This Academic Exercise aims at analysing and assessing the literary thought of Gong Zizhen (龚自珍), a famous poet and philosopher in the Qing dynasty. Gong's outstanding achievements in classical and historical studies and in poetry writing have been widely recognized, but his literary thought has been long neglected by scholars.

In this paper, an attempt is made to reconstruct the theoretical framework of Gong's literary thought by piercing together his families, especially Mr. Pei Lian Chai, for their constant and scattered viewpoints on literature which appear in his works on classics, history, letters and poems.

This study shows that the literary thought of Gong was built upon the foundation of his predecessors and closely related to his time. Gong emphasized that the literati should have social consciousness and literature should reflect the social and political realities. Moreover, he also felt that good writing should allow a flow of true and spontaneous feelings and emotions. He also criticised the imitative and rigidly structured literary style which was practised by his contemporaries.

The last part of this Academic Exercise presents an assessment of the contribution of Gong's literary thought. Being a revolutionary pioneer in the field of verse, Gong had influenced a great host of late Qing writers including Kang Youwei (康有为), Liu Yazi (柳亚子) and others. However, this study also concludes that Gong had over stressed the social functions of literature at the expense of individual feelings and art forms.