Software Aided Classic Chinese Poem Composition

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ABSTRACT

The forms of Chinese classic poetry have been developed through thousands years of history and are still current in today’s poetry society. A re-classification of the rhyming words, however, is necessary for the classic poetry writing to be done in the new settings of modern Chinese language. In order to maintain the continuation of the poetry forms, computing technology can be used to help the readers as well as poetry writers to check the compliance of poems in accordance to the forms and compose poems without the effort to learn the old grouping of rhyming words. This work will help revive Chinese classic poetry in modern society and promote its writability.

Keywords: Chinese Classic Poetry, Computer Aided Poetry Composition, Natural Language Processing

INTRODUCTION

Chinese classic poetry is featured in the way of expressing feelings and thoughts in a scenic surrounding. Visible objects are often skillfully related to contemplation over the life. For this reason, there was a saying that poetry and drawing have the same origin. As one of the essential parts of Chinese literature, Chinese classic poetry is drawing attention from all around the world (Owen, 1987; Waley, 1937).

Chinese classic poetry has strict rhyme and structural rules. Two major Chinese classic poetry styles are "Shi (诗)” and “Ci (词)”, each having various forms. A “Shi” has fixed number of verses and the length of verses is the same.

In addition, depending on the forms, there are detailed rules on the rhymes among the verses. A “Ci”, on the other hand, has verses of different lengths. However, the length of each verse as well as the number of verses is predetermined and the rhyme rules are normally even stricter than a “Shi”. Therefore, writing a “Ci” is also said “Completing a form of Ci”.

Through thousands of years of history, as part of the Chinese culture and civilization, Chinese classic poetry has evolved in reflecting the linguistic and societal settings of different epochs (Ramsey, 1987). Examples of some notable styles include the free style old-fashioned forms prior to Tang Dynasty, including the Book of Songs (Wheeler, 2011) and Yuefu (Selected
The evolution refined the forms of the poetry in order to utilize the tones, rhymes, and the brief wording with flexible semantics to achieve the ultimate beauty of the poetry. Even in the modern society when the old classic written forms of the Chinese language has been abandoned to give the way to the modern plain language, classic poems still represent the highest achievements in literature and adorned by Chinese people. Recital of the old famous poems is a common practice among Chinese people, especially in schools. Also, a lot of idioms came by adoption of lines from poems, and the use of those idioms has become part of Chinese people’s everyday life. It is clearly seen that the effect and the strength of the classic poems are not surmountable by modern free style Chinese poems in plain language.

An investigation in the history of the Chinese language can reveal that the pronunciation and the usage of the Chinese words have been evolving and this was reflected in the reform of the poetry styles (Baxter, 1992; Pulleyblank, 1984). As a matter of fact, some classic poems do not rhyme in the current pronunciation although they did at the time of their composition. Sometimes we have to refer to the old pronunciation to maintain the rhyme in reading. In the last century, Chinese government has standardized the Chinese mandarin and this causes the poetry society to rethink the classic forms of poetry in the new language. One major issue involves the tones of the words. For example, the classification of the rhyming words according to old pronunciation includes the “Rù” (入) sound that does not correspond straightforwardly to any one of the four tones of modern Chinese. Not only is the classification of the Rù words not plausible in the current language settings but also it impedes the writing of poems in classic forms. A re-classification of the rhyming words is necessary.

A problem that needs to be solved is that the new grouping of the rhyming words must be accompanied by maintaining the connection between the new grouping and the old one in order to preserve the continued use of the forms as well as help understand the composition of the existing poems. A dilemma, therefore, is that we still try to understand the old system while adapting to the new one. To solve this problem, we use computer technology to aid such a transition (Lin, 2011). The computing technology can further computerize the poetry checking and the composition process. This work will contribute to the current discussion in the Chinese poetry forum and benefit the poetry society with the computerized tools (He, Zhou, & Jiang, 2012).

This paper details the scheme of the re-classification of the rhyming words and antithetical phrases and the design of the computerized poetry system. The paper will be organized as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the problems in the current language settings. In Section 3, we present the proposed classifications of the rhyme words and discuss how the new classifications fit in the current language. In Section 4, we present the computer software that aids the checking of conformation of poems to the forms and poetry composition. We discuss about directions of future work and conclude the paper in the end.

THE PROBLEM OF CHINESE CLASSIC POETRY IN THE MODERN LANGUAGE

Tones of the Chinese Language and Tonal Patterns of Poems

To understand the metrical patterns of Chinese poetry, we need to know the tones of the Chinese language. Tones determine the rhymes of poems. Tones used in classic poetry are based on ancient Chinese. There are four tones, viz., flat (平 [Píng]) tone, ascending (上 [Shàng]) tone, descending (去 [Qù]) tone, and short
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