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Literature in Chinese

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Source: *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Special Issue: Comparative Literature  
in East Asia (2017), pp. 70-88

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/complitstudies.54.1.0070>

Accessed: 19-06-2023 14:24 +00:00

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THE ESSENCE OF LITERATURE AS THE SYMBOL  
OF LIFE PAIN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL  
LITERATURE IN CHINESE

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*Shoutong Zhu*

ABSTRACT

Travel literature is a very important literary phenomenon in the history of both Chinese and world literatures. It is the literary prototype for the civilization of mankind. The most important tradition for travel literatures both in Chinese and in the world is the statement of life pain through literary creation. Travel literature has prototype meanings as well as long traditions in the value composition of Chinese literature or even entire Chinese culture. Travel literature in Chinese has richer cultural accumulation, and is easier to cast away from the influence and coverage of powerful foreign literature, from which to win its own independence. Although it is extremely convenient for residents in Hong Kong, Macau, and other Chinese communities in the world to travel, there have been no influential publications of travel literature until now. Such a crisis in travel literary writing has been caused by the fact that the writers in the Chinese language cannot know the key point of travel literature as the symbol of life pain.

KEYWORDS: travel literature, tradition, new literature in Chinese, life pain

Travel literature research is not a hotspot in literary studies, just like its writing situation in contemporary literature. However, to a broad understanding, travel literature is closely related to the original literary imagination of human beings and directly relevant to the main trend in the developmental history of Chinese and world literature. Thus, travel literature is, in fact, a major theme of human literary culture. In the historical period of New Literature

in Chinese, though it has been degenerated into a literary subject matter and distances itself from the general trend of literary development, travel literature still offers a large number of valuable references for the modern and contemporary development of the New Literature in Chinese, and provides significant resources for the academic research on it.

*Prototype Meanings of Travel Literature Both in Ancient China and Abroad*

In world literature, travel literature possesses important and even essential historical significance. It is not just a special literary theme or genre, but also a literary nature, namely, to imagine the realm of myth by means of fairy travel, representing a primitive thinking type accompanied with the rise of the mythological prototype.

Around the tenth century BC, there came out a mythic geography *Shan Hai Jing* (《山海经》, *Classic of Mountains and Seas*) in the East; while around the eighth century BC, there appeared Homer's epic *Odyssey* in the West. In almost 200 years, both in the East and West, the mythological systems were constructed by their literary classics, which not only belong to their own cultures, but also to the world. Interestingly, the subjects of these basic mythological systems both construct their narrative style by means of fictitious travel, which is presented as continuous walking and discovery, which, of course, uncovers fictional and imaginary scenes and things. These alike modes of construction can lead to a potential theory: people from the ancient times design their own original myth, and as well set up the route to the realm of myth and the method to reach it. Mythological systems constitute the basic prototype series of human civilization, and meanwhile, fictitious travels (actually can be termed as fairy travel) become a logical means and historical access to the culture of prototype. In this sense, just like what *Shan Hai Jing* and the *Odyssey* show, the fairy travel of human beings, which is the embodiment of the original travel form and imagination, is actually of great significance in cultural prototype.

The *Odyssey* is a typical fairy travel literary work. Its prequel the *Iliad* is one of the classical legends about heroes, while the *Odyssey* is the prototype of myth. The *Odyssey* begins after the Trojan War, in which Greek soldiers have returned to their homeland, but resourceful Odysseus is still on the way home leading his fleet and drifting at sea. They witness many islands and different coasts, experience a variety of magical attacks, fight with Neptune, Aeolus, and even supreme god of all gods Zeus, and then, accompanied by

the ghosts of Agamemnon and Achilles, make an arduous journey back to Odysseus' own palace. Since all he suffers come from the punishment and revenge of powerful gods, Odysseus' voyage is full of heroic sacrifices, painful distress, and hopeless setbacks. Odysseus' raft, by means of which he and his men drift at sea, is smashed again and again by thunders or waves, and even hurricanes and swords sent by the gods. Their every step home contains blood, tears, pain, and hardships.

About two centuries earlier than the *Odyssey*, *Shan Hai Jing* is not a storytelling epic, but a classic following the main line of mythology that mainly features diverse local products and scenes, including ancient geography, animals, plants, minerals, witchcraft, religion, history, medicine, folk and ethnic and other stuff. There are different stories about the time for its composing and process. It is generally believed that, in the sense of its edition, *Shan Hai Jing* was published in the Western Han Dynasty (202–9 BC), under the collation of Liu Xiang (刘向) and his son Liu Xin (刘歆), but in speaking of its content, it is usually considered to be completed in the early Zhou Dynasty (1046–249 BC). The background of the content it describes can trace back to the era of Da Yu (大禹), the Xia Dynasty (2033?–1562? BC). Therefore, some scholars even believe that the author of *Shan Hai Jing* is Da Yu himself, and this book keeps a careful and detailed chronicle of his “work” when he controlled flood and stabilized Nine Provinces. *Shan Hai Jing* is undoubtedly the oldest myth in Chinese culture. The dissemination and recording of these myths are unique, not to use narrative plot, but to record geography, scenery, alchemy, and others. However, the mythological spirit that *Shan Hai Jing* conveys is very close to the *Odyssey*: to reveal a remote, extensive, mystery, and eerie unknown world, to describe the beauty and magnificence of hard-to-reach mythical realm, and to express the tragic sense, aching feeling, and desperate mood of human beings, when they hope to reach this mythical realm, but ultimately have to face their incapability. It is exactly as the chapter “Hai Wai Nan Jing” (《海外南经》, “Classic of Regions Beyond the Seas: South”) writes: “That the earth supports, exists in the universe, and within the four seas; Illuminated by the sun and moon, and warped by the routes of stars; Timed by the four seasons, and chronicled by Jupiter cycle; What gods might create, were diverse in shape; Which might vanish soon, or endure forever; Could be thoroughly known by saints only!” (“地之所载，六合之间，四海之内，照之以日月，经之以星辰，纪之以四时，要之以太岁，神灵所生，其物异形，或夭或寿，唯圣人能通其道。”).<sup>1</sup> This mythical realm is obviously beyond human capacity. As for human cognition, it is even more impossible to perceive it.

Thus, in the existing myth prototype cognitive systems of cultural anthropology, the realm of myth, namely prototype itself, is adequately analyzed and reasoned. However, little attention has so far been given to either the impulse to reach mythical realm, or the route and method design, namely, the motif development of original fairy travel. This should perhaps be left to the establishment of the travel literature prospective: primitive fairy travel literature should be taken as the aesthetically original pattern of modern travel literature.

The *Odyssey* and *Shan Hai Jing* make Western civilization distant from Eastern civilization in terms of construction of mythical prototype. The Western prototype is based on maritime civilization, just as Odysseus' voyage and later Robinson Crusoe's driftage convey, while the Eastern prototype focuses on the civilization of mountains and forests. *Shan Hai Jing* generally records and narrates mountains, forests, and strange things in it. Even the chapter "Hai Nei Dong Jing" (《海内东经》, "Classic of Regions within the Seas: East"), which should describe seas, is still filled with the civilization of mountains and forests. For example, the lines follow like this: "The first Great River stems from Mount Wen, the North River stems from Mount Man, and South River stems from High Mountain, which is in the west to Capital" ("首大江出汶山, 北江出曼山, 南江出高山, 高山在城都西").<sup>2</sup> Even modern Kung Fu novels are full of various Cave Masters, or we should say that Kung Fu sects were founded in well-known mountains.

It is important to note that the route and access to the mythical realm in the *Odyssey* and *Shan Hai Jing*, or the method of fairy travel in these two classics, also show the original differences between Eastern and Western civilization. The voyage of heroes in the *Odyssey* is always inseparable from "earthly" travel tools, such as ships and rafts, which always become the targets of attack and destruction from gods, while various mythical realms in *Shan Hai Jing* can be simply accessible by means of ideation and imagination, but generally difficult to arrive at by boats or other "real" transportation. These different original designs of access to mythical realms reveal the differences of thinking habit between Eastern and Western civilization. Western civilization focuses attention and expectation on instrumental rationality, while Eastern civilization relies more on the ideating rationality than instrumental rationality. This thinking habit in Eastern civilization is endowed with "Wu Dai" (无待, with no dependence), a concept full of ideating rationality and philosophical meaning. Zhuang Zi's (庄子, BC 369–BC 286) *Xiaoyao You* (《逍遥游》, *Happy Excursion*) defines "Wu Dai" as: "Supposing that you were with eternal heaven and earth uprightness; Grasping rules of 'Six Qi' (six kinds of the air), Yin (阴, shady), Yang (阳, sunny), Wind, Rain, Dark

and Bright; what would you need to depend on, traveling peripatetically in infinite nihility?"<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, this "what to depend on" is the mythical realm of "with no dependence." It is also remarkably embodied in *Li Sao* (《离骚》, *The Malcontents*) by Qu Yuan (屈原, BC 346–BC 278). However, compared with it, Dante's travel, as the protagonist in his *Divine Comedy*, though ranging from hell to heaven, his every step is by means of "earthly" walk, and his every pace is focused on to be difficultly and painfully successive in "depending" reality.

Undoubtedly, the fairy travel "with no dependence" designed by primitive myth in the East makes later protagonists in mythological literature not necessarily resort to some special tools as transportation. They tread on clouds or drive the fog, as Sun Wukong<sup>4</sup> usually does, or rein various mythical creatures as saddle animals. Meanwhile, the "depending" fairy travel in the West cannot make their subsequent literary heroes in myth be natural and unrestrained. They may either ride on a magic mop or broom, sit on a flying tool like magic carpet in Arabian mythology, or use their dependable foot to practically cover the real-world ground. Though the methods of fairy travel are different, the spiritual experiences of it are amazingly similar. They all give expression to the torment of the soul and the suffering of life, just like what is described in the words in *Li Sao*, "Sobbing with heavy sighing" (长太息以掩涕). Qu Yuan sighs in other lines in this poem: "Depressed and frustrated, I wander lonesomely; Stuck in lonely plight, find no way-out at the moment; Vanished with the passage of water, I would rather die at once; Than to compromise with this sullen world" (饨郁悵余侘傺兮，吾独穷困乎此时也。宁溘死以流亡兮，余不忍为此态也。).<sup>5</sup> While Dante says in "The Gate and Vestibule of Hell," the third song of *Divine Comedy*: "Through me one goes into the town of woe, through me one goes into eternal pain, through me among the people that are lost."

Hence, the Eastern and Western classical literature forms and shares the same great tradition in this regard, to express the pain and anxiety of human beings, when they are unable to reach the brilliant and magnificent realm of mythology. After the refinements and training of Medieval literature, primitive fairy travel literature was in transition to vulgar picaresque literature, which was rising in the West around the fifteenth to sixteenth century, while the vernacular novels in ancient Chinese came about in the East around the sixteenth to seventeenth century, in which the representative works included *Yu Shi Ming Yan* (《喻世明言》, *Maxims to Enlighten the World*), *Jing Shi Tong Yan* (《警世通言》, *Maxims to Caution the World*), and *Xing Shi Heng Yan* (《醒世恒言》, *Maxims to Awaken the World*),

known as the trilogy “Three Maxims” edited by Feng Menglong (冯梦龙, 1574–1646); and another two collections in the same format edited by Ling Mengchu (凌蒙初, 1580–1644), *Chu Ke Pai An Jingqi* and *Er Ke Pai An Jingqi* (《初刻拍案惊奇》和《二刻拍案惊奇》), *Bang the Table in Surprises I and II*, known as the “Two Bangs.” These works contain many sighs of homeless people and stories of civilians wandering over the world. At the same time, accompanied with the rise of picaresque, hero roam literature came into existence as the situation required. There are typical hero roam works like Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* in the West and Li Ruzhen’s (李汝珍, 1763–1830) *Jinghua Yuan* (《镜花缘》, *Flowers in the Mirror*) in China. The first half of *Jinghua Yuan* tells the story that Tang Ao, Duo Jiugong, and other people travel overseas by junk, narrates their travel in 30 “countries” including the Country of Women, the Country of Gentlemen, the Country of Intestineless People, and other strange countries like the Country of Black Teeth, the Country of White People, the Country of Hypocritical People, the Country of Two-faced People, and the Country of Dogmen. The freak people, oddments and exotic customs they undergo fully demonstrate the fairy travel imagination of the literati in that era. It is very significant if the method of parallel study of comparative literature could be brought in the research on *Don Quixote* and *Jinghua Yuan*. This is not only because both of the works are novels typically representing the fairy travel tradition in Eastern and Western culture, but also because they both bear some irony meant to describe the setbacks suffered by the declining aristocrats in the magic travel and the lessons they are given. In fact, these travel literary works simultaneously proclaim the end of the fairy travel era for aristocrats, because they are unable to reap any benefits except embarrassment and discomfiture. Fairy travel is the human fantasy derived from a particular historical period, and necessarily appears to be pedantic and outmoded, when the historical development of human beings passes over that period.

When it steps out of the period of fairy travel literature, literary creation focuses on the wander of literati and scholars and the roam of those who are homeless or down and out. The history of world literature after the Renaissance quotes chapter and verse for travel literature, and lays out gorgeous and brilliant routes of literary development. One of them is the frequent variation in the space constructed by fairy travel, wander and roam, which is long-time prevalent in literary narrative and quite flexible in conception and expression. The desire to restrain this technique of expression might develop into the powerful drive to raise the “Three Unities” of classicist dramas after the seventeenth century. However, the freedom of literary conception and expression is unable to be suppressed. Together with Romanticism, the

internal returning power of wander and roam literature finally broke the strict disciplines of Neoclassicism. This returning power contributed a bit to the prosperity of sentimental travel literature and adventure literature in the eighteenth to nineteenth century. Laurence Sterne's novel *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* started the overflowing of sentimentalism, and simultaneously influenced and cultivated the sentimental disposition of new literature in China, including Yu Dafu (郁达夫, 1896–1945), who wrote “Ganshang de Xinglü” (《感伤的行旅》, “A Sentimental Journey”), with the same name as the Chinese edition of Sterne's novel. Then, the representative works of adventure literature are *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, and some others in the West. Meanwhile in China, the representative works that end traditional literature and start the New Literature in Chinese, such as *Lao Can You Ji* (《老残游记》), *The Travels of Lao Can* by Liu E (刘鹗, 1857–1909) and *Fusheng Liu Ji* (《浮生六记》, *Six Records of Floating Life*) by Shen Fu (沈复, 1763–1825), also restored this tradition and possessed such cultural significance. In fact, though *Honglou Meng* (《红楼梦》, *The Dream of Red Mansions*) and other classics are not in the category of travel literary works, their attractiveness and depth of expression exactly lie in the traveling part, such as Jia Baoyu's travels in Fantasy Land and Granny Liu's garden tour in the Grand View Garden.

In this sense, I should say that travel literature is the form of prototype in Eastern and Western literature, representing certain essential property of primitive environment for literary creation. This essential property is closely related to the primitive mode of human thinking. To reach a magnificent and miraculous mythical realm, literature must endure the pain of life, appreciate the misery of facing predicament, and experience the hardship and despair of any unexpected situation. Travel literature is a record of life and soul adventure, effectively stretching human spirit, whose situation originally curled up, and basing human yearning for an unknown world and infinite space on literature.

*Travel Literature: An Independent Genre  
from the Influence of Foreign Literature*

Due to the fact that travel literature has the prototype significance as well as a long tradition in entire Chinese literature or even entire Chinese culture, it is natural that when comparing with the similar works in world literature,



travel literature in Chinese has a richer cultural accumulation, and is easier to escape from the influence and coverage of powerful foreign literature from which it has gained independence. It is not going to follow the steps from ordinary literary writing “which hardly shakes off impacts from foreign writers”<sup>6</sup> since the very beginning, making Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881–1936), such an outstanding and mature writer, no exception.

In the field of New Literature in Chinese, life expression or even self-expression is treated as the main goal in creation, so of course literature of recluses (normally comes to be known as “literature of maintains and forests”) and leisure literature are targeted as the critical objectives. While travel literature has tight connections with traditional literature, it is also categorized into the type to be criticized and liquidated. Given this cultural context, it rules out the possibility of travel literature as the major type of new literature, and would not be specially encouraged but can easily be ignored.

In “Wenxue Geming Lun” (《文学革命论》, “On Literary Revolution”), a named article of “rising in revolt” for New Literature Movement, Chen Duxiu (陈独秀, 1879–1942) impressively criticizes the “Three Principles,” and attacks the Guizu Wenxue (aristocratic literature), Gudian Wenxue (classical literature), and the Shanlin Wenxue (literature of recluses). To him, the Shanlin Wenxue (literature of recluses, to enjoy and write about maintains and forests) reveals the tradition of classical literature advocating reclusion, and encouraging fair travel, which is coincidentally the target for New Literature to judge and abandon. Based on this fundamental ideology, traditional travel literature is undoubtedly not to continue.

In this way, the New Literature is now faced with several more urgent “life problems.” The pain and sadness in real life is so heavy that it is sufficient enough for writers to express their feelings of tragedies. They do not need to express such tragic feelings with imaginary or experimental travel literature. In any era when realism and classicism are booming, the proper travel literature may not be developed on a large scale. It is only in the era of romanticism and sentimentalism where the fertile soil can be formed thoroughly for travel literature. The travel component in Lu Xun’s works and in the works of authors from Literary Research Association is smaller than that in the works of Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo, and others from the Creation Society. The story “Nan Qian” (《南迁》, “Migrating to the South”) by Yu Dafu, and the serious stories “Piaoliu Sanbuqu” (《漂流三部曲》, “Drifting Trilogy”) by Guo Moruo, are typical representative works and wield a lot of influence at that time. All of the above reflects the corresponding relation between the literary tendency and travel literature. Generally speaking, realist works comparatively more refer to people’s material living condition, while

romanticist works more focuses on the spiritual aspect of people's life. The difficulties of material living conditions make it hard to carry on traveling, while the spiritual adventure and romance encourage the impulsion of people's long journeys.

Like what "a sentimental Journey" has showed, the travel essays written by Yu Dafu are filled with strong memories of sentimentalism. Every step out of traveling and regression from the trip is fulfilled with pain of life, setbacks of emotion, and sentiments of feelings. His story "Nan Qian" ("Migrating to the South") has a particular tone of travel literature. Through the famous essay *E Xiang Jicheng* (《饿乡纪程》, *Travel Notes in Russia*), the revolutionary writer Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899–1935) has pushed travel literature into the sacred altar of New Literature. Litterateurs with revolutionary romantic tendency naturally start to regain the cultural traditions of travel literature. The novel *Shaonian Piaobozhe* (《少年漂泊者》, *The Young Vagrant*) by Jiang Guangci (蒋光慈, 1901–31) is a typical representative, with the protagonist Wang Zhong as a sentimental flaneur, in whose influence the novels and dramas of revolutionary professional journey emerges. In these works, the heroes are always travelers, and they are all wanderers, aiming at getting their official positions away from their hometowns or the cities they are accustomed to living in. Such novels are *Liuwang* (《流亡》, *Exile*) by Hong Lingfei (洪灵菲, 1902–34) and *Di Quan* (《地泉》, *Fountain*) by Yang Hansheng (阳翰笙, 1902–93). There is also a revolutionary professional journey movie *Sun Zhongshan* (《孙中山》, *Sun Yat-sen*), an unfinished work and an unfinished "Silver Dream" by Tian Han (田汉, 1898–1968). Regardless of whether it is a novel or a movie, it always puts the track of revolutionists into relentless steps of imprisonment, searching, sorrowing, depressing, and inspiring in the journey of that imprisonment, exactly like what has been demonstrated in *Fuxing* (《复兴》, *Renaissance*), and part of *Di Quan* (Fountain) by Yang Hansheng.

Almost every drama composed by Tian Han more or less displays the emotional tone of sentimental travels, with the most typical examples as *Nan Gui* (《南归》, *Coming back to the South*) and *Gutan de Shengyin* (《古潭的声音》, *The Voice of Ancient Pond*). In *Nan Gui*, the protagonist as a poet is wandering in the world freely for love and beauty. One day, he takes leave from the small village in the south of Yangtze River where he once temporarily stayed, determined to go northeast to look for his previous lover, a beautiful shepherdess. He fails and returns back to the south with his exhausted sorrow and endless sadness, expecting a reunion with the village girl named Chun Guniang (Spring Girl) who once devoted her heart to him. But her mother tells the poet that she has already been engaged to

someone else in the village. The pained poet has to choose to leave again, with his luggage and his cane, toward an even further and unknown world, to continue his exile. The anguished yet sentimental wandering is filled with a temptation of poetic features in the village girl's heart. Surprisingly, due to the beautiful wandering, the village girl tells the boy who has been passionately and enthusiastically waiting for and loving her, she tells the poet: "Look at him, how different he is from you. When he shows I have no idea where he is coming from; when he is leaving, I do not know where he is heading to. He is a God to me in my heart. No matter whether he sits down or stands up, his eyes are always looking afar. I am wondering what an interesting place it should be, and how many beautiful things it must be filled with."<sup>7</sup> Traveling toward the distant places, even though it is just a wandering, is indeed fascinating to her. That is the representation of the original mood of travel literature.

That is the expression from the village girl, and her monologue as well. It also represents the Bohemian aesthetic idea of Tian Han and his Southern States Society. The romantic yet sorrowful Southern States Society career in fact represents the history and times through the way of traveling, echoing the performance of a pathetic art of behavior. At that time, leading a group of young artists, carrying the idea of art dreams, and calmly facing the inevitable misfortunes ahead, Tian Han and his group were on the move among Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing, or even further places. During these journeys, they traveled, created, performed the plays they wrote, and practiced teaching for the Southern States Arts Academy. That was the vivid traveling summary that thrived in Chinese literature and Chinese live arts from 1920 to 1930, an art action that would be engraved permanently in modern Chinese literary history, filled with enthusiasm of arts and sorrow of infinity, just like the aesthetic aura revealed from the theatrical creations by Tian Han in that generation.

The roam action of Tian Han and his art team has been referred to as a Bohemian style of arts by reviewers and theater history researchers.<sup>8</sup> In fact, their creations, performances, and pursuit of arts completely belong to themselves, to the era when they live, and to the self-selection of literary survival mode in that era, especially having no direct relations with the influence of foreign literature and art behavior when creating their works. It is also in that era that most of the themes in the majority of modern Chinese literature still stuck heavily under the powerful influence of foreign literature, while in the writing of travel literature, it walked out independently and stepped toward the unique road of modern Chinese literature. From the perspective of literary theme, having direct relations with the realistic experience of life

and the self-selection of arts, travel literature gained self-independence from new literature in Chinese at a very early stage. Since traveling in life and spirit can only be based on self-experience and self-comprehension in life, it is difficult for foreign literature to act as a forerunner or example. Such a work is *Fusheng Liu Ji* (*Six Chapters of Floating Life*), and though it is sentimental and wielded a lot of influence when it was originally discovered, it is still unlikely to become a model of modern travel literature. Therefore, travel literature is probably the type that can most reflect its originality in modern Chinese literature, though it failed to gain popularity during the 1910s and 1920s in China.

If the “Roam” of Southern State Society means the major romantic tendency of these young writers and artists, the travel literature created by a group of modern writers forced to travel under various circumstances shows the unique prospects of modern Chinese literature in 1930s. In this sense, political wandering literature, with the sentimental expression by northeast vagabondages after “the September 18th Incident” in 1931 as its main content, is in fact a travel literature with a special meaning. The comparatively touching description among them comes from two outstanding young writers, Xiao Jun (萧军, 1907–88) and Xiao Hong (萧红, 1911–42). Their hometown had been brutally occupied by the Japanese imperialists, and then they were forced to start their tough journey of running away. When they arrived in the so-far peaceful place Qingdao, and saw the “green foot of hill” there, they yelled, “Oh, motherland, we are screaming like we were in dreams.”

The indignation and sadness, as well as the relevant romantic sentiments revealed from the yelling—“like we were in dreams”—are still the keynotes of this work. In the movie *Malu Tiabshi* (《马路天使》, *Angels on the Road*), Tian Han composes a “Seasons Song” through the sweet voice of an actress, emblematically expressing the situation and sentiments of being forced to run away from their hometown and be desperate travelers due to the political issues. “The lotus is fragrant in the autumn, the beautiful girl dreams of her hometown day and night. Can’t she meet her parents when she wakes up, she can only see in moonlight from the window.”

This is the typical Chinese traveling romanticism, and the closest aesthetic feelings to combine with the aesthetic traditions of Chinese poems. “Gleaming moonlight shines at bedside, like frost, to my eyes. Raising my sight, I see a vivid moon, lowering it, my homeland comes to mind” (“床前明月光，疑是地上霜。举头望明月，低头思故乡。”). The song reminded the girl and all readers of Li Bai (李白, 701–762)’s famous poem of his nostalgia. Although the romantic sentiments and its expression containing the traces of old century from Western literature, it is still

the typical Chinese way to express emotions and to best isolate from the influence of foreign literature.

The performance of this traveling theme and sentiment of the modern wandering build up a closer relationship with the aesthetic conception of traditional Chinese literature, from which forces the literary creations to be powerful enough to shake off the influences of foreign literature. On the other hand, writing concerning foreign affairs in New Literature creation, such as travel literature, idealistic traveling notes and so on, provides Chinese people with an opportunity to read the foreign travel experience from their own emotional and rational experience, or even summarizes a Chinese type of conclusion that foreign cultural is declining; therefore, it resists the natural friendliness between foreign literature and Chinese writers from the emotional and rational level, expediting the isolation of travel literature to foreign literature.

In that sense, the essay collection *Bali de Linzhao* (《巴黎的鳞爪》, *Paris Splinter*) by Xu Zhimo (徐志摩, 1897–1931) and *Ou You Zaji* (《欧游杂记》, *European Tour Journal*) by Zhu Ziqing (朱自清, 1898–1948) should be given more attention. Xu Zhimo's essays of European travels devoted the complementary and ardor to Keats, Romain Rolland, Da Vinci as well as Cambridge and Florence and so on, which are attached with traditional Chinese ideology and strong oriental aesthetic information and is a completion under the fascinating comparison between Chinese and Western culture. In Xu Zhimo's essay "Feilengcui Xianhua" (《翡冷翠闲话》, "Digression in Florence Hills"), he writes, "As Goethe said, nature is the greatest book. We are able to read the most profound information from every single word of his book. And everyone is easy to comprehend his language; Alpass and Five-old Peaks, Sicily and Mount Putuo, The River Rhine and the Yangtze River, Lake Geneva (Lake Léman) and the West Lake, sword-leaved Cymbidium and Viburnum, the West Reed Snow in Hangzhou and sunset red tide in Venice, lark and nightingale, not to mention the same yellow, purple, and green, of yellow wheat, wisteria, and grass, respectively, growing equally on earth, and waving rhythmically in the wind. The symbols applied should be coincidentally equal." He demonstrates the homogeny between Chinese and Western scenes and culture through a splendid poetic comparison, not only abandoning the model of simply copying foreign literature, but also contributing the unique observation of his abundant accomplishment in Chinese culture to world literature. Xu Zhimo's first poem about his first goodbye to Cambridge titled "Kangqiao Zaihui ba" (《康桥再会吧》, "Farewell to Cambridge"), applying the traditional yet elegant Chinese language to describe Chinese hibiscus flowers in Cambridge, appears to be a typical Chinese style.

There is an essay “Ou You Manji” (《欧游漫记》, “European Tour Journal”) in the collection *Bali de Linzhao* (*Paris Splinter*) by Xu Zhimo, while Zhu Ziqing writes an exclusive travel literature *Ou You Zaji* (*European Tour Journal*). As Xu Zhimo has displayed, the essays by Zhu Ziqing observe and analyze the European civilization from a Chinese cultural perspective, and participate in the construction of ancient glory of China in travel literature. The following is what he has used to describe Plaza San Marco in “Venice”: “Here is the most bustling place in Venice, also the most solemn place. Except of the west, they are surrounded by constructions with more than three hundred years of history. San Marco is located in the center of east, with about eight to nine hundred years of history—bell tower is next to it in the right. Then turn right is the ‘new government.’ On the left side of church is the ‘old government.’” The meaning of comparative literature provided by this kind of work is the illustration of Western culture with the involvement of Chinese cultural elements.

With a typical Chinese aesthetic attitude of observing the culture and civilization of Western countries, and then creating the Chinese travel literature independently from the West, this type of literary style should be traced back to *Xin Dalu Youji* (《新大陆游记》, *Travel Notes of the New Continent*) and *Ou You Xin Ying Lu* (《欧游心影录》, *The Recipient Records of Travels in Europe*) by Liang Qichao. Although his works are generally not going to be categorized into the products of New Literature, they still influence the relevant creations of New Literature in Chinese. His *Xin Dalu Youji* unexpectedly and specifically narrates “the truths in American politics, history and society.” His travel literature seldom spares efforts to document general magnificent scenes, but more focuses on social culture. “Before and After War of Europe” and “Wedge” in *Ou You Xin Ying Lu* (*The Recipient Records of Travels in Europe*) describe Europe as the “the awful atmosphere in air” with Chinese writing techniques and cultural ideas, indicating a powerful yet symbolic meaning—the climate in north Europe is indeed thoroughly forested. With an earlier coldness, even around the time of rural Chongyang Festival, there is already a scene of deeper winter, relentless rainy and gloomy days, sometimes occupied by heavy yellow fog. Occasionally the sunshine would break the levels of cloud and fog with some hesitation, signaling its location but fading away when we warmly welcome it. This kind of baseline becomes the major beginning for him to describe the decline of Western civilization. No matter whether it is observation or writing, it all belongs to the traditional Chinese way of cultural digestion and aesthetic expression.

Obviously, the travel literature of traditional New Literature walks away from the influence of foreign literature. With its accumulation of literary

prototype and its inevitable influence, New Literature gradually regains the structure of travel literature and achieves remarkable accomplishments. There is a great number of literary writings with exotic flavor. They more often are written by the writers returning back to their hometowns and expressing their disappointment and loneliness when traveling and returning. The latter are also the original products struggled away from the influence of Western literature, and engraved with profound Chinese literary writing.

When it comes to representatives of travel literature with exotic flavor, of course the priority should be given to *Nan Xing Ji* (《南行记》, *Journey to the South*) by Ai Wu (艾芜, 1904–1992). Although it chooses a wanderer as its protagonist, it has not been influenced by Western picaresque novel. More importantly, *Nan Xing Ji* is filled with a cultural atmosphere of southwestern border areas and the Thai-to-Myanmar region. In its cultural connotation, the folktale and local customs alternate and form a strong literary narrative aura, which enlarges the distances with Spanish picaresque novels such as “*Lazarillo de Tormes*,” the one that raises an intensively social religious criticism. Some researchers compare *Nan Xing Ji* to “*Wei Xiaoe’s Journey to the West*,” a serial folktale in Sichuan Province, in an isomorphic way, suggesting that “these stories not only influence his wandering behavior but also restrict the molding of its protagonists.”<sup>10</sup> With a thorough analysis of that, they finally approve that there are fundamental differences between *Nan Xing Ji* and the Western picaresque novels.

### *A Reflection on Contemporary China’s Travel Literature*

In both Taiwan and Mainland China, contemporary literature in Chinese general cuts off the relationship with the literary tradition of similar literary works in modern China. It is a long period for Chinese writers after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, without the war, as well as without the free travel abroad. So there is no travel literature of high quality in Mainland China. Although it is extremely convenient for residents in Hong Kong, Macau, and other Chinese communities in foreign countries to travel, there have been no influential publications of travel literature until now.

Successful travel literature is a means to recall special life experiences. In other words, the normality of free travel does not always imply brilliant effects in travel literature, but when a kind of travel behavior is somehow defined as one’s particular action and even an adventurous ordeal, the literature of

these behaviors tends to shine with brilliance, which most literary works find harder to achieve generally.

In the 1970s, Taiwan opened itself to the outside world, allowing people greater freedom to travel in the world, but such freedom also made travel literature seem insipid. However, Echo (San Mao, 1943–91) attained enormous success on her travel literature because of her tourist destination, the Sahara Desert, which was a dangerous zone and most people were afraid of it and avoided it. These travel essays by Echo were edited as *Sahara de Gushi* (《撒哈拉的故事》, *The Stories of the Sahara*), which was published in 1976. The book was gradually welcomed and received great attention in Chinese reader circles. This marked that the receptive mechanism of travel literature tended to become mature in the New Literature in Chinese. *Sahara de Gushi* recounted not only the love between Echo and Jose, a Spanish man who was in deep love with her in the desert, but also their extraordinary experience of overcoming the odds so as to settle down in desert, their suffering and hardships, and their anxieties and confusions about facing nature, life and love, and friendship. Above all, their travel experiences earned respect and these travel notes gained love from the readers.

Around that time, many works of travel literature sprang up, but none of them were as attractive and refreshing as *Sahara de Gushi*. Since the late 1970s, the passion of writing travel literature has been reinstated by the policy of opening, but almost immediately the shortages exposed themselves—most of the travel notes were creepy and cheesy, which dully outlined all strange scenes and travel processes to propagate how splendid the travel group was, how they were warmly treated, how great the services were, how incredible the sights were, and so on. Vulgar travel works sprang up under a combination of light flaunting and sophistication, banal and dumb diction. Those words were presented often in the well-covered readings in travel magazines and mass media, while the writers of those words knew nothing about what makes travel literature valuable or the beauty of Echo's travel works. The beauty of travel literature is to stay away from fastness and to demonstrate the sufferings in a travel where personality, cultural spirit, mind breadth, characteristics, tastes, friendship, and realm were refined to overcome those difficulties. Echo's travel works, at this point, declared the pioneering position of travel works under the perspective of the writers after the open policy and that they should be counted in world literature as an excellent contributor to the new Chinese literature.

The odious style of merry tour writing in the New Literature in Chinese was as severe as "The Joys of Travel" in *Fusheng Liu Ji* (*Six Chapters of a Floating Life*) by Shen Fu. The chapter "The Joys of Travel" was elaborately



written, recording his knowledge and impression of his travel destinations (mainly Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Yangzhou) in elegance. But the word “joy” in the title has betrayed its vulgarity, because the key of the note is not a depiction of convenient traffic, but a demonstration of pleasure over experiences and joy including either the company of a famous person, a warm reception, song and dance, or leisurely wine tasting. But in travel, there are no exhausted moments and hardships. Although this “merry tour” was happy, it was flooded with praise and cockiness in arrogant criticism and arguments. Travels of this type, similar to an inexperienced lad who lacks corresponded life experience and value bearing, walking in his back garden with complacency and satisfaction, might provide readers with certain scene depiction, but hardly brilliant life enlightenment. Unfortunately, such extravagant writing related to “merry tour” is becoming a tendency in travel literature in Chinese. Among them are enormous “backpackers” travel essays and gourmet travel writings. These words rank top life enjoyment (even luxurious ones) and show off the writers’ delight toward travel and writing, which are actually loathsome and boring except as little cheap intellectual references. Therefore, most “merry tour” notes with showing off and exaggeration generally exclude enough reading and appreciation value.

The aesthetic essence of travel literature lies in the demonstration of the hard journey, confusions of the traveler, the bitterness and happiness in wandering, hoping in painful ideal pursuit, and even the romantic fantasy in desperation, flapping wings in the abyss of agonizing. Travel literature with these elements can be deep, charming, sweet, and meaningful with rich experiences and joy after pains. Because of that, Ai Wu put forward the essence of travel after his journey from home in Sichuan to Yunnan on foot: “Wandering in poverty was more interesting and attractive than traveling with wealth.”<sup>11</sup> This is a nobler and more enviable travel realm compared with the “merry travel” of “The Joys of Travel,” and the permanent art enchantment of Ai Wu’s *Nan Xing Ji* (*Journey to the South*) was the comprehensive portray of life enjoyment and suffering in a romantic “suffering travel” genre.

There is no doubt that travel essays of Yu Qiuyu (余秋雨, 1946–), who devotes himself to cultural perspective writing and hence is called the pioneer of cultural essays, has injected a drift of wind to travel essays of the New Literature in Chinese. Indeed, rich cultural concerns and analyses, and even cultural criticism, shaped the fundamental connotation, genre, and value of Yu’s essays, which was the most credited and influential travel essay writing since the embryo of the New Literature in Chinese in the 1980s. These essays were based on the fertile soil of traditional Chinese culture, thus symbolizing a modern travel literature image shaking off foreign factors.

Yu was a preeminent scholar famous for Western drama theory study, and his essays successively inheriting traditional Chinese culture instead of foreign elements accurately show the independence of cultural character of new literature. In the middle and later 1980s, the cultural craze blanked the Chinese world and surely gave rise to Yu's cultural essay. That was an era of cultural zeal during which every culture-related label gave rise to another fashion, let alone Yu's essays of great depth with acute cultural criticism and powerful and proficient writing. Despite the intellectual and historical faults, Yu's essays can be listed among masterpieces of travel works—poetically zooming the historical customs and epochal sights of Suzhou area in “Baifa Suzhou” (《白发苏州》, “Silver Suzhou”), mercilessly revealing and deeply criticizing of foreign cultural invasion and so-called cultural betrayal in “Daoshi Ta” (《道士塔》, “Pagoda”). More importantly, he proved in an apathetic essay writing area that essays can be composed in this way, namely, overriding the artificial bound of alleged narrative essay, lyric essay, and argumentative essay, to present cultural stories and cultural sights in combination with poetic expression and pointed argument in travel notes. That has absolutely widened essay writing and epochal influence of the essays. With historical writing achievement, Yu and his travel essays could be regarded as the lasting cultural spotlight of the area.

However, the charm of Yu's travel essays was quickly fading. Although his works are still bestsellers and his achievements are still delightfully talked about by the circles of readers, the cultural depth of his rigid and weak intellectual structure is doubted, as well as the praise and disparagement of good and evil in his works. What mattered was that people no longer found his works so attractive. As a composer of travel literature, Yu's posture and figure between the lines revealed that he was more than a concentrated traveler; at least, he was different from an ordinary one. Such words in his prose “Piaobozhemen” (《漂泊者们》, “The Vagrants”) had become a common label of Yu's identity: “A local newspaper carried some reports of my lectures in succession,” which turned into a routine of his works. This identity made his travel doomed to be “Merry Tour” ones rather than “Painful Journey” ones. Thus, he was disqualified from sentimentality and hardships and he could not write heart-breaking and soul-touching travel essays, of which the words are pitiful.

In general, travel essays will pay a heavy price when their writers forget their mission but define themselves as professors in a fixed field of “Word Shows.” The professors cannot be sentimental “suffering travelers,” but sermonizers or critics with strong strength and luxury in spirit, who need extravagant and luxurious travel notes to decorate their world and enlighten

their thoughts in travel! Let us take “Lushan” (庐山, Mount Lushan) by Yu for example. In order to give Mount Lushan the cultural identity of “Scholars’ Preference,” the writer quoted poems and stories of Sima Qian (ca. 145 or 135–86 BC), Hui Yuan (334–416), Lu Xiuqing (406–477), Tao Qian (132–194) and Xie Lingyun (385–433), additionally stated about Li Bai (701–762), Bai Juyi (772–846), Ouyang Xiu (1007–72), Su Shi (1037–1101), Lu You (1125–1209), Tang Yin (Tang Bohu, 1470–1523), and so on, and in relation to Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200). With mature writing skills, the writer successfully avoids writing the essay into a name roll of historical culture, but it is hard to avoid the suspicion of extravagance and word stuffing by the frequent appearance of so many cultural heroes, the bygones and details of their activities. This kind of work is contrary to the principles of travel literature and misses the leeway, even the natural and unrestrained characters of essays. It is fair to say that Yu Qiuyu, whose works have both market and some literary history value, is the most outstanding writer of travel literature in contemporary Chinese writing. The shortage of his creation methods in some aspect actually exists in other writers in contemporary literature. None of them could catch up with their predecessor Ai Wu, nor did they realize that “wandering in poverty” and writing went painfully, which might be the best way to express the soul in the specific field, namely travel literature. Expression of life pain should be the ideal essence of literary works; it is also a brilliant way to approach travel literature.

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### Notes

1. “Hai Wai Nan Jing” in *Shan Hai Jing* (《山海经》, *Classic of Mountains and Seas*), ed. Guo Pu (Shanghai, Shanghai Ancient Book Press, 1991), 54.

2. *Ibid.*, 68.

3. Zhuang Zi, “Xiaoyao You” in *Zhuang Zi Jin Zhu Jin Yi* (《庄子今注今译》, *Zhuang Zi Annotated and Translated Today*), ed. Chen Guying (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), 14.

4. A mythological hero in the Chinese classic novel *Xi You Ji* (《西游记》, *Pilgrimage to the West*), who is a monkey monster with a very magic finger of God.

5. Qu Yuan, "Li Sao," in *Chuci Xin Zhu* (《楚辞新注》, *Newly Notes for Chuci*), ed. Nie Shiqiao (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Book Press, 1980), 9.

6. Lu Xun, "Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi Xiaoshuo Erji Xu" ("Preface to the Second Collection in Fictions of the Great Series of Chinese New Literature"), in *Lu Xun QuANJI* (《鲁迅全集》, *Collected Works of Lu Xun*) (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 2005), vol. 6, 247.

7. Tian Han, "Nan Gui" in *Tian Han JuzuoXuan* (《田汉剧作选》, *Selected Works of Tian Han's Drama*) (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1981), 118.

8. Zhu Shoutong, "Lun Tian Han de Boximiya Shi Xiju Fengge" (《论田汉的波希米亚式戏剧风格》, "On Tian Han's Bohemian Style in His Drama"), *Wenxue Pinglun* (*Literary Review*) 3 (1998): 97.

9. See Xiao Jun's essay "Dalian Wan Shang" (《大连丸上》, "On the Ship of Dalian"), in Lu Xun "Sanyue de Zhujie" ("Concession in the March"), *Lu Xun QuANJI* (《鲁迅全集》, *Collected Works of Lu Xun*) (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 2005), vol. 6, 532.

10. Zhang Yong, "Ai Wu Xiaoshuo de Minsu Xushi" ("Ai Wu's Folk Narration in His Fictions"), in *Ai Wu Jinian Wenji* (《艾芜纪念文集》, *Collection for Memory Ai Wu*), (Hong Kong: Tian Di Press, 2014), 202.

11. Ai Wu, *Xiang dao Piaobo* (《想到漂泊》, *Thinking of Drift*) (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), 1.