ABSTRACT

It is undeniable that the appraisal of the achievements of contemporary Chinese fiction writers remains to be the most difficult task for those who are engaging in the history of modern Chinese literature. The differences in political backgrounds, individual standpoints of different literary historians as well as the vigorously changing political system present in the contemporary China, make it a difficult task to assess justly and objectively.

This academic exercise attempts to analyse and compare the various viewpoints on the achievements of five contemporary fiction writers based on the studies of six well-known titles of the history of modern Chinese literature.

The first chapter briefly discusses four important topics which can be summarised as follows:

(1) The budding and development of modern Chinese literature. It is generally agreed that the period between 1917–1927 was an important milestone in the history of modern Chinese literature, which could be attributed to its historical influence and strong impact on the development of the modern Chinese literature.

(2) The selection of six different titles of the history of modern Chinese literature is based on the fact that these six books represent different standpoints, which are thought to be essential for an objective and justified assessment on the achievements of the five contemporary Chinese fiction writers. The writers of these six modern literary histories are Yang Yao (王瑶) and the editorial team of nine colleges and universities (九校校部编组) from the People’s Republic of China; Si-ma Chang-feng (司马长风) and Li Hui-ying (李辉英) from Hong Kong; Zhou Jin (周锦) from Taiwan and Xia Zhi-qing (夏志清) from the USA. They represent four different political points of view, which to a great extent determine their approaches.

(3) The five contemporary fiction writers chosen for this academic exercise are Lu Xun (鲁迅), Ye Shao-jun (叶绍钧), Bing Xin (冰心), Xu Ji-shan (许地山) and Yu Da-fu (郁达夫). They are selected mainly because of their contributions and the roles that they played during the period of 1917–1927.
(4) In general, there are two approaches adopted by the literary historians to the appraisement of the five contemporary Chinese fiction writers' achievements. Firstly, studying in detail the representative of each fiction writer's work and the central thought of each fiction as well as its artistic characteristics. Secondly, evaluating their contributions and impacts on the development of the modern Chinese literature.

Chapters two to six emphasize on detailed discussion of each individual fiction writer's work and achievement. There is no doubt that these five contemporary fiction writers had played their important roles during the period between 1917-1927. They have however been assessed differently by the writers of the six titles of literary history. In terms of literary achievement, it is not difficult to see that these historians have given high credit to Lu Xun mainly because of his two famous collections of short stories, Na-han (呐喊) and Pang-huang (彷徨) which have immense impacts on the development of modern Chinese literature.

The remaining four writers (Ye Shao-jun, Bing Xin, Xu Di-shan and Yu Da-fu) are regarded as realistic fiction writers. The uniqueness of their writings had been discussed by the different historians. It is important to note that Ye Shao-jun emphasized more on the educational problems in China and the gloomy life of the lower class city dwellers during that period. Bing Xin, who is the only female writer among the five, was distinguished for her ability to reveal the psychological activities of both women and children at that time. The uniqueness of Xu Di-shan's writings was his religious belief and finally, Yu Da-fu is highly praised for his brave reflection of 'sex' in his writings which was once considered as decadent in that conservative and feudal society.

Having analysed the various viewpoints of the six different histories, we are then capable of appraising justly the achievements of the five contemporary Chinese fiction writers. In short, there can be no doubt that it is the responsibilities of the literary historians to try to be impartial in making judgement of the achievements of various fiction writers. Nevertheless, it is of my opinion that their viewpoints can only be treated as a guide and not the sole truth.