ABSTRACT

The Nineteen Old Poems has always been hailed as the pioneer of the five-word lyrical verse (五言抒情詩). This group of poems, found in Xiao Tong (蕭統) Wen Xuan (文選) were acknowledged by most scholars to be written by a group of anonymous poets in the later part of the Eastern-Han dynasty (126-219AD). The Nineteen Old Poems, written at about 1800 years ago, has influenced many poets of the later times, even great poets like Li Bai (李白) and Du Fu (杜甫) of the Tang Dynasty, in terms of their writing style and themes.

The group of writers of these poems was believed to be people of lower classes of the society. These scholars travelled all the way to the Capital (洛陽), but were often rejected in their search for official posts.

Some of the themes of the poems include the expression of yearning for the hometown and the loved ones. The passage of time (时间流逝) and the spatial difference (空间辽阔) was among some of the common themes. At times, the poets also offered insight of the luxurious life of the officials and mocked at such a lifestyle. The poets were on the whole, pessimistic about their future, as they were deprived of their official posts and were being left behind.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the lyrical feature of the Nineteen Old Poems, and it will be discussed by using the ancient Chinese literary concept of imagery (意象). In Chinese literary criticism, imagery is defined as a binary coherence between the poet’s subjective feelings (意) and objective image (象). In my discussion, imagery used in the Nineteen Old Poems will be divided into two groups, namely, the simple imagery and the compound imagery. Within the simple imagery, images such as those of animals (动物意象), will be touched on in greater detail. This is to show how skilful the poets of the Nineteen Old Poems were in
conveying their feelings through the use of such images. As for the lyrical feature of the
compound images, they were used in the poems to induce imagination and, ultimately, convey
the fear and anguish of the poets. Next, the discussion will be in the light of the integration of
these images and the characteristics this integration displays (temporal structure, musical
structure, etc.). An evaluation of the value of the Nineteen Old Poems will also be made after this
analysis.