

Exploring Changes in Ancient Literary History Textbooks: A Case Study of the Ming and Qing Literature Chapters

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Abstract. As an important part of the core curriculum of Chinese language and literature, ancient literature history textbooks are not only teaching tools, but also a concentrated reflection of the specific social background, academic atmosphere and the editor's view of literary history. By comparing the Ming and Qing literature sections in six major textbooks on the history of ancient Chinese literature—compiled by Xie Wuliang, Zheng Zhenduo, You Guoen, Zhang Peiheng, Yuan Xingpei, and the “Marxist Theory Research and Construction Project” (commonly known as the “Ma Project”)—this study analyzes the changes in their writing characteristics, research focuses, and literary historical perspectives, thereby revealing the developmental trajectory and characteristics of literary history research. The study found that the textbooks' interpretation of classic writers and works remained generally stable, but due to differences in scholars' backgrounds and times, there were differences in emphasis and perspectives of interpretation, reflecting the era characteristics and diversified development of literary history research. The study pointed out that in the future, textbook compilation needs to innovate methods on the basis of inheriting traditions to enhance the applicability of teaching and research. In addition, the sample size of this study is limited, and subsequent research can expand the textbook versions and disciplinary perspectives to enhance the representativeness and depth of the research.

Keywords: *Ancient Chinese Literary History, Textbooks, Ming and Qing Literature, Teaching Reform, Chapter Division*

1. Introduction

As an important core course of Chinese language and literature, the compilation of ancient literary history textbooks has always been the focus of common concern in the academic and teaching circles [1]. Textbooks compiled in different eras are often not only teaching tools, but also a concentrated reflection of specific social backgrounds, academic atmospheres and the editors' literary history views [1]. While conveying literary knowledge, textbooks also profoundly reflect the discourse system and cultural value orientation of the times. As the peak stage of the development of ancient Chinese literature, the Ming and Qing dynasties had rich literary forms and diverse thoughts, and were a highly controversial and complex component of ancient literary history. The literary presentation methods of the Ming and Qing dynasties not only reflected the interpretation paths and re-evaluations of classical literature in various historical stages, but also reflected the continuous adjustment and

transformation of literary history research in terms of macro-historical views, focus points and value judgment systems.

This study adopts the method of comparative text analysis. Through close reading of the texts and cross-text comparison, this study attempts to reveal how changes in academic paradigms and historical contexts have influenced the portrayal of Ming and Qing literature in these important texts. This study aims to explore the writing characteristics, research focuses, and changes in literary historical perspectives of ancient literature history textbooks in the Ming and Qing literature sections by comparing the contents of the Ming and Qing literature chapters in six ancient literature history textbooks authored by Xie Wuliang, Zheng Zhenduo, You Guoen, Zhang Peiheng, Yuan Xingpei, and the “Ma Project”.

2. Analysis of research focuses

The evolution of narrative in Ming and Qing literature textbooks reflects the extensive changes in literary history, academic focus and methodology of different scholars. From the perspectives and breadth of research, early textbooks such as those by Xie Wuliang and Zheng Zhenduo focused on the introduction and analysis of classic works and authors of Ming and Qing literature, emphasizing internal research on literary works and aesthetic analysis, and stressing discussions on literary styles and techniques [2,3]. As research deepened, later textbooks like those by You Guoen and Zhang Peiheng began to expand their research perspectives, examining Ming and Qing literature within a broad social and historical context, focusing on the interaction between literature, sociology, and history, and exploring external factors in literary development [4,5].

Regarding the content of research, the textbook by Yuan Xingpei offers a detailed discussion of works that occurred during the Ming and Qing dynasties and especially the literary transformations and developments that took place during this era, as well as the interpretations and judgments of the outstanding works [6]. His studies are concentrated in inner soul and social worth of the literary works and the innovation and transformation of literary forms.

As the newer resource in the recent years, the textbook, the so-called Ma Project, focuses on the systemic analyzing and understanding of the Ming and Qing literature [7]. It is the integration and innovation of the past research findings, and it is on this that it seeks to bring a wholesome and objective perspective on the literature on Ming and the Qing. Moreover, other textbooks also have differences in the methods of research. Textbooks of the early period tended to use a traditional documentary approach, giving particular attention to the structure and analysis of antique works; later textbooks were marked by the employment of multidisciplinary research and comparative literature which rendered the utilization of modern academic tools and theories in a deeper and more encompassing analysis of the marvels of Ming and Qing literature.

The variations in research interests among the six textbooks occur mostly in the research views, material, methodology and scope. These disparities represent the features and tendencies of academic writing in various epochs, which constitute a variety of views and methods to make a complex picture of the literature of the Ming and Qing period.

3. Author discussions

Different authors have different views on the compilation of literary textbooks, which is largely influenced by the differences in the background of the times and personal backgrounds.

Mr. Xie Wuliang was an outstanding scholar, who experienced the late Qing and Republican. Having emerged in the middle of an overarching set of ideological conflict between East and West, tradition and modernity, he introduced his own pluralistic amalgamation of thought based on the Confucian principles that made him a singularly modern thinker of his era [2]. Being among the

earliest study of literary history, Xie Wuliang textbook focuses the arrangement and decoding of traditional literature modes such as poetry, prose, drama and novels in the Ming and Qing literature parts. It is written in a concise way and is easy to understand both as a background to further research on literary history.

Zheng Zhenduo possesses peculiar understanding of the interpretation and judgment of the Ming and Qing literary works [3]. Those interpretations do not only dwell on the artistry of the works themselves, but also on the historical context and social reality that is reflected in the works, performing interdisciplinary studies that trace Ming as well as Qing literature within the environment of history and sociology and broadening the scope and insight of the literature as a whole.

You Guoen applied the tight and extensive research attributes when editing the sections of Ming and Qing [4]. He made profound discussions about the developmental course of Ming and Qing literature, significant authors and works, and literary schools through a huge organization and examination of historical materials and literature. He also analysed Ming and Qing literary works and their social, political and economic contexts of the era therefore, fully unearthing the connotations and values of Ming and Qing literature. His work reiterates the strong connection that Ming and Qing literature have to social realities be it in terms of social, political or economic life of the day.

It is explicitly stated in the three volume survey of the History of Chinese Literature under the editorship of Zhang peiheng and Luo Yuming of Fudan University, Literature ought to be the embodiment of humanity and it ought also to have particular individuality; the latter, in fact, is a necessity of humanity itself [5]. Zhang Peiheng is a textbook that focuses on methodological and thorough approaches to the study of the literary history. He gives a clear picture of the developmental process of Ming and Qing literature and makes a detailed analysis of their stylistic features of different works of literature. His style of writing is organized and logical in nature allowing readers to have a broad idea of the whole terrain of Ming and Qing literature.

The Chinese Literature, edited by Yuan Xingpei, Peking University. This is a literary history offering the model of the Three Ancient Periods and Seven Stages of ancient Chinese literature. In its general introduction, it says that literary history is history of literature itself, and a piece of literary history is supposed to give the development of literature in a larger cultural background [6]. Specifically, it also takes a cultural lens to study the relations between literature and politics, history, philosophy, and religion, which gives it a wide and grandiose academic outlook. Moreover, the state of the art academic performances are incorporated in this historical writing of literature in terms of annotations by integrating numerous schools of thought and drawing equitable arguments, which makes most universities adopt this collection of books as the textbook to pass graduate examinations in Chinese language and literature and ancient literature studies.

The textbook titled as the Ma Project that was recently adopted focuses on the discussion of phenomena related to literature in terms of Marxist historical materialism [7]. It strives to construct an ideological point of view of literary history in accordance with the requirements of national social systems and ideological progress. Moreover, to address the requirement of higher education, the edition of the Ma Project is characterized by the accentuation of the key points within the chapter settings and organization of content provided so that students could easily learn and process information in a more organized manner. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this method of writing plays some roles in neglecting diversity and complexity of research of literary history.

The six books represent changes in academic paradigms and ideological leanings of the interpreter of traditional texts to interdisciplinary venturing and ideological smacking within the Ming and Qing literature research, and collectively illustrate the path of development of the literature historiography in various historical and scholarly settings.

4. Relatively stable chapter content

The content of the Ming and Qing literature chapters exhibits stability in several aspects. The analysis and interpretation of important authors and works constitute the core of the Ming and Qing literature chapters, which are typically elaborated upon in detail across different textbooks. Classics such as *Journey to the West*, *The Plum in the Golden Vase* from the Ming dynasty, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* from the Qing dynasty are all key works highlighted in various textbooks.

Although the core chapters and main contents of Ming and Qing literature chapters remain generally stable. However, the perspective, depth and breadth of specific discussions will show obvious differences due to the differences in the academic views of the textbook compilers and the different historical backgrounds. Some textbooks may focus on analyzing the aesthetic changes of Ming and Qing literature from the context of historical development, with a deeper discussion and a wider breadth. These textbooks may involve the influence of various factors such as social culture, politics and economy at that time on literature; while some textbooks may focus on the creative techniques of a specific school or writer, and conduct meticulous discussions from a micro perspective, with a concentrated depth but relatively narrow breadth.

Hence, reading various versions of Ming and Qing literature textbooks, the readers can easily feel this balance of stability and diversity and its perfection. This equilibrium, besides giving the assurance to the stable transmission of the fundamentals of Ming and Qing literature knowledge system, also offers the readers a diverse number of perspectives on interpretation and a wealth of scholarly outlooks, which is able to effectively bring the readers to a better comprehension and deeper appreciation of the exclusive beauty and profound connotation of the Ming and Qing literature.

5. Evolution of literary historical perspectives

Early Ming and Qing literature textbooks often emphasized the introduction and analysis of classic authors and works, reflecting a traditional literary historical perspective that values the inheritance and influence of classic works. These textbooks typically devote substantial attention to classic works such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Margin*, offering in-depth analyses that uncover their literary value and social significance.

With the development of modern literary historiography, people pay more and more attention to the diversity and interdisciplinarity of literature. Therefore, Ming and Qing literature textbooks, there is a gradual increase in attention to marginalized fields such as women's literature, ethnic minority literature, and foreign literature. In addition, interdisciplinary research methods have been widely applied in the study of Ming and Qing literature, such as the intersection of literature with philosophy, religion, and art, which helps to comprehensively understand the richness and complexity of Ming and Qing literature.

Along with these changes, the organization and content of Ming and Qing literature chapters have been continuously improved. New academic discoveries and evolving research paradigms have prompted the six textbooks mentioned in this article to introduce emerging literary phenomena, including popular novels and dramas, while reconstructing or omitting certain traditional materials [8]. These changes reflect the dynamic expansion and deepening of the discipline of literary history.

In general, the changes in the textbooks of Ming and Qing literature in the history of Chinese literature have well demonstrated the transformation of textbooks from traditional perspectives to modern perspectives, and from single perspectives to multiple perspectives from the perspective of literary history. This change also provides a broad perspective and ideas for the progress and development of academic research and a deeper understanding and appreciation of Ming and Qing literature.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, in doing comparative textual analysis of the chapters concerning the Ming and Qing literature of six ancient literature history textbooks, this paper finds the significant role of the variations in the academic paradigm and historical backgrounds on the discussion of Ming and Qing literature. The study discovered that despite the Ming and Qing literature textbooks are relatively stable in how they interpret classic writers and works, there are some differences in the content focus and interpretation substance of the same considering the background and period of scholars. Besides representing the evolutionary path and the characteristic nature of the research of literary history in various time frames, these changes provide valuable information regarding the evolution of ancient literary history textbooks.

Every textbook has its sole advantages and disadvantages. Within any further study of literary history, textbook collection ought to expand on the successes of other research yet also be creative and revise methodology so as to better cater to the requirements of teaching and research. The comparison of chapters on Ming and Qing literature in the six textbooks on ancient literature history shows how the contents dealing with the Ming and Qing period evolved in the literary history books. Such changes mirror the historical and scientific aspects of the academic work as well as the academic approaches and styles of writing of the authors of the textbooks. These changes should remain the focus in future research and writing of literary history textbooks, further enhancing the process of research and innovation of literary history.

Besides, six exemplary literature history textbooks are primary sources of information utilized during this research. They may be different in the periods of history and the discipline they follow, however, the sample size is small and it is hard to represent all versions of texts, as well as all orientations of the research. Future studies can also increase the sample size to embrace additional versions and textbooks based on other fields of study in order to increase the representativeness and richness of the study.

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