

TRADITION–INNOVATION DIALECTICS AND POETIC EXPERIMENTS IN WANG GUOWEI’S POETRY

Ochilov Ozodjon Mardievich

PhD, Associate Professor

Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies

E-mail: ozodochilov85@gmail.com

Abstract: The article examines the legacy of Wang Guowei, whose ideas produced a paradigmatic shift in Chinese literary and aesthetic thought in the early twentieth century. Emphasizing his integrative synthesis of classical Eastern philology with Western philosophy and aesthetics, the author highlights Wang’s view of literature’s intrinsic aesthetic value as primary and his critique of political didactic interpretations. The concept of *jingjie* (境界) is interpreted as the creation of a poem’s artistic world through the organic unity of emotion and landscape. In the traditional *ci* (词) genre, the “barrier” of *ge* (隔), arising from historical allusions and symbolism that distance the reader from the text, is explained with examples. The paper also theorizes the principles of “self” and “selflessness” in poetic perception and generalizes the criteria of emotional realism. As a result, this approach is shown to redirect Chinese poetics from a didactic model toward a philosophical aesthetic paradigm, providing a methodological foundation for modern literary studies and new poetry theories.

Keywords: Literary-aesthetic paradigm; East–West synthesis; *jingjie* (境界); *ci* (词) poetics; *ge* (隔) barrier; emotional realism; aesthetic autonomy; self and selflessness; new poetry theory.

Wang Guowei stands out as a pivotal figure in the paradigmatic reorientation of early twentieth century Chinese literary and aesthetic thought. Grounded, on the one hand, in classical philology and the inherited corpus of traditional learning, he was, on the other, deeply conversant with Western philosophy, aesthetics, and theories of literary criticism. His oft cited principle that scholarship should not be partitioned into “ancient” versus “modern,” or “Eastern” versus “Western,” signals an explicitly integrative intellectual posture. Without rejecting the Confucius informed doctrine of *shijiao* (诗教), the idea that poetry functions as a medium of moral cultivation, he rearticulates this tradition by foregrounding aesthetic experience, inner affect, and the structures of subjective imagination.

The most consequential articulation of this orientation appears in *Renjian Cihua* (《人间词话》), where he advances the notion of *jingjie* (境界), often rendered as “aesthetic or poetic realm” and “poetic world,” as a central criterion of artistic value. Through *jingjie*, poetry is theorized not merely as an instrument of social didacticism, but as an autonomous form of spiritual and aesthetic experience in which feeling and vision coalesce into an internally coherent artistic world. In this sense, Wang’s intervention helps shift Chinese poetics away from a predominantly didactic poetry model toward a philosophically grounded, aesthetically oriented paradigm. It also provides an early and influential template for a modern Chinese literary critical discourse framed through the productive synthesis of Chinese and Western intellectual resources.

In his article “*Reflections on the Contemporary Academic Milieu*” (《论近年之学术界》), Wang Guowei offers a critical appraisal of literature’s position in modern society and of the dominant approaches

brought to bear on it. He writes: “If one considers the literature produced in recent years, it becomes evident that it is valued not for its intrinsic aesthetic worth, but rather treated primarily as a political and pedagogical instrument. In this respect, it scarcely differs from philosophy. Such an orientation strips both literature and philosophy of their sacred essence; under these conditions, it is wholly impossible to expect any genuine value from literary discourse. For this reason, the most important prerequisite for the advancement of scholarship is the capacity to regard it not as a mere means, but as an end in itself.” [1, p.9] These observations suggest that, by the early twentieth century, Wang Guowei was already conversant with a central paradigm of Western literary thought—namely, the imperative to secure literature as an autonomous intellectual domain grounded in its own internal aesthetic order. He forcefully criticizes the subordination of literature to political or didactic ends, and instead conceptualizes it as a free aesthetic sphere: proximate to philosophy in its depth and reflective capacity, yet endowed with its own sovereignty and irreducible specificity.

This position resonates in particular with key tenets of Western literary modernism, which treats literature as an independent field of texts capable of articulating a society’s intellectual and aesthetic condition. It is for this reason that, in interpreting literary works, Wang Guowei often frames his analyses through ideas associated with Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and other major figures of modern philosophical and aesthetic thought.

Wang Guowei criticizes an academic structure grounded primarily in the Confucian classical canon and, on that basis, argues that philosophy must exist in universities as a separate and autonomous discipline. In “An Analysis of Philosophical Controversies” (《哲学辩惑》) and “On the Ratification of Teaching Curricula: A Commentary on the Regulations for the Traditional Classics Curriculum and University Literature Departments” (《奏定经学科大学文学科大学章程后》), he elucidates in depth the genetic and ontological interconnectedness between literature, especially poetry, and philosophy. In his view, art represents the highest form of feeling, whereas philosophy constitutes the highest form of knowledge. Both ultimately serve the mind’s final satisfaction: the former through an affective intuitive pathway, the latter through a reflective and rational foundation. [2, p. 176] Wang not only places poetry on an equal plane with philosophy, but also treats them as sharing an underlying essence. Each is oriented toward grasping foundational questions concerning the universe, life, existence, and meaning. This stance decisively distances him from the classical maxim that “poetry functions as a moral instrument,” and introduces an ontological aesthetic grounding into Chinese poetics.

He considered the involvement of philosophy indispensable to any full understanding of a literary text. In particular, when approaching Western literature, he viewed works by Friedrich Schiller and William Shakespeare as creations shaped, at least in their intellectual premises, by the influence of philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Baruch Spinoza. This position is not merely a form of contextual reading; rather, it reflects an attempt to subject literary aesthetics to ontological analysis. On this basis, Wang Guowei interprets literary studies as, simultaneously, a practice of ideas, feeling, and cognition. He treats the modern discipline of aesthetics developed in the West as an indispensable foundation for literary theory. In his view, without a philosophical component, the reader can grasp meaning only at a superficial level. For this reason, he calls on the Chinese academic community to restore an organic linkage between literature and philosophy. He demonstrates this not only in theory but also in practice. A concrete example concerns the American educator Horn. Horn’s *Psychological Principles in Education* (1906) was published just one year later, in 1907, in the journal *Education World* (《教育世界》) under Wang Guowei’s editorial supervision, offering practical evidence of this integrative agenda.

According to Wang Guowei, to study literary aesthetics without philosophy is a futile undertaking, “like a person who intends to go north but sets out toward the south.” [2, p. 178] This observation has not lost its relevance today. In contemporary literary scholarship, approaches such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, and psychoanalytic criticism all rest, in one way or another, on a determinate philosophical foundation.

Among Chinese intellectuals, the question of how to reconcile Western and Eastern cultures generated intense debate. Within these discussions, the model of “Chinese learning as essence, Western learning for practical use” (中体西用, *zhongti xiyong*) gained wide currency. Yan Fu, however, criticized the logical and practical shortcomings of this formula, arguing that cultures cannot be harmonized through artificial design.

Unlike Wang Guowei, who pursued a firmer and more radical path in advocating the implementation of

Western science in China, Yan Fu adopted a more conciliatory and synthesis oriented approach. Although he subjected traditional Chinese thought to critique, his reasoning nevertheless remained rooted in the Chinese philosophical tradition of holistic generalization and harmonization. In a metaphorical critique of the *zhongti xiyong* thesis, likening it to an ill conceived comparison between a bull and a horse, Yan Fu emphasizes that cultures possess their own internal logic. To treat one as the “foundation” and the other as a mere “instrument” is therefore fundamentally misguided. [3, p. 42] In doing so, he calls for recognizing cultures as autonomous systems and for allowing them to develop according to their intrinsic particularities. Yan Fu thus insists not only on the need for cultural compatibility, but also that any convergence must be organic rather than engineered. His position remains significant for modern Chinese philosophy and cultural studies, retaining its relevance in contemporary Chinese debates on modernity and tradition, and on the relationship between East and West.

In 1908–1909, *Guocui Xuebao* (国粹学报) published *Renjian Cihua* (人间词话), Wang Guowei’s influential work of poetic criticism. While defining the traditional *ci* (词) genre, he pays particular attention to its musicality, formal refinement, and distinctive aesthetic delicacy. At the same time, he argues that in many traditional *ci* poems there exists a “barrier” (隔, *ge*) between author and reader—a barrier produced largely by historical literary allusions (借典) and by highly symbolized imagery. As an illustration, he cites Jiang Baishi’s *ci* “Yangzhou Man (扬州慢),” including the line: “*The Twenty-Four Bridges still remain; waves rise, the cold moon is silent...*”. He evaluates this passage as follows: “Although the tone and style are exceedingly elevated, it is as though one were viewing flowers through mist; between the reader and the text there is a ‘barrier.’” [4, p. 17] In assessing the authenticity of emotional expression in ancient poetry and lyric writing, Wang leans toward criteria akin to affective realism in Western literary thought—namely, truth-grounded depiction and the direct articulation of sincere feeling. He writes: “Great works penetrate the heart in matters of love, and in depiction they unfold before one’s eyes. Such expression is natural; it contains neither contrivance nor inappropriate ornament. For what they have seen is real, and what they have understood is profound. Poetry ought to be like this. If we evaluate ancient and modern works by this standard, we will not fall into serious error.” [4, p. 24] Wang’s notion of the “barrier” holds a genuinely transformative place in the history of Chinese literary criticism: it functions as a cognitive–aesthetic criterion for gauging the emotional and aesthetic distance between a text and its reader. At the same time, traces of such “barriers” can also be observed within the author’s own poetic practice.

Among the key figures involved in the sharp reorientation of literary and philosophical thought in early twentieth-century China, Wang Guowei deserves particular attention. He was one of the most significant intellectuals to approach Western literature in China through a *systematic aesthetic* lens. This is especially evident in his sustained engagement with the works of Romantic poets such as Goethe, Schiller, and Byron. Between 1904 and 1907, he published a series of essays in the *Journal of Education and Pedagogy* (《教育杂志》), including “German Literary Geniuses Goethe and Schiller” (《德国文豪格代、希尔列尔合传》) and “Byron: A Representative of English Romanticism” (《英国大诗人白衣农小传》). Although these writings appear, on the surface, to be predominantly biographical, their internal structure is grounded in a consistent framework of aesthetic analysis, poetic-theoretical reflection, and spiritual–ethical criteria.

Wang Guowei composed these essays in a classical Chinese prose style, ceremonial in tone and enriched with historical and poetic connotations. This stylistic choice reflects his aspiration to reconcile Western modernity with the resources of Chinese classical aesthetics, while also signaling a strategic reliance on established cultural forms as a mediating vehicle for introducing new literary paradigms into the broader intellectual horizon. This aesthetic synthesis is articulated with particular force in the concluding lines of his essay on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, where he offers a fervent, imagistic proclamation: “*Look at the Weimar hills, serene through a thousand years; listen to the Rhine, forever surging; and the spirits of these two geniuses still wander in those places, vying with the stars in radiance. If only such literary geniuses might also be born in our Eastern lands.*” [2, p. 256]

These lines clarify Wang Guowei’s emotionally charged relation to literature. They register his aspiration to renew Chinese letters through inspiration drawn from the Western canon and his conviction that national cultural selfhood could be revitalised through literary creation. A similar spiritual and intellectual disposition was widely shared among Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. While absorbing

Western achievements in science, philosophy, and literature, they also sought to modernise their own national culture from within. From this perspective, Wang Guowei's position, when set against the reformist agendas of Hu Shi or Lu Xun, appears relatively restrained, yet more inward in aesthetic orientation and more developed in theoretical ambition. He did not treat literature primarily as a political instrument. Rather, he affirmed its autonomy as an aesthetic phenomenon. In his view, literature, understood as a philosophical category, should disclose the inner life of the human spirit and must not become subordinate to external ideological ends.

Wang Guowei's essay *A Brief Biography of the Great English Poet Byron* (《英国大诗人白衣农小传》) was, for its time, among the most advanced Chinese attempts to approach Western literature through a critically informed framework. It offers a particularly clear demonstration of his method grounded in the classical principle of "explaining the age through understanding the person" (知人论世, *zhī rén lùn shì*). This principle, central to the tradition of Chinese literary criticism, examines the complex interaction between an individual's personality and the historical and cultural milieu within which that personality takes shape. In the essay, Wang interprets Lord Byron as a poet of "absolute lyricism," and closely analyses the psychological architecture articulated in Byron's work, including an intense and restless flow of emotion, moral conflict, and a pronounced condition of social isolation. Although Wang's evaluative vocabulary remains largely anchored in Chinese aesthetic norms, he nonetheless grasps the internal logic and imaginative structure of Byron's poetic world with notable depth. This achievement can be attributed, first, to Wang's philosophical training and sustained engagement with Western thought and literature, and second, to his refined aesthetic sensitivity and his cultivated skill in composing literary portraits as an interpretive form.

Wang characterises Byron as a "subjective poet" and identifies the dramatic inner contradictions of his oeuvre, above all the role of personal experience in poetic expression and the posture of resistance toward social norms, as its central axis. He sketches Byron's psychological profile through several salient points: "In truth, these are feelings that cannot be governed by reason; and his rational faculty is powerless to exercise full control over them... The clash between him and society is not a conflict between ideal and reality, but rather a contradiction between personal will and customary convention." [2, p. 234] These remarks construe Byron as a modern "romantic exile," a poetic figure separated from society and marked by inner rebellion and spiritual independence. For Wang, the value of such a figure lies in concentrated humaneness: individual anguish, inward integrity, and aesthetic sincerity. His analytical method, grounded in the interdependence of social conditions, cultural background, and personal biography, aims to grasp the organic nexus between literary texts and their historical milieu. This orientation distinguishes him from many contemporaries, insofar as he apprehends the poetic text not merely as an aesthetic unit, but as a spiritual and philosophical phenomenon.

In the early twentieth century, a notable affinity between Wang Guowei and Lu Xun's approaches to poetic criticism lies in their shared effort to bring modern Western philosophical and cultural ideas into the critical process. Both intellectuals, drawing in particular on Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of the "will to power" (*der Wille zur Macht*), redirected poetic critique toward a newly metaphysical horizon. They sought to detach literary creation and criticism from Confucian ideals of harmony, beauty, and moral goodness, and to reorient critical attention toward the complex, often unsettling strata of truth.

Within this framework, criticism is no longer grounded solely in aesthetic taste or normative standards of beauty. It becomes inseparable from intellectual anguish and metaphysical inquiry. For them, genuine literary criticism should not celebrate beauty unreflectively; it must also disclose those subtle dimensions of human existence that are frequently censured yet remain closer to lived truth. Consequently, the ideal of "goodness" appears not as an absolute value, but as a relative category that may be reconsidered, and where necessary set aside, in the pursuit of truth.

Wang Guowei's critical and aesthetic thought tends to privilege metaphysical ideals, as he regards art and poetry as a medium through which an enduring spiritual truth can be expressed. He formulates this position in his well-known essay *Lun zhexuejia yu meishujia zhi tianzhi* (《论哲学家与美术家之天职》, "On the Sacred Duties of Philosophers and Artists") in the following terms: "The primary aim of philosophers and artists is truth. This truth is not a temporary truth, but should be an eternal and universal truth... If someone forgets the sacred nature of philosophy and art and turns them into instruments of morality or politics, then their works lose their genuine value. Therefore, philosophers and artists of the future must not forget their

natural duties and must preserve their independent standing.” [1, p. 21]

While firmly defending the autonomy of art, Wang rejects the view that it should be reduced to a vehicle serving political or moral doctrines. In his understanding, art and philosophy each possess an internal logic, and subjecting them to external ideological pressures amounts to a betrayal of aesthetic truth. For this reason, he approaches literature from the standpoint of aesthetic independence and treats it as a higher form of spiritual reflection.

In “Renjian Cihua”, Wang Guowei advanced the theory of *jingjie*, thereby making a significant contribution to freeing Chinese poetics from the long-standing opposition between the Tang and Song poetic schools. However, his heavy reliance on Western philosophical and aesthetic thought at times hindered his ability to conduct poetic criticism on a sufficiently consistent, systematic, and methodologically transparent basis. In particular, when Wang attempted to compare Chinese and Western literary traditions, certain methodological imbalances and a relative lack of analytical depth often became apparent. His critical approach did not always align fully with the internal nature of the poetic phenomena under discussion, which in turn rendered some of his theoretical generalizations open to debate. At an internal level, Wang appears to waver between affective-intuitive and rational-intellectual principles, and this oscillation contributes to the emergence of aesthetic and epistemological tensions within his critical subjectivity.

Wang Guowei’s Poetry: Tradition, Innovation, and Influence. Wang Guowei worked predominantly in the *ci* (词) genre, a musical-lyrical form in classical Chinese poetry. In 1908–1909, he published nearly fifty poems in *Guocui xuebao* (《国粹学报》, *Journal of National Cultural Heritage*), which were later incorporated into the corpus associated with his “Reflections on Human Poetry.” The discussion below examines poems from this body of work in order to identify the contours of his renewed aesthetic orientation, the features that anticipate modernist sensibilities, and selected traces of Western poetic influence.

Commitment to Literary Tradition and Classical Continuity. Wang Guowei held classical literary tradition in high esteem and sustained it in his own practice. Many of the forty-six poems preserved in collected form are composed in established tune patterns (词牌) inherited from the Song period, such as *Dielianhua* (《蝶恋花》, “Butterfly in Love with Flowers”), *Huanxisha* (《浣溪沙》, “Sand Washed in the Stream”), and *Qingpingyue* (《清平乐》). While observing conventional prosodic and rhyming constraints, he nonetheless employs these classical forms as vehicles for articulating new reflections and affective registers characteristic of his time.

Fidelity to Classical Imagery and Symbolic Motifs. His poetry frequently mobilises a repertoire of imagery typical of classical Chinese poetics. Motifs such as the moon, flowers, spring and autumn, frost and snow, wind and rain, birds, and stars recur across his texts, extending the symbolic and aesthetic ethos of Tang-Song lyricism. Themes of amorous suffering, the pain of separation, and the transience of life likewise occupy a central place in his verse—topics long cultivated within the classical canon.

For instance, one lyric from the *Dielianhua* sequence (Poem 26) renders the tragedy of parting through a densely traditional farewell scene:

满地霜华浓似雪。/人语西风，瘦马嘶残月。/一曲阳关浑未彻。/车声渐共歌声咽。/换尽天涯芳草色。/陌上深深，依旧年时辙。/自是浮生无可说。/人间第一耽离别。*Frost lies thick across the ground, as dense as snow. In the west wind, human voices; a gaunt horse neighs at the broken moon. A single strain of “Yangguan” is not yet finished, and the sound of the cart slowly joins the song in choking silence. To the world’s edge, the fragrant grasses have changed their hue; along the roadside, deep remain the same old wheel-ruts of former years. Such is this drifting life there is nothing more to say. In the human world, nothing weighs heavier than parting.*

This passage constructs a recognisably classical tableau: a frost-laden morning, a broken moon, and the evocation of “Yangguan,” a conventional emblem of departure in Chinese poetic memory. The sustained use of inherited symbols and allusive cues suggests a deliberate reactivation of earlier poetic registers, thereby foregrounding Wang Guowei’s commitment to classical continuity. In this respect, the lyric displays an affinity with motifs characteristic of Tang farewell poetics, including those associated with Wang Wei.

Fidelity to the traditional ethos and philosophy. In a number of his poems, the poet also sustains classical philosophical and aesthetic principles. One of the most salient is the long-cherished ideal of the “unity of scene and feeling” (qíngjǐng jiāoróng), namely the practice whereby the poet infuses an external landscape with inner emotional experience. In Wang Guowei’s lyric scenes, natural imagery and subjective affect frequently appear as an integrated whole rather than as separable layers. This classical aesthetic principle, valued since the Song period, is consistently maintained in Wang’s poetic practice. Preserving the formal and thematic features of classical poetry, he “re-sings” them in the idiom of a new age. Such fidelity is therefore rightly regarded as an organic continuation of the classical literary tradition.

Innovation and poetic experimentation. Although Wang Guowei works within traditional forms, he introduces a modern sensibility, new content, and a distinct spiritual atmosphere characteristic of his time. His poetry becomes a site of experiment in which classical templates are used to test new ideas, emotions, and aesthetic positions. Wang’s innovations may be outlined along several lines, including the following.

New themes and philosophical depth. Wang Guowei is among the poets who brought pronounced philosophical depth into lyric writing. Beyond conventional themes of love, he articulates existential concerns such as the meaning of life, the tension between aspiration and reality, and the dialectic of transience and permanence. The conceptual novelty of his verse lies in the way it generates poetic expression at the intersection of Western philosophical discourse and an East Asian mode of reflection. For instance, in one poem (Poem 29), the speaker ascends a lofty summit to view the world from above: 山寺微茫背夕曛，/鸟飞不到半山昏。/上方孤磬定行云。/试上高峰窥皓月，/偶开天眼觑红尘。/可怜身是眼中人。 *A mountain temple, faint, stands against the dusk’s dim glow; No bird can reach the halfway slope where darkness gathers. From above, a solitary chime stills the drifting clouds. I try to climb the high peak to glimpse the bright moon; For a moment, heaven’s eye opens and looks down on the “red dust”; Alas, my own body is only a figure within that gaze.*

These lines yield a concentrated philosophical inference: the human impulse to rise toward truth and transcendence is coupled with the recognition that one remains inseparable from the very world one seeks to leave behind. This reflective tone and motif of self-knowledge mark a notable departure from narrower sentimental confines. Where much traditional lyric poetry often remains within a predominantly amorous or affective register, Wang Guowei more boldly foregrounds questions of meaning, the illusoriness of desire, and the shared ground between beauty and suffering, thereby advancing a distinctly modern poetic horizon.

Renewal in style and imagery. In terms of both style and imagery, the poet introduced subtle yet consequential innovations by re-reading classical motifs in search of new semantic inflections. He invests inherited poetic symbols with intensely personal affect. Images such as the flower and the moon, ubiquitous in classical verse, are reinterpreted by Wang Guowei through a distinctly philosophical lens. In one of his well-known lines, he writes in effect that the most lamentable truth is the impermanence of all things: even facial beauty will eventually “leave the mirror,” and the flower on the branch must, in time, be severed from it. Although “the face leaving the mirror” and “the flower parting from the tree” are conventional emblems, Wang’s tonal register is markedly elegiac and contemplative, drawing a sober conclusion about the transience of youth and beauty. Here he transforms the classical “flower-withering” motif into an existential symbol of human finitude, thereby articulating a modern sensibility within traditional imagery. Stylistically, too, his achievement lies in replacing ornamental rhetoric with scenes animated by inward experience: his descriptions function less as decorative tableaux than as living landscapes saturated with psychological resonance. As some critics have observed, he turns away from contrived pathos in order to foreground authentic feeling and a more natural emotional state, a shift that differentiates his poems from earlier, more mannered styles and helps to establish their value as a distinct poetic idiom.

Implementing new aesthetic ideas. The most significant aspect of Wang Guowei’s contribution is that he introduced a distinctly modern set of aesthetic principles into Chinese poetry. He formulated a critical concept meant to govern poetic creation, the theory of *jingjie*, which may be rendered as a “poetic realm” or “spiritual landscape.” According to this view, an accomplished poem attains an organic unity of poet and scene, emotion and image; it should immerse the reader in a specific inner world and sustain a coherent aesthetic mood. Although the notion of *jingjie* has antecedents in classical Chinese literary criticism (for example, *yijing*, the idea of an “artistic conception/poetic scene”), Wang reinterpreted it in a

new sense.[5, p.116] Under the influence of Western aesthetics, he emphasized the disinterestedness of art and its intrinsic meaning: poetry is neither a vehicle of moral instruction nor a political instrument, but a valuable expression of the human spirit in its own right. This constituted a new aesthetic orientation in modern Chinese poetics. For instance, in an aesthetic essay written in 1907, Wang elevated beauty and refinement above everyday life and explicitly declared art to be independent of morality and utility.[6, p.6] These convictions also shaped his poetry. In his understanding, a poem could function as a form of “momentary salvation,” offering aesthetic repose from the burdens of life. For this reason, his verse is often marked by a melancholic beauty in which feeling and landscape interpenetrate. While this beauty remains compatible with classical poetic taste, it is grounded in a newly articulated personal and philosophical worldview.

Taken together, the points above suggest that Wang Guowei succeeded in generating new meanings and a new sensibility within classical form. He pursued poetic experimentation and renewal from within the horizon of tradition: classical form combined with modern reflection. This feature set his poetry apart in its own time and helped establish it as a model for later generations. Active during the formative period of modern Chinese literature, he laid a durable foundation for subsequent writers through both his ideas and his poetic inquiries. Although he continued to write largely in a traditional classical idiom, his literary and aesthetic thought, in an important sense, exerted an influence on the emerging modern free-verse poetry that developed in the early twentieth century.

Several dimensions of Wang Guowei’s contribution may be highlighted:

1) An ideological bridge and a reformist sensibility. He lived in a complex transitional era in which Eastern and Western literary thought intersected. Striving to integrate traditional poetry with modern philosophical perspectives, he advanced the idea of “modernity” in literature. When the New Culture Movement began in the early 1910s, he came to be recognized as one of the earliest scholars and poets to introduce Western aesthetic theories into Chinese poetry.[5, p.134–137] For example, he was among the first to present, in Chinese, the works and key ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Immanuel Kant, and he initiated comparative reflections on Eastern and Western aesthetics.[7, p.116] This offered the new generation an opportunity to revisit their own literary inheritance and to approach it critically. Some scholars even describe him as a “forerunner” of the May Fourth Movement poetic revolution,[5, p.134–137] insofar as he provided a theoretical justification for the necessity of renewal in poetic thinking. While the direct leaders of the new poetry movement were younger reformers such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, Wang enriched their intellectual horizon and could function as a bridge between old and new. His practice demonstrates a distinct strategy: renewal without negating tradition, and the articulation of a modern spirit within classical form. This became an important source of inspiration for many later poets. To the extent that new-poetry writers did not entirely abandon classical imagery and symbolism, this continuity can be understood, at least in part, against the background of Wang’s example, because he demonstrated that classical poetic expression could still convey modern ideas.

2) The impact of “jingjie” and of a poetics of selfhood. The “jingjie” (境界) theory he developed, the idea of a poetic “realm” or “aesthetic world,” gained wide circulation among later critics. In Renjian Cihua, he argued that the value of a poetic work lies in the harmony of feeling and scene.[7, p.117] This view also influenced later new-poetry discussions. For instance, poets of the 1920s such as Xu Zhimo and Wen Yiduo likewise pursued the unity of emotion and landscape and expressed this orientation within their own poetic programs. Wen Yiduo reportedly held Wang’s notion of jingjie in high regard and argued that new poetry, too, should aspire to it.

In addition, Wang formulated the concepts of *ziwo* (自我, “the self”) and *wuwo* (无我, “selflessness”) in poetic creation. Some poems, in his view, are saturated with the poet’s personal feeling, whereas others present a mode in which the poet seems to dissolve into the natural scene. These ideas became a point of lively debate among later critics and provided conceptual resources for discussions of the place of the lyric “I” in modern poetry.[5, p.135] In this sense, Wang’s personal explorations offered the next generation a methodological and theoretical orientation.

3) Re-discovering the classical legacy through a modern lens. Although the new poetry movement initially positioned itself against classical literature, many young poets and critics later returned to the classical canon and re-read it from a new perspective. Here, Wang’s scholarship and poetic experiments proved significant. He conducted research on Song-Yuan drama and on ci lyric poetry and related these

genres to modern literary development. His studies of the history of song and drama helped articulate, in a systematic critical language, the value of older forms. Likewise, his essay on *Dream of the Red Chamber* has been regarded as a major achievement in modern Chinese critical thought. Such works encouraged critics and poets to revisit classical texts through new analytic frameworks. For example, when 1920s critics interpreted *Dream of the Red Chamber*, they increasingly approached it as a tragic epic, partly in line with Wang's interpretive method. In a similar way, classical *ci* lyrics were "re-discovered" through his readings, and their sincere lyricism came to be viewed as an exemplar even for new poetry. Some new-literature figures, including Yu Dafu, noted that they drew inspiration from the kind of sincere intonation that Wang embodied. Thus, he helped prepare the ground for bringing the classical legacy into the conceptual space of modern literature.

4) An intellectual lineage and later continuities. Although Wang did not establish a formal school with direct disciples, a scholarly current shaped by his influence gradually emerged. For example, Long Yusheng, working under the impact of Wang's approach, developed theories on the external system of *ci* lyric poetry and remained influential in the field well into the mid-twentieth century.[5, p.136] Long and others extended Wang's emphasis on naturalness and sincerity, even advancing the claim that there is no essential aesthetic difference between *ci* and modern new poetry, since both obey the same aesthetic principles.[5, p.137] While debatable, this argument nevertheless promoted the idea of continuity between classical and new poetry. As a result, new-poetry writers gradually moved away from a one-sided negation of classical forms and came to recognize that they could still learn from classical craftsmanship or selectively adopt certain elements. This, in turn, contributed to the enrichment of new poetry. At a broader level, Wang also embodied a model of intellectual independence. Rather than immersing himself in immediate political struggles, he devoted himself to scholarship and to the autonomy of art. This image of an independent intellectual, loyal to art and learning, offered later generations a form of ethical and spiritual exemplarity.

In conclusion, Wang Guowei's poetry and theoretical legacy became a major intellectual resource in the formation of China's new literature. He connected classical poetry to the modern era and enriched the spirit and content of new poetry. His ideas, whether the theory of an aesthetic "realm" or reflections on the disinterestedness of art, later proved useful in shaping the trajectory of twentieth-century Chinese poetic development. For this reason, contemporary scholarship often recognizes his work as an intellectual foundation for modern Chinese poetry. He sustained the classical tradition while pointing toward innovation, and he pursued innovation while deepening it through the resources of classical culture. Through this distinctive stance, Wang occupies an exceptional place in twentieth-century Chinese poetics, and his legacy continues to inspire writers and researchers today.

References

1. 佛维. 王国维学术文化随笔. 中国青年出版社, 1996, 330页.
2. 王国维. 静庵文集, 辽宁教育 出版社, 1997, 213 页 .
3. 黄克武. 严复卷(中国近代思想家文库). 中国人民大学出版社, 2014, 536 页.
4. 姚柯:人间词话 及评论汇编 . 书目文献出版社,1983年, 495页 .
5. Wu Yana: The Influence of Wang Guowei's Ci-Style Oriented Thought. // Open Journal of Social Sciences > Vol.3 No.10, October 2015, P:134-137.
6. Wei Du: "Exploring the Inner Relationships between Modern Chinese Aesthetics and the Confucian Mind-Soul (心性) Framework," Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive): 2018, Vol. 6, 15p.
7. Rosker, Jana. "Methodology of Chinese Philosophy." Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 192p.