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Literary Criticism, Public Space, and Social Justice

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Abstract Taking the profound impacts of generalized system, new electronic media, and subculture into consideration, this paper holds that, presently China has entered an era of comprehensive social transition, along with the tendency that the era of the former unified or centralized literature (criticism) values will come to an end. For this reason, literary criticism will probably go into public space in a generalized form. The formation and bearing of public reason and social justice or moral law should become the conscious duty of current literary criticism. This article, whose textbook cases arise, in the main, out of Renmin wenxue put out from 1949 to 1976, states how the accredited commission to write on the given topics in the general sense has acquired the special status of political culture, and therefore assumed the specially-designated significance, function and value in the literary institution of modern China. And organizing manuscripts not only occupies a direct role in being involved in the creation of literature, but also makes a subtly different history of literature that gives a reflection of the politically motivating force for the authorized literary compositions.

Keywords literary criticism, public space, public reason, social justice organizing manuscripts, cost

Direction of Literary Criticism in the Era of Transition

The so-called transitional era mainly refers to the period of social change or transformation that has taken place and taken shape as a whole starting from 1990s when China consciously incorporated itself into the historical development

Translated from Wenyi yanjiu 文艺研究 (Literature and Art Studies), 2008, (2): 16–20 by ZHANG Ruogu

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process. Of course, we can understand, recognize or judge the cause, feature, or trend of such an era from different perspectives or at all levels, according to our specific objectives. However, I mainly talk about following three aspects:

First, the institutional change of the system. Speaking of system, we do not refer to political system, but rather, the general system in the sense of sociology. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the general system has to do with political system, but the subtlety lies in the fact that when general system is constrained by political system, it also interacts with political system. As to the “institutional change” of system, that means, spatially, the change is partial and limited, and temporally, it is gradual and slow, far from integral, complete, or drastic, abrupt change. Therefore, I view the institutional change of the system positively, considering it as the institutional establishment or formation of multiple institutional factors or forms within the current China. Institutional construction has become a key feature of China’s present social and political development. And the other way round, we can also view the same phenomenon passively. That is, apparently, the former (old) system concept and theory can to explain or cope with present situation of China; in other words, the politics related to system has changed or is changing, and the constancy of the system in the general sense is actually being impacted or challenged. The breaking and building at system level (its process in particular) will always be its usual status.

Second, the proliferation of new electronic media represented mainly by computer network in day-to-day activities has brought about enormous changes to culture and civilization. I believe that, in theory, we haven’t fully realized the thorough revolutionary role of computer network in changing human culture and civilization level, since it, as an instrument, has increasingly become the major or hallmark instrument of human being: when the leading embodiment of productive force development level—the instrument (that is, computer network)—has made revolutionary change or progress, the relations of production or civilization level will undergo substantial change accordingly. That is to say, what computer network has changed is not only cultural approach or shape of culture, but more importantly, the approach, level or stage of civilization; and the later is the most substantial change. This change will re-define our culture or ideology—undoubtedly, including our literature and values and standards thereof.

Third, the emergence of social sub-cultural thoughts and thereof forms has widespread and profound impacts on overall cultural structure of the society of its development. In general, the actual influence of the balance of forces between the so-called mainstay culture and sub-culture is hard to judge clearly within a given time or space (such as cultural groups relatively identified by age, sex, region, belief, and so on), and sometimes well opposite to the common sense and usual concepts. In other words, in a specific time and space or cultural group, the