SYNOPSIS

Gu Kuang (顧況) (Tang Dynasty A.D. 727 to 820) was a long-lived poet. His life spanned over six emperors of the Tang dynasty. During his life, he accepted with humility low government official posts, relegation and finally seclusion from society. However, he left behind several poems which till this day, little research had been done. The reasons for the lack of research are two folds: firstly, there is generally deficiency in available research material and secondly, a general neglect of the contribution which this humble poet official made to literary works.

This thesis comprises of seven chapters. The first chapter consists of an analysis of the social changes and literary influence (particularly on poetry) consequent upon the rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming (安史之亂 A.D. 757-763). The second chapter discusses Gu Kuang's imperial examination, his official posts, the reasons for his relegation and his life during seclusion from available materials. The third chapter attempts to ascertain the actual age of Gu Kuang to draw a conclusion on an otherwise endless debate. The fourth chapter analyses his poems, highlights the varied idealistic thoughts and explains his sympathy to the weak and poor, his pessimistic outlook and his views on literary works. The fifth chapter discusses his poetic creations which consists of three parts: This first part explains the development and changes of his poems, the second part analyses his literary thoughts while the third part dissects the features peculiar to his poetry. The sixth chapter comments on Gu Kuang's position in the Tang poetic circle, the development of his poems on relegation and his influence on mid and late Tang poets. The seventh and final chapter gives a summary and conclusion to the research on the earlier chapters.

After a series of research into essential primitive resources, there are several unprecedented findings. Firstly, one could trace the continuous years in the life of Gu Kuang from his success in imperial examination, his position in various government official posts, his relegation and last but not least, his life in seclusion thereafter. Perhaps the most important finding would be that Gu Kuang was the successful candidate under a special imperial edict of the imperial examination during the armed rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming. This became a serious hindrance to his later promotions. He wrote several poems to admonish his superior, Han Huang (韓滉), against arms
expansion and hegemony. This was his admirable quality: He detested warfare and propagated that the country should be united as one. One of the many reasons of his relegation had to do with his courage to criticise people in authority. During his life in seclusion, he first stayed at Wuxing (呉兴), then at Maoshan (茅山). Secondly, from one of the funeral dirges written by Gu Kuang and according to the aristocratic funeral rites and rituals prevailing then, one would be able to calculate the actual age of Gu Kuang to be 92 years (A.D. 730-822). What was always an endless debate has now a new finding. Thirdly, from a comprehensive analysis of all his works, one would be able to discover that the development of his ideals and creativity was in complete consonance. He sympathised with the small and weak, and satirized lordly influential officials. From his personal experiences, it was also easy to detect the meaning of nothingness in Buddhism and the serenity and quietness of Taoism in his works. His vagabond lifestyle contributed to his understanding and appreciation of folk art while at the same time, formed an aesthetic viewpoint for him. Folk art had its considerable and noticeable influence to his poems and was also one of the causes for the evolution fresh and natural style in poetry. Fourthly, Gu Kuang’s literary ideals showed that he was a humanitarianist. Due to the prevailing conditions of the society then and personal reasons, however, he gradually transformed his beliefs, from Confucianism to religious, leading to a tragic escapism from community by staying in the deep mountains and valleys. Fifthly, Gu Kuang’s collection of poems was innumerable. This essay not only probes into the evolution of his collection of poems but also corrects some of the misnomer of his poems. At the same time, a compilation of his works as available from the research is set out in a table of the essay for reference and contrast. Lastly, it is the views of the writer that Gu Kuang’s poetic works influenced the style of poets during the mid-Tang Dynasty and perhaps even the late Tang Dynasty immensely.