



# A Critical Illumination of Poetic Styles

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People are born with sentiments,  
Sentiments are conveyed in poetry.  
Poetry appeared in the glorious antiquity,  
And flourished with The Book of Poetry.  
Liu Xie (Ch. 6, Illuminating Poetry)

What marks a milestone in Chinese literary criticism is the Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind (Wenxin diaolong) by Liu Xie (c.465-c.532).<sup>1</sup> As is noted in Chapter 6 on “Illuminating Poetry” (Ming shi), the focus is placed on a tangle of historical and formal issues in Chinese poetry dating from the antiquity to the 5th century. Even though it conducts a brief survey, it bears much significance to the development of Chinese poetics in general and its poetic styles in particular.

In order to reveal the implications of the “Illuminating Poetry,” it is necessary to pinpoint its hidden structure of formulation with a special reference to the “Postscript” (Xu zhi) for it serves as a methodological guideline. Therein Liu Xie proclaimed, “When I discussed verse and prose writing, I distinguished various genres. I traced their origins to demonstrate their developments, defined terms to clarify their meanings, listed exemplary pieces to illustrate my points, and looked into the general characteristics of each genre.”<sup>2</sup> According to this statement there arise a number of basic requirements. First and foremost, when it comes to evaluating each poetic genre or form, its origin and historical development should be tracked down; secondly, its designation should be explained with a clear-cut conceptual denotation; thirdly, the works that stand up for each genre should be selected out for attribution, analysis and evaluation;





lastly, a theory of each poetic style should be based upon these interpretive efforts and then elaborated while due highlight to its substance and artistic features is given.

As for the “Illuminating Poetry” itself, it follows up closely what it claims for such a structure of poetics. It sets out initially to present the connotation of shi (poetry) in a historical panorama by “seeking wide reference in the six classics,” obviously an example of the methodology of “explaining the categorical term in order to reveal meaning.” Then, it is immediately followed by an account of the origin and evolution of poetry, enumerating representative poets and their works that belong to different ages, and making a critical judgment in the description of their merits or flaws, i.e., the procedure of “selection of sample works for evaluation.” Finally, in starting a linear search of poetry in different times and examining closely the classical genre and popular styles, the chapter goes to draw its theoretical conclusion with regard to poetic style, its function and effect, and the craft of poetic writing. This is no other than what Liu Xie justified for his poetic ideal in “unfolding the basic pattern and its requisites in the description of each style.” In my initial reading, I have felt that the Chapter in question, though with a striking note of stylistics, actually allows itself to operate a study of the history of poetics. For it largely devotes itself to an exploration of where poetry originally arises, thus demonstrating how poetry attains different styles in its historical development and change. What is more, Liu Xie’s key conceptions of “zhezong” (correct inclusiveness) and “qitong” (holistic vision), together with other thought-provoking ideas in the “Illuminating Poetry,” have exerted great influence on artistic creativity, aesthetic ideal and stylistic characters, etc. This paper only deals with three aspects among others, namely, the development of literary style, artistic making, and stylistic paradigm.

### **The literary development: form and style**

The so-called poetic style contains at least two levels of meaning: one is tishi, which includes the formal types like what we find as requisites in the siyan (four-character) verse or the wuyan (five-character) verse the number of characters, syntax, rhyme, and rhythm; the other is style, i.e.,



the distinguishing feature that is achieved through the integrity of content and form or “mutual conquering” of each other.<sup>3</sup> Style is not only the way an artist carries himself toward his ideas, feelings, aesthetic tastes, pursuit of ideal and personality, but also a manifestation of his individuality in artistic creation, his unique command over genres, his tailoring of subject matter, his use of language, and his way of image-making in particular.

One part of the “Illuminating Poetry” that deals with “literary style” mainly relies on two modes, i.e., the diachronic mode of “tracing out the origin and historical development,” and its synchronic counterpart of “selecting out the labeling works for attribution and analysis.” Though both of them pertain to the issue of style, the former places emphasis on the historical evolution of tishi (poetic form) while the latter shifts to the diverse characteristics of different styles.

Generally speaking, Liu Xie’s overview of the development of poetic paradigm is quite inclusive. It goes back as early as to the ballads in remote antiquity down to the verses in the early 5th century. This extensive review constantly mentions as its reference frame the key notions of sishi (four classics) and liuyi (six styles) in *The Book of Poetry* (*Shi jing*), and therefore is able to identify the two poetic forms that achieve their tentative maturity during Liu Xie’s time, that is, the siyan as four-character verse and the wuyan as five-character verse. Historically these two forms used to be common in *The Book of Poetry*. However, they have gone through stages of evolution before they can stand as independent ones. As a matter of fact, it is not until the Han Dynasty around early 200 B. C. that the siyan verse first appeared in Wei Meng’s *Poem of Fengjian*, a satirical persuasion to the Duke Mao of Chu kingdom. Despite its attempts at formal innovation, the main content is largely composed of criticism and persuasion, with a view to rectify the lord’s misconduct. Obviously, it has picked up the traditional allegory widely used in the Zhou Dynasty from the 9th to the 5th centuries B. C., which serves as evidence of the practice of cultivation through poetry. As for the wuyan verse, Li Ling’s three poems *Dedicated to Su Wu* and Ban Jieyu’s *Ode to Sorrow* are said to be the first efforts. Since there existed a widespread suspicion of the origin of the wuyan verse, Liu Xie, cautious not to rush to any assertion, turned for proof to the



folk songs of “Xing lu” in The Book of Poetry, “Cang lang” in the Mengzi (The Book of Mencius), “Xia yu” (Happy and Leisurely) by You Shi in the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 B.C.), and the children’s rhyme “Xie jing” (The Crooked Path) which was popular in the time of Emperor Hancheng (32-8 B.C.), and eventually justified the factual existence of the wuyan verse in history. In addition, Liu Xie went on to enumerate it via Mei Cheng and Fu Yi (for example, the “Gu zhu” as “Lone-growing Bamboo”), and then reached a positive conclusion that there are high-quality wuyan compositions as early as in the West Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-8). And thanks to “Wang Can, Xu Gan, Ying Yang, and Liu Zhen followed the lead of Cao Pi and Cao Zhi in their active literary production,” the flourishing of the wuyan verse could come along in the early phase of the Jian’an period (196-220). Generally speaking, the evolution from the siyan verse to its wuyan counterpart is a diachronic process, which takes place by stages. This seems to show that each age will ensure the birth of a new style it need conducive to its artistic production and development.

Here I venture to put forward a conjecture that there are at least three factors contributing to the rise of the siyan and wuyan forms. These factors seem to be related to the institutional, fashion, and political domains.

### 1. The institutional factor

During the Qin and Han Dynasties, the authorities set up the institution of Yuefu (the Music Bureau), sent officials everywhere to collect folk songs, and had literati compose song or score, in order to supply music for ritual performance or entertainment. This official establishment made great contribution to the development of music and poetry in that time, even though it is considered to have led to “the rampancy of the indecent music of Zheng and the peerlessness of the classical music of Shao.” The distinguishing features of the siyan and wuyan modes lie in its much strengthened musicality and enhanced artfulness in the process of reciting. This adaptation in poetic pattern is evidently a result of both the social demand that poetry be accompanied by music, and of the technical innovation of singing. The advent, popularity, and maturity of the siyan and the wuyan verse are closely related to official or institutionalized



promotion. A similar view is shared by Huang Kan as he assumes that “Ever since the Jian’an period, literati had vied to produce the wuyan verse, and as a result there appeared a large number of them. But the style of the ballads among folk songs remained as it had been in the Han Dynasty. When we take into consideration the tone, music and lyrics carried within, the wuyan style accounted for the vast majority. The expression sounded as an echo of Yuefu, the Music Bureau in the Han Dynasty.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The fashion factor

This factor is closely associated with the institutional one. During the Han Dynasty when the unified China realized its totalitarian ruling, whatever was promoted by the Department of Music as the official and mainstream paradigm of poetry, the general public would soon follow its lead. In the case of poetry, for example, when the writing in the siyan and the wuyan forms turned out to be a fashion owing to the governmental promotion, the literati and gentry would surely strive to imitate by all means. Therefore, from the historical and cultural context concerned, the prosperity and thriving of these poetic forms can be reasonably anticipated.

## 3. The political factor

In the traditional Chinese society, the influence of the emperor and the aristocracy extended to the field of art and literature. Their taste and preference took the lead among literati and occasionally developed into a style or paradigm of great concern. The reason why the wuyan verse flourished during the Jian’an period was that the Cao brothers, emperor and prince, galloped ahead in producing poems of the new form, and thus pushed the writing of the wuyan verse up to its high tide. This political impact varied in different times. As a matter of fact, the Cao brothers’ accomplishment in poetry is also supposed to be owing to their coincidence with the prime time of the wuyan verse. By contrast, although “Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty loved literature and summoned his courtiers to improvise poetry on the Tower of Boliang,”<sup>5</sup> their production of the qiyan as seven-character verse was of much less significance, because the new form was still in its infancy and had to wait for about 700 years



to become mature and popularized in the Tang Dynasty.

With respect of style, Liu Xie's expository description is rendered both diachronically and synchronically. On one hand, he summarized on the grounds of works by different authors the overall historical development of poetry in its chronological order; on the other hand, his criticism of poetry varied with each individual poet, drawing a comparison between the generality and individuality of different poets that belonged to the same period. In Liu Xie's opinion, the siyan verse, first produced by Wei Meng, "followed the poetic tradition of the Zhou Dynasty with an intention to remonstrate"; the Poem of Lament by Zhang Heng was pure, elegant, and full of aftertaste; the wuyan pieces attributed to Mei Cheng and Fu Yi were "straight but not crude, with plaintive and moving description;"<sup>6</sup> the style of the Jian'an period was "generous of spirit, open in displaying talent, not caring for ingenious minuteness in description, and striving only for clarity in expression;"<sup>7</sup> down to the Zhengshi period (240-249), its poets began to attach themselves to xuanxue (neo-Daoism that integrates The Book of Changes and the works by Lao Zi and Zhuangzi), among whom He Yan was very "shallow", "Ji Kang stood out with his austere purity and Ruan Ji with his depth"; "writers of the Jin Dynasty leaned towards the frivolous and the ornate... their works were more ornate than those of the Zhengshi period and not as forceful as those of the Jian'an period when some sought ingenuity in embellishment and some others indulged in smooth cadences";<sup>8</sup> "poetic styles continued to change in the South and North Dynasties and early years of the Song era, because with Daoism receding into the background, nature poems came to the fore, parallelisms were sustained as long as a hundred characters, and great pains were taken to produce one striking line. Descriptions were meant to be exhaustive; language was for all purposes made to be new."<sup>9</sup>

As is discerned in Liu Xie's commentary, it involves at least three causes of the change in style, say, group dynamic, historico-cultural context, and artistic individuality of each poet.

### **Group dynamic**

Literature in the Jian'an period stood out for its generous and robust



spirit. Although specific social factors (war and peace) and political factors (the Cao brothers' relationship with poetry and rhymed writing) were accountable for its unique and unparalleled literary style, the Jian'an school of seven writers (Jian'an qizi), who joined together in their parallel pursuit of similar artistic ideal, was also an important element that deserves more attention. As a group, those writers "loved wind and moon, frequented ponds and parks, gloried in honors and made merry at parties,"<sup>10</sup> enjoying much in common in lifestyles and subject matter of poetry. Meanwhile, they benefited much from mutual inspiration and group dynamic, breathing into their own style what they communicated with each other through poetry. As a result, their poems could excel for their generosity and unrelenting outpouring of talents, all of which are rarely found in the literary output by their contemporaries or their following generations. They played down the novelty in overly elaborate expression or description, and turned to conciseness with much concern about the theme. In history, any poetic school or style that sustains time as a model for posterity has never outgrown the influence of its specific group dynamic.

### **Historico-cultural context**

So far as the historico-cultural context is concerned, it varied in accord with the popularity of Laozi's and Zhuangzi's ideas in the Zhengshi period, the indulgence in neo-Daoism and qingtian (pure talk in philosophically speculative terms) in the West Jin Dynasty, and the downfall of xuanyan (Daoism-themed verse) along with the recession of Daoist philosophy as well as the rising of nature poetry. This being the case, it had different influences upon the alteration in literary style. With both compliment and disapproval in his criticism of poetic composition in the East Jin Dynasty, Liu Xie did not hold a high opinion of the overall poetic accomplishment of that time. According to his observation, except Guo Pu's extraordinary *Roaming in Fairyland*, which stood out among its mediocre contemporaries, the works by Yuan Hong, Sun Chuo and others, although each blessed with its own ornate style, were invariably impaired by their efforts to seek both diction and purport from neo-Daoism because



of the lack of freshness and sincerity in their eloquent but monotonous abstraction. Such condition seemed unfavorable for the sake of the “verse inspired by emotion” (wei qing er zao wen). For it was associated with the fact that the notion of “sit to talk about the Dao” was running so rampant that the literati and gentry flocked after it and competed with one another in order to produce a singular and striking line. In Liu Xie’s own words, it was entangled in a rather engaging trend that the people “submerged in the Daoist atmosphere, ridiculed worldly ambitions and indulged in metaphysical conversations.”<sup>11</sup> Of course, the historico-cultural context of this kind is bound to have a multi-dimensional impact upon literary production, but here we just want to throw highlight upon the negative role it played in that specific period of time.

### **Artistic individuality**

To a great extent, the artistic individuality of an artist is well justified in its claiming authorship of a given style, although it is true that the style can also be attributed to a certain literary group or school. The Western notion of principium individuationis fits well in the study of artistic style. What makes a Tom cannot make a Peter because of the former’s distinguishing individual features such as complexion, height, name, voice, look, facial expression, the way he carries himself, and so on. Similarly, a given style is recognized merely by its distinguishable individual character (the author’s spirit, taste, artistic ideal, mastery of language, the special way to treat subject matter, and artistic traits of his works, etc.). For example, although He Yan, Ji Kang, Ruan Ji and others were contemporaries in the Zhengshi period, they developed different styles that arose from their distinctively natural disposition, erudition, pursuit, experience and value judgment. According to Liu Xie, the depth of thinking was absent in He Yan’s works because of his shallowness, the ideal profundity and purity found in Ji Kang’s works were due to his stern and unyielding character, and the deep thoughts in Ruan Ji’s works were firmly established upon his quiet and speculative disposition. As we know, the extraordinary artistic individuality is taken to be one of the essential elements for developing a unique style.

It should be pointed out that Liu Xie’s description of the evolution





of poetic paradigms that spans several thousand years is a bit too brief for it uses merely about 600 words in all. This is inevitably conducive to negligence, especially when it comes to the selection of representative works, which is no less than “one citation leaves out ten thousand other possibilities (gua yi lou wan).” For example, in his comments on the siyan verse and the Jian’an poets, Cao Cao was not mentioned; in his comments on the wuyan verse and the poets in the Eastern Jin period, Tao Qian was not reviewed. Huang Kan, a renowned annotator of the Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind, rightly points out that “With an abundance of poetic styles and their complicated origins, it is not advisable to sum them up with too short a survey.”<sup>12</sup>

Liu Xie, who is believed to be “orthodox” and live up to the ideal of “zongjing” (modeling on the classics), was capable of resting his judgment upon the objective fact and succeeded in drawing a correct conclusion that the wuyan verse originated from ballad. This finality is well backed up in the Shipin Jiangshu (Explanation and Annotation of Poetry) as says that “The wuyan verse turned up mostly as ballad and yuefu-style poem in the West Han Dynasty when the literati were still unwilling to imitate it as a model. Li Duwei, a soldier, and Ban Jieyu, a concubine, still identified it with folk song and believed it to have emerged from singing for a sentimental expression excited by things. However, the wuyan verse achieved predominance later on, and since then it has been looked upon and deployed as a handy model. The reason is no other than its origin as folk song... Ever since the Jian’an period, the literati turned to the wuyan verse and competed among themselves to produce this renewed poetic paradigm in great number. The folk song still held fast to the style of the Han Dynasty. With the wuyan verse, when we take into consideration the tone, music and lyrics carried within, its style accounted for the vast majority. The import and expression sounded as an echo of Yuefu-style poem in the Han Dynasty. All this should be able to convince us that the form of the wuyan verse derives from ballad.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Artistic creation: correct inclusiveness and holistic vision**

The theory of artistic creation can be witnessed in the “Illuminating





Poetry," where "expression arises when emotions stir" stood out among other exemplary illustrations in the chapter. Tong Qingbing holds that this conception of the origin of poetry should be conceived as "the central category of Chinese poetics." His paper on "Expression Arises when Emotions Stir in the Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind" presents a precise observation among the existent literature about Liu Xiu's system of literary criticism.<sup>14</sup>

As we know, the "Illuminating Poetry" commences with the introduction of such classical definitions as "poetry carries sentiments in words," "poetry as the discipline of human nature," "evil thoughts are absent in poetry," and "the exegesis of poetry as discipline."<sup>15</sup> All of them are intended to explain the content and meaning of poetry, its basic functions and primary role in moral cultivation relating to other Confucian expectations. Then this opening turns to define the character of poetic production, asserting that "human beings are blessed with seven types of emotion, which stir in response to the environment, and it is natural that people express themselves when emotions stir."<sup>16</sup> With respect to the nature of art, this assertion is both reasonable and refreshing, but it does not quite go in tune with the aforementioned classical ideal of poetry, where the notion of "to discipline" predominates as a means for the bridling of emotion. By contrast, Liu Xie hereby upheld the ideal of "natural rendering," and stressed the necessity of "emotional expression." Thus, a morality-based theory of emotional restraint and that of spontaneous outflow of emotion come into being as a pair of contradictory categories in his poetics.

Now questions arise about what on earth Liu Xie wanted to promote when he mentioned simultaneously the pair of contradictory categories. Did he intend to persuade people to follow the "golden mean," a principle of poetic cultivation to "discipline human nature"? Or did he approve of the essence of poetry as "expression arising from response to things" and speak up for the rule of artistic making that art should go the way it is? This follows a subsequent question about how Liu Xie treated the relationship between the classical doctrine and the new voices. With these two questions in mind, Tong Qingbing reached a conclusion that



throughout the “Illuminating Poetry,” Liu Xie kept swaying between the inheritance of “the classical doctrine” and the acceptance of “the new voices.” As for the relevant significance of the former, Liu Xie readily offered his affirmative praise. However, he did not confine himself to this alone. For he was fully aware that questions round the creation of poetry could not be solved simply through the classical definition which was then in need of being renovated by virtue of some new elements to be added. That is how the notion of “poetic expression arising from the response to things” was proposed as a complement, correction, and renovation of the traditional conception of poetry. The relation of poetry to emotion and to the correspondence between human beings and their surroundings is believed to be the outcome of “the new voices” in his poetics that deserves more attention.<sup>17</sup> Tong’s interpretation appears convincing in that it exclusively coincides with what Liu Xie intended in his hypothesis. In a similar light, we can go on to examine the idea of correct inclusiveness (zhe zhong) and the methodology of holistic vision (qiu tong), both of which run through Liu Xie’s horizon of poetics for the most appropriate and unbiased judgments.

Liu Xie declared in the “Postscript (Xu zhi)” his own conception of correct inclusiveness:

*“To evaluate one piece of work is easy; to give an overview of so many is hard... If some of the ideas here coincide with past opinion, it does not mean that I have copied them but that they are irrefutable. If they differ, it does not mean that I deliberately set out to contradict past opinion but that I have no reason to accept them as true. Whether my views differ or not from other people’s has nothing to do with whether these people are ancients or moderns. My foremost concern is to combine close analysis with unbiased judgments.”<sup>18</sup>*

As is noticed from the statement above, Liu Xie should be regarded as a practical literary critic although he advocated from the very outset of his book the two fundamental principles of zhengsheng (relying on the sages) and zongjing (modeling on the classics). Regarding those conventional theories that allow no different interpretation, he readily took them in only if he considered them to be irrefutable and still making sense; as for the new voices that do not welcome the same interpretation, he encouraged



those that worked through, and did not mechanically return to the beaten track, nor did he indulge himself in any sheer novelty or fanciful invention. What he had in view was to take over the old with the new or the different with the similar, placing them onto the platform of deep analysis, and finally coming up with a sound, unbiased, and appropriate assessment. This shows how the principle of zhezong as correct inclusiveness works for his poetics refined through an integrated tactic. This tactic basically “lies in its recognition and integration of different and even contradictive aspects without putting overemphasis on each.”<sup>19</sup> As is seen in the text on “An Appreciative Critic” (Zhi yin), Liu Xie imputed the failure in achieving correct inclusiveness to the attempt at “apprehending constant change of the world from a household angle,” depicting it as “looking into the east to find out the west wall.” In addition, the meaning of so-called yuangai or yuanzhao (panoramic viewing and observation) comes very close as synonyms to that of correct inclusiveness (zhezong).

However, the principle of correct inclusiveness was intended only as an approach to arriving at the holistic vision (qiu tong) as the ultimate end. The notion of tong was frequently mentioned in the *Dragon-carving* and the *Literary Mind*. In this context concerned, tong is meant as a comprehensive correspondence in one sense, and in the other, as a virtue of incorporating things of different nature. In “The Treatise and the Speech” (Lun shuo) Liu Xie claimed, it is a must to “investigate subtle problems and penetrate mysterious depths” in order to “attain a sound and intelligible thesis” that could be comprehended by all without being distorted.<sup>20</sup> When talking about “Choosing the Style or Natural Tendency” (Ding shi), he affirmed that a truly great writer “can manipulate styles as different as the fanciful and the orthodox,” because “if one loves the elegant style but despises the ornate, there is no versatility or compatibility to speak of.”<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere he insisted that “Only a gentleman know what human beings under the sky think and feel, and therefore resort to no crooked arguments.”<sup>22</sup> Noticeably, he was mission-bound to arrive at a disinterested, appropriate and inclusive conclusion, which was free from distortion, and left no misleading guidance to the posterity. For this sake, he also devoted another chapter under the heading of “Continuity and



Change" (Tong bian), where he discussed the interrelationship between inheritance and renovation in view of tradition. Therein he borrowed from The Book of Changes the dialectic interaction between change and continuity, that is, "Wherever there is no room for further development changes arises; change results in continuity, and continuity leads to constancy." Accordingly, he argued that "The genres of writing are constant; the art of writing is changeable... Language and thought will retain lasting appeal only when they are constantly renewed: This is the art of change."<sup>23</sup> This naturally conduces to his logical conclusion that "Constant change produces lasting appeal, and continuity prevents the impoverishment of the source."<sup>24</sup> That is why he actively recommended that the alteration of inheritance via imitation and renovation via transformation constitutes the laws of change and continuity. For it is according to such laws a poet or writer par excellence will be able to strike a balance between substance and form and between the classical and the popular.

In the final analysis, Liu Xie's schema of correct inclusiveness and holistic vision is very similar to the way of ying (inheriting and renovating). In principle, yin is to cling to tradition, while ge is to reform or make up the defect or bias. Although the pair occasionally contradicts each other, they are the key links in the continuance and development of poetic legacy. The self-evident interaction and mutual completion of yin and ge run consistently throughout Liu Xie's poetics. In the light of the principle of sage-guided reference, the "Illuminating Poetry" starts in the first place from the reiteration of the poetic significance in its ancient phase and its conventional definition. This approach comes as a result of "allowing no different exegesis (zi bu ke yi)." When discontented with the lack of inclusiveness in the old theory, Liu Xie turned to the praxis of poetic writing for the root of potential renovation, and consequently offered new hypothesis that conforms to the law of artistic production. This fresh tone is said to be the result of "never permitting the same exegesis (zi bu ke tong)." Thanks to the theoretical configuration going under the law of ying, Liu Xie did not only fulfill his mission as a gentleman that the apprehension of one's ideal by all relies on his sound and unwarped judgment, but also leave as legacy in poetics his thought of "inspiration



from things and expression of feelings.”

In Tong Qingbing’s analysis, the notion of “inspiration from things and expression of feelings” in fact covers the four elements sufficient for an unbroken process of poetic production. Specifically, “things” is used as a general term for the object, “inspiration” as an emotional activity on the part of the subject, “expression” as the formal impression of internal stirring, and “feelings” as the meaningful substance of art work. Since the four elements realize an integral poetic production, they are considered to be of great theoretical value. The notion of “things” does not exclusively refer to the external and natural beings, but it also covers what the subject beholds, speaks about, thinks and feels, in one word, the things tinged with subjective hue. Likewise, “inspiration” amounts to the imagination stirred by the things, and the emotional response amounts to the things and empathy with the things as well, or, if put in another way, the oneness (psychological correspondence) of emotion and scenery, the unity of subject and object, all of which cannot be maintained without emotion as their precondition. “Expression” is as much accented reciting as vocal or verbal treatment of “feelings”, i.e., the process of writing or “elaboration.” The “feelings” largely overlaps with the range of qingzhi, i.e., with what is harbored at heart and expressed out as poetry. On the whole, there are four points as follows in connection with the idea of “inspiration from things and expression of feelings” in terms of artistic creation:

“Firstly, poetry arises from the correspondence between the feelings within and the things without. With the absence of the feelings, the things and their mutual relation, poetry can never spring up. Hence the feelings and the things are necessary for the emergence of poetry. Secondly, the ‘correspondence’ is critical to the feelings carried through poetry. Due to the ‘correspondence’ as a psychological agent, the natural feelings in the poet will be charged with poetic meaning in its relation to the things. Thirdly, the feelings carried through poetry need to go through artistic treatment to become aesthetic feelings, and ‘expression’ is therefore the necessary access as the second agent in the production of poetry. Fourthly, poetry is by nature the ‘feelings,’ which has endured from the bud of natural feelings a dual psychological forge of ‘inspiration’ and ‘expression’.”<sup>25</sup>



It needs to be pointed out that the doctrine of “inspiration from things and expression of feelings” is in fact not Liu Xie’s original invention. It arises as a result of his effort to extend and renovate old theories of poetry. It has been agreed in much scholarship that he drew his inspiration from in the Yueji (Record of Music)<sup>26</sup> or the Yuelun (Discourse on Music)<sup>27</sup> the interpretation of music qua “sound appears as the echo of heart; when the heart is inspired by things, it will be released in the form of sound” and summed up as “inspiration from things and expression of feelings.” In other words, he seized the idea in old theory of the origin of music and reshaped it into a fitting vehicle for poetry. In my opinion, this transformation is far from being the whole story. Instead, a complete analysis should expand to the influence of the Wenfu (Literary Criticism) by Lu Ji. Actually it is Lu Ji who first came out to claim that poetry was “arising from feelings (and becoming gorgeous)” in defiance of the traditional theory of poetry as “expressing aspirations in words (yan zhi).” Liu Xie held with the idea of “expressing aspirations in words” on one hand in his attempt to follow up the tradition, while on the other hand he promoted the novel assumption of poetry as “arising from feelings (yuan qing)” in an effort to improve the old conception. He even pushed further by affirming that “Humankind possesses seven types of emotion, and they come alive when inspired by things.” This serves as a logical foundation to meet with what he spoke up for in “writing verse for the expression of feelings (wei qing er zao wen)” and what he spoke up against in “arousing feelings by means of verse-writing (wei wen er zao qing).” In considering the length of this paper, this relationship cannot be treated in great detail here.

### Further Considerations

In order to expose further the usage of the two poetic forms (siyan and wuyan) and the two styles (yarun and qingli), Liu Xie specified the apprehension of the difference in their application, saying “simplicity and floridity applies differently” as do flower and fruit (hua shi yi yong). Accordingly, a poet should never give himself up to the popular taste, nor should he allow himself to seek after what some other poet has made a



name with. If any poet wants to develop an individual style and does well with one of the poetic paradigms, he probably has nothing to do except “leaving himself to his own talent (weicai suoan),” which is preceded by the recognition of one’s natural gift and born disposition as well. This insight amounts to a truth-seeking attitude, and bears fruit with a dialectic theory that enlivens the relationship between the style of simplicity and that of floridity. As a matter of fact, the poetry is rather an outburst of emotion than an all-around accommodation of each paradigm. Even though “Poetry has unchanging forms, thinking follows no fixed rule. Each writes according to his natural gift; few can be all-round masters.”<sup>28</sup> This observation is quite faithful to the experience of poem writing. In one sense, it testifies the truth in what “simplicity or floridity depends on one’s natural talent (huashi weicai)” contains; and in the other sense, it also sets a poet free to some extent from the influence of “established poetic paradigms (heng cai).” When each man is blessed with distinct faculties and rests with his exceptional tastes, a given poetic paradigm is invariably built up with static components. If a man alive ever attempted to stretch his neck into a “dead cocoon”, he would undoubtedly be “stifled in the cocoon spun by himself (zuo jian zi fu).” Holding fast to convention and imitating others, a poet is doomed to fail in bringing his talents into full play, neither can he develop any individual style. He is sure not capable of producing anything that holds sway in the domain of poetry.

What is more, Liu Xie also examined the issue of difficulty in poem production and came up with a fairly comprehensive argument. He warned that without deep understanding of the difficulty in composing a poem, anyone who is longing for a good piece is most likely to run into entanglement because of their negligence; on the contrary, the recognition of where the impasse stands will likely help the poet get over obstacles. Apparently, the poem writing will probably gear in a process where the difficult could be reversed to certain extent. As a rule difficulty exists as it does anywhere, but it can be overcome through painstaking efforts and consequently changed into its opposite counterpart. Of course the transformation of difficulty relies on untiring exertion and perseverant pursuit, but the key element lies in miaoshi, the profound insight into the



nature of an object concerned. It can lead a poet to take effective steps in his practice. Liu Xie's conception of difficulty in poem writing can be named as the theory of apprehension of the difficult and the easy (*miaoshi nanyi*). In fact, this theory also applies to other kinds of practice as well. For example, we can have the theory of *miaoshi* unfolded in a different perspective like what we can find in the teachings of Laozi, that is, "The most difficult things begin with the easy, and the largest things arise from the minute. Hence, tackle the difficult while it is still easy; achieve the large while it is still minute."<sup>29</sup> Whenever we start with the easy and minute, through constant endeavors, it will be most liable for us to end up with a successful transformation according to the golden rule proposed above.

All in all, the whole argument in the "Illuminating Poetry" deals with three aspects of history, style and production. Some of its remarks are brief but significant, touching upon some important issues in poetics. It really deserves more attention and study. The theory of inspiration from things and expression of feelings (*ganwu yinzh*) has invited widely acclaimed analysis, while those of "being natural above all in style (*mofei ziran*)," "being graceful and elegant in style (*yarun qingli*)," "style of simplicity or floridity agrees with the poet's talents (*huashi weicai*)," and "writing poems according to one's natural gift (*suixing shifen*)" among others still need further investigation. This paper is no more than an intention to raise our awareness of them and expects more fruitful illustration in the wake.

## Notes

- 1 It is controversial about the year of Liu Xie's death. For instance, there are typically three assumptions. Fan Wenlan assumed that Liu was born in 465 and died around 520-521. Li Qingjia concluded that Liu died in 532 after examining the records about Liu Xie in the Buddhist documents written in the Song Regime during the South and North Dynasties. Yang Mingzhao reckoned that Liu died around 538-539. The second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Chinese Literature* (1988) adopts Yang's view. I hereby follow the conclusion presented in the *Ci hai* (The Encyclopaedia Dictionary in Chinese, Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1980), p. 1540.
- 2 Cf. Liu Xie. "Postscript (Ch. 50, *Xu zhi*)," in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind* (trans. Yang Guobin, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), vol.2, pp. 716-717.
- 3 Cf. Tong Qingbing, ed. *Xiandai xinli meixue* (Modern Psychological Aesthetics, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1993), pp. 463-524.
- 4 Cf. Huang Kan. *Shipin jiangshu* (Comments on Poetic Styles) in *Wenxin diaolong zhaji* (Notes on the Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2000), pp. 28-29.

- 5 Cf. Liu Xie. "Illuminating Poetry (Ch. 6, *Ming shi*)," in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind* (trans. Yang Guobin, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), pp. 64-65.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
- 12 Cf. Huang Kan. *Wenxi diaolong zhaji* (Notes on the Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2000), p.25.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.
- 14 Cf. Tong Qingbing. *Wenxin diaolong ganwu yinzhishi* (Expression Arises when Emotions Stir in the *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*), in the *Journal of Wenyi yanjiu* (Literary Studies), no.5, 1998, p. 19.
- 15 Cf. Liu Xie. "Illuminating Poetry (Ch. 6, *Ming shi*)," in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. pp. 60-61.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
- 17 Cf. Tong Qingbing. *Wenxin diaolong ganwu yinzhishi* (Expression Arises when Emotions Stir in the *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*), p.21.
- 18 Cf. Liu Xie. "Postscript (Ch. 50, *Xu zhi*)," in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind* (trans. Yang Guobin, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), vol.2, pp. 718-719.
- 19 Cf. Li Zehou and Liu Gangji, eds. *Zhongguo meixue shi* (A History of Chinese Aesthetics, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1987), vol.2, p. 609.
- 20 Cf. Liu Xie. "The Treatise and the Speech" (Ch. 18, *Lun shuo*), in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. vol. 1, pp. 248-249.
- 21 Cf. Liu Xie. "Choosing the Style, or Natural Tendency" (Ch. 30, *Ding shi*), in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. vol. 2, pp. 424-425.
- 22 Cf. Liu Xie. "The Treatise and the Speech" (Ch. 18, *Lun shuo*), in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. vol. 1, pp. 248-249.
- 23 Cf. Liu Xie. "Continuity and Change" (Ch. 29, *Tong bian*), in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. vol. 2, pp. 408-409.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 418-419.
- 25 Cf. Tong Qingbing. *Wenxin diaolong ganwu yinzhishi* (Expression Arises when Emotions Stir in the *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*), in the *Journal of Wenyi yanjiu* (Literary Studies), no.5, 1998, p. 26.
- 26 One of the Confucian classics. It is available as part of the *Li ji* (*The Book of Rites*).
- 27 An essay by Xunzi. Cf. *The Book of Xunzi*.
- 28 Cf. Liu Xie. "Illuminating Poetry (Ch. 6, *Ming shi*)," in *Dragon-carving and the Literary Mind*. pp. 70-71.
- 29 Laozi. *63 zhang* (Chapter 63 in The book of Laozi), see Wang Keping. *The Classic of the Dao: A New Investigation* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), p. 249.