

BOOK REVIEW

Li, Jikai 李繼凱 et al., *Wenhua Shiyu Zhong De Xiandai Silu Wenxue* 文化視域中的現代絲路文學 (*Modern Silk Road Literature in Cultural Perspective*), Beijing: Science Press, China, 2020, pp. 348. ISBN 9787030636409.

Once a source of cultural and literary splendor in ancient China, the Silk Road has gradually fallen silent in modern times due to political, economic, and educational backwardness as well as geographical barriers and has switched from being an active exporter since the Han and Tang dynasties to being receivers and learners of modern culture. Such a shift in role profoundly affected the subject matter, themes, and styles of modern Silk Road literature, resulting in the fact that the Silk Road studies mainly focused on the old part instead of the modern and contemporary part. Even though some research has been conducted in this area, most studies examined the Silk Road literature mainly from a regional perspective, showing a sense of localization and fragmentation while lacking a macroscopic research vision.

Modern Silk Road Literature in Cultural Perspective, authored by Li Jikai et al., systematically explores and sorts out the historical lineage of the development of modern Chinese Silk Road literature by viewing the writings along the Silk Road as a critical literary phenomenon. The book provides a comprehensive examination and case analysis of the pluralistic and diversified literary forms from the cultural domain, thus correcting the current parochialism of regional Silk Road literary studies to a certain extent. By defining the concept, this book identifies the research category of modern Chinese Silk Road literature, constructs a genealogy of modern and contemporary writing in this field, and forms an effective response to the new demands of the academic community on the literature of the Silk Road.

The lead author of the monograph, Professor Li Jikai, is known for his avid interest and involvement in promoting intercultural dialogue between the east and the West while upholding the value and importance of research on Silk Road Literature as a means of communication. Prior to this book, he published a series of articles on the subject, i.e., “The Construction of Silk Road Science and the Study of Silk Road Literature” (2020) and “The Flower of the Maritime Silk Road Literature: Modern Chinese Literature of Studying Abroad” (2019), etc. Such a background undoubtedly ensures the professional attainment of this book.

Collecting and interpreting Silk Road writings requires clarifying the spirit and scope of Silk Road literature. In the preface to this work, Li Jikai emphasizes the entrepreneurial spirit of the Silk Road, saying that it is this spirit that “has driven generations of people to put on silk, ring the camel bell, or cross the ocean and go to the world” (p. 2). Then, he directly explains the need for this spirit for both individuals and nations when he writes, “for individuals, starting a family and establishing a career is the most urgent and basic issue in life; for the country, making the state wealthy and powerful is the most important and fundamental goal of the nation-building strategy” (p. 2). Therefore, the entrepreneurial spirit is evident throughout the Silk Road and, as we can see, throughout the book.

The book comprises two interrelated parts: Land Silk Road Literature (the first part) and Maritime Silk Road Literature (the second part). The former

includes the works of writers along the Chinese section of the Silk Road; the latter covers the works of writers who embody the culture of the Maritime Silk Road, including poems, essays, and novels concerning seas and oceans.

The first part, "Literature of the Land Silk Road," consists of five chapters.

After reviewing the history of the Silk Road, the first chapter elucidates the concept of the Silk Road and Silk Road culture. It delineates the literary works to be explored in this book regarding space and time before presenting the trajectory of the Silk Road's occurrence and historical evolution from a channel of material exchange to a bridge of spiritual and cultural exchange.

The second chapter chiefly deals with literary works featuring the culture or spirit of the Silk Road since the modern era, including the local literature of the Silk Road and the literature of the westward journey. With the launch of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, the advancement of the education and publishing industries, and the migration of many literary groups to the northwest, the flourishing of Silk Road native literature was promoted. Moreover, journeys of Chinese and foreign scholars, literati, explorers, and officials to investigate and travel the Silk Road also gave rise to many Silk Road-themed literary works and new literary styles, such as expedition reports and travelogues. This chapter also features Chen Zhongshi, a well-renowned local writer, and Lu Xun, who traveled westward, to elaborate on their far-reaching influence on the Silk Road literature.

The third chapter highlights the trend of culture breaking-in in contemporary Silk Road literature. The blending of farming and nomadic cultures embodied by writer Lu Yao and the collision between the rational and rustic Guanzhong culture and the solid and exuberant Xinjiang spirit in Hong Ke's works are fully demonstrated in this chapter as representatives of the Silk Road literature.

The fourth chapter proposes cultural idioms and creative cultural language to help break through the closedness and stereotypes of regional cultures, leading to a focus on cultural integration in the context of globalization. In addition, the works of the westbound writer Mao Dun and the group of writers living at the starting point of the Silk Road are cited for inquiring into the relationship between writers' mentality and the thematic implications, mode of expression, and aesthetic style of their works.

The second part, "the Maritime Silk Road," contains three chapters.

Chapter 5, "Maritime Silk Road and its Literature," begins with a review of the history of the Maritime Silk Road, noting that it was a sea route for trade between ancient China and other countries and regions of the world, as well as a significant artery for cultural exchange. Moreover, it extensively examines the literature of the Maritime Silk Road from the multidimensional perspectives of literary geography and Sino-foreign cultural interactions.

Chapter 6, "The Blue Imagination," discusses subjects of the Maritime literature and devotes further attention to the maritime spirit contained therein, one that represents openness and progressiveness. In constructing and shaping the figure of the sea with literature, modern China has shaped a new image of itself as a subject "full of modern feelings and world consciousness" (p. 223).

Chapter 7, "Seeking Dreams on the Maritime Silk Road," focuses on the experience of studying abroad and the achievements of the Maritime Silk Road literature. This chapter fully elaborates on the subject matter of international students, the works of modern study-abroad writers, and their contributions to the exchange and dissemination of Chinese and Western cultures. Precisely, they

translated and interpreted Western culture, constructed modern Chinese literature by drawing on Western resources, and introduced Chinese culture to the West through their writing and translation work. In this regard, examples are given in the book, such as Chen Jitong's writings in French and Gu Hongming (Thomson) and Lin Yutang's works in English, which corrected Western prejudices against Chinese culture and Chinese people a certain extent. The cross-cultural writing of the contemporary group of international students and immigrant writers differs from that of their predecessors. The pursuit and loss of their dreams and the hardships of local survival haunted them, leading to a new trend of thematic variety and stylistic diversity in their works.

In addition to copious quotations in the text, the book contains some twenty pages of literary works in an appendix, including more than 600 works of Silk Road literature written by nearly 400 writers. Those works are listed by author and publication time, making it easy for later researchers to track down the necessary works.

The chapter summaries above may help the reader appreciate the academic value of this book while making its features conspicuous. In general, this book is characterized by three distinctive features. First, based on extensive analysis of a large number of literary works, the authors argue that the Silk Road culture stands out from other regional cultures in that it is not static and closed but dialogical and open. The second feature is the interaction between Silk Road culture and literary writing, as reflected in the fact that cross-cultural exchanges expanded writers' horizons. At the same time, the cross-regional and cross-ethnic dissemination of literature also influenced cultural development and social progress. Finally, the book presents a previously unappreciated but vital spirit of the Silk Road, the entrepreneurial spirit, for the first time. The authors abstract the spirit of "pioneering exploration of the Silk Road" (p. 6) from the concrete works so that they converge into a spiritual and cultural synergy to hopefully rebuild the cultural confidence of Chinese literature.

Overall, by adopting a problem-oriented discussion approach, this book composes the vertical historical lineage of Silk Road literature on the one hand and distills the contemporary characteristics and spiritual character of Silk Road literature through horizontal comparison on the other hand, thus establishing a genealogy of knowledge and general theoretical framework for the study of modern Silk Road literature. Precisely for this reason, the reviewer could say that this book, with its rich content and broad vision, is a rigorously argued treatise and a remarkable achievement in the study of Silk Road literature in recent years.

YEYAN GAO, Ph.D candidate in contemporary Chinese literature at Shaanxi Normal University, lecturer at Xi'an Technological University. Email: gyxit@qq.com.