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The Making of a Master Narrative and How to Break It—Introduction to the Double Special Issue “Multivalent Lyric Classicism”

This and the next special issues of *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China (FLSC)* are dedicated to exploring the diverse forms, functions, linguistic registers, and intellectual persuasions of modern Chinese classicist poetry. The terms “classicist poetry” and “lyric classicism” are defined in the December 2015 special issue of *FLSC*, “Back into Modernity.” As we have argued then, and are arguing now, “the authors’ choice of classical literary language instead of modern vernacular for their versification was not necessarily due to the inertia of the tradition. It rather reflected a keenly felt need to construct a cultural/aesthetic identity in continuity with the tradition. Therefore, twentieth-century poetry in the classical literary language, including experimental and semi-classical contemporary verses and lyrics, may be regarded as a form of ‘classicist poetry,’ on a par with other styles and schools of modern poetry.”¹ Further explanation on this term will follow.

We are glad to see that in the past few years, scholars of modern Chinese literature have increasingly agreed to include classicist poetry into their discussion. The recently published *A New Literary History of Modern China*, for instance, has integrated the diverse production and consumption of classical-style poetry into its narrative, with attention on such poetry written by women, collaborationists, diaspora and online poets,² even though the predominant focus is still on vernacular genres and authors. Considering the

¹ Zhiyi Yang et al., “Frankfurt Consensus,” 1.

² David Der-Wei Wang ed., *A New Literary History of Modern China*.

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quality and quantity of classicist poetry, much more need to be done, and more researchers need to focus, or refocus, on this field. This volume is the result of joint efforts by a group of Chinese poetry scholars who, in recent years, have begun to restore the position of classicist poetry within the spectrum of modern Chinese literature. In this Introduction, it appears therefore necessary to briefly examine the making of the master narrative of literary historiography, which habitually distorts the actual literary history and neglects modern classicist poetry, in order for us to finally break it.

The standard narrative of modern Chinese poetry is a saga of liberation that generally includes certain narrative elements. The story goes as follows. Chinese poetry—either after more than a millennium of decline since the early era of its creativity, or its stagnation following the High Tang—was finally breaking the shackles of the reified classical literary language (*wenyan* 文言). This liberation was pioneered by the so-called late Qing “Poetic Revolution” (*Shijie geming* 詩界革命), with Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1925), and other audacious poets. Their poetry used neologism to describe a modern world, though it still largely abided by classical genre conventions. It then became self-conscious with the advent of the New Culture Movement of 1917, a movement that began with Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) and Chen Duxiu’s 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) call for the complete vernacularization of Chinese literature across all genres (poetry in particular). This thorough conceptual liberation unleashed the creativity of poets like Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897–1931), Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946), and Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–96); their lyrical accomplishments vindicated the foresight of the New Culturalists—as scholars have acknowledged, the development of “New Literature” was the theory prior to the practice.³ This process has been seen as linear and deterministic. The dynamics came from the intellectuals anxiety over a national crisis, which translated into a cultural one. In this narrative, Huang’s “Poetic Revolution” failed to come to fruition and a genuine “Literary Revolution,” as it was proclaimed, finally occurred with the advent of vernacularization. As Xie Mian 謝冕 declared, “Together with the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform, the ‘Poetic Revolution,’ which had never managed to gain momentum in the first place, quickly dissolved.”⁴ In Xie’s own metaphor, it was a wave of labor

³ See Qian Liqun et al., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue sanshinian (xiudingban)*, 19.

⁴ Xie Mian, “Qianye de zhentong” (Labor pains before dawn), in *Dangdai xuezhe zixuan wenku: Xie Mian juan*, 318.

pains—ephemeral but necessary suffering for the birth of modern vernacular Chinese poetry.

This narrative depicts the rise of vernacular poetry as fulfilling a teleological purpose, its course as predesigned by the natural law of language, and its conquest over its increasingly reified foe—classical poetry written in *wenyan*—as inevitable. The exegetical advantage of teleology is its certainty. Seen from a retrospective vantage point, the turbulent trends in history are identified as “preludes,” “the mainstream,” “the aftermath,” “deviations,” “countercurrents,” and so forth. And, of course, the winner takes all—including the right to document and interpret history. The use of vernacular, dialect, and translated foreign terms in Huang Zunxian’s poetry is thus seen as the sign of his revolutionary spirit, while his adherence to established genre conventions makes his transformation “incomplete.” Yet designating a process as “incomplete” is only meaningful if one assumes that complete vernacularization had always been the end-point of literary history waiting to be discovered. Only in this sense might one say that Huang failed to accomplish the “task,” while the prophetic Hu Shi—student of John Dewey’s (1859–1952) philosophical pragmatism and one of the most prominent intellectual figures in twentieth-century China—finally succeeded.⁵ It is important to note that this view fails to take a significant fact into account. Throughout the Three Decades of modern literature prior to 1949, the years of continuous revolutions after 1949, and to the present day, in print and online, poetry in classical styles remains vibrant and continuously relevant to its contemporary social, political, and cultural realities. Indeed, as Stephen Owen notes, contemporary classical-style poetry enjoys significant readership. The first issue of *Dangdai shici* 當代詩詞 (*Contemporary shi and ci Poetry*), a regional Guangzhou journal (despite its title), had a first print run of 36,000 copies, and a second run of 33,600 copies—a fact that, according to Owen, would be “enough to make any publisher of a journal of contemporary poetry envious.”⁶ Thus Owen remarks that, “despite its nearly complete institutional dominance, the new poetry often feels embattled in a struggle for domestic acceptance even

⁵ Just how this narrative has been solidly established as an integral part of the historiography on Chinese literature will be explained in greater detail in the next section of this Introduction.

⁶ Stephen Owen, “Stepping Forward and Back: Issues and Possibilities for ‘World’ Poetry,” 545.

more than for international recognition.”⁷ The decoration of the Sichuan poet Zhou Xiaotian 周嘯天 with the 2014 Lu Xun Poetry Prize⁸ was the eventual recognition of the continuing importance of the genre. For the first time in contemporary China, a major literary prize was given to a poet whose works largely follow classical formal conventions. Despite the controversy over the aesthetic merits of Zhou Xiaotian’s “instant news” poetry, this award is the long overdue institutional recognition of classical-style poetry as a modern genre. The fact that the prize is named after Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936; orig. Zhou Shuren 周樹人), the virtual founder of the New Literature and a formidable iconoclast, makes the decoration even more ironic. But, if we consider that Lu Xun himself wrote some highly acclaimed poems in classical styles, the irony may equally serve those who, until now, have ignored the “dark side of the moon.” The inclusion of such traditional literary practices can enrich historical narrative, making it fairer, more interesting, and more complex than institutionalized memory may wish to selectively remember.

Resisting the teleological narrative means recognizing that verse in the classical styles is one genre within the whole canon of modern Chinese literature. We propose to call it “classicist poetry,” a strategic term that distinguishes itself from other terms that have been proposed and used. This kind of poetry is not just “classical-style verse” or “old-style poetry” (*jiutishi* 舊體詩), as these terms suggest a passive continuation of the tradition. A number of English-language monographs in the last decade by scholars like Jon Eugene von Kowallis, Jerry Dean Schmidt, Shengqing Wu, and Haosheng Yang, to name but a few,⁹ have repeatedly demonstrated the modernity in such poetry. Even Xiaofei Tian’s modified term “New Old Style Poetry”¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 544.

⁸ An event to be examined in greater detail in the article by Zhiyi Yang, Dayong Ma and in this volume.

⁹ See Jon Eugene von Kowallis, *The Lyrical Lu Xun: A Study of His Classical-Style Verse*; Jon Eugene von Kowallis, *The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the “Old Schools” during Late Qing and Early Republican China*; Jerry D. Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian (1848–1905)*; Jerry D. Schmidt, *The Poet Zheng Zhen (1806–1864) and the Rise of Chinese Modernity*; Shengqing Wu, *Modern Archaics: Continuity and Innovation in the Chinese Lyric Tradition, 1900–1937*; and Haosheng Yang, *A Modernity Set to a Pre-Modern Tune: Classical-Style Poetry of Modern Chinese Writers*.

¹⁰ See Xiaofei Tian, “Muffled Dialect Spoken by Green Fruit: An Alternative History of Modern Chinese Poetry.”

may perpetuate the dichotomy between the “new” and the “old,” with the “new” assuming the superiority of being modern and relevant. Indeed, terms like “modern classical poetry” and “New Old Poetry” are uncomfortable oxymora. “Classicist poetry,” on the other hand, has already assumed such poetry to be intrinsically modern, as the suffix “-ism” in China is a modern phenomenon. This term necessarily implies a kind of conviction, insistence, and antagonism against other “-isms.”

In recent years, some Chinese scholars and authors began to promote the term “National Verse” (*guoshi* 國詩) in earnest. Xu Jinru 徐晉如 went as far as to declare that all vernacular poetry written since 1917 was “colonial poetry.” He accused it of embodying a “colonial spirit” which was in fatal conflict with the Chinese “national spirit.”¹¹ Different from such nationalistic discourses which aim at exclusion, we propose to use the term “classicist poetry” as a neutral umbrella term that includes all poems written in or largely inspired by premodern poetic genres since China entered the age of Westernized modernity (regardless of when this is believed to have occurred). Literary classicism refers to a deliberate choice that mobilizes the repertoire of indigenous literary resources for aesthetic preference, the construction of a cultural identity, or the adoption of ideological agendas. It is as “modern” and “Chinese” as all the other literary genres available and used in twentieth- and twenty-first-century China.

From this point on, we will use the term “classicist poetry” consistently. As stated before, classicist poetry is a genre by choice. Its writers did not necessarily reject the notion of modernity. In effect, some New Culturalists and modern writers, for instance Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), Nie Gannu 聶紺弩 (1903–86), and Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905–2003), also resorted to classical genres during times of hardship. An unbiased assessment of their cases paints a rather different picture of modern literature: the relationship between classicist genres and New Literature is not temporal, but rather topological—namely, that they coexist on a literary map of viable genre options which serve different needs and ends.

As an umbrella term “classicist poetry” does not imply any value judgment. It includes all verses and lyrics, which employ rhetorical techniques and dictions inspired by the classical literary tradition. The boundary between

¹¹ Xu Jinru, “Guoshi chuyi.”

classicist and vernacular poetry may be vague. Some recent pop hits in China, for instance, deliberately create an aesthetic appearance of classical elegance. Take the example of “Rolling Up the Pearl Curtain” (“Juan zhulian” 卷珠簾), first sung by the singer Huo Zun 霍尊 on January 3, 2014 on the CCTV singing competition *Sing My Song* (Season 1). The title of the song is inspired by a line in Wang Bo’s 王勃 (c. 649–76) “Colophon on Prince Teng Pavilion” (“Tengwangge xu” 滕王閣序): “The pearl curtains are rolled up at dusk, revealing the rains on the western mountains” 珠簾暮卷西山雨. The lyrics, written by Li Shu 李姝 and LUNA, liberally borrow from classical poetry to create an image of a well-educated, beautiful, young woman languishing in her boudoir, longing for a distant lover—a clichéd image in premodern lyric poetry. This song became immensely popular, won Huo Zun the title of champion, and immediately secured him a slot in the 2014 CCTV New Year’s Gala (a high-stakes extravaganza often seen to represent China’s state cultural policies), broadcasted on January 30, 2014. This song, along with many others in a similar style, represents a recent trend in the Chinese cultural arena, whereby the Chinese Government and official media have joined the efforts of academic scholars and the entertainment industry to recover certain indigenous cultural roots. Their aim is to fill the vacuum in mainstream culture—a culture in which foreign and domestic soap and pop stars are more effective than the old propaganda tools.

More noteworthy are those creative poets active in online poetry forums, experimenting with combining classical genre conventions with modern aesthetic sensibilities. Xiaofei Tian was the first to introduce the poet Zeng Shaoli 曾少立, known online by his eccentric alias *Lizi lizi lizi* 李子梨子栗子 (Plum Pear Chestnut).¹² A self-conscious poet, Zeng Shaoli terms his poetry “songs of humanity” (*renleici* 人類詞), in reference to poems written from a divine perspective, or “countryside cinema” (*xiangcun dianying* 鄉村電影) in which he describes a snippet of southern Jiangxi countryside life like a mini film.¹³ Duan Xiaosong 段曉松 (online alias *Xutang* 嘯堂) is another noteworthy poet. His symbolic poetry employs ancient, almost archaic, genre conventions. His poems are deliberately obscure, suggesting the private

¹² See Tian, “Muffled Dialect Spoken by Green Fruit.” Tian introduces him as from Hunan province; in effect his hometown is Ganzhou, Jiangxi province.

¹³ See Zeng Shaoli, “Wangluo shici xinbian” and “Jishou renleici de zijian.”

sentiments of metaphysical reflection or political dissent. His “Nine Ancient Verses” (“Gushi jiushou” 古詩九首),¹⁴ for instance, uses both Chinese and Western imagery to create a sense of existential loneliness. They employ the pentasyllabic archaic style, a form that harks back to Late Eastern Han aesthetics popularized since the sixth century. Since the poems are long, I will only translate the second half of the third poem:

徜徉廊柱間	I wander among the colonnades—
空洞其凝視	Empty and hollow are their gazes.
柱影遠且長	The columns cast slender shadows reaching afar;
柱身久棄毀	Their bodies long abandoned and ruined.
惟餘蔓草紋	Only the fine marks of creeping weeds remain;
穿行神廟址	Patterns crawling midst the site of this divine temple.
幽香豈能循	How could I follow the subtle scents?
神聖不能倚	Or cling to the divine, the sacred?
而有無言者	And there are the speechless ones,
大地或城市	Namely the Earth or the Metropolis.
存亡兩難求	To be or not to be—both are tough options,
適如我與你	Just like the choice of being Me or You.
我今但漠然	Now being Me, I am the indifferent;
你固無終始	And You have neither beginning nor end.
秋水正揚風	Upon the autumn flood a wind rises,
其音殊未止	Its music lasts without end.

The columned “divine temple” summons the image of a Greek ruin. It may symbolize a cultural tradition, a hollow site of once sacred authority. The “speechless ones”—the Earth and the modern Metropolis—are both forces that threaten to absorb individual existence. Their silence is menacing. As the lyric persona cannot rely upon the inscrutable divine message to navigate life, he is caught by the dilemma of existence. This takes the form of the question about the meaning of life or the existential isolation between the self and the eternal other. Despite its deliberate formal archaism, the loneliness of *Dasein* described in this poem appears at once timeless and contemporary.

¹⁴ Compiled into the poet’s 2002 online anthology, *Yisun ji* 一損集; <http://www.douban.com/note/45036701/>, accessed April 7, 2015.

Hu Shi and the Master Narrative of Chinese Literary History

Most articles in this volume are focused on poets active in the first half of the twentieth century. This was the period when literary histories were written and established, a process which eventually led to the exclusion of such poets from the mainstream. A reexamination of this period is overdue, not just for the purpose of gaining a more holistic view of Chinese literary and cultural history, but also for understanding what preceded lyric classicism's resurgence in our own time.

The removal of classicist poetry from the canon of modern Chinese literature is consistent with a rewriting of premodern Chinese literary history as an evolutionary history, where the vernacular slowly but unstoppably strengthens itself and rises to replace *wenyan* as the legitimate language for literary expression. This metanarrative was first proposed during the New Culture Movement to justify its main proponents' linguistic agendas. It was finally established, through a radical rewriting of history, by Hu Shi's *Baihua wenxueshi* 白話文學史 (History of vernacular literature), Part I.¹⁵ Though unfinished, it became a seminal work that, while constantly being challenged and modified, has never lost its relevance.

As cited in Luo Yuming's introduction to the 1999 re-publication of Hu Shi's *History*, Hu once described himself as "only aspiring to be a pioneer of trends, not to become a master" 但開風氣不爲師. One of the trends that he pioneered was a fresh way of writing history as a grand narrative.¹⁶ According to Hu Shi, the history of Chinese literature was driven by the supposed incongruence between "vernacular literature" (*baihua wenxue* 白話文學) and "archaic literature" (*guwen wenxue* 古文文學). The former was lively and creative, while the latter was static and moribund. The former underwent a historical evolution which would eventually morph from "natural transformation" into the "literary revolution" that Hu Shi and his comrades advocated. Since vernacular literature "contained the essence" of literature, Hu Shi thus emphatically declared his work to be a *de facto* general history of Chinese literature. Unlike previous works, which generally adopted

¹⁵ First edition, Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1928. Part Two of the book was never written.

¹⁶ Luo Yuming 駱玉明, "Introduction," in Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxueshi*, 1–2, 7–8.

the traditional historiographical method of writing individual and biographical accounts of authors, Hu Shi positioned the authors and their works within a wider context. The structure of the previous works is paratactic, while Hu Shi’s narrative is syntactic. Furthermore, as Dai Yan 戴燕 notes, Hu was also a pioneer in applying the method of historical positivism to rediscovered facts,¹⁷ which gives his narrative a “scientific” appearance.¹⁸ Therefore, even though Hu’s radical proposal—that literature written in the vernacular was the only noteworthy literature—was not always wholeheartedly accepted, the influence of his master narrative, as well as that of his methodologies, has been pervasive and enduring. Literary histories written after 1917, and especially after 1927, could be pro, anti, or augment Hu Shi’s proposals, but no one could ignore him. As Hu Shi only wrote Part One of his *History*, which stopped at the Tang dynasty, it was other scholars who carried his implicit suggestion to its logical end—namely that the internal evolution of Chinese literature would eventually lead to the prominence of vernacular genres after the Song and the establishment of New Literature as the mainstream. With this master narrative becoming the norm in school textbooks, Hu Shi has, perhaps, permanently altered our understanding of the history of Chinese literature.

Just how much of a lasting impact Hu Shi had on the way Chinese literary history was taught, and subsequently thought about, becomes clear if we examine early twentieth-century textbooks on literary history. The evolution of these textbooks clearly illustrates the eventual emergence of this master narrative out of competing discourses and how it dominated the production and consumption of knowledge.

In Lin Chuanjia’s 林傳甲 (1877–1922) *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 (History of Chinese literature),¹⁹ the very first textbook on this subject, Lin adopts a style that emulates traditional historiography. His book begins with philology and rhetoric before proceeding to genres and individual styles—a strategy that shows his definition of literature as being generic. The purpose

¹⁷ In my understanding, such as Tang vernacular stories in newly excavated Dunhuang manuscripts.

¹⁸ Dai Yan, *Wenxueshi de quanli*, 54–55.

¹⁹ Written in 1904 during Lin’s tenure at Jingshi daxuetang 京師大學堂 (later renamed as Peking University) and first published in 1910 in Beijing by Wulin mouxinshi 武林謀新室.

of this book appears to be as much about delineating a history of writing in China as offering a pedagogic guide to the art of writing in refined Chinese. Lin's influence was still seen in literary histories that were published in the decade after 1917. In *Zhongguo da wenxueshi* 中國大文學史 (The great history of Chinese literature),²⁰ the author Xie Wuliang 謝無量 (1884–1964) structures the book by dynasty, school, and genre. One major thread for him is the unification of and division between the Way (*dao* 道) and the Craft (*yi* 藝), a classical dualism in Chinese criticism. Instead of categorizing lyric songs, drama, and romances as “vernacular literature,” his categorization is based, quite idiosyncratically, on punctuation and rhyme. The “unpunctuated” category includes genres like catalogues and mathematical works (genres that later literary histories, under the influence of European taxonomy, would not count as “literature”). The “rhymed and punctuated” category includes lyric songs and drama, while the “unrhymed but punctuated” category includes philosophical theories, histories, bureaucratic documents, legal documents, essays, and romances. Apparently, Xie's notion of “literature” was still largely traditional, and his taxonomy was based on the formal features (instead of registers) of language. Xie's work, however, also betrays the influence of the New Culture Movement. Xie divides literature into four categories: creative literature, emulative literature, statist literature, and commoners' literature. As can be seen, his categorization appears to have combined Hu Shi's dualism of creative literature versus emulative literature,²¹ and Chen Duxiu's dualism of aristocratic literature versus the people's literature.²² Hu's and Chen's essays were both published in 1917 in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (New youth), a progressive journal published in Beijing that became the primary battleground of the New Culture Movement. Xie, despite his traditionalist training, accepted these categories together with their inherent value judgments. Similar hybridity is seen in Ge Zunli's 葛遵禮 *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 (History of Chinese literature),²³ a

²⁰ First edition, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1918.

²¹ Hu Shi, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi.”

²² Chen Duxiu, “Wenxue geming lun.” The term that Chen uses for “people's literature” was *guomin wenxue* 國民文學, which Zhou Zuoren in 1919 further modified as “commoners' literature” (*pingmin wenxue* 平民文學); see Zhou Zuoren, “Pingmin wenxue.”

²³ First edition, Shanghai: Huiwen tang, 1921.

structurally inconsistent work. Aside from defining literature as either “hard” (i.e., applied) or “soft” (i.e., pure), the author further divides “soft literature” into aristocratic literature and commoners’ literature. He does not, however, establish a category for “vernacular literature,” and does not elevate lyric songs, drama, or romance above other genres. Xie’s and Ge’s textbooks show that, even though the New Culturalists’ promotion of vernacular literature had become influential, scholars with more traditionalist leanings did not necessarily apply the same principle of elevating the vernacular retrospectively into the history of classical literature. Their versions of Chinese literary history, therefore, would make the New Literature a bastard child born under the influence of the West. It is exactly such a narrative that Hu Shi’s *History* fought against, and instead sought to sign the birth certificate of the new vernacular literature as the heir of China’s indigenous traditions.

As chance would have it, in 1921 and 1922, the Ministry of Education invited Hu Shi to teach the history of Chinese “national language literature” (*guoyu wenxue* 國語文學), in “National Language Seminars” held in Beijing, to students from the provinces. In 1927, his mimeographed pedagogic notes for the fifteen classes were edited and published by Li Jinxi 黎錦熙 (1890–1978), linguist and fellow champion of a national vernacular. Claiming to be embarrassed by this immature (and unauthorized) publication, Hu published his revised *History* in 1928. During this period, however, his version of Chinese literary history had already begun to exert influence on other published literary histories, possibly facilitated by the circulation of his theory through class notes or orally. Wang Mengzeng’s 王夢曾 (1873–1959) *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 (History of Chinese literature),²⁴ for instance, had already listed the “vernacular poetry” of Song and the “vernacular prose” of Yuan as separate genres, calling them “the trend” of their times.²⁵ Wang’s book was commissioned by the Ministry of Education as a “Republican Textbook for Middle Schools,” a status that contributed to its nineteen reprints in just two years. A similar partial influence of Hu Shi’s can be seen in Hu Huaichen’s 胡懷琛 (1886–1938) *Zhongguo wenxue shilüe* 中國文學史略 (A synopsis of the history of Chinese literature),²⁶ which proposes to use a

²⁴ First edition, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1923.

²⁵ *Ibid.* (19th reprint, 1925), 67–69.

²⁶ First edition, Shanghai: Liangxi tushuguan, 1926.

“scientific method” (Hu Shi’s slogan) to define “literature,” and regards Song dynasty popular fiction and didactic “discourse records” as the precursor of modern vernacular novels and prose. He notes the distinction between speech and writing, as well as the opposition between aristocratic and commoners’ literatures—though he regards the development in printing techniques to be the real cause of the change of register in the written language (namely, that it was the advancements in printing that allowed the written language to be increasingly verbose and vernacularized). In short, even though his observations of the history of Chinese literature followed Hu Shi’s vision, Hu Huaichen did not see this process as an irresistible linguistic evolution as Hu Shi did. These textbooks, published before the formal publication of Hu’s history, showed that his theory was gaining attention, but was yet to become the dominant narrative. A few other histories written in this period betrayed deeper “Hu Shi-ism”—such as Ling Dujian’s 凌獨見 *Xinzu guoyu wenxueshi* 新著國語文學史 (A new history of national language literature)²⁷ and Zhou Qunyu’s 周羣玉 *Baihua wenxueshi dagang* 白話文學史大綱 (An outline of the history of vernacular literature)²⁸—but their scholarship was challenged and their influence was limited.

Influential textbooks published after 1927, however, began to show how Hu’s narrative had truly become a metanarrative—to the extent that others were modifying or even partly challenging him, but no one could completely overturn his evolutionist model or propose alternatives to his positivistic methodologies. Through their repeated etching over Hu’s original marks, this master narrative became an integrated part of a normative discourse.

For example, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958),²⁹ in his highly popular *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxueshi* 插圖本中國文學史 (An illustrated history of Chinese literature),³⁰ declares that his new history supplements the “missing chapters” in previous histories—namely the vernacular genres that include Tang “transformation texts,” Song lyric songs, Yuan drama, and Ming and Qing novels. As this brief summary shows, it was not the case that no one had noticed these genres before, however Zheng declares these former

²⁷ First edition, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1923.

²⁸ First edition, Shanghai: Qunxue she, 1928.

²⁹ Zheng Zhenduo was a key figure in the New Culture Movement and his literary works and proposals are discussed in some detail in Frederik H. Green’s article in the second part of this double special issue.

³⁰ First edition, Beiping (Beijing): Pushe, 1932.

works to be inadequate as they pay too much attention to “aristocratic genres.” Instead, his work shows the “true face” (*zhen mianmu* 真面目)³¹ of history. In his narrative on literature after the Southern Song, Zheng pays little attention to “conservative” genres like regulated poetry or ancient prose, and focuses instead on the development of vernacular genres. In other words, Zheng’s agenda was in line with Hu Shi’s. And instead of calling his work solely a history of “vernacular literature,” Zheng declares it to encompass Chinese literature in general. Hu Shi’s assumption that vernacular literature was the essence of Chinese literature, therefore, was now taken as default. Zheng’s methodology is also that of positivism and scientism. Dai Yan observes that, different from other histories whose chapter or section titles usually bear the names of individual authors, most of Zheng’s chapter titles are about a period or a group of authors.³² In this way, Zheng “democratized” literary history, seeing even the greatest writers or works as being symptomatic of their age. According to him, the consistent driving forces behind the changes in styles and genres were not individual talents but popular and foreign literature. Thus, it seems only natural that he ended his book with the influx of Western literature and the May Fourth New Literature. With Zheng’s work, Hu’s narrative has reached its intended end.

Hu Yunyi’s 胡雲翼 (1906–65) *Xinzhu Zhongguo wenxueshi* 新著中國文學史 (A new history of Chinese literature)³³ explicitly declares its intention to remedy Hu’s neglect of great works not written in the vernacular. Nonetheless, he associates genres to dynasties and depicts a linear development of “Han rhapsody, Tang *shi* poetry, Song lyric songs, and Yuan drama.” He does mention the “orthodox (namely, *wenyan*) literature” of the Qing dynasty, but even so Hu calls the Qing *shi* poetry “extremely prosperous and at the same time extremely degenerate,” because it was purely emulative and lacked creativity.³⁴ Like Zheng he ends with the New Literature, suggesting that the latter is not only the necessary end of an evolutionary history, but also the redemption of its degenerated “orthodoxy.”

³¹ Zheng Zhenduo, “Introduction,” 1–2.

³² Dai, *Wenxueshi de quanli*, 63.

³³ First edition, Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1932.

³⁴ *Ibid.* (7th reprint, 1937), 299.

Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君 (1900–1974) and Lu Kanru’s 陸侃如 (1903–78) highly influential work *Zhongguo shishi* 中國詩史 (History of Chinese poetry),³⁵ still reprinted and read today, focuses on the development of lyric genres. When the narrative reaches the “Recent Era” (*jindai* 近代), namely history after the Tang, the authors include only lyric and drama poetry. In the Appendix on “Modern Poetry,” Feng and Lu dismiss the “Poetic Revolution” of Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao as a genuine revolution. The authors predict two trends in modern poetry: Vernacular poetry and proletarian poetry; this is despite the fact that neither trend was supported by actual evidence of any masterpiece (the first movement was “yet to see its effects” and the second was still emerging). The same theoretical confidence was seen in their *Zhongguo wenxueshi jianbian* 中國文學史簡編 (A short history of Chinese literature),³⁶ which includes prose genres. Similar to Hu Yunyi, they mention late Qing ancient prose but only see it as emulative and degenerative, doomed to be replaced by the New Literature.

The master narrative of genre evolution was repeated, sometimes with modification, in works like Liu Dabai’s 劉大白 (1880–1932) *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 (History of Chinese literature)³⁷ and Liu Dajie’s 劉大傑 (1904–77) *Zhongguo wenxue fazhanshi* 中國文學發展史 (A history of the development of Chinese literature).³⁸ Comparatively, Liu’s work is more balanced (documenting Ming and Qing *shi* poetry), but the predominant focus is on the dramatic and new. A limited number of textbooks had apparently tried to resist the master narrative. Kang Bicheng’s 康璧成 *Zhongguo wenxueshi dagang* 中國文學史大綱 (An outline of the history of Chinese literature),³⁹ for instance, focuses on traditionally orthodox genres like *shi* poetry and ancient prose. This conservative approach was elevated to a higher level by Qian Jibo’s 錢基博 (1887–1957) *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 (History of Chinese literature).⁴⁰ Despite Qian’s scholarly stature,

³⁵ First edition, Shanghai: Dajiang shupu, 1931.

³⁶ First edition, Shanghai: Dajiang shupu, 1932; Fifth edition, Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1939.

³⁷ First edition, Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1933.

³⁸ First editions, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, Part I, 1941; Part II, 1949.

³⁹ First edition, Shanghai: Guangyi shuju, 1933.

⁴⁰ First edition, Anhua: Hunan lantian xiuzhen shudian, Part I, 1939; Part II, 1942; Part III, 1943.

however, it was inevitable that his work would be viewed as staunch opposition to the entrenched mainstream discourse. Its peripheral status was symbolized by the fact that it was first published by a Hunan local press rather than the major presses in Shanghai or Beijing. Given the author’s scholarly gravitas, this work is well noted, but does not lead to any paradigmatic shift.

Through these decades, a stable structure of teaching Chinese literary history was eventually established. Firstly, every dynasty is associated with a dominant genre, and authors whose works are representative of the dynastic genre receive the most attention. Secondly, the genres are increasingly vernacularized over time. Thirdly, judgment of a work’s literary value is based intrinsically on its relevance to the line of historical evolution. If written in the “wrong” genre of the “wrong” dynasty, aesthetically outstanding works would be seen as aberrant instances and excluded by the historiography, or denounced as a mere vestigial practice. Ming- and Qing-era *shi* poetry, for instance, usually receives only cursory notes in literary textbooks, and most, if not all, teaching positions for Ming and Qing literature in Chinese universities are given to scholars who specialize in vernacular genres.

There is an increasing number of scholarly works that argue against the above narrative. They reject the possibility that literary genres on various registers may coexist, with each displaying a subtle hybridity of linguistic register. Indeed, the genre-specific use of vernacular has always been a staple feature of Chinese literature in its “premodern” life, as already noted by Hu Shi’s contemporary opponents.⁴¹ Put otherwise, it turns a synchronic relationship into a diachronic one. They also deem premodern literary works with a higher degree of vernacularism as the precursor of the May Fourth *baihua*; disregarding the fact that the *baihua* they constructed can be seen, in the words of Robert Culp, as:

A hybrid product that integrated late imperial styles of vernacular writing with ongoing lexical changes influenced by Europe and Japan and also stylistic and grammatical approaches based on both spoken

⁴¹ See, e.g., Mei Guangdi, “Ping tichang xinwenhua zhe.”

language and European and Japanese models.⁴²

Moreover, even the oral language that modern *baihua* is based on, as Shang Wei aptly points out, was in effect *guanhua* 官話, a *lingua franca* spoken by officials; therefore, it is inaccurate to describe its [*baihua*'s] relation with *wenyan* in terms of the distinction between official and popular, high and low, and between center and periphery.⁴³

All these made the May Fourth vernacular, in Perry Link's words, "a new classical language," namely "a strange new language strongly associated with the West and with the Westernized elite."⁴⁴ Furthermore, and somewhat ironically, even if there were a historical evolution of vernacular from earlier popular fictive genres to Late Imperial novels, it would only make the Republican period's semi-classical popular novels (what the May Fourth writers derogatively termed as "Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School" [Yuanyang hudie pai 鴛鴦蝴蝶派]), the true successor of the vernacular "orthodoxy."⁴⁵

Despite the piling evidence and arguments against it, the master narrative retains its firm hold in literary histories written and taught to date. In the 1950s, the May Fourth anti-traditionalist approach was criticized as "vulgar formalism" because the only criteria that held any value was the linguistic register and not the content of the works. Some "orthodox" authors were thus rehabilitated into the official historiography as "patriotic poets" or

⁴² Robert Culp, "Teaching *Baihua*: Textbook Publishing and the Production of Vernacular Language and a New Literary Canon in Early Twentieth-Century China," 5. Culp, in turn, draws his definition from Edward Gunn, *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-Century Chinese Prose*, 36–48, and Christoph Harbsmeier, "May Fourth Linguistic Orthodoxy and Rhetoric: Some Informal Comparative Notes." In effect, the May Fourth intellectuals, such as Zhou Zuoren and Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950), openly advocated the construction of such a hybrid language. See Yue Kaihua, *Wusi jijinzhuyi de yuanqi yu Zhongguo xinwenxue de fasheng*, 356–62.

⁴³ See Shang Wei, "*Baihua*, *Guanhua*, *Fangyan* and the May Fourth Reading of *Rulin waishi*," 4.

⁴⁴ E. Perry Jr. Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*, 19.

⁴⁵ Certainly, by the late 1920s and increasingly in the 1930s, leftist intellectuals began to call for a genuine *baihua* that would represent the plain speech of the common people, an issue that is also reflected in Mao Zedong's 1942 speech on the Yan'an Forum.

“writers of the people.”⁴⁶ This development betrayed an ideological agenda to baptize the cultural legacy for the purpose of constructing a statist nationalism which supported a centralized state power with the alleged consensus of the people. Therefore, the antagonistic character of “vernacular literature” also needed to be purged and redefined. Nevertheless, even with Du Fu’s regulated poetry and some Ming and Qing authors’ *shi* and ancient prose works reintroduced into the history of Chinese literature, the narrative strategy of dynasty-genre partnership and the increasing vernacularization of representative genres remains unchallenged. Worse still, with the increasing standardization of nationwide pedagogy in middle schools and universities, most students today are not even aware of the possibility of an alternative literary history.

As a result of the evolutionist historiography, modern *wenyan* compositions were seen as outdated—a vestigial practice that only paid homage to the past, and one that did not count as “literature” proper (since proper literature was now defined as “creative literature”). The rewriting of history and the redefinition of literature went hand in hand in exiling classicist poetry from modern literary institutions. Other than Qian Jibo’s *Xiandai Zhongguo wenxueshi* 現代中國文學史 (Modern Chinese literary history),⁴⁷ which paid equal attention to “ancient literature” (*guwenxue* 古文學) and “new literature” (*xinwenxue* 新文學), other histories on modern Chinese literature generally excluded works from classicist genres. The Southern Society (Nanshe 南社, active 1909–23), a broadly influential classicist poetry society (which at its peak had at least 1128 registered members), is at best noted in the margin of histories. This lack of acknowledgement of classicist poetry also fed contemporary and Western academic research. For example, in Michel Hockx’s outstanding work *Questions of Style*, despite the author’s promise to “remove the ‘May Fourth’ paradigm from the study of modern Chinese literature,”⁴⁸ he nevertheless

⁴⁶ Dai Yan terms this movement as shifting the orthodox from “popular literature” (*minjian wenxue* 民間文學) to “the people’s literature” (*renmin wenxue* 人民文學). See *Wenxueshi de quanli*, 106–31.

⁴⁷ Completed in 1922; first edition, Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1932.

⁴⁸ Michel Hockx, *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911–1937*, 5.

follows the May Fourth bias and reduces classicist poetry to a mere footnote to twentieth-century literature. Though he lists the Southern Society as the first modern literary society, he allocates only 11 pages to it—significantly less than the 40 pages he dedicates to the Literary Association, which was roughly one-tenth of the size of the Southern Society (approximately 100 members). This situation is perhaps due in part to conceptual restrictions as well as to historiographical convention. Therefore, it is time for us—to reuse Hockx's words—to truly remove the May Fourth paradigm and reacknowledge classicist literature as being part of modern Chinese literature.

Toward a Paradigmatic Shift

To avoid the pitfalls of historicism we cannot just voice what has been forgotten, we also need to illustrate why it deserves to be remembered. There is one question that Hu Shi was oblivious to: Aside from its formal novelty or the fact that it was written at all, what gives a literary work its value? Great literature is read and reread because it renews its own relevance by speaking to generations of readers and normalizing their cultural identity. But readers can be historically conditioned, and our contemporary readership has already been schooled by Hu Shi and his comrades. So, after an iconoclastic century, our task is not simply to restore the diversity of modern Chinese literature but also to alter the standard of value judgment and to examine how both kinds of literature—the May Fourth anti-traditionalist literature and the hidden stream of modern classicist literature—have contributed to the making of a contemporary Chinese literary reality. Here, four trends have been identified which have been shaped from the late nineteenth century onwards, and have continued to exist. Each trend demonstrates a way that classicist poetry functions to express modern consciousness and to construct its authors' and readers' cultural identity.

Classicist literature differs from classical-style literature in its constant dialogue with modernity. Ever since the introduction of Western modernity, Chinese literature has been produced in response to it, willingly or not. We find a bold sense of modern consciousness not only in the works of reformers like Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao, but also in those culturally

conservative Tongguang School 同光派 poets like Chen Sanli 陳三立 (1853–1937) and Zheng Xiaoxu 鄭孝胥 (1860–1938). As Jon Eugene von Kowallis argues in his excellent study *The Subtle Revolution*:

[W]hen re-set in their proper historical and literary context, these poets emerge as the voice of a generation which straddled the chasm between the traditional Chinese world-order and the Darwinian state of affairs which came upon the Third World by the mid-to-late nineteenth century.⁴⁹

The conservative resistance to Western modernity, in a certain sense, is itself modern—not the least because the ability to choose and to defy is an exercise of liberty. Even among the next generation of poets—represented by the Southern Society, the leaders of which generally endorsed Huang and Liang’s innovations—there were many who insisted on writing in Tongguang-inspired styles. Today, many of China’s active classicist poets, Xu Jinru amongst them, proclaim to champion a purist vision of poetry that remains faithful to its Tang dynasty *shi* or Song dynasty *ci* linguistic and phonetic roots. Their poetry appears to be as much about conforming to indigenous aesthetic standards as to claiming a cultural identity. Studies on this group of poets are pioneered by Jon Eugene von Kowallis’ aforementioned work. Shengqing Wu’s recent book, *Modern Archaics*, is another timely study on how these poets actively endeavored to construct cultural identities in an era of Westernization and modernization.

The second group of poets consists of those who largely wrote classicist poetry, but embraced the ideals of the New Literature whilst attentively heeding its criticisms. Leading poets of the Southern Society, for instance, experimented to make their poetry more fluid, spontaneous, and syntactically prosaic. Many contemporary classicist poets, as discussed earlier, have furthered the experiments. They attempt to write more metaphysical, abstruse, or epical poems, or poems in local dialects, in the style of “instant news,” or as mini-stories. Strikingly, these innovative features are exactly what the May Fourth generation accused classical poetry to be

⁴⁹ Jon Eugene von Kowallis, *The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the “Old Schools” during Late Qing and Early Republican China*, vii.

lacking—particularly in comparison to European poetry. Arguably, their poetry strives to expand the expressive horizon of classicist poetry and enables it to compete with New Poetry in the latter’s comfort zones. They also prove that the “Poetic Revolution” of the late Qing was far from a fruitless failure, but in fact has been succeeded by generations of poets in their forays into virgin territories. Jerry D. Schmidt’s *Within the Human Realm* is the first English monograph on Huang Zunxian’s poetic innovations; however more English monographs on classicist poetry (following Huang’s tradition) are still waiting to be written.

The third group of classicist poetry writers consists of those who are better known as writers of the New Literature. It is important to note that they tended to write classicist poetry in times of suffering: Shi Zhecun, on his escape from war, Zhou Zuoren, humiliated and imprisoned as a collaborator, and Nie Gannu, “reeducated” in the desolate northeast countryside. Classicist poetry seems to have fortified them against the precarious temporality. It also allows them to compare their own plight to that of their historical predecessors, and to build alternative personas. Their poetry also tends to deviate from the classical ideal of solemnity, using humor to lyrically transform their plight. Zhou and Nie, for instance, often called their classicist poems “doggerels,” a name that is at once humble and proud (they were conscious of creating something unfamiliar within the tradition). This group of poets drew the attention of Western academia with Jon Eugene von Kowallis’ *The Lyrical Lu Xun*. This work provides a full annotated translation and discussion of Lu Xun’s classical-style verses. Haosheng Yang’s *A Modernity Set to a Pre-Modern Tune* is the latest work that examines classical-style verses of a number of modern poets, including Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), and Nie Gannu. Other scholars, including Kang-I Sun Chang, are planning to publish their monographs soon. Their works will greatly enrich our understanding on the interaction between New and Classicist literatures.

The fourth group consists of those involved in politics who used classicist poetry to express their ambition, conformity, or frustration. Political engagement has been a staple function of classical-style poetry and throughout the Republican era many political players wrote verses for social or political purposes without intending them to be “pure literature”; the two

figures whose poetry exerted the broadest influence over this group were Mao Zedong and his Poet Laureate Guo Moruo. Mao’s ambitious poetry and Guo’s eulogistic verses have provided the vocabulary and formulas of expression endlessly recycled by the politicized strata of Chinese society, like a semi-automated discourse machine which produced non-individualistic pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic quatrains or octaves that more or less abided by classical genre conventions. Since such poems tend to reflect the interests of the political establishment, this style is commonly dubbed as Old Cadre Style (*laogan ti* 老幹體) in China. However, since not all writers of such poems are old Communist cadres, we propose to call it “the poetry of the establishment.”

While maintaining some essential features of the genre conventions that identify it to be the successor of premodern classical-style poetry, classicist poetry has undergone changes from form to language and to the philosophy. Furthermore, its authors and functions have changed, as indicated by the huge variety of groups of authors analyzed above. Even though traditional classical-style poetry was not exclusive to the gentry literati class, it was perceived as a cultural capital that this class exercised to impose their literary taste over the society at large and to acquire a certain distinction. And even though not in all historical periods classical-style poetry was tested in state examinations, its related capacity of refined writing was a necessary requirement to win the entry ticket to officialdom—let alone that being able to write classical-style poetry well and fast was a highly useful skill in the bureaucrats’ social life. In twentieth, and now twenty-first century China, it is the social and cultural milieu of poetry that has undergone the most radical changes. The authors are de-gentrified, and they come to perceive their poetry less of a means for career gains or social communication, and more of an “art,” in the sense of *l’art pour l’art*—or, in some cases, a meta-art that establishes them as carriers of a tradition and relates them to a lost classical world of refined taste and life style.

If we keep the scope and variety as well as the cultural significance of classicist literature in mind, the paucity of academic research on the subject seems glaring. And in comparison to the already few published monographs on individual poets, this volume is a preliminary attempt to exhibit a broader spectrum of classicist poetry from the late nineteenth century to date.

The first article, by Richard John Lynn, discusses the Japanese poems by Huang Zunxian, written when he was member of the staff of the Qing legation in Tokyo (1877–82), as well as the prose introductions written much later as supplementary reading to the poems. Lynn argues that the poems were intended to have more than literary impact—to enlighten those in power in China by casting Japan in a positive light and promote Japan as a model for reform and modernization. Huang linked Japanese tradition with the Chinese, which he did in poems emphasizing their common high culture. The broad topics of these poems introduced many subjects unknown to earlier tradition but now topical and urgent as China began to shed old ways and embrace the new.

The next few articles examine the novel consciousness in the poetry of poets who are usually seen as “conservative.” In “Li Ruqian, the Lu Xun of the Nineteenth Century,” Jerry D. Schmidt discusses the biography, thought, literary theory, poetry, and prose of Li Ruqian 黎汝謙 (1852–1909), a diplomat to Japan who studied the political institutions and culture of Meiji Japan and the West. He translated Washington Irving’s biography of George Washington into Classical Chinese, a book which exercised a great influence on late Qing reformers and was probably even read by Lu Xun. A prescient poet and prose writer, he urged Chinese intellectuals to abandon their smug conservatism and adapt to the new world or perish. He poked fun at his own society in biting satirical pieces reminiscent of the writings of Lu Xun’s May Fourth era. Schmidt argues that Li may have been the first Chinese author to develop the idea of Chinese inadequacy and guilt which is so common in the literature of the next century.

Nanxiu Qian’s article explores the poetry of Shen Queying 沈鵲應 (1877–1900). Better known as the virtuous widow of the late Qing reform martyr Lin Xu 林旭 (1875–98), Shen eventually committed suicide to follow her husband in death. Qian’s article subverts the conventional portrayal of Shen Queying and, through reading her poems and song lyrics, shows that she was a reformer in her own right. In this she was Lin Xu’s vocal soulmate and not simply his mute wife and widow. Her pining to death, although it appears to conform to the Late Imperial *lienü* 烈女 (“chaste women”) model, goes beyond the realm of traditional female virtues and bears the marks of the reform era when a female intellectual would have closely linked her

personal life to the destiny of the country and the people.

Chen Sanli, a leading Tongguang poet, is considered to be a central figure in the poetic transition that took place between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tsung-cheng Lin’s article on Chen Sanli’s ancient-style verse argues that Chen’s poems not only broke the conventional stereotypes, regulations, and structural limitations of past poetry to create innovations in poetic form, but also adopted a variety of writing devices such as transformed metaphors and abstruse diction. Within these invented poetic forms, converted metaphors and recondite diction, Chen Sanli’s experimentation with new subject matters were unprecedented in poetry. They conveyed his feelings of oppression, anxiety, helplessness, fear, despair, and confusion toward the changes and upheavals in Late Imperial China. All the poetic forms, metaphors, linguistic devices, and emotions in Chen’s verse have had great impact on modern Chinese literature.

Sun Zhimei’s article pays attention to the diachronic succession of the Southern Society to the “Poetic Revolution” in the late Qing. It provides a careful analysis on the novelty of Huang Zunxian’s poetry and shows how the Southern Society transformed Huang’s Europeanized innovation into something that was rooted in both traditional scholarship and modern political discourse. On the whole, Sun regards the poetry of the Southern Society as being more formally conservative than Huang’s; however, spiritually, it represents a kind of progress as it styled itself as the “poetry of the cotton-clothed” (*buyi zhi shi* 布衣之詩)—the “cotton-clothed” stands for the scholars not serving in court. In this regard, its poetry could be seen as modern in spirit.

The voluminous “poetry talks” (*shihua* 詩話) written by Southern Society members are previously uncollected materials, and Lin Hsiang-Ling’s recent research is the first systematic effort to collect, edit, and understand them. These poetic discourses succeeded the language of traditional literary criticism, but also exhibited ideals of the new epoch. Lin Hsiang-ling’s article mainly focuses on two tendencies in these discourses: The general cult of sentimentality and the narrative strategy on women’s poetry. The cult of sentimentality continued the trend of individual liberation from the late Ming and further showed a collective discourse that promoted a new kind of revolutionary subjectivity. These authors were also fond of collecting

sentimental stories about female poets. More than being traditional “talented women,” these poets exhibited a diversity of female roles in an era of liberation.

The next six articles will come out in the third issue of *FLSC* in 2018. Lam Lap’s article endeavors to reveal and examine the features of *ci* societies in the Republican era, asserting that within the collective voice of (and harmonious correspondence among) the traditional lyricists, there was always some dissonance. Lam delineates a general picture of *ci* societies in Republican China and explicates the geographical distribution and social networks of *ci* lyricists. The focus then shifts to Oushe 滬社, the *ci* society formed in Shanghai before the Japanese occupation of the city, and the composition of its group *ci*. Contrary to the general perception of *ci* as a uniform, sentimental, and stylistically conservative genre, Lam finds that their works demonstrate a variety of styles and that the membership of *ci* societies were more inclusive than *shi* societies. Therefore, their societies were formed less in accordance with a political ideology or even aesthetic principle, but rather functioned as a social network for dislocated and marginalized poets.

The following four articles examine the classicist literary composition by New Literature writers. Jon Eugene von Kowallis recontextualizes Lu Xun’s early *wenyan* essays within the context in which they first appeared, i.e., the expatriate Chinese journal *Henan* 河南, then published in Tokyo as an unofficial organ of the anti-Manchu Tongmeng Hui (Revolutionary alliance). These essays focus on issues in literature, philosophy, politics, and aesthetics during an era of profound cultural change in China. Part of their significance, as Kowallis argues, lies in the way in which they provide us with an unabashed glimpse of what Lu Xun, who was to become China’s most important writer of the twentieth century, set out to accomplish early on with his new-found literary career. Examining Lu Xun’s 1907 essay “On the Power of Mara Poetry,” Kowallis contrasts Lu Xun’s early romantic tendencies with Zhou Zuoren’s more realistic proclivities.

Frederik H. Green’s article examines Zhou Zuoren’s critical writings on the Japanese *haiku*. Zhou believed that the modernized *haiku* could at once be rooted in tradition, yet also channel a new modern subjectivity and thus be conducive to modernity. Green’s analysis illustrates that Zhou Zuoren

increasingly came to believe that a modern Chinese poetic voice needed to engage creatively with traditional Asian verse forms, both Chinese and Japanese. A number of Zhou’s translations of Japanese verse, as well as Chinese poems influenced by Zhou, demonstrate the importance of Zhou’s creative imagination to the emergence of a new kind of Chinese poetry. Zhou’s interest in traditional Chinese and Japanese poetics also challenges the perception that it was Western modernists and critics who first revealed the modernity of such verse.

Kang-I Sun Chang’s article examines Shi Zhecun’s classicist poems during the war. Shi, a “modern Chinese literary superstar,” is known for his modernist fiction written during his twenties. But in the fall of 1937, when the Anti-Japanese War began, Shi suddenly changed direction and devoted his energy to writing classical-style poetry. Chang argues that it was Shi’s wartime experiences, especially during his refugee’s journey to Yunnan, which triggered his poetic inspiration to write in the classical form. Yet his poems also often express a kind of “modern” sentiment. The poet described his own unique psychological impressions in a way that reminds the reader of his “modernist” fictional writing style. The “synesthesia” in his poetry was certainly influenced by the poetic technique of the Tang poet Li He 李賀 (791–817), but his imagery has the unique quality of “modernism,” which touches upon the level of, in her own terms, “psychological/emotional truth.”

Xiaofei Tian’s article investigates the paradox of old and new in Nie Gannu’s writings by juxtaposing classical-style with new-style poetry for a comparative analysis. She proposes that Nie Gannu’s preference for the regulated verse in the seven-syllable line is a deliberate embrace of the technical aspect of classical-style poetry: On the one hand, the absorption in poetic skills and craftsmanship was therapeutic for him in the traumatic years of the socialist revolution; on the other, the restraint of the form and the use of parallel couplet afforded him linguistic resources unavailable in the new-style poetry, so that he was able to express emotional complexity, ambivalence, and an irony that is, in his own words, “both there and not quite there.” Nie Gannu’s case demonstrates the importance of understanding the new and old verse forms in each other’s context.

The last article, co-authored by Zhiyi Yang and Dayong Ma, explores the

representative contemporary classicist poets in China whose primary channel of publication is the Internet. This characteristic not only marks them as the new tech-savvy generation, but also allows them to experiment on new language and forms, and to express thoughts and sentiments unsupported by the officially recognized literary establishments. Their poetry is thus dubbed here as “the poetry of resistance,” resisting both the institutionalization of modern Chinese literature as vernacular literature, and the dominant (in terms of quantity) type of classicist poetry recognized by state cultural institutions and mainstream media. A small number of poets and their works are closely examined to reveal their thematic, linguistic, and formal innovations.

All the articles in this double special issue delineate a picture of changes and continuities, where the relation between *wenyan* and vernacular poetry is not a lineal, let alone a teleological, progression, but is rather marked by mutual influences and complementary functions. We hope to further demonstrate the quantity and quality of classicist poetry in the twentieth and now in the twenty-first centuries, to which more but far from enough academic attention has been accorded. Hundreds, if not thousands, of anthologies are hand-copied or printed on fragile, yellowing papers, lying on library shelves or in family collections, waiting to be recompiled, reedited, and republished. Hundreds, if not thousands, of poets are waiting to be studied, some of whom still command living memories that are fading. Furthermore, their poetry has played multivalent functions in modern and contemporary society, politics, intellectual life, and cultural production and consumption, which is another topic yet to be fully explored. These two thin volumes shall be another good start.

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