

FROM EXCLAMATION TO POETIC SHAPING: THE FUNCTIONS AND AESTHETIC TRANSFORMATION OF INTERJECTIONS IN CHINESE POETRY

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 14-03-2026

Revised: 06-06-2026

Accepted: 20-06-2026

Published: 30-06-2026

Volume: 10

Issue: 3

DOI: 10.33019/lire.v10i3.606

KEYWORDS

*Interjections; Chinese Poetry;
Poetic Shaping Function;
Exclamatory Particles;
Literary Linguistics;
Historical Poetics*

ABSTRACT

Interjections and exclamatory particles have often been treated as marginal linguistic forms because they appear syntactically detached, semantically unstable, and strongly dependent on context. In poetry, however, these small units may become concentrated sites of rhythm, emotional pressure, tonal transition, and aesthetic organization. This article examines the functions of interjections in Chinese poetry from early and classical traditions to modern poetry. Using a qualitative, text-based design, the study combines close reading, comparative textual analysis, and historical-poetic interpretation. The corpus consists of selected passages from the Canglang song and Chuci tradition, Li Bai's Shu Dao Nan, Su Shi's Qian Chibi Fu, Wen Yiduo's Hongzhu, and selected poems by Mu Dan. The analysis is organized through five operational indicators of what this article calls the poetic shaping function: rhythmic shaping, tonal shaping, structural shaping, subjective or embodied shaping, and cultural shaping. The findings show that in classical poetry forms such as xi, hu, zai, and related exclamatory particles, condense emotion while also regulating cadence and rhetorical pressure. In later classical usage, these particles accumulate cultural memory and transform direct exclamation into lament, reflection, and philosophical modulation. In modern poetry, especially in Wen Yiduo and Mu Dan, interjections become more visible and structurally active: a and o/oh not only express emotion but also organize address, pause, perception, bodily tension, and modern subjectivity. The study argues that interjections are therefore not peripheral residues of speech but formative aesthetic micro-units in Chinese poetic language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interjections occupy an unusual position in linguistic description. They are among the most immediate resources by which speakers display affect, surprise, pain, admiration, hesitation, or stance, yet they have often been placed near the margins of grammar because they resist stable classification. In influential pragmatic accounts, interjections are not simply lexical words with fixed propositional content; they are context-sensitive utterance units whose force depends on position, intonation, embodied situation, and discourse uptake (Ameka, 1992a; Wilkins, 1992; Wharton, 2003). This status has made them analytically difficult, but it has also made them particularly useful for studying how language moves between sound, feeling, and social meaning.

The problem becomes sharper in poetry. Poetry does not merely report feeling; it gives feeling a verbal body through rhythm, sound, spacing, repetition, and tonal arrangement. In Chinese poetic traditions, this relation between affect and form is central to ideas such as shi yan zhi, often rendered as "poetry expresses aspiration," and shi yuan qing, "poetry arises from emotion" (Guo, 1979; Liu, 1962; Liu & Fan, 2006). Within such a tradition, a small form such as



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兮 (xi), 乎 (hu), 哉 (zai), 呜呼 (wuhu), 啊 (a), or 哦 (o/oh) cannot be dismissed as a minor grammatical residue. These forms often mark the place where breath, emotion, and poetic design converge.

Previous linguistic research has already shown that interjections and discourse particles cannot be understood through syntax alone. They organize stance, attention, emotional alignment, and pragmatic force (Aijmer, 2004; Norrick, 2009; Tao, 2022). Recent studies of Chinese discourse markers and sentence-final particles also emphasize the need to account for grammar, semantics, and pragmatics together, because particles often operate at more than one interface (Jing-Schmidt, 2022; Yang & Jia, 2025). These developments are important for the present study, yet most of them remain focused on conversation, discourse pragmatics, or modern usage. The literary function of interjections, especially in poetry, remains insufficiently theorized.

Chinese poetry offers an especially valuable field for such theorization because interjective and exclamatory forms appear across radically different poetic regimes. In early and classical poetry, forms such as xi, hu, and zai often occur within compact lines where cadence, tonal emphasis, and emotional implication are inseparable. In Tang and Song writing, exclamatory particles may intensify lyric force, create rhetorical elevation, or turn historical reflection into audible lament. In modern poetry, after the vernacular movement weakened fixed classical prosody and opened the poem to colloquial voice, visual spacing, and subjective fragmentation, interjections acquired a more visible and sometimes more autonomous role (Yeh, 1991; Voigt & Jurafsky, 2013).

The present article responds to a specific gap in this scholarship. Studies of Li Bai and Su Shi commonly emphasize imagination, philosophical breadth, tonal mastery, or aesthetic restraint; studies of Wen Yiduo and Mu Dan often address modern form, musicality, dramatic voice, and modern subjectivity. However, the small exclamatory units that help generate these effects are rarely placed at the center of analysis. As a result, a crucial micro-level mechanism of poetic expression remains underdeveloped in literary linguistics and Chinese poetics.

This article therefore asks: how do interjections evolve from immediate markers of emotion into poetic elements capable of carrying cultural significance and advanced aesthetic function? The question is not merely grammatical. It is also historical and aesthetic. If a particle such as xi extends breath and binds rhythm to affect, if zai turns a statement into philosophical questioning, or if a modern o interrupts the visual field of a free-verse line, then the interjection is no longer a peripheral marker of feeling. It has become part of the poem's formative architecture.

The central argument is that interjections in Chinese poetry undergo a functional expansion from expressive signs to poetic shaping elements. The term poetic shaping function is used here to refer to the capacity of an interjective unit to construct or reorganize rhythm, tone, structure, subjective perception, and cultural memory. This concept does not deny the emotive origin of interjections. Rather, it explains how emotive force becomes aesthetically productive when placed within a poetic system.

The article contributes to literary linguistics, Chinese poetics, and historical stylistics in three ways. First, it offers a clearer operational definition of interjection in poetic discourse by distinguishing lexical interjections, exclamatory particles, modal or sentence-final particles, and interjection-like rhetorical structures. Second, it provides direct textual close readings of Chinese



poetic lines in which these forms appear. Third, it proposes a model of poetic shaping function that may be used in future studies of Chinese poetry, comparative poetics, and translation.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, text-based research design. The purpose is not to count every occurrence of interjections in Chinese poetry, but to explain how selected interjective forms operate within poetic structure. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study concerns function, position, rhythm, tone, and aesthetic effect rather than statistical frequency. The method combines close reading, comparative textual analysis, and historical-poetic interpretation.

The corpus was selected purposively. The principal texts were chosen because they represent different moments in the history of Chinese poetic language and because they contain interjective or exclamatory units that are analytically significant. The study uses early and classical examples as a historical foundation, Li Bai and Su Shi as major classical cases, and Wen Yiduo and Mu Dan as modern cases. The aim is not to claim exhaustive representativeness, but to trace a plausible diachronic trajectory through carefully selected and textually visible examples.

A key methodological correction in this revised version is the explicit distinction between grammatical category and poetic function. In strict linguistic terms, not all of the forms examined are identical. Some are lexical interjections, some are exclamatory particles, some are modal or sentence-final particles, and some are rhetorical structures that acquire interjection-like force. Because Chinese poetic discourse often blurs the boundary between particle, pause, tonal marker, and exclamation, this study uses a controlled functional definition. An interjective unit is defined as a lexical, particle-like, or semi-independent exclamatory form that intensifies or reorganizes emotional, tonal, rhythmic, or aesthetic force within a poem.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, selected poems and passages were examined in Chinese to identify forms such as xi, hu, zai, a, o/oh, and related exclamatory structures. Second, each form was analyzed within its immediate textual environment, including line position, syntax, sound, repetition, and semantic movement. Third, cases were compared across historical periods to distinguish recurrent functions from period-specific innovations. Fourth, the findings were synthesized into the model of poetic shaping function described below.

Table 1. Corpus design and analytical focus

Text / poet	Period / tradition	Selected textual evidence	Main forms analyzed	Reason for inclusion
Canglang song / Chuci-related early tradition	Early lyric and classical resonance	沧浪之水清兮，可以濯吾纓；沧浪之水浊兮，可以濯吾足。	兮 (xi)	Shows xi as a rhythmic and affective hinge in early lyric expression.
Li Bai, Shu Dao Nan	Tang classical poetry	噫吁嚱，危乎高哉！ / 其险也如此，嗟尔远道之人胡为乎来哉！	噫吁嚱，乎，哉，嗟	Shows maximal exclamatory force, rhythmic rupture, and rhetorical elevation.



Su Shi, Qian Chibi Fu	Song fu and reflective lyric prose-poetry	桂棹兮兰桨，击空明兮溯流光。/ 固一世之雄也，而今安在哉？	兮，乎，哉	Shows exclamation as tonal mediation, philosophical reflection, and cultural memory.
Wen Yiduo, Hongzhu	Early modern vernacular poetry	红烛啊！/ 哦！我知道了！	啊，哦	Shows interjections as address, repetition, musical punctuation, and interpretive turning point.
Mu Dan, selected poems	Modernist poetry	O，让我的呼吸与自然合流！/ O！我们看见透明的大海拥抱着中国。	O / 哦	Shows visual rupture, embodied breath, perceptual staging, and modern subjectivity.

The Chinese poetic passages analyzed in this study were checked against standard printed editions and accessible digital textual witnesses. The Canglang song is cited from the *Yufu* chapter in the *Chu ci* tradition, with reference to Hong Xingzu's *Chu ci bu zhu* [楚辞补注]. Li Bai's *Shu Dao Nan* is cited with reference to *Li Bai ji jiaozhu* [李白集校注], while textual variants were checked against the *Quan Tangshi* tradition. Su Shi's *Qian Chibi Fu* is cited with reference to Kong Fanli's punctuated edition of *Su Shi wenji* [苏轼文集]. Wen Yiduo's *Hongzhu* is cited with reference to *Wen Yiduo quanji* [闻一多全集]. Mu Dan's lines are cited from *Mudan (Zha Liangzheng) shiwen ji* [穆旦 (查良铮) 诗文集], especially the poems *Wo kan* [我看] and *Yuanye shang zoulu—Sanqian li buxing zhi er* [原野上走路——三千里步行之二]. Unless otherwise stated, all English renderings in this article are working translations by the authors.

Table 2. Operational indicators of the poetic shaping function

Indicator	Definition	Textual signs used in the analysis
Rhythmic shaping	The interjective unit creates pause, acceleration, repetition, breath extension, or cadence.	Initial exclamations, repeated vocatives, line-internal pauses, sound clusters, breath-like particles.
Tonal shaping	The unit shifts the poem from description to emotion, irony, lament, wonder, reflection, or philosophical questioning.	Change from image to response, from narration to affect, or from landscape to ethical reflection.
Structural shaping	The unit marks a hinge, threshold, climax, turn, or stanzaic reorientation.	Opening cry, repeated refrain, sudden vocative, or particle at a rhetorical turning point.
Subjective / embodied	The unit materializes bodily pressure, breathing, fractured	Breath verbs, first-person perception, visual interruption, broken or isolated



shaping	consciousness, or modern inwardness.	exclamatory form.
Cultural shaping	The unit activates inherited poetic memory, ritual lament, archaic resonance, or collective historical affect.	Classical particles, archaic diction, lament formulae, cultural allusion, historically recognizable tonal register.

A form is treated as having a poetic shaping function when it does more than signal emotion. It must participate in the organization of the poetic line or stanza by affecting at least two of the five dimensions above. This criterion prevents the analysis from classifying every emotional expression as an interjection and responds to the need for stronger conceptual precision.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Classical interjections as condensed emotional and rhythmic units

The first result is that classical Chinese interjections and exclamatory particles function as compressed units in which sound and feeling are inseparable. They are not decorative additions to an already complete meaning. Rather, they often help determine how a line is heard, where the breath turns, and how the speaker’s emotion enters the poem. This pattern is visible in the early line:

Table 3. Close-reading of “兮” (xi) in the Canglang Song

Original line	Pinyin	Working English rendering	Interjective unit and function
沧浪之水清兮，可以濯吾缨； 沧浪之水浊兮，可以濯吾足。	Cānglàng zhī shuǐ qīng xī, kěyǐ zhuó wú yīng; Cānglàng zhī shuǐ zhuó xī, kěyǐ zhuó wú zú.	When the Canglang water is clear, it may wash my cap strings; when the Canglang water is muddy, it may wash my feet.	兮 (xi) extends the line, creates a pause after the condition, and makes the moral contrast audible rather than merely semantic.

In this example, xi is not adequately translated by a fixed English equivalent. Its function is phonetic, rhythmic, and interpretive. It delays the movement from the condition, “the water is clear/muddy,” to the practical response, “wash my cap strings/feet.” The pause created by xi gives the ethical contrast a tonal shape. The line does not merely state adaptability; it performs composure through balanced recurrence. This is the first form of poetic shaping: rhythm and moral tone are generated by a particle that appears small but is structurally active.

Li Bai’s *Shu Dao Nan* presents a different and more explosive version of the same principle. The poem begins with a chain of exclamatory sound before it settles into geographical description:



Table 4. Close-reading of exclamatory units in Li Bai's *Shu Dao Nan* 《蜀道难》

Original line	Pinyin	Working English rendering	Interjective unit and function
噫吁嚱，危乎高哉！ 蜀道之难，难于上青天！	Yī xū xī, wēi hū gāo zāi! Shǔ dào zhī nán, nán yú shàng qīngtiān!	Ah—oh—alas! How perilous, how high! The road to Shu is harder than climbing the blue sky.	噫吁嚱 opens the poem as a bodily cry. 乎 and 哉 bracket the evaluative adjectives and convert danger and height into dramatic sound.
其险也如此，嗟尔远道之人胡为乎来哉！	Qí xiǎn yě rúcǐ, jiē ěr yuǎndào zhī rén hū wèi hū lái zāi!	Since its peril is like this, alas, traveller from afar, why have you come?	嗟 introduces direct lament; 乎 and 哉 intensify the question and make the line a rhetorical turning point.

The opening of *Shu Dao Nan* is crucial because the poem does not begin with objective scenery. It begins with voice. The sequence *yi-xu-xi* is almost pre-semantic: its force lies in sound, breath, and shock. Only after this vocal eruption do the adjectives *wei* (“perilous”) and *gao* (“high”) appear. The particles *hu* and *zai* do not simply add exclamation marks; they rhythmically suspend and then release the evaluative force of the line. In other words, the landscape is not first described and then emotionally interpreted. It is produced from the beginning as an overwhelming acoustic event.

The later line, “嗟尔远道之人胡为乎来哉,” shows that Li Bai’s interjections also have structural function. The particle chain appears at a moment when the poem turns from topographical enormity to direct address. The traveller is suddenly placed inside the danger that the poem has been constructing. The interjective unit therefore performs three simultaneous tasks: it marks lament, it intensifies the rhetorical question, and it turns the poem toward the human body confronting the mountain road. This is already more than emotional amplification; it is structural shaping.

Su Shi’s *Qian Chibi Fu* shows a more restrained but equally important pattern. In Su Shi, interjective particles often do not explode outward. They modulate mood, extend breath, and move the poem toward philosophical reflection:

Table 5. Close-reading of “兮” (*xi*) and “哉” (*zai*) in Su Shi’s *Former Red Cliff Rhapsody* 《前赤壁赋》

Original line	Pinyin	Working English rendering	Interjective unit and function
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<p>桂棹兮兰桨，击空明兮溯流光。 渺渺兮予怀，望美人兮天一方。</p>	<p>Guì zhào xī lán jiǎng, jī kōngmíng xī sù liúguāng. Miǎomiǎo xī yú huái, wàng měirén xī tiān yī fāng.</p>	<p>Cassia oars, orchid paddles; striking the clear emptiness, rowing against streaming light. Dim and distant is my longing; I gaze toward the beloved at one side of heaven.</p>	<p>兮 gives the song an archaic cadence, spacing desire through repeated breath and turning longing into resonance.</p>
<p>固一世之雄也，而今安在哉？</p>	<p>Gù yīshì zhī xióng yě, ér jīn ān zài zāi?</p>	<p>He was indeed a hero of his age; yet where is he now?</p>	<p>哉 turns historical memory into philosophical questioning and marks the collapse of heroic permanence.</p>

In the song embedded in Qian Chibi Fu, the repeated xi does not merely imitate archaism. It produces a floating cadence appropriate to the river scene. The phrase “渺渺兮予怀” depends on xi to extend the distance between feeling and object: longing is not simply named; it is stretched. The particle mediates between image, breath, and absence. Its effect is lyrical but disciplined, which fits Su Shi’s broader movement from sensory pleasure to reflective detachment.

The particle zai in “而今安在哉?” is different from the explosive zai in Li Bai. Here it is not a cry of danger but a philosophical inflection. The line recalls Cao Cao as a once-great figure and then uses zai to turn heroic memory into a question of impermanence. The interjective particle becomes a hinge between history and ontology. This shows that classical particles do not have one fixed poetic function. Their meaning is shaped by line position, rhetorical environment, and historical register.

3.2. From exclamation to cultural lament and historical memory

The second result is that the function of interjections expands historically from direct exclamation toward cultural and reflective density. Classical Chinese poetic language tends to compress emotion into small formal units. Over time, such units become recognizable carriers of inherited tone. A particle may therefore signal not only the speaker’s present emotion but also a memory of earlier poetic diction and cultural lament.

This historical thickening is visible in the relation between xi, hu, and zai. In early lyric usage, xi often appears as a rhythm-bearing particle that makes emotion audible through cadence. In Tang lyric amplitude, exclamatory sound can open an entire poem, as in Li Bai. In Song reflection, particles such as hu and zai may carry philosophical modulation. The movement is not linear replacement but cumulative layering. The same family of exclamatory forms can operate as breath, lament, rhetorical pressure, and historical consciousness depending on context.

The culturally charged nature of these particles is particularly important for translation and pedagogy. If xi is translated mechanically as “ah,” or zai as a mere exclamation mark, the poetic



function is flattened. The translator must decide whether the particle is primarily rhythmic, affective, archaic, rhetorical, or philosophical. Recent research on Chinese poetry translation emphasizes that classical poetry is difficult precisely because its concision, ambiguity, allusion, and cultural resonance are not easily transferred into another language (Gao et al., 2024). Interjections intensify that difficulty because their meaning is often carried by sound and literary memory rather than by lexical content alone.

This finding also clarifies why the article treats some forms as “interjective units” rather than strictly as lexical interjections. In classical Chinese, exclamatory particles often work at the boundary between grammar and poetics. Their category is not always identical to modern lexical interjections such as *ah* or *oh*, but their function in verse can be interjective because they condense affect and reshape the utterance. This approach is consistent with recent calls to move beyond purely terminological debates and to examine actual linguistic facts across grammar, semantics, and pragmatics (Yang & Jia, 2025).

Table 6. Diachronic thickening of interjective function

Historical layer	Dominant function	Representative form	Poetic effect
Early lyric resonance	Cadence and emotional spacing	兮 (xi)	Feeling is made audible through pause, recurrence, and balanced line movement.
Tang lyric amplification	Vocal eruption and rhetorical elevation	噫吁嚱, 乎, 哉	The poem begins as sound before becoming image; topography is dramatized as bodily pressure.
Song reflective modulation	Philosophical turn and historical questioning	乎, 哉, 兮	Exclamation becomes reflection; heroic memory and impermanence are brought into the same tonal field.
Modern vernacular transformation	Address, graphic visibility, subjectivity	啊, 哦, O	Interjection becomes a visible and structural device in free verse.

3.3. Wen Yiduo: interjection as address, musical punctuation, and interpretive turn

In Wen Yiduo’s *Hongzhu*, the interjection *a* appears repeatedly as part of a vocative structure. This repetition is not ornamental. It establishes the poem’s dramatic relation between speaker and object. The candle is not a passive image; it is addressed, questioned, interpreted, and transformed into an emblem of sacrifice and poetic vocation:

Table 7. Close-reading of vernacular interjections in Wen Yiduo’s *Red Candle* 《红烛》

Original line	Pinyin	Working English rendering	Interjective unit and function
红烛啊！ 这样红的烛！ 诗人啊！	Hóngzhú a! Zhèyàng hóng de zhú! Shīrén a!	Red candle, ah! Such a red candle! Poet, ah!	啊 creates vocative intensity, repeated address, and musical



			punctuation. It binds image and speaker.
哦！我知道了！	Ó! Wǒ zhīdào le!	Oh! I understand now!	哦 marks a cognitive and tonal turn from questioning to interpretation.

The line “红烛啊!” is structurally simple, but its function is complex. The particle a makes the candle audible as an addressed presence. Without a, “red candle” could remain an image. With a, it becomes a listener, a symbolic counterpart, and an object of lyrical confrontation. The repetition of the same vocative pattern creates musical recurrence, which corresponds to Wen Yiduo’s concern with formal and musical beauty. The interjection therefore shapes rhythm while also constructing a dramatic situation.

The line “哦！我知道了！” performs a different function. It does not merely show surprise. It marks an interpretive turn. Before this line, the speaker questions why the candle must burn, melt, and weep. After the line, the speaker offers an explanation: the candle’s tears are caused by the wind and by its unstable burning. The interjection oh thus functions as a hinge between perplexity and insight. In terms of the model proposed in this article, it performs tonal shaping and structural shaping simultaneously.

Wen Yiduo therefore occupies a transitional position. His interjections remain strongly tied to musicality and rhetorical address, yet they already move beyond simple emotional marking. They help organize the poem’s voice, create repeated pulses of address, and stage the speaker’s movement from admiration to questioning and from questioning to explanation. The interjection becomes part of the poem’s internal dramaturgy.

3.4. Mu Dan: interjection as visual rupture, embodied breath, and modern subjectivity

The most decisive modern transformation appears in Mu Dan. In his poetry, the interjection is not only a sign of emotion or address. It may become a visible mark of rupture and a device for staging perception. This is especially clear in lines where the Roman-letter form O interrupts the Chinese textual field. The form is graphically marked, acoustically open, and semantically underdetermined. Its force lies in how it opens a field of perception or bodily pressure before the sentence unfolds:

Table 8. Close-reading of “O” as a Modern Interjective Sign in Mu Dan’s Poetry

Original line	Pinyin	Working English rendering	Interjective unit and function
O, 让我的呼吸与自然合流！	O, ràng wǒ de hūxī yǔ zìrán héliú!	O, let my breathing merge with nature!	O precedes the imperative and makes breath itself the poetic event. It shapes embodiment before meaning is completed.
O！我们看见透明的	O! Wǒmen kànjiàn	O! We see the	O opens collective



大海拥抱着中国。	tòumíng de dàhǎi yōngbào zhe Zhōngguó.	transparent sea embracing China.	perception and turns vision into an event of national and bodily intensity.
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In the first line, O is not appended to a completed statement. It precedes the imperative and prepares the reader for a bodily act: breathing. The line does not say “I feel united with nature” in a conceptual way. Instead, the interjection creates an inhalational threshold. The reader encounters an open sound before encountering the command “let my breathing merge with nature.” The interjection therefore performs subjective and embodied shaping. It makes bodily pressure and aspiration formally legible.

The second line expands this function from individual body to collective perception. The interjection precedes the first-person plural “we,” so the cry opens a shared field of vision before the sea and China are named. The effect is not merely patriotic description. The visual image is introduced through a vocal rupture that converts seeing into collective affect. The interjection becomes a perceptual trigger. It does not simply modify the sentence; it initiates the sensory and emotional condition under which the sentence is read.

The Roman-letter O is especially significant because it is graphically different from the surrounding Chinese characters. In free verse, where spacing, lineation, and visual surface carry aesthetic weight, this graphic difference matters. O appears as a small circle, an open mouth, and a visible interruption. It is simultaneously sound and shape. This gives Mu Dan’s interjection a stronger degree of autonomy than the classical particles. It is no longer merely a rhythmic hinge within an inherited prosodic order; it becomes an event on the page.

This is where the concept of poetic shaping function becomes most necessary. In Mu Dan, the interjection shapes rhythm by producing pause and vocal lift; it shapes tone by moving the line toward intensity; it shapes structure by appearing at the threshold of perception; it shapes subjectivity by making breath, body, and consciousness unstable; and it shapes culture by reworking an older exclamatory tradition through modernist visual form. The interjection is therefore not simply expressive. It becomes one of the micro-structures through which modern Chinese poetry constructs inwardness.

3.5. Comparative synthesis: from expressive marker to poetic shaping element

The close readings above show that interjections in Chinese poetry develop across a spectrum. At one end, they express immediate affect. At the other, they organize rhythm, structure, cultural memory, and subjectivity. The same general category therefore cannot be reduced to a single grammatical function. It must be read as a mobile poetic operator whose force depends on position, historical environment, and aesthetic regime.

Table 9. Comparative synthesis of interjective functions

Poet / tradition	Primary interjective forms	Dominant shaping function	Evidence-based interpretation
Canglang / early lyric	兮	Rhythmic and cultural shaping	Xi creates balanced pause and turns moral contrast into audible cadence.
Li Bai	噫吁嚱, 嗟, 乎,	Rhythmic, tonal,	The opening cry produces the



	哉	and structural shaping	mountain road as an acoustic shock; later exclamation turns description into direct address.
Su Shi	兮, 乎, 哉	Tonal and cultural shaping	Particles mediate between river imagery, archaic song, historical memory, and philosophical reflection.
Wen Yiduo	啊, 哦	Rhythmic and structural shaping	Repeated vocatives create musical address; oh marks the transition from questioning to interpretive insight.
Mu Dan	O / 哦	Subjective, embodied, visual, and structural shaping	The interjection interrupts the visual field and stages breath, perception, and modern inwardness.

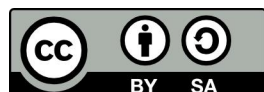
Three broader findings follow from this comparison. First, interjections are not marginal in poetry because poetic language foregrounds precisely those dimensions that ordinary grammar often leaves peripheral: sound, pause, breath, affect, and tonal pressure. Second, the poetic function of interjections changes historically. Classical particles are often embedded in cadence and literary memory, whereas modern interjections become more visible, graphic, and psychologically charged. Third, modern transformation does not erase the classical inheritance. Mu Dan's O is innovative because it reworks an old function of exclamatory voice under the new conditions of vernacular free verse, visual layout, and modernist subjectivity.

This argument also has methodological consequences. Literary-linguistic analysis should not treat small particles as incidental unless their textual position has been examined. In tightly constrained classical poetry, a particle may carry rhythm and affect that no lexical paraphrase can reproduce. In modern free verse, a single interjection may operate as a graphic sign, a breath mark, and a turning point in consciousness. The smallest forms may therefore hold disproportionate aesthetic value.

3.6. Implications for translation and literary linguistics

The findings have implications for translation. Interjections and particles in Chinese poetry should not be automatically omitted, flattened, or replaced with generic English exclamation. Their function must be diagnosed case by case. Xi may require a pause, syntactic suspension, repetition, or archaic cadence rather than an English "ah." Zai may require a rhetorical question, a heightened cadence, or a philosophical inflection. O in Mu Dan may need to be preserved visually because its graphic force is part of the poem's modernity.

The findings also support a broader literary-linguistic claim. Interjections are commonly defined through their pragmatic function in discourse, but in poetry the pragmatic becomes aesthetic. A cry that would serve interactional alignment in conversation may become an organizing principle of rhythm in verse. A particle that would indicate stance in ordinary language may become a historical index, a tonal hinge, or a phenomenological marker. Poetry does not remove the pragmatic base of interjections; it intensifies and reshapes it.



Recent corpus and computational studies of Chinese poetry are relevant here, even though the present article remains qualitative. Studies of 20th-century Chinese poetry have shown that the relation between tradition and modernity can be traced through measurable features of diction and form (Voigt & Jurafsky, 2013). More recent work on Classical Chinese NLP also demonstrates that poetry differs from prose in ways that complicate segmentation, parsing, and automatic analysis because poetic lines are concise and rhythmically disciplined (Zheng & Moeller, 2025). These studies strengthen the rationale for attending to small forms such as interjections, whose poetic value may be lost in broad thematic analysis or automated processing.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined how interjections and exclamatory particles function in Chinese poetry across selected early, classical, and modern texts. The revised analysis demonstrates that forms such as xi, hu, zai, a, o/oh, and related exclamatory structures do not merely signal spontaneous emotion. They may shape cadence, direct address, rhetorical pressure, tonal transition, cultural memory, bodily perception, and modern subjectivity.

The findings support three conclusions. First, in early and classical poetry, interjections operate as condensed emotional and rhythmic units. Xi extends breath and gives balance to the line; Li Bai's exclamatory clusters create an acoustic shock before description begins; Su Shi's particles transform river imagery and historical memory into philosophical reflection. Second, across historical development, interjections acquire cultural thickness. They move from immediate sound toward inherited tonal registers of lament, reflection, and ethical seriousness. Third, in modern poetry, especially in Wen Yiduo and Mu Dan, interjections become more autonomous and structurally generative. Wen uses a and oh to organize vocative address, musical recurrence, and interpretive turning. Mu Dan uses O as a visual and embodied threshold through which perception and subjectivity are staged.

The article's main theoretical contribution is the concept of poetic shaping function. This concept identifies five indicators: rhythmic shaping, tonal shaping, structural shaping, subjective or embodied shaping, and cultural shaping. Through this model, interjections can be understood not as peripheral residues of speech but as formative aesthetic micro-units. They are small in size but large in poetic consequence.

The study contributes to literary linguistics by extending pragmatic accounts of interjections into the domain of poetry. It contributes to Chinese poetics by showing how small exclamatory forms participate in the long transformation from classical compression to modern formal experimentation. It also contributes to translation studies by showing why particles and interjections require sensitive functional rendering rather than mechanical equivalence.

This study is limited by its selective corpus. It does not claim to represent the full history of Chinese poetry, nor does it provide a complete frequency-based account of interjections across periods. The selected examples were chosen for interpretive depth and historical contrast. Future research should expand the corpus to include poets such as Tao Yuanming, Du Fu, Li Shangyin, Ai Qing, Bei Dao, and Haizi, as well as a wider range of contemporary poetry.

Future research should also combine close reading with corpus-assisted methods. A larger dataset could identify the distribution, positional tendency, and collocational pattern of particles such as xi, hu, zai, a, and o across periods. Such a mixed-methods approach would make it possible to connect micro-level interpretation with broader empirical patterns.



Finally, the typology of interjective units in Chinese poetic discourse requires further refinement. The boundary between lexical interjection, exclamatory particle, modal particle, sentence-final particle, and rhetorical exclamation remains fluid. A stronger typology would support comparative studies across Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and other poetic traditions, especially in relation to translation and historical stylistics.

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