

SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

REVIEW OF THE CHINESE SEVENTEEN-YEAR LITERATURE
(1949–1966)

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Abstract

The formation of the People's Republic of China is an important moment in the history of the country. As of this time, a stage of new processes has begun in the life of the country. There have been shifts in state politics and economy, which have invariably caused changes in the sphere of culture, particularly in the field of literature. The history of modern Chinese literature since the formation of the People's Republic of China, as a rule, is divided into three periods. This article considers the literature of the Seventeen-Year Literature (1949–1966) including the novel, poetry, prose, and drama, which could exist and develop only by following its own rules while pursuing the goal of serving the people. Modern Chinese literature reflects the political construction of the country that has taken place in Chinese society since 1949, as well as the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Historical and realistic novels have had some success. The poetic works are mainly devoted to the formation of the People's Republic of China. Unfortunately, poetry lacked individual traits. Prose became the main genre and flourished. Traditional Chinese theatre, spoken drama, opera – the three main genres of drama also released works devoted to the people. Thus, it does not matter from the point of view of the needs of society for literature or the leading policy of literature, or the point of view of the practical path of literature, modern literature has its own differences.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Drama, modern Chinese literature, novel, poetry, prose



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1. Introduction

With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a new period in Chinese history begins, and a new period also begins for Chinese literature. "In the twentieth century, new creative methods, motives and techniques appear, since the work of writers is bound up with public life in their native country" (Trunova, 2015, p. 192). From the founding of the New China to the "Great Cultural Revolution", the Seventeen-Year Literature continued and developed the glorious traditions of modern Chinese literature, in a new era, under new existing circumstances, the genres of modern Chinese literature are gradually developing: novel, poetry, prose, drama, as well as other areas of creativity, are achieving outstanding success. We can say that the search for new literature continues, the founder of which is considered to be Lu Xun. "It is possible to agree with Mao Zedong, who said that the direction taken by Lu Xun is the direction of the new culture of the Chinese nation" (Nikolskaya, 2017, p. 78).

The Seventeen-Year Literature makes "an emphasis on nationality and mass character ... it contrasted internal and external, national and borrowed" (Khuziyatova, 2008a, p. 81).

2. Problem Statement

The novel of the Seventeen-Year Literature is different in each period, new plotlines develop, and it also adheres to old traditions, there are "collisions of traditionalist views and new trends in the 30–40s of the XX century" (Sinetskaya, 2017, p. 334).

During the early years of New China, the main themes of the novels are the history of the revolutionary struggle, resistance to the American imperialists, and assistance to Korea. The novel "Flames ahead" by Liu Baiyu, "Invincible flowers" by Ma Jia, "The Story of New Heroes and Heroines" by Yuan Jing and Kong Jue, "Life on the Dam" by Chen Denke, "Steel Fence, Iron Wall" by Liu Qing – all this is recognized by readers as prose on a historical theme. The novel "The Country of Three Thousand Li" by Yang Shuo, "The Battle in the Lowlands" by Lu Lin, and other works from different sides reflected the resistance to the American imperialists and assistance to Korea. In addition to the above-described subjects in prose, there were also themes about the spirit of the masses in the vicissitudes of the old and new eras, for example, "Registration", "Wedding", "Quarrel" and other works. At the time of the feudal ideology criticism, they expressed the liberation of the peasant people from the shackles, the desire for a new life, glorified a new person, new trends in the countryside.

After 1953, the genre of the novel, reflecting the theme of the revolution history, reached a new level. For example, "Dawn on the River" by Sun Jun-Qing, "Party Duties" by Wang Yuanjian, etc. works full of enthusiasm, they expressed the spirit of the revolutionaries who lost their lives. In the novel "Defend Yanan", Du Pengcheng vividly depicted the heroic story of the battle for Yanan, created a glorious image of the commanders and fighters of the People's Liberation Army. The novel "Notes on Dissent" by Sun Li truthfully describes the historical picture of how the people rose against the enemy. The novel "Annals of a provincial town" by Gao Yunlan, set against the backdrop of a Chinese southern town in the 1930s, describes the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese Communist Party. "Railway Guerilla Band" by Zhi Xia and "Sacrificing Everything for the Part" by Wu Yun Duo are also based on the history of the revolution and have been recognized by readers. Since the formation of the state, novels

depicting rural life have also developed. Following the significant changes in rural life, many novels describing cooperation in the countryside, as well as new rural people and new agriculture have been created. "The Wrong Way" by Li Zhun, the novel "The Village of Sanliwan" by Zhao Shuli, "The Bright Future" by Ouyang Shan, "You Reap What You Sow" by Kang Zhuo, "Rural Records" by Zhaoyang Qin, "Green Branches, Green Leaves" by Liu Shaotang, etc. – all of them kept an unforgettable impression in the mind of the readers. Also, novels on the subject of the industry achieved their first success in this period. The novel "Locomotive" by Cao Ming, the novel "For the Sake of a Happy Tomorrow" by Bai Lang, the novel "Steel Stream" by Zhou Libo, the novel "Spring Came to Yalujiang" by Lei Jia, etc. are great works that reflect industrial construction and the lives of working people.

In 1956 the Chinese Communist Party puts forward a policy with the slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend", which enlivens the literary community (Zhu et al., 2009, p. 73). "Writers who remembered the ideas of the May Fourth Movement about the place of literature in society and the responsibility of the writer began to resist the policy of the Communist Party of China. Thus, "the Hundred Flowers" movement, which responded to the call for free discussion and consideration of social issues, criticized the policies of the party" (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 95).

From 1956 to the first half of 1957, a new style appeared in the novels, works that seemed to interfere in life, attracted the special attention of readers. The story "A young newcomer to the organization department" by Wang Meng, "Gray Sail" by Li Zhong, "Flagpole Climber" by Geng Jiang, "Department Head" by Nan Ding, "Joining the Party" by Geng Longxiang, etc. from different points of view, they boldly criticize the negative aspects of life, expose bureaucracy, factionalism, subjectivism, etc., which harm revolutionary activities. All of them had a deep, real value. However, they were not published for long, and soon they were subjected to unfair criticism, which had a negative impact on the perception of these works.

After 1958, the works revealing negative aspects of life almost disappeared, some writers remained silent concerning the vicious tendencies that harmed revolutionary activities, others based on long preparation and developing, turned to history while creating large works. The novel "The Story of the Red Banner", "Red Rock", "Song of Green Spring", "Three Families Lane", "Red Day", "The Source of Forests, Seas and Snow", "Bitter Rapeseed Flowers", "Wild Fire and Spring Wind Overcome the Old Town", "Military Detachment Behind Enemy Lines", "Avant-garde" and other works reflect the difficulties of each period of the revolutionary struggle from different points of view. "Big Wave" by Li Jiezheng and "Sixty Years of Change" by Li Liuzhu are two great historical works depicting life during the revolutionary struggle for the old democratic doctrine, which also had a great influence. Large and not very large works reflecting rural life during this period include: "The History of Entrepreneurship", "Huge Changes in the Mountain Region", "The Feng Shui River Flow", "Four Seasons Fragrances", "The Island of Golden Sand" and other. Large and not very large works on the subject of industrial construction include: "Hardened in the Struggle", "Windy and Rainy Dawn", "In Peacetime" and other. Besides, there are major works "Bright Sunlight on Tien Shan", describing the life of the army, and "Boldly Forward", describing the life of students. After 1958, outstanding short novels were published and recognized by readers. For example, "A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang", "New Acquaintance", "Seven Matches", "Lilies", "Harden Up", "Rely On Your Daughter-in-Law" and other works form interesting images and

depict vivid pictures of a new life, that is why they are quite well-known in the history of modern Chinese literature.

The novels created during the Seventeen-Year Literature period were a huge success and brought valuable experience to the creation of works in modern China.

The poetry of the Seventeen-Year Literature period is slightly inferior to the novel, but its success also should not be underestimated.

The very first poems of New China are dedicated to the National Day of the People's Republic of China, the party, the leader, and the new life. Guo Moruo, Ai Qing, He Qifang, Hu Feng, Feng Zhi, Zhu Ziqing, Zang Kejia, and other poets expressed the joyful voice of the heart of the masses. Their odes reveal the lyrical atmosphere of the political governance of New China aimed at paving its further way. Among the poems are: "The Strongest Voice of the Peace" by Shi Fang-Yu, "Dedicated to the Volunteers" by Zhongping Ke, "On a Difficult Campaign" by Guo Xiaochuan, the poem "Sing at the Top of Your Voice" by He Jingzhi and other famous works. In the period from 1957 to 1958, the number of political lyrics was growing, but there were few really good works, some poems showed fanaticism and exaggeration and did not deserve recognition. Political lyrics were making progress in the 1960s. "Anthem of the Decade", "Song of Lei Feng" by He Jingzhi, "Anthem of the Red Banner" by Zhang Zhimin, "Homeland! Sparkling October!" by Wen Jie, "Sing the International and Push Forward" by Ruan Zhangjing, "Towards Kunlun" by Li Ji, "Wander on Mount Jinggangshan" by Wei Wei, etc. all of them in a unique style express a genuine sense of pride.

The first poems of New China appeared during the transition from the old to the new era. "The Waters of the Zhanghe River" by Ruan Zhangjing, "Han Bo Chopping Wood" by Feng Zhi, "White Orchid" by Qiao Lin, "Liu Hulan" by Li Bing, and others are relatively early poems. Among the poets representing small nations, it is important to note Bao Yutang "Rainbow", Wei Qilin "The Robes of a Hundred Birds", and other famous poets. The development peak of the poem genre falls around the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the New China formation. At that time, more than a hundred major poems were published. The poems "The Life of Yang Gao" by Li Ji, "The Flame of Revenge" by Wen Jie, "General Trilogy" by Guo Xiaochuan, "The Charioteer" by Tian Jian, "The Songs of the Mountaineers" by Ge Bizhou, as well as the works of poets representing the small peoples of China, such as "Hymn among the Sands and Rivers" by Kang Lanying and "Rainbow" by Bo Yuwen, etc., all these remarkable major poems surpassed the poems of the past years in literary art, marking an unprecedented flowering of poetry.

Nevertheless, Seventeen-Year Literature had its ups and downs. After the campaign "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" of 1956, satirical poems, love poems, and landscape lyrics still appear. This was the flourish of poetry, but soon, due to the rise of the struggle against the right, some works by talented writers, mistakenly classified as "right", were criticized.

The struggle against the right caused serious damage, China lost not only a few poets, but suffered more serious losses. Since that moment the thoughts of the poets were shackled, the talent of the poets was ruined. Some wrote boring, uninteresting slogans. Others avoided the contradictions of life and lacked the courage to praise people in their poems.

The prose of the Seventeen-Year Literature period which inherited the traditions after the May Fourth Movement has achieved success in depicting a new life. For 5–6 years after the New China formation, there was a dawn of prose, despite the setbacks in 1957, since 1961 there has been a craze for prose.

The Seventeen-Year prose very broadly reflects all aspects of life and describes life in mines, workshops, reservoirs, schools, state institutions, streets, alleys. The prose represents a new world, praises the construction of socialism. This is an important feature of the Seventeen-Year prose. A significant number of works were created during this period. Only from 1953 to 1961, 8–9 collections of prose were published.

In the Seventeen-Year prose, in addition to monotonous genres, such as travel, prose poems, informative stories, interesting stories, essays and other genres, but there was also a lack of famous works, and among the narrative, lyrical prose, essay literature, revolutionary memoirs, there were outstanding works. Essay literature and revolutionary memoirs gained a long-term development. In the 50s, essays "The Motherland is Ahead", "Reports on Economic Construction", "The History of the Heroism of the Volunteer Army" and other collections were published. In the 60s, many excellent works were published, such as "Chairman Mao's good soldier - Lei Feng" by Tong Siwen, "Arid Sky, Rainless Land" by Guo Xiaochuan, "Hand" by Ba Jin and Ru Zhijuan, "The Girl Carries the Banner" by Huang Zongying, "How to Open a Red Peach" by Wei Gangyan and other. Revolutionary memoirs are represented by the following works: "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire", "The Red Banner Flies", "Life of Fang Zhiming Soldier", "Eternal Life in a Raging Fire", "The Great Turn" etc., all these works were popular and warmly recognized by readers.

The list of the Seventeen-Year prose authors is impressive: representatives of the old generation of writers Bing Xin, Ba Jin, Wu Bo-Xiao, Cao Jinhua, modern writers Liu Baiyu, Yang Shuo, Wei Wei, Qin Mu and other writers who became active after the liberation of Xu Chi, Bi Ye, young writers Wei Gangyan, Lin Xia, Yang Shi stood out from the general mass. This group of authors in 1961 released many masterpieces, prose reached its apogee. For example, "Ode to Sakura" by Bing Xin, "Photo from Kamakura" by Ba Jin, "Three days on the Yangtze River" by Liu Baiyu, "Song on the Crests of the Waves" by Yang Shuo, "Flower Fair", "Spring Dawn on the Ancient Battlefield" by Qin Mu, "Notes from the Garden" by Wu Bo-Xiao, "Boatman's Song" by Wei Ganyan. All these works were written or published in 1961. This year was even called the "Year of Prose", it marked an unprecedented flourishing of prose.

Due to the interference of the ideological currents of the "left", the prose failed, since the beginning of the 10-year period of unrest, even "Night Talks in Yanshan" considered harmful.

Drama in the Seventeen-Year period was successful, regardless of whether it was a play, modern performance and new historical drama or an opera.

From the general tendency perspective, the drama retained close ties with the people and life, it was national and aimed at the masses. The dramas were created by Tian Han, Lao She, Guo Mojo, Cao Yu, Yang Hansheng, Xia Yan, Cheng Baichen, Ding Xiling, Yu Lin and other writers of the older generation, as well as by new authors Hu Ke, Chen Xitong, Shen Ximeng, Du Ying and others. At the beginning of the New China formation, the following plays had an influence: "Song of the Red Banner",

"Grow Up during the War", "Face of "the New,"", "The Sixth Gate". From 1953 to 1957, the theme of the industry was reflected in the plays "Trial", "Happiness", etc.; the village theme – "On the Way to the Height", "Bamboo Pipe", "Cuckoo's Cry", etc.; based on the history of the movement for resistance to American aggression and for helping the Korean people "The Front Line Moved to the South", "On Guard for Peace", etc.; based on the history of the revolution "Through Mountains and Rivers", "The Commander of the Partisan Detachment", etc.; and the display of history in the play "Teahouse" is widely known. After the 1950s, a "hero" appeared from performances with the plot based on deception, bragging, verbiage and plays reflecting the historical theme were also released, such as "Guan Hanqing", "Princess Wencheng", "Wu Zetian", "The Sino-Japanese War at Sea", "The Overture of the Offensive to the East". From 1962 to 1965, appeared plays that also made a great contribution to the development of drama, "Second Spring", "Pine Pass", "Sentries Under Neon Lights", "Lei Feng", "July Comet", "The Young Generation", etc.

The Seventeen-Year drama demonstrates significant development in the theme, characters, and skills, but due to the influence of politics at certain stages, the range of themes of the plays is still relatively narrow, a form of completeness begins to be observed in the creation of the characters, tendencies of distorted life and attempts to avoid contradictions appear.

The image of the hero has changed dramatically. Now portrayed as a cadre party member or head of an organization, the hero loses initiative and individuality. His duty is to follow the party line, trying to match the changing course (Khuziyatova, 2008b, p. 144).

In the modern adaptation of the traditional opera, the most successful is the repertoire of the Shanghai theatre "Small Coin", the Lui Theater "Li's Daughter-in-Law Marries Again", the Henan Opera "Chaoyanggou". After 1960, a new version of the historical drama "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" was released, presented on the stage of the Beijing Opera, "Li Hui Niang" Kunqu Theater, etc., which attracted the attention of the viewer.

It is worth noting that in 1964, the National Festival of Contemporary Art of Beijing Opera Drama was held, in which 29 troupes of the Beijing Opera from different regions took part, 36 performances of modern opera were staged. The list includes "The Legend of the Red Lantern", "Taking of Weihushan Mountain", "Sparks of the Reed Thickets", "The Sudden Attack of the White Tiger Squad".

The Seventeen-Year drama is known for the following major plays: "The Red Guards on Hong Hu Lake", "Dawn". "The role of the historical background, the correlation of the characters with a particular class was great" (Turusheva, 2014, p. 128).

3. Research Questions

In this paper, we try to answer the question concerning the features of Seventeen-Year literature in China from 1949 to 1966 and to identify the main characteristics of the following genres: novel, poetry, prose, drama.

4. Purpose of the Study

This work analyzes the features of the early Chinese literature of the new period, since the founding of the new state, as well as the historical interdependence of literary and political processes.

5. Research Methods

Descriptive and cultural-historical methods are used in this work.

6. Findings

Seventeen-Year literature developed under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Historical and realistic novels have had some success. The negative aspects are criticized by the authors, especially those phenomena that damage the revolutionary activity. The poetic works mainly glorified the creation of the PRC, which affected the self-expression of the poets, their individualization. Prose is flourishing, touching all aspects of life. The drama also strives for the service of the people and revolution. Literature also went through difficult periods, the serious consequences of which were manifested in the subsequent period during the Cultural Revolution.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the Seventeen-Year literature, including novel, poetry, prose, and drama, has achieved new achievements in depicting the new era, new life, new characters, in improving the skills of artistic expression, thereby enriching the art gallery of Chinese literature. The intervention of the "left" helps the Seventeen-Year literature to overcome difficulties. Since the 50s, the "left" bias in literary creativity has become obvious. The "Gang of Four" denied the Seventeen-Year literature, but its left trend paved the way for the method of artistic creativity that was promoted during the "Cultural Revolution" when creating works of art: 1) highlight the positive characters; 2) highlight heroic characters among them; 3) highlight the most important heroic character among them.

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