

Research Article

Poetic Archaism and Lyric Tradition in Ming Theories of Poetry: Readings on Zhou Xu, Xu Zhenqing and T'ang Shunzhi

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Abstract

Archaism stands as a prevailing literary ideology in the Ming Dynasty, famously proposed by the Former Seven Masters and later championed by the Latter Seven Masters. This movement established a formidable critical discourse, shaping much of the era's literary ecology. Conventionally, this archaist paradigm is positioned in stark opposition to the principles of the Gong-an School, which argued forcefully for the freedom of direct, authentic self-emotional expression in writing. This critical narrative has long posited a seemingly irreconcilable binary opposition between formal imitation and genuine lyricism. This article, however, challenges the rigidity of this established dualism. By examining several rarely scrutinized poetic theories from the Early, Middle, and Late Ming, this study uncovers nuanced perspectives beneath the mainstream paradigm that serve to deconstruct this binary. Through focused analyses of Zhou Xu's *Shi Xue Ti Hang*, Xu Zhenqing's *Tan Yi Lu*, and the theoretical writings of T'ang Shunzhi, this paper seeks to prove that poetic archaism in the Ming context was not fundamentally opposed to the core tenets of the lyric tradition. Instead, it demonstrates that archaism often operated within a profound intertextuality with lyricism, frequently functioning as a specific methodological or pedagogical pathway intended to recover and reinvigorate authentic poetic expression.

Keywords

Archaism, Lyric Tradition, *Shi Xue Ti Hang*, *Tan Yi Lu*, T'ang Shunzhi

1. Introduction

Archaism is one of the keywords of Ming Poetry. In general, the assertion of "prose (*wen*) must be like that of the Ch'in (221-207 B. C.) or the Han (206 B. C-A. D. 220), and poetry (*shih*) must be like that of the High T'ang" proposed by Former Seven Masters and advocated by Latter Seven Master is regarded as the representative of this ideological trend of poetic archaism [1]. The opposition, typified by Gong-an School or Jingling School, are basically

anti-archaist. Albeit the detailed opinions of archaists and anti-archaists have complicated intertextuality on diverse aspects, poetic archaism remains the boundary monument of each circle, resulting in a counterposed impression that anti-archaists like Yuan Hongdao, Gui Youguang and Zhong Xing, who are expressionists themselves in the meantime, are much more emotional than those archaistic prigs. In other words, anti-archaism is closer to the lyric tradition in

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Chinese poetry. However, the nexus between poetic archaism and lyric tradition in Ming poetry theories is a more convoluted issue than it appears to be. Materials have indicated that archaism has apparent hints long before the official announcement of Former Seven Masters, and archaism does not seem to be in contrast to lyric tradition. This article discusses the issue through the ideology of three poetic theorists, Zhou Xu (AD.1392 – AD.1452), Xu Zhenqing (AD.1479 – AD.1511) and T'ang Shunzhi (AD.1507–AD.1560), in a chronological way to elaborate the innermost relevance between poetic archaism and lyric tradition, trying to substantiate that archaism in Ming poetry is part of the united-field of lyric tradition.

International sinologists have conducted study on famed literati like T'ang Shunzhi and Former/Latter Seven Masters¹, yet little research has been carried out on less famous Zhou Xu and Xu Zhenqing. Thanks to contribution made by scholars like Chen Guanghong and Hou Rongchuan, new and rare text materials of Ming's poetry theories have been reorganized and published in recent years, enabling further research that dives deeper into microscopic level. On the premise of newly found materials, this article values itself by making probably the first introduction of Zhou Xu's monograph and the first text-analysis of Xu Zhenqing's poetic assertion into the vision field of international sinology as a meaningful supplement for current narratives of Ming Study. Most of existing research mainly focus on archaism discourse, which indeed illustrates the undertone of prevailing inclination of Ming's poetry theory. However, discussion of its relationship with lyric tradition is an infrequent attempt especially in terms of international sinology. Using poetic theory in Ming to enrich the paradigm of lyric tradition proposed by Shih-Hsiang Chen is a process to complete academic jigsaw with creators' text and experience. The article gives an unprecedented introduction of Zhou Xu into international sinology, making comparison with Xu Zhenqing and T'ang Shunzhi to further unravel the snarl of archaism and lyric tradition under an opposed and united tangle. Much as the analysis might not be inspiring and accurate enough, selecting three theorists in different stages of Ming Dynasty as example is an interesting cut-in path for the reading of Chinese ancient literary theory.

2. Archaism as an Educational Methodology for Lyric Tradition: *Shi Xue Ti Hang* as an Example

Ladder and Compass of Poetry (Shi Xue Ti Hang) is a poetic monograph authored by Zhou Xu². As a guidebook aiming to “elaborate the dharma and origin of poetry”, [1] *Ladder and Compass of Poetry* exhibits an riveting image of historical view as well as methodology of poetry in Early Ming dynasty.

Zhou Xu, with courtesy name as “Gong Xu”, is a

scholar-officialdom in Early Ming from Emperor Hongwu to Jingtai. Born in Jiangxi in 1392, Zhou Xu was promoted as official historiographer in Hanlin Nanking in 1446. Two years later, he completed the compilation of poetic theories and writing material inherited from his forebears, giving birth to the book of “*Shi Xue Ti Hang*”. Along with stories beneath the scene, Zhou explicates his motivation to write such a book in the preface: “One needs ladder to seek jade buried in the mountains, and compass to find pearl hid in the sea”, from where he titles his monograph. He also asserts that his initial purpose is to provide learners a poetic guidebook that they can conform to (p.1468). The whole book was orchestrated in eight chapters, including “Poetry Introduction”, “Poetic Meter”, “Titling”, “Writing Strategy One (Pandect of poetry style)”, “Writing Strategy Two (Five-character verse)”, “Writing Strategy Three (T'ang Shi Rhythm)”, “Poetry Gradation” and “General Conclusion”. The catalogue implies an intermediate state of Zhou's poetic blueprint where he tries to make a commentary on the history of poetry, and then give a guideline for green poets on the base of historical commentary and quintessence poetries, making the book not only theoretical but also functional and practical. Thus, *Shi Xue Ti Hang* is more than a personal Shihua. It aims to play a role in poetry-writing education on the substratum of connoisseurship. Considering Zhou's political status in government, the poetic stand and educational strategy of *Shi Xue Ti Hang* may also allude the official orthodoxy in Early Ming.

Neither Zhou nor his book is well-known in the literature history. Not many researchers have paid attention to this poetic monograph conducted long before Former Seven Masters. Nevertheless, *Shi Xue Ti Hang* is not a negligible text if we regard it as a cut-in path to observe the relationship of lyric tradition and archaism in Early Ming era. A close reading to this special “textbook” might open a new gate through which we can find some tortuous phenomena that make the literature scenery in Ming more clearly illustrated. For instance, dovetailing with the literary climate in Early Ming, *Shi Xue Ti Hang* holds an archaism opinion that treasures poetry in Han T'ang and downplays poetry in Song Dynasty. However, the archaism contains different meanings in terms of “historical view” and “writing methodology”, with the former involves more political propaganda and the latter concerns, on the contrary, emotional articulation. The odd mixture has an inner literary connection with the lasting argument between archaists like Former/Latter Seven Masters and anti-archaists like Gong-an/Jing-ling School. Under a more extensive discourse, taking the assertions of ensuing Gong-an/Jing-ling School and Former/Latter Seven Masters into consideration, *Shi Xue Ti Hang* might trigger a deeper discussion on the way how lyric tradition interacts with archaism. The possible conclusion may stand in contrast to the dichotomy of archaism and expressionism, encompassing the seemingly opposing ideas under the united field of lyric tradition.

It is a widely accepted common sense that the archaist movement centered around Former/Latter Seven Masters and the ensuing anti-archaism ideology proposed by T'ang-Song School, Gong-an School and Jingling School have exerted manifold influences on the Ming Literature since the middle of dynasty. But the narratives in *Shi Xue Ti Hang* give an indirect evidence that archaist movement is not the true commencement of archaism, which, at least as an aesthetic inclination, has appeared in Zhou's poetic assertion.

In "Poetry Introduction", Zhou expresses an unhide glorification to Han Shi, indicating that "it is a pity to see few Han verses remain, with only several Yue-fu poems, unsurpassable achievements for following poets, are preserved nowadays" (p.1469). He commented poets after Wei-Jin, especially those who later than Shen Yue, Xu Ling and Yu Xin as "lacking of spirit and courage" (p.1469), whose only advantage is the "inheritance of ancient poetry law" (p.1469). When talking about T'ang Shi, Zhou divides the holistic poetry of T'ang Dynasty into four stages: Early T'ang, High T'ang, Mid T'ang and Late T'ang. He thinks highly of High T'ang poetry, and criticizes poems within Mid and Late T'ang as sere and torpid (p.1470). It is also not surprising to see Zhou takes a pejorative attitude towards Song Shi, as many peer critics, influenced by Yan Yu's *Canglang Shihua*, do, yet we can still find some interesting details from his criticism to poetry of Song Dynasty. Zhou gives examples of Ouyang Xiu, Huang Tingjian and Su Shi. He describes Ouyang Xiu as a reformer who "wished to fix the hermetic language" of Late T'ang Poetry. Ouyang Xiu writes poems with "the core of spirit and touch" and "crystal-clear language"; Huang Tingjian imitates Du Fu; Su Shi creates poems "out of pure personal thinking without following Han and T'ang styles". Zhou does not impugn Ouyang and Huang's poetic styles directly. Instead, he gainsays their poetry from the perspective of "learner", like the learners of Ouyang "more often than not lose themselves by being over artless and earthy" (p.1470), and learners of Huang "either being magniloquent or indecent" (p.1470). In other words, albeit some luminaries in Song do have shining points in their poetry creation, their language or style does not befit greenhorns. The angle of educational function is a unique perspective in that it presents the complexity of the archaism assertion in *Shi Xue Ti Hang*. Archaism can be divided into two dimensions according to Zhou's subtext: one is archaism in poetic history, the other one is archaism in poetic creation. Poetic historical archaism is closer to political ideas. Simulation of poetry in Han and T'ang implies more than a reminiscence of nation's heyday. By imitating the poetry style of Han and High T'ang, poets envisage a redivivus prosperity of the old days. If intelligentsia can follow the mainstream poetry written in Han and High T'ang, the fate of empire will be as prosperous as these dynasties in full flourish. This can be proved by Zhou's dictum that "it is truth the poetry has close connection with national destiny" (p.1470). He further

proposes that "the wax and wane of poetry follows the rise and fall of country", "past glories only recur when we trace back to T'ang and keep pace with Han". Therefore, archaism in terms of poetic history involves political imagination shared by intelligentsia and utilized by governing class. On the other hand, archaism means much more different in poetry writing methodology. Take a view on the chapter of "Poetic Meter", where Zhou itemizes each meter and genre of poetry from Xian Qin to T'ang like Qin Cao, Yue Fu, Gu Shi, Jue Ju, Lv Shi and so on. When talking about varying styles of poetry, Zhou classifies them as Ge, Xing, Yao, Yong, Ci, Qu, Yin, Chang, Pian and Yin, giving respective descriptions on each item: Ge→passional articulation, Xing→written meticulously, Yao→vulgar and demotic, Yong→nature spontaneity, Ci→thinking expression, Qu→emotional elaboration, Yin→sad as cricket and cicada, Chang→outspoken sentiment, Pian→ornate diction expatiation and Yin→full narratives (p.1476). The stylistics illustration conducted by Zhou, though not impeccable, exhibits his understanding towards different stylistic features. Worth mentioning, he keeps focusing on the connection between content and style, as if the style is not determined or featured by "form" but "content", especially emotion-pertinent elements. He defines styles like Ge, Yong, Qu, Yin with emotional expression, which, under a bigger context, jibes with the lyric tradition of Chinese poetry. As an educational guideline for neophyte poet, *Shi Xue Ti Hang* avoids the intricate stylistics doctrine and makes an easier explanation on various styles with terms like Qing (Emotion), Xing Qing (Nature) and Bei (Sorrow). The strategy is perspicacious as it gives learner a perceptual concept of what poem should be like. To sum up, in the aspect of poetry writing education, Zhou applies the category of lyric tradition, concentrating on the emotion, feeling, passion and inner nature. Archaism, within the educational discourse, has less connectivity with politics or grand narratives. Concerning the poetry-writing methodology, archaism here means an efficient shortcut through which tyros can easily learn from former poets who are emotionally expressive, a reconnection with the lyric tradition that prevails especially in Han and T'ang poetry. This conclusion can be evidenced by ensuing chapters of "Writing Strategy". In "Writing Strategy One (Pandect of poetry style)", Zhou makes a historical review on the development of poetry, listing quintessence poets and poems in the literature history. In his evaluation on Yuan Zhen, Zhang Ji and Wang Jian, Zhou gives comment of "rhetorically modest and emotionally exquisite" (p.1480). On poems of Wang Wei, he appraises *Farewell in Mountain* as "so many sentiments within" (p. 1482-1483), followed by an opinion that "Seven-Character Jue Ju fully depends on spirit and passion" (p. 1482-1483) with examples of Du Mu, Liu Yuxi and Wu Yuanheng. As for writing techniques of Lv Shi, Zhou also suggests to "open one's mindset first to catch poetic flavor and then elaborate it with steady, orchestrated rhetoric in order" (p.1482). Then in

Writing Strategy Two (Five-character verse), Zhou emphasizes the importance of emotion in both aesthetic and methodology under the archaistic assertion, coinciding with the everlasting lyric tradition of Chinese poetry. From Zhou's perspective, poetry in Han-Wei is the infallible precept of five-character-verse (p.1483) as "it has accommodating language and profound philosophy, out of pure nature, without any artifice, like a mild breeze" (p.1483). He also analyzes some samples from The Book of Songs. For instance, he believes that the beauty of *Cooing And Wooing* lies in the "interwinding and interacting purest sadness and happiness, revealing poet's visceral nature" (p.1483). Also, from Writing Strategy Three (T'ang Shi Rhythm), Zhou makes an eager recommendation for Liu Changqing as the best shortcut to emulate, saying that Liu's poems are "full of delightful interest, inspiring rumination, naturalistic language and harmonious thinking" (p.1487). In *Shi Xue Ti Hang*, a guidebook with educational function, Zhou pays a plethora of concerns on the structure, rhythm, form and even title, yet it is untrue to say he is a Shklovsky-esque formalist. As a matter of fact, from his aesthetic taste presenting in writing guidance, Zhou shows an inclination of "emotion-ontology". It is obvious that Zhou does not pursue a stark archaism in poetry creation. The poems and poets that he regards as the target of archaism are all under a clear standard where personal emotion matters. Moreover, Zhou seems to prefer poetic expressionism that is natural and spontaneous. From his disagreement with Su Shi and some other poets of Song Dynasty, it can be inferred that Zhou dislikes the elusive, over-philosophical poetry that encumbers a natural, less-artificial emotion articulation, warning that learners should "avoid abstruse words in emotional expression" (p.1494). He more acclaims emotion-oriented and politics-oriented poetry than philosophy-orient poetry. That makes up the core of Zhou's archaism regarding poetic education.

It is significant to nail down the different meaning of archaism ideology on different paths of poetic history and poetic writing in the reading of *Shi Xue Ti Hang*. On a microscopic viewpoint, archaism has separated purposes in the two direction, with historical archaism chasing a political discourse or governmental function and methodological archaism pursuing personal expression and self-realization³ of poets, which, inevitably, contradicts grand narratives to some extent [2]. However, supposed we take a more macroscopic attitude to study the text, we might find that poetic archaism is in fact not the demarcation line of political pursuit and emotional expression. For the literature circle in Early Ming, poetry in Han and T'ang represents the top apotheosis they can ever imagine, in both dimensions of politics narratives and emotion/language aesthetics. Looking back upon the poetry achievement in Han and T'ang, archaism in Early Ming is actually seeking a comprehensive solution for the reestablishment of literature, in which the lyric tradition is included. This deduction can be inferred

from the "General Conclusion" of *Shi Xue Ti Hang*. Zhou says:

"Poetry is to sing what is in the heart. Best poems can move the universe and touch the gods." [3]

"To sing what is in the heart" is a famous dictum originating from *Canglang Shihua*. Obviously, Zhou has been influenced by Yan Yu. He shows an intentional acceptance of Yan's poetic opinion that poetry is the lyric expression of one's nature and emotion. Then he instructs that "it is uneasy to write poems, so the law of poem creation is vital", "learners must make firm determination to unceasingly follow the step of ancient poets" (p.1484). This is an apparent evidence Zhou takes archaism as a path to achieve the rehabilitation of lyric tradition. The real purpose is lyric tradition rather than archaism, which is the method actually.

Much as Zhou is not an influencer in history literature, his ideology shown in *Shi Xue Ti Hang* proved to be a valuable by offering us a wider ken about the understanding of poetic archaism and lyric tradition in Ming Literature.

3. Archaism as an Access to Lyric Tradition: Emotion Ontology of *Tan Yi Lu*

Notes on Art Talks (Tan Yi Lu), authored by Xu Zhenqing, is another key text deserving high attention⁴. Within this 3,000-word-long review article, Xu sets forth his standpoint on three main dimensions of poetry: function, history and origin. Respectively, the function of ancient poetry is to "explore nature, move gods, propagate social morality, and reflect popular will" [4]; the history of poetry is a process of separation from music and a regression from ancient poems, where, on Xu's position, poetry of Xianqin, Han and Wei represent the utmost achievement (though according to Xu, poetry of Han is better than that of Wei); the origin of poetry is emotion. Compared with *Shi Xue Ti Hang*, *Tan Yi Lu* is more widely spread among in Ming and Qing Dynasty, and as a contemporary theoretical article with Former Seven Masters, it presents bountiful textual richness with its unique assertion in poetic history and emotion-orient aesthetics.

Tan Yi Lu expresses a different archaism to ancient poetry. In his poetic historical view, Xu argues that the provenance of poetry is music (p.2333). The correspondence with music can be the yardstick of poetry's quality. So as far as Xu is concerned, poems from *The Book of Songs* and Western Han Dynasty represent the highest literary achievement⁵ (p.2333). As time goes on to the Eastern Han Dynasty, the uprising of five-character-verse wanes the musicality of poetry, yet its rhythm, rhetoric and emotion elements still befit the musical beauty of Yue-fu in Western Han, which makes five-character-verse an equally beautiful jade with slight flaws (p.2333). Poetry writing in Wei goes farther from musical tradition, but thanks to the antique and unadorned

language, as well as the contribution made by talents like Cao Zhi, Wang Can, it is still commendable in many senses.

Surprising enough, Xu uses very harsh word to criticize Lu Ji's poetry theory. In Lu's opinion from *Wen Fu*, he believes that "The lyrics (Shih), born of pure emotion, is gossamer fibre woven into the finest fabric" [5]. Xu is strongly against Lu's saying by comparing it to "dregs of poetry in Wei". (p.2335) He then uses the terms of literary "grace" (Wen) and "modesty" (Zhi), borrowed from *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius* [6], to expound his point of view: "(Literary) modesty leads grace, so the ancient

poems are elegant; grace preponderates modesty, resulting in the onset of poetry decadence since Jin". Oddly enough, similar to Lu's lyric-emotion assertion, Xu also places emotion on the ontology of poetry. Compared with *Shi Xue Ti Hang*, *Tan Yi Lu* gives much longer length to discuss the paramount significance of emotion, confirming the decisive influence of emotion in poetry creation. Epitomized by "emotion can move things, so poetry can touch people" (p.2335), Xu's analysis on different poetry style like Ge, Xing and Yin has a strong intertextuality with that in *Shi Xue Ti Hang*. Let's make a frank comparison:

Table 1. Comparison between *Shi Xue Ti Hang* and *Tan Yi Lu* in terms of Style.

Styles	Zhou Xu <i>Shi Xue Ti Hang</i>	Xu Zhenqing <i>Tan Yi Lu</i>
Ge	emote passion	voice in muddle and disorder
Xing	written meticulously	word is flexible and non-stagnated
Yin	sad as cricket and cicada	groan with sorrow
Qu	emotional elaboration	periphrase innermost feelings
Yin	full narratives	extract fantasy
Shih		express emotion

As can be seen, Xu also hammers hone the relation between emotion expression and poetry style. Moreover, he directly claims that "emotion is the pith of heart" (p.2334):

"Emotion is elusive and only ignited by feelings. Once it is triggered in heart, it must be expressed in voice".

"Emotion brings breath, which brings voice, which brings lyrics, which brings rhyme. This is the origin of poetry" (p.2334).

Hence, Xu goes further than Zhou by ascertaining that poetic style is the dependent variable of emotion. Emotion determines the language paradigm and writing form of poetry, indicating that an explicit "emotion-ontology" is established.

Archaism exhibited in *Tan Yi Lu* and *Shi Xue Ti Hang* are different. Firstly, the target sample Zhou and Xu want to emulate is not quite similar. Zhou, basically affected by poetic aesthetic trend from Yuan Dynasty and *Canglang Shihua*, underscores archaism to Han and T'ang while disdaining Song poetry. Xu, however, underplays almost all poetry history since Jin, only extoling poems created in Xianqin and critically praising poems created in Han & Wei. Xu's idea is holistically similar to Liu Xie's comment on Wei poetry in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, whereas his negative view to poetry since Jin is perhaps an osmosis of the critique tendency on Southern Dynasties Literature since Mid-T'ang. Xu's aggressive criticism has long been controversial, supported by Yuan Zhi (A. D.1502 – A. D.1547) and opposed by Wang Shizhen (A.D.1526 –

A.D.1590). Secondly, Zhou presents a totally emphatic attitude towards archaism, encouraging learners to follow the law of ancient poems established by gurus from previous dynasties. To Zhou's point of view, archaism is a methodological paradigm. In Xu's letter communication with friends, we can find that he also agrees with archaism: "I like vocal poems since childhood and have dabbled in the six arts. But I find poems written nowadays are all deviant.....Current people like the inferior than the ancient, making them hard to talk with" [7]. But within *Tan Yi Lu*, Xu's voice for archaism is not as eager as that of Zhou in *Shi Xue Ti Hang*. Although Xu does appreciate ancient poems like many contemporary critics and poets, his pessimistic attitude to the poetic development since Jin might be an impediment to his enthusiastic advocacy of archaism, at least in terms of writing methodology. In his eyes, Han poetry, as the inheritor of Xianqin poetry, performs well; Wei poetry, as the inheritor of Han poetry, is relatively less satisfying; Jin poetry, as inheritor of Wei poetry, goes worse. Sequential archaism does not stop the atrophy of poetry. Thus, Xu pans poetry after Wei without making clear assertion to archaism, resulting in a situation where, as pointed out by Wang Shizhen, "learners have no access to learning" [8]. In comparison, Xu's archaism is less educational or methodological than Zhou's theory. We might even say Xu is applying a much more radical archaism closed to literary fundamentalism. Such a difference, as a

specific example, is important for us to figure out the complex connotation deep inside the archaism appearing in Ming Literature. Archaists in Ming Dynasty are not tightly united under the flag of archaism. They share lots of things in common, but there are nuances, differences and even conflicts in their archaistic method, purpose and pursuit.

As for lyric tradition, *Tan Yi Lu* reveals a higher similarity with *Shi Xue Ti Hang* in their shared opinion on language and emotion. As is illustrated above, Zhou opposites the over-philosophical poetry in Song Dynasty. In the meantime, Xu is also against Lu Ji's lyric theory. However, considering his emotion-ontology, what Xu really disagrees with is perhaps the "finest fabric" rather than "pure emotion". Zhou believes abstract philosophy will retard the expression of emotion, while Xu holds akin opinion that gorgeous, meretricious language hampers natural articulation of emotion. They both insist that elements besides emotion should not preponderate emotion itself. Accordingly, they appreciate the form and language in poetry before Wei & Jin. Lyric tradition makes up the substratum of Zhou's and Xu's poetic theory. In spite of the fact that they have disparate ideas in terms of archaism, they both utilize archaism to build up a theoretical pathway leading to the achievement of emotion ontology and inherence of lyric tradition. Admittedly, Zhou and Xu adapt divergent argument strategy in respective monograph, with Zhou focusing more on archaism and Xu highlighting emotional issues. But we shall still realize that archaism discourse in Early-Middle Ming is by no means the contradiction of lyric tradition, and even exceeds the relationship of "unity of opposites". If we view archaism in Ming as a toolkit to refurbish and enrich the lyric tradition, like what Chen Zi'ang has done in his poetic proposal of "spirit and bone of Han & Wei" as well as Xingji [9], we can easily find that Ming's "literary archaism" is more or less another "theoretical archaism" akin to the assertion conducted by previous poets, which will help us dispel the "noise" of archaism and go beyond simple dualism, reaching directly to lyric tradition, the crux of matter.

4. T'ang Shunzhi's "Inherent Quality" and Lyric Tradition

As a literatus who has been fully studied by researchers, T'ang Shunzhi is a cornucopia of literary academic value. Although T'ang is prestigious largely owing to his essays, it is reasonable to select him as a meaningful example to discuss poetry issues of Ming Dynasty. As Richard John Lynn puts it:

"T'ang Hsien-tsu was a prolific poet in the *shih* form, but he left almost no poetry criticism. However, both he and Hsu Wei seem to have largely thought of all literary art as one and did not, as far as their assumptions were concerned, greatly distinguish among verse (*shih*), lyrics (*tz'u*), drama (*ch'u*), and prose (*wen*). This flexible, almost indifferent, attitude to

generic form, of course, set them and the Kung-an school at complete odds with the archaists for whom form always played a key role in almost any theoretical discussion. Therefore, it is likely that whatever T'ang says about the function and nature of any literary form will apply as well to poetry." [10]

This article does not aim to make a comprehensive analysis on his ideology, but concentrate on his theory of "Inherent Quality"(Ben-Se) and its relationship to archaism and lyric tradition to discuss T'ang's literary meaning in Ming poetry.

Ben-Se is an important term within T'ang's category. This term initiates from his essay of *Answer to Mao Kun* [11], where he makes a comparison between two hypothetical persons, one is a pure-mind, less-honed writer who expresses direct emotional articulation, the other one is an erudite bookworm who writes banal, trite essays with strict literal regulation⁶. From this comparison, T'ang deduces Ben-Se of literature, say, the natural and original quality of one's innermost emotion.

Doubtlessly, T'ang is a proponent of lyric tradition, but in the meantime, a convert in literature faith for twice. In his early age, T'ang follows Former Seven Masters, then changes his favor into essay in T'ang & Song, under the influence of Wang Shenzhong. Sinologists have made extensive analysis on this theoretical transformation, like Chih-ping Chou explains this changeover from the perspective of poetic education:

"T'ang Shun-chih believed that the works of the Ch'in and Han dynasties were too far removed from the present for people to follow as models, and owing to the subtlety of the fa (rules) contained in these work, one could never truly recapture the spirit of the Ch'in and the Han. The secrets of the methods of composition or fa, as T'ang Shun-chih indicated, were more T'angible in the T'ang and Sung dynasty works, and he therefore advocated studying the works to those of the T'ang and Sung as the path to literary excellence." [12]

Chou's analysis does not catch the nub in that it cannot interpret T'ang's ensuing change in his assertion. Aged 40, T'ang realizes that literary creation is not pure emulation of ancient people, but a rather personal, individual creative process. Researchers like Ching-I Tu have made sensible explanation to this, indicating that T'ang's changeover from Cheng-Zhu School to Lu-Wang School, which is a prevalent philosophy phenomenon in Ming, is the very reason beneath his transformation from Qin-Han to T'ang-Song [13]. Now that natural self is the supreme principle, according to Lu-Wang School, empirical rumination shall surpass the law of former literary writing. Thus, nature-exhibition and emotion-articulation are topmost consideration in literary creation, tallying with the lyric tradition that can be seen from Zhou's and Xu's assertion.

This article chooses T'ang Shunzhi to exemplify the deeper interplay between archaism and lyric tradition.

Changing from an archaist to an iconoclast and expressionist, T'ang inspires the forthcoming Latter Seven Masters as well as Gong-an School, two literati group holding opposite assertions. The paradox further proves that archaism has no essential relationship with lyric tradition. Arguments around archaism and anti-archaism cannot conceal a general awakening of individualism in Ming Dynasty. From zealous supporters for archaism like Zhou Xu, prudent archaists like Xu Zhenqing, to iconoclasm-advocators like T'ang Shunzhi, literati from Early Ming to Late Ming share a self-conscious pursuit of personal emotion in their poetry or essay creation. Archaists (like Former/Latter Seven Masters) and anti-archaists (like Gong-an School and T'ang Shunzhi) all follow lyric tradition and express personal emotion with poetry. Succeeding to or abandoning archaism does not affect their creation philosophy that treasures the natural outflow of individual feelings, no matter political or emotional. Conflict between archaists and anti-archaists is more around the generic form of language, rhymes or rhetoric—aesthetic preferences—rather than certainty of emotional expression. Thus, the close reading to Zhou, Xu and T'ang might help us to draw a less dazing picture of the mind-boggling texts in Ming Literature within the discursive coordinate of archaism and lyric tradition.

5. Conclusion

Richard John Lynn makes such a historical comment on the literary function of Gong-an School:

“The basic tenets of literary theory held by the Kung-an school have received extensive treatment elsewhere, and many of the most important passages in the critical writings of the school have already been translated and annotated and do not have to be dealt with again here. Actually, there was not so much that was new in Yuan Hung-tao, his brothers, and their followers; their iconoclastic attitude toward Hing T'ang poetry, their fondness for Sung dynasty poetry, their wide-ranging taste for highly individual expressionist poetry from all over the tradition, their glorification of the natural instincts and the innate qualities unique and original with each individual—all these are to be found scattered throughout the earlier Ming expressionists.....What the members of the Kung-an school did was to render all these features into a far more constant and coherent view of literature and to write a great deal of very original poetry and prose that exemplified in concrete form the theoretical principles involved.” [14]

“Far more constant and coherent view of literature” can in fact be applied in high on every aspect for the postmortem of Ming Literature. We might probably attain a new theoretical image by digging out more scattered evidences from less-popular poets or theorists like Fu Ruojin, Liang Qiao and Xie Zhaozhe, which, unfortunately, goes beyond the scope of this humble article.

Horizontal comparison of Zhou Xu, Xu Zhenqing and

T'ang Shunzhi is an effective supplement to the paradigm establishment of lyric tradition in Chinese poetry and literature. Influential theories concerning poetic essence basically involve in two dimensions: Intention [15] and Emotion, with the former proposed by *The Great Preface* and latter proposed by *Wen-Fu*. Intention and Emotion theories have different points of focus in many ways, but both of them emphasize the subjectivity of poet, laying strong concentration on the psychological feelings of the person who writes poems. They both form the lyric tradition of Chinese poetry, literature and even culture ecology. “Lyric tradition is not a traditional concept of ‘style’”. This concept is not limited to a single style of genre, nor any certain theme or object. In a broad sense, this tradition covers the ‘ideology’ of some people within the cultural history, including their value, ambition and specific method to utter this ‘idea’.” [16] Analyzing poetry creation and theory among Ming and ensuing Qing Dynasty, we can find that such an ideology is being strengthened with political and historical narratives be expelled from the discourse of poetic aesthetic (like what Wang Fuzhi says: “Poetry is not the appendage of history” [17]). The maintenance and development of lyric tradition respond to the inchoate individualism among Ming’s literature circle, which is growing rapidly in the poetic ecology in Qing Dynasty. The lyric tradition, as an individual emotional expressionism, is excluding any archaic narrative system established by ancient poets, no matter how close to archaism as it looks like. Deconstructing the archaism discourse from the surface and going deep into the sincere pursuit of self-emotion are beneficial for us to achieve a more comprehensive understanding to the intricate context of poetic theory in Ming Dynasty.

Further expansion of this train of thought may lead to study on coeval familiar essays. Ming’s familiar essay, especially created by Gong-an School and T'ang-Song School, is homologous with their poetry. We can see a wide spectrum of emotional expression from the writing of these essays and easily find the inner similarity with the articulation of poems. It is also interesting to discuss the same and different outlook between the two genres in Ming’s literature. Furthermore, the raveling symbiosis of archaism and lyric tradition in ensuing eras is more convoluted. If we realize that even in modern Chinese literature, there are archaists who try to reform poetry by simulating middle ancient poems (like Huang Yuanyong 1885-1915) and strong emotional-expressionism that supported by writers like Zhou Zuoren and Shen Congwen, we will make it clear that this kind of symbiosis is a generalized, all-embracing and everlasting issue in the holistic history of Chinese literature. It will be a buoyant and promising direction to bridge the gap between ancient and modern Chinese literature.

Abbreviations

B.C. Before Christ

A.D./AD. Anno Domini

Author Contributions

Liu Zhiyi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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- [1] Zhou Xu, "Shi Xue Ti Hang"诗学梯航, in *Mingren shihua yaoji huibian* 明人诗话要籍汇编, eds. Chen Guanghong, Hou Rongchuan, Shanghai: Fudan University Press (复旦大学出版社), 2020, p. 1467.
- [2] The most interesting demonstration in this section is Zhou's analysis on *Beating the Drum* (《击鼓》), which is defined by him as a "political pasquinade"(怨上之诗也). The poem illustrates soldiers' resentment to unceasing war. Zhou summarizes that individual sorrow makes politics narratives and official virtue a nihility as the unstoppable sadness makes it impossible to sing leisurely (至于言天下之事, 美盛德之形容, 固不言而可知. 其与忧愁思虑之作, 孰能优游不迫也?). Zhou Xu, "Shi Xue Ti Hang", p. 1484.
- [3] Zhou Xu, "Shi Xue Ti Hang", p. 1493. As for the translation of "吟咏性情", here the article uses the version of Stephen Owen ("sing what is in the heart"). See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 406. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1dnnb9p>
- [4] Xu Zhenqing, "Tan Yi Lu" 谈艺录, in *Mingren shihua yaoji huibian*, p. 2333.
- [5] The translation of "诗缘情而绮靡" is a big topic in international Sinology. Arbiters have interpreted this famous dictum into many versions, like "Poetry [shih] traces emotions and should be exquisite as fine pattered silk" (James J. Y. Liu), "The poem (shih) follows the affection (ch'ing) and is sensuously intricate" (Stephen Owen), "Lyric poetry springs from feelings and is exquisitely ornate" (David R. Knechtges), "Poetry (shi) ought to follow the poet's feelings and be ornate" (Sui-kit Wong), "Shih(lyric poetry)traces emotions daintily" (Achilles Chih-t'ung Fang), "Lyrical poems are the outcome of emotion and should be subtle elaborations" (E. R. Hughes), "The lyric (shih) articulates speechless emotion, creating a fabric" (Sam Hamill) and "Poetry(shi)is a bright web of sensuous emotion" (Tony Barnstone & Ping Zhou). This article selects the version by Shih-Hsiang Chen (Essay on Literature). *Chinese Literature Theories and International Sinology* (Volume: UK & NA), ed. Huang Zhuoyue, Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing House (北京师范大学出版社), 2018, p. 615.
- [6] "When the natural qualities of men get the better of the results of education, they are rude man. When the results of education get the better of their natural qualities, they become literati." (质胜文则野, 文胜质则史), translated by Thomson (辜鸿铭), in *Gu Hongming Wenji* 辜鸿铭文集, Haikou: Hainan Publishing House (海南出版社), 2000, p. 385.
- [7] Xu Zhenqing, *Chronological Annotation of Complete Works by Xu Zhenqing* 徐祜卿全集编年校注, ed. Fan Zhixin, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House (人民文学出版社), 2009, p. 696-97.
- [8] Wang Shizhen, "Yiyuan Zhiyan"艺苑卮言, in *Lidai Shihua Xubian* 历代诗话续编, ed. Ding Fubao, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company (中华书局), 1983, p. 949.
- [9] Wu Guoping has made a deep study into the archaism and emotional expression in *Tan Yi Lu*. Wu, "Duet of Archaism and Emotion—A Discussion on Xu Zhenqing Tan Yi Lu"复古与抒情双重协奏——论徐祜卿《谈艺录》, *Literature & Art Studies* 文艺研究 (Feb 2012).
- [10] Richard John Lynn, "Alternate Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry," p.335.
- [11] In fact, "本色" is also mentioned in *Canglang Shihua* 沧浪诗话 as "须是本色, 须是当行". Stephen Owen translates that as "It must be the original color; it must show expertise". "Original color" is the literal translation of 本色, while this article translates it as "Inherent Quality" in a sense-for-sense way. Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 413.
- [12] Chih-ping Chou, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511570575>
- [13] More relevant researches can be seen from Ching-I Tu, "Neo-Confucianism and Literature Criticism in Ming China: The Case of Tang Shun-Chih (1507-1560)," *Tamkang Review: A Journal of Cultural and Literary Studies* (1984).
- [14] Richard John Lynn, "Alternate Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry," p.336.
- [15] The dictum of "在心为志, 发言为诗" has been widely translated into various versions, including: "Thought (cherished) in the mind becomes earnest; exhibited in words, it becomes poetry" (James Legge), "Existing in the mind it is intention; expressed in words it is poetry" (Chow Tse-tsung), "Lying in the heart (or mind), it is 'intent'; when uttered in words, it is 'poetry'" (James J.Y. Liu), "In other words the activities of mind, once verbalized, becomes poetry" (Sui-kit Wong), "While in the heart (xin), it is the aim; manifested in words, it is an Ode" (Steven Van Zoeren) and "In the heart it is intent; sent forth as speech it is poetry" (Haun Saussy). This article selects the version of Stephen Owen: "In the mind (hsin) it is 'being intent' (chih); coming out in language (yen), it is a poem". Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 40.

- [16] Gao Yougong, *Cannon of Beauty: Anthology of Chinese Literature Research* 美典, Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company (生活读书新知三联书店), 2008, p. 83. The original language is Chinese, translated by the article author.
- [17] Wang Fuzhi, *Annotation of Jiangzhai Shihua* 姜斋诗话笺注, ed. Dai Hongsen, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House (人民文学出版社), 1981, p. 24.

¹ Especially refer to researches made by Richard John Lynn, Ching-I Tu and Chih-ping Chou.

² As for version issues, this article selects the manuscript collected by Tianyi Chamber (天一阁馆藏旧钞本), and the Jiaqing copy (1806) collected by National Library of China (中国国家图书馆藏嘉庆十一年刻本)

³ Richard John Lynn asserts the "self-realization" as the core spirit of Ming's poetic theory. Self-realization implies an obvious subjectivity of poets, which, to large extent, dovetails with this article's argument that lyric tradition prevails in face of archaism ideology.

⁴ As for version issues, this article selects the Wanli printed copy (1602) from Feng Yuancheng Analogy, collected by Taiwan Library (台湾图书馆藏明万历三十年刊《冯元成选集》本).

⁵ Precisely, Xu believes that the latter is inferior to the former, as he described Han poetry as the "son of Ya and Song", "next to Guofeng" ("可为《雅》、《颂》之嗣也", "亦十五《国风》之次也").

⁶ "今有两人, 其一人心地超然, 所谓具千古只眼人也, 即使未尝操纸笔呻吟, 呻吟学为文章, 但直抒胸臆, 信手写出, 如写家书, 虽或疏卤, 然绝无烟火酸馅习气, 便是宇宙间一样绝好文字; 其一人犹然尘中人也, 虽其专学为文章, 其于所谓绳墨布置, 则尽是矣, 然翻来覆去, 不过是这几句婆子舌头语, 索其所谓真精神与千古不可磨灭之见, 绝无有也, 则文虽工而不免为下格。此文章本色也。" translated by author.