CHAPTER 9

The Voicelessness of Literature: Reorganizing National Heritage and Evidence-based Research on Literature

In the early 1920s, the reorganization of national heritage (zhengli guogu 整理国故) emerged in Chinese academia and swept across the country. In 1923, Zhang Pengchun 张彭春 (1892–1957) realized, ‘Chinese ‘learning’ all leans towards history—‘I am one who is fond of antiquity and earnest in seeking knowledge there.’ The publicly recognized scholars of today, such as Liang [Qichao] and Hu [Shi], also devote themselves to reorganizing ancient texts.’¹ Liang Qichao had already made his reputation, but Hu Shi’s role as a ‘publicly recognized scholar’ was fairly new. Over the next several years, Liang Qichao and Hu Shi fundamentally differed in their attitudes towards traditional Chinese culture, and in many of their specific ideas, but both promoted national learning (guoxue 国学), which made its attractiveness that much greater. Zhang also wanted to research national learning, but knew his “foundation in ancient works is shallow.” He still hoped “I can serve as an experiment for future students so they would know whether it is possible to research national learning without having read ancient texts.”² Allowing someone who has not read ancient texts to research national learning seemed a bit too romantic, but Zhang pointed out the attraction of national learning and confirms the contemporary recognition of the necessity for and validity of the subject.

¹ An earlier version of this article entitled “Hu Shi and the Reorganization of National Heritage from the Perspective of Research on Literary History,” was presented on 17 December 2001 at the “Research Workshop on Hu Shi and the Establishment and Transformation of Modern Chinese Scholarship” at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica. Other revised versions were presented at the Faculty of Arts of Nankai University (6 December 2001), the History Department of Xiamen University (26 December 2001), and the Research Group on Hu Shi at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica (18 July 2002). I would like to thank panel discussant Professor Li Xiaoti and various other participants for their valuable comments and criticisms.

² Zhang Pengchun 张彭春, “Richeng cao'an” 日程草案 (Daily schedule) (viz. diary) (12 August 1923). The original version of this document is housed in the Yanjing Library of Harvard University. I used the microfilm copy at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

Translator’s note: “I am one who is fond of antiquity …” is a quote from Confucius.

1 Zhang Pengchun 张彭春, “Richeng cao’an” 日程草案 (Daily schedule) (viz. diary) (12 August 1923). The original version of this document is housed in the Yanjing Library of Harvard University. I used the microfilm copy at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

2 Zhang, “Richeng cao'an,” (10 March 1923).
In 1923, Hu Shi himself said, “Over the past four or five years, I don't know how many ‘how to begin researching national learning’ letters I’ve received from young friends.” Significantly, it was the ‘youth’ who wanted to imitate Hu Shi in pursuing ‘national learning.’ This was a special phenomenon in the years immediately following the strongly anti-traditional mood of the New Culture Movement; however, Kangfu (Fan Shaoquan 樊少泉 [1876–1931?]) observed something completely different. In 1922, he noted that evidential scholarship (kaozheng zhi xue 考证之学) had undergone “unprecedented development” over the past twenty years, particularly in the works of Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei, but “few common people know” this type of “‘specialized old learning’ and even less among the magazine-reading youth.”

In the early 1920s, ‘old learning’ (jiu xue 旧学) was a synonym for ‘national learning,’ or at least their research subjects were similar. On the one hand, Hu Shi’s promotion of ‘reorganizing national heritage’ was sweeping the country, but on the other hand, Luo and Wang’s ‘specialized old learning’ was distant from “the common people,” and particularly “the magazine-reading youth.” The latter group constituted the core of Hu Shi’s readership and supported his cause to become a ‘publically recognized scholar.’ With virtually identical research subjects, the sharp contrast in social responses to these two types of learning fully illustrates the shift of ‘discursive power’ as well as the quite serious divisions and multifacetedness of ‘academic society’ in the early 1920s. As Lu Xun observed in 1919, in China “everywhere there are things containing two, three, or multiple layers, and every layer is self-contradictory” meaning everyone lived with these contradictions. After the May Fourth Movement, ‘academic society’ clearly shared the same characteristics.

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3 Hu Shi 胡适, ”Yige zui di xiandu de guoxue shumu” 一个最低限度的国学书目 (A very basic bibliography on national learning), in Hu Shi wencun erji 胡适文存二集 (The essays of Hu Shi, second collection) (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1924), 1: 165.
4 Kangfu 抗父 (Fan Shaoquan 樊少泉), ”Zuijin ershinian jian Zhongguo jiu xue zhi jinbu” 最近二十年间中国旧学之进步 (The progress of old Chinese learning over the last twenty years), Dongfang zazhi 东方杂志 (Eastern miscellany) 19: 3 (10 February 1922), 33, 38.
5 Reorganizing national heritage became rapidly popular partially because national heritage was the only subject that Chinese old- and new-style-scholars could study well. The scientificization of national learning (that is, it was no longer ‘old’ or even ‘Chinese’ learning) also played a crucial role in the popularity of reorganizing national heritage. See Chapter 8 in this volume.
6 Lu Xun 鲁迅, ”Suiganlu wushisi” 随感录五十四 (Random jottings no. 54) (1919), Refeng 热风 (Hot wind), in Lu Xun quanji 鲁迅全集 (The complete works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 1: 344–45.