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Reflections on *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*: An Interview with Professor Stephen Owen

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Title: Reflections on *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*: An Interview with Professor Stephen Owen

Abstract: The author interviewed Professor Stephen Owen regarding *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. The issues covered in the interview include the origins of the Western literary history and Chinese literary history, the stages and modes of writing Chinese literary histories, the interrelationships between literary historiography and intellectual history, and the new perspectives of literary historiography. The interview focuses on the new notions of “the Cultural Tang” and “discursive communities” proposed by Owen and elaborates their theoretical and methodological implications.

Key words: Stephen Owen literary historiography *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* the Cultural Tang discursive communities

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《剑桥中国文学史》探究与思考 ——宇文所安教授访谈

摘要: 笔者围绕《剑桥中国文学史》与宇文所安教授进行交流,主要探讨了西方文学史和中国文学史的起源、中国文学史的发展历程和模式、文学史学与学术史的关系以及文学史学的新趋势,并就宇文所安提出的“文化唐”和“话语群体”的概念进行了理论探讨和解析。

关键词: 宇文所安 文学史编撰法 《剑桥中国文学史》 文化唐 话语群体

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Wang: Congratulations on the publication of *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*! I know that you have been involved with Chinese literature studies since the 1970s. Among your publications, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* published by W. W. Norton in 1996 and the latest *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* in 2010 stand out as two landmark books in the field of Chinese literary history. Would you please share with us your reflections on the writing of Chinese literary history which spans over 100 years since the late 19th century? Could you also make some comments on literary historiography from the perspectives of trans-cultural studies and comparative literature?

Owen: Thank you! You have raised some crucial questions in this field. These questions are concerned with the origin of Chinese literary history, the background of the national literary histories in the realm of world literature and the vicissitudes of Chinese literary history for over 100 years. I will address your questions in details. From the macro perspective of world literature, the origin of writing literary history was closely related to the ideology of nation or state. Writing literary history was a way of constructing the national identity. The earliest known literary history was published on German dramatic texts in 1811—*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* by August Wilhelm Von Schlegel (1767 – 1845). The literary historians emphasized nationalism and *Zeitgeist* or time-spirit—the mainstream of the 19th century. The practices of writing the national literary history facilitated the formation and consciousness of the ethnic history and ethnic vernacular. Let us take Italy as an example, many literary works

in Italy were written in Latin. But only Italian vernacular works were included in the national literary history, while the Latin works were excluded from it. The national literary history is a history of history, e. g. a reconstructed history of the literary history. Then the English literary history also serves as a good illustration. The earliest literary history can be traced back to *History of English Poetry* by Thomas Warton published in 1824, which presented the history of poetry between 11th century and 18th century in chronological order. The beginning of the English literary history can be traced back to Beowulf. This anonymous Old English epic poem of the legendary hero was believed to have been composed in the early eighth century. Beowulf slayed the monster — Grendel and its mother, became the King of the Geats, and died in fighting the dragon. The manuscript came into being around 1000, but before that, nobody ever talked about it (currently “the canon”) in English literary history. Then the Danish/Icelandic literary historians began to talk about it until it was established as a literary canon. So the literary history is a kind of reconstruction later by literary historians.

Likewise, the medieval literary history is indeed a late 19th century reconstitution. It retells the national cultural narrative and unifies the national vernacular. Take Southern India for an instance, Tamil literature is a part of Indian literary tradition. When the British colonizers arrived at India, they assigned literary scholars to study the English literary history and then they were sent to colleges to teach people the Indian literary history. Tamil literature was reconstructed to represent the colonized culture and raise the consciousness of the public. It is a process of the historical narrative formation, the ethnic history and the ethnic vernacular.

It was not until the late 19th century that the concept of literature was introduced into China. The concept of literature was expanded to novels, dramas, etc., whereas, the core of *wenxue* was only *belles-lettres* before. Out of the European influences of the 19th century national literary histories, Chinese literary histories were written in Japanese first by Japanese sinologists. Therefore, the beginning of Chinese literary history was characterized with a transnational and trans-cultural nature. A group of pioneering scholars attempted to write a History of Chinese Literature respectively. For example, Lin Chuanjia declared his book was an imitation of the Japanese scholar Sasagawa Rinpu (笹川种郎)'s *Sino Dynastic Literary History* (《支那历朝文学史》). Among all the Chinese literary histories compiled by Western sinologists, *A History of Chinese Literature* by Herbert A. Giles (1845–1935) was a pioneer work. It was first published in 1901 and republished by D. Appleton at New York in 1909. He declared that the *History* was the first systematic history of Chinese literature to be published “in any language, including Chinese”. Due to the limitations of scholarship at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, these sinologists did not have access to the original written records, the Tunhuang manuscripts and the fruits of archaeological excavations. Their histories offered encyclopedic information with generalizations. They frequently used Western concepts to interpret the Chinese culture. In addition, on the European Continent, sinologists also wrote *Chinese literary histories in German and French*. A German scholar named Wilhelm Grube (1855–1908) wrote the *Chinese Literary History* (*Geschichte der Chinesischen Litteratur*), which was published in 1902. Georges Margouliés's *Histoire De La Littérature Chinoise: Prose* was published by Payot – Bibliothèque Historique in Paris in 1949. *Histoire De La Littérature Chinoise: Poésie* was compiled by de Margouliés G. and was published by Payot in 1951.

Wang: In this light, the origin of the Chinese literary history was influenced by the 19th century national literary histories in Europe via Japanese historians. During this phase, if we call it the first stage, Chinese literary historiography developed with the establishment of the institution of “literature” in universities at the turn of the 20th century. Chinese scholars, such as Dou Jingfan, Lin Chuanjia, Huang Ren, Wang Mengzeng, Zeng Yi and Xie Wuliang, intended to make a change to the traditional “*wenxue*” or “literature” by using the Western framework of national literary history. Literary history writing was closely associated with national identity and modern university institution from the very beginning. In the introductions to his literary history, Huang Ren elaborated on the definitions of literature by quoting from Henry Spackman Pancoast and Hutcheson Macaulay Poshett. The histories by Lin and Huang served as the course books for the Imperial Capital University (京师大学堂) in Beijing and Dongwu University (东吴大学堂) in Suzhou.

Owen: I agree with your categorization. I am very impressed that you have made an in-depth study of Chinese literary histories.

Wang: Thanks. The second stage of literary history writing in China is from “The May Fourth Movement” to the founding of PRC, characterized by the autonomy mode that focused on the evolution of language or genres. Since the 1920s, we have seen more mature literary histories, with an argument and historical narrative, such as those by Hu Shi, Zheng Zhenduo and Liu Da-jie, and their histories have far-reaching impact on the contemporary historians. Literary histories in the second stage appear to

be more mature and evolution – theory – based with categorization of Chinese characteristics. For example, Tan Zhengbi edited *The Outline of Chinese Literary History* in 1924, which was revised and developed into *The Evolution History of Chinese Literature* published in 1929.

The third stage is from the founding of P. R. C. to 1990s. During this period, it was generally accepted that literature should be integrated into the socio – historical context. This is mainly influenced by the Marxist theory of the dialectic relation between the economic base and the superstructure. Literary history writing emphasized the external factors in literary development, including factors from politics, economy to ethics and socio – psychology. In other words, literary history writing in the third stage is characteristic of the heteronomy mode. This heteronomy mode together with the evolution – based mode of the second stage laid the foundation for later literary historians.

The fourth stage is from the 1990s to date. They usually take an integrated approach while advocating some new methods and concepts from a new perspective. Zhang Peiheng and Luo Yuming published *A History of Chinese Literature* in 1996 and collaborated on *A New History of Chinese Literature* published in 2007. Their 2007 “introduction” states that “our description is generally based on aesthetics and its development involved with human nature. This is concerned not only with the relationship between literature and human nature, but with the artistic form of literature.” This view can be traced back to the Marxist views on human nature and human history. Literature is a special way for humans to pursue their nature of freedom and to create their own lives.

The four different modes of Chinese literary history writing in China appear to be still in the confines of “autonomy” and “heteronomy,” and they remain in one theoretical paradigm, that is, a teleological narrative of the nineteenth century historicism. In *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, you proposed two notions of “the history of literary culture” and “the Cultural Tang.” How would you make an association between the notion of “the Cultural Tang” and the current trends in Western sinology? What implications will these new perspectives shed on Chinese literary historiography?

Owen: Chapter IV of *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* is entitled “The Cultural Tang”. The “Cultural Tang” is a new concept advocated by me in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. This new concept is comparable to a transformation from “Newtonian physics” to “Quantum physics” in literary historiography. The notion of “the Cultural Tang” does not correspond exactly with the political dynastic division of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907). In this way the literary history becomes independent of the extra – literary categorization. The conventional literary history is confined within the framework of political or dynastic histories. It is intended to present not an inventory of authors or titles, but rather a history of Chinese literary culture. In other words, it is not an author – based narration but a frame of the cultural history of Chinese literature. It situates basically cultural practices in society and meets the purposes of a book like this. The traditional modes of encyclopedic presentation are primarily the continuous historical narrative or alphabetical “dictionary”. The *Cambridge History* presents a complete coverage in a hierarchical, non – linear literary cultural genealogy. It is basically arranged in chronological order while focusing on some important dates and distinctive discursive communities. It differs from the general presentation of a history of literature in its synchronic cross – sections in the history of literary culture. The juxtaposition of certain groups of poets is designed to produce the heterogeneity of literary culture and disrupt the separateness of traditional literary histories.

The beginning of “the Cultural Tang” is Empress Wu’s rise to power in 650s and the ending is half a century after the establishment of the Song Dynasty in 1020s. This categorization is based on the fundamental changes of the Tang literary culture instead of the dynastic/historical division. I explained the reason in the book as follows: “This period is bounded on one side by the reign of Emperor Taizong (r. 627 – 649), the final phase of Northern court culture and the full assimilation of the sophisticated legacy of the South. On the other side our period ends with the rise of the great political and cultural figures of the eleventh century, such as Fan Zhongyan (989 – 1052) and most of all, Ouyang Xiu (1007 – 1072), writers who were to give Song literati culture its characteristic stamp.” In the 650s, Empress Wu gathered her own literary courtiers, no longer from the old families with cultural prestige, and added the composition of poetry to the literary examination, which extended to ever wider circles of the elite as a means to participate in a unified culture and advance in the central government. The center of literary production—poetry, prose, anecdote, and literary scholarship—gradually moved away from the court and became the defining competence of a class. The striking achievements of Tang literature are in part due to its production and circulation in expanded communities of changing values and fashions that no longer were centered on the court.

The primary feature of the Cultural Tang is the transition from the court – centeredness to outside – the – court of the literary culture. In the 650s, literature was centered almost entirely in the imperial court; by the end of the era literature had become the

possession of an educated elite ,who might serve in government ,but whose cultural life was primarily outside the court. The second dominant feature of the Cultural Tang is to integrate literature as part and parcel of the literary culture. Literature is regarded as primarily a social practice ,shared by an increasingly widening community. It is the transformation of the literary culture that makes the Cultural Tang a distinctive era in the history of Chinese literature. Third ,the Cultural Tang presents the dynamic inter-relationships in the field of cultural production as a whole.

There are three layers of meanings for the literary culture: First ,the literary culture refers to the collective ways in which literary works are produced ,read ,circulated ,received and transmitted ,varied or transformed in the particular historical moments. This can be referred to as the historicity of texts. The second layer of the literary culture is that literature also influences aspects of social life—the textuality of history. In Chinese literary culture ,when new gardens are built ,the patrons will ask the poets to write poems about these gardens. Each garden has a name and a poem related to it ,so literature spreads into the real world—the textualization of the world. Take steles as an example ,a lot of steles are kept in people’s homes. Now they become visually textualized as a way of constructing the empire. This also becomes part of the literary culture. Third ,the canon shapes the literary culture too. There are super – canonical figures like Du Fu or Shakespeare in every literary history. The history of writing literary history (canonization) becomes part of the literary history itself. In other words ,literary history is a partially reconstructed history of the literary history *per se*. I emphasize the reconstruction process of literary history ,to represent the process of production ,circulation ,and reception of literary works among discursive communities. This is a complex and dynamic system in which many factors are involved. Attempts have been made to trace the details of the process of change in history of literary culture. The changes in literary genres and subgenres are investigated in relation to the literary culture. For instance ,the early decades of the ninth century saw an unusually rich set of fully developed prose narratives ,which went hand in hand with other cultural changes that can be traced back to the 790s. Like Liu Zongyuan’s anecdotal miscellany entitled *Records of Longcheng* was not regarded as high literature both in Chinese tradition and in the European definition of literature. But it does deserve a place in literary culture. In brief ,the literary culture is an umbrella concept within which ,literary practices and other social practices are interacted ,formulating the champ. The concept of “Cultural Tang” was proposed to substitute the conventional literary history with a history of literary culture.

Wang: Could you interpret the notion of the Cultural Tang by some specific examples?

Owen: At the beginning of the “Cultural Tang” in 650s ,literature was centered in the court; by the end of the era literature became the possession of the educated elites. The general tendency is that literature as a social practice is shared by an increasingly widening community. I will explain how the elements of the cultural production work together in the case of temple – visiting poems ,such as ,proto – professionalism and the power relations ,etc. At the beginning ,temple – visiting poems functioned more in the civil bureaucracy as part of the court routine; by the end of the Cultural Tang ,they were more tied to social occasions or obligations. The elements of the “Cultural Tang” can be investigated in the process of production ,circulation ,reception of this subgenre. I would like to interpret the Cultural Tang by temple – visiting poems. Xie Lingyun (385 – 433) ,the Eastern Jin poet was also a prominent Buddhist theorist. He participated in the project of translating the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra. He was a devout Buddhist and focused on the “mountains and streams”. He is traditionally credited for bringing landscape poetry into maturity. His poetry was allusive and complex.

登石室饭僧诗 谢灵运
迎旭凌绝巘 映沍归淑浦。
钻燧断山木 掩岸瑾石户。
结架非丹雘 借田资宿莽。
同游息心客 蹇然若可睹。
清霄飏浮烟 空林响法鼓。
忘怀狎鸥鹭 摄生驯兕虎。
望岭眷灵鹫 延心念净土。
若乘四等观 永拔三界苦。

Xie Lingyun ,as the founder of Chinese Natural Landscape poetry ,has combined the “Mountain & Streams Poems” with Buddhism. His poem used an erudite vocabulary and Buddhist jargons. Because of his flaunt character ,he endured lots of setbacks in his political career ,and he sought comfort in the landscape and the Buddhist world. His love for landscape and his proficient

knowledge of Buddhism made him the first poet to write temple – visiting poems in the Southern and Northern Dynasties. He enriched and expanded the realm of landscape poetry and led it in a new direction. He established the position of landscape poetry in Chinese history of literature and originated the temple – visiting poems. His landscape poetry has many Buddhist associations.

游摄山栖霞寺诗 江总
 乘风面冷冷 候月临皎皎。
 烟崖憩古石 云路排征鸟。
 披径怜森沉 攀条惜杳杳。
 平生忘是非 朽谢岂矜矫。
 五净自此涉 六尘庶无扰。

Jiang Zong (519–594), as a well-known Courtly Style poet, was a courtier of Chen Shubao (553–604, r. 582–289), the last Chen emperor, also an avid poetry lover. Most of Jiang Zong's poems were elegant formal exercises composed to imperial command at banquets and parties. The elaborate Southern court literary style was still prevailing in the North in the sixth century. The style was ornate and sumptuous, influenced by the sophisticated culture of the South. The first emperor of the Tang Dynasty, Li Yuan, was a Northern general, a descendant of the ruling house of one of the Sixteen Kingdoms that came to throne in 618. Emperor Taizong Li Shimin ascended the throne in 626 and ruled for 23 years. The cultural and literary influences of the Northern and Southern Dynasties still lingered on into Taizong's court. The early Tang court poetry owed much debt to Liang Palace Style, notorious for being effeminate and decadent. Poetry fulfilled these social functions—verses were exchanged between friends, courtiers were called upon to compose poetry at imperial banquets or court gatherings, and eulogies were presented to rulers to celebrate memorable occasions. The fifth century was a period for both four – and five – syllable lines in literary output. Four – syllable lines were written on formal occasions during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Courtiers presented eulogies to the emperors in the four – syllable line. This was the poetic convention of the classical four – syllabic literary tradition initiated from *the Book of Songs*.

In conclusion, the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui and early Tang were in many ways combined with each other in terms of the literary culture. The increasingly sophisticated use of parallelism in poetry is one of the impacts Southern literature has on the North during the sixth century. The era of Emperor Yang and Emperor Taizong both bear the influences of the Southern court style. The Southern literary culture has lingering influences until the reign of Emperor Taizong. The court rhetoric will be elucidated in the case of temple – visiting poems in this section. It forms a sharp contrast with the simplicity of poetic diction and easy syntax at the end of “the ‘Cultural Tang’”. The well – wrought parallel couplets were gradually replaced with more individualized poetic lines.

Courtly style poetry and temple – visiting poetry were combined intrinsically because the former includes a lot of formal occasional poems, celebrating court events by the courtiers. Court poetry conformed to certain rules, such as the topical and lexical decorum. In the *yingzhi* (应制) poems the poet's inner life was submerged in the persona of the role of the courtier at the beginning of the Cultural Tang. In addition, temple – visiting poetry was often written in exile or frustration with political and social life. Temple – visiting poems were usually concerned with dissatisfaction with political careers and aspiration for the eremitic aloofness. The lexical decorum of the court poetry was characterized of restrained emotions, avoidance of colloquialism and archaisms and a set of basic frequently – used terms. For example, *lin* (临), to look down on; *bi* (碧), jade green; *long* (笼), veil. The poetic conventions of court poetry were marked with excessive ornamentation, periphrasis, distorted syntax, semantic warping and figured language.

In the beginning of the Cultural Tang, the lexical choices of temple – visiting poems are more graceful and narrowed. We can investigate the poetic conventions of temple – visiting poems: the structural conventions of amplification, the use of the body of lore or literary and Buddhist references and stories. In court – centered literary culture, the potential for poetic originality was greatly limited, and the variety of roles and personal responses was severely diminished. The social function was to elegantly celebrate the courtly occasions instead of performing the creative and psychological functions. The hackneyed themes of court poetry were expanded in the reign of Empress Wu, such as the Taoist nihilism.

The court poetry of Empress Wu's reign was accredited with Song Zhiwen and Shen Quanqi. Their poems were epitomes of court poetry and its conventions. These stylistic features had great impacts on later Tang poems. Their court poems were distinctive from those of the Southern Dynasties in the sense of the literary culture. First, the court poets of the Southern Dynasties were

mostly from the royal, distinguished literary families, while Empress Wu's court poets were literary figures of more humble backgrounds who won favor in the court after passing the jinshi examination. Their position – takings were different in the field of literary production. The promising young poets sought to be the *protégé* or entourage of the court favorites. The only hereditary factor in Wu's reign was Shangguan Yi and his granddaughter——Shangguan Wan'er, the arbiter of court poetic competitions. Second, the continuity of court poetry was gradually disrupted while more individuality and personal freedom were integrated. The rigid codes of decorum and normative conventions had been replaced by more individualized personal styles, represented by the Four Talents of the Early Tang and Chen Zi'ang. Third, the formal occasional court poetry was complemented by more informal occasional poetry. Fourth, the scope of poetry was increasingly broadened. These fundamental changes can be interpreted from the perspective of the field of literary production.

Shen Quanqi (ca. 650 – 729), made great contributions to Chinese poetry, especially the five – syllable (or pentasyllabic) regulated verses (*wuyan liushi*). Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen were known as the “Shen – Song” pair. Shen and Song were the dominant figures in court poetry. The descriptive court poems are known for the stilted periphrasis, for example, dragon refers to the Emperor being fraught with imperial symbolism. Old style poetry (pre – Southern Dynasties style) was transferring to a kind of proto – regulated verse. So the beginning of the Cultural Tang can be said as breaking the conventional regulations of court poetry. But the tripartite pattern of setting, scene and response are still evident to a greater or lesser degree. The subgenre of temple – visiting poems is treated with more individuality and sophistication at the beginning of the Cultural Tang (CT) compared to the pre – CT era.

游少林寺 沈佺期
长歌游宝地 徙倚对珠林。
雁塔风霜古 龙池岁月深。
绀园澄夕霁 碧殿下秋阴。
归路烟霞晚 山蝉处处吟。

The pre – Cultural – Tang court poetry is characterized with fragmentation of the description into a string of unrelated items. There are different poetic beginnings for temple – visiting poems: usually non – parallel; setting the context. At the beginning of the Cultural Tang, the poems of “Shen & Song” were featured with Buddhist terms and parallelism. The *yingzhi* temple – visiting poems were filled with fossilized terms of imperial references. When it came to the end of the Cultural Tang, the poetic conventions were changed dramatically with the decentralized culture. The changes were reflected in the lexical choices. There are a pair of antithetic terms: 绀宇 vs. 小楼 (both referring to the temple); the different degrees of formality or registers of the diction in “绀园澄夕霁 碧殿下秋阴。” vs. “暮霭生深树 斜阳下小楼。” The literary values in the particular discursive communities were different. Du Mu and his brother Du Yi served the military commissioner Li Deyu nearby Runzhou (now Zhenjiang).

题扬州禅智寺 杜牧
雨过一蝉噪 飘萧松桂秋。
青苔满阶砌 白鸟故迟留。
暮霭生深树 斜阳下小楼。
谁知竹西路 歌吹是扬州。

题苏州虎丘寺僧院 许浑
暂引寒泉濯远尘 此生多是异乡人。
荆溪夜雨花开疾 吴苑秋风月满频。
万里高低门外路 百年荣辱梦中身。
世间谁似西林客 一卧烟霞四十春。

Here I have illustrated how the subgenre of temple – visiting poems can be addressed throughout the Cultural Tang, particularly its beginning and ending. The temple – visiting poems are related to the literary values of literary culture across the spectrum of the Cultural Tang. We get to know what are the poetic conventions and variations of temple – visiting poems and how they changed during the Cultural Tang. Temple – visiting poems are also related to the elements in the field of cultural production, e. g. proto – professionalism and power relations, etc.

Wang: Writing Chinese literary history has gone through ups and downs in the West. There are different models in writing

literary history. Its theoretical paradigm is interrelated with the literary theories. In another words, literary historiography is related to the larger intellectual history. Could you elaborate on the changes concerning the interrelationships between literary historiography and literary theory?

Owen: In the 19th century, the dominant “contextualism” historiography has different representations in the following models: socio – historical determinism model (Taine) , genre evolution model (Brunetière & Symonds) , humanity model (Brandes) and biological model (Lanson) . First , Hippolyte Taine (1828 – 1893) , as a French critic and historian , was a major proponent of sociological positivism and one of the first practitioners of historicist criticism. Literary historicism as a critical movement has been said to originate with him. Taine is particularly remembered for his three – pronged approach to the contextual study of a work of art , based on the aspects of what he called race , milieu , and moment. Second , Ferdinand Brunetière (1849 – 1906) and John Addington Symonds (1840 – 1893) proposed the evolution history of literature. Literary genres are described in analogy with species in nature , origin , development , culmination , decline , disappearance. The genres are developed in a higher genre. Third , Georg Morris Cohen Brandes (1842 – 1927) proposed that human soul and emotions are the motives of literary phenomena and they serve as the medium of life and literature. Fourth , Gustave Lanson (1857 – 1934) proposed the idea of “literary sociology” , a complex formulation of the relationship between social influences on an author , readers’ expectations , and the text. For Lanson , a text was neither a mere product of collective social forces nor an autonomous work by an autonomous genius , but something in between. Lanson was seen as a pedant obsessed with historical and biological trivia and a rigid and unliterary philology. The biographical approach has been dominant in literary studies , which could be categorized as a kind of mechanical determinism.

Formalism arose in the early twentieth century and focused on the structural features of texts while downplaying the historical , biographical and cultural context. Two schools of formalist literary theories developed , one is Russian formalism , and the other is Anglo – American New Criticism. The influence of formalism lasted until 1970s. Russian Formalism emphasized the dominant concepts of “literariness” and “defamiliarization” of literary works. Russian Formalism (Viktor Shklovsky , et al.) led to the prospering of the Prague Circle and Structuralism , with Roman Jakobson and Ferdinand de Saussure as the leading figures. René Wellek and Austin Warren’s *Theory of Literature* (1948 , 1955 , 1962) was a landmark book of New Criticism. The American New Criticism transferred from the conditioning environment to the literary works themselves. Structuralism was developed in France in the 1950s and 1960s. It became a dominant intellectual movement in academic fields such as linguistics , literary criticism , sociology etc. The most famous structuralists include Roman Jakobson , Michel Foucault , Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes. Pierre Bourdieu as a structuralist sociologist is concerned with how cultural and social structures were changed by human agency and practice. The movement of New Criticism in the United States emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. Structuralism was a dominant trend in English and American literary criticism of the mid twentieth century—from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Its adherents were emphatic in their advocacy of close reading and attention to texts themselves , and their rejection of criticism based on extra – textual , with its interest in the exploration of metaphor and image and the distancing of a text from the circumstances that created it. This is a reversal from top – down model to bottom – up model. The previous stage of literary historiography seeks positivist description and explanation through the nineteenth century historicism narrative. It is a method of induction. The formalist historians focus on close – reading of the textual features , in a deductive method.

In the meantime , another major school of literary history studies is the Marxist theory in which the literary superstructure is determined by the economic and social base. There are different general conceptions of the literary historical process proposed by St. Augustine , Hegel , Marx , and Spengler. Hegel and Marx proposed to view history as a process of dialectical change. The leading Marxist scholars are Georg Lukas (1885 – 1971) , Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) , Louis Althusser (1918 – 1990) , etc. Lukas advocated Marxism – historical materialism is the best methodology and world vision to study literary history. According to Marxism , literature is basically regarded as reflections of the economic forces , while literary works themselves are mystified. Literature is interpreted as representations of ideology and social and economic forces in literary history. There are different sets of competing forces and different literary values in literary field. The relationship between the literary text and history are theorized in a number of ways. There is a straightforward deterministic relation between social reality and literature , so that literary genres are seen as causally determined by the changing social background. Literature is one of the institutions which serve as state apparatus to strengthen the state power and promote ideology among people.

Wang: There were very few Chinese literary histories written in US in the 1970s. This is a period of downside for literary

history writing. Is it pertinent to the overall intellectual background—the uprising postmodernism and poststructuralism? Could you elaborate on the dramatic changes especially in case of American sinology?

Owen: In the 1960s and 1970s, the literary history studies got out of fashion in the academic institutions. Literary scholars were more concerned with deconstructionism since then. Since the 1970s, structuralism was criticized for its rigidity and ahistoricism. New Historicism developed in the 1980s and gained widespread influence in the 1990s. New Historicists intend to understand the paralleled relations between literary works and the cultural, historical context. New historicism has provided new ways of thinking about the relationships between literary texts and other non-literary events. New historicism criticizes the single coherent linear history. New modes of writing literary history try to provide more plural and dynamic explanations about relationships between literary texts and other factors related. New historicism and postmodernism are closely related. The textuality, language and representation serve as the basis for historical analysis of literature. The specificities and complexities of history are investigated by new historicists. New historicist methods treat a variety of texts in the network of linguistic, cultural, socio-political elements. New historicist approach has great impacts on writing literary history by reconstructing the forces at work in historical periods, particularly, in the time of their production. For them, the literary texts are closely related to the contexts of their production, the socio-political contexts, the institutions (the court, patronage, education, etc.) And literary canons are reconstructed, reappraised, reassigned by literary histories through different institutions across the history. Literary productions are put in the wider field of cultural production, generally speaking. Proto-professionalism is a specific strategy for reading the cultural materialism in literary history. In some ways new historicism and cultural materialism are intertwined.

Wang: New Historicism emerged in the late 1970s in the USA and cultural materialism in the early 1980s in Britain. There are two theoretical “movements” which have become prominent and influential practices in all aspects of the discipline of literary history study. Literary historians have always been concerned about the role of historical context in interpreting literary texts in history, either with 19th century historicists or Marxists. New historicism and cultural materialism equip us with very useful ways of looking at literature in history. Could you illustrate these new changes by giving some examples? In what ways did literary historians make new attempts to get away from the old modes?

Owen: For example, *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier was published in 1989, in which the editor claimed that “Neither of the traditional modes of encyclopedic presentation—continues historical narrative or alphabetical ‘dictionary’—seemed adequate for such an undertaking. The former, while attempting complete coverage, introduces masses of often irrelevant information, and the latter artificially homogenizes literature into linear genealogies.” During the 1960s and 1970s, the literary academia has undergone a period of reflection. Since then, the intellectuals challenged the notion that literary history is viewed as a collection of facts about authors and works organized in diachronical sequence or as a kind of narrative, teleological history. Scholars are concerned with a new definition of literary history, which is a reconstruction of literary history. The formation of the national canon and literary tradition, literature as institutions were brought into the foreground. Literary history is reconsidered in a new light. Two leading factors in intellectual history in the past few decades are neo-historicism and cultural materialism. Another trend of literary historiography since the 1990s is that the literary and socio-political public spheres are conceived as parts of a whole history of literary culture. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) proposed a cultural history of society. The followers of Foucault proclaimed to divide history into histories. Methodological debates concerning literary history traditionally focus on the relations between what is inside and what is outside a literary work, between its content and its context. Whether they intend to demonstrate literature’s independence of any contextual influence, its enforced responsiveness to what occurs in its surroundings, or its evolution according to its own laws. *A New History of French Literature* has offered a non-teleological model, where they just take the moments. They don’t organize it around narratives, but rather around a series of moments. This is a new way of doing things, like Index or Snapshots. It is a reflection on the history of literature by discarding the clear-cut demarcation between the inside and the outside of a work of art.

Wang: The term postmodernism has initially been used mainly as a school of literary studies, and gradually its use was found in a wider context since the 1980s, even to the extent that it characterizes the culture of the late twentieth century in general. This postmodernism movement has permeated in the fields of critical theory and literary historical scholarship in a revolutionary manner.

Owen: Post-structuralist thinking had a major impact on American criticism in the 1970s, particularly on a group of critics who were based at Yale—the ‘Yale deconstructionists’. I was at Yale in this period, so it is natural that I was also under this

influence. My notion of “history of literary culture” is influenced by this school of thought. The complexity of the literary culture is represented in the dynamic processes and interrelations of literary traditions, institutions of literature, canon formations. The cultural process is treated as a system, with its dominant, subordinate and trivial features and lineages. Such chiasmic formulations present a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between discursive and material domains. The individual discourses or discursive communities are interpreted in the social networks and cultural codes.

Wang: I have generalized the modes of writing Chinese literary histories. The “autonomy” mode emphasizes the intrinsic change of literary history. The motives of literary development are internal factors, like literary forms, literary techniques, and literary discursive structures, etc. The other extreme perspective in literary historiography is called “heteronomy” mode. Literature is put in the context of the external factors, nation and environment. Evolutionary literary perspective examines whether literary history develops like an organic body, e. g. “origin — development — maturity — decline”. Since the early 20th century, with the spreading of the Evolution Theory in China, the evolutionary literary development perspective became the dominant mode in literary history studies among Chinese scholars. Literary history is viewed as a process of natural selection like the organic world. Every literary historical period can be regarded as a legitimate stage towards a higher stage because it is part and parcel of the continuum of the general literary evolution. The continuum can be divided into three periods: Origin, Development and Maturity. The evolution theory was combined with the heteronomy mode as the predominant historiography from the 1930s until now. Could you talk about the theoretical models in literary historiography?

Owen: The first stage of literary historiography is characterized with encyclopedic literary history. There is a kind of documentary relationship between literary historians and literary texts. In this stage, the arrangement of literary history implies a teleological narrative model. However, the dichotomy of what is inside or outside of the literary texts is indeed problematic itself. There is a kind of analogy between the text and the outside world as a prerequisite. Texts are representational of the world, its context. The literary history is reconstructed based on the contexts in a single – line schema. Literary historians make great efforts to pin down targets like *Geist*, *Wesen*, *Dasein*, *Werden*, *Idee*. The systematic representation of literary historical material should not block away other possible types of representation. For literary history writing, there are more perspectives that inform the contemporary in addition to the narrative mode of representation.

The 19th century historicism is featured with the nationalist history, which was later replaced by positivist determinism advocated by Taine. As a sociological positivist, Taine’s views were based on his scientific account of literature—the categories of race, milieu and moment or “nation”, “environment” or “situation”, and “time” in the English translations. In this aspect literature was largely the product of the author’s environment. In historiography, a preponderance of the context has been widespread in China and in the West. The interpretation of texts is based on the analogy between texts and their pertinent contexts, being historical, social or political. The author’s intention, genre evolution, biography, social background and economic base serve as the adequate interpretation of texts. The contextualism is designated as a kind of over – deductionism or oversimplification. Thus, historical understanding or imagination is constrained and fossilized within the model of documentary relationships between texts and contexts. There is a dilemma between “of literary history” and “about literary history”. Literary history is lost in the background information about it epistemologically.

The underlying pseudosyllogism for the nineteenth – century model and contextualism of literary historiography is that the complexity and fluidity of real literary history can be represented by the systematic narrative discourse. One of the results is that the particularities and contingencies are aggregated into a set of comprehensible and universal, organic whole. This is a problem with representing literary history. There is no easy solution, but that does not mean the problem should be avoided. We should also address the synchronic fragments in the whole of literary history. The instruments for these are literary historical imagination and linguistic analysis of the discursive communities. The subject matter for literary historians is the history of literature, not just the relationship between literature and the external contexts. The structures and processes of literary history are illuminated by the narrative discourse. But it is impossible to substitute the particulars for the whole, like the trees are ignored for the wood *per se*. The neo – historicist history can be characterized as a non – teleological history. The contemporary cultural studies have completely discarded determinism and single perspectives. Literary history has lost its single teleology or common perspective. All texts are the products of their specific historical moments. The production, reception and transmission are unique to the different historical material conditions. The epistemological turn from contextualism to the institutionalization of literature has far – reaching impacts on literary historiography.

Wang: Could I sum up in this way? In terms of epistemology of literary historiography, the notion of literary history is developed into the institution of literature. The model of writing literary history is transferring from nationalist ideology reconstruction and the deterministic teleological history to culture/power influenced history of literary production. From the perspective of methodology in literary historiography, it has transformed from historicist positivism to neo-historicist multi-dimensional methodology; from the empirical aesthetic value judgment to more systematic linguistic analysis; from sequential, factual atomistic history to explanatory, detached or topical axiomatic history. There are no fixed literary values or canonization, compared to the traditional connection between texts and their historical contexts. The distinction between New Historicism and the contextualism of Taine lies in that the 19th century historicism emphasizes the cultural forces or ideology, the political disposition that governs the literary works. New Historicists are concerned with how these cultural factors influence the production, circulation and dissemination of literature. As an influential scholar in the field of sociology and culture, Pierre Bourdieu has proposed the “field of cultural production” or *champ*. We have exchanged views about his theory before. So in what way is your theory of literary culture influenced by Bourdieu?

Owen: I agree to Pierre Bourdieu’s philosophical theory of the “field of cultural production”. Bourdieu himself is a French structuralist and sociologist. There are three levels of social reality in the field: the position of the literary field within the field of power; the internal structure of the literary field; and the genesis of the *habitus* of occupants of these positions or the systems of dispositions. In my literary historiography, I proposed the history of literary culture. By the notion of literary culture, literature is interpreted alongside other cultural products of a particular historical period to illustrate how concepts, attitudes, and ideologies operated across a broader cultural spectrum that is not exclusively literary. Literary historians can also be analyzed in their historical situations and ideologies. Their perspectives are also products of the historical context in cultural and intellectual history. The first level is similar to the socio-historical approach. The second level is incarnated in the notion of discursive communities, e.g. the structure of objective relations between positions occupied by individuals and groups. The third level is an integration of the external and internal positions of literature in the field of cultural production, the systems of dispositions determined by both a social trajectory and the literary field.

For example, in the Cultural Tang the court patrons and the *jìnshì* examination system are the agents and institutions possessing the capital for the dominant positions. The poets within the court and the poets outside the court are competing for the legitimacy of different literary values. With the transformation of the Cultural Tang, literature is getting decentralized from the central court. The Four Talents of the Early Tang stood out as advocates of the heretical rupture with the dominant court literary traditions. They were referred to as literary *avant-garde*. Court poets such as Song Zhiwen and Shen Quanqi combined similar intellectual dispositions. Both of them are Great Scholars (直学士) in *Xiwen guan*. The structural homologies in power relations entail shared literary values. The hierarchy is established by the writers’ dispositions and the institutional structure in the field of power. At the end of the Cultural Tang, the court was overthrown by external forces, the An Lushan Rebellion in 755. The hierarchical structure was also changed by the constituents of the fields. The heteronomy was transformed from the court to the patrons or sponsors outside the court—the military governors. The state of relations of forces depends on the autonomy of the ensemble of writers (successful or humble, in dominant or dominated positions). On the other hand, it also depends on the heteronomy of forces in other fields, e.g. political fields, social fields and economic fields. The fundamental change of the literary culture is from court-centeredness to the possession of educated elites generally outside the court. At the beginning of the Cultural Tang, the poetry was still under the influence of Northern court culture. For poets such as Song Zhiwen, literary talents brought them social distinction and imperial recognition. But gradually, public recognition goes beyond the court or imperial favor. It is the literary merit that is to be appreciated and recognized, and ironically poets established their names by political failures and success in poetry. When it comes to the end of the Cultural Tang, writing poetry became a vocation in itself. The prominent feature of Tang literary culture lies in this whole process of literature as a social practice, which is increasingly separated from the court life.

By 679 the composition of poetry and *fu* (rhapsody) was used in the literary examination (*jìnshì*). And these components were added to the older essay question on policy, ritual, or some moral issue. Both the poem and the *fu* required a strict structure of exposition in parallel couplets, eventually with prosodic requirements in balancing tones. For Early Tang poets, *Wenxuan*, *Selections of Refined Literature* is the literary tradition. Literary courtiers celebrate all the great events of the imperial court. This *fu* section of the literary examination proves to be difficult for people from provincial regions like Meng Xiangyang. The criteria of poems and legitimacy for literature were determined by the imperial institutions. Therefore, the system precluded poets like him

out of the court. In the Late Tang, poets seek patronage and preferment by writing poems and prose.

Temple – visiting poetry becomes highly conventional, and these conventions continue to dominate such poetry in Chinese literary tradition. In Tang Dynasty, Chan Buddhism thrived with the imperial support and cultural diversity. When it comes to High Tang, living a recluse's life outside the mundane mortal world is gradually regarded as desirable in that context both for people in the court and outside the court. People who were frustrated or successful in political life both wrote temple – visiting poems. They lament the serenity and peace in temple and express the desire to recede from secular world. Both Li Bai and Wang Wei celebrated Meng Haoran's poetry and personality. Li Bai even came to Xiangyang to visit Han Chaozong, a sponsor of Meng Haoran. Li Bai has never taken the examination. By 740s poetic talent no longer needed the confirmation of the literary examination to be recognized. Li Bai travelled around to seek new patrons. Meng Haoran was known as his eccentric personality and disdain for public life. He was frustrated politically when he went from Xiangyang to Chang'an at the age of forty and failed in the jinshi exam. This poem is a representation of his recluse life style. Buddhist terms, such as "jingshe" (精舍, "fayū" (法雨) and "tanxuan" (谈玄), are used. The ending still follows the poetic convention of "returning at the sunset".

题融公兰若 孟浩然

精舍买金开 流泉绕砌回。

菱荷薰讲席 松柏映香台。

法雨晴飞去 天花昼下来。

谈玄殊未已 归骑夕阳催。

In the first half of the eighth century, poets in or out of the court culture aspire for the serene world of Buddhism. The temple – visiting poetry follows the poetic conventions set up in the early Tang. Whether the poets are in or out of the court culture, they exchange poems in the same discursive community. The cultural life is in the court, but people regard hermit life as a bliss.

Writing poetry became increasingly a profession or vocation or a way of making a living in Late Tang. Military commissioners (*jiedushi*) and surveillance commissioners (*guanhashi*) had an array of posts. These posts provide another alternative for talented young men, especially for scholars from "poor families" (*hanmen*) in addition to passing *jinshi* examination and entering the central government offices. Some young men even gave up the minor government posts for posts offered by commissioners. The regional power even outweighs the capital. As I generalized "the Cultural Tang" as the following, "In the 650s literature was centered almost entirely in the imperial court; by the end of the era literature had become the possession of an educated elite, who might serve in government, but whose cultural life was primarily outside the court."

Wang: Therefore, you have talked about how the elements of the cultural production work together in the case of temple – visiting poems, such as, proto – professionalism, the power relations, and the autonomy of literature, etc. . How are literary values in particular discursive communities influenced by the literary culture in Cultural Tang?

Owen: From the mid – seventh century, poets rely primarily on passing the *jinshi* literary examination. When it comes to the eighth and ninth centuries, the judgment of literary merit is not necessarily based on the central court, rather there are poets who claim poetry as a vocation, approximating the "European tradition". This process by which literary practice became separated from the authority of the state on the general level (as opposed to the recluses of earlier periods) helped define a whole new sphere of cultural life for the elite. There is a discursive community around Li He around the 830s including Zhang Hu, Du Mu and Xu Hun. Zhang Hu (792 – 854) had always been wandering from place to place and living off his poetic reputation. Literary historians like to characterize periods in general terms. We can see groups of poets that share common interests, new fashions emerging, particular locales as centers of poetic production, and specific individuals following their own singular paths irrespective of contemporary poetic fashions. In other words, when we look closely, there is no coherent "Late Tang" except as a span of years.

In the seventh century, there were large parts of China that were controlled by the court or the government. At the beginning of the Cultural Tang, poetry belonged to the gentry as a whole. The Chinese culture became gradually shared by these *shidafu* (士大夫) over a wide area, which is a big transformation of China. As we look at a lot of poets from the 9th century, they never got a post and they tried many times and did not pass the *jinshi* examination until very late in life. They probably came from a place where they could never have the hope of passing *jinshi* examination. Take Jia Dao for example, though everyone thought he was a great poet, actually he was basically from Yan (燕), the northeast, which was normally out of the control of the government. They worked out of the social network of the empire. The poet was a monk and he was the first and only prominent person

in the family. No other family member has been recorded in the Tang history. People of humble origins all come into the cultural world, so the *jìnshì* system was sending a lot of people from all over the empire. And they got different jobs with *jiedushi* when the five dynasties started at the early tenth century (907). All these regional generals have a little court, where they have poets to prettify their great accomplishments. It represents a kind of cultural prestige by having literary men around them. These poets do secretarial work and write poems. *Jiedushi* offer these outsiders jobs and patronage. This symbolizes a way of making a living. All these factors are part of the literary culture.

In *Wen yuan ying hua* (文苑英华), there are eight temple-visiting poems written by Jia Dao (779–843).

宿慈恩寺郁公房

病身来寄宿, 自扫一床闲。
反照临江磬, 新秋过雨山。
竹阴移冷月, 荷气带禅关。
独住天台意, 方从内请还。

就可公宿

十里寻幽寺, 寒流数派分。
僧同雪夜坐, 雁向草堂闻。
静语终灯焰, 余生许峤云。
由来多抱疾, 声不达明君。

With these two examples, we can see that “Spending the night at a temple” was a recurrent topic for these monk-poets. These poets have a shared literary aesthetic value of ascesis. In the ninth century, temple-visiting poems bore little influences of the court poetry and the court culture. The position of the literary field was out of the center of the court, the field of power. The center of power was transferring to the military commissioners to a great extent. The poets wrote poems to seek patronage from the commissioners and express their frustrations and setbacks in careers. Accordingly, the court poetry conventions were changed. The roles of the poets changed and the system of social institutions changed. There were almost no imperial lexicons and Buddhist jargons. The poetry was characterized with plain descriptions of the physical and mental state. The literary value of asceticism is reflected in the finely crafted parallel couplets in plain lexicons.

The circle of Jia Dao and Yao He is known for its literary values of “bitter chanting” or “taking pains on poetry”, *kuyin* or asceticism. The poetic ascesis of *kuyin*, from “bitter chanting” (chanting from personal bitterness) to “painstaking composition.” The dispositions of poets or their proto-professionalism are related to their literary values. There are a set of specialized vocabulary in the Regulated verse in the Short Line. Jia Dao had been a monk, and all these poet-monks specialized in regulated verse in the five-syllable line. Their aesthetic values are focused on perfectly formed couplets constructed of a limited range of images and vocabulary—exactly the kind of poetry practiced by Jia Dao and Yao He. As a group of poet-monks, these young men are intended to pass the *jìnshì* examinations, seeking *ming*, both “name” and “fame”, politically, religiously or socially. He came from Fanyang and received monastic education. Jia Dao used to be a Buddhist monk named Wuben. It is very hard for him to pass the *jìnshì* examination essay, *fu* or poem. Jia Dao never passed the *jìnshì* examination and had no hope of passing the examination. He is a politically unsuccessful, solitary figure. Liu Deren is a younger poet in the circle of Jia Dao and Yao He. When we say that regulated verse in the short line represents ‘craft’, it creates two opposing values in the form. One value is the poem that flows naturally and hides the strict rules that inform it; the second value is the poem that celebrates and foregrounds craft, which means the craft of the couplet. To appear, craft stand out against less ostentatiously ‘poetic’ language. Thus, in the second value there is an inherent disposition to play one or both of the middle parallel couplets off against the plainer diction of the opening and closing couplets. There are motifs that supported and doubtlessly contributed to the image of asceticism. In contrast, poets like Bai Juyi seek individualistic personality. Bai Juyi identified himself with nicknames like “mad chanting,” *kuan-gyin* or “drunken chanting,” *zuiyin*.

Wang: Thank you very much. Your explication of the notion of the Cultural Tang through by the case of temple-visiting poems is very insightful, and the notion of the Cultural Tang has incorporated the particular properties of the literary field *per se*, involving multiple social and institutional factors. This new notion has proved to be a new perspective to literary history writing. Thank you again.

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