The poetical theory of Chao Chih Hsin

This essay deals with a famous critic Chao Chih Hsin (趙執修 1662-1744) who disagreed with the poetical theory of Wang Yu Yang (王漁洋 1634-1711) in early Ch'ing Dynasty.

Chao Chih Hsin, a relative of Wang Yu Yang, extremely satirized Wang's literary thought through "T'ian Lung Lu" (談龍錄) and "Sheng Tiao Pu" (聲調譜). Up to now there is no precise nor systematic studies on his poetical theory yet.

This essay falls into two parts on conceptions of Chao Chih Hsin:

1. The background of Chao's thought:

The poetical theory of Chao derived from Feng pan (馮班 1614-1681) and Wu Ch'iao (吳喬). They viewed the main function of poetry as having a kind of "political, moral and educational" duty. Both of them reproached the poetical thoughts of Yen Yu (顏羽) and Wang Yu Yang. Chao Chih Hsin followed the same trend of their poetical thoughts.

2. The poetical thought of Chao Chih Hsin:

He was a typical critic who complied with the traditional poetical thoughts that poetry was for one to express his true emotion and volition.

This essay attempts to locate Chao Chih Hsin's poetical theory. It further tries to point out some disputable thoughts of Chao:

(a) Wang held that poetry should be "non-personal" (詩中無人有), that is, the poet merges with the universe in the poems,
and the image of poems can only be perceived between lines.
Chao however misunderstood the term "non-personal" as poems not
expressing the composer's emotion or volition, which conflicts
with the tradition concept of the main functions of poetry. He
thereupon gave two examples from Wang's poems to show that they
still express Wang's emotion and volition.

(b) Moreover, Chao misinterpreted the metaphor of a dragon
in Wang's literary criticisms. Wang Yu Yang said,

"Poetry is comparable to a dragon, which either shows its
head but conceals its tail or blurs a few scales and claws
behind the clouds."

His comparison of a poem to a dragon is well-known in
Chinese literary criticism. It constitutes the main gist of his
"Shen Yun Shuo" (神韵說). Chao Chih Hsin, on the other hand,
said,

"A dragon without claws or scales is not a completed dragon."

These differences obviously show that Chao was confused by
Wang's metaphor of the dragon, and his criticism is unreasonable.

Although the poetical thoughts of Chao Chih Hsin is not
outstanding, he achieved in writing down the rules of intonation
of the ancient poems. Nevertheless, he misinterpreted the phrase
"Pan Ke Shih" (半格詩) as a term referring to a special poetic
style. This essay projects some new objections to his interpreta-
tion by comparing different editions of "Pai-Shih Ch'ang-Ch'ing
Chi" (白氏長慶集).

Finally, this essay tries to answer Professor James J.Y. Liu's
criticism of Chao as a formalist, proving him untenable view in
his misapplication of the poetical thought of Chao.