

The Two-Dimensional Causes of the “Aphasia” in Ancient Chinese Literary Theory*

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Abstract—Since Professor Cao Shunqing from Sichuan University put forward the “aphasia” in literary theory in the 1990s of the last century, this proposition has triggered continuous and extensive discussions in the academic community. Both proponents and opponents have expressed their views. The relevant debates and research still remain heated until now, and have extended to other humanity disciplines such as philosophy, history, and English teaching. It is one of the most influential academic phenomena in the field of literature in recent decades. This paper combs and integrates Professor Cao Shunqing’s relevant research on aphasia. On this basis, it is believed that there are mainly two two-dimensional causes of the “aphasia” in ancient Chinese literary theory. One is that the vernacular, with historical evolution as an agglomeration trend, gradually deconstructs the classical-style ancient literary theory. The other is the intervention and domination of the Western scientism ideological system over the experiential and perceptive nature of ancient literary theory. These are important factors in deconstructing the discourse rules, text frameworks, logical forms and many other characteristics of ancient Chinese literary theory, thus forming the topic of the aphasia in ancient Chinese literary theory.

Index Terms—Cao Shunqing, ancient literary theory, aphasia, two-dimensions

I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Cao Shunqing frankly stated, “For the field of literary theory, the raising of this issue indeed reflects a very good aspiration of seeking a way out in the face of the current situation... The ‘aphasia’ issue has stirred up a thousand waves. There are those who approve and those who oppose. The academic debates it has triggered have far exceeded the slogan itself” (Cao, 2016, p. 5). Evidently, the proposal of “aphasia” is not the subjective imagination or wanton fabrication of Professor Cao and others. Instead, it is a reflection of the real situation faced by Chinese literary theory in its modern and contemporary development and an urgent need to address its own shortcomings. With numerous scholars discussing “aphasia”, the publication of relevant journal articles, and the holding of a series of academic conferences, the proposition of “aphasia” has transcended its initial connotation. Due to the passage of time and the deepening of research scope, the disputes and topic values it has generated have also exceeded the original meaning of “aphasia” itself. On this basis, discussions such as “reconstructing the discourse system of Chinese literary theory”, “the modern transformation of ancient Chinese literary theory”, “dialogue between Chinese and Western literary theories”, “the sinicization of Western literary theory”, and “the going-out of Chinese literary theory” have also gained academic popularity and controversy. In the author’s view, the “aphasia” in literary theory is actually a non-closed and fluid concept, rather than just a simple and straightforward “academic slogan” or “research strategy”. It is a dynamic meaning-generation and response made under external doubts, opposition, and pressure, and its meaning and theoretical basis have thus been continuously enriched and developed. After the proposal of “aphasia” in literary theory, Professor Cao Shunqing, either alone or in cooperation with others, successively published many academic papers, constantly providing new interpretations and explanations of “aphasia” in literary theory. However, most of these viewpoints are scattered, not systematic, and some even contradict each other. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out and integrate the “aphasia” proposition of Professor Cao Shunqing and others, explore the internal hidden laws and surface-deep meanings, and then discuss the contemporary academic value of “aphasia” and its two-dimensional causes.

II. THE BACKGROUND AND CONNOTATION OF THE PROPOSAL OF “APHASIA” AND THE MODERN MISPLACEMENT OF THE DISCOURSE POWER IN LITERARY THEORY

Professor Cao Shunqing’s article *The Development Strategy of Chinese Culture in the 21st Century and the Reconstruction of the Discourse of Chinese Literary Theory* published in 1995 can be regarded as the “advance order” of his theory of “aphasia”. At the very beginning, this article states clearly, “The first step in the development strategy of Chinese culture in the 21st century is to actively embrace and promote the transformation of world culture, and take the initiative to engage in a dialogue with Western culture” (Cao, 1995, p. 215). However, in fact, the real-world background of this kind of dialogue, since the late Qing Dynasty and modern times, has often been that China has been passively accepting and forced to engage in dialogue. The principle of equality in dialogue has vanished in Western cultural

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hegemony, and it has even become a one-sided recognition without rules. Traditional Chinese discourse has gradually been “marginalized” and “obscured” by Western powerful discourse. Western literary theories and critical methods, which are attached to the cultural attribution of the West, are more suitable for the interpretation and research of modern and contemporary Chinese literary phenomena due to their scientific knowledge-system way of speaking and their rational-speculative interpretive language models. At the same time, Chinese literary theory has “neither been seen nor heard”. Traditional poetic discourse has gradually given way to Western scientism discourse. Many scholars even forcefully interpret or over-interpret ancient Chinese literature with foreign literary theory terms. Chinese literary theory has “nothing to say” in the grand garden of world academia. Regarding this, Professor Cao pointed out with deep emotion, “This impoverishment of theory and loss of theoretical discourse are not only manifested in modern and contemporary times, but also in the study of ancient culture... Some people refer to this application of Western rules to Chinese content as the aphasia of Chinese culture” (Cao, 1995, p. 215). Professor Cao’s insights reveal the existing problems and development status of the Chinese literary theory community. At the same time, they also express his personal concerns about the current prevalence of Western literary theories in China, as well as the academic community’s national demands and practical appeals for the construction of China’s own literary theory. Therefore, some scholars have pointed out that “Professor Cao Shunqing’s paper has, in fact, become the beginning of the discussion on the issue of ‘aphasia’ in literary theory within China’s literary and artistic theory community” (Gao, 2010, p. 112).

If the article *The Development Strategy of Chinese Culture in the 21st Century and the Reconstruction of the Discourse of Chinese Literary Theory* serves as a “foreshadowing” for the concept of “aphasia”, then the article *Aphasia in Literary Theory and Cultural Pathology* published by Professor Cao in 1996 marks the formal proposal of “aphasia” in literary theory. As Professor Cao stated in this article, “For a long time, modern and contemporary Chinese literary and artistic theories have basically borrowed a whole set of Western discourses and have long been in a state of ‘aphasia’ in terms of literary theory expression, communication, and interpretation... We simply don’t have a set of our own literary theory discourses, a set of unique academic rules for expression, communication, and interpretation” (Cao, 1996, pp. 50-51).

These two articles can be regarded as Professor Cao Shunqing’s early research and thinking on “aphasia” in literary theory, and they directly triggered the discussion of related issues such as the reconstruction of Chinese discourse in literary theory and the modern transformation of ancient literary theory. However, at the same time, we also notice that in these two papers, Professor Cao interprets “aphasia” more from the perspectives of the fierce collision between Chinese and Western cultures, the strong intervention of Western culture, cultural pathology, extreme national mentality and cultural devastation (Professor Cao cited two landmark events, the May 4th Movement and the Cultural Revolution). There is obvious personal subjective emotion in his words and there is a lack of necessary academic basis and deduction. More often than not, “aphasia” in literary theory is interpreted by Professor Cao as “cultural aphasia”: cultural “aphasia” comes first, and then “aphasia” in literary theory. Because of this, his proposition of “aphasia” in literary theory has been criticized by some scholars as “cultural fundamentalism” (Zhou, 1997, p. 258), “Cultural revenge sentiment” (Xiong, 2003, p. 18); Professor Dong Xuewen from Peking University regards the “aphasia in literary theory” as “extreme expressions of indignation” (Dong, 1998, p. 216); Jiang Yin, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, even attributed “aphasia in literary theory” to a kind of “contagious disease” in an almost humorous and teasing tone, believing that “aphasia” in literary theory is a “false proposition” (Jiang, 1998, p. 24). In response to these criticisms, Professor Cao also realized that the “aphasia in literary theory” required necessary theoretical expansion and detailed explanation. In the article *On “Aphasia”* published in the 6th issue of *Literary Review* in 2007, he further pointed out that “the ‘language’ in ‘aphasia’ refers to ‘discourse’ ... ‘Aphasia’ means losing the inherent cultural rules of meaning-generation and discourse-expression” (Cao & Jin, 2007, p. 79).

The above passage can also be regarded as Professor Cao’s exact definition and demarcation of the term “aphasia in literary theory”. The connotation derived from this, in a nutshell, is the modern misplacement of Chinese traditional discourse rules. This misplacement of traditional discourse rules is a progressive and endogenous language transformation, a self-negation formed under the continuous interference of external languages, which in turn leads to the “modernity” deficiency in the discourse rules of literary theory that depend on classical Chinese discourse. Professor Cao and others then further explained “discourse” and held that “the so-called discourse refers to academic rules, which are the rules of language and meaning construction established by convention within a certain cultural tradition, historical background, and social context” (Cao & Yang, 2009, p. 168). Based on the above passage, we can hold the view that discourse rules are the logical forms and external manifestation factors of cultural presentation, as well as the presupposition and definition of the written language of a cultural group. At the language level, discourse rules output texts through standardized and orderly expressions, thus imposing certain interpretive restrictions on text discourses and constructing and deconstructing the ways of expression. Therefore, Professor Cao further pointed out that “the right to discourse is a kind of real power that is highly concealed yet omnipresent. Whoever is familiar with the rules therein and has the right to speak on ‘truth’ and the authority to write means that this person can formulate rules, uphold authority, determine truth, write history, and even suppress others” (Cao, 2017, p. 92).

III. THE FIRST DIMENSION OF APHASIA IN LITERARY THEORY: THE GRADUAL INTERNAL DISSOLUTION OF CLASSICAL CHINESE BY VERNACULAR CHINESE

For a long time, there have been two forms of Chinese written discourse: classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese.

However, due to historical conditions and other reasons, classical Chinese has always been regarded as the official written discourse. In various texts, classical Chinese, with its concise and elegant language style, was highly favored by the gentry class, thus enjoying absolute discourse power in classical written discourse. From the “transformation of the new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period” that occurred in the Pre-Qin period to the development of the modern vernacular Chinese movement, the written discourse rules of classical Chinese lost their discourse power due to the historical dissolution of classical Chinese by vernacular Chinese. Therefore, traditional ancient Chinese literary theory, which mainly uses classical Chinese as its means of expression, has lost its poetic language-presenting context due to the dominance of vernacular Chinese, thus leading to the “aphasia” of Chinese literary theory in modern times.

A. “The Reform of the New-Style Classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period”: The Incorporation and Modification of Vernacular Elements Into Classical Chinese

The co-existence of vernacular Chinese and classical Chinese, or even the co-existence of the two as two language systems for writing, has existed since the early ancient times in China. During the historical development, the two writing methods have always been intertwined. Compared with classical Chinese, the colloquial vernacular, which is convenient for interpersonal communication, is more conducive to the transmission of ideas and the connection of emotions in reality. However, due to the low productivity in ancient society, the limitations of writing tools, and the imperfect language system at that time, engraving colloquial language on animal bones, tortoise shells, or metals such as bronze often consumed a large amount of manpower and material resources and could not be effectively popularized. Therefore, the concise and simple ancient-style classical Chinese became the first choice at that time. On the one hand, this was a helpless move due to the insufficient material conditions and shortage of writing materials in ancient times. At the same time, it also demonstrated the characteristics and fashion of language writing in a specific period.

With the development of social productivity, the social form in ancient Chinese society completed the transformation from primitive system to slave system. This transformation also profoundly influenced the choice of language expression. The replacement of the academic writing norms of classical Chinese by vernacular Chinese, which is close to the form of oral expression, was also carried out and even changed gradually within the social system and the internal language environment of ancient Chinese. As for this reform of classical Chinese, it can be traced back to the transformation from the ancient-style classical Chinese in the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period. That is, the classical Chinese in the Shang and Zhou dynasties with archaic sentence patterns and profound meanings evolved into the new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period with lively language styles and flexible forms. This can be regarded as an innovation of the “abstruse and difficult-to-read” ancient-style classical Chinese. In this regard, Professor Fu Daobin believes that “In the Spring and Autumn Period, classical Chinese achieved a historical leap from the old-style to the new-style, and the development of Chinese literature took on a new pattern and atmosphere” (Fu, 2007, p. 171).

The replacement of the old-style classical Chinese by the new-style classical Chinese, on the surface, is a transformation within classical Chinese from simplicity to complexity, from plainness to elegance, with the vague meaning-orientation and obscure expression of the ancient old-style classical Chinese being abandoned, and the rhetorical forms and clear text communication of the new-style classical Chinese being adopted. However, the underlying mechanism is the dissolution of the writing style of the old-style classical Chinese by colloquial vernacular and the textual mapping of the new-style classical Chinese by the vernacular. The aesthetic trend of colloquial vernacular is injected into the internal paradigm of writing. To a certain extent, it “liberates” the written language from the ancient-style classical Chinese. The textual modification of the old-style classical Chinese by the new-style classical Chinese objectively reflects the development and changes of people’s self-awareness and aesthetic taste, and it is the manifestation of the expressive impulse of colloquial vernacular in the form of the new-style classical Chinese. As Professor Wang Xiuchen pointed out, “Classical Chinese pursues the ‘ornamentation’ of language, has the demonstrative significance of literary language and the theoretical significance of literary development, and reflects the embryonic characteristics of the early Chinese literary world” (Wang, 2009, p. 40). Classical Chinese is a conscious or unconscious modification of straightforward oral expressions, extending the ordinary language writing method to the generation of language meaning at the literary level. It is a bold attempt to incorporate vernacular spoken language into ancient written language expressions. Therefore, whether it is the oral language records of the real-life status of people in the “Guofeng” and “Xiaoya” sections of the “Book of Songs” during the Pre-Qin period, or the intuitive records of Confucius’ daily words in the “Analects of Confucius”, even modern people thousands of years later can still understand most of the text expressions in these works that are close to the form of spoken language.

The new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period has vivid language and lively ways of expression, showing a style of expression that is quite different from the ancient-style classical Chinese and is more inclined to colloquial vernacular. In written expression, there began to be a gradual trend from rigid and obscure classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese. Although the new-style classical Chinese still belongs to the form of classical Chinese, it has an internal connection with the vernacular Chinese at that time. The vernacular Chinese, to a certain extent, softened the writing style of the ancient-style classical Chinese. The new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period can be said to be parallel to the May 4th Vernacular Movement in modern times. Both are transformations of the old classical Chinese system. To some extent, the transformation from the old-style classical Chinese to the new-style classical Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period laid the groundwork in terms of time for the subsequent internal gradual changes of

ancient Chinese vernacular and the dissolution of classical Chinese writing by vernacular Chinese. It also influenced the language expression of literary theory and the norms of literary creation after the Pre-Qin period, pioneering the way for vernacular Chinese to intervene in and disrupt the writing patterns of classical Chinese.

B. The Vernacular Movement: The Transformation of Two Language Systems and the Temporal Dimension Dissolution of Ancient Literary Theory

If the effect of the “new-style classical Chinese reform” in the Spring and Autumn Period was the incorporation and modification of classical Chinese by vernacular Chinese, and a slow deconstruction of the discourse rules of classical Chinese had already taken shape in the early stage, then the vernacular movement led by Hu Shi and others in the modern era achieved the transformation between the two language systems of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. At the same time, it also completed the dissolution of the written discourse power of classical Chinese in terms of historical evolution. As early as the late Qing Dynasty, the Chinese intellectual class had already issued calls to “abandon classical Chinese”. People at that time believed that classical Chinese was no longer suitable for the needs of social development. Liang Qichao even directly stated, “Abandoning contemporary language and being reluctant to use it, adhering solely to the ancient, thus the articles are elegant, with profound and instructive words, ranking first among the five continents” (Zhang, 1999, p. 90). Compared with the abstruse and difficult-to-read nature of classical Chinese discourse, the popularization of vernacular Chinese is, to a certain extent, more easily accepted by the general public. Therefore, one of the achievements of the May 4th Vernacular Movement is the popularization of written discourse. The emergence of the modern vernacular movement was an inevitable result of the entanglement and confrontation between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese from the Pre-Qin period to the late Qing Dynasty. Although the significant language reform brought about by the vernacular movement had certain limitations and was restricted by the historical background, generally speaking, vernacular Chinese took the initiative to gain control of the discourse rules with the rise of this movement. As some scholars pointed out, “The purpose of the May 4th Vernacular Movement was not to establish vernacular Chinese as the orthodox form, but to abandon classical Chinese as a whole” (Zhang, 2023, p. 94).

The emergence of the Vernacular Movement not only rewritten the rule-making of written discourse, but also had a huge impact on Chinese traditional culture, ideological concepts, and ancient literary theory, which took classical Chinese as the writing style and means of expression. “The May 4th Vernacular Movement was not merely a ‘self-contained transformation within the language’. It was closely linked to the innovation of the entire mindset and the national modernization movement. In a sense, it was a collision between two different value systems and social ideologies, namely, the Chinese and Western, as well as the old and new” (Zhang & Zhang, 2018, p. 120). Therefore, when Western cultural ideas kept pouring into modern society, ancient literary theory, which was attached to classical Chinese discourse, was also impacted due to its language and discourse form. The philosophical quality of “harmony between man and nature” pursued by ancient literary theory and its poetic writing style lost the legitimate empowerment in the context of the times and the re-formulation of written discourse rules due to the influence of the Vernacular Movement. In addition, the development of modern vernacular Chinese absorbed Western-style languages to a certain extent, thus forming “a new language system, a mixture of spoken language, Europeanized vocabulary, and some classical Chinese vocabulary, and a discourse mode with strong Western ideological and thinking characteristics” (Gao, 2000, p. 45). Compared with traditional ancient Chinese vernacular, this kind of vernacular that integrates the characteristics of Western languages has an inherent cultural barrier with the classical Chinese discourse form of ancient literary theory, whether in terms of language style, or the texture and form of the language.

IV. THE SECOND DIMENSION OF APHASIA IN LITERARY THEORY: THE INTERVENTION AND DOMINATION OF WESTERN SCIENTISM OVER ANCIENT CHINESE LITERARY THEORY

The second dimension contributing to the “aphasia” in literary theory is the spatial intervention and domination of the objective logical knowledge system of Western scientism over the disorderly experiential and perceptive state of traditional Chinese literary theory. This spatial intervention and domination takes the language reform in the late Qing Dynasty and the May 4th Cultural Movement as the entry points, scientifically and orderly modularly cutting the poetic and hazy way of expression and system construction of ancient Chinese literary theory. The holistic life perception of “harmony between man and nature” emphasized in ancient literary theory and its unique philosophical thinking characteristics have been undermined by the diversified, theorized, and disciplinary research methods of the West, thus resulting in the loss of discourse rules and discourse power in the spatial dimension.

A. The May 4th Cultural Movement: The Worship of Scientism and Extreme Mentality

Western scientism emphasizes rational dialectics and the summarization of practical methods, which starkly contrasts with the academic trend in China that has always valued experience over reasoning. This difference is also profoundly reflected in the thinking habits and national cultural characters of the East and the West. As Wang Guowei put it, “The characteristics of our Chinese people are practical and popular. The characteristics of Westerners are speculative and scientific. They are good at abstraction and proficient in classification. They apply the two methods of generalization and specification to all tangible and intangible things in the world. Therefore, it is natural that they have a rich vocabulary” (Fu, 1997, p. 386). If the advanced warships and powerful guns of the West exposed the Chinese in the late Qing Dynasty

to the sensory shock caused by material differences and concerns about their own safety, then the scientism that flooded in alongside imperial hegemony also had a spiritual impact equivalent to that of weapons on local scholars and their academic habits in terms of knowledge structure and ideology. “The introduction of scientific concepts has cultivated the thinking of Chinese intellectuals since modern times to attach importance to logical analysis, while the aspect of Chinese traditional culture that emphasizes synthesis has often faced numerous challenges” (Cao, 2010, p. 234). Ancient Chinese literary theory, which adheres to the rules and modes of expression of traditional Chinese discourse, is characterized by intuitive imagery-inspired feelings and hazy perceptions. This characteristic is often presented through the construction of discourse meaning like “the co-existence of yin and yang, and words being unable to fully express ideas” and the way of verbal expression of “subtle words with profound meanings”. The ambiguous direction of China’s “Tao”, which can only be sensed but not expressed in words, seems to have an inevitable connection with the general sense-generation of ancient literary theory. It is the open-minded understanding of life and the subtle perception of all things in the universe by the subject and the object in the literary field, and then it is connected to the unique traditional Chinese philosophical system of “harmony between man and nature, and the unity of the self and things” through synesthesia. This kind of thinking existence that is hard to explain clearly and cannot be described in words has long been questioned by Western scientism, which emphasizes empirical exploration and clear expression.

Intellectual elites criticized the ambiguous expressions of the significance of ancient Chinese culture. Objectively, this reflects that the accurate description of facts and the precise grasp of academic principles are inevitable requirements for social development. The correct transmission of concepts is of more practical significance than the implicit and reserved expression of meaning. The concept of seeking truth and emphasizing practicality in scientism also gained a mass base and the necessity of dissemination during the turbulent social period from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China. Under the influence of Western scientific thinking, especially during the May 4th Cultural Movement’s criticism of traditional culture and worship of the scientific spirit, people at that time always mentioned “Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science”. “Science was elevated to an authority for testing all legitimacy. In fact, the elevation of science to truth, to a synonym for absolutely reliable legitimacy and authority, was not just the belief of a few people like Hu Shi and Ding Wenjiang, but a basic belief cultivated by the new Chinese culture in the 20th century, held by people in academia, politics, business, and even the general public” (Cao & Wu, 1999, p. 70). The concept of Western scientific spirit, first advocated and introduced by the academic community, has expanded to other fields and various social strata. This shift in group mentality has also changed the operating rules of discourse and the inherent ways of existence of knowledge forms. The scholars of the New Culture Movement abandoned the traditional meaning of “wen”.

At that time, scientism in China became an inviolable and sacrosanct object, a devout belief similar to that of a religion. The traditional Confucian moral codes and order were also challenged by science and democracy. China’s feudalism that had endured for thousands of years and the resulting literary concepts were at risk of disintegration under the impact of the scientific spirit.

Based on the idea of “scientism is omnipotent”, a conventional concept even emerged: Literary theories bred by Western culture are scientific, accurate, advanced, and omnipotent, while ancient Chinese literary theories are unscientific, ambiguous, backward, and limited. The traditional Chinese methods of literary theory criticism such as annotation, exegesis, transmission, collation, and interpretation were overshadowed by Western writing rules. The commonly used terms and proper nouns in ancient Chinese literary theory also became difficult to interpret and led to “garbled interpretations” due to the obscuration of Western scientism. The technical critical methods of Western classical literary theories also failed to justify themselves when facing the discourse patterns of traditional Chinese literary theories. As a result, ancient Chinese literary theory was labeled as “unscientific scholarship” for not conforming to the “authoritative yardstick” of Western science. “When ‘scientism’ becomes the sole ‘metalanguage’ governing social culture, in this single-voiced system, the application of science evolves into the worship of science, and ‘scientism’ thus transforms into ‘scientism exclusivism’” (Cao & Shi, 2014, p. 15).

When Western scientism from abroad spreads in China, it also deviates from its initial independent self-system construction and the good “vision of helping the world” with humanistic spirit. Instead, it uses a non-indigenous system to interfere with or meddle in local non-scientific knowledge systems, thus intensifying the excessive tendency of “seeking truth”. At the same time, the worship of scientism by domestic intellectual elites also causes a deviation in the rational cognition of the academic community. As Li Wei wrote in “A Preliminary Discussion on Scientism Exclusivism”: “R. G. Owen pointed out that scientism exclusivism is the result of elevating the status of science and is a form of idolatry...” (Li, 2010, p. 39). Under the banner of “scientism exclusivism”, it became a historical choice to re-examine and even transform traditional Chinese culture represented by Confucianism with scientific methods. So much so that “topple the idols” and “re-evaluate all values” became the slogans of historical rationalism with a strong critical stance towards the humanistic tradition at that time (Yang, 1999, p. 8). Although the traditional Chinese “Confucian idol” belief has gradually declined under the impact of scientism, and people have shifted from an ignorant “unawareness” to a rational understanding of the drawbacks of the Confucian orthodoxy, after toppling “this idol”, another “new idol”, scientism exclusivism, has emerged as a new yardstick for judgment and a new value choice for people at that time, almost replacing traditional culture.

Therefore, as a derivative form of traditional cultural thoughts in the literary field, ancient Chinese literary theory has, due to the Chinese people’s worship and extreme attitude towards scientism exclusivism, lost both its practical judgment

of modern literature and the psychological support of many intellectuals. Consequently, a mass backlash has emerged, demonstrating a series of processes in modern China regarding scientism exclusivism and Western literary theory discourse, from unfamiliarity to contact, recognition, identification, acceptance, worship, and finally extreme bias. This shows a development in public psychology from weak to strong and from small-scale to large-scale.

Due to its strong rule-making and the extensive promotion during the May 4th Movement, scientism exclusivism has achieved an expected psychological occupation of the discourse of ancient Chinese literary theory in many aspects. It has gradually deprived ancient Chinese literary theory of its natural local superiority and regional a priori legitimate existence. Eventually, it has realized a transition from conceptually replacing ancient Chinese literary theory to psychologically conscious worship. The consequence of this accumulated worship over time is the evolution of the “worship theory” of scientism exclusivism into the “omnipotence theory”, the transformation of the group’s worship mentality into an extreme mentality, and China’s own suspicion of traditional literary theory.

This excessive and over-spread thought of scientism exclusivism has been directly or indirectly negating Chinese traditional culture and literary theory, and its influence persists to this day. Therefore, it can be said that the extreme and excessive worship mentality of scientism exclusivism is the psychological factor contributing to the “aphasia” of literary theory, and it is also one of the reasons for the sense of inferiority in national literary theory.

B. Systematically Studying National Heritage: The Introduction and Domination of Western Scientific Methods

During the May 4th New Culture Movement in full swing, “smashing the Confucian shop” became the goal pursued by radicals. Mentioning “traditional culture” or “the Confucian orthodoxy” made people “turn pale at the mention of a tiger”. It seemed that talking about ancient culture was equivalent to talking about feudal superstition, and only discussing “science” and “democracy” was the trend of the times.

The extreme development of the May 4th Cultural Movement even presupposed a concept of binary opposition between “ancient/modern”, “traditional/scientific”, “nature/humanity”, “domestic/Western”, “old knowledge/new knowledge”, and “old literature/new literature”. The worship of scientism exclusivism seemingly aimed to get rid of cultural dross, eliminate feudal remnants, and revitalize China. However, it was more about blindly destroying traditional culture—both its essence and backward elements were all negated. The direct consequence of this extreme act of one-sided negating ancient culture without rational judgment was the abandonment and severance of outstanding ancient Chinese heritage in modern society.

Facing this situation, people of insight realized that the extreme and radical emotions generated by the May 4th Cultural Movement would hinder the modernization of culture, and further affect the comprehensive progress of China in politics, economy, society, and morality. Therefore, some intellectual elites during the May 4th period “took the opposite approach”. They tried to shift from the radical upsurge of “sweeping away old knowledge and old traditions” to the study of traditional heritage. They re-examined national heritage and the rich ancient Chinese literature resources from a modern perspective, hoping to draw on the ideas and achievements in outstanding ancient scholarship that were adaptable and corroborative with modern times to support the new spirit and new ideas of the May 4th Cultural Movement.

In 1919, Mao Zishui, Fu Sinian and others “Took the lead in proposing to study national heritage with the spirit, doctrine and methods of science. However, they believed that the spirit, doctrine and methods of science did not exist in ancient China, so they must be borrowed from the West, ‘adopting Europeanization’” (Hong, 2006, p. 16). The viewpoints of Mao Zishui, Fu Sinian and others provided new methods and solutions to address the inherent drawbacks of ancient knowledge, heralding the scientific research of “national heritage”. Although their approach was regarded by the radicals of the May 4th Movement as a “counter-current of the May 4th Movement”, a “betrayal” of the May 4th Movement and a “compromise” with traditional culture, this rational and non-conformist approach played a positive role in promoting the “systematic study of national heritage”. It was a bold attempt to introduce the positive elements of the May 4th Cultural Movement into the study of ancient culture. In 1919, Hu Shi regarded the systematic study of national heritage as “an inalienable part of the New Culture Movement and repeatedly emphasized the use of scientific methods to conduct this study” (Zeng, 2007, p. 78). In Hu Shi’s view, the movement of systematically studying national heritage has the remarkable characteristics of a paradigm revolution. It is not contradictory or confrontational to the May 4th Cultural Movement; instead, it presents a complementary relationship with it and is an extension and inheritance of the New Culture Movement. The essence of “systematically studying national heritage” is to use Western scientific methods to explore and interpret the knowledge states in ancient documents that are compatible with modern academic trends and conducive to promoting the construction of new discourse rules and academic systems. Therefore, the emphasis of “systematically studying national heritage” lies in the word “systematization”. “Systematization” is the means, form, and method, and it holds a primary position; “national heritage” is the content, the recipient, and is passive. Against the backdrop of the May 4th Movement, the academic research method has shifted from the ancient traditional one mainly based on Confucian classics to a scientific “transformation” with modern consciousness. “Obviously, in the New Culture Movement, systematically studying national heritage means using the ‘authority’ of science to drive away the ‘long-standing’, ‘authority’ of Confucian classics, enabling the research on ‘Chinese learning’ to undergo a ‘scientific baptism’” (Chen, 2015, p. 24). The attitude of rational criticism and the spirit of seeking truth and being practical, which are emphasized by scientism, have deeply influenced Hu Shi and others in “systematically studying national heritage with scientific methods”. It can be said that systematically studying national heritage is a continuation of the May 4th Cultural Movement. On the other hand, “systematically studying national heritage” represents “the concrete application of the

principles of democracy and science in the academic field” (Li, 1995, p. 71). Shift the mentality of excessive worship of “scientism exclusivism” towards reforming the research methods of Chinese traditional scholarship. Transform the criticism of traditional culture during the May 4th period into academic exploration and research, and truly introduce science into the practical study of ancient culture. Systematically studying national heritage does not mean a complete negation and abandonment of ancient legacies. In terms of content, it is guided by Western scientific research methods, systematically summarizing and organizing traditional Chinese ideological, cultural, and academic knowledge. It re-examines and explores the connotations of old culture from a modern perspective, organically integrating Chinese and Western ideological systems and universal requirements, and thus “re-creating civilization”, attempting to revive the excellent qualities of traditional Chinese culture and seek its basic modern significance and value.

To a certain extent, the movement of systematically studying national heritage “corrects” the extreme mentality of comprehensively criticizing traditional Chinese culture and the radical consciousness of so-called “smashing the Confucian shop” during the May 4th Cultural Movement with a mild and neutral attitude. Compared with the group unconscious psychology of excessive worship of “scientism exclusivism” during the May 4th period, it has more rational and inclusive progressive factors. Therefore, we can consider that the movement of “systematically studying national heritage” has promoted, to a certain degree, the modern transformation of traditional Chinese academic research and thinking, and moved them as a whole into the orderly framework of the modern academic system, exploring ancient cultural thoughts with scientific methods and thinking.

C. “History of Literary Criticism”: The “Historical” Framework Limitation and the Scientific Consciousness of “History” in Ancient Chinese Literary Theory

After the extreme mentality of “scientism exclusivism” during the May 4th Cultural Movement and the academic introduction of Western scientific methods through “systematically studying national heritage”, conducting scientific and effective modern-oriented research on ancient Chinese literary theory became a common demand in the academic community at that time. The “History of Chinese Literary Criticism” that originated in the 1920s not only inherited the spirit of the previous “scientism exclusivism” and connected with the academic theory of “systematically studying national heritage”, but also extended scientism to the study of ancient literary theory, making it systematic and academic. After being publicized as a slogan during the May 4th Cultural Movement and having its methodology explained in the context of “systematically studying national heritage”, scientism was finally transplanted into the compilation of “History of Literary Criticism” in the form of practical application. At the same time, with the passage of time, the demands of reality, and the subsequent “systematic study of national heritage”, the extreme ideas of scientism exclusivism have become more rational. This has demonstrated the refinement and professionalization of scientific paradigms in literary research, and thus the path towards the academicization of ancient Chinese literary theory has become clearer and brighter. Therefore, rather than saying that the History of Chinese Literary Criticism is a product of the May 4th Movement, it is more accurate to say that it is the crystallization of the systematic study of national heritage.

Scientism exclusivism has led to the emergence of academic works that are in line with the establishment of ancient Chinese disciplines. In particular, the writing of works such as *The History of Chinese Literary Criticism* has, to a certain extent, been influenced by the research ideas and writing norms of Western literary theory, both in terms of theoretical practice and system building. It has even played a crucial role in the formation of Chinese literary theory. “*The History of Chinese Literary Criticism* was written under the inspiration of Western academic trends, and naturally, in aspects such as the discipline name and theoretical construction, it has been influenced by Western literary theory to varying degrees...” (Wang, 2014, p. 97).

The perception of the inner spirit, the experience of transcending the self and worldly things, and the discourse expression of the inexpressible in ancient literary theory have been deconstructed by the modern scientific system and the writing of a series of *Histories of Chinese Literary Criticism*. Therefore, the conscious implantation of scientification in the “History of Chinese Literary Criticism” and the compilation of related books reflect the sequential evolution of ancient Chinese literary theory from the chaos of the May 4th Cultural Movement, through the guidance of scientific methods in the systematic study of national heritage, to the aggregation of the academicization of ancient literary theory. The Western knowledge system has also completed its domination over the thoughts of ancient Chinese literary theory. The traditional knowledge state, discourse rules, and means of expression of ancient literary theory have lost their ability to interpret modern literary phenomena and guide literary practices due to the systematic transformation of Western scientism, and have lost the space for the expansion of the significance of discourse power. Western knowledge and methods have “existed” in many works of *History of Chinese Literary Criticism*. In this regard, Professor Cao and others pointed out: “Since the establishment of the discipline of ‘History of Chinese Literary Criticism’, ancient Chinese literary theory has basically withdrawn from modern and contemporary literary creation and literary criticism practices. In this sense, the origin of the discipline history (History of Chinese Literary Criticism) means the arrival of the death of the discipline (ancient literary theory)” (Cao & Qiu, 2009, p. 191).

In addition, due to the emergence of scientific consciousness in the “History of Chinese Literary Criticism” and the completion of related works, ancient Chinese literary theory has been solidified in modern times in the “form of history” and with the “consciousness of historians”, merely becoming “antiques in the museum” for people to appreciate. And the existence of “history” is based on basic objective facts, which is a limitation of the systematic framework for ancient Chinese literary theory, which is accustomed to being “detached from worldly things” and “unconstrained”. The “poetry

and prose criticism” of ancient Chinese literary theory, driven by scientific methods, has evolved from the subjective and arbitrary creative mode of the past to the modal of theoretical logical analysis. The drawbacks of ancient literary theory are eliminated through systematic deduction. On the one hand, the form of ancient literary theory has been transgressed and damaged; on the other hand, it has also been transformed and rejuvenated. Influenced by the May 4th Cultural Movement and inspired by the trend of “systematically studying national heritage”, the “History of Chinese Literary Criticism” has become a relatively independent scientific form. Ancient Chinese literary theory has also broken through its original closed internal system, becoming an open and continuously developing system that integrates into the global discourse.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

It can be said that the two-dimensional aspects of the aphasia in ancient literary theory seemingly occur in a sequential mechanism, but they are also inevitably interconnected in terms of theoretical basis and internal development logic. Even during the historically turbulent “field” from the late Qing Dynasty to the May 4th Movement, the two aspects often complemented each other within the trend of doubting ancient traditions and the movement of systematically studying national heritage. It is precisely under the dual impetus of these two dimensions that the traditional discourse of ancient Chinese literary theory has lost its control over the modern and contemporary context, as well as the “game-setting” of discourse rules and the meaning-transformation of ways of expression. The mentality of worshipping scientism exclusivism and Western literary theory discourse, coupled with an inferiority complex, has exacerbated this trend. The self-doubt of the academic community regarding ancient literary theory, the estrangement between modern and contemporary literary criticism practices and ancient literary theory, and the formation of a temporal-spatial gap under post-colonialism have ultimately led to the “aphasia” of Chinese literary theory today. The tension formed by the combination of these two temporal-spatial dimensions has obscured the construction and development of modern Chinese literary theory by deconstructing the discourse rules and control of ancient Chinese literary theory.

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