



**JGSS**

*International Journal of Geographical and Spatial Studies*

**JGSS** Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp. 140-151.

Print ISSN: 3105-1294; Online ISSN: 3105-1308

Journal homepage: <https://www.gssjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/JGSS.26.1.13>



## MEI Xinlin and the Construction of Chinese New Literary

### Geography

徐超超 (XU Chaochao), 李 莉 (LI Li)

**Abstract:** In response to the challenge of “Rewriting Chinese Literary History” in the late 20th century, Professor MEI Xinlin and his team have worked on constructing a disciplinary system, developing theoretical discourse, and innovating research methods for Chinese New Literary Geography, which has gained widespread recognition from Chinese academia. For many years, MEI has managed to cross the boundaries between Chinese and Western literature, integrating Chinese spatial research traditions with Western geocritical thoughts, making him a key figure in Chinese New Literary Geography. Core concepts in MEI’s Chinese New Literary Geography include regional criticism, geo-criticism, map criticism, and geopoetics, which demonstrate clearly China’s response and solution to the challenge of rewriting literary history. Therefore, introduction and promotion of MEI’s Chinese New Literary Geography is particularly crucial to keep the world up to date with the new achievement in Chinese literary theory.

**Keywords:** MEI Xinlin; Chinese New Literary Geography; theoretical genesis; future development

**Author Biography:** XU Chaochao is a PhD candidate at the School of Foreign Studies, Nankai University, specializing in British and American literature and literary geography (Email: 1120220988@mail.nankai.edu.cn); LI Li (corresponding author) is a professor at the School of Foreign Studies, Nankai University, specializing in British and American literature and Western literary theory (Email: Li.Li@nankai.edu.cn).

**标题:** 梅新林与中国新文学地理学建构

**摘要:** 面对 20 世纪末“重写中国文学史”的时代命题，梅新林教授及其学术团队致力于建构中国新文学地理学的学科体系、理论话语和研究方法，得到了中国学术界的广泛认可。多年以来，梅新林游走于中国文学与西方文学、西方地理批评（空间批评）思想流变与中国文学地理学研究传统，展现出独到的学术思想。“地域批评”“地理批评”“地图批评”“地理诗学”是梅新林所建中国新文学地理学的核心概念，是应对“重写文学史”的中国声音与中国方案。因此，推介梅新林的中国新文学地理学

Received: 01 Mar 2026 / Revised: 19 Apr 2026 / Accepted: 30 Apr 2026 / Published online: 30 May 2026 / Print published: 30 Jun 2026.

对于世界学界了解中国文学理论尤为重要。

**关键词：**梅新林；中国新文学地理学；理论缘起；发展趋势

**作者简介：**徐超超，南开大学外国语学院博士生，研究方向为英美文学与文学地理学，电子邮箱为 1120220988@mail.nankai.edu.cn；李莉（通讯作者），南开大学外国语学院教授，研究方向为英美文学与西方文论，电子邮箱为 Li.Li@nankai.edu.cn。

Over the past two decades, New Literary Geography, characterized by a distinctly Chinese intellectual orientation, has emerged as an important paradigm in literary criticism within China. Initially proposed by MEI Xinlin, this framework marks a notable shift in a Chinese academic landscape long shaped by Western critical discourse. It challenges the entrenched assumptions of conventional literary historiography and opens up new avenues for rethinking Chinese literary history. Contemporary literary studies have often focused on the temporal dimension of literature while marginalizing the geographical one, thereby underestimating the significance of spatiality in both authorship and textual production. Yet literature, as a mode of representing both society and nature, remains deeply intertwined with geographical and environmental conditions. Against this intellectual backdrop, the rise of New Literary Geography in early twenty-first-century China can be understood as both historically grounded and theoretically significant. On the one hand, it provides a critical corrective to the tendency of literary historiography to become detached from local contexts. On the other hand, it directly responds to the persistent neglect of geographical factors in modern literary research.

This article aims to review and summarize the background and development process of this critical theory, and then distill the core concepts, theoretical framework and development trends of the New Literary Geography, thereby providing a window for the international academia to understand the distinctive contributions of Chinese literary theory.

### **Retrospective Review of Rewriting Chinese Literary History in the 1980s**

The concept of “Rewriting Chinese Literary History” has emerged as a widely recognized proposition in contemporary Chinese literary studies. Since the 1980s, when scholars such as CHEN Sihe and WANG Xiaoming first put forward this concept formally, it has exerted a profound and far-reaching influence upon a large number of scholars. Around this scholarly discourse, prominent academics in China have offered diverse perspectives, collectively shaping one of the most significant intellectual trends in the 21st century. Among those, HUANG Ziping, a distinguished literary critic and one of the leading figures in this movement, observed that “the Rewriting of Literary History in the 1980s meant, of course, something rather special...since many believed that only high-end term like ‘movement’ was suitable to encapsulate its scope, ambition, impact and accomplishments” (DING, 2012, para. 8).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the more a topic stimulates discussion, the more likely it is to hit the crux in literary research. With no exception, this raises a series of critical questions: What is literary history? Why does Chinese literary history need rewriting? And how should the rewriting of Chinese literary history be directed?

The term “literary history” refers to the systematic study and classification of literary works, progressive trends, and prominent literary phenomena within a particular temporal period and region, aiming to explore the cultural characteristics and spiritual ethos in different eras and in specific locales. At the dawn of the 21st century, YANG Yi (杨义, 2003), former editor-in-chief of *Literary Review*, introduced the concept of

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “八十年代的重写文学史当然是另一回事了……很多人觉得必须用‘运动’这种大词才能概括其规模、雄心、影响和成就了”。

“rebuilding the pedigree chart of Chinese literature” (重绘中国文学地图) and expounded the origins of the “Rewriting Chinese Literary History” movement.

Literary historiography should cultivate a twenty-first-century critical awareness, grounded in a creative understanding of the nature of literature and an innovative engagement with modes of historical representation...Conceived as a “practical-spiritual” mode of apprehending the world, literature does not merely record historical, social, and human realities; rather, it renders them through lived experience (p.17).<sup>1</sup>

...

A twenty-first-century reorientation in literary historiography requires new modes of thinking that are integrative, multidimensional, dialogic, and dynamic, grounded in Chinese intellectual traditions and informed by modern rationality (p. 28).<sup>2</sup>

In the context of Chinese scholarship, YANG Yi’s insights can be read from at least three aspects. Firstly, the concept of “Rewriting Chinese Literary History” lays more emphasis on the value of pure literature and the de-politicization of literary studies. It challenges the evaluation systems and standards rooted in the revolutionary literary tradition that prevailed before the 1980s in China. By doing so, it resumes writers, works, phenomena, and literary movements as the center in literary history, focusing on the exploration of aesthetic values and the authorial subjectivity in literary creations. Secondly, since the current study of modern literary history prioritizes chronological criteria to classify, evaluate, and judge literary works, it may lead to oversimplification by blurring the boundaries among such grand terms as “World Literature”, “Regional Literature” and “Minority Literature”. As a result, many literary critics tend to focus on temporal changes in literary practice while neglecting spatial diversity, an oversight that requires correction. The concept of “Rebuilding the Pedigree Chart of Chinese Literature” is to find out a balancing way to explore Chinese literary history across temporal and spatial dimensions. Thirdly, with China’s turn toward rewriting literary history, the influx of Western literary critical theories, such as reception aesthetics, reader-response theory, structuralism, postcolonialism, to name just a few, led to an awkward situation in which Chinese literary criticism was dominated by these western theoretical frameworks. Consequently, most contemporary Chinese critics have suffered from theory aphasia (理论失语症).

YANG Yi’s thought-provoking remarks have attracted a lot of attention from many of his contemporary literary critics. Among a great number of pioneering Chinese scholars, MEI Xinlin initiated the concept of New Literary Geography, aiming to construct a new discourse system to study Chinese literature from a broader historical perspective. According to MEI (2010), in an era defined by spatial-temporal imbalance, New Literary Geography, which emphasizes the “intrinsic blending of the temporal and spatial forms of literature” (p.1)<sup>3</sup>, offers the most effective and reliable research approach for “realising the dual goals of reconstructing the paradigm of Chinese literary history and redrawing the chart of Chinese literature” (p.1)<sup>4</sup>. MEI is a professor of Chinese Literature at Zhejiang University of Technology, and he also serves as the dean of Research Institute of Ancient Capital of Southern Song Dynasty (南宋古都研究院), a leading research

1. The original text of the quotation is “文学史写作应该出现新世纪的自觉，这种自觉源于对文学本质的创造性理解和文学史表达方式的创造性把握……文学作为‘实践—精神’地把握世界的方式，它不是一般的历史社会人生的纪录，而是对历史社会人生的带有生命体验性的纪录”。

2. The original text of the quotation is “文学史写作的新世纪自觉，必须采取新的思维方式，采取具有充分的中国智慧和现代理性的综合、立体、对话、动态的思维方式”。

3. The original text of the quotation is “文学的空间形态及其与时间形态的内在交融”。

4. The original text of the quotation is “实现重构中国文学史范式与重绘中国文学地图之双重目标”。

base of literary geography in China. In the field of literary geography, MEI has published a series of works, including *The Forms and Evolution of Ancient Chinese Literary Geography* (《中国古代文学地理形态与演变》, 2006), *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1 and 2) (《文学地理学原理》(上、下卷), 2017), “Literary Mapping” (“论文学地图”, 2015), “Literary Geography: Theoretical Construction from the Perspective of ‘Space’” (“文学地理学：基于空间之维的理论建构”, 2015), “The Construction of Academic System in New Literary Geography” (“新文学地理学学术体系之建构”, 2017) and “The Reconstruction and Exploration of Chinese Literature History’s Model: in the View of Transition of Chinese Literature Geographic Map” (“中国文学史模型的重构与探索——以中国文学地理版图变迁为视角”, 2020). In a nutshell, the publication of his works demonstrates that MEI has progressively established a coherent theoretical framework in literary geography. It also shows that MEI has fulfilled one of his academic ambitions, i.e. to contribute to the rewriting of Chinese literary history.

Admittedly, MEI’s new research in literary geography has its origin in the conceptual reconfiguration of Chinese literary history studies. Besides YANG Yi’s “Rebuilding the Pedigree Chart of Chinese Literature,” it also encompasses the geographical research tradition in Chinese literary history, CHEN Zhengxiang’s (陈正祥) “The Three Southward Waves of the Chinese Cultural Centre” (中国文化中心三次南迁波澜), Michel Foucault’s “Space Era,” among others. In 1967, Foucault announced in an academic lecture that “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space” (1986, p. 22). This tremendous revolution known as “spatial turn”, not only reshaped traditional category of space within Western academia, but also exerted great influence upon the theories and methods of space research among Chinese scholars. In 2006, MEI concluded in *The Forms and Evolution of Ancient Chinese Literary Geography* that the traditional criticism of Chinese literary history had “an overemphasis on the linear progression of the temporal dimension, coupled with a general neglect of spatial forms and the multidimensional configuration arising from their intrinsic interweaving with temporal structures” (p. 3)<sup>1</sup>. MEI’s findings marked the logical beginning of Chinese New Literary Geography, and his insightful remarks encouraged more Chinese scholars to reexamine the limitations of the traditional linear historical perspective in Chinese literary criticism. Over more than a decade of rigorous research, MEI has refined and enriched his theoretical system. In July 2017, MEI formally introduced the concept of “New Literary Geography” in his article entitled “The Construction of Academic System in New Literary Geography”. In doing so, he sought to develop a renewed analytical perspective to examine spatial issues in literary texts that transcends both Chinese traditions and Western geographical criticism (p. 112). It is worth noting that MEI named the discipline “Literary Geography” with the character “New” (新), which not only acknowledges the historical roots of this research field in the Chinese literary tradition but also highlights the innovative academic insights he has put forward. Four months later, MEI Xinlin and GE Yonghai (葛永海) released *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1 and 2), marking the establishment of a systematic theory of Chinese New Literary Geography. The books provide a comprehensive review of the disciplinary history and research paradigms of literary geography in both Eastern and Western contexts, reflecting the authors’ profound scholarly expertise in spatial criticism. In reconstructing the theoretical framework of Chinese literary geography, the authors systematically elaborate the theoretical system of New Literary Geography by focusing on conceptual definition, disciplinary positioning, theoretical development, and methodological innovation, thereby indicating directions for future literary research. ZHAN Furui (詹福瑞, 2019), former director of the National Library of China, believed that the publication of *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1 and 2) “represents a significant breakthrough and maturity of the theoretical

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “过于注重时间一维的线性演进，而普遍忽视空间形态及其与时间形态内在交融的立体图景”。

framework of Chinese literary geography, offering substantial theoretical value and practical significance for the advancement of disciplinary construction and academic research within the domain of literary geography” (para.1).<sup>1</sup> With no doubt, MEI’s scholarship represents a pioneering contribution to the field of Chinese literary geography and a notable advancement in addressing the methodological challenges inherent to the study of Chinese literary history.

### Academic Reasoning of Chinese New Literary Geography

Strictly speaking, the concept of literary geography is not the original product of Chinese scholars, whilst in the West, the notion and method of spatial study has undergone a long history. The historical development of Western literary geography can be divided into two stages. Firstly, from the mid-18th century to the 1970s, French geographers, such as Montesquieu, August Dupouy, and André Ferre, to name a few, focused on the study of regional literature in France. They examined the relationship between geographical environment and the distribution of writers through the division of administrative units. Secondly, since the 1970s, the ongoing enrichment of spatial critical theory has brought new perspectives and approaches to the study of literary geography. French scholars Bertrand Westphal and Michel Collot, in collaboration with American scholar Robert T. Tally Jr. and Italian literary historian Franco Moretti, elevated textual space and literary maps to the core of literary geography, elucidating the unique aesthetic value of literary geography for the practice of literary criticism. By reviewing the western spatial theories, MEI outlines the historical stages of Western literary geography, which can be summarized as follows: The 1940s saw the genesis of Western literary geography with France as its epicentre. After that, the United States emerged as the dominant force in this domain from the 1970s onwards, driven by the advent of spatial criticism. To further expound the differences between the French and American approaches to spatial criticism, Robert T. Tally Jr. offered his insights in an interview in 2020 with Chinese scholars ZHU Liyuan (朱立元) and LU Yang (陆扬). Tally asserted that French scholars “adopted a geo-centred approach, whereby a specific place, whether a city or an island, was selected as the focus for the collection of texts relating to it”. On the other hand, American scholars “favoured an ego-centred approach...It is possible to discern metaphorical social relations by examining how space and place are represented in a text”(ZHU et al, 2020, pp.143-144). He attributed the differences in the research findings to the methodological discrepancies in the application of spatial criticism and at the same time acknowledged that both approaches were subject to constraints and limitations.

China plays a distinctive role in the field of literary geography with significant academic contributions across four main areas: historical documents, literary theories, prefaces (集序) and monographs. To illustrate, one may consider *Historical Records: Biographies of Merchants* (《史记·货殖列传》) by SIMA Qian (司马迁, 145-90 BC) during the Western Han dynasty (西汉, 202 BC-8 AD) and *The Book of Former Han: Geographical Records* (《汉书·地理志》) by BAN Gu (班固, 32-92 AD) during the Eastern Han Dynasty (东汉, 25-220 AD). These historical documents are characterized of a consistent narrative style, faithful records of local geographical landform, cultural customs, historical figures and events in alignment with administrative divisions. Subsequently, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (《文心雕龙》) composed by LIU Xie (刘勰, 465-520 AD) during the Southern Dynasties (420-589 AD) established the research framework of literary theory from two perspectives: geographical distribution of writers and geographical description in works. New research hotspots such as “Literature School” (文学流派) and

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “标志着中国文学地理学理论建树的重要突破与走向成熟，对于推进文学地理学的学科建设与学术研究具有重要的理论价值与实践意义”。

“Literary Families” (文学家族) have come into existence. In addition, the sense of place is likely to be a distinct literary device or structural framework in the preface of a literary work (MEI & GE, 2017, p.74). For instance, when studying QU Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BC), one must mention Hunan Literature (湖湘文学) in the introduction part, and a similar close relationship can be seen between SU Shi (苏轼, 1037-1101 AD) and Guangdong Literature (广东文学), OUYANG Xiu (欧阳修, 1007-1072 AD) and Jiangxi Literature (江西文学). Finally, monographs—serving as a type of explanatory text for classic Chinese literary works—acquire significant reference value by virtue of their specific research focus. For example, *Mao Shi Pu* (《毛诗谱》) by ZHENG Xuan (郑玄, 127 - 200 AD) of the Eastern Han dynasty (25 - 220 AD) and *Shi Ji Zhuan* (《诗集传》) by ZHU Xi (1130 - 1200 AD) of the Southern Song dynasty (1127 - 1279 AD) both stand as exemplary studies of the geography found in *The Book of Odes* (《诗经》). It is evident that the critical practice of Chinese literary geography has a very long history spanning thousands of years, fostering an academic tradition with distinctive research methodology, clear-cut terminology, and coherent subject matters. In 2006, MEI published a pioneering article entitled “An Introduction to the Chinese Literary Geography” (“中国文学地理学导论”) in *Literature and Art News* (《文艺报》), which initiated an academic review of the long-standing practice of literary geography criticism in China. He highlights that Chinese literary geography encompasses both the French approach to regional literature and the American method of spatial criticism, while addressing two key questions: first, how does literary geography differ from cultural geography? And second, how does Chinese literary geography differ from Western literary geography? This pioneering essay has been widely regarded by Chinese scholars as a turning point in the study of literary geography in China, as it enabled researchers to move beyond the entrenched view of literary geography as merely a subfield of cultural geography and to begin constructing an independent research discourse and academic framework. In its wake, Chinese literary geography has developed a research orientation that diverges significantly from its Western counterpart. It is not simply “a cross-disciplinary critical theory and methodology with literature as the base and the study of literary space as the focus” (MEI, 2014, p.1)<sup>1</sup>; rather, it has evolved into “an emerging interdisciplinary field that organically integrates literary and geographical research” (MEI, 2014, p.1)<sup>2</sup>.

After clarifying the different evolving paths of literary geography in the West and China, MEI moved on to his next task, that is, to construct an applicable theoretical system. HUANG Lin (黄霖, 2007), president of the Shanghai Classical Literature Society (上海古典文学学会), argued that traditional Chinese literary criticism is strong in literary creation, yet relatively weak in explicit theoretical articulation and systematic construction. He therefore suggested that Chinese scholars should draw on Western modes of theoretical reasoning and expression (p. 206). In 2015, MEI paid several visits to Professor Westphal at the University of Limoges and Professor Collot at the University of Paris III in France. During these visits, he engaged in comprehensive academic discussions on the subjects of “literary geography” and “geocriticism”, thereby gaining new insights and a deeper comprehension of the concepts, origins, significance and future prospects of the relevant theories. Following a rigorous examination of Collot’s literary geography system, MEI put forth a novel proposition that the New Literary Geography can be understood as a general concept–sub-concept composite system. Within this system, literary geography functions as the overarching concept, under which four core sub-concepts are identified: “regional criticism”, “geocriticism”, “map criticism”, and “geopoetics”. The term “regional criticism” focuses on physical space, specifically the geographical distribution of writers and how external geographical elements influence their literary creation; “Geocriticism” explores fictional spaces to uncover how writers convey their understanding of the world through textual

1. The original text of the quotation is “一种以文学为本位、以文学空间研究为重心的跨学科研究理论与方法”.

2. The original text of the quotation is “一个有机融合文学与地理学研究的新兴交叉学科”.

spatial practices. “Map criticism” examines the complex relationship between the real world and fictional literary space. It bridges the empirical dimension of regional criticism and the fictional dimension of geocriticism, and responds to the specific phenomenon of literary maps in literary works. “Geopoetics” calls for “the development of a comprehensive system of concepts, categories, and research methods in the critique of literary geography, offering paradigms and practical guidelines for critical practice” (YAN, 2014, p. 115)<sup>1</sup>.

In comparison with Collot’s theory, MEI posits that his innovation lies in introducing and explaining the structural role of map criticism in the compound system, displaying the narrative function and aesthetic value of literary maps for literary works. In his analysis, MEI started with the cartographic origin of Chinese characters proposed by the well-known British historian of science and sinologist, Joseph Needham (李约瑟, 1900-1995). He then moved on to highlighting the unique style of graph-text integration in one of the Chinese classics, *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (《山海经》), as well as the style with “maps on the left and history on the right” (左图右史) prevalent in local chronicles. Finally, MEI reached the conclusion that there was a long tradition in the history of Chinese literature that the narrative was unfolded in the form of maps, pictures, diagrams or schemes. His view can be verified by the vast corpus of Chinese literature, spanning from ancient texts to modern novels. In discussing the literary approach of map criticism, Franco Moretti and Eric Bulson both advocate the visual expression of literary maps, while Robert T. Tally Jr. insists on the textual narration of works as the invisible drawing process of literary maps. MEI believes that he has solved this issue. According to MEI, the aesthetic value of literary maps does not lie in the form of expression. Both physical maps and metaphysical maps can be employed to explore the ethical relationship underlying literary phenomena. It can be argued that “a sign doesn’t become useful until some shared meaning is attached to it, and a visual depiction of a space with place-names alone doesn’t become meaningful unless there is a narrative to go with those names, a literature to go with the cartography.” (Van Noy, 2003, p. 177) Consequently, MEI’s theoretical system not only undertook a comprehensive investigation of the research tradition of Chinese literature and the research focal points of Western literary theory, but also reconsidered the research pathways of the real, fictional and fusion aspects in the literary space.

In an effort to strengthen the theoretical framework of New Literary Geography, MEI defines his own key concepts, including “three-origin theory” (三原理论), “spatial layer” (空间层级), “inner space” (内层空间), “outer space” (外层空间), “geographical distribution of writers” (作家籍贯地理), “geographical mobility of writers” (作家活动地理), “geographical description in works” (作品描写地理), and “geography of communication of works” (作品传播地理). In the view of the American geographer Jeffrey Martin (2005), all studies of geographical phenomena are supposed to answer three fundamental questions: “Where is it?”, “What is it like?”, and “What does it mean?” (pp.2-5) The first question concerns the orientation of space. The second deals with the presentation of spatial form and the transition from spatial orientation to meaning pursuit. The third question addresses the significance of space research. Together, the replies to these three fundamental questions form an integral part of a cohesive theoretical framework upon which Chinese New Literary Geography is to be built. Specifically, MEI coins the term “three-origin theory,” namely “original map restoration” (版图复原), “original scene restoration” (场景还原), and “spiritual origin exploration” (精神探原). The issue of “original map restoration” aligns with Martin’s initial inquiry, which concerns the comprehensive depiction of literary space at a macro level including geographical distribution of writers, geographical mobility of writers and geography of communication of works. In response to the second

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “地理诗学从学理角度研究文学地理学的概念、范畴、方法、建构一套完整的理论体系，为批评实践提供规范与指导”。

question, “original scene restoration” focuses on a detailed analysis of geographical description in works at the micro level, answering what role of physical settings play in shaping the narrative, themes, and characters. The third question is addressed by the “spiritual origin exploration,” which delves into the metaphorical significance of the literary space. Based on the above methods, MEI finds that the subject, whether it is “literature in space” (outer or physical space), “space in literature” (inner or fictional space), or their interrelation, can be effectively examined. This theory facilitates the critics to decode the signifier and the signified in the literary texts, revealing both surface and deeper meanings. To illustrate, MEI applies the three-origin theory to literary analysis through a reinterpretation of the Jinling (金陵) in CAO Xueqin’s (曹雪芹) *Dream of Red Mansions* (《红楼梦》). As a special literary space, Jinlin can be understood on at least three levels. The initial layer of Jinling is set in the real city where the writer CAO Xueqin was born, grew up and received an education. The second serves as a crucial and fictional narrative backdrop in the novel. The third represents an extended space encompassing the author’s intention and emotion. It is characterized by a complex interplay of multiple dimensions, including childhood, family, national, historical, and Oedipal complexes, each occupying a distinct section within the narrative structure. By analysing Jinling from different geographical layers, literary critics have achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the work. This process entailed a detailed examination of the spatial design and creative intention embedded in the writer’s vision, as well as an interpretation of the aesthetic value conveyed in the work.

In addition to his efforts in defining the theoretical framework of Chinese New Literary Geography, MEI’s notable contribution to literary practice has also won acclaims from other scholars. In *The Forms and Evolution of Chinese Literary Geography*, MEI draws on an extensive collection of traditional Chinese literary works to examine two spatial factors: the geographical distribution of writers and the geographical mobility of writers. This book arouses new interpretations regarding the relocation of literary centre in Chinese literary history. Different from his earlier academic works which center on Chinese literary texts, MEI’s 2017 books entitled *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1 and 2) are welcomed as the first to incorporate western literary texts into his exploration of literary geography. For instance, MEI asserts that the motif of “leaving and returning home” is a prevalent theme in both Chinese and Western classical literary works. The concept of home entices a sense of place, or topophilia in Yi-Fu Tuan’s term. It can be traced back “from the early epic *Gilgamesh* in the Middle East thousands of years ago, to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Aeschylus’ *Oedipus the King*, and numerous other examples in literature. This pattern has been repeatedly observed in fairy tales, chivalric romances, and hundreds of heroic fiction stories (including legends and contemporary travel narratives)” (MEI & GE, 2017, p.464)<sup>1</sup>. When discussing the process of urbanization, MEI proposed that cities are not merely locations where populations gather, but also repositories of imaginative materials for political novelists. This trait is exemplified in numerous western contemporary novels, including “*As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Sabbath’s Theatre*, and *Blood Meridian*” (MEI & GE, 2017, p.480). MEI and his follower’s grand research project is to write a monograph about comparative study of Chinese and Western literary geography, systematically analyzing geographical themes and spatial narratives present in Chinese and Western classical literary works.

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “从数千年前中东的早期史诗《吉尔伽美什》、荷马的《奥德赛》，古希腊悲剧埃斯库罗斯的《俄狄浦斯王》，直到我们可能想到的童话故事、骑士传奇和数以百计有着英雄情结的小说故事（包括传奇故事和现代的游记），一再演绎了这一模式”。

## Future Directions for Chinese New Literary Geography

On the basis of inheriting the critical methodology of traditional Chinese literature while learning and adopting various thoughts in western geographical criticism, MEI hence constructed his own distinct theoretical system, which can be summarized as follows:

First, Chinese New Literary Geography should be regarded as an interdisciplinary study which integrates the two different disciplines, literature and geography.

Second, Chinese New Literary Geography is not a simple addition of literature and geography, but rather an organic integration of these two distinct fields.

Third, literature holds a more prominent position than geography, as it serves as the foundation in the field of Chinese New Literary Geography.

Fourth, as a general concept, Chinese New Literary Geography consists of four sub-divisions: region criticism, geo-criticism, map criticism, and geopoetics, which together formulate a compound system of general concept-sub-concept.

Fifth, Chinese New Literary Geography provides spatial positioning for literature and focuses on various spatial forms in literature.

Sixth, in the practice of literary criticism, key concepts such as “three-origin theory” (“original map restoration,” “original scene restoration,” “spiritual origin exploration”), “spatial structure,” “inner space,” “outer space,” “geographical distribution of writers,” “geographical mobility of writers,” “geographical description in works” and “geography of communication of works” have become the underpinning tools for critics to interpret and critique literature.

Seventh, the primary objective of Chinese New Literary Geography is not only to sort out a novel research method for literary criticism, but bring into existence a new cross-disciplinary field, ultimately becoming an independent and comprehensive discipline. With no doubt, this objective is different from western literary theories, such as French *géographie littéraire* (literary geography) in the 1940s and American spatial criticism in the 1970s.

MEI's theory of Chinese New Literary Geography has received a wealth of positive comments from Chinese scholars. According to HUANG Lin (2007), “The innovation of a subject does not mean acting recklessly or simply being unconventional at will. It must be based on the collection of sufficient materials, supported by original theories, and organized into a systematic framework.” (p.205)<sup>1</sup>. He adds, MEI's New Literary Geography stands out as one of the models in academia. GE Yonghai (2007) acknowledges that MEI's theory is a breakthrough of “the stereotypical way of thinking to investigate and analyze writers' works from the angle of time”<sup>2</sup> and offers a fresh perspective to deal with “the puzzle of spatial belonging” (空间归属问题) in literary works. LIU Yuejin (刘跃进) also thinks highly of *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1 and 2). He asserts that MEI's new theory with theoretical innovations and multiple explorations is deeply rooted in the long-standing practice of literary criticism in the history of Chinese literature, which marks a new epoch of Chinese literary geography. In this sense, it proves that Chinese New Literary Geography led by MEI has acquired the ability to engage in theoretical dialogue with the French and American schools (MEI & GE, 2017, preface). Meanwhile, as a rapidly sprouting literary theory, Chinese New Literary Geography has been widely applied by scholars to analyze literary texts across various countries and genres. For example,

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “学科的创新不等于胡来，绝不是随心所欲地标新立异。这必须要收集充分的材料作基础，要自立原创的理论来支撑，要做好通盘的梳理成体系”。

2. The original text of the quotation is “打破了以时间的观念去考察和探索漫漫历史长廊中的作家作品”。

HE Rongyu and LIU Lihui (何荣钰、刘立辉, 2024) reread early modern British literature from the perspective of New Literary Geography and believe that “in the early modern British literature, writers tend to deem national geography as an essential component of political bodies, resulting in embodied rhetoric within national geographical narratives” (p.260)<sup>1</sup>. In “Mapping: From Fantasy Literature to Story World”, under the guidance of MEI’s literary mapping, SHI Chang (施畅, 2019) argues that fantasy literature, including George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, exhibits close interactions between maps and literature. These interactions are characterized by spatial-temporal logic, a blend of visual and textual structures, and the function of intertextuality (p.48). Based on MEI’s “three-origin theory,” Yuan Junxuan (袁君煊, 2018) has undertaken a systematic investigation of Xingge (信歌) of the Yao People (瑶族). He claims that Xingge serves as an indicator of the spatial distribution and migration patterns of the Yao People, a record of their lives and sites, and a faithful reflection of the Yao People’s aspirations to explore their spiritual home (p.118). As of the present, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database indexes 823 journal articles and 31 doctoral dissertations on the topic of “literary geography.” Notably, a significant portion of these works cite MEI Xinlin’s relevant theories and core perspectives. This phenomenon not only attests to the remarkable flourishing of research in literary geography but also underscores MEI’s important role within this development.

Indeed, formulated during the spatial turn in western countries and built upon the rich soil of the history of Chinese literature, MEI’s theoretical system of Chinese New Literary Geography has become one of the most popular critical approaches prevalent among Chinese scholars in textual analyses of both Chinese and western literature. In MEI’s words, Chinese New Literary Geography can be deemed as a transcendence of traditional Chinese and western literary geography. He adds, although Chinese literary history has a long tradition of critical practice in literary geography, Chinese New Literary Geography remains a nascent discipline, still in its exploratory phase. It requires ongoing, sustained efforts by successive generations of Chinese scholars to refine its terminology, define its theoretical framework, and innovate its research methodology. In this process, the contributions made by some other representative scholars in Chinese literary geography also deserve our attention. For instance, HU Axiang (胡阿祥, 2001) investigates the historical distribution, composition, and transformation of literary phenomena using geographical theory and methods (p.174). TAO Litian (陶礼天, 1997) focuses on the dual processes: one is how natural geography influences literature; the other is how literary geography evolves from natural space to artistic space (pp.6-7). In their critical explorations of contemporary literary geography, those scholars mentioned above have made insightful contributions based on academic research. In fact, it is the communication and debates among diverse ideas and perspectives that foster the inclusiveness and vitality of Chinese New Literary Geography, providing momentum for its future development and refinement as an original theoretical system.

In our recent interview with MEI, he stated that the emergence and rapid growth of Chinese New Literary Geography was not only the specific response to “rewriting literary history,” but also a positive endeavor made by Chinese scholars to utter their own perspectives on the global literary stage. In distinguishing itself from the spatial theories articulated by French and American scholars, Chinese literary geography still has a long and uneven path ahead toward internationalization. At the same time, a growing group of Chinese literary geographers is actively engaging with earlier Western scholarship while preserving distinct national characteristics through ongoing intellectual exchange. Against this backdrop, MEI expresses strong

---

1. The original text of the quotation is “英国早期作家都将国家地理视为政治身体的重要组成部分，由此生发了国家地理叙事的具身化修辞”。

confidence in the future development of Chinese New Literary Geography. It is also reasonable to anticipate that, with the increasing introduction and translation of Chinese cultural works, more Western scholars will become familiar with China's critical practice in literary geography. Through dialogues and mutual communications between Chinese and international scholars, Chinese New Literary Geography will fulfil the task of rewriting Chinese literary history and ultimately establish itself on the stage of world literature.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## ORCID

XU Chaochao <sup>ID</sup> <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8650-9030>

LI Li <sup>ID</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1261-6051>

## References

丁雄飞 (2012年9月23日): “黄子平再谈 ‘二十世纪中国文学’”, 《东方早报》。

[DING, Xiongfei (2012, September 23). Revisiting 20th century Chinese literature by Huang Ziping. *Oriental Morning Post*. [https://www.douban.com/group/topic/32993567/?\\_i=66747792GzY1wj](https://www.douban.com/group/topic/32993567/?_i=66747792GzY1wj)]

Foucault, Michel (1986). Of other spaces (Jay Miskowiec, Trans.). *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22-27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464648>

葛永海 (2007年7月5日): “中国文学地理学: 理论奠基与体系建构”, 《光明日报》。

[GE, Yonghai (2007, July 5). Chinese Literary Geography: Theoretical foundations and system construction. *Guangming Daily*. [https://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2007-07/05/content\\_634145.htm](https://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2007-07/05/content_634145.htm)]

何荣钰、刘立辉 (2024): “国家地理叙事的具身化: 以早期现代英国文学为例”, 《西南大学学报 (社会科学版)》50 (03): 260-273。

[HE, Rongyu & LIU Lihui (2024). The embodiment of national geo-narratives: A case study of early modern English literature. *Journal of Southwest University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 50(3), 260-273. <https://doi.org/10.13718/j.cnki.xdsk.2024.03.021>]

胡阿祥 (2001): 《魏晋本土文学地理研究》。南京大学出版社。

[HU, Axiang (2001). *Studies in Wei and Jin native literary geography*. Nanjing University Press.]

黄霖 (2007): “文学地理学的理论创新与体系建构——评梅新林新著《中国古代文学地理形态与演变》”, 《文学评论》(05): 205-206。

[HUANG, Lin (2007). Theoretical innovation and system construction of Literary Geography: A review of MEI Xinlin's *The Forms and Evolution of Ancient Chinese Literary Geography*. *Literary Review*, (5), 205-206.]

Martin, Geoffrey J. (2005). *All possible worlds: A history of geographical ideas* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

梅新林 (2006): 《中国古代文学地理形态与演变》(上、下册)。复旦大学出版社。

[MEI, Xinlin (2006). *The Forms and evolution of ancient Chinese literary geography* (Vols. 1-2). Fudan University Press.]

梅新林 (2006年6月1日): “中国文学地理学导论”, 《文艺报》。

[MEI, Xinlin (2006, June 1). An introduction to Chinese Literary Geography. *Literature and Art News*. <https://image.chinawriter.com.cn/2009-06-18/UFb10560237001245336895.pdf>]

梅新林 (2010): “世纪之交文学地理研究的进展与趋势”, 《浙江师范大学学报 (社会科学版)》(03):

- 1-7。
- [MEI, Xinlin (2010). Literary geography at the turn of the century: Achievements and future development. *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University (Social Sciences)*, (3), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1001-5035.2010.03.001>]
- 梅新林 (2014): 《中国文学地理形态与演变》。上海人民出版社。
- [MEI, Xinlin (2014). *The Forms and evolution of Chinese literary geography*. Shanghai People's Publishing House.]
- 梅新林 (2017): “‘新文学地理学’学术体系之建构”, 《浙江社会科学》(07): 112-125+159。
- [MEI, Xinlin (2017). The construction of academic system in New Literary Geography. *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, (7), 112-125+159. <https://doi.org/10.14167/j.zjss.2017.07.014>]
- 梅新林、葛永海 (2017): 《文学地理学原理》(上、下卷)。中国社会科学出版社。
- [MEI, Xinlin, & GE Yonghai (2017). *Principles of Literary Geography* (Vols. 1-2). China Social Sciences Press.]
- 施畅 (2019): “地图术: 从幻想文学到故事世界”, 《文学评论》(02): 48-59。
- [SHI, Chang (2019). Mapping: From fantasy world to virtual world. *Literary Review*, (2), 48-59.]
- 陶礼天 (1997): 《北“风”与南“骚”》。华文出版社。
- [TAO, Litian (1997). *Northern “Ballads” and southern “Laments” (Bei “Feng” yu nan “Sao”)*. Sino-culture Press.]
- Van Noy, Rick (2003). *Surveying the interior: Literary cartographers and the sense of place*. University of Nevada Press.
- 颜红菲 (2014): “开辟文学理论研究的新空间——西方文学地理学研究述评”, 《武汉大学学报(人文科学版)》67(06): 112-117。
- [YAN, Hongfei (2014). A review on western literature geography research. *Wuhan University Journal (Humanity Sciences)*, 67(6), 112-117. <https://doi.org/10.14086/j.cnki.wujhs.2014.06.015>]
- 杨义 (2003): “重绘中国文学地图”, 《文学遗产》(05): 17-28。
- [YANG, Yi (2003). Rebuilding the Pedigree Chart of Chinese Literature. *Literary Heritage*, (5), 17-28.]
- 袁君煊 (2018): “行走的歌谣: ‘三原’论视阈下瑶族信歌探赜——瑶族信歌研究系列之二”, 《西北民族大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》(06): 118-124。
- [YUAN, Junxuan (2018). Walking ballads: Probing into Xinge of Yao nationality from perspective of “Three Originals”: Study of Xinge of Yao nationality (II). *Journal of Northwest Minzu University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, (6), 118-124.]
- 詹福瑞 (2019年3月23日): “新文学地理学‘新’在哪里——评《文学地理学原理》”, 《光明日报》。
- [ZHAN, Furui (2019, March 23). New insights in the New Literary Geography: A review of *Principles of Literary Geography*. *Guangming Daily*. <https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2019-03/23/32671432.html>]
- 朱立元、陆扬、塔利 (2020): “关于空间理论和地理批评三人谈——朱立元、陆扬与罗伯特·塔利教授的对话”, 《学术研究》(01): 143-148。
- [ZHU, Liyuan, LU Yang, & Robert T. Tally Jr. (2020). A triologue on space theory and geo-criticism: Conversation between Zhu Liyuan, Lu Yang and Robert Tally. *Academic Research*, (1), 143-148. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1000-7326.2020.01.018>]

(校对编辑: 章菀婷 林诗丛)