

# "One's Own Voice": on Liang Yuchun's prose writing

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**Abstract.** Liang Yuchun's prose writing holds a unique value and significance in the history of modern Chinese literature. He approached writing with a passion for life, drawing upon concrete life experiences as creative material. His "whispering" style of youthful reflection reveals the intellectual atmosphere of an entire era. Through the interplay of his pessimistic and optimistic attitudes, he cast a skeptical eye on all forms of authority and truth, producing essays that shine with the light of human nature and uphold the spirit of freedom and independence. Deeply influenced by Charles Lamb and Six Dynasties literature, Liang's prose demonstrates the maturity of modern prose through a harmonious integration of Chinese and Western literary resources. Liang Yuchun is a neglected gem in the annals of modern literary history. Researching his prose offers new avenues for understanding prose writing and youth consciousness in the post-May Fourth era.

**Keywords:** Liang Yuchun, prose studies, creative thought, skepticism

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## 1. Introduction

Compared with earlier prose traditions, the most distinctive feature of May Fourth prose is its pronounced spirit of freedom and independence. As personal consciousness gradually awakened through the New Culture Movement, the call for literature to express individuality and restore the spiritual subjectivity of the human being became a prevailing intellectual current. In literary creation, promoting a free and independent spirit became a shared pursuit among May Fourth writers. As one scholar notes, "In terms of content, prose places greater emphasis on personal experience and inner feeling. Life, labor, reading, and travel—all relate to the individual or involve individual participation. Even as a bystander, the focus remains on the personal gaze; thus, in terms of form, particular attention is paid to the so-called 'personal tone.' As a result, prose depends on the spirit of freedom more than any other genre" [1]. With the convergence of an awareness of the prose form and a heightened sense of subjectivity, May Fourth writers used prose to carry forward the spirit of freedom. Even after the May Fourth tide receded, its residual influence persisted.

Liang Yuchun was an outstanding inheritor of this residual force. Although he "disappeared into the night sky like a comet" [2] and faded from the mainstream of modern Chinese literary history, his brief and emotionally turbulent life—marked by "unpredictable appearances, now sorrowful, now joyful" [3]—left behind only two collections, *Spring Wine Collection* and *Tears and Laughter*, comprising thirty-five essays and numerous translations. Yet he consistently approached life with fervor, sincerity, and innocence. He candidly and unreservedly reflected a young man's truest, most forthright, and independent thoughts in his writing. As such, his works always resound with an elevated spirit of freedom—his "own voice"—free from the noise of his era. His writing was a dialogue with himself and with fellow youth like himself. As a youth shaped by the May Fourth movement, Liang's prose, emerging after the fervor of that period had subsided, outlined the spiritual landscape of his generation. Exploring how his prose writing was unified with his life and thought is not only essential for understanding the psychological and emotional depth of the individual Liang Yuchun, but also serves as an important lens for examining the intellectual state of youth in the post-May Fourth period.

## 2. Writing in the torrents of life with heart and soul

Turgenev once remarked on literary creation: "In a literary genius... or rather, I believe, in all kinds of genius, what matters most is something I dare call one's own voice. Yes, what is essential is one's own voice—vivid, distinctive, personal tones that no other throat can utter... A person full of vitality, brimming with originality, and gifted with exceptional talent is most markedly characterized by this." [4] In the case of Liang Yuchun, his writings are no less than heartfelt utterances forged in the blaze of his

own life. Even across the boundaries of time and space, the vitality of his spirit surges through his essays with an undiminished intensity.

Born in Fuzhou in 1906 and passing away in Beijing in 1932, Liang Yuchun's life spanned only twenty-six years—a brief arc that nonetheless flared like the most radiant firework. In his attitude toward life, Liang was never one to cling to it timidly. Rather, he disdained those who lived conservatively, clutching life as though it were a fragile treasure. As he once wrote: "Those who live cautiously and obediently, guarding life day by day, constantly fearing its loss, end up missing out on its true joy. Only when the coffin is closed do they realize they have squandered a precious lifetime." [5] ("On 'Tramps'") It was for this reason that he praised "the wave-riders in the sea of life"—the tramps, driven by instinct and untethered passion. He quoted Jackson: "The tramp lives in the turbulent tide of life," for only a soul free of fetters and full of childlike innocence can truly grasp the essence of life. Liang Yuchun himself dove headfirst into the tides of life, burning like fire—and indeed, fire held a special place in his imagination. "Liang Yuchun loved fire. He regarded the metaphor 'life is like fire' as a beautiful symbol of human existence. All things in life worthy of love—art, faith, the pursuit of knowledge, and romantic affection—could be compared to fire. He frequently mentioned Prometheus from Greek mythology. His writing, following in the wake of May Fourth authors, was imbued with a fiery passion and intense thought." [6] His essays feature three with "fire" in their titles—Watching Fire, The Fireman, and Kissing Fire—for him, fire symbolized the very meaning of life. He wrote: "Our lives should be like flames—free and unrestrained, surging forward according to our own will. Only then will we feel alive, feel the joy of being. Our spirits should flicker like fire, directed solely by their inner heat, smashing down barriers of custom, prejudice, and morality, flying freely until they spark and blossom into dazzling flames." (Watching Fire) "He dared to kiss this fierce, living fire, and in its glow, decay was transformed into magic, the world bloomed with spring flowers. No wonder he was always in awe; no wonder his eyes resembled those of Greek statues—for the Greeks too kissed the fire of life and sang of its wonder." (Kissing Fire) It was this ever-burning inner fire that fueled his relentless inquiry into life and the human condition. His prose pulses with a yearning to understand, a profound sensitivity to joy and sorrow alike.

Because his writing arose from such intense and sincere experience, Liang Yuchun's essays brim with lived reality and emotional honesty. His compositions always emerged from powerful feelings and authentic events, maintaining the posture of youth and speaking to the reader like an intimate friend. This tone renders his writing deeply personal and emotionally resonant. In *On Public Lectures*, he presents his skepticism toward the prevailing fad for public lectures in the form of a casual conversation: "If one truly seeks knowledge and learning, those bits and pieces from lectures are useless. Even sitting in class does little. What matters is a genuine thirst for understanding, not some herd-instinct dressed up as a thirst for knowledge." In essays like *A Letter to a Heartbroken Man*, *She Left*, *Bitter Smile*, and *Tomb*, he writes earnestly of love: real love is always fleeting, but its brief existence leaves a lasting, searing memory. Even if loss is tragic, it does not diminish our fundamental yearning for love. In *A Spring Night Worth a Thousand Gold*, he sings the praises of sleeping in, calling it "an art." While Confucius scolded Zai Yu for napping during the day, Liang saw "late rising" as the prelude to daily happiness—the only remedy for a life that is dull and anxious. In *Cats and Dogs*, he confesses his irrational fear of animals: "Shamefully, I'm afraid not just of dogs, but cats too. In truth, I have a general fear of all animals." These glimpses of everyday life became key sources for his essays, and his keen sensitivity to such experience enabled him to connect with readers on equal terms. His prose, warm and genuine, often touched readers deeply. As Liu Xiongyang exclaimed after reading his collected essays in one sitting: "I have never encountered an essayist who moved me as deeply as Liang Yuchun." [7] The painter Wang Yuping similarly reflected on the lasting impact of Liang's writing: "Ten years have passed, and if Liang Yuchun's essays brought changes to my life and art, it is because a shared longing for life already connected us. That longing carried me into my forty-second year. [8]"

This emotionally driven expression of lived experience gives Liang's prose its characteristic xuyu (rambling or musing) style. In 1926, Hu Menghua's *Xuyu Essays* explicitly defined the genre by its focus on the personal and the everyday, forming a sharp contrast to traditional Chinese prose, which emphasized moral or philosophical declarations. "It is a rebuttal to the grandiose mode of discourse in classical Chinese essays." [9] Chen Sihe similarly notes: "This kind of essay does not engage in lofty logic or rigorous argument. It is like idle household chatter, written in an elegant yet cool and detached style, composed of fragmented musings." [10] Liang's essays do not present deep philosophical systems; they consist of fleeting thoughts without clear structure, just as the writer Feiming once said: "His ideas are like strings of stars across the sky, twinkling everywhere, but without a connecting thread—they vanish in a blink." [11] And yet, through their impassioned sentiment and unpretentious observation, his essays take a freewheeling, spontaneous path [12] that sets them apart from other prose of his time, becoming a unique presence in modern literature. Reading his work, one experiences not only the lightness and freedom of thought but also glimpses the author's own leisurely, wandering personality. This xuyu style reflects the unity between Liang Yuchun's literary personality and personal character, resonating perfectly with his naturalistic view of writing. He believed that "when a writer grabs his hair, furrows his brow, and exerts every ounce of energy to compose something, the result often fails to please. It would be better to read something lazily tossed off by an idle fellow—plain and unadorned, yet far more touching." (*Drunken Dream Talk I*) He also wrote: "The power of literature lies buried deep in the heart—it cannot be destroyed by ideology or principle." (*Literary Miscellany*) Thus, only writing that flows naturally from sincere emotion is worth reading. Otherwise, "Writing produced by effort is bad writing—not worth learning from," for it will always fall short of that seamless, uncrafted perfection.

### 3. The writing of optimistic pessimism and skeptical thought

Liang Yuchun was deeply intrigued by the "mystery of life." Though such contemplation seemed heavy in comparison to his relatively limited life experience, he nonetheless expressed profound admiration for writers like Shakespeare—figures who, despite not necessarily being encyclopedic scholars, had deeply penetrated the essence of life and thus earned Liang's highest respect. He believed that "true writers enter the very heart of life" and need not rely on erudition alone. On the other hand, Liang himself delved deeply into Chinese and Western literary classics, especially the rich tradition of English literature, discovering others' lives in this vast indirect world of human experience and thereby gaining insight into his own. Within the intellectual realm he wove for himself, he crafted a vibrant image of cultural vitality: simultaneously spirited and melancholic, hopeful and despairing, rebellious and resigned, profound in knowledge yet limited in lived experience [13]. Thus, his prose always intertwined two opposing life attitudes: pessimism and optimism. Yet even amidst this contradiction, he often greeted readers with a smile. Although he had peered into life's inevitable sorrows and regrets, he still sought ways to resolve and channel them through everyday living. Just before plunging into bottomless melancholy, he would often pull back with the courage to face life head-on—thereby revealing his philosophy of optimistic pessimism.

A deeper look into his thought reveals that both his optimism and pessimism were rooted in skepticism—a worldview that had significant influence on the May Fourth generation of youth and persisted in those who followed, like Liang. The May Fourth era was a time of intellectual liberation and awakening, during which countless "isms" and theories surged forth in a short span, causing every young person to be shaken by the dualities of tradition and modernity, old knowledge and new, the individual and the collective, the nation and the world. The result was a sky full of "problem symbols," fostering a spirit of skepticism that urged people to "re-evaluate all values." While May Fourth youth may have once believed passionately in a bright future, by the turbulent and disillusioning 1930s, that passion had faded, and young people had to confront a dark reality with no clear path forward. Depression, solitude, and uncertainty dominated their inner worlds. As Liang once wrote: "Clutching at the empty girdle, looking back in endless sorrow"—this is the taste we, this group of people, experience daily. Countless golden hopes have been lost; only the shadow of hope remains..." (Dawn). So how did Liang confront such a spiritual dilemma? His method was to lift a cup of spring wine, drink deeply, dream freely, and speak of life with abandon—thus adding a splash of bright color to his otherwise dim reality. This dual emotional state—"weeping when awake, singing when drunk" (Dawn)—though buffeted by doubt, reveals a deep love for life and a steadfast belief in freedom and ideals. These become the grounding tones in Liang's essays, imbuing them with vitality and youthful passion.

#### 3.1. Optimistic pessimism

When facing elementary school children, middle schoolers, or old men, Liang Yuchun often found himself overcome by an unspeakable sorrow. The former made him feel dull and world-weary, while the latter filled him with fear over the dissipation of life force. Therefore, he once exclaimed, "If we are to praise the decline of vitality, why not, on a moonlit and breezy night, deliver our lives straight to the doorstep of death?" (*So That's What It Is*). He saw "suicide" as the shortcut to ease sorrow, showing no concern for the meaning of life, and regarding life as endless grief—sheer pessimism. Yet, he left two "buts" at the end of that piece—what do they signify? In another essay, *On the View of Death*, we find an answer. Shakespeare once said, "To be or not to be, that is the question." Even a sage like Shakespeare could not avoid contemplating both "being" and "not being." But in Liang's world, only "non-being" seemed worth pondering. He approached life with agnosticism: "Since we were not born of our own will, how can we know the purpose of life?" and "Perhaps only God knows the meaning of life" (*On the View of Death*). On the contrary, "though we do not initiate life, we often seek out death ourselves" (*On the View of Death*). Therefore, our "view of death" deserves the same attention as our "view of life." Liang's intense focus on death stemmed from confronting the fear it inspires, and transforming this helpless, passive end into an act of willing acceptance. In this way, beyond pessimism lies a true optimism about death. Grand talk about "life philosophy" and giving life meaning is often a veil of optimism that hides deep-seated pessimism. Han Ziyong once said: "Thinking about death is the most difficult; it points to the value of life." [14] Thus, it is precisely out of his profound love for life that Liang Yuchun was willing to explore death so actively. In this sense, he fits the mold of what Lu Xun called a "true warrior."

As for "living," Liang believed that the greatest fortune lay not in attaining happiness or fulfilling ambitions, but in preserving vitality and curiosity. If one walks through life merely as a physical shell, losing sensitivity to both joy and sorrow, then "to live" becomes nothing more than tragedy. In *The Sorrow of Losing Sorrow*, he expresses deep grief and regret for his former close friend "Qing," who had "lost all feeling for comedy and tragedy alike." Even though "I" was also someone whose dreams and ambitions had worn away over the years, "I" could still feel sorrow and tragedy—and was therefore not yet pitiable. "Qing" had become someone who "devoured his own heart," with nothing but an "exquisite emptiness" inside. The world to him was numb and indifferent, devoid of vitality—a dead life. Facing such a "Qing," "I" found it hard to believe, yet was forced to accept this person who still "grinned grimly, smiled vaguely, and kept on living." Despite the pervasive gloom, Liang negated this "heart-dead" existence and thus regained a sense of meaning in life. Amidst sorrow, there remained a thread of comfort, expressing the authentic emotional complexity of a young man—interwoven with both joy and grief.

Looking broadly at Liang Yuchun's essays, this intertwining of pessimism and optimism is nearly ubiquitous. Even the titles of his two collections reflect this duality: *Spring Wine* serves both as the intoxicant he used to escape life's suffering and as the tonic that allowed him to speak freely, laugh at life, and dream vividly; while *Tears and Laughter* is even more direct—though life

may rarely yield heartfelt laughter, "tears are affirmations of life," proving that we still cherish and care about things in this world. Due to limitations in both historical context and his own life experience, Liang was unable to envision a clear and bright future. Thus, he wrote in a consistently somber tone, relying on the limited vitality he possessed to maintain his longing and pursuit of kindness, freedom, and independence. In essence, his outlook remained a fundamentally positive one: pessimism within optimism.

### 3.2. Skeptical thought

Liang Yuchun's essays are replete with seemingly heretical and rebellious ideas. His critique of traditional culture, divergence from prevailing ideologies, and reflections on youth and life all reveal a kind of "out-of-bounds" thinking. He was passionate yet acerbically indifferent, idealistic yet hesitant and lost—qualities that strongly suggest a skeptical orientation.

In his essay "Give Me Back My Head" and Other Pieces, Liang Yuchun uses the bizarre and absurd image of Guan Yu shouting "Give me back my head!" after his decapitated head is presented as a peace offering. This serves as a metaphor for his own plaintive cry: "Never did I imagine I would one day utter such a gloomy and bitter cry myself." At its core, this bitter cry amounts to a single declaration: "I do not believe!" What Liang doubts is precisely those so-called "truths" that people accept without a second thought—those "mainstream" ideologies that are passively and unanimously embraced without debate: "Religion must be negated," "Confucius must be overthrown," "Eastern culture is inherently worthless," "Soviet Russia has the most advanced literary tradition," "All schools—primary, secondary, and university—must teach vernacular Chinese exclusively; literature must evolve (because Mr. Hu Shi wrote a treatise on literary evolution)," "Behaviorism is the only legitimate psychology," "Philosophy must be grounded in science," "The new is always better; all that is old must be destroyed." In Liang's view, such dogmatic declarations obstruct free thought. Under the shadow of dogmatism, dissenting voices are silenced, and differing opinions are obliterated. Everyone becomes an "accommodating" person, someone "willing to sacrifice," but fails to notice that "their own heads are disappearing one by one." Most people submit to this "discursive hegemony." Liang, however, refuses to comply—he wriggles uncomfortably, holds his head high, and asks with a smile, "Why should I accept this?" While everyone else is drunk on what is fashionable, only he remains sober and alert, sensing that something is not right.

Beyond those who willingly surrender their "heads," there are also those who eagerly wish to sever others' heads. Liang criticizes the 1925 Peking Daily Supplement campaign soliciting a list of "Ten Must-Read Books for Young People," and he takes issue with the appendix of Liang Qichao's 1923 article Reading Guide for Chinese Classics, which includes a "Minimum Essential Reading List." Liang doesn't object to book lists per se, but the moment "must-read" is appended, the compiler appears petty, and worse yet, it deprives young people of the very qualification to be "young." After all, "if these are books all youth must read, then those who haven't read them must not count as youth." Even more absurd is Hu Shi's claim that there is a single, unquestionable method for studying the history of Chinese philosophy—this, to Liang, embodies the image of a guillotine-wielding executioner eager to behead the minds of young people. Faced with such "authorities," Liang Yuchun refuses to lie down and be slaughtered. Nor will he allow himself to become the passive prey of those who exercise their intellectual authority like tyrants. What he wants is simply to "take good care of this six-and-a-quarter-pound head" and to speak "ordinary and mundane words that express his own personality."

In On 'Tramps', Liang Yuchun reveals his distinctive reflections on life. While others argue incessantly about how best to translate the word gentleman, Liang chooses instead to discuss the "tramp." In a society of gentlemen, people treat one another politely, considerately, and aim to "avoid making those around them feel discomfort or conflict of opinion or emotion—no tension, no suspicion, no resentment." Everyone feels at ease, as if they were at home. It sounds like the ideal society—harmonious and free of confrontation. But Liang questions whether this is not actually the "peace of the dead." No one is willing to take the lead; everyone just echoes and compromises. There's no vitality. Tramps, on the other hand, are bold and unrestrained, fearless and driven. They are the "catfish" that stir up the stagnant waters of a lifeless world, injecting it with a bit of energy.

On the matter of freedom, Liang argues, "When Nature created us, we were all tramps—it is society that turned us into respectable rule-followers." In his eyes, the tramp symbolizes freedom, while society imposes the shackles that bind them and turn them into tedious, ordinary people. He questions the so-called "rules": things that appear dignified and orthodox are often the byproducts of breaking those very rules. Many literary figures idolized by gentlemen have tramp-like pasts. Thus, Liang provocatively asks, "Why is it that tramps are the ones who write so many immortal works, which later generations of 'gentlemanly' college students dutifully read night after night?" To him, "the best way to cultivate creative spirit" is to "fool around"—to challenge the constraints of the mundane world. Formal education, with its rigid instruction, only serves to deaden the mind. He even suggests that suspending classes "would be of great benefit to the future of Chinese literature." Liang's rebellion against "rules" does not result in the regression of civilized society; rather, it is the true engine of social progress. Sadly, most people believe that social advancement comes from adhering to the rules—they never question them, nor are they permitted to question them, because they themselves are the product of those rules. But Liang Yuchun is a restless soul. He wants to see the light. He wants to break down the iron house. So he raises the hammer of "doubt" and pounds on the walls of "rules." The clamorous noise provokes the displeasure of those long accustomed to slumber. Their tranquil dreams are disrupted. As even a sliver of light peeks through, they hurriedly shield their eyes and cry out, "Quick, bring back the rules!"

Thus, like Lu Xun's famous retort—"Because it's always been this way, does that make it right?"—Liang Yuchun too embodies a spirit of defiant questioning. He responds to reality in an independent and unconventional manner: some are delighted by his words, others scoff. He even jokes that he may be "guilty of reactionary tendencies and should be charged with ideological backwardness." Yet he persistently and tirelessly continues to voice his "own sound."

Nearly all of Liang Yuchun's essays reflect his skeptical thinking. His doubt toward mainstream beliefs, authoritative figures, and societal conventions ultimately reveals his admiration for the spirit of independence and freedom. The more he questions what others unquestioningly believe, the more he affirms his own faith in the values of autonomy and liberty. The only pity is that his essays often stop at doubt and fail to provide adequate support for the convictions that lie behind it. As a result, they sometimes appear shallow or flippant, sustained only by the youthful passion that underpins their arguments. Perhaps this reflects a broader feature of the post-May Fourth generation—a cohort awakened but still facing a pathless future.

#### 4. A modern literary style integrating Chinese and western creative resources

Hu Shi pointed out in *The Autobiography of Hu Shi* that the May Fourth Movement "focused on the introduction of contemporary Western thought, new concepts, and new trends," [15] which was of decisive significance for the formation of the modern character of Chinese new literature. The influx of foreign cultural resources into China occurred both passively, due to foreign invasions, and actively, through the return of a large number of overseas students. Especially the latter, many of whom became the pioneers and leading figures of modern literature—such as Hu Shi, Bing Xin, and Lin Yutang who studied in the United States; the Zhou brothers and Yu Dafu who studied in Japan; Chen Duxiu who studied in Japan and France; and Ba Jin who studied in France—all carried the profound influence of their study abroad experiences into their literary creations. These writers brought a more comprehensive, in-depth, and enriched understanding of Western culture into China. Thus, it was through the active adoption of Western cultural resources by modern writers that new literature ultimately took shape. Of course, traditional Chinese cultural resources were also important to the emergence of new literature, but they were not decisive; rather, they served as the foundational background, highlighting the unique significance of new literature. Regarding the formation of modern prose, Zhu Ziqing stated that "the direct influence on modern prose still comes from external factors," [16] which directly underscores the importance of Western cultural resources. These influences extend to the author's personal sentiments, stylistic concepts, and specific writing techniques.

The influence of Western cultural resources is also distinctly evident in Liang Yuchun's prose works, particularly the deep impression left by British essayist Charles Lamb, to the extent that Yu Dafu referred to him as "China's Elia" (Elia being Lamb's pen name) [17]. Although Liang never studied in the UK and was only acquainted with Lamb through self-study and reading, this did not diminish the "Lambian temperament" evident in his writings. Having studied English literature under Yeh Kung-chao in the English Department of Peking University, Liang had a solid foundation in English. Over a period of five years, he completed more than 20 translated works, including three anthologies of British prose, involving over 400 foreign authors. As Yu Daxiang noted, "Liang Yuchun, though never having studied abroad, is a young prose writer of the first rank in the past hundred years. His knowledge of Western, especially British, culture, literary history, and various forms of literary creation is as detailed and comprehensive as if cataloged from memory." [18] Hence, Liang was able to naturally incorporate Western cultural resources into his work—drawing from them while also transcending them—thus expressing a unique personal style. The development of this unique style was, of course, inseparable from the influence of traditional Chinese culture. As Feng Zhi remarked, "He learned how to observe life from British essays, how to savor life from Chinese poetry—especially Song verse—and how to explore life from Russian novels." [19] Feiming also commented, "This is a natural growth, one that cannot be imitated or acquired through learning. His personal letters to friends reveal his true character—charming and multifaceted, splendid and captivating, somewhat chaotic yet profoundly deep—reminiscent of the prose of the Six Dynasties." [20] Immersed in Chinese traditional culture, Liang Yuchun was able to transcend the limitations of Western thought in his prose writing and, through the harmonious integration of Chinese and Western creative resources, shaped a truly modern literary style—becoming a model for language use in new literature.

##### 4.1. The influence of British "Lambian Essays"

Lu Xun once remarked in his essay *The Crisis of Prose Essays*, "Prose essays have achieved greater success than fiction, drama, and poetry. Naturally, this success includes struggle and combativeness, but as they often borrow from the British essay (Essay), they also carry a bit of humor and grace; their writing is elegant and refined. This serves as a demonstration against traditional literature, showing that vernacular literature is capable of what classical literature prides itself on." [21] This illustrates the broad and profound influence of British prose on modern Chinese prose. Among many British essayists, Liang Yuchun was especially fond of Charles Lamb and even wrote *A Critical Biography of Charles Lamb*, in which he described Lamb as "the greatest essayist of Britain." To Liang, Lamb was not merely a model of prose writing but also a spiritual guide and kindred soul in temperament, sentiment, and thought—a friend never met yet deeply understood. Thus, what we feel in Liang's prose is not a mechanical imitation of Lamb's writing techniques, but an emotional affinity and a shared approach to expressing life.

Although Lamb led a life of hardship, his essays often exuded a sense of humor—"a smile through tears"—lightly dissolving pain and revealing a love of life and positive outlook. Liang referred to this as "heroism" (*A Critical Biography of Charles Lamb*). Liang inherited this trait in his own writings. In an era of hesitation and despair, humor became his way of releasing stress and resisting adversity. He could casually mock public speaking, freely satirize the "must-read lists" prescribed by "masters," unabashedly express his fondness for sleeping in, or ridicule those overly cautious "gentlemen." He wrote, "Those who smile all day do not tell jokes, because humor stems from perceiving contradictions in life," and, "Through the ages, all great humorists have been deeply sorrowful." Therefore, humor is not meant to provoke loud laughter but to "gently utter a few witty lines, enough

to make people smile faintly at the corners of their mouths" (*Drunken Talk II*). This represents a deep emotional resonance with Lamb; both shared a similar approach to expressing life.

Lamb often used allusions and quotations in his works, and Liang's prose exhibits the same artistic feature. He frequently referenced not only Chinese classical poetry and idioms, but also a variety of Western quotes and literary works—for example, Spenser's poetry (*The Sorrow of Losing Sorrow*), Blake's two poetry collections (*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*), Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (*Dawn*), Robert Herrick's "Upon Himself" (*Drunken Talk II*), French critic Amiel, and Katherine Mansfield's husband Middleton Murry (*Literature and Life*). These rich references reflect his strong command of English and the extensive influence of British culture.

Lamb's use of English syntax also inspired Liang's prose writing. Chinese emphasizes meaning over grammatical structure and is less bound by logical syntax, which can sometimes lead to vagueness. English, on the other hand, often employs short sentences and frequent use of relative adverbs, relative pronouns, and conjunctions to build logical connections. This results in a more precise and rigorous expression, lending a distinct sense of rationality and thoughtfulness. Liang's prose, influenced by English sentence structure, appears orderly and forceful. His reflections advance step by step and often explore unexpected paths—demonstrating his flexible and meticulous logic.

#### 4.2. The influence of the Six Dynasties aesthetic

Although it is difficult to trace Liang Yuchun's systematic study of traditional Chinese culture, he once expressed his deep admiration for the "figures of the Six Dynasties and the poetry of the Late Tang." His friend Fei Ming also referred to him as a talent of the Six Dynasties and described his prose as "Six Dynasties-style writing in modern literature." These comments offer clues that the aesthetic of the Six Dynasties was an important creative resource for Liang—something that is also reflected in his prose works.

The Six Dynasties aesthetic in Liang's prose is mainly manifested in two aspects: refined and elegant language, and a leisurely and unrestrained personal style. Six Dynasties literature is known for its ornate diction and meticulously crafted form. Although Liang's prose does not overly rely on florid language, its elegance and precision evoke a similar sense of beauty. For instance, in his essay *Dawn*, he alludes to the line "Empty holds the silk girdle, regretfully turning back" from Li Yu's *Immortals by the River* (Linjiangxian: The Cherries Have Fallen, Spring Has Gone), using it to open his theme and ultimately concluding: "Thus, failure is the guardian of illusion, melancholy is the crystallization of dreams, and the most delightful, dewdrop-like emotion. We live, after all, to cultivate more wistful affections, so as to escape the pressures of reality and retain youthful imaginings to nourish our withering souls." Here, the classical allusion is integrated naturally; the rhetoric is appropriate, and the sentence structure is carefully balanced, delivering an aesthetic pleasure. In *Spring Grass Turns Green Again*, he writes: "A kindred spirit is never easily found—in truth, we need not yearn so desperately. Who can claim to truly know themselves? Otherwise, the Greeks wouldn't have carved the phrase 'Know thyself' on the temple at Delphi." The first reference is from Gao Shi's poem *Farewell to Recluse Jin of the Third Rank*, lamenting the difficulty of finding a true friend. The second comes from an inscription on the temple of Apollo at Delphi, exhorting individuals to understand themselves before judging others. The clever juxtaposition of Chinese and Western classical references adds novelty to his argument and provides readers with a delightful intellectual experience.

As for personality, like the literati of the Six Dynasties, Liang Yuchun favored a life of leisure and spontaneity. Although he spent his life working in "intellectual marketplaces" as a "clerk," he was dissatisfied with the university system of his time. He advocated that college students—especially those in the humanities—should not have to attend lectures and could rely on self-study. He also believed that celebrity lectures were little more than spectacles and not worth attending. The "ideal person" in his eyes was someone who, like a wanderer, could live freely and care little about getting up early for productivity. He had distinctive views on life and death, tears and laughter, darkness and light, often appearing out of step with his time. This attitude echoed the unrestrained and carefree ethos of the Six Dynasties literati, particularly the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove." Thus, his prose naturally took on a lyrical character. Whether pondering the taboo subject of death or mocking politics and authority, it was ultimately an outpouring of emotions that demanded expression, not persuasion—spoken casually for others to hear casually, imbued with a sense of freedom and ease.

By harmonizing Chinese and Western creative influences, Liang Yuchun's prose truly embodies the "newness" of modern Chinese literature. As Li Qingxi observed: "Writers of the New Literature at the time loudly denounced the 'errors of the Tongcheng School' while advocating for the adoption of Western literary forms—a position that made perfect sense. Yet, when they put pen to paper, many still wrote within the traditional framework of the Confucian literati. Much of the prose in the New Literature was essentially a product of 'literary renaissance': despite switching from classical to vernacular Chinese, it lacked the radical transformation that a revolution in prose should entail." Liang Yuchun alone showed a "path out of the old discourse." [22] Thanks to his dual literary resources, "lyricism and reflection coexist in Liang Yuchun's prose in the same way flesh does to bones, leaves to branches, and rudders to ships." This integration brought modernity into aspects of syntax, diction, sentence structure, and composition, ultimately helping his prose reach a mature form and marking a new breakthrough in modern literary prose.

## 5. Conclusion

For a long time, Liang Yuchun's prose did not receive the attention it deserved; indeed, it was even neglected and disappeared from view for a significant period. Though he passed away young, his death only stirred ripples among a few close friends before

being swallowed by the tide of history. Wu Fuhui, in evaluating Liang Yuchun, echoed Fei Ming's sentiment that Liang had "cultivated a fine momentum"—a momentum that unfortunately dissipated with his early demise. Since the 1980s, however, scholars have gradually renewed their interest in Liang's prose, a development closely tied to broader shifts in the intellectual climate. This renewed attention reflects Chinese literature's progression toward a more open and diverse perspective and the move beyond a singular mode of socio-historical criticism in literary studies. Though Liang's work was out of step with the literary mainstream of his time, he consistently voiced his own perspectives—ones imbued with the spirit of his era and resonating with the hearts of the youth of that time. His writing, infused with passionate reflections on life, a contradictory outlook on human existence, a bold embrace of independence and free thought, and the construction of a modern prose form, remains a unique and valuable asset to modern Chinese literature—an asset worthy of continued scholarly excavation and appreciation.

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