

## A Study on Lu Ji's Archaistic Poems

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**Abstract:** "Archaistic poetry" is an important part in traditional Chinese literature. This thesis goes through some representative works, basically written by Lu Ji, who is good at imitating, in order to analyze the characters his archaistic poems have. There are four steps for us to discuss. Firstly, to outline the early development of archaistic poems from *An Anthology of Literary Works*; Secondly, to find out the generation reason of "archaistic poetry"; Thirdly, to analyze some representative works written by Lu Ji; Fourthly, to put Lu Ji's archaistic poems on a right position in the whole literary history.

**Keywords:** archaistic poetry; Lu Ji; *An Anthology of Literary Works*; Tao Yuan-ming

It's very hard and complicated for us now to take a discussion about "archaism", for it's used in many fields, especially in Chinese literature. If we just look back into the history of ancient poetry, we will find that those famous poets often pay attention to how to treat traditional things and how to assimilate them as theirs. Few poets can avoid direct confrontation with tradition, except someone such as Qu Yuan (340-278B.C.), an outstanding and patriotic poet, who wrote *The Sorrow of Separation*, expressed his gloom and finally went to suicide. But in fact, with regard to him, it's just short of sufficient information to do comprehensive investigation on the literary tradition before him. Li Bai (701-762), the greatest romantic poet in the Tang Dynasty, he himself is a master of "archaism", for in his poems, there exist a majority of imitation from the previous poems. But he still has enough talent to make readers forget the shadow of archaism on him. However, The Former Seven Writers and Latter Seven Writers in the Ming Dynasty are not so lucky at all. Although they were praised a lot for a short time at that moment, they still got unprecedented attacks in future. Before the May fourth Movement the word "tradition" as a sacred totem, was defended by all poets, so that the challengers' voices were soon drowned out. But we should not deny that "archaism" is still and always a very popular word in the development of Chinese poetry history. There comes Lu Ji in the Western Jin Dynasty, a master of imitation, whose imitation works are criticized by many scholars as "fake antiques". But are all his archaistic poems "fake antiques"? It's the biggest issue in my discussion. In the following text, I want to firstly introduce the archaistic poetic style in the initial stages of the formation of evolution mainly through *An Anthology of Literary Works*.

*An Anthology of Literary Works*, compiled by Xiao Tong (501-531), crown prince Zhaoming of Liang, is so far the earliest and largest collection of poetry and articles in ancient China. Not only keeping a great deal of information on literary texts, but also the main reference book for future generations to help research the society, literature and thoughts in the Southern Dynasty. Its classification style is always a very concerned issue by anthologists. In this paper I do not want to discuss the classification style of selection, but only pay attention to "miscellaneous archaism", which is one of styles in this book. Then we can explore and discuss the trace of generation about the early archaistic poetry and take a deep discussion towards Lu Ji's archaistic poems.

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If we consult the book *Pre-Qin Han Wei Jin Northern and Southern Dynasties Poetry*, which was compiled by Lu Qin-li, we can see that the history of existing early archaistic poems has been basically described in the *An Anthology of Literary Works*. These authors in general can sketch out the initial development of archaistic poems. The best authors thereafter include Lu Ji, Tao Yuan-ming, Xie Ling-yun, Bao Zhao and Jiang Yan, etc. And archaistic poems written by Lu Ji and Jiang Yan are in large majority. These two persons happened to occupy the beginning and the end of time process in above volumes in *An Anthology of Literary Works*. *Shan Hu Gou Poetics* volume I, written by Zhang Biao-chen in the Song Dynasty, mentioned that "Lu Shi-heng wrote archaism poems, while Jiang Wen-tong wrote miscellaneous poems. Although the splendid words were different at different time, the style was almost similar". Thus, the conclusion can be made that style of miscellaneous archaism originated from Lu Ji, and developed by Jiang Yan.

The prototypes of two volumes are probably two kinds of "ancient poetry". The first category is folk poetry in the Eastern Han, such as *Nineteen Ancient Poems*; the second category is literary poetry, which is usually created by predominantly literators in the city of Ye Xia. Besides, there is Zhang Heng (78-139), the writer of *Four Melancholy Poems*, and including the poets whom Jiang Yan (444-505) imitated. We can see that in accordance with the selection in *An Anthology of Literary Works* that what kinds of poems the poets in the Jin Dynasties imitated basically belonged to the first category, while the poets in the Southern Dynasty imitated both of the two categories, and put emphasis on the second one.

When history's wheels run into the Cao Wei era, which means the society was governed by Family Cao, social transformation made everything complicated, and we even heard different voices towards literature in the wars. The reason is complex, which includes society and philosophy. Usually, literature style in the Jin Dynasties inherits from Cao Wei era, which was praised as "literary consciousness era" by later scholars, its "conscious" performance presented in two major aspects: One is the flourishing scenery in literary criticism, and the other is the enhanced awareness of literary creation.

Confucianism had been the only respected one since the Western Han Dynasty. "Saints" were shaped as an unattainably, more insurmountably ultimate fantasy. The attitudes of literators, who relied on their own morality to prove the value of themselves, tended to be even vaguer. So the behavior idealism of "leaving a name behind" began to be replaced by "to advance in rank and position promotion". And this situation did not maintain so long. The social collapse in the end of the Han Dynasty finally made this seemingly stable mechanism of value unreliable. Most literators had lost their value of ultimate dependence, and they desperately sought for a new value as writers. The Emperor Wei Wen put forward a point of view about the immortal "article" timely, which gave opportunities to many literators to create new indications of life. It's quite reasonable that his theory is better than Cao Zi-jian's theory of "articles are trifle". In that case, the high argument of the Emperor Wei Wen has transcended his brother who's in political frustration, becoming the typical words of "literary consciousness", which are constantly cited by later generations.

I would say that literary words are the supreme achievement in the business of state, a splendor that does not decay. (Cao Pi on *Classics and Proses*)<sup>2</sup>

This sentence pointed out the importance of literature, and the author lifted it up to a political lay. For most of literators, the more important thing is still "not decay". Historical lesson of Confucianism is that "to set one's virtue, to set one's meritorious, to expound one's ideas in writing" can be immortal, in which "to expound one's ideas in writing" also refers to moral meaning. Since articles can make people immortal, then the deep thoughts of article creation inevitably come into being. Literature conceptions under negative or under sub-consciousness often follow natural rules and then they inherit and develop. Only after the active and positive conceptions of literature generate, can it be likely to promote thinking and practicing in deeper arrangement towards literature essence, and at the same time it may have a revolutionary change. It came along with experiments in literature creation, which are finally caused such changes that brought a great impact on later literary scene. The sentences in poems made by poets in that era are tending to be known as art parallelism, ornatation and neatness, which are rhetorical innovation; Creation is tending to simulation. It's in fact the attempt of writing practice. I would say that the process of imitating

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<sup>2</sup>Stephen Owen, translated by Wang Bai-hua and Tao Qing-mei, (2003) *Chinese Literature Theory: English Translation and Criticism*. Shanghai:Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences publisher. p.70.

predecessors' works is the way all poets must pass through. After grasping the old things gradually, they can really innovate at last. So it is difficult for us to imagine the presence of a genius who never imitates anyone else. But the "imitation consciousness" of poets in the Wei and Jin Dynasties was not limited to this. They urgently needed innovation and an entirely new literary situation to fit their views to "immortal" ideals. So they needed to find out the most appropriate scale in the narrow space between "imitation" and "creation". This simulation itself is not a single phenomenon. It must be accompanied by other phenomenon. In other words, before it realizes, it must rely on some necessary factors.

If you look back to the poetry history in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, you may find that there are a large number of inspiration pieces everywhere. First began to practice this ideal is "Three Caos", who are father and sons, and the best is Cao Zhi. In their poems, verse songs such as "Yin", "Xing" are widespread, which can never be equated to other simple and traditional verse poems. Generally Yue Fu poetry is the main motif of a certain type of ancient poetry, while sometimes there are irrelevant ones under this topic, but few are of very different tones from the titles. It's actually limited by the music. Once a Yue Fu poem does not match music, then only the author's ideal of literary history can regulate it in order to avoid mistakes. Accordingly, there came some prototypes of "simulation" in literary history set up by poets thereafter. "Archaism" is the outcome of this "simulation". But please note that despite the previous poem and the simulation have the same title, different contents and themes could be seen under the same title.

As one of the famous poets in Chinese literary history, Lu Ji has the well-known article *Wen Fu* and fifth poems named *Yan Lian Zhu*. The former is considered as a textbook of teaching learners how to write, while the latter is a certain writing style. Although he didn't bring forward a clear slogan on poetry revolution, we still see a large number of literary innovation experiments in his works, especially in his Yue Fu poems. Please note that Lu Ji's position in literature history was not so high for a long time in the twentieth century, and some of his poems were denounced as "fake antiques". But are that Lu Ji's "archaistic poems" actually "fake antiques"? I think it may be worth of further consideration. When a poem simulates another poem, it naturally deviates from life and comes into the surface of formality. So it's difficult for literature researchers who are paying attention to literary realism to identify.

We need to extract Lu Ji's belongs and things that belong to original versions of simulation from Lu Ji's imitation works, hoping it may help our judgment. In this article, I choose one of Lu Ji's archaistic poems as an example, to compare with its original version of simulation and to do close reading, hoping to find out the password of the evolution from ancient poems to "simulation" ones. The title is *A Tower in Northwest*.

Original	Imitation
There is a tower in northwest,	How high the tower is,
In the same level with the cloud;	And it's severe but peaceful;
Gorgeous windows in trellis,	Gorgeous windows beyond the earth,
There are many stairs up to the loft.	Stairs up in the air.
Chord sound is heard upstairs,	The beauty touches music instrument,
With a so sad tone!	With hands gentle;
Who can play this melody?	Fragrant grass gone with the wind,
Is that not Qi Liang's wife.	Sorrow as orchids.
Liquid rhythm up to wind,	Who will see her beautiful face,
And wandering over and over;	Her charm overwhelms the city when
Sighing when playing,	playing;
Fervent but in sadness.	Standing under the sunset,
I do not care about the suffering the singer	Lingering and sighing
has,	I do not complain the long time standing,
But heartrending to see people who know	But only wish the singer happy;
the tone is few;	Wish to be a swan goose,
Wish to be the twin swan geese,	Flying in accompanied with each other.
Spreading the wings into the sky.	

If we just focus on the statements of the facts in the two poems, then we can exactly find the same images, which are tower and the beauty. The two images established the whole world in poems. Two poems in the first sentence simultaneously painted a picture of tower. Ancient poem focused on the phenomenon itself.

The poem provided a perspective which gave a detailed description of the tower's orientation (northwest) and appearance (in the same level with the cloud). The description to the appearance of the tower was entirely implicit, and no judgments were provided.

Lu Ji described the dual property of the tower as "severe but peaceful". Clearly, he appeared on the screen as a guide, making comments for the provided pictures. But the original one did not push the author to the front of platform, and it still kept deep and mysterious consistently. And then "windows" and "stairs" came out. "Gorgeous windows in trellis" implied the window was closed, with so many stairs up to the "loft". This was a completely closed environment, with all access routes were towards inside. Only possible way to escape was blocked by the "trellis". Lu Ji's poem described it like this: "Gorgeous windows beyond the earth, stairs up in the air." which meant a kind of escape. Perhaps the window was still closed, but if walking along the stairs could get to the clouds, regardless steepness, there was no danger for a person to escape. It's opposite to the ancient poem that the tower was considered as a cage.

As we mentioned a person want to escape, or more precisely, to leave, it's naturally that the next description was focused on character. When Lu Ji saw the beautiful woman's hands, he once again interpreted. Lu Ji's beautiful woman of course was free, and she "touched" the musical instrument gently. Although the tone was full of sadness, the aroma of orchids, to a great extent, cleared up the sorrow mood. We cannot see that person in the original poem at all. Only we can guess was the information the original revealed that maybe it's Qi Liang's wife. But in Lu Ji's imitation, he put his sight on the beauty. She was in elegant gesture, appeared in the view of readers as a player, while her secret identity was a dancer, for her purpose was representing her appearance. But in the original poem, the beauty didn't show up as a player, or in other words, she never appeared. What readers paid attention to was merely the music instrument, which was so-called "liquid rhythm up to wind. And wandering over and over." Lu Ji once again appeared in his own poem as a spectator. He was obsessed on that woman's beauty and elegant gesture. "Standing" meant he refused to leave, lingering and sighing, hoping fervently that this woman would be happy. And this description was just the implication because the person in his poem was unable to feel the singer happy or not. The ancient poem here gave up the usual hints, and clearly pointed out that the singer was in blue mood, and she had few friends. It established the spirit of suffering. Nobody forgot that suffering prisoner in cage. The author felt sad for her had no friends, while at the same time he took pity on her. In Lu Ji's imitation he was worried about his unattainable to that beautiful woman, and feared that she would leave away. Finally, the two poems used fly image as the end. It's common in many ancient poems that the author uses this image to express his desire. And we can find out that the desire in Lu Ji's work was not actually intended to be a swan goose. Only he wanted was to ride in the bird's back with the upstairs person together. The tower described by Lu Ji showed the high ideal fleeing away from earth, but the ancient poem described a cage all the time. Therefore, Lu Ji wished that woman could go back to the earth, while the prisoner in original poem expected escaping.

Apparently, the two poems are of the same motif, but to a certain degree, a simple "imitation - imitated" relationship. Formally, Lu Ji's work is full of characteristics. There are several elements as follows: First, the highlights of the main body; second, be filled with concern about individual, while the ancient poem is often accomplished through hints and statements; third, the author thinks much of the dialog model between poet and images; fourth, digestion to the sentimental atmosphere which is diffused in the ancient poem. The original poem just provides a certain statement of facts, but Lu Ji's imitation creates a new situation of poetics, which is related to the background of "literary self-consciousness". Different descriptions will reflect the authors' perspectives in a different way. Only in common between the original and imitated work is the original motif. In fact, in Lu Ji's time, the new concept of poetic creation had been gradually showed up, and the above comparison reveals some rules which are basically the main trends in the evolution of poetry at that time.

Two volumes of "miscellaneous archaism" in *An Anthology of Literary Works* include the work of Tao Yuan-ming and Yuan Hong's in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. These works cannot be compared with Lu Ji's in quantity. We will find out that in *Pre-Qin Han Wei Jin Southern and Northern Dynasties Poetry*, the poems of this pattern are also very few. This simulation practice for poets in the early Western Jin Dynasty reached peak, while at the same time the society tended to be temporary stable, which would inevitably lead to changes of values.

The most famous work of literary criticism in the Western Jin Dynasty is called *Wen Fu*, also written by Lu Ji. The first paragraph of *Wen Fu* is as follows:

He stands in the very center, observes in the darkness,  
Nourishes feeling and intent in the ancient canons.  
He moves along with the four season and sighs at their passing on,  
Peers on all the things of the world, broods on their profusion,  
Grieves for the falling leaves in strong autumn,  
Rejoices in the pliant branches in sweet spring;  
His mind shivers, taking the frost to heart;  
His intent is remote, looking down on the clouds.  
He sings of the blazing splendor of moral power inherited by this age,  
Chants of the pure fragrance (or 'reputation') of predecessors,  
Roams in the groves and treasure houses of literary works,  
Admires the perfect balance of their intricate and lovely craft.  
With strong feeling he puts aside the book and takes his writing brush,  
To make it manifest in literature.<sup>3</sup>

The author himself stated the main purpose of "To make it manifest in literature" in general. If we take it with the previous work in the former era for comparison, we will be surprised to find out a significant difference that there is a concern about the world, which is so-called space dimension. While the discussion towards literature in the Emperor Wei Wen's articles *Classics and Proses, a letter to Wu Zhi* and letters from Cao Zhi and Yang Xiu only relate to the time span. The root of this change depends on the relationship between the individual and society. As mentioned formerly, literators in the Three Kingdoms era concerned about the timeline, for the individual cannot be able to seek for their own existence value in society, only put into history. Society was stable in the Western Jin Dynasty, so literators once again looked forward to the new government, while the established literary value was impossible to be pulled down over again. So the change gradually came out. But the problem is that the stability of government in the Western Jin Dynasty didn't maintain a long time. Just a few decades later, the country was once again split.

Archaistic poem in the Eastern Jin Dynasty in *An Anthology of Literary Works* is only one, which was written by Tao Yuan-ming (365-427). But the collection of his works has eight archaistic poems. In this paper, we just represent the one in *An Anthology of Literary Works*.

No clouds at sunset,  
There is a fan in the spring wind;  
A beautiful woman in the night,  
Sleeping and singing when day dawns.  
She sighs after singing,  
In a moving mood;  
A bright moon is in the clouds,  
Flowers in full blossom.  
When a short happy time passes away,  
How is going after that?

The change is obvious that we cannot even be able to find out the imitated poem from the ancient poems. Its blueprint seems intangible. In the above verses, the readers can approximately understand the rough meaning, while it is completely different from Lu Ji's works. In other words, archaistic poems had begun to transform concrete simulation of ancient poems to simulation of "ancient meaning" in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. "Fan" and "the beautiful woman" have the shadows of "fan song", which is written by Ban Jie-yu, a concubine but a poet in the Han Dynasty. And the flowers remind us a famous Yue Fu poem *Dong Jiao-rao*, which is written by Song Zi-hou. We notice that revolutionary changes of simulation here have taken place dramatically.

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<sup>3</sup>Stephen Owen, translated by Wang Bai-hua and Tao Qing-mei, (2003), *Chinese Literature Theory: English Translation and Criticism* Shanghai:Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences publisher, pp. 91-96.

Lu Ji's archaistic poems are re-creation works which are based on the same motif of ancient poems. But the "motif" is transformed into the inheritance of "image" here. We would say that such changes in literature root on the society thought. Changes in a very small number of archaistic poems in the Eastern Jin Dynasty can mainly reflect the development of "distinction between word and meaning" in thoughts. The government was changed into the minority regime, which was an unprecedented political situation in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The social unrest had not completely destroyed people's values, but it was unable to establish a strong support for the value system, so literators were forced to search for a re-orientation of literary value judgments. Meanwhile, Buddhism and Daoism reached their peaks separately at this time, and it inevitably exerted a big influence on literature. Metaphysic poetry and poetry about Immortals there suddenly came out. And we now know it's not by accident. Wang Xi-zhi(303-361)'s famous work *Orchid Pavilion Preface* fully demonstrated the life of values in this era. Wang expressed his attitude toward the world that death and birth meant nothing at all. So according to many works at that time, "immortal" ideal was entirely diluted. Wang wished future generations would have the same feelings about this article. So in this way, the metaphysical poetry which was focused on the individual thoughts and poetry about immortals which emphasized on personal imagination naturally became the mainstream in literature.

The poets in the Eastern Jin Dynasty cannot stop progressing, but they are obsessed by their predecessors, which is quite different from the Western literature. It is rare in literary history that as a new poetic form would have an important impact on future generations, I mean, archaistic works such as Lu Ji's. But it suffered such a downturn after the rise over a hundred years.

The above is my simple analyzing about archaistic poems in the Jin Dynasties. We see there are two different types: one is a new creation established by Lu Ji in the Western Jin Dynasty; another is image imitation, which is reflected in Tao Yuan-ming's poem. And the second one is soon replaced by the Metaphysic poetry and poetry about Immortals, which governed the whole poetic circles in the Eastern Jin Dynasty for a long time. So we can say that these two types opened the situation of the archaistic poetry for future generations, and had a significant impact on the development of Chinese poetry. We should admit that Lu Ji has a big courage to do those things. He dares to challenge the excellence of predecessors and attempts to express his new feelings towards original materials. Other archaistic poems he wrote such as *Ri Chu Dong Nan Yu Xing*, which is the first time to imitate an ancient poem named *Mo Shang Sang*, and also mixed with Cao Zhi's *Mei Nv Pian*, finally leads it into a combination of narration and romanticism. It's not merely a copy, which is tried to make itself as genuine, from content to technique. But Lu Ji changed its manner. There is no regulation for him to imitate. Only he can do is taking the place of the person in poem and make this person act as he wishes, which is based on his own knowledge and insight. Such style is so-called first-person narrator, and it's usually used by Lu Ji in the woman angle. Besides *Imitaing A Tower in Northwest*, there are *A poem for Lu Si-yuan's wife*, and *A poem for Mrs. Zhou's present*. Both of them are expressed in verse, but they seem to be letters wrote by Lu Ji. It's typically new wine in old bottles.

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