ABSTRACT

Bào Zhào (414? - 466), a native of Dōnghǎi 海, is well-versed in a gamut of literary forms and styles, even though he is most notable for his Yuèfǔ poetry 乐府. Although his poems have a great influence on Táng poets, they are not widely appreciated in modern times due to the difficult diction. He lived in the Liú Sòng dynasty 刘宋 (420 - 479), which is a turning point in both Chinese literary and political history. It was a time where internal power struggles never ceased. Throughout his life, he strived to become an official, but propitious circumstances were not on his side. Instead, he was entangled in the web of political upheaval, and he was eventually killed when Jiānglíng 江陵 was raided.

“Imitating the ancient style” (Nígǔ 拟古) was a trend amongst Six Dynasties poets. Besides being able to learn the art of composition, this could also be a vehicle for expressing their veneration towards talented poets of the previous dynasties. It is likely that they were also hoping to emulate the success of these preceding works. The Annotated Collection of Adjutant Bao (Bào Căn Jūn Jí Zhù 鲍参军集注) includes twenty-five such poems. Some of the poets whom Bào Zhào had imitated include Ruǎn Jí 阮籍, Liú Zhēn 刘桢 and Táo Yuān Ming 陶渊明.

Indeed, he is an expert in this genre, for his ability to grasp the essence of these previous poets’ styles is impressive. Yet some of his imitations are intended to be political allegories, and more often than not, he would lament the fact that his talent went unnoticed. This is why his “imitating the ancient style” poems appear to be his autobiography and letters of self-recommendation. This thesis therefore explores how Bào Zhào portrays his talent, inner thoughts and feelings through these poems. It is hoped that this thesis would provide new insights to Bào Zhào’s “imitating the ancient style” poetry, and act as a reference to those interested in this area.