I Ride My Carriage to the Upper East Gate

I ride my carriage to the Upper East Gate,
Gazing at the graves north of the wall.
White poplars, how bleak they are in the wind!
Pine and cypress flank the broad paths.
Underneath them, the dead from long ago,
Dark, dark is their long night.
Lost in sleep beneath the Yellow Springs,
Come a thousand years, they will not awaken.
Seasons of growth and decay march on and on,
The years allotted to man are like morning dew.
Man’s life is as transient as a sojourn,
His frame is not as firm as metal or stone.
Ten thousand years have gone by,
No sages or worthies can cross the flow of time.
Some take drugs and hope to become immortals,
Many only end their life with poison.
Far better to drink fine wine
And wear clothes made of choice white silk.

萬 岁 更 相 送
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多 為 藥 所 誤
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[Translated by Zong-qi Cai]
The poem read in English by Brian Zeng
The poem read in Mandarin by Zhao Sikun

II. Episode Notes

1. The Pentasyllabic Form
   • Pentasyllabic poetry (wuyanshi 五言詩): five-character-line poetry
   • Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE)
   • Convergence of sound and sense in pentasyllabic poetry
   • Binom: two-character compound in Chinese
   • The rhythm of pentasyllabic lines: 2+(1+2 or 2+1)

2. “Nineteen Old Poems”
   • Two types of poems: “Poems of the Wandering Man” and “Poems of the Abandoned Woman”
   • The theme of human transience

3. Language factor for the Rise of Reflective Poetry
   • Syntactic flexibility as shown in the positioning of verbs
   • The syncing of poetic lines with reflective process
   • Luoyang, capital city of the Eastern Han
III. Textual Source