

## **The Past and Present of Chinese Literature Study from the Perspective of Literature Communication**

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文学コミュニケーション学の視座の下に行われた中国文学研究の歴史と現状

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## Abstract

In this study, I examine the history of Chinese literature communication and analyse its current status, existing issues, and prospects from the perspective of literature communication. The study of communication in China began with the introduction of Western communication in the 1980s. After digesting the theoretical knowledge of Western communication, China began creating its own path and has explored various fields, such as literature communication. Literature Communication has been established in China for only a brief period, and although outstanding achievements have been made, the theoretical aspects of the discipline must nevertheless be strengthened. The existing achievements of Chinese literature communication centre mostly on the study of ancient literature, whereas the communications of network literature, film and television literature, and folk literature have been inadequately addressed. Specifically, the study of the communication of folk literature in terms of literature communication is lacking, though literature communication is highly suitable for the study of folk literature communication, which is expected to become a new research focus of Chinese literature communication in the future.

**Keywords:** communication, literature communication, Chinese literature research, history, current situation

## 要 旨

本稿は、中国文学コミュニケーション学の歴史を踏まえ、現状と問題点を分析し、文学コミュニケーション学の視座の下に中国文学研究の未来を展望する試みである。中国におけるコミュニケーション学の研究は、1980年代に西洋のコミュニケーション学の紹介から始まり、西洋の理論知識を取り入れた上で、現在既に中国独自のコミュニケーション学の道を歩み出し、文学コミュニケーション学などの研究領域にまで拡張している。文学コミュニケーション学は、中国で成立して数多くの研究成果を獲得したが、新しい研究領域として理論面の検討はまだ不足しており、さらに強化する必要がある。また、現在の中国文学コミュニケーション学の研究成果は、古代文学の研究に集中しており、ネット文学、映画文学、口承文学については、コミュニケーション学の視座から行われる研究がかなり少ないのである。特にコミュニケーション学の視座から行われる口承文学の研究は極めて珍しい。口承文学の特徴から見れば、文学コミュニケーション学の研究方法は口承文学の研究に非常に適しており、今後口承文学の研究は、中国文学コミュニケーション学の新たな焦点になると考えられる。

**キーワード:** コミュニケーション学、文学コミュニケーション学、中国文学研究、歴史、現状

## **Introduction**

The establishment of the discipline of communication in the United States began in the mid-20th century. In the late 1970s, against the background of the government's call for emancipating the mind, the academic community in mainland China began clarifying the context of journalism research and discussed several basic questions, including the definition, value, and authenticity of news and the nature and prospects of journalism. The theoretical exploration of these basic concepts created conditions for the introduction of communication studies. In the 1980s, with the help of the spring breeze of reform and opening-up, communication studies took root in mainland China. Communication studies, once considered an emerging interdisciplinary subject in the West, has since received great attention in mainland China.

In the 1990s, the Chinese communication community continued to explore and introduced the latest research methods and statistical software from abroad and Taiwan, and Communication studies have since become a fad in mainland China (W. Wu). In 1997, the Academic Committee of the State Council of China adjusted the traditional disciplinary system to include "Communication studies" in journalism, an originally Level 1 discipline, and renamed the field of study "Journalism and Communication". The field subsequently comprised two sub-disciplines, i.e., journalism and communication, both Level 2 disciplines. Having introduced and digested theories and methods of Western communication studies, communication studies have rapidly developed in China in the 21st century. Relevant theoretical discussions and research applications have continued emerging, numerous monographs and papers have been published, many large-scale symposiums have been held, and the Chinese academic community of communication has been continuously and consciously paving the way for the localization of communication studies. The academic trend of communication studies facilitated the creation of the branch of literature communication. In this article, I review the history of Chinese literature research from the perspective of literature communication to analyse the research status, existing issues, and prospects of Chinese literature research and discuss the implications for the future development of the subject in China.

### **1. The rise of Chinese literature communication research**

In 1982, communication studies were introduced to China by the renowned communication scholar Wilbur Schramm. At the end of the same year, the first national symposium on communication studies was held at the Institute of Journalism of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. In 1985, the Cultural and Communication Research Center, the first communication research institution in Chinese colleges and universities, was established at Fudan

University, Shanghai. One year later, the second national symposium was held in Huangshan, Anhui Province, during which the achievements in the education of communication studies since the first national symposium were presented, and new developments of communication studies in other countries were analysed and evaluated, based on which the goal of “developing the subject of communication studies with Chinese characteristics” was proposed. This conference became a landmark meeting in terms of localizing communication studies in China. In 1993, the third national symposium was held in Xiamen, Fujian Province, during which the goal of localizing communication studies in China was reaffirmed. Through the academic trend of localization of communication studies, many branches of communication studies have since been created. In 1995, the 4th national symposium was held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, which further broadened the field of communication studies.

In the 20-year process of introducing, learning, studying, localizing and applying communication studies, literature communication is a branch that developed rather late. Not until 2004 was a dedicated teaching and research institution established in Shenyang Normal University. Despite the relatively later establishment of literature communication in China, case studies of Chinese literature from the perspective of communication were already conducted before the subject of communication studies was introduced into China. For example, Zhang Keli analysed the spread of Jian’an literature from the perspective of communication and discussed its ways and scope of dissemination and the latter’s impact on the development of literature at that time. In the 1990s, case studies on Chinese literature from a communications perspective gradually increased, such as “On *Dream of Red Mansions* and Shakespeare’s works from the perspective of communication” (W. M. Li), “On journalism of Du Fu’s poem” (B. J. Zhang), “On the compilation and publishing of Song Dynasty Literature” (F. Xu), “On the basic characteristics of ancient Chinese cultural communication” (Qin), and “literature communication and literature acceptance in Yuan and Ming Dynasties” (Y. D. Guo). These studies all investigated Chinese literature from the perspective of communication.

Based on case studies, the academic community began exploring the construction of literature communication disciplines. The article “Introduction to Chinese literature communication: A newly erected discipline of Shenyang Normal University” published in 2004 in the fourth issue of *Journal of Shenyang Normal University*, introduced the new discipline of Chinese literature communication in detail. The discipline focuses on the history of the spread of ancient Chinese literature and the dissemination of famous works, and its creation has enabled the disciplinary construction and theoretical exploration of Chinese literature communication. In the 2005 article “The creation of literature communication studies and studies of the communication of ancient Chinese literature”, Cao Meng, the director of the discipline, reviewed the research status of Chinese literature communication and analysed and set forth basic ideas concerning the feasibility and necessity of its study (“The creation” 13-18).

## 2. Development of Chinese literature communication research

Since the start of the 21st century, China's literature communication studies have made tremendous achievements in terms of both case studies and theoretical development. These achievements are reflected mainly in the following aspects.

### 2.1 Theoretical development of the discipline of literature communication

As noted, the establishment of the discipline of Chinese literature communication at Shenyang Normal University has enabled the disciplinary construction and theoretical exploration of Chinese literature communication. Subsequently, Wen Yan compiled and published a monograph entitled *Introduction to literature Communication*, which discusses literature communication in terms of the "5W" theory, i.e., "who" says "what" in "which channel" to "whom" with "what effect", and established a systematic framework for the discipline of literature communication from the perspective of the theory and method of literature communication. This monograph represents an outstanding contribution to the development of the discipline of Chinese literature communication.

In the article "A meagre opinion on literature communication", Huo Youming and Li Yongping investigated the subject system, research object, content, and method of literature communication, noting that literature communication comprises five parts, i.e., literature communication theory, literature media, linguistic communication, stylistic communication, historical literature communication, and cross-cultural literature communication. In terms of research method, in addition to the methods employed in literature studies and communication studies, they also recommended actively drawing on the research results and methods of sociology, folkloristics, and cultural studies. Based on this article, Li Yongping further examined the nature and research method of literature communication in an article entitled "Outline of literature communication studies", arguing that contemporary literature is a "multimedia" presentation, "which again restores the narrative strategy in the pre-media era (oral communication era), in which words, sounds, and images once again [have] achieved isomorphism"<sup>1)</sup> (45). In the case of literature exhibiting the characteristics of media, researchers should include the writer's manuscript, former residence, inscriptions, pictures, and other literary exhibitions and activities as well as cultural relics in the scope of investigation and conduct in-depth field research on the urban culture.

Wu Haijin discussed the communicational transformation of literature studies from the perspective of the history of literature research and showed that the booming of mass communication has altered the literary production order of past eras and has prompted literary activities to enter a disorderly and mixed pluralist order. Literature research has been continuously

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1) The quote from the text and subsequent quotations are the author's translation.

making breakthroughs in various frameworks, such as “writer-centred theory”, “text-centred theory”, “reader-centred theory”, and “socio-cultural theory”, that are based on the four elements of “writer → text → readers → world”. This field of research has moreover been advancing towards interdisciplinary integration and is now trending in communication studies. Wu studied the social benefits of literature communication research, arguing that it is particularly important for cultural development in underdeveloped areas. Taking the development of Guizhou contemporary literature as an example, he argued that the media in Guizhou Province has too obsessively pursued market benefits, while ignoring the social benefits of cultural communication, thus failing to combine the development of Guizhou literature with the economic and social development of Guizhou. He recommended that the media within Guizhou Province be integrated to seize opportunities according to the requirements of the times and the overall planning of social development in Guizhou and that developing “new Guizhou” image be conveyed in literature communication through a series of manoeuvrable communication strategies so that awareness of Guizhou identity can be strengthened, and the social development of Guizhou can be promoted. Wu’s discussion broadened the scope of the five elements of traditional communication, i.e., “who” says “what” in “which channel” to “whom” with “what effect”, extending the scope, namely, to “how to affect.” This broadening involves redefining the research object and content of literature communication studies and the basic issues of the literary discipline, such as the essence and the nature of literature. Thus, the rationality of this broadened scope remains to be discussed. Nonetheless, his emphasis on the interaction between literature communication and society merits recognition.

## **2.2 Research on writers’ literature communication**

Based on theoretical research, Chinese scholars have conducted numerous case studies on the communication of literary works, mainly ancient Chinese writers’ literary works. As mentioned, within the early Chinese academic community, the case study of literature communication originated with the study of ancient literary works such as *Dream of Red Mansions* and Du Fu’s poems. Since the start of the 21st century, research on the literature communication of ancient writers has boomed. For example, “The acceptance and dissemination of Jian’an literature in the Song Dynasty” (M. Wang), “The news communication value of current-event novels and dramas in the Ming and Qing Dynasties” (P. R. Zhang), and “Journalistic poems: Pioneering of Du Fu’s poems” (X. T. Zhou) all investigate the communication of ancient Chinese literature based on previous studies.

In his article “The creation of literature communication studies and studies of the communication of ancient Chinese literature”, Cao advanced the creation of literature communication, discussed the basic ideas of literature communication research using the study of Chinese ancient literature as an example, and detailed the ways of communication of Chinese

ancient literature and the related communication ideas. Cao's discussion of the regularity and theoretical characteristics of the communication of ancient literature has widened the theoretical study of the communication of ancient literature in Chinese academic circles and is thus of seminal significance.

Since then, the study of Chinese ancient literature communication has become more active and has become focused on literary classics, such as the abovementioned communication study on *Dream of Red Mansions*. Master's theses on this topic have also emerged. For example, the Chen Huiwen's master's thesis from Fudan University, entitled "The communication of *Dream of Red Mansions* in contemporary Malaysia", investigated the communication of the Chinese version of *Dream of Red Mansions* in Malaysia from two perspectives, namely, the relationship between external literary factors and literature communication and between literary ontology elements and literature communication. In addition, the communication of the classical masterpiece *Journey to the West* has been a prime research interest among academics. Some examples are Shao's master's thesis from Zhejiang University, entitled "Study of visual communication of *Journey to the West*"; "The spread and reception of stories in *Journey to the West*" by Zhu Mingsheng and Fan Shengyu; and "Investigation of the audience awareness of overseas communication about *Journey to the West*" by Li Jiak.

In addition to the abovementioned ancient novels, Chinese scholars are also keen on the study of the communication of ancient poetry, particularly from the Tang Dynasty. Some examples are "The spread of Bai Juyi's Poetry in the Tang Dynasty" (H. Zheng); "The relationship between Bai Juyi's literary spread consciousness and his poetry spreading effect" (J. J. Huang); "The literature communication tendency of Du Fu's discussing poetry based on poems" (W. W. Duan); and "Cultural phenomenon of the poetry of the Tang Dynasty from the perspective of communication studies" (W. Q. Liu, Y. Zuo). Certainly, the study of ancient Chinese literature communication has not been limited to novels and poetry, as indicated by studies such as "Study on the origin of Beisanqu from the perspective of literature communication" (Y. Zhou) and "Literature communication of the proses of pre-Qin philosophers" (Ma), which concern other literary genres, in these cases, Sanqu (lyrics) and prose, respectively. The diversification of the genre as a research object is also a current trend in the development of Chinese literature communication research.

The studies mentioned above are case studies of individual work or a literary genre. Scholars have also investigated dynastic features of literature communication. For example, "Study on literature communication in the Tang Dynasty" (Ke), "The Literature of Song Dynasty in the View of Media Studies" (H. F. Zhao), "Study on literature communication in the Liao Dynasty" (Y. X. Wu) all focus on dynastic features of literature communication. They have contributed to the macroscopic grasp of Chinese literature communication and are landmarks in the development of literature communication.

As Chinese literature communication research has flourished, scholars are studying the five

elements of communication more comprehensively, and the study of the communication method of ancient literature has become a new focus in academic circles, as evidenced by the following works: “Censorship and dissemination: An alternative way of dissemination of novels in the Ming and Qing Dynasties” (Jiang, Cao), “Study on the ways of spreading verses in the Tang and Song Dynasties” (Qian), “Image and communication: A survey of communication about illustrations of ancient novels” (Lu), “Digital film and television mediatization of ancient Chinese literary classics” (H. L. Zhao), and “Study on communication skills of novels in late Ming Dynasty” (D. Zhang).

Notably, among investigations of the communication of ancient Chinese literature, the study on ancient minority literature has rarely been studied. “Study of communication ways of novels of the ethnic group of Manchu in the Qing Dynasty”, Xu Xiaoyu’s master’s thesis from Shenyang Normal University, used two novels, *Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Tale of Heroes*, to analyse the ways of communication of novels of the ethnic group of Manchu in the Qing Dynasty and the functions of these novels as modes of communication. This work represents a valuable attempt to the study the communication of ancient minority literature, while providing a case study for guiding the theoretical construction of literature communication studies, an innovative interdisciplinary discipline.

In addition to research on the communication of ancient literature, studies on the communication of modern and contemporary literary works are also gradually being conducted. Research in this area focuses on two main concerns: the first concerns these works’ overseas disseminations, and the other concerns the dissemination of Yan’an literature. The former has been the chief focus of the study of well-known literary works around the world, e.g., “Comparative analysis of the overseas communications of Jia Pingwa and Mo Yan’s novels from the perspective of communication studies” (A. F. Xu). Several studies have addressed the dissemination of Yan’an literature, e.g., “Accommodation and building: Yan’an papers and periodicals in literary spreading (1935-1948)” (L. Yang), “A primary study on the significance of communication science of Yan’an Literature” (M. D. Li, J. Zheng), and “Morphology of Yan’an literature communication” (X. Q. Zhu). Among them, Zhu systematically and comprehensively examined major elements, such as the communication environment, the subject, the media, and the receiving subject, and their changes.

### **2.3 Research on the communication of new media literature**

Among case studies of literature communication, scholars have addressed the communicational significance of literary works communicated through new media, i.e., other than traditional paper media, such as the Internet, films and TV. Several studies have investigated online literature from the perspective of communication, including “Network literature within the new medium visual field” (Z. B. Jin), “A communication study of Internet literature” (J. Guan), “Analysis of the communicational elements of the original Internet literature” (M.X.Wu), and

“Assessment of the communicational significance of Internet novels from the perspective of communication” (Dong, Tan). Moreover, some dissertations have intensively examined certain topics of online literature, e.g., “The relationship between new media and literature as demonstrated by Internet popular novels” (Y. Li) and “Analysis of the ‘5W’ elements of communication of Chinese online novels” (Y. Gu). As the research has progressed, researchers have begun conducting detailed investigations of different types of online literature, e.g., “Communicational interpretation of online novels for women” (C. Y. Yang) and “Microblog literature from the perspective of communication studies” (Y. Y. Fang, K. Fan).

Researchers have also conducted studies on the dissemination of film and television (TV) literature, focusing on the meaning of literature communication from the aspects of the communication subject, object, mode, content, and effect. Yang Xu used the TV dramas adopted from the Four Classical Literary Works as examples of the influence of TV dramas on the communication of Chinese classical literature, particularly ancient novels. Liu Yue examined the film and TV adaptations of Ailing Zhang’s works to understand the disintegration of Zhang’s literary style by these adoptions. Li Jinling analysed the changing role of the director in adapting literary works to films and described the evolution of adaptation ideas of Chinese Films from dramatization to literature to cinematics, noting how the director’s role has evolved from a subsidiary to a dominant role. Qiu Xuan examined the process of adapting novels to screenplays and investigated several impacts of this adoption on the creators of the novels and films, the audience and the communication effect.

In the past decade, with the rapid development of mobile terminals such as smartphones, tablets, and smart TVs, competition among video websites has grown fierce. Against the backdrop of China’s crackdown on pirated video, various video websites have launched self-produced online dramas with diverse themes, distinctive features and strong interaction. In academia, in addition to the abovementioned traditional film and TV media such as films screened in cinemas and TV series broadcasted by TV stations, researchers have begun including original film and TV works disseminated by the Internet in the field of literature communication studies. For example, in his master’s thesis “Study on the acceptance of online dramas”, Wei Pingcheng discussed how self-produced online dramas are received and investigated the acceptance objectives, psychology and satisfaction of the audience concerning their dissemination. The study of literature communication in this area is ascending and is expected to develop into a new academic hotspot of Chinese literature communication studies.

#### **2.4 Research on the dissemination of folk literature**

As described, studies on writers’ literature communications have primarily focused on the literature of the Han Chinese. By contrast, because literature works of ethnic minorities often lack written records and have been circulated by word of mouth, studies of folklore dissemination have

mostly concentrated on the spread of minority literature. Among them, Long Shan pioneered an investigation of minority literature from the perspective of literature communication. At the 2004 International Symposium on Ashima Study held in the China Center of Minorities Research of Minzu University of China, Long Shan presented her findings on the evolution of *Ashima* in the communications process and discussed a new path of boosting the currently marginalized minority folk literature by transforming communication mechanisms and strategies (405-416).

Since then, numerous studies on the communication of minority folk literature have emerged. For example, in “The study of literature communication of Manchu etiquettes in the Qing Dynasty”, remove the parenthesis R. Cheng analysed Manchu etiquette communication through the Qing Dynasty literature and outlined the rules of the dissemination of these etiquettes by literati literature and folk literature, which involved extensive communications of Manchu folk literature. Cao, the course director of the Chinese Literature Communication of Shenyang Normal University, has been emphasizing the study of communication of minority literature in Northeast China. He detailed the significance and research framework of studying communication of Northeastern minority literature and outlined three steps to pursue this study: “The first step is to collate and compile the literature; the second step is to study the compiled communication literature of Northeastern minorities using the principles and methods of communication, semiotics, and aesthetics, drawing on the research methods and principles of journalism, and combining the description techniques of history and literary history; the third step is to describe and explain the role of the communication of minority literature in Northeast China in the development of Northeastern culture” (Cao, “The significance” 6).

In addition, Cao noted that the subject of the study of communication of ethnic minority literature in Northeast China includes “the myths, legends, stories, sagas, prosimetric and verse narratives, poetry, dramas and novels of these ethnic minorities” (“The significance” 8). Evidently, because the ethnic minority literature is dominated by folklore literature disseminated by word of mouth, research on the communication of minority literature is dominated by the study of the communication of folklore literature.

Based on the macroscopic planning of research on the communication of folklore literature of Northeast China, Cao and Deng examined the current state of research on the communication of folklore literature of Northeast China and outlined future research ideas. Namely, they asserted that first, the communication process of Northeastern minority folklore literature should be vertically examined. Then, the major constituent elements of the communication, including the content, subject, form and medium, function, audience, and effect of communication, should be horizontally investigated sequentially.

Although the two papers on the dissemination of literature of Northeastern ethnic groups referenced above are not specific case studies, they are crucial for guiding the study of minority literature communication, particularly the study of minority folklore literature communication.

Importantly, the study of folklore literature communication is not limited to the dissemination of oral literature, and scholars have also examined literature communication that combines oral communication and written communication. Zhao Kuifu used the Dunhuang yishu and Han bamboo slips as the entry point for investigating the role of oral communication in the ancient literature dissemination and found that the combination of oral communication and written communication of folk literature has achieved unexpected dissemination results.

### **3. Existing problems and prospects**

China's communication studies discipline originated with the introduction of Western communication theories. After digesting the theoretical knowledge of Western communication studies, China paved its own approach to communication studies and has established many branches of literature communication. The introduction of new branches is urgently required to strengthen and construct relevant disciplinary theories.

In addition, because of the focus of existing case studies, findings based on Chinese literature communication are biased towards ancient literature. Studies of new media literature communication and folk literature communication remain inadequate, particularly those on folk literature from the perspective of literature communication.

In fact, the traditional folk literature research method combines horizontal comparison and vertical examination to investigate the communication and evolution of folk literature within the same cultural circle or between different cultural circles. Investigations of the dissemination of folklore literature examine the subject, medium, content, audience, effect and function of communication. Such investigations have been emphasized by folk literature investigators, yet sophisticated and systematic theories and research methods of folk literature communication have not been established.

In terms of the communication medium, the folk literature has been circulated mainly by word of mouth. It has developed into many new media works, such as publications, film and TV, and the Internet, that highlight the diverse media involved in its dissemination. In addition, in today's society, which is characterized by a growing economy and the rapid development of information technology, the change in communication media of folk literature is more pronounced than that of writers' literature. The latter originally relied on mainly written communication, which remains the dominant mode of dissemination, although communication via new media has occurred. By contrast, with the popularization of culture and the rise of modern lifestyles, the traditional way of communication of folk literature that relies on word of mouth is no longer its main mode of communication. In old times, children gathered around and listened to the elders as they told stories and legends that had been passed down from generation to generation. Now, children access folk literature by reading books and watching movies and TV alone. Even if their parents tell them stories, parents typically read these stories from a book. In short, the traditional

means of communication, i. e., word of mouth, is being subverted. Based on the unique medium characteristics of folk literature, we require in-depth investigations of folk literature communication from the perspective of the communication medium.

In terms of other major elements of communication, the communication subject and audience of folk literature are the only aspects of folk literature that individuals will retain. Folk literature is not merely literature; it is a unique cultural phenomenon and is closely related to the daily life of people and the cultural traditions of ethnic groups. Precisely because of this uniqueness, which differentiates folk literature from writers' literature, investigating the interaction of folk literature texts and people's lives is becoming particularly important. Communication studies can provide a more comprehensive and refined perspective to this investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Chinese communication studies emerged in the late 1970s, when the mainland Chinese academic journalism community began exploring the basic concepts of the subject. Later, the field developed further through theories and methods of Western communication studies. Since the start of the 21st century, it has rapidly developed in China, giving birth to literature communication studies.

Although the establishment of Chinese literature communication happened recently, it has made remarkable achievements involving rich and diverse literary genres and demonstrates expanding scope and depth in research. In terms of theoretical development, based on the analysis of the status quo of literature communication research, many scholars have investigated various basic issues such as the disciplinary framework, theories, significance, content, methods, and ideas of literature communication studies. The study of the theories of literature communication remains nascent. The emergence of new case studies has continued to provide new case references for the theoretical exploration of the subject, while the study of the theory of literature communication must be further strengthened.

In terms of case studies, most existing research focuses on the study of the communication of writers' literature, particularly that of ancient Chinese writers. In addition, some researchers have studied the communication of literary works and folk literature that extend beyond the traditional medium, as they are disseminated via new media such as the Internet, film and TV. Compared with the study of writers' literature communication, studies on the communications of new media literature and folk literature have been inadequate, particularly studies of folk literature from the perspective of literature communication. The methods of communication studies are particularly suited to the study of folk literature due to its uniqueness, and investigations in this regard are expected to become a new research focus of Chinese literature communication.

In summary, in this study, I reviewed the history related to the study of Chinese literature communication and analysed the research status, existing problems, and prospects of Chinese

literature study from the perspective of literature communication. In so doing, I aimed to help promote the development of the discipline of Chinese literature communication and improve foreign scholars' understanding of its history and current state.

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