

BOOK REVIEWS

Li Jikai (李继凯), “‘Cultural Running-in Trend’ and ‘Wild-Ranging Modern’ Chinese literature” (“‘文化磨合思潮’与‘大现代’中国文学”), *Social Science in Chinese Higher Education Institutions* (中国高校社会科学), No. 5 (2017), pp. 147-154.

As the Chinese philosopher, Huimin Jin pointed out in his article, “Cultural studies has been dramatically internationalized recently, and a new theoretical framework is accordingly demanded.”¹ In addition, the article ‘*Cultural Running-In Trend’ and ‘Wild-Ranging Modern’ Chinese literature* by Jikai Li² has an in-depth discussion of the framework of Chinese cultural studies. A well-known expert on Chinese modern culture and contemporary literature, Li’s thinking on this issue undoubtedly offers a unique perspective and theoretical point. In this article, he puts forward the theories of “Cultural Running-in Trend” and “‘Wild-Ranging Modern’ Chinese Literature”.

Li believes that cultural running-in is a common but important phenomenon between heterogeneous cultures and even homogeneous ones. Taking the development of Chinese culture and literature as an example, he points out that since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese and foreign cultures have started the process of cultural running-in. This is a long-lasting, tortuous and complicated process. It has had an indelible influence on the development of the Chinese cultural movement and the emergence of the new literary phenomenon. In the 21st century, the development of Chinese culture and literature has entered a new stage, and the phenomenon of cultural running-in is more common and prominent. However, at the same time, there is a trend of dualism in Chinese academia that opposes cultural running-in. One may either pay too much attention to Western culture and denigrate traditional Chinese civilization, or exclude the former and excessively boost the latter. Li criticizes such thinking, and he believes that the development of Chinese culture urgently needs to abandon this dual mode of thinking.

Li stresses that the culture and literature we want to establish should be inclusive, interactive, tolerant, and transformable; we should strive to promote harmony, unification, communication and correspondence where culture and literature build a bridge between east and west. Under such theoretical premise, he elaborates on his theory of cultural running-in in three parts in the article.

Li states that modern Chinese culture is formed by the cultural running-in between Chinese and foreign cultures. The process is developed from collision to running-in with sometimes both occurring at the same time. Take the literature schools during the *May 4th New Culture Movement* as examples, works such as the *Enlightenment literature*, *Anti-imperialist literature*, *Children's literature*, *Female literature* and *Labor Writings*, they have accepted the influence of western culture but

¹ Jin, Huimin. 2016. “Towards Global Dialogism: Transcending ‘Cultural Imperialism’ and Its Critics”, *Journal of East-West Thought*, vol. 6, no. 3, Sept. 2016, p. 34.

² Dr. Jikai Li is a professor and the dean of Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Science, Shaanxi Normal University. He researches on modern and contemporary Chinese culture and literature, as well on Chinese calligraphy. His current main project is a monograph on Yan’an literature.

also have the characteristics of Chinese traditional culture. They accepted the concept of freedom advocated by western culture but did not lose the basic spirit cherished by the traditional Chinese culture. So, it's not hard to understand the principles and advocates by these literature schools, such as "reform of social life" advocated by the *Literary Research Society*, "creative life" supported by the *Creation Society*, "People's liberation" advocated by *Yan'an Literature*, etc.

Furthermore, Li argues that it should be noted that this cultural running-in during the *May 4th New Culture Movement* is not smooth sailing. The conservative schools like the famous *Xueheng* and *Tongcheng*, which advocated the retro spirit, had a nostalgia for the traditional Chinese culture, and they rejected Western culture. However, the impact of cultural running-in is invisible, neither the literature schools nor individuals could be immune to the affect during this trend. Li analyses that even though *Xueheng* and *Tongcheng* are widely considered as the cultural conservatives, they have their own "new ideas". Under the cultural running-in trend, they passively experienced the running-in between western culture and Chinese culture, actively exploring the internal rejuvenation of traditional Chinese culture. Whether active or passive, the objective result was that these conservative schools obtained a true cultural integration and cultural recreation. This is why traditional culture can maintain its vitality and have a more extensive cultural influence in the new century.

By analyzing the development of Chinese culture and literature around the *May 4th New Culture Movement*, Li tries to illustrate that one of the important functions of cultural running-in is the establishment of cultural consciousness. Meanwhile, he intends to reveal that cultural running-in does not mean the eradication of cultural uniqueness, but rather the diversity based on divergence. In fact, the establishment of cultural consciousness, cultural diversity and cultural divergence meant they all needed to, not only engage with heterogeneous culture, but also the homogeneous ones. As is shown, regardless of heterogeneous or homogeneous, the important ways of running-in are the same: inter-relatable, inter-actable, and inter-transformable. Only by such running-in can we form a culture and literature with characteristics such as inclusivity, interactivity, tolerance and transformability, and finally establish our cultural consciousness, cultural confidence and cultural tolerance.

Li reveals further that neither cultural running-in, cultural awareness or cultural diversity and cultural divergence could be based on the dualistic mode of thinking. He contends that every kind of culture has its own unique features, and its cultural characteristics cannot be compatible with others. Our analyses of different cultures cannot only fall into two different types based on binary opposition, as this would form a hostile relationship between different cultures. Li is a famous calligrapher in China, and he takes the art of calligraphy as an example to elaborate his idea. The example is, the writers of *May 4th New Culture Movement* did not give up the traditional writing instruments and writing methods, instead they gradually adapted to the changing demands of writing activities proposed by the times and began to make contact with the "hard pen" calligraphy and adjust to it. We cannot tell which writing instruments are better, but we are sure that both of them have their own advantages. Li tries to illustrate that the nature of things is not just good or bad, useful or useless. Culture and literature cannot be divided into top dog or underdog, dominant or

subservient, superior or inferior. There is no feudal system between different cultures and literatures, all cultures are egalitarian.

Through the theoretical analysis, combined with the clear understanding of the current development situation of Chinese culture and literature, Li proposes the concept of building a “wild-ranging modern” Chinese literature which is based on the theory of cultural running-in. Its core point is to recognize and develop the pluralism of Chinese modern literature. The so-called “wide-ranging modern Chinese literature”, should include the length of time and the breadth of content. It should be multi-dialogue, non-confrontational and promote harmony in diversity. Li stresses that it is important to create a literature with the characteristics of “wide-ranging modern”, and it should explore the advantages and disadvantages of our national culture. Meanwhile, it also should embody the positive energy and the life of ordinary people. It should keep a cultural balance and recover our national cultural confidence, and it should avoid falling into the mode of binary opposition and cultural destruction. This is a vision of Li's ideal state for the development of Chinese culture and literature. He also understands that this kind of literature is extremely lacking in the contemporary Chinese literary world and the development of “wild-ranging modern” Chinese literature in China has a long way to go.

At last, Li looks forward to the development of Chinese culture and literature in the new century and proposes several suggestions. He suggests that Chinese literature in the new century should embody the new look of society, the important value of culture, the creative spirit of writers.

Overall, Li builds a broader, inclusive definition of cultural running-in, and establishes the concept of “wild-ranging modern” Chinese literature. This essay reflects Li's broad vision as a scholar and his deep understanding of the development of modern and contemporary Chinese culture and literature, his thought sheds new light upon this question.

Another fact is this view of cultural running-in and wild-ranging modern Chinese literature is the result of Li's long-term thinking. For decades, he has kept constant attention and in-depth thinking on this issue. The related articles he published as early as in 2006,³ and as lately as in 2017. On the issue of contemporary Chinese culture and literature, Li has the ambition to establish his own theoretical system. It is undoubtedly a very fresh perspective to emphasize the tortuous process of running-in but not the simple integration of different cultures, as well as discussing this issue in detail with Chinese modern and contemporary literature. In particular, it should be pointed out that the proposal of the concept of “wild-ranging modern Chinese literature” is undoubtedly a very fresh and original theoretical conception at home and abroad. Therefore, it is understandable why Li's article ‘*Cultural Running-In Trend*’ and ‘*Wild-Ranging Modern*’ literature has had such a big impact in China. Moreover, it could be predicted that his theory will provoke more and more discussions on the relevant problems. We look forward to Li's theory in this article and his following works will have much more influence both at domestic and abroad.

³ Jikai Li (李继凯), “New Literature in Cultural Running-in” “文化磨合”中的新文学, *Yangtze River Academic* (长江学术), No. 4 (2006), pp. 21-26.

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