

What is Jintishi?

Jintishi (近體詩) literally means "modern-style poetry" in Chinese. Actually, *Jintishi* is nothing modern at all. In fact, its origin could be traced as far back as the Six Dynasties (222-589 A.D.) when Shen Yue (沈約) and Zhou Yong (周顥) first outlined the rules governing the tone and rhythm of Chinese characters. However, it was not until the Tang Dynasty that *Jintishi* was fully developed and adopted as a popular poetic form in Chinese classical poetry.

The term *Jintishi* was originally used to distinguish this type of poetic form from *gutishi* (古體詩), the ancient-style poetry. In contrast to *gushi*, which is under no constraints in terms of *ping ze* (alternating the level and deflected tones), *jintishi* must adhere to a certain tonal pattern, rhyme scheme, and parallelism. The two basic forms of *jintishi* are *lüshi* (律詩) and *jueju* (絕句). In this book, both *lüshi* and *jueju* are considered to be regulated verse.

Lüshi takes the following two forms:

Wulü (五律): an eight-line regulated verse with five characters to a line.

Qilü (七律): an eight-line regulated verse with seven characters to a line.

What are the tonal patterns of Chinese regulated poetry?

Before getting into the tonal patterns of *jintishi* or regulated verse, it is helpful to know the symbols used in this book to represent the tones of *ping* and *ze*. Characters that are pronounced in the level tone are referred to as the *ping* tone; characters that are

pronounced in a deflected manner belong to the ze tone. A ze tone comprises the tones of *shang*, *qu*, and *ru*.

- = *ping* (level) tone
- △ = ze (deflected) tone
- = rhyme (*ping* tone)
- ▲ = rhyme (ze tone)
- = can be replaced by a ze tone
- △ = can be replaced by a *ping* tone

The five-character regulated verse:

The five-character regulated verse can be either “ze start” or “*ping* start.” In a ze start, the second character of the first line must be in a ze (deflected) tone. By the same token, the second character in a *ping* start must be in a *ping* (level) level tone.

A. Ze Start

△△ ○○	○○ △△	△ ●
○○ △△	○△ △○	△ ●
△△ ○○	○○ △△	△ ●
○○ △△	○△ △○	△ ●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: △△ △○ ●

B. *Ping* Start

○○ △△	○△ △○	△ ●
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△△	○○	△
○○	△△	●
○○	○△	△
△△	△○	●
△△	○○	△
○○	△△	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: ○○ △△ ●

Some rules to be observed:

In general, the first and third character in each line may be in either *ping* or *ze* tone as long as the condition known as “*lone ping*” (孤平) will not occur. That is to say, a level tone in any line should not be surrounded by two deflected tones as shown below:

△○ △△ ●

The above condition can be “*rescued*” by placing a level-tone character at the third position as illustrated below:

△○ ○△ ●

Also, within each couplet, the second and fourth characters of the first line must be different in tone from those of the second line. For example, if the second character of the first line is a deflected (*ze*) tone, then the second character of the second line must be a level (*ping*) tone, and vice versa. On the other hand, the second and fourth characters must be of the same tones for the beginning and ending lines of the two adjacent couplets. For example, if the fourth character of line 4 is in level tone, then the fourth character of line 5 must also be in level tone.

The seven-character regulated verse

The following are the two basic tonal patterns of the seven-character regulated verse:

A. Ze Start

△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●
○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●
△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●
○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: △△ ○○ △△ ●

B. Ping Start

○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●
△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●
○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●
△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: ○○ △△ △○ ●

The rules governing the five-character regulated verse also apply to the seven-character regulated verse. In general, characters placed at the first, third, and the fifth positions are more flexible in the sense that they may be changed to a different tone.

However, any changes in tonal placement must not result in having one single level (*ping*) tone surrounded by two deflected (*ze*) tones as shown in the following case:

○○ △△ △○ △

This means that the level tone normally placed at the fifth position should not be changed to a deflected tone as it will cause the sixth character to be a “*lone ping*” (孤平).

In addition, the last three characters in a line should not be all in level tones as shown in the following case:

○○ △△ ○○ ●

The five-character truncated verse

Jueju is a curtailed version of *jintishi* that has only four lines. *Jueju* can take the form of five or seven characters to a line. Parallelism is not required in *jueju*.

The following are the tonal patterns of the five-character truncated verse:

A. Ze Start (level-tone rhyme)

△△ ○○ △
○○ △△ ●

○○	○△	△
△△	△○	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: △△ △○ ●

B. Ping Start (level-tone rhyme)

○○	○△	△
△△	△○	●
△△	○○	△
○○	△△	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: ○○ △△ ●

C. Ze Start (deflected-tone rhyme)

△△	○○	▲
○○	○△	▲
○○	△△	○
△△	○○	▲

D. Ping Start (deflected-tone rhyme)

○○	○△	▲
△△	○○	▲
△△	△○	○
○○	○△	▲

The seven-character truncated verse

The following are the two basic tonal patterns of the five-character truncated verse:

A. Starting with the ze tone (level-tone rhyme)

△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●
○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: △△ ○○ △△ ●

B. *Ping* Start (level-tone rhyme)

○○	△△	○○	△
△△	○○	△△	●
△△	○○	○△	△
○○	△△	△○	●

Note: The first line can be substituted with the following tones: ○○ △△ △○ ●

C. Ze Start (deflected-tone rhyme)

△△	○○	○△	▲
○○	△△	○○	▲
○○	△△	△○	○
△△	○○	○△	▲

D. *Ping* Start (deflected-tone rhyme)

○○	△△	○○	▲
△△	○○	○△	▲
△△	○○	△△	○
○○	△△	○○	▲

Deflected tone is infrequently used as a rhyme in both *wujue* (five-character truncated verse) and *qijue* (seven-character truncated verse). The rules governing five-character regulated verse also apply to seven-character regulated verse.

What is parallelism?

In both *wulu* and *qilu*, some form of parallelism must be present in addition to tonal variations. By parallelism it is meant that the verbal units at the same position within a couplet must be balanced in terms of word order and parts of speech. Parallelism can take many forms, including contrast, analogy, and similarity. In an eight-line verse, only the two middle couplets require parallelism.

To illustrate how parallelism is used, let's take a look at the following poem by Wang Wei: 山居秋暝 (Autumn Evening in a Mountain Retreat).

空山新雨後
天氣晚來秋
明月松間照
清泉石上流
竹喧歸浣女
蓮動下漁舟
隨意春芳歇
王孫自可留

Since each five-character line normally consists of an initial disyllabic unit and a final trisyllabic unit, we can separate them to see how parallelism is performed.

明○月△ 松○間○照△
míng yuè sōng jiān zhào

bright moon shines through the pines

清○泉○
qīng quán
clear spring

石△上△流●
shí shàng liú
flows over the rocks

In the above couplet, the words to be matched are 明月 and 清泉. As can be seen, 月(moon) and 泉(spring) are both nouns while 明(bright) and 清(clear) are adjectives. In the trisyllabic unit that follows, 松間照 (to shine through the pines) and 石上流 (to flow over the rocks), are also appropriately matched.

竹△喧○
zhú xuān
bamboos rustling

歸○浣△女△
guī huàn nǚ
clothes-washing girls are
returning

蓮○動△
lián dòng
water lilies moving

下△漁○舟●
xià yú zhōu
fishing boat is coming down

In the above couplet, the first characters 竹 (bamboos) and 蓮(water lilies) are both nouns while 喧(to rustle) and 動(to move) are verbs. In the second unit, 歸浣女 (clothes-washing girls are returning) and 下漁舟 (the fishing boat is coming down) are matched in grammatical relationship.

