

The Future of Literature

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About 20 years ago, people in China predicted the future prospect of literature like this: The rapid growth of movie & TV art will occupy the space of literature to a great degree; literary writing and appreciation is no longer important in the social culture. With the rapid development and popularization of the Internet, plus the ubiquitous modern communication means like the cell-phone, the decline of literature is inevitable. Although we cannot predict the accurate time of the disappearance of literature, its decline is definite.

Yes, many people, including those engaged in literary creation, would make such a judgment 20 years ago or even a bit earlier.

20 years later, the prosperity of literature has gone beyond a lot of people's anticipation in China. Traditional paper literature is still influential and it serves as an important demonstration in terms of art and the integration of thought and art. Internet literature is a new force emerged unexpectedly. Numerous writers are finding and proving their own talent in writing through Internet literature; Internet literature also has a large audience--though they are divided in types of writing. But it is no doubt that the appearance and gradual development of Internet literature caused the expansion of readers of literature in a geometric progression. Now in China, we are unable to count how many people writing online can be called cyberspace writers. But we can imagine that but for the development of the Internet, a lot of people will not pick literary writing, but continue their professions in banking, architecture, IT, etc. Nowadays, the cell-phone has already become the most important company in people's life and they can't be separated from it even for a moment. There are all keys to the doors of life on the cell-phone, including literature among them. People read through their cell-phone. In today's China, you just can't simple claim that those looking through their cell-phone are addicted to games or other time killers. The reading of literature is finished on the cell-phone in many cases; even some people are beginning to write with the cell-phone.

In other words, the modern technology and media have changed the ecology of literature completely. But they do not make literature decline, but have given it a pair of scientific wings to let it fly even more forceful and higher. The social influence of literature is being strengthened. Perhaps the writers don't have as a strong sense of profession as before, but those who have produced works approved by the society are enjoying great reputation and influence. A lot of films or TV dramas are becoming influential because they were adapted from the literary works---these are traditional literary books or all kinds of novels on the Internet. In China, a lot of people analyze the current situation of literature with the concept of literature population. Traditional writers, authors of Internet literature, editors of literary magazines/newspapers/ publishing houses, workers of literature websites, workers of such organizations as the writers' association, etc. amount to a huge figure if the numerous literary readers are also counted. Some people used the phrase of "all people are writers" to describe the large population of literature today. In my opinion, "all people are writers" is definitely exaggerated. But, because of the development of the Internet, popularization of the cell-phone and the influence of blog, weibo, WeChat and official accounts of WeChat, we can say that the number of people who would like to read literary works and try to

write literary works among the cell-phone subscribers has seen an unprecedented increase. That is what people dared not imagine 20 years ago. Those who were never related to writing in the past and are shy to express their thoughts and feelings by characters have joined the team of writing slowly until manifesting their talent in creation.

The increasing influence of literature is also reflected by a rising number of people applying to join Chinese Writers Association and local writers' associations in recent years. Take the membership of Chinese Writers Association as an example, the number of applicants for this year topped 2,000. The point is that all these are applicants who have met the primary requirements, namely publication of more than two literary works and a certain number of works in the literary newspapers and periodicals. The number of the members of Chinese Writers Association has already reached 12, 000 at present. The number of the members of provincial writers associations nationwide is above 50,000 in total. From these figures we can realize the magnitude of the team of literary creators. Looking back, people's prediction that literature would gradually decline with the growth of movie & TV, the Internet and cell-phone 20 years ago has not become reality. Instead, the reality is that literature has shown unprecedented vigor---a large variety of literary writing and divided groups of readers.

After all, it is an impossible task for us to predict the possibility and development of literature in the future based on today's situation; and it is very difficult for us to realize the prediction in the real situation of the future. It is just the same as we did not predict the present situation accurately 20 years ago. However, we can still conduct certain analysis on the inherent change of literary creation. For instance, in the area of novels, the integration of contents and form is becoming the trend according to the current development of the Chinese novel circle. After realism and avant-garde literature running parallel with each other interspersed with ups and downs for a number of years, the two are on the road of integration in recent years. Chinese writers are using the creation method of realism while breaking new grounds in art by incorporating many factors of avant-garde literature into their own creation. This integration makes contemporary novels not only have the traditional essence but also the modernity in line with the times. I have made special exploration into this point. I think there are many outstanding novels in contemporary China with not only the modernity, but also the nature of a fable, not only the traditional root from the land, history and life, but also a strong modern identity and the creation of the writer conscious of art, thus forming a plump quality of contemporary novels. We even can say that the boundary between serious literature and popular novels is beginning to get blurred in an era when traditional paper literary works and Internet novels co-exist. One can find the regional customs, history of ethnic groups, folk legends and the latest contemporary life as well as a broad global vision at the same time in the same novel. How can a writer leverage these factors, making them elements integrated into the novel to form a joint force? And how can he/she create a work having both the cultural connotations and the rhythm in real life, and incorporating the serious theme, legendary story and esthetic aspiration as a whole? All this is testing the ability of a writer in summarization and his/her strength in writing. I believe and feel from my limited scope of reading that the trend is the same in the dimension of the world and even there are precedents.

Looking forward based on the situation of the contemporary China, we have the reason to be optimistic about the prospect of literature since people are becoming increasingly related to literature in life.

文学的未来

阎晶明

大约20年前，在中国，人们是这样预测文学未来前景的：影视艺术不断发展，大大挤占了文学的生存空间，文学写作与欣赏已经不再是社会文化生活中的重要方式了。随着网络迅猛发展和普及，更加上手机等现代通讯在生活里的无处不在，文学的式微就是一种必然的结局，虽然我们不能预测文学消亡的准确时间，但它的衰落无可挽回。

是的，20年前甚至再早一点时间，很多人，包括从事文学创作的人，都是如此感慨和判断文学形势的。

20年后的今天，在中国，文学的繁盛超出了许多人的预想。传统的纸质文学依然具有强大的影响力，在艺术上，在思想与艺术的融合上，起着重要的示范作用。网络文学异军突起，众多的写作者通过网络文学发现和证明着自己的创作才华，网络文学也拥有广大的受众，尽管他们是以分众式地选择呈现的，但毫无疑问，因为网络文学的出现和逐渐发展，形成了文学阅读人群的几何式扩充。现在，在中国，人们几乎无法统计有多少人在网络上写作并可称之为网络作家，但可以设想，如果没有网络的发达，很多人不会走上文学写作的道路，而是继续他们的银行、建筑、IT等职业。发展到今天，手机已成为人们生活中最重要的陪伴，几乎须臾不能离开。手机上拥有打开生活之门的所有钥匙。这其中，也包括了文学。人们在手机上阅读，在今天的中国，已不能简单判断人们无一例外地低头翻看手机就是沉溺于游戏或其他不务正业的事情。文学阅读在很多时候在手机上完成。甚至一部分人开始尝试用手机进行写作。

总而言之，现代科技和现代传媒彻底改变了文学的生态，但它们不是使文学式微，而是使文学插上了科学的翅膀，开始了更有力、更高的飞翔。文学的社会影响力不断增强，作家的职业感也许没有从前那么强了，但创作出具有社会反响的作品的作家，具有广泛的名誉和影响力。许多电影电视剧也因为改编自文学作品而产生广泛影响，这些改编作品既来自传统的文学书籍，也来自网络上的各种小说。在中国，很多人用文学人口这个概念来分析当今的文学态势。传统意义上的作家，网络文学写作者，文学杂志、报纸、出版社的编辑，文学网站的从业者，作家协会等组织的工作者，等等，如果把广大的文学阅读者也计算在其中，那则是一个非常庞大的数字。也有人用全民写作来比喻今天的文学人口之多，我以为全民写作肯定谈不上，但由于网络的发达和手机通讯的普及，博客微博、微信以及微信公众号等交流平台的漫延，几乎可以这么说，手机用户中愿意进行文学式阅读，尝试进行文学类写作的人空前增加，这才是20年前想都不敢想的情形。一些从前与写作毫无关联，怯于用文字表达思想感情的人，慢慢地加入了写作的队伍直至显露出创作的才能。

文学影响力的扩大还表现在，近年来，申请加入中国作家协会及各地作家协会的人不断增加。以中国作协会员发展为例，今年的申请人数突破2000人，要知道，这些都是已经达到基本条件的申请者，即出版过两本以上文学著作，在文学报刊上发表过一定数量的作品。中国作家协会的会员人数目前已达到12000人。全国各省级作家协会的会员人数总计在5万以上。文学创作者队伍之庞大可见一斑。回过来说，20年前人们预测的文学将随着影视、网络、手机的发达而逐渐衰弱的想象并未成为现实，现实是文学表现出前所未有的强劲生命力，是文学写作的千姿百态和文学阅读的分众化。

说到底，让我们站在今天预测文学在未来世界的可能性和发展状况，终究是一件难以做到位的事情，也很难真正将预测在未来的现实情形中兑现。就像我们20年前并没有准确地预测到今天一样。但我们仍然可以对文学创作的内在变化做出一定的分析。比如在小说领域，以中国小说界的情形看，从内容到形式的融合正在成为趋势。在现实主义和先锋文学此起彼伏、并行不悖若干年之后，近年来，现实主义与先锋文学正在逐渐形成融合。中国作家正在自觉运用现实主义的创作方法，又能够在艺术上打开格局，把先锋文学的诸多因素融入到自己的创作中。这种融合使当代小说既具有传统的根性，又具有与时代吻合的现代性。我曾经专门就此做过探讨，认为在当代中国，不少优秀的小说既有当下性，又有寓言性，既有来自土地、历史、生活的根性，又有强烈的现代标识和作家艺术自觉的创作，形成一种饱满的当代小说品质。甚至我们可以说，在传统的纸质文学作品与网络小说同行的时代，严肃文学与流行小说的界线也开始变得模糊。同一部小说里，可以有地域风情，有民族历史，有民间传奇，也有最新的当代生活，同时还有一种广阔的世界视野。一个作家如何能够调动这些因素，使其成为互相关联、交融的小说要素，从而形成一种合力，创造出既有文化上的要脉，又有现实生活的律动，还有开放的世界眼光，将严肃主题、传奇故事、美学抱负融为一体，正成为对一个小说家综合能力与创作实力的考验。我相信而且也从有限的阅读中感到，这种趋势在世界范围也是一样的，甚至早有先例。

站在当代中国往前看，我们有理由相信，文学的未来前景值得期待，因为人们的生活与文学的关系正在发生着越来越紧密的联系。