

The Current Situation and Counter Measures of Compilation of English Literature Textbooks in the Context of New Liberal Arts

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With the promulgation of the “National Quality Standards for Undergraduate Teaching of Foreign Languages and Literatures in General Institutions of Higher Education” and “Teaching Guidelines” in 2018, the humanistic attributes of English majors and the important position of literature in foreign language learning are emphasized. Nowadays, the English literature curriculum is facing the problems of marginalization, reduction of class hours, simplification of curriculum and so on. Then in the context of the new liberal arts, it provides a new way to break through the dilemma of the literature curriculum. The study has collected the use of teaching materials of British and American literature courses in some colleges and universities across the country. Based on the survey results, the compilation of teaching materials in the new era should consider how to adapt to students’ deep learning, autonomous learning, cross learning and research-based learning to provide guidance and support. The diversity of learning requires us to break the monotony of textbook compilation, show diversity and complement each other.

Keywords: new liberal arts, compilation of textbooks, English literature

Introduction

“National Quality Standards for Undergraduate Teaching of Foreign Languages and Literatures in General Institutions of Higher Education” clarifies that English majors are subject majors that take English language, English literature and the social culture of English-speaking countries as the objects of study and research, emphasizes the humanistic nature of English majors, and clarifies the status of “Introduction to English literature” as the core curriculum of English majors. Meanwhile, introduction to foreign language and national literature is also included in the core curriculum of translation majors, Selected readings of English literature will be included in the core courses of business English majors.

As early as 2002, the fifth issue of the *Journal of Zhengzhou University* made a special discussion entitled “The Search for Meaning: The Humanistic View and the Teaching of English and American Literature”, and invited the heads and subjects of the foreign language colleges of several key domestic universities. The leaders Wang Shouren, Guo Yingjian and other professors conducted a more in-depth discussion on the current situation of British and American literature teaching. What is the role of literature? What is the significance of

British and American literature teaching? How to deal with the changes and development that come from the transformation of society and disciplines?

Nearly twenty years have passed, many problems have not been solved, and such worries still exist. Our literature teaching is still facing a similar dilemma.

Current Situation of Literature Course

Nowadays, the English literature curriculum is facing the problems of marginalization, reduction of class hours, simplification of curriculum and so on. Among the students, and even some teachers, the popular theory of the uselessness of literature, while the teaching of British and American literature has lost its own disciplinary characteristics, and the debate between the practical and academic aspects of English teaching is often heard. Teaching materials are an extremely important part of the curriculum. We have roughly counted the textbooks of English literature published after 2000, mainly focusing on the 36 textbooks edited and published by domestic scholars. These do not include the foreign textbooks introduced and translated by major publishing houses, such as John Peck and Martin Coyle, a brief history of English literature 2010, a history of English literature by F. Sefton Delmer, Henan people's Publishing House 2016, etc. Through investigation, we found the use of teaching materials for the national British and American literature course, and obtained the following information:

Literary history + selected readings (two textbooks) (38.5%)

Literary history + selected reading (one textbook) (7.7%)

Literary history (one textbook) (34.6%)

Selected works (one textbook) (19.2%)

Two points could be found from the information above, firstly, it can be seen that it is still partial to literature history, or the combination of history and selection; secondly, the textbooks are still concentrated on the planning textbook which may be related to the requirements of the school. The history of literature is mainly by Chang Yaixin and Liu Bingshan, and the selected readings are mainly by Wang Shouren, Wu Weiren and Luo Jingguo. These textbooks are not new, although they are revised and reprinted.

New Chances and Challenges

New opportunities show up with the promulgation of the "National Quality Standards for Undergraduate Teaching of Foreign Languages and Literatures in General Institutions of Higher Education" and "Teaching Guidelines" in 2018. It clarifies that English majors are subject majors that take English language, English literature and the social culture of English-speaking countries as the objects of study and research, emphasizes the humanistic nature of English majors, and clarifies the status of "Introduction to English literature" as the core curriculum of English majors. The importance of literature curriculum has been established.

The second new opportunity is the construction of the "new liberal arts" which is currently under discussion. Recently, the construction of new liberal arts and foreign language teaching and research have also been discussed in the domestic academic fields, and experts have also made suggestions.

In June 2019, the high-end forum "strategic thinking on foreign literature research under the new liberal arts concept" was held in Shanghai. In August 2019, the "2019 national High Level Round Table Forum on

Foreign Language Research and Innovation under the New Liberal Arts Background” was held in Yanbian. In October 2019, Beijing held the “new liberal arts and new foreign languages in the new era—a high-level forum on the development of foreign language and literature”. In November 2019, the “innovation of literary education and scientific research methods in the context of new liberal arts” forum was held in Huaibei. In September 2020, the school of foreign languages of Shandong University held the “new liberal arts and foreign language education forum”, and 12 experts from the Chinese foreign language community were invited to make wonderful reports. The construction of “new liberal arts” provides new opportunities for the construction of English majors, but it also puts forward new requirements. The question is: under the background of the new liberal arts, under the premise of the implementation of the national quality standards, and under the establishment of the core curriculum status of British and American literature, how can the teaching of British and American literature assume the responsibility in the training of talents? How to reform the teaching of British and American literature? And how does the compilation of British and American literature textbooks adapt to these reforms? These are things we should think about and explore.

Countermeasures and Thoughts

The following will combine the my own’s textbook *English Literature Handbook: Reading and Perspective* (2019) to talk about the countermeasures and thoughts on the compilation of English literature textbooks. The Table 1 displays the first five chapters of the book:

Table 1
The Contents and Perspectives

Text	perspective
William Shakespeare: <i>Measure for Measure</i>	Feminist Reading and Political Reading
Mary Shelley: <i>Frankenstein</i>	Psychoanalysis and Identity
D.H. Laurence: <i>The Odour of Chrysanthemums</i>	Ecocriticism and Feminism
E.M. Forster: <i>A Passage to India</i>	Postcolonialism and Cultural Studies
Doris Lessing: <i>The Grass Is Singing</i>	Feminism and Postcolonism

Firstly, the compilation should emphasis on cross-cultural, interdisciplinary and cross integration. At the Forum on “innovation of literary education and scientific research methods in the context of new liberal arts”, Professor Li Weiping pointed out that foreign language disciplines in the new era play an extremely important and unique role in promoting cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and foreign countries, and improving China’s image; English Majors in Colleges and universities should devote themselves to cultivating high-end international foreign language talents with national feelings and humanistic spirit. The intersection of literature is reflected in the introduction of comparative literature. Proper introduction of the concept of world literature, do not separate English literature, we know that many trends of thought in British literature originate from European countries such as France, Italy, and the appropriate introduction of large European culture can better help students trace their origins and deeply understand the works. genre writers, etc. “New liberal arts” emphasizes “national and regional +” comprehensive ability, cross-cultural ability, and internationalization ability. In the textbook *English Literature Handbook: Reading and Perspective* (2019), Angela Carter’s the company of wolves is selected. There are three versions of the story from other countries, namely, little red riding hood by Charles Perot of France, little red riding hood by Green brothers of Germany, and old tiger

grandma of China. The textbook refers other versions of stories in the after class thinking, which can guide students to compare and analyze texts from different cultures, and help students establish the concept of multiculturalism. Interdisciplinary is also needed to reflect in the textbooks. Literature has never been isolated. In the past, more emphasis was placed on the integration of literature, history and philosophy. With the development of society, more and more scholars have paid attention to the relationship between economy, management, law, science and technology, geography and text. Interdisciplinary research in literature has been in the ascendant. How to introduce this trend of thought into literature teaching and textbook compilation is an issue that we can explore and think about in the future. For example, the interpretation of “Measure for measure” from the political perspective enables students to pay attention to the political crisis from moral anomie to political corruption, the ruling strategy of the monarch and Shakespeare’s monarchy in the drama. And Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* involved economic perspective especially the modes of management in farms. And “New liberal arts” also emphasizes Chinese discourse and the construction of Chinese theoretical system. Many scholars are also calling for the formation of Chinese schools, emphasizing students’ cultural confidence and telling Chinese stories well. Frankenstein’s after class exercises provide a new perspective. At the forum in Shanghai, Professor Yang Jincai of Nanjing University put forward that the compilation of domestic textbooks was lagging behind. We should actively guide students not to blindly copy Western concepts, and help students establish a national literature pedigree and cognitive framework.

Secondly, the literature study should emphasis on thinking. It means the compilation of teaching materials should also change from knowledge inculcation to enlightenment. The traditional compilation style should be changed. The compilation style of “literary background—Introduction to the author’s life and creation—selected reading of works - Notes to difficult words and sentences” in the previous history textbooks can no longer meet the requirements of literature teaching in the new era. The new *Syllabus* (2000, pp. 39-40) for English majors points out that one of the characteristics of teaching materials for foreign language majors in the 21st century is that the teaching materials should not only attach importance to the teaching of knowledge, but also help to cultivate students’ appreciation, criticism, thinking and innovation abilities. Therefore, we should not ignore those enlightening thinking questions and interpretation methods when compiling textbooks. Literary theories and criticism methods should also be properly introduced, and literary criticism methods should be properly introduced to help readers establish a certain theoretical system and enhance their literary evaluation and appreciation ability. The new *Syllabus* (2000, p. 26) clearly points out that the main purpose of the English and American literature course is to train students’ ability to read, appreciate and understand the original works of English literature. Students must master the basic knowledge and methods of literary criticism so as to improve their literary aesthetic ability more effectively. For example, I have made some attempts in this regard in the textbook I wrote. In the book, we have only selected eight texts from different periods, but each text is interpreted from two different perspectives. For example, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is from the perspective of psychoanalysis and identity (Cultural Research). Angela Carter’s *The Company of Wolves* is from the perspective of deconstruction and feminism. For each text, we have designed about 10 questions for students to discuss from these two perspectives. These questions focus on students’ analysis and understanding of the text, with the aim of cultivating students’ critical thinking ability. The following appreciation part also focuses on these two perspectives.

The third point is to pay attention to the advancement of teaching materials. On the one hand, the literature textbooks should be updated in a timely manner and pay attention to new developments and trends. We found that most of the textbooks were written in the 1960s, 1970s and even earlier. The selected readings of English literature by Professor Wang Shouren is up to Julian Barnes' *a History of the World in 101 / 2 Chapters*, which was published in 1989 and is relatively new. Many textbooks are up to V. S. Naipaul and Kazuo Ishiguro, and excerpts are also the works of the 1970s, or even earlier. Moreover, most contemporary writers choose novelists, and the development of contemporary poetry and drama is absent in many textbooks. Little attention has been paid to contemporary female writers. In addition to Doris Lessing, who won the Nobel Prize, many female writers have been selected. Many textbooks can not reflect the latest developments and achievements in the development of British and American Literature in the past 40 years, and are not a complete literary history. At the same time, students may be more interested in the new works and more sympathetic. On the other hand, with the development of Internet technology, the form of teaching materials should also keep pace with the times and reflect the characteristics and advantages of the times. In the "Internet +" era, the learning needs of students have changed, and the talent training mode and teaching methods have changed greatly. Online and offline hybrid teaching, virtual reality based situational learning, mobile teaching, etc are blooming. So, how to adapt the compilation of textbooks to such changes and maximize learning efficiency and how to combine the traditional paper teaching materials with MOOC and micro courses, and combine classroom teaching with students' self-study is what we need to think about. At the same time, the paper-based teaching materials can be attached with CD-ROM, poetry reading audio and other multimedia documents, so as to build an audio-visual foreign literature history that integrates visual, listening, reading, writing, doing, editing and performing, and become a three-dimensional teaching material. For example, *The selected Reading of English literature* and related opening course online edited by Professor Wang Shouren, at the beginning of each course, the two-dimensional code of the i-course network is provided in front of each chapter. And students can scan the code to join the study. At the end of the chapter, the website of relevant writers' works is provided for students to expand their study.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence, big data and other new technologies continue to develop and replace, and the changes of the times have challenged the traditional liberal arts. The compilation of literature textbooks should keep pace with the times. Based on the cross linguistic and cross-cultural characteristics of English literature, new contents should be added while retaining the literary characteristics. The compilation of textbooks in the new era should consider how to provide guidance and support for students' deep learning, autonomous learning, cross learning and research learning. The diversity of learning requires us to break the singleness of textbook compilation, show diversity and complement each other, so as to continuously improve the ability and quality of foreign language talent training.

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