

## ON THE CURRENT POPULAR LITERATURE OF CHINA

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Since the eighties of the twentieth century, the popular literature creation in the world of literature and art of China had been presenting a vigorous developmental momentum. Entering the nineties, still the tendency is very strong. Taking the popular novels as an example in 1991 and 1992: excepting the chivalrous novels and the detective stories, in social popular novels, there were Yang Lixia's "Trilogy of Metropolis", You Jingcai's "The Lover's Prattle under the Moon on the Border" and "The Abyss" written from the angles of marriage and love; there were Ke Tianguo's "Life's Trilogy in Metropolis", Li Keren's "The Mad Cattle in the Compound", Chen Jiguang's "The Permanent Enigma" and Deng Gang's "The Red Lanterns and Green Wine" written from the angles of affairs of human life in city; there were Yu Jingxu's "The Pale Blood", Zhao Danian's "The Foot of the Imperial Wall", Fan Xiaoqin's "The Old Shore" written from the angles of conflicts between morality and money, forgiveness and vindictiveness, and so on. 1 The prosperous phenomenon is arousing the literary reviewers and research workers to widespread attention in China and the world.

In the academic circles of China, there had been many definitions about "popular literature" in the past. For example: Zheng Zhenduo said: "The common literature means popular literature, means folk literature, also means people's literature. In other words, the common literature is such a literature which is unrefined and unvalued by scholars and officialdoms. It is

prevalent among the people, it is enjoyed and liked by people.” 2

Fan Boqun said: “ The modern popular literature of China was such works:it took the industrial and commercial economical development in Late Qing and early days of the Republic of China as the base to grew and prospered; it took traditional psychological mechanism as the core in content ; it belonged to the literater’s creation which inherited the traditional model of ancient chinese novels in the form and was the works which was processed and re-created by literaters;it laid particular emphasis on the interest,recreation, knowledge and readability in function, but also gave consideration to the effect of ‘ putting education to recreation ’ in order to punish evil and encourage good ; it based on the superiority according with the national appreciation habit and formed the readers in which vast numbers of townspeople were dominant . So modern popular literature of China was a kind of commercial literature which was regarded as the mental consumer goods by the vast numbers of townspeople , the literature certainly would reflect their social sense of value too . ” 3

Then, how should people define the present popular literature ? The writers agree to such a point of view — popular literature must possess the following three characteristics : (1) Linking up the Commom customs ; (2) Being easy to read and understand ; (3) Having the function of recreation . 4

What is called linking up the commom customs is to stress the creative spirit ; Being easy to read and understand is to stress the aesthetical grade; Having the function of recreation is to stress the consumable usefulness which will cause the other function of literature . Although the three characteristics are different,they are also connected each other, thus forming the basic factors of current popular literature . Just for the reason , when people review the current popular literature , in view of the different starting points , they would

like to advance various homologues . Such as popular novel , when stressing the popular grade, they will contrast with the “ refined novel ” ; when stressing the function of recreation , they will contrast with the “ serious novel ” ; when stressing the use of artistic form and technique, they will contrast with the “ pioneer novel ” or “ exploration novel ” ; when stressing the commodity character or utility character , they will contrast with the “ pure novel ” ; when stressing the traditional character or national character , they will contrast with the “ new literature novel ” or “ new literary and artform’s novel ” , and so on .

Even though these versions are not all-round and accurate , we should not criticize them severely . However , in the various reviews , there is such a extreme deviation that merits attention : equating the “ popular literature ” with the “ vulgar literature ” to depreciate it . The viewpoint is neither conformable to the producing course of current popular literature of China nor unfavourable to the healthy development of current popular literature of China . Furthermore, there is still such a viewpoint in the review circles : being vulgar literature in fact , the popular literature’s development in current China is absolutely forced by the market-economy . The viewpoint is also uncorrect .

The writers think that there are three reasons to explain the popular literature’s occurrence in current China :

(1) Analysing from the external reason of literature , it is a bringing order out of chaos to the ultra - “ Left ” trend of thought in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China ;

(2) Analysing from the inner law of literature , it is the polycentric reflection of the current literature in the sence , subject matter , form , style , technique of expression and so on ;

(3) Analysing from the accepting aesthetics' angle , as the aesthetic subject , the reading public's need must be manifold for the cultural works acting as thd aesthetic object . The rise of the current popular literature is only the manifold need's embodiment ;

The writers would like to have a observation of the development of the popular literature in current China further. First of all , observing from the longitudinal angle , the development of the current popular literature of mainland China profited by the influence of traditional literary and art forms , such as noval, drama , story , joke and comic dialogue . Secondly , observing from the crosswise angle , the development of the current popular literature of mainland China obviously received the direct influence of the contemporary popular literature of Hong Kong and Taiwan .Taking novel as an example : influenced by Hong Kong's chivalrous novels written by the famous writers Jin Yong, Gu Long ,Liang Yusheng and so on , there had borne a " Chivalrous Craze " in mainland China ; at the same time , influenced by Taiwan and Hong Kong's love-story novels written by the famous writer Qiong Yao , Yi Shu and Cen Kailun , also there had borne a " love-story Craze " in mainland China . Thirdly , the development of the current popular literature of mainland China also accepted the influence of the contemporary popular literature of the West, for instance , the influence of some importing American Hollywood films .

No need for reticence , there are also some problems in current popular literature of China . For example : owing to the temptation of money , some unlawful underground publications , flaunting the banner of " popular literature " , pollute society and poison young people and juveniles with pornographic and

violent poison . Moreover , after the middle time of the eighties , in virtue of the reform of the economic systems of China , the sectors of news and press began to be the independent accounting units and assumed sole responsibility for its profits or losses . Under the influence of market-economy , some publishing units begin to pay attention to economic benefit in the first place . 5 It is under these circumstances that the sex description is used as a means to make " sensation effect " . Some popular novels are full of the sex description and exert a negative influence . Nor is this all , according to the information of the cultural market , some writers think that the sex description has permanent charm and they should grasp such a universal cultural psychology of mankind , thus putting the sex description in the serious artistic construction of the pure literature . 6 However , although really there are some unhealthy or vulgar works in current popular literature of China , it is not the main trend . We can not negate current popular literature itself for this reason . Generally speaking , judging from its social effects , the main trend of the current popular literature of China is good , not only developing the recreative and aesthetical effects , but also developing the active educational and cognitive functions .

In a word , making a comprehensive survey of the current trend and run of the literary world in China , we can draw such a analysis : Owing to the market - economy system's introducing on the quiet , facing the polycentric cultural market's forming by degrees , accepting the reading public's free cultural selection , the Chinese literary and artistic creation after the late eighties is adjusting and establishing its cultural position again in its self-conformity .

## Notes

- 1 Lin Weijin , The coexistence of hope and disappointment , the synthetical observation of Achievement and defect— a general survey of novels published in recent years ’ , the Contemporary Writers Review of China , No. 2 1994 , pp . 36-37.
- 2 Zheng Zhenduo , ‘ The history of popular literature of China ’ , The Writers’ Publishing House of China , 1954 .
- 3 Fan Boqun , ‘ The modern and contemporary popular writers’ critical biography series of China , the general preface .”
- 4 Kong Qingdong , ‘The evolution and definition of the popular literature ’ , The Literary Review of China , No. 1 1996, p. 48 .
- 5 Liu Bingze , ‘ The regression of the popular literature of China in the eighties ’ , The Journal of Zhongnan National College , No 2 1994 , pp 116-119 .
- 6 Wang Damin , ‘On the sex description craze and the artistic principle of the sex description in the contempory novels ’ , The Contemporary Writers Review of China , No . 5 1994 , pp. 109-110.