Study on the Pre-Qin Period of Literary Criticism in the 20th Century

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Abstract. The Pre-Qin is the origin of Chinese ancient literary criticism. The study of literary criticism in the Pre-Qin period is along with the study of the subject of Chinese literary criticism. We will have a good knowledge of the Pre-Qin of literature criticism through placing this period’s study in the three phases of the whole Chinese literary criticism.

Introduction

The Pre-Qin is the origin of Chinese ancient literary criticism. The origin means that there are no professional papers or works, no systematic studies, no critics of literature about the literary criticism. We can only speculate the literary criticism from the existing literary views. Scholars who study literary criticism of the Pre-Qin period always have two main aspects of content. One of contents is from ancient books of the Pre-Qin such as the Book of Songs, the Commentary of Zuo, and the Book of History, etc. The other content is from the books that wrote or edited by Confucius, Mencius, Mo Zi, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.

The Chinese literary criticism as an emerging discipline was born in the 1920s. From the born to the end of the twentieth century, the Chinese literary criticism has experienced three different periods of development: (1) The 30s and 40s is the first phase, and is also the upsurge of the development. (2) The 50s and 60s is the second phase and the low of the development. (3) The 80s and 90s is the third phase, which is the second upsurge of the development. As the initial phase of the whole history of literary criticism, the studies of the three developments about the Pre-Qin of literary criticism present different situations.

The 20s to 40s of the Pre-Qin Literary Criticism Study Situation

The study of Chinese literary criticism is the earliest, the most harvest and the successful of the ancient Chinese literary theory field. The first work of the History of Chinese Literary Criticism that wrote by Chinese in 1927 is the Chen Zhongfan's the History of Chinese Literary Criticism. And Chen Zhongfan's work is a symbol of the birth of the history of Chinese literary criticism discipline. Even though Chen's work has only seventy thousand words, the scope of discussion is very wide. From Confucius to Zhang Binglin, both are discussed in the work. The work draws the outline of the whole clue of the history of literary criticism. Meanwhile, the work introduces subject nature, object, characteristic and development phases of the history of literary criticism through a modern perspective. [1] Because the book is the first work, there are some unsatisfactory aspects, such as the lack of detailed discussion, the information is not enough, etc. In spite of this, it has a certain influence on the history of literary criticism.
In 30s and 40s, the history of Chinese literary criticism has attained the first upsurge. During this period, the main representative works are Guo Shaoyu's *History of Chinese Literary Criticism*, Fang Xiaoyue's *Literary Criticism of China*, Luo Genze's *History of Chinese Literary Criticism* (From Zhou dynasty to Wei and Jin dynasties) and Zhu Dongrun's *Outline of Chinese Literary Criticism*.

Different scholars have different characteristics and key points during this period. For example, the literary criticism of Zhou and Qin dynasties is standalone in Chen Zhongfan's work. In the study of the history of literary criticism's birth, he said that although there was no professional study about literary criticism in past dynasties, the ancients always had their opinions about literary criticism, such as Cao Pi's *Dian Lun Lun Wen*, Lu Ji's *Wen Fu*, Zhi Yu's *Wen Zhang Liu Bie Lun*, Li Chong's *Han Lin Lun*, which are the pioneers of Chinese literary criticism. [2] In Chen's opinion, the origin of Chinese literary criticism is in Win and Jin dynasties. Obviously, Chen's opinion is influenced by Japanese scholar Suzuki Torao who writes the *History of Chinese Poetics*. Chen thinks that literature criticism is approximately comment of poetry and article. So in the chapter of the literary criticism of Zhou and Qin dynasties, he mainly discusses Confucius, BuShang, Mencius and Xun Zi's view. From Chen's content and detailed discussion, he doesn’t incorporate the critical view and theory from the *Book of Songs*, the *Commentary of Zuo*, and the *Book of History* into his own discussed scope. And his discussions are limited to the poetic field although he discusses the Confucius and other schools' critical view.

If Chen Zhongfan's study also has obvious deficiency, then, by 30s and 40s, all works about history of Chinese literary criticism seem to agree that the time of Chinese literary criticism is in the Pre-Qin period. For instance, Guo Shaoyu thinks that the time of Chinese literary criticism origin is in the Spring and Autumn period.[3] Zhu Dongrun shares the same point of view as Guo Shaoyu.[4] But for Luo Genze, he holds different view from Guo Shaoyu and Zhu Dongrun. He thinks that the origin of literary criticism should be the *Book of Songs*. Furthermore, he thinks the authors of the *Book of Songs* have already revealed the meaning of writing poem. [5] Nevertheless, Fang Xiaoyue said “there is no professional critic in ancient, the only that we can regard it as literary is the poetry, although these criticisms scatter in various books, they also have a great impact.” [6] So Fang Xiaoyue thinks that the history of Chinese literary criticism origin is in the books such as the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of History* etc.

In study content, Guo Shaoyu and Luo Genze have in common. Firstly, they state the critical thought and theory of the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of History*. Secondly, they annotate the critical thought and theory of the works that wrote or edited by Confucius, Mencius and Xun Zi, Mo Zi, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. The studies of later scholars are on the basics of this period is the time of evolution of literary thought. And the literary criticism of this period pays more attention to the literary than the word. Zhou and Qin dynasties mingle the literature and academic literature. Meanwhile, in ancient schools, the Taoist opposes the literature, the Mohist advocates simple and unadorned writing style, the Confucianism is rewarded and respected the literature, so the Confucianism becomes the mainstream of literary criticism of this period. [7] And the key point discussion of Guo Shaoyu is the Confucianism instead of the Taoist and Mohist.

In Luo Genze's study, the discussed scope is wider than Guo Shaoyu’s. Luo Genze discusses Han Fei's critical thought except for Confucius, Xun Zi, Mo Zi, Mencius, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's critical thought. Han Fei's critical thought is against the literature. In addition,
Luo Genze also takes note of Xun Zi's *Yue Lun* that Guo Shaoyu ignores. And Luo Genze discusses the critical thought more detailed than Guo Shaoyu’s. Zhu Dongrun's the *Outline of Chinese Literary Criticism* is similar to the Luo Genze’s the *History of Chinese Literary Criticism*. Because Zhu Dongrun's work is just an outline, there are some aspects that have no in-depth discussion. And for Fang Xiaoyue, he pays more attention to the critical thought of ancient books such as *the Commentary of Zuo, the Book of History*.

From the above, we can know that Guo Shaoyu's study emphasizes the critical thought of all classes of authors. Fang Xiaoyue's study emphasizes the critical thought of ancient books. Both of Luo Genze and Zhu Dongrun have a wide discussed scope, especially Luo Genze, his discussion is not only wide, but also very detailed.

### The 50s to 60s of the Pre-Qin Literary Criticism Study Situation

The 50s and 60s is the low tide of the history of Chinese literary criticism development. During this period, with the change of regime and the transformation of ideology, people's ideology has changed correspondingly, and the academic study was influenced by the political climate. This influence is shown in the study of the history of Chinese literary criticism. For Guo Shaoyu, he revises the history of Chinese literary criticism two volumes into one volume. The new book was published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing Press in 1956. By 1959, Guo Shaoyu has accomplished the second revision of the history of Chinese literary criticism, which named the *History of Chinese Classical Literary Criticism*. And the *History of Chinese Classical Literary Criticism* was published by People's Literature Press. In addition to revise the old version, the new history of Chinese literary criticism is Huang Haizhang's *A Brief History of Chinese Literary Criticism* and Liu Dajie's *the History of Chinese Literary Criticism* (Volume1). Huang's work was published by Guangdong People's Publishing Press in 1962, Liu's work was published by Fudan University Press in 1964.

Although there are only three professional literary criticism works, it is worth noting that the study of Chinese literary is very prosperous in this period, and the study of Chinese literary criticism mingles with the study of Chinese literary.

In the origin of the history of criticism, Guo Shaoyu thinks the time of the history of criticism origin is in the Spring and Autumn period. But in the new works, Guo Shaoyu thinks that the origin of the history of criticism is the Confucius. [8] This statement is different from the former statement. Furthermore, Guo Shaoyu sets a standalone chapter to discuss the critical origin of realism theory. To Huang Haizhang's *A Brief History of Chinese Literary Criticism*, it discusses that with the times developing, the professional critics come into being, such as Cao Pi's *Dian Lun Lun Wen*, Lu Ji's *Wen Fu*, Zhi Yu's *Wen Zhang Liu Bie Lun*. On the base of this, the professional critical works come into being, such as Liu Xie's *Wen Xin Diao Long*, Zhong Rong's *Shi Pin*. [9] Huang Haizhang speaks about the origin of literary criticism is vague. In the *History of Chinese Literary Criticism* (Volume 1), Liu Dajie states the time of critical origin is in Zhou dynasty. And the most representative work is *the Book of Songs* during this period. People who are written by the authors of *the Book of Songs* already begin to express their critical views. So *the Book of Songs* is the origin of the literary criticism.

In the history of Chinese literary works of this period, they also discuss the origin of literary criticism. Some of this works think the origin of literary criticism is in Han dynasty, such as Jilin University's the *History of Chinese Literature* and Peking University's the *History of Chinese Literature*. And other works think the origin of literary criticism is in Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties, the representative works are You Guo-en's the *History of Chinese
Literature. For the study of the origin of literary criticism, Tan Dexing's paper *Research of the Origin of Chinese Literary Criticism in the 20th Century* has a detailed discussion. [10]

In study content, Huang Haizhang only discusses some views of Yue Ji and Shi Da Xu. Such as the content and form of literature, the gentle and kind poetry theme, the roundabout admonish poetics theory. About the critical view of the Commentary of Zuo, the Book of History, Huang Haizhang doesn't discuss clearly. And he only discusses the critical thought of the Confucianism and Taoism. He doesn't discuss the Mohism and Legalism's. In Liu Dajie's the *History of Chinese Literary Criticism*, he discusses the *praise-and-criticize*, poems stating poets' ambitions, *three eternities poetics theory* and the thought of Xun Zi's *Yue Lun* in the chapter of Pre-Qin literature criticism.

The 70s to 80s of the Pre-Qin Literary Criticism Study Situation

In 80s and 90s, the history of Chinese literary criticism has attained the second upsurge. In this period, there are more than 20 critical works, and in addition to the whole history of literary criticism, there are general history, dynastic history, etc. The books' length is from a volume to multiple volume. Especially, the critical works of this period have not only a high quality, but also a comprehensive grasp of the material and a deeper theoretical analysis. In these works, the main representative works relating to the Pre-Qin literature criticism are Min Ze's the *History of Chinese Literary Theory Criticism*, Wang Yunxi and Gu Yisheng's the *History of Chinese Literary Criticism* (2 volumes), Cai Zhongxiang, Huang Baozhen and Cheng Fuwang's the *History of Chinese Literary Theory*, Wang Yunxi and Gu Yisheng's the *History of Chinese Literary Criticism* (7 volumes), Zhou Xunchu's *A Brief History of Chinese Literary Criticism*, Zhang Shaokang and Liu Sanfu's the *Developing History of Chinese Literary Theory Criticism* (2 volumes), Gu Yisheng and Jiang Fan's the *Literary Criticism History of the Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties*.

About the origin of literary criticism, Zhang Shaokang and Liu Sanfu think it is from the *Book of Changes*. Min Ze, Gu Yisheng and Jiang Fan think it is from the *Book of Songs*. Cai Zhongxiang, Huang Baozhen and Cheng Fuwang think it is in the Spring and Autumn period. Guo Shaoyu in his 79 edition works thinks it is in Jin dynasty, which is different from his former views. In the study content, the depth of critical theory of this period is deeper, the scope is more extensive, and material is more abundant. On the ancient works of Pre-Qin dynasty, the critical study focuses on the poem, music and dance, poems stating poets' ambitions, *praise-and-criticize*, *san biao fa* of the Commentary of Zuo. Meanwhile, they also study the aesthetic thought of the *Book of Changes* and the poetic and musical thought of *Yue Ji*.

In critical thought of all classes of authors, one of the central topics of their discussion is the evaluation of poetry and music. But because of different standpoints, the Confucian, Mencius, Taoism and Legalism have different opinions about the literary. Even though the Confucian, Mencius and Xun Zi have a similar standpoint, they also have different key points about the discussion of literature. For example, as a founder of the Confucian, the Confucius preserves *system of rites and music*, emphasizes on the moral cultivation of literary, advocates literary criticism criterion of *si wu xie*, discusses the social function of *xing guan qun yuan*. As a conservative of the Confucianism, Mencius preserves the theories of Confucius, and he comes up with the theories of *understanding by heart*, *zhong ren lun shi* and *zhong yan yang qi*. For Xun Zi, he is an innovator of the Confucianism. He develops the Confucius' theory of music, deepens the understanding of literary nature. His literary thought is the herald of Liu Xie's.
And the thought of his Yue Lun has a great influence on the music and the poetry theory.

Although Taoism and Mohism are opposed to literature, some of theories, especially the theory of Taoism has an effect on the following literary criticism directly or indirectly. To the Taoism, Lao Zi's theory of da yin xi sheng and Da xiang wu xing, Zhuang Zi's theories of natural aesthetic thought and the romantic and symbolistic characteristics have a great influence on the following literati. To the Mohist, the main thought of literary criticism that makes a difference is the fei yue, shang zhi and san biao fa.

It is worth mentioning that the literary criticism theory of Legalism which is represented by Shang Yang and Han Fei in this period has been further attention and discussion. They point out that Han Fei's literary theory depends on whether the literary is conducive to the rule of law. And the literary criterion is the rule of law and the effect. Qu Yuan and Song Yu's thought which is not mentioned in the Pre-Qin literary criticism is also discussed. In addition to Qu Yuan and Song Yu’s thought, Lv Buwei and his Lv Shi Chun Qiu, Li Si and Shang Yang's literary thought also get more attention. In Lv Shi Chun Qiu, it discusses the fundamental principle of interpersonal relationship, the relationship between benefit and art activities, and how to collective wisdom, strength and how to unify people's ideological. [11]

Summary

From the comprehensive study of the Pre-Qin’s literary criticism of the twentieth Century, we can find that on the first development phase, the study is influenced by the times, and the researchers use western views and methods for reference to analyze the literary criticism. The researchers emphasize the historical consciousness consciously, and most of them think literary criticism of the Pre-Qin dynasty is the origin of the history of Chinese literary criticism. On the second development phase, because of the political climate, the academic achievement of Chinese literary criticism is limited. And the literary criticism of the Pre-Qin dynasty also doesn’t get a better development. On the third development phase, the researchers carry on a comprehensive analysis to the literary criticism through new perspective. And the researchers discuss whether the Pre-Qin dynasty is the origin of the history of Chinese literary criticism. In general, the study of literary criticism of this period is wider, deeper and more preciseness than before.

References


