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The Modernity of the Ancient-Style Verse

Abstract This article explores the stylistic innovations in the Ancient-Style Verse (*gutishi* 古體詩), and particularly in the subgenre of *gexing* 歌行, from the Late Qing to the 1930s and 1940s. It argues that the relative free prosody of the Ancient-Style allowed innovation disguised as restoration. Yet, instead of being the prelude to modern vernacular poetry, the innovations in this genre may have found an end in themselves—namely, creating a style of verse which showed a unique combination of modern elements and deliberate stylistic archaism. Its lyric archaism and innovation were formulated in dialectical terms, which have been frequently evoked in the reformative moments of the Chinese tradition. This paper examines the evolution of the new *gexing* style through the close reading of a few *gexing* poems by Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Lin Gengbai 林庚白 (1896–1941), and Liu Yazhi 柳亞子 (1887–1958). Given the rise of vernacular poetry since 1917, the poems of Lin and Liu may be called the Classicist Verse, which represents the author’s conscious choice to elaborate on the subject matter using a particular classical genre, when other modern genres are available. In the end, I will also discuss the *gexing* style verses by Li Sichun 李思純 in the translation of multi-stanza European poetry, as a practice in accord to the indigenization agenda of the *Critical Review* magazine.

Keywords Lyric Classicism, Ancient-Style Verse, modernity, *gexing*, Huang Zunxian, Liang Qichao, Wang Lixi, Lin Gengbai, Liu Yazhi

Introduction

This article explores the stylistic innovations carried out in the Ancient-Style Verse (*gutishi* 古體詩) genre, and particularly in the subgenre of *gexing* 歌行, from the Late Qing poet Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905) to the poets of the 1930s and 1940s. The less strict formal requirements of *gexing* make it the de

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facto free form poetry among the classical genres.¹ Classical-style poets of the modern era, following the innovation of Huang Zunxian, exploited this relative freedom to experiment with new meters, rhythms, and dictions. And I argue that, instead of being the prelude to modern vernacular poetry (as some scholars maintain),² the innovations in this genre may have found an end in themselves—namely, creating a style of verse which showed a unique combination of modern elements and deliberate stylistic archaism. Its lyric archaism and innovation were formulated in dialectical terms, which have been frequently evoked in the reformative moments of the Chinese tradition. With these innovative works, which I term “classicist poetry” (or *gudian zhuyi shige* 古典主義詩歌 in Chinese), the “ancient” lives in the heart of modernity, preventing it from becoming one-dimensional and expanding its possibilities for self-expression.

Huang Zunxian’s combination of vernacular, classical diction, neologism, and traditional themes has already been extensively explored by Jerry Schmidt in his pioneering work.³ In the following article, I will examine a *gexing* poem by Huang Zunxian as an example of his stylistic innovations in this particular genre. Further, I will argue that his cautious experimentation with *gexing* was continued by later poets, as attested to by the works of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Wang Lixi 王禮錫 (1901–39), and Lin Gengbai 林庚白 (1896–1941). I will end the study with a few poems written by Liu Yazhi 柳亞子 (1887–1958) in the 1940s, in which the boundaries of the genre were seemingly broken, and a new genre of semi-classical, semi-modern verse—the poetry of modern classicism—was about to emerge.

Throughout this study, I am aware of the temporal leap from the time of Huang and Liang to that of Lin and Liu. The intervening period also happened to be one of the most rapidly changing periods in Chinese history. Socioeconomic and political changes notwithstanding, their poetic adversaries had also moved away from the more conservative style of the mainstream classical poetry toward the rising vernacular poetry. Given the limited length of this article and the broad temporal scope, I will, in the main, restrict my discussion to stylistic succession and transformation. This will be done at the expense of contextualization (which has been and will be the focus of my other papers on the poetry of this period).

¹ This form of poetry allowed for greater freedom than other genres, but it was still freedom by degrees within the constraints of formal classical-style poetry.

² See, e.g., Gong Xiping, “Jindai ‘getishi’ chutan,” 16, 17.

³ See Jerry D. Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian 1848–1905*, 58–92.

The Archaism of Huang Zunxian's Innovative Poetry

Huang Zunxian was the poster child of the Poetic Revolution (*Shijie geming* 詩界革命) that Liang Qichao promoted. According to Liang, Huang's poetry was able to "melt new ideals into an old style" (*rongzhu xin lixiang ru jiu fengge* 熔鑄新理想入舊風格).⁴ While most studies on Huang's poetry focus on its "newness," the following discussion will, on the contrary, explore its so-called "old style." In the context of Huang's work, "old style" certainly does not mean simply being faithful to a particular style of pre-modern Chinese poetry. Rather, I argue that it refers to the deliberate archaism that Huang employed in his poetry to create a stylistic balance when he used modern vocabulary to depict modern life.

Against the late Qing faddism of emulating Tang or Song poetry, Huang Zunxian emphatically argued that a changing society required changing literary practices. Thus, in the preface to *Poetry within the Human Realm* (*Renjinglu shicao* 人境廬詩草), he proposed to discard the "dregs" (*zaopo* 糟粕) of the ancients.⁵ This metaphor was borrowed from a Zhuangzian parable in which Wheelwright Bian (Lunbian 輪扁) boldly advised Duke Huan of Qi to discard books, since written words were nothing but the dregs of the sages.⁶ Notably, however, the wheelwright did not challenge the normative authority of the ancient sages' ideas or spirit *per se*. What he advocated was mastery of the essence of the sages' teaching, namely the Way, through wordless and concentrated practice. Similarly, immediately following his statement of not being restricted by the ancients, Huang Zunxian declared:

嘗於胸中設一詩境：一曰，復古人比興之體；一曰，以單行之神，運排偶之體；一曰，取離騷樂府之神理而不襲其貌；一曰，用古文家伸縮離合之法以入詩。⁷

I once envisioned a realm of poetry in my chest, which shall, first of all, recover the ancient style of *bixing*; second, apply the spirit of lineal narrative to couplets in parallelism; third, grasp the spirit and principles of *Lisao* or Music Bureau poetry without emulating their appearance; and fourth, use the methods of Ancient-Style Prose, such as expatiation, summary, deviation, and synthesis, in the writing of poetry.⁸

The second item on the list could refer to the use of *liushui dui* 流水對 ("running-water parallelism"). Whereas normal parallel couplets contain two lines that are both complete in meaning, lines in "running-water parallelism"

⁴ Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi shihua* (#4), in *Liang Qichao quanji*, 5296.

⁵ Huang Zunxian, "Zixu," in Qian Zhonglian, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 3.

⁶ See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 13:490–91.

⁷ Huang Zunxian, "Zixu," 3.

⁸ All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

form a single narrative sentence (sometimes comprising the strict formal parallelism). This type of parallelism, which Huang often employs, increases the fluidity of the narrative movement between the lines. The other three items all point to a kind of stylistic archaism that Huang seeks to recover: first, ancient styles, such as *bixing*, or explicit and implicit comparisons, as used in the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經); second, the ancient spirit, as conveyed in *Lisao* or Music Bureau poetry; and third, Tang-Song ancient-style prose. Of these kinds of *gu*, the “ancient spirit” might be the hardest to define, as he explicitly says that he does not seek to emulate the stylistic appearance of *Lisao* or Music Bureau poetry. The spirit of *Lisao* probably refers to the use of allegory. In poems like “Song on Mixing Lotus, Chrysanthemum, and Peach Blossoms in One Vase” (*Yi lian ju tao zagong yipping zuoge* 以蓮菊桃雜供一瓶作歌), the harmonious coexistence of different flowers is used as an allegory for cosmopolitanism. The spirit of Music Bureau poetry is reflected in songs bearing titles similar to Han Music Bureau poems or the Tang *gexing* poems that were inspired by the Han verse. Some famous examples include “Modern Parting” (*Jin bieli* 今別離—a title that evokes the category “Parting, in the Olden Times” [*Gu bieli* 古別離] found in the eleventh century *Anthology of Music Bureau Poetry* [*Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集], the most comprehensive source of Music Bureau poetry from the Han to the Tang); “The Great London Fog” (*Lundun dawu xing* 倫敦大霧行; *xing* in the title is a typical genre designation for *gexing* poetry); and “The Foreign Guest” (*Fanke pian* 番客篇; *pian* in the title similarly designates Music Bureau or *gexing* poetry). The mixing of words like “modern,” “London,” or “foreign” with terms commonly used to identify the poems, such as *gexing*, already shows the poems’ hybrid nature. These are longer verses with irregular meters, in which highly innovative language is combined with deliberate stylistic archaism (as will be observed later in my translation of “The Great London Fog”).

In a letter addressed to Liang Qichao in 1902, Huang Zunxian criticized the poets after the Six Dynasties for having “lost” the true spirit of the *Book of Odes*, namely, “the intention of explicit and implicit comparisons (*bixing zhiyi* 比興之義)” and “the principle of [using the *Odes*] to stimulate, to observe, to socialize, and to complain” (*xing guan qun yuan zhi zhi* 興觀群怨之旨). They, therefore, did not merit his emulation.⁹ Rather, his innovation in poetic language aimed to recover the ancients’ *bixing* spirit. If *bixing* as a style refers to the use of explicit or implicit comparisons to initiate a poem, then the *yi* (intention) of *bixing*, according to the “Great Preface” to the *Odes*, is to transform social customs or to criticize political misconduct. *Xing guan qun yuan* is a canonical description of the functions of poetry, declared by Confucius (*Analects* 17.9) in exhorting his son to study the *Odes*. Huang seems to suggest that, by recovering the spirit of

⁹ Huang Zunxian, *Huang Zunxian ji*, 490.

the ancients, he was recovering the critical functions of poetry and making it socially useful.

The fact that Huang, the most innovative poet of his generation, talked extensively about recovering the “ancient spirit” and emulating archaic styles, is not necessarily paradoxical. Rather, in the pre-modern Chinese literary tradition renovations were often couched as a return to antiquity. In the conceptual world of the classical Chinese language, *gu* 古 (the old, the ancient) is juxtaposed with *jin* 今 (the present). (There is no monosyllabic term to express the notion of the future; *weilai* 未來, the term used to designate the future, is an imported Buddhist term, its foreignness revealed by its disyllabic construction.) Thus, dissatisfaction with the present is often expressed by a call for a return to the past. According to this binary nomenclature, the *gu* of yesterday could well become the *jin* of tomorrow—as long as both are distinct from the *jin* of today. The sixth-century anthology *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選), for example, used the term Ancient Poetry (*Gushi* 古詩) to denote a specific set of pentasyllabic verses from the Han dynasty in order to chastise the embellishment and sensuality of contemporary styles. In the Tang, when Regulated Verse (*Lüshi* 律詩), also called the Recent-Style (*Jinti* 近體), was moving from the palace to the mainstream, writers and literary critics began to use the term Ancient-Style to denote those poems that consciously rebelled against the tightened meters. The Ancient-Style, therefore, was not truly ancient; it was a self-conscious rebellion against prescribed rules (of course, in order to have rebelled against them, the authors must first have fully internalized these rules).¹⁰ This edge of self-consciousness distinguishes this poetry from the “naïvely” unregulated pre-Medieval verse.

A primary example of a writer associated with the so-called “Returning to Antiquity” (*fugu* 復古) movement was Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824). Aside from his archaic poetry, he began to write what he termed Ancient Prose (*Guwen* 古文) because he considered popular parallel prose overly embellished and bound by formal restrictions. As Charles Hartman has argued, Han Yu conceived Antiquity (*gu*) to be an almost spiritual state, yet it was a state that stood in dialectical complementarity to *jin*; “the two states, although distinct, are ultimately identical, and when each is perfected, ‘Antiquity is now.’”¹¹ Since the classical Chinese conception of time was not lineal but cyclical (*Yijing* 易經), “return” (*fu* 復), represented by the *fu* hexagram in the *Book of Changes*, meant “the coming back again of something that once existed before, not a going back to something that will never exist again.”¹² The break from the unsatisfactory present is disguised

¹⁰ As Xu Xueyi 許學夷 (1563–1633) argued, the Tang poets had studied regulated meters since childhood, so their ancient-style poems occasionally used regulated couplets (唐人沿襲六朝, 自幼便為俳偶聲韻所拘, 故盛唐五古……多雜用律體). See *Shiyuan bianti*, 177 (entry 17.24).

¹¹ Charles Hartman, *Han Yu and the T'ang Search for Unity*, 218.

¹² *Ibid.*

as continuity—as if the spirit of the past simply returns in an altered costume. The idealized ancient reflects an envisioned future.

Huang Zunxian, however, never explicitly used the compound *fugu* as a fixed term to express his poetic theory. Perhaps it was because times were changing—enlightened intellectuals were beginning to question ancient worldviews, and the “new” began to assume ethical value in itself. In just two decades, various intellectual or political movements would begin to base their claims to legitimacy on the virtue of being new. This wave of radicalization was unprecedented in Chinese history.¹³ In the pre-modern Chinese discursive context, the term “new” (*xin* 新) is normally used in addition to the reference to antiquity, as seen in Wang Mang’s 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) New dynasty (*Xinchao* 新朝, 8–23), Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772–846) New Music Bureau Poetry (*Xinyuefu* 新樂府), and Wang Anshi’s 王安石 (1021–86) New Policies (*Xinzheng* 新政). New Music Bureau poetry explicitly evokes an institution that dates back to the Han dynasty (allegedly to even earlier times) and the type of poetry that it produced. The New dynasty and the New Policies both evoked *The Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮, itself a classic, likely forged in the Han to present an idealized bureaucratic system which supposedly existed in early Zhou times) as a blueprint for reformative political design. In all of these cases, the “new” suggests a rebirth of antiquity. This discursive strategy tacitly acknowledges that, despite the glorious birth of a certain notion or institution in antiquity, its development somehow followed a devious path and resulted in an unsatisfactory present; thus, a second or even third rebirth was needed to correct historical wrongs. The future will be the redeemed past.

In this regard, a major change in the twentieth century is that the “new” came to be understood as a radical break from the past. The “new” eclipsed the “ancient” as the possessor of normative power and was increasingly equated with the ethically “good.” But even the guardians of the “new” were hesitant to strip the ancient of all dignity. Early Chinese philosophy, for instance, was frequently cited as the original ancestor of imported conceptions like liberty or democracy. In order to justify their efforts to establish a written vernacular as the standard form for Chinese literature, writers and thinkers argued that ancient poetry, such as the *Book of Odes* or Han dynasty Music Bureau poetry, was written in languages spoken by the common people of early times. Even with its authority shattered, the ancient was still invited to stamp the birth certificate of the modern,¹⁴ and the complex dynamism between ancient and modern produced

¹³ Yu Ying-shih, “The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century,” 123–43.

¹⁴ Hu Shi, for instance, tried to build a classical lineage for modern vernacular literature—an effort particularly evident in his preface to *Baihua wenxue shi* 白話文學史, which declares that all literature written in an “easy, fluent, and relatively colloquial” style to be the precursor of the modern literary vernacular that he promoted; see *Baihua wenxue shi*, 7.

hybrid offspring.

This development was already tentatively suggested by Huang's decision to call his poetry "New-School Poetry" (*xinpai shi* 新派詩), implying a certain confidence in his poetic innovations. Nevertheless, I argue that the so-called "new" in Huang's terminology is not actually radical newness, which thoroughly negates the past, but something else, which appears to lie within the traditional spectrum of variations created by the dialectical movement between the new and the old. Huang's "new" likely meant something similar to the "new" of Bai Juyi's New Music Bureau Poetry, namely, a revival of certain stylistic elements from the past in service of the needs and tastes of the present. In other words, his newness was quantitative and not qualitative. It was not meant to result in the New Literature that Hu Shi and his generation would promote.

From the perspective of China's long tradition of normative discourses, it was not unusual that Huang Zunxian saw his poetry as something that was simultaneously new and archaic. Many of Huang's contemporary admirers noticed the archaism in his poetry: his style was described by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) as "rigorous and upright, archaic and refined" (*yanzheng guya* 嚴正古雅),¹⁵ and by Liu Yanxun 劉燕勛 (dates unknown) as "archaic and splendid" (*guyan* 古豔).¹⁶ The archaism of Huang's poetry, moreover, went all the way back to the early period and was described by contemporary intellectuals as "befriending the spirit of *Lisao* or Han poetry" (*you shen Sao Han* 友神騷漢)¹⁷ or "inheriting the spirit and marrow of Han and Wei poets" (*de Han Wei ren shensun* 得漢魏人神髓).¹⁸ Yet, although these figures praised the archaism of his poetry as originating from *Lisao*, *yuefu*, Du Fu, or Han Yu, they also described him as the "Columbus of the world of [Chinese] poetry" (*shishijie zhi Gelunbu* 詩世界之哥倫布)—a man who discovered a new continent of linguistic expression.¹⁹ The archaism in his poetry was, at the same time, its innovation.

Moreover, the *gu* in Huang Zunxian's poetry also refers to a particular genre, namely, Ancient-Style Verse. As Jerry Schmidt has noted, Huang's Ancient-Style Verse in particular has been praised as his finest stylistic achievement—sometimes at the expense of his regulated verse.²⁰ In Lin Gengbai's words, Huang Zunxian's pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic ancient-style verse "opened a new path for the students of poetry today." By that account, they were truly "the

¹⁵ See *Huang Zunxian ji*, 77.

¹⁶ See Liu Yanxun's colophon, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 1089.

¹⁷ See Liang Qichao's colophon, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 1086.

¹⁸ See, for example, the colophons of Yu Mingzhen 俞明震 (1860–1918) and He Zaoxiang 何藻翔 (1865–1930), *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 1084, 1085.

¹⁹ See e.g., the colophons of Wen Zhonghe 溫仲和 (1849–1904) and Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), *ibid.*, 1088.

²⁰ See Jerry Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm*, 59.

poetry of our contemporary age” (*zhennai jinshi ye* 真乃今詩也).²¹

Lin’s judgment is intriguing. As discussed earlier, the Ancient-Style emerged as a self-conscious rebellion against Recent-Style Poetry. In the same spirit, Huang Zunxian’s revolution was a self-conscious one. His use of vernacular, dialect, and neologism was carefully balanced within the acceptable boundaries of the lyrical tradition so that its newness was not so new as to challenge the conventions of the ancient-style genre *per se*. His New-School Poetry did not represent a break from the tradition, nor did it seek to overthrow or replace it. Rather, Huang’s new poetry represented one more possible variation on the existing tradition and stood alongside all other classical poetic genres—just as *ci* did not replace *shi* and *qu* did not replace either *shi* or *ci*. Through such continuous variation, the tradition maintained its vitality through history—and, at Huang’s time, there was no reason to doubt that this model of “continuity in variety” would be maintained in the future development of Chinese poetry as well.

Similarly, in using vernacular, dialect, and translated terms, Huang did not seek to replace classical literary language, but rather aimed to enrich the repertoire of possible expression—just as the southern dialects in *Chuci*, translated Buddhist terms, Six Dynasties folk songs, and Song dynasty vernacular lyric songs had already enriched this repertoire. Therefore, unlike many other modern scholars, I do not believe that he regarded his poetry as only a transitory stage on the path to a complete transformation into the vernacular. Indeed, he once compared himself to “a single Puritan standing alone in the blizzard” (獨立風雪中清教徒之一人), awaiting the Washingtons and Jeffersons of poetry.²² But nothing suggests that the Washingtons he imagined were similar to the New Culturalists. Instead, he envisioned the creation of an entirely new genre (or subgenre) that would continue the tradition of classical verse into the modern age. In a letter to Liang Qichao, written in the fall of 1902, he proposed to create a genre of Miscellaneous Songs and Ditties (*Za ge yao* 雜歌謠). The verse would be written in a hybrid style that combined elements of dialect and popular folk tunes with traditional verse style. Its content would focus on modern instead of ancient matters, and its lines could vary between three, five, seven, nine, or more syllables.²³ The term *za ge yao* refers to the category “*Za ge yao ci*” 雜歌謠辭 in the *Anthology of Music Bureau Poetry*. Poems collected under the heading of “*Za ge yao ci*” are the most archaic in the anthology. They are the lyrics of songs—authentically ancient or imaginatively reconstructed—which allegedly had folk origins, with the earliest pieces dated to the earliest Chinese civilization

²¹ Lin Gengbai, “*Jinshi xuan fanli*,” cited in *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 1308.

²² Huang Zunxian, “*Yu Qiu Shuyuan shu*” (1902), in *Huang Zunxian ji*, 478.

²³ “*Guangxu ershiba nian bayue ershi ri shouzha*,” cited in *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 1245–46.

ruled by mythological sages. Many of these songs are prosaic. Huang's invocation of the term suggested not only the new genre's folk origins, but also its illustrious ancestry—thus giving it the moral significance typically associated with genres considered to have folk origins, as they were believed to enable the ruling class to observe the lives of common people. Liang responded to Huang's proposal and created a “Miscellaneous Songs and Ditties” column in his *New Fictions* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) magazine. From 1902–5, the journal published a few dozen poems with customary titles such as New Music Bureau Poems or Cantonese Folk Ditties (*Yue-ou* 粵謳). Their efforts also suggested that Huang was expecting generations of future poets to keep writing in this new style and to expand its horizons of expression. If such lyric experiments in this and other traditional genres were continued, they would create a separate realm of modern poetry that absorbed the full spectrum of the Chinese literary tradition. These future poets who managed to accomplish the task would be the Washingtons and Jeffersons of the “New World” that Huang, the “Columbus” of Chinese poetry, had discovered.

The New *Gexing* Experiments

The genre *gexing* has an ancient origin. Many Han dynasty Music Bureau poems are titled as *ge*, *xing*, or *gexing*. Etymologically, *ge* is the generic term for songs, and *xing*, according to the Ming critic Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 (1569–1645), refers to longer narrative songs.²⁴ In actual fact, the difference between the two subgenres *ge* and *xing* is negligible. Indeed, the Southern Song critic Yan Yu 嚴羽 (active 1197–1245) treated them as one genre.²⁵ In Tang dynasty poetry, *gexing* refers to longer ancient-style poems mostly written in heptasyllabic meters and often mixed with lines of irregular length. According to Xu Xueyi 許學夷 (1563–1633), *gexing* originated from *Lisao* and venerated “strangeness” (*shang qi* 尚奇).²⁶ In contrast to other ancient-style poems, which were “orderly and structured” (*zhengzhi* 整秩), *gexing* verses seek to be “unconstrained and audacious” (*yidang* 軼蕩).²⁷ Huang thought that his pentasyllabic ancient-style verses (*wugu* 五古) were superior to his heptasyllabic ancient-style verses (*qigu* 七古, which should include *gexing*). He praised his *wugu* as “surpassing [all the poems in this genre from] the last millennia” (*lingkua qiangu* 凌跨千古), while he modestly claimed that his *qigu* were merely on a par with the work of Du Fu

²⁴ “Yan qi shi er ge zhi yue xing” 衍其事而歌之曰行, *Tangyin guiqian*, 2.

²⁵ See Guo Shaoyu, *Canglang shihua jiaoshi*, 49.

²⁶ See *Shiyuan bianti*, 190 (entry 18.4).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 197 (entry 18.22).

and Han Yu.²⁸ Yet, I regard his *gexing* poems as his most innovative. The unique features of the *gexing* style allowed him to include modern elements, which appeared “strange” to those who were used to the established lyrical or aesthetic conventions. Moreover, multisyllabic translated neologisms were more easily integrated into a poem with lines of irregular length. The unrestrained boldness required for a *gexing* poem also encouraged more syntactic experiments, such as the use of prosaic, narrative lines. Below, I will illustrate these stylistic features through an analysis of Huang’s poem on the London fog.²⁹ Although Jerry Schmidt has already made a wonderful translation of this poem,³⁰ from which my translation has benefited, my new translation attempts to follow Huang’s original poem more closely, especially in terms of parallelism and use of allusions. The breaks of stanzas are also different, as mine are based on the changes in rhyme.

<p>倫敦大霧行 蒼天已死黃天立 倒海翻雲百神集 一時天醉帝夢酣 舉國沉迷同失日 芒芒蕩蕩國昏荒 冥冥蒙蒙黑甜鄉 我坐斗室幾匝月 面壁惟拜燈光王</p>	<p>The Great London Fog The Black Heaven has died; a Yellow Heaven reigns.³¹ The ocean overturns, clouds tumble, and hundreds of gods assemble. In a moment Heaven is tipsy and the High God falls into a sound dream; So that the whole capital is lost in a sunless darkness. Vast and boundless is the city’s desolation in dimming light; Benighted and hazy, like a dark kingdom of sweet dreams. I have been sitting in a tiny studio for months, Meditating toward a wall and worshipping only the King of Lamp Light.</p>
<p>時不辨朝夕 地不識南北 離離火焰青 漫漫劫灰黑</p>	<p>I cannot tell dusk from dawn in terms of time, Or north from south in terms of space. Lush, lush—the ghostly green flame; Endless, endless—the black ashes of <i>kalpa</i>!³²</p>

²⁸ See his letter to Liang Qichao, in *Huang Zunxian ji*, 502.

²⁹ For the original poem “Lundun dawu xing,” see *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 509.

³⁰ See *Within the Human Realm*, 268–69.

³¹ This line humorously refers to a rumor invented by the late second century rebels the Yellow Turban (*huangjin* 黃巾). The rumor originally implied that a Yellow Heaven should replace Black Heaven as ruler (*Cangtian yi si Huangtian dang li* 蒼天已死黃天當立). See Wang Xianqian, *Houhanshu jijie*, *juan* 71, 804. Because the Han dynasty ruling house believed that it possessed the virtue of water (which, according to the Five Phase theory, corresponds to the color black), the rebels claimed to possess the virtue of earth (which corresponds to the color yellow), which has the power to control water.

如渡大漠沙盡黃 Like crossing a desert where all sands are yellow;
 如探巖穴黝難測 Like diving into a cave's immeasurable depths of darkness.
 化塵塵亦緇 When the fog transforms into dust, the dust is also black;
 望氣氣皆墨 When I gaze into the air, the air is like ink.
 色象無可名 Its form and appearance cannot be named;
 眼鼻若并塞 Our eyes and noses are as if corked.

豈有盤古氏 When will there be another King Pangu, the giant,³³
 出世天再闢 Born to separate Heaven and Earth once again?
 又非阿脩羅 Could this be another example of the mischief of Ashura,
 攪海水上擊 Who stirs the sea to beat up surging waves?
 忽然黑暗無間墮落阿鼻獄 Suddenly we fall into the Avici Hell's endless
 shadows,
 又驚惡風吹船飄至羅刹國 And are astonished that a malicious wind
 blows our ship to the Rakshasa's Land.³⁴

出門寸步不能行 When I go outdoors, I can hardly move an inch;
 九衢徧地鈴鐸聲 All through the avenues I hear the sound of bells.
 車馬雞棲匿不出 Carriages and horses are hiding themselves in the
 fog like roosters in the den;
 樓臺蜃氣中含腥 Tall towers are illusory like a mirage, with a sea
 monster's fetid breath.³⁵

天羅罽匝偶露缺 The net covering Heaven is sometimes open at one
 corner,
 上有紅輪色如血 Revealing a red wheel above, the color of blood.
 曖曖曾無射目光 Darkened and dimmed, its rays do not hurt the eyes;
 涼涼未覺炙手熱 Cooled and chilled, its heat does not warm the hands.
 吾聞地球繞日日繞球 I've heard our globe circles the sun and makes one
 revolution daily;

³² *Kalpa* refers to the periodic destruction of the universe, a popular belief in Hinduism and Buddhism.

³³ The mythological creator of the Universe, who, with an axe, split the Chaos into Heaven and Earth.

³⁴ Huang uses a few familiar Buddhist (and Hinduist) terms here. Ashura is a species of belligerent demigod who often fights against heavenly gods. Avici Hell is the Buddhist hell of endless suffering. Rakshasa is a kind of bloodthirsty demonic creature that eats human flesh.

³⁵ In early China, a mirage was believed to be an illusion created by the breath of giant clams (*shen* 蜃) living in the ocean.

今之英屬遍五洲	Now the British Commonwealth extends over five continents.
赤日所照無不到 光華遠被天盡頭 烏知都城不見日	Its judiciary covers wherever the bright sun shines; Its glory reaches as far as the end of the sky. But who could imagine that no one in its capital ever sees the sun;
人人反抱天墮憂	And everyone is afraid that the sky will fall on his head? ³⁶
又聞地氣蒸騰化為雨	I've also heard that the earth's moisture evaporates and condenses to form rain,
巧算能知雨點數 此邦本以水為家 況有竈煙十萬戶	Clever calculation can tell the number of raindrops. This country has always been by the sea, And, in addition, has chimneys from a hundred thousand households.
倘將四海之霧銖積寸算來	If we calculate all the fogs in the whole world inch by inch,
或尚不如倫敦城中霧	It might still not come close to the fog in London Town!

Despite the length of the poem, the rhyme changes every four or six lines, a technique that avoids the sense of repetition that would result if the author used just a single rhyme. Aside from the last couplet, all the other couplets are pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic—auxiliary interjections such as “I’ve heard,” “I’ve also heard,” and so on do not count toward the syllabic count, and the longest couplet (“Suddenly we fall... the Rakshasa’s Land”) is comprised of four pentasyllabic segments. The last couplet uses syntax that is typical of Ancient-Prose, thus loosening the lyric rhythm and creating a sense of narrative purpose for a poem that is mostly descriptive. In terms of vocabulary, for the most part Huang seems to have deliberately avoided neologism. The only novel word that appears in the first seven stanzas is *Dengguang Wang* 燈光王, or King of [Electronic] Lamp Light, presumably a new kind of *Liuli guang Wang* 琉璃光王, or Bhaisajyaguru, the Buddha of Medicine and King of Lapis Lazuli Light. The sixth stanza depicts the perils of driving through the dense fog, as well as the avenues and tall buildings of London, but the terms that Huang uses—*jiuqu* 九衢, *chema* 車馬, *loutai* 樓臺—are all deliberately archaic. Huang’s use of traditional

³⁶ *Liezi* 列子 (1.13) describes an extremely anxious man in Qi 杞 who was constantly worried that the sky would fall on his head, to the extent that he could hardly sleep or eat. See Yang Bojun, *Liezi jishi*, 30–31.

Chinese terms to depict a modern Western metropolis creates a sense of familiarity among Huang's contemporary domestic readers, but also serves to defamiliarize London for readers who have actually visited the city. Huang furthermore uses traditional terms to a humorous effect. Only in the last two stanzas does the author begin to show his new knowledge of astronomy, geography, meteorology, and world politics. These two stanzas are also more prosaic. There is not a single parallel couplet, and the lines contain subordinate clauses, rhetorical questions, conjunctive adverbs, and the subjunctive mood. Yet the poem ends on a deliberately witty note: the reputation of Great Britain as "the empire on which the sun never sets" is belied by the fact that its capital, London, seldom sees the sun. Modern meteorology only serves to support a non-scientific conjecture, that is, there is more fog in London than in the rest of the world combined.

Huang Zunxian carefully uses archaism and rhythmic lyricism to counter-balance sections characterized by neologism and prosaism. Similar experiments are seen in the verses of other poets of his generation, such as Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑 (1863–1924) and Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912). Liang Qichao also followed Huang's example and wrote poems such as "Song of Leaving the Fatherland" (*Quguo xing* 去國行), "Song of the Twentieth-Century Pacific" (*Ershi shiji Taipingyang ge* 二十世紀太平洋歌), "Song of Patriotism" (*Aiguo ge* 愛國歌), "Song on the Eight Worthies in Poetry, Expanded" (*Guang shizhong baxian ge* 廣詩中八賢歌), and so forth. These poems are prosaic and argumentative, and they use neologism and translated terms to demonstrate the author's understanding of the modern world. "Song of the Twentieth Century Pacific,"³⁷ in particular, is an ambitious poem that limns world history, the discovery of the New World, and the beginning of modernity. The poem frequently uses irregular longer lines mixed with more regular lines in pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic meters. As this poem is quite long, I have only translated the first stanza (which shows extreme variations in prosody).

亞洲大陸有一士
自名任公其姓梁

盡瘁國事不得志

斷髮胡服走扶桑

扶桑之居讀書尚友既一載

On the Asian Continent there is a Scholar
Who called himself Rengong and whose
family name is Liang.

He dedicated himself to the affairs of the state,
but his ambition was thwarted;

He ended up cutting his hair and escaping in
foreign garb to the Kingdom of the Sun.

Dwelling in Japan for a year spent in reading

³⁷ See *Liang Qichao quanji*, 5426–27.

耳目神氣頗發皇
 少年懸弧四方誌
 未敢久戀蓬萊鄉
 逝將適彼世界共和政體之祖國
 問政求學觀其光
 乃于西歷一千八百九十九年
 臘月晦日之夜半

 扁舟橫渡太平洋
 其時人靜月黑夜悄悄
 怒波碎打寒星芒
 海底蛟龍睡初起
 欲噓未噓欲舞未舞深潛藏

 其時彼士兀然坐
 澄心攝慮遊杳茫

 正住華嚴法界第三觀
 帝網深處無數鏡影涵其旁

 and befriending kindred spirits,
 His horizon has broadened, his appearance
 changed.
 Since his youth he had always admired heroes
 and desired to see the world;
 So he does not dare to linger in the Fairyland
 of Penglai.
 He shall travel to the fatherland of the
 world's Republicans,
 To study its form of government, seek
 knowledge, and observe its grandeur.
 Thus at midnight of the last day of the last
 month of Eighteen Ninety-Nine in the
 Western Calendar,

 He is riding a tiny boat across the Pacific
 Ocean.
 At this moment men are at rest, the moon
 dark, and the night tranquil,
 Raging waves break asunder the bristles of
 cold star-light.
 Dragons at the bottom of the sea are just
 waking up from slumber,
 They have yet to breathe and dance,
 but are hiding deep.
 At this moment the scholar is sitting alone;
 With meditative mind and gathered thoughts
 his spirit is roaming in the Great Void.
 He has reached the third phase of contemplation
 in the dharma's realm of Flower Garland,³⁸
 Deep in the bejeweled net in the Lord of
 Heaven's palace,³⁹ infinite mirror images
 swim around him.

³⁸ In the Huayan (Avatamsaka, or Flower Garland) School of Buddhism, the three phases are: "the contemplation of true emptiness" (*zhenkong guan* 真空觀); "the contemplation of the principles and the phenomena that do not hamper each other" (*lishi wu'ai guan* 理事無礙觀); and "the contemplation of the total acceptance" (*zhoubian hanrong guan* 周遍含容觀).

³⁹ According to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, a vast net hangs in the palace of Indra, Lord of Heaven, and its strands are joined together by jewels. When light reflects onto one of the jewels, the same light is reflected and re-reflected endlessly throughout the expanse of the net. This metaphor expresses the concept of mutual interpenetration.

驀然忽想今夕何夕地何地	All of a sudden he reflects, “Which night is tonight, and where am I?”
乃在新舊二世紀之界線	I am right at the moment when the new century is being divided from the old,
東西兩半球之中央	And in the middle of the eastern and western halves of the globe.
不自我先	It is neither before
不自我後	nor after me —
置身世界第一關鍵之津梁	I am upon the world’s most vital bridge!”
胸中萬千塊壘突兀起	Thousands of emotions rise sharply from my chest;
斗酒傾盡蕩氣回中腸	And as I wash them down with a goblet of wine, my bowels stir.
獨飲獨語苦無賴	Ah, in vain am I toasting and talking to myself;
曼聲浩歌我二十世紀太平洋	So instead I sing a slow, heroic song on my Twentieth Century Pacific!

This poem was written in 1900, during Liang’s trip from Japan to America. The entire poem has 1,539 characters. Aside from a few auxiliary interjections, there are 85 couplets, with a few couplets consisting of three instead of two lines. Each couplet rhymes with /-ang/, with 18 couplets in which both lines rhyme, so that altogether there are 104 characters at the end of a line that rhyme with /-ang/. Even though a few rhyme words are used more than once, the poem still represents an extraordinary display of lyric skill. The rhyming is condensed, particularly toward the ending, with couplets 78–83 all containing double rhyming lines. The last two couplets again restore the ABCB rhyming scheme and use more prosaic syntax to release the cascading lyric tension. The formal tour-de-force is matched in content by the author’s ostensible display of his erudition in the classical Chinese intellectual tradition, modern geography, world history, and Western politics. Many interlineal notes are employed to instruct the reader. For instance, into a line describing a “divine bird flying on winged wheels” (翼輪降空神鳥翔), he inserts a note explaining that when Columbus arrived in America, the natives thought he was a god, because they mistook the sails on his ship to be gigantic bird wings. For another line that mentions the “four great kinds of freedom” (四大自由), his notes explain that these refer to the freedoms of thought, speech, action, and press. The prosodic variation and prosaic syntax, coupled with the overwhelming exhibition of skill and erudition, suit the pedagogic purpose of the poem.

A closer examination of the section translated above demonstrates that the voice morphs freely from third-person to first-person narrative. The opening

recalls the line “In the East there is a scholar” (東方有一士) from the eponymous poem by Tao Qian 陶潛 (352?–427?); and the second line echoes the couplet “The clan of Qin has a good daughter / who named herself Luofu” 秦氏有好女 / 自名為羅敷 from the anonymous Han *yuefu* poem “Mulberries on the Path” (*Moshangsang* 陌上桑). The way in which Liang Qichao introduces himself in the third-person emulates *Lisao*, where, at the beginning, the authorial voice of Qu Yuan introduces his ancestry, the origin of his name, and his frustration at state affairs. Another reference to early poetry is seen in the line: “It is neither before/nor after me,” which is a direct quotation from the Ode “The First Month” (“Zhengyue” 正月, Mao 191). These lines are interlaced with neologisms and references to Buddhist canons; a number of lines seem prosaic and almost vernacular; and the length of the lines shows the deliberate creation of an entirely hybrid work. Yet, in general, all these variations are built upon the combination of traditional meters in units of two, three, four, and five syllables, and their grammar does not exceed the limits of flexibility of the classical Chinese literary language. These variations are carefully calculated to make sure that the verse is innovative, but not so innovative that it breaks the acceptable conventions of the genre. In comparison to Huang’s “Great London Fog,” Liang’s poem is even bolder. Liang follows Huang’s pioneering style in combining archaism with innovation, but, unlike Huang, pays little attention to formal regularity or semantic parallelism.

Classicism as a Choice

The stylistic experiments of the Late Qing Poetic Revolution were continued by some poets of the Southern Society (*Nanshe* 南社; active 1909–23), a group of progressive intellectuals founded in Suzhou on November 13, 1909. At its peak, the Society had more than 1180 registered members, whose networks reached as far as Japan, Southeast Asia, and America. The longest-serving chair of the Society was Liu Yazhi, whose poetry was much indebted to the reformist tradition of Huang Zunxian (though he fashioned himself more after Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 [1792–1841], another innovative Late Qing poet, whom Liu saw as Huang’s predecessor).

At the time of its foundation, the Southern Society’s leading poets perceived their main rivals to be the late Qing Tongguang poets, whose refined, erudite, and traditionalist style was part of the “old world” that they aimed to overthrow. However, the radical New Literature, which began to assume preeminence in intellectual circles in 1917, promoted the exclusive use of a constructed written vernacular for all literary forms (foremost among them poetry). At this point, the Southern Society poets suddenly found themselves branded as “conservatives,” a

label with which they struggled to cope.⁴⁰ The rise of vernacular poetry threatened to shrink the Southern Society poets' presence in published media. A case in point is the literary supplement to the Shanghai *Republican Daily* (*Minguo ribao* 民國日報), which had been the official bulletin of the Southern Society for years and exclusively published the classical-style literary works of its members. However, as the Chief Editor, Shao Lizi 邵力子 (1882–1967), increasingly turned to Marxism, the supplement published its first vernacular poem on August 22, 1919. By the following year, classical poetry had disappeared entirely from its pages. Thus, with New Literature rising to claim the mainstream, a poet's continued composition in the classical style became a gesture of resistance against the Westernized modernity that the New Literature represented or, at least, reflected a conscious decision to continue the classical tradition. The Southern Society poets continued to carry out various stylistic experiments to keep classicist poetry relevant in an increasingly modern world. Like the *gexing* poems of Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao, the compositions of Southern Society members Lin Gengbai and Liu Yazi are hybrid and experimental. However, Lin and Liu's work is more radical in style and illustrates their deliberate attempt to push the classical genre to its limits.

Lin Gengbai's conception of poetry bore important similarities to Huang Zunxian's. Like Huang, Lin had studied a wide range of earlier poetry.⁴¹ He emphasized the importance of competing with the ancients instead of being restricted by them. Also like Huang, he was confident enough to declare that his poetry had surpassed that of Du Fu, let alone Zheng Xiaoxu 鄭孝胥 (1860–1938), the representative Tongguang poet.⁴² Lin composed some vernacular poems, which are rhymed and show certain regularity in metrical patterns. According to Lin, despite the immediate popularity of vernacular poetry shortly after 1917, by the early 1930s the sales figures for vernacular verse had fallen so low that bookstores refused to sell them (this was especially true for freestyle poems). Lin boasted that he had not only reinvented classical-style poetry to depict modern life, but was also opening a new epoch in vernacular poetry.⁴³ His habitual megalomaniac posture aside, his classical-style verse usually abided by traditional genre conventions, even though it embraced linguistic simplicity and neologism. The poem in which he shows the greatest stylistic innovation is “Alas, Where Shall I Go?—Matching a Poem by [Wang]

⁴⁰ The Southern Society poets responded in diverse and intellectual sophisticated ways to the challenges posed by the rise of the New Culture Movement. For more on this group, see Yang Zhiyi, “The Tower of Going Astray: The Paradox of Liu Yazi's Lyric Classicism.”

⁴¹ See Liu Yazi, “Lin Gengbai jiazhuan,” in *Libailou yiji*, 1227–28.

⁴² See “Libailou shihua,” in *Libailou yiji*, 983.

⁴³ See “Jielou suibi,” in *Libailou yiji*, 775.

Lixi” (*Wuhu wu jiang an wang xi he Lixi* 嗚呼吾將安往兮和禮錫),⁴⁴ written around 1939. Because Lin’s poem is explicitly a matching poem, I will shortly introduce Wang Lixi’s poem as well. Despite the latter’s stylistic freedom, Lin’s matching poem shows greater boldness and innovation.

Wang Lixi was a poet and leftist KMT member whose activism led to his repeated exile to Europe in 1933 and 1934–38. The Chinese and English poems that he wrote during his exiles were collected as *Manuscripts in Exile* (*Quguo cao* 去國草) and published in the wartime capital of Chongqing in 1939. Most of these poems are written in regular archaic or regulated styles. The poem “Alas, Where Shall I Go?” (*Wuhu wu jiang an wang xi* 嗚呼吾將安往兮),⁴⁵ however, shows greater lyrical freedom—apparently inspired by the innovative poetry of Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao, on the one hand, and by “Summons of the Soul” (*Zhaohun* 招魂) in *Chuci*, on the other. Each stanza begins with the same rhetorical question that comprises the title of the verse. As in “Summons of the Soul,” the work depicts the four directions (east, south, west, and north), each in a stanza, only to find havoc and destruction in every direction. The speaker then ponders whether or not to stay in England, but he is overcome by the London smog and bourgeois hypocrisy, which disgust him. He ends by declaring:

嗚呼長居異邦兮心神摧	Alas! A long dwelling in a foreign country breaks my heart!
吾安往兮吾欲歸	Where shall I go? I want to return!
無論全生快死	Regardless if I will preserve my life or die a quick death,
如處女之靜	Regardless if I will live quietly like an unmarried maiden,
抑如脫兔之歸	or advance fast like an escaped rabbit dashing home.
或得敵頭而溺	I will either pee in my enemies’ skulls,
或得敵而食其肉寢其皮	or seize them, eat their flesh, sleep on their
火化而風揚其灰	skins, burn their bodies, and scatter the ashes in the wind!
必有一日民氣伸	There will be a day when our people’s spirit lifts,
四萬萬心如一心	when the four hundred million hearts are united as one,
四萬萬人如一人	and the four million people act as one person.
與天地日月同其不朽兮	Until then, shall the soul of China never die,

⁴⁴ See *Libailou yiji*, 497–98.

⁴⁵ Wang Lixi, “Wuhu wu jiang an wang xi,” in *Wang Lixi shiwen ji*, 530–31.

中華之魂

eternal like Heaven and Earth, the
Sun and the Moon!

This stanza includes two rhyming sequences, as indicated by the line break. The poet imagines the worst possible death for his enemies—apparently referring to the invading Japanese army. (The Chinese version conjures up less graphic images than the English translation; he uses only clichéd phrases of hatred, which strike the reader as more palatable and are not to be taken literally.) Despite his uncertainty about his personal future, he remains hopeful and anticipates China's collective rebirth as a unified nation. The longest line in this stanza, which is also the longest in the whole poem, contains seventeen characters, but its syntax allows it to be easily broken into smaller, regular units. The same holds true for other longer lines in the poem. In comparison to the poetic personas of Huang and Liang, Wang Lixi (or at least his poetic persona) is no longer in awe of the vast world beyond. Rather, he sees the world as full of peril and is sickened by the modern malaise, even though he is well versed in Western culture, as demonstrated by his references to Shakespeare and Shelley in the fifth stanza of the poem and his composition of English poetry. As a writer of classicist verse, Wang Lixi was not only able to choose among various available genres, but also able to choose among languages, as he wrote poems in both Chinese and English.

Lin Gengbai's matching song is even more interesting than Wang's original verse. Lin follows the original only in its basic structure of listing the four directions and in using the words for the directions as rhyme categories. Otherwise, Lin's poem is not restricted by the original. Most of the lines are heptasyllabic, but there is no observable pattern to his movement between heptasyllabic and uneven lines. Almost every line rhymes, and, aside from some common allusions which are easy to comprehend, the poem does not seek to achieve stylistic erudition or elegance. Rather, it reads as somewhat akin to a freestyle anti-colonial, pro-Communist treatise. The tone is also optimistic, as we see in the first stanza:

嗚呼吾安往兮吾其東
扶桑之水可以濯我胸
我欲一蹴落日紅

盡驅武士親勞農

盡收三坂之金銀鋼鐵銅

Alas! Where shall I go? I go to the east!

The Sea of Japan can wash my chest.

I would like to kick the round red ball of the
setting sun,

to drive all the warriors to befriend the laborers
and farmers,

and to collect all the gold, silver, steel, iron, and

	bronze from the hillocks ⁴⁶ [for peace].
日本中華本弟兄	Japan and China have always been brethren;
胡為兵革猶洶洶	So why should it wage a war against China, a
	fierce fight that never ends?
少壯之欲方無窮	The young Turks' [territorial] lust cannot
	be satiated;
重臣元老兩耳聾	The senior establishment turns a deaf ear
	[to criticism].
委蛇狼狽商與工	The merchants and entrepreneurs work either
	for or with them, hand in glove.
財賦已竭聚斂充	Normal taxation has been exhausted, and they
	resort to plunder.
軍興十室今九空	Since the militarization began, young men are
	depleted;
望夫思子多婦翁	wives long for their husbands, and fathers miss
	their sons.
相煎其豆使我心忡忡	The fratricidal war pains my heart.
孰云久戰中國必無幸	Who says that China cannot survive a prolonged
	fight?
我如百足之蟲彼狂童	We are resourceful and will die hard, and our
	enemy is an arrogant brat.
彼又如暴富之家嬰災兇	Like a misbehaving upstart he will pay
	in the future.
淺者但聞飛機大炮	Shallow people only hear the roaring sounds of
唐克之車聲隆隆	planes, canons, and tanks;
危疑恐懼震厥躬	so that they feel endangered, become
	apprehensive, and shake to the core.
安得一朝紫氣生日宮	Shall there be a day when the purple aura
	of fortune rises from the sun,
百萬鐵錘鐮刀之眾歌其中	And the crowd of a million, raising their hammers
	and sickles, sing?
東方携手車書同	The whole East is united under the same
	institutions and culture;
炎黃之裔大和風	The offspring of Yan-Huang joins the Yamato
	people.

⁴⁶ The term *sanban* 三坂 does not lend itself to easy interpretation. I failed to identify a reference to any real Japanese place name or conventional expression. I therefore chose to stay with the original meaning of *ban* as “hills, slopes,” and understand “three” as *pars pro toto*, referring to “all.”

青天白日之旗揚蒼穹	The Blue Sky with a White Sun banner flies above the clouds,
櫻花之下大醉傾千鐘	And underneath the cherry blossoms, I shall wash away my worries with a thousand goblets of wine.

Unlike Wang, who sees cosmic destruction in every direction, Lin analyzes the political situation in Japan closely and argues that the war is unsustainable for the Japanese economy. China, in contrast, is a big country that could survive a prolonged war. As a KMT leftist, Lin was a disciple of Marxism and thus believed that by awakening the laborers, China and Japan could work hand in hand in the future and realize a genuine Pan-Asianism. This certainly did not mean an East Asian order dominated by Japanese militarism, but instead referred to an anti-imperialist political ideal upheld by many Chinese at the time, including Sun Yat-sen.

Stylistically, aside from one line (“Who says that China cannot survive a prolonged fight?”), every line ends with /-ong/, a rhyme category decided by the first line, which ends with the direction of “east” (*dong* 東). This style is commonly known as Boliang Style 柏梁體, its origin traced by to a group poetic composition by the emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (156–87 BCE; r. 141–87 BCE) and his courtiers. The Boliang Style is used more often in heptasyllabic poems; applying it to an extensive *gexing* with uneven line lengths is quite unusual, but it increases the sense of phonetic archaism.

The unusual rhyming scheme is important in determining where line breaks occur in lines like the following:

又不見蘇維埃之國無貪官污吏亦無一人日驚聲色玉帛營第宅

Don't you also see that in the Soviet Land there are no corrupt bureaucrats and no one who daily lusts for sensual pleasures and luxury goods or is preoccupied with building mansions for himself.

The line contains 26 characters in total, and the rhyme is determined by the last character *zhai* 宅, which in classical Chinese has the entering tone (*rusheng* 入聲) and rhymes with “north” (*bei* 北). The meter is comprised of highly fragmentary units of 3–5–1–4–1–3–2–4–3. In general, lines in Chinese classical poetry contain only two or three caesurae, usually between bi-, tri-, or tetrasyllabic units, as is still seen in poems by Huang Zunxian, Liang Qichao, and Wang Lixi. In Lin's poem, however, the classical meter is occasionally crushed to its building blocks and reassembled into something highly unusual. Certainly, it is also possible to break the line in the middle, namely before the *yiwu* 亦無 (“and no”). Adding a break here would make the line into a couplet with the

“running-water” syntactic structure. But since *li* 吏 is in the departing tone and does not rhyme with the rest of the stanza, adding a break here does not seem natural. Moreover, even the addition of a line break would not change the highly unusual metric structure.

Wang and Lin’s poems both use the *gexing* style to make political arguments. The lyrical form increases the emotional appeal of the argument, and the archaism further relates their poems to the long tradition of “recitations on history” (*yongshi* 詠史) poetry, a subgenre that expresses the author’s judgments about illustrious historical figures or political events. On the one hand, the evocation of the classical tradition lends weight to their arguments, amplifying them in the echo chamber of genre history. On the other hand, the strident spirit of innovation makes this verse what I have termed a Classicist Verse—namely, a verse that borrows elements and some genre conventions from the classical tradition, but is otherwise unrestricted by it. A Classicist poem represents the author’s conscious choice to elaborate on the subject matter using this particular classical genre, when other modern genres are available. In contrast to his Classicist verse, Lin Gengbai’s vernacular poems are usually about his romantic sentiments, suggesting a division between classicist and modernist verse that characterized his use of these genres—just as, beginning in the Song dynasty, the *shi* and *ci* genres were used to treat different subject matter (with *shi* being a public genre and *ci* a largely private one).

Both Wang and Lin died soon after their respective poems were written. Therefore, we do not know if, given more time, they would have carried on such stylistic experiments. However, a group of poems by Liu Yazhi, Lin Gengbai’s closest friend, written in the 1940s in Guilin, pushed stylistic innovation even further—to the extent that the New *Gexing* style seemed to be on the verge of disintegrating into modern prose poetry. We do not know if Liu was directly inspired by Lin’s experiment, apart from the fact that at the time he was co-editing Lin’s posthumous anthology⁴⁷ with Lin’s wife, Lin Beili 林北麗 (1916–2006), a project that they completed in 1944. Regardless of whether there was any direct influence, the stylistic affinity is quite notable.

Liu Yazhi’s poetry and his literary theories were intriguing in and of themselves. In contrast to Lin Gengbai’s confidence in his vernacular poetry, Liu only wrote three vernacular poems in his entire life; he admitted that they were no good, as the classical meter had become too natural for him. This presents a rather curious paradox because Liu Yazhi began to adhere to radical literary theories in the early 1920s and supported the complete vernacularization, if not Romanization, of the Chinese language. Yet he simply could not bring himself to write vernacular

⁴⁷ The anthology was called *Libailou yiji* and was finally published in 1996 by Renmin University Press in Beijing.

poems.⁴⁸ The majority of his poems are regulated verse. Even though sometimes his writing appears to be fast and facile, the regulated prosodic structure remains well-maintained, proving that Liu had fully internalized this structure. In the 1940s, however, he wrote a series of long experimental poems that stylistically followed the New *Gexing* experiments of earlier poets and were quite radical. This series starts with a long song written extemporaneously—at least according to the title—on the morning of February 12, 1941.⁴⁹ It appears to have been written in response to Guo Butao's 郭步陶 (1879–1962) lament that vernacular poetry was replacing classical-style verse. In the poem, Liu argues that it is natural for the new to replace the old, and that in the future there would be great vernacular poets on a par with the poets of the past. His argument on behalf of vernacular poetry, however, is expressed entirely in regular heptasyllabic meter. Only toward the end of the poem does the verse become a true *gexing*, employing longer lines and neologism to discuss the future of domestic and international politics. The writing is stridently casual and straightforward, as if the speaker were simply expressing his opinions in an animated conversation.

Similar use of the irregular *gexing* form as a medium to discuss international politics is seen in another poem written by Liu in October 1941 as a response to General Chen Xiaowei's 陳孝威 (1893–1974) poem for President Franklin Roosevelt.⁵⁰ Perhaps because it was written to address an American president, this poem shows a clear awareness of stylistic experiment. Regulated heptasyllabic sections are interlaced with longer lines that are mostly argumentative.

Liu composed a third poem, which I will cite and discuss in greater detail here, in Guilin on May 5, 1944, to celebrate a new Poet's Day in the Gregorian Calendar. Far away from the wartime violence, scenic Guilin had become a haven for many cultural celebrities. Liu Yazhi had come to Guilin in June 1942 after barely escaping from fallen Hong Kong. On May 30, 1941, in honor of the Duanwu 端午 (or Duanyang 端陽) festival, which, according to tradition, commemorates the death of patriotic poet Qu Yuan, these refugee intellectuals celebrated the first Poet's Day (*Shirenjie* 詩人節). The Chairman of the

⁴⁸ The same paradox can be observed in the life and work of Liu's "poetry friend" Mao Zedong. When Mao's classical-style poems were first collected and published in 1957 in the first issue of *Shikan* 詩刊, he asserted that young people should never follow his suit and declared that classical-style poetry was a "dead form." See Yang Zhiyi, "Classical Poetry in Modern Politics: Liu Yazhi's PR Campaign for Mao Zedong," 226.

⁴⁹ Liu Yazhi, "Shi'er ri chenqi cheng changge yishou bucheng Butao Chenlou shuangcan" 十二日晨起成長歌一首補呈步陶菖樓雙粲, in *Mojianshi shiciji*, 927–28.

⁵⁰ Liu Yazhi, "Chen Xiaowei jiangjun yi fu zeng Meilijian Dazongtong Luosifu shi shi suohe manchou changju" 陳孝威將軍以賦贈美利堅大總統羅斯福氏詩索和漫酬長句, in *Mojianshi shiciji*, 933.

ceremony was Yu Youren 于右任 (1879–1964). After arriving in Guilin, Liu Yazi argued that the ancient festival should be celebrated on May 5 of the Gregorian calendar. Since Sun Yat-sen had formally assumed the Presidency on May 5, 1921, and Sun could also write classical-style verse, the day should be made into a New Poet’s Day (*Xin shirenjie* 新詩人節)—so that the holiday commemorated not a poet who died out of loyalty to a tyrant, but one who founded a new nation. Liu wrote a long poem to argue in favor of the change in the festival’s name. The first half is translated below.⁵¹

- | | |
|--|--|
| 五一、五三、五四、五七、
更五九
填胸血淚未忍酌杯酒 | May First, May Third, ⁵² May Fourth, May
Seventh, ⁵³ and again May Ninth ⁵⁴ —
Blood and tears fill my chest, and I can hardly
bear to toast a cup of wine. |
| 獨有詩人佳節五五時日良
況在文化聖城、始安故郡、
江號相思峰獨秀 | The only good day is May Fifth, the Poet’s Day.
How much more so that I’m in [Guilin,] this holy
city of culture, the ancient town of Shi’an,
where the river’s name is Romantic Longing
and the mountain is called Solitary Beauty. |
| 端陽吊屈據亂始於鬻 | The mourning for Qu Yuan at the Duanyang
Festival in this chaotic wartime began with Yu,
Mr. Beard. ⁵⁵ |
| 移宮換羽太平改制吳江柳 | The one who altered the tune and changed the
institution in a peaceful manner was Liu [Yazi]
from Wujiang. ⁵⁶ |
| 武昌創義、大功未竟、
乃有非常總統粵都之正位 | The Wuchang Uprising failed to accomplish
the great feat [of national revolution], hence
we have the Extraordinary President’s
swearing in at Guangzhou. ⁵⁷ |
| 雙十雙五、儼如姊妹成雙偶 | The Double Tenth and the Double Fifth are
like a lovely pair of sisters. |

⁵¹ “Shiri jucanhui jishi,” 是日聚餐會紀事, in *Mojianshi shiciji*, 1193–94.

⁵² Memorial Day for the Ji’nan Incident, which occurred on May 3, 1928, when the Japanese army attacked Ji’nan and killed more than 2000 civilians.

⁵³ Memorial Day for Japan’s ultimatum, the Twenty-One Demands, 1915.

⁵⁴ Memorial Day for Yuan Shikai’s 袁世凱 (1859–1916) government’s acceptance of the Twenty-One Demands, 1915.

⁵⁵ Yu Youren’s style name was Rangong 鬻公, or Mr. Beard.

⁵⁶ He proposed a new Poet’s Day and changed the date from the Han Calendar to May 5 of the Gregorian Calendar. Wujiang (in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province) was Liu’s hometown.

⁵⁷ The Wuchang Uprising on October 10, 1911 resulted only in Yuan Shikai’s “stealing” the victory of the national revolution. Sun Yat-sen assumed the title of the Extraordinary President (*feichang dazongtong* 非常大總統) on May 5, 1921 in Guangzhou, thus beginning the northern expeditions against the Beiyang 北洋 warlords.

中山先生況能詩 歌風真見尼山又	Moreover, Mr. Sun Yat-sen can also write poetry; The style of his songs is like encountering another Confucius.
東方西方革命兩聖人	Two Sages of the Revolution in the East and the West—
印須孫、列同心友	the admirable Sun Yat-sen and Lenin share the same soul.
大師更奉馬克思 病理生理一以貫之、 奚須偏袒分左右	I further venerate Karl Marx, the Grand Master, whose theory is a single thread running through pathology and physiology – why should we show favoritism to the left or the right?
五月五日紀念多 尊孫壽馬、美俱難并、 豈徒憑弔懷沙叟	There are so many anniversaries on May Fifth! We venerate Sun’s presidency and celebrate Marx’s birthday, because their merits are peerless, instead of simply mourning the old man who embraced sand [Qu Yuan, who committed suicide by jumping in the Miluo River].
夏正、周正、楚曆、 秦曆汗漫那能理	Furthermore, the calendars of Xia, Zhou, Chu, and Qin are too confusing for us to determine the actual date [of Qu Yuan’s death].
何以報功崇德近代哲人茂	Why shouldn’t we instead reward the deeds and merit of a modern man of illustrious virtue?

Even though the *gexing* style is known for its strangeness, this poem is still a curiosity. In comparison to Lin Gengbai’s easy style, Liu’s poems are erudite in an eccentric way, as he mixes classical, modern, Chinese, and Western references. The rhyme scheme is the only way to determine the line breaks for lines of extraordinary length and complex syntax. Aside from the first couplet, in which both lines rhyme, the rest of the poem rhymes every two lines. Still, modern punctuation helps us to read this poem. Classical Chinese texts have little need for punctuation, since usually there are particles, parallelism, and meters to help the reader break up the lines. In particular, classical poetry has no use for markers of line breaks, because its rhyme pattern is generally easy to detect and line lengths are regular. Modern punctuation was introduced into poetry only with the emergence of freestyle vernacular poems, first used in the fourth issue of *The New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年), in January 1918. In Liu Yazi’s poem, however, line breaks are needed since the rhyming words /-ou/ are few and far between, while many sentences are long and highly prosaic. Even when, relying on the rhyme scheme, one breaks the poem into lines and couplets, the couplet structure is idiosyncratic. For example, the syntax within each line is so complicated that

some lines (see lines 4, 7, 14, and 16) include a few clauses or separate sentences. Modern punctuation greatly helps the reader's comprehension of these lines. This poem can be categorized as classical-style verse only because of the meter and some of the stylistic conventions. Although less than one-third of the lines are heptasyllabic, some longer lines (such as lines 4, 8, 14, and 16) also contain semantic units that are heptasyllabic. These longer lines also contain tetrasyllabic and pentasyllabic units, mixed with bisyllabic or trisyllabic elements. The prosodic complexity of the poem is unprecedented. Except for one couplet toward the end of the poem (which is not quoted here), there are no parallel couplets in the poem, but parallelism within a line (a technique called *juzhongdui* 句中對) is used extensively. Neologism is used so frequently that it is taken for granted; it is employed without flourish and sometimes even abbreviated to form parallel phrases, as seen in the lines "pathology and physiology" (*bingli shengli* 病理生理) or to "venerate Sun's presidency and celebrate Marx's birthday" (*zun Sun shou Ma* 尊孫壽馬). What began as innovation by Huang Zunxian had become convention for Liu Yazi.

The lyric freedom shown in this poem finds no parallel in previous *gexing* poetry. It is possible that Liu's versatility in classical poetry enabled him to compose poems in classical meters and grammar without deliberately trying to do so. This skill gave him great freedom to incorporate modern elements and break down genre conventions. If we compare this poem to the other compositions discussed above, we can trace a lineage of New *Gexing* poems from Huang Zunxian all the way down to Liu Yazi's generation. However, by the time Liu Yazi was active, New *Gexing* poems had become so radically different from standard *gexing* poems that the generic label had begun to lose its meaning. In my opinion, poems such as Liu Yazi's verse on New Poet's Day may be more aptly termed *classicist* poems, because their invocation of the classical tradition represents a conscious stylistic choice. Whereas neither Huang nor Liang could envision writing poems in freestyle form or in the vernacular, Lin and Liu could. The fact that they continued to embrace classical generic and linguistic features, even while including a great deal of Western and vernacular elements, is significant. It is perhaps not a coincidence Lin and Liu's New *Gexing* poems were argumentative and commented on political matters. The semi-classical form allows them to more easily draw upon historical precedents to comment upon the current situation. For instance, Lin's poem uses the metaphor "burning bean stems to cook beans" (*xiangjian qidou* 相煎其豆) for "fratricidal fight." This phrase refers to a poem credited to Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), which he supposedly composed impromptu when his brother Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) wanted to kill him. Similarly, Liu Yazi's poem uses the phrase "embracing the sand" (*huaisha* 懷沙). Anyone with a basic knowledge of the classical lyric tradition would know immediately that this phrase refers to Qu Yuan's chosen

means of suicide and evokes a sense of patriotic pathos. In this way, the past is used to shed light upon the present, amplifying the expressive space of the poem. Moreover, the semi-classical language also allows for the formulation of pithy, if sometimes odd, phrases (like the aforementioned *zun Sun shou Ma*). This pithiness, typical in classical poetry when a well-known personality is referred to only by one character in his or her name, enables the poet to provide the greatest amount of information within the limited space of the poem.

Curiously, Liu did not continue his poetic experimentation. Aside from a few poems,⁵⁸ such experimentation largely disappeared from Liu's poetry, and he continued to write in predominantly regulated meters. This may have been a conscious decision, since even in Lin's modern *gexing* songs, the most memorable lines are often relatively regular (e.g., "In the best of the times there is no marriage, and in the secondary ones there is free love" 太上無婚姻，其次乃自由).⁵⁹ Both of these lines are written in pentasyllabic ancient-style meter, but the relatively conservative form does not prevent them from being strikingly bold and novel in content. So, it is entirely possible that Liu simply did not like to write structurally radical poems. It is hard to say what he thought of them—he never mentioned them in his critical writing or letters, making his experiment a silent and largely unnoticed one. However, the existence of such radical poems proves that his stylistic reversal was as self-conscious as was his decision to write radical verse. He continued to experiment with various innovations, though in a less strident fashion.

Coda

The relatively free form of the *gexing* style imbued it with the potential to transform into a modern genre with a wide range of functions. For instance, it was used to translate multi-stanza foreign poems. According to Li Sichun's 李思純 preface to his *Xianhe ji* 仙河集, an anthology of translated French poetry first published in the journal *Critical Review* (*Xueheng* 學衡),⁶⁰ there were three styles of translated Western poetry. Ma Junwu's 馬君武 (1881–1940)

⁵⁸ For instance, "Fang Guanyinshan jisih" 訪觀音山紀事 (1944), in *Mojianshi shiciji*, 1200–1202; "Shixi Suye Fangke zhaoyan Lügong badie jiuzi yun" 是夕素野、方可招宴綠宮八疊九字韻 (1944), *ibid.*, 1202–3; and "Shixi Xi'nan diyijie xiju zhanlan dahui juxing bimudanli [...]" 是夕西南第一屆戲劇展覽大會舉行閉幕典禮[...] (1944), *ibid.*, 1215–16.

⁵⁹ "Nankang Liu Zehong nüshi wanshi" 南康劉澤宏女士挽詩 (1946), in *Mojianshi shiciji*, 1416.

⁶⁰ *Critical Review* had ties to the Southern Society. Of the four founders, Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890–1945) and Hu Xiansu 胡先驌 (1894–1968) were both members of the Southern Society, and Wu Mi 吳宓 (1894–1978) and Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵 (1880–1956) were also friends with Southern Society leaders.

translations were in strictly regulated classical meters. Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884–1918), also a Southern Society member, translated poems into the ancient-style with relatively free prosody. Hu Shi's translations, in contrast, were in the freestyle vernacular.⁶¹ Li Sichun regarded Su's translations as the best, because they were sensitive to both the poems' original meaning and the prosodic elegance of the Chinese language.⁶² Most of Su's translations are in the more regular ancient-style, but he also translated some poems into the *gexing* form. Examples include “*Ji Xinailai houjue*” 寄西奈萊侯爵 (*Au Marquis de Seigneley* by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux [1636–1711])⁶³ and “*Bayue zhi ye*” 八月之夜 (*La nuit d'aout* by Alfred de Musset [1810–57]).⁶⁴ The *Critical Review* magazine in general aimed to find indigenous cultural roots for imported modern notions, and Li Sichun's translation of foreign verses into native meters was in line with their agenda of indigenization.

Given the limited scope of this article, it is impossible to exhaustively cover all of the stylistic and thematic variations in *gexing* that emerged in the years after Huang Zunxian's innovations. A selected analysis of texts has nevertheless demonstrated the vitality of the Chinese poetic tradition. We have examined the eventual transformation of the classical *gexing* form, as it acquires new characters, grammar, and vocabulary. During the late Qing and early Republican period, *gexing* seemed to be on the verge of developing into an entirely new genre, which combined elements of regulated poetry, ancient-style poetry, and modern vernacular poetry. The poets' formal innovations were sustained by dissatisfaction with the acceptance of the classical tradition as a *fait accompli*. Whereas Huang and Liang were dissatisfied with the traditional genres available to them as means of expression, Wang, Lin, and Liu showed that New Literature, with its modern vernacular poetry, was also not an adequate vehicle through which to express their thoughts and feelings. Because classical poetry had traditionally been used to record history and voice political opinions, modern poets, in using classical forms, found their voices amplified in the echo chamber of literary history. Complete vernacularization would have stripped their poetry of such argumentative power. They sought the best vehicle to express their thoughts, and the innovative form of *gexing* provided a balance between freedom and regularity.

⁶¹ The distinction between these three styles of translation is not absolute. For instance, all three poets once translated Byron's “The Isles of Greece.” Su Manshu's translation is a pentasyllabic ancient-style poem; Ma Junwu's is a *gexing* poem; and Hu Shi's, interestingly enough, is a *sao* 騷 poem in the style of *Chuci* (another highly archaic genre). Their chosen styles to translate this poem all differ from Li Sichun's characterization.

⁶² See Li Sichun, “*Xianhe ji xu*,” 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 32–35.

The “ancient” thus exists in the dialectical core of the “modern.” The “ancient” is contemporaneous with the “modern,” as the modern requires the ancient in order to move forward in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with time and space. To be truly modern—not just in the sense of being “current,” but also in the stylistic and historical sense of the word—is, in Marshal Berman’s words, to be paradoxical.⁶⁵ The experimental New *Gexing* poems, with their curious mixture of seemingly contradictory elements, thus represent the modern voice of their age.

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⁶⁵ Berman Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 13.

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