

Wang Guowei

"The most fleeting in this world are youth departing from the mirror and flowers falling from the tree."

This is a quote from a famous Chinese poet, Wang Guowei, who is also my great-great-grandfather. If you think he was just an average great-great-grandfather, then you are wrong. He faced many challenges throughout his life, such as living during the Chinese Qing Dynasty, surviving poverty, finding life's purpose, and many more challenges that he had to overcome.

Wang Guowei was the first to apply Western philosophy, aesthetics, and literary theory to the study of Chinese history and literature, profoundly influencing historiography in China. He combined the essence of Chinese literature with that of Western literature and developed a complete theory of literature and art that continues to shape Chinese scholarship today. Fascinated by Western philosophy, he believed that blending Western ideas with Chinese thought could improve Chinese literature and expand its intellectual boundaries. This desire to improve Chinese literature inspired him to teach himself Western philosophy by reading works from renowned philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer.

At first, I didn't know much about Wang Guowei and assumed he was just an ordinary person. Curious to learn more, I asked my mom about him and explored his history on Britannica, New World Encyclopedia, Scholar Space, and many other sources. The more I discovered, the more fascinated I became with Wang Guowei's life and Chinese culture. During my research, I came across many videos about him, and I was surprised to find a detailed article

about him on Wikipedia! This showed me how influential he was. My desire to learn more about him made the research both enjoyable and rewarding, sparking a deeper interest in his work.

Wang Guowei had a very difficult life in China and had to overcome many challenges. One major challenge was his limited formal education, but he overcame this by teaching himself Western philosophy by reading works by famous Western philosophers. He also experienced deep psychological and emotional turmoil as he witnessed the decline of the traditional Chinese order and the rise of a chaotic, modernizing society. To cope, he immersed himself in scholarly work as a form of solace, using his research as an escape from the turmoil of reality.

Wang Guowei also lived during the Qing Dynasty, which was one of the most difficult periods in China's history. During this time, China faced numerous problems, including corruption, overpopulation, and political unrest. The Qing government became increasingly corrupt and inefficient over time. Officials often bought their positions and focused on personal gain rather than serving the public, which weakened administrative control, reduced tax revenue, and eroded public trust. By the 18th century, China's population had grown rapidly, reaching over 400 million by the late 19th century. This led to land shortages, rising food prices, and widespread poverty, which triggered frequent famines and unrest. Dissatisfaction with the Qing government led to major uprisings such as the "White Lotus Rebellion," "Taiping Rebellion," and "Nian Rebellion." These conflicts devastated regions, drained the treasury, and challenged imperial authority.

Compared to Japan's Meiji Restoration, the Qing Dynasty's attempts at modernization were limited and poorly executed. As a result, the Qing Dynasty eventually collapsed. During this period, the emperor did not allow the people to think for themselves, forcing them to follow

strict rules and limiting creative expression. Wang Guowei didn't want that to happen, so he hoped that by using Western philosophy, he could help Chinese literature grow beyond the influence of the Qing Dynasty and let the people have independence of spirit and freedom of thought.

Luckily, Wang Guowei's life took a positive turn when Luo Zhenwei read one of Wang Guowei's poems and was very impressed by it. Luo Zhenwei then offered Wang Guowei a better job with higher pay, allowing him to support his family. He even invited Wang Guowei to study at a prestigious school, giving him the opportunity to further develop his knowledge and skills. This turning point not only changed Wang Guowei's life but also enabled him to make even greater contributions to Chinese literature and scholarship.

This is the story of Wang Guowei, my great-great-grandfather. He started as an ordinary man and transformed into a historical and influential figure. His life teaches us that no matter how difficult a challenge is, it can be overcome with determination and perseverance. His journey inspires me to stay resilient, pursue knowledge, and make a positive impact in the world. Wang Guowei's legacy lives on, reminding us that even in the face of hardship, greatness can be achieved through courage and dedication.