Introduction

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Since reform and opening-up, Western literary theory has become the “otherness” that has profoundly impacted on the transformation of contemporary Chinese literary discourse. Its influence could be demonstrated in two aspects: One, as a theoretical discourse system, Western literary theory has transformed the approach and system of contemporary Chinese literary discourse from perspectives of issue consciousness, study object and approach, viewpoint and conclusion; the other, through discovering, understanding and interpreting the phenomena and issues concerning Chinese literature, art and culture, it has transformed the issue and image of China. We could say, the former focuses on the shift “from one theory to another” of Western literary theory while the latter impacts on the detour and access “from experience to theory”. The former mainly takes place in “heterogeneous collision” within the theoretical discourse system, the latter scatters like “dissolving erosion” among the field of criticism practice. The former could be named “Westernized Chinese discourse” and the latter, “Westernized Chinese issues”. Therefore, it has been significant to analyze Western interpretation of Chinese issues and the problems it has brought in the construction of contemporary Chinese literary discourse system.

“Western theory, Chinese experience”? Scholars who first step into the topic “Chinese issues in Western literary theory” may conform to such a “stereotype”. Since reform and opening-up, the massive influx of Western theoretical trend has brought Chinese literary theories new ideology, theory, approach and discourse, but meanwhile, it triggers Chinese scholars’ great concern: Chinese issue, experience and phenomena are increasingly interpreted and demonstrated by Western academic discourse. Moreover, it has become a prime mission for the system of philosophy and social science subject, scholarship and discourse to overcome the influence of Western theoretical trend on Chinese literary theory and regain the mainstay of Chinese literary theory.

The topic “Chinese issues in Western literary theory in the 20th century” starts from “Westernized Chinese issue” and then presents the complicated relation between Western literary theory and Chinese issues, including the criticism towards Western misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Chinese issues, the Chinese reference and enlightenment for knowledge production of Western literary theory. Besides, it also reflects on the phenomena that Chinese scholars copy “Westernized Chinese issues” as their own issue consciousness, and explores the potential approach for dialogue and exchange between Chinese scholars and Western literary theory in the path of discussing Chinese issues.

“Western literary theory in the 20th century” is not a self-evident object with clear boundary, but a knowledge field with ever-growing recognition and construction as well as a close relation with Western academic thoughts. Its particularity lies in “reflection on modernity” and “aesthetic modernity”. Hence “Chinese issues in Western literary theory in the 20th century” bear characteristics of dual reflection: First, as a component of Western knowledge system, “Western literary theory” epitomizes Western studies on Chinese
issues to some extent. Second, “Western literary theory in the 20th century” itself reflects on and criticizes the overall Western knowledge system, so it actively chooses and introduces Chinese issues to overcome, surpass and renovate Western knowledge system. We should attach great attention to the duality of this reflection but avoid simply regarding Western literary theory as mainstream ideology of capitalist developed countries, classifying Western remarks on Chinese issues into misinterpretations and misunderstandings and refusing Western scholars’ concern on Chinese issues.

In this sense, the core of this topic is to “focus on the epitome of Western literary theory’s studying on Chinese issues in the 20th century”, to oversee the origin, development and transformation of three study epitomes of “exoticism”, “orientalism” and “plural intergrowth”, to analyze Western position, attitude and viewpoint while discussing Chinese issues and to determine Chinese scholars’ perspective and approach while engaging into related discussions.

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