

ISSUES OF STUDYING CHINESE LITERATURE IN THE REGIONAL ASPECT (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY NORTHEAST CHINA FICTION OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY)

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Background/Objective: The purpose of the article is to design a theoretical basis and identify regional features of the Northeast China fiction of the first half of the 20th century. To achieve this purpose it is necessary to study geographical, ethno-cultural, historical, socio-political, economic, and linguistic factors shaping the specificity of the region and to establish their relationship with fiction development.

Methods: The method of complex analysis of the historical context and literary tradition in Northeast China will be a basic tool to be used in conjunction with the descriptive, comparative, and textual methods.

Findings: It is the first time in Russian Sinology when Chinese literature is studied as a phenomenon of the regional culture. The current research proves that a regional approach to the study of the literature of the Northeast China is acceptable. This approach is defined by a complex of various factors (from natural geographic to linguistic). The research also identifies characteristics that unite the Northeast China fiction with the national literature. It is noted that regional specificity is manifested in the development of the literary process and directly in fiction texts. New genres and themes of literary works appear. The authors of fiction texts use literary devices and images borrowed from the foreign literature (Soviet and Japanese); in the meantime, their language is enriched by the dialect vocabulary. Moreover, Chinese “Native-land literature” is investigated in detail contributing to the development of Sinology taken as a whole. The works of Russian theorists of literature and culture experts M.M. Bakhtin, V.N. Toporov, D.N. Zamyatin, A.A. Zabyako, and G.V. Efendieva were referred to in the research.

Improvements/Application: Data for study, methods, and conclusions can be used to design university courses in the Chinese fiction of the first half of the 20th century; they can also be used to study distinctive features of literature of other regions. Examples can be used to prepare reference books on Northeast China.

Keywords: Northeast China Fiction, Regional Specificity, Chronotope, “St. Petersburg text”, Geographical Image

INTRODUCTION

The Northeast China fiction of the first half of the 20th century (中国东北现代小说 Zhongguo Dongbei xiandai xiaoshuo) is a significant phenomenon of the Chinese spiritual culture. On the one hand, it is an integral part of the national literature; on the other hand, it reflects the specificity of the region, which was formed under the influence of the aggregate geographical, ethno-cultural, historical, socio-political, economic, and linguistic factors.

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In the early 20th century the region of Northeast China (Dongbei, or Manchuria) included the Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang Provinces. Their original inhabitants were the Manchus and representatives of other non-Han ethnic groups, but in the late 19th - early 20th centuries the mass migration of Chinese people from behind the Great Wall of China to the vacant lands of this region began. As a result, the Northeast was covered with a stormy wave of Chinese colonization. The ethnic and cultural assimilation of the local population increased, the Manchu language was increasingly squeezed out of circulation and the Chinese language was gradually becoming the main language of the region.

Initially formed as a region in which cultural traditions of different peoples and ethnic groups intertwined closely, Northeast China created a unique environment in its richness and diversity for the development of literature. The changes in Chinese society in the early 20th century, brought to life by the movement for a new culture and the “May 4th Movement” in 1919 acted as the catalyst for this process.

In 1931, the deployment of Japanese military aggression in the North-East of China put the creative intelligentsia to the need of determining their position in the war impending over the entire China. Young writers Xiao Jun (萧军), Xiao Hong (萧红), Duanmu Hongliang (端木蕻良), Luo Feng (罗凤), Lo Bingji (骆宾基), Shu Qun (舒群), Bai Lang (白朗), Li Huiying (李辉英) and others were the first authors in the Chinese literature to raise the issue of anti-Japanese resistance, showed the awakening of the national and human dignity in the peasant masses.

After the victory of the Communists in the Chinese People’s Liberation War (1946 – 1949) the agrarian reform and the restoration of the destroyed industry began in the North-East of the country, where the liberated areas had already existed for some time. Fictional texts of the region reflected these new processes and phenomena. The writer and publicist Liu Baiyu (刘白羽) was one of the first who described the heroic liberation of the North-East of China in the genre of documentary essay *baogao wenxue* (报告文学). Zhou Libo (周立波) and Ma Jia (马加) were also among the first in the Chinese literature to create works dedicated to land reforms. Cao Ming (草明) dedicated her novel to the restoration of the damaged hydropower plant, striving to show not only the construction of the hydraulic structure, but also the birth of a new personality.

The entire corpus of literary texts created in Northeast China in the first half of the 20th century obtains artistic specificity due to a number of natural, ethnic and cultural, historical, socio-political, economic, and linguistic factors.

Chinese literary scholars completely agree with this, but Russian scientists argue. Therefore, the aim of this article is to prove the validity of a regional approach in the study of Chinese literature.

Concept Headings. Background of a Regional Approach to the Study of Chinese literature of the 20th Century

The modern world exists within two opposing and interacting trends. On the one hand, there is a political and economic globalization; on the other hand, there is cultural and psychological ethnicization of human consciousness. The search for national identity relates not only to nations and states, but also to regions in equal measure. Humankind has long associated a specific area with specific properties of personality, being the embodiment of the special characteristics of the region, which was revealed in culture as peculiar features.

For example, in ancient mythology there was the concept of *genius loci*, which was referred to as the protective spirit of a place. In those days, every person, family, home, town, and even the whole ethnic group had such guardian spirits. As a rule, the spirit appeared in the image of a naked young man. It is significant that ancient people were waiting for intellectual gifts from their protective spirits and *genius loci* actualized intellectual, spiritual, and emotional links of the human beings with their environment.

In Chinese tradition, there is also a spirit comparable with the ancient *genius loci*. This is the concept of “土地神” (Earth Spirit) which is closely associated with the cult of Earth. Until now, in some parts of the country Chinese people celebrate the preserved ancient holiday: Earth Spirit birthday (社日). Through the deity Hou-Tu people implemented the cult of worship to Earth Spirit (Tkachenko, 1999). With the development and strengthening of statehood in China, protective spirits of different areas were linked increasingly with the idea of the government and prominent officials who were native residents of those places. There appeared Ch'eng Huangs (城皇), godlike twins of the rulers of administrative territories that were supposed to protect those areas. In the era of the Tang dynasty, (618 - 907) Tudi-gua (土地官) were supposed to assist them and they are defined as the local deities-administrators. In the south, the protective spirits of place were known as Fu De Zheng Shen (福德正神) (God of Prosperity) (Malyavin, 2000). It should be noted, however, that the Chinese protective spirit of place, being the same guardian and protector, as those that ancient peoples had had, and carrying the same life-giving potency of the land, underwent modification by rational Confucianism and with the course of time began to act more as a functionary of the state than an artistic inspirational figure.

Once having started up, the tradition of expressing regional specificity in the national culture survived and continued to evolve throughout the entire history of China, intensifying in the modern period. In recent decades, the process of self-identification of provinces, which is based on the existing cultural and historical differences between them, is on the rise. On August 2, 2007 Northeast Area Revitalization Plan was published, which was one of the first regional development

projects approved by the State Council. The project focused on the need of generating the new structure of the economy, sustainable economic growth, energy savings and environmental protection, rise of living standards and the harmonious development of society.

The process of self-identification of the provinces also affects the political problem of relations between the center and the regions. China has always had a strong idea that disintegration, disunity and chaos can threaten the central government. However, the history has shown that chaos can be created by efforts and commands of the center, as it happened during the “cultural revolution” (Lary, 1997).

On the contrary, the absence of strong political control of the center does not necessarily lead to decay in the country. For example, the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) can hardly be attributed to strong dynasties in terms of the degree of political control, but it was the period of rapid development of artistic culture and philosophy in the history of China. The same can be referred to the 1920s-1930s, when the country did not undergo strong central governing, and national culture showed the world wonderful and various achievements.

Apart from the problem of relations between the regions and the center, the issue under investigation is also important in terms of defining national identity. According to the researchers, “local” and “regional” are now regarded as preferred categories to determine the cultural identity compared with the categories of “nation” and “state” (Oakes, 2000). Thus, the determination of the share of the regional in the national becomes an urgent problem of the modern world, viewed from different angles.

Adopting the regional approach to the study of Chinese literature, three groups of factors determining it can be distinguished:

1. the tradition of analyzing literary phenomena, their creation and existence, by reference to their geographical location;
2. the conception of “native-land literature”, or literary nativism;
3. the trend towards separating literary groups of Northeast China and describing the literary process in the years of the occupation and after the liberation.

Mentioning the factors of the first group it is necessary to note that the Chinese literary critics single out so-called Beijing (京派) and Shanghai (海派) writers' groups that existed in the Chinese literature in the 1930s. The names of the groups are associated with the place of stay of the writers and trace back to the literary discussion. In 1931, the writer Shen Congwen (沈从文) drew attention to the fact that after 1927 the new literature in Shanghai reflected a new trend that was “the Shanghai literary group”. In 1933 he published the article “The Position of Writers” (《文学者的态度》), in which he wrote that, along with the fact that

the Beijing writers take serious creative efforts, the Shanghai writers only contribute to the commercialization of literature. Shen Congwen criticized proponents of “the Shanghai literary group” for their aptitude to create entertaining literature. The publication provoked a discussion between the two groups. As a counter to this article, another articles appeared praising “the Shanghai literary group” and accusing “the Beijing literary group”.

One interconnecting idea for these groups was that they both related to liberal literature, another uniting feature was their belonging to the two largest cities of China and the authors reflected the urban atmosphere of life in their works. The writers of “the Beijing literary group” generally adhered to critical realism, “not evading social problems, they remained on humanistic positions and denied the class approach while readers perceived them primarily as portrayers of ordinary life” (Serebryakov, 2005). The writers belonging to “the Shanghai literary group” can be characterized as modernist writers.

The Chinese researcher Yang Yi (杨义) notes that “the Beijing literary group” created “native-land literature”, drawing on the experience of both Chinese and foreign literature. However, they tended to moderate use of pictorial means, using a simple, plain language. Being in the political storms of that time these writers were willing to create lyrical works, describing real-life experience on the background of the beautiful Chinese scenery, yet preserving national traditions.

The writers who belonged to “the Shanghai literary group” actively responded to the needs of Chinese literature in new ideas and new means of artistic expression. In an effort to upgrade the artistic form, they used the method of psychological analysis, based on Freud’s psychoanalysis and Japanese neosensualism. The works created by them had signs of modernism and carried some elements of psychological games which was unusual for a national literary tradition.

“The Beijing literary group” consisted of Shen Congwen, Fei Ming (废名), Ling Shuhua (凌叔华), Lin Huiyin (林徽因), Lu Fen (芦分), Xiao Qian (肖乾), Wang Zengqi (汪曾祺) and others. “The Shanghai literary group” consisted of Mu Shiyong (穆时英), Liu Naowu (刘呐鸥), Shi Zhecun (施蛰存), Hei Ying (黑婴) and others. To a particular extent works by the writers of both groups reflected the features of the places where they were created.

One more factor proving the regional approach to the Chinese literature is connected with the concept of “native-land literature” (乡土文学). It should be noted that in the present handbook on the history of the Chinese literature this term is translated as “village literature” that dramatically narrows the range of works belonging to this trend (Serebryakov, 2005).

In the history of the country Chinese theorists of literature distinguish three groups of literary works written in the “literary nativism” frames. The first group includes the works by provincial writers about poverty and poorness of rural life,

written under the influence of Lu Xun in Beijing. Moreover, Lu Xun is considered the first writer of this branch of literature, having created “The True Story of Ah-Q” (“阿 Q 正传”), “Motherland” («故乡»), “Prayer of Happiness” («祝福»). Talking about the features of these works, Lu Xun pointed out that they should reflect two settings: 1. “to leave the country and live in foreign lands” (侨寓异地); 2. “to feel nostalgia” (隐现这乡愁). In the mid 1920s several relatively young writers came to the literary scene, who either came from the once rich but now impoverished families or grew up in the village. All of them were influenced by works of Lu Xun that awoke their interest to village life and encouraged writing on this topic. Among these writers were members of the Literary Research Society, Wang Luyan (王鲁彦), Xu Jie (许杰), Wang Renshu (王任叔), Peng Jiahuang (彭家煌) as well as the writers who did not belong to this association, such as Tai Jingyi (台静衣), Feng Wenbing (冯文炳) and others. “Native-land literature” works built a bridge between the prose of Lu Xun about countryside and other works on this topic, created in the 1930s. The researchers unanimously note that almost all of them reflect the specificity of the depicted places (Chzhungo, 1998).

Such writers as Shen Congwen and Zhou Zuoren (周作人) refer to the second group with works romanticizing rural living.

The third group is represented by the writers from the occupied territories of Northeast China. The initiator of “native-land literature” in the region was Liang Shanding (梁山丁) (1914 - 1995), also known as Shan Ding (山丁). In early 1934, Shan Ding already discussed the development of progressive literature in the region with Xiao Jun. Recognizing the chaos and disunity of literary forces, the young writers talked about the need to find ways of publishing literary works under the conditions of affluent reduction in the number of periodicals and oppression of censorship. The authors also agreed that various literary groups should be demarcated. To accomplish these tasks it was planned to work together and issue special literary publications. It was supposed to start with the description of the real situation in the countryside.

In July 1937 the journal “Mingming” published the article by Shan Ding “Native-land literature” and “The Flowers of Shan Ding” in which the author analyzed the novel of Yi Chi “The Flowers of Shan Ding” describing it as an example of “native-land literature”. Shan Ding stressed: “Regardless of time and space, the ideas that are expressed in a literary work and the skill of depicting should create reality. But as the characters’ real life described in the work mostly takes place in our native places, then this is the “native-land literature”... Manchuria needs “native-land literature” and this literature is real and authentic” (Dongbei, 1989).

It is fair to admit that the ideas of Shan Ding had opponents. For example, some members of the “Mingming” editorial board considered the concept of “native-

land literature” as too narrow, limited, and one-sided, in which literature is limited only by the description “of beans and sorghum” and has nothing in common with the development of literature and art.

The head of the group of literary records (艺文志派 *yiwenzhipai*) Gu Ding and his supporters found many shortcomings in the “native-land literature” accusing it of “parochial mentality” (地域主义), limitations, and bias. For Gu Ding, to advocate “native-land literature” meant to advance just beautiful slogans, but in reality it was “drooling over the beans and sorghum”⁸

The proponents of Shan Ding, for example, the writer Wu Lang (吴朗), believed that the concept of “native-land literature” faced the real life, and thus was meeting the needs of modern society. The main thing in it was “to show the reality” and “to grasp the spirit of the times”. It is of great value, rather than the concept of aestheticism, that should be refused of.

According to Li Chunyan, the value of the heated discussion was as follows:

1. The concept of “native-land literature” opposed to the idea of transplantation of the Japanese colonial literature to Northeast China. The Japanese culture leaders Manchukuo positioned their literature as the world-class literature, unlike imperfect literature of the captured region. They tried, therefore, to replace local Chinese literature by Japanese literature, or assimilate it. Promotion of “native-land literature” stimulated the emergence and growth of the local literature and declared a boycott against Japanese intention of transplanting colonial literature.
2. The concept of “native-land literature” was a counterbalance to lofty, opulent books devoted to “wind, snow, flowers, and moon” representing sentimental and decadent style, i.e. books that went counter to the true reality, which played a significant role in the theory of Shan Ding.
3. For the first time in the history of Northeast China in the years of the occupation the concept of “native-land literature” objectivized the social significance of literature and pointed out the direction of its development (Lee Chun Yan, 1997).

The third factor proving the reasonability of the regional approach to the Chinese literature is putting emphasis on the group of writers in Northeast China (东北作家群) and analyzing the literary process in the years of the occupation and after the liberation. The reason for such attention to the literature of Northeast China in all of the works referred to below is the recognition of literary distinctness of the situation and uniqueness of the works created here.

Thus, Song Zhongtian (孙中田) (Chzhungo, 1988) analyzes the work of writers who left Manchuria occupied by the Japanese for the central regions of China: Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun, Duanmu Hongliang, Shu Qun, Luo Bingzi, Luo Feng,

Bai Lang, Li Huiying and others. This scientific publication also focuses on works created in the occupied areas (Chzhungo, 1988, Chzhungo, 1999) and is devoted to writers working under occupation (Chzhungo, 1999).

Huang Xiuyi (黄修己) analyzes the works of the Northeast China writers in the chapter devoted to the literature of anti-Japanese resistance (Huang Xiuyi, 2003).

The two-volume “History of Chinese Literature of the 20th century” focuses on the works of Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun and Duanmu Hongliang (Ershi shiji zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi, 2008).

In the context of the article, it would be appropriate to remind that the Chinese theorists of literature prepared and published two books devoted to the contemporary literature in Northeast China (Dongbei, 1989, 1996) and one more edition considering the history of literature in Heilongjiang Province (Heilongjiang, 2002). (24) These works are dedicated to a comprehensive study of literature in the region, identifying its specificity on the background of national literature. In the Introduction (Dongbei, 1989) the authors write: “The modern literature of Northeast China is a constituent part of the history of the Chinese contemporary literature, which occupies a rightful place in it. Literature of Northeast China is a phenomenon arisen not by chance, it does not exist in isolation, but it has its due continuity of historical development. From antiquity to early modern period, from early modern period to recent period, i.e. for several thousand years, the phenomena of different national cultures fused together and then split into its constituent parts having evolved in the struggle of contradictions. By recent period, struggle and division of Northeast areas between Russia and Japan stimulated the development of the cross-border economy, politics, culture, and caused huge profound changes. Interplay of these historical factors helped pave the way to a specific development of modern literature in Northeast China, form its specific, unique image. However, it is a part of the entire Chinese modern literature in the aspects of the spiritual culture, the main directions, and the forms. Nevertheless, in reference to content, composition, artistic features the literature of Northeast China has novelty, freshness, and distinct local identity” (Dongbei, 1989).

All the above considered, it is obvious that traditionally in China in the study of the national literature its specificity and regional identity were not ignored. It is proved by the investigation of the literature of Northeast China. Nowadays this trend persists; moreover, it becomes one of the branches of literature studies, and requires close attention and further investigation.

Methods. Issues of Studying Russian literature in the Regional Aspect (in the context of “local texts” of Russian literature)

Since the 1980s the Russian literature studies begin to apply a regional approach to studying literature in the form of research of “local texts”. Russian academician

V.N. Toporov (Toporov, 2009) and his works about St. Petersburg texts initiated this branch of literature studies (Toporov, 2009).

S.G. Bocharov writes that the scientist “discovered in our culture such a super-phenomenon as St. Petersburg text”, “he insisted on the fundamental difference between this concept especially formulated by him and such ordinary concepts as St. Petersburg literature or the image of St. Petersburg in literature” (Toporov, 2009).

According to V.N. Toporov (Toporov, 2009), space generates the text inseparably associated with the place, in particular with the city of St. Petersburg. Virtually St. Petersburg text is a heterogeneous text, consisting of a set of the Russian literature texts from A.S. Pushkin (the 1820s – 1830s) to K. Vaginov (the 1920s – 1930s), as well as of the images of St. Petersburg in the visual arts. St. Petersburg text has its sacral significance of continuity and coherence due to the unified conceptual paradigm - to find salvation and spiritual renewal by struggling against difficulties. Speaking about similar descriptions of the city in the works of different authors, the researcher distinguished climatic, topographic, scenic, landscape, ethnographic, household, and cultural characteristics of the space determining the similarities in St. Petersburg text.

Despite the fact that the V.N. Toporov insisted on the uniqueness and individuality of Petersburg text, theorists of the Russian literature, using his methodology, indicate the presence of Moscow, Perm, Russian mansion house, Siberian literature texts (Abashev, 2000, Bango, 2003) In their studies, the authors tend to reconstruct semantic parameters of historically marked world territories, their image being reflected in the works of Russian literature.

It appears very interesting to apply V.N. Toporov’s idea of St. Petersburg text to Russian literature created by the writers living in exile in the Northeast China, in the city of Harbin in the early decades of the 20th century. According to Zabyako, there is specific Harbinian text that has perfection of details. Writers created it in three stages: in the period of Harbin as a Russian city (basically in fiction and journalism), then in the artistic practice of Harbin immigrant poets and, finally, in the so-called post-Harbin period (the memoirs of the former Harbin residents, as well as in oral narratives of those who talked about their life in Harbin).

It is stressed that such cultural phenomenon as a Harbinian text was caused by a distinctive marginal Harbinian space between the two worlds – the Chinese and Russian cultures, and then even between the three – the Chinese, the pre-revolutionary Russian and the new Soviet ones.

It should be noted that the arguments about the Harbinian text present another evidence of the uniqueness of Northeast China as a region that, for a variety of reasons, appeared to be able to become a space where various cultural phenomena occurred. They include the Chinese literature, with its regional uniqueness, and the Russian literature being outside the metropolis, while maintaining the basic

features of the national traditions. The literature created by Russian emigrants in Harbin was written in the Russian language, but it was created on the Chinese land and under the Chinese sky, therefore, it was influenced to a certain degree by the Chinese culture even in the form of a language barrier.

In the context of the investigated problem, the idea of M.M. Bakhtin (Bahtin, 2000) about *chronotope* representing the fusion of time and space proves to be fruitful. It is supported in the conception of the incarnation of a certain space in artistic images suggested by the Russian art historian D.N. Zamyatin (Zamyatin, 2006, 2004).

The author introduces the category of “a geographical image” and describes it as a sustainable spatial concept which is formed because of human activity, and thus representing compact models of a specific geographical area. In a general sense D.N. Zamyatin interprets geographical images as sets of bright, characteristic signs, symbols, key concepts that describe real spaces (Zamyatin, 2004).²³

To make a geographical image means to build a kind of synthesized structure which must represent the region or country as clearly and concisely as possible (Zamyatin, 2006). The researcher believes that the organization of the plot, the author’s language and speech of the main characters, landscape descriptions, features of literary style, spatial and temporal gaps in the narration suggest both implicit and explicit formation and development of geographical images. In the course of time some geographical images that have a literary origin begin to be perceived as a natural part of real locations and landscapes. These statements can be fully attributed to the mechanism of formation and existence of regional specificity in the fiction of Northeast China.

Results. Geographical, Ethnic and Cultural, Historical, Socio-Political, Economic, and Linguistic Prerequisites for the Formation of the Regional Specificity of Literature in Northeast China

In the study of the artistic culture of a particular region and its relations with the national culture, dialectical links between the general, individual, and special should be of methodological importance. In the context of the problem under investigation the fiction of Northeast China should be analyzed as a special part of the national Chinese literature. It should be born in mind that the Chinese language acts as a link between the literature of a particular region of China colored by its specificity, and the nationwide Chinese literature. The Chinese language is common to the literatures of different regions of this great country.

Among the factors having impact on the regional specificity of art and culture, geographical, ethnic and cultural, historical, economic, socio-political, and linguistic ones can be viewed as dominant. All these factors stimulating regional disunity represent cultural universals.

Consider the factors that determine the regional characteristics of Northeast China. It would be logical to proceed to the consideration of regional specificity of Northeast China.

1. Geographical location and corresponding features of relief, climate and nature.

Northeastern region of China borders with Korea, Russia, and Mongolia. The region exhibits almost all forms of relief: from mountains to lowlands, from mountain plateau to the broad river valleys, from hilly plains to rocky coasts. In the north there is a vast mountain system, The Greater Khingan Range; in the east - the Changbai Mountain Range. In the center of Northeast China the Manchurian plain stretches, in the mountains originate the rivers Argun, Nen Jiang, Sungari, Tumen Jiang, Yalu Jiang, and Liao He. River systems connect Northeast China with the Far Eastern seas.

The main features of sharp continental climate are represented by a very dry, with strong winds, sunny, and frosty winter and a hot, rainy summer. Within almost seven months of the year the territory is affected by monsoons. This has an impact on the formation of soils: dark- and light- brown soils prevail over the black one, which is limited. The flora of the Northeast resembles humid subtropical Asia, cold Siberia, and the Gobi Desert. The fauna also can be characterized by a mixture of northern and southern species (Krushanov, 1989).

Various landforms, contrast climate, profusive variety of flora and fauna distinguish Northeast China from other areas of the country determining its regional specificity.

In addition, the geographical position of the region, its common border with Russia and Korea, its close vicinity to Japan and Mongolia allow characterizing Northeast China as a marginal (transitional) zone with high near-border communicative capacity. Experts in regional studies associate near-border communicative capacity with near-border mobility. From this point of view, the marginal zones of different natural, economic, ethnic and cultural, informational and other fields serve as a source of energy pulses. It is easy to see that the marginal energy is directly related to the emotional sphere and, thus, can be not only a strategic resource of corporeal development, but also a resource of moral revival of society, ethnic groups, and the state (Gladkij, 2000).

This hypothesis of regional study experts is confirmed by the research done by V.N. Toporov. In his work on St. Petersburg text the marginal position of the city is indicated among other elements of St. Petersburg description. "In St. Petersburg text there is a unique game basing on the transition from the spatial margin to the extremes of life on the edge, on the verge of death, in desperate situations when there is no way out" (Toporov, 2009). It is this location on the margin of the world that is seen as an opportunity to break through to new moral values to solve unsolvable problems, to overcome difficulties on the edge of the

abyss. Thus, it is clear that, being a marginal area, Northeast China has additional specific energy resource that can help this area successfully meet all challenges of times. It is here, as in the experimental zone, the most acute problems of the 20th century were set and solved. Later the experience was extrapolated to the entire country. The regional specificity could not but affected the development of the artistic culture of the Northeast.

2. Historical and socio-political peculiarities of the area development.

On the verge of the 19th and 20th centuries Northeast China, which was previously inhabited mainly by the Manchus and representatives of other non-Han ethnic groups, survived the violent Chinese colonization. The core values of the existing feudal system of the Manchu administrative division and control existing in the period of the Manchu Dynasty (1644 - 1911) were lost. The administrative offices of the Chinese type were introduced instead. With the destruction of the Great Wall peasant settlers from behind it brought the elements of private capitalist management to Manchurian agriculture and handicraft production.

Geographical location of Northeast China determined strategic and economic benefits in the region, giving rise to clashes of German, British, Japanese and Russian interests and providing their constant presence in the region. In the late 19th century, Russia's influence notably increased. In the situation of political pressure on China placed by England, Germany, and Japan, the idea of a political alliance with Russia became very popular with the Chinese government. After the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905, Japan forced China to sign the Beijing Agreement, making it pass on all the privileges in South Manchuria belonging to Russia before, as well as accord a number of additional rights that would provide control over the area. Thus, the position of Russia in this region was weakened, and Manchuria was divided into spheres of influence: North Manchuria was controlled by Russia; South Manchuria was under the influence of Japan. During the First World War, Russia's trade with Northern Manchuria decreased, and the US and Japan captured trade position lost by Russia (Krushanov, 1987).

Manchuria underwent administrative division into three provinces – Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, and was in a state of dynamic economic and socio-political development.

The period of the 1920s was turbulent in the history of China and Northeast China was not an exception: the ideas of the movement for a new culture and the May Fourth Movement in 1919 reached the region a little later, but just as in the entire country, left an indelible mark. In the early 1930s, the historical development of the region was marked by the Japanese aggression against China which began with Northeast and determined the vector of its development for many years. After the Communist victory in the People's Liberation War (1946 - 1949) the agrarian reform was launched in the Northeast and restoration of the destroyed industry began.

3. The level and features of economic growth.

In 1878 the cancellation of all restrictions on the migration of the Chinese people to Manchuria, and the agreement on the construction and operation the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) signed in 1896 between China and Russia gave new impetus to the all-round development of the region, especially its northern part. The city of Harbin, which became the center for dissemination of the Russian culture in the region, was fastest growing. Grain farming took the dominant position in the structure of agriculture. However, industrial development of the region was lagging behind other regions of the country. In the period of colonization of Manchuria many well-developed crafts were transferred there from China, which played a significant role in the development of individual sectors and pre-factory manufacturing in the region. Textile and food industries developed as manufacturing systems. There was a small proportion of factory workers and their geographical distribution was very uneven on the background of a high proportion of seasonal and casual workers, keeping in touch with their villages, and a large percentage of female and child labor in the manufacturing industry (Krushanov, 1989).

4. Way of living and psychology of people, patterns of family and social life.

As it was already stated, the population of the Northeast, represented mainly by the Manchus and representatives of other non-Han ethnic groups, were subject to Sinitification which came from the provinces of Shandong and Zhili. Due to the fact that for a long time Chinese women were prohibited crossing the Great Wall of China and the Northeast was consequently inhabited mostly by men, there was formed a quantitative imbalance between men and women. This would not only make changes in the status of women in society, but also accelerated China's assimilation of the local population, which became the prominent tendency of development in the region. Because of ethnic and cultural assimilation, the Manchu language was increasingly being squeezed out and Chinese became the main language of the region. The way of life of native people was gradually changing: the Eight Banners administrative division became outmoded; civilian institutions of governance began to be formed in the provinces; Chinese culture was introduced in all spheres of public life.

All factors mentioned above determined the way of living and formed a new psychological type of the residents. One can even talk about the regional character, which is understood as a set of stable mental features of the person, depending on their activities and living conditions in the region; this regional character is manifested in acts. Outstanding Russian sinologist N.A. Speshnev wrote on the possibility of shaping the regional character at the national level: "How considerate the Chinese public is to seemingly minor nuances and subtleties of the behavior of their fellow citizens living in the vast territory of the country. It is reasonable that each ethnophor possesses both national and individual traits. Observations of Chinese scientists help to capture features of the Chinese national character even in small towns and villages (Speshnev, 2010).

It is a matter of interest that, characterizing the inhabitants of the Northeast, the researchers highlight the presence the impact of the Russians, especially in Harbin.

5. Language and dialect differences.

In the process of the national language formation, China had to overcome the medieval tradition according to which a person was aware of themselves as an inhabitant of a particular area and only then - as a citizen of the entire country. This resulted in regionalism in public relations and the phenomenon of fellow-countrymen in the area of interpersonal relationships. In these conditions, two types of personality developed: regional and national. The first most common one was a resident of a village or a small town, living in one place from the cradle to the grave. The second one was typical for the Confucian elite, embodying the concept of *Jun zi* actualizing the character graced by every virtue. Such a person was not associated with one region objectifying a citizen of the entire China (Speshnev, 2010).

There were two options open for consolidation of the Chinese society through the creation of a common language. Each part of the country was characterized by particular regional peculiarities in the language and popular culture. Under the circumstances, national consolidation could mean both a refusal of the local features of the language and culture with the following transition to the unified national culture and language, and the spiritual unity of the regional linguistic and cultural groups that would retain their regional characteristics.

In the early 20th century, China chose the first, integrated way, which was possible only with the linguistic, cultural and religious homogeneity of the nation. However, having a single written language for the entire country China is a country rich in dialects. M.V. Sofronov (Sofronov, 1979, 2007) believes that in Northeast China a variant of northern dialect *Guanhua* (官话) is widespread, extending its range from Guilin in the southwest to Harbin in the northeast. The researchers from Northeast China call it the northeast dialect (东北方言) (Jianming, 1988).

It is evident that the dialect could not but affect the level of literary works as dialectal differences concern not only phonetics, but vocabulary and grammar, as well. It also deserves mentioning that the dialect vocabulary was actively enlarged because of contacts with the languages of neighboring peoples. In this regard, Northeast China had special opportunities to enrich the vocabulary of literature works created here due to its vicinity to the Manchu, Mongolian and Russian culture.

While studying the regional specificity of literature, the next step after identifying the diversity of its backgrounds is to analyze the forms of its actualization. In our view, regional features of literature in Northeast China include the following:

1. topical originality;
2. distinctive features of prose genres development;
3. expression of time and space fusion in artistic images using the concept of *chronotope*;
4. creative impulses of Russian and Soviet literature, having an impact on the works of local writers.

It is also necessary to take into account that the formation of the region's image in Northeast China was dialectical in nature. Given that in the late 19th century the Chinese population was many times as large as the native people, the Chinese language prevailed, public administration took China-wide character, the Manchu, Mongolian, Japanese, and Russian culture still had a significant impact on the regional one.

CONCLUSION

Now it is known with certainty that a complex of geographical, ethnic, historical, socio-political, economic, and linguistic factors identified regional specificities of the prose in Northeast China. The feasibility of such an approach to the study of literature in the region is confirmed by the current literary tradition of descriptions, such as the Beijing and Shanghai writers' groups, "the native-land literature", and the study of regional literature of Northeast.

The experience of Russian science, especially its schools for the study of "local texts" of Russian literature, based as a rule on the works dealing with St. Petersburg text by V.N. Toporov, M.M. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope as a way to reflect the specific space-time characteristics in the text, can be used for analysis of the Chinese literature. Ideas of D.N. Zamyatin about the incarnation of geographical space in artistic images and G.D. Gachev about national images of the world may also prove useful in justifying the regional specificity of the literature of the Northeast China.

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