All languages, tone languages or non-tone languages, have their prosodic features. The metrical patterns in the classical works of Chinese, verse and prose, represented the prosodic features of the language in a certain historical period. They have been preserved, more or less, in a tradition of “literary reading”. Being divorced to some degree from the ordinary, relatively simple, metrical patterns in the vernacular, they are not totally artificial. They are still used in the chanting of classical verse and prose as the elaborated, refined, or even exaggerated forms. From a functional point of view, these refined forms are essentially emphatic forms to fulfill, supposedly more effectively, the emotive function and poetic function of the language.

I. A General View of the Rhythm in Chinese

The rhythm (more technically, prosody) in Chinese can be classified into three layers, i.e. the rhythm in the vernacular, in classical prose and in (classical) poetry. Henceforth I mainly deal with the rhythm in poetry and prose; the rhythm in the vernacular must be studied separately outside the present talk. First of all, it is noteworthy that the oral presentation of prose and poetry can be done basically in 3 ways: reading (讽读), chanting (吟诵) and singing (咏歌), which in greater detail can be further classified into 5 forms: plain reading (念读 reading for plain sense), loud reading (朗读 reciting), cadenced chanting (赋诵), intoned chanting (吟哦) and singing (咏歌). Here I shall deal with the latter two general ways, i.e., chanting and singing.

When we take an overview of the rhythmic patterns, realized in metric patterns or verses (a verse is a metric line with regular feet) across languages, we can identify three forms: syllable-timing verse (音节体 or 音节节拍), foot-timing verse (音步体 or 音步节拍) and stress-timing verse (音强体 or 重音节拍).

The foot-timing verse (音步体 or 音步节拍) has been widely used in classical European poetry. The long-and-short foot was used in Ancient Greek and Early Latin poetry, and also Arabic and Persian poetry. The accented-and-unaccented foot was used in Late Latin poetry, and also
Germanic and Slavonic poetry.

The stress-timing verse (音强体 or 重音节拍) was used in Old Germanic poetry; and later it became the prevailing form of English poetry. The rhythmic group (loosely, a foot) is composed of a stressed syllable with one or more unstressed syllables.

The syllable-timing verse (音节节拍) was used in Romance languages, Celtic languages and many Asian languages. In China it was widely used from the pre-Qin period all the way down to the Six Dynasties. In the pre-Qin period, the main verse form was the quadric-syllabic verse (四言诗), as seen in *The Book of Songs* (《诗经》):

关关雎鸠，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。
参差荇菜，左右流之；窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。
求之不得，寤寐思服；悠哉悠哉，辗转反侧。

A later example is the poem *Duange-xing* (《短歌行》) by Cao Cao. Occasionally, long verse with a caesura (mainly, the tune particle 兮) could be used, as in *Yishui-ge* (《易水歌》) by Jing Ke:

风萧萧兮/易水寒，壮士一去兮/不复还！

And *Dafeng-ge* (《大风歌》) by Liu Bang:

大风起兮/云飞扬，威加海内兮/归故乡。安得猛士兮/守四方！

Actually, *Dafeng-ge* belongs to the category of poems and songs of the Chu style. There is a rich collection of such works in the *Chu Poetry* (《楚辞》), of which the *Lisao* (《离骚》) by Qu Yuan is the best masterpiece. Then the general vogue shifted to pent-syllabic verse (五言诗) in the Han Dynasty. A typical set of 19 anonymous poems have been regarded as its models; e.g.

明月何皎皎，照我罗床帏。忧愁不能寐，揽衣起徘徊。客行虽云乐，不如早旋归。出户独彷徨，愁思当告谁？引领还入房。泪下沾裳衣。

This was held as a norm of classical style through centuries until the Tang Dynasty at least. Li Bai’s *Ziye-qiuge* (《子夜秋歌》) is an example:

长安一片月，万户捣衣声。秋风吹不尽，总是玉关情。

何日平胡虏，良人罢远征？

See also the poem by the monk Jiaoran for a visit in vain (《寻陆鸿渐不遇》):

移家虽带郭，野径入桑麻。近种篱边菊，春来未著花。

扣门无犬吠，欲去问西家。报道山中去，归时每日斜。

To come back to the Han Dynasty--- in its late years (1st century onward), Buddhism was introduced to China, together with the translation of its sutras documents. In the search for most equivalent sinograms (汉字, a sinogram is pronounced as a syllable) in the translating (and also chanting) of the sutras, Indian śabdavidyā (声明学), i.e., philology (including phonology), began to make its way into China in a time not later than the 3rd century. In the 5th century (in the Qi Dynasty of south China), poets and writers often had friendly contacts with foreign or Chinese monks in Buddhist conventions, where they listened to the singing of Buddhist brahma-pāṭha (Chinese version), which imitated, to some extent, the Sanskrit intonation (as in veda chanting) in three tones: udātta (high), svarita (falling), anudātta (low), occasionally plus anudāttara (lower). From time to time they discussed the appropriate transliteration of Sanskrit syllables by sinograms. In so doing, they were greatly inspired by Sanskrit pronunciation and intonation (although indirectly), and began to recognize the existence of tones in Chinese (and to see also the essential combination of the onset and rime in sinogram syllables). They identified the four tones as pingsheng (平 level tone), shangsheng (上 rising tone), qusheng (去 departing tone), plus the entering tone (入 with an abrupt coda, holding corresponding tone levels of the other three tones). These tones,
with some changes across more than a thousand years, have been retained in various dialects, among which Cantonese still invaluably has the most complete system (with later division into eight tones, plus some extra feature in the entering tone). Soon, poets grouped the four tones into two categories: \textit{ping} (level tone) and \textit{ze} (oblique tones---rising, departing and entering tones), and formulated new laws for versification. The chanting of verse and prose began to have a new style by making full use of the rise and fall of the tones in different syllables. At this point, the relation between poetry and music displayed a new look. On the one hand, Chinese poems could be sung more gracefully; and on the other hand, they could be chanted more elegantly without music. The latter is very decisive in the development of Chinese poetry, especially its versification.

As standard versification finally got established in the early Tang Dynasty, Chinese poetry began to use pitch-syllabic verses. This norm was continued in the Ci-poetry (with long and short verses) from mid-Tang to Song dynasties. Such a tradition was carried on in Japan, Korea and Vietnam in the poems written in Chinese by Chinese poets or by their own native poets. (The late Professor Hua Zhongyan once reported his personal experience employing absolutely the same pattern with a Japanese scholar in chanting a Tang poem.)

However, owing to the incessant influence of Altaic languages brought about by the invading and ruling of the nomadic tribes and nations, in the northern part of China the language was barbarianized (胡化, or altaicized), although the invaders themselves were sinicized (汉化). As a result, there appeared unstressed syllables between stressed syllables in Chinese. Such a new phenomenon began to display an influence upon poetry; so in Yuanqu (元曲) we can see pitch-timing verses, as in Guan Hanqing’s work:

\begin{quote}
我是个蒸不烂、煮不熟、捶不扁、炒不爆,响当当的一粒铜豌豆！

恁子弟们谁教你钻入他锄不断、斫不下、解不开、顿不脱、慢腾腾千层锦套头？
\end{quote}

Or in another example (coined by myself):

\begin{quote}
``眼睁睁地`看着一堆``白花花的`银子，``哗啦啦地就`没了！

But in the southern drama (南戏), the ci-tradition was retained in chanting and singing. I will come back to this point later.

\section*{II. The Development of Chinese Phonemics and its Influence on Poetry}

Chinese phonemics (音韵学) has been developed on the accumulation of practical experiences of composing and chanting of poems and the conscious analysis of their syllables under the guidance of śābdavidyā principles in Sanskrit. A Chinese syllable can be segmented into two parts: onset (声纽) and rime. There can be different types of onsets, some with, some without, a following medial (介音). Likewise, there are different types of rimes---some can, some cannot, have a medial before the nucleus (vowel); and the vowel can be of different grades of highness. On the whole, both onsets and rimes can be identified into different classes (等). Such a theory is
called “dengyunxue” (等韵学), which has a relative explicit and easy way in a form of yuntu (韵图 rime charts) to show the internal structure of the sinogram syllables (in perfect minimal pairs in 4 directions!).

This theoretical study has both positive and negative influences on poetry. On the one hand, the careful identification and explicit allocation of the minute differences in the rhymes (to be exact, the rimes in syllables) offered a chance to poets so that they could produce most elegant verses in terms of rhyme (rime). Assonance (半谐韵; came/cane; 金/津) and consonance (协韵; hill, fall; 山/先) were excluded. The recognition of the four tones and their regular alternation in the syllables along a line, plus the patterned arrangement across the lines, further, brought about a beauty of high and low, rise and fall, with to and fro in rounds, and also orderliness versus intermixture in the verses! (平仄和黏对的诗律, 使诗句表现出抑扬顿挫、回环往复、整齐错综之美!)

But on the other hand, too rigid rules (even only for rhymes) became heavy fetters and handcuffs on the poets. And the earlier warning of the “eight shortcomings or taboos” (八病) proposed by poets in the southern dynasties and Sui and Tang (also under Sanskrit influence to some extent) brought about conventions to get rid of, among other things, alliteration (头韵) and internal rhyme (腰韵). They were fairly common, and sounded natural, in the Book of Songs; but now they were totally avoided.

On the whole, however, phonemics may be useful. This is especially true in “guyinxue” (古音学), the study of the phonemic system of Old (or Archaic) Chinese. By learning from the theories of historical comparative linguistics, we now try our best to reconstruct the OC phonology, so that we can have a better understanding and appreciation of OC poetry. I have proposed a hierarchical model of general syllabic structure for language comparison.

OC phonology is understood to have, among other things, some consonant clusters as in many other languages in the world. These clusters can be *sr-, *spr-, etc. Take, for example, my reconstruction of the rhyming words at the end of Qu Yuan’s Zhaohun (招魂):

......

湛湛江水兮上有枫 (*pram);
目极千里兮伤春心 (*sram).
魂兮归来, 被江南 (*nam)!

The Chinese syllable ‘feng’(风) would have its place in the model as seen above (compared with bryad---the Tibetan syllable for ‘eight’). This constructed pronunciation of *pram has a strong
support in the Korean language: *palam* (‘wind’), already recorded in an ancient book in China.
Clearly, the rhyming syllables *pram, *sram, *nam sound more harmonious and beautiful than the Cantonese fung, sam, naam, not to say the Mandarin feng, xin, nan.

### III. In Quest of a Good Way to Chant Verse and Prose 诗文吟诵佳境之追求

A poet who knows nothing about Chinese phonemics may not be a perfect poet. However, a phonemician may not be a poet, not to say a good poet; because poets are “born”, not made. But even if we do not want to be poets, it would still be meaningful to correctly understand and appreciate classical poetry in its reading and chanting.

So, the appropriate application of phonemics to composing poetry and chanting it is a very interesting issue to be studied. What is more, it is really an important thing in our effort to carry on the invaluable literary tradition of Chinese verse and prose (and more generally, the rich and elegant tradition of Chinese culture). A good understanding of the metric patterns of Chinese will enable chanter to improve their skills to make chanting more melodious, elegant and effective, both in verse and prose.

In the reading and chanting of prose, there are less things to be discussed except some principles. One thing is the textual markers, which must be clearly observed and emphasized.

In the chanting of verse, we have to adopt a suitable way to deal with the syllable-timing verse and the pitch-syllabic verse. The most important thing is to observe the pingze-rules in terms of pitch-syllable timing metre. It is to be noted that, usually, *ping-syllables should be read out longer than ze-syllables* (which treatment is, so to speak, in a relatively similar kind of foot-timing metre). Review the examples cited above:

移家---虽带-郭-, 野径-入桑--麻---。近种-篱边--菊-, 春来---未著-花---。
（第一首是标准的律诗）

长安---一片-月-, 万户-捣衣--声---。秋风----吹不-尽-, 总是-玉关--情---。
（第二首是乐府，是失黏的律诗）

This can be a standard model for the chanting rhythm of the metric verse. With such an understanding, syllable-timing verses (archaic poems [e.g. poems of the Zhou and Han dynasties] and later poems of an archaic style [e.g. certain Tang poems]) could be chanted in a loose “foot-timing” metre with some modifications. E.g.古诗:

古风, (the latter half of Zhang Jiuling’s *Ganyu*):

谁知---林栖--者-, 闻风---坐相--悦--。草木-有本-心---, 何求---美人--折--?
（悦 and 折 are in the abrupt entering tone. But as the rhyming syllables they could be chanted a little bit longer.）

After a long dominant period of the pent-syllabic verse, metric or not metric, septa-syllabic verse (七言诗) emerged as a prevailing norm. This began in the second half of the Six Dynasties and finally got established in the 10th- 12th centuries (during the Song dynasty). But all styles of poetry, be it pent-syllabic or septa-syllabic, could still be sung, which is best seen in a famous anecdote of Tang poets in a competing assessment of their own poems by secretly watching the singing girls presenting these poems.

開元中，詩人王昌齡、高適、王之渙齊名。一日，共詣旗亭小飲。忽有梨園伶官十數人登樓會讌。俄有妙伎四輩, 畀次而至。昌齡等私相約曰: “我輩各擅詩名, 可密聽諸伶所謳。
若詩入歌詞多者為優。”俄一伶唱曰：
　寒雨連江夜入吳，平明送客楚山孤。
　洛陽親友如相問，一片冰心在玉壺。
昌齡引手畫壁曰：“一絕句。”尋又一伶謳曰：
　開繚淚霑臆，見君前日書。夜臺何寂寞！猶是子雲居。
　適引手畫壁曰：“一絕句。”尋又一伶謳曰：
　奉帚平明金殿開，暫將團扇共徘徊。
　玉顏不及寒鴉色，猶帶昭陽日影來。
昌齡又引手畫壁曰：“二絕句。”
　之渙自以詩名已久，因謂諸人曰：“此輩潦倒樂官，所唱皆巴人下里之詞耳。”因指諸伎中最佳者曰：“待此子所唱，如非我詩，即終身不敢與子爭衡矣。”須臾，次至雙鬟，發聲則曰：
　黃沙逺上白雲間，一片孤城萬仭山。
　羗笛何須怨楊柳？春風不度玉門闗。
　之渙即揶揄二子曰：“田舍奴！我豈妄哉？”因大諧笑。
　（《陝西通志》引《唐詩紀事》）

As can be seen in my reconstructed presentation here, the aesthetic effect of singing poems can be realized in various ways and confined by certain factors. This is true also when they are chanted out.

In Ci and Qu, we have still some fixed metric patterns. That ci-poems could be sung is known to everybody. But how a ci is to be sung is not very clear. Although there exist some fragments of the manuscript of the Song poet Jiang Kui with musical notation, their decipherment is problematic. However, it at least gives us a few hints to the singing of ci-poetry. What is more, we could detect or feel something from our study of certain recent metric works. A retrospection from historical principles is necessary and helpful. In this connection, there are still a lot of things to do. Here I would like to mention my personal experiences of studying the Cantonese dialect and drama with an aim to understanding and reconstructing a few features of the chanting and singing of verse in the Song Dynasty. I was born in a village (of 800 years since the Southern Song Dynasty) in the northern suburbs of Guangzhou. It could be supposed that the villagers, as farmers generation after generation without much contact with the Central Plains and the north, still retain to a great extent the basic phonological system of the Song Dynasty (and the suburban accent, compared with the pronunciation in the provincial capital, retains some older features of Cantonese). Remember the series of dynasties: Tang, Five Dynasties, Song (and Liao and Jin), Yuan, Ming, Qing. The Cantonese drama living nowadays was left behind by the Qing people 100-360 years ago; and they had taken on the drama from the Ming People who possessed the southern drama. For example, the “Qu” (tune) Suwu Muyang is very old and popular (even in the north it can be heard). Here is one of my poems using such a tune, to be sung like this:

**苏武牧羊**

终年独影野瀰茫。
草凋兔尽藏，叶落鸟飞光。
北风紧，帐撕口，瞬间雪沒牀。
夜夜枕（去声）冰底，捨荐（垫）护群羊。

Zhou Liuxi
It is remarkable that, in the singing, practically all syllables have the same pronunciation used in everyday vernacular language, which can never be seen and imagined in other dialects! This implies that, in chanting and singing with an artistic flavour, the language may still remain quite natural in Cantonese. Of course, the rhythms in chanting and singing are elaborated forms compared with that in the vernacular. And these forms have a difference among themselves in chanting and singing. In chanting, we have to use a rhythm different from, or simpler (from a musical view) than, that for singing.

Notice that, diachronically, the “tunes of Qu”曲牌 (in Yuan and Ming dynasties) are newer than those “melodies of Ci”词牌 of the Tang and Song dynasties, which in turn are newer than the various forms of poems in the Tang. Let us have a short piece of Ci from Mao Zedong, sung in Mandarin (官话) and Cantonese respectively:

十六字令       Mao Zedong
山！刺破青天锷未残。天欲堕，赖以拄其间。

Now, finally, consider the chanting of the following two poems, again in Cantonese:

蜀相        Du Fu
丞相祠堂何处尋？錦官城外柏森森。映階碧草自春色，隔葉黄鸝空好音。
三顧頻烦天下計，兩朝開濟老臣心。出師未捷身先死，長使英雄淚滿襟。

登岳阳楼远眺      Zhou Liuxi
高楼浩泽漫登临，吴楚天光映古今。吞吐千流波淼淼，交融万象气森森。
美人遥望隔秋水，志士长歌撼夏林。挥蘸浮金写新什，当仁不让待知音。

Compare the two poems, and you will see that my poem has been written purely in the Tang style; and you might have felt that, in these two poems, the ping-syllables are usually longer than the ze-syllables in my chanting.

Anyway, if we could feel and grasp something about singing and chanting in the Ming, then we could feel something farther in the Song; and then something still farther in the Tang!

The Cantonese chanting can be said to be a refined form of reciting. But the chanting in many other dialects is often more melodious (or in more complicated musical patterns) than that in Cantonese, so much so that we could call it “cadenced chanting”, which is already just next to singing. Therefore, in order to retain the general term “chanting” (吟诵), I have further distinguished its two types: “cadenced chanting” (赋诵) as seen in Cantonese and “intoned chanting” (吟哦) as seen in the Wu and Min dialects. But here I will not delve deep into this delicate affair.

Now, let us turn to the topic of the chanting of prose. In terms of rhythm, the chanting of prose and the chanting of verse have few differences in Cantonese; this is also something quite peculiar, because in other dialects we can see more differences. Again I have to skip over the detailed explorations here. However, it is understandable that the chanting of prose
may tend to be a kind of cadenced chanting; and it should be so if it is to be differentiated from the chanting (especially the intoned chanting) of verse. Now let us have a piece of prose work: Fan Zhongyan’s *Yueyanglou-Ji*, chanted in Cantonese. In your potential appreciation of the rhythm, please pay enough attention to the discourse markers in the chanting. (The paragraphing has been specially made artificially by me to emphasize this point.)

**岳陽樓記 **范仲淹

慶曆四年春,滕子京谪守巴陵郡。越明年,政通人和,百廢具興。乃重修岳陽樓,增其舊制,刻唐賢今人詩賦于其上,屬余作文以記之。

余觀夫巴陵勝狀,在洞庭一湖;衔遠山,吞長江,浩浩湯湯,橫無際涯;朝暉夕陰,氣象萬千。

此則岳陽樓之大觀也。前人之述備矣。然則北通巫峽、南極潚湘;遷客騷人,都㑹於此。覽物之情,得無異乎?

若夫霪雨霏霏,連月不開;陰風怒號,濁浪排空;日星隠耀,山嶽潛形。商旅不行,檣傾檝摧。薄暮冥冥,虎嘯猿啼。

登斯樓也,則有去國懷鄉,憂讒畏譏,滿目萧然,感極而悲者矣。

至若春和景明,波瀾不驚。上下天光,一碧萬頃;沙鷗翔集,錦鱗游泳;岸芷汀蘭,鬱鬱青青。而或長煙一空,皓月千里;浮光躍金,靜影沉璧。漁歌互答,此樂何極!

登斯樓也,則有心曠神怡,寵辱皆忘,把酒臨風,其喜洋洋者矣。

嗟夫!予嘗求古仁人之心,或異二者之為。何哉?不以物喜,不以已悲;居廟堂之高,則憂其民;處江湖之遠,則憂其君。是進亦憂、退亦憂。然則何時而樂耶?

其必曰:先天下之憂而憂,後天下之樂而樂歟?!

噫!微斯人,吾誰與歸?

The discussion above is but a rough outline of the problem concerning the chanting and singing of classical Chinese verse and prose. Many issues remain open questions to be answered in a better and more convincing way.

**List of References**


(The text above is a modified version of the lecture in the tutorial.)