

Exploring Changes in Ancient Literary History Textbooks: A Case Study of the Ming and Qing Literature Chapters

Rui Yin

*School of Chinese Language and Literature, Jiangsu Normal University, Xuzhou, China
1969455993@qq.com*

Abstract. As an important part of the core curriculum of Chinese language and literature, ancient literature history textbooks are not only teaching tools, but also a concentrated reflection of the specific social background, academic atmosphere and the editor's view of literary history. By comparing the Ming and Qing literature sections in six major textbooks on the history of ancient Chinese literature—compiled by Xie Wuliang, Zheng Zhenduo, You Guoen, Zhang Peiheng, Yuan Xingpei, and the “Marxist Theory Research and Construction Project” (commonly known as the “Ma Project”)—this study analyzes the changes in their writing characteristics, research focuses, and literary historical perspectives, thereby revealing the developmental trajectory and characteristics of literary history research. The study found that the textbooks' interpretation of classic writers and works remained generally stable, but due to differences in scholars' backgrounds and times, there were differences in emphasis and perspectives of interpretation, reflecting the era characteristics and diversified development of literary history research. The study pointed out that in the future, textbook compilation needs to innovate methods on the basis of inheriting traditions to enhance the applicability of teaching and research. In addition, the sample size of this study is limited, and subsequent research can expand the textbook versions and disciplinary perspectives to enhance the representativeness and depth of the research.

Keywords: Ancient Chinese Literary History, Textbooks, Ming and Qing Literature, Teaching Reform, Chapter Division

1. Introduction

As an important core course of Chinese language and literature, the compilation of ancient literary history textbooks has always been the focus of common concern in the academic and teaching circles [1]. Textbooks compiled in different eras are often not only teaching tools, but also a concentrated reflection of specific social backgrounds, academic atmospheres and the editors' literary history views [1]. While conveying literary knowledge, textbooks also profoundly reflect the discourse system and cultural value orientation of the times. As the peak stage of the development of ancient Chinese literature, the Ming and Qing dynasties had rich literary forms and diverse thoughts, and were a highly controversial and complex component of ancient literary history. The literary presentation methods of the Ming and Qing dynasties not only reflected the interpretation paths and

re-evaluations of classical literature in various historical stages, but also reflected the continuous adjustment and transformation of literary history research in terms of macro-historical views, focus points and value judgment systems.

This study adopts the method of comparative text analysis. Through close reading of the texts and cross-text comparison, this study attempts to reveal how changes in academic paradigms and historical contexts have influenced the portrayal of Ming and Qing literature in these important texts. This study aims to explore the writing characteristics, research focuses, and changes in literary historical perspectives of ancient literature history textbooks in the Ming and Qing literature sections by comparing the contents of the Ming and Qing literature chapters in six ancient literature history textbooks authored by Xie Wuliang, Zheng Zhenduo, You Guoen, Zhang Peiheng, Yuan Xingpei, and the “Ma Project”.

2. Analysis of research focuses

The evolution of narrative in Ming and Qing literature textbooks reflects the extensive changes in literary history, academic focus and methodology of different scholars. From the perspectives and breadth of research, early textbooks such as those by Xie Wuliang and Zheng Zhenduo focused on the introduction and analysis of classic works and authors of Ming and Qing literature, emphasizing internal research on literary works and aesthetic analysis, and stressing discussions on literary styles and techniques [2,3]. As research deepened, later textbooks like those by You Guoen and Zhang Peiheng began to expand their research perspectives, examining Ming and Qing literature within a broad social and historical context, focusing on the interaction between literature, sociology, and history, and exploring external factors in literary development [4,5].

In terms of research content, Yuan Xingpei’s textbook provides an in-depth analysis of literary works from the Ming and Qing periods, particularly emphasizing the literary changes and developments of this time, along with interpretations and evaluations of outstanding works [6]. His research focuses on the intrinsic spirit and social value of literary works, as well as the innovation and evolution of literary forms.

The “Ma Project” textbook, as a newer resource in recent years, emphasizes a comprehensive understanding and systematic study of Ming and Qing literature [7]. It builds upon previous research findings through integration and innovation, aiming to present a comprehensive and objective view of Ming and Qing literature. Additionally, different textbooks also exhibit variations in research methods. Early textbooks often adopted traditional documentary research methods, focusing on the organization and interpretation of ancient texts; later textbooks emphasized the use of interdisciplinary research and comparative literature, employing modern academic methods and theories for a more in-depth and comprehensive study of Ming and Qing literature.

The differences in research focuses among the six textbooks primarily manifest in their research perspectives, content, methods, and breadth. These differences reflect the characteristics and trends of academic research in different eras, providing diverse perspectives and approaches for a comprehensive understanding of Ming and Qing literature.

3. Author discussions

Different authors have different views on the compilation of literary textbooks, which is largely influenced by the differences in the background of the times and personal backgrounds.

Mr. Xie Wuliang was a prominent scholar who lived through the late Qing and Republican periods. Amid a broad ideological clash between East and West, tradition and modernity, he

developed a pluralistic fusion of thought grounded in Confucian values, distinguishing himself as a uniquely modern scholar of his time [2]. As an early researcher of literary history, Xie Wuliang's textbook emphasizes the organization and interpretation of traditional literary forms, including poetry, prose, drama, and novels in the Ming and Qing literature sections. The writing style is concise and clear, laying a foundation for later literary history research.

Zheng Zhenduo has unique insights into the interpretation and evaluation of Ming and Qing literary works [3]. His interpretations not only focus on the artistic value of the works but also consider the historical background and social realities they reflect, conducting interdisciplinary research that intersects Ming and Qing literature with history and sociology, thereby expanding the depth and breadth of literary studies.

You Guoen demonstrated rigorous and comprehensive research characteristics when compiling the Ming and Qing sections [4]. Through extensive organization and analysis of historical materials and literature, he conducted in-depth discussions on the developmental trajectory of Ming and Qing literature, important authors and works, and literary schools. In addition, he examined Ming and Qing literature within the social, political, and economic contexts of the time, thereby comprehensively revealing the connotations and values of Ming and Qing literature. His research highlights the close relationship between Ming and Qing literature and social realities through an in-depth study of the social, political, and economic aspects of the time.

The three-volume "History of Chinese Literature" edited by Zhang Peiheng and Luo Yuming at Fudan University clearly states, "Literature must reflect humanity and must also possess distinct individuality; the latter is, in fact, a requirement of humanity" [5]. Zhang Peiheng's textbook emphasizes systematic and comprehensive approaches in literary history research. He provides a clear overview of the developmental trajectory of Ming and Qing literature and conducts in-depth analysis of the stylistic characteristics of various literary works. His writing style is well-structured and coherent, enabling readers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the overall landscape of Ming and Qing literature.

The History of Chinese Literature, edited by Yuan Xingpei, Peking University. This literary history presents the "Three Ancient Periods and Seven Stages" framework for the development of ancient Chinese literature. In its general introduction, it states that "literary history is the history of literature itself, and a work of literary history should depict the evolution of literature within a broad cultural context" [6]. In particular, it adopts a cultural perspective to examine the connections between literature and politics, history, philosophy, and religion, presenting a broad and majestic scholarly vision. Additionally, this literary history incorporates cutting-edge academic achievements through annotations, synthesizing various schools of thought and establishing fair arguments, leading many universities to designate this set of "History of Chinese Literature" as the textbook for graduate exams in Chinese language and literature and ancient literature research.

The "Ma Project" textbook, recently implemented, emphasizes exploring literary phenomena through the lens of Marxist historical materialism [7]. It aims to ideologically form a literary historical perspective that aligns with the needs of national social systems and ideological development. In addition, to meet the needs of higher education, the "Ma Project" edition emphasizes highlighting key points in chapter settings and content arrangements, facilitating students' comprehension and systematic learning. However, this writing approach also somewhat neglects the diversity and complexity of literary history research.

The six textbooks reflect the evolution of academic paradigms and ideological orientations in Ming and Qing literature research from traditional text interpretation to interdisciplinary exploration

and ideological docking, and together depict the development trajectory of literary historiography in different historical and academic contexts.

4. Relatively stable chapter content

The content of the Ming and Qing literature chapters exhibits stability in several aspects. The analysis and interpretation of important authors and works constitute the core of the Ming and Qing literature chapters, which are typically elaborated upon in detail across different textbooks. Classics such as *Journey to the West*, *The Plum in the Golden Vase* from the Ming dynasty, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* from the Qing dynasty are all key works highlighted in various textbooks.

Although the core chapters and main contents of Ming and Qing literature chapters remain generally stable. However, the perspective, depth and breadth of specific discussions will show obvious differences due to the differences in the academic views of the textbook compilers and the different historical backgrounds. Some textbooks may focus on analyzing the aesthetic changes of Ming and Qing literature from the context of historical development, with a deeper discussion and a wider breadth. These textbooks may involve the influence of various factors such as social culture, politics and economy at that time on literature; while some textbooks may focus on the creative techniques of a specific school or writer, and conduct meticulous discussions from a micro perspective, with a concentrated depth but relatively narrow breadth.

Therefore, when readers read different versions of Ming and Qing literature textbooks, they can clearly perceive the exquisite balance between stability and diversity. This balance not only ensures the stable inheritance of the basic framework of the Ming and Qing literature knowledge system, but also provides readers with a variety of interpretation perspectives and rich academic viewpoints, which helps readers to understand the unique charm and profound connotation of Ming and Qing literature more comprehensively and deeply.

5. Evolution of literary historical perspectives

Early Ming and Qing literature textbooks often emphasized the introduction and analysis of classic authors and works, reflecting a traditional literary historical perspective that values the inheritance and influence of classic works. These textbooks typically devote substantial attention to classic works such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Margin*, offering in-depth analyses that uncover their literary value and social significance.

With the development of modern literary historiography, people pay more and more attention to the diversity and interdisciplinarity of literature. Therefore, Ming and Qing literature textbooks, there is a gradual increase in attention to marginalized fields such as women's literature, ethnic minority literature, and foreign literature. In addition, interdisciplinary research methods have been widely applied in the study of Ming and Qing literature, such as the intersection of literature with philosophy, religion, and art, which helps to comprehensively understand the richness and complexity of Ming and Qing literature.

Along with these changes, the organization and content of Ming and Qing literature chapters have been continuously improved. New academic discoveries and evolving research paradigms have prompted the six textbooks mentioned in this article to introduce emerging literary phenomena, including popular novels and dramas, while reconstructing or omitting certain traditional materials [8]. These changes reflect the dynamic expansion and deepening of the discipline of literary history.

In general, the changes in the textbooks of Ming and Qing literature in the history of Chinese literature have well demonstrated the transformation of textbooks from traditional perspectives to modern perspectives, and from single perspectives to multiple perspectives from the perspective of literary history. This change also provides a broad perspective and ideas for the progress and development of academic research and a deeper understanding and appreciation of Ming and Qing literature.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, through comparative textual analysis of the chapters on Ming and Qing literature in six ancient literature history textbooks, this study reveals the important influence of changes in academic paradigms and historical contexts on the presentation of Ming and Qing literature. The study found that although the Ming and Qing literature textbooks remain relatively stable in the interpretation of classic writers and works, there are certain differences in the focus and interpretation perspective of the content due to differences in the background and era of scholars. These changes not only reflect the developmental trajectory and distinctive features of literary history research in different periods but also offer important insights into the evolution of ancient literary history textbooks.

Each textbook has its unique value and limitations. In future research on literary history, textbook compilation should continue to build upon the achievements of previous scholarship, while innovating and refining approaches in order to better serve the needs of teaching and research. The comparison of the Ming and Qing literature chapters in the six ancient literary history textbooks reveals the evolution of the content related to the Ming and Qing period in literary history. These changes reflect both the historical and scientific dimensions of academic research, as well as the scholarly perspectives and writing styles of the textbook authors. In future literary history research and textbook writing, continued attention should be given to these changes, further promoting the development and innovation of literary history research.

In addition, this study mainly relies on six representative literature history textbooks. Although they cover different historical periods and academic backgrounds, the sample size is limited and it is difficult to fully reflect all textbook versions and research perspectives. Future research can further expand the sample range to cover more versions and textbooks from different disciplinary backgrounds to enhance the representativeness and comprehensiveness of the research.

References

- [1] Xie, T., Chen, S., Wang, D., & Liu, J. H. (2021). Collective remembering of Confucianism in Chinese language textbooks: Official historical representations from 1949 to 2019. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 15, 1834490921993511.
- [2] Tian, Y. (2010). The achievements and characteristics of Xie Wuliang's research on classical literature. *Literary Heritage*, (4), 151-158.
- [3] Zheng, Z. (2023). *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature (Volumes 1 and 2)*. Hong Kong Zhonghe Publishing Co., Ltd.
- [4] Xie, W. (2022). The knowledge positioning and discourse competition of Chinese literary history in modern times. *Literary Review*, (4), 87-95.
- [5] Ding, F. (2023). Review and Prospect of the Study of Yuan and Ming Dynasty Poetry and Prose in the New Era. *Journal of Soochow University Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition*, 44(3).
- [6] Li, L. (2025). Research on the compilation and publication of Chinese subject textbooks in my country. *Advances in Education*, 15, 659.
- [7] Peng, L. (2021). Exploration and practice of ideological and political education in the course "Literary Theory" based on the use of the "Marxism Project" textbook. *Journal of Hunan University of Humanities, Science and*

Technology.

- [8] Yang, Z.P. (2021). “History” and “Historical Materials”: How to Chronologically Compose the Theory of Ming and Qing Novels?. *Journal of Literary and Art Theory*, 41(6), 83-92.