

Review of Chen Zhongyi's *The Study in Cervantes' Academic History and Beyond*

Taciana Fisac

Abstract: Professor Chen Zhongyi has written extensively and pertinently as a central member of the study of Spanish literature in China. Over the years, he has produced an impressive body of analytical criticism on Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American literary culture, ranging from studies of the works of authors to intergenerational and general literary histories. His work is particularly noteworthy for its ability to bring new color to traditions and light to classics. This article will discuss three areas: the study of Cervantes' academic history, the general documented account of Spanish and Spanish American literature, and the relationship between capital and literature.

Keywords: academic history; general history of literature; capitalism

Author: Taciana Fisac is Professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid, linguist and literary translator (Madrid 28049, Spain). Her major translations include Ba Jin's *Family*, Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged*, Yan Lianke's *The Four Books*, and many others (Email: taciana.fisac@uam.es).

标题: 评陈众议《塞万提斯学术史研究》及其他

内容摘要: 作为中国西班牙文学研究的核心成员，陈众议教授在该领域的著述甚丰。多年来，他对西班牙、葡萄牙和拉丁美洲文学文化进行了深入的分析 and 批评，涵盖作家作品以及文学断代史和文学通史研究。尤其值得关注的是，其著述为传统和经典增光添彩。本文将探讨以下三方面：塞万提斯学术史的研究、西班牙和西班牙语美洲文学的综述以及资本与文学之间的关系。

关键词: 学术史；文学通史；资本主义

作者简介: 达西安娜·菲萨克，马德里自治大学汉语语言文化专业教授、翻译家，主要研究方向为中国现当代文学和中国古典文学。译著包括巴金的《家》、钱钟书的《围城》、阎连科的《四书》等。

I. Study in Academic History

The study of academic history is a conventional tool for academic research, but in an age of modernism and postmodernism, it has been put on the back burner. It

evokes one of the old Chinese saying: “The sword and the spear go into the treasury, and the horse is let loose in the south.” Therefore, all sorts of fancy new things came on the scene, each leading the way for a year or two. Among them, there are both the words that are detached from the essence of literature and the words merely broken from one extreme to another. Professor Chen seems that has followed a seemingly old-fashioned path, but he always hit the nail on the head of trends, as in his *The Study of Cervantes' Academic History*.

According to him, this work had its beginnings early on, but it was really put into action at the turn of the century. In 2004, he began designing the project for the Studies of the Academic History of Foreign Literature, which was included in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. This was a program of integration towards reconstruction, and its creation marked the beginning of a group of “three sets (i.e. the 1960s to the 1990s—interrupted during the Cultural Revolution—of the Institute of Foreign Languages).” The project marked the beginning of the consolidation of the original “three series:” the “Masterpieces of Foreign Literature Series,” the “Foreign Classical Literary Theory Series” and the “Marxist Literary Theory Series.” It also means that the study of foreign literature in China has begun to reckon more systematically with the academic relativization, fragmentation and nihilism that followed the wave of deconstruction.¹ As a result, a series of questions concerning the classics have been raised anew in this systematic project. For example, what is a classic? Is the classical inevitable or accidental? Do classics focus on the eternal contradictions of human beings (in the words of Qian Zhongshu, “the basic root of bipedal animals”), or do they mainly point to the real contradictions of the society of the times? What are their characteristics in terms of cognitive approach, value judgement and aesthetic orientation? How do the classics and classical criticism relate to the society, economic base and superstructure of the times? What is the role of criticism and critics, including their positions, perspectives and approaches, and their general and specific relationship to the society of the time? In addition, questions such as the circumstances and temperament, experience and gifts of classic writers, the content and form, inheritance and innovation of the classics, as well as the general laws of literature and the specificity of the literary canon, are all the subject of this project.²

Specifically, the *Study in Cervantes' Academy History*, which I have reviewed in a relevant journal. Sad to say, it is actually the first study of Cervantes' academic history in the world, even though it cannot be all-encompassing. In Professor Chen's

1 See Chen Zhongyi, *Study in Cervantes' Academy History*, Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2011, 3.

2 Idem.

words, “Cervantes’ studies are vast and boundless” (*Study in Cervantes’ Academy History* 1). In order not to be overwhelmed by the vastness of the material, this work captures almost only the most prominent tip of the iceberg of Cervantes’ academic history, and that tip is the study of *Don Quixote*, which is the absolute center. Even so, however, it is only possible to pick out the best of the best; it is inevitable that one will lose sight of the rest. Moreover, academic history, no matter how objective it may be, can be intentionally or unintentionally tainted by the researcher. This color is both ideological and inevitably reflects the researcher’s vision and learning, temperament and preference. Therefore, Professor Chen has done his best to be unbiased and objective, but the truth is: absolute objectivity and comprehensiveness is impossible. “As for the part of the study to be presented in this work, it naturally cannot cover many of the issues in the whole of Cervantes, or even the main ones; for the four hundred years of Cervantes’ studies are as numerous as the cattle, and the results are so voluminous and extensive that they cannot be covered in a single monograph” (ibid.). Moreover, “all history is contemporary history,” and all literature is contemporary literature, and standing at the height of the times and with the cultures of the peoples at his back, Cervantes is undoubtedly inexhaustible. But this is, in any case, a commendable beginning to the study of Cervantes’ academic history.

The studies of the academic history of the works of classic authors is undoubtedly one of the most important, or basic, foundations of literary studies. Any study of the works of classic authors is almost inconceivable without a certain, if not potential, vision of academic history. “The result of postmodernist deconstruction, however, has been the replacement of relative absolutes by absolute relativities. As a result, much disdain relatively objective academic-historical studies in favor of empty theories anymore. In some people’s eyes, even the relatively objective view of truth has been dissipated” (Chen, *Study in Cervantes’ Academy History* 2). So says Professor Chen.

The *Study in Cervantes’ Academic History* consists of three parts, the first of which is a compendium of the academic history, with five chapters dating from the beginning of the century to the beginning of the 17th century AD. The first of these chapters, on the seventeenth century, is a meticulous raking of the documents, for example, the details of Cervantes’ feud with the great writer Lope de Vega, which may not be well known in Spanish studies in Cervantes, as they are completely buried between the lines of both writers. In addition, he detects a trace of Don Quixote in Góngora’s extra-collections, which, despite the tone of the mainstream Spanish writers of the time, is considered to be a possible pseudo-parody of

Góngora.

The second chapter, “The Eighteenth Century,” was inaugurated by the English translator Peter Motteus, who positively evaluated and affirmed *Don Quixote*, but at the same time the French translator Lesage (Alain-René) precisely rejected Cervantes and *Don Quixote* from the opposite side. The latter not only translated Avellaneda's forgery, but also lashed out at Cervantes in the Translator's Preface:

This is a *Don Quixote* distinct from Cervantes. I will provide a brief explanation of the alleged disbelief. After Miguel de Cervantes had published the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605, it was a big hit but nothing more. Hence an Aragon's Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda published the second book of *Don Quixote* in 1614. This work also obtained a modest success. The first translation at hand is none other than Avellaneda's *Don Quixote*. Cervantes, jealous that someone else had been the first to do so, picked up the seemingly abandoned sequel [...] and it must be noted that there are many similarities between the two sequels. However, given that Cervantes came after and Avellaneda came before, it is clear which is true, and which is false. (Armero 26)

What is significant is that Professor Chen, through his search for the truth, discovered that *Don Quixote* was included in the *Spanish Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish Language* (1737) and in the *Encyclopedia* under Diderot (Denis) (1751-1765).

The third chapter, “The Nineteenth Century,” is the century in which *Don Quixote* and its author, Cervantes, were canon and set in stone. Although it is clear that the division of literature and literary criticism into eras, and especially centuries, remains a practice of necessity. In fact, whether it is seventeenth-century Baroque or eighteenth-century neoclassicism, or rationalism and the Enlightenment, or nineteenth-century Romanticism and realism, etc., most of these are definitions of later generations, and it is difficult to establish clear temporal boundaries, nor are they clear-cut or incompatible with each other. Moreover, the situation in each country was different, as were the levels of productivity and social development, and literary thought was altogether different. In the case of Romanticism, for example, the German “Rampage” is broadly considered to have begun in the 1870s, while French Romanticism did not really take off until the 1820s, although it is also claimed that *Julie or La Nouvelle Heloise* was the first, written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Enlightenment thinker. The French Romanticism did not really take off until the 1820s, although Rousseau's *Julie or La Nouvelle Heloise* has also been

called the forerunner of French Romanticism. Spain was even later.

Firstly, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, inspired by Rousseau's "return to nature" and combined with English sentimentalism, wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*. The concept of Romanticism, as opposed to Classicism, was first introduced by Goethe and Schiller (Johann Christoph Friedrich von).¹ As for realism or critical realism, although it is a counterpoint to Romanticism, it also inherits many elements of it, as is particularly evident in the French writers. Secondly, it is astonishing that the critical realist writers did not despise *Don Quixote* by abandoning Romanticism.

Let us begin with the fact that the German Romantics set the tone for the classicization of Cervantes and his *Don Quixote*. On this point Professor Chen gives a great deal of space and reaches its peak in the section on Heine. In the preface to the German edition of the fine printing of *Don Quixote*, the latter writes with great affection: "The first book I read after my childhood knowledge had been opened up and I could read quite well was *The Life and Deeds of Don Quixote, a Perceptive Gentleman of the County of La Mancha* by Cervantes [...]. In *Don Quixote* one cannot hear the opposition to the old religion, the opposition to the totalitarian monarchy. The voice against the old religion is unheard in *Don Quixote*, nor is the voice against the monarch's authoritarianism. Those critics who hear such voices are clearly mistaken. There is a school of thought that poetically idealize absolute obedience to the monarch; Cervantes belongs to that school. The monarch here is the Emperor of Spain, who was then so powerful that he shone brightly on the earth. Even a laughing-stock felt so honorable that he preferred to disregard his own freedom [...]. The political greatness of Spain at that time could instruct its men of letters to be broad-minded. In the mind of the Spanish poet, as in the realm of Charles V, the sun never sets [...]. This was the case in Elizabethan England, when Spain also had a burgeoning poetic school, and it can be compared to it. England had Shakespeare, and Spain had Cervantes [...]" (Henie 413-433). He concludes: "Cervantes, Shakespeare and Goethe became a three-headed reign, each at the top of the three categories of writing: narrative, drama and lyric [...]" (ibid.).

From then on, *Don Quixote* went out into the world with a "new image." In Lu Xu's words, Don Quixote's spirit can be summed up as "the courage to go ahead and do something based on ideals," whereas Hamlet "spent his life meditating and doubting, so that he could do nothing;" and, he says, "later on there were others" (158). He also says, "later on, as opposed to these Don Quixotes, who were

¹ See *Chinese Encyclopedia-Foreign Literature* Vol.1, Beijing: Chinese Encyclopedia Press, 1982, 586.

idealistic, they were called 'Marxist,' who saw reality and went ahead and did things" (ibid.).

In the fourth chapter, "The Twentieth Century," which spans from modernism to postmodernism and beyond, the study of Cervantes' scholarship presents a very diverse and varied picture. Many of the passages reflect the breadth of the author. But as a sinologist, I prefer his relevant comments on Chinese scholars, especially about Lu Xun. He begins by quoting Lu Xun: "Quixote's determination to fight injustice cannot be said to be wrong; it is not unappropriated to be insolent. The error is in the way he fights. Because of the haphazard thought, the wrong way of fighting is induced [...] and is 'not in vain, but harmful'" (Chen, *Study in Cervantes' Academy History* 397). It is then argued that "Lu Xun used Q to create an anti-Don Quixote with no idealism. Moreover, based on the image, the tail in the character 'Q' is seen as a braid. In fact, it seems to have a connection with Don Quixote. First of all, Q's 'method of spiritual triumph' is an almost exact copy of Don Quixote's 'method of spiritual triumph:' Don Quixote loses many battles, but always consoles himself. For example, after losing a battle against a windmill, he says to his squire Sancho that if it had not been for a magician who turned the giant into a windmill, the giant would have been no match for him. Secondly, the Q, which Lu Xun relies on to refer to 'A Q' is precisely the first letter of Quixote. Why would Lu Xun have to use a foreign letter to refer to the name of an authentic national if he did not mean to?" (ibid.)

The fifth chapter, "Aftermath," is certainly an epilogue, but it also leaves a number of threads or suspense.

The second part of *The Study in Cervantes' Academy History* is a study of studies, with seven chapters presenting the author's many fascinating contributions to the study of Cervantes. Among them are outstanding fundamental questions, such as some unanswered questions and contradictions about Cervantes' life, as well as a series of questions about *Don Quixote* and the process of its canonization, gradually amplified from point to point: "Cervantes' contradictions or prejudices," "Cervantes' irony or parody," "Cervantes' Fiction and Truth," "Classical Contingency and Necessity," "Negation of Negation Recognition of Recognition," and "*Don Quixote* and the Classical Reversal," and "*Don Quixote* and the Renaissance Movement." There are quite a few highlights worth exploring and remembering, but for the sake of space, I will only highlight one point: the reflection on the Western Renaissance movement, falsely based on Cervantes, and revealing the other side of the Renaissance movement: the liberalism and individualism behind humanism. The reflections in question are indeed thought-provoking.

The third part is a bibliography, which is not without detail; but in view of its length, it will not be reiterated here.

II. Writing a General History

It is on the basis of a number of indispensable case studies (Cervantes and the Spanish “Golden Century,” García Márquez and Borges and the Latin American “literary boom,” etc.) that Professor Chen has produced a multi-volume *General History of Spanish and Spanish American Literature*. This is the culmination of his research on Spanish and Spanish American literature, zenith of his longstanding commitment to the study of Chinese and Western literature and culture.

Given the magnitude of the work, which is nearly two million Chinese characters, I can only go so far here. To be honest, what is most striking is no longer his treatment of classic writers of the past and present, such as Cervantes, García Márquez and Borges, and the genres they emerge from or derive from, but the distinctly Chinese or Oriental perspective.

First, in all the histories of Spanish and Spanish American literature to date, few scholars have extended to the Arabian Andalusian and ancient American periods. However, Professor Chen has worked on precisely these two sources. In the first volume of the *General History, Spanish Literature: The Middle Ages*, the Visigoth-Latin period and the Arabian Andalusian period, in particular, occupy more than half of the space. In the second chapter, “Arabic Literature,” the author begins by saying that there are still Western scholars who regard Arabs and Muslims as other, even heretical. As a result, the contribution of the Arabs to Europe has not been fully acknowledged in Western literature and history, and only a few Western literary historians mention it in relation to the Middle Ages. Oswald Spengler is one of them, writing in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, vol. 2: “Arab culture is a discovery [...] but since it has been so completely omitted in Western historical research, we have not even been able to find a proper name for it” (35). Jackson Spielvogel is a more objective and distinctive one. In his *Brief History of Western Civilization*, he speaks of the willingness of Arab Muslims to actively assimilate the culture of the conquered. He thus argues that “the Arabs were the true inheritors of the Greco-Roman culture that remained in the Roman Empire. They also readily absorbed Byzantine and Persian culture. In the 8th and 9th centuries, countless Greek, Syrian and Persian scientific and philosophical works were translated into Arabic” (212). In fact it was not only Arabic, but also Latin and Hebrew. While Western Europe was in cultural decline as a result of the Germanic sweep, Muslims created glory. This is evident not only from the flourishing of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo

at the time, but also from the numerous cities founded by the Arabian Umayyad and post-Umayyad dynasties in south-eastern Iberia and their Islamic civilization. Among them, Cordoba, the capital of Andalusia, had nearly 100,000 inhabitants as early as the 9th century AD. It was second only to Constantinople and was one of the largest cities in the world at the time.

Secondly, in the 8th century AD, the Arabs, led by their princes and famous generals, were invincible and pushed right up to Constantinople and the Carolingian Dynasty. The empire's territorial expansion was accompanied by the task of saving and spreading classical civilization. Ancient Greek philosophy was practically forgotten and fell into desolation in the European Middle Ages; whereas the works of ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle were collected in large numbers in Islamic cities such as Damascus (capital of the Umayyad Dynasty) and later Baghdad (capital of the Abbasids), and were translated in large numbers into Arabic and Latin. In addition to the Greco-Roman source, mathematical and scientific writings had influences from India and China. The art of papermaking played a significant role in the spread of classical scholarship and classical literature in India. Paper-making originated in China, from where it was introduced by the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries AD.¹ The Arabs founded the first paper mill in the Middle East in Baghdad. Muslim booksellers flocked to the city and libraries sprang up. What the Umayyads brought to Europe was a continuation of this cultural diffusion project. Centennial Translation Movement is a testimony to this cultural dissemination project.

Once again, Professor Chen and his disciple Zong Xiaofei believe that the "Harakah al-Tarjamah" ("Centennial Translation Movement") began in the early 8th century AD. "In the middle of the 7th century, when Islam emerged, Arab culture began a centuries-long ascendancy, with rapid developments in language, religion, philosophy, literature, art, jurisprudence, science and technology. After the death of Muhammad, the four caliphs devoted themselves to the formation and expansion of the Arabian Empire. The iron horses went where much of the essence of classical human culture was to be found. By absorbing Byzantine, Persian, Babylonian, ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman cultures, as well as Indian and Chinese cultures, they created a glorious Arab-Islamic civilization, leaving behind a vast and starry legacy of cultural achievements in the history of human civilization. These achievements range from direct translations of classical writers to new works that build on the shoulders of their predecessors" (Etiemble 78-104). The "Centennial

1 See René Etiemble, *L'Europe Chinoise*, translated by Gen Sheng, Beijing: Commercial Press, 2013, 78-104.

Translation Movement” was of the former type and took place simultaneously in the Arab empires of East and West.

Apparently, as early as the end of the 7th century AD, with the formation of the Arab empire, the Muslim intelligentsia began to collect and translate the cultural texts of the conquered peoples. In 711 AD, Musa bn Nusayr, the Arab governor of North Africa, sent the famous Arab general Tariq bn Ziyad to attack the Visigoth dynasty. The Arabs drove in and quickly took over most of the Iberian Peninsula and established a viceroyalty in Seville. A little later, Abd al-Rahman I, the only descendant of the Umayyad Dynasty at the time of its downfall, founded the Arab-Islamic Andalusia, which was independent of the Abbasids, with Cordoba as its center. This means that the rise of the Abbasids in the mid-eighth century did not mark the end of the Umayyad Dynasty. In fact, the princes or vassals of the latter ruled for centuries as Emir and Caliph, the post- Umayyad Dynasty. During this period, the Islamic scholars of Córdoba, led by Abdur-Rahman, began to translate and disseminate classical scholarship. The Abbasid dynasty, also in the eighth and tenth centuries, was responsible for a large and created translation campaign, sponsored and promoted by the caliphs, which gave rise not only to the famous “Baghdad School,” but also to the “Alexandrian School” and interacted with Córdoba and Cairo.¹

In the 9th and 10th centuries Córdoba reached its peak, and in 929 Abd al-Rahman III was crowned king, abolishing the Emirate and renaming it the Caliphate. At that time there were seventy libraries in Cordoba, each of them rich in collections, and the Caliph’s private library alone contained over 400,000 manuscripts. Muslims collected books from all over the world and translated them into Arabic and Latin.² These books laid the foundations for the later Renaissance movement and the extraordinary maritime discoveries. Prince Rahman of Umayyad also built the Great Mosque in Cordoba, which attracted large numbers of pilgrims and literary scholars. In just over two centuries, the Jewish population alone had tripled. By this time, the ethnic and religious composition of Andalusia was already relatively complex, with the majority of the population being Christians left over from the Visigoth Kingdom, followed by Muslims, then Jews, then Slavic slaves at the bottom of the social ladder and mercenaries of more complex origin. The Muslim authorities adopted a tolerant stance towards the infidels, however there

1 See Chen Zhongyi, *General History of Spanish and Spanish American Literature* Vol.1, Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2017, 89-90.

2 See Judith M. Bennett and Charles Warren Hollister, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, translated by Yang Ning and Li Yun, Shanghai: Academy of Social Sciences, 2007, 92.

were still a number of Christians and Jews who converted to Islam because they were overwhelmed by the extra taxes.

The Muslims of Andalusia made great strides in the natural sciences and the literary arts while translating a considerable number of classical texts. Their achievements in astronomy, mathematics and physics were astonishing. These achievements not only incorporated the fruits of Western civilization, but also led to the construction of advanced observatories and the application of the Chinese compass to astronomical observation; the development of the Indian system of counting, and the creation of Arabic numerals and counting methods. In the words of the American scholar Eduardo Glante, “a real wave of translations between 1125 and 1200 translated important parts of Greek and Arabic science into Latin, and even more in the thirteenth century (the New Translation Movement up to the time of Alphonsus X). No event in the history of science has balanced the translation of a large number of Greek sciences into Arabic since the 9th and early 10th centuries” (17). Simultaneously, they were also successful in the field of medicine. Literature, moreover, took a completely different path from that of the Western Middle Ages: the early secular expressions and the later purism (such as Sufi mysticism) formed two poles, between which there was richness and color.

In short, the Arabic literature of Andalusia offers a different landscape from that of its Latin contemporaries; its richness and its forwardness (or modernity) seem to have been erased by a dozen centuries, and even today it can still be dazzling or empathetic. By contrast, the Visigoth period could be considered practically devoid of literature.

As for Spanish America, ancient Indian literature was greatly expounded. In the fourth volume of the General History, *Literature of Spanish America: The Classical Period*, Amerindian literature also occupies more than half of the pages.

In terms of time, the civilizations of the Americas are almost as old as those of Asia and Europe. Among them, the Maya are regarded as one of the oldest civilizations of mankind and have not been immersed in civilizations from other continents. Although some scholars believe that the Maya belonged to the Mongolian race, a yellow race that migrated to the Americas through the Bering Strait tens of thousands of years ago, and there have been legends in China that the “Yin people migrated to the east” and the “Fusang countries,” these are not the consensus of the archaeological community. Especially in recent years, with the development of genetic engineering, some ancient skeletons have been discovered in Central and South America (these skeletons are older than the “most ancient skeletons” found in North America, and their physique and DNA are closer to those

of the Javanese people in Southeast Asia), and some scholars believe that the earliest Native Americans may have drifted by sea from Oceania and Southeast Asia to Central and South America. Certain scholars have suggested that the earliest Native Americans may have drifted by sea from Oceania and Southeast Asia to Central and South America. Taken collectively, there is a growing tendency to believe that the aboriginal peoples of North and some Central America are descended from Siberian inhabitants who migrated to the Americas via the Bering Strait Ice Land Bridge for hunting, while other aboriginal peoples of Central and South America may be descended from Malays who migrated from the Pacific islands. Of course, there are also anthropologists and archaeologists who hold to a multi-ethnic symbiosis and believe that the American race could have arisen at the same time or almost at the same time as the Asian and European races. There are many different views and opinions.¹ However, Professor Chen does not confine himself to any view or discussion of the origins of the human race, he focuses on the civilizations of the Americas themselves, particularly their ancient literature and culture.

He argues that the Mayan civilization is one of the ancient civilizations of mankind, dating back to the Pre classical period, a thousand years B.C. or even earlier. Other early civilizations or cultures include the Olmeca, Tolteca, Chichimeca, Teotihuacán, Zapoteca, Totonaca, Mixteca, Azteca, Chavin and the Maya. Tiwanaku, Inca, and so on. However, not all civilizations or cultures in the Americas have bequeathed a literary legacy. Some, like the Maya, Olmeca, Tolteca, Misteca, Teotihuacan, Chavin and Tiwanaku, flourished long before the invasion of the Western colonists, leaving behind more mysteries than literary legends; the Azteca and Inca cultures, at their height, were killed by the Western colonists' bloodshed and the smallpox plague, and their literary heritage was destroyed. Even so, thanks to the archaeological discoveries of the last century and the tireless work of countless dedicated people, the literature of the Americas, from myths to legends, from poetry to drama, is now so vast that it cannot fail to capture the attention of the world.²

In this way, Professor Chen reviews chapter by chapter the Mayan, Azteca and Inca literatures. Many of these texts are being presented for the first time in China. For example, there are some narrative sketches and Nuo operas of the Maya, some lyrical poems and prose of the Azteca, some myths, legends and plays of the Inca, and so on.

1 See Robert Frank, *Los americanos*, Madrid: La Fabrica, 2008, 1-35.

2 See Chen Zhongyi, *General History of Spanish and Spanish American Literature* Vol.4, Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2021, 2.

In addition, the author synthesizes and discovers a large number of novels from the colonial period absent from the history of literature. Since the Spanish-Portuguese colonists forbade the novel to enter the American colonies to “poison the Indians,” it remained a secret undercurrent that gradually emerged from the end of the last century to the beginning of the present one, when the dust of history was gradually removed. At the same time, some of the unresolved issues of ancient American and colonial literature have been re-examined, like the trajectory of ancient Indian literature, the mechanism of colonial literature, and the sexual orientation of the “tenth muse,” Sister Juana, and so on.

III. Capital and Literature

In addition to the above-mentioned studies of Spanish and Spanish-language literature, Professor Chen has never abandoned his studies of literature and art, with a particular focus on the relationship between capital and literature. In his works, he often cites Marx's *The Capital*, while empirically examining how literature conflicts with or colludes with capital.

In a series of literary criticisms on the Western Renaissance and beyond, capital frequently emerges as an important thread linking his thought on the relationship between the individual and the general, appearance and essence.

More than a decade ago, Professor Chen sharply revealed another face of the Western Renaissance movement. The greatness of the Renaissance movement is well known, he said, “but its other face or dimension has been little questioned and little commented on. That is the three beasts of humanity that Dante glimpsed in the dawn light” (“Other Dimension of the Renaissance” 13). Engels calls Dante “the last poet of the Middle Ages and at the same time the first poet of the new age” (ibid.). This is certainly not a problem. The problem is that both before and after Engels, the Renaissance has been praised almost uniformly with great praise and, in the words of Engels, “the greatest, progressive change that mankind has never experienced, is a change that required giants and produced giants—in thinking power, enthusiasm and character, giants in versatility and learning” (ibid.). Professor Chen pointed out that Engels' statement that these giants were “the figures who laid the foundations of modern bourgeois domination [...]” is constantly forgotten, even though they were not “subject to the bourgeoisie” (ibid.). He considers that similarly, Marx saw the Renaissance as a new play by the emerging bourgeoisie in the name of Greco-Roman. Naturally, these are not just the ideas of Marx and Engels; it's a way of summarizing the Renaissance movement as it has been explored and revealed by European scholarship over centuries. But his approach has somewhat transformed

the way in which Western humanist scholarship has defined the Renaissance movement. For he states those definitions were somehow inaccurate (*ibid.*).

Hu Shi has famously said he treats people with doubt where there is no doubt, and asks questions where there is no doubt. Before answering these two “non-questions,” it is useful to look at the Chinese literary scene today. Apart from the vaguely preserved virtues of the old ancestors or the shadows or slogans of Marxism and Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science, China has a real “triviality,” a huge annual production of more than 700 films and more than 12,000 television episodes, as well as more than 3,000 full-length novels, more than 15,000 anthologies of various kinds and more than one million Internet novels. But the impact of all these products combined is perhaps no more than that of the sketches and the performance art of a few people. Individualism, liberalism and materialism, on the other hand, entered and rapidly covered the Chinese landscape as a matter of course. In other words, the Chinese accomplished in thirty years what had taken the Western bourgeoisie (the Renaissance) more than three hundred years to do: to achieve greatness and at the same time to awaken the three beasts that had so terrified Dante—the leopard (carnal desire or lust), the lion (pride), and the wolf (greed). In the words of Professor Chen, the Western Renaissance, while giving birth to humanism, caused the other side of it, liberalism, individualism and materialism, invincible.¹ In the fourteenth century, Saccetti’s eccentric and ridiculous Heraldo, an old man who, at the age of seventy, sets off from Florence to a neighboring village to participate in a tournament on a whim, only to be teased by a few ill-intentioned men (they stuff a handful of iron orchids into the tail of his horse, causing that the horse suddenly galloped and jumped on its back, and did not stop until it returned to Florence). In the fifteenth century, Pulci and Boaldo also treated previous literary or literary figures in a jocular manner. The former added to the folklore of Orlando’s story, while the latter simply made a man of Orlando’s experience fall in love and become a clumsy, shy fool who was played by Angélica. In Ariosto’s and Rabelais’s writing, this kind of banter is transformed into “parody” and “grandstanding” or “carnival.” This more casual than strict satire, but also more infectious, is combined with the burgeoning comedy of the early Renaissance into a powerful cultural force that slowly deconstructs and melts away the relative rigidity of the Middle Ages. At almost the same time, the giant Cagandua was born, able to suck the milk of thousands of cows before he was born, so much so that he couldn’t wait to swallow one in his cradle. And this has always been considered a symptom of Rabelais’s humanism: a representation of the human spirit from another perspective (i.e. mocking the giant gods with giants, or

1 Idem.

scandalizing them with giants). In the comedies of Manrique and others, this has developed into a “spoof.” Thus Joseph becomes a smiling old man, who even says humorous things like:

Oh, unfortunate old man!
 Fate is so dark.
 To be Mary's husband.
 She has trampled on his honor.
 I see that she is pregnant
 But I do not know when.
 I heard that the Holy Spirit had done it
 and I know nothing about it. (Chen, “Other Dimension of the Renaissance” 13)

Professor Chen underlines that it was based on humanism, that the religious world gave birth to the doctrine of election, an attempt to divorce the Holy Spirit from the Trinity, which was suppressed by the Vatican. However, the roaring orgy of the Renaissance laid the intellectual foundations for the triumph of the bourgeoisie over the feudal dynasties. Erasmus identified this. With malicious glee, he saw in “the Ode to a Fool” the instruments of human reproduction as the divine source of all things, of life. Thus, it is as if we hear a tramp-like harrumph in the face of the fall of Olympus. “If Dante marks the end of an age of gods and the dawn of an age of men, Cervantes likewise marks the end of one age and the beginning of another. On the one hand, the end of an age of idealism and the beginning of an age of rationalism; on the other hand, it is the end of an age of heroism and the beginning of an age of villainy, or the end of idealism and the beginning of materialism. This is not, of course, an either/or rule, and the complexities are too well-known to require further elaboration. But on the whole, this is the inevitable result of the development of private ownership or capitalism” (Chen, “Other Dimension of the Renaissance” 13).

Professor Chen emphasizes, “There is nothing inherently wrong with jokes and comedic performances in literature and the arts, but what is wrong is the uncritical and unrestrained pursuit of them and their praise regardless of the occasion, regardless of elegance or vulgarity. Moreover, reflecting on the Renaissance does not mean denying it, but rather using its method of relying on the past to see the dimension of Chinese literature and art today. Moreover, there are scholars who have long ago corrected the errors of the past, and I have offered my views on a range of issues stemming from the development of capitalism, such as modernity,

modernization and alienation, to which I have merely added. By the way, the true cultural consciousness and university style are to advance and retreat in the middle, to follow the beauty of the world; to take the right and the wrong in both secondary and western studies, and to benefit firstly the civilizational progress and the long-term stability of our nation, and secondly the broader academic spirit, objective truth, world morality, etc., even though they are often complementary and indistinguishable from each other”(Chen, “Other Dimension of the Renaissance” 13). The contemporary scholar Schmitt, reflecting on modernity, said that from the beginning it was a “secular age.” Everything was in order except what Erasmus called “the sole thing that mattered,” and even humor, banter and jocularity were institutionalized. With the solemnity dispensed with, the sublime banished, the reverence gone, the desire liberated, is it really “entertainment to death” that awaits mankind?

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