

The Criticism of Liu Xizai's Eight-Legged Essay

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Abstract: Liu Xizai was a famous scholar, educator and literary critic in the middle and late Qing dynasty. *General Introduction to literature and art* is a special work on the criticism of the eight-legged essay. It regards the eight-legged essay as an independent style, discusses its practice. Its creative criticism can be summed up into three aspects: "Tracing back to its source and textual research on literary style". "Make clear the idea and pay attention to the standard". "Rhetoric and brilliance". It not only embodies the "Simplicity" of scholars in the Qing dynasty, but also reveals the eight-legged essay criticism thought of respecting Confucian classics and combining art and Taoism in the middle and late Qing dynasty.

Keywords: Liu Xizai, General Introduction to Literature and Art, Literary Criticism of Eight-Legged Essay

1. INTRODUCTION

Liu Xizai's (劉熙載) academic experience can be roughly divided into three periods: the first period is the early study career, which laid the foundation for the formation of his academic thought system. During this period, Liu Xizai was influenced by his family, the teachers of the academy, his friends and the sages of his hometown respectively, and formed the basic academic research attitude which is from wisdom to wise. The second period is the official tour life of the prime age, which is the initial formative period of his academic thoughts. As a Confucian identity, Liu Xizai's Confucian classics of the bright thought began to highlight. The third period is the lecture life in his twilight years, which is the period when his ideas came into being. *Yigai* 藝概 (General Studies of Art) was completed in this period (Xia, 2015). The sixth volume of *Yigai* is *The Summary of Jing Yi* 經義概 (the Summary of Confucian Classics), which is a special work on the eight-legged essays of writing criticism. It shows that Liu Xizai not only classified the eight-legged essays interpreted Confucian classics as a part of art and literature, and also combined the art and literature into the Confucian classics. *The Summary of Jing Yi* reflects the creative criticism of

respecting Confucianism, and synthesizing the art and doctrine. Compared with the criticism on eight-legged essays in dynasties of Emperors Qianlong 乾隆 and Jiaqing 嘉慶, *The Summary of Jing Yi* marks the significant change in the middle and late Qing Dynasty. From the content, the first article to the 34th article of *The Summary of Jing Yi* mainly discusses the topic analyzing and essay opening, and the opening two articles are the general instructions; the 35th article to 75th mainly discuss the methods of writing eight-legged essays, such as the layout and contrast, column, touch and so on; the last twenty articles are the general summaries. The structure level among the three parts is clear, and the argument is well organized with unique form, which is very systematic and logical. Therefore, some scholars even think that Liu Xizai's *Yigai* is another literary criticism theory monograph with historical significance after Liu Xie's (Liu, 1958) 劉勰 *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍. As a literary theorist and critic, Liu Xizai made an accurate review of the origin and evolution of the eight-legged essays. On the one hand, he reflected that the scholars advocated the textology in dynasties of Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing, on the other hand, he also endowed the eight-legged essays a stylistic significance as a literary style based on textual research. It provides rich "literary" factors for his creative criticism. In short, Liu Xizai's creative criticism on writing eight-legged essays can be summarized into three aspects, "distinguishing the source and current, explaining the literary style", "understanding the principles of righteousness, emphasizing the writing method", "studying on diction, combining talent".

2. DISTINGUISHING THE SOURCE AND CURRENT, EXPLAINING THE LITERARY STYLE

All the eight-legged essays critics have made the work of examining the source of its literary style in Qing Dynasty, but Liu Xizai's position is different from that of the critics in the early, middle and even at the same period. Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (Delury, 2013), Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 and Li Guangdi 李光地 (Berthrong, 2002) in dynasties of Emperors Shunzhi 順治, Kangxi 康熙 and Yongzheng 雍正 researched the eight-legged essay combine theory with practice, which highlighted the eight-legged essay's clear role principle and law, in order to administer affairs ; Ruan Yuan 阮元, Hang Shijun 杭世駿, Guan Shiming 管世銘, etc. in dynasties of Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing use the standpoint of "examining and

writing classics" to research, which highlighted the authors' level of learning and moral, in order to understand the truth; Lude 路德 in the middle of Qing Dynasty took the position of literary style to research, which highlighted the skillful techniques of the eight-legged essay creation, in order to take the exam (Hong, 2007). However, Liu Xizai's textual work on the eight-legged essay has obvious differences with the above mentioned ones. The creative purpose can be seen from the content and structure of *Yigai* and *The Summary of Jing Yi*, which is a macro summary of the original essence of the discipline of Jing Yi, the basic stylistic characteristics of the eight-legged essays and the creative techniques in practicing the eight-legged essays. Thereby the scholars can easily understand the knowledge of "Jingyi", and learn the criticism standard about the eight-legged essay writing, then make them draw a lesson from one another, and pass an imperial examination, embark on an official career, serve the country and society, and realize the value of the ancient scholar's life ideal. In other words, Liu Xizai's basic understanding of the eight-legged essays is mainly from the standpoint of taking into account both the invention of scripture and the contribution of imperial examinations, that is, "the sage looks forward to a hundred miles, and the knowledge of scripture is everything" (Yigai et al., 2023). In this kind of position, the summary of Jingyi regards the eight-legged essays as a kind of independent writing style, and discusses the writing method of the eight-legged essays in detail, including some understanding of the imperial examination system (Zhang & Nagy, 2012). *The Summary of Jing Yi* is the essence of Liu Xizai's study, which is concise and creates a system of its own (Stepien, 2018). It is also the lecture experience of Liu Xizai accumulated for many years. The *Zhi Yi Shu Cun* 制義書存 is one of the five existing eight-legged essays written by Liu Xizai, which can provide reference for us to explore the writing gist of the eight-legged essays in *The Summary of Jing Yi*. Liu Xizai examined the origins, formation and development of Confucian classics argumentation from two perspectives. The first perspective tracing the origin is considered the eight-legged essays as a literary form of Imperial examination. The book begins with the statement: "Use Confucian classics as a way to examine talents is from the Emperor Shenzong 神宗 of Song Dynasty (Fisk, 1986). Emperor Shenzong used Wang Anshi 王安石 and Secretariat-Chancellery's to establish the imperial examination system, which encompassed some reference books such as *The Book of Changes* 周易, *The Book of poetry* 詩經, *The Book of History* 史記, *Rites of Zhou* 儀禮, *The Book of Rites* 禮記, in addition to *The Analects of Confucius* 論語 and *Mencius* 孟子. The initial trial

focused on sutras while the second emphasized righteousness, followed by further customization" (Xia, 2015). It is observed that Liu Xizai highly approved of the early practice of imperial examination by testing the Confucian classics in the Song Dynasty. So, what exactly "Jing Yi" is? Liu Xizai explained: "Huan Tan 桓譚 in Han Dynasty learned the *Five Classics* 五經, He paid much more attention to explain words in ancient books, not for the sentence, here see the meaning is much important than the word. Use Confucian classics as a way to examine talents is acceptable" (Xia, 2015). He believed that "Jing Yi" should not be bigoted to the search for chapters and sentences literally, but should be explored from the perspective of meaning on the whole. From the macro angle to grasp the essence of "Jing" appeared since the Han Dynasty. Liu Xizai further cited Zhao Qi's *Menzi Inscription* as evidence: "In the early Han dynasty, Emperor Xiaowen wide travel road, Mencius set doctor. Up to now, all the scriptures have been quoted Mencius to Ming things, called blog post" (Yigai et al., 2023). At the same time, Liu Xizai also compared "Jing Yi" with the imperial examination texts of the previous dynasties, He insist that testing the Confucian classics is to promote and explain them by later scholars, rather than rote memorization of these classics. As he spoken, "Yang Yang 楊瑒 in Tang dynasty thought that the great righteousness is lost because of its quality. During the reign of Emperor Renzong 仁宗 of the Song Dynasty, Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 and Song Qi 宋祁 submitted that, "If you ask some question about the Confucian classics, it is not just concentrate on memorizing it" (Yigai et al., 2023). In sum, we can derive explicit evidence to Jing Yi in personnel selection. After comparing the two opposite methods of studying Confucian classics appeared in the Tang and Song dynasties, the original meaning of testing Jing Yi was clear without words, that is, they were not confined to the literal content of the Confucian classics. From this point of view, It is reasonable that Liu Xizai attempted to find the rational basis for the production of the eight-legged essays. Wang Anshi in Song Dynasty also put forward the method of choosing scholars by testing Confucian classics, whose purpose is to test the ability of scholars to benefit the society more scientifically. Liu Xizai is also adhering to the spiritual tradition of "judging scholars by testing Confucian classics" 經義試士, and affirms the scientificity and rationality of eight-legged essays in imperial examination from the original purpose of these classics. The second Angle from which Liu Xizai traces the origin of the eight-legged essays is to regard it as a literary style. eight-legged essays,

the certain connection between Confucian classics and the prose in Qin&Han Dynasties, the prose in Tang&Song Dynasties, integrates the characteristics of various styles of the previous dynasties. The most prominent feature of Jing Yi is "eight-legged" stereotype, which is the antithesis of poetry and antithetic prose. Therefore, Liu Xizai traced the stylistic features of the eight-legged essays back to the pre-Qin period to prove the rationality of the "eight-legged" stereotype (Qiu, 2020a). *The book of Changes* recorded that various and complicated things gather together. Each has its own characteristics, which means diversity, we also call it literature. *Discourses of the States* said if an object or thing has only a single characteristic, then it lacks literary flair and beauty. The literature has many characteristic elements. In pairwise relative elements, the relation of meaning always occur by interleaving each other. The second notable feature of the eight-legged essays is expound ideas in writing from the sages' angle. Liu Xizai believes that this form of creation of "endorsement style" can also be traced back to the pre-Qin period: "To deduce the meaning of the scriptures, close to the transmission of style." The transmission is not prior to the Ten Wings of Yi. By the time "University" interprets the scriptures with the word "so-called", it is already hidden that it wants to substitute the holy Word, such as the tone of the text. Liu Xizai find the source of endorsement style in *The book of Changes*, in order to prove that this literary creation feature also has a long history. Therefore, Liu Xizai believes that as a kind of literary style, the eight-legged essays inherits and integrates the characteristics of various literary styles of the previous generation to a large extent. In the form of expression, the eight-legged essays requires the antithesis, and pays attention to the rhythm, which inherits the characteristics of ode and parallelism prose in previous generations. In content creation, the eight-legged essays requires the elaboration of the gist of the topic, and pursue the fluency in writing, which is also the writing method reflected by the ancient philosophers and ancient prose in Tang and Song dynasties. Even before the eight-legged essays taking the Confucian classics as content was customized as imperial examinations, the themes of ancient texts has appeared. *Song Wenjian* (A Collection of Poems and Essays of the Northern Song Dynasty) said it seems unreasonable to take Confucian classics as a ancient texts. However, before the Song Dynasty, Han Changli had tried it in imperial competitive examination. We know that scholars quote Confucian classics in examination before it has been taken to be the chosen literary style. Liu Xizai thoroughly examined the origins and evolution of classical righteousness from various perspectives, providing scholars with a

comprehensive understanding of its formation, development, and transformation. Additionally, Liu Xizai skillfully incorporated literary elements from the Qin, Han, Tang, and Song dynasties into his eight-legged essays writing. It demonstrates his innovative approach to criticism by penetrating the style, features and creation methods of ancient prose into the creation of eight-legged essays. To investigate the root and the source of literary style of eight-legged essays, Liu Xizai chooses two perspectives: exam taking and literary style. From the perspective of exam taking, it shows the clarity of creative ideas and the meritorious characteristics of creative content. Liu Xizai regards the stylistic functions as the standard of judging the scholars' level and talent. The eight-legged essays inherits the traditional concept of literature as the aim of creation with the purpose of benefiting people. It advocates the Confucian way in the ideological purview, and the combination of parallel and prose in the form of content. It laid down the rules to the eight-legged essay test in the view of principle and dharma, so that it can be more ideal for the country's ruling class to select social talents. As for literature, the eight-legged essays can also show the independence of the creative subject and the artistry of the text content. Liu Xizai regards its stylistic function as "Break free from the superficial views of fame and wealth, and truly demonstrate the tangible achievements in the pursuit of principles and truth" 破幹祿之陋見，證求理之實功. And "Although it should not be quoted, this sentence can also serve as a proverb" 雖不應舉，亦可當格言一則. Textually, in terms of content, the eight-legged essays reflect the thought of respecting the Confucian classics and expressing ideas as well as the prose in Qin and Han Dynasties, Tang and Song dynasties, the ancient text, etc. In terms of form, the eight-legged essays has inherited and learned from the parallel prose, poetry and ode, so there is no clear boundary between the eight-legged essays and other traditional literary genres. In terms of creation subject, Liu Xizai applied the Confucian literary theory-literary works are related to human character-to the eight-legged essays' literary criticism, and emphasized the importance of spiritual cultivation. It holds that the eight-legged essay should pay equal attention to the situation and content, and reflect the author's real thought and personality, so the eight-legged essay criticism is included in the category of literary criticism. That is to say, in addition to the examination requirements of theory and law, Liu Xizai also set eight critical standards for literary creation in two aspects of Ci and Qi, making it a link in literary theory and art practice. The above two aspects are Liu Xizai's new interpretation of the eight strands style, which is different from

the previous generation and different from that time.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, EMPHASIZING THE WRITING METHOD

Liu Xizai elaborates the emergence and development of Jing Yi in the beginning of *The Summary of Jing Yi*. in order to distinguish the creative purpose of the eight-legged essays from the root. On the one hand, it could correct the malpractice, on the other hand, it also gave his basic understanding and criticism criteria for the eight pieces of text, namely: "An article is nothing more than logic, structure, rhetoric, and qi. The principle requires correctness and precision, the chapter strives for meticulousness and coherence, the rhetoric requires elegance and conciseness, and the qi requires clarity and thickness" 文不外理、法、辭、氣。理取正而精，法取密而通，辭取雅而切，氣取清而厚 (Liu, 1958). As we all know, the eight-legged essays in the sages tone, the elaboration of Confucian principles as a skill, requires scholars in the process of creation must be the ideological theme of neo-Confucianism and Confucian principles, to Zhu Xi's 朱熹 *Four books, Chapters and sentences 四書章句集注* as the standard of expression, so the eight-legged essays critics often regard the eight-legged essays as the "reason" as the primary concern. Influenced by the traditional Confucian culture, Liu Xizai highlighted the position of the six classics from the standpoint of a Confucian scholar in his criticism, and showed a strong thought of "Confucian classics", which is not only Liu Xizai's view of ancient literature, but also the guiding ideology of his discussion of contemporary texts. This kind of literary and artistic thought will inevitably guide the discussion of the eight-legged essays, that is, the so-called "principle is correct and fine, the law is dense and clear." Liu Xizai thinks that the characteristic of the eight-legged essays is "to clarify the meaning of the scriptures", which indicates the purpose of the eight-legged essays—to deduce the meaning of the scriptures. It is also believed that the four books that are called *The Summary of Jing Yi* are actually from the mouth of sages, "Sages spit out words as sutras, and respect them with sutras, and the name is not lost" (Yigai et al., 2023). This combines the way of the sages with the purport of the meaning of the Sutra, so the purpose of the eight-legged essays based on the elucidations of the way of the sages is also to clarify the gist of the text. In other words, the "Sutra" described by the sage is the carrier of the "Tao" of the sage. Therefore, Liu Xizai laid great emphasis

on seeking "right principles" from pre-Qin sages and Han and Song famous Confucians, as he said: "Thicking roots, fixing trends, focusing on exhausting classics. It is advisable to learn more about the sages in writing the Eight-legged Essay, while the rest articles should be carefully followed by rules"厚根柢，定趨向，以窮經為主。秦漢文取其當理者，唐宋文取其切用者，制義宜多讀先正，餘慎取之 (Yigai et al., 2023). Then what does the "way" of the sages carried by the "Sutra" refer to? Liu Xizai said: "His text can still be mixed with a hundred schools of learning, the righteousness is only the holy way is Ming, generally not from the world of the constant classics, ancient and modern pass righteousness also". It can be seen that "Tao" is the thought of the saints and the law of all things. The eight-legged essays is also "to speak on behalf of the sage", its content and writing method is the expression form of "Tao", that is, the so-called "art, the form of Tao" (Liu, 1978). At the same time, Liu Xizai also said: "The way of writing, time is great" (Liu, 1978). "Tao" should have different characteristics with the changes of the times, have a certain sense of inclusiveness, reflect the spirit of the times, and conform to the social reality at that time. "Tao must be useful to strangers, but it is different from selfishness. Changli 'Original road' main thrust, including a 'public' word." (Liu, 1978) It can be seen that in the understanding of "Tao", Liu Xizai injected the traditional neo-Confucianism and Confucian classics into the times color of the application of the economic world, paying attention to the practical value and practical significance of the article, which is called "the essence of reason". On the other hand, the eight-legged essays in the creation of the request to abide by the Sutra note, to simulate the tone of the sage, to say the meaning of the Sutra. Therefore, it is a kind of argumentative article in the form of limited identity, which restricts the freedom of intellectuals to express their thoughts to a large extent. When Liu Xizai discussed the eight texts, although the thought of "respecting Confucian classics" ran through the whole time, he did not stick to the scriptures, but took an understanding attitude, and implemented the writing standards and norms of the times, which showed that he paid attention to the performance of the spirit of the subject. First, attention to personal emotions. Liu Xizai summed up the lecture experience in "Jing Yi Concept" and thought that personal perception should be integrated into the article. "If a scholar wants to know and practice with his heart, he should take teaching as his first task. To tell a book, you must make yourself realize it, and testify to what is common at present. And it is appropriate to ask more questions to observe its meaning, and then a number of words to enlighten it. But it is not for the sake of composition, so it can be

beneficial to the article" (Liu, 1978). Lectures need to be integrated into everyday things and their own life feelings, then they will be "flavored". The same is true of lectures and compositions. Writing essays for the sake of writing essays in eight-legged essays is Mired in the system of selecting scholars through imperial examinations. Compositions only become tools for selecting scholars, and naturally they will not write excellent works. Liu Xizai believes that the eight-legged essays are the same as lectures, and they all pay attention to the reality of life, accumulate the personal perception of real life, so as to achieve the purpose of "intentional practice", and stimulate the excellent article. The last part of *The Summary of Jing Yi* is: "By reading its text, we can learn the temperament of the person and the will is still outside the ignorance of the work, and the learning of the people is also a few know!" This is consistent with the viewpoint of "holding one's ambition by writing" in the book, which advocates that the author's spirit and interest should be reflected in the eight-legged essays, which is the evolution of Han Yu 韓愈 and Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 "writing to carry Dao" 文以載道 and "writing to illuminate Dao" 文以明道. In addition, with regard to the standard of personal emotion, Liu Xizai said in his book *Chi Zhi Shu Yan* 持志塾言: "Those who look at the goods, look at their aspirations and actions. The will and the line must not be separated from the words 'right' and 'real' (Liu, 1978)." The "right" of the "will" and the "reality" of the "action" of the creative subject echo each other, so it can be seen that Liu Xizai's attention to individual emotions is aimed at the shortcomings of the eight kinds of literature in the Qianjia 乾嘉 period, which became difficult and profound. This is the so-called "right principle". Secondly, the author's subjective initiative. *The Summary of Jing Yi* not only discusses that the eight-legged essays should "speak on behalf of the sage", but also discusses that the eight-legged essays should "speak for oneself". This seemingly contradictory view reflects Liu Xizai's dialectical color in essence, and strives to express himself in the text under the premise of following various norms of the eight-legged essays. As he said, "There are two bodies of making righteousness, one of which is a commentary on the subject; An ancient text, including narration and discussion. Annotation, more open less; Ancient writing, small opening big closing, big opening small closing, both. First after the discussion, I note also; Discuss it first and then tell it. I've been told. There are many variations in grammar, but there are always two" (Liu, 1978). Liu Xizai admits that the eight passages are like classical commentary, with strict order and grammatical format, and that it has always been traditional to use the ancient style of writing in addition to the interpretation of the topic, first quoting the classical text,

and then discussing it according to the Zhu notes, that is, "I annotate the classics". However, it also believes that the eight-legged essays is not an immutable dead format, but can also be on the basis of "taking the right and fine", develop what has not been developed before, first express opinions, put forward personal views, and then cite the classics to confirm it, that is, the so-called "commentary on me". For example, when Liu Xizai talked about "breaking the title", he put forward the views of "the article is by me" and "I am by the article": "In the past, the paper was said to have not broken the title, the article is by me; Both as a topic, by the article (Qiu, 2020b). The question is from the book, can mediate; It is from me, but hold fast to it. 'Title-breaker, my title is also" (Liu, 1978). As can be seen from this, this new concept of "Sutra notes myself" not only ensures that scholars abide by the sutra and comply with the requirements of the eight-legged essays creation, but also makes the content and form norms of eight-legged essays creation not rigid under the transmission and annotation. This kind of advocating from the French to the eight-legged essays "close and pass" can be described as one of the major breakthroughs in the criticism of the eight-legged essays creation at that time. Finally, Liu Xizai also pointed out that in order to achieve "The principle requires correctness and precision, the chapter strives for meticulousness and coherence" (Liu, 1978). the creative subject must have the ability of "knowledge" and "force". "The essence of writing is to say knowledge and power. Knowledge, in the recognition of the true; Strength is at the end of the problem" (Liu, 1978)."knowledge" means that the author should have a high level of knowledge. "Power" refers to the author's creative level under the rich knowledge reserve. Only on the basis of understanding all the six classics and Zhu notes, but also with the vast insight and vision of reading books, can we accurately and truly interpret the views of "others have not made" and "others have made" in the title, and then fully and thoroughly explain the meaning of the title without adding or missing in the creation of expression. To sum up, Liu Xizai regards the eight-legged essays as a literary style, and the discussion on the issues of "Wen Tao" and "grammar" is often the topic of common concern of the previous generation and literary scholars. In response to these "platitudes", Liu put forward most of the theories and methods that are different from the times and customs, which are very innovative and practical. Although it emphasizes the importance of the sage's words, it also opposes rote memorization and rigid writing. In the creation of the eight-legged essays, the four books and five classics are the theme, and the eight-legged essays dual structure is the basic requirement. Liu Xizai, in addition to following

this norm, also advocates that the author is the center, through personalized understanding to maximize the subjective initiative of the creative subject, so that the work contains the author's point of view, and serves the discussion of the creative subject. It is valuable to have such a view as a sincere Confucian scholar,

4. TO STUDY ON WORDS CHOICE AND EMPHASIS KNOWLEDGE AND TALENT

After Daoguang 道光 period of Qing Dynasty, when the traditional textual research and the increasingly spread of western learning collided with each other, the academic culture has given rise to new fashions, and then the standard of criticism in the form and content of the eight-legged essay has undergone a transformation. First, the proportion of eight-legged essays in the imperial examinations was significantly reduced compared with that in the earlier period. For example, in the middle and late Qing Dynasty, The content of the imperial examinations conducted by general academies and academic administrations is focused on poetry and prose or classics and ancient instead of eight-legged essays. Therefore, scholars also focused their daily essay training on classics, practical studies, poems and chapters, and anecdotes. As for the eight-legged essays, they just practice it in the leisure time (Leo et al., 2022). Secondly, under the influence of textual research in the dynasties of Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing, the eight-legged essays the scholars emphasized the tendency of learning through textual examination and learning through anecdotes, so the creation and criticism of the eight-legged essays during this period also had the characteristics of "art and literature". On the basis of profound knowledge, scholars drove their talents as much as possible, and made more efforts in the aspects of machine method, rhetoric, and tone. Therefore, the integration of literature and art in this period is particularly obvious. According to the "Art Summary" was done in the 12th years of Tongzhi, we can see that the summary of JingYi was written in Liu Xizai's old age, which has the significance of review and summary, then Liu Xizai and the eight-legged essays' writing in this period must also have interactive influence. When we examine the theory of the eight-legged essay from the four angles of "principle, law, rhetoric and qi", it is not difficult to find that Liu Xizai's theoretical contribution to the eight-legged essay criticism is that he takes the artistic originality of the eight-legged essay as the starting point of his creative criticism, and the idea of not using the article's merit format to destroy individual's intellectual talent is particularly prominent. It is

concentrated in the following aspects:

4.1 To Guide the Creation of Eight-Legged Essays of Writing with Artistic Laws

Liu Xizai was a famous writer, artist and literary critic in the middle and late Qing Dynasty. He always looked at various literary and artistic genres with a comprehensive and compatible vision. That is to say, it advocates the creation and criticism of the two literary genres of poetry and prose. Therefore, when Liu Xizai discusses the creation criticism of the eight-legged essays of literature, he often penetrates the theory of poetry, calligraphy and painting with them and observes each other. That is: "Writers all know how to refine sentences and characters, but it is easy to refine words and phrases alone, but it is difficult to refine words and phrases for the text. Words and sentences can reflect on the text, only then can they be hidden in the text. Otherwise, it's what the connoisseurs of cultivation call blind refinement" 文家皆知煉句煉字，然單煉字句則易，對篇章而煉字句則難。字句能與篇章映照，始為文中藏眼。不然，乃修養家所謂瞎煉也 (Liu, 1978). Liu Xizai believes that words are the most direct expression of the "meaning" in one eight-legged essays, and also express the scholar's personal "idea" in the most direct way, so the words of eight-legged essays are an important link to maintain the author, the text, the theory and law, and the scholars must do more exercises and refine the exact word. "Refine the words" and "Stress the key word" belong to the category of poetry theory. Xuexue 薛雪, a scholar in Qing dynasty said that the scholars should refine sentences in article, words in sentence to achieve accurate meaning, refined implicit. which means the request to refine words is to achieve the accurate meaning. As for the eight-legged essays, to refine word is to make the words express the exact meaning of this article. *The Summary of Poetry* 詩概 said that the key word in a poem might be the key to the whole prose or part of it, and the key word could be one or several sentence, or one or two words. The "key word in the poem" and "hidden key word in the text" are obviously from the same critical perspective (Ma, 2016). In addition, Liu Xizai discusses the writing method of words and sentences in the creation of the eight-legged essays, which is compared with the "technique of writing" in calligraphy. "The calligraphers change the stroke slowly or suddenly to make the character easy on the eyes." "The most important strokes are start, go and stop, and three may occur at the same time." "No matter the first stroke of a character is weak or strong, the stroke must be coherent from beginning to the end." "Although there is no necessary to pay much attention to the

stroke in the beginning of learning, we need to study on it in the more proficient time (Liu, 1978)." The word "stroke" is not a thesis term, but belongs to the category of calligraphy art. Liu Xizai specializes in calligraphy, and put *The Summary of Calligraphy* 書概 in the position as the other five summary in *Yigai*, which shows that he thinks there is an art law that can be integrated between the writing of calligraphy and the creation of eight-legged essays. The Summary of Calligraphy says the first stroke of a character should be precipitous, stop the pen sharply and make the process completeness full. The start, go and stops in calligraphy is as same as those in writing eight-legged essays (Zhang, 2021). The "quick" of handling the brush in calligraphy and the "steep" expressed in the eight-legged essays can be regarded as interactive inventions. The slow, graceful brushwork harmonizes with the steep, abrupt brushwork, resulting in a fluctuating, relaxed layout. There is a steep in the cop, see the cop in the steep, graceful to do, in order to swallow the potential. In his calligraphy, Liu Xizai emphasizes "alternating between incoherent and astringent", while in his eight-legged writings, he emphasizes "confluent and complementary", which is another example of Liu Xizai's integration of various arts. It is not difficult to find that Liu Xizai's mastery of various artistic techniques is an embodiment of his "literary and artistic generalist". The deep factors that influence and promote him to become a "generalist" are his artistic vision and aesthetic taste. The six concepts involved in *Yigai* almost penetrate the common creation laws and artistic principles of various literary and artistic styles, and *The Summary of Jing Yi* discusses the creation and criticism of eight-legged essays with an artistic perspective (Wang, 2010). This is obviously an essential difference from the position of other critics who adhere to the dogmatic paradigm and focus on merit and profit. Since Liu Xizai advocates through literature and art, and guides the creation of eight-legged essays with artistic laws, and "literature" and "art" emphasize the "talent" of the creation subject to a large extent, then Liu Xizai naturally reflects the characteristics of showing personal knowledge and talent through articles in his eight-legged essays criticism theory.

4.2 To Emphasize the Idea and Use the Meaning to Overall Plan the Expression

Liu Xizai asserts that for an exemplary eight-legged essays to "elucidate the reason," it must employ a method of "speaking through objects," namely, employing classical Chinese as the medium of reasoning and adhering to a logical sequence. The terms used here correspond to the

concept of subject in composition and are expressed as words within the eight-legged essays; similarly, the object corresponds to the compositional object and is manifested as principles within these eight-legged essays. In addition to using words to convey reasoning in his writing, Liu Xizai also presents two dual propositions: "words should be refined and concise" and "meaning should be pure and consistent." In summary, both word usage and conveying meaning should rely on each other. Let's begin with discussing the concept of "meaning". Liu Xizai referred to the intention behind each piece of writing as the "main brain", emphasizing that a single word can encapsulate its purpose. Despite being expanded into tens of thousands of words, it is ultimately distilled down to one word, hence the term "mastermind". To address this issue, we must delve into the core essence and carefully examine the overall tone, section tone, and sentence tone without imposing rigid opinions. Once we have grasped the main brain, we should then transition to a state of tranquility and approach problem-solving with simplicity. We should adhere to our original focus throughout any changes made in order to maintain coherence and avoid digressions. In Liu Xizai's perspective, the "main brain" can be specifically understood as all the language of the article revolving closely around its "meaning": "The foil is not mere words, but rather critical text that opposes and challenges the theme, known as the guest pen idea" (Liu, 1978). The term "theme" in this context is another expression for Liu Xizai's concept of "meaning" and the "main brain", which not only refers to the subject matter and intention of the text but also encompasses its structural significance. He asserts that whether directly addressing or indirectly contrasting with the theme, it is essential to maintain a close focus on it and serve its underlying purpose. Although foil sentences may appear unrelated to the theme at first glance, they are actually centered around it. Furthermore, these sentences aim to achieve a sense of purity in relation to their intended meaning. To elucidate this notion more precisely, Liu Xizai employs metaphors such as music: just like how once a melody has been established as dominant within a composition, it should not be repeated by other accompanying melodies from different sections or instruments; similarly, phrases like "soldiers do not fight" and "shooting without aiming" emphasize unity of spirit without dispersion or deviation from their core essence-everything converges towards their central point. This vividly illustrates how material arrangement and phrasing relate to and revolve around the central theme. Therefore, the quality of article writing primarily lies in its coherence with the main idea, which is represented by the "main brain". To align with the theme, it is essential to coordinate and plan all

sections of the eight-legged essays so that they comprehensively elucidate the topic (Huang, 2020). As commonly said, one must assess the significance of tone, section, and sentence without imposing personal opinions. Simultaneously, it is crucial to consistently focus on grasping the essence of each chapter, section, and sentence while considering their individual intentions within a broader context. Organizing materials around the main idea should be prioritized over forcefully expressing personal viewpoints. Liu Xizai emphasized that ideas should align with themes because in imperial examinations, understanding of topics not only reflects comprehension of classics but also closely relates to authors' interpretations of textual meanings. After elaborating on examination methods and principles for titles in *The Summary of Jing Yi's* analysis paper titled "The Text Is as Valuable as Its Title," it concludes that either subtracting or adding content would diminish its value: "When there is meaning in title but not in text; reduce title. When there is no meaning in question but added into text; as valuable as subject" (Liu, 1978). Furthermore, specific creation requirements are discussed from various perspectives such as title selection criteria like relevance to respectfulness or recognition. Liu Xizai argues that when creating eight-legged essays, the primary focus should be on the title: "The text is more valuable than the title... Those who respect the title may claim its relevance, but it does not reflect their actions." The passage, context, structure, and tone of each sentence are all derived from the title itself: "The passage derives its name from the title... The text lacks a specific context as it stems from the title's context; It doesn't adhere to a particular structural method since it follows the column method implied by the title; There isn't a fixed intonation because it aligns with that of the title" (Liu, 1978). The concept of "recognizing the title" refers to accurately analyzing and comprehending its meaning, which necessitates deep understanding of biblical significance. Similarly, addressing an "imitate problem" entails associating creativity while unraveling its meaning and explaining connotations through various perspectives: "An 'imitate problem' encompasses everything: imitate in terms of divinity, imitate in terms of energy or aura, imitate in terms of voice or sound quality, imitate in terms of appearance or manifestation" (Liu, 1978). When inscriptions exist, one must decipher them accordingly; In their absence, one must compensate for their absence. If a question cannot be approached as an 'imitate problem,' reading and recognizing it becomes futile." Furthermore, Liu Xizai also proposes examination methods theory encompassing breaking down titles into positive and negative aspects along with reading between titles using techniques such as

focusing on key elements within titles themselves or exploring connections among multiple titles. The strong emphasis on the "text topic" is an inherent requirement of Liu Xizai's conceptualization of "ideas", which is based on the utilization of language in critiquing eight-legged essay compositions. This stems from Liu Xizai's advocacy for employing eight-legged essays to highlight the author's individual spirit, while simultaneously achieving the realistic effect of obtaining official rank through such compositions. Consequently, it becomes imperative that the words used in these articles are both "Literally manifested" and effectively communicated. The accuracy of intention and reasonableness of problem formulation inevitably become prerequisites for fulfilling these two functions, leading Liu Xizai to advocate for prioritizing "intentional writing" and imbuing words with meaning. The "meaning" of Liu Xizai can be regarded as the overarching concept prior to the creation of the eight-legged essays writing, encompassing the establishment of the main idea, construction of content framework, integration of material arrangement, and various other aspects. As Liu Xizai stated: "The ancients intended to write first; therefore conduct leisure; later generations intended to write, so they scrambled" (Liu, 1978). At this point, Liu Xizai urged scholars at the outset of composing these eight-legged essays to develop their sincere and independent "meaning" based on a profound understanding of Confucianism's great significance, sages'wisdom, artistic skills, classics and historical facts. In other words, it refers to Liu Xizai's own interpretation or perspective. This step is necessary after experiencing an inner agitation about a certain matter but before commencing actual writing. Subsequently, "intended to write first" serves as guidance for word and sentence composition: scholars engage in repeated contemplation centered around the "meaning," sort out ideas accordingly while integrating materials based on this "meaning," and subsequently employ this "meaning" during writing process in order to control language usage through deliberate selection of materials and organization structure—thereby completing all eight components including rhetoric utilization within text creation. As he expressed: "The key lies in having a clear theme from which everything else follows suit. Without grasping the original topic and establishing its meaning upfront not only fails to meet standards but also lacks fundamental relevance with respect to textual content" (Liu, 1978). The concept of "resignation" serves as a conduit for conveying "meaning", and Liu Xizai advocates the notion of "elegant and precise resignation". The eight-legged essays tradition has long embraced the essence of elegance in language. For instance, Emperor Kangxi explicitly

stated that elegance and clarity are the benchmarks for eight-legged essays. The term "precise resignation" primarily refers to words that can accurately express and reflect their intended meaning after careful contemplation and refinement. From an artistic perspective, it aims to achieve the aesthetic effect of vividness and authenticity. In the previous section, Liu Xizai's approach to creating eight-legged essays was described as akin to a poet's meticulous word selection process combined with rhetorical activities employed by authors of such works, emphasizing a positive attitude towards this endeavor. However, he also emphasized the importance of naturalness in writing through his analogy with calligraphers who prioritize quality characters; asserting that achieving a state of naturalness is paramount in rhetoric: "Writings should be created naturally. On the other hand, Cai Zhonglang 蔡中郎 argued that writings are inspired by nature itself rather than solely influenced by human intervention: 'Heavenly principles precede human efforts.' Quoting from *Zhuangzi Shanmu* 莊子·山木篇: 'Both carving and polishing ultimately return to simplicity.' Admirable indeed!" (Liu, 1978). How can one achieve a "natural" standard in language? Liu Xizai proposes two specific requirements: first, to abandon any pretense of meaning. According to Liu Xizai, the text should be like a product that displays its true colors on top. If an author wishes to convey their artistic originality and noble intentions through their writing, they must reveal their genuine emotions within the work itself; thus, Liu repeatedly emphasizes that poetry cannot be written insincerely or hastily. As Wang Anshi once said: "Every word I write is imbued with my love for flesh and blood; when I feel sorrowful, my words are suffused with sobs" (Liu, 1978). Genuine emotion arises from feeling and is expressed naturally without artifice—it flows straight from the heart. Second, one must choose words naturally. When expressing personal feelings in language that is real and natural, it's important to maintain a balance between words used, meanings conveyed and things described—as Liu puts it: "Not only should things be called by their proper names but righteousness too" (Liu, 1978). The eight-legged essays serves as an explanation of sutras on behalf of sages; therefore scholars creating such texts must adhere closely to the sage's tone in terms of language use as well as content selection so that the text itself aligns with both what is being described and what needs explaining all while remaining close to the natural style inherent in expounding upon sutras. It can be seen that when Liu Xizai discusses the creation of eight-legged essays, he intends to pay equal attention to "highlighting literature and art" and "expressing nature". "Intention" and

"work" are the embodiment of the scholar's personal knowledge and talent, and there are also primary and secondary among the two, first emphasizing the "intention to write first", and then asking "resignation" to cut "meaning", that is, its so-called "elegant and cut".

4.3 To Focus on the Layout, Writing with Art

In Liu Xizai's perspective, apart from the literati's intention and words, the eight-legged essays encompasses artistic creation techniques and exhibits specific artistic characteristics in its textual layout and structure. Liu Xizai argues that while the eight-legged essays adheres to a rigid structural format, this format is ultimately "lifeless", whereas the creator of the subject matter is "alive". Therefore, he strongly advocates for a "transformation" in the structural arrangement of the eight-legged essays: "Through this transformation, it transcends into a text representing heaven and earth." He emphasizes that there should always be room for change within grammar. So, how can the eight-legged essays be both "neat" and "changing"? Firstly, it must possess a sense of neatness. As Liu Xizai stated, "The three greatest strokes: start, go, and stop" (Liu, 1978). "Each section should have these three elements simultaneously; if it starts, there will be a beginning to initiate action and an end to conclude it". Additionally, it is mentioned in the cloud that the introduction of the article should not only closely relate to the theme but also ensure coherence among its parts. This connection can also be referred to as a "line", which signifies carrying forward what has been stated before and developing the article further. The smooth transition allows for seamless connections and free opening or closing within the entire piece. Finally, at its conclusion, attention needs to be given to its relationship with "combination", "closure", and "connection". In summary, a well-structured article requires considering both its beginning and subsequent sections while ensuring continuity during transitions—resulting in a complete and stable orderly structure. Then, the concept of "change" becomes imperative. Liu Xizai initially elucidated the artistic aesthetic impact of grammatical transformations in his article, emphasizing the paramount importance of composition layout for achieving a sense of "survival": "Commencing in ethereal realms and grounding oneself firmly on reality, survival is contingent upon these three elements; without them, an article lacks substance" (Liu, 1978). Liu further expounded on the notion of "survival after death", "While there exists a path to tread upon during life, death offers no such passage... In its absence lies an avenue attributed to demise", implying that articles should traverse

winding paths with twists and turns, evoking both hidden depths and moments of brilliance. After elucidating the concept of "change" in consciousness, Liu Xizai also presented various artistic approaches to "grammatical change" for practical creation. These include integrating layout methods with the topic: "In the past, there were four layout methods - original, reverse, positive, and pushing: introducing the topic through originality, making the topic potential through reversal, returning to the topic through positivity, and explaining the problem through pushing" (Liu, 1978). The article can investigate sources to lead towards concluding a topic or employ reversals to create potential within it. Alternatively, positive elaboration can point back to its original intention or reasoning can be used for comprehensive explanation of the topic. The layout is closely associated with clarifying the subject matter due to its title's context. Also on the layout of the article has the method of reversal: "The bureau law, there are the first half of the introduction of the second half, there are the first half of the introduction from the second half" (Liu, 1978). The push method is both solid and reverse, and the forward push is often not as good as the reverse push, and the reverse push is wider and more active." In the law of the reverse, the reverse is the best, starting from the opposite side of the topic, according to the reason to introduce the positive meaning of the topic, this layout from the reverse to the positive, from the opening to the joint, so that the article discusses thoroughly, ups and downs. Also on the layout of the article has the method of producing reality: "The good use of the text, the reality of the virtual, the virtual of the real; Those who are good at expressing their opinions, show their micro, and show their micro". Only by turning the virtual into the real can subjective feelings be aroused, and only by generating the real from the virtual can the things written be highlighted. As for the use of virtual and real, there are "first empty and then real, there is first real and then empty, there are also overlapping with real, overlapping with empty... Even the positive and negative are both empty and positive, and the empty and positive are both positive and negative, and we do not want to say anything". There is a method of discontinuous article layout: "The text is suddenly broken, and the change is also, such as the sudden release of the pen after collecting the pen is; The restfulness is continuous, and the focus is also called, such as having already collected the pen before, putting the pen in the middle, and then recollecting the pen to respond to the former". The method of discontinuity is actually the article's discontinuity, affecting the sense of rhythm of the article, making the article ups and downs. Also on the layout of the article has the method of intonation, stopping is the method of

intonation, referring to the intonation, but also refers to the change of the meaning of the relaxation: "There are four methods of intonation, say: Wanting to suppress first Yang, wanting to suppress first, wanting to suppress first Yang. Depression will result in success" (Liu, 1978). On the dual method of eight-legged essays, Liu Xizai gives seven methods of change:" The text has a total of seven methods of comparison, saying: cutting one for two, filling one for two, reversing one for two, cutting one for two, stripping one for two, interlining one for two". In short, no matter what kind of layout method, it avoid abnormal and straight plate. As for the internal relations of the article, we not only pay attention to the logical relations between the whole and the part, but also grasp the dynamic changes between each part, so that people can clearly see the way and way of "grammar change". In conclusion, Liu Xizai emerged as a versatile figure in literature and art during the middle and late Qing Dynasty, exhibiting profound theoretical insights through his meticulous analysis. The essence of Liu Xizai's eight-legged essays criticism theory is primarily concentrated in Volume 6 of *Yigai*, titled *The Summary of Jing Yi*. By delving into and evaluating *The Summary of Jing Yi*, we can discern its incorporation of literary sentiments from *The Summary of Jing Yi* while rectifying the deficiencies prevalent in the previous Qianjia and Daoguang literary trends through concepts such as Confucian classics, and worship literature. Considering the prevailing imperial examination system and the eight-legged essays style at that time, Liu Xizai advocated for an integration between classical texts to serve society's needs while emphasizing ethical considerations derived from these classics. He proposed that articles should complement classical works to enhance their impact on readership by inspiring individuals' morale towards pursuing education. Consequently, the content within *The Summary of Jing Yi* holds immense value and far-reaching significance due to its influence on subsequent generations as well as its provision of guiding ideologies for contemporary research in literature and art.

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