SUMMARY

Wang GuoWei (王国维, 1877-1927) is one of the greatest Chinese scholars of the twentieth century. He has made substantial contributions in such fields as Chinese history, archaeology, philology and literature. However, this thesis only attempts to study Wang's literary thoughts.

The research begins with an overview of Wang's philosophical and aesthetic outlooks which had been greatly influenced by German philosophy and Indian Buddhism. The research then traces the relationship between Wang's philosophical and aesthetic thoughts and his literary theories. The central focus of this study is an analysis of the roots and substance of Wang's literary thoughts.

Wang's philosophical and aesthetic thoughts are deeply influenced by Kant (1724-1804) and Schopenhauer (1778-1860). He accepted Schopenhauer's pessimism, and according to him, the essence of life is desire and will. However, this desire originates from a state of insufficiency, which leads to suffering. Thus, life is nothing but suffering. Following the footsteps of Schopenhauer, Wang suggests that the role of art is to set man free from desire and help him acquire temporary emancipation. Ultimate emancipation from suffering of life has to be found in asceticism through denial of desire for life.

However, to say that Wang was profoundly influenced by Kant's and Schopenhauer's theories does not imply that he was completely free from the influence of tradition.
Wang's philosophical and aesthetic thoughts are the foundation of his literary thoughts. He maintains that art originates from 'Games', that sense of enjoyment and play which creates delight. Hence, he urges that literature should not be utilitarian. True emotion is the main theme of Wang's literary thoughts. He points out that a perfect piece of work always embraces genuine emotion and natural expression. Always against pretentious, ornate language, imitation and allusion, Wang upholds the tradition that literature expresses the true, spontaneous state of emotion of the people. With this view of literature, he comes to respect vernacular, colloquial literature (drama and fiction), maintaining that each generation has its own peculiar form of expression.

Many of Wang's literary ideas are considered to be revolutionary during that time. His theory and methodology of literary criticism have profound influence on subsequent literary figures such as Hu Shi (胡适, 1891-1962), Yu Pingbo (俞平伯, 1899- ).

As a pioneer of the new literary revolution, Wang Juowei has provided significant contributions to the literary tradition and critical development of modern Chinese literature.