

A Textual Research on Cao Nan Poetry Society's Responsory Collection: A Local Literary Work

Chen Zhao

Heze University, Heze 274015, Shandong, China

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Abstract: The Cao Nan Poetry Society was an old literary society in Heze, Shandong Province during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China period. It was dedicated to the creation of ancient and near-form poetry. Initiated by Li Jingye, a native of Heze, it was active in the southwestern part of Shandong from the third year of the Xuantong reign to the seventh year of the Republic of China. The Cao Nan Poetry Society successively recruited 64 members and produced a large number of poems. In the seventh year of the Republic of China, Li Jingye compiled them into twelve volumes of "Cao Nan Poetry Society's Collection of Poems", which are now kept in the Qingdao City Library. It is a relatively rare local document. The "Collection of Poems and Responses of Cao Nan Poetry Society" comprehensively presents the overall creative and activity situation of Cao Nan Poetry Society, retains a large number of deeds of the society's members, contains a great deal of historical information, and also plays a very positive role in the research of regional culture.

Keywords: Xiangbang arts and culture; "Collection of poems and responses from Cao Nan poetry society"; "Examination and discussion

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1. Cao Nan poetry society and "collected poems of Cao Nan poetry society"

The Cao Nan Poetry Society was established in the third year of the Xuantong reign of the Qing Dynasty. It mainly composed ancient regulated verse, and most of its members were remnants of the Qing Dynasty. The poetry works are rich in content and simple in style. It was a distinctive old literary society in the southwestern part of Shandong Province during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China. Li Jingye, the founder of the poetry society, was from Heze. He passed the imperial examination in the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty and held positions such as the governor of Lianzhou and the general director of the Hubei Mint. In the third year of the Xuantong reign of the Qing Dynasty, he resigned from his position as the chief director and spent his leisure time in the countryside, devoting himself to the creation of ancient regulated verse. He invited friends from the same county to establish the Cao Nan Poetry Society and recruited many members. By the seventh year of the Republic of China, the society had created over a thousand poems, which were then compiled into the "Cao Nan Poetry Society's Collection of Poems".

The "Collection of Poems and Responses from Cao Nan Poetry Society" consists of twelve volumes, arranged in chronological order. On the title page, there is a sign that reads, "The Summer Monthly of Wu Wu was published in Cao Nan." Later, there are the preface for Ke Shaomin in the seventh year of the Republic of China and the preface for Xu

Jiru in the first year of the Republic of China. After the preface, there are the “Same surname of the Society”, which are arranged in the order of joining the society. The names, native places and information of the members of the poetry society are recorded in detail. At the end of the volume, there is the preface for Li Jingye after the seventh year of the Republic of China. Half a page consists of twelve lines, each line containing twenty-three characters. The first line of each volume indicates the number of volumes and the quantity of poems. This book is now kept in the Qingdao Library and is rare in existence.

The Collection of Poems and Responses include a total of 1,696 poems written by the poets of the poetry society. The number of poems created by the main members of the society, such as Li Jingye, Xu Jiru, Chen Jiyu and Yao Shumi, is relatively large, all exceeding 100. Li Jingye alone composed 512 poems, accounting for nearly one-third of the entire collection, which is the largest in the poetry society. Each volume of the “Collection of Poems” counts the number of poems in that volume and strictly avoids taboos. All characters such as “xian”, “xuan”, “xuan”, “hong” are missing their last strokes. “ning” is written as “ning”, “chun” as “淳”, and “li” as “歷”. There is also a change of the character “Xuan” to “Yuan”. There are total of sixty taboo characters in the entire collection. In addition to avoiding taboos, when encountering words such as “Imperial carriage”, “Imperial Capital”, and “Traveling”, leave one space blank to show respect.

2. The main contents of “Cao Nan poetry society’s collection of poems and responses”

The poems preserved in “Cao Nan Poetry Society’s Collection of Responses” can be roughly classified into the following five categories in terms of content.

2.1. Compose poems about rural life and express a desire to retreat from the world

Among the Cao Nan Poetry Society, officials like Li Jingye and Xu Jiru all served in the Qing court. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, most of them returned to their hometowns to live in seclusion, so there were many poems expressing their rural life and their feelings of seclusion. As Li Tiren wrote in “Summer Leisure and Enjoyment”: “In the garden, vegetables are grown; outdoors, the pavilion is bathed in crown. With sweet treats for children and grandchildren, the dinner is a sumptuous feast. A friend’s letter is often replied to late, but people’s expectations gradually change”^[1]. These verses are brimming with the joy of seclusion and reveal a desire to escape from the world.

2.2. Lamenting the tremendous changes in the country and expressing the desolation of being in a chaotic world

As Li Tiren wrote in “Immediately Sent to Xinfu and Presented to Hui Zhai, Shi Yun and Yu Xuan”: “Many hardships multiply the sense of estrangement, and I am sad to hear the poets praise the clear river.” In Volume Five, Yao Shumi’s “Jie’ an Shu of Ci Yun” states: “How many tears of concern for the country have I shed throughout my life, and my brush has been scattered all over the land.” Now and then, the sighs are no different. Especially in this year of misfortune for Huangyang.” Li Jingye’s “Reply to Zhou Shichen”: “After a year of recuperation at the school, the world was turned upside down and people changed.” The vast land of China suddenly sank, and a few close friends were left behind. The sorrow of one’s own life and the grief of one’s family and country are palpable.

2.3. Care about the hardships of the people and keep an eye on current affairs

The “Collection of Poems and Responses” records the true history of the time, such as floods and droughts, and the threat of bandits, revealing the concerns of the poets of Cao Nan Poetry Society about the living conditions of the villagers. As Li Jingye’s “Eating Alfalfa” in Volume Three states: “After a long drought, spring vegetables are scarce, and the price of elm seeds is comparable.” Chen Jiyu’s “Summer Relaxation and Harmony in the Sea of the Heart”: “The hum of the wild goose is mournful in the pond, the dragon is trapped in the shallow water of the pool.” Moreover, when strict official orders

are issued, they are as fierce as burning classics. The drought demon torments it, and the inkstone field is bound to be disheartened. All mentioned the spring drought in the second year of the Republic of China. Meanwhile, the poets of Cao Nan Poetry Society are also very concerned about international current affairs. Li Jingye wrote in “On the Train, I Heard people Talk about Russia”: “There was a man from Peter the Great who, after eight years, learned about him from outside the country.” The common people were tough and fond of fighting. The allied forces were Britain, France and Germany^[2].

2.4. Care about and love traditional culture, and express concern about the prevalence of foreign cultures

Members of Cao Nan Poetry Society have been exposed to traditional Chinese culture since childhood and have a relatively solid foundation in Sinology. They are passionate about traditional culture and have certain cultural interests, such as enjoying collecting ancient books and rubbings of steles. Xu Jru wrote a poem titled “A Dull Scholar, with a Sharp mind “搨” Chu’s Calligraphy of the Preface to the Sacred Teachings of the Wild Goose Pagoda Presented to Him, and expressed his gratitude with a Poem”, recording the event when Li Jingye gave him a copy of the “Preface to the Sacred Teachings of the Wild Goose Pagoda”. Zhu Changgeng once obtained a copy of Shi Wanpu’s “Poetry Collection of Mr. Liu Ji’ an”, which he found extremely precious and composed a poem to record it. After the Self-Strengthening Movement in the late Qing Dynasty, Western science advanced into China, and people’s attention to traditional culture correspondingly decreased. Members of Cao Nan’s Poetry Society expressed concerns about the prevalence of foreign cultures in China, and this sentiment is often reflected in their poems. Xu Jiru, in his “Ode to the Poets of Fanhu Yinshe”, said: “The mayfly’s clothes have changed, and the dazzling clothes are in the chaos of summer.” No longer devoted to poetry and books, I am left behind like a humble earth.” There is also a “Poem of Condolence by Zhu Peiquan and His Wife, Poets of Dingtao” which goes: “The eastward spread of Nestorianism has led to a decline in refinement, and my deep sorrow has filled my heart.” In Volume Five, Xu Jiru’s “The Foolish Old Man borrowed the ancestral hall of a local sage as a lecture hall. The number of scholars increased day by day, reaching over seventy. He composed a poem to present to his classmates and disciples” states: “There were many inks from the West in the Nestorologist School, and the silk and bamboo on the walls of the holes turned to dust.” It is precisely because they are worried about the lack of inheritance of traditional culture that they are committed to spreading it. In the second year of the Republic of China, the Confucian Society was established in Cao County, with Chen Jiyu serving as its first president. He then started teaching at the Cao County Academy. The students were not only from Cao County but also many from other counties and provinces who came to learn upon hearing the news. Chen Jiyu’s opening of the lecture hall to teach apprentices has played a certain positive role in the preservation and dissemination of traditional culture^[3].

3. The historical and cultural value of “Cao Nan poetry society’s collection of poems and responses”

The poetry works of Cao Nan Poetry Society have been preserved through the “Cao Nan Poetry Society’s Collection of Responses”, which is of great significance for understanding and studying the early history of the Republic of China and the state of scholars in southwestern Shandong.

First of all, the origin and development of Cao Nan’s Poetry Society have been preserved thanks to the “Collection of Singing and Harmony”. The entire process from the establishment to the decline of Cao Nan Poetry Society is reflected in “The Collection of Poems and Verses”, and various activities of the poetry society are also presented through “The Collection of Poems and Verses”. The preface written by Xu Jiru in the first year of the Republic of China before “The Collection of Poems and Responses” has a clear record of the establishment of Cao Nan Poetry Society. The complete collection is arranged in chronological order, covering the period from the third year of the Xuantong reign to the seventh year of the Republic of China. It contains over a thousand poems, presenting a magnificent scene. From these poems, one can trace the activities of the Cao Nan Poetry Society over the years, thereby clarifying the development process and stages

of the society.

Secondly, the “Collection of Singing Responses” preserves a wealth of historical and cultural materials. The “Collection of Poems and Responses” is rich in historical information and contains numerous records of droughts, floods and bandit disasters in the Shandong area during the early Republic of China. In Volume twelve of “The Collection of Poems and Responses”, there is a poem by Li Jingye titled “Chasing after the Captain of the Cao County Defense Corps, Shang Xianchao”. Yao Shumi wrote the poem “Poem to Save Ma Junzong, who was Killed in the Campaign against Bandits by Shan Fu”, and also the poem “Poem Inspired by the Feelings of the local militia in Killing Bandits”. These poems record the deeds of the local militia in protecting the villagers and slaying bandits in the early years of the Republic of China, affirming the positive role of this civilian military organization. To preserve history through poetry, to some extent, it can fill the gap in historical records. The historical information of the early Republic of China preserved by the poetry of Cao Nan Poetry Society can provide people with more abundant historical materials for research, facilitating more in-depth discussions^[4].

Thirdly, the “Collection of Poems and Responses” presents the real living and ideological conditions of the declining scholars in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, providing rich historical materials for the study of the remnant groups. Many members of Cao Nan Poetry Society were officials of the Qing Dynasty. They withdrew from the political stage during the Republic of China period but opened up a new realm of literature and art. The poems preserved in the “Collection of Songs and Verses” can clearly present the living and ideological conditions of these declining scholars.

Fourth, the “Collection of Singing and Responses” records a large number of deeds of the members of the poetry society through the poems of singing and responses, and preserves many biographical materials of local virtuous figures that are not recorded in historical records. For instance, in the second year of the Republic of China, Xie Kun asked Xu Jiru to write a stele for his father. In the third year of the Republic of China, Li Jingye, Xu Jiru and others went to Jinxiang Chrysanthemum Society to enjoy chrysanthemums. In the fourth year of the Republic of China, Li Jingye visited Qufu and Mount Tai. All these events are preserved in the form of poetry in the “Collection of Singing and Harmony”, providing more documentary materials for these figures to be studied.

Fifth, the “Collection of Poems and Verses” records some works of the members of the poetry society that have not been widely circulated, which can fill the gap in the catalogue. Li Jingye authored books such as “Haijiao Ji”, “Lianyang Guanfeng Lu”, “Hu You Ji”, and “Wen Ke Cao”. Xu Jiran wrote one “Beiyong Ji”, and Chen Shiming wrote one “Chenhai Ji”. None of these works are recorded in the catalogues. The relevant information of these works is preserved in “Chaohe Ji”, which can fill the gap in the bibliographic records of works from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China^[5].

Sixth, the “Collection of Poems and Responses” reflects the efforts made by the members of Cao Nan Poetry Society to inherit and protect traditional poetry. The period when Cao Nan Poetry Society was active coincided with a time of social transformation in China. The New Culture Movement was brewing, Western science and technology were in full swing, and people’s attention to classical literature was decreasing. Cao Nan Poetry Society takes classical poetry as its creative object, adheres to carrying forward the spirit of Chinese classical literature, upholds the old cultural position, and has a large number of members, which has played a certain promoting role in the preservation and dissemination of traditional poetry. It is precisely because of such literary societies that adhere to traditional culture that classical poetry culture has been passed down and rejuvenated with new vitality.

4. Conclusion

The “Collection of Poems and Responses of Cao Nan Poetry Society” comprehensively presents the overall creative and activity situation of Cao Nan Poetry Society. It clearly records the entire process of the establishment, development and decline of Cao Nan Poetry Society, preserves a large number of traditional poems, retains the deeds and social interactions of a large number of poetry society members, and contains a lot of historical information. It has a positive role in the research of regional culture. The history, culture, economy and other aspects of Heze area in the early years of the Republic

of China can all be reflected in the “Collection of Singing and Harmony”. It records the true history of the economic depression and rampant bandits in the early years of the Republic of China in the Heze area, as well as the real life of rural scholars in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China who read books, appreciate poetry and lived in seclusion. It also records the psychological state of scholars at that time who cared about the people’s livelihood and sympathized with the suffering people. It is a brilliant cultural pearl in the Heze area in the early years of the Republic of China.

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