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From Poetic Revolution to the Southern Society: The Birth of Classicist Poetry in Modern China*

Abstract This paper examines the birth of classicist poetry by paying attention to the Southern Society's (Nanshe) diachronic succession of the late Qing Poetic Revolution. It provides a careful analysis on the novelty of Huang Zunxian's poetry and shows how the Southern Society transformed Huang's Europeanized innovation into something that was rooted in both traditional scholarship and modern political discourse. I argue that the poetry of the Southern Society as being more formally conservative than Huang's; however, spiritually, it represents a kind of progress as it styled itself as the "poetry of the cotton-clothed" (*buyi zhi shi*)—the "cotton-clothed" stands for the scholars not serving in court. In this regard, its poetry could be seen as modern in spirit. It selectively integrated the traditional and the Western, for pragmatic and utilitarian purposes.

Keywords Huang Zunxian, Poetic Revolution, Southern Society (Nanshe), Liu Yazhi, poetry of the cotton-clothed

Contrary to the common narrative of the rise of vernacular literature, classical-style poetry abounded in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. Such poetry is often dismissed as "old-style poetry" (*jiuti shi* 舊體詩), a negative label which places it in opposition to the "new."¹ During

* Translated by Thomas J. Mazanec, collated and edited by Zhiyi Yang.

¹ In this essay, the term "classical-style poetry" (*guti shi* 古體詩) is used to describe a form of poetry which emerged in the classical period. It should not be confused with the distinction between "old-style" (also *guti* 古體) and "recent-style" (*jinti* 近體) poetry, which emerged in the Tang dynasty as a way of classifying poetry according to different meters. The "classical poetry" described here includes both types of meters.

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the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, the Poetic Revolution School headed by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) “believed the world of poetry to be filled with over a thousand years of parrots” and classified it as a subset of “old studies” (*jiuxue* 舊學). Similarly, after the May Fourth Movement of 1917, the words “old” and “new” belied an implicit critique: “new” meant progress, innovation, and the mainstream while “old” meant backwardness, conservatism, and deserved marginalization. But these same “old” poems could be called “classical-style” (*guti* 古體), a more positive literary term implying continuity with the classical tradition. By using the term “old,” we perpetuate a negative stereotype of classical poetry in modern China, despite the fact that it had no fewer readers and writers than its modern counterpart. It would be better to think of the two styles of poetry as twin rivers flowing in the same direction. Most accounts of literary history, however, downplay or even willfully ignore this fact.

This paper rejects the discriminatory term “old” and instead adopts the term “classicist poetry,”² a term that aims to distinguish classical-style poetry written around the turn of the twentieth century from classical poetry written in earlier times. In outward appearance, classicist poetry may look almost exactly like its classical predecessor, but it is drastically different in spirit. This difference stems not just from the inevitable social or linguistic changes that happen over the course of time, but from having a fundamentally different basis: Whereas classical poetry was rooted in the study of the Confucian classics and official histories, classicist poetry is a product of modern scholarship, in which scholasticism is deconstructed, classical historiography fragmented, and Western-style utilitarianism fully absorbed. In this essay, I will not attempt a comprehensive description of all the newly emerging forms of classicist poetry; rather, I will trace the birth and first steps of classicist poetry, focusing on its practitioners' scholarship to describe the historical logic of this transition.

The “Deconstruction” of Classical Poetry in the Poetic Revolution

In the Poetic Revolution after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), represented

² [Editor's Note] Prof. Sun's original Chinese term is *xin guti shi* 新古體詩, or “neoclassical-style poetry.” We have changed it to “classicist poetry” to conform to the collective proposal of the volume.

by the likes of Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–98), Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑 (1863–1924), and Liang Qichao, we find the emergence of several new analytic terms to describe recent developments in poetry. These include “new poetry” (*xinshi* 新詩, or “new-learning poetry,” *xinxue shi* 新學詩), “new school poetry” (*xinpai shi* 新派詩), and “new-style poetry” (*xinti shi* 新體詩), all of which sought to eliminate the old in favor of the new. It is through such attempts that they carried out their deconstruction of classical Chinese poetry.

At the end of the Qing, the “Ultrastable” form³ of classical poetry faced several new crises. First were the unprecedented changes in society, a result of China’s previously isolated economy being dragged by modern capitalism into a global system. In the eyes of then Chinese intellectuals, China was being “split apart like a pea pod” and “carved up like a melon” by Western imperial powers. Secondly, traditional social structure and scholarship responded to these changes with nothing but stupefaction and bewilderment. The defeat in the Sino-Japanese War led to the reparations, concessions, and the humiliating loss of national sovereignty China entered a period of crisis. Thus, the reforms of this period were to be, first and foremost, changes in governance and culture.

In Beijing at the end of 1896 and the beginning of 1897, Liang Qichao, Xia Zengyou, and Tan Sitong attempted to establish a kind of “new poetry.” The achievements and influence of the Poetic Revolution were limited (even Liang Qichao felt that the movement was a failure because it removed too many of the poetic qualities of poetry); nevertheless, it was the first direct assault on classical poetry. Another word they used to describe this “new poetry” was “new-learning poetry,” opposing it to the poetry of “old learning.” But what exactly did these terms mean? In his *Autobiography at Thirty* (*Sanshi zishu* 三十自述), Liang Qichao made the distinction, describing how he came into contact with “new learning” when studying under Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–1927) at the age of eighteen (1890). “Old learning” referred to “glosses and exegeses of words and phrases,” opposite styles of scholarship to Kang Youwei’s unique exegesis of Confucianism. “New

³ [Editor’s Note] The “Ultrastable structure” (*chaowending jiegou* 超穩定結構) is a term coined by modern historians like Jin Guantao 金觀濤 (1947–) to explain the unusual stability of premodern Chinese society.

learning,” on the other hand, referred to the books of new knowledge that he bought when he went to Beijing for the civil service exams at the age of twenty-one. These included scientific books translated by the Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau and the *Compilation of Scientific Knowledge* (*Gezhi huibian* 格致彙編) edited by the Englishman John Fryer (1839–1928). All these morphed into his scholarship on the *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳), the “principles of Great Unity” (*datong yili* 大同義理), and “universal truths” (*shijie gongli* 世界公理) that he lectured in the winter of 1893 in Dongguan.⁴ However, there is clearly more than this to the “new learning” found in “new-learning poetry.”

In his essay “On My Deceased Friend, Mr. Xia Zengyou,” Liang Qichao remembered that, from 1894 to 1896, he lived in Beijing in Xinhui Huiguan 新會會館 and Xia Zengyou in the nearby Jiajia Hutong 賈家胡同. Soon after, Tan Sitong took up residence in the Bei Banjie Hutong 北半截胡同. Their “crossbeams and eaves stared inches from each other”; “there was hardly a day when they didn’t meet, and when they met they discussed scholarship, often arguing with each other, each day having one or two big arguments.” Both Liang and Xia “wanted to upend the monopolized world of Han learning, to strike at their originator, Xunzi, in order to ‘control brigands by striking at their leader.’”⁵ Later, in his “Overview of Qing Scholarship,” Liang Qichao talked about the way Xia and Tan influenced him, how “they flayed every

⁴ On Liang Qichao’s lectures, cf. *Zhang Huangxi riji* 張篁溪日記 (Diaries of Zhang Bozhen 張伯楨, 1877–1946): “Mr. Liang lectured in my town in the winter of 1893–1894 in the ancestral temple of the Zhou clan on Duntou Street. A seventeen-year-old student at the time, I had the chance to travel with him. He let me study the *Gongyang Commentary*, and my thinking would change every time he brought up the principles of Great Unity. I began to understand so-called ‘universal truths’ and nationalism.” Quoted in Ding Wenjiang and Zhao Tian, *Liang Qichao nianpu changbian*, 21.

[Translator’s Note] In the late Qing, renewed interest in the *Gongyang Commentary* to the classic *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) was fundamental to developments in political thought, including the search for a native precedent for democratic reform. For a good overview of the topic in English, see Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924*.

⁵ Liang Qichao, “Wangyou Xia Suiqing xiansheng” 亡友夏穗卿先生, in *Liang Qichao quanji*, 5207.

[Editor’s Note] “Han learning” refers to the scholastic scholarship in the Qing, namely the “old learning” that Liang was educated in when he was young and ultimately went against.

scholar skinless, from Xunzi down through the Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing.”⁶ They denied the very idea of Han learning, seeking instead to tear down its founder: “At that time, we thought that all Chinese scholarship from the Han onward was worthless and that scholarship from abroad was better.”⁷ They believed that the Han learning of the Qing, along with the entire scholastic tradition after the Zhou and Qin, should be upturned, that a new scholarly system should be constructed based on a deep absorption of Western learning. This new system would have three general fields. First would be the pre-imperial classics and philosophers. As Liang Qichao put it in “On My Deceased Friend, Mr. Xia Zengyou”: “Since everything from the Han onward was worthless, we would carefully read all the classics and the pre-imperial philosophers.” The second would be foreign scholarship. Though they admired the new knowledge coming in from abroad, they knew no foreign languages and thus had no way of reading foreign books, so “the best we could do was regard the books translated by Christian churches as precious treasures.” Third would be “subjective ideas,” what Liang Qichao defined as “our strange and immature ideas of pseudo-religion, pseudo-philosophy, pseudo-science, and pseudo-literature.” The mixing of these three different types of knowledge would form the basis of the “new studies” they sought to convey in their “New Poetry,” something neither Western nor Chinese.

The first to start writing “new-learning poetry” was Xia Zengyou, who frequently “wrote down his own views on life and the universe in poetry.”⁸ This kind of “new poetry” was something that no one understood but they themselves, a kind of verse which Liang Qichao later described as “pulling out (*xianche* 擗扯) new terminology to express his own uniqueness.”⁹

From this perspective, “new-learning poetry” seems only to be a question

⁶ Liang Qichao, “Qingdai xueshu gailun” 清代學術概論, in *Liang Qichao lun Qingxueshi erzhong*, 69.

⁷ Liang Qichao, “Wangyou Xia Suiqing xiansheng,” in *Liang Qichao quanji*, 5207.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi shihua* 飲冰室詩話, entry 60, in *Liang Qichao quanji*, 5326.

[Editor’s Note] *Xianche* 擗扯, also written as *xianche* 擗擗, is a derogatory term first used to describe the Song dynasty Xikun 西昆 School’s poetry, accused of liberally “plucking” from the poetry of Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–ca. 858); see Liu Ban, *Zhongshan shihua*, 287.

of language, but in reality, this was not the case. These new words represent massive shifts in the world which undermined the very foundation of classical poetry—namely, a surviving and thriving traditional scholarly culture—and thrust it into the new world of Western learning which they skinned alive. In terms of literary history, we could say that it was a stripping off of classical poetry from traditional scholarship, a casting off of its inherited form in search of new grounds.

Not long after the “new-learning poetry” of 1897, Huang Zunxian asked Zeng Guangjun 曾廣鈞 (1866–1929) to write a preface to his collection, *Poems from a Cottage in the Realm of Men* (*Renjinglu shicao* 人境廬詩草). In his preface, Zeng proclaims that Huang’s poetry is superior in “transformations in style” (*bianti* 變體).¹⁰ They were “superior” because their style did more than just register the changes of time. In classical poetry, all formal changes—such as the transition from four-character to five- and seven-character verse, from “old-style” to “recent-style” prosody, from the more formal style of the Early Tang to the looser style of the Mid Tang, Late Tang, and Song dynasty—all of these were “transformations in style,” and all captured “the power of an age” (*daixiong* 代雄) in their “new transformations” (*xinbian* 新變). Innovation in the history of poetry comes from such “new transformations.” The tumultuous modern era, full of great societal change and new realms of knowledge introduced from the West, provided the right conditions for further transformations in poetry. Clearly, Huang Zunxian had a more self-conscious, broader view of changes in poetry than most of his peers, and his “new school poetry” was another way for him to convey his “transformations in style.”

What exactly was new about Huang Zunxian’s “new school poetry”? Some scholars conclude that the “new school” was essentially characterized by its “singing beneath foreign skies” 吟到中華海外天,¹¹ which inevitably means that these poems describe a modern world beyond China’s borders. The first

¹⁰ In the preface to his poem “Thanking Zeng Guangjun, Editor at the Imperial Academy, and Sending This Poem also to Pan Feisheng [1858–1934]” 酬曾重伯編修並示蘭史, printed in *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 1904, no. 4, Huang Zunxian wrote: “When Zeng Guangjun wrote a preface to my poetry, he said that all famous poets from ancient times to date must be good in the transformation of styles; mine, according to him, are superior transformations. Thus my poem contains reference to this issue.”

¹¹ Zhang Yongfang 張永芳, “Shijie geming yu Huang Zunxian,” 25.

and second fascicles of the printed version of Huang Zunxian's *Poems from a Cottage in the Realm of Men* are comprised of poems written in China between 1863 and 1877, the third fascicle of poems written while he was on a diplomatic mission in Japan between 1877 and 1881, the fourth fascicle of poems written while in the United States between 1882 and 1885, the fifth fascicle of poems while back in his hometown between 1885 and 1889, the sixth fascicle of poems written in England between in 1890 and 1891, the seventh fascicle of poems written in Singapore between 1891 and 1894, the eighth fascicle of poems written during the Sino-Japanese War and the Hundred Days' Reform, and the ninth, tenth, and eleventh fascicles of poems written after his return to China.¹² The poems Zeng Guangjun saw in 1897, according to Zhang Yongfang's study, were at least the first six fascicles. That is to say, Huang Zunxian's "new school poems" are those he wrote while living abroad, collected in fascicles 3, 4, 6, and 7, all of which predate Xia Zengyou's "new-learning poetry." Huang Zunxian called his poetry "new school poems," but what exactly was the relationship between these "new school poems" and "new-learning poetry"?

The third fascicle of *Poems from a Cottage in the Realm of Men* is comprised of 61 poems under 18 titles. They fall under three general categories: 1) matching poems with Japanese friends, 2) descriptions of the Japanese landscape and people, and 3) his emotional reactions to events in Japanese history. Many contain distinctively Japanese features, such as poetic descriptions of cherry blossoms. The fifth poem in his series on "Poem on Wandering about Shinobazu Pond in the Evening" 不忍池晚遊詩 describes a scene of blossoming cherry trees:

百千萬樹櫻花紅	A hundred thousand myriad trees, red with cherry blossoms;
一十二時僧鐘樓	A single dozen hours on a monk's clock tower. ¹³

And his "Song of Cherry Blossoms" ("Yinghua ge" 櫻花歌) describes

¹² This is a very rough outline: Many poems written while in England, the U.S., and Singapore were later revised after he returned to China.

[Translator's Note] For a study and selection of Huang Zunxian's poetry in English, see Jerry D. Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848–1905*.

¹³ Huang Zunxian, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 2.265.

Japanese people enjoying the sight of cherry blossoms:

坐者行者口吟哦	Sitting and walking, their mouths chanting,
攀者折者手按莎	Plucking and pulling, their hands rubbing together,
來者去者肩相摩	Coming and going, their shoulders rubbing.
[...]	[...]
傾城看花奈花何	If the whole city comes to view the blossoms—what of these blossoms?
人人同唱櫻花歌	Everyone sings together a song of cherry blossoms. ¹⁴

The first of these poems conveys a dazzling scene of blossoming cherry trees set against the backdrop of a bell-tower at a Buddhist temple, while the second gives us a detailed description of the deep feelings Japanese people hold for the cherry blossom season. Huang Zunxian describes other Japanese folk customs in his “Song of the Dance of the Capital” (“Duyong ge” 都踊歌). His “Song of a Patriot of Late” (“Jindai aiguo zhishi” 近代愛國志士) and his “Song of the Forty-seven Rōnin of Akō” (“Chisui sishi qi yishi ge” 赤穂四十七義士歌), some of Huang’s earliest surviving song, are both paeans to national heroes of Japanese history, inspiring in the reader the spirit of nationalism. This is also where we start to see Huang “pulling out new words” in search of new methods of description. These words include “Europe” (*Ouluoba* 歐羅巴), “globe” (*diqu* 地球), “president” (*zongtong* 總統), and “reform” (*weixin* 維新). These terms imply a new vision of the world and other political systems than what China had.

The fourth fascicle of Huang Zunxian’s collection contains eight titles, written upon his appointment to be the Consul General of San Francisco, his bidding farewell to Japanese friends, and his journal across the Pacific Ocean. But it also included a song of General Feng Zicai’s 馮子才 (1818–1903) bravely fighting against his enemies in the Sino-French War (1884–85), as well as an ode to Baoting 寶廷 (1840–90), who deliberately sully his reputation [in order to retire] by marrying a boat woman. Both subjects have nothing to do with the U.S. The only real descriptions of the U.S. in this fascicle are his “On the Expulsion of Foreigners” (“Zhuke pian” 逐客篇) and “Record of Events”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.231.

(“Jishi” 紀事). “On the Expulsion of Foreigners” is about the Chinese Expulsion Act of 1882, which attempted to restrict Chinese laborers from entering or staying in the United States.¹⁵ The “Record of Events” is about the 1884 Presidential election, to be cited below. While in Japan, communication with foreign peers was relatively easy due to similarities between Chinese and Japanese writing and culture. Thus, Huang Zunxian quickly gained a close familiarity with Japanese intellectuals, and was able to study Japanese history. In his four years in Japan, Huang Zunxian became an expert in Japanese history and culture. During his time in the U.S., as seen from the two poems he left behind, he seemed to clash a bit more with the American culture and institutions. On the one hand, Huang Zunxian expressed deep admiration for American independence, prosperity, freedom, and equality; but on the other hand, he believed that many things about the presidential election between the Republican Grover Cleveland and Democrat James Blaine were not quite right. The “Record of Events”¹⁶ reads:

吁嗟華盛頓	Alas, George Washington!
及今百年矣	It's been over a hundred years.
自樹獨立旗	Since he planted the flag of independence,
不復受壓制	That they may never be oppressed again.
紅黃黑白種	Red and yellow, black and white:
一律平等視	All races are seen as equal here.
人人得自由	Everyone has freedom,
萬物咸遂利	And the good is pursued in all things.
民智益發揚	The people's wisdom is promoted,
國富乃倍蓰	The country prosperous several times over.
泱泱大國風	Mighty, might is the spirit of this great nation.
聞樂歎觀止	I hear them, happy to the utmost.
烏知舉總統	But who could understand their election,

¹⁵ [Editor's Note] The title of this poem plays upon the reference to the State of Qin's expulsion of foreign ministers (*keqing* 客卿) in 237 BCE. Li Si 李斯 (280–208 BCE), a foreign minister from Chu, remonstrated by submitting “Against the Expulsion of Foreigners” (“Jian zhuke shu” 諫逐客書) to Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259–210 BCE; r. 247–210 BCE)—later the First Emperor—arguing that it was essential for Qin to retain the foreign ministers' brain power to unite China.

¹⁶ See Huang Zunxian, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 4.376–78.

所見乃怪事	And the strange things I have seen?
怒揮同室戈	Swords angrily brandished at family members,
憤爭傳國璽	As they battle in rage for the seal of state.
大則釀禍亂	On a large-scale, it brews chaos;
小亦成擊刺	On a small-scale, assassinations.
尋常瓜蔓抄	It's common to see the whole network investigated,
逮捕遍官吏	Officials are arrested all over.
至公反成私	The public good becomes private,
大利亦生弊	And from the general welfare comes corruption.
究竟所舉賢	Even if a worthy man were elected,
無愧大寶位	Wouldn't he be ashamed in that Revered Office?
倘能無黨爭	If not for this fight between the parties,
尙想太平世	I could think of it as a peaceful world.

Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (1910–98) said of Huang Zunxian: “He was almost able to explain Western systems and things, grasping the fields of the natural sciences but mistaking them as embellishment. Indeed, his understanding of the wonders of Western poetry and the subtleties of their philosophy was meager. Thus, though his poetry contained new things, it lacked new understanding (*lizhi* 理致).”¹⁷ In the western system, built upon the philosophy of opposition instead of China’s ideal of harmony, Huang Zunxian saw only bickering and fighting between rival political parties, never the checks and balances placed on these conflicts. He had no understanding whatsoever of a multi-party election. Nevertheless, several new words appeared in his poem “Record of Events” which had never before been seen in poetry. And despite his negative impression of American democracy, his readers might nonetheless draw a different conclusion from his description.

In 1890, Huang Zunxian concluded a period of writing at his family’s home and went to serve in Europe with senior minister Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838–94). He wrote a series of poems on the journal, departing from Hong Kong, passing through Vietnam, and stopping by the Island of Ceylon to see the famous recumbent Buddha. Upon arriving in Europe he wrote several poems on meeting at Windsor Palace, on London fogs (industrial smog) and

¹⁷ See Qian Zhongshu, *Tanyi lu*, 23–24.

taking a photo, on climbing the Eiffel Tower, and on crossing the Suez Canal. The sixth fascicle contains twenty titles, mostly on foreign topics. The “Modern Parting” (“Jin bieli” 今別離) cycle of poems has received the lion’s share of attention of works in this section of his collection. These poems meld together the feeling of longing found in traditional departure poems with steamboats, trains, telegraphs, and photography. Liang Qichao praised these poems as models of “putting new ideas and scenery into old poetic forms.” His poem on the “Recumbent Buddha on the Island of Ceylon” (“Xilandao wofo” 錫蘭島臥佛) is a reflection on history, giving a narrative of Buddhism through a plethora of Buddhist allusions. Liang Qichao praised it highly as an exemplar of a long narrative poem.¹⁸

The seventh fascicle of Huang Zunxian’s collection contains eight titles. The first title was written in Singapore in November 1891.¹⁹ Huang later wrote fifteen poems titled “Further Poems of Longing for Others” (“Xu huairen shi” 續懷人詩), which are different from his “Poems of Longing for Others” (“Huairen shi” 懷人詩) from the sixth fascicle because they are mainly about foreign, especially Japanese, friends. His other poems on Singapore describe the place’s “historical events, customs of the people, and products of the land,” as Qian Zhonglian aptly summarizes.

Zeng Guangjun said that *Poems from a Cottage in the Realm of Men* were

¹⁸ Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi shihua*, 4.

¹⁹ It is titled as “Climbing Seaside Tower at Night” (“Ye deng Jinhailou” 夜登近海樓). The annotator Qian Zhonglian mistakenly declares that the Seaside Tower is located in Shuntian Prefecture (modern Beijing). According to the entry for “Guangxu 17 [i.e., February 2, 1891–January 29, 1892]” in Qian Zhonglian’s own chronological account on Huang Zunxian’s life, however, “Thus, Huang Zunxian should have left at the end of the eighth month or beginning of the ninth month [early October] . . . In the beginning of the tenth month [early November], he went down to Singapore. On the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month [January 26, 1892], he asked for a hundred days’ leave so that he could take of things upon his father’s death. After his leave concluded in fourth month of Guangxu 18 [May 1892], he went back to Singapore.” There is no evidence in this to show that he went to Beijing, so the “Seaside Tower” is not the one located in Shuntian Prefecture. The poem itself indicates that he is climbing the tower in autumn, and we know that Huang Zunxian arrived in Singapore in late autumn. The scenery on which he gazes after climbing the tower is coastal, not inland. In the next couplet, the Dipper “pointing north” and the ocean “flowing west” express his thoughts of home. With the “moon of Qin times” and “the land Yu circumscribed,” Huang explains his own sense of unease while in Singapore. Thus, I argue that the Seaside Tower is in Singapore, and this poem was written in November 1891 in Singapore.

“transformations in style” and “new-school poems” because Huang Zunxian described utterly new things, places, realms of knowledge, and life experiences, and that in order to realize these new frames of mind, language had to change accordingly. Many of Huang Zunxian’s longer pieces were written retrospectively after his return to China during the 1898 reform period. Influenced by the craze for Buddhism at that time, the language of Buddhism, natural science, and western learning filled his poems, strongly clashing with the static, closed nature of language in most classical poetry. If Liang Qichao’s “new-learning poetry” offered a radical destruction of classical poetry, Huang Zunxian’s “new-school poetry” was a kind of blood transfusion. It pointed to a new direction for classical poetry: The foreign was a new field of representation, and its new realms of knowledge and new phrases were the fresh lifeblood to be pumped into classical poetry’s aging body.

If one wants to promote an idea of “new people” (*xinmin* 新民) via poetry, then one must knock poetry off its pedestal, turn it from something refined and elegant into something with popular, mass appeal. After the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform, Liang Qichao fled abroad and launched his “Poetic Revolution” through the journals *Qingyi bao* 清議報 (The China discussion), *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (New people’s magazine), and *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New fiction). At this time, Huang Zunxian, who had settled back in his hometown, sent a letter to Liang Qichao about how to reform poetry.²⁰ The first thing he mentioned was that, in popularizing poetry, they need not consider the *yuefu* 樂府 (music bureau) style. The *yuefu* used more vernacular language, freer metrical requirements, and a mix of line lengths, but it was still a form of classical poetry. Therefore, Huang Zunxian believed that their new form of poetry should break free of the reigns of *yuefu*. Instead, they should carefully consider both *tanci* 彈詞 (prosimetric storytelling) and folk songs in order to create a poetic form far freer than the *yuefu*. This would bring poetry down to earth in terms of form. The second way to go about reforming poetry was to eliminate the requirements of traditional scholarship from the composition of poetry: In this line of thought, “recent matters” ought to be on genuinely new matters, in new realms of

²⁰ Huang Zunxian, *Huang Zunxian ji*, 494.

knowledge, using a new language.

Liang Qichao, happily agreeing with Huang, began devoting a section of his journal *Xin xiaoshuo* to “miscellaneous songs” (*za geyao* 雜歌謠). He also published a series of one hundred “new-style poems” and “new Cantonese tunes” (*Xin Yue ou* 新粵謳).²¹ These “new-style poems” were characterized by their simple subject matter, their free and vernacular language, and their easiness in terms of pronunciation. Along with Huang Zunxian’s “Kindergarten Songs” (“*Youzhiyuan shangxue ge*” 幼稚園上學歌) and “Matching Songs for Young Students” (“*Xiaoxuesheng xianghe ge*” 小學生相和歌), Liang Qichao called them “marvelous works of their time” (*yidai miaowen* 一代妙文). Because they were well suited to the needs of agitprop, these sorts of songs were beloved by revolutionaries, such as Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) and Gao Xu 高旭 (1877–1925), who wrote quite a few of their own. It is still uncertain how history will judge these poems, but the result is that classicist poetry was not only ripped apart from traditional scholasticism, but also eliminated some of the aesthetic qualities that are essential to classical poetry as a form of art.

The Southern Society’s Mixed Attitude toward the Poetic Revolution

There are clear problems with the Poetic Revolution represented by Liang Qichao and Huang Zunxian. Its “newness” is based on something external to China: Its landscapes are all foreign, its scholarly roots are Western learning, its poetic language is a bunch of fresh-off-the-boat terminology, and its mental realms are mostly concerned with feelings of living abroad. The changes in their poetic form come from the integration of the “song” style. But, as we know, classical poetry is rooted in the form, sound, and sense of the Chinese language. It was therefore a positive effort to stimulate the poetic transformation through the introduction of Western learning, but China’s several thousand years of a continuous poetic tradition was too powerful a force to resist, if only due to inertia. This was why the authors of the Poetic Revolution remained a limited group: The key which would lead to

²¹ Gong Xiping 龔喜平 believes that “new-style poetry” should be called “song-style poetry” 歌體詩, on which see his “Jindai ‘getishi’ chutan.”

the “new poetry” they awaited would never be available to most.

The Southern Society (Nanshe 南社), founded in 1909 by a group of young nationalists, was a major progressive literary society dedicated to the writing and promoting of classicist poetry.²² But poetry was not their sole concern. From the very beginning, it had a clear proposal to carry on the Poetic Revolution’s use of literature to enlighten the masses, to lift up the people’s spirit, and to announce a nationalist revolution. Liang Qichao was the first to stress the propagandistic potential of literature, but after the failure of his reformative political agenda, he ceased his advocacy. Those who truly followed through on his literary ideas and played a significant role in political battles were the Southern Society. Thus, in the “Founding Manifesto of the New Southern Society” (“Xin Nanshe chengli bugao” 新南社成立佈告, 1923), written retrospectively as the original Southern Society dissolved in 1921, Liu Yazhi 柳亞子 (1887–1958), the longest serving chairman of the Society, said with more than a little pride:

The old Southern Society was established three years before the founding of the Republic of China. Its goal was to fight against the Manchurian Qing dynasty, and its name was the Southern Society, marking its opposition to the “Northern [Imperial] Court.” Now, Sun Yat-sen and his comrades have created the Chinese Alliance abroad, rallying support with the Three Principles of the People. [. . .] The Southern Society that we have established is to be the trumpet of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance.²³

Similarly, Gao Xu says: “When the Manchurian barbarians ran rampant, I and my friends Liu Yazhi and Chen Qubing 陳去病 (1874–1933) proposed to set up the Southern Society, after we had all joined the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance. We take as our mission the use of words for *revolution*; we were not

²² [Editor’s Note] English studies on the Southern Society have been scarce. For the most recent publication, see Zhiyi Yang, “The Tower of Going Astray.”

²³ Liu Yazhi, *Nanshe jilüe*, 100.

[Translator’s Note] The “Three Principles of the People” 三民主義 are Nationalism (*minzu* 民族), the People’s Power (*minquan* 民權), and the People’s Livelihood (*minsheng* 民生).

focused on the realm of words.”²⁴ After the overthrow of the Qing in the 1911 revolution, they all tried to position the Southern Society in the narrative of the Chinese Revolution, and it became practically a propaganda organ for the Chinese Alliance.

A comparison of the poetry of the Poetic Revolution and that of the Southern Society makes their differences quite clear. The poetry of the Poetic Revolution is a poetry of “singing beneath foreign skies,” revealing how the intelligentsia gorged itself on Western learning, their language open and fresh but also graceless and superficial. The Southern Society, however, wrote of the break between the intellectual classes and the autocracy, as well as society’s intellectual journey toward a new system, following the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the Boxer Indemnity of 1900. Though there was no lack of new vocabulary in their poems, their poems were on the whole more classical. In their reverence for the poetics of the Tang and Song dynasties, they retained many of the characteristics of the “return to antiquity” (*fugu* 復古) and “imitating antiquity” (*nigu* 擬古) styles. In this, the Southern Society was quite distinct from the Poetic Revolution’s blind Westernization: They had a certain mental awareness as they went about utilizing Western learning in their poetry, and thus from the very beginning they planted the Poetic Revolution’s roots in the soil of traditional culture.

Tradition can mainly be found in two aspects of the poetry of the Southern Society. The first aspect is the tradition of “Airs and Elegantiae” (*fengya* 風雅) stemming from the canonical *Book of Odes*. Chen Qubing, Gao Xu, and Liu Yazhi all lamented the decline of the traditions of Elegantiae in recent years, so they made it their somber mission to continue the tradition of elitist classical poetry. The second aspect was in their realization of certain traditions of classical poetics, particularly the opposition to foreign rule represented by the Restoration Society (*Fushe* 復社) and the Seeds Society (*Jishe* 幾社) of the late Ming and early Qing. In a poem bidding farewell to Wang Dungen 王鈍根 (1888–1951), a native from Hunan, Gao Xu mourns the “planting of errors” and the “inundation of the land,” waiting for a time when Hunan, Hubei, and the southeast will join hands, restore the spirit of loyalist literature after the disappearance of the Seeds Society and Wang Fuzhi 王夫

²⁴ Gao Xu, “Preface to the *Collection of Traces of an Inexhaustible Hut* [of Zhou Shi 周實, 1885–1911]” (“*Wujin’an yiji xu*” 無盡庵遺集序), *Gao Xu ji*, 512.

之 (1619–92), and make it flourish once again in the world of poetry.²⁵ Soon after this, Chen Qubing formed the “Spirit Communication Society” (Shenjiao she 神交社), the “Small Inauguration” (“Xiaoqi” 小啓) of which looked back at the connection between the rise and fall of the late Ming societies and the rise and fall of the nation. In it, he clearly expresses that he “awaits the continuation of Among the Clouds matters, when all the forests of song display their talents.”²⁶ In Liu Yazhi’s notes to a group portrait of the members of the Spirit Communication Society, he highlighted the implications of their continued attempts to restore the spirit of boldness.²⁷ Ning Tiaoyuan 甯調元 (1883–1913), who had founded a regional branch of the Southern Society in Hunan, compared the Southern Society with the Restoration Society in his “Preface to *Poems of the Southern Society*” (“Nanshe shi xu” 南社詩序):

My friends Gao Xu and Liu Yazhi, having becoming famous for their poetry within the seas, further set up a Southern Society, to network the poets and extraordinary men of the age. It has since become a grand vision. When Zhong Yi [famed musician of the pre-imperial period who was imprisoned at Qin] played southern melodies, it was to remind himself of his roots. During the transition between the Tianqi 天啓 (1620–27) and Chongzhen 崇禎 (1627–44) reign periods, the two Zhangs of Taicang [i.e., Zhang Pu 張溥 (1602–41) and Zhang Cai 張采 (1596–1648)] started a society. [. . .] Though their streams were separate, most encouraged each other with poetry, classical prose, and lyrics, and all belonged to the Restoration Society. When mountains cry out, valleys respond; when wind picks up, rivers echo them: in this they prospered. Oh strands of

²⁵ Gao Xu, “Dungen jiang hui Chu, suoshi, cheng sizhang yi yingzhi” 鈍根將回楚，索詩，成四章以應之 [As Wang Dungen departs for Chu, he asks for a poem, so I compose these four Stanzas in response], originally published on *Fubao* 復報, no. 11 (August 15, 1907). The title was later modified as “Zaizeng Junjian huan Changsha” 再贈君劍還長沙 (Again sending off Junjian to return to Changsha), *Gao Xu ji*, 69.

²⁶ Chen Qubing 陳去病, “Wuwei, Tianmei, Yalu, Liugong pianran pingji, xicheng cishi” 無畏、天梅、亞盧、嚶公翩然萍集，喜成此什, *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報, January 7, 1908.

[Translator’s Note] In the quotation, “Among the Clouds” 雲間 refers to a school of poetry in the late Ming and early Qing period centered around Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608–47).

²⁷ Liu Yazhi, “Shenjiaoshe yajitu ji” 神交社雅集圖記, in *Nanshe congke*, vol. 1, 20.

the spring trees! Oh quails that guide my hand! Though they've been gone three hundred years, men like this still exist! Those who would arise to follow on their heels, surely, should be capable of contemplation, capable of association, and capable of lamentation.²⁸

Ning Tiaoyuan places the Southern Society as the intellectual inheritors of the Restoration Society and Seeds Society. It is through the Southern Society's response to the Seeds and Restoration Societies that they are able to realize a return to a tradition of poetics rooted in the *Book of Odes*, one in which poetry is characterized by stimulation (*xing* 興), contemplation (*guan* 觀), association (*qun* 群), and lamentation (*yuan* 怨).²⁹ It is precisely through the Southern Society's selective use of traditional culture that their poetry that we see how different they are from the Poetic Revolution.

This has given rise to a mistaken belief that the poetry of the Southern Society was regressive compared to the Poetic Revolution, that they represented a return to the old classics. In fact, this is not the case. While rooted in tradition, the Southern Society did not abandon Western learning. Nor did they simply absorb new phrases and realms of knowledge from Western learning like the Poetic Revolution did; rather, they deeply understood and self-consciously selected from Western learning, trying their best to use the modern knowledge introduced by the West to solve China's systemic problems. Though the Southern Society's political goals included a particularly nationalistic sense of anti-Manchu Revolution, based on a traditional distinction between "Chinese" and "barbarians," the republican form of government they pursued in fact a Western system.

Both Western and Chinese ideas comprised major themes in the poetry of the Southern Society. The "Preface to the *Selected Readings of the Southern Society*" ("Nanshe congxuan xu" 南社叢選序) by Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883–1944) provides an excellent introduction to the literature of the Southern Society.³⁰ First, the literature of the Southern Society is "literature

²⁸ In *Nanshe congke*, vol. 2, 139.

²⁹ [Translator's Note] Cf. *Analects* 17.9: "The Master said: 'My children, why do you not study the *Book of Odes*? The *Odes* can be used for stimulation, can be used for contemplation, can be used for contemplation, can be used for lamentation. Nearby, they aid you in serving your father; afar, they aid you in serving your lord. From them, you learn the names of birds, animals, plants, and trees.'"

³⁰ Hu Pu'an ed., *Nanshe congxuan*, first fascicle.

of the revolution,” different from the literature of the Hundred Days’ Reform period and from post-May Fourth literature: It is literature of the Three Principles of the People. Second, the Southern Society literature was rooted in both traditional scholarship and Western learning, which inspire each other in many aspects. The nature, aims, and theoretical basis of the literature of the Southern Society were there at its founding. Gao Xu once explained the new purpose of the Southern Society through an exegesis of the classic formulation, found in the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Odes*, that poetry “originates in circumstance and terminates in rites and duty” (*fa hu qing zhi hu liyi* 發乎情止乎禮義):

Originates in feelings is not only the private feelings of an individual in ancient times. *Terminates in rites and duty* speaks of the great and the distant. Thus, advocacy for human rights, rejection of autocracy, appeals to the people to think independently, and enhancement of people’s notions of race—all of these perfectly benefit *terminates in rites and duty*.³¹

Thus, the Southern Society was the first to raise the banner of revolution in the world of classical poetry. Using literature to express the pursuit of nationalism and democracy among China’s progressive intellectual circles after 1900, the Southern Society retreated from the biases of the Poetic Revolution and headed instead toward a confluence of Chinese and Western cultures. A progressive spirit was, in fact, contained beneath the appearance of retreat.

The Poetic Revolution once attempted to use Cantonese tunes, *tanci*, and song-style verse to push poetry forward, a fact which has been roundly lauded by contemporary critics, though I cannot agree with them. *Tanci* is its own, independent art form: It would be very hard to use it to replace classical poetry. Cantonese tunes are a localized, popular art form: To use them in place of the forms of classical poetry would clearly be impossible to carry out. Only the freedom, vernacularity, and popularity of the song-style could fit with the spirit of transforming the people advocated by Liang Qichao. Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao’s song-style poems were all clearly written with propagandistic aims in mind. The song form was not at heart a new form but

³¹ Gao Xu, “Yuanwujinzhai shihua” 願無盡齋詩話, in *Nanshe congke*, vol. 1, 39–40.

a continuation of classical forms such as *gexing* 歌行 and *yuefu*, a new form adjusted to the modern needs of agitprop. There were two paths for song-style poetry after the Poetic Revolution: the first was to gradually move closer to music, in which it would become a true “song-poem”; the second was the slogan form, also called the propaganda form. Among the Southern Society, there are excellent writers who followed both paths. Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880–1942) followed the former, becoming one of the most famous modern song lyricists. Gao Xu followed the latter. In his early years, Gao Xu wrote many song-style poems under the influence of the Poetic Revolution. But this does not represent the mainstream of the Southern Society’s efforts. The poetry of the Southern Society was primarily studies in Tang and Song dynasty poetry. Tang poetry focuses on inspiration, while Song poetry focuses on cultivation, but both belong within the frame of classical poetics, and lend nothing to the vernacular and popular. Seen from the angle of changes in poetic form, the Southern Society is without a doubt a step backward compared to the Poetic Revolution.

But a step backward is not the same as regressive conservatism. If we look at it from the perspective of the nascent development of classicist poetry, the Southern Society’s step backward is in fact a giant leap forward. Classical poetry had traditionally been a form of scholar-officials’ literature. In the Qing, in particular, the dominant style was the erudite poetry of scholars. The Southern Society’s poetry reform did not limit itself to a specific poetry form, but rather chose to focus on the meaning and qualities of a poem when composing. Liu Yazhi’s “Preface to the Poems of Hu Pu’an [1878–1947]” (“*Hu Jichen shi xu*” 胡寄塵詩序) offers the following critique of the late Qing poetry:

Looking on them, the outer clerks and circuit officers, the capital officials and the ministers of the central government are full of talent and artistry, all brilliant and dazzling, while men of rough robes are silently ignored. Alas! How are these things any different from a record-book of the official ranks or of local gentry? [. . .] When I set up the Southern Society with my colleagues, we longed to restore the melodies of the Tang, rejecting the vulgarity to stress the Poetry of the Cotton-clothed, not serving the nobility with their lofty

goals—something the meat-dining officials could not dare to look upon.³²

While gentry literature only values the world of poetry, “men of rough robes” are rejected and never heard from. The Southern Society advocates “the poetry of the cotton-clothed” (*buyi zhi shi* 布衣之詩), challenging the revered position of the gentry in the world of poetry. The so-called “gentry literature” refers to the prestigious Tongguang Style 同光體 of the time.³³ Practitioners of the Tongguang style were mainly officials in the Qing court, people who belonged to the system; practitioners of “the poetry of the cotton-clothed,” however, “did not serve the nobility with their lofty goals,” but were a heretical group bent on forsaking or subverting the system.³⁴

So what were the unique characteristics of the “poetry of the cotton-clothed”? According to Southern Society members themselves, one was their stress on integrity. They took the Seeds and Restoration Societies as their precursors: These groups were driven by a desire to demonstrate the integrity of opponents to the Qing, achieved through a restoration of classical studies during the Ming-Qing transition. The first rule of the “Eighteen Rules of the Southern Society” from its founding is: “Those who are superior in both moral conduct and literature may join the Society.” The “moral conduct” mentioned refers to such integrity. As Fu Fu 傅專 recalls, before the Republican period they “urged the people of China to take up the banner [of the revolution],” then during the Republican period, The Powerful Bandit (aka. Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 [1859–1916]) usurped the nation, deceiving the world and stealing the throne, submitting to brutality and oppression, and some of the intelligentsia sold themselves off to him. But there were plenty members of our Society who became martyrs or were imprisoned, fled

³² Liu Yazhi, *Mojianshi wenlu*, 257.

³³ [Translator’s Note] The name “Tongguang style” 同光體 is named as such because it was popular during the Tongzhi 同治 (1861–75) and Guangxu 光緒 (1875–1908) reign periods.

³⁴ [Editor’s Note] Arguably, however, this division was also generational. Unlike the Tongguang Style poets who came to age under the Qing dynasty and took the classics examinations to enter officialdom, Southern Society poets were mostly born after 1875, making it unlikely for them to pass the metropolitan exam when it was abolished in 1905. Most of them went to modern schools and many even studied in Japan.

or hid their traces, and would not yield the mighty or shame themselves for money. We would not associate with the Liu Xin, Yang Xiong, and their like.³⁵ Such was the result of our encouraging integrity for years (since the foundation of the Society).³⁶

He believed that under the autocratic rule of Yuan Shikai, members of the Southern Society would maintain their dignity because of the Society's promotion of integrity. This explains what Liu Yazhi meant in his "Preface to the Poems of Hu Pu'an" when he said that after the Republican period, the Southern Society "would not serve the nobility and retained their lofty ambitions."³⁷

Secondly, the feelings expressed in the "Poetry of the Cotton-Clothed" are characterized by their passion and unrestrained bravado. Liu Yazhi's "Preface to the *Tianhu Pavilion Collection*" ("Tianhuge ji xu" 天湖閣集序) argues that, even though in general "poetry becomes refined after the poet's career ambition is frustrated" (*qiong er hou gong* 窮而後工), poets can be divided into three types: "ordinary men of the villages and alleys," retired Qing officials "who lament their old age and low position, who grieve over heaven and men," and "those of impressive moral character."³⁸ The first two types

³⁵ [Translator's Note] Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE–20 CE) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) are literati who served both the Han dynasty and the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 during the interregnum of the Xin Dynasty 新朝 (8–23 CE).

³⁶ Fu Fu 傅尊, "Preface," in *Nanshe congxuan*, first fascicle.

³⁷ [Editor's Note] In effect, there were also Southern Society members in the "Representative Assembly" which were bribed and voted Yuan Shikai to restore monarchy.

³⁸ Liu Yazhi, "Chi Zhu Yuanchu" 斥朱鴛鴦, arguing against Zhu Xi 朱璽: "The phrases 'poor, grieving, and despondent, filling the page with bitter words' are only results of their unsuccessful bureaucratic careers; 'lamenting old age and sighing over low position' reveals his shamelessness; and with 'worrying over the nation as if it were set ablaze, being vigilant in all' his main worry is over the loss of the northern barbarians, with which their life's hopes are dashed." See *Mojianshi wenlu*, 473. In his "Preface to the Poems of Hu Pu'an" 胡寄塵詩序, he writes: "Several former officials, whom are exiled from the officialdom, long for wealth and rank, never forgetting it. Though they'll never have it back, they embellish their stanzas and attach themselves to poets—they use abstruse words to cover up their shallowness!" From this we can clearly see that those "who lament their old age and low position, who grieve over heaven and men" are retired Qing officials.

[Translator's Note] Zhu Xi [aka. Zhu Yuanchu] was a Southern Society member who opened admired the Tong-Guang poets, most of whom retired Qing officials at the time.

[Editor's Note] More on this event and its aftermath, see Zhiyi Yang, "The Tower of Going Astray."

are incapable of writing refined poetry even if their ambition is frustrated, but the latter type is capable. The difference is that the first two kinds write of an individual's feelings, while the latter is concerned with the suffering of the family and of the nation. The first two sing bitter, acerbic songs, while the songs of the latter "clang and boom" (*cenghong tangta* 噌吰鐘鞳). Sorrowful laments and passionate bravado are characteristically youthful emotions, so Cao Juren 曹聚仁 declares that "they had a youthful vigor, which hinted at the rebirth of the Chinese nation."³⁹

Thirdly, it was characterized by its lack of a gentrified air and thus could not avoid a bit of uncouthness, contrary to the restraint understatement of the Tong-Guang Style. In his "Southern Society Poetry Talks" ("Nanshe shihua" 南社詩話), Hu Pu'an often set "the commoners' literature" and "gentry literature" in opposition to each other. Fu Fu said this about the poetry of the Southern Society in his preface to the *Selected Works of the Southern Society*: "Their words strove to be mighty and rousing, as though themselves unsurpassed in all the world, like the rising sun with its shook gold and dazzling colors. But they never pay much attention to the principle of thinking over profundities and contemplating subtleties." Wang Jingwei summarized this passionate, uncouth poetry style as "unadorned and brave" (*zhuopu yongyi* 拙樸勇毅), and had high hopes for this kind of literature:

Critics have said that revolutionary literature serves only to excite and agitate. But I say: When spirits of the intelligentsia are so low, what's wrong with a little excitement, and why not agitate? The big problem with the educated is that they see benefits and disadvantages too clearly, love discussing others' strengths and shortcomings, and are unwilling to put things into practice. They in effect aid the petty men to lose all scruples. Such a situation can only be rectified by the simple, brave revolutionary literature.⁴⁰

Facing critics who say that the Southern Society's works "serve only to excite and agitate," Wang Jingwei believed that it was necessary to rectify the

³⁹ Cao Juren, "Nanshe · Xin Nanshe" 南社·新南社 (The Southern Society and the New Southern Society), in Liu Yazhi, *Nanshe jilüe*, 248.

⁴⁰ Wang Jingwei, "Preface," in *Nanshe congxuan*, first fascicle.

intelligentsia's moral outlook. His "Preface to [Chen Qubing's] *Drafts of Poems from the Hall of Surging Song*" ("Haogetang shichao xu" 浩歌堂詩鈔序), he offered the following evaluation of the Southern Society's poetry:

In form and voice, there is nothing that is not completely different from other men, and their mental realms are distinct. In the past twenty years, their style has become so influential, almost to the point that "the corrupt become pure, and the weak strong in will."⁴¹ One cannot say that they have given nothing good to the forest of arts.⁴²

The poetry of the Southern Society, as the members themselves argue, may not be as technically proficient as gentry poetry, but it was effective in changing people's hearts and minds.

In accordance with the needs of the time, the Southern Society continued down the path of the Poetic Revolution, who had given full play to the poetry's political functions of stimulation, contemplation, association, and lamentation. Rooted in traditional culture, the Southern Society took on the mission of overturning the autocratic system of governance and realizing a republican system in its place, all the while dialing back the "Westernized" poetics of the Poetic Revolution. The Southern Society also had a deeper, more rational understanding of Western learning, which they used to realize improvements in the social system. In this way, they had deepened the understanding of Western learning. The Southern Society's poetry reform essentially abandoned the Poetic Revolution's plans to replace classical poetry with vernacular, popular forms such as Cantonese songs, *tanci*, and song-style verse. Instead, they reinvented the intrinsic characters and contents of classical-style poetry to bring about transformation from gentry literature to a literature "of the cotton-clothed."

The Southern Society's greatest contribution to development of modern literature was the way in which they injected the spirit of literature of the commoners and the cotton-clothed into the body of classical poetry, turning classical poetry into something more modern and, arguably, democratic. Out of the Southern Society's efforts emerged a new kind of verse: classicist

⁴¹ [Translator's Note] This phrase comes from Mencius, 5B.10.

⁴² Wang Jingwei, "Haogetang shichao xu" (1924), in *Chen Qubing quanji*, 1.

poetry. Of course, classicist poetry did not reach its full form with the Southern Society, for it still had to undergo the baptism of history. The implementation of a new educational system and the establishment of the concept of modern academic disciplines and scholarship completely—these measures did away with the students’ reliance on traditional scholarship after the end of the civil service examination system, and classical poetry, likewise, no longer had its long-abiding foundation. With the May Fourth Movement, classical poetry came to be dismissed as “dead literature,” seemingly never to return. Albeit the case, after the collapse of the Qing, no one would give up writing in traditional forms of poetry, not the old-school literati, nor the new-school scholars, nor even the political revolutionaries. Through all of their ceaseless writings, the classicist became, along with newer forms, another kind of modern poetry.

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