealized without having to deal extensively with actual examples. Second, the distortions introduced by literati redactors and writers could be used explain the low quality of many of the works that were extant. Third, it broadened the scope of a history of popular literature. As many critics have pointed out, the works

⁸² Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 73; Ian Reid, *Wordsworth and the Formation of English Studies* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 7.

⁸³ For Zheng’s description of this process, see his *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* (1938; rpt. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), p. 2.

actually included by Zheng in his history of popular literature were not consistent with his supposed criteria: “emerging from the people and written for the masses,” “produced anonymously and communally,” “transmitted orally,” “fresh, though sometimes rough,” “bold and unrestrained imagination.”⁸⁴

In my discussion of Zheng’s *Illustrated History* and *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* in the next chapter, I will explore his attempts to incorporate the people into a history of Chinese literature, and how these attempts related to the privileged position of the intellectual, as well as contemporary debates regarding the role of the people.

⁸⁴ Huang Yonglin, “Lun Zheng Zhenduo,” p. 74.

Chapter 2

From the World to the People: Zheng Zhenduo's Three Histories of Literature

In this chapter, I will develop further some of the ideas discussed in the first chapter through an examination of Zheng Zhenduo's three most substantial literary histories: the *Wenxue dagang*, *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*, and *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*. Zheng's writing of literary history was not simply an objective, disinterested narration of the Chinese literary past. However, this does not mean that his histories should be discarded as merely 'ideological'. Rather, their unique ways of dealing with the past provide important clues to the problems that Zheng and other intellectuals faced in creating a history for the modern Chinese nation. Their responses to this problem were shaped, on the one hand, by institutional and conceptual demands, many of which were linked to an awareness of global structures of knowledge; but also, on the other, by shifting local pressures and the weight of the Chinese literary heritage. My discussion of each history will focus on what I take to be its most characteristic feature: for *Wenxue dagang*, a history of world literature, the focus will be on questions of global knowledge; for the *Illustrated History*, a history of Chinese literature from its origins, focus will be on the question of literary change; for *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, focus will be on the role of the people.

A. *Wenxue dagang* 文學大綱 (1924-1927): Constructing a Global Literature

The greatest historical value of Zheng Zhenduo's book is that it is really the world's first true history of world literature.⁸⁵

We believe in the importance and potential of literature. We believe that literature is not only the reflection of one time, one place, or one person, but transcends time, place, and individual . . . Only it has the power to cause the people of different times and places to be assimilated through the author.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Chen Fukang, "Chongyin *Wenxue dagang* xu," in Zheng Zhenduo, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1 (1927; rpt. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2003), p. 6.

⁸⁶ Zheng Zhenduo, "*Wenxue xunkan xuan yan*," (1921).

The *Wenxue dagang* was Zheng's first major work of literary history, and the only to narrate the history of Chinese literature alongside other literatures. This work was distinctive in other ways: it was not published as a school or university text; nor, like Lu Xun's *Brief History of Chinese Fiction* or Hu Shi's *Baihua wenxue shi*,⁸⁷ was it created to meet an instructor's need for materials on China's literary history. Instead, it was published in serial form; its intended audience included not only the intellectual, but the "average reader." If it was not a professional work, it did share in many of the understandings that lay behind new ways of teaching and studying literature. Most importantly, it embodied the tension between an ideal of literature as temporally and spatially unrestricted (the very ground of possibility for literature's formation as an academic discipline), and the assumed sufficiency of the nation to bound a national literary history that led, for example, to the division of departments of literature along national lines.⁸⁸ Zheng's first work was an attempt to realize the ideals of the former, even while it was constrained by the latter, what Prasenjit Duara has described as the appropriation of "pre-existing representations [of political community] into the mode of being of the modern nation—that is, the nation as existing in the time of History and embodied in the nation-state."⁸⁹

1. Background to the *Wenxue dagang*

The *Wenxue dagang* was first published in serial form from January 1924 to January 1927 in the influential literary journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Editorial responsibilities of this journal, published since the late nineteenth century by the Shanghai Commercial Press, had passed in 1921 to Zheng's close friend, the author Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (1896-1981).⁹⁰ Intellectuals of the time and many

⁸⁷ See the introductions to both these works for the authors' explanations of their reasons for writing.

⁸⁸ For example, the departments of literature were divided into French literature, German literature, Chinese literature, etc. Zheng himself comments on the institutionalization of departments of literature along national lines. In his essay "Wenxue tongyi guan," he notes how these narrow perspectives, and particularly the focus on national literatures, has been institutionalized in universities where one will find departments of French, English, German, or Greek literature, but never a simple "Department of Literature" (*wenxue ke* 文學科).

⁸⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 27.

⁹⁰ Better known by his pen-name Mao Dun 茅盾. Both were founding members of the *Wenxue yanjiu hui*.

later scholars treated this as a battle between the decadent writings of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school and the modern, politically-engaged literature of May Fourth intellectuals (led by the Literary Research Society [Wenxue yanjiu hui 文學研究會]) in which the latter was finally successful. As Denise Gimpel points out, this characterization of the pre-1921 journal is clearly biased.⁹¹ Nonetheless, it does reveal the two-pronged agenda of Zheng and others in the Literary Research Society: their diatribes against the early version of the journal were aimed not only at its preference for low-brow fiction, a malady that could be remedied with a good dose of realist vernacular literature, but also its lack of serious literary research, a problem that demanded new understandings of both the nature of a literary text and the reader's proper attitude toward this text.⁹²

The lack of literary research was addressed in Zheng's plans for the journal in his first year as editor (1923). Foremost was what he described as a "plan to greatly expand the space allotted for literary history and literary overviews (*gailun* 概論)." This, he wrote, "can at least provide the average reader and young literary scholar with great assistance." In addition, he announced that the study of China's own literary past would be supplemented by an increasing emphasis on global literary trends and other literatures through the translation of more relevant works by qualified translators.⁹³ The *Wenxue dagang*, in its envisioned form at least, was a fulfillment of both these goals.

2. Zheng's views on world literature

These goals had already been developed in much of Zheng's earlier writing. Here we see two important emphases: one is a recognition of the need for a national

⁹¹ Denise Gimpel has shown that the pre-Mao Dun *Xiaoshuo yuebao* was far more complex than the characterization of Zheng and Mao would suggest. See her book, *Lost Voices of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

⁹² The tendency to overlook literary research, historiography, and criticism in favour of literature itself is a problem that has been noted by Q. S. Tong and Xiaoyi Zhou who note that, "while there have been copious studies of the significance of the new literary movement—in particular, in relation to forms of creative writing, such as new fiction and new poetry—little attention has been given to the rise of modern criticism and to its significant contribution to the May Fourth cultural movement." See their article, "Criticism and Society," *boundary 2* 29.1 (Spring, 2002): 169.

⁹³ The other three stated plans included: publishing literary works of a higher quality, increasing useful articles such as "short biographies of famous world literary figures" and "reading lists," increasing the number of illustrations." Zheng Zhenduo, "Mingnian de 'Xiaoshuo yuebao,'" (1923; rpt. in *ZZDQJ*, vol. 3), pp. 469-470.

history of Chinese literature, the other a demand that Chinese—or, sometimes, Asian literature in general—be incorporated on equal terms into histories of world literature. My brief review of several of these essays below will show that even those that focus on national literary history presuppose, and often use as justification, a notion of literature as an ultimately universal (or human) rather than national phenomena.⁹⁴ What these essays don't show is how these ideals corresponded to actual Chinese literature, and the demands of a specific literary historical practice. They tend to gloss over an important problem that reemerges in all Zheng's longer literary histories, that is, how the defined universality of literature can be incorporated into histories that deal with particular literary works or national literary traditions. The three histories that I examine in this chapter can be understood, in part, as three explorations (though not necessarily successful resolutions) of this question. The first is the most optimistic in its design and revolutionary in its intentions: it deals with the problem by imagining a homogenous global literary space in which great literature is not the sole property of any one nation, but can stand for entire epochs, civilizations, or regions regardless of its local origin; the model of literary history, with its focus on 'immortal masterpieces' (*buxiu zhi jiezuo* 不朽之傑作), is generally comparative⁹⁵ rather than developmental. The universal ground of literary comparison is found in the sanctioned emotional responses of an abstract reader. The second explains the apparent particularity of local literatures through an application of universal notions of change based on a binary of death and life: true literature in China, as elsewhere, has always been a living literature. The particularity of Chinese literature is not so much a formal distinction as a stasis created by the constant intrusion of a dead tradition linked to the literati that extinguishes any eruptions of life from the people. The universal in this work is no longer explicitly a ground of comparison, but becomes a source of influence or

⁹⁴ First, a brief comment on thinking about world literature in this period. The devotion was not unique to Zheng. Wang Guowei's writings on Chinese drama, had expressed a similar interest. Sieber points out that Wang's History of Song and Yuan drama "represented the first systematic Chinese-authored insertion of Chinese literature into the discourse of 'world literature.'" See Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, p. 22.

⁹⁵ That is, comparing either how the works match up to an abstract ideal of great literature, or to the great works of other civilizations.

model of periodization that help to explain Chinese literary change. The third shifts the location of the universal from a dynamic force in China's literary development to a psychological rule explaining the response of the people or the popular writer to their environment. Universality is in direct proportion to the absence of cultural mediation in the reactions of these people to their natural environment. The Chinese people—excluding the literati—in many cases become inseparable from primitive people anywhere. The goal is not to show the development or the comparison of great literatures, both notions more or less wrapped up in cultural particularity, but to provide proof of the coterminous existence of the people and the nation (bounded by the state, but defined by relation to the land). Literature is less an autonomous aesthetic defined by intrinsic literary value than a way in which the people as producers and consumers of texts can be incorporated into the history of the nation.

My review begins with Zheng's essay "My One Request" (*Wo de yi ge yaoqiu*),⁹⁶ his first and most vigorous appeal for the writing of a proper history of Chinese national literature. Zheng begins the essay with a disdainful review of the few literary histories that had been written in the first two decades of the twentieth-century. Nearly all, he points out, had been written haphazardly in response to the form but not meaning of curricular change. He judges their content to be almost entirely unrelated to the modern sort of disciplinary study that was suggested in their titles and had evidently provided the impetus for their creation.⁹⁷ As he puts it:

I demand a "History of Chinese Literature." But is there one? I have done all that I could, finding every "History of Chinese Literature" in every library in China. Look! All that I could find are [here follows a list of nine histories]. There's nothing! These are all the histories of Chinese literature written in Chinese, but among these few books, those of Wang Mengzeng, Zhan Zhidun, and Ge Zulan are only used in teachers' college, they're incredibly

⁹⁶ Zheng, "Wo de yi ge yaoqiu," (1922; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), pp. 36-38.

⁹⁷ The sometimes spotty quality of textbooks is discussed to some extent in Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*.

shallow; Lin Chuanjia's is titled *History of Chinese Literature*, but its content is made up of who knows what!⁹⁸

Zheng's appeal for a new history of Chinese literature in this essay is not based on an ethical argument (such as Liang Qichao's well-known argument for the power of literature to change the people), or the desire for a more objective understanding of the past that characterized some of his later writings. Instead, his comments suggest that China's current understanding of literary history was unsuited to the modern world, represented here by the appropriately defined discipline of literary history. It wasn't that China had nothing called "History of Chinese Literature" (in fact, nearly all the books Zheng mentions have precisely this title), but rather that the existing literary histories guaranteed their own obsolescence by modeling themselves after the categories of traditional works of textual classification such as the *Siku tiyao*; as Zheng pointed out, no work had been done to organize (*zhengli* 整理) or conduct research on the basis of a true understanding of literature (*wenxue*). Thus, there was a glaring discrepancy between the ostensible (modern) and actual (traditional) content. Second, he notes that Chinese literary history had been either neglected or grossly distorted in the works of foreigners, specifically the Englishman Giles (see below) and Japanese scholars such as Kojō Teikichi 古城真吉 (1866-1949). Both of these suggest Zheng's belief in global-adequacy as the grounds for value in literary research and historiography. The first, as I argued in Chapter One, was founded on a belief in the presence and pertinence of universal modes of organization that could be applied unproblematically to any literature. These manifested themselves in both refined definitions of literature and new criteria governing the inclusion and emplotment of literary works in national literary histories.⁹⁹ The second revealed Zheng's anxiety when faced with foreign misunderstandings of China. Chinese intellectuals had to craft a history that would not only meet China's own needs, but also justify the entrance of its literature into a global discourse. He expressed

⁹⁸ Zheng Zhenduo, "Wo de yi ge yaoqiu," pp. 36-37.

⁹⁹ The frequent questioning of dynastic periodization—often taken to be an improper elevation of politics over literature—was one sign that politically-determined divisions of literature would have to be replaced or at least supplemented by a more natural, and therefore universal, understanding of literature qua literature.

this anxiety in a 1921 article, observing that every language in the world “had its own literature, and at the same time had the best literature of others . . . the interconnectedness of world literature is indeed people’s (*renmen* 人們)¹⁰⁰ highest spiritual interconnection. As long as the Chinese remained distanced from world literature, “not only will other people of the world be unable to understand our highest spirit, we will also be unable to understand them. To cut off relations with world literature is to cut off relations with the highest human spirit.”¹⁰¹

In a second essay, “A Critique of Giles’ *History of Chinese Literature*” (*Ping Giles’ de Zhongguo wenxue shi*), Zheng further emphasized the need for an indigenous Chinese literary history. However, rather than arguing for a literary history that might address particular internal needs, he again insists that Chinese literature can and must be remolded into the form of a global knowledge. A real danger, according to Zheng, was that this formation could be prevented by foreigners’ misconstruals of Chinese literary history.¹⁰² Zheng took as an example Herbert Giles’ *History of Chinese Literature*:

His [Herbert Giles] book is really lacking in thorough investigation; misunderstanding and confusion are apparent throughout. This is considered to be the first history of Chinese literature in English . . . if we allow his mistakes to lead to further mistakes, then I’m afraid that Chinese literature will be frequently misunderstood.¹⁰³

Zheng does not limit his criticism to the book itself, but addresses the book’s potential to distort foreign understandings of Chinese literature.¹⁰⁴ In this article, a

¹⁰⁰ Note that the term for ‘people’ here denotes people in the sense of humanity; it does not suggest a certain group of people defined by education or socio-economic status. See f. 189 for a further discussion of the terms for ‘people’.

¹⁰¹ Zheng Zhenduo, “*Wenxue xunkan xuan yan*,” pp. 388-389.

¹⁰² The belief in the inability of foreigners to comprehend (or likelihood that they would misconstrue) Chinese literature was shared by others including Fu Yanchang 傅彥長 in his article, “*Zhongguo wenxue zai shijie shang de diwei*,” *Wenxue zhoubao* 4 (1928): 141-145. The point also comes up in the *Wenxue dagang*, where Zheng notes that foreigners chose to translate the less than mediocre novels of the “*Jiaren caizi*” genre while remaining ignorant of the classic novels like *Water Margin* and *Journey to the West*. See Zheng Zhenduo, *Wenxue dagang* vol. 2, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Zheng Zhenduo, “*Ping Giles de Zhongguo wenxue shi*,” in *Zheng Zhenduo gudian wenxue lunwen ji* [ZZDGWLJ], p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ In another essay, based on his experiences travelling in Europe in the late 1920s, Zheng remarked further on Western misunderstandings of the Chinese: the West sees China either as romantic, stupid and ignorant, or as a location for their movies. See Zheng, “*Xifang ren suo jian de Zhongguo*,” (1929; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 2), pp. 504-507.

true understanding of Chinese literature meant an awareness of the ‘canonical’ figures and works of Chinese literature and, secondly, an ability to refine the unprocessed corpus of Chinese texts into a truly literary corpus by applying the same definition that could be applied to the literature of any other place or time. While the first measure of understanding was not entirely iconoclastic, it did reflect new criteria for the evaluation of literary merit:¹⁰⁵ like the second measure it indicates that understanding Chinese literature meant first understanding literature as a global phenomenon. The major objection Zheng raises to Giles’ work, thus, is that it incorporated works that were not literature by the global definition of literature (aka *wenxue*) into a schema based not on literary development itself, but the parochial measure of dynastic change. This was due in part to Giles’ benightedness as a foreigner studying Chinese literature. Zheng and others had questioned the ability of a foreigner to truly understand Chinese literature; and, in this article, Zheng positioned himself as “a far-ahead-of-the-colonial-masters scientific pioneer.”¹⁰⁶ But Giles’ foreignness is not enough to explain Zheng’s objections. In fact, they were very similar to those he had raised earlier against Lin Chuanjia’s *History of Chinese Literature*. Both Lin and Giles—one an insider, one a foreigner—showed a similar lack of understanding that stemmed not so much from their narrowness of their national perspectives as from a failure to grasp the essence of a universal that had replaced traditional (Lin) or personal (Giles) misunderstandings of literature.

Misunderstanding of the global category of ‘literature’ was apparent in another way in the “histories of world literature” produced by authors such as John Drinkwater. In the early 1920s, Zheng, along with several other members of the Literary Research Society, had been considering the question of how to most efficiently introduce Chinese readers to world literature. Their initial solution was

¹⁰⁵ His list of missing authors reflected important reassessments of traditional literature. First, the importance placed on a defined literary field meant that Zheng desired the inclusion of literary critics (the traditionally well-known Shen Yue as well as the newly elevated Liu Xie); second, the interest in suitably universal literary forms (such as tragedy) as well as the interest in foreign influence is indicated in his choice of Yuan dramatists such as Guan Hanqing and Ma Yuanzhi.

¹⁰⁶ This quote is taken from Benedict Anderson’s essay on the Filipino folklorist Isabelo de los Reyes who, like Zheng, saw himself as the implementer of a universal science in a place that colonists had ignored. See Benedict Anderson, “The Rooster’s Egg: Pioneering World Folklore in the Philippines,” in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (New York: Verso, 2004), p. 199.

to produce a translation of Drinkwater's *Outline of Literature*.¹⁰⁷ The purpose of the work seemed to align well with Zheng's own predispositions. As described by Drinkwater,

It aims at placing the [literary] work in historical perspective, showing that from the beginning until now, from the nameless poets of the earliest scriptures down to Robert Browning, the spirit of man when most profoundly moved to creative utterance in literature has been and is, through countless manifestations, one and abiding.¹⁰⁸

However, shortly after embarking on the translation, the project was abandoned. In a brief piece written in the *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, Zheng expresses his disillusionment: "Drinkwater's book is written for English and American readers, all that it describes is centered on England and America . . . as for non-European nations, they are only very briefly mentioned in the first few sections."¹⁰⁹ The inadequacy of this history, like Giles', stemmed from a misunderstanding of the definition of literature. However, whereas Giles' mistake was to substitute the formal definition of literature with his own anachronistic views, Drinkwater's was to write as though literary production was not a natural human response to the world but a national/racial response (or, that the "spirit of man" could only be found in the West). Zheng's solution did not, and perhaps could not, avoid the use of national terms. He argues that a true world literature means a literature including works from every nation (*guojia* 國家), not only England and America. However, he continues to state his firm belief that any nation's literature could be understood by people of any other time and place. The nation might organize global space, but Zheng resisted the use of national characteristics as a determinant of literary value.

¹⁰⁷ Zheng Zhenduo et al., "Guonei wentan xiaoxi," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (1923). Note: the specific location of this reference needs to be checked in the *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, unfortunately unavailable at McGill.

¹⁰⁸ John Drinkwater, *The Outline of Literature*, vol. 1 (London: George Newnes, 1900), Introduction.

¹⁰⁹ Chen Fukang, "Chongyin Wenxue dagang xu," p. 5.

Finally, a lengthy essay on the possibility of a “Unified Literary View” (*Wenxue tongyi guan*)¹¹⁰ written in response to Richard Moulton’s book *World Literature and its Place in General Culture*,¹¹¹ was Zheng’s attempt to grapple with the national divisions that he saw as undermining the definition of literature as something transcending nation (both temporally and spatially). The essay was intended as a logical extension of Moulton’s argument that literature had been unjustly denied recognition as a “unified” field. Unlike other disciplines—philosophy, art, mathematics, philology—the study of literature had been divided up by national or linguistic boundaries, meaning that “we look in vain for an independent study of literature itself, and of literature as a whole.”¹¹² Moulton’s solution was not, however, to treat all literatures as homogenous, but to argue that literature, while ideally a unified object, was actually diffuse. Literary works were spread about the globe like the features of an expansive landscape, and one naturally saw only those parts of the landscape available to one’s specific (national) perspective. The evaluative function of Moulton’s scheme, however masked, corresponds with Lydia Liu’s reading of Goethe’s notion of *Weltliteratur*, about which she writes, “*Weltliteratur*, therefore, does not signify the loss of individuality of national literatures, on the contrary, it constitutes the latter by admitting them to the hierarchical relation of a global system of economic and symbolic exchange.”¹¹³ Zheng was certainly aware of this implied hierarchy in Moulton’s view; the problem, of course, was that as long as the writing of literary history was circumscribed by the authors’ view of the literary landscape, and authorship (at least of widely-read books) was monopolized by the West, the literature of the rest would forever remain, in the words of Moulton, “a distant mountain” that “diminish[ed] to a point of snow.”¹¹⁴ Zheng’s work was to cinch up Moulton’s landscape, to bring literature into relation not with the perspective of a privileged viewer, but with its own boundaries. The application of the definition of literature, therefore, became a way of questioning the exclusivity of

¹¹⁰ Zheng, “Wenxue de tongyi guan,” (1922; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 15), pp. 137-151

¹¹¹ Richard Moulton, *World Literature and its Place in General Culture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911).

¹¹² Moulton, *World Literature*, p. 2.

¹¹³ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 187.

¹¹⁴ Moulton, *World Literature*, p. 7.

the Western perspective (even, in a typically paradoxical way, as the West was always the penultimate source of the definition).¹¹⁵

In all these early essays, Zheng's plans for Chinese literary history went beyond the domestic audience. His ambition was to incorporate the study of Chinese literature into the globally-defined field of literature. This was to be a rectification not only of traditional Chinese views, but also common Western misunderstandings: his history would be written against the narrow or skewed Western understandings of a universal concept (literature). Moretti has written that world literature, like global capitalism, is at once "one and unequal."¹¹⁶ Zheng's response to the "profound inequality" (the fact that the periphery is "intersected and altered by another culture [from the core] that 'completely ignores it'),¹¹⁷ was not to reject as false the putatively universal notion of literature coming from the West, but to re-imagine it as a true universal; and, moreover, as a universal which only a scholar from the periphery—not the core—could truly understand.

While Zheng's intentions were noble and intentionally subversive, his vision was limited by his sense of a generic lag or lack in Chinese literary history, a sense shared by many of his contemporaries who often questioned why China did not have an epic,¹¹⁸ why its myth was fragmentary, why its drama had occurred so late, etc. To a great extent, the West—even if its scholars misunderstood the true universality of the concept of literature—remained the source of universal literary categories. Chinese genres were not expected of non-Chinese literatures; the West was not lacking *ci* or *shi* poetry in the same way that China was lacking the epic or the tragedy. So, when I show below that Zheng does not reduce the particularity of Chinese literature to Western categories or temporal schemes, I am really saying two things (1) it is often Chinese literature rather than Zheng himself that refuses easy assimilation into the universal *qua* West; and (2) Western categories, in particular their increasing links to

¹¹⁵ Zheng is critical of Moulton's conception of national perspective which inevitably privileges the West. See Zheng, "Wenxue de tongyi guan," (1922; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 15), pp. 147-150.

¹¹⁶ Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 149-150.

¹¹⁷ Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," p. 150.

¹¹⁸ For Zheng's discussion of China's lack of an epic, see *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 131.

professionalization or abstraction of knowledge, were in tension with a local politics that demanded an engaged knowledge.

3. *Structure of the work*

Before beginning my analysis, it will be useful to provide a brief description of the *Wenxue dagang*. Most broadly, the work was designed to tell the complete history of world literature, beginning from the origins of writing and ending with “Literature of the New Century,” and covering in scope the entire ‘civilized’ world. The chapters on non-Chinese literatures are divided by civilization (Greece, Rome, India), region (the “East”, Europe), nation (Japan, England, France), or author (Homer). Discussions of Chinese literature are allotted their own chapters. These are divided temporally (the “Middle Ages,” including the Tang and Song dynasties), by specific works (*Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Odes] and *Chuci* 楚辭, chp. 7), and by genre (History and Philosophy, chp. 8; Drama, chp. 17, 24; *Xiaoshuo* [Novel], chp. 18, 23). Chinese literature does not appear in any larger regional formations: it is not, for example, a member of the “East” (chp. 5). All the chapters, with the important exception of those on China, are distributed along a narrative of global socio-political change from a period of primordial human unity, to a time of orderly civilizational succession, to a period of feudalism that precedes the rise and eventual global spread of the nation, the discussion of which consumes the last third of the work.

Several characteristics are apparent in the structure of the work.¹¹⁹ First, at least four schemes of temporal classification govern the material: there is a shared universal time (all literatures emerge from a pre-historic or mythical period in which writing is developed and myth is invented and gradually desacralized), bounded dynastic times (in which Chinese literature, for example, is explained with the parameters of dynastic periods),¹²⁰ metonymic civilizational times (in

¹¹⁹ A raggedness in the conception of chapter divisions might be attributed to the fact that the chapters were originally published in serial form over several years, were based on material from a large number of secondary works, and, in the case of at least the two chapters on Japanese literature, were not written by Zheng himself. The effect, regardless of its origins, is interesting.

¹²⁰ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, p. 73. Zheng writes, “What’s frequently referred to as ‘Tang shi,’ ‘Song ci,’ ‘Yuan qu,’ ‘Ming chuanqi,’ can represent the flourishing of *chuanqi* during this period [late Ming].” However, Zheng also had an interest in reducing the centrality of dynasty as an organizing category since he had earlier argued against it himself (see his article on Giles), and dynastic periodization had been questioned by many others among his contemporaries.

chapters on Greece, Rome, and India—where these are parts standing for a regional or temporal whole), and, finally, a more ‘modern’ measure of time by centuries (17th, 18th, 19th, 20th) that emerges along with the modern nation. The intrusion of Chinese generic and temporal divisions often unsettles what would otherwise be a more or less pure “Eurochronology.”¹²¹ Second, many of the dedicated areas of analysis in China fall outside the categories delimited by Western literary history and, sometimes, Zheng’s own definition of literature: an example of the latter include his discussions of Chinese history and philosophy (chp. 8), examples of the former include literary forms that are uniquely Chinese and apparently incommensurable with other world literary forms: *shi* and *ci*. Third, China (aka *Zhongguo* 中國) is the only state to appear as a main player in the work from beginning to end.

4. Analysis

a. Metonymic world literatures

If historiography is circumscribed by the nation, it is also true that all national histories are forced to deal with (or, as Prasenjit Duara puts it “appropriate”) pre-national pasts that are not easily bound by the geographical, cultural or linguistic definitions of the modern nation. In the *Wenxue dagang*, the modern nation is often present as an organizing trope or a lurking teleological premonition, however Zheng claims to be concerned with more than national literary histories. He is intent on showing that certain literatures transcend the locale in which they were created, and become bearers of global or regional significance. The measure of a literature’s quality, therefore, becomes not so much the degree to which it fits with a local context as the extent to which it manages to escape a specific nation. Corresponding with this agenda, Zheng’s first work is nearly devoid of the sort of contextual study he advocated in the *Illustrated History*. He does not simply

¹²¹ This term comes from Arjun Appadurai. He discusses Filipino adoption of ‘American’ songs by Kenny Rogers and others. He writes, “*Americanization* is certainly a pallid term to apply to such a situation, for not only are there more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of some American songs (often from the American past) than there are Americans doing so, there is also, of course, the fact that the rest of their lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world that first gave birth to these songs.” This points to the weakness of a method which sees only the superficial trappings of borrowed culture, without examining the divergent local meanings. See his, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 29-30.

construct parallel narratives of national literary histories that correspond with a given people or environment, but focuses on those literatures that he deems most representative of the literary potential of each epoch. Importantly, the degree to which a work is representative is not only measured by its contemporary reception, but in its ability to sum up the past or prefigure the future. To illustrate this point, I will look at two of Zheng's examples of archetypical world literatures: Greek literature and the vernacular writing of Dante.

The Greece of Zheng's literary history is not primarily the precursor of the modern Greek nation, but the Greece (more particularly the city of Athens) whose civilization was the pinnacle of its own age and the basis of all later Western development.¹²² The role of this state's literature in the *Wenxue dagang*, to borrow a term from Hayden White's formal analysis, is that of metonym: not only is it a part that stands for the literary production of the entire European world in this period, as an essential event in world literature (imagined ahistorically as a unified field defined by an unchanging notion of 'literature'), it is adequate as a representation of literature in general.¹²³ All later European languages and literatures are somehow Greek; any literature that fails to have a certain Greekness is in danger of crossing the boundary into the non-literary. Zheng's introduction to his chapter on Greek mythology bears quoting in length:

In both ancient times and the present, there are none who are not moved by the beautiful and captivating stories [of Greek mythology]. Furthermore, it has not only been adults that have realized their qualities, all children in the world have frequently read these stories as source for fables (*tonghua* 童話). In all the languages of Europe, there are many words that are closely tied to Greek myth . . . So, even though there are none today who worship the gods of Olympus, they have an eternal position in the hearts and souls of humanity (*renlei* 人類) . . . If we want to understand

¹²² "They [the Greeks] were the first light of the European people, a light that shone out suddenly." 他們是歐洲人民的曙光，突然而照射出來的曙光. Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 178.

¹²³ Greece is that which without the West at this period simply wouldn't exist; as White explains that when one says "50 sail" to refer to 50 boats, "it is suggested that 'ships' are in some sense identifiable with that part of themselves without which they cannot operate." Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 35.

ancient or modern European art and literature, we cannot but begin
by understanding Greek myth.¹²⁴

Greek mythology, drama, and epic poetry dominate the first chapters on non-Chinese literatures. While Greece disappears as a contemporary reality (having been absorbed into the Ottoman empire), this ancient Greek literature retains a vitality that is credited with sparking the Western Renaissance.¹²⁵ World literatures, Zheng seems to suggest, survive not by attaching themselves to the vagaries of national history, but by escaping the national boundaries by which they are artificially constrained. This does not, however, mean that they become politically impotent. When not serving as the foundation for a modern national consciousness, they still guard access to literariness—European literature became recognizable as literature only after drinking from the cup of Greek literature. And, to a certain extent, Greek literature played a similar role in regards to Chinese literature (see below).

My second example, Dante, is an illustration that the metonymical role of a world literature can be occupied also by the writing of an individual. While this might seem to offer some promise of significance to great writers wherever they appear, the potential for this sort of significance is again restricted, in particular, it is only imagined within a narrative leading up to the nation state. Dante, though writing in Italian, becomes the literary figure that redeems an awakening Europe from its dark middle ages, and ushers it into the era of nation-states. Zheng offers a glowing assessment of his writing:

Just as there were no English poets after Shakespeare who could compare with him, and no Chinese poets after Li Bo and Du Fu who could compare with them, Dante also occupied a very high position in the history of Italian literature. However, he did not only belong to the Italians; He belonged to all of Europe; he and his work were the crown (*guanmian* 冠冕) of Medieval Europe.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 56.

¹²⁵ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 281.

The importance of Dante is not simply intrinsic to his writing. If Dante's writings had not been followed by the development of the nation state, they could have only remained parochial. However, because of the imminent arrival of the nation, Dante's unique status as an early writer in the Italian vernacular literary tradition is attributed representative status: he not only crowns Medieval Europe but belongs to the future European nations. For the latter, his vernacular writings prefigure the development of each national literature.

This held great significance in terms of China because China, as represented in this work, did not participate in similar political transformations—that is, from great civilizational past, to feudal middle age, to modern nation.¹²⁷ Though Zheng compares Li Bo and Du Fu favorably with Dante and Shakespeare, China's political particularity meant that their works were, at best, a high point of Chinese literature. And, this high point was terminal rather than metonymical, an absolute ending rather than the sort of prefiguration characteristic of Dante and Greek literature.¹²⁸ Without any meaningful political (or even literary) change to point toward, the Chinese literary figures seem strangely unassimilable. Li Bo's poems are imaginative, and bold (*haofang* 豪放),¹²⁹ and Du Fu's reveal the poet's feelings and the social situation of the time,¹³⁰ but neither are more than aberrations in a literary history that was characterized by derivative poetry; and neither ultimately does more than reveal their own authors' brilliance.

Reading through Zheng's history of world literature it is interesting to note that, from the very beginning, China stands outside the civilization-feudalism-nation narrative described above. China does not share in the primordial origins of myth (though, as I show in the next section, by the late 1920s Chinese myth had been discovered and incorporated into its literary histories); its experience of the "Middle Ages" during the Tang and Song dynasties is not, as in Europe, the early formation of national consciousness but a termination of civilizational ascent; and, finally, its literary development does not follow the European nations into a

¹²⁷ We will, however, see that this problem has been addressed in Zheng's next history.

¹²⁸ Zheng argues that the effect of the great Tang poetry on later generations was deadening rather than invigorating (*Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 308). He attributes to the weight of this literary tradition China's inability to produce a Milton or Dante (*Ibid.*).

¹²⁹ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 313.

¹³⁰ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 316.

modern temporality, the division of time into centuries and their inexorable march forward, but rather concludes with the rise of genres—traditional drama, fiction, and *chuanqi*—that are cut off arbitrarily with the entrance of the modern.

Thus, in terms of the larger narrative of the work, Chinese literature appears inadequate. But this is not because it is lacking in longevity, unconnected to a strong state, or even absent of great writers—none of these features qualify a literature for world literary status. The problem is that it is missing the metonymic quality, the ability to stand for something more than itself, that characterizes Greek literature and the European literatures that grew out of ancient Greek roots. Zheng's attempts to compensate for the insignificance of Chinese literature by giving it more extensive treatment or showing the length of its tradition ultimately fail to compensate for the political marginalization that precludes Chinese literature's transformation into a world literature. As Shu-mei Shih puts it, "when Chinese Occidentalism appropriated the West, the West was seen as the universal, its prerogative of modernity the goal of universal history."¹³¹ At the same time, this hegemony did not necessarily restrict potential responses to the universal. Rather, the relation of Chinese intellectuals to the West (qua universal) was an ongoing process of strategic, sometimes faltering renegotiation. As we will see in Zheng's *Illustrated History*, the global insignificance of Chinese literature implicit in the *Wenxue dagang* was explicitly remedied by incorporating European models of change and undertaking a study of Greek literature. This meant attempting to overcome the stubbornly particular classifications and temporality of Chinese literature by uncovering a hidden universal in the Chinese past (for example, inventing a Chinese mythology or narrative of the development of the novel); elsewhere, it involved translation of the Greek stories that had shaped the language and vocabulary of European literature, a necessary prerequisite to the creation of China's own classical corpus.¹³² In Zheng's *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, the use of a global narrative or classificatory scheme to provide a structure for traditional Chinese literature gave way to an anthologizing tendency, a chronicling rather than narration of Chinese literary history that

¹³¹ Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, p. 134.

¹³² See Zheng's extensive translations of Greek and Roman mythology in *ZZDQJ*, vols. 18-19.

returned to Chinese dynastic periodization. This should not, however, be interpreted as a sign of intentional resistance against the hegemony of the Western model of literary development; if resistance occurred, it was only through the recalcitrance of the traditional literary sources. Popular literature was adopted as an alternative entrance into the universal, through the naturalized relation of people to nation. However, because of the Chinese nation's marginality, this also inevitably became a turn to the particular. Thus, even as the objective examination of a popular literature met the requirements of a universal discipline of literary history, it arguably also deprived literary history of the sense of a meaningful mission. That is, it was only by imagining Chinese literature as a potential participant in a larger narrative of literary development that something beyond the present could be imagined, and only by inserting Chinese literature into this narrative that its inadequacies could be revealed. Turning to the people led to the sort of morass I discussed at the end of the previous chapter—a sustained transformative politics based on a popular literature of the past almost always remained untenable.¹³³

However, before we turn to the strategies employed in Zheng's later works, I want to discuss an alternative measure of Chinese literature's universality that appears in the *Wenxue dagang*. Chinese literature had been shown to have failed miserably as a world literature with metonymical import. But this sort of failure could be attributed largely to China's geographical isolation; it was not necessarily a feature inherent to Chinese literature. A stronger measure of Chinese literature's (potential) global value lay within its potential to bring the individual reader into a certain relation to the text.

b. Ways of reading: views of the text

Zheng's model of literary reading, based on a distinction between "appreciation" (*jianshang*) and "research" (*yanjiu*), reveals several rules that govern reading. The first is a principle of the text: literary texts must be read by all not for a deeper meaning they might conceal, but for the stories that mark their surface. The second and third are principles of the body: every reader's emotions are stimulated in a specific way through the reading of a truly literary text. However,

¹³³ A point that was recognized by Marxist critic and one-time Communist Party leader, Qu Qiubai.

this stimulation has to be processed differently by the amateur and professional readers. For the former, as I will show below, the emotions were to be a direct impetus for social action or belonging. For the latter, these emotions could inhibit research and thus had to be controlled by a rigorous application of the objective standards of literary research. All three principles of reading followed the definition of literature in claiming universal applicability: they were pertinent to Chinese and non-Chinese texts, ancient and modern, and showed no regard for how a text may have been read originally. Thus, for example, Zheng chastises early European exegetes for misreading Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

Dante's early commentators talked of many things touching on his theology, philosophy, his use of analogies, and all this sort of thing. Just like the commentators on Virgil: they didn't treat him as a great poet, but as a prophet, taking his writings as the prophetic utterances of God. . . . This sort of talk should be ignored by any who enjoy this poem . . . only then can we enjoy the true character of this work—a great and surpassing poem, an immortal story of love and sorrow, a work that has no match among the great works of humanity.¹³⁴

Early readings and ways of classifying the *Shijing* are also summarily disqualified:

Today, when we study the *Shijing* we can't but destroy (*chongpo* 衝破) this layer of superstitious writing (*mizhang* 迷章)! We should bravely begin from the poems themselves and distinguish their character (*xingzhi* 性質). We must know the content of the *Shijing* is very complex, that the divisions of *Feng*, *Ya*, and *Song* are inadequate to categorize all the poems in the *Shijing*.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, pp. 286-287. This quotation is taken almost verbatim from Drinkwater, *The Outline of Literature*, p. 170.

¹³⁵ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, pp. 137-138. The *Shijing*, or Book of Odes, is divided into three large sections, Guo Feng 國風 (State Airs), Ya 雅 (Court Songs), and Song 頌 (Hymns). See Nylan, *The Five Confucian Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 73-74. Zheng makes a similar point when criticizing readings of *Journey to the West* as a Buddhist sutra, Daoist scripture, or Confucian classic. He writes, these readings "add a layer of dust three inches thick, making it impossible to see its true literary artistic value." See *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, 59. He similarly discards readings of *Mudan ting*, *Ibid*, 77; and readings of Du Fu's poetry, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 316.

There are two criticisms here related to the misreading of traditional Chinese literature. First, Zheng argues that there have been systematic errors in classification; and, second, literature's potential to provoke an immediate response in the reader has been reduced by an obfuscating layer of "superstitious writing." The former, as we have seen, was being corrected by the establishment of a discipline of literary history and a narrowing of the definitions of literature. It is also linked to the latter, however, in that both suggest a belief that there was nothing in the literary text that should be concealed, that the meaning of the text and categories into which it should be placed were self-evident. Zheng rejected the legitimacy of reading according to what Stephen Owen has referred to as a concern for "'concealment'."¹³⁶ Owen suggests that in the context of pre-modern Chinese literary study, applying a belief in concealment to the reading of a text meant, first of all, a recognition of the danger that a literary text could hide its author's true character. The struggle was to devise a mode of reading that would bring this character into true relief. Secondly, it meant that a reader's initial emotional response to the text had to be treated with a degree of suspicion. Owen reads in *Mencius* the idea that "[t]o understand the poems of the *Book of Songs*, one must possess a special capacity to know 'what was really meant' by the speaker, not simply what the poem might seem to say."¹³⁷ Zheng's problem with this mode of reading is evident: it is not so much that an emotional response to the text is devalued altogether, but that the emotional response is restricted (it is a "special capacity" that is the property only of the well-educated elite) and leads not to action but, at best, to empathy. Clearly, if literature is to have a social function, it must have the potential to move a non-professional or non-initiated reader.

Zheng's criticisms were also directed against traditional commentary, a form that he felt buried the literary text beneath a mass of subjective judgments and disintegrative word studies. Not only was this commentary an improper form of literary research, but it had the secondary effect of blocking the individual

¹³⁶ Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, 1992), p. 21.

¹³⁷ Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 25.

reader's relation to the text. Daniel Gardner argues that the primary mode of hermeneutics, the interlinear commentary, was essentially based on a "claim that every word, every sentence, every paragraph of the canonical text [was] profoundly significant, deserving of the most genuine and thorough reflection."¹³⁸ The real meanings of the text were not believed to be immediately apparent to the average reader, but could only be worked out with great effort by the initiated scholar. In time, a similar form of interlinear interpretation came to be used in readings of even the decidedly unorthodox vernacular novels.¹³⁹ Fiction commentary rose to prominence during the late Ming in response to the popularity of commentary in other genres.¹⁴⁰ The densely interpreted and revised editions of vernacular novels produced by commentators such as Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1608-1661) (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 [Water Margin]) and Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (fl. 1661-1700) (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [Romance of the Three Kingdoms]) are two of the most famous examples.¹⁴¹

Zheng's criticism against this form of reading was not unique. Something akin to the Reformers' demand for *sola scriptura* was widespread and already implicit in the way literature was being printed in Republican China. In the twentieth century vernacular novels reappeared in the form most commonly encountered today, a form that mimics the European novel with clear attribution of authorship, print running horizontally from left to right, modern punctuation, and an almost complete absence of commentary. The move away from the novel with interlinear commentary suggests not only changes in printing technology,¹⁴² but also a general devaluation of (or, at least the loss of a market for) a form of reading closely associated with the Confucian canon. Just as the Confucian canon was divided up among academic departments for an 'objective' study unmediated by the distortions of traditional interpretations; novels were now offered to their

¹³⁸ Daniel Gardner, "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57. 2 (May, 1998): 401.

¹³⁹ Martin Huang, "Author(ity) and Reader in Traditional Chinese Xiaoshuo Commentary," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* vol. 16 (Dec. 1994): 41-67.

¹⁴⁰ David Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, p. 58.

¹⁴² Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, p. 41.

readers stripped of commentarial adornments and rid of ambiguities. They were no longer to be read or evaluated as sources of hidden meaning, didactic parables, or moral archetypes; nor were they to be divided up by the intrusive interlinear commentaries that substituted an elite reader's subjective interpretation—even if it was in the guise of a retrieval of authorial intention—for each reader's prolonged engagement with the original text.

Zheng's criticism of Jin Shengtan in *Wenxue dagang* illustrates his problem with the traditional form of reading:

Each time he commented on the sentences or praised the characters of the original text, he accommodated his own meanings (*qianjiu jiyi*), there are places in which [his actions] were like dismemberment or taking the scales off a fish; the effect was to prevent the reader from seeing the true meaning of the original text. This is his greatest fault. Those among later critics who adopted this practice can all be traced back to him.¹⁴³

Of course, it should be stressed that Zheng's critique of traditional literary criticism was based on an oversimplification of this tradition; this simplification served well as a foil against which he could expound the proper (professional, objective, scientific) mode of reading that marked the practice of the modern literary historian. According to this new mode, obfuscations in the text were to be addressed primarily by contextualization or translation, not by hermeneutics.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, to study a text as a literary historian meant to detach the study of the text from the story itself. A literary history should not be inserted willy-nilly among the words of a work of literature, but should comprise a work in itself. For the amateur reader, the historical context created by the professional historian

¹⁴³ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, p. 103.

¹⁴⁴ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, p. 5. We should be cautious about presenting this shift as something entirely new. If we look at the history of the interpretation of the *Shijing*, for example, the extreme form of hermeneutics (reading into the text) practiced by some earlier commentators, albeit for the laudable ideal of propriety, was questioned by many during the Song dynasty who felt that the poems of the *Shijing* actually meant what they apparently said. Ouyang Xiu was one of the first to advocate "a direct unmediated engagement with the Classics." See Steven Van Doeren, *Poetry and Personality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 152. It is also important to note that some developments in philological scholarship in the Qing presaged some of the work done by literary historians in the Republican period. See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

could provide background information, but this should supplement rather than impinge on the experience of the story as a cohesive narrative or the poem as a more or less direct reflection of the author's emotions. In terms of the literary historian himself, an objective reading of the text would bring him into a larger critical discourse that was not contingent on the emotional response to be derived from a work of literature. This allowed, as we will see in Zheng's later works, for the separation of judgments of literary value from the objective study of literary history.

By restoring immediacy for the amateur reader, this reader could gain access to the meaning and emotive quality that were taken to be always present in the uninterpreted literary text. Zheng, of course, could not argue that there was absolutely no concern with emotional effect in traditional literary criticism. For example, the perceived absence of this very sort of immediacy had led many traditional scholars to criticize the overly allusive nature of Song dynasty lyric poetry.¹⁴⁵ However, Zheng made this ideal a universal standard for reading. In the process, certain types of texts were devalued (for example, poetry whose understanding was contingent on allusions was less amenable to this mode of reading than more apparently direct or realist poetry); and others, in particular novels, were revalued.

c. Ways of reading: reader and emotion

I have suggested above that the function of literature was thought to lay on its surface—this surface, however, was imagined as surface only in the sense¹⁴⁶ that instead of beckoning toward a deeper (often allegorical) meaning in the text itself, it lay directly and transparently on some reality that was assumed to become immediately accessible and moving to any reader. Therefore, the study of the text was no longer intended to work out through hermeneutics a true understanding of

¹⁴⁵ David Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 58.

¹⁴⁶ That is, by 'surface' I do not mean that Zheng reduced literature to only the textual artifact itself or its intertextuality, the sort of flatness described by Jameson in *Postmodernism*. Jameson argues, in his description of 'postmodern' architecture, art, and texts that the hermeneutic or 'depth model' has been replaced by "a conception of practices, discourses, and textual play [in which] depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)." See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 13.

the text or to unlock the mysteries of its words, but to restore the text to its historical context or integrate it into a narrative of literary change. From this we can derive two primary modes of reading: the first, that of the amateur reader, consisted of a circumscribed sort of emotional engagement or enjoyment (that is, the amateur reader was not to enjoy the text through ‘appreciation’ but through identification, seeing his or her own reality in the work). The second, that of the academic, was a more rigorous discipline that demanded mastery over a certain set of practices (governing both the emotions and the scholarly method). It began by abandoning both appreciation and interpretation. For many academics, including Zheng, literary historiography was not primarily interpretive—it didn’t have to be because the text meant exactly what it said; nor, like the canonical commentarial tradition, was it comprised of contributions to accumulated readings from the past. In Zheng’s larger corpus, the focus was on recreating textual or generic histories,¹⁴⁷ providing an author’s biography, or sketching out later influences,¹⁴⁸ not on trying to understand what the stories meant or determining their value as moral prescriptions.¹⁴⁹ In its extreme objective form, literary history simply converted literature into a historical source, its value for the literary historian lay in the extent to which it could be historicized. With the professionalization of literary historiography, the response of the amateur reader became of less importance as a guide to the construction of literary histories. However, in the *Wenxue dagang*, a work with the distinctly polemical agenda of

¹⁴⁷ For examples, see Zheng’s numerous studies of the textual histories of popular novels and dramas.

¹⁴⁸ This was similar to Hu Shi’s approach. For example, in his history of Chinese philosophy, “Hu evaluated the great thinkers of the past by avoiding discussing the intrinsic value of their work and instead examining their impact on later thinkers.” See Xiaoqing Lin, “Historicizing Subjective Reality,” *Modern China* 25.1 (Jan. 1999): 7. Lin also points out that this approach was rejected by many other academics; for intellectuals such as Liang Qichao, the ideal of objectivity came into conflict with the need for social efficacy.

¹⁴⁹ I would argue that these characteristics are largely shared by other influential literary historians of the Republican period: see Hu Shi’s studies of textual history, Wen Yiduo’s philological studies of Chinese myth and poetry, essays in *Wenxue yanjiu*, etc. Wen, for example, commented on the apparent inability of earlier scholars of the *Shijing* to see the obsession with sexuality that lay so close to its surface: “Ever since ancient times, it is unfortunate that honest and frank (*kaicheng-bugong*) people were so few, so they were always unable to read the true *Shijing*.” See *Wen Yiduo quanji*, vol. 3 (Hubei: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 170. There was a strong antipathy to moralistic interpretations among many scholars of this generation – it was the story, not the implicit moral lesson of the literary work that was important.

redressing the marginalization of Chinese literature, the professional method remained necessarily inchoate and often secondary to the need to construct a literary corpus that would guide the amateur reader to a proper mode of reading.

Therefore, before moving on to the academic reader, I will begin by examining the ideal of the amateur reader as revealed in this text. Zheng's critical readings of the works in the *Wenxue dagang*, when not simply providing a brief textual history,¹⁵⁰ rarely offer more than a brief description of his own emotional response, or rather the emotional response he prescribes for the imagined non-academic reader, to a passage. He insists that it would be improper to expect anything of the literary text but emotional stimulation, and this emotion is expected to arise spontaneously (notice his use of the term 'naturally' *ziran* 自然) from the text. For example, he writes the following of a passage from the opera *Mudan ting*:

The light and leisurely yet refined language is truly moving (*zhenzhi dongren* 真摯動人), it is also the sort of work that has been rarely seen since *Xixiang ji*. Each character is given a unique description. The "Jing meng" 驚夢 section is especially well-known [Zheng includes a lengthy excerpt . . .] This is naturally an immortal (*buxiu*) phrase, yet there are many other places that stand up well in comparison to the beautiful language here. Some think that *Mudan ting* has parts that point [to something else], or were intended as satire (*fengci* 諷刺); some even think some author used this drama to describe the boudoir affairs of some family or to express his own indignation. None of this should be believed.¹⁵¹

We see in this passage one of Zheng's primary measures of the value of any literary work: its ability to move the reader (*dongren* 動人).¹⁵² In introducing the *Wenxue dagang*, he established this as an underlying principle: "We should only ask whether this [literature] is of the best quality, whether it is the most moving, whether it is that which we enjoy the most; we shouldn't ask whether or not it is

¹⁵⁰ For example, his brief examination of the textual history of *Xiyou ji*. See Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, pp. 55-59.

¹⁵¹ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, pp. 76-77.

¹⁵² For example, see Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, p. 57.

ancient or modern, whether it is of our own nation or foreign—if we do this we are bound to have a sort of bias.”¹⁵³ At first glance, Zheng appears to be advocating an autonomous aesthetic, a literature set apart and valued for its beauty alone. This is misleading, a product of Zheng’s theoretical investment in the definition of literature. Gregory Jusdanis makes this point well in his discussion of literary historiography in Greece: he argues that “autonomous art is not a product simply of philosophy. It arose in response to the differentiation of social practice, one of the chief characteristics of modernity . . . [Art] evolved into an institution after it separated itself from other practices in the festival, aristocratic court, and church.”¹⁵⁴ In a society, such as Greece, in which completely differentiated institutions did not emerge or emerged only belatedly, the role of art was clearly different. It was not situated, as in the West, vis-à-vis capitalism as “one of the last refuges, untainted by market instincts, where the individual could find peace, transcendence, and universal communicability,”¹⁵⁵ rather, it was tightly linked to political debates and inseparable from struggles over the definition of a national character, history, and modernity.

For Zheng, in the *Wenxue dagang*, the aesthetic value of literature was similarly inseparable from its political potential.¹⁵⁶ To understand this, we have to look briefly at his argument that literary quality was linked to a work’s ability to move the reader (*dongren*). Zheng made a strong connection between what he called the mission of literature (*shiming*) and the qualities of literature that would allow the realization of this mission. The mission relied on the belief that in literature, “the joys and sorrows of the author [of literature]” could “stir up similar feelings in the reader.”¹⁵⁷ While an emotional response was the reader’s proper attitude to a literary text, there was a specific connotation to this emotional

¹⁵³ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, preface.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 95.

¹⁵⁵ Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁶ As we will see in Zheng’s later works, it was only with the professionalization of literary historical practice, accompanied by increasing institutional differentiation, that literature could be studied apart from its effect. However, the direct consequence was not the creation of an autonomous aesthetic, but a deaestheticization of literature, the conversion of literature into historical artifact.

¹⁵⁷ Zheng, “Wenxue de shiming,” (1921; rpt. in ZZZDQJ, vol. 3), p. 402.

response, and certain responses were disqualified: a text's capacity to move its reader could not be measured simply by the enthusiasm of a popular audience's reception of a given literary work; nor should literary texts simply create a sense of fun or be treated as playthings.¹⁵⁸ Instead, literature was expected to "expand or deepen human empathy, [bring] consolation (*weijie* 慰藉), and raise the human spirit; this meant saving people from a "cruel and vulgar (*canku beibi* 殘酷卑鄙) world . . . [in which] empathy is suppressed by cruel systems of nation and class."¹⁵⁹

This stance was probably most apparent in the reaction of Zheng and other May Fourth intellectuals to the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature. Rey Chow provides the following description of their view: "Butterfly authors were also 'untrustworthy' as they shamelessly regarded their own work as play (*youxi wenzhang*), as a leisurely withdrawal into the ideological leftovers of a social and political world which was collapsing but which still constituted, in broken-up forms, the materiality of a people's lives."¹⁶⁰ Zheng's work makes it clear that he saw this as a problem that pervaded the Chinese past. Many of the most popular texts in Chinese literary history—including the *Jiaren caizi* 佳人才子 (beauties and scholars) genre,¹⁶¹ the historical *xiaoshuo*¹⁶² of the Ming and Qing, and the stories of martial heroes in the late Qing, for example—were received with great enthusiasm by popular audiences but are deemed by Zheng to lack the capacity to *dongren*. The popularity of a text, or the value of the text as commodity was associated with "the crude enjoyment of the masses;"¹⁶³ and, clearly the masses

¹⁵⁸ Zheng, "Zhongguo wenren duiyu wenxue de genben wujie," (1921; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 3), p. 423.

¹⁵⁹ Zheng, "Wenxue de shiming," p. 402.

¹⁶⁰ Rey Chow, "Rereading Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: A Response to the 'Postmodern' Condition," *Cultural Critique* 5 (Winter, 1986): 80.

¹⁶¹ According to Daria Berg's description, these short works of fiction, "comedies of errors and romances between talented scholars and beautiful ladies . . . celebrat[ing] chastity, chivalry, virtue, and wit," became popular from the mid-17th century. See her, "Traditional Vernacular Novels: Some Lesser-Known Works," in Mair, ed., *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 666.

¹⁶² I have chosen to leave this term untranslated. In the Republican period, the term *xiaoshuo* referred to modern novels and certain types of narrative fiction in traditional literature. This required stripping the term of many of its earlier connotations and recreating a history of a generic development, as I discuss in my section on the *Illustrated History*.

¹⁶³ Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity*, p. 102. As for the literati, certain types of enjoyment were disqualified for the popular reader.

did not have the capacity to recognize when they were really enjoying a literary text properly (or enjoying a proper literary text . . . the two were conflated). For example, Zheng writes of the late Qing heroic tale *Peng gong'an* 彭公安: "The popularity (*shengxing* 盛行) of this sort of story has a very bad influence on society, it often causes ignorant people to become preoccupied with imagined heroes while forgetting the actual situation of society."¹⁶⁴

The popular historical novels of the Ming and Qing are given a slightly higher assessment—at least they taught some history—but they are also lacking in the ability to properly *dongren*. Zheng writes, "All that's known among the people (*minjian* 民間) of history comes from this sort of book [i.e., the *yanyi* 演義]. But the authors of these stories write in a clumsy and dry style and have no ability to produce precise description." Works that tell the story of individuals are given slightly higher credit:

The narratives of these *xiaoshuo* are mostly pure fabrication (*xuhuan* 虛幻) and have no basis in history. However, in the end, those based on one character, when compared to works like *Dong Zhou lie guo* that have numerous historical characters and an incoherent narrative, are better able to move the reader (*geng zu dongren* 更足動人).¹⁶⁵

In this example, there is an important, if grudging, explanation for the slightly higher ability of the second sort of fiction to move its audience. The explanation is a combination of content and form. The content, Zheng suggests (negatively in this case), should adhere to some reality, either historical or current; the form should be an integrated and comprehensible narrative. Zheng makes a similar assessment when comparing two editions of the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the West):

As soon as we pick up the two editions of *Xiyou ji* and read them side by side, we immediately can see how much the narrative technique of the Wu edition has advanced . . . Yan [Zhihe]'s

¹⁶⁴ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, p. 491.

¹⁶⁵ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, pp. 53-54.

edition is only the bare bones of a story, whereas Wu Cheng'en provides it with ample flesh and a lively spirit.¹⁶⁶

The importance attributed to narrative is a sign that Zheng saw the individual reader, the one for and within whom the story unfolds, as the sanctioned unit of textual consumption. Obviously, for Zheng, this should be an experience unsullied by commentarial interference or inadequate storytelling. However, keeping in mind Zheng's notion of the mission of literature as something transcending individual enjoyment, something intended to spur the reader to social action, this talk of narrative can also be taken as an articulation of a model through which literature is able to draw the reader into a larger community and thus fulfill its mission.

It is expected that the reader, alone with an unmediated text, will through his or her experience of the text be prepared for incorporation into a universal humanity. The basis for inclusion is understood as something innate—of the emotions—and therefore provides the possibility that any reader will respond in a predictable way to the same narrative. There is no need for cultural or communal mediation, supervision, or training. This is a literature made public. Conversely, we should note that the refusal to accept alternative (or, for Zheng, inferior) approaches to narrative was also a refusal to accept or even bother explaining the ways that these had brought the pre-modern reader into community. In the case of interlinear commentary, for example, readers came into community through an extended conversation with other commentators;¹⁶⁷ in the case of traditional fiction, the reading of almost any popular literature could evoke a communal experience that supplemented narrative gaps with memories of an event in which

¹⁶⁶ Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 2, pp. 55, 58. Zheng also attributes the power of Guan Hanqing's famous *zaju* play *Dou'e yuan* (Injustice to Dou'e) to the strength of its narration (*xuxie* 敘寫) which creates suspense and urgency and "naturally makes it hard for the reader to forget." *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, pp. 410-11. This work, as Zheng points out, was one of the few Chinese dramas to correspond to the important category of tragedy (*beiju* 悲劇). For a translation of this *zaju*, see Mair, ed., *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 673.

¹⁶⁷ Tong and Zhou, for example, point out that: "[t]raditional Chinese criticism, then, is not a conceptualized category or an abstract notion but rather a mass of critical knowledge accumulated over hundreds of years and made available as a collective formation." The sort of knowledge they describe here is quite the opposite of that which was necessary for a world literature. See their article, "Criticism and Society," p. 159.

the stories were embodied in drama, ritual, or oral story telling.¹⁶⁸ These local communities, insofar as they were based on specific local knowledges, were not the sort of communities that were to be formed through the construction of a world literature.¹⁶⁹

In the *Wenxue dagang*, communities found an easier source in the Greek myths or Indian epics. This is symbolized by Zheng's decision to tell these as stories, not simply to dwell on their textual histories or influences on later literature.¹⁷⁰ By treating them as narratives, Zheng marks these stories as potential members of the world literary canon. Reflecting his low view of narrative in Chinese literature, Chinese works are praised or criticized but rarely narrated except in a very cursory fashion.¹⁷¹ In the years following the *Wenxue dagang*, Zheng did, in fact, try to retell the Chinese past in the form of stories. The historical novels and short stories he wrote during the Japanese occupation and civil war relied on the power of narrative to inspire nationalist sentiment and a sense of shared history; and his active participation in the movement to convert the traces of ancient Chinese myth into a systematic mythology was intended to create a national mythology by reintegrating these traces into complete stories.¹⁷² In other words, ultimately the search for narrative was not only, as one author has put it, a sign of "simplistic views, which clearly reflect implicit or explicit

¹⁶⁸ Many have pointed to a "striking feature of the Chinese situation . . . the sharing of materials and methods between three genres superficially discrete: the vernacular story, the classical-style tale, and the theater piece." Cyril Birch, "Forward" in Andrew Plaks ed. *Chinese Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), xi. In other works of later imperial China we can see a similar tendency to refer the viewer back to the theatrical stage: a good example of this is the theatrical *nianhua* (New Year's prints) whose stereotypical features and stage settings are only meaningful when the viewer can place them within a memory of performance.

¹⁶⁹ Zheng had a rather complicated relation to the local; his later work collecting popular literature and art comprised a turn toward the local, if not necessarily a rejection of the universal.

¹⁷⁰ Zheng's interest in narrating Greek literature for the Chinese audience is also indicated by his extensive translations of Greek mythology.

¹⁷¹ One exception are the Yuan dynasty dramas, some of which Zheng regarded as the only examples of Chinese tragedies. *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, chp. 17.

¹⁷² On the process through which scattered mythical remnants were turned into an extensive mythology, see Michael Puett's article, "Sages, Ministers, and Rebels: Narratives from Early China Concerning the Initial Creation of the State," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58.2 (December, 1998), pp. 430, 432. Puett argues, "the concern for reconstruction has dominated much of the scholarship on early Chinese narratives." He argues that, "instead of searching for some authentic, or more basic, mythology, the goal should be to understand why, in each case, a particular narrative, or a particular version of a more common narrative is given."

imposition of Western norms,”¹⁷³ but rather a complex attempt to make traditional Chinese literature meet very real, and often contradictory political and scholarly demands.

d. Ways of reading: the disciplined scholar

Along with a concern for moving the reader, a concern that often served to mediate between the autonomy of literature and its socio-political function, there is in Zheng’s writings a distinction between the literary historian and the amateur reader’s relation to the text. I conclude my discussion of *Wenxue dagang* with this because it marks a transition between Zheng’s first and later literary histories. Whereas the *Wenxue dagang* is primarily concerned with works that move the reader, Zheng’s later histories tend to exclude a direct concern for the amateur reader of literature, instead placing the literary historian in direct relation to a set of materials that are obliged only to adhere to the abstract definition of literature or fill gaps in the history of literary development. To some extent, this meant that the ‘mission’ of literature, of evident importance in the *Wenxue dagang*, was either displaced (to writings that were not professional literary historiography) or only present in a sublimated form.

Unlike the amateur reader, the literary historian was created through a process of disciplining that included both an acquisition of professional skills and a control of the sensual and emotional body, always an obstacle to objective knowledge. In his introduction to *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* (1927), a collection of papers on Chinese literary history, Zheng describes three scenes of reading: In the first, a literatus (*wenren* 文人) reads a collection of classical poetry; totally oblivious to his environment he can’t help but exclaim: “Isn’t it great, this poem of Li Bo’s.” In the second, a group of friends enjoy delicacies and fine wine while discussing literature and art. Already drunk, one stammers out: “Who can attain the spirit of Du Fu” while another responds, “Du Fu’s poems are still bound by rules, only Li Bo’s poem’s are entirely unrestrained (*tianma xingkong*), none can attain his level. Therefore many people advocate the study of Du and none the study of Li.” In the third, a lone scholar in a room labours over his desk, reading

¹⁷³ Shuen-fu Lin, “Ritual and Narrative Structure in Ju-lin wai-shih,” in Andrew Plaks, ed. *Chinese Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 248.

and rereading a book, stopping occasionally to stare blankly out the window. He comes across a particularly vivid phrase and writes “Excellent language” (*miaoyu* 妙語); he makes two circles beside the character.¹⁷⁴ All of these, for Zheng, are too unintentional (*suiyi* 隨意), too concerned with enjoyment rather than research (again, we can see a clear and moralistic condemnation of improper emotional response), or simply vacuous.

So, what is research? In the first chapter I mentioned the importance ascribed to “objectivity” in the practice of the professional literary historian. This required a disciplining rather than denial of one’s humanity (that is, a choice of qualities that were most conducive to serious study such as calmness and focus). The scholar’s approach to the text was founded on the belief that a human’s awareness of his or her own subjectivity could produce a pure objectivity. This cultivation of the emotions would be combined with an acquisition of professional skills and concepts. Thus, Zheng’s description of literary research combines both emotions and methodology: “The literary researcher does not research for his own entertainment. His is not a tour of famous parks and appreciation of rare flowers; his duty is investigating the genre and nature of the flower, the period and form of the blossom. . . [he] does not speak carelessly, but first undertakes careful investigation and research and only then produces a conclusion or opinion . . . The writer of literature is rich in imagination and has a romantic character; the literary researcher is not like this: he searches for the truth with calm and cool investigation.”¹⁷⁵ The creation of the professional literary historian was no less universal in its ambitions than the creation of the amateur reader; the difference was that the universalism rested not only a shared humanity, but a shared scientific discipline that aimed at the construction of a global knowledge via the nation.

¹⁷⁴ Zheng Zhenduo, “Yanjiu Zhongguo wenxue de xin tujing,” in Zheng, ed., *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1927), pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ This corresponds with a similar set of characteristics set out by Liang Qichao in his article discussing the respective traits of the author and the historian. He provides the following three ideal attributes of the historian: (1) a patience for collecting materials; (2) a meticulous sense of discrimination to sift between true and false sources; (3) sharp powers of observation to see what others might miss. Liang, “Wen shi xuejia de xingge ji qi yubei,” in Xu Xiaotian, ed., *Guoguo xue taolun ji*, vol. 1 (1927; rpt. in *Minguo congshu*, Series 3, 1991), pp. 272-274.

In the *Wenxue dagang* Zheng has been forced to negotiate between these universals and: (1) the demands of national history (2) the notion of literature's mission, based on the reader's emotional response. The first required that the national past, imagined both temporally and spatially, be filled with content, and that the literature chosen have something to say to its national readers. To rescue the national past for literary history, Zheng reads 'non-literary' writings such as philosophy or history in a literary historical mode—this meant refusing to understand these texts as history or philosophy, but approaching them with a set of literary questions. For example, when assessing the value of historical works as literature, it was not the degree to which they told the truth of history, but the degree to which they were formally or linguistically innovative, emotive, or apparently influential in later developments of 'pure' literature.¹⁷⁶ The second meant sacrificing an objectivity based on shared methodologies to measure textual change (the specific universality of the literary historian), to an awareness of a shared human response to literary works. Zheng in the *Wenxue dagang* was concerned less with literary development than with bringing together works that would move the reader.

In Europe, Hayden White argues, professional history arose out of a desire to "determine the 'facts' of history, by which to assess the objectivity, veridicality, and realism of the philosophies of history that authorized the different political programs."¹⁷⁷ He goes on to note that "[t]he political aspect of this analytical effort consisted in opposing a properly disciplined historical consciousness to utopian thinking in all its forms (religious, social, and above all political)."¹⁷⁸ I would argue that professionalization in the Chinese case, while also founded on an ideal of objectivity, could not entirely divorce itself from a utopian vision. Chinese scholars' awareness of their 'belated modernity'—that is, modernity as a

¹⁷⁶ Their clever and unimpeded arguments, beautiful and innovative literary style (ci cai), junjie 俊捷 and moving narration, gave later literary writers an indescribable contribution. See Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 160. Or, of the 'philosophical' work *Liezi* 列子: "its language (wenci) is magnificent (xuanli 絢麗) and extremely graceful, it can really move the reader (很能使讀者感動)." *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 173.

¹⁷⁷ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 61.

¹⁷⁸ White, *Content of the Form*, p. 61.

project that had to be consciously crafted—implied that their work was always aimed at something better to come. Sometimes, as in the popular literary history *Wenxue dagang*, this was quite evident. Here, a strong sense of the mission of literature meant that the historian measured universal literary value by a work's ability to move the reader, and thereby bring him or her into a higher order of humanity. The shift to a more professional literary historiography in Zheng's later works did not mean that this criteria was abandoned, only that it was sometimes sublimated and other times displaced to non-professional writing. The sublimation occurred through its incorporation into the very conceptions of change or evolution (in China of this time a very scientific notion). That is, change was determined to have occurred not only when new forms or literary vocabularies emerged, but when new forms emerged that moved the reader or pointed toward a higher, better society. A literary historian's objective knowledge of the development and obsolescence of literary forms was based on a peculiar objectivity: a dispassionate awareness that a certain poem would not (or, should not) move the reader, that it was 'dead'. The comparison between different old and new literary forms served for the literary historian as a way to prove the necessity of certain models of literary development (that ultimately were measured against this mission).¹⁷⁹

I will end this section by looking briefly at Zheng's treatment of two poems by the "immortal" (*buxiu*) poet Li Yu 李煜 (937-977) of the Tang-Song transition:

Li Yu's *shi* "Du Zhongjiang wang shi cheng qi xia":

South, north of the Yangtze, my old hometown
 For thirty years I've dreamt of only one place
 The Wu garden and palace door are desolate
 The great tombs and halls have been abandoned.
 Clouds wrap distant peaks, a thousand moments of worry
 Rain strikes the returning boat, ten thousand tears flow

¹⁷⁹ In my discussion of Zheng's *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*, we will see an increase in this way of thinking: texts that have little intrinsic literary value (or the quality of *dongren*) can still play a central role in the narrative of literary development.

Four brothers, three hundred mouths

I cannot sit idle and ponder.¹⁸⁰

And his *ci* “Lang tao sha:”

Outside the window, rain murmurs

The sense of spring, crumbled fence

This sieve-like shroud, cannot withstand the early morning cold

In a dream, not knowing myself, I become a guest

For a moment I desire happiness

Alone in the dusk, leaning on the fence

Unending rivers and mountains

Parting is easy, meeting is hard

Flowing water, falling blossoms, spring has gone

Heaven above, among men.¹⁸¹

After offering the two poems, Zheng states: “Any person can see that the difference between these two works is great. While the feeling of sadness (*qice* 淒惻) is originally the same in both, because “Du zhong jiang” is clad in an old poetic form, there is nothing that moves that reader, “Lan tao sha” uses a new poetic form and one immediately feels the deep emotion and sadness (*qichu*).”¹⁸² The criteria here for change is formal, but the form is inseparable from its effect on the reader.

We are also introduced to one of Zheng’s early attempts to explain literary development. Li Yu’s poetry is written in the midst of dynastic change. He was taken hostage by the Song after the fall of the Southern Tang and killed in 977. As we will see in Zheng’s later works, literary history is increasingly detached from accounts of the brilliant or innovative individual, and resituated in liminal spaces—between the domestic and the foreign, the stable and chaotic, the uneducated masses and educated literati, the cultured and the earthbound. Figures

¹⁸⁰ The Chinese text reads: 江南江北舊家鄉，三十年來夢一場。吳苑宮闈今冷落，廣陵台殿已荒涼。云籠遠岫愁千片，雨打歸舟淚萬行。兄弟四人三百口，不堪閑坐細思量。

¹⁸¹ The Chinese text reads: 簾外雨潺潺，春意闌珊。羅衾不耐五更寒，夢裏不知身是客。一晌貪歡。獨自暮憑闌，無限江山。別時容易見時難，流水落花春去也。天上人間。

¹⁸² Zheng, *Wenxue dagang*, vol. 1, p. 328.

like Li Yu and places like Dunhuang—where identities straddle two of these realms—become privileged sources of literary change.

**B. *Chatu ben Zhongguo wenxue shi* [Illustrated History of Chinese Literature]
插圖本中國文學史 (1932)**

1. Background to the Illustrated History

According to Zheng's biographer Chen Fukang, the *Illustrated History* was the product of several years' research in both China and abroad. Zheng was assisted in his work by Liu Shudu 劉淑度, a recent graduate of the Beiping Normal University for Girls.¹⁸³ In the late 1920s, Zheng spent nearly two years at libraries in England and France where he had gone in May of 1927 to escape possible persecution in Shanghai.¹⁸⁴ Of particular importance in this research were the Dunhuang *bianwen* 變文 that had been taken to France and England by Paul Pelliot and Aural Stein in the early 20th century. The *bianwen* became key pieces of evidence in Zheng's conception of Chinese literary change, and played a central role in his *History of Popular Literature*. The plans for the *Illustrated History* were published in 1932 by the Beiping *pushe chubanshu* 北平朴社出版部;¹⁸⁵ the work itself was printed shortly after.¹⁸⁶

a. Relation to earlier work

In the *Illustrated History*, Zheng did not forsake his vision of a world literature, but re-imagined the relation between China and the world. His first work had attempted to situate Chinese literature among the great literary works of other, mostly Western civilizations. It was written in response to the absence of a history

¹⁸³ Chen Fukang, *Zheng Zhenduo zhuan*, pp. 271-272.

¹⁸⁴ Zheng, Hu Yuzhi and several others wrote a letter condemning the massacre on April 13. On April 12, union headquarters and leaders in Shanghai were attacked by men from the Society for Common Progress; protests against this crackdown on the 13th led to the killing of nearly 100 civilians by GMD troops. See Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), p. 335-336. Fearing possible repercussions from the virulently anti-leftist GMD, Zheng left China for the first time, departing for Marseilles in 1927. He spent about 15 months conducting research at important libraries in London and Paris, focusing especially on Chinese texts that were either inaccessible or no longer extant in China: *bianwen* that had been removed from Dunhuang in the late Qing, popular novels, and drama scripts. While in London, he also developed a deeper interest in Greek and Roman mythology through the writings of James Frazer—the *Golden Bough* and *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*—Frazer's approach to the study of mythology was influential in Zheng's later series of studies on Chinese mythology, published together under the title *Tang dao pian* 湯禱篇 (1933).

¹⁸⁵ Chen Fukang, *Zheng Zhenduo zhuan*, p. 272; Zheng Erkang, *Zheng Zhenduo*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁸⁶ The version used below was reprinted in the 1950s by the Shanghai Commercial Press.

of world literature that gave adequate representation to Chinese literature. It was less concerned with tracing the lineages of specific national literatures than with providing synchronic portraits of the most important literatures of each epoch. However, these portraits, while generally indifferent toward literary development, were situated within a socio-political development that culminated in the nation. It was this development that bestowed on European literatures a metonymic significance. Their significance was not bound to proofs of mechanistic cause and effect—Dante's writing was not significant because it directly spurred the writing of other vernacular literatures, but because it prefigured a typical national superstructure. Insofar as the Chinese state occupied an ignominious position outside this developmental scheme, its literature lacked a similar metonymical potential. However, the *Wenxue dagang* also revealed a second characteristic of a world literature, its ability to move the reader. In this regard, Chinese literature proved itself more capable. The problem was that this capability was less often based on narrative or story as it was for Western literature (a form tied closely to the ideal of a universal human community), but on poetry or the poetic elements of literary texts. Even as Zheng attempted to incorporate these elements into a universal literary experience, they resisted easy comparative analysis; he continued to look for the forms that seemed to be poorly represented in the Chinese tradition: myth, epic, long narrative, and realist literature.

To some extent, this problem of inadequacy is resolved in the *Illustrated History* by Zheng's move away from the ideals of a universal literature to the discipline of literary history. Instead of dwelling on the respective qualities of Chinese literature vis-à-vis a universal literary ideal, this work relies on the apparent objectivity of disciplinary methodologies. These demanded a focus on the specific mechanics of literary change within a national context. But, it should be pointed out, the nation was re-imagined—it was no longer an empty container or convenient label for literary classics otherwise unattached to any particular space or time, but a society existing within a bounded geographical space and populated by a 'people' who could not be adequately represented by the works of an elite literate class. Thus, it would not suffice to have a merely formal comparison between literary texts at early and later stages of generic development,

or an anthology of works that were conceded by all to be the classics of Chinese literature. Rather there had to be a real understanding of the broad social origins of literary change. Zheng insisted in his introduction that all people were products of society (*shehui* 社會): “people, after all, are social creatures, the possibility of an individual completely transcendent of the world is impossible to accept.”¹⁸⁷ Literary change had to be found within society. The irony, as we will see later, is that an understanding of literary change as socially-based often resulted in the elevation of the very figure who had become socially-transcendent and, consequently, a marginalization of the social qua people.

If world literature was withdrawn from explicit examination, it was not entirely ignored. Rather, it was transformed most evidently from a model¹⁸⁸ to a source of change, becoming an external force that provided a primary motive for Chinese literary development. The archetypical example of this was Buddhist influence on Chinese literature in the Middle Ages (defined as the Tang and Song), particularly as embodied in the then recently excavated Dunhuang library. However, the world was also present in a more covert way. It had been transformed from a parallel to an immanent structure. Instead of systematically comparing Chinese to foreign literatures, the universal aspects of the foreign were incorporated into Chinese literary history itself. For example, the ‘novel’ (*xiaoshuo*) was no longer a foreign form that China lacked, but a universal form whose development in Chinese history earlier literary critics had ignored; the Chinese people were no longer irreducibly particular, but equivalent to or substituted for the political nation. Whatever the distortions, these show Zheng’s continued attempts to respect the specificities of Chinese literary development, while still situating his work as part of a global discourse.

As part of a global discourse based on the commonality of human emotion, the emotions also remained important. However, the focus on change meant that the criteria of emotional affect was made secondary when selecting past works,

¹⁸⁷ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, p. 4. Zheng’s interest in society fits into a larger interest among intellectuals beginning in the mid-1920s with a socially (or sociologically) based historiography. See Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 262.

¹⁸⁸ A good example of this tendency is seen in the work of Hu Shi. For example, Hu attempts to explain the late emergence of the “epic” (*xushi shi* 叙事诗) in Chinese literature. Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi* (1927; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 47.

and, furthermore, that there was a transfer of focus from the reader's emotional response to the text (i.e. measured by a work's ability to *dongren*) to the factors that moved authors to create the sort of literary works that could be linked to substantive change or development. In particular, this emotional response was linked to figures (or social roles) whose literary practice took place in a number of privileged locations: the people, whose natural desires domesticated the foreign; the intellectual who converted dislocation into innovation; the author who unwittingly transferred his efforts into a uniquely national genre.

2. Description of the work

The *Illustrated History* begins with a lengthy introduction outlining Zheng's methodology and justification for the study of historical literature. This discussion touches on the importance of developing histories that have the potential for contemporary social efficacy, but focuses primarily on the importance of a literary historian's professional competence. In terms of the former, Zheng argues that any national literary history should reveal the highest spiritual successes (*zuigao jingshen chenggong* 最高精神成功) of a certain people (*minzu* 民族) to themselves and the world, and, particularly in the case of China, should retrieve the history of popular (*minjian* 民間) literature.¹⁸⁹ The notion of spiritual success

¹⁸⁹ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, pp. 5, 11. The terms *minzu* and *minjian* should be distinguished: the former refers to ethnicity, and refers generally to the totality of a national ethnic people. The latter is usually defined negatively in contrast to the elites or officials (as the *Hanyu da cidian* puts it: "it indicates the mass of people [*minzhong* 民衆], it is opposed to official [*guanfang* 官方]," vol. 6, p. 1428). It is best understood in terms of this binary, though, as we will see, this binary was rarely sustainable when applied to traditional literature. *Minjian* has often been translated as "folk," but the usage can sometimes be ambiguous in practice. This is due, first, to the fact that the term often is used to mean something like "among the people"—that is, it can refer to a space (drawing in connotations of land and nature, aspects that can be accessed equally by educated people such as Tao Yuanming) as well as a specific group of people. For example, we often come across a phrase like *liuxing yu minjian* 流行于民間 (widespread among the people) that does not necessarily denote folk authorship. Second, there is a problem that it was difficult to find *minjian* literature that had not been edited by the literati, a problem that Zheng discusses in his article "Yanjiu mingde liang tiao da lu" (1929; rpt. in *ZZDQJ*, vol 6), pp. 773-775; in order to construct a history of *minjian* literature, it was necessary to rely heavily on edited works in which the distinction between literati and popular became very blurred. In his third history, Zheng began describing literature as *tongsu* 通俗 or *su* 俗 (popular). Again, these terms are ambiguous, they are inclusive of *minjian* (p. 3)—sharing qualities such as popular/collective authorship, oral transmission, and rough style—but also incorporate works that are generally not defined as 'folk' such as the great novels (p. 5). Terms such as the masses (*dazhong* 大眾), used increasingly in Zheng's later writing, have connotations of class and thus are more exclusive than either *tongsu* or *minjian*. I will generally translate *minjian* as 'people,' 'popular,' or 'among the people,' preserving the ambiguity

is measured not only by a work's contemporary reception, but by its effect on the citizens of a modern nation. This demand for social efficacy is tempered by a series of professional guidelines: (1) a literary history should not only provide accounts of great works and authors, but should provide a narrative of literary development (*fazhan* 發展) that necessarily incorporates the vacuous (*wu shen neirong* 無什內容) and crude, but ground-breaking, works that stand at the beginning of each new genre;¹⁹⁰ (2) it should incorporate newly discovered, or neglected literary works that, similarly, fill out the picture of literary development;¹⁹¹ (3) it should make a clear distinction between literary and non-literary texts on the basis of a professionally-determined definition of literature (eg. as texts of emotion [*qingxu* 情緒]);¹⁹² (4) it should vigorously exclude unreliable historical materials;¹⁹³ and (5) it should accord with the most recent developments in literary historiography in the West.¹⁹⁴

The introduction does not provide a rationale for Zheng's division of Chinese literary history into the putatively universal temporal categories that had

that marks their use in Zheng's writing but understanding these terms as somehow in opposition or tension with the literati.

¹⁹⁰ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, pp. 3, 6. Liang Qichao also argues against a history that focuses on the famous individual: as he puts it, the society is the proper boundary of history. See Liang Qichao, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa* (1922; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), p. 2. Other literary historians of the 19th century in Europe had also argued for the importance of obscure works in filling out a history of development. For example, John Dunlop notes that these "now obsolete works . . . form as it were landmarks which testify the course and progress of genius." Dunlop, *The History of Fiction*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), p. 9.

¹⁹¹ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 8. The importance of newly discovered materials is evident in Gu Jiegang's review of Chinese historiography; a third of the book is dedicated to a review of "the discovery and study of new historical materials." Gu Jiegang, *Dangdai Zhongguo shixue* (1934; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), pp. 40-77. See also Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang*, pp. 70-71. Zheng's use of this sort of material was also a source of criticism by Lu Xun who wrote in a letter that Zheng's work placed too much emphasis on rare books "孤本秘笈."

¹⁹² Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 7. The determination of this definition was constructed as a global enterprise. The Chinese scholars almost always presented their own definitions as refinements of definitions that were offered by Western scholars.

¹⁹³ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 9. Schneider points out the value that historians such as Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang placed on reliability: "It was essential that historical studies be based on a sound and thorough knowledge of reliable sources; therefore, it was of value to collate and publish what earlier textual critics had said about the reliability of specific materials." See, Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁴ Thus, Hippolyte Taine and Brandes are regarded as passé. Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 2.

solidified in nineteenth century Europe.¹⁹⁵ However, we might see this sort of re-periodization of Chinese literature as another prerogative of the modern literary historian.¹⁹⁶ Zheng divides Chinese literary history into “Ancient” (*gudai* 古代), “Medieval” (*zhongshi* 中詩), and “Modern” (*jindai* 近代). The ancient period includes several developments that had been exclusive to Western literary development in Zheng’s first work; we can see here the impetus toward a universalizing of ancient Chinese history, something that becomes even more apparent in Zheng’s later work on mythology (see my discussion of this in the Conclusion). For example, one chapter is dedicated to the history of the development of Chinese writing through a discussion of oracle bones and bronzes and mention is made of the sources for Chinese mythology.¹⁹⁷ As with the early Chinese literature in the *Wenxue dagang*, much of the literature of this period—especially history and philosophy—serves to fill in a national literary past. If these works do not seem particularly well-qualified when measured against the definition of literature, their presence was not without precedence in the origins of literature described Western literary histories.¹⁹⁸ Initially, the Middle Ages of Chinese literature are not conceived of as ‘middle’ at all, rather, the borrowed appellation appears to serve a nationalist agenda. The European Middle Ages served in the European historical imagination as a time of transition, as Blix puts it, it had been “named pejoratively for its parenthetical character, it remained an arid period of slumber until the Romantics at last chose to unearth their national and religious roots there.”¹⁹⁹ Zheng takes the orthodox understanding of the European Middle Ages and draws a stark contrast with China, “In European literary history, the Middle Ages was a period of darkness. But our Middle Ages

¹⁹⁵ William Green points out that, “[t]he ancient/medieval/modern formula currently in use had its origins in Italian humanist thinking, but acceptance of this tripartite model did not become universal until the nineteenth century.” See his article, “Periodizing World History,” in *History and Theory* 34.2 (May, 1995): 99.

¹⁹⁶ See discussion of the need for non-dynastic periodization in Zheng Binyu, *Zhongguo liubian wenxue shi*, pp. 1, 14.

¹⁹⁷ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, pp. 33, 61.

¹⁹⁸ For example, Drinkwater notes some of the early Roman historians and philosophers; Wilbur Cross, in his history of the English novel, makes brief mention of how fiction grew out of (“freed itself”) from historical writing. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ Göran Blix, “Charting the Transitional Period,” *History and Theory* 45 (February, 2006): 55.

was brilliant and flourishing, there were almost no times that cannot be considered “clear and pure days.”²⁰⁰ However, in the end, China’s brief excursion from the European path is not so unique after all. The use of the three-part temporal scheme necessarily converts the Chinese Middle Ages into a period of transition. Like the European Middle Ages they are made a precursor to the modern period; their flourishing literature thus becomes irrelevant, and the search begins for the sorts of works that lead up to the present. As in the West, Zheng’s modern begins around the period of the Renaissance (sixteenth century). Here the borrowed periodization is made to coincide more properly with developments in European literature; works that formed the traditional mainstream are increasingly marginalized. This period ends with the May Fourth Movement and is most renowned for the rise of the vernacular novel, a form which, in works like *Jinping mei* 金瓶梅, finally throws off the remnants of the Middle Ages.²⁰¹ The history is written as a telos in which non-novelistic forms cannot escape the taint of their future obsolescence.²⁰² Yet, even though the period ends with the May Fourth Movement, Zheng is careful to avoid presenting this as an absolute break with the past; instead the new literature is tied to the past through the figure of the gradually awakening Chinese intellectual whose growing awareness, not the foreign per se, marks the final realization of the modern. Not simply a response to foreign encroachment, the new literature is the end result of a longer and indigenous process of awakening. Thus, temporal division and intellectual agency tie the past to the present, and the body of Chinese literary history remains divided but unbroken.

A detailed discussion of the literary works of each period is preceded by a “Bird’s-eye view” (*niaokan* 鳥瞰) of the socio-political background and most important literary developments. In terms of developments in the early period, we have already seen Zheng’s interest in ‘universal’ elements such as developments of writing, mythology, a literature unbounded by tradition;²⁰³ for the Middle Ages,

²⁰⁰ The Chinese reads: 天朗氣清的佳日.

²⁰¹ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 920.

²⁰² As Zheng puts it, “‘Modern literature’ (*jindai wenxue* 近代文學) refers to living literature, literature that has not yet died.” Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 829.

²⁰³ Zheng notes, for example, the absence of the bounds of tradition in pre-Qin prose. Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 67.

Zheng stresses the importance of the arrival of Buddhism; in the modern period, emphasis is placed on the rise of narrative genres *xiaoshuo* and *xiqu*. These overviews are followed by chapters divided primarily by genre, and secondarily by author, dynastic period, or important literary event. Many of these chapters include terms that suggest an organic conception of change: progress (*jinzhan* 進展), origins (*qiyuan* 起源, *faduan* 發端), rise (*qilai* 起來). The writing of professional history without also theorizing change simply did not exist within the range of contemporary 'scientific' disciplinary methodologies. It is to the question of change that I now turn.

3. Analysis

Just as Zheng's first work had disqualified certain types of emotive force (eg. those that led merely to a work's popularity), his second work was circumscribed by a rather rigid notion of what comprised legitimate change. In 1928, Mao Dun [Shen Yanbing] wrote an article for the *Wenxue zhoubao* entitled, "The Reasons for Chinese Literature's Unhealthy Development."²⁰⁴ The unhealthiness, Mao argues, came from a persistent muddling of the boundaries between literary and other texts,²⁰⁵ and a literary practice that focused on literatures of the past rather than actual experience or the author's emotions. Mao Dun was not alone in discussing the problem of China's literary or, more generally, social development. Since Yan Fu's 嚴復 (1853-1921) influential introduction of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley in the late nineteenth century, the questions of change and progress had been inextricably linked to the fate of the modern nation. These considerations of the nation, in turn, brought Chinese intellectuals face to face with apparently universal trends in which the Chinese nation was situated. Like later intellectuals, Yan Fu was early on faced with a problem: "The impersonal forces of evolution described by Darwin and Spencer are universal. Why then

²⁰⁴ Mao Dun [Shen Yanbing], "Zhongguo wenxue bu neng jianquan fazhan zhi yuanyin," *Wenxue zhoubao* 4 (1928): 1. This journal was the mouthpiece of the Literary Research Association, and was edited by Zheng. For more information on the journal and association, of which Zheng was a founding member and president, see Michel Hockx, *Questions of Style*.

²⁰⁵ This included a failure to capitalize on more correct understandings that had emerged between the Han and Tang dynasties. Mao Dun, "Bu neng jianquan fazhan," p. 3. Zheng asks the same question in his 1922 article "Zhengli Zhongguo wenxue de tiyi," *Wenxue zhoukan* 51 (1922). His response also points to the absence of a correct definition of literature (p. 1).

have they bogged down in China and achieved realization only in the modern West?” According to Schwartz, Yan’s answer was that only “the sages of the modern West have clearly *understood* the processes of evolution.”²⁰⁶ This focus on understanding is important because it points to Zheng’s own belief in the power of the idea to redeem history. That is, rather than simply positing a complete absence of change, the question was how to convert Chinese history from a history of undevelopment to a history of development. This began, as Mao Dun, Zheng and others noted, with the creation of a proper (discrete) historical subject, generally based on imported disciplinary classifications, in this case a national literature. Once this literature was defined (as a formal written expression of the emotions) and delineated (to exclude all non-literary works) it became possible to construct models that shed light on the way it had developed over time. As we might expect, these models of change had to come to terms with the way the definition was constructed: there was, first, an irresolvable tension between the natural (that is, literature of the emotions, often associated with the ‘people’) and the social (literature as inherited form, often associated with the literati). Theoretically, the former was privileged for its spontaneity, naturalness, realness; however, these very features also precluded historicization and led almost inexorably to a reconsideration of the latter. Second, there was a constant questioning of how Chinese literature—increasingly understood as an expression of the Chinese nation—could be situated vis-à-vis other nations, both in terms of the adaptability of foreign literary classification and the relation of foreign literatures to Chinese literary change.

a. Models of change

By the time Mao Dun wrote his essay in 1928, the values of change and progress had been naturalized: few questioned whether Chinese literature should have changed over time, the question was merely why it hadn’t or in what ways (and locations) it had. Responding to the need for demonstrable historical change, the Republican period saw the development of numerous models to describe change. I

²⁰⁶ My italics. Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 45.

will describe a few of these before moving on to some related and novel conceptions that emerge in Zheng's *Illustrated History*.

Very broadly, the conceptions of change can be divided into two types. One attempted to assert the specificity of Chinese literary history; the other saw Chinese literary history as following more or less adequately a natural (i.e. universal) process of change. In terms of the first, one of the most innovative models was articulated by Zhou Zuoren in his *Zhongguo xin wenxue de yuanliu* (1932). Zhou used the traditional concepts of *shi yan zhi* 詩言志 (literature to express the aim or intention) and *wen yi zai dao* 文以載道 (literature to convey the Way) to develop a unique vision of literary development in which twentieth-century literature was not viewed in terms of radical disjunction from the past, but in terms of its relation to long-term historical fluctuations between *shi yan zhi* and *wen yi zai dao*. According to Zhou's scheme, the origins of the cycle of which modern Chinese literature was a part could be traced back to the Gong'an school in the late Ming dynasty.²⁰⁷ A second, and more influential model known as "stratification" was espoused most famously by Gu Jiegang. In this model, works that had been treated as reliable historical documents were shown to be the product of a long history of revisions and adaptations that served immediate political needs rather than any transcendent ideal of historical objectivity. In his study of the classics, Gu argued that the earlier a description claimed to be, the more recent its likely provenance; and the more detailed the description of an early event, the more likely it was that this description was actually distantly removed. According with the ideals of objectivity, the layers of stratification were still useful insofar as they shed light on the political or social needs of the time they were added; thus, Gu was able to see even the distorted Warring States accounts of early events as valuable in shedding light on the situations of their fabricators. However, after Confucian hegemony was achieved in the Han dynasty, the classic texts became ossified and thus no longer useful as historical sources.

²⁰⁷ Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), pp. 113-118, 134-138. See Zhou's diagram of this change in his *Zhongguo xin wenxue de yuanliu* (1921; rpt. Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995), p. 18. Zhou's conception is similar to Zheng's in terms of temporal division (Zheng also began his 'modern' period in the late Ming). However, Zheng was determined to see the modern in terms of a linear historical process toward the present.

Gu was led, thereafter, to examine texts that seemed to maintain a relation to society, and thus contain the potential of change—popular literature.

In terms of the second model, the most clearly present in Zheng's own writing was Hu Shi's binary of living and dead literatures. Inspired by the divide between Latin and the vernacular European languages, Hu Shi defined two types of literature in the Chinese tradition: the first, living, was written in the vernacular of its day; the second, dead, was written in an unchanging archaic language that became increasingly distant from the actual spoken language over time. In this schema, the vernacular rather than the classical became the sole location of change, because it alone was tied to underlying social change. However, in practice, this structure could not simply exclude classical works, but always had to reassign them a vernacular origin. Not only were the most 'obviously' popular works such as folksongs included in the vernacular corpus, works such as the classic *Shijing*, and poetry by the likes of Tao Yuanming were also re-imagined as vernacular.²⁰⁸ In fact, for Hu Shi and for Zheng, it was often this second type of vernacular works that became the locus for change, because only they were the products of an adequate mediation between emotional stimulation and literary form. The final model, which eventually became dominant, involved an increasing reliance on fixed, particularly Marxist, notions of social development. The dogmatism of this approach became especially apparent in post-1949 literary histories. However, Liu Dajie's 劉大傑 (1904-1977) *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi*, written in the late 1920s, shows the sort of creative rereading that could emerge out of this sort of thinking. Liu explicitly adopts the notion of superstructure and base, but his work manages to go beyond the notion that the superstructure (i.e. literature) is simply a product of the base. Rather, he attempts to combine three vectors of change: the first is social change, including changes in economics, politics, family organization, and religion; the second is a logic of development

²⁰⁸ This reflected similar moves elsewhere. One example is the change in understandings of the *Man'ōyshū* that took place in the late Meiji period. Shinada Yoshikazu notes that with the "importation of the German concept of Volkslied, or folk song . . . intellectuals saw a more sophisticated poetry that was culturally based in popular (*minshuteki*) folk (*minzokuteki*) songs and that was cultivated through contact with foreign civilizations." See Shinada Yoshikazu, "Man'ōyshū: The Invention of a National Poetry Anthology," in Shirane and Suzuki, eds., *Inventing the Classics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 42.

and decline that is intrinsic to every literary genre; the third is a theory of the formation of an autonomous literature, based on the writings of Friche, Bucher, and Plekhanov, in which literature develops from purely functional (at its earliest stages, literature regulates labour or productive activities), to magical (serving the spirits), to religious, to didactic (*jiaoyu* 教育), and finally to an autonomous aesthetic form.²⁰⁹

Despite their differences, all models have features that point to certain shared understandings of change. First, in all four models, the stimuli for change are most often ascribed to three sources: the people (*minjian*),²¹⁰ the foreign, and political disunity.²¹¹ Second, all asserted that change was a more 'objective' or 'scientific' form of literary research.²¹² Third, all were interested in moving to the origins of each type (or phase) of development—that is, change was always defined against a beginning (an organic model). And, fourth, all discredited change that was rooted in textual rather than human experience: i.e. the increasing refinement of an archaic form would not be considered progressive change, but only evidence of a genre's decline unless this refinement could be traced back to legitimate types of human experience.

b. Creating a literary history of change

Zheng participated with Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren and others in the elevation of popular literature. But his relationship to popular literature was always conflicted. For Zheng, this literature was at once the embodiment of positive literary value—

²⁰⁹ Liu Dajie, *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi* (preface dated 1929; printed by Zhonghua shuju in 1949), pp. 6-9, 277.

²¹⁰ As I indicated in f. 189, the 'people' as *minjian* are most commonly understood in Zheng's writing negatively, that is, as those people who did not belong to the literati (i.e. those who had not passed the civil service exams or gained a formal education in the Classics).

²¹¹ On Gu Jiegang's belief in the importance of foreign influence see Tze-ki Hon, "Ethnic and Cultural Pluralism," *Modern China* 22.3 (July, 1996): 320; similar ideas were propounded by Chen Yinke, see Axel Schneider, "Between Dao and History," *History and Theory* 35.4 (December, 1996): 62. Zheng Zhenduo asserted in the introduction to his *Illustrated History* that he also felt foreign influence and the people to be the most important causes of literary development. Liu Dajie felt, for example, that Li Bo's poetic talent could be attributed in part to his 'foreignness', and that Tao Yuanming's proximity to the people explained the quality of his writing (Liu, *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi*, p. 176). The interest in political disunity was mirrored in nineteenth-century European historiography. See Blix, "Charting the Transitional Period," pp. 51, 54.

²¹² This was true even with Gu Jiegang, someone whose understanding of science was admittedly superficial.

that is, it was living—and the occupant of the lowest rung on the ladder of literary development: it was always originary, but inexplicably so; it often evoked real experience, but its forms were crude and incompatible with a definition of literature that presupposed a certain refinement.²¹³ The corpus of popular literature was comprised of discrete, and often baffling, emergences. To make matters worse, these emergences were almost always followed by literati (aka *shidafu* 士大夫 or *wenren*) misappropriation. Characteristically, according to Zheng, the literati would take raw popular forms and embellish them with florid language that reflected no real experience. Thus, literatures introduced by or from among the people were always stillborn. Development was almost always decline.

In Zheng's work, the problems with the people and the literati were similar in a way: the people lived in direct relation to the land and the literati in direct relation to their texts. The spontaneity of literary production from the people, while one of the grounds for their high valuation, also became negatively understood as a sign of their pre-consciousness, an almost vegetable fecundity that was virtually impossible to historicize (especially given a notion of history as progressive change).²¹⁴ Zheng's descriptions of popular or folk literature often include terms that connote, either positively or negatively, this lack of consciousness: terms such as "crude," "natural," or "innocent."²¹⁵ The literati, on the other hand, responded primarily to a textual past, in this case their relationship to texts was unmediated by a lived reality: their work was always done to and in response to these texts and described in terms such as "embellishment," "decoration," etc.

In other words, both the literati and the people in Zheng's description are trapped, the former discursively and the latter naturally. Given this predicament, it is not surprising that the responsibility for literary change is often placed on those

²¹³ For example, Zheng comments on the poetry of the Six Dynasties that the poems are "clear like speech" – not awkward like earlier poems in *Shijing*. He also notes that they are different from the "popular love poems of the Ming and Qing [that] are boorish (*cuguang* 粗獷) and frank (*tanshuai* 坦率), leaving the reader feeling uncomfortable. Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 188.

²¹⁴ The alternative to historicizing was anthologizing, an effect that we see to a larger extent in Zheng's third history of popular literature, particularly in those sections that deal with what he takes to be more truly popular works.

²¹⁵ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 110.

individuals who manage to at once tap into a source of spontaneous vitality—particularly the land, the foreign, or their own human natures—and demonstrate a mastery of forms that allows their works to be placed within a literary tradition. It is a combination of vitality and technical mastery that enables these individuals to strip literary forms of the ornate and overburdened language of the “typical” literati, and reassert their dual function as bearers of emotion and catalysts for creativity.²¹⁶ In fact, the use of this sort of figure points to a quandary faced by all intellectuals who espouse a model of social change in which the people are at once idealized in their potential and doubted in their actuality. Just as Marx was forced to concede, however reluctantly, the need for an enlightened bourgeoisie to join and raise the consciousness of an alienated and numbed proletariat,²¹⁷ Zheng searched for figures that could be of the people without the awkward banality of the populace. In practice, this meant testing the boundaries that divided the people from the elites, looking for some essence that would allow the reintegration of elite and popular literatures (this might help to explain why the terms used to refer to the people can never be quite pegged down). If successful, the result would be the creation of a complete national literary history, one no longer stalled by an unended split between the people and the literati.

1. The person and change: Tao Yuanming

Laurence Schneider describes the search by Gu Jiegang and Hu Shi for past intellectuals who could be redeemed for a Chinese historiographical tradition. Gu, for example, wrote a series of biographies of undervalued intellectuals from the Chinese past.²¹⁸ Two of the best-known were of Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104-1162) and Cui Shu 崔述²¹⁹ (1740-1816).²²⁰ According to Schneider, “[w]hat most

²¹⁶ For a useful discussion of theories on the tension between spontaneity and imitation (or relations to the past), see David Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-24.

²¹⁷ As Adamson puts it, Marx in his later writings felt that “the worker under capitalism does not appear to possess any powers through which he might express his need to revolt. He is too beaten and broken physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to respond to his needs in a rational and aggressive fashion.” Therefore, he “openly concedes the need for a much more rigorous education led from the outside by formerly bourgeois, now revolutionary tutors.” See Walter L. Adamson, “Marx and Political Education,” *The Review of Politics* 39.3 (July, 1977), pp. 372, 374.

²¹⁸ These were collected in the *Bianwei congkan*.

²¹⁹ Hu Shi also wrote a biography of Cui Shu, entitled “The Scientific Historian Cui Shu” (*Kexue de gu shi jia Cui Shu* 科學的古史家崔述), *Guoxue jikan* 1.2 (1923). For a study of Cui Shu’s

endeared Cheng Ch'iao [Zheng Qiao] to Ku Chieh-kang [Gu Jiegang] was that many of Cheng's ideas were directed at 'overthrowing the authority of the sages and the traditions of the Confucianists'."²²¹ Similarly, Cui Shu was elevated because of what Gu perceived to be his unique take on the Chinese classics. These scholars were important, Schneider argues, "[b]ecause they were isolated . . . safe from the taint of the main tradition—the tradition of Tung Chung-shu, and of the 'schools.'"²²² It is important to note that the approach taken by both Hu and Gu was biographical, because the constructed historical figures of Cui and Zheng often structure these modern scholars' readings of their writings—Gu and Hu were intent on converting Cui and Zheng into predecessors of the modern historian, sometimes regardless of significant ideological ambiguities in their writings. The persons of Cui and Zheng functioned, much like the intellectuals of the May Fourth for Zheng, to restore wholeness to a national history split between tradition and modernity, even while obviating the need to demonstrate a process of causal development.

Zheng's story of the Six Dynasties' poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) is similar to those written for Cui and Zheng insofar as it elevates a figure whose works appeal to a modern ideal—in this case, a literature that describes real (i.e. difficult, natural) experience. However, Zheng's project is divided: on the one hand the enlightened individual reattaches the past to the present by foreshadowing in his writings these modern literary values, on the other, this figure has to be incorporated into a professional literary history founded on the belief in change as a social phenomenon stemming from the people rather than the exemplary individual.

hermeneutical method, see Michael Quirin, "Scholarship, Value, Method, and Hermeneutics in Kaozheng," *History and Theory* 35.4.

²²⁰ According to his biography in Hummel, Cui Shu questioned the authenticity of passages in the *Analects*, saw that many texts of the Qin and Han disagreed with accounts in the Classics, and propounded the notion of stratification. His works, compiled and printed by his student Chen Lihe, were largely unappreciated in his lifetime. See Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1943), pp. 772-773.

²²¹ Laurence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang*, p. 91. Zheng Qiao questioned, for example, the authenticity of the Great Preface of the *Shijing*.

²²² Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang*, p. 95. Of course, as Schneider also points out, their actual writings were much more complex; but, I am most concerned here with their ascribed function.

I would suggest that the power of the figure of Tao is related largely to his embodiment of both these qualities. He is enlightened, yet this is the result not of some metaphysical endowment, but of his very immanence, his attachment to nature. To demonstrate these qualities, Zheng has to depart from the disciplinary guidelines of literary history. He begins his account not with contextualization but with extraction. The general literary currents before and during Tao's time, according to Zheng, were characterized by "two tendencies: the first was toward over-embellished and ornate language; the second was an emphasis on things related to emotions of the boudoir (*guiqing* 閨情) and a distancing from reflection." Having given the context, he immediately asserts its irrelevance. Tao, he writes, is one of the "courageous gentlemen able to pluck themselves out of the style of their time," and "emerge unsullied from the mud."²²³ Tao's transcendence for Zheng is not at all about his poetry, as I will show below, but centered around his person, both his character—a "broadmindedness" (*xinxiong kuoda* 心胸闊大) that contrasts with the parochial concerns of the court poets—and his physical location, an abstract "nature." It was Tao's personal "individuality" (as Liang Qichao had argued in a 1923 essay), and only by derivation his style, that set him apart from the crowd.²²⁴ At the same time, by stripping away the history, this individuality was only a vaguely 'Chinese' instance of a universal humanity.²²⁵

Zheng, however, does not stop here. Cui Shu and Zheng Qiao had been shown by Gu Jiegang to be precocious, but there had been little attempt to prove their relevance to pre-modern Chinese thought. Zheng's history of literature, on the other hand, was bound with the task of narrating literary development. Thus, he had to consider how a de-socialized individual such as Tao could be transformed into an objective figure of change. This was of considerable importance, because if worthy figures such as Tao could not be emplotted in a

²²³ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 180.

²²⁴ Liang Qichao, "Tao Yuanming zhi wenji ji qi pingge," (1932); rpt. in *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao huibian* vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p. 267.

²²⁵ In other words, Tao was transformed into the sort of ahistorical, universal human that was the subject of humanist histories. As Robert Young argues, this is a figure that has been expunged of the particular context in which he was formed. See Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 158-165.

history of literary development, the only alternative was to concede that the rift between modernity and tradition was indeed absolute, that the two developmental regimes were bridgeable only by positing analogies between apotheosized figures of the past and ideals of the present.

Tao's presence in literary tradition

Somewhat surprisingly, given his low view of traditional scholarship, Zheng's search for the Tao of change begins not with Tao's writings unmediated by tradition, but with the assessments of several pre-modern writers—Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105).²²⁶ The comments extracted from the writing of Xiao Tong are the lengthiest and most concerned with Tao's biography; Xiao's glowing review of the person and literary production of Tao directs Zheng's own reading.²²⁷ Most importantly, Xiao takes Tao's apparently 'autobiographical' writings (as found in "Gentleman of the Five Willows") as actually autobiographical. Out of this work we learn of Tao's transcendence of the crowd, his personal attachment to the land, his impoverishment, and of course his literary talent. Xiao's view of Tao's literary merit, by all accounts a minority view in the Six Dynasties period when many critics rated Tao's work rather poorly, became dominant in the Northern Song. During this time, Tao was finally ascribed his status as one of the greatest pre-Tang poets. Not surprisingly, Zheng turns next to comments from two Northern Song writers. First, we are provided Su Shi's observation that Tao's poetry was "dry on the outside but fat within; apparently bland but actually rich."²²⁸ Next, Zheng quotes Su Shi's contemporary Huang Tingjian: "The poems of Xie

²²⁶ According to *Zhongguo wenxue da cidian*, Huang, known as one of the "Four Song Masters" (*Song si jia* 宋四家), "emphasized unique creation (*du chuang* 獨創) and individuality (*ge xing* 個性), and advocated 'using the old as new, and the vulgar as refined'" (vol. 1, p. 492); he also advocated the natural (*ziran* 自然) over the 'chiseled and carved'. This characterization is made somewhat more complicated by David Palumbo-Liu in *The Poetics of Appropriation*

²²⁷ It should be noted that Zheng's use of Xiao and these other critics was rather circumstantial and piece-meal—their values and his conveniently overlapped on this occasion. But he did not consider, for example, how Xiao could value both the transcendent works of Tao and the imitative verse of Lu Ji and others, nor why Xiao, despite his high valuation of Tao, included only eight of Tao's works in the *Wen xuan*. See Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, pp. 38-41.

²²⁸ The Chinese text reads: 外枯而中膏，似淡而實腴。This is taken from Su Shi's short piece entitled "Yu Su Che shu 與蘇轍書." For the full context of this phrase, see *Tao Yuanming yanjiu ziliao*, p. 35.

Kangyue and Yu Yicheng are creations of tempering and refinement, no efforts have been spared; yet they cannot peer over Peng Ze's [i.e. Tao Yuanming] several *ren* (1*ren*=8ft) wall."²²⁹

Obviously, the critical comments of Su and Huang do not, in and of themselves, prove that Tao's poetry played a role in furthering Chinese literary development; and they only hint at the fact that Tao's poetry influenced later writers such as Su Shi and Huang Tingjian. More importantly, I would suggest, is the fact that they simply provide historical provenance, a truth-effect, for the image of Tao and his poetry as "'nature' or 'naturalness' itself"—that is, the reader is assured by Zheng that this is the true and only possible depiction of Tao. (If we are to agree with Tian Xiaofei,²³⁰ this image was actually constructed in large part during the Northern Song.) The blandness noted by Su Shi suggests an absence of intentional embellishment; and Huang Tingjian's elevation of Tao above the refined works of Xie and Yu points to an idealization of works that were 'natural' rather than 'chiseled and carved', or more precisely, works produced by an author who had no need to expend effort in his poetic practice.

We should consider why Zheng was particularly attracted by these comments. It is not that Zheng has simply or disinterestedly accepted the assessments of one stream of traditional literary criticism over another. Zheng's Tao is not elevated as a natural poet only to ensure his place among a short-list of other great poets. Just as he had for Hu Shi, Tao becomes for Zheng a privileged surrogate for the creative but developmentally-challenged people.²³¹ Like the

²²⁹ The Chinese text reads: 謝康樂，庾義城之詩，鑪錘之功，不遺餘力，然不能窺彭澤數仞之牆者。

²³⁰ Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 19, 35.

²³¹ As Hu Shi put it in his *Baihua wenxue shi*, pp. 80-81: "He was born among the people, served a few times as an official, but then again returned to the people. . . His environment was the environment that produces literature of the common people; but, his scholarly thinking (*xuewen sixiang* 學文思想) was also able to elevate the mood of his works (*zuopin de yijing* 作品的意境). Therefore, his mood was that of a philosopher, while his language was that of the people. . . although he created works of philosophical principle, he never ceased to be a poet of the people." Hu, however, attempts to extract Tao from a scholarly tradition by arguing that while there may have been some similarity to the works of Ying Qu 應璩 (190-252), as suggested by Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (fl. 502-519) in the *Shipin*, more important were "his natural abilities and environment", and "a natural trend" in literary history from the "simple and unadorned" to the "naturally adorned." See Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi*, p. 81.

literature of the people, Tao's poems emerge spontaneously. They tap into a source of inspiration, nature, whose legitimacy is based on the fact that it also underlies popular literary production. Yet, because of Tao's mastery of the literary tradition—indicated in part by the assessments of pre-modern critics—his works remain unbound by the organic cyclicity Zheng found in the 'naïve' and 'innocent' works of the people. Therefore, even as Zheng approves of Tao's personal transcendence and proximity to nature, these qualities are valuable in terms of literary development only because they enabled Tao to do what the people had not: to convert the inspiration of nature into change. Thus, Tao is attributed a sort of Midas touch; whatever he writes bestows progress on an existing genre or becomes a portent of change to come. He is able to write the much besmirched sentimental poetry (*qing shi* 情詩) of his time without lapsing into vacuity: as Zheng writes, "it's not that he didn't write this sort of poetry, it's just that his writing is even more deeply sentimental and beautifully (*qi* 綺) lustrous (*ni* 膩)." ²³² Similarly, he resurrects the four-character verse: "Not only his pentasyllabic verse, even when he writes the long faded (*tunse* 褪色) four-character verse, [his works] are equally admirable. Works like "Ting yun", "Shi yun", "Rong mu" etc., are all among the greatest successes of four-character verse, and cause this already buried form to once more flourish." ²³³ Finally, even his *fu*, despite Xiao Tong's disparaging comment that they "are the white jade's one blemish" (*baibi weijia* 白璧微瑕), are taken as examples of "fresh and honest full-length lyric poetry." ²³⁴

The consistency between the authorial figure of Tao and the poetry he produced is suggestive of the same sort of determination that characterized Gu Jiegang's biographies of Cui Shu and Zheng Qiao. Zheng makes no attempt to argue that Tao escapes tradition as a writer—even more so than Cui Shu and Zheng Qiao, his writings were in constant conversation with and developmentally linked to other works and traditions—but he is shown to escape social determination as an individual through his return to nature. This individual,

²³² Zheng uses the term *ni*, usually used to describe a negative literary quality, as a positive.

²³³ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 182.

²³⁴ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 229.

physical transcendence is, somewhat anachronistically (I mean in terms of history, not Zheng's ideology) read back into Tao's writings and ultimately becomes the ground of possibility for his place in the development of the Chinese literary tradition. Zheng's attraction to the role created by Tao in "Gentleman of the Five Willows" means that he follows traditional commentators such as Su Shi, Huang Jingtian, and Xiao Tong, whose understandings of autobiography, Stephen Owen notes, tend "to honor the desires of poets and takes note only of the uncomplicated surfaces."²³⁵ But Zheng's use of these writings was largely instrumental and supported a rather different agenda:²³⁶ the surface of the role Tao created for himself in "Gentleman of the Five Willows" became for Zheng a convenient basis for his elevation and emplotment—Tao's palpable connection to the land seemed to betoken the possibility of the sort of popularly-directed literary change that was urgently demanded by the historians of the modern nation. It was merely a question of education.

2. Locations of change: foreign lands

We have seen in the case of Tao Yuanming that the intellectual came to enlightenment not only through his own effort, but also by physical relocation: Tao chose to remove himself to the countryside rather than remain an official in the decadent Six Dynasties' court. Unlike the people, whose response to the land was immediate and crude, Tao was able to mediate his experience of the land through a language and form that were adequate to place him within a literary tradition, (at least according to the judgments of Northern Song writers and Zheng Zhenduo). In the following section I will discuss a second location of change that became of increasing importance in the writing of Zheng and many other historians of the Republican period—the foreign.

First, it should be pointed out that the foreign in Zheng's work is not necessarily defined as foreign in terms of the modern Chinese nation. In many instances, the primary expression of the foreign is regional rather than non-

²³⁵ Stephen Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," in Lin and Owen, eds., *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 86.

²³⁶ As I showed in the first part of this chapter, Zheng frequently uses the comments of traditional critics not to support his arguments, but as a foil for the proper, literary historical mode of reading, a reading that would restore the possibility of original meaning to the literary work.

Chinese (that is, the North as foreign, the South as native). In the Six Dynasties, for example, poets such as Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581) and Wang Bao 王褒 (513-576) are used by Zheng to illustrate how rather mediocre poets from the south had been transformed into great poets by their dislocation to the north. Zheng writes,

The works of these two had originally been in the *zhengti* style of Qi and Liang, however, after going to the north, their style changed greatly. From decorative (*fuyan* 浮艷) to solemn (*chenyu* 沉鬱), from empty and exaggerated (*xukua* 虛誇) to profound, from mediocre (*fanfan* 泛泛) parallelism to language that was at once beautiful and meaningful.

Zheng notes a similar phenomenon in the writing of the female poet Cai Yan 蔡琰 (ca. 178-?): her dislocation to the Xiongnu—she had been given in marriage to the Xiongnu leader and bore two sons whom she was later forced to leave—enabled a poetry that surpassed anything that could have been produced by a woman confined to the boudoir. As a foreigner, she is not so much a woman as a bearer of Chinese culture. Zheng is careful to stress in all these cases that their poetic success was not a product of environmental determinism; it was not the northern climate, for example, that stimulated the production of a powerful literature. In fact, the north was perplexingly missing its own pure literature.²³⁷

If figures like Yu Xin, Wang Bao, and Cai Yan demonstrate the sort of literary progress that can occur as a result of dislocation to the foreign, the mechanism of change was still basically similar to that of Tao Yuanming: that is, Yu, Wang, and Cai became mediators, processing a primary source of inspiration into formal literary evolution. While Zheng does not detail exactly what changes their writings wrought on those of their followers,²³⁸ he notes that they were able

²³⁷ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 260. Zheng attributes the paucity of literature to the chaotic politics of the time, the Northerner's inadequate grasp of the Chinese language, and suppression by minorities.

²³⁸ In much of Zheng's writing, 'influence' (*yingxiang* 影響) is often ascribed to works or writers that he felt inspired change in the later literary tradition, but is rarely supported with concrete evidence (whatever this might be). This accords well with Foucault's description. Foucault points out that the "notion of influence . . . provides a support—of too magical a kind to be amenable to analysis—for the facts of transmission and communication." Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 24.

to produce works that had “influence” on later generations.²³⁹ This was quite unlike the purely Northern (crude) and Southern (decadent) works whose potential influence ultimately vanished along with the “literary unification” of the country.²⁴⁰ As I will show in the following section, unlike the works of Tao and the dislocated southern poets, Dunhuang literature was missing this characteristic of mediation—a feature that always seemed a grudging concession to the need for elite literatures in a history of Chinese literature. Absent this grudge, it served as the prime, if not only, exhibit for the two sources that Zheng sees at the root of all literary change, the people and the foreign.

Dunhuang: from the foreign to the people

Like many of his contemporaries,²⁴¹ Zheng was fascinated with literatures in China that were produced at the intersections of multiple cultures. In the 1930s, the most notable of these locations was Dunhuang, a Buddhist cave complex in which had been discovered (plundered) an impressive corpus including numerous Buddhist sutras and vernacular texts.²⁴² By the time Zheng completed his book in the early 1930s, Dunhuang studies in China had moved beyond the organization and compilation of the materials “into a deeper stage of research.” One of the characteristics of this period, according to Zheng Jinde, was the demonstration of Dunhuang’s position in Chinese literary history, proving, for example, “that Chinese vernacular literature had already arisen by the Tang Dynasty.”²⁴³ In fact, Zheng Zhenduo had begun outlining his thesis on the influences of Dunhuang on later popular literature during his research in England and France in the late 1920s. A lengthy article he wrote for the *Xiaoshuo yuebao* upon his return to China, “Dunhuang de su wenxue” (1929), traced his beliefs regarding the influences of

²³⁹ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 266. Cai Yu’s poetry was regarded by many twentieth-century scholars as one of the earliest examples of long-narrative poetry in the Chinese tradition.

²⁴⁰ Zheng argues that China became unified through literature before its political unification. *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 261.

²⁴¹ See, for example, Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*. This interest was shared by historians outside of China as well. English literature, for example, is often traced not to pure roots, but to foreign influences.

²⁴² Chen Pingyuan points out that literary historians from the 1930s-1960s became increasingly interested in Dunhuang among other areas of research. See, Chen Pingyuan, *Wenxue shi de xingcheng yu jiangou* (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), p. 11.

²⁴³ Zheng Jinde, *Dunhuang xue de fasheng he fazhan* (Gaoxiong xian, Dashu xiang: Foguang, Mingguo 82 [1993]), p. 189.

the originally Buddhist *suwen* 俗文 and *bianwen* on later Chinese literature.²⁴⁴ He argued that *suwen* and *bianwen* had had a formative influence on later popular prosimetric forms such as *tanci* 彈詞,²⁴⁵ *baojuan* 包卷,²⁴⁶ drama, and even the vernacular novel.

These beliefs were incorporated in slightly modified form into his *Illustrated History*. In his introduction to the section on literature of the Chinese Middle Ages, Zheng makes it clear that the effect of Buddhism was of utmost importance for understanding later developments in Chinese literature. He writes, “[i]t can be said that if there was not this marriage between China and India, if Buddhist literature had not entered China, medieval Chinese literature would have followed an absolutely different route of development.”²⁴⁷ More importantly, the entrance of Buddhism, as textualized in the space of Dunhuang, was used by Zheng to show that the Middle Ages of Chinese literature was not a peak of literary development, but a period of transition whose literature led up to the vernacular literature of the present. Prior to the discovery of Dunhuang, Zheng tells us, it had been impossible to trace later popular literary forms to their Buddhist origins:

How was it that combined verse and prose came to be used to narrate, chant, or perform a story? Previously this was an unsolvable riddle. However, a new literary form can absolutely not

²⁴⁴ Zheng used the term ‘*suwen*’ to describe the overtly religious prosimetric texts (i.e. those that were based on Buddhist sutras); he used the term ‘*bianwen*’ to describe secular prosimetric texts.

²⁴⁵ *Tanci* refers broadly to “several types of sometimes very different prosimetric narratives once popular in the lower Yangtze delta and farther south.” They appear to have been most popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term includes both texts written in Mandarin and some written in the Wu dialect and using specialized graphs. Works of both types often tell stories of the love affairs between scholars and beauties. See, Bender, “Regional Literatures,” in Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 1019-1025.

²⁴⁶ *Baojuan* are a form of prosimetric text (also known as precious scrolls) that flourished from the 15th century. See, Anne McLaren, “The Oral-Formulaic Tradition, in Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 991. According to Daniel Overmyer, “The basic concerns of these texts throughout are religious salvation and ethical exhortation,” and they are often sectarian in nature. See Overmyer, “Attitudes Toward the Ruler and State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 44.2 (December, 1984): 348.

²⁴⁷ The Chinese text reads: 我們可以說，如果沒有中印的結婚，如果佛教文學不輸入中國，我們的中世紀文學可能會是完全不相同的一種發展情況的。

be sent down from heaven; if it is not the creation of a local talent,
it must be the result of the entrance of foreign influence.²⁴⁸

But, the foreign did not remain simply foreign: Dunhuang offered apparently incontrovertible proof that Buddhist influence was felt primarily on the earliest works of vernacular literature. This was used by many at the time to show that the vernacular did not merely spring into use as a tool for description by elite fiction writers in the late imperial period, but actually had a popular provenance dating back at least to the Tang. As Xiang Da 向達 (1900-1966), another Republican-era scholar, put it, vernacular literature could finally be shown to be the final result of a “period of preparation” of which the Dunhuang materials were a significant reflection. Xiang Da, in a typical use of the notion of objectivity, argued that even if the texts discovered at Dunhuang were not necessarily valuable as literary works, the shadows of their “sayings” (*yanyu* 諺語) and “aphorisms” (*geyan* 格言) could be seen in opera (*xiqu* 戲曲) and *xiaoshuo* since the Song.²⁴⁹ For Xiang, Dunhuang—a space of multiple confluences and potential origins—provided a corpus of literature that could be placed, if somewhat tentatively, at the origin of a narrative of popular literary development.

Zheng was bolder than Xiang Da in his historical arguments regarding the Dunhuang materials. For Zheng, Dunhuang not only enabled a refashioning of the Middle Ages into a time of transition or ‘preparation’, but, more concretely, dispelled the notion of a popular literature of doomed emergences and replaced it with a literature of successful development, even if it was ultimately traced back to foreign origins.²⁵⁰ The importance of popular development meant that Zheng was not content, as Xiang Da had been, to merely see ‘shadows’, but argued that *bianwen* had led directly to later forms. In his 1929 article, he outlined precisely how these influences could be understood. He points out that *tanci* and *baojuan* were both prosimetric forms, and *baojuan* had a clear relation to Buddhist sutras. These features suggested to Zheng that the former was a descendent of *bianwen*

²⁴⁸ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 1, p. 448.

²⁴⁹ Xiang Da, “Ji Lundun suo cang de Dunhuang su wenxue,” in *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bainian wenku*, wenxue juan 1 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1999), p. 234.

²⁵⁰ Interestingly, while there could never be a literati origin of popular literature, the same appears not to have been true for foreign origins.

and the latter a descendent of *suwen*. The relations Zheng draws between *bianwen*, *xiaoshuo* and drama are similarly based on the mingling of verse and prose in late imperial drama and *xiaoshuo*. Zheng writes, “If Chinese *xiaoshuo* were not influenced by *bianwen* and *suwen*, then they undoubtedly received this character directly from Indian *xiaoshuo*. Prior to the Song we never encounter this type of *xiaoshuo*.”²⁵¹

While Zheng in his *Illustrated History*, published three years later, no longer traces a direct relationship between *bianwen* and *xiaoshuo*,²⁵² and has dropped the distinction between *suwen* and *bianwen*, his basic point remains the same: all later popular prosimetric literary forms were directly influenced by *bianwen*. His depiction of change in this case is clearly different from that which we have seen in the case of Tao Yuanming and the dislocated southern poets. Instead of formulating literary progress as a process that occurs through the mediation of certain privileged literati—the conversion of spontaneous response into formal tradition—change here is measured by analogy, that is, the assumption that if two genres have certain formal similarities they can be assumed to be developmentally linked and traced back to a shared origin.²⁵³ Proof for this development does not come from textual evidence or an explanation of the mechanics of change, but from a certain logic in which the people’s desires or needs—in the absence of textual evidence to the contrary—are assumed to ‘influence’ a path of literary development from its origins to a later fulfillment.

However, before turning to the role of the people, I want to begin by elaborating some of the assumptions underlying Zheng’s narrative. Most important for his argument are the presence of certain shared formal

²⁵¹ Zheng, “Dunhuang su wenxue,” in *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bainian wenku*, zongshu juan, p. 47.

²⁵² Though, he again asserts in a 1935 article that Song *huaben*, works that Zheng had described as early progenitors of *xiaoshuo*, were the secular descendants of *bianwen*. He writes, “*Huaben* were *bianwen* liberated from the temples and brought to the marketplace (*wazi* 瓦子).” Zheng, “Song Yuan huaben shi zenyang fazhan qilai de,” in *ZZDGWLJ*, p. 405.

²⁵³ Zheng basically accords with Foucault’s description of traditional historiography. In addition to the notion of ‘influence,’ (see f. 240), Foucault describes “the notions of development and evolution [that] make it possible to group a succession of dispersed events, to link them to one and the same organizing principle, to subject them to the exemplary power of life . . . to discover, already at work in each beginning, a principle of coherence and the outline of a future unity.” See his, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, (1969; rpt. London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 23-24.

characteristics in earlier and later texts—particularly the combination of verse and prose, what he referred to as prosimetric literature (*jiangchang wenxue* 講唱文學).²⁵⁴ For example, in an article written one year after the publication of the *Illustrated History* Zheng remains unable to provide evidence of the temporal or spatial proximity of *baojuan* and *bianwen*. Yet, on the basis of their shared prosimetric form, he notes confidently that the view of the *baojuan* as “very modern” has been completely overturned. Though the earliest extant *baojuan* he knows of is a Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) version of story of “Mulian Rescuing his Mother from Hell,” Zheng appears confident that missing Song (960-1279) versions will eventually consolidate the relationship with the Tang dynasty (618-907) *bianwen*. He is similarly confident in his assessment of two other prosimetric forms that flourished in the late imperial period, *tanci* and *guci* 鼓詞.²⁵⁵ Both, he argues, are “undoubtedly also born from *bianwen*.”²⁵⁶ Second, Zheng’s analogical argument is based on the assumption of a condensed and homogenous national space. It is really this national space, defined to include both Dunhuang (an area on the very margins of Chinese control for much of the imperial period) and Eastern China (*tanci*, for example, were prominent in the Lower Yangtze and further south), that allows a connection to be made even in the absence of any demonstrable historical relation. However, the space of relation is not so much the geographical land—whose landscapes, and linguistic and cultural disparities would, if taken seriously, disrupt easy flows of influence—but the text (and specifically, the pages of the national history book) in which the obstacles to demonstrating influence are only rhetorical and organizational. The writing of these books is made possible by a concurrent conceptualization of two unities: the historical China is imagined not as fragmented peoples awaiting a modern nation,

²⁵⁴ *Jiangchang* was another term invented in the modern period and used to cover a variety of genres; the unity that it described was based on modern, not traditional conceptions. Zheng admitted that this term was not traditional, but argued for its importance in his introduction to *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 7.

²⁵⁵ *Guci* were “composed for performance at court” and “written by known authors who appropriated elements of the classical tradition to form a hybrid genre for an elite audience.” See Anne McLaren, “The Oral-Formulaic Tradition,” p. 990.

²⁵⁶ Zheng Zhenduo, “Shenme jiaozuo ‘bianwen’? He houlai de ‘baojuan’, ‘zhugongdiao’, ‘danci’, ‘guci’ deng wenti you zenyang de guanxi,” in *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bai nian wenku*, *wenxue juan*, pp. 141-142. Mark Bender notes that there are still no “clear genetic relationships” between *bianwen*, *zhugongdiao*, and *tanci*. See Bender, “Regional Literatures,” p. 1019.

but as a more-or-less coherent society throughout history; the works subsumed under each named literary genre are, similarly, assumed to comprise a unified literary object. Finally, Zheng's argument assumes a single origin out of which flows a basically linear process of literary development. That is, even if the precise point of connection cannot be identified, each genre that uses a prosimetric form must be understood as having emerged from an earlier prosimetric genre. The job of the literary historian is to discover similarity and then bring these similarities into temporal series.

What makes the link between Dunhuang literature and the later prosimetric texts of particular importance is that the model of linear progress not only adheres faithfully to contemporary conceptualizations of historical development, but also rescues the people from the characterization as always creators *sui generis*. As usual, we find that the people are attributed a role in the very origins, that is, in the creation and popularization of *bianwen* itself. However, Zheng spends more time than usual explaining how they were involved. Their role is contingent on what has become a rather contentious definition of *bianwen*:²⁵⁷ according to Zheng, "[o]riginally, the meaning of *bianwen* was similar to that of *yanyi* 演義."²⁵⁸ That is, taking an ancient story, and then retelling it and changing it so that the people can understand it easily." He comes to this definition by equating the functions of *bianwen* and *bianxiang* 變相 (on the basis that both contained the character *bian* 變). Both, he argues, were used by Buddhist missionaries to propagate their message among the common people. He asserts that the pictures (*xiang* 相) were used to relate "classic stories in a way that would move the masses," a fact proven by their omnipresence in temples and caves of the time, places where he believed the people would gather for worship and instruction.²⁵⁹ He borrows the demonstrable prevalence of *bianxiang* as

²⁵⁷ Victor Mair provides an overview of the different definitions that have been attached to *bianwen* since the Republican period, including Zheng Zhenduo's. See Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 12-14.

²⁵⁸ *Yanyi* is the term used to describe works of fiction that are built around an historical framework. The best-known example is Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo zhi yanyi*).

²⁵⁹ Another Republican scholar, Sun Kaidi, made a similar point. Wu Hung questions this assumption in his article, "What is Bianxiang? On the Relationship Between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.1 (June, 1992). According to Wu, first, *bianwen* were not only religious, as were *bianxiang*, therefore their relationship is not as

evidence for the much more uncertain status of *bianwen*.²⁶⁰ That is, if *bianwen* were used along with *bianxiang*, it seems logical that the former were equally widespread and equally familiar to popular audiences. Once the *bianwen* are ascribed their function as widely-used aids for preaching to the masses, it becomes possible for Zheng to create a transition from the *bianwen* to the later popular prosimetric forms in which the originally Buddhist qualities are finally shed to make way for a native tradition. He explains this link in his 1929 article:

The period from the Six Dynasties to the Tang was a time when Buddhist clergy were very active in propagating Buddhism in China; on the one hand, they focused on the literati, on the other they couldn't neglect the majority of the people. Therefore, they could not but use vernacular prose (*yutiwen* 語體文) to translate the scriptures. However, we can suspect that translating the scriptures alone was not adequate, they also had to take the moving stories from the scriptures, and change them into *suwen* in order to proselytize the people (*minzhong* 民衆). Thus, the people learned to enjoy hearing these stories. However, the proclamation of stories about karma from the sutras was not enough to satisfy the people's desires (*yuwang* 欲望), and therefore from the sutras it expanded into China's original tales (*yuanyou de gu chuanji* 原有的古傳記).²⁶¹

We should note that at the end of this narrative, the foreign has disappeared and a once foreign form has become popularized.²⁶² A foreign literature is appropriated

evident as Zheng and Sun assert (p. 122); second, he questions whether the caves in which *bianxiang* appear would have been used for popular storytelling at all (pp. 126-127). While disproving Zheng's argument, Wu doesn't consider why Zheng was so intent on demonstrating the link between *bianwen* and *bianxiang*. I argue that Zheng was not simply making a mistaken judgment, but was making a connection that had the potential to undergird an important narrative of popular literary development.

²⁶⁰ On the popularity and pervasiveness of *bianxiang* see Wu Hung, "What is *Bianxiang*," p. 116.

²⁶¹ Zheng Zhenduo, "Dunhuang de su wenxue," (1929; rpt. in *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bai nian wenku*, 1999), p. 29.

²⁶² The process from foreign to popular is noted by literary historians in the West as well, for example, Wilbur Cross argues that the popular songs and stories of early English literature "have been traced in their germinal form to India. But what originally came from the East was almost invariably so modified and enriched that it seemed to spring from medieval soil." Cross, *Development of the English Novel*, p. 5.

by the people—here clearly depicted as the non-educated counterparts of the literati. But, this appropriation does not require that the people actually write their own literature. Instead, by regarding the written texts as tools for oral performance, the “people’s desires,” that is, their emotional responses as audience members and listeners are made to supplant authorial intention as the guide of textual production. The authors of the written texts merely inscribe the people’s desires; their own role in the creation of the popular tradition is not considered. In the following section, we will see that the notion of orality—joining the ‘origin’ as another space opened up for popular participation in literary production—is used to incorporate the people into a history of the Chinese novel, in this case by linking the novel to the Song dynasty storyteller scripts (*huaben* 話本).

3. *Texts of change: the vernacular novel*

A third type of change also features in the *Illustrated History*: the change that Zheng believes to occur naturally within a certain genre. The literary historian Liu Dajie, a contemporary of Zheng’s, provides a good description of this sort of change. He writes, “Although literature is a product of human spirit, literature itself is like a living organism, and in its development it is also possible to see a process from formation to flourishing to decline and ossification.”²⁶³ The problem, as we have seen in Zheng’s writing, was that many of the genres in Chinese literature did not seem to follow this putatively natural path. They emerged from the people but were quickly and artificially snuffed out by literati appropriation. The ‘novel’ (*xiaoshuo* 小說) appeared to be an exceptional case of successful generic literary development. I would suggest, however, that the apparently exceptional development of the novel, more than anything, illustrates the power of the idea to create and naturalize a literary historical narrative. The novel was something that modern nations had to have; the job of literary historians was to prove that it had indeed existed.

The absence of any precise generic definition of *xiaoshuo* in the pre-modern period was fortuitous to this mission in that it facilitated the construction of a developmental literary history. Lu Xun provides an overview of the history of

²⁶³ Liu Dajie, *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi*, p. 273.

the term as it was traditionally used in his *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*.²⁶⁴ he points out that it had been ascribed variously, and with no apparent consistency, since the Warring States period to materials collected from among the people to gauge public opinion, to pseudo-historical works, to accounts of “ghosts and fairies,” and to “books of divine retribution.”²⁶⁵ Lu Xun and other modern scholars remedied the confusion through a process of redefinition similar to that which took place in the definition of literature, though with less emphasis on a stable definition and more emphasis on generic evolution. Works that seemed to fit a logical developmental scheme for *xiaoshuo* were ascribed a common definition as *xiaoshuo* (or *xiaoshuo* progenitors) and others that had traditionally been labeled *xiaoshuo* but seemed not to fit this developmental scheme were excluded. Once those included were subdivided according to length—short (*duanpian* 短篇), medium (*zhongpian* 中篇), long (長篇 *changpian*)—²⁶⁶ the development of the novel through time became evident, if tautological. The development of *xiaoshuo* was placed along two axes that ensured the possibility of demonstrable development: from the crude or primitive to the refined, and from lesser to greater length. The earliest *xiaoshuo* therefore, consisted of all brief and crude fictional short stories or tales. Those of *xiaoshuo*’s middle age were medium-length and more refined. Finally, these shorter *xiaoshuo* culminated in the full-length narratives of the late-Ming and Qing dynasties.

These principles for determining the origins and development of the novel had already been established by Lu Xun and Hu Shi, two of the path-breakers in Republican-era literary historiography. As Dai Yan points out, Hu Shi had created an origin for *xiaoshuo* by demonstrating that “rhymed verse and prose” could be brought into the system of short novels, that these forms “could also be read as

²⁶⁴ Sheldon Lu repeats most of Lu Xun’s observations in *From Historicity to Fictionality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), chp. 2.

²⁶⁵ Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang and Yang (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), pp. 4-5.

²⁶⁶ Zheng makes this division in his article on literary genres, “Wenxue de fenlei,” (1923; rpt. in *ZZDQJ*, vol. 3), pp. 446-454. It is also present in his writings on *xiaoshuo*. See various essays in *ZZDGWLJ*. These three subdivisions of the novel reflect the apparently natural periodization of literary history that structures Zheng’s entire work: from the ancient, to the middle ages, and finally to the modern.

short novels.”²⁶⁷ Lu Xun’s *Brief History of Chinese Fiction* traced *xiaoshuo* back even earlier to popular mythology of the Warring States period. He shows that these originally primitive stories were over time stripped of their supernatural elements and converted into legend, these legends then became precursors to longer narrative forms.²⁶⁸ Lu Xun’s discussion is a good example of how these principles were formed: he begins with terminological rectification (converting *xiaoshuo* from an unstable, inconsistently applied signifier into something clearly associated with a certain type of work), and moves on to form a historical narrative that followed the rules of novel development. That is, he ensured that even writings not traditionally labeled *xiaoshuo* could, through a consideration of certain privileged qualities, become part of the tradition that, like Zheng’s description of *bianwen* and its vernacular descendents, flowed smoothly through an undifferentiated national space.

Zheng, writing more than a decade after Hu Shi and Lu Xun and perhaps more concerned with maintaining generic integrity, is reticent to trace *xiaoshuo* back to ancient mythology and rhymed verse. However, the alternative origins he provides are equally unstable, and seem to shift from work to work (an indication perhaps of the rather arbitrary relations that are drawn to later *xiaoshuo*). On several occasions, he chooses as his point of departure the “crude popular prose” and *bianwen* that had been unearthed at Dunhuang;²⁶⁹ elsewhere, he suggests that the progenitors of the novel are the stories found in *biji xiaoshuo* 筆記小說;²⁷⁰ or, that the origins of *xiaoshuo* can be found in the sort of works included in the recently discovered (in Japan) collection of five Song dynasty storyteller scripts (*huaben*),²⁷¹ *Jingben tongshu xiaoshuo* 京本通俗小說. The first two types of works met all the criteria for novel origins—that is, they were crude and brief

²⁶⁷ Dai Yan, *Wenxue shi de quanli*, p. 141.

²⁶⁸ Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, chp. 2.

²⁶⁹ Zheng Zhenduo, “Dunhuang de su wenxue,” p. 29.

²⁷⁰ Zheng Zhenduo, “Zhongguo xiaoshuo de fenlei ji qi yanhua de qushi,” in *Xuesheng zazhi* 17.1 (January, 1930; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), p. 331. According to James Hargett, many *biji*, a rather heterogeneous genre of prose whose classification dates back to the Song, deal with stories of ‘anomalies or unusual happenings.’ Similar types of writing are found as early as the Wei and Jin period (third to fourth century). See his, “Sketches,” in Mair, ed., *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 560-565.

²⁷¹ Note, the phrase *huaben* was used by Zheng to bring together a mixture of works (*cihua*, *shihua*, and *lishi xiaoshuo*); the term stressed the links to an oral (i.e. popular) tradition.

stories, apparently written for a popular audience. The third required further explanation. These Song dynasty texts were attractive for a history of *xiaoshuo* for a couple of reasons. First, they seemed formally closer to the late imperial *xiaoshuo* than did, for example, *bianwen*. Second, their function in oral storytelling allowed for the insertion of a popular audience and, thus, the people's desires. However, they were also much more refined than Zheng felt appropriate for a literary origin. The solution was to apply the logic of development: the fact that these works seemed somewhat refined was proof for Zheng that there had to be an even earlier tradition of *xiaoshuo*, or perhaps a contemporary corpus of crude texts on which the more refined works were based but which were no longer extant.²⁷² The pursuit for ultimate origins, of course, can continue *ad infinitum* until an arbitrary origin is set: this origin for Zheng here, as always, was the amorphous 'people'.

However, while the people always had to be assigned an originary role in literary developments, they very quickly disappeared from the narrative of the ongoing development of the novel. The troublesome nature of their role in a national genre becomes apparent. Luo Guanzhong, the reputed author of the earliest versions of *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for example, is related to the people both through his use of historical stories that had been popular since the Tang, and in his personal identity as an intellectual who, much like Tao Yuanming, bridged the gap between the popular and literate traditions.²⁷³ However, Luo is later faulted by Zheng for his over-reliance on popular historical material. The proper content of a novel, Zheng felt, should not be based on pre-existing historical narratives, but derived from the author's own imagination.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, Luo's liminal position between the people and the literati is rather unique among the later *xiaoshuo* writers Zheng examines—it certainly does not seem a pre-requisite for successful novel-writing. Instead of Luo's works, Zheng regards *Jinping mei* as the pinnacle of pre-Qing dynasty *xiaoshuo* development. Unlike *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *Water Margin*,

²⁷² Zheng Zhenduo, "Song Yuan Ming xiaoshuo de yanjin," in *Zhongxuesheng* 11 (January, 1931; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), p. 376.

²⁷³ Zheng Zhenduo, "Song Yuan Ming xiaoshuo de yanjin," pp. 381, 386.

²⁷⁴ Zheng Zhenduo, "Song Yuan Ming xiaoshuo de yanjin," p. 390.

works that Zheng feels remain either stuck in the past or obsessed with the supernatural, *Jinping mei* is credited with being a “purely realist (*xieshi zhuyi* 寫實主義) novel.”²⁷⁵ However, it becomes this not by reflecting or gaining inspiration from the lives of the common people, but by its honest portrayal of daily life and human emotion, albeit life among the privileged.

In his *Illustrated History*, Zheng makes the development of *xiaoshuo* an exemplar of the “regulations” governing natural literary historical development.²⁷⁶ Yet, this development marginalizes the ‘people’ (again, the people as opposed to the literati). To understand some of the complexities of literary historiography in Republican China, it is necessary to ask why this particular development is deemed natural when nearly all other literati-directed literary developments had been discarded as mere embellishment or decline from natural origins. It was not, as was the case with the Dunhuang texts and their progeny, that *xiaoshuo* were seen as the works of the people. While Zheng did attempt to prove popular origins, most of his writing on novels is concerned with changes introduced by well-educated literati, and the novels that eventually gained the greatest popular success were frequently criticized.²⁷⁷ Zheng, for example, described the change from the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典²⁷⁸ version of *Xiyou ji* to Wu Cheng’en’s (ca. 1500-1582) version as the work of literati: “it [the *Yongle dadian* version] had not yet shed its primitive appearance as a popular legend. Wu’s work, however, was the great work of a literatus. The former was dry and flavorless, the latter was fleshed out and flavorful.”²⁷⁹ Nor do *xiaoshuo* advance by attaching themselves to social progress. Most of the greatest novels—*Jinping mei*, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, and *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史—are described by Zheng as chronicles of regress and

²⁷⁵ Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 920.

²⁷⁶ Zheng Zhenduo, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 911.

²⁷⁷ Zheng joined Liang Qichao in condemning these popular works; however, Liang had also condemned some of the great novels—*Honglou meng*, *Water Margin*—works that he regarded as harmful to young readers. The harmfulness of popular fiction (*xiaoshuo*) was also noted by traditional critics such as Liu Zhiji (661-721), Hu Yinglin (1551-1602), etc. Pre-modern advocates such as Jin Shengtan had justified *xiaoshuo* in terms of their concealed morality; for Zheng, justification was in terms of universal relevance. See Sheldon Lu, *Historicity to Fictionality*, pp. 48-52.

²⁷⁸ A massive collection of works sponsored by the Ming Yongle emperor (1403-1424).

²⁷⁹ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 911.

social decline.²⁸⁰ The divide between the people and the literati that had been used to explain the distorted or thwarted development of other literary forms here is broken down, *xiaoshuo* develop despite becoming what Zheng elsewhere referred to as ‘playthings of the literati.’

I would suggest that we see here two conflicting ideals: one, that dominated *Wenxue dagang*, demanded that all true national literatures match up to global standards; the other, propounded in the *Illustrated History* and *Su wenxue shi*, expected all literature to be a product of the people, and all decline a product of literati interference. In the case of *xiaoshuo*, the ascription of origins to crude or oral stories becomes a way to save this people-centered ideology; but, ultimately, the demand for a suitably national literary form trumped the requisite role of the people in later development. Narrative in general, and the novel in particular, were uniquely important for a nation. On the one hand, they were taken to be exemplars and potential ‘renovators’ of national spirit.²⁸¹ For Liang Qichao, the power of novels to speak powerfully to and change the behavior of a broad popular audience led him to contend that, “if one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction (*xiaoshuo*).”²⁸² It was also apparent that this form, more than any of the other popular forms, was conceived of as a world literature. If other popular genres had some local value, they were rarely obliged to stand for the nation and thus match up with foreign works. *Xiaoshuo*, like a select few universal (usually narrative) genres such as the epic and the tragedy, were drawn into a comparative framework.²⁸³ Zheng, for example, compares the novel *Fengshen zhuan* 封神傳 with the *Iliad* and *Mahabhrata*; and *Xiyang ji* 西洋記 with the *Odyssey* and *Ramayana*; and the *Xiyou bu* 西游補 with

²⁸⁰ As Zheng puts it, “When this new realm emerged, it was no longer a time of flourishing aristocratic families, but was the sad sound of desolation and decline.” 這新境界的出現時，已不是蓬勃貴冑世族的光榮時代，而祇是淒涼沒落的哀音。Zheng, “Qing chu dao zhongye de changpian xiaoshuo de fazhan,” (1934; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), p. 461.

²⁸¹ Zheng had noted the importance of narrative forms in portraying the national spirit in the *Wenxue dagang*. He felt that China was unique in having nothing like the epic that could serve as a representative of the “national people” (*guomin daibiao* 國民代表), p. 131.

²⁸² Liang Qichao, “On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People,” trans. Gek Nai Cheng, in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 74. On Liang’s view of the novel, see Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 101-115.

²⁸³ For the question of tragedy as a universal genre, see Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*.

H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (*Shijian che* 時間車).²⁸⁴ Elsewhere, he argues that the “four great works” of Chinese fiction can “stand up proudly with other world literary classics.”²⁸⁵ Given its fundamental importance to the modern Chinese nation—and in the discipline of literary history as a nationally-circumscribed practice—change in traditional *xiaoshuo* became an object of interest, regardless of its origin. Rather than focusing, therefore, on the ways that the form might be linked to the people in their concreteness, Zheng measured *xiaoshuo* against the standards of various abstract universals: the focus was not on positing obscure popular origins, but on measuring development toward ideals based on a three-fold schema of length (short/medium/long), and apparently universal literary ideals (i.e. away from the crude, supernatural or allegorical and toward the realist).

Despite the iconoclasm he shared with others of his generation, throughout the *Illustrated History*, Zheng attempts to show that literature of the past need not be simply discarded, but that this past could be brought into a history of development that belonged to the modern Chinese nation. To achieve this, it was necessary, first of all, to demonstrate that the break with the past was not absolute, that the past continued to be a meaningful precursor of the present. For example, by drawing parallels with instances of foreign influence in the past, the modern period could be reinterpreted as another instance of foreign influence rather than a radical disjunction. That is, just as Buddhist influences had shed their foreign religiosity in the process of assimilation into a truly national form, and just as southern poetry in the Six Dynasties had gained pre-eminence despite the political domination of the north, the foreign influences of the present would also be eventually shed to make way for a reinvigorated national tradition. Connections between past and present could be made through the figure of the intellectual. Tao Yuanming's ability to introduce change into a stagnant tradition hinted at the role that modern intellectuals imagined for themselves: not a complete withdrawal from tradition, but a conversion of their unique liminal position into a medium for the progressive change of tradition. The historicizing of marginalized genres such

²⁸⁴ Zheng, *Illustrated History*, vol. 2, p. 916; Zheng, “Qing chu dao zhongye de changpian xiaoshuo de fazhan,” *Shenbao yuekan* 3.7 (August, 1934; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), p. 455.

²⁸⁵ Zheng Zhenduo, “Zhongguo xiaoshuo de fenlei ji qi yanhua de qushi,” *Xuesheng zazhi*, 17.1 (January, 1930; rpt. in ZZDGWLJ), p. 336.

as *bianwen* and *xiaoshuo* were also important. In the former, the people—through their desires and demands—were given a sustained role as participants in history. The latter offered proof of the possibility for Chinese literature to participate in universal modes of development. Both originated in the Middle Ages, thus proving the suitability of a tripartite periodization of China's national history.

C. *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中國俗文學史 [History of Chinese Popular Literature] (1938)

As I mentioned in my introduction, shortly after the publication of the *Illustrated History*, Zheng wrote an article entitled “Wenxue dazhonghua wenti zhengwen” (The Question of a Literature of the Masses).²⁸⁶ The article espoused a radical ideal, but it was limited by a complete lack of confidence in the contemporary masses. On the one hand, the masses must produce their own literature—as Zheng put it, the production of literature must be “placed in the hands of the people.” On the other, this goal could only be achieved by first educating the people. A mass literature was to be achieved by raising the masses up to or toward the level of the elite. In Zheng's earlier writings, we have seen that the people of the past were depicted—in theory at least—as an unlimited source of creativity whose literary development was stunted more by its appropriation by the literati than any innate limitations of their own. However, we have also seen that it was almost always only the literati who had the potential to extend change through time. In this article, modern intellectuals simply replaced traditional literati as the loci of change; it was only that the change brought by the modern intellectual was development rather than decline. The literature produced in both cases would accord not with the people but with the interests of the elite. This article, despite its contemporary agenda, reveals an understanding of the people that also underlies Zheng's history of popular literature. We will see that despite this work's declared intent to tell a history of popular literature, the professional historian rather than the people themselves served as the arbiter of ‘popularity’.

Throughout Zheng's *Illustrated History*, “the people” remained a comfortably ambiguous category, most often understood in terms of language (as bearers of the vernacular) and a certain set of characteristics (proximity to the

²⁸⁶ (1934; rpt. in ZZDQJ, vol. 3), p. 481.

land, pre-reflective consciousness, fecundity), or, negatively, in contrast to the literati. In the history of *xiaoshuo*, they were replaced altogether by the nation. If the nation was comprised of the people, a national form such as the novel was, by definition, popular. In other words, this was a popularity in the subjunctive or potential sense, not what the people were, but what they should have been or could become. With the exception of Dunhuang literature, little time was spent describing exactly how the people, the non-elite, participated in popularization. Most often, popular literature was mediated by members of the elite who either compiled popular literature or tapped into sources of inspiration that were legitimized through their identification with the people. In many ways, Zheng's final history continued to embody this sort of ambiguity. This ambiguity, moreover, is compounded by a profusion of terms referring somehow to the people—*dazhong* (masses), *min* (people), *tongsu* (popular), *minzu* (the ethnic people), *minjian* (the people as opposed to the literati)²⁸⁷—there was no one 'people', and certainly not yet any sustained attempt to conceive of the people as a class.

This work is described by Laurence Schneider as a summary of the previous two decades of research into popular literature, a movement including such luminaries as Gu Jiegang, Zhou Zuoren, and Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891-1934). In terms of its content, the work is indeed a valuable resource, including the full text of many recently discovered and rare works. However, it also points to the limitations of the popular literature movement. If Zheng's history can be understood as part of a broader project to ascribe value to popular literature, a project that was often political in its origins, it also reveals that this literature had become valued more as an object of academic inquiry than a tool for the liberation of the masses.²⁸⁸ The "people" of the Chinese past were restored as historical subjects, but the professional academic project was detached from an explicitly political agenda, and therefore was absent the need to provide a precise definition of who exactly the people were, it was adequate simply that they were

²⁸⁷ See footnote 189.

²⁸⁸ Though, we should note that some scholars, such as He Bingsong, do seem to have joined the folklore movement in response to the Japanese invasion. See Edward Q. Wang, *Inventing China Through History*, p. 152.

(ontologically speaking). To put it another way, the very ambivalence of the term ‘people’ precluded political action (who would one be acting for?); the people were primarily important for their necessary presence in nationally-circumscribed, globally-aware scholarship.²⁸⁹ A more explicit indication of political detachment is the justification of the work according to the requirements of a professional, universal discipline. By the 1930s, Zheng had shifted from working as an editor at the Shanghai Commercial Press, to work as a professor of literature.²⁹⁰ His personal professionalization coincided with that of his works: he invokes global disciplinary developments, not politics in the introduction. He argues that the study of traditional popular literature is important because other nations have histories of popular literature, comprised not of the forms traditionally elevated in China—‘*shi* poetry’ and ‘prose’—but of novels, drama, and poetry (*shige*).²⁹¹ By retrieving its popular literary tradition, the study of literary history in China would take another step toward the universal. This tradition had to be carefully situated not only vis-à-vis the local, but also the demands of a universally recognizable popular literature.

1. Description and historical background

Against its historical background, this professionalization is especially striking. Japan’s invasion of China—particularly the invasions of Shanghai and Nanjing—had not gone unnoticed by professional historians. The response, in many ways, was a turn toward nationalism. For example, many historians writing in the 1930s and early 1940s looked to the past for stories of resistance against foreign incursion; some, most famously Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950), had even written revisionist histories asserting China’s ancient claim to the lands in Northeastern China that had been or were threatened by Japanese occupation. However, while the nationalist movement received wide support among academics, Fu’s history was not well-received, its blatant disregard for historical accuracy was apparent to

²⁸⁹ This is very similar to the way that the category of “literature” could be stretched to incorporate philosophy, history, or political science in those cases that true literature seemed to be absent from the Chinese tradition. The demand of national history was that no part of the national past be left unfilled.

²⁹⁰ He taught literature at Yanjing University in Beijing, and Jinan University in Shanghai from the early 1930s and into the early 1940s.

²⁹¹ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 2.

many of its academic reviewers.²⁹² Zheng's politics was, like that of many historians, separated from his academic writing. His most overtly political works were not literary histories, but a series of short stories and tales that centered around heroic figures of the Chinese past.²⁹³

Therefore, while intellectuals such as Zheng were certainly politically engaged, professional developments in historiography cannot be linked directly to the political upheaval of the late 1930s. In literary history, important developments had been occurring throughout the 1920s and 1930s, including the rise of various folk literature movements, and these developments continued to occupy professional historians. The standards espoused by the collectors of folksongs—articulated most famously by Zhou Zuoren—comprised a sort of de-aestheticization of the literary ideals that were espoused in the *Wenxue dagang*. Zhou had argued that the collectors of folk literature should not be concerned to collect only works of the highest quality or moral rectitude, but works that were actually circulating, no matter how crude or offensive to the delicate sensibilities of the collector.²⁹⁴ Despite its appearances, this was not a precedent of what Mao called for in his Yan'an talks (to learn from the people in order to produce a revolutionary literature), nor was it a return to the 'mission' of literature that Zheng advocated in his early writings.²⁹⁵ The collecting of these sources required that intellectuals go to villages, but the real purpose was not to draw intellectuals closer to the people. Rather, the movement was justified through the ideal of

²⁹² Schneider, "Between Dao and History," p. 69.

²⁹³ Kirk Denton points out that intellectuals in the war years "were encouraged to produce works that were readily accessible to a mass audience. This meant using 'national forms' (*minzu xingshi*) or 'old forms' (*jiu xingshi*) – literary, performance, and visual forms that had indigenous roots and were appealing to a rural as well as urban audience. These forms included storytelling, ballads, New Year's prints, local opera, and Peking drum singing." See his "Historical Overview," in Mostow, ed. *Columbia Companion to East Asian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 295.

²⁹⁴ The importance of this sort of objectivity was seconded by Zheng in his article, "Yanjiu mingde liang tiao da lu," where he notes that "if one is a scholar of popular culture (*minsu xuejia* 民俗學家), a researcher of the people's (*minjian*) primitive psychology or customs, then we will be focused on the latter [i.e. the often 'laughably crude' (*cubi kexiao* 粗陋可笑) works that have not been edited by the literati]."

²⁹⁵ At the same time, folk literature collected by disinterested professionals was not perceived as harmless by the GMD government who criticized one of the main folklore journals, *Minsu zhoukan*, for spreading superstition. See Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 160.

'objective' scholarship that had become increasingly important in professional historiography over the previous decades. Zheng had long used the notion of objective value to justify the inclusion of crude works in narratives of literary development. What we see in the study of popular literature is an attempted reorientation of the purpose of objective scholarship. The study of popular literature was not intended primarily as a science of change (the people, after all, were generally treated as unchanging), but a more sociological science that contented itself with a deeper understanding of primitive psychology or customs.

Therefore, whereas the *Wenxue dagang* and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the *Illustrated History*, had been based on an autonomous aesthetic founded on the notion of progressive change, Zheng insisted in the introduction to his third history that the criteria for inclusion had only to do with the proximity of this literature to the people. As Zheng puts it in a sentence that neatly conflates nearly all the terms he uses to refer to the people, "*su wenxue* is popular (*tongsu*) literature, it is literature from among the people (*minjian*), it is literature of the masses (*dazhong*);" this '*su wenxue*', Zheng asserts, is characterized by anonymous or collective authorship, oral transmission, style that tends to be both fresh (*xinxian* 新鮮) and coarse (*cubi* 粗鄙), and great imagination.

Whatever the abstract ideals, when we turn to the content of the work itself there are evident problems of application. First, it proved impossible to conceive of a literary history without returning to a notion of change. As long as the people were imagined as primitive, the search for change almost always ended by returning to the writings of literati. The reiteration of the development of *bianwen* into later prosimetric genres such as *tanci* and *baojuan* is again the only exception to a general rule that literary change excludes the people except at its origins. For the most part, Zheng cannot resist the temptation to insert 'popular literature' into a narrative of popular origin and literati appropriation; that is, when one originally popular genre becomes 'ossified' (*jianghua*) by its literati practitioners, it is replaced by another genre emerging from the people.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ For example, Zheng writes that "Tang and Song ci were originally popular songs, but by the Five Dynasties and Northern Song they had become songs of the aristocracy and by the Southern Song had become ossified. At that time, *sanqu* arose to replace them; *sanqu* were very popular during the Yuan and were lively creations of the people." *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 338.

Reading through the work, we see clearly that there was still no adequate model for demonstrating change among the people. Instead, the people throughout the book fit into a basically unchanging typology. They are always ‘crude’, ‘innocent’, and lacking consciousness regardless of their location in history.²⁹⁷ In practice, as I will show below, the application of a notion of literary change demanded the inclusion of a large number of works that were produced during the developmental stages of a particular genre—works of the literati—even if these works are criticized for their decadence. Despite Zheng’s theoretical elevation of the ‘people’ or the ‘masses’, the majority of the works in the *Su wenxue shi* are not direct products of the uneducated masses, but the creations of the sorts of people who had been valued in Zheng’s earlier histories as participants in change: the educated writers who manage to convert the raw essence of the people into a more refined form, literati who happen to write a genre that has been defined as popular, or educated redactors of folk literature.

The work is divided into fourteen chapters. Like the first two histories, it is designed to trace Chinese literature back to the earliest possible origins. After defining popular literature and providing a rough sketch of the types of some popular genres that could not be treated in greater length, the second chapter looks at what Zheng believes to be the earliest extant popular writings, the poems of the *Shijing*. Following this, Zheng examines popular literature in the Han dynasty, folksongs of the Six Dynasties, popular verse (*gefu* 歌賦) during the Tang dynasty, the *bianwen* at Dunhuang, *zaju* 雜劇 during the Song dynasty, *zhugongdiao* 諸宮調, *baojuan*, and *tanci* (purported descendants of *bianwen*), Yuan dynasty *sanqu*, and Ming and Qing dynasty folksongs. This history is more an anthology than a well-developed history; chapters have brief introductory sections and short biographies are provided for well-known authors, but there is little analysis of individual works apart from brief praise or criticism. Zheng’s apparent intention was to provide easy access to works that he felt had been overlooked in other histories and anthologies.

²⁹⁷ Though, of course, he claims that popular literature can show the “development” of the people. Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 14.

2. Analysis

a. *Sanqu* and Ma Zhiyuan

I have chosen to look at Yuan dynasty *sanqu* because this genre seems a particularly bad choice for a history of popular literature devised according to Zheng's own standards.²⁹⁸ We have seen in genres such as *xiaoshuo* that the people could be incorporated into the history of nearly any genre by positing a stage of crude popular origins, but *sanqu* seem to be missing this stage. Instead, the *sanqu* that Zheng finds are immediately the polished works of well-educated writers. As Zheng himself acknowledges, "as soon as *sanqu* appeared, there was immediately a great period with the likes of Guan Hanqing, Ma Zhiyuan, Zhang Shaoshan, and Qiao Mengfu." According to Zheng, *sanqu* were not originally crude (in fact, they seem to have originated not with the people but with the literati),²⁹⁹ they were written most commonly by educated individuals rather than anonymous popular collectivities,³⁰⁰ they were very popular among members of the elite, and they were often concerned with affairs that are far removed from the people.³⁰¹

Ma Zhiyuan's 馬致遠 (1270-1330) *sanqu* are the best example of the problems Zheng encounters when dealing with *sanqu*. For Zheng, Ma is at once

²⁹⁸ *Sanqu*, a poetic form that flourished in the Yuan dynasty and continued to be practiced by some in the Ming, were originally set to melodies that have now been lost. *Sanqu* appear to have developed first in the north, before becoming popular also among educated writers in the south. While some works offer political or social criticism (these were particularly attractive to Zheng), most deal with love, as Schlepp puts it, "innumerable poems written by men in the voice of a lovesick girl waiting for an errant lover;" there are also many that are humorous. See Wayne Schlepp, "Yüan San-ch'ü," in Mair, ed., *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 370-382.

²⁹⁹ It was only in the second stage of their development that they began to take on more of an appearance of crude popular literature.

³⁰⁰ Despite Zheng's claim that his chapter will include important "anonymous" *sanqu*, we find in the end that only two pages of the very long chapter include these potential collective verses.

³⁰¹ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 339. Zheng writes, "They are certainly not rough and vulgar folk songs (*liqu* 俚曲), they are not produced by those who have never received training in literature. Among them, therefore, are many that are the masterpieces (*jiezu*) of the best lyrical poets. They are, therefore, pearls that have gone through carving and polishing, gold that has been selected. Among them, there may be some that are not in accord with the popular (*xiesu* 諧俗), or that are not of very high order (*shangcheng* 上乘), however, the majority entered deeply among the people."

the pinnacle of *sanqu* writing, and the beginning of its long-term decline. Reading between the lines, Zheng's confusion marks the intersection of several conflicting measures of literary value. When measured against the definition of literature, Ma's works exemplify the notion of literature as a formal expression of emotion. Zheng suggests that Ma "was the first writer of Yuan arias (*qu* 曲) to express all of his emotions and thoughts in *zaju* and *sanqu*." Ma's writings, a 'natural product' of the 'darkness' (*mo'an* 墨暗) of the times, can also not be faulted by the ideals of the realist aesthetic.³⁰² But, this is a history of popular literature, and neither of these qualities have anything at all to do with Zheng's own description of a popular work—they simply indicate that Ma's *sanqu* are good literature by the standards of a Republican literary critic. However, if we try to find proof of proximity to the people among other's of Ma's *sanqu*, we are again disappointed. Zheng's criticisms of Ma, for example, go further in explicitly demonstrating not that Ma's works are bad popular literature, but not really popular literature at all. Their enthusiastic acceptance by literati of the Yuan and Ming indicates that they have entered the "hall of great elegance" (*daya zhi tang* 大雅之堂)³⁰³ and their tendency toward escapism predicts the inevitable decline of the genre. Most importantly, they almost invariably deal with themes about which Zheng's imagined 'people' are expected to have little interest. For example, the 'discontent' Ma often expresses for his social situation may have moved the literati, but it "is very far from the people" (*yuanli le minjian* 遠離了民間), who, according to Zheng, are not fond of having their "nostrils assailed by sour air" (*suanqi pubi* 酸氣撲鼻).³⁰⁴ The reader is left wondering how someone like Ma could possibly be included in Zheng's history of popular literature.

Perhaps pressed to provide some justification for the inclusion of Ma's writing, Zheng provides one example of a 'popular' *sanqu* in his lengthy section on Ma's writing. This piece, titled "Jie ma," was apparently written to entertain a child (it is subtitled *Shua hai'r* 耍孩兒). According to Zheng, this is one of a few of Ma's works that did not merely reflect a literati state of mind but was

³⁰² Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 362.

³⁰³ This is a phrase Zheng uses frequently to describe literature that has left the 'people' and become popular primarily among the literati.

³⁰⁴ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, pp. 356-357.

humorous and popular (*xiesu* 諧俗) The story is certainly comedic: a man expresses his unwillingness to sell a horse, he recounts the great care he has bestowed on the horse—rising every night to give it hay, carefully scrubbing dirt from its coat, sparing it from any hard labour; he exhorts the buyer at great length to “tie it in a cool spot beneath a west awning,” “feed it with tender hay,” “ride it slowly when it’s full,” “teach it to shit in a clean place.” When the horse is sold, the man sheds a pair of tears, he laments his decision. The justification for labeling this work “popular” is, as always, left unarticulated. To some extent, Zheng seems to rely on an evolutionary scheme common in Republican China that identified the primitive (crude or popular) with the child. That which a child enjoyed would, ipso facto, also be enjoyed by the people.³⁰⁵ Thus, popular literature did not require actual production among the people, but, as with the transition of Buddhist texts into popular at Dunhuang, simply that an author inscribe what were imagined as the people’s desires or characteristics into his writing.

Thus, when these desires or characteristics are missing, a *sanqu* by the same author, also describing a horse and heartbroken man cannot be deemed popular. Both these figures appear again in “Qiu si,” a work that Zheng refers to as the most “representative” of Ma’s *sanqu*. The spare language of this verse contrasts markedly with “Jie ma,” and it is solemn rather than humorous, but are there none among the people who could appreciate its content? The poem reads:

Withered wisteria, old tree, darkling crows—
 Little bridge over flowing water by someone’s house—
 Emaciated horse on an ancient road in the western wind—
 Evening sun setting in the west—
 Broken-hearted man on the horizon.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Andrew Jones, “The Child as History in Republican China,” *Positions* 10.3 (2002). According to Zheng Zhenwei, Zheng Zhenduo “thought that children’s psychology was similar to that of primitive people (*chumin* 初民), therefore in his preface to the magazine *Ertong shiji* 兒童世界 [Children’s world], he declared that he would use the myths and legends of many different peoples (*minzu*).” See Zheng Zhenwei, *Zheng Zhenduo qianqi wenxue sixiang*, p. 76.

³⁰⁶ The Chinese text reads: 枯藤老樹昏鴉，小橋流水人家，古道西風瘦馬。夕陽西下，斷腸人在天涯。 Translation by Victor Mair in, Mair, ed., *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 176-177.

Whatever the case, according to Zheng's standards of popularity—whether we concur with them or not—Ma's one popular *sanqu* seems an aberration in his larger corpus. Therefore, it can be argued that Zheng's inclusion of Ma Zhiyuan had little to do with Ma's perceived proximity to the people (who are depicted here as primitive or childlike). Instead, his choice might be understood in terms of two factors. The first is the importance of Ma as a national writer. Beginning with Wang Guowei's 王國維 (1877-1927) *History of Song and Yuan Drama*, and continuing in the writings of Hu Shi, Ma had been considered one of the traditional writers best qualified for inclusion in an international research agenda.³⁰⁷ He was doubly privileged by his location in a time of foreign influence and his writing of dramatic works that were considered among the rare Chinese examples of tragic drama (*beiju*). If Ma's works were popular, it was only in the sense that *xiaoshuo* were popular; that is, not in terms of their reception by or origins among the Chinese people (that is, *minjian*, a group defined vis-à-vis the literati), but in terms of their adequacy to stand for one nation defined abstractly as belonging to or comprised of 'a people' (that is, an ethnic people, or *minzu*). The second, and probably more important, is Ma's position in the development of the *sanqu* genre. Once the *sanqu* genre has been defined, however arbitrarily, as popular, Zheng could not perform his duties as a literary historian without also showing its eventual decline. This was necessary to prepare for the entry of a new popular genre, the folksongs of the Ming. Ma's elitist writings, according to the scheme of decline, foreshadow *sanqu*'s eventual demise. Those among his writings that concur with Zheng's conception of a popular literature are merely fortuitous.

However, the development of *sanqu* is itself rather unsettling to a scheme of development that always begins with a crude popular literature and ends with literati appropriation. As described in Zheng's three-stage narrative, *sanqu* begins as a refined genre written by the likes of Ma Zhiyuan and Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (c. 1220-1307), is then converted in the second-stage into a relatively popular literature of relatively inferior literary quality,³⁰⁸ and finally enters into the

³⁰⁷ Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, pp. 31-32.

³⁰⁸ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 389.

expected decline.³⁰⁹ The popularity of works in the second stage is related to the fact that the writers were impoverished professionals who had to appeal to a popular audience (*touhe dazhong de shihao* 投合大眾的嗜好) in order to make money. However, this brief narrative lapse is corrected in the next chapter; the orthodox genealogy re-emerges apparently unscathed as Zheng asserts self-contradictorily that “by the time Yuan *sanqu* entered the second period, they had already become a plaything of the literati . . . they were as far from the people as the heavens”³¹⁰

b. Ming folksongs

Far from a solidly popular genre, the Ming folksongs (*minge* 民歌) raise another problem, namely that most extant folksongs from the imperial period had been gathered by literati collectors. Zheng is forthright in admitting that the ‘folksongs’ he has included had been unabashedly refined by the literati. These literati, of course, chose the popular songs that they found most attractive and then did their best to make them even more attractive for an interested audience of fellow literati. While Zheng’s milieu did not sanction a similar polishing of works, he follows the literati in choosing those that he deems of the highest quality. What is it about these works that makes them good? His criteria for selection often indicate a desire to create a respectable rather than representative popular literature. Thus, his decisions are sometimes based on moral considerations: he refuses to include works in the collection that ridicule prostitutes (“making pitiable people the target of ridicule shows a fundamental lack of sincerity”).³¹¹ At other times, his criteria is clearly aesthetic. For example, he praises the rare “pretty language” of the question-answer songs collected in *Yu gu tiao huang* 玉谷調簧;³¹² further on in the chapter, he comments on the delicacy of “Shishang ji yu” that “each verse is a pearl, every paragraph is adorable, like a drop of dew on a lotus leaf.”

What Zheng is really praising, in other words, is the way that certain enlightened literati were able to convert folksongs, often absent in their original

³⁰⁹ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 426.

³¹⁰ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 432.

³¹¹ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 435.

³¹² Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 438.

form, into works of true literature. This is just what we have seen with Tao Yuanming, a successful conversion of nature into culture. Among the literati, Zheng notes, there were many “willing to brave their generation’s sarcasm and imitate the popular melodies. Feng Menglong was a later rising talent, earlier there were already Jin Luan, Liu Xiaozu and Zhao Nanxing.”³¹³ After providing several pages from the works of these three writers, Zheng assures the reader, “we can be certain that there are none among those using new popular melodies that have not been successful. Among the many great writers of pentasyllabic verse of the Jian’an period, Six Dynasties’ new *yuefu*, and *ci* of the Tang and Five Dynasties, there were none that did not derive their greatest success from this source.”³¹⁴

Throughout Zheng’s final history, this desire to present a morally or aesthetically pleasing popular literature, a popular literature that inspired its literati redactors to produce great works of their own, remains in tension with the standards of objectivity that demanded the inclusion of popular works that fail to meet the standards of great literature. Therefore, Zheng also includes songs that “do not have any great value, [but] were on the lips (*chuansong* 傳送) of all the people.”³¹⁵ He does not, however, find an answer for the problem of why the great popular works that are assumed to stand before those of their literati appropriators are so often missing, or why the works that remain so often refuse to present an image of the people as anything more than primitive, crude, and unrefined. Again, the people are most comfortably valued in their absence.

3. Summary

Rather than showing the development of a popular literature, this work demonstrates that change only occurs through the literati, even if this change comes through appropriation and leads inevitably to decline. Ultimately, Zheng’s last history is missing an alternative structure of historical development that could make the people more than typologies. Popular literatures are historicized only by constructing a chronology in which they are necessarily marginalized (we might

³¹³ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 465.

³¹⁴ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 469.

³¹⁵ Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, p. 434.

call his book not a history of popular literature, but a history of the impossibility of a historicized popular literature). He organizes the book by dynastic cycles, despite having long questioned the pertinence of this form of periodization. Furthermore, he remains dedicated to a notion of change that relies on the presence of intellectuals, either elevating the crude literature of the people to a higher level of development or dooming it to a process of decline. Arif Dirlik points out that Gu Jiegang, Liang Qichao, and others in the 1920s, “provided later historians with models of historical inquiry [but] . . . were unable to substitute for the Confucian view a comprehensive theory of history that could account for the interrelationship of historical phenomena or the dynamics of historical change.”³¹⁶ He goes on to note that the felt need to produce ‘universal histories’ had ultimately foundered because of the absence of “a coherent principle of organization that could guide investigation and explanation.”³¹⁷ Zheng’s experiment with borrowed schemes of periodization—particularly the three-fold scheme of ancient, medieval, and modern history—had succeeded on some accounts, particularly in helping to explain the rise of an indigenous fiction, but it seemed to have little relevance for a popular literature that was defined as popular on the basis of an image of the people as unchanging (always primitive). Even in what was meant to be a history of popular literature, intellectuals inevitably became the locus of change while the people remained locked into an unfortunate marginality. At best, the people—or popular literature—were only flotsam tossed up here and there by the surging wave that was the history of the universal, the history of change.

The history that best addressed what Zheng early in his career had referred to as the “mission” of literature was not the one, therefore, that fixed its attention on “popular literature,” but the one which treated Chinese literature as a world literature, his *Wenxue dagang*. Even if this earlier work ultimately failed to show China’s commensurability with other national literatures, it struggled to articulate the ways in which literature could move the people or create a new sense of community. It also indicated (albeit unintentionally), more than his other works,

³¹⁶ Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History*, p. 10.

³¹⁷ Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History*, pp. 12-13.

that Chinese history was resistant to a complete assimilation into a totalizing Western history. This struggle was abandoned before its implications could be worked out. Zheng, as we have seen, interpreted this ill-fittingness as a troublesome particularity that could be remedied by integrating the universal into the local. Chinese literary history had to be brought into accord with the temporal, generic, and (universal) human categories set out for literature; the system of classification would not stand for persistent difference. Zheng's history of popular literature, on the other hand, may have borrowed its appearance of relevance from the struggle of the Chinese people against imperialism or for the future of their own nation, but it ultimately spoke to professional, and sometimes aesthetic, expectations that displaced political ambitions.

Conclusion: The People, The Universal, and Mythology

I hope it has become clear that Zheng's work is more than a mechanistic application of a borrowed ideology to the Chinese literary past. At the same time, I have also tried to avoid responding to the accusation of ideological determination by simply writing an apology for Zheng's historical method. Rather, I have tried to look at Zheng as a practitioner rather than an ideologue intent on misshaping the Chinese literary canon. My focus has been not on his theoretical writings alone but on his literary histories, because it is here that we get a sense of what it meant to test ideas of literary historiography against the realities of literary tradition and the demands of professional practice, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. Ideology is completed before it meets its object; it is a certainty that precedes knowledge. Practice is an embedded process that has to deal with the inadequacy of any ideology to describe its object perfectly or settle comfortably and seamlessly into local institutions. In terms of ideology, Zheng was not particularly successful; the ends he produced did not always match well with the beginnings he espoused. In part, this was because many of his ideas, when applied to literary history, came into contradiction. At the same time, it is evident that his practice was woven around several concerns, including, most importantly, a belief in the centrality of the 'people' and the universal.

I have shown how, in Zheng's practice, the people (as *minjian*) are located at the origins of nearly every literary form that emerges in Chinese history. At the same time, the importance of the role they are ascribed often seems to be a compensation for their inadequacy or indeterminacy; the people's presence in history is often made possible only by a refusal to say exactly who they are or precisely how they became participants in literary development. The people become, rather than a carefully defined object of study, different things at different times. In *bianwen*, the most avowedly people-centered of all literary developments, the people consist of those who listen to the message of the foreign missionaries in Dunhuang and then guide, through their natural emotions (a useful crutch in the absence of concrete textual evidence), the foreign forms into a popular tradition; in the history of *xiaoshuo*, the people as *minjian* soon give way to the people as *minzu*, an ahistorical equivalent of the nation, becoming in effect

little more than geographical placeholders; in the writings of Tao Yuanming, the people are sublimated into the land or nature allowing an intellectual to be popularized; to rephrase an expression of Zheng's that I mentioned earlier, Tao, despite being a member of the elite, becomes more popular than the popular. In the larger historical narrative, the people's role is essential but contingent on the requirements of elite literature. Even when elite literature is criticized, it always sets the developmental agenda. Popular origins are demanded when the development of an elite literary form has been exhausted. The 'people' were clearly imperfect as an ideological construct, yet they remained an important part of literary historical practice.

Why were the people always present at the origins? A historiography that took the people seriously faced difficulties, most apparently the absence of an unambiguously popular literature in the Chinese past, a literature that had developed independently of literati involvement. In Zheng's conception of literary history, the origin was often the only temporal location in which the people could be fashioned into historical actors. This was partly because origins were always premised on universality rather than historicity; if a demonstration of literary development required substantial textual evidence, the origins of each development were simply presumed to be rooted among the people (*minjian*). The paucity of popular literature did not have to be seen as a reflection of the actual situation, but as a result of the failure to preserve popular texts.

Because they relied on universals (i.e. the pre-cultural human nature of the primitive man) rather than the particularity of local literary texts, these moments of popular origin also provided an opening—however inadequate—for the inclusion of Chinese literature in a global literary historical practice. I have shown that as the practice of literary history became increasingly professionalized in the 1920s and 1930s, an alternative route of access to the universal began to take form. Chinese literary historians could explain the ways that literature moved away from these moments of primitive origin and into universal patterns of change, that is, they could describe literary development. In Zheng's *Illustrated History* we see a greater concern with concrete explanations of literary change and development. These conceptions of change were often applied to forms that

were unique to China. In this application, they offered the possibility for an objective examination of even those works that would have failed to move any but the most local audience, works that would have been disqualified by the definition of literature in Zheng's *Wenxue dagang*. But these techniques were also used to show the development of literary forms in the Chinese past that met the demands of the universal reader, in particular fiction (*xiaoshuo*). The imposition of a three-fold macro-historical scheme of periodization contributed to a privileging of forms that emerged out of the transitional period (the "Middle Ages"—i.e. the Tang and Song dynasties) and led directly to the modern. This meant that even though Zheng followed traditional critics in describing literature of the Tang as a high-point of Chinese literary development, the temporal logic meant that this literature ultimately had to be revealed as irrelevant. Its emergence could only be premature and incomplete. Instead, developmental primacy was attributed to *xiaoshuo*, a genre that most effectively addressed the perceived absence of an indigenous narrative tradition in Chinese literature and provided the best analogy to the modern novel.

The division of Chinese literary history between the popular and the elite created a need to find moments of wholeness, and the logic of literary historiography always promised that these moments could be found at the origins. From this perspective, there was a certain inevitability in the turn to myth, the penultimate literary origin. To conclude, I want to reflect briefly on Zheng's writings on myth (*shenhua* 神話), a significant part of his corpus from the early 1920s and into the 1950s, and, in many ways, a summation of the struggle to place Chinese literature within a global discipline. The sustained interest of Zheng and many other literary historians in Chinese mythology suggests, I think, the degree to which it addressed the two fundamental needs I have outlined above: to incorporate the people into history and to join Chinese literary history with the universal. Mythology could be understood simply as a sign of primitive unreason, or it could be approached—as Wen Yiduo had done—as a basically philological problem that reflected in its fragmentation not so much a move away from an originary wholeness as a reflection of a land divided linguistically and

culturally.³¹⁸ However, most Chinese scholars of the time portrayed the creation of mythology as a universal stage of human development; and, in particular, universal in terms of its coexistence with the primordial nation. Chinese myth was built during this period into a system that could take its place on the world stage. Zheng Zhenduo, for example, was inspired by George Frazer to demonstrate that the myths of ancient China had been shared by other great civilizations.³¹⁹ He showed that the myths of sacrificed kings, miraculous births, or great floods were in no way unique to China. At the same time, mythology not only recorded a universal human experience. It also compensated for the failure to locate the people at the origins of other literary forms by invoking a primordial unity in which the people and their national culture were, at last, undivided. That is, it preceded the division of Chinese literary history between the popular and the elite, a development that had not only prevented the development of a people's literature, but had erased the traces of their participation in literary origins. As Lu Xun had pointed out, this division had occurred in the process of the transformation of myths into legends.³²⁰ These legends marked the first step away from nature, the first intrusion of the cultural into the universal. In the end, a literature was produced, but it was a literature that had become the particular property of the elite rather than a nation or a people. Even though myths continued to exist after this division, they were no longer a sign of a unified civilization's participation in a universal experience, but a sign of the continued and imposed backwardness of the people (and, therefore, the nation). In other words, in offering up their first creative impulse to the literati, the people had also sacrificed their potential to produce a truly universal literature. Mythology was, in fact, not merely a retelling of ancient legends, but a reflection of the modern: both offered the possibility for a reintegration of the people and their nation, and, thus,

³¹⁸ See, for example, Wen's essays collected in *Shenhua yu shi* (Shanghai : Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996).

³¹⁹ See the collection of comparative essays on Chinese and Western mythology compiled under the title *Tang dao pian* (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957).

³²⁰ Lu Xun, *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, chp. 2. Also see, for example, Mao Dun, *Zhongguo shenhua yanjiu ABC* (1929; rpt. in Ma Changyi, ed., *Zhongguo shenhua xue wenlun xuancui*, vol. 1), pp. 127-130; Huang Shi, "Shenhua de jiazhi" (1927; rpt. in Ma Changyi, ed., *Zhongguo shenhua xue wenlun xuancui*, vol. 1), p. 105.

an incorporation of the Chinese nation into the universal. However, the universal always had the potential to be both bondage and emancipation. Even as the Chinese nation was incorporated into the universal order, most of its people could exist only where history was absent. Mythology and modernity both offered the possibility of finding a place for the people without theorizing the people as historical agents. The people remained essential yet an abstraction; they were simply there at the beginning and the end of the nation, the occupants of utopias past or present.

Abbreviations

ZZDQJ *Zheng Zhenduo quanji* 鄭振鐸全集

ZZDGWLJ *Zheng Zhenduo gudian wenxue lunwen ji* 鄭振鐸古典文學論文集

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