ABSTRACT

This paper aims at examining the values of the theories of fiction in late Qing in the field of Chinese literary criticism.

This study gives a brief background of the theories of fiction before late Qing with main focusses on the analysis and evaluation of theories of fiction in late Qing.

Before late Qing, fiction had low status and was not regarded as literature. The late Qing fiction critics however managed to raise the social status of fiction and regarded it as the highest form of literature. Late Qing critics differed in their arguments. However, the prevailing view was predominately a pragmatic one which regarded fiction as a means of social reform. Hence, Liang Qichao (梁启超) called for a "revolution in fiction" (小说界革命) so that it could be used to reform the society.

Late Qing critics also dealt with the nature and character of fiction, the theories of fiction creation such as the relationship between a work of fiction and the society in which it was produced, the primacy of the writer's experience and his imagination in the process of writing. Further, they looked seriously at the criticism of traditional Chinese fiction and Western fiction.

The late Qing critics brought about the rise of "new fiction" (新小说) and translated Western fiction. The late Qing critics achieved great results. The concept of fiction was much clearer as criticism became more specialised. They also managed to integrate the Chinese and Western theories of fiction.

This study reveals that some modern literary critics have been unjust in their assessment in their criticism of the theories of fiction in late Qing. The findings prove that an in-depth study of the critiques of theories of fiction does provide us with clearer understanding and a more complete picture of the theories of fiction in late Qing.