

Practical Thoughts and Compilation of Ancient Prose in Late Ming Dynasty^{*}

CAO Yang, MA Maojun

South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China

After the middle of the Ming Dynasty, along with the rapid social changes, the ideological trend of practical studies guided by the reflection and criticism of the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism of “putting books on the shelf and not reading, exploring and studying without foundation” profoundly, widely, and comprehensively, affected every aspect of literary life. Influenced by this, selecting ancient prose in the Tianqi and Chongzhen periods developed new characteristics in three aspects: the purpose of selecting, the preferences of selecting, and the path of evaluating. As far as the purpose of selection is concerned, there is a new trend that the ancient writers of Tianqi and Chongzhen take the enlightenment and the world as the purpose of selection, and are no longer confined to the stereotypes of selecting articles for articles and selecting articles for their emotions. A large number of articles reflecting the economy and people’s livelihood, military affairs, and politics have been included in the anthology horizon of the anthology, thus expanding the selection types of ancient Chinese anthology. From the point of view of comments, the comments of Tianqi and Chongzhen ancient prose appear to be “especially today”. The merit of the ancient prose of management and government and the application of the world can replace the layout of the text, words, and rhetoric, and become the value of the selection of home evaluation.

Keywords: practical ideological trend, ancient prose, purport of interest, category

The Evolution of Editorial Purpose

The relationship between “Ancient prose” and “Confucian orthodoxy” is the core issue of ancient Chinese literary theory, and it is the universal value convention of scholars in the collection of ancient prose. Since in the Tang Dynasty Han Yu proposed that ancient prose is used to inherit the concept of Confucian orthodoxy, the later essay theory has focused on the discussion of the two categories of “Ancient prose” and “Confucian orthodoxy”. The concept that literature must contain the Confucian orthodoxy in order to have the meaning of existence requires that the anthology of ancient texts, as a collection of literature, should assume the mission and obligation of carrying the Confucian orthodoxy. In the eyes of the editors of Tianqi and Chongzhen ancient prose, editing ancient prose is to cleanse the world and restore social order. To commend loyalty, filial piety, and integrity, In the 10th year of Chongzhen, Hu Jiehui, a native of Luling, collected the writings of Hu Quan, Zhou Bida, and Wen Tianxiang in the Song Dynasty, and selected them into the 14 volumes of

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CAO Yang, Master, School of Liberal Arts, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China.

MA Maojun, Doctoral Supervisor, School of Liberal Arts, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China.

Lixianzhongsanxianshengwenxuan (里先忠三先生文选), with the intention of giving full play to the civilizing effect of the writings of three Zhong, in order to commend the loyalty and correct the customs of the world. Chen Hanhui said:

This is the reason why my teacher compiled this anthology of ancient prose. Society, sharp contradictions, the atmosphere has become bad...The so-called people who save society and help justice, there is no also. The corrupt occupy high places, a gentleman and a wise man is envied. My teacher believed that if only one of the three men—Hu, Zhou and Wen—could save the society from collapse.

In his generous, tragic, and indignant prose, Chen made an unprecedented criticism of the shortcomings of the late Ming Dynasty. The uncovering of the social trend of the time also reveals the original intention of the anthology, which is to develop the function of politics and religion of ancient literature to maintain the people of the world and to serve the reality.

The imminent collapse of the social reality proposed to Tianqi and Chongzhen ancient prose electors the practical task of saving the world and restoring the nation. With the help of the ideological trend of practical studies, some electors began to think about the use of the selection of ancient proeses for national use, and to re-examine the merits of ancient texts in “statecraft”. The reason why electors like Lu Menglong, Dong Yingju, and Jiang Zhiqiao attach great importance to Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan’s ancient prose lies in the power of “statecraft” of their ancient prose. In the preface to the *Hanliuheping* (韩柳合评), Dong Yingju explained his intention in choosing the text, saying,

Both of these two men had the extraordinary power and always took the responsibility of maintaining the Confucian orthodoxy from the beginning to the end. They work hard, so their articles are profound; they inherit the will of their predecessors, so their articles can stand out. And they diligently pursue the social value of the article, perseverance, that is why they can become leaders through the ages!

In the view of Dong Yingju, the reason why Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan’s proeses “stand out through the ages” and become a model for the teaching of hundreds of generations is that their proeses focus on the development of “statecraft” and are useful in the world. The reason why Jiang Zhiqiao praises Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan’s ancient proeses is the same. He pointed out that Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan’s ancient proeses “are by no means frivolous words, nothing to fill the actual text also”. It shows that he attaches equal importance to the achievements of Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan’s ancient proeses. In view of the difficulties of the country, Chen Zongqi chose the ancient literature as a means to govern the world, and selected the 13 volumes of *Guwenqiliùè* (古文奇略). It became the common understanding and behavioral consciousness of the ancient anthologists to draw nutrients from the selection and compilation of ancient proeses, and to sum up experience and lessons from the review and reflection of history.

An Extension of the Selection and Selection Types

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the trend of practical learning, which arose in the late Ming Dynasty, opened up the theoretical horizon and anthology horizon of ancient writers and anthologists, expanded the path of collecting ancient anthology, enriched the types of ancient anthology, and played an important role in the history of ancient anthology.

Tianqi and Chongzhen’s compilers of ancient prose took the service of reality and the pursuit of practicality as the essence, and vigorously expanded the scope and boundary of “ancient prose”. All the articles related to the

military and people's lives, such as heaven and earth, official officials, border affairs and coastal defense, etiquette, rites and music, finance and taxation, horse administration, salt and iron, etc., are included in the anthology of ancient literature anthologists. Taking "border affairs" as an example, at the end of the Ming Dynasty, Liaodong issue became a major event related to the survival of the dynasty. The battles of Sarhu (萨尔浒), Daling He (大凌河) caused extreme adverse conditions for the Ming Dynasty, resulting in the death of many good generals and soldiers. It has become an important responsibility of ancient prose anthologists to select articles of "border affairs" so as to make people pay attention to border affairs and provide references for the authorities. In the selected ancient prose of Tianqi and Chongzhen, the articles on defending the frontier in the past dynasties have significantly expanded in the earlier period. During the reign of Emperor Tianqi, in the *Chentaishizhaodaijingjiyan* (陈太史昭代经济言) compiled by Chen Zizhuang, "border affairs" is one of the highlights of the anthology. It is composed of Li Xian's *Yurongshu* (御戎疏), Shang Luo's *Bianwushu* (边务疏), Yu Qian's *Beibianfuti* (备边覆题), Wang Shizhen's *Beilushu* (备虏疏), *Bianfang* (边防), *Herong* (和戎), Zhang Juzheng's *Lunbianshi* (论边事), Zhang Dong's *Chenbianshi* (陈边事), Li Dongyang's *Yibianjunruweishu* (议边军入卫疏), Wang Ao's *Bianyibashishu* (边议八事疏), Wang Shouren's *Chenyanbianwushu* (陈言边务疏), Zheng Xiao's *Huangmingsiyikaoxu* (皇明四夷考序), *Huangmingbeilukaoxu* (皇明北虏考序), Gao Gong's *Yichubenbingjibianfangdufubingbeizhichenyibianrangdajishu* (议处本兵及边方督抚兵备之臣以裨安攘大计疏), and so on, reflecting the concern of the electors about the fate of the empire in the late Ming Dynasty. In the late Chongzhen period, Yu Yu, a native of Quzhou, collected a collection of *Chunshiji* (纯师集), which covers the Eastern Zhou Dynasty and the Southern Song Dynasty. Among them, the ancient prose of "border affairs" in the past dynasties is the focus of its selection. Yu Yu selected Chao Cuo's *Yanshoubianbeisaishu* (言守边备塞疏), Zhong Jun's *Qingshixiongnushu* (请使匈奴书), Wei Xiang's *Jianfaxiongnushu* (谏伐匈奴书), Zhao Chongguo's *Qiangshidui* (羌事对), *Yixinwuxianjiqiangzou* (议辛武贤击羌奏), Hou Ying's *Babianbeiyi* (罢边备议), and so on. These articles covered many aspects, such as politics, economy, military affairs, geography, and so on. It embodies the strong realistic concern of Tianqi and Chongzhen's anthologists.

A Turning in the Focus of Evaluation

Evaluation is the center of ancient prose compilation and selection, which is the concentrated presentation of the writer's aesthetic imperative and literary thoughts. Under the influence of the trend of practical learning, scholars in Tianqi and Chongzhen often focused on practical concerns when reviewing ancient prose, and their attention on the writing techniques and artistic value of ancient prose gradually gave way to their admiration for the political function of ancient prose. The ancient prose anthologists closely combine the appraisal of ancient prose with the social reality, and are good at integrating the ancient and the modern in the appraisal, forming an appraisal trend with the ancient and the present, especially the present.

The anthology series of *Tangsongbadajiawenchao* (唐宋八大家文钞) occupies an important position in the anthology system of ancient prose in Ming Dynasty. Before the apocalypse and Chongzhen, scholars of ancient literature commented on the importance of enlightenment or literature itself from the point of view of learning. For the ancient prose of Tianqi and Chongzhen, the focus of their selection of home reviews is very different. They pay more attention to the elucidation of the world value of "Eight Great Scholars in Tang and Song Dynasties", keen to explore the practical value of "Eight Great Scholars in Tang and Song Dynasties", formed a blend of ancient and modern, and especially pay attention to the current atmosphere of comment.

The points of Wu Zheng-Kun's *Tangsongbadajiawenxuan* (唐宋八大家文悬) not only closely adhere to the current politics, but also incorporate the battlefield records of Ming and Qing Dynasties extensively, which has valuable historical document value. In the process of appreciating ancient proses, he has devoted rich practical concerns to form a unique taste for comment. Such as comment Su Shi's *Dachenlunxia* (大臣论下):

In the Guijia year, Fuqing control power, he is used to reconciliation, but the problem is blamed on Yang Lian, Zuo Guangdou, that their provocation led to the situation out of control. But what he doesn't know is that escalating the conflict can lead to changes, and not escalating the conflict can also lead to uncontrollable situations.

Fuqing, namely Ye Xianggao, according to the *Mingshi—Yexianggaozhuan* (明史·叶向高传) records:

Yang Lian on the thin impeachment Wei Zhongxian has 24 felonies. Chief Assistant Xiang Gao said that things were not so serious that Yang Lian did not do the right thing. Ministers to the emperor one after another, someone advised Ye Xianggao, that should be quick victory. Ye thinks Wei Zhongxian is not so easy to deal with, ministers should avoid intensifying the conflict, so there will be no big disaster.

This comment by Wu Zheng-Kun not only shows Ye Xianggao's errors and deficiencies in handling the problem, but also shows the “escalating the conflict can lead to changes, and not escalating the conflict can also lead to uncontrollable situations”, which is thought-provoking. Another example is the review of Su Shi's *Guanzhonglun* (管仲论), which says:

The recent use of troops in the left area of Liao is not subject to discipline. The two armies confronted each other, and the enemy, driving ten thousand horses, charged directly at our army. As soon as we met the enemy, our troops fled in all directions, and were not able to resist. The enemy charged our troops with the speed of their horses. Our troops only rely on firearms to resist, after three shots, firearms have been hot, unable to timely replenishment of gunpowder. Does the idea of a quick victory with weapons really exist?

From strategic decision-making to campaign command, from ordnance armament to military rules and discipline, Wu Zhengkun made a vivid and delicate presentation of the combat situation of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and made a profound summary and reflection on the causes of the Ming army's defeat. With the purpose of serving the reality, it breaks the traditional framework of reviewing ancient prose, which is unique and unique in the Tang and Song literature selection group.

Conclusion

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the ideological trend of practical learning, with the value core of replacing the virtual to the real and applying to the world, had a wide and profound influence on the literary activities of the period, especially the compilation and selection of ancient proses. In the face of the rapid social changes, the ancient prose anthologists, who pursue “the rise and fall of the country and the life and death of the people” as their academic pursuit, consciously shoulder the social responsibility and historical mission of protecting the country. Compared with the anthologists before Tianqi and Chongzhen, they did not stick to the stereotype of choosing articles for their own feelings. Instead, they chose and reviewed ancient proses from both the enlightened and the historical, enriching their meaning and clarifying their direction. In order to give full play to the practical value of the ancient proses, they collected a large number of proses about military affairs, economy, and people's livelihood, and expanded the scope and categories of the selected texts of the ancient proses. As the center of ancient prose anthology, the commentary on ancient prose became a field to explore and control chaos,

rise and fall from Tianqi and Chongzhen electives, showing a strong sense of realism and utilitarianism, which has a unique value and significance in the history of composition and ancient prose anthology.

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