

Abstract

The study of trains and railways as well as their cultural representations have received increasing attention from scholars across the disciplines, as they played an important role in the shaping of modernity through mechanical acceleration and capitalized globalization. There has been a great deal of research on trains and railways as related to literature, cinema, nation-state, urban space, technology, women and gender in Western scholarship. Thinking comparatively, what is the role of trains and railways in shaping the perception and experience of modern time and space in China? What is the relation between railways and the formative process of China from an empire to a modern nation-state in comparison with the situation in the West and the other Non-western states? What is the influence of trains and railways on modern Chinese culture and literature? Did the representations of trains and railways provide a new sense of speed and an alternative expression of modern experience for China different from the West? To answer these questions and fill the lacuna of research on railway modernity in China, the PI would like to undertake a comprehensive cultural and literary study on trains and railways in modern China.

The proposed research is built on the PI's previous project on railway modernity in China from the late Qing to the Republican period (1840-1937). The PI attempts to extend the research to 1937-1958, which in the meantime China was undergoing three wars (the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Civil War, and the Korean War). It will investigate the literary works and cultural representations of trains and railways within the framework of modern Chinese writers and intellectuals' wartime experience of speed and mobility. Drawing extensively on historical materials (newspaper reports, private records, databases, oral histories) and cultural works (literary texts, paintings, photographs, and films), the proposed project will be divided into three parts to investigate railway modernity in China in the state of exception, especially how the experience of mobility, the new sense of speed, the bodily perception of violence affected on the modern Chinese literature and culture.

The first part of the project will analyze the related works created by the Northeastern diasporic writers, the literatus in the isolated-island Shanghai, the intellectuals and artists based in National Southwestern Associated University (Lianda 西南聯大) as well as in the occupied Hong Kong and Taiwan, exploring the dynamic correlation between the writers' experience of mobility and warfare and their literary writings on trains and railways. The second part will look into the representations of trains and railways in various visual media, especially the films concerning the three wars, aiming to identify the different metaphoric meanings and narrative functions of trains and railways in Chinese visual culture from the republican period to the socialist era. The third part will examine the intellectual discourses and political trends on modernity and warfare from 1937 to 1958, highlighting how nationalism, modernism, the cosmopolitan left-wing and anti-imperialist thoughts interplay with the social reality and cultural imagination produced by trains and railways.

This project will fill in the gaps from existing research on twentieth-century China, by adopting a new research paradigm as railway modernity to investigate the two understudied areas in the experience of mobility and speed and the cultural representations of warfare. It

will enrich the study of modern Chinese literature and film and advance our understanding of literature and war, the critique of modernity, and the Sinophone studies in today's world.