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The New Path of Chinese New Literature Research from Multiple Perspectives: A Review of Zhang Yu and Dong Huichuan's *The Universe in the Glimmer: The Multidimensional Perspective on the Study of Chinese New Literature*

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Abstract: *The Universe in the Glimmer: The Multidimensional Perspective on the Study of Chinese New Literature*, co-authored by Zhang Yu and Dong Huichuan, was published by Beijing Publishing House in March 2025. This book revisits the development of Chinese new literature over the past century through the methodology the authors term as “multidimensional vision”. The authors cut into the core of Chinese new literature from different dimensions, covering five distinct themes: gender rethinking, language reconstruction, social imagination, the deep exploration of human nature, and cross-disciplinary breakthroughs. Drawing on a wide range of theoretical approaches, including interdisciplinarity studies, New Historicism, and feminist criticism, the authors bring together detailed historical materials and multiple analytical frameworks to achieve a deep connection between literature and other fields of knowledge. It highlights the authors’ forward-looking, cross-disciplinary thinking, open research horizon, and the continuous in-depth exploration of Chinese century-old literature, offering a stimulating contribution to the rethinking of literature research.

Keywords: *The Universe in the Glimmer: The Multidimensional Perspective on the Study of Chinese New Literature*; Chinese new literature; multidimensional perspectives; cross-border thinking

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标题: 多重视角下中国新文学研究的新路径: 评张宇、董卉川的《微光中的宇宙: 中国新文学研究的多维视野》

摘要: 《微光中的宇宙: 中国新文学研究的多维视野》由张宇、董卉川合著, 2025年3月北京出版社出版。本书聚焦于百年中国新文学的发展历程, 致力于文学研究边界的拓展与创新。著者从多维视野切入中国新文学的内核, 涵盖了五个鲜明的主题: “语言的重构” “社会的想象” “人性的深描” “性别的重思” “跨界的突围”。本书以丰富的理论为基础, 以跨学科、新历史主义、女性主义等多维度的视角呈现。本书立足于翔实的史料、依托多元的理论, 达成了文学与其他学科的深度联结, 既彰显著者前沿创新的跨界思维、多元开阔的研究视域、对中国百年文学的深耕细研与持续探索, 也为文学研究带来了全新的启发。

关键词: 《微光中的宇宙: 中国新文学研究的多维视野》; 中国新文学; 多维视野; 跨界思维

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In the century-long process of research on Chinese new literature, traditional paradigms have long maintained a dominant position. These approaches have generally operated with single-disciplinary frameworks and have primarily focused on canonical writers such as Lu Xun and Mao Dun. And as a result, the contributions of marginal or less-studied writers have not been fully explored. For interdisciplinary, gender issues and other research fields, the academic community has also lacked systematic research and excavation for a long time.

In recent years, there has been a growing consensus in the academic field on the need to transcend disciplinary boundaries and illuminate the obscured parts of literary research. The publication of *The Universe in the Glimmer: The Multidimensional Perspective on the Study of Chinese New Literature* (Hereinafter referred to as *The Universe in the Glimmer*) is a response to meet the demands of this shift. This book seeks to move beyond the limitation of single-disciplinary approaches. By proposing a “multidimensional vision” as its central methodology, this book draws on insights from theories of journalism, history, philosophy and other disciplines, and broadens the research horizon, integrating these diverse perspectives into literary analysis.

With the frontier cross-border thinking and grand research perspective, this book broadens the research space with innovative significance and enlightening value for Chinese new literature. The research field involved in the book reflects the authors' sensitivity to evolving scholarly concerns and their commitment to ongoing study on Chinese new literature to rethink the field in

more inclusive and innovative ways.

1. Interdisciplinary Perspective

The remarkable feature of this book is the authors' expansion and innovation of literary research. The content covers the theoretical system of journalism, history, philosophy and other disciplines, forming a multi-dimensional research perspective. Based on a study of the "mini-commentary" column in *China Critic* (《中国评论周报》), a global English cultural publication run by Chinese in the first half of the 20th century, and with the help of English essays written by Chinese writers, the authors of *The Universe in the Glimmer* analyze how the cross-lingual practice of successive editors, such as Lin Yutang, Wen Yuanning and Wu Jingxiong, has become a way of cultural identity and social interaction. From the perspective of journalism and media studies, the book further highlights the dynamic relationship between *China Critic* and contemporary literary production, revealing a self-conscious engagement with global literary modernity. This interdisciplinary research perspective has broadened the boundaries of literary research and created a new model of interaction between literature and other fields.

For a long time, literature and philosophy have shown a situation of mutual integration and harmonious coexistence. This book also foregrounds the productive intersection of literature and philosophy. In the interpretation of Liang Hong's *Four Images* (《四象》), the authors point out that the concept of the "four images" embodies a philosophical vision of harmony between humanity and nature, as well as a quaternary structure integrating heaven, earth, humanity, and the divine. In their analysis, the "four images" is not only the reincarnation of the four seasons, but also the structure of the novel. In the internal chapters, it implies the stage of the development of things from simple to complex, from prosperity to decline, and also implies the personality characteristics of the characters and the multiple aspects of human nature. Through the resilient figure of Lingzi, one of the characters, *Four Images* is further interpreted as expressing Liang Hong's aspiration toward an idealized human condition and a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world. Such a close reading in *The Universe in the Glimmer* demonstrates the authors' sustained engagement with philosophical inquiry. This kind of knowledge reserve across the boundary of disciplines is not formed by chance, but comes from the keen insight and active response to the deep problems of literary research. Traditional literature research is often limited by a single discipline framework. The authors have successfully broken through the barriers by virtue of their extensive exploration and deep absorption of philosophical knowledge.

In addition, the authors pay close attention to the integration of stylistics and literary analysis. As a discipline grounded in modern linguistics, stylistics, in a sense, provides a methodological bridge between language and literary form. As Shen Dan (2000, pp.66-67) observes, developments in linguistic theory have often given rise to new approaches within stylistic studies. Building on this insight, the authors of *The Universe in the Glimmer*, in the "cross-boundary breakthroughs" part, examine Liu Bannong's revisions to *Old Ox* (《老牛》), focusing in particular on his six instances of modifying the pronoun "ta" (he, 他) and his adoption of new punctuation. These changes are analyzed in terms of their impact on linguistic expression, stylistic form, and the articulation of emotion and thought. As the authors note, "Liu Bannong, as a pioneer in reforming the use of 'ta' and an advocate of new punctuation, rendered the language of *Old Ox* in *The Whip in Hand Collection* (《扬鞭集》) more refined and concise through such modifications, bringing it closer to the expressive qualities of modern poetry... This innovation also exerted a formative influence on other literary genres, especially the development of new poetry" (Zhang Yu & Dong Huichuan, 2025, p.206). This perspective of breaking through the

conventional narrative not only injects a new thinking dimension and research path into this field but also provides a valuable demonstration and enlightenment for the follow-up scholars' linguistic research.

2. New Historicism Perspective

The authors are skilled in conducting literary research from a New Historicism perspective. Distinct from traditional historical materialism, New Historicism, as Zhang Jin argues, "intentionally or unintentionally avoids direct engagement with the actual historical process. Instead, it seeks to interpret the residual history and social history by elaborating on the 'ways and methods' of historical narration, and 'approach the historical process' and explain historical issues by reconfiguring and rearranging historical remains within a limited frame." (Zhang Jin, 2013, p.9) In this sense, historical understanding is achieved through discursive operations rather than direct access to historical reality. As Hugh Grady further observes, New Historicism criticism is "doubly political", it is concerned not only with the political motivations of the texts it studies, but also with the political implications of the critical discourse it produces. (Grady, 2001, pp.200-201)

In *The Universe in the Glimmer*, the authors move away from the inertial thinking of "big history" and "linear history." Instead, this book emphasizes the excavation of marginal literary histories and the reproduction of history in the gap. Through close engagement with historical materials, the authors seek to disrupt established accounts of literary history and to foreground overlooked dimensions of literary production. For example, in the discussion of "Seventeen Years literature," the authors go beyond the conventional focus on ideological regulation to examine the affective structures and ethical transformations embedded in literary texts, revealing the multiple possibilities of literature to negotiate a degree of autonomy under specific historical conditions. By shifting the historical perspective, those literary phenomena obscured by mainstream narratives are brought back into critical visibility.

This concern with marginality is further reflected in the book's attention to writers and texts that fall outside the established canon. Marginal writers, excluded from dominant literary groupings, have long remained underrepresented in scholarly discourse. In the context of contemporary fiction, the authors of *The Universe in the Glimmer* revisit the theme of tragedy, particularly the conflict between the individual and society. This opposition between individual and society is irresistible. Although it is different from the sense of powerlessness brought by fatalism, it makes people face a difficult situation to control. This form of conflict, often perceived as inevitable, resonates with Friedrich Engels's formulation of tragedy as the tension between the historical necessity of a demand and the impossibility of its realization (Engels 1972, p.586).

In this regard, the authors examine the collaborative work *Primordial Way, Endless Horizons* (《远道苍苍》) by Liu Huaiyu and Liu Ziyi, a father-daughter writing duo. Focusing on the struggle history of Chen Yixi, an overseas Chinese figure from Taishan, and the construction of Xinning Railway from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China, this collaborative work not only reconstructs a neglected chapter in the history of Chinese railways, but also captures the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the broader dynamics of globalization reflected in the experiences of overseas Chinese communities. This text analysis in *The Universe in the Glimmer* exemplifies the book's methodological commitment to combining archival research with close reading, which helps recover the historical and literary significance of marginalized texts, highlighting the authors' rigorous creative attitude. More importantly, this perspective makes readers clearly realize that the "universe" of Chinese new literature is constituted not solely by masters such as Lu Xun and Mao Dun, but also by many lesser-known yet meaningful "glimmer" dispersed across literary history.

In addition, the book extends its New Historicist sensibility to the study of literary genres that

have traditionally occupied a marginal position within the literary field. As Zhang Jin (2025, p.11) suggests, the deepening of literary research has increasingly blurred the boundaries between literature and history, as well as between disciplines more broadly, challenging hierarchical distinctions between the canonical and the non-canonical, elite and popular culture. Within this context, the authors turn to the rapidly evolving cultural-mixed field of Chinese science fiction, with particular attention to a cultural mixed area: the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area, in which has emerged a new generation of science fiction writers represented by Dong Qizhang, Chen Qiufan, Wang Shiyue, etc. Inspiringly, scholar Li Aize (2025) has placed contemporary science fiction’s writers in a broader developmental trajectory: the earlier writers represented by Wu Yan, Han Song and Wang Jinkang have responded to critiques of the genre’s lack of realism, literariness or scientific rigor, actively dispelled stereotypes and promoted the development of Sci-fi; the “middle-generation” writers including Chen Qiufan, Bao Shu, Xia Jia, Cheng Jingbo and A Que, have foregrounded localized and diversified narrative practices; and the more recent writers, such as Wang Nuonuo, Liu Yang, Gu Shi, Shuang Chimu and Mu Ming, are noted for their experimentation with narrative form and speculative imagination, as well as their engagement with themes of global interconnection and the “community of shared human destiny.” Notably, this newer generation includes a growing number of female authors, whose work brings new perspectives and creative energies into the field. (p.158)

Rather than remaining at a general level, *The Universe in the Glimmer* adopts a more focused regional approach by examining representative writers such as Dong Qizhang, Chen Qiufan, Wang Shiyue and others. It identifies key aesthetic and thematic features in these works, including “bold imagination, forward-looking abstraction, and posthumanism concern” (Zhang Yu & Dong Huichuan, 2025, p.237). Through such analysis, the book articulates what it terms the “Bay Area Experience,” “Bay Area Consciousness,” and “Bay Area Aesthetics,” thereby offering a more grounded account of how regional contexts shape literary production. This approach not only offers a new understanding of the diversity of contemporary Chinese Sci-fi but also provides a productive analytical framework to think about the diversity of literary forms today.

3. Feminist Perspective

Gender constitutes another analytical dimension through which the book advances its reexamination of Chinese new literature. As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts in *The Second Sex*, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (2011, p.9) This proposition challenges the traditional view of femininity as biological destiny and points out the role of social, cultural, and ideological formations in producing women’s subordinate status. Building on this insight, *The Universe in the Glimmer* extends feminist inquiry into the field of Chinese new literature, offering a systematic re-examination of gendered representation and discourse.

From the perspectives of Western feminists in the 1980s, the narratives of women’s liberation in socialist China were often mediated by state ideology and embedded within reconfigured patriarchal structures. In this view, socialist labor did not necessarily emancipate women, but in many cases intensified their burdens. (Lisa Rofel, 2006, p.55) Rather than simply reproducing this line of critique, the authors show their unique innovation to re-construct the feminism. They not only treat gender as an object of analysis but also mobilize it as a critical lens through which the broader field of Chinese new literature can be reassessed.

This approach is particularly evident in the book’s discussion of the representation of “new women”. Through a detailed interpretation of the changes in the image of women in the texts, the authors show how socialist education and shifting family ethics reshaped women’s lived experiences. Such analysis moves beyond reductive interpretations of the “new woman” as merely a vehicle of political propaganda nor a simple literary symbol, while also avoiding the wholesale application of

Western feminist paradigms. Instead, it foregrounds a form of locally grounded critical practice. As the authors argue, the women's social education movement in socialist China "was not a simple process of literacy acquisition, nor merely a form of political mobilization, but a project that combined state will with the discourse of women's liberation to enlighten and transform women, who in turn were expected to participate actively in the transformation of society" (Zhang Yu & Dong Huichuan, 2025, p.150). This analysis of the socialist women's social education movement demonstrates that the emergence of the "new woman" cannot be reduced to a purely political construct but should be understood as the product of complex interactions among gender, power, and education within a specific historical and cultural context.

As gender discourse continues to evolve, moving beyond biological determinism toward a broader framework of social and cultural relations, the study further extends its inquiry into contemporary literary representations. By studying the female narrative represented by Can Xue, the authors describe the inner world of female protagonists as "an inner castle filled with dreams, delirium, and neurotic intensity." (Zhang Yu & Dong Huichuan, 2025, p.184) The female protagonists' staying in the "castle" can be regarded as a form of resistance to male-dominated structures, and it somehow turns out that the "staying in the castle" always beautiful but bleak. This gloomy ending is a symbol of women's inability to break free from their besieged historical destiny. Through such analysis, the book foregrounds women's living conditions while articulating a distinct gender consciousness and aesthetic sensibility. It signals the emergence of female subjectivity in contemporary literature, while also acknowledging the enduring struggles and sacrifices involved in the pursuit of individual and collective rights.

Although mostly situated within academic discourse, the book also demonstrates a strong concern with contemporary realities. In the discussion of Chen Qiufan's reflections on Feminist Science Fiction in his essays *Feminist Writing in Science Fiction* (《科幻中的女性主义书写》) and *The Future Belongs to Them* (《未来属于她们》), the authors of *The Universe in the Glimmer* propose that speculative literature opens up new possibilities for reimagining gender relations. Within such narratives, women are envisioned as capable of transcending the constraints of existing social structures, thereby articulating more plural and fluid forms of gender identity. This kind of academic research makes the book transcend the traditional academic discussion and has a direct appeal. As the authors note, "feminist literary trends ultimately envision a world in which the female and male spheres, while distinct, move from opposition toward mutual integration and coexistence" (Zhang Yu & Dong Huichuan, 2025, p.188). At the same time, they acknowledge that contemporary Chinese feminist literary discourse remains "unfinished," still in the process of development and negotiation. This open-endedness not only reflects the evolving nature of gender relations but also underscores the continuing relevance of feminist critique within the study of Chinese new literature.

Conclusion

The Universe in the Glimmer: The Multidimensional Perspective on the Study of Chinese New Literature contributes to the field of Chinese new literature studies with its multidimensional analytical framework and its new pathways for re-examining literary history. Its significance lies not only in the originality of its arguments, but also in its capacity to recontextualize familiar texts and to generate fresh insights through cross-disciplinary perspectives.

The spirit of exploration presented in this book is of exemplary significance and provides reference value for research in related fields. This enlightens readers that the "glimmer" of literature is not something isolated. Only through the cross-interaction of multiple perspectives can its hidden great value be activated. The content of this book is not the solidified traditional

theory, but the academic research with the spirit of exploration, which opens up a new perspective and injects new vitality into the study of Chinese new literature. With a unique research perspective, this book proves that real academic innovation requires not only the proposal of new ideas, but also the innovation of research thinking.

In general, this book is an in-depth exploration of Chinese new literature and a profound reflection on literature itself. It is expectable that in future studies of Chinese new literature, more “multidimensional perspectives” will be practiced, more “glimmers” will be found, and more “universes” will be explored.

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