

Wu Guangxing (吴光兴), *The Eighth Century Poetic Manner: On Exploration of the "Shen-Song Century" (705-805) in Tang Poetic History* 八世纪诗风：探索唐诗史上“沈宋的世纪”（705-805），Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (社会科学文献出版社), 2013.

Among many narrations of Tang poetry history, the theory of “Four Periods of Tang Poetry” proposed by Gao Bing 高棅 (1350-1423) in early Ming has acquired a very unique commanding position and exerted considerable impact on the interpretative methods and perspectives in the study of Tang poetry. Although continuously faced with numerous scholars’ severe challenges from Ming and Qing to present day, so far it looks like that no other interpretive modes could replace it. In order to shake off this dogmatic interpretive atmosphere, Wu Guangxing’s book, *The Eighth Century Poetic Manner: On Exploration of the "Shen-Song Century" (705-805) in Tang Poetic History* provides new insights into Tang poetic history from the eighth century.

In this important book, Bing argues the eighth century is “Shen-Song Century” in the minds of Tang writers, which, in fact, can be regarded as “regulated verse century”. Within this century, finalized by two early Tang poets Shen Quanqi 沈佺期 (656?-715?) and Song Zhiwen 宋之问 (656?-715?), and followed by the poets of several generations, the genre norms of regulated verse absolutely dominated the whole world of poetry. Other literary styles, literary trends, and literary movements played complementary and subsidiary roles. In other words, the literary norms of regulated verse established by Shen-Song embodies a pre-eminent influence in Tang literary history, especially before the poetic reform movement during Yuanhe 元和 (806-820) period.

This book consists of two parts. The first part discusses the influence of regulated verse norms upon the active literary practices of six successive poet-groups and the gradual evolution of poetic styles which is divided into four phases, Kaiyuan 开元 (713-741), Tianbao 天宝 (742-756), Dali 大历 (766-779), Zhenyuan 贞元 (785-805). The second part should be considered as a comprehensive evaluation, based on Tang poets’ own observations, reviewing and examining the concept foundation and formation of regulated verse genre and exploring how literature model figures crucially were transformed from Shen-Song to Li-Du (李白、杜甫).

Surveying this century’ literary phenomenon with compassion and understanding, the author expertly collects scattered and fragmented comments from Tang writers, carefully examines and verifies with extant several editors of “Tang Poetry Anthology Compiled by Tang People” and as many Tang poetry texts as possible. He analyzes Tang writer-communities’ concerns and consensus on contemporary literature, to understand the context of their own literary criticism, and to comprehend their own literary conception. As he observes, his arguments and conclusions in this book are nothing more than modern commentaries and annotations to Tang writers’ poetic views, and what he describes and represents is nothing more than the Tang poetry history seen in Tang writers’ own eyes and from their own lips.

More precisely he reveals, in Tang writers’ opinion, Shen-Song style not only

dominated the periods of Kaiyuan-Tianbao and Dali, but also extended to and covered Zhenyuan. Most importantly, the author points out there is no unbridgeable gap between Kaiyuan-Tianbao and Dali in Tang poetry history. The poets from Kaiyuan-Tianbao to Dali were all fostered by regulated verse norms, the literary conventions and every poet's practices had shared family resemblance until major changes happened during Zhenyuan-Yuanhe period, when the abuses of regulated verse gradually exposed and widely criticized. Through tracking the replacement of literary model figures, the author discovers that in Tang writers' opinion, there were three successive generations of model figures, i.e. Shen-Song, Wang-Cui (王维、崔颢), and Qian-Lang (钱起、郎士元). The reason that Wang-Cui's role as the model figures of Kaiyuan-Tianbao was completely forgotten in the literary history is because Li-Du was retrospectively built as a much more important and insurmountable authority figures. In Tang writers' opinion, Li-Du and Shen-Song represented two kinds of poetic norms respectively. Shen-Song style meant being familiar with and mastering the various complicated and normalized rules of regulated verse, especially five-character poetry (in the context of Tang poetics, five-character poetry was in some sense a synonym for poetry, even for literary works). However, Li-Du style meant preferring to non-regulated verse, that is, pre-Tang's classical poetic forms. As the model of literature archaist movement, Li-Du style ended the leading role of regulated verse norms, but they were both nurtured by the eighth century Shen-Song style and therefore were the products of overwhelming regulated verse norms. The author suggests the transition from Shen-Song to Li-Du should be considered as the key point of literature evolution in the middle and late Tang periods.. With describing the eighth poetry styles as "Shen-Song century", and from the perspectives of "literary conception—poetic style" and "model figure—poetic style", The author brings a new serious challenge to the widely adopted theory of "Four Periods of Tang Poetry", which was initially proposed by Gao Bing in earlier Ming. As mentioned above the Tang poetry history can be divided into four periods: early, high, middle, and late Tang. Throughout these periods the poetry constructed and polished by numerous scholars transwformed from Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing to our present day, esteemed "Li-Du" as the models, "high Tang" as the climax, Regulated verse is well known as the lifeblood of Tang poetry. As a new emerging genre in Tang Dynasty, it connected the past and the future. From the perspective of genre-style, the eighth century marks a new beginning for poetry for over one thousand years, various poetic styles were modernized and baptized by regulated verse's norms during this Shen-Song century, "regulated verse culture" affected both inside and outside literary world. From the perspective of model-style, the replacement of one model figure by another clearly demonstrated the gradual revolution of the poetic styles during this one hundred years, Shen-Song were the pathfinders, Li-Du were not only the successors but the rebels. In general, trying to understand the Tang literary contexts and explore the evolution of Tang poetry history means focusing on the inner norms of literary genre and the profound influence of the regulated verse norms in the eighth century, The author marks "Shen-Song century" as the core spirit of Tang poetry history, which surely will facilitate and activate future study of Tang literature.

Moreover, there are many insightful and valuable accounts about eighth century poetic manners found in this book. For example, through analyzing the three successive generations in Kaiyuan-Tianbao, juxtaposing three groups in Dali literary circles, comparing the different standpoints and concerns between different editors of the *Tang Poetry Anthology Compiled by Tang People*. This brings to light several long neglected poets' roles in poetic history by digging their social contacts and the travel of their texts and opinions. The author's work not only fills the Tang poetic picture with new details and new knowledge, but also profoundly represents the inner structure and motivation of the evolution of Tang poetry. His study will allow a better understanding of the Tang poetry world, inspiring and promoting the Tang poetry study. It is particularly worth mentioning that there is a long and detailed appendix named "Chronology of the Eighth Poetic Styles", which carefully arranges and sorts the poets' biography, experiences, and literary works, all in line with Du Fu's life story and integrated with important culture, political and military events. Based on the extant research achievement, this appendix provides many new materials and new analysis, needless to say, which are extremely useful for Tang literary researchers.

The author contends the established theoretical paradigms of Tang poetry study does not always accord with historic reality. Instead, they cover up the truth, and should differentiate between the Tang writers' own observations and the successors' commentaries and interpretation. This perception undoubtedly is enlightening and informative, but as the saying goes "A bystander is always clear-minded", maybe the reason for the "Four Periods of Tang Poetry" casting a long shadow is because it tells the part of what happened, at least cannot be easily wiped out. As for returning to Tang literary contexts, many original materials have been lost, transmitted texts including Tang poetry anthologies and Tang writers' own comments are limited, so the attempts to reconstruct the distant past are inevitably limited. Being true to the facts, we have to accept and deal with this limitation. Still, we have many reasons to believe that the author's excellent work will be revelatory and trigger further discussions on the relevant problems.

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