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Brushwork as Bloodwork:
Character Appraisal, Calligraphy, and Individual Style
In Early Medieval China

By
Christopher J. Elford

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Chinese Language
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Robert Ashmore, Chair

Professor Michael Nylan

Professor Andrew Jones

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Abstract

Brushwork as Bloodwork: Character Appraisal, Calligraphy, and Individual Style in Early Medieval China

By

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Doctor of Philosophy, Chinese Language

Professor Robert Ashmore, Chair

This dissertation gives a new account of the emergence of the concept of individual literary style in China between the second and the fifth centuries CE. It argues that the tendency, new in this period, to posit a stylistic, characterological, calligraphic, and even somatic identity between author and text is best understood as a complex response to 1) innovations in technologies of writing used to produce and copy texts and 2) to changes in the bureaucratic institutions and archives in which these texts circulated and were evaluated. Case studies of three writers—Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433)—conducted against the background of the distinctive mediascapes in which they worked, reveal that although these writers developed a more author-centered mode of engaging with and shaping traditional forms, they did so with the awareness that this new mode of expression foreclosed other, older modes of engaging with the literary past.

Contrary to the notion, still widespread in the scholarly literature on this period, that early medieval writers began speaking more fully in their own voices in an effort to liberate themselves from constraints imposed by court poetry, I show the emergence of the lyric “I” to have been indexed to the loss of the hallowed institutions and ancient channels of self-cultivation which obviated the very need to speak as oneself. The melancholy that suffuses the literature of the post-Han period is thus in part the melancholy of having been reduced to speaking in one’s own voice. This loss was the result not only of political fragmentation but also of momentous changes in textual media which threw into question as never before the relationship between text and author.

“Brushwork as Bloodwork” represents the first attempt to take up an ecological approach to textual practice in the early medieval period. As such, it challenges the primarily intellectual-historical approach to the literature of this period, which has tended to view changes in *ideas* about literature, authorship, and the self as the driving force behind the emergence of a more robust concept of individual literary style. Using a methodological approach derived from the works of the anthropologist Bruno Latour, this dissertation suggests that only in collaboration with certain physical media and only within a very particular institutional and archival context did people come to see themselves and others as fully present in the words on the page. By treating the concept of individual literary style not as an epistemological given but as the *outcome* of this collaboration with new forms of physical media in a historically unique institutional setting, it also contributes to recent discussions of the role material culture and technology play in shaping our conceptual world.

The order of ideas must follow the order of institutions.

Giambattista Vico
The New Science (1725)

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Introduction: A New Approach to the Emergence of Individual Literary Style

This dissertation offers new purchase on a familiar phenomenon in the history of Chinese literature of roughly the second through fifth centuries: the emergence of named authors with distinct styles out of what in earlier eras had been predominantly oral and anonymous performance traditions. In China near the end of the second century CE, literary texts were still closely tied to ritual and performance. Many of the texts we read today as written works of literature or poetry were once scripts for oral and musical performance in settings bound by ritual norms and expectations. Competing for patrons at court, educated men drew on the Confucian Classics and other authoritative writings, as well as a fluid repertoire of model texts by their peers as tools for formulating, for example, an erudite account of a court ceremony or an efficacious response to an occasion such as a parting banquet or hunting excursion.

In his pathbreaking book *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, Stephen Owen has shown that, particularly in the case of the still amorphous genre of *shi*-poetry 詩, the resulting texts were highly malleable, stylistically indistinguishable from others in the same genre, and only loosely tied to their historical authors.¹ While successful performance in these genres was a means of demonstrating cultivated bearing and scholarly aptitude, extant texts suggest little attention was to the technical aspects of this or that writer's individual literary style. The impetus, so evident in the poetry of later periods, towards striking diction and idiosyncratic phraseology of a kind that would cause an author to stand out against the background of the repertoire he drew on is largely absent in these texts. A poem succeeded to the degree that it rose to meet the demands of occasion and genre. In some sense, the more generic the poem was, the more powerful it became; generic conventions and turns of phrase were channels through which the authority of the canonical texts of the past could flow into the present occasion. Much the same could be said of works of calligraphy, whose emergence as an autonomous artform, and eventually as the site for the expression of personal style, closely paralleled these developments in the rise of literary style in the early medieval period. At this stage, fidelity to the disposition of forces inherent in a particular script form was seen to reflect a deeper mastery of antique modes of refinement. While an author could be deemed temperamentally suited to writing works in a particular genre, he was not yet considered the fountainhead of a style all his own.

By the fifth century, however, literary texts came to be seen as avatars of a particular *person's* response to the world. The personality of the author could be reconstituted through the medium of the text—indeed, this was to become practically the definition of “reading” a literary work in this and later periods. Collections of poetic expositions (*fu* 賦), court songs (*ge* 歌), inscriptions (*ming* 銘) and the like, organized by genre began to circulate alongside individual literary collections (*bieji* 別集). Particularly in the case of *shi*-poetry, paratextual elements such as titles and prefaces became longer and more detailed in this period, situating texts within life of an author and preparing them for circulation beyond those to whom they were originally addressed. The practice of poetic imitation (*ni* 擬), which from the early stages of classical poetry through the fourth century had been primarily a matter of recasting poetic responses to generic occasions of composition, came in time to connote mimicking the signature style of a specific historical author. By the sixth century, in the princely salons of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557), authors' names functioned quite naturally as placeholders for distinctive literary and calligraphic styles. Writing, which encompassed the traces left by the writer's

¹ *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

brush on paper and the words used to convey their intentions, had become a privileged medium for knowing and evaluating character, and would remain so for the entire premodern period,

How do we explain this shift from shared repertoire to stylistically distinct individual oeuvres? What accounts for the unprecedented self-revelatory power of literary writing as it came to be conceived in the Southern Dynasties 南朝 period (420–589)? Under what circumstances did it become possible to see the personality of the author in the details of a landscape depiction or an astonishing closing couplet? To borrow a term from modern medicine, how did brushwork become bloodwork? A full account of this process, treating both individual style in literature and calligraphy across the entire sweep of the early medieval period is beyond the scope of the present work but will be taken up in a future project. This dissertation will offer some preliminary answers to these questions through a series of detailed case studies. It responds to the predominantly intellectual-historical treatment of the emergence self-consciously “literary” literature and the rise of lyric poetry in previous scholarship with a new (or perhaps simply renewed) emphasis on the materiality of writing. This is to say that it will describe the shift from shared repertoire to stylistically distinct individual oeuvres with reference to the practices, procedures, and media of performance with which certain kinds of texts are made and alongside of which a notion of individual literary style is produced.

This type of inquiry proceeds on the conviction that textual practices, sites of performance, technologies of writing, and media environments are at least as rich with information about how early medieval Chinese authors produced texts as are the reflexive statements about literature and definitions of literary genres to be found in sixth century texts such as *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 [The Literary Mind Carves Dragons] and *Shi pin* 詩品 [Grades of the Poets]. While such “theoretical” works are essential reference points for understanding the literature of the sixth century and later periods in which their pronouncements carried significant weight, the tendency of both texts to assume broad continuities between their own modes of textual production and those of earlier periods makes them of somewhat limited use for the purpose of writing a *history* of those practices. In order to qualify as a history, such an account would have to track the drastic changes in the rules governing the production of texts, even texts written in the same genre. As the scholar of Ancient Greek lyric poetry Gregory Nagy has put it, the “primary evidence” for the way a society views poetry is not “restricted to whatever the poets say about themselves and their world: it embraces the context in which they say what they say.”² In the following sections, I outline the dominant approach to the literature of the early medieval period and offer an alternative focused on textual practices, or the things people do with literary texts, as a device for understanding literary and generic categories

The age of “literary self-consciousness”?

Previous scholarship has treated the elevation of literary writing centered on the contributions of individual writers and thinkers in the early medieval period in China primarily as an intellectual development. It argues that new trends in philosophy, religion, and the arts inaugurated the era of the self-consciousness of literature” (*wenxue zijue* 文學自覺) or “literary self-consciousness.”³ This phrase

² Gregory Nagy, “Early Greek Views of Poets and Poetry,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. George Alexander Kennedy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

³ Although “the self-consciousness of literature” is a better rendering of this phrase, it becomes tiresome upon repeated use. I will therefore use it interchangeably with the more common, but unfortunately somewhat misleading “literary self-consciousness” as needed. Note that *Wenxue zijue* refers to the emergence into self-conscious of the category of literature as a kind of writing with its own rules and goals, a distinct sphere of human cultural activity no longer subordinated to functions of the court. It does not refer to a form of self-

made its first appearance in Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881–1936) justifiably famous 1927 essay (based on a lecture given earlier that same year) entitled “The Relationship of Wei-Jin Style and Literature to Drugs and Alcohol” 魏晉風度及文章與藥及酒之關係.⁴ It is fairly clear, however, that the Japanese Sinologist Suzuki Torao 鈴木虎雄 (1878–1963) in his 1925 book *Shina shiron shi* 支那詩論史 was in fact the first to articulate the idea that the literature and philosophy of the early medieval period showed a new critical awareness of the “literary.”⁵ It is unclear whether Lu Xun “borrowed” this way of characterizing the early medieval period or whether he developed it independently. In any case, Lu Xun's essay is not a restatement of Suzuki's position but sets out in an entirely original direction. Lu Xun's provocative but often misunderstood thesis in this essay is that the new appetite for lyric poetry and abstruse philosophy and the accompanying distaste for political life among elite scholars beginning in the middle years of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265) was in fact a *symptom* of changes in lifestyle and material culture, specifically the culture of binge-drinking and narcotic-use that sprang up in the bloody decades following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE. What readers have perceived as the manifestation of the style (*fengge* 風格) of this age—men in flowing robes, pondering being and nothingness in mountaintop gazebos, detached, elegant, refined—was, Lu Xun shows, in reality rooted in a physical or even a physiological condition. The well-known anecdotes in which elite gentlemen refuse to observe the appropriate dietary restrictions during the mourning period, so often interpreted to be a self-conscious rejection of Confucian teachings, are documents instead of their attempt to cope with the side-effects of the drugs they had taken, which drove them to eat voraciously. Thus, for Lu Xun, “the self-consciousness of literature” was the outcome not of a new spiritual regime but of a new dietary regime, which awakened the mind to an appreciation of “art for art's sake” but ultimately poisoned the body.⁶

While Lu Xun's subversive materialist account of period literary style would inspire scholars like Wang Yao 王瑤 (1914–1989) to undertake pioneering studies of early medieval Chinese literature in the context of material culture,⁷ his claim that the Wei-Jin period marked the inception of “literary self-consciousness” blasted, as it were, out of the argument of his essay, would prove far more influential. In the decades following the publication of this essay, scholars designated “literary self-consciousness” or in some accounts “the discovery of the individual” (almost always through the reading and writing of literary and philosophical texts) as the epochal stage corresponding to the Six Dynasties 六朝 period in an explicitly developmental account of the history of Chinese literature.⁸

consciousness that is literary in nature or that emerges in relation to literary works, as “literary self-consciousness” seems to imply.

⁴ “Wei-Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi” 魏晉風度及文章與藥及酒之關係, in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1991), 3.501–29.

⁵ See Li Yong 李勇, “Zhuzhong ‘wenxue zijue’ xueshuo de huigu yu fansi” 諸種“文學自覺”學說的回顧與反思, *Changji xueyuan xuebao*, no. 6 (2011): 37.

⁶ Lu Xun's repeated comparisons of the mineral potions ingested by Wei-Jin *philosophes* to opium suggests that this essay should be read at two levels. It is both a novel description of the origins of the literary culture of the early medieval period and a trenchant materialist critique of the literary pretensions of his *own* age. Lu Xun's emphasis on the body rather than the mind as the site of cultural transformation reflects his newfound skepticism circa 1927 about the role literature might play as a quasi-medicinal agent in the spiritual transformation of the Chinese nation. Writers in Lu Xun's era had failed to recognize that literature is *downstream* from the life of the body and the broader social and political context in which it exists.

⁷ Wang Yao 王瑤, *Zhonggu wenxueshi lun* 中古文學史論 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2011), 4–5.

⁸ This developmental framework is so ubiquitous in 20th century surveys of the literature of the Six

Since an exhaustive account of the codification of “literary self-consciousness” in 20th century Sinology would require a separate dissertation, a couple of examples of texts in which the main arguments associated with the term will have to suffice. Yü Ying-shih’s essay “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China” typifies the use of the self-consciousness of literature and philosophy as a heuristic device for reading the main intellectual developments of the period.⁹ Yü claims that the collapse of the Eastern Han dynasty and with it the stultifying and thoroughly corrupt system of Confucian ethics triggered the release of “personal feelings and emotions” that the “traditional ritual system lacked sufficient flexibility” to channel back into the project of Confucian governance.¹⁰ According to Yü, these energies were channeled instead into the pursuit of “self-discovery” and “spiritual liberation,” as thinkers posed new questions about man’s relationship to the cosmos, the state, the moral order, and to other people with a new set of textual interlocutors in the core texts of Daoism.¹¹

Donald Holzman has taken up the consequences of the momentous reorientation in the realm of poetry and literary criticism, arguing that “the development of new forms of literature can be seen, and should be seen, as one of the ways contemporary intellectuals reacted to the spiritual void left by the decay of the old values.”¹² In his study of the life and career of third century literatus Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) (discussed in more detail in the second chapter of this dissertation), Holzman credits Ruan Ji with “broadening and deepening” the hitherto formulaic and impersonal pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry of his day, opening up a space in it for a highly encoded political critique, philosophical reflection, but perhaps most importantly “personal realization.”¹³ For Holzman, Ruan Ji fled from the dangerous intrigues of the Wei dynasty court to “grope incoherently” in his literary works among the dominant philosophical traditions of his time (none of which satisfied him) in search of “some kind of religion... a new level of meaning in life.”¹⁴ Building on the work of Yü Ying-shih and others,

Dynasties period that any list of publications in which the discourse of “the self-consciousness of literature” is used (or in which it constitutes an unspoken assumption) is bound to both somewhat arbitrary and woefully incomplete. For explicit uses of the concept as a heuristic, see Qian Mu 錢穆, “Du Wen xuan” 讀文選, in *Zhongguo xueshu sixiangshi luncong* 中學學術思想史論叢, vol. 3 (Taipei: Dongda tushu, 1976), 97–133, Aoki Masaru 青木正兒, *Shina Bungaku Shisōshi* 支那文學思想史. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1943), 71–2, Qian Zhixi 錢志熙. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shige shishu* 魏晉南北朝詩歌史述. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 1–17, and Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shib-Shuo Hsin-Yu and Its Legacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 6–7. Morino Shigeo’s 森野繁夫 work stands out for positing the emergence of a “literature of individuals” which is then lost in the word games of Southern Dynasties salon poetry. See *Rikuchō shi no kenkyū: shūdan no bungaku to kojō no bungaku* 六朝詩の研究：集團の文學と個人の文學 (Daichi gakushūsha, 1976), 1–51.

⁹ “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China” in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1985), 121–55. This article is an English language digest of his book-length article “Han Jin zhi ji shi zhi zijue yu xin sichao” 漢晉之際士之自覺與新思潮, in *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 286–400.

¹⁰ Yu, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China,” 138.

¹¹ Yu, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China,” 133.

¹² “Literary Criticism in China in the Early Third Century A.D.,” *Asiatische Studien* 28 (1974): 113.

¹³ *Poetry and Politics: the Life and Works of Juan Chi (A.D. 210–263)* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 136.

¹⁴ *Poetry and Politics*, 245.

Charles Holcombe has characterized the third and fourth centuries as a “rare time in Chinese history when the exploration of a person’s soul, for members of the elite, took precedence over court intrigue and bureaucratic career building.”¹⁵ Like Holzman, Holcombe sees these changes in the “early medieval worldview” as an “intellectual development” something to be traced in the “history of ideas” not in the “specific historical circumstances” and “material conditions.”¹⁶

While a great deal can be learned about the literature of the early medieval period by paying close attention to the texts and ideas authors engaged with in their works, there is always the risk that we end up projecting our terminology back into the period under consideration, taking terms, generic categories, ideologies, and schools of thought which come into focus only in hindsight as either absent, nascent, or fully present in the texts we read. While some degree of backward projection is inevitable, approaches which put a great deal of hermeneutic pressure on such terms often result in teleologies. The “literature” of the “self-consciousness of literature” is clearly literature as defined in later periods and in ways that anticipate our own definition of literature, to quote M.H. Abrams, the subset of texts that “[exist] simply to be...read...with an absorbed, exclusive, and disinterested attention.”¹⁷ The “individual” whose “liberation” prepares the way for a literature of “personal realization” is a proxy for the modern, bourgeois subject. Indeed, Michael Nylan has taken proponents of the “rise of individualism” thesis to task for the way their transparently approbative account assimilates the history of the period (in ways never fully acknowledged) to the European and American historical experience.¹⁸ Nylan also shows that much of the behavior termed “individualistic” in this period falls entirely within accepted Confucian ethical norms which, by political and social necessity, demanded that members of the *shi* 士 or gentry class perform their opposition to other powerful groups in the newly decentralized world of the post-Han period.¹⁹ One way to do this was to immerse oneself as fully as possible in the words and texts of the sages, curating pathways between texts that could be used to convey one’s oppositional ethical stance.²⁰ Does such a practice imply “literary self-consciousness”? To return to Lu Xun’s essay, we might quip that an answer in the affirmative certainly implies *our own* “literary self-consciousness” and perhaps, as I have suggested above, that is what Lu Xun really meant to say.

These criticisms aside, all scholars and students of early medieval Chinese literature owe a tremendous debt to Lu Xun’s “literary self-consciousness” and to the scholars who attempted to elucidate it. Prior to the 1920’s, traditional biases framing the era as a sort of “dark age” meant that the literature of the period was rarely the subject of sustained scholarly inquiry. It is not an exaggeration to say that Lu Xun’s essay (bolstered by his posthumous fame) was instrumental in putting the field of early medieval Chinese literature and philosophy on the map. Moreover, the phenomenon which “literary self-consciousness” tried to name is, in some sense, a real phenomenon: the reading, writing, and evaluation of many kinds of texts, including but not limited to those we modern readers would classify as literature, *did* play a much more central role in the lives of educated men in the sixth century than it did in the second century. Near the end of the Eastern Han a private library of around five thousand fascicles (*juan* 卷) would have signaled unusual level of erudition and scholarly commitment.

¹⁵ *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 4.

¹⁶ Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, 87.

¹⁷ “Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics,” in *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. by Michael Fischer (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 136.

¹⁸ Nylan “Confucian Piety and Individualism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996): 1.

¹⁹ Nylan, “Confucian Piety and Individualism,” 24–5.

²⁰ Nylan, “Confucian Piety and Individualism,” 26.

By the Liang dynasty, one needed a library of that size just to gain entry into the conversations and poetry salons of the day. Moreover, the demand to write in a distinctive way, to hone one's literary chops by closely imitating the distinctive techniques of earlier literary greats, is only really in evidence from the fifth century. Why? We need an explanation that takes into account changes in textual media, in particular the introduction of paper alongside more traditional media of inscription like bamboo and wood. We must also find ways to take seriously the use of conversation, literary works, and calligraphy in personnel evaluation within and adjacent to the civil service recruitment apparatus as a corrective to the tendency to see abstruse metaphysical argumentation as a sign of indifference to government service. If we want to explain why texts we must locate ourselves much more fully in the world in which those texts were written and circulated.

Towards an ecological approach to textual practice

The work of the anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour as one avenue for producing an account of this kind. His work can help us see the networks of material and institutional interactions within which the concept of individual literary style emerged and began, in turn, to shape those interactions. Latour is best known today for his contributions to “actor-network theory” (hereafter ANT). He initially developed this methodology to study scientists working in the vast technological assemblages we call laboratories to produce scientific facts.²¹ Instead of focusing on individual scientists and their ideas in isolation from the messiness of the real world outside of the lab (and of the mind), Latour gives an account of the way science is done that pays attention to anything and anyone present in the assemblage that *makes a difference*. This is the only criterion for inclusion. The result is a sprawling account of scientific practice in which scientists, lab equipment, microorganisms, mouse colonies, chemical manufacturers, government agencies, data-entry software, editorial boards of scientific journals, and hundreds of other agents enter into a tenuous alliance, the terms of which must be constantly renegotiated, in order to produce the results that lead to scientific discoveries. The scientist and her ideas are but one node in this network, which includes people as remote as the head of the European Research Council and entities as near to hand as the hard drive in her computer. Both can stop an experiment in its tracks. Both make a difference. Both will be included in the account.

Latour's work over the past three decades has pursued ANT's radical implications for the way we think about agency social formations in an extraordinarily wide range of contexts. He has never shied from drastically modifying his conception of ANT as a methodology to take into account the special features of a new object or interaction. This willingness to critique and then abandon old explanations of what ANT is and how it works is admirable, but it makes a throughgoing and consistent “Latourian” investigation of anything, let alone early medieval Chinese textual practice impossible. This is by design. Latour has always framed the methodology he still begrudgingly calls ANT as a series of steps to be taken or skipped, questions to be posed or modified in the course of a dialogue with one's informants, which for Latour includes people, practices, artifacts, architectural forms, elements of geography and

²¹ The best and most accessible example of Latour's work in this vein is his book *The Pastuerization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). It should be noted that Latour has *never* held that the facts produced in laboratories are therefore “made up.” The history of science is the history of laboratories configured in one way yielding a fact about the universe, reconfigured in light of these results to yield (unexpectedly) a contradictory fact, reconfigured once again to yield yet another fact and so on. That millions of actors and billions of pieces of information are mobilized in the ceaseless production and confirmation of these facts should cause us to trust the process not mistrust it. See *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–23.

climate and so on.²² In spite of its name, ANT is not a “theory” at all, if by theory we mean a system of interconnected and immutable terms assumed to have a universal application. It does not tell us in advance which things will make a difference. It is a method that helps us notice and make connections between as many things capable of making a difference as possible.

Following Latour’s lead in treating ANT as unsystematic and open-ended, I will take up ANT’s suggestions for posing questions about the role technology plays in social formations as a starting point for developing what I will term an ecological approach to textual practice. By ecological, I mean an approach that sees the way texts are produced in a certain moment in a particular culture as the result of system-wide activity of the things, people, and institutions that exert a quantum force at the site of textual production. To distinguish this from more conventional strategies, an ecological approach does not take texts to be the products of an interaction between an author and the ideas they want to express, open on one side to the mysterious influence of vague social and material forces. Such an approach will see notions of authorship, literature, style, edition, and even text as developing through contingent interactions within a network of actors that includes writers and their ideas but refuses to treat them as the deciding factor in the shape the text finally takes. Textual media articulate their own concept of authorship as much as they act as the medium through which authors come into possession of an understanding of what it means to be an author.

This approach is not original to the current project. Scholars of English, American, and European literatures have already laid the groundwork for an ecological approach to textual practice of the kind I wish to try out in this dissertation.²³ Likewise, scholars of early and medieval Chinese literature have begun to pay much closer attention to the materiality of the texts we now encounter in extremely durable, portable, punctuated, and heavily annotated modern print editions. One of the places the agencies at work at the site of textual production is the material form of the original manuscript; when an early Chinese manuscript is remediated in a modern print edition, new agencies come into play in the form of the text and others, those present in the original manuscript are weakened or disappear entirely. Japanese scholars such as Ōba Osamu 大庭脩 (1927–2002) and Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃 (1911–1998) began paying extremely close attention to the physical form of early imperial and medieval manuscripts more than half a century ago.²⁴ More recently Matthias Richter, Hsing I-tien 邢義田, Tomiya Itaru 富谷至, and Momiyama Akira 末山明 have shown that the size of the bamboo and

²² See the humorous dialogue with a struggling anthropologist entitled “On the Difficulty of Being an ANT” in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 141–56.

²³ Two foundational texts in this regard are Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward A Media History of Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014) and Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). For a study of paper as a medium of inscription which help us see the space of the page as a theater in which all kinds of agencies are in play see Joshua Calhoun, *The Nature of the Page: Poetry, Papermaking, and the Ecology of Texts in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). Andrew Piper’s *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009) contains a fascinating exposition of the effects of the scale of the book trade on readerly imaginations. Distilling his book down to a single sentence he says, “Romanticism... is what happens when there are too many books to read” (pg. 17). See also Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

²⁴ See, in particular, Ōba Osamu’s superb collection of essays *Kankan kenkyū* 漢簡研究 (Kyoto: Dohosha, 1992). The best single-volume introduction to the material features of the Chinese manuscript tradition remains Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃, *Moji no bunkashi* 文字の文化史 (Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

wood administrative manuscripts, the number and position of their bindings, the style of script, the layout of the passage, the shape (curved or angular) of the ends of the slips, and even in some cases carved notches made all told the user how to read the text.²⁵ Using a combination of anecdotal evidence and the manuscript cache recovered from the Library Cave at Dunhuang, Jean Pierre Drège, Antje Richter, and Christopher Nugent have taken crucial steps toward gauging the unique affordances of paper as a medium of inscription in the medieval period.²⁶

There are important differences, however, between a Latourian or ANT approach to the study of textual media and the study of textual media as a component of Chinese material culture. The problem with traditional anthropological approaches to the study of human artifacts, Latour says in his essay “On Inter-objectivity,” is that they “oscillate between two definitions of the object.”²⁷ Material things are *either* neutral screens onto which humans project cultural meaning but which remain powerless in themselves to shape this process in any way *or* they exist in a world of their own, resisting human efforts to bring them into the social fold, a kind of alien counterforce at work with human social formations. “Either objects do nothing except deceive or they do too much. Either they are totally

²⁵ Matthias Richter’s *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) provides an extremely meticulous close reading of the changes a text inscribed on bamboo undergoes in the process of remediation. See also his “Faithful Transmission or Creative Change: Tracing Modes of Manuscript Production from the Material Evidence.” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 73, no. 4 (2009), 889–908. For essays that bring the labor of the scribe into focus as a maker of texts in three dimensions, see Hsing I-tien 邢義田, *Di bu ai bao: Handai jiandu 地不愛寶：漢代簡牘* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011). Tomiya Itaru’s 富谷至, *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku 文書行政の漢帝国* (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai 名古屋大学出版会, 2010) illustrates in great detail the extent to which physical texts as objects and not merely as bearers of written pronouncements and orders were made to do the work of administration in the Han dynasty. For an exciting collection of essays on the artifactual nature of Han-era bamboo and wooden documents, see Momiyama Akira 籾山明 and Satō Makoto 佐藤信, *Bunkun to ibutsu no kyōkai: Chūgoku shutsudo kandoku shiryō no seitaiteki kenkyū 文献と遺物の境界：中国出土簡牘の生態的研究*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2011). Rens Krijgsman’s work on the material features of bamboo manuscripts as guides to changes in reading practices is also worthy of note. See “An Inquiry into the Formation of Readership in Early China: Using and Producing the *Yong yue 用曰 and Yinshu 引書 Manuscripts” *T’oung Pao* 104, no. 1 (2018): 2–65. For a helpful survey of the history of the study of the material features of early manuscripts, see Tsang Wing Ma, “Scribes, Assistants, and the Materiality of Administrative Documents in Qin-Early Han China: Excavated Evidence from Liye, Shuihudi, and Zhangjiashan.” *T’oung Pao* 103 (2017): 297–333.

²⁶ For the ineluctable materiality of letters as bearers of the bodies and spirits of correspondents, see Antje Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013). For an extremely careful attempt to gauge the effects of the parallel use of paper alongside side other textual media in the early medieval period, see Tomiya Itaru, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai: shoki no bunkashi 木簡・竹簡の語る中国古代：書記の文化史* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 1–16 and 159–223. Although it treats materiality of writing in the Tang dynasty, Christopher Nugent’s *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2010) provides scholars with an excellent template for placing the texts we read in modern print editions back into the media environment in which the originally circulated. Jean Pierre Drège’s introduction to *Le papier dans la Chine impériale: origine, fabrication, usages* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017) contains the most up to date archeological findings on the introduction and gradual expansion of paper as a medium of inscription. See also his edited anthology of short essays on texts in relation to their surfaces of inscription *La Fabrique du lisible: La mise en texte des manuscrits de la Chine ancienne et médiévale* (Paris: Institut des hautes études chinoises, 2014).

²⁷ Latour, “On Interobjectivity,” *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 3, no. 4 (1996): 236.

manipulated by humans; or it is them, on the contrary, which manipulate unsuspecting humans.”²⁸ This critique might be extended to the approach to objects as texts or canvases for the projection of social meaning in some of what falls under the designation of material culture studies. The truth lies somewhere in between these positions.

Latour develops a conception of technology broad enough to include artifacts capable of restoring to them their agency in the production of the social. Human societies are characterized by procedures for offloading extraordinarily complex social practices, behaviors, and hierarchies in the form of technologies. Our cookware and table settings, in Grant Kien’s telling example, contain in their very material forms a *program* for eating food cooked and served in a certain way, in certain quantities, and in certain arrangements around the dinner table which we *run* as we prepare and eat food together.²⁹ Thousands of decisions about what to eat and how to eat, many of them made hundreds or even thousands of years ago (think of chopsticks), have been delegated to these technologies. But it would be a mistake to see technologies as mere means to the end of achieving certain preconceived goals. Technologies bundle human and nonhuman agencies (human intentions and the intentions of the raw material) in ways that necessarily produce *new* goals. The raw materials out of which our tools are made have their own properties, are only amenable to certain arrangements, and reserve the right to break down, injure us, poison us, or function in ways we never intended them to function. Texts are no exception.

An ANT approach to technologies of writing must also be distinguished from a pure phenomenology of reading. Latour cautions us about the pitfalls of reducing technical objects to their outward material forms. A serious engagement with the materiality of writing must avoid the temptation to allow a lovingly detailed description of the physical text—its texture, size, and weight in the hand, its blemishes and idiosyncrasies—to stand in place of a more robust account of the vast array of agencies at work in its physical form.

We shall never find the mode of technological existence *in* the object itself, since it is always necessary to look beside it: first, between the object itself and the enigmatic movement of which it is only in the wake; then within the object itself, between each of the components of which it is only the temporary assemblage.³⁰

What does it mean to say that a technology is a “trajectory” that leaves both the things it makes or does in the world and the tools that fabricate them in its wake? Let us imagine a mid-fifth century paper copy of the *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注 (original text with commentary attributed to Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312)) produced for storage in a private library. What makes this scroll a technology for the transmission of a text is a matter of things contained entirely within and existing completely outside of the physical object itself working in coordination with one another: the plant fibers in the paper, the glue holding the sheets together in the right order, the mineral wash that ensures the paper absorbs ink without bleeding or tearing, the workshops of the paper, brush, and ink makers, the animal glue and lampblack in the ink which must interact with water at just the right consistency to produce legible text, the historical sequence of scribes who copied the text, as well as more intangible things such as

²⁸ Latour, “On Interobjectivity,” 236.

²⁹ Grant Kien, “Actor-Network Theory — Grant Kien,” Youtube video, 17:09, June 2, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Uh2UIPvIhs>

³⁰ *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 221. For another statement of the non-material or not-exclusively-material nature of technology, see “Technical Does Not Mean Material,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (2014): 507–510.

the memorized procedures the scribes followed to title, lay out, and punctuate the manuscript, the training of the scribes' hand and the hand, eyes, and tongue of the reader—all of this has to be at work for the inscribed scroll to transmit a text, to qualify as the “sumptuously opaque” thing we call a technology.

All of the agencies present in this assemblage have been detoured, altered, curved away from some other activity in some way to achieve a goal that corresponds to no single entity's original mode of action.³¹ The text folds into its form materials with different time signatures originating in different spaces; it is only in moments of breakdown—when the ink fades or the fibers become food for pests—that these time signatures and spaces emerge to alter the nature of the interaction.³² Crucially for the argument of this dissertation, the text inscribed on paper is a *different* text—in being inscribed it has “crossed the commonsense boundary between signs and things.” For one thing, the range and duration over which it can communicate its meaning has increased. As an inscribed text, it will tend to stay close by other texts which share its format, to be compared, corrected, copied, and reread; in such a space its capacity to detour the people who encounter it is also greatly increased by comparison with spoken utterance. For Latour, “humanity is but the recoil of the technological detour.”³³ By describing the discourse of individual literary style as the production of “concatenations of mediators” instead of the influence of ideas about the individual, we stand a better chance capturing the conditions under which such a discourse took hold.³⁴ Latour describes ANT's account of the social as “flat” because, like an ant (Latour's pun) the anthropologist moves slowly across the contiguous surfaces of the connections where differences are made, and then back along those lines until the surface is mapped.³⁵ Ideas—for example ideas about sagehood in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子—are one kind of connection we will come across, but we will only be able to move from there to ideas about sagehood in Wang Bi's 王弼 commentary on the *Lunyu* 論語 if we go through the intermediary steps linking the two commentaries (insofar as we are able) along lines of shared or divergent textual practices, sites, and media of inscription.

Objectives of this study

This dissertation gives a new account of the production of the concept of individual literary style between the second and the fifth centuries. It argues that the new tendency to posit a stylistic identity between author and text was a complex response to two major shifts in the media environment these texts were produced in and circulated through. Through of case studies of three major writers and scholars from the period, it characterizes the emergence of reading and writing practices more intensively centered on written texts, authors, and their distinctive styles as a “recoil effect” of in changes in technologies of writing used to produce and copy texts, in particular the emergence alongside bamboo and wood (as the primary media of inscription) of the first cheap, durable paper. It also propose the civil service bureaucracy as a second, though by no means, separate site for the production of the concept of individual style. Although high-level appointments were made on the basis of lineage connections throughout the period, speech, physiognomy, deportment, calligraphy, and literary talent were increasingly used to evaluate the personalities of candidates for official posts. Admittedly, this was done largely in order to justify existing hierarchies. I show how the effort to

³¹ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 178–83.

³² Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 183–5.

³³ Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, 230.

³⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, 136.

³⁵ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, 165–72

centralize and standardize the criteria for evaluating character centered on the person of the emperor at the Wei dynasty court precipitated a counter-discourse of character appraisal aimed at subverting or exploding this official rubric by privileging eccentric behavior; a reputation for such behavior could enable one to move a stagnant bureaucratic system. My thesis shows how changes technologies of inscription and institutions made possible new modes of interacting with texts and new ways of thinking about literary history and authorship while simultaneously foreclosing others.

Chapter One focuses on the Eastern Han dynasty polymath Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), one of the first men in Chinese history to gain recognition in his own lifetime for both his literary prowess and his calligraphy. Cai Yong has typically been viewed as a precursor of a shift toward “literary self-consciousness.” His works and career, which spanned the chaotic final decades of the Han dynasty, have thus typically been evaluated within the framework of literary and cultural history in the transition to the period of division. In this chapter, I argue that we can better understand Cai Yong by seeing him as much more fully of his time, both in terms of his notion of textual practice and its significance, and in terms of his response to ongoing changes in institutions and in the materiality of writing. Far from inaugurating a new era of individual literary self-expression, these interventions index a crisis in the viability of ancient models—a crisis precisely of *ti* 體 in all its semantic dimensions. I suggest that this crisis was precipitated, in part, by the rapid spread of textual production and, with it, textual authority beyond the confines of the court facilitated by the more widespread use of the first cheap, durable paper as an auxiliary medium for storing and sharing texts. I first reconstruct the deeply intertwined notions of text, script, self-cultivation, and administration the late Eastern Han. I then examine his leading role in the creation of the Xiping Stone Classics 熹平石經, for which he provided editorial guidance and calligraphy, his memorials to the throne criticizing the inappropriate use of script forms, and his tomb inscription for the scholar-recluse Chen Shi 陳寔 (104–186). This analysis reveals Cai Yong’s deeply ambivalent attitude toward the notion of an “individual” literary or calligraphic style, even if he saw himself as possessing both. Like Ruan Ji and Xie Lingyun, Cai Yong late works embrace a conception of individual authorship as a kind of emergency procedure for transmitting the exemplary patterns of the past to future generations in moments of deep crisis.

Chapter Two focuses on the Three Kingdoms (*San guo* 三國) period (220–285) thinker Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), best known his series of eighty-two pentasyllabic *shi*-poems transmitted to us under the title “Singing of My Innermost Cares” (“Yonghuai” 詠懷). Ruan Ji’s *shi*-poetry is typically read as some of the first in which a poet can be seen breaking out of the anonymous lyric tradition to speak in his own voice. Such readings, which use his poetry to mark a break with the past, failed to note its deep connection to the canonical use of the repertoire for the normative shaping of individuals and for signaling the collapse of those norms. This chapter will attempt to say something new about Ruan Ji’s *shi*-poetry precisely by attempting to tease out the implications of one of its earliest readings, that of the sixth century critic Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (d. 518) who claimed that the style (*ti* 體) of Ruan Ji’s *shi*-poetry can be traced to the “Minor Court Odes” (*Xiao ya* 小雅) section of the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) (hereafter the *Odes*). In order to give a more period-accurate account of his poetics, I suggest we must read Ruan Ji’s poems against the background of the same changes in textual media treated in Chapter 1 as well as the discourse of character appraisal, which took speech, physiognomy, deportment, calligraphy, and literary writing as the outward signs of inner talent and cultivation. Both technologies facilitated the deeper identification of author and text, that is, of inner and outer dimensions of expression. I argue that many of these poems register in their very language and form the loss of the dynastic institutions of rites and music into which the singer could once have merged to praise the virtuous administration of the ruler or celebrate the comradeship of true friends. Precisely to the degree that Ruan Ji spoke in his own voice about his own fallen present, his poems were signs

or omens that such a repertoire was in the process of breaking down. In the first half of the chapter, I trace the development of vocabulary for character appraisal from its beginnings in the late Warring States to its centralization and standardization in the Wei court during Ruan Ji's lifetime and in the midst of a major crisis of dynastic authority. I then read two accounts of Ruan Ji's bizarre somatic performances before those intent on reading his personality—vomiting blood after gorging himself on meat at wine at his mother's funeral and keeping his eyes rolled back in his head when receiving unwelcome visitors—as pointed affronts to the normative discourse of personality appraisal. The disjunction of the interior and exterior of the body, of internal states and their outward expression, in these anecdotes can help us understand of Ruan Ji's relationship to the textual repertoire he mobilized, in a similar way, to both mask and reveal his feelings. Finally, through close readings of five pentasyllabic *shi*-poems from the (retroactively constituted) series "Singing of My Innermost Cares," I show in Ruan Ji's determination to make himself legible as illegible an attempt to highlight a more general crisis of the legibility of canonically rooted literary forms when they have ceased to connect the poet to the lost world of antiquity and began to serve as a resume of the poet's personality. In particular, I read moments when textual or linguistic modes of expression are remediated into non-signifying modes such as bird song, music, and tears as places where Ruan Ji's poetry both registers and resists changes in repertoire that have forced a deeper identification of author and text. The melancholy that subsumes Ruan Ji's poetry is the melancholy of having been reduced to speaking in one's own voice.

Chapter Three examines the pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry of Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433). I argue Xie Lingyun developed his singular literary style partly as compensation for failing to attain the high position at court he believed was his birthright as scion of one of the most powerful families in the empire. I examine two poems written to commemorate his grandfather the war-hero Xie Xuan 謝玄 (343–388). In these poems, we see Xie engaged in the process of transforming his grandfather's legacy (*ye* 業)—his legacy as a statesman and paragon of aristocratic virtue, as well as the concrete legacy the mountain-side estate in Shi'ning 始寧 that became the site for many of Xie's excursion poems—into his own textual legacy, circumscribed to the scope of *shi*-poems written in a style emblematic of their origins. In Xie's excursion poetry, the villa and its representation formed a space in which an older aristocratic notion of personal style commensurate with political rule could be preserved in the compensatory medium of an individual literary style. Xie Lingyun's individual literary style could only perform this function with reference to the then still relatively new archival format of the literary anthology. Two kinds of literary anthologies formed what I call the material horizon of possibility for the recognition of an individual literary style: the comprehensive literary collection (*zongji* 總集) and the single-author literary collection (*bieji* 別集, literally "separate collection"). In the second half of this chapter, I argue that Xie Lingyun made his most profound statement about the diminished status of literature at court, its degeneration into so many individual styles, in one of the strangest and most complex "imitation" (*ni* 擬) poems in the tradition. Xie's "Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei's Gatherings at Ye" 擬魏太子鄴中集詩 takes the form of fictional anthology of banquet poems by the members of Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) literary salon. Xie's poetics of distinction translates the pain and resentment he felt at having been prevented from acting within the hallowed ritual institutions of the state, institutions which obviated the very need to speak in one's own voice or write in one's own style.

It is important to say, in closing, what this dissertation is not. This dissertation is not a paleographical investigation of the materiality of writing in the early medieval period in China. No manuscript copies of any of the texts I examine in the following pages dating to the period in which they originally circulated have survived—indeed, as the work of Glen Dudbridge and Jean Pierre

Drège has demonstrated, hundreds of thousands of manuscripts written during the period of division had been lost by the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) and only a fraction survived into the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279); even the few that were preserved in chains of manuscript copies long enough to make the jump to printed editions represent only a tiny fraction of the texts then in circulation.³⁶ I have not attempted to compensate for this absence by using the very few examples of written documents that have survived from this period to reconstruct what such poems must have looked like on their original surface of inscription or in their original format on the page. We do not know, and we should not guess. Our analysis of the materiality of writing in this period must be carried out at a higher level of generality.

Nevertheless, we can use the little we do know about the monumental changes which occurred in this period in the way texts were realized and circulated to act as a gentle counterweight to our own readerly and scholarly prejudices. The alternative to applying such a counterweight is not unprejudiced reading but rather a mode of reading subject to a different set of prejudices deriving from the very different media environment in which we typically encounter these texts. For example, if we tend to take for granted the mobility and portability of the texts we read, we will benefit from learning that the texts became both more mobile (i.e. easily and cheaply copied) and more portable in the early medieval period and thus that there was an earlier moment when the same texts were mostly encountered immobilized in difficult-to-access archives. Such a thought experiment invites us to reflect on a number of things. How did the mere fact of increased mobility and portability change those texts, not incidentally, but in their very essence? What has the assumption of portability and mobility carried over from modern print culture obscured to us about the way literature was encountered in earlier periods? We can venture tentative answers to these questions for the early medieval period without consulting an archive of thousands of manuscripts (although a few more manuscripts would be nice!) and without direct statements about such matters in theoretical writings on literature by looking more closely at the material practices surrounding texts.

Perhaps the most pernicious among the prejudices we bring to our reading of early medieval texts is the belief that we modern readers stand at the natural endpoint of the developments we trace. Such a prejudice is baked into the very idea of development. This prejudice is more apparent in the scholarship of the first half of the 20th century, but it is very much still with us. Premodern writers are seen as advancing in the direction of our hermeneutical categories, more and more closely approximating our notions of literature, literary criticism, authorship, edition, and text. By paying closer attention to the way contingent changes in technologies of writing shaped very different notions of these categories, we can begin to see the history of Chinese literature not as the highway to modern, individualistic, late capitalist subjectivity but, instead, as a garden of forking paths. The more stylistically varied, author-centric, lyrically self-expressive literature of the Tang dynasty is not closer to the truth of human experience than the more formulaic, rhetorically anonymous literature of the Three Kingdoms Period. The remediation of the textual tradition from bamboo and wooden slips to paper was not inevitable, nor does it unequivocally represent progress from an irrational knowledge system to a more rational one. I hope to show that three of the most talented writers in the period were deeply ambivalent about their own participation in this new world in which texts circulated in unprecedented quantities and the writing of literature had become an arena for social climbing, empty banter, and legacy-building outside of the civil service. This signaled to them that earlier modes of

³⁶ See Glen Dudbridge, *The Lost Books of Medieval China* (London: The British Library, 2001) and Jean-Pierre Drège, *Les bibliothèques en Chine au temps des manuscrits: Jusqu'au Xe siècle* (Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991).

access to the sages of antiquity sustained for so long by the ritual matrix of the court were giving way to newer and narrower channels of writerly and readerly activity.

This dissertation seeks to make the following modest contributions to the field. It represents the first attempt to take up an ecological approach to textual practice in this period in which the “human” and the “literary” are productively decentered. It also aims to open the study of early medieval texts to questions posed by scholars in the field of media studies. While many have examined the impact of print culture in the early modern period, few have considered the momentous changes brought about by the widespread availability of paper beginning in the second century, except to note that this must indeed have been a momentous change. Finally, at a more concrete level it challenges the notion, still widespread in the scholarly literature on this period, that early medieval writers began speaking more fully in their own voices in an effort to liberate themselves from constraints imposed by court poetry. I show the emergence of the lyric “I” to have been indexed to the loss of the hallowed institutions and ancient channels of self-cultivation which obviated the very need to speak as oneself. This loss was the result not only of political fragmentation but also of momentous changes in textual media which distributed the authority associated with the canonical literary forms beyond the confines of the court. The melancholy that suffuses the literature of the post-Han period is thus in part the melancholy of having been *reduced* to speaking in one’s own voice.

Chapter 1

Off Script: Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192) on Writing, Calligraphy, and Self-Cultivation in Crisis at the Dawn of the Age of Paper

At the height of his career, Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192 CE) was perhaps the most celebrated scholar-official in the Han empire. A polymath of the first order, he was recognized for his expertise in calendrical mathematics, historiography, court ritual and administration, lexicology, epigraphy, omenology, music, painting, calligraphy, and *belles lettres*.¹ It is a matter of historical irony then that a scholar of such comprehensive abilities, who had once railed against the evaluation of officials on the basis of their literary writings and calligraphy, should be remembered and appreciated today primarily for his literary writings and calligraphy. In scholarly surveys of the literary culture of the late Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), Cai Yong typically appears as the author of several stylistically distinctive “poetic expositions” (*fu* 賦) and commemorative “stele inscriptions” (*beiwén* 碑文). He is also frequently listed as one of the first men to have gained contemporary recognition as an excellent calligrapher, one of the first, that is, to recognize its capacity for purely artistic expression.

With these contributions at the center of their attention, modern scholars have tended to place Cai Yong in a diffuse constellation of eccentric literati figures who, so the story goes, turned their backs on the moribund Liu 劉 ruling house and began to write literary, historical, and philosophical reflections on the times more fully in their own voices and styles than at any previous point in Chinese history.² In such accounts, Cai Yong stands alongside these luminaries at the threshold of the discovery of individual literary and calligraphic style. In the only English-language monograph on Cai Yong’s life and works to date, Mark Asselin has argued that Cai Yong’s heightened awareness of living at the end of an era inspired him to produce literary works addressed to the members of his own social circle rather than the court. Focusing exclusively on Cai’s poetic expositions and stele inscriptions,

¹ Cai Yong’s biography can be found together in the same *juan* 卷 with that of Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166) in *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, comp. Fan Ye 范曄, annot. Li Xian 李賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 60B. 1979–2013. I have also consulted the biography and selected bibliography of Cai Yong’s works in David Knechtges and Taiping Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide, Part One* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 60–9.

² Standard treatments along these lines include Okamura Shigeru 岡村繁, “Sai Yū o megaru Go Kan makki no bungaku no sūei” 蔡邕をめぐる後漢末期の文學の趨勢, *Nippon Chugaku bungaku hō* 28 (1976), 61–78 and Gong Kechang 龔克昌, “Cai Yong pingzhuan” 蔡邕評傳 in *Hanfu yanjiu* 漢賦研究 (Shangdong wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 278–304. For a standard reading of Cai Yong’s writings on calligraphy see Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Liang Han meixue shi* 兩漢美學史 (Taipei: Chinfeng, 1987), 253–65. Cai Yong’s literary works are typically grouped with the poetic expositions of Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), Ma Rong, and Zhao Yi 趙壹 (fl. 178 CE), and the prose of Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143), Zhu Mu 朱穆 (100–163), and Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 90–ca. 167). In fact, no contemporary figure was closer to Cai Yong in terms of overall outlook than Ying Shao 應劭 (fl. 203 CE), though they are rarely discussed together. For an illuminating treatment of Ying Shao’s career which examines many of the same aspects of Ying Shao’s work I cover in relation to Cai Yong in this chapter see Michael Nylan, “Ying Shao’s ‘Feng su t’ung yi’: An Exploration of Problems in Han Dynasty Political, Philosophical, and Social Unity,” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1982). In what follows, I will suggest Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) and Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC) as two other key influences. After all, it was none other than Cai Yong who re-discovered Wang Chong’s *Lunheng* 論衡 during his exile in the south and ensured that it would be transmitted to posterity.

Asselin concludes that his oeuvre can be characterized as “aesthetic” rather than “utilitarian,” “self-expressive” rather than “didactic,” and sharply critical of the status quo in ways earlier more formulaic complaints supposedly were not. It is in these works, he argues, that we can detect the shift toward “direct lyric self-expression.”³ By implication then, Cai Yong’s writings are deemed worthy of our consideration largely because they anticipate the embrace of literary writing (*wen* 文) as the highest form of personal and cultural expression in later periods. In particular, they set the stage for the rise of lyric poetry during the Jian’an 建安 reign period (196–220) and the even more wide-ranging literary endeavors of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–266) court.⁴

This chapter will contend that such a characterization of Cai Yong’s contribution to Chinese letters—based as it is on a limited cross-section of his extant works read in the light of subsequent developments—is incomplete and even misleading. If we want to understand Cai Yong’s major works within the temporal horizon of their creation, we must limit the terms of our engagement to the norms and expectations governing textual practice in his period as best we can reconstruct them. This will require that we relinquish our conception of “literary writing” as a distinct sphere of textual production turned inward on itself in the pursuit of artistic beauty and self-expression for its own sake. We must re-encounter the works we have habitually labeled “literary” (as well as many we have ignored) in their natural habitats where they easily blend in among many kinds of “non-literary” official documents and ritual texts. Furthermore, as I have argued in the Introduction, to read and respond to written texts in circulation at a particular moment in time is always to read and respond to the full range of forces at work in the assemblage in which the writer or reader works. This includes changes in the physical form, layout, script, and paratextual apparatus of those texts. Any effort to read Cai Yong’s extant works *in situ* must therefore also attune itself to the material dimensions of his textual practice. As we will see, this is especially important when new forms of media—in this case the first cheap, mass-produced writing paper—begin to disrupt the hierarchies and regimes of behavior embedded in texts.

Cai Yong’s desire to shore up the delicate network of interlocking institutions and ritual protocols designed to ensure the survival of the dynasty remained the ineluctable horizon of his major written works. To simplify things a great deal, he spent the first half of his career attempting to reinforce these institutions in high-level research on pitch-pipe harmonics and calendrical mathematics, by assisting with the compilation of the *Han ji* 漢記 [Han Records] in the Eastern Lodge 東觀, in the creation of the Xiping Stone Classics 熹平石經, and, finally, in treatises on administration such as the *Duduan* 獨斷 [Solitary Judgements]. Although projects carried out in direct collaboration with Lingdi’s 靈帝 (r. 168–189) court did not yield the results Cai Yong envisioned, he did not turn away from political life. Even in de facto exile, his energies remained focused on the same vision of cultural and political renewal. By his own telling, no work was more important to him during these years than his

³ See Mark Asselin, *A Significant Season: Cai Yong (ca. 133–192) and His Contemporaries* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2010), 163–8. Asselin’s work builds on Xu Jie 許結, *Handai wenxue sixiang shi* 漢代文學思想史 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1989). In Xu’s account, Cai Yong is the pivotal figure in the achievement of “literary self-consciousness.” See *Handai wenxue sixiang shi*, 350–7.

⁴ See for example David Knechtges’ reading of Cai Yong’s “Fu Recounting a Journey” in his article “Poetic travelogue in the Han fu,” in *Court Culture and Literature in Early China* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2002), 146–152. Citing Itō Masufumi 伊藤正 on the “lyricization of the fu,” Knechtges argues Cai Yong’s description of his journey to Luoyang displays a specificity of time and place and a fusion of political comment and private expression that will become the norm in the poetry of the Jian’an period. Asselin extends this reading of the “Fu Recounting a Journey,” citing Knechtges, in Chapter 2 of his book.

ten “treatises” (*yi* 意)⁵—long discursive texts modelled on the Ban Gu’s “Monographs” (*zhi* 志) in the *Hanshu* 漢書 which aimed to articulate the theoretical underpinnings of Han ritual and administration. So seriously did he take his treatises that he continued to write them well beyond the term of his employment in the Eastern Lodge. In a petition sent from exile to the throne in 178, Cai Yong claimed his intention in the treatises was to “illuminate the ruling house and its bodily constituents [i.e. chief ministers and ruling authorities]” (*zhaoming guoti* 昭明國體).⁶ But this project of casting light on what we might think of as the body of the state, held together by rites and undone in their absence, underlay more than just his treatises; it can be detected in a variety of works, even his privately commissioned stele inscriptions.

The bulk of this chapter will track Cai Yong’s response to an ongoing crisis in the viability of ancient models triggered by changes which threatened the ritual infrastructure of the dynasty embodied in and as texts. This was a crisis of *ti* 體 in all of its semantic dimensions. The first of these dimensions is its Han-era cognate *li* 禮, or correct ritual comportment, understood, in this association, as a matter of correct bodily comportment.⁷ This crisis manifested at three levels: 1) script, in the misuse of character forms, the corruption of archival copies of canonical texts, and the fabrication of official documents at court; 2) the cultivation or “embodiment” (*ti* 體) of Classical models, in the appointment of unlettered technicians and wordsmiths to high-level posts and 3) the extended “body” of the dynasty itself (*guoti* 國體) in the more general corruption of the appointment system and the absence of the emperor at major sacrifices and ceremonies. The tangible result of this crisis, as Cai Yong pointed out in a series of memorials, the last of which nearly got him killed, was a cascade of bad omens. These prodigies poured in through the gap between the ritual order sanctioned by the Classics and the disembodied ritual order of Lingdi’s court. After a brief excursus on how deeply intertwined notions of text, script, self-cultivation, and administration had become by the mid-Eastern

⁵ The term *yi* 意 was used in place of the usual *zhi* 志 (often translated “treatises” or “monographs”) to avoid a name taboo.

⁶ Less than a year into his exile in the far north, Cai Yong petitioned the throne to be allowed to return to the capital to continue working on the treatises because he feared they would be destroyed during a Xianbei border raid. He also attached unfinished drafts of seven of the ten treatises to the petition itself. This petition appears in a note to the “Lüli zhi” 律曆志, originally part of Sima Biao’s *Xu Hanshu* 續漢書 but later incorporated into Fan Ye’s *Hou Hanshu*, under the title “Rongbian shangzhang” 戎邊上章. See *Hou Hanshu*, *Zhi* 志 *juan* 3, pgs. 3082–4n1.

⁷ In the preface to his commentary on the *Li ji* 禮記, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) glosses *li* 禮 as follows: “Ritual, to embody, to carry out [lit. to step with one’s feet]. To bring it together in the mind is to embody, to put it into practice [lit. to go] by stepping [as one would in a ritual setting?] is to carry it out” 禮者，體也，履也。統之於心曰體，踐而行之曰履。Both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of these words are active in these glosses in ways that make them nearly impossible to translate. The first points to the body as the site of ritual practice and the body as metaphor for a hierarchical system in which all of the organs and extremities move as one, or, finally, a practice which involves such coordinated motion. The second points to physical act of stepping or pacing and the more abstract use of both *li* 履 and *xing* 行 to mean “to put into practice” or “carry out.” In the preface to his subcommentary, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) points out these glosses appear in the “Li qi” 禮器 and the “Ji yi” 祭義 chapters of *Li ji* itself. See *Li ji zhengyi* 禮記正義, comm. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, sub-comm. Kong Yingda 孔穎達, in *Shisan jing zhushu* *Shisan jing zhu shu* 十三經注疏, comp. and ed. by Ruan Yuan 阮元, modern edition by Li Xueqin 李學勤 et al. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 8. The two terms have some semantic overlap when used as verbs meaning “to perform [a ceremony/sacrifice]; “to undertake or execute a ritually appropriate course of action;” “to dispose oneself or something in accordance with a certain protocol, to carry out, both in and through one’s own person or body.”

Han, I will turn to focus on two moments in Cai Yong's career in which he addressed the threat posed by the emergence of new modes of textual practice: his involvement in the creation of the Xiping Stone Classics and his memorial opposing, among many other things, the misuse of script forms and the forgery of official documents by members of the Hongdu Gate Academy 鴻都門學.

I will suggest this crisis Cai Yong sought to address in these works was subtly accelerated by changes in textual media, changes in the very material support of the texts on which the fate of the dynasty rested. The more widespread use of the first cheap, durable paper as an auxiliary medium for the storage and circulation of texts gradually multiplied sites of textual production, dispersing claims to textual authority beyond the confines of the court. This was a multifaceted process that had begun in many respects decades before the widespread use of paper, and we cannot describe it as simply a matter of centrifugal dispersion of textual authority alone. To paraphrase Latour, the new technology of paper is a secondary cause that puts many of the efficient causes at work redistributing this authority into relation.⁸ Paper did not unilaterally trigger the developments traced in this chapter, but it did act as an accelerant. We can track this process through its symptoms. By some accounts, the last decades of the dynasty were accompanied by fierce debates and competition for regional prestige among scholars no longer affiliated with the court, suggesting a much wider access to the textual materials necessary for reading and producing commentaries than had been available in previous periods.⁹ While students in previous generations had apprenticed themselves primarily to the “section and line” commentaries (*zhangju* 章句) and “explications” (*shuo* 說) of teachers in specific scholarly lineages, students in regional networks could build their own libraries and work more directly with the original texts. Scholarly affiliations thus began to grow rhizomatically through written correspondence exchanged between peers, some of it clearly on paper.¹⁰ Finally, in 178, Lingdi established the Hongdu Gate Academy for the purpose of directly appointing men who had risen to the top of this anarchic world of textual production by very dubious means to the highest positions in the court. This horrified scholar-officials like Cai Yong who rightly saw it meant he and his peers no longer had, so to speak, the only set of keys to the car.

Cai Yong's response to this dual crisis was to *re-ti*—to both re-script and re-embody—the ancient models under threat in his own hand and in his own written work in the hopes that they might be salvaged in a later, more enlightened age. He had as precursors in this endeavor both Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) and Confucius (559–479 BCE), albeit Confucius as viewed by Sima Qian. Both Sima Qian and “his” Confucius responded to the corruption of institutions in their respective periods by creating texts that could function as channels for the transmission of models and institutional norms, “these exemplary patterns” (*siwen* 斯文) of antiquity as they are called in *Analects*

⁸ “Visualisation and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands.” In *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, edited by Henrika Kuklick, 1–40. Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, 1986), 10.

⁹ On the expansion of local academies see Zhao Lu, *In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2019), 115–18.

¹⁰ Kogachi Ryuichi 古勝隆一 has noted that prefaces to commentated editions of texts shift into a more personal and collegial register beginning in the late Eastern Han period. He connects this development to the circulation of such texts between friends. See “Gokan Gi Shin chūshaku sho no jobun” 後漢魏晉注釋書の序文, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 73 (2002): 1–48. In precisely this context, Zhao Lu discusses what he calls the growth of “horizontal relationships” between peers and the exchange of copied texts written on paper. See *In Pursuit of the Great Peace*, 125–135. Although dated, Shimizu Shigeru 清水茂, “Kami no hatsumeï to Gokan no gakufū” 紙の發明と後漢の學風 *Tōhōgaku* 79 (1990): 1–13 contains a nuanced series of reflections on the probably impact of paper on textual learning.

9.5, to later-born sages and worthies.¹¹ In the final section of this paper, I turn to Cai Yong's innovative use of stele inscriptions to this end, particularly during the period of his exile. In his hands, these grave markers began to take the form of a “Biographies” (*liezhuan* 列傳) section of a quasi-public-facing history. This history would be embedded in the landscape instead of stored away in the court archives. I focus in particular on Cai Yong's late stele inscription for the scholar-recluse Chen Shi 陳寔 (104–187) which transforms him into a “model of refined patterns” (*wenfan* 文範, which the stele inscription itself announces as Chen Shi's posthumous title). Although many stele inscriptions from this period close by inviting the audience or reader to take the deceased person as a model of virtue, Cai Yong's “Chen Taiqiu bei” 陳太邱碑 explicitly invokes what I will call the *siwen* 斯文 paradigm, treating Chen Shi's death as an omen of dynastic crisis in response to which, Cai's record of Chen Shi's life will transmit his embodiment of the patterns whose viability is threatened by the immanent collapse of the ritual order in the compensatory medium or body of a text inscribed in stone. Cai Yong's investment in stone as a medium for his works should be understood in the context of the volatile world of paper media. These stelae will function as something like wireless routers allowing future readers to access a network of models and norms that cannot be found in the fallen world of their present. If we wish to sharpen our sense of what was at stake in Cai Yong's major works, no moment is more revealing than the contemporary response to his death.

1.1. Cai Yong's Afterlives

Sometime in June of 192 CE, Cai Yong died in a prison cell in Chang'an.¹² In the months leading up to this, then Chancellor and Director of the Secretariat Wang Yun 王允 (d. 192) had arranged the assassination of the warlord Dong Zhuo 董卓 (138–192) and seized control of the court. Despite vehement protests from high-ranking officials, Wang Yun's first act had been to jail Cai Yong to await execution on trumped up charges of treason. To wit, Cai Yong had *sighed* when news reached him of Dong Zhuo's assassination, thereby apparently betraying his sympathy for the would-be usurper's

¹¹ “The Master was under threat in Wei. He said, ‘King Wen is already long gone, but are the patterns not right here [in me]? If Heaven was going to allow these patterns to perish with him [i.e. King Wen], then those living after his death would not have come into possession of them; if Heaven is not yet ready to let these patterns perish, then what can the people of Kuang do to me?’” 子畏於匡。曰：文王既沒，文不在茲乎？天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之未喪斯文也，匡人其如予何？ See *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, ed. Cheng Shuda 程樹達. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 17.174–8. It is not clear that the patterns referred to in this passage have anything to do with texts per se. Basing themselves on a reference to Confucius' authorship of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 in *Mengzi* 孟子, Han-era thinkers would begin to read this passage in the context of Confucius' writings. See “Kongzi as Author in the Han,” in *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*, eds. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 292. For an Eastern Han reading of this passage see the discussion of Wang Chong below.

¹² *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2006. Cai Yong died sometime between Dong Zhuo's assassination in late May of 192 and Wang Yun's assassination in late June. See Rafe De Crespigny, *Fire over Luoyang: A History of the Later Han Dynasty 23–220 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 466–7. Note that Yuan Hong's 袁宏 (328–376) *Hou Hanji* 後漢紀 says that Wang Yun “killed” (*sha* 殺) Cai Yong. See *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 後漢紀校注, ed. Zhou Tianyou 周天游 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1987), 17.753. Given how often high-ranking officials in the late Eastern Han died in prison soon after being incarcerated, this may be a distinction without a difference.

cause. According to one account, Wang Yun soon came to regret his decision and wished to stay the sentence.¹³ He did not act in time.

When word of Cai Yong's death spread east from Chang'an 長安 to the area around the former capital at Luoyang 洛陽, "none among the upright officials and classicists did not shed tears."¹⁴ To his many colleagues and acolytes, Cai Yong's untimely passing carried a dual significance. At a practical level, it meant the ten-year-old Han Xiandi 漢獻帝 (r. 189–220) and his already decimated court, which had only just relocated to Chang'an following the razing of Luoyang in 189, would no longer have the talents of perhaps the most celebrated scholar-official in the empire at their disposal. At a deeper level, the very arbitrariness of Cai Yong's execution seemed to bring home, once and for all, the reality that the collaborative project of Han rule was now a thing of the past. The Eastern Han version of this project held that in order to secure a claim to sage-rule, the emperor and his representatives must appoint worthies, or men with precisely Cai Yong's gifts, moral pedigree, and breadth of learning, assiduously seek their counsel, and patronize their studies so that they might serve as guides to past precedents and future courses of action. This collaboration was understood to be especially vital at critical junctures in the life of a dynasty. That the court had reached just such a critical juncture in the bloody summer of 192 was likely beyond dispute, making expert counsel grounded in the authoritative texts of the past more urgent than ever. Cai Yong's role in this collaboration included, among other things, his work on the latest installment of the history of the Eastern Han dynasty and the ten still-unfinished "treatises" (*yi* 意). Indeed, many high officials deemed Cai Yong's contributions so important that they apparently backed his request to be spared execution and instead submit to mutilating punishments so that he could continue writing. Wang Yun turned down these requests, and Cai Yong was left to die in his jail cell. Given that the court was then governing with only a fraction of the archives and libraries lost in the fires at Luoyang,¹⁵ we can only imagine how foreboding the further destruction of this living archive in the person of Cai Yong must have been to his peers in the administration.

In a move that may surprise modern readers, however, Wang Yun justified his decision to execute Cai Yong by comparing him to Sima Qian, the brilliant and, to most of us, quite sympathetic author of the *Shiji* 史記. Like Sima Qian, Cai Yong had suffered bitterly at the hands of the court and it must have been known to Wang Yun, as presumably to other officials at the time, that this suffering had shaped (or warped) his account of the recent past. To pardon him so that he could continue writing, as Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) had pardoned Sima Qian, would be to sanction his further transformation of the history of the dynasty into a vehicle for personal invective against the throne.¹⁶

¹³ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2006.

¹⁴ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2006. *Jinshen* 摺紳 (lit. "[those with writing tablets] tucked in their sashes") is a synecdoche for officials at court, but often referred more narrowly to the group of "upstanding officials" who, like Cai Yong, had risked their careers and even their lives to oppose abuses of power in Lingdi's court. For another use of the term, see Yang Ci's 楊賜 (d. 185) memorial of 178 discussed below.

¹⁵ Dong Zhuo ordered all of the archives in Luoyang burned in preparation for shifting the capital to Chang'an. Apparently Wang Yun saw to it that some portion of the documents contained in the Orchid Terrace 蘭台 and the Stone Chamber 石室 were transported in wagons to Chang'an. See *Hou Hanshu* 69A.2548 and 56.2124. According to Ying Shao 應劭, these documents were then towed through a rainstorm and so cannot have arrived in Chang'an in good condition. See Wu Shuping 吳樹平, *Fengsu tongyi jiaoshi* 風俗通義校釋 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1980), 408, cited in Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of the Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography*, (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 47.

¹⁶ Cai Yong's low opinion of the Eastern Han emperors after Zhangdi 章帝 is not in question. In 190, he recommended that Hedi, Andi, Shundi, Huandi, and Lingdi all be deprived of their temple names (suffixed -

In any case, Cai Yong's brief but high-level collaboration with Dong Zhuo and his fateful sigh of alleged sympathy for the tyrant provided Wang Yun with sufficient grounds for seeing to it that no sequel to Sima Qian's "slandering text" (*bangshu* 謗書) would be written. In response, Cai Yong's close friend Ma Midi 馬日磾 (d. 194), one of the many officials who had unsuccessfully intervened on his behalf, issued a dire warning to the court:

善人，國之紀也；制作，國之典也。滅紀廢典，其能久乎？

Good men are the guide-ropes of the ruling house and institutional protocols are its standards. Having destroyed the guide-ropes and discarded the standards, will he [i.e. Wang Yun] be able to last much longer?¹⁷

Just as Ma Midi predicted, Dong Zhuo's former officers assassinated Wang Yun just a few weeks later, plunging the new capital into chaos. From roughly this point forward, scholar-officials all over the empire began to turn their attention from the restoration of the Han (mandatory rhetorical endorsements of this course of action notwithstanding) to the contemplation of who and what would ultimately replace it.

Fan Ye's 范曄 (398–445) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 account of the contemporary response to Cai Yong's imprisonment and death makes an ideal starting point for our inquiry because it registers a perspective on his legacy as a writer so dramatically different from the one most modern scholars have used to view his contribution to Chinese letters. From the latter perspective, Cai Yong was a masterful literary stylist, one of the first calligraphers to gain recognition in his own lifetime, and an excellent zither-player. All three pursuits—literary writing, calligraphy, and zither-playing—are taken to signal his aloofness from or even indifference to the corruption and decadence of the Han court.¹⁸ It is striking then that to the hundreds of scholar-officials who flocked to his tomb to eulogize and make portraits of him, Cai Yong apparently died a key figure in the hoped-for restoration of the Han and the sole remaining active contributor to its dynastic history.¹⁹ Shortly after his death, the teacher and

宗, indicating their status as "exemplars") because they were "without meritorious deeds or virtue" 無功德. See *Hou Hanshu* 9.370 and Beck, *Treatises*, 107–8.

¹⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2006. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹⁸ A few notable exceptions to this characterization do exist which attempt to assess Cai Yong's writings in terms closer to those of his own era. Michael Nylan, in "Calligraphy, the Sacred Text and Test of Culture," in *Character & Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, eds. Cary Y. Liu, Dora C.Y. Ching, and Judith G. Smith (Princeton: Princeton, The Art Museum, 1999), 17–42, argues that Cai Yong "strongly asserted that the value of writing must reside in its association with vigorous empire" and thus that those works in which he asserted his independence from the court nevertheless express a desire that his talents "be employed in the cause of fuller integration of the whole society and state" (pg. 52). This article is discussed in more detail below. Howard L. Goodman, "Chinese Polymaths, 100–300 AD: The *Tung-kuan*, Taoist Dissent, and Technical Skills," *Asia Major* 18.1 (2005): 101–74, reminds us of Cai Yong's participation in high-level research on pitch-pipes, harmonics, and calendrical mathematics in the Eastern Lodge 東觀, all fields of the highest conceivable importance for the continued prosperity of the empire. Finally, Enno Giele's superb *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China. A Study of Cai Yong's Duduan* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), though not technically a book on Cai Yong, nevertheless succeeds by the very nature of its subject matter in holding Cai Yong's concern with administrative protocols and hierarchies at the center of our attention.

¹⁹ The records of the Eastern Han dynasty passed through several stages. Mingdi 明帝 (r. 57–75) commissioned the annals of Guangwudi 光武帝 (r. 25–57) in 72 CE. At this point the text was called the *Jianwu* 建武注記. Work began in 120 on a second installment, under the title the *Hanji* 漢記 consisting of the

exegete Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) would lament that *only* Cai Yong’s historical writings had stood any chance of rectifying the affairs of the Han.²⁰ This statement, coming as it does from a figure whose scholarly reputation at the time was second to none, gives us a sense of the power and importance these texts had at the time.

Though it has been rarely been thought deserving of comment, Wang Yun’s comparison of Cai Yong to Sima Qian can also serve as an important indicator of his stature at the time.²¹ There are at least three striking similarities between Cai Yong and Sima Qian worth mentioning here. First, in an incident with close parallels to the “Li Ling 李陵 affair” in Sima Qian’s life, Cai Yong was initially sentenced to death in 178 after criticizing Lingdi’s administration. Like Sima Qian, Cai Yong had his punishment reduced. He submitted to head-shaving and exile to the far north. This was followed by a self-imposed exile in the far south, during which he continued to work on his treatises and portions of the dynastic history.²² When he was sentenced to death for the second time in 192, his explicit request to have his face tattooed and his feet cut off so that he could continue writing calls to mind the lineage of mutilated and incarcerated writers Sima Qian constructed for himself in his “Letter in Reply to Ren An” 報任安書.²³ Second, like Sima Qian, Cai Yong failed to carry out his filial obligation

annals of Mingdi through Shangdi 殤帝 (r. 105–106) and the corresponding tables and biographies. A third phase compiled between 151 and sometime in early 160s added tables, biographies of empresses, the Qiang 羌 and Xiongnu 匈奴 border peoples, and two eunuchs. Cai Yong participated in the fourth installment, begun in 177 at the behest of Lingdi, which covered annals from Andi 安帝 (r. 106–25) through Huandi 桓帝 (r. 146–168) and biographies through 168. From this point on, the text would be known as the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記, in reference to the site of its compilation, the Eastern Lodge. It is reasonable to assume that official work on this installment in the Eastern Lodge had been discontinued by 184 at the very latest, since by that point all of the main contributors had shifted to other posts (Han Yue 韓悅 and Yang Biao 楊彪), were in exile (Cai Yong), or were leading troops against the Yellow Turban rebels (Ma Midi and Lu Zhi 盧植). No further installments were commissioned during the Eastern Han. For an overview of the compilation process see *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目, comp. Yongrong 永瑤 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 50.446–7.

²⁰ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2006.

²¹ Esther Klein discusses this episode in her book-length study of *Shiji* reception, *Reading Sima Qian From Han to Song: The Father of History in Premodern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 179–82. Naturally, Klein’s focus is more interested in Wang Yun’s claim that the *Shiji* is a “slandering text” than she is in what this comparison suggests about the nature of Cai Yong’s contributions to the *Dongguan Hanji*.

²² Sima Qian defended the Han general Li Ling’s 李陵 (d. 74 BC) decision to surrender in the face of overwhelming enemy forces (instead of committing suicide to save his honor) during what seems to have been a poorly planned and undermanned mission deep in Xiongnu territory. Han Wudi initially sentenced Sima Qian to death but later agreed to reduce his punishment to castration. Cai Yong was technically sentenced to death along with his uncle Cai Zhi 蔡質 (fl. 178) for requesting favors of the official Liu He 劉郃 (d. 179) and then plotting to harm him when their requests were ignored. In Fan Ye’s telling however, it is only *after* the eunuch Cao Jie 曹節 (d. 181) reads a sealed memorial in which Cai Yong directly ties a series of bad omens to specific eunuchs and their allies in Lingdi’s administration that fellow eunuch Cheng Huang 程璜 (fl. 178) presses charges against the Cais. Because Cao Jie was never supposed to have seen the sealed memorial, it appears he sought some other pretext for getting rid of Cai Yong. He may have found it in the fact that Cai Zhi was involved in a dispute with the powerful minister Yang Qiu, none other than the son-in-law of the eventual plaintiff Cheng Huang. See *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2001.

²³ This list is presented in chronological order, beginning with the Earl of the West 西伯 [The Duke of Zhou 周公] and extending down through Confucius, Qu Yuan 屈原, Lü Buwei 呂不韋, Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, Sunzi 孫子, Han Fei 韓非 and finally to Sima Qian himself. All endured humiliating circumstances to “vent

to bear a son.²⁴ In a petition written at the age of 46 *sui*, Cai Yong acknowledges this fact and says he will have to compensate by “entrusting my name and reputation to [my service as a] loyal minister” 託名忠臣, the foremost duty of which he took to be ensuring that the emperor hears the “direct speech” 至言 (carrying the implication of “blunt remonstrance”) of his aides, either in person or in writing.²⁵ And third, just as Sima Qian’s collateral descendants were eventually awarded a patrimonial title of nobility on the basis of his historical writings, effectively repairing the gap in the Sima lineage caused by his castration, Cai Yong’s students, led by Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212), set up a temple for Cai Yong in his home county.²⁶ Finally, there are the similarities between the histories themselves. To the best of our knowledge, Cai Yong spent the last years of his life writing the annals of Lingdi, under whom he had served for nearly a decade, as well as forty-two biographies of key figures in his court.²⁷ He also continued to work on the treatises. We have no evidence that these sections were ever commissioned by an emperor, nor that they were ever officially recognized as part of the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記.²⁸ Cai Yong worked on these texts in exile, presumably with the aid of his vast

their frustrations” (*jufen* 發奮) in writing in the hopes that they would be remembered by later generations. See *Hanshu* 62.2733.

²⁴ Cai Yong did have two daughters. A short biography of Cai Yan 蔡琰 (a.k.a. Cai Wenji 蔡文姬, b. 177) and two poems attributed to her can be found in the “Lienü zhuan” 列女傳 chapter of the *Hou Han shu*. See *Hou Han shu* 74.2800–3. Cai Yan was quite well known in her own lifetime for her poetry, calligraphy, and musical expertise. A second daughter’s name is unknown. She married Yang Dao 羊道 (dates unknown) of Taishan 太山 and their daughter in turn married Sima Shi 司馬師 (208–255), posthumously known as Jingdi 景帝 of the Jin dynasty. For a discussion of the Cai family’s ties to the Taishan Yangs, see Cao Daoheng 曹道衡 and Shen Yucheng 沈玉成, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao congkao* 中古文學史料叢考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 9–10.

²⁵ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2002.

²⁶ For the temple established for Sima Qian see *Hanshu* 62.2737. For Cai Yong’s temple *Weishixian zhi* 衛氏縣志, *juan* 4, cited in *Cai Yong ji biannian jiaozhu*, 619.

²⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.2007.

²⁸ The status of the *Hanji* 漢記 changed over time, making generalizations about its form nearly impossible. By Lingdi’s reign, it seems to have been a cross between the dossier of materials which would be used to compose an official dynastic history at a later date and the official dynastic history of the Later Han dynasty itself. Unlike the *Hanshu*, the *Hanji*, at least in its Eastern Lodge (*Dongguan* 東觀) phase, seems actually to have become an official record of the events of the current dynasty made for the eyes of living Han emperors and their ministers. For the *Dongguan Hanji* as a text intended to shore up dynastic legitimacy in real time see Zhang Zongpin 張宗品, *Jiaoshu yu xiushi: Dongguan yu Dong Han dizhi wenhua zhenghe* 校書與修史: 東觀與東漢帝制文化整合 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2019). Burchard Mansvelt Beck points out that “treatises” were *not* one of the officially commissioned sections of the history at any of the four known stages of the project, nor does any Han-era document state that Cai Yong’s treatises were included in the *Dongguan Hanji*. (Note, however that they were eventually included in the version of the text produced under the auspices of the Wei 魏 dynasty court. Cai Yong seems to have begun the treatises during his time at the Eastern Lodge circa 176–177 in parallel with his work on the *Hanji*. In the aforementioned petition of 178, he says that he has been writing them for more than twenty years on his own. See Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of the Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography*, 25 and 43–45. Much of this is clear from Fan Ye’s remark in his precis of Cai Yong’s existing works that he has no record that the portions of the dynastic history Cai Yong was working on at the time of his death were ever incorporated into the *Dongguan Hanji*. Note that, according to Fan Ye, Cai Yong’s annals of Lingdi were lost or destroyed in the fighting that followed Wang Yun’s assassination and thus the fragments of these annals recovered from later collectanea must be the work of later compilers. See *Hou Han shu* 60B.2007.

personal library, rather than in the court archives. He was, in other words, writing a *private* addition to the history of the dynasty. To get a sense of how threatening such interventions were considered to be by their very nature, we need only recall that Ban Gu was arrested and nearly executed for “privately altering the history of the ruling house” 私改作國史.²⁹ From the aforementioned petition submitted to Lingdi in 178 asking for permission to return from exile to continue work on the treatises, it is clear that Cai Yong did seek some form of imperial patronage for the treatises and further that he considered them something on the order of a lifetime achievement.³⁰ The upshot of this comparison, discussed in more detail in the concluding section of this chapter, is that Cai Yong, like Sima Qian and possibly even in self-conscious imitation of Sima Qian, considered his history a timely discussion of matters of the highest import to the longevity of the Han dynasty and, at the same time, a deeply personal work to which his posthumous reputation would and did in fact turn out to depend.

Other works, broadly conceived, likely to have stood out in the minds of his contemporaries as particularly worthy of praise include the Xiping Stone Classics, for which he provided editorial guidance and calligraphy, his stele inscriptions for noteworthy scholars and officials, and possibly his administrative text the *Duduan* 獨斷 which gives an idealized account of the language, format, and movement of official documents through the Han administration. While he was undoubtedly recognized as an excellent calligrapher and the author of many superb “poetic expositions,” “discourses” (*lun* 論) on various topics, “linked-pearl verses” (*lianzhū* 連珠), and “poems” (*shī* 詩), these were likely seen by those in the mainstream of Eastern Han opinion as the dazzling ephemera of a great talent whose true contributions lay elsewhere. When Cai Yong’s colleagues and students travelled to his tomb to celebrate his work in portraits and inscriptions, they did so for the deep commitment evinced therein to the rectification (*zheng* 正), as Zheng Xuan put it, of the Eastern Han court.

What accounts for the discrepancy between contemporary appraisals of Cai Yong’s contributions and the much narrower characterization of his work by later scholars? Partly this was the result of changes in the use of the material on the basis of which the legacies of exemplary figures were reconstructed and evaluated in later periods. Modern readers were not the first to see Cai Yong’s investment in the putatively “detached” pursuits of poetry writing, calligraphy, and zither-playing as the outward sign of his alienation from the Han court. While Fan Ye clearly holds Cai Yong’s treatises, memorials, historical writings, and editorial work in the highest esteem as the efforts of a loyal minister to set the empire aright, he nevertheless makes Cai Yong’s progressive alienation from the Han court the narrative through-line of his lengthy *Hou Hanshu* biography. For example, he includes in its entirety Cai Yong’s poetic exposition “Defense Against Admonishment” 釋誨, an elaborate rebuttal of those who would criticize his refusal to serve in Huandi’s 桓帝 (r. 146–168) administration, as well as anecdotes recounting his prowess at selecting wood for zithers and his extraordinary ability to read the intentions of a zither-player solely through their playing style.³¹ Fan Ye’s inclusion of these texts and anecdotes reflects not so much their objective importance in Cai Yong’s career as it does Fan Ye’s

²⁹ *Hou Hanshu* 40A.1333–1334.

³⁰ “Shubian shangzhang” 戍邊上章, in *Hou Han shu*, *Zhi* 志 *juan* 3, 3082–4n1.

³¹ The *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 contains a very similar story about Confucius and his students, only with the roles reversed. See *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳箋疏, annot. Qu Shouyuan 屈守元 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1996), 7.659. Instead of Confucius playing a zither (*se* 瑟) out of sight of his students as he watches a *tanuki* (*li* 狸) stalk a rat, a man who has invited Cai Yong to dinner plays a zither (unaware that Cai Yong has already arrived) as he watches a mantis stalk a cicada. Like Zengzi 曾子 in the *Hanshi waizhuan* anecdote, Cai Yong can detect the murderous intent of the mantis as it registers in his dinner host’s zither-playing.

own concerns writing three hundred years later in the Liu-Song 劉宋 dynasty (420–479). During this period, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, poetry, calligraphy, and musical performance were quickly becoming privileged sites for reading the character and motivations of great men, especially with regard to what we might think of as *the* question of the early medieval period: to serve or not to serve. It is hard not to see Fan Ye's long and moving account of Cai Yong's life as a reflection on his own isolation from court as a man fond of playing the zither and practicing calligraphy as he worked in private on the *Hou Hanshu*.³² That of the numerous histories of the Later Han period written during the Six Dynasties, Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu* has become the definitive account of the period is partly due to the contingent circumstances under which some texts continue to be transmitted and others do not. But its survival also owes to the continued efficacy of the approach he took to his materials for readers in later periods.

Thus we might say that at one level Fan Ye's biography constructs an image of Cai Yong like the painted portraits Cai Yong's students made of him and paraded through Chenliu 陳留 commandery after his death. The aim of both portrait and biography is to capture something Cai Yong embodied so that it might become part of the viewer or reader's self-fashioning. At another level, however, what Cai Yong embodies for Fan Ye is inextricably bound up with his texts and his authorial imprint on those texts. The search for clues as to the character and motivations of past worthies in their texts—not as points of reference but as the very externalized form of the patterns of the person—changed the way literary writings were positioned within biographies.³³ It also guided the selection of material preserved in the individual literary collections that began to be made in earnest sometime in the fourth century. Such collections skewed towards the kind of texts a reader could use as the basis for character evaluation. Thus, Fan Ye worked in a kind of feedback loop, consulting texts thought of as showcasing a past figures' erudition, moral cultivation, administrative acumen, etc., to produce yet another layer of evaluation which would carry something of what Cai Yong embodied for Fan Ye forward into the present. Both Cai Yong's posthumous textual legacy and the transformative personal and social cultivation he was engaged in when he was alive are *wen* 文. Fan Ye's history is animated by a conviction that the latter can be reanimated through the proper presentation and elucidation of the former. In many ways, Fan Ye's account of Cai Yong's life bears witness to the gradual textualization of *wen* 文 between the second and the fifth centuries which this dissertation takes as its subject. In order to understand this process, we must understand *wen* 文 at an earlier stage of its textualization. We must also learn what was at stake in this transformation.

³² Scholars of Chinese literature (myself included) still utilize early dynastic histories like the *Hou Hanshu* as repositories of historical information useful for establishing the historical context of other events. This approach runs the risk of missing the way the narrative has been shaped by the priorities, concerns, and obsessions of a compiler or compilers. For an illuminating attempt to bring Fan Ye's questions and preoccupations into sharper focus see Béatrice L'Haridon, "The Historian's Judgement and the Peers' Judgement in the 'Biographical Chapter on the Proscribed Party' of the *Hou Han shu*," *Monumenta Serica* 67, no. 1 (2019): 127–143.

³³ Admittedly, several of the biographies in Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 use texts written at pivotal moments to interpret the author's motivations in ways that anticipate the later more systematic deployment of writing. Commenting on this, Stephen Owen has called him "the central figure in the formation of 'authorship' in China." See Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 214. Fascinating though they are, these biographies in which texts play an essential role as repositories of the patterns of the person are exceptional even within the text of the *Shiji* and so cannot be taken as representative of mid-Western Han conceptions of authorship.

1.2 *Wen* 文 as Interface, Text as Ritual Infrastructure

Debates about the meaning of the word *wen* 文 and how it should be translated into English are as old as the field of Anglophone sinology itself. Pattern, civilization, culture, refinement, literature, writing, script have all been put forward as possible translations. For reasons of space, I will not dwell on the debates about its earliest meanings since they are not relevant to this study. Uffe Bergeon has convincingly argued that *wen* does not mean “culture” in anything like the modern sense of the word in any pre-Qin text. He traces, instead, a shift in the adjectival use of the word from the “awe-inspiringly beautiful” physical appearance and clothing of an imposing ruler to the beauty of a “morally refined” person, no longer necessarily a ruler. By the late-Warring States period, *wen*, used as a noun, began to refer to the “abstract concept of ‘ideal patterns in conventionalized behavior’ of an entire dynasty or of social practices in general.”³⁴ At this stage *wen* has nothing inherently to do with written texts. Michael Nylan has seen in the collational and lexographic activities of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) and Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE) in the late Western Han 西漢 (202 BCE–9 CE) dynasty the roots of a “much later shift in focus to the written word as an ideal repository of the past” but she emphasizes that “neither thinker invested texts with the distinctive ‘god-like’ or ‘divine’ status that they would enjoy some two centuries afterward.”³⁵ According to Nylan, “cultivating *wen*” had four senses for these two influential thinkers: 1) “conforming with the glorious deeds of the ancestors” 2) “attaining enduring status and value” 3) “epitomizing the cosmic regularities” and 4) “mining certain authoritative traditions—not all of them in writing—for insight into the supreme sources of order.”³⁶

In discussions of the Eastern Han period, *wen* is often reflexively translated “literary writing” or “literature.” Martin Kern has argued that during the Eastern Han the word *wen* “collapses” from its earlier sense referring to the brilliant outward patterns of ritual forms of clothing, speech, and music to refer primarily to “written texts,” specifically modes of “classicist writing” undertaken in opposition to the excessive rituals of the court.³⁷ Written texts do play a much more central role in the ritual matrix of the court beginning in the Eastern Han, but that is not due to a newfound reverence for written texts as the “highest expression of Chinese culture” (pg. 44) but because texts in general had come to play an outsized mediating role in all aspects of imperial administration. *Wen* became gradually more textually-inflected along with every other aspect of official life. In his recent network-based study of Han dynasty classicism, Zhao Lu traces the largely successful campaign waged by scholar-officials beginning in the reign of Yuandi and continuing into the early years of the Eastern Han to persuade the administration that the Confucian Classics, as texts authored by a sage, were more than just a reference point for administration but contained the very keys to maintaining good relations with

³⁴ Uffe Bergeon, “From ‘Awe-Inspiringly Beautiful’ to ‘Patterns in Conventionalized Behavior’: The Historical Development of the Metacultural Concept of Wén in Pre-Qín China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 2 (2019): 436.

³⁵ Nylan, “Calligraphy, the Sacred Text and Test of Culture,” 30.

³⁶ Nylan, “Calligraphy, the Sacred Text and Test of Culture,” 30.

³⁷ “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of Wen in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 87, no. 1 (2001): 43 and 74. Kern focuses primarily on the binome *wenzhang* 文章 which has a narrower range of meanings than *wen*. It is never clear that *wenzhang* ever refers to writing completely shorn of its ritual significance. Kern acknowledges this. In a later article, Kern comments on the continuing ritual use of poetic expositions in “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 2 (2003): 383–437.

Heaven and governing a fractious empire.³⁸ The case these scholars made for the Classics as the lodestar of Han administration was as much a case for their own importance as experts on texts concerning ritual and administration as it was a genuine expression of a belief in the Heavenly origin of these texts. This new centrality of the texts of the Classics within the realm of administration precipitated the first systematic attempts to collect and establish stable versions of the Classics and other authoritative writings in the reign of Chengdi 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) under the direction of Liu Xiang and his colleagues.³⁹ It is also at around this moment that we begin to see a gradual shift of ritual forms into textual media. In a fascinating analysis of excavated “greeting tablets” (*ye* 謁) of the kind that would be exchanged on a first meeting, Maxim Korolkov notes that the cards carry out what was previously a sequence of bodily movements, ritualized gestures, and polite phrases by narrating these movements in the form of a text.⁴⁰

It is crucial to recognize, however, that in Eastern Han texts, the word *wen* still carries its earlier sense of “pattern.” It refers to cosmic and terrestrial patterns in nature, designs, decorations, emblems of ritual significance, dignified comportment, elegant speech (often allusive, rhyming) in addition to certain kinds of texts or writings. If we want to understand how *wen* fits into this list of seemingly incongruous phenomena, we must think these dimensions at once within the domain of textuality. In this sense, even when *wen* means written text, it points to the use of writing as a kind of interface which allows the user access to patterns in the broadest sense. *Wen* are the kind of texts which interface with the cosmos, whose patterns are literally present in the character forms of the language, and with the past, with the sages of antiquity, whose language and examples can be gleaned from texts and woven together to charge new texts with meaning and normative authority. Any text that serves this function qualifies as *wen*. Texts in this category are interfaces through which a performance or a realization of the patterns of antiquity and the cosmos becomes possible. In that sense they are a form of ritual infrastructure. We might recall in this connection instances where music, very much a manifestation of *wen*, magically or mysteriously accompanies the presence of the texts of the Classics. The reading of the *Changes*, for example, was accompanied in ritual contexts by drumming and dancing to communicate its otherwise incommunicable meaning.⁴¹ Also, when the so-called ancient script (*guben* 古文) texts of some Classics hidden away in a wall of Confucius’ house were discovered, music could be heard emanating from the recess.⁴² These anecdotes can serve as a reminder that even as “written text” comes to be a more central dimension of the meaning of *wen*, performance remained the privileged form of use and exegesis.

Wang Chong’s *Lunbeng* 論衡 contains a striking and distinctly Eastern Han attempt to make a case that the performative nature of *wen* centered on the ritual administration of the court was equally present in writing undertaken outside of the court.⁴³ In the chapter from which the following passage

³⁸ Lu, *In Pursuit of the Great Peace*, 1–47.

³⁹ On the importance of 26 BCE as a turning point in the elevation of the status of written texts, see Micahel Nylan, “Textual authority in pre-Han and Han,” *Early China* 25 (2000): 205–58.

⁴⁰ Maxim Korolkov, “‘Greeting Tablets’ in Early China: Some Traits of the Communicative Etiquette of Officialdom in Light of Newly Excavated Inscriptions” *T’oung Pao* 98 (2012): 295–348.

⁴¹ Rudolf Wagner, “The Language of Heaven,” in *Reading the Signs: Philology, History, Prognostication: Festschrift for Michael Lackner*, ed. Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz, 97–125. Munich: Verlag 2018, 107

⁴² *Hanshu* 30.1706.

⁴³ Wang Chong makes it very clear in the final autobiographical chapter of the *Lunbeng* entitled “Zi ji” 自記 that he resents the fact that his writings are not taken seriously because he has no scholarly pedigree and no imperial sponsorship. His constant urge to praise the Han in the most hyperbolic terms imaginable—calling it the greatest dynasty in history—can be read as an attempt to neutralize the threat of the

is taken (“Yiwen” 佚文) Wang argues that the production of new texts in the form of discourses like his own are in fact the highest mode of interacting with the Heavenly *wen* of the Classics. *Wen* cycles through a number of different registers in this passage, so I have placed the word in italics next to my translation.

孔子曰：「文王既歿，文不在茲乎！」文王之文，傳在孔子。孔子為漢制文。傳在漢也。受天之文。文人宜遵五經六藝為文，諸子傳書為文，造論著說為文，上書奏記為文，文德之操為文。立五文在世，皆當賢也。造論著說之文，尤宜勞焉。何則？發胸中之思，論世俗之事，非徒諷古經、續故文也。論發胸臆，文成手中，非說經藝之人所能為也。周、秦之際，諸子並作，皆論他事，不頌主上，無益於國，無補於化。造論之人，頌上恢國，國業傳在千載，主德參貳日月，非適諸子書傳所能並也。上書陳便宜，奏記薦吏士，一則為身，二則為人，繁文麗辭，無上書文德之操，治身完行，徇利為私，無為主者。⁴⁴

Confucius said, “King Wen has passed away, but do exemplary patterns (*wen*) not survive in me?” The exemplary patterns (*wen*) of King Wen were transmitted to Confucius. On behalf of the Han, Confucius made patterned texts (*wen*) and transmitted them to the Han. [The Han] received the exemplary patterns/texts (*wen*) of Heaven.⁴⁵ It would be appropriate then that men of literary refinement (*wenren*) honor the Five Classics and the Six Arts as *wen*, the Masters texts and commentarial traditions as *wen*, the creation of discourses and the composition of arguments as *wen*, the submission of proposals and presentation of memoranda as *wen*, and the polishing of the charismatic power of patterns as *wen*. Anyone who establishes one of these five kinds of patterned texts (*wen*) in the world will invariably be deemed a worthy. But as for the kind of patterned writings that create discourses and compose arguments, these are especially worth toiling away at. Why? [Because] expressing the thoughts in one’s bosom and discoursing on matters concerning the customs of the age is not merely a matter of reciting the ancient classics or continuing the old writings. Discourses express the innermost thoughts and intuitions; [in this way] writings (*wen*) form in the hand—this is not something people who [merely] explain the Classics are able to do. Between the Zhou and the Qin, the various Masters arose, but they all discoursed on other matters, and did not praise their rulers, and so were of no benefit to their kingdoms and made no contribution to transformation [of customs]. But people who write discourses [i.e. people like me], do praise their sovereign and magnify the realm, such that the legacy of the ruling house will be transmitted for one thousand years, and the charismatic power of the ruler will be on par with that of the sun and the moon. This is not something the aforementioned Masters texts and traditions can equal. To submit a proposal laying out an appropriate course of action or to submit a memorandum recommending an official, the former is something done on one’s own behalf and the latter is done on behalf of someone else, but writings with florid language (*fanwen*) and ornate diction are entirely without the polishing of submitting proposals [on

independence of his writings. See *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, ed. Huang Hui 黃, comm. by Liu Pansui 劉盼遂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 30.1187–1210.

⁴⁴ *Lunheng jiaoshi* 20.860.

⁴⁵ Liu Pansui 劉盼遂 declares this sentence to be a fragment. He guesses that the *wen* 文 which begins the following sentence was copied twice and that later editors added *shou* 受 to try to make sense of the fragment. See *Lunheng jiaoshi* 20.860

the 之]⁴⁶ charismatic power of patterns or cultivating oneself and perfecting one's behavior; they pursue advantage only for themselves and do nothing for the ruler.

Wen in this passage covers a dizzyingly wide range of phenomena. Wang first lays out the transition from the *wen* of King Wen, presumably the *patterns* of Heaven, exemplary rulership, ritual conduct etc., to the *writings* of Confucius which will function as the basis for all aspects of Han administration. This is why everything from the Classics themselves through the submission of official proposals and memoranda, to the writing of discourses “could appropriately,” as Wang says, be considered part of the same body of texts and activities known as *wen*. All are equally modes of interfacing with the patterns of the cosmos and the past. Taken in the context of the chapter in which this occurs, “discourses” stands out in this list as the one most independent of the operations of the court. Wang argues that, in fact, “discourses” (like his own) are the worthiest of being classed as *wen*. This is a characteristically back-bending argument for Wang Chong. He must hold that what is seemingly closest to the *wen* of the Classics (i.e. commentary) is in fact furthest away, and what would seem on the surface to be the most self-centered kind of writing (i.e. discourses) is in fact the least self-centered. For Wang the highest performance of *wen* is its activation in the writing hand, as he says, of someone so proficient in the *wen* of Classics that even when they are expressing their “innermost thoughts and intuitions,” they remain fully within the ambit of the Classics. Earlier in the chapter, Wang argues that this kind of writing is the highest confirmation of the rule of a sage king, and thus in its very form constitutes genuine as opposed to merely flattering praise of the ruler. (There is, it should be noted, plenty of explicit praise for the Han dynasty's unparalleled claims to sagely governance in the *Lunheng*). Fully in possession of the *wen* of the Classics, the self too can act as an interface.

The degree to which someone like Cai Yong would have subscribed to such a view cannot be known. He certainly sensed the forces at play in such a position and likely would have been more sympathetic to it during his long period of exile, during which, according to one account, he came into possession of a copy of the *Lunheng* and used it to bolster his own talking points.⁴⁷ As officials charged with preserving the ritual order of the court, Cai Yong and many others in his peer group were also deeply concerned with the integrity of the interface, at the literal level of the words on the page, when the texts of the Classics come into the possession of scholars writing outside of the court like Wang Chong. What was the potential for the distortion of the *wen* of the Classics in such writings? If individual writers from families and regions with no longstanding scholarly traditions could also become legitimate sites for engagement, what consequences would this have for the court's monopoly on such engagement? This anxiety is well-documented throughout the latter half of the Eastern Han but perhaps its clearest articulation belongs to the Eastern Han classicist Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124).

⁴⁶ The text looks corrupt at this point. I have chosen to take 之操 as having been moved up a clause. It should come after the second four-character unit.

⁴⁷ The earliest mention of Cai Yong's engagement with Wang Chong's *Lunheng* occurs in Zhao Ye's 趙曄 *Hou Hanshu* biography (included in the “Rulin liezhuan”) where Cai Yong supposedly considers a work by the latter superior to the *Lunheng*. The abovementioned detail of Cai Yong's role in the transmission of the *Lunheng* comes from Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) “Hou Han san xian zan” 後漢三賢贊. For the relevant excerpts from both texts, see *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, 1327.

1.3 Distortion Patterns: The Threat Posed by Clericalization 隸化

Scholars often approach Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 as the first dictionary of the Chinese language. This is true so long as it is not taken to mean that the text aims to provide definitions of words as they were used at the time of its compilation circa 100 CE. In fact, as Françoise Bottéro and Christopher Harbsmeier have put it, the text is a “dictionary of graphic etymology” which “provides only meanings that are relevant to the explanation of the graphs.”⁴⁸ The graphs it explains are first and foremost the minor seal script (*xiaozhuan* 小篆) forms of words as they appear in the Confucian Classics, not these words as they appear in everyday Eastern Han usage. Xu Shen is clear in his “Postface” that he compiled the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 in order to counteract the deleterious effects of what we now call the “clericalization” (*libua* 隸化) of the Chinese script, which had severely limited the ability of his contemporaries to correctly interpret the Classics and, by extension, to administer the Han empire.⁴⁹

Clericalization refers to the emergence, beginning in Xu's account during the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BCE), of a simplified and practical “scribal vernacular” that drew on earlier standardized “seal-script” types as well as the regional scripts of non-Qin Warring States. Both “clerical script” (*lishu* 隸書) and the closely related “draft script” (*caoshu* 草書) emerged during this process.⁵⁰ By the middle of the Western Han, the vast majority of texts in circulation were written in either clerical script or draft script. One result of this, which Xu Shen mentions in his “Postface,” was that even highly competent readers could no longer read texts in pre-Qin scripts, and thus experts had to be called in to read texts and inscriptions in “ancient scripts” (*guwen* 古文). The other more serious result of this process was that hundreds of variants introduced though regional scribal vernaculars could be introduced in successive manuscript copies of texts written in clerical script, which we must remember in this period was not a standardized script form like minor seal script. Copies of the Classics written in clerical script and stored in personal libraries almost certainly differed at the level of graphs, even if the text they recorded was cognate with both the source text and other manuscript copies. In manuscripts solely used for oral teaching and recitation, this kind of variation was not an issue. But Eastern Han practice had shifted to favor elaborate interpretations of single phrases, some of which turned on reconstructions of the etymology of individual words as realized in clerical script. In order to understand why this process posed a threat not just to the day-to-day interpretation of the Classics in academies but to the very integrity of the textual interface itself, we must get our bearings in the development of the Chinese script Xu lays out in his “Postface.” Space does not permit a detailed exposition of the argument, so I will only make a summary of the main stages.

⁴⁸ Françoise Bottéro and Christopher Harbsmeier, “The *Shuowen jiezi* Dictionary and the Human Sciences in China” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 249.

⁴⁹ For the “Postface” see *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, comp. Xu Shen 許慎, comm. Duan Yucui 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 753–65. For two recent English language translations of the “Postface,” see *Orthography of Early Chinese Writing: Evidence from Newly Excavated Manuscripts* (Budapest: Budapest Monographs in East Asian Studies, 2006), 151–64 and Timothy Michael O'Neill, *Ideography and Chinese Language Theory: A History* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2016), 258–73. It is clear from Xu Shen's son Xu Chong's 許沖 memorial to the throne of 123 CE, made in conjunction with his submission of the text to the throne, that Xu intended his text to serve as a guide to the etymology of the language of the Classics. See *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 786. For an excellent account of the political background against which *Shuowen jiezi* was compiled, see Roy Andrew Miller, “Problems in the Study of Shuo wen chieh-tzu,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1953), 27–41.

⁵⁰ For an overview of this process and the most common forms of abbreviation, see Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, *Wenzixue gaiyao* 文字學概要 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), 82–5.

Xu's history of Chinese script can be divided into three main periods. In High Antiquity (*shanggu* 上古), it is implied that no language was necessary, and people governed themselves.⁵¹ Presumably at the tail end of this period, when the situation had already begun to deteriorate, Fuxi 伏羲 creates a system of non-signifying patterns in the form of the “eight trigrams” (*bagua* 八卦) based on patterns observed in nature: celestial asterisms, the constants of the earthly terrain, and the patterns of birds and beasts. He observes that the positions of the asterisms are correlated with seasonal changes, which are in turn correlated with the suitability of certain activities in agrarian society and can be used as a shorthand to identify those moments. Likewise, different types of terrain are suited to different modes of cultivation, habitation, and transportation; their emblems or images can be used to identify those modes. These patterns are indexical: they do not point as signs do but identify things as the things they are.

In the next stage, which Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) identifies as already being Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu* 中古), the earlier forms of images which permitted the management of a totality have become confused. The Yellow Emperor's 黃帝 scribe Cangjie 倉頡 develops a new kind of shorthand using the same principles Fuxi used to create the trigrams, that is, by looking closely at the paw-prints and hoof-tracks of birds and beasts. We gather that in the same way that paw-prints can be used to reconstruct the seasonal movements and local interactions of animals, the scratch-marks of words can be used to map the patterns of human society. The creation of these written tallies allows the hundredfold industries to be regulated and the myriad taxa to be clearly distinguished from one another again. *Wen* is now part of system whereby the ruler extends goods and bounties to the population based on official posts or titles, each of which has a designated salary. Interestingly, at this stage there are already those who pride themselves on not taking a salary and oppose this. Opposition to official titles and bureaucratic hierarchies entails an opposition to writing itself. The emergence of both forms of opposition show the double-edged sword of the writing system itself, which divides and distinguishes, bringing order to the world but sewing division and political conflict in the process.

Crucially, Xu says that during this prehistoric period, the script forms of the writings on jade tablets placed in the caskets on Mount Tai as part of the *fengshan* 封禪 sacrifice over the course of 72 performances were in no case “the same” (*tong* 同).⁵² Since this statement is immediately followed by an account of the Six Principles of character formation (*liushu* 六書) whereby one can arrive at the meaning of a character given *any* combination of components, we must take this to mean that the differences in script forms over such a vast stretch of time did not render the texts mutually unintelligible, nor did they interfere with the consistent performance of the sacrifice.⁵³ Those in

⁵¹ I have followed Duan Yucai's periodization schema throughout this summary.

⁵² *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 40B.754.

⁵³ Imre Galambos construes this passage and the entire argument of the “Postface” very differently. For him, Xu tells a story in which the written language passes from a uniform or standardized state to a hopelessly confused state in which regional variants render the language of the Classics unintelligible. Xu's project then aims at creating a system which makes the original, uniform, transparent state of the language intelligible again. See *Orthography of Early Chinese Writing: Evidence from Newly Excavated Manuscripts*, 52–62. I believe Xu holds that the earliest phase of the language was characterized by an *unproblematic* diversity of ways of writing words undergirded by consistent principles of character formation. The Six Principles are useful because they hold the key to reconstructing the etymology of the extraordinarily diverse “ancient script” of the Classics by means of its nearest relative in minor seal script. Timothy O'Neill has also come to this conclusion. See *Ideography and Chinese Language Theory: A History*, 260n12. For the argument that the regionally diverse writing system that shows up in Warring States bamboo manuscripts was in fact undergirded by consistent principles of character

possession of the Six Principles could navigate theoretically infinite variations in script. According to the *Zhou li* 周禮, which Xu quotes in this context, even eight-year-old children could use this system to arrive at the meaning of any graph they encountered. This a powerful indicator of the simplicity and elegance of the system. It is only once the Six Principles are lost that that the writing system, and with it, the system of governance is thrown into chaos.

The third period, Lower Antiquity (*xiagu* 下古), corresponds to the historical dynasties. Feudal lords rebel against the Zhou house and create different ritual forms, laws, standards, music, and finally writing systems. Importantly, Confucius writes the Classics in ancient script or *guben* 古文 which is to say the script preserved in the Zhou-era lexicon *Shizhou* 史籀. It is not until Li Si 李斯 (284–208 BCE) and his colleagues unify the script in the Qin 秦 dynasty to bring it into concordance with *Shizhou* (albeit with slight, apparently insignificant abbreviations) that the connection to the language of the Classics is restored. As soon as the process of standardizing the script is complete, however, the burning of books begins. Qin clerks trying to keep up with the mountains of documents generated in the process of administering a vast empire begin to abbreviate the standardized character forms. Distortion leads to loss of etymological connection with the original language of the Classics, which can only be gotten at through the minor seal script (*xiaozhuan* 小篆) as the last fully legible relation to the “ancient script” of the Classics. This process of distortions compounding earlier distortions continues in the Han. The seventeen-year-old scribes who must learn thousands of characters by rote memorization compare poorly to the eight-year-olds in the Zhou who did not need to memorize anything. The result is that almost no one in the Han administration knows how to gloss characters in the Classics with reference to the forms in which they were originally written. From the Eastern Han perspective, the Classics were already highly abbreviated, “faint” or “subtle” (*wei* 微) traces of Confucius’ great principles (*dayi* 大義). To add yet another layer of distortion by way of abbreviation would risk severing the link with the sage entirely. To put it in the terms I have been using in this chapter, these changes in script threaten the capacity of the Classics to serve as an interface with the past and with the cosmos. Because clerical script was ubiquitous in the Han, Xu notes that his contemporaries are not even aware of the degree to which the language had changed.

諸生競逐說字，解經誼，稱秦之隸書為倉頡時書，云：「父子相傳，何得改易！」乃猥曰：“馬頭人為長，人持十為斗，虫者，屈中也。廷尉說律，至以字斷法：“苛人受錢，苛之字止句也。”若此者甚眾，皆不合孔氏古文，謬於《史籀》。俗儒鄙夫，翫其所習，蔽所希聞。不見通學，未嘗睹字例之條。怪舊執而善野言，以其所知為秘妙，究洞聖人之微旨。又見《倉頡篇》中“幼子承詔”，因曰：“古帝之所作也，其辭有神僊之術焉。”其迷誤不論，豈不悖哉！⁵⁴

Scholars vie with one another to explain characters and explicate the meaning of the Classics. They claim the clerical script of the Qin is the script of Cangjie’s time saying, “Fathers have passed this down to their sons, so how could you [i.e. Xu Shen] change it!” And egregiously they say, “Horse-headed people were ‘chiefs’” 長 or “A ‘person’ 人 holding ‘ten’ 十 is a ‘peck’ 斗 or “‘Insect’ 虫 is a bent ‘middle’ 中.” When Superintendents of the Law explain the legal codes, they even use

formation, see Haeree Park, *The Writing System of Scribe Zhou: Evidence from Late Pre-imperial Chinese Manuscripts and Inscriptions (5th–3rd centuries BCE)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

⁵⁴*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 75A.762–763.

character components to make legal decisions: [The legal code says] “Denounce men who receive bribes.” [The Superintendents of the Law explain] “The character ‘denounce’ 苛 is made up of ‘stop [him]’ 止 and ‘seize’ 句 [=拘] [the money paid in bribes].” Instances like this are exceedingly numerous, and in every case [the graphological explanation] does not accord with the [structure of the character in the] Kong family’s ancient script texts, and [so] deviates from [its form in] the *Shizhou*. Vulgar classicists and uncultured men amuse themselves with what they take to be familiar and cover up that about which they rarely hear. They have never witnessed someone of comprehensive learning, nor have they ever so much as glimpsed a laying out of the principles of character formation. They spurn the old arts and esteem backwoods theories and take what they know to be esoteric and wondrous, penetrating the subtle intentions of the sages. Moreover, they see the line in the *Cangjie pian*, “The young boy received the summons” and, on this basis, say, “This edict [summons] was written by an ancient emperor. In its phrases there are techniques for attaining divinity and immortality.”⁵⁵ Is it not baffling that they do not see how wrong they are?

It is difficult to tell exactly what is going on in this passage when the original text is rendered in standard script (*kaiti* 楷體). Suffice it to say that the character components and shapes for which Xu’s contemporaries have invented false etymologies are only present in these arrangements in the clerical script forms. They are not present in the minor seal script forms and so have no etymological significance in Xu’s system. In the case of the Superintendent of the Law, we can guess that the etymology may in fact be retroactive, justifying an existing policy by proving the punishment is contained in the very graphic form of the character. To gloss characters in this way is to be utterly trapped in the present. The texts under scrutiny can put up no resistance to the interpretations readers reading in this way wish to foist upon them. In fact, insofar as they act as guarantors of their own interpretations, these readers play the role of both sage and interpreter. It is their own intentions which they “recover” from the text. This subverts the very purpose of written language in Xu’s account, which is to act as a medium for readers to access the models of antiquity. Even more threatening to Xu is perhaps the fact that this illegitimate way of reconstructing etymologies with reference to character components *resembles* the legitimate use of the Six Principals. As we will see in the following sections, for Eastern Han thinkers it is the *resemblance* illegitimate deployments of script forms bear to legitimate ones that poses a systemic threat. Xu closes with an appeal to return to the norms for writing (what, in the Han, was called *shufa* 書法 before the word came to mean “calligraphy”) advocated by the Classics.

《書》曰：「予欲觀古人之象。」言必遵修舊文而不穿鑿。孔子曰：“吾猶及史之闕文，今亡矣夫。”蓋非其不知而不問。人用己私，是非無正，巧說邪辭，使天下學者疑。蓋文字者，經藝之本，王政之始。前人所以垂後，後人所以識古。故

⁵⁵ Presumably Xu considers the interpretation of this passage bafflingly wrong because an “ancient emperor” would not have written an “edict” (*zhao* 詔). *Zhao* used in the sense of “edict” is an artifact of Qin administrative usage circa 221 BCE. Interestingly, Xu’s complaint is that his contemporaries are so limited by their linguistic capacity, they cannot see beyond the imperial period. One thinks of the 20th Century evangelical Christian who considered studying a foreign language unnecessary because, “If English was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for me.”

曰「本立而道生。」

The *Documents* says, “I wish to view the images of the ancients.”⁵⁶ This says that one must respectfully adhere to old texts, and not tunnel or drill down [i.e. construct elaborate and highly speculative interpretations]. Confucius said, “I still go back to the empty spaces of the scribes. Now that practice is gone.”⁵⁷ Probably this [statement] opposes not knowing and not even bothering to inquire. When people act according to their own private interests, right and wrong lack any standard, and crafty explanations and perverse words cause scholars throughout the world to be in doubt. I take it that words are the root of the Classics and the beginning of kingly governance. For people in former times, it was the means whereby they transmit [their teachings] to posterity; for people in later times, it is the means whereby they come to know antiquity. Thus it is said, “When the rootstock has been set in place, the Way will grow.”⁵⁸

By linking the language of his present back to the character forms of antiquity through the intermediary of minor seal script, Xu Shen has, in a sense, transformed the character system itself into a kind of “classic” or *jing* 經. Like a classic, the system has stages of transmission. At each stage, a sage expands the system to bring it into accordance with a new set of demands. The principals at work within it are simple and can be used to make sense of any variation one encounters. Finally, the system corresponds to and thus can be used to map the cosmos.⁵⁹ A reader who can return in their mind to the minor seal script form of a problematic word has access to a kind of portal through which teachings can be transmitted from the past to students who wish to know antiquity. Crucially, the problem with reconstructing etymologies based on semantic and phonetic components of words written in clerical script is not that excessive pressure is being put on the graphic realization of the word to yield a reading. The problem is that any pressure at all is being put on the *wrong* graphic realization of the word to yield a reading. If the graph is written correctly (i.e. in minor seal script or in guwen), the word is now part of a system every part of which is organically connected. Indeed, the final line posits the character system as the living “root” of the way. This is more than just a metaphor. We see an extended elaboration of this comparison of characters to living beings in Cai Yong’s “Configuration of Seal Script,” one of the earliest texts we can comfortably say is on the calligraphic power, though not yet precisely the beauty, of the seal script character forms.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ This phrase is spoken by Di 帝 in the “Yi ji” chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 in reference to images of the sun, moon, stars, and various other creatures on ritual regalia. In this passage, it refers to the primordial images (*xiang* 像) captured by the earliest phase of the writing system.

⁵⁷ *Analects* 15.26.

⁵⁸ *Analects* 1.2

⁵⁹ For this definition of “classic” see Michael Nylan, “Classics without Canonization, reflections on classical learning and authority in Qin (221-210 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220),” *Early Chinese Religion, Part One, Shang through Han (1250 BC - AD 220)*, eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 721–77.

⁶⁰ *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 75A.762–763. For an reading of the animal images in this text alongside later works on calligraphy, see Ronald Egan, “Nature and Higher Ideals in Texts on Calligraphy, Music, and Painting,” in *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*, ed. by Zong-qi Cai (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 277–309.

1.4 Living Lines: Cai Yong's "Configuration of Seal Script" 篆勢

Any engagement with Cai Yong's writings on calligraphy must begin with the admission that none of the texts attributed to him on this subject are well-attested before the Tang dynasty. Cai Yong's posthumous reputation as one of the first great calligraphers ensured that adding his name to any text on the artform would endow it with a certain air of authority. Oft-cited texts such as the "Nine Configurations" ("Jiu shi" 九勢) and the "Treatise on the Brush" ("Bi lun" 筆論), do not enter the textual record until the mid-Tang. These texts so closely resemble the slick, handbook-like tone of Tang-era texts on "brush methods" (*bifa* 筆法) (e.g. "if you master these never-before-revealed techniques, your calligraphy will improve in no time!) to be taken seriously as Eastern Han texts. That Cai Yong has written a treatise of the "Configuration of Seal Script" as opposed to another script is not a coincidence. His text explicitly ties the power of this script form to its status as the "original." This power is captured by the difficult-to-translate word *shi* 勢, referring to the configuration of forces bound up within a structure or a topological feature. A complete version of this text appears in the *Siti shushi* 四體書勢 or "Calligraphic Configurations of the Four Script-Styles," a treatise on calligraphic technique attributed to Wei Heng 衛恆 (d. 291) and appended to his *Jinshu* 晉書 biography.⁶¹ Though not without its own issues, there is solid evidence that Wei Heng's treatise existed in a version closely resembling our own when Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451) set out to write his commentary on the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志.⁶² This piece begins by recounting the origins of the form.

⁶¹ Editors of the various editions of Cai Yong's collection have tended to include this text in the *waiji* 外紀 ("outer record") or *waizhuan* 外傳 ("outer transmission") chapters, suggesting a degree of uncertainty as to its provenance. A comparison of early witnesses suggests that at least two different versions circulated in the Tang. An excerpt of one version appears in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (hereafter *YWLJ*, completed in 624). See *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, comp. Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1965), 74.1267. Another, apparently complete version was included in the *Jin shu* 晉書 (hereafter *JS*, completed in 648). See *Jinshu Jin shu* 晉書, comp. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 36.1063–4. The *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (hereafter *CXJ*, completed in 728) also reproduces a complete version very close to the *JS* version but with a number of variants. See *Chuxue ji* 初學集, comp. by Xu Jian 徐堅 et. al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 21.507–8. If we divide the complete *JS* version into two sections at the rhyme change and compare the first section with the corresponding section in the *YWLJ* excerpt, not a single line matches, though the order of the statements and their content is roughly comparable. The movable-type version of a Northern Song edition of the *Cai Zhonglang wenji* (hereafter *CZLWJ*) contains a version which shares a portion of section one as excerpted in the *YWLJ* as well as the entire second section of the *JS* version. See *Cai Zhonglang wenji* 蔡中郎文集, coll. Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 (Changsha: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1938), *waizhuan* 4. Note that the page numbers unhelpfully restart at 1 in the "outer transmission" so this is page 4 of that section. The first three trisyllabic couplets which open the *JS* and *CXJ* versions appear in the *CZLWJ* as two tetrasyllabic couplets, the first of which does not rhyme with the rest of the opening section. The only edition of Cai Yong's collection which does not use the *CZLWJ* as its copy-text is the 1999 *Cai Yong ji biannian jiaozhu*. This collection follows the opening lines of the *JS* version before returning to the text of the *CZLWJ* with minor emendations. I have taken the *JS* version as my copy-text and emended it using what I take to be its cognate text in *CXJ*.

⁶² See *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, comp. Chen Shou 陳壽, comm. Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 1.31 and 621n2.

鳥遺跡，	Birds left tracks，
皇頡循，	August Jie followed [their forms]. ⁶³
聖作則，	The sage established the model，
制斯文。	and he made “these patterns.” ⁶⁴
體有六，	There are six character forms， ⁶⁵
篆為真。	seal script is the original. ⁶⁶
形要妙，	Their shapes are subtly wondrous，
巧入神。	The artistry enters into the category of the divine. ⁶⁷

⁶³ August Jie is Cangjie 倉頡, the mythical inventor of Chinese characters. Here *xun* 循 suggests that Cangjie “follows” or “traces” the shapes of the footprints of birds and other animals in order to invent written characters.

⁶⁴ The “sage” here is Fuxi 伏羲, the mythical inventor of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) among other things. The “model” or “principle” (則) is the use of patterns from nature. “These patterns” refers here to the written characters invented by Cangjie through which the knowledge of the sages was transmitted.

⁶⁵ The term “six character forms” appears in the *Hanshu* “Yiwen zhi” 漢書藝文志 in a quotation from the rules and regulations attributed to Xiao He 蕭何 (d. 193 BC) stipulating the character forms all clerks must be master. See *Hanshu* 30.1721. According to the *Yiwen zhi* they are: 1) “ancient script” (*guwen* 古文), 2) “unusual characters” (*qizi* 奇字), 3) “seal script” (*zhuanwen* 篆書), 4) “clerical script” (*lishu* 隸書), 5) “quasi-seal script” (*minzhuan* 繆篆), and 6) “worm script” (*chongshu* 蟲書). An identical list appears in the “Postface” to the *Shuowen*, only there it is called the “six scripts” (*liushu* 六書) and described as a reclassification of the Qin dynasty’s “eight character forms” (*bati* 八體) undertaken during the Xin dynasty (9–23 CE). In this list, “clerical script” is referred to as “scribal attendant script” (*zuoshu* 左書) and “worm script” is called “bird and worm script” (*niaochongshu* 鳥蟲書). See *Shuowen jiezhi* 15.621.

⁶⁶ *Zhen* 真 might be translated “standard” or “correct” to capture its semantic overlap with *zheng* 正. Incidentally, *zhen* is often used in Han period administrative documents to refer to the “original” vis-à-vis a series of copies. See Hsing I-tian 邢義田, “Handai jiandu gongwenshu de zhengben, fuben, caogao he qianshu wenti 漢代簡牘公文書的正本副本草稿和簽署問題,” *Zhongguo yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 82, no. 4 (2011): 601–678. Here, because the *primacy* of seal script, its direct link to an original (paradoxically) pre-linguistic form of writing, that makes it worthy of being treated as the standard or correct form vis-à-vis later script forms, I have translated it “original.” Richard Barnhart has argued that “Configurations of Seal Script” is a later forgery because *zhen* is not used in the sense of *kai* 楷 (meaning “standard”), as he believes it is here, until the Tang dynasty. See “Wei Fu-jen’s Pi Cheng T’u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 13–25. Barnhart has not considered the possibility that *zhen* has other senses which also work in this context and, moreover, are well-attested in Han-era texts.

⁶⁷ The opening lines of the *CZLWJ* version read:

字畫之始，	As for the inception of the brush strokes，
因于鳥跡。	They were based upon bird tracks。
倉頡循聖，	Cangjie followed [the example of] the sages，
作則制文。	He created the model and carved the patterns。
體有六篆，	Of [the eight] character forms, six are seal script，
巧妙入神。	Ingenious and wonderful, they enter the category of the divine。

或	Some are:
龜文鍼列，	Tortoise-shell patterns—arrayed like fine needlework,
櫛比龍鱗。	Serrated like the teeth of a comb—dragon scales. ⁶⁸
紆體放尾，	They twist their frames and unfurl their tails,
長短複身。 ⁶⁹	Lengthening and foreshortening, they double their body-length.
頽若黍稷之垂穎，	Slumping forward, they are like dangling awns of millet stalks,
蘊若蟲蛇之焚緼。	Amassed, they are like a teeming profusion of worms and snakes.
揚波振擎，	Lifting up “wave”-strokes and shaking left-falling “toss”-strokes, ⁷⁰
鷹峙鳥震，	The hawk towers and birds tremble,
延頸脅翼，	Stretching its neck, it draws back its wings,
勢似凌雲。	Its posture as though preparing to surmount the clouds.

The resemblance of the seal script characters to animals thematizes their distant origins in the patterns and designs on animal skins. These patterns are so rich they thwart attempts to draw distinctions between man-made objects and natural objects. Some descriptions, such as the dangling millet stalks, represent character components—here a vertical stroke with a tilting top, characteristic of the seal script form. Some are more abstract, meant to convey the muscular tension in a particular configuration of strokes. These images of forces welling up inside the body of an animal as it readies itself to strike beautifully capture what contemporary calligraphers refer to as the inwardness (*neixiang* 內向) of seal script calligraphy, or the tendency of the brush to draw in towards the empty center of the graph instead of moving from the center rapidly outward as is the case in draft script.⁷¹

或	There are those
輕舉內投， ⁷²	With brush gently lifting, the strokes are inwardly cast,
微本濃末，	Hiding the roots and darkening the tips,

⁶⁸ The *CZLWJ* does not contain the extra-metrical *huo* 或. Instead, it reads:

或象龜文，	Some mimic the patterns on a tortoise shell,
或比龍鱗。	Others duplicate the look of dragon scales.

⁶⁹ The *YWLJ* version reads: “[They] lengthen their wings and foreshorten their bodies” 長翅短身. This line has the advantage of being parallel to the preceding line and considerably more evocative. Pan Yungao 潘運告 suggests that this image describes the tendency in small seal script (for example, in rendering of the “roof” semantic component 宀) to extend the symmetrical left- and right-falling strokes well below the component they frame. See *Han Wei Linchao shubua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論, ed. and annot. Pan Yungao 潘運告 (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997), 40n8. These strokes flap downward like wings as the central framed component seems to retract. We should always be wary of the possibility that lines like this one, which appear to us as better and, in a sense, neater, may be the result of a later editorial intervention aimed at achieving just this effect. In this case, I have kept the flatter line preserved in *JS* and *CXJ* which just describes the creaturely lengthening and foreshortening of the character’s bodies.

⁷⁰ Deng Ansheng guesses that 波 and 擎 (=撇) are brush-strokes named for their patterns of motion. *Cai Yong ji biannian jiaozhu*, 510n9.

⁷¹ See Xu Liming 徐利明, *Zhongguo shufa fengge shi* 中國書法風格史 (He’nan meishu chubanshe, 1997), 28.

⁷² Following *CXJ* which has 舉 instead of 筆.

若絕若連，	Here seemingly broken off and there as though connected.
似露緣絲， ⁷³	They resemble dewdrops following a silken thread,
凝垂下端。	Congeeing and descending to the tip.
從者如懸，	Verticals are as though suspended from a height,
衡者如編。	Horizontals are as though strung together [like bamboo strips]
杪者邪趣，	The branch-tips slant askance,
不方不員。	Neither angular nor round.
若行若飛，	As though walking or flying,
跂跂翾翾。	They scuttle and flit about.
遠而望之，	Gazing at them from a distance,
若	They resemble:
鴻鵠群遊，	Swans roving the skies in great flocks,
絡繹遷延。	Lingering and undulating in unbroken skeins.
迫而視之，	Looking at them up close,
端際不可得見，	The end-points and junctions cannot be seen,
指撝不可勝原。	The [sequence of] hand signals cannot be exhaustively retraced.

This section emphasizes the organic connectedness of the strokes, which seem to have neither a beginning nor an end. This represents a type of brush technique still used in the writing of seal script characters today called “bow-shaped stroke” (*hubi* 弧筆). Unlike strokes in other character scripts which tend to move in one fluid motion from one point to another, *hubi* begins from the high point of the arc and completes one side of the arc. It then returns to the high point of the arc and completes the other half. The result is a symmetrical arc in which the starting point of the two strokes is now invisible. Moreover, the movement of the calligraphers hand does not correspond to the resulting shape, which seems to have been accomplished with a single arcing stroke. These features of seal script characters make them appear as organic wholes instead of fabricated objects.

研桑不能數其詰屈，	[Ji] Yan and Sang [Hongyang] could not count the twists and turns, ⁷⁴
離婁不能睹其隙間。	Li Lou would be unable to discern the gaps between strokes. ⁷⁵
般倕揖讓而辭巧，	[Gongshu] Ban and Chui would bow in deference to its craftsmanship, ⁷⁶
籀誦拱手而韜翰。	[Scribe] Zhou and [Ju] Song would salute and hide their brushes. ⁷⁷

⁷³ Following CXJ and omitting the redundant 水 before 露.

⁷⁴ Ji Yan 計研 was the teacher of Warring States general Fan Li 范蠡 536 448. Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 was a minister in Han Wudi's court. Both were famous for their ability to perform mental calculations.

⁷⁵ The *Mengzi* mentions Li Lou 離婁 in connection with his excellent eyesight. In a note on this passage, Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) identifies him as a minister of the Yellow Emperor 黃帝.

⁷⁶ Gongshu Ban 公輸般, also known as Lu Ban 魯班 was a Warring States period woodworker and engineer. Chui 倕 was a craftsman who served the ancient sage king Yao 堯.

⁷⁷ According to Wei Heng's introduction to the *Siti shushi*, Ju Song 沮誦 served as the *shi* 史 of the Yellow Emperor alongside Cangjie and also invented a character system based on animal tracks.

處篇籍之首目，
粲粲斌斌其可觀。⁷⁸
摛華豔於紈素，
為學藝之範先。
嘉文德之弘蘊，
懿作者之莫刊。
思字體之俯仰，
舉大略而論旃。

Taking up its place in the titles and headings of chapters and writings,
Brilliant and balanced—in this it is worthy of contemplation.
Setting forth its florid loveliness on plain silk,
It acts as model and precursor for the study of the Classics.
Estimable is this vast repository of the power of patterns,
Praiseworthy is its maker in his irreplaceability.
I have reflected on the comportment of this character form,
And, discoursing on it here, have merely adduced the general outlines.

In the closing section of this piece, the greatest craftsmen in history cannot fathom how something like seal script was ever created. This highlights an important aspect of the conception of script in this period. The power of seal script—its infinite store of *wende* 文德—is tied to the fact that it carries within it the designs of the prehistoric, predynastic sages, not the expedient designs of mere men. In the previous subsection, we saw that Xu Shen’s fears about the corruption of the Classics through bad exegesis boiled down to a fear that the language of those texts would become a blank screen for the projections of readers. Cai Yong’s “Configuration of Seal Script” is silent about the role of the calligrapher in executing or shaping the characters. For a calligrapher who has mastered the “configuration,” the characters will write themselves, erasing any trace of their fabrication. They contain their own tendencies and motivations which it is the duty of the calligrapher to master. Put otherwise, the forms of seal script are seen to emanate from the sages of antiquity, not from their human intermediaries. When the models cease to point back to antiquity, serious problems arise.

1.5 “Their Lips and Teeth are Always Black:” A Draft Script Craze as Omen

The late Eastern Han writer Zhao Yi’s 趙壹 (fl. 178) “Against Draft Script” (“Fei caoshu” 非草書) gives us a vivid picture of just such a shift in the temporal location of models.⁷⁹ Very little is known about Zhao Yi’s life and career; this diatribe against the contemporary fashion of writing cursive or draft script is one of the few texts of his that survives.⁸⁰ Vincent Leung has discussed this piece in the context of what he calls an “ethics of orthography” in the Eastern Han period, which came to view the pleasure taken in cursive calligraphy.⁸¹ This certainly captures some aspects of Zhao’s overall argument. Read in the context of the texts we have just examined, though, we will see that Zhao’s essay, very much like Xu Shen’s “Postface” to the *Shuowen jiezi*, frames these practices as

⁷⁸ Following CXJ, which keeps the rhyming lines even at seven characters each. The JS reads 粲斌斌.

⁷⁹ This text first appears in the Tang compilation of writings on calligraphy *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, comp. Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1986), 1–3. In making this translation, I have consulted the Pan Yungao’s notes in *Han Wei Liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論, 36–36.

⁸⁰ *Hou Hanshu* 80B.2628–35.

⁸¹ “Bad Writing: Cursive Calligraphy and the Ethics of Orthography in the Eastern Han Dynasty,” in *Behaving Badly in Early Medieval China*, eds. N. Harry Rothschild and Leslie V. Wallace (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 107.

indicating a much deeper level of corruption than the deviance of men having too much fun with calligraphy. Texts and scripts have become unmoored from their position in history and their place in a kind of hierarchy of knowledge and practices of self-cultivation.

余郡士有梁孔達、姜孟穎者，皆當世之彥哲也，然慕張生之草書過於希孔、顏焉。孔達寫書以示孟穎，皆口誦其文，手楷其篇，無怠倦焉。於是後學之徒競慕二賢，守令作篇，人撰一卷，以為秘玩。

In my commandery are the scholar-officials Liang Kongda and Jiang Mengying.⁸² Both are eminent wisemen of the present age. Their esteem for Mr. Zhang's draft script, however, surpasses their admiration for Confucius and Yan [Yuan]. When Kongda copies a work of calligraphy to show to Mengying, inevitably they recite its words aloud with their mouths and take its written text as a model with their hands, never growing listless and fatigued therein.⁸³ As a result, later-born students vie with each other in their admiration for these two worthies. Provincial governors dash out a copy of one piece, while others compose an entire fascicle, taking them to be treasured curios.

The language used here to describe Liang Kongda and Jiang Mengying's dedication to their study of draft script comes from *Analepts* 7.2 wherein "studying without becoming sated and guiding others without becoming listless" 學而不厭，誨人不倦 is paradigmatic of the correct attitude toward learning. Here, though, the object of study and by extension of the students' self-cultivation has shifted from Confucius to the ephemera of Han-era figures such as Du Du 杜度 (fl. 75–88), Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143), and Zhang Zhi 張芝 (d. 192). Worse, it is only the outward forms of these texts—their calligraphy, not their content—that the students admire and imitate. They do not want to be an erudite gentleman like Cui Yuan, whose excellent handwriting is understood to flow naturally out of his elite upbringing; they want their letters to friends and benefactors to *look like* Cui Yuan's letters. Zhao's use of the language of the *Analepts* here transforms the students' devotion to reenacting the exact tilt of Zhang Zhi's wrist or twist of Cui Yuan's brush as they make copies into a kind of parody of the retracing of the Master's intentions in the study of the Classics. Much like in Xu Shen's "Postface," where glosses of clerical script characters were produced with a method that resembled but did not match the Six Principals, the danger lies in the *proximity* of this painstaking attention to model works of calligraphy and the earnest engagement with the models contained in the Classics. For Zhao, a practice which apes self-cultivation poses a much greater *systemic* threat than a practice which could never be mistaken for self-cultivation in the first place. Once a simulacrum of a practice of self-cultivation is taken for the truth, it has usurped its model. For Zhao, again echoing Xu's "Postface," draft script is too close in time to constitute a legitimate model.

夫草書之興也，其於近古乎？上非天象所垂，下非河洛所吐，中非聖人所造。蓋秦之

⁸² Liang Xuan 梁宣 and Jiang Xu 姜詡 (here referred to by their courtesy names) were students of Zhang Zhi 張芝 (d. 192), son of the general and scholar Zhang Huan 張奐 (104–181). Zhang Zhi was famous for his draft script.

⁸³ Mr. Zhang refers to Zhang Zhi.

末，刑峻網密，官書煩冗，戰攻並作，軍書交馳，羽檄紛飛，故為隸草，趨急速耳，示簡易之指，非聖人之業也。但貴刪難省煩，損復為單，務取易為易知，非常儀也。故其贊曰：「臨事從宜。」而今之學草書者，不思其簡易之旨，直以為杜、崔之法，龜龍所見也。其蠻扶拄，詰屈龍乙，不可失也。齟齬以上，苟任涉學，皆廢倉頡、史籀，竟以杜、崔為楷；私書相與之際，每書云：適迫遽，故不及草。草本易而速，今反難而遲，失指多矣。⁸⁴

As for the rise of draft script, did this not occur in Lower Antiquity?⁸⁵ Above it was not what was let down by the heavenly images; below it was not what was spit out by the Yellow River and the Luo River; in the middle [i.e. in the human realm], it is not what the sages made.⁸⁶ Presumably at the end of the Qin dynasty, the mutilating punishments were severe and the net of the law was tightly meshed; official documents were vexatiously profuse, battles and attacks arose side by side, military documents sped back and forth, winged missives flew about all over, therefore they made clerical script and draft script; this was a matter of pursuing speed only, and clearly evinces the aim of curtness and ease—it is not part of the legacy of the sages. Solely prizing the elimination of what is difficult and the reduction of what is vexatious, subtracting from the double to make it single, and programmatically taking as one's primary task to adopt what is easy to make and easy to understand, this is not a constant way of comporting oneself. Therefore [Cui Yuan] praised it saying, "In accordance with the nature of the affair, do what is suitable."⁸⁷ But those who study draft script today do not ponder its aim of being simple and easy, but directly take the examples of Du and Cui as what was manifested on the [backs of the] dragon and turtle and so [each movement of] tilting and straightening, pressing down and plucking up, twisting and turning, pulling up and bending cannot be neglected.⁸⁸ From childhood on,⁸⁹ they haphazardly set about their studies, in all cases abandoning Cangjie and Scribe Zhou and taking instead Du and Cui as their models. Every time they exchange private letters, they write, "I was in a rush so I didn't have time to use draft script." Draft script was originally easy and fast; now, on the contrary, it is difficult

⁸⁴ *Fashu yaolu*, 1.1.

⁸⁵ Zhao is playfully reworking a line from the "Appended Statements" 繫辭 section of the *Changes* 繫辭: "As for the rise of the *Changes*, did this not occur in Middle Antiquity?" 易之興也，其於中古乎。The implication of the original statement is that anything which arose in Middle Antiquity must be the product of vexation and anguish, given its place in a narrative of constant decline. If draft script only arose in Lower Antiquity, how much more so must it be a product of a fallen world?

⁸⁶ Above, below, and in the middle correspond to Heaven, Earth, and the realm of men. Zhao Yi is saying that draft script forms are not the Trigrams, which represent Heavenly or cosmic phenomena, nor are they the Yellow River Diagram (*Hetu* 河圖) or the Luo Writings (*Luoshu* 洛書), forms of writing brought to the surface of these rivers by a dragon and a tortoise respectively, nor are they the invention of men alone, since they are filiated to the standard script.

⁸⁷ This line occurs in Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78–143) "Configuration of Draft Script" which happens also to have been preserved in Wei Heng's *Siti shushi*. See *Jin shu* 36.1066. There it reads, "In accordance with the demands of the moment, do what is appropriate" 臨時從宜. Both constructions mean that under certain circumstances the use of an abbreviated, cursive script is perfectly appropriate. According to Zhao Yi, the use of such a script will remain harmless so long as it is not elevated to the status of a model.

⁸⁸ Du Du 杜度 (fl. 75–88) and Cui Yuan were both well-known for having beautiful draft script.

⁸⁹ Literally "from teeth-shedding age on up."

and slow-going. This misses the point by a great deal.

For Zhao, draft script was created without reference to the scripts of antiquity to meet the demands of a particular, contingent situation in the administration of the Qin dynasty, familiar to us from Xu Shen's "Postface." But contingent means cannot achieve constant ends. To attempt this is to turn the hierarchy of models contained within the script upside down. Here, the painstaking writing of draft script characters mimics the slow, premeditated motions of a ritual performance. The details given in Zhao's account of the lengths to which young men will go to perfect their draft script style are intentionally alarming. Zhao reports that these young men have ceased to talk to their peers, writing in a kind of fugue state until the skin on their forearms splits and their fingernails crack. Their lips and teeth turn black as they suck the tips of their brushes to prepare them for writing. These images transform the draft script craze then sweeping the empire into a kind of omen of the coming collapse. These activities are an exact parallel of the perversion of sociality and hierarchies of script forms Cai Yong would petition the Emperor to address in the mid-170s. Now that we have seen what is at stake in the distortion of script forms and the practices of self-cultivation associated with them, we are in a better position to understand the seriousness with which Cai Yong set about restabilizing the system.

1.6 A Dynasty Off-Script: The Xiping Stone Classics 熹平石經 and the Hongdu Gate Academy 鴻都門學

In a recent article, Michael Loewe has argued that the power of the Eastern Han emperors began to diminish as early as 100 CE and that by 140 it was in precipitous decline. He lists a number of contributing factors, though perhaps none had a more widespread impact than the process by which vertical ties to the throne and the government administration were dissolved and replaced by fealty to local and regional magnates who formed horizontal alliances and competed with each other for power and influence.⁹⁰ Many of the other crises that beset the dynasty radiated from this most fundamental crisis. This process through which regional authorities took over the functions of the central government exacerbated the crisis in the distribution of textual authority I am arguing Cai Yong was responding to in the works we will examine in this section. The Partisan Proscriptions (*danggu* 黨錮) of 166 and 169, which were themselves a response to the emergence of a political counterforce among the clientele loosely (with an emphasis on loosely, for reasons discussed below) affiliated with the Imperial Academy (*Taixue* 太學), one effect of which was to create a vacuum of scholarly authority in the capital region.⁹¹ Influential scholars and teachers in lineages which had once existed to prepare students for examinations and administrative life in the capital now became, almost by default, rival centers of textual authority. We see a vivid account of the process in Fan Ye's "Rulin zhuan" 儒林傳:

自是游學增盛，至三萬餘生。然章句漸疏，而多以浮華相尚，儒者之風蓋衰矣。逐黨人既誅，其高名善士多坐流廢，後遂至忿爭，更相信告，亦有私行金貨，定蘭臺漆書經字，以合其私文。⁹²

⁹⁰ See "Dynastic Decline in Eastern Han," *Monumenta Serica* 67, no. 1 (2019): 11–32.

⁹¹ See Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, "Tōko to gakumon: tokuni Ka Kyu no ba'ai" 黨錮と學問—とくに何休の場合 *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 35, no. 3 (1976): 414–446.

⁹² *Hou Hanshu* 79A.2547.

From this point on [i.e. 143 CE when a new layer of examinations was introduced in the recruitment process], the traveling scholars increased manyfold, reaching more than thirty thousand. However, they became gradually unfamiliar with the chapter and line exegesis, often rather striving with each other in the shallow and showy—the manner and norms of the Traditionalist scholars had declined. Thereafter when the Partisans were punished, many of these excellent officials of lofty reputation were sent into exile; following this, vicious disputes arose [among scholars] and they freely denounced each other; there were also those who privately made bribes to “fix” the characters of the Classics written in lacquer and kept in the Orchid Terrace⁹³ so as to match their own personal versions of the texts.

“Traveling scholars” refers to the students who, at least in Fan Ye’s account, flocked to the Imperial Academy in droves to study. Lü Simian 呂思勉 (1884–1957) has convincingly shown that the numbers given here and elsewhere in the *Hou Hanshu* for the number of students frequenting the Imperial Academy must be inflated, and moreover, that many of those who did travel to the capital for “study” did so primarily in order to gain access to patronage networks for which scholarly expertise was not necessarily required.⁹⁴ In a forthcoming article on rites controversies in the Eastern Han, Nicholas Constantino and Michael Nylan add that recent archeological evidence (still tentative) shows that the rather small site of the Imperial Academy sat so close to the Sanyong 三雍 ritual complex outside the walls of Eastern Han Luoyang 洛陽 that they may in fact have been part of the same venue for ritual performances.⁹⁵ They also point out that according the commentary on a passage in Ying Shao’s *Han guanyi* 漢官儀, participation or possibly mere attendance at an Archery ceremony in the suburbs of the capital qualified one as a “student” at the Academy.⁹⁶ These discrepancies concerning the function and scope of the activities at the Imperial Academy aside, there is reason to trust Fan Ye’s claim that the loss of an institutional center of gravity at court around which to formulate scholarly debates in the wake of the Partisan Proscriptions did lead to the further loss of any sense, especially among Cai Yong and his peers, that scholars were reading the same texts. In fact, the interpretations of key lines in one textual and interpretative tradition have gotten so far-fetched that they now require the original texts to be changed in order to bring commentary and Classic back into concordance. Whereas in the past one could stake one’s claim to the definitive reading of a passage on the prestige of a teaching lineage that extended back to a disciple of Confucius, now such claims were made with reference to the wording of texts. It is perhaps natural that Cai Yong and his colleagues framed the decline of the dynasty in terms that would ultimately justify their intervention. They saw the root cause of this decline as the gradual unmooring of the ritual norms and administrative procedures in use at court from those sanctioned by the texts of the Classics as they interpreted them. The most immediate problem, therefore, was the unmooring of the Classics from *themselves*. In the fourth year of the Xiping reign period (175), Cai Yong and his colleagues petitioned to inscribe the Classics in a new medium in an effort to prevent further corruption.

⁹³ The Orchid Terrace (*Lantai* 蘭台) was one of several archives located in the capital city of Luoyang. It contained reference copies of the Confucian Classics as well as administrative and legal documents.

⁹⁴ Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1947), 733–7.

⁹⁵ See Nicholas Constantino and Michael Nylan, “On the Rites and Rites Controversies in mid-Eastern Han,” in a forthcoming publication edited by Anne Cheng and Stephane Feuillas for the Collège de France.

⁹⁶ Constantino and Nylan, “On the Rites and Rites Controversies in mid-Eastern Han.” See *Hou Hanshu* 79A.2547, 2547n6.

邕以經籍去聖久遠，文字多謬，俗儒穿鑿，疑誤後學，熹平四年，乃與五官中郎將堂溪典、光祿大夫楊賜、諫議大夫馬日磾、議郎張馴、韓說、太史令單揚等，奏求正定六經文字。靈帝許之，邕乃自書丹於碑，使工鐫刻，立於太學門外。於是後儒晚學，咸取正焉。及碑始立，其觀視及摹寫者，車乘日千餘兩，填塞街陌。⁹⁷

Cai Yong believed that the texts of the Classics and other authoritative writings, being far-removed from the Sages, had thereby been subjected to many textual errors, as well as the specious interpretations of vulgar classicists, which have confused and led astray latter-born students. In the fourth year of the Xiping reign period, together with Leader of the Gentlemen of the House for All Purposes Tangxi Dian (dates unknown), Counsellor of the Palace Yang Ci (d. 185), Advisory Counselor Ma Midi (d. 194), Gentlemen Consultants Zhang Shun (dates unknown) and Han Yue (dates unknown), and Director of the Archives Shan Yang (dates unknown), [Cai Yong] petitioned the emperor requesting to correct and establish the texts of the Six Classics. Lingdi approved this request and so Cai Yong wrote them himself in red ink onto steles, leading the artisans to carve them, and had them set up outside of the gate of the Imperial Academy. Thereupon, later-born classicists and students all took them as standard. When the steles were first erected, those who went to view them and make copies clogged the thoroughfares and alleyways, their carriages daily numbering more than one thousand.

The number of Classics inscribed is reported here as six but is listed as five in the “Rulin zhuan” 儒林傳 of the *Hou Hanshu*.⁹⁸ Since the Xiping Stone Classics were destroyed during the razing of Luoyang in 189 and its fragments were easily mixed up with fragments of the Stone Classics of the Wei dynasty undertaken half a century later, scholars like Fan Ye had no way of checking these discrepancies. The current consensus, based on excavated evidence, is that seven Classics were inscribed in stone: the *Zhouyi* 周易, the *Shangshu* 尚書, the *Yili* 儀禮, the *Gongyang* 公羊 commentary to the *Chunqiu*, the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (by itself), and the *Lunyu* 論語.⁹⁹ If the *Gongyang* and the *Chunqiu* are treated as a single Classic, the total comes to six. These stones were inscribed between 175 and 183. The inscribed text moved in sequence along the fronts of 46 steles arrayed in a U-shape, before continuing onto the backs of the same steles in the opposite direction. Each stele was approximately 245 centimeters tall and 98 centimeters wide.¹⁰⁰ Cai Yong did not write out all of the Classics by himself though he did write some sections; that the texts are attributed to him alone in multiple accounts suggests his name added some degree of prestige to the project. In fact the creation of the Stone Classics likely involved thousands of people, from the men who chiseled the marine limestone slabs from the mountains and transported them to the capital, to the teams of artisans responsible for carved tens of thousands of characters over Cai Yong (and several others’) brushstrokes.¹⁰¹ It is clear now too

⁹⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 50B.1990.

⁹⁸ *Hou Hanshu* 79A.2547.

⁹⁹ Yu Wanli 虞萬里, “20 shiji Xiping shijing yanjiu niaokan” 20 世紀熹平石經研究鳥瞰 *Zhongguo jingxue* 23 (2018): 237.

¹⁰⁰ Yu, “20 shiji Xiping shijing yanjiu niaokan,” 237.

¹⁰¹ For a fascinating attempt to reconstruct the professional lives of the artisans who specialized in carving steles and other stone monuments in the Eastern Han, see Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, “Carving Out a Living: Stone-monument Artisans During the Eastern Han Dynasty,” in *Recarving China’s Past: Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of the “Wu Family Shrines,”* ed. by Cary Y. Liu, Michael Nylan, and Anthony Barbieri-Low (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2005), 485–511. For a discussion of the workshops responsible for

that “correcting and establishing the text” meant more than simply deciding which of two competing variants to inscribe for a particular word. The order of sections differed between the editions of Classics affiliated with specific teaching lineages. A version inscribed in stone would have had to decide which lineage version of a text would serve as the base text and so by extension which internal order of texts with section breaks would now represent the correct order. Furthermore, we can now confirm that the steles included punctuation marks to delineate section breaks and collation notes which list the names of both calligraphers and artisans.¹⁰² Zhao Liwei 趙立偉 has demonstrated that the execution of the characters in graceful *bafen* 八分 clerical script is remarkably uniform for a monument of this size; even components that are freely swapped or written differently from iteration to iteration within the same document in other Han-era excavated texts are identical across as many as a dozen iterations from stone to stone.¹⁰³

Perhaps the most interesting detail of Fan Ye’s report is the claim that people gathered to copy the texts. This suggests that the Stone Classics functioned as a kind of early medieval copying machine with human component parts. Fan Ye’s word *moxie* 摹寫 suggests that the copying is not merely aimed at capturing the verbatim content of these editions.¹⁰⁴ Those who crowded around to copy also intended to copy the calligraphy. Taken as a whole, this project is riven with contradictions. The stele complex intends to freeze the Classics in time and lodge them in ritual space outside of the gates of the Imperial Academy, providing them with a new, more solid, and more durable body in the process. Cai Yong and his associates act as co-guarantors of the text through their collation and calligraphy, placing themselves between the vulgar classicists and their texts on the one side and the Sages of antiquity on the other. They will act as privileged vessels for the transmission of the Classics to future generations. At the same time, however, we have reason to believe that the stones facilitated the transmission of the text of the Classics back out into scholars’ libraries and academies in copies made at the site or portable writing materials very possibly including paper, where it was once again subject to change. On the one hand, this project offered Lingdi an opportunity to reestablish his legitimacy during a time of ongoing crisis. As scholars and officials from all over the empire came to stoop in the presence of the steles, they would stoop in his presence; their desire to draw nearer to the Sages would require them to draw nearer to him. On the other, the very need to create versions of the Classics in stone might be seen as confirming in the mortuary silence of their physical form the end of the living culture of classical exegesis, whose competitive nature had kept the Classics at the very

coordinating projects like the Stone Classics, see his *Artisans in Early Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

¹⁰² Yu, “20 shiji Xiping shijing yanjiu niaokan,” 207.

¹⁰³ Zhao Liwei 趙立偉, “Xiping shijing zixing yu Handai wenzi de guifan—yi shijing yu Hou Han jiandu wenzi de bijiao wei canzhao” 熹平石經字形與漢代文字的規範——以石經與後漢簡牘文字的比較為參照 *Zhongguo jingxue* 15 (2015): 155–163. For a treatment of the calligraphic style of the Xiping Stone Classics in relation to other Eastern Han steles, see Rebecca Prosner, “Moral Character: Calligraphy and Bureaucracy in Han China (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 220)” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1995), 54–104.

¹⁰⁴ One might be tempted to read *moxie* here as “copy by taking a rubbing.” Some scholars in the late imperial period such as Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671) understood the term this way and treated this anecdote as the first account of the use of the technique. See Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, *Beike wenxian xue tonglun* 碑刻文獻學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 366. Kenneth Starr rejects this possibility outright arguing that in the absence of 1) reports of extant rubbings from the Han in later centuries, 2) descriptions linking *moxie* specifically to rubbing per se 3) any evidence that early paper was of a high enough quality to permit rubbings to be taken from stone. See *Black Tigers: A Grammar of Chinese Rubbings* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 6–8. There are also practical issues of access to consider. The process of taking a rubbing of an entire panel would render it invisible to onlookers for long stretches of time.

center of debates about correct governance for centuries. Michael Nylan has argued that the Stone Classics point both to the dynasty's immortality—in that they could be consulted as the basis of Han ritual and administration forever—and its imminent demise—they are built to outlast the dynasty.¹⁰⁵ Cai Yong certainly knew of the various attempts by pre-Qin kings to inscribe legal codes in metal or stone. A standard Traditionalist reading of inscribed standards preserved in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 held that they were signs that the kingdom undertaking the project would soon perish.¹⁰⁶

As the Stone Classics were erected in the shadow of the gates of the Imperial Academy, the crises facing the dynasty continued to deepen. In the seventh month of the year 177, Cai Yong submitted a memorial in seven parts linking the reports of omens pouring in from all over the empire to breaches of ritual protocol, ranging from the unprecedented procedures for appointing officials to Lingdi's habit of having others stand in as proxies for him during important rituals performed in the Bright Hall 明堂, where, at least according to Cai Yong's interpretation of the ritual canon, only the Emperor should preside. The *Hou Hanshu* gives the background of this memorial as follows.

初，帝好學，自造皇義篇五十章，因引諸生能為文賦者。本頗以經學相招，後諸為尺牘及工書鳥篆者，皆加引召，遂至數十人。侍中祭酒樂松、賈護，多引無行趣勢之徒，並待制鴻都門下，憲陳方俗閭里小事，帝甚悅之，待以不次之位。又市賈小民，為宣陵孝子者，複數十人，悉除為郎中、太子舍人。時頻有雷霆疾風，傷樹拔木，地震、隕雹、蝗蟲之害。¹⁰⁷

Previously, the Emperor was fond of study, having himself created the *Huang Xi pian* in fifty sections.¹⁰⁸ Following this, however, he summoned those men of the academy who were able to compose elaborate poetic expositions. Originally, he tended to make appointments on the basis of classical learning, but later those who made [i.e. wrote] foot-length wooden tablets and were skilled at writing bird-seal script were summoned, and soon the number reached a few dozen. The libationers of the palace attendants Yue Song [fl. 177] and Jia Huo [fl. 177] repeatedly summoned the type of trend-chasers who lack standards of conduct, and they awaited Imperial Command [to be made scholars] beneath the Hongdu Gate. They delighted in relating local customs and the trivial affairs of the villages and alleyways; the Emperor greatly enjoyed this and treated the whole lot to posts outside of the usual series of grades. Moreover, a few dozen petty commoners from among the merchants served as the filial sons at Xuanling,¹⁰⁹ and all were appointed as Gentlemen Attendants and Chamberlains of the Crown Prince. At this time there were frequent calamities such as lightning storms and severe wind, which harmed the trees and pulled them out by the roots, along with earthquakes, hail, and locusts.

¹⁰⁵ Nylan, "Calligraphy, Sacred Text," 49.

¹⁰⁶ For criticisms of this practice in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, see the entries for Lord Zhao 6.3 and 29.5, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annot. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 1274–77 and 1504–5. For an excellent discussion of the Traditionalist suspicion of quasi-public-facing inscriptions, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 293–300.

¹⁰⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 50B.1991–2.

¹⁰⁸ This text no longer exists. The title, which refers to the sage Fuxi, strongly suggests it was some kind of graphological text analogous to those compiled during the Qin dynasty such as Li Si's *Cangjie pian* or Zhao Gao's *Yuanli pian*. Early on in his reign, Lingdi seems to have had a genuine interest in script forms.

¹⁰⁹ Lingdi's father Huandi 桓帝 (r. 146–168) was buried at Xuanling. Normally, members of the imperial family would staff the imperial mausoleum towns.

The details surrounding this group of scholars ominously assembled beneath the Hongdu Gate are vague and difficult to piece together into a coherent narrative.¹¹⁰ A few things are clear. First, these men do not come from elite families and lack any kind of scholarly pedigree. They are currently rising through the official ranks on the basis of 1) their skill at writing poetic expositions and producing texts Lingdi values for their calligraphy; and 2) glib talk and gossip from their local regions. That Lingdi extended favor to those skilled at writing poetic expositions is relatively straight-forward and unsurprising, if only because poetic expositions frequently doubled as policy advice of the kind that Han emperors regularly solicited from their advisors. These texts are labeled here “elaborate poetic expositions” (*wenfu* 文賦) and in Cai Yong’s memorial “ornate poetic expositions” (*cifu* 辭賦), possibly suggesting that they lack substance. We will return to them momentarily.

The spectacle of an Emperor assembling a group of men who specialize in writing works of calligraphy and appointing them as a group to high-level positions is more surprising. These men are first described as making “foot-long placards” (*chidu* 尺牘). This word typically refers to official and personal correspondence written in draft script.¹¹¹ The *Hanshu* contains a number of anecdotes in which ministers with particularly good handwriting are asked to submit *chidu* in draft script for their Emperor’s enjoyment; in some cases this talent is loosely connected with official promotions and in only one case do such exchanges elicit disapproval for implying that the Emperor and his ministers are peers.¹¹² It is possible that the same scenario is in play here. Cai Yong’s consternation would therefore be directed at men with commoner’s backgrounds submitting what is effectively personal correspondence in causal, cursive handwriting to the Emperor. The same might hold for “bird-seal script,” which to the best of our knowledge was a highly embellished handwritten variety of seal script in which strokes were elongated or modified in some way to make them resemble birds.¹¹³ The text describes these men as “skilled” (*gong* 工) at writing characters in bird-seal script. Fan Ye has other

¹¹⁰ For a comprehensive review of all mentions of the Hongdu Gate Academy, see David Knechtges, “Court Culture in the Late Eastern Han: The Case of the Hongdu Gate School,” in *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan, Yuet-Keung Lo, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 9–40. Knechtges helpfully debunks the claim, based on a misconstrual of the fragmentary information we have about about Yue Song and Jia Huo, the two men mentioned here, that the Academy was staffed by eunuchs. I disagree with Knechtges that the men of the Academy were simply scholars of undistinguished backgrounds engaged in literary and aesthetic pursuits other more conservative scholars like Cai Yong felt were inappropriate. On the contrary, there is evidence, offered below, that Lingdi established the Academy to leech power away from the Palace Secretariat.

¹¹¹ See Eva Yuen-wah Chung, “A study of the ‘Shu’ (Letters) of the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220)” Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1982) 198–202 and 212–220 and Antje Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 17–23.

¹¹² See Eva Yuen-wah Chung, “A study of the ‘Shu’ (Letters) of the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220),” 198–202.

¹¹³ See Qi Gong 启功, *Zhongguo ziti lunliao* 中國字體論稿 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 22–5. Qi limits his discussion to “bird and worm script” and “worm script.” The addition of “seal” in the above passage is curious since as far as we know both calligraphic styles were used to write characters in script forms that could be broadly classified as “seal” script. Although both the *Hanshu* “Yiwen zhi” and Xu Shen’s “Postface” contain references to “worm script” and “bird and worm script” as one of either six or eight official character forms (*ti* 體), it is not clear where these scripts came from, how they were related, or how extensively they were used. The “Yiwen zhi” does add that “worm script” was used for seals and certain kinds of banners. See *Hanshu* 30.1721. For an overview of the use of these terms and some possible examples, see Hua Rende 華人德, *Zhongguo shufa shi: Liang Han juan* 中國書法史：兩漢卷 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 190–6.

words for the skills of elite men such as *shan* 善 (“to excel at”) or *hao* 好 (“to be fond of”). *Gong* strongly suggests that these men only have a technical knack for writing characters—any characters they are given—in bird-seal script. Appointing these men to high positions on the basis of such skills without considering their family and scholarly background violates the unity of ritual body and ritual action, of substance and pattern in administration on which the dynasty depended. This is certainly scandalous behavior and deserving of remonstrance, but the omens which are reported as having arisen in response to these activities point to a deeper problem.

There is evidence that Fan Ye’s summary is missing some crucial details, which will help us understand why Cai Yong took the activities of the Hongdu Gate Academy to be cause for such alarm. In Yang Ci’s 楊賜 (d. 185) memorial on the same issue also submitted in 178, these placards are referred to as (*chiji* 尺一) or “foot-long documents.”¹¹⁴ Since this is the term used in the language of a memorial as opposed to Fan Ye’s summary, it is perhaps more trustworthy. According to Cai Yong’s own *Duduan* 獨斷, *chiji* are used to inscribe a type of edict issued by the Palace Secretariat (*Shang shu* 尚書) which was used to make and deny certain kinds of appointments and titles to officials. For some appointments, a version of the edict in *seal script* was appended.¹¹⁵ According to Sima Biao’s 司馬彪 (240–306) *Xu Hanji* 續漢記, when the Hongdu Gate Academy was made official just a year later, members of the Academy produced *chiji* ordering appointments and entitling themselves and others to grants of land and honorary titles.¹¹⁶ Yang Ci’s request that Lingdi “put an end to the foot-long documents” (*duanjue chiji* 斷絕尺一) submitted by the men of the Hongdu Gate suggests that they were already (in 177) being used for something far more threatening than imperial entertainment. This possibility throws the appointment of men skilled at writing seal script in a new light. It seems Lingdi was in the process of transforming the Hongdu Gate Academy into a kind of shadow Palace Secretariat in which low-born men with no training in the Confucian Classics and no understanding of the delicate procedures governing the inscription of edicts and the submission of documents could fabricate titles and appointments without regard to the usual protocols or sequences. Like the misinformed exegetes in Xu Shen’s “Postface” and the scab-ridden, ink-covered youths laboriously copying a model work of draft script calligraphy, the men of the Hongdu Gate are *aping* the procedures of legitimate self-cultivation and administration. When an official can fabricate an edict in draft script or in bird-seal script promoting himself or one of his colleagues which nevertheless passes as real, the flow of the entire system will reverse, causing the bounties intended to be distributed across the corporeal person of the dynasty (*guoti* 國體) to converge on individuals. Such procedures will have ceased to participate in the cosmic order embodied in the administration. Cai Yong touches upon the problem of duplicity in the text of the memorial itself.

夫書畫辭賦，才之小者。匡國理政，未有其能。陛下即位之初，先涉經術，聽政餘日，觀省篇章，聊以游意，當代博弈，非以教化取士之本。而諸生競利，作者鼎沸。其高者頗引經訓風喻之言；下則連偶俗語，有類俳優；或竊成文，虛冒名氏。¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Hou Hanshu* 54.1780.

¹¹⁵ I follow Enno Giele’s reading of this somewhat confusingly worded passage. See *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China*, 272–3.

¹¹⁶ See *Ba jia Hou Han shu jizhu* 八家後漢書輯注, ed. and annot. Zhou Tianyou 周天游 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 306–7.

¹¹⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.1996.

Now, calligraphy, painting, and the writing of elaborate poetic expositions are the meagerest among talents; when it comes to rectifying the ruling house and perfecting the administration, never have such abilities contributed [in isolation]. Originally, when your majesty had just ascended the throne, you studied the Classics and, on your days off from holding court, you would survey and scrutinize works in sections and chapters [e.g. poetic expositions and works of calligraphy], briefly using them to let your mind freely wander. Such activities can stand in for rods and encirclement chess, but they are not essential to the task of selecting officers on the basis of [their ability to facilitate] transformative instruction. Yet now all the Academy scholars strive for advantage, and the composers of such things are [like] a cauldron boiling over [i.e. arise in great numbers]. The lofty among them are somewhat more inclined to employ language that draws on the teachings of the Classics and the [technique of] indirect remonstrance [of the *Odes*], but the lowest among them string together vulgar anecdotes, and so are in the same category as court jesters; some even steal finished writings [by other people], passing themselves off as distinguished gentlemen.

Yang Qiu's 陽球 (d. 179) memorial of around the same time also mentions the fact that some of the works of poetry and calligraphy that have served as the basis for the elevation of the men under the Hongdu Gate were in fact forgeries.¹¹⁸ A number of the items in Cai Yong's memorial in seven parts point to the emergence of doubles or proxies for the ritual order as the root cause of the disturbances that have pushed him to submit his memorial. Lingdi is remonstrated against for using proxies in the Bright Hall; the Hongdu Gate Academy has emerged as the corrupt double of the Palace Secretariat; the documents circulating in this space are simulacra of real official documents just as the officials who produced them are simulacra of true Confucian officials. In Cai Yong's eyes, script, surface of inscription, and the status, learning, cultivation of the person doing the writing were deeply intertwined. These elements enter into relation only in the service of the state. A promotion given in recognition of an official's beautiful writing or calligraphy implicitly sanctions their merely *personal* use. Unsurprisingly, Cai Yong's memorial fell on deaf ears. Lingdi responded by making the Hongdu Gate Academy an official proxy administration.¹¹⁹ Just a few years later, after denouncing Lingdi's administration again even more vociferously, Cai Yong found himself writing his "Treatises" and the remainder of the discontinued *Han ji* in exile. This experience seems to have pushed him to think in new ways about the task of writing produced outside of a court that had veered drastically and disastrously off-script. Could the blueprints of the correct, cosmically resonant relations of the ruling house and its constituents be salvaged and transmitted to future generations? If Cai Yong's "Treatises" were intended to transmit these blueprints at the broadest and most abstract level, we can read his late stele inscription for Chen Shi as an attempt to transmit them through the example of the upstanding gentlemen of his age.

1.7 Preserving "These Patterns" in Stone: Cai Yong's Stele Inscription for Chen Shi

Were one suddenly to find oneself walking along a road on the outskirts of a large commandery in the provinces of Yuzhou 豫州 or Yanzhou 兗州 circa 188, all along the paths leading to family tombs in the surrounding hills one would see dozens of large limestone slabs supported by giant stone tortoises, bearing texts recounting the lives of local worthies and their families.¹²⁰ Were one to take

¹¹⁸ *Hou Hanshu* 77. 2499.

¹¹⁹ *Hou Hanshu* 60B.1998.

¹²⁰ In fact, by 188, one would have seen stone inscriptions of all kinds lining the roads. For an illuminating account of a series of cliff-face inscriptions commemorating the construction of a tunnel see Robert E. Harrist

the same stroll at an earlier date, say 56 CE, this would not necessarily be the case. During the last half century of the Eastern Han elite men began to erect stele inscriptions for deceased family members, teachers, and benefactors in far greater numbers than in any previous period.¹²¹ Michael Loewe has observed that stele inscriptions for mid-ranking officials enter our records *en masse* at roughly the same moment that the complex scheme for denoting succession used to arrange imperial tombs of the Liu ruling house is abandoned and the mausoleums themselves lay open to vandals.¹²² Steles document new regional concentrations of power in the highly charged media of tomb architecture. Since the ceremonies for mourning family members were largely carried out inside the mortuary complex, steles served as public-facing testaments to the sincerity of the mourners, as well as their wealth and prestige.

By the late Eastern Han, the creation of steles and the writing of stele inscriptions had become a lucrative business. Cai Yong seems to have made money writing the texts of grave inscriptions as a young man. Participation in stele culture was by no means limited to family members. Some were commissioned by very large networks of scholars and officials; the names of these officials appear on the back and sides of the stelae.¹²³ Kenneth Brashier has shown how stele inscriptions served to embed the life of the deceased into the cultural ideals of the age by packing the account of their life with made-to-order eulogistic phrases and allusions to the Classics.¹²⁴ He argues such phrases were intended to make the inscription and, by extension, the legacy of the deceased person stick in the heads of those who read them aloud in passing. Often this “conversion” of the specific person into a generalized cultural ideal was done somewhat crudely. Many of Cai Yong’s early stele inscriptions pile up allusions with little regard for deeper resonances of those texts with the life of the deceased. Cai Yong’s “Inscription for Chen Taiqiu” 陳太丘碑, written near the end of his life while he was still in exile in the south in 188, stands out even among his best inscriptions. The comparison it makes between Chen Shi and Confucius far exceeds the demands of a commemorative inscription. In Cai Yong’s hands, Chen Shi’s death is transformed into an omen of the collapse of the dynasty and his life into a model meant to survive that collapse in the form of a text inscribed in stone.¹²⁵ Like Confucius in Sima Qian’s account of his decision to commit his Way to writing, Cai Yong transmits the exemplary patterns of the past embodied in the life of Chen Shi by acting as the author of a text that will see them through this moment of crisis.

Chen Shi was born in the year 107 to a middling family in Yingchuan 潁川 commandery.¹²⁶ He travelled to the Imperial Academy in the capital as a youth but returned to hold a series of mid-level posts, two of which he quit to protest the poor decisions of his colleagues. He was banned from office during the Partisan Proscriptions of 166 and lived at home in retirement. He received guests and acted

Jr., *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 23–89.

¹²¹ See Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 42–50. Brown argues that the Party Proscriptions did correspond to a boom in the production of commemorative stele inscriptions.

¹²² Loewe, “Dynastic Decline in Eastern Han,” 13–4.

¹²³ For a detailed analysis of once such inscription, see Patricia Ebrey, “Later Han Stone Inscriptions,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40 (1980): 325–53.

¹²⁴ See Kenneth Brashier, *Public Memory in Early China*, (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 317–65.

¹²⁵ *Cai Zhonglang wenji*, 2.14, *Cai Yong biannian ji*, 375–80; *Wen xuan* 文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統, comm. Li Shan 李善 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 58.801 I have consulted Mark Asselin’s extensive annotations to his translation of this text in the process of making this translation. Some the notes below reproduce information gleaned from his notes. See *A Significant Season*, 413–29.

¹²⁶ Chen Shi’s biography can be found at *Hou Hanshu* 52.2065–7.

as an informal judge to settle local disputes until 184 when the ban was lifted. As we will see, his reputation as an incorruptible gentleman won him many invitations to take sometimes very high-level positions. He refused these offers and died at his home in 187. Aat Vervoorn notes that unlike many officials who became hermits in pursuit of social prestige, Chen Shi seems to have been genuinely reluctant to withdraw from the world.¹²⁷ Indeed, this is probably why Fan Ye signaled him out as unique amongst his peers for strategically alternating between periods of remote engagement and full retirement. It is clear that a number of different kinds of inscriptions would have been commissioned for a celebrated figure like Chen Shi. Cai Yong's inscription recounts the significance of Chen Shi's life and death within the context of his peer group. We might guess that the *Analepts* would feature prominently in an inscription praising the upright conduct of a gentleman born in an age unfit to employ his talents. The sheer density of quotations from this text in the opening section of the inscription invites a more sustained consideration of the analogy Cai Yong is drawing in this inscription between Confucius and Chen Shi. To give the reader a sense of this density, I have bolded direct quotations from Classics which describe Confucius or in which Confucius or one of his students describes a cultivated gentleman.

含元精之和，應期運之數。兼資九德，摠脩百行。於鄉黨則恂恂焉，彬彬焉，善誘善導，仁而愛人，使夫少長咸安懷之。其為道也，用行舍藏，進退可度，不徼訐以干時，不遷貳以臨下。¹²⁸

He held within him the harmonies of the “primal essence” and came in accordance with the fixed cycle of fate.¹²⁹ He held the “nine virtues” in combination, and comprehensively cultivated the “hundred modes of good conduct.”¹³⁰ **“In his home village, earnest and respectful”** was he, **“refined and balanced.”**¹³¹ He **“excelled at guiding people”**¹³² and was **“skilled at showing them the way,”**¹³³ he was **“humane”** in **“showing favor toward others.”**¹³⁴ He **“made both the young and the elderly feel at ease and cherished.”**¹³⁵ As for his carrying out the way, “when

¹²⁷ See *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990), 158–9.

¹²⁸ *Cai Zhonglang wenji*, 2.14, *Cai Yong biannian ji*, 375,

¹²⁹ According to the Li Shan commentary, men fit to be rulers contain the “primal essence” in their persons. See *Wen xuan* 58.801. The “cycle of fate” referred to here is thus presumably the period of 500 years mentioned by Mengzi between the appearance of kings during which only worthies can appear.

¹³⁰ The Nine Virtues are listed in the “Gao yao mo” 皋陶謨 chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 as a series of paired opposites. Noble character was defined by the ability to hold these seemingly incompatible traits together.

¹³¹ According to *Analepts* 10.1, “In his home village, Confucius was earnest and respectful” 孔子於鄉黨，恂恂如也。In *Analepts* 6.18, Confucius says that “when outward patterning and raw substance enter into a refined balance, that person is a cultivated gentleman” 質勝文則野，文勝質則史。文質彬彬，然後君子。

¹³² In *Analepts* 9.11, Yan Yuan 顏淵 says that Confucius “excels at guiding others” 善誘人。

¹³³ In *Analepts* 12.23, Zigong 子貢 asks about “friendship” (*you* 友) and Confucius responds “wholeheartedly admonish them and skillfully direct them” 忠告而善道之。

¹³⁴ In *Analepts* 12.22, Confucius defines “humaneness” (*ren* 仁) as “showing favor toward others” (*ai ren* 愛人)。

¹³⁵ In the midst of a conversation about “commitments” (*zhi* 志), Zilu 子路 asks Confucius about his. Confucius replies “As for the elderly, to put them at ease. As for friends and acquaintances, to establish trust. As for the young, to cherish them.” See *Analepts* 5.26.

employed, he set about his duties and when rejected, he hid himself away.”¹³⁶ “His way of advancing and retreating can serve as a guideline.”¹³⁷ He did not “pilfer” [the thoughts of others] or “divulge” [secrets] so as to seek the favor of the age.¹³⁸ He neither “shifted” [his anger] nor did he “twice” [err] in supervising inferiors.¹³⁹

The text begins by placing Chen Shi’s birth in the cosmic cycle of sages and worthies. Like Confucius, he is made of the stuff of sages but has emerged at a moment when these virtues can only be expressed in the role of teacher. Many Eastern Han stele inscriptions move between stock eulogistic phrases and classical allusions or quotations. The deceased are praised with reference to a variety of classical models. The traits they possess as filial sons, as officials, as parents, as husbands reflect their lifetime apprenticeship to the Classics. But they are not typically treated as fully identified with those models. In the opening section of this stele inscription, Cai Yong comes as close as it is possible to get to writing about Chen Shi’s character entirely in the language of the *Analects* and of Confucius and his students. Chen Shi’s embodiment of the exemplary patterns of the past is communicated in the very form of the text. He appears here as a kind of living latticework of these texts. *Wen* as exemplary or antique modes of comportment and *wen* as texts through which these models become accessible to students completely coincide. The middle section of most stele inscriptions is concerned with the deceased person’s official career. After a few lines on Chen Shi’s posts prior to the Partisan Proscriptions, Cai Yong masterfully shifts to dwell on the incongruity of the sagely patterns Chen Shi embodied in his person and the worldly patterns, in the literal sense of the insignia and garments of office, he is offered and refused to accept when he became eligible to return to office after the Proscription was lifted.

及文書赦宥，時年已七十，遂隱丘山，懸車告老，四門備禮，閑心靜居。大將軍何公，司徒袁公，前後招辟，使人曉喻，云欲特表，便可入踐常伯，超補三事，紆佩金紫，光國垂勳。先生曰：「絕望已久，飾巾待期而已。」皆遂不至。¹⁴⁰

When an official decree pardoned him, he was already seventy years old, so consequently he secluded himself in the hills and mountains, hung up his carriage and announced his old age [i.e. his retirement]. Men of the four quarters observed all of the appropriate rituals, but he set his mind at ease and serenely dwelled. Grand Commandant Lord He [Jin 何進 (d. 189)] and Minister of Instruction Lord Yuan [Wei 袁隗 (d. 190)] summoned him for appointments one after another,

¹³⁶ In *Analects* 7.11, Confucius describes what Cai Yong here calls his “Way” to Yan Yuan, “When employed I set about my duties and when rejected I hide myself away” 用之則行，舍之則藏。

¹³⁷ This is one of the many traits Confucius uses to describe a “filial” person. See *Xiaojing zhushu* 孝經注疏, comm. Li Longji 李隆基, subcomm. Xing Bing 邢昺, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 comp. and ed. by Ruan Yuan 阮元, modern ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤 et al. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 5.42.

¹³⁸ In *Analects* 17.24, Confucius asks Zigong what he despises (*wu* 惡) and Zigong replies, “I despise those who pilfer the thoughts of others but are taken to be wise; I despise those who are not yielding but are taken to be valorous; I despise those who divulge secrets but are taken to be upstanding” 惡徼以為知者，惡不孫以為勇者，惡訐以為直者。

¹³⁹ In *Analects* 6.3, Confucius is asked which of his students is “fond of learning (*haoxue* 好學). He replies, “Yan Hui was fond of learning. He did not shift his anger, nor did he twice err.” 有顏回者好學，不遷怒，不貳過。

¹⁴⁰ *Cai Zhonglang wenji*, 2.14, *Cai Yong biannian ji*, 375.

and dispatched others to persuade him to see the light, saying that they wished to go out of their way to present him (honors), so that straightaway he would be permitted to mount to the position of regular attendant,¹⁴¹ and then, bypassing the normal sequence, fill the post of one of the Three Excellencies, be tasseled and girdled with a gold seal and a purple sash, to glorify the realm and pass on meritorious deeds. The gentleman said, “I have given up all hope already for a long time, I don my head-cloth and wait for my appointed time and that is all.” And so, in all such cases thenceforth, he did not go to take the appointments.

In this section of the inscription, Cai Yong traces what amounts to a kind of anti-career. We are told what posts Chen Shi refused to hold, what honors he refused to take, what garments he refused to wear. Chen Shi’s white head-cloth—already a standard outward sign of reclusion in this period—functions as a kind of official cap in the negative. Chen Shi is a kind of uncapped official or *suguan* 素官 in the same way that Confucius was an uncrowned king (*sunwang* 素王). In the aftermath of his death, his status outside of the order of Confucian officials is confirmed.

大將軍弔祠，錫以嘉謚，曰：「徵士陳君，稟嶽瀆之精，苞靈曜之純。天不慙遺老，俾屏我王，梁崩哲萎，于時靡憲。搢紳儒林，論德謀迹，謚曰文範先生。」傳曰：「郁郁乎文哉。」書曰：「洪範九疇，彝倫攸敘。」文為德表，範為士則，存誨沒號，不亦宜乎！¹⁴²

The Grand Commandant [He Jin] offered condolences and a sacrifice, bestowing upon [Chen Shi] a fine posthumous title. He said, “The summoned gentleman Lord Chen embodied the essence of the marchmounts and waterways, he held within him the purity of the potent effulgence.¹⁴³ But heaven has not spared to leave this Elder gentleman, to cause him come and be a protector of our King. ‘This pillar has collapsed, this wiseman has wilted,’¹⁴⁴ so that in this moment we are without a standard. Upright officials and scholars discussed his virtue and considered his traces and have given him the posthumous title Master “Model of Refinement.” The tradition¹⁴⁵ says, “Splendidly refined is pattern (*wen*) indeed!”¹⁴⁶ The *Documents* says, “The Grand Exemplar’s nine domains, constant norms which order [the world].”¹⁴⁷ “Patterned refinement” is the external manifestation of virtue, a “model” serving as the standard of the scholar officials. While alive, he instructed and in death he will be called by such a title, is this not fitting?

¹⁴¹ The Li Shan commentary to the *Wen xuan* cites Ying Shao’s 應劭 *Hanguan yi* 漢官儀 which says that *changbo* 常伯 is an archaic term for the honorary position of “palace attendant” (*shizhong* 侍中). See *Wen xuan* 58.802.

¹⁴² *Cai Zhonglang wenji*, 2.14, *Cai Yong biannian ji*, 375–6.

¹⁴³ The Li Shan commentary cites the belief preserved in Han-era apocrypha that the Five Marchmounts or sacred peaks are responsible for producing the essence embodied by living sages. Numinous Sparkler is here a reference to Heaven.

¹⁴⁴ The “Tang gong” 檀弓 chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記 records Confucius singing this line in reference to himself.

¹⁴⁵ The *Analects* are here referred to as a “tradition” (*zhuan* 傳).

¹⁴⁶ In *Analects* 3.14 Confucius says “The Zhou surveyed the previous two eras; splendid indeed are its patterns. I follow Zhou” 周監於二代，郁郁乎文哉！吾從周。

¹⁴⁷ In the “Hong fan” 洪範 [Great Plan] of the *Shangshu* 尚書, the “plan” itself is described in these terms.

Chen Shi's death mirrors the death of Confucius: he leaves the world without a living standard but, through the action of his posthumous title and legacy, his life will have the status of a model. In the closing section, this becomes even more explicit.

峨峨崇嶽，	Towering lofty and severe are the exalted marchmounts!
吐符降神。	They send forth auspicious omens and bring down spirits. ¹⁴⁸
於皇先生，	Oh, this august teacher of ours!
抱寶懷珍。	He embraced treasures and held jewels within.
如何昊穹，	Why oh bright Heaven,
既喪斯文。	Are we now bereft of “this exemplary pattern”?
微言圯絕，	His subtle words are ruined and cut off,
來者曷聞。	And those who come later, how will they hear them?
交交黃鳥，	“Keeaw keeaw” cries the yellow bird,
爰集於棘。	As it perches on the buckthorn.
命不可贖，	His life cannot be ransomed,
哀何有極。	And our grief, how can it ever come to an end? ¹⁴⁹

The imagery here tracks very close to Sima Qian's account of Confucius' response to the capture and killing of the *lin* 麟 creature in the “Hereditary House of Confucius” (“Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家) in the *Shiji*. A number of versions of the story of the capture of the *lin* exist. Martin Kern has pointed out that Sima Qian's version makes the most explicit connection between the capture of the *lin* and Confucius' decision to write the *Chunqiu* 春秋 as a way of communicating both his Way and something like his own *personal* legacy to future generations.¹⁵⁰ Because Confucius knows that the *lin* will only appear when a sage is preparing to mount the throne and the other omens, such as the resurfacing of the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Documents, have not accompanied the appearance of the *lin*, he concludes that no such king will appear. Confucius will not live to see his Way put into practice in the world. Confucius' status as a sage is only known to Heaven. Cut off from communication with his contemporaries, he will have to become the sole author of a text that will communicate his person and his Way to future generations. The rhetoric governing the “application” of this story to Chen Shi's case in Cai Yong's stele inscription is highly flexible. As in Sima Qian's account, Heaven inexplicably deprives the world of a man fit to rule in the person of Chen Shi. This raises the question of how Chen Shi's “subtle words,” which are also the subtle words of this inscription, will be communicated to future generations. For Cai Yong, Chen Shi's death is the omen that necessitates the production of a text. Thus, although the formal rhetoric requires him to say that Chen Shi, as the embodiment of exemplary patterns, has perished, “these patterns” live on in the very text of the stele inscription itself which has so meticulously woven the patterns of the Classics into its account of his life. We should note too the interplay of different media of *wen* in the image taken from “Huang Niao” 黃鳥 [Yellow

¹⁴⁸ “Song gao” 崧高 [Towering and Lofty] (Mao #259) refers to the sacred peaks as “bringing down spirits” that then give birth to sages.

¹⁴⁹ *Cai Zhonglang wenji*, 2.14, *Cai Yong biannian ji*, 376.

¹⁵⁰ See “Kongzi as Author in the Han,” in *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*, eds. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 268–307.

Bird] (Mao #131).¹⁵¹ According to the Mao tradition, this Ode is sung by the people of Qin as they witness the execution of Lord Mu's 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE) ministers in a gruesome spectacle of co-burial. The inexplicable cruelty of Heaven in this moment is conveyed by the appearance of a yellow bird, which lands on a plant whose name rhymes with the name of the next minister to be executed. The first stanza runs as follows:

交交黃鳥，	“Keeaw keeaw” calls the yellow bird, ¹⁵²
止于棘。[krək]	As it stops on the buckthorn.
誰從穆公，	Who will follow Lord Mu to his grave?
子車奄息。[sək]	Ziju Yanxi.
維此奄息，	Ah, this Yanxi.
百夫之特。	Outstanding among many men.
臨其穴，	Looking down into the burial pit,
惴惴其慄。	We shiver uncontrollably with fear.
彼蒼者天，	That blue thing, Heaven,
殲我良人。	It annihilates our finest men.
如可贖兮，	If only he could be ransomed,
人百其身。	A hundred men for his life.

Life and fate (*ming* 命) and name and legacy (*ming* 名) coincide at the moment of death in this song. We might say too that the outcry (*ming* 鳴) which comes in the form of the song which names these men and mourns the loss of their lives brings life and legacy into relation for an implied audience. Indeed, in Zheng Xuan's reading, the song mourns the injustice of talented men who like the yellow bird are denied the protection of their lord (represented by the bush) and asked instead to take their own lives. If we understand the song as sung in some sense at the moment of each retainer's death, we might say that the passage of the twittering bird from bush to bush transmits their legacy by inspiring a rhyming outcry on the part of those witnessing the spectacle in the medium of song. In the context of the stele inscription, it is the stone itself, written on behalf of all those who mourned Chen Shi's death, that names him and describes his legacy to future generations. If we recall Kenneth Brashier's observation that many Eastern Han steles were intended to be read aloud by the visitors to the tomb, the crying of the bird acts as a figure for those who enunciate the text. It will now be in the form of this type of direct transmission from person to person through the medium of a text that “these patterns” will survive.

¹⁵¹ *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, comm. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, sub-comm. Kong Yingda 孔穎達, in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 500–2. I have also consulted *Shijing zhuxi* 詩經注析, annot. and comm. Cheng Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 500–3.

¹⁵² I follow a number of commentators in taking *jiao jiao* 交交 to describe the sound of the bird. This also seems to be the way the phrase is used in Cai Yong inscription. Zheng Xuan glosses this phrase as “the look of being small” (*xiaomao* 小貌). “Keeaw” seeks a middle ground between the sound of a sistrum's call and the Old Chinese pronunciation given by Baxter and Sagart of *[k]ʰraw. See William H Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (Cambridge, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 296.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the main thematic threads that will run through the remainder of the dissertation. Cai Yong's career will function as a template for understanding what was at stake for scholars in the early medieval period faced with the emergence of more author-centered modes of engaging with the texts and scripts of antiquity facilitated by the wider use of paper as an auxiliary medium of inscription. He responded to new features of the mediascape by engaging in a mode of textual production that embraced this more author-centric mode and yet remained suspicious of it. We can see in his use of textual media an attempt to forestall or counteract the damage being done by the centrifugal distribution of textual authority away from the places where it was most needed, which at the same time mirrored this very action of dispersion. For Cai Yong writing in the late 180s, this meant transmitting the patterns of antiquity through the medium of more fully "authored" texts of his "Treatises" and, I am also arguing, his stele inscriptions. Cai Yong's shares with Ruan Ji and Xie Lingyun a conception of individual authorship which sees it as a kind of emergency procedure. This chapter has also taken the first step toward reassessing Cai Yong's oeuvre in accordance with his own abiding concerns, again, as best we can reconstruct them. I have discussed texts or "sites" in which those concerns are most visible. For reasons of space, I have not treated his "poetic expositions" in this chapter. It is my hope that by examining Cai Yong's work from the perspective of his engagement with the most pressing issues of his political moment and the changes in the institutions and material forms of writing underlying and exacerbating those issues, those texts too might now appear in a new light.

Chapter 2 The Omen of the Lyric Self: Style, Repertoire, and Interiority in Ruan Ji's 阮籍 (210–263) "Singing my Innermost Cares" 詠懷

This chapter takes what may seem at first glance to be an abrupt turn to away from the abiding concern with the preservation of canonical ritual norms in a time of dynastic crisis covered in Chapter One to an examination the very different seemingly unrelated phenomenon of the emergence into prominence of a new kind of lyric poetry during the Three Kingdoms (*San guo* 三國) period (220–285). There is a surface-level comparison to be made between the properly lyrical outburst in the final lines of Cai Yong's "Chen Taiqiu bei" 陳太邱碑, which we saw wove together the death of a paragon of cultural refinement, the imminent collapse of the Liu 劉 ruling house, and the duty of the writer to transmit models to future generations and a the new kind of weaving together of canonical allusions and contemporary events in the *shi*-poetry of the Cao-Wei 曹魏 court, but our method requires that we move along the more solid connections that link the textual practice of one writer or group of writers to the next and not merely their ideas. In fact, Cai Yong does bear a kind of material and text-practical connection to the lyric poetry of the Wei dynasty court and to Ruan Ji 阮籍, whose pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry will be subject of this chapter. Two of the most talented writers from the period were Cai Yong's students: Chen Lin 陳琳 and Ruan Yu 阮瑀, the father of Ruan Ji.¹ A third writer, Wang Can 王粲, inherited all or a portion of Cai Yong's personal library and we can speculate that the presence in that library of texts of ritual and music were part of what qualified him to compose lyrics for the processional hymns of the Wei court.² Ruan Yu would not only have honed his writing with Cai Yong—he would later ghost-write letters for Cao Cao 曹操 while out on campaign—he almost certainly would have learned music or pitch theory and zither-technique with Cai Yong as well. It is not a stretch to guess that Ruan Ji's own fondness for music and for zither-playing, and perhaps even his playing-technique, can be traced back to Cai Yong's influence. In what follows, I will show that Ruan Ji shared with Cai Yong both a conception of the conservative role of literature in a time of widespread corruption and violence, that is, its duty to open channels through which it will be possible to remain in contact with antique modes of refinement, as well as a deep suspicion of the more author-centric modes of textual practice in his time. Like Cai Yong, he embraced individual authorship, and even something like individual style and an idiosyncratic symbolic universe, as an emergency procedure for rising above the fray to look back at the sages and immortal-beings of antiquity.

This type of revisionist reading is a daunting because it requires us to reconsider nearly all of the assumptions we have inherited from past commentators about what Ruan Ji was up to in his pentasyllabic poetry. The poems in Ruan Ji's "Singing of My Innermost Cares" are typically read as some of the first in which a poet can be seen breaking out of the anonymous lyric tradition to speak in his own voice precisely to denounce, albeit in highly coded language, the corruption of the Confucian tradition and the men scheming to overthrow the Wei dynasty; the intensity of personal suffering attested to in the poems points through the lyrical form itself to a quest for liberation in various "Neo-Daoist" alternative conceptions of ethical life.³ A number of assumptions underlie this

¹ *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, comp. Chen Shou 陳壽, comm. Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 21.600 4.

² *Sanguo zhi*, 21.597.

³ Here and in what follows, I am attempting to articulate underlying and often unstated assumptions guiding traditional commentaries on these texts beginning roughly in the Tang dynasty. This tradition is not monolithic, but the arguments tend to arise precisely on a common ground I am laying out here. For an overview of the

reading, nearly all of which turn out to be basically untenable. The first is that Ruan Ji wrote at eighty-plus pentasyllabic poems under the title “Singing of Innermost Cares.” This title is taken to signal that they are meant to unburden the poet of pent-up frustration or anguish the source of which is encoded in the language of the poem. They function as a set and so can be read a single composition with a kind of internal logic of symbols and recurrent themes. As such, they encode a critique of either 1) Sima 司馬 clan, evil usurpers of the Cao-Wei dynasty, to whom it is assumed Ruan Ji must have been loyal because of his father’s connection to Cao Cao or 2) the corrupt regent Cao Shuang 曹爽 and his clique or 3) both depending on what was happening at the moment he wrote the poem. Finally, Ruan Ji’s investment in this form (as the one it is assumed he preferred) signal the embrace of heptasyllabic *shi*-poetry as the form most suited to personal expression.

Scholarship on Ruan Ji’s poetry in the West has largely been carried out within these grooves. In his ambitious study of Ruan Ji’s life and career in which nearly all of Ruan Ji’s works are translated and commented upon, Donald Holzman credits Ruan Ji with “broadening and deepening” the formulaic and impersonal pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry of his time, opening up a space in it for political critique, philosophical reflection, but perhaps most importantly “personal realization.”⁴ For Holzman, Ruan Ji was torn between his support for the Wei dynasty (against the Sima clan) and a desire to flee from the dangerous intrigues of the Wei dynasty court.⁵ These contradictions led Ruan to “grope incoherently” in his literary works among the dominant philosophical traditions of his time (none of which satisfied him) in search of “some kind of religion... a new level of meaning in life.”⁶ Zong-qi Cai voices skepticism that Ruan Ji encoded direct references to current events in his poems and reads Ruan Ji as a “symbolist poet” whose goal was to “minimize referential function and maximize the connotative meanings of poetic imagery.”⁷ His poems nevertheless grants access, to a “introspective plane unknown to earlier poetic traditions.”⁸

The problems with such an approach to the poetry of the third century begin at the formal level. As I have already discussed in the Introduction, Stephen Owen has shown that poets in Ruan Ji’s time worked within an open-source repertoire consisting of themes, topics, and template lines. Perhaps his most provocative claim is that this was “not a referential poetics.”⁹ It pointed neither to concrete events and places in the world nor to idiosyncratic thoughts and desires in the poet. It was rather in the openness of the resources to manipulation that allowed to channel powerful emotions. In a brilliant and still unpublished master’s thesis, Yang Zhigang 楊志剛 goes some distance toward restoring Ruan Ji’s *shi*-poetry to the world in which it circulated. First “Singing of my Innermost Cares” is a generic designation used to label a kind of poem in the sixth century anthology *Wen xuan* 文選 and it was only after Ruan Ji’s poems appear under that heading that they come to carry the “title” “Singing of my Innermost Cares.”¹⁰ Moreover, there is no evidence that the eighty-two poems we now

main threads see Qiu Zhenjing 邱镇京, *Ruan Ji Yong huai shi yanjiu* 阮籍咏怀诗研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1980).

⁴ *Poetry and Politics: the Life and Works of Juan Chi (A.D. 210–263)* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 136.

⁵ *Poetry and Politics*, 17–33.

⁶ *Poetry and Politics*, 245.

⁷ *The Matrix of Lyric Transformation: Poetic Modes and Self-Representation in Early Chinese Pentasyllabic Poetry* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 306.

⁸ *The Matrix of Lyric Transformation*, 276.

⁹ *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 283.

¹⁰ Yang Zhigang 楊志剛, “Ruan Ji Yong huai shi kao lun” 阮籍咏怀诗考论 (Master’s Thesis, Beijing Normal University, 2008), 1–10.

read together as a set were circulated together as a unit prior to the Tang.¹¹ Finally the argument that Ruan Ji held the Sima clan in contempt for preparing and finally carrying out a coup simply does not hold water: in fact Ruan Ji seems to have enjoyed the protection of the Simas at various points in his career.¹² But the questions remains—and it is not a question the field has been able answer—how do we read poetry without recourse to historical circumstances or authorial intentions?

One possibility open to us is to look back at one of the earliest readings of Ruan Ji's "Singing of My Innermost Cares" series which has no stake in arguments about the emergence of an individual voice or breaks with tradition. On the contrary, it reads these poems as deeply in touch with the modes of expression codified in the *Odes*. This reading appears in *Shi pin* 詩, a text intended to establish a definitive ranking of poets in past age by the sixth century literatus Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (d. 518).

其源出於《小雅》。無雕蟲之功。而《詠懷》之作，可以陶性靈，發幽思。言在耳目之內，情寄八荒之表。洋洋乎會於《風》、《雅》，使人忘其鄙近，自致遠大，頗多感慨之詞。厥旨淵放，歸趣難求。顏延年注解，怯言其志。¹³

His style originates from the Minor Court Odes. Although his poetry lacks the artistry of carving insects, but as for his "Singing My Innermost Feelings" compositions, one can use them to mold one's spirit and express deep ponderings. The words are right there before the eyes and ears, but the sentiments are lodged beyond the eight wilds. Vast indeed is their concourse with the "Airs" and the "Court Songs." They cause one to forget one's profane and proximate [mind] and bring out [i.e. express] the far-off and the grand—it being the case that there are rather many deeply stirring phrases. His import was deep and unfettered, but as for its fundamental inclination, that is difficult to seek out. As for Yan Yanzhi's comments and exegesis, he was timid in regard to declaring Ruan Ji's intentions.

The language Zhong Rong uses in this comment to describe Ruan Ji's poetry is arresting. The other entries for poets in the highest grade (*shangpin* 上品) dwell almost exclusively on the quality of the poet's diction and the distinctive way their character shaped their poetic conceits. None say that a poet's writing can be used to "mold one's spirit (*tao xingling* 陶性靈). In fact, none of the other entries speak of using another poet's poems as a medium for working out one's own poetic mettle. Although each poet is assigned to a lineage leading back to the *Odes* or the *Chuci*, no other entry makes a point of returning to the poet's "vast concourse" with his stylistic lineage. These comments place Ruan Ji's poems in the same functional category as the *Odes*: they can be used as channels for the moral shaping of individuals. In his preface to his commentary on Ruan Ji's "Singing of my Innermost Care," Huang Jie notes that the assignment to the "Minor Court Odes" is not arbitrary, but calls out the role of his poetry in showing the breakdown of the repertoire in which it is written, "When the Court Odes are

¹¹ "Ruan Ji Yong huai shi kao lun" 13–18.

¹² "Ruan Ji Yong huai shi kao lun" 29–38. Yang is drawing on Sun Mingjun 孫明君, "Ruan Ji yu Simashi jitian zhi guanxi bianxi" 阮籍與司馬氏集團之關係辨析 *Beijing daxue xuebao* (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban) 39, no. 1 (2002): 78–83. It should be clear now from Qiu Luming's 仇鹿鳴 *Wei-Jin zhi ji de zhengzhi quanli yu jiazhu wangluo* 魏晉之際的政治權利與家族網絡 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015) that the image of the Sima clan as planning and then undertaking a coup entirely on their own behalf to the horror of onlookers is a confection of later historians.

¹³ *Zhong Rong Shi pin jianzheng* 鍾嶸詩品箋證, annot. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu suo, 1992), 165–170.

tossed aside the realm will tenuous. This refers to a situation in which no one applies themselves to the Court Odes [and so to refinement] and so the realm approaches termination.” 夫雅廢國微。謂無人服雅而國將絕爾。¹⁴ Huang Jie is right to leave the culprit open-ended. The “altered” (*bian* 變) “Minor Court Odes” are not always meant to respond to a particular political or moral transgression; they often respond to a generalized situation. The same is true of Ruan Ji’s poetics.

In order to give a more period-accurate account of his poetics, I will suggest we must read Ruan Ji’s poems against the background of the same changes in textual media treated in Chapter 1 as well as the discourse of character appraisal, which took speech, physiognomy, deportment, calligraphy, and literary writing as the outward signs of inner talent and cultivation. Both technologies facilitated the deeper identification of author and text, that is, of inner and outer dimensions of expression. I argue that many of these poems register in their very language and form the loss of the dynastic institutions of rites and music into which the singer could once have merged to praise the virtuous administration of the ruler or celebrate the comradeship of true friends. Precisely to the degree that Ruan Ji spoke in his own voice about his own fallen present, his poems were signs or omens that such a repertoire was in the process of breaking down. In the first half of the chapter, I trace the development of vocabulary for character appraisal from its beginnings in the late Warring States to its centralization and standardization in the Wei court during Ruan Ji’s lifetime and in the midst of a major crisis of dynastic authority. I then read two accounts of Ruan Ji’s bizarre somatic performances before those intent on reading his personality—vomiting blood after gorging himself on meat at wine at his mother’s funeral and keeping his eyes rolled back in his head when receiving unwelcome visitors—as pointed affronts to the normative discourse of personality appraisal. The disjunction of the interior and exterior of the body, of internal states and their outward expression, in these anecdotes can help us understand of Ruan Ji’s relationship to the textual repertoire he mobilized, in a similar way, to both mask and reveal his feelings. Finally, through close readings of five pentasyllabic *shi*-poems from the (retroactively constituted) series “Singing of My Innermost Cares,” I show in Ruan Ji’s determination to make himself legible as illegible an attempt to highlight a more general crisis of the legibility of canonically rooted literary forms when they have ceased to connect the poet to the lost world of antiquity and began to serve as a resume of the poet’s personality. I pay particularly close attention to moments in which textual or linguistic modes of expression are remediated into non-signifying modes such as bird song, music, and tears. In these places, Ruan Ji’s poetry both registers and resists changes in repertoire that have forced a deeper identification of author and text. The melancholy that subsumes Ruan Ji’s poetry is the melancholy of having been reduced to speaking in one’s own voice. In order to understand how this could be cause for melancholy in the first place, we must place *shi*-poetry back into an orbit in which its center of gravity is court repertoire and musical performance and recognize that *shi*-poetry as we know and study it is poetry that has taken form as a result of the loss of this center of gravity.

2.1 *Shi*-Poetry in the Wei dynasty Court

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I remarked on how cautious we must be when using sources from the latter half of the early medieval period to read sources from the first half of the period. For example, the “Preface” to the *Shipin* contains a fascinating genealogy of pentasyllabic *shi* poetry that proceeds on the assumption that the genre of *shi*-poetry is a matter of textual form and nothing else. For Zhong Rong a poem with five syllable units which rhymes every tenth syllable is a pentasyllabic

¹⁴ *Ruan Bubing Yonghuai shi zhu* 阮步兵詠懷詩注, annot. Huang Jie 黃節, in *Huang Jie zhu Han Wei Linchao shi liu zhong* 黃節注漢魏六朝詩六種 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 459.

shi poem. But if it turns out that the text in question is a script for musical performance, the text on the page can be broken up in any number of ways depending on the musical accompaniment. But by Zhong's time, it is generally thought that the musical repertoire for early medieval poetry had been lots—poems were words on paper and thus could be categorized according to purely textual-formal features. Modern scholars have tended to follow this textual-generic understanding of early medieval verse in their analysis.

There are three predominant ways of characterizing the early lyric tradition along these lines. The first is the traditional, genre-based evolutionary model. This approach argues for 1) the presence of both genuine and stylistically distinct “folk” *yuefu* 樂府 compositions and literati imitations of these compositions in the extant corpus of early lyric verse and 2) the gradual emergence of pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry, called at first “ancient poems” (*gushi* 古詩), as the ideal form of lyric expression in this period.¹⁵ Charles Egan has challenged this approach, arguing that there is no definitive textual evidence, and little to no stylistic or linguistic evidence, to support of the “folk” *yuefu* hypothesis and, moreover, no reason to think that literati in later periods were not capable of writing in registers we might now be tempted to construe as “rustic.”¹⁶

The second approach sets aside the question of origins and argues that the most salient feature of the early lyric tradition is its inter- and intra-textuality. According to Joseph Allen, the intertextuality of the *yuefu* corpus provided poets with the raw materials for the construction a different kinds of lyric personae “[freeing] the poet to speak in the voice of others, in a voice larger than the biographical self.”¹⁷ Although I agree with Allen's conclusions, his use of intertextuality as an analytical tool brings with it assumptions about texts that seem to me both alien to the period under examination and to the practice (still primarily oral) of lyric composition. The very notion of “a” text (as a unit) and “this” text (as an integral whole, not to be altered) arises very late and represents a drift away from the multiformity that characteristic of early lyric performance.

The third approach argues that most of the examples of early lyric poetry are best approached as snapshots of a fundamentally fluid poetic repertoire rather than poems by individual poets bearing some indelible stamp of their personality. Stephen Owen's *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* provides dozens of examples both of the fluidity of the lyric poetry in this period and the ways in which the later tradition fostered the illusion of stability in accordance with their own very different poetic practices.¹⁸ Owen's book demands that we teach ourselves to read early *shi*- and *yuefu* poetry without reference to stable notions authorship, of genre, and of the unit of the poem. My own approach proposes to extend Owen's treatment of this material. In Owen's reconstruction, the individual poet's use of the repertoire—his mixing and matching of a free-floating set of “topics” and

¹⁵ See Xiao Difei 蕭滌非, *Han Wei Liuchao yuefu wenxueshi* 漢魏六朝樂府文學史, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2011), 18–22, and Cai Zongqi, “Dramatic and Narrative Modes of Presentation in Han Yue-fuh, *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 44 (1996): 101–140.

¹⁶ Charles Egan, “Reconsidering the Role of Folk Songs in Pre- T'ang Yüeh-Fu Development,” *T'oung Pao* 86 (2000): 47–99.

¹⁷ Joseph Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry*, (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies University of Michigan, 1992), 236. Hans Frankel makes a similar argument emphasizing instead the ways in which the early lyric tradition furnished later poets with thematic templates and stock characters that would form the raw material for the development of a more personal poetics in later periods. See “The Development of Han and Wei Yüeh-fu as a High Literary Genre,” in Stephen Owen and Shuen-fu Lin, eds., *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T'ang* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 255–86.

¹⁸ Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

“themes”—is still tied to the aesthetic preferences of poet-performers in a particular period.¹⁹ The repertoire when it is working properly is delimited by the occasion itself, which is to say by the demands it makes on the poet. In the early medieval period, the poet responds to the occasion of, for example, the parting banquet by drawing on a repertoire and his performance will be judged on the basis of his aptitude for response. It is not until much later that he responds to the occasion by responding to the repertoire itself.

Toward the Jian'an 建安 reign period (196–220), when we begin to get a clearer picture of the various uses of *shi*-poetry at court, the term *shi* covers an extremely wide range of kinds of texts: the *Odes* themselves, the court hymns, processional, sacrificial hymns, that claim a direct filiation to them, the scripts for musical performance we call *yuefu*, the texts now called “ancient poems” (*gushi* 古詩), and the texts we treat as pentasyllabic poems. Yu Guanying 余冠英 (1906–1995) has even gone as far as to say we should think of *Shi* 詩 (referring to the *Odes*) and *yuefu* 樂府 as functionally identical even if there are good reasons for keeping them formally distinct.²⁰ Indeed, the label should not confuse us into thinking these various instantiations of *shi* are identical. They are best distinguished by occasion or site of performance.

At the top of the hierarchy of works that fall within the genre of *shi*-poetry Wei court commissions new hymns which are considered new versions of particular *Odes* tied to particular rituals.²¹ The *Odes* furnished the ideal models, and in many cases, the actual tunes and texts for the court banquet repertoire throughout the early medieval period. State banquets either implicitly or explicitly constituted as reenactment of the banquets immortalized in the *Odes*. Painting in very broad strokes, there are two main kinds of banquets in the *Odes* which served as templates for Wei court processional: those with a vertical orientation in the form of ancestral rites closely tied to the language of the “Hymns” (*song* 頌) section of the classic and one with a lateral or horizontal orientation (the lineage or state banquet) aimed at maintaining harmonious relations with the living members of the lineage, the extended family, and with neighboring lineages with whom one was making a military alliance for example, which was most often associated with the texts of the “Major Court Odes” (*daya* 大雅) and “Minor Court Odes.” Of course, as Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) has pointed out, the *Odes* repertoire was much more flexible in its deployment than its arrangement in the Mao *Odes* suggests and thus the banquet hymns were by no means limited to those explicitly set to accompany a banquet performance.²² It is crucial for us to work against our bias toward the kinds of *shi* poetry the Jian'an reign period is typically studied for, by forcing ourselves to recall that there was no higher venue for the classical learning and literary skills of a scholar-official than work on the state banquet repertoire. Wang Can, who is now remembered almost exclusively for his pentasyllabic poetry in the decidedly new vernacular of the Cao-Wei court, would probably have considered the processional hymns he wrote for the Wei court one of his greatest achievements.²³

¹⁹ Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 20. There is one exception to this tendency. In the chapter on feasts, Owen notes that there are essentially two registers for feast poetry, each pinned to the occasion on which it is performed. Owen, 204–5.

²⁰ “Yuefu shixuan xu” 樂府詩選序, *Han Wei Liuchao shi luncong* 漢魏六朝詩論叢 (Shanghai: Tangdi chubanshe, 1952), 9.

²¹ See Kevin A. Jensen, “Wei-Jin Sacrificial Ballets: Reform versus Conservation,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2012).

²² Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, “Shijing zai Chunqiu Zhanguo jian de diwei” 詩經在春秋戰國間的地位, in *Gushi bian* 古史編 vol. 3, ed. Gu Jiegang, Luo Genze 羅根澤, et al. (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe), 332.

²³ See *Song shu*, 19.534, 14.327.

Shi 詩 could also refer to less formal subset of Han banquet songs which purported to be based on regional folk songs gathered by the office of the Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府). These tunes were meant to accompany particular kinds of performance, choreography, and instrumentation; they achieved their unity in performance, not on the page. Such songs had no fixed text: stanzas could be inserted or removed at will as the performance dictates. Yu Guanying has compared cognate texts realized in different collections to show that the *Song shu* “Yue zhi” 樂志 [Treatise on Music] contains cut-and-paste scripts of this kind which have been cleaned up to align with the textual-generic criteria of pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry.²⁴ Yu reminds us that when *yuefu* were still being performed to music, melody and instrumentation, and dance choreography) took precedence over lyrics.²⁵ Sudden jumps between “scenes” are more easily handled in a musical performance; they are only jarring to us because we are reading a two-dimension script for a three-dimensional performance.

Shi-poetry could also refer to scripts for performance which carry the title of one of these “ancient” (meaning Han era) banquet songs, but could be filled in using a repertoire of stock characters, tropes, and phrases and then performed. This seems to have become particularly fashionable in Cao Cao’s court. There Cao Cao wrote banquet songs, called *shi* 詩, that were then immediately performed. “Whenever [Cao Cao] made new poems, he had them set to wind and string accompaniment, so that they all became musical pieces” 及造新詩，被之管弦，皆成樂章。²⁶ The texts produced by Cao Cao and those in his immediate orbit are distinguished by a genuinely new incorporation of contemporary events into the texture of pieces voiced by stock personae in language heavy with allusions to the *Odes*. It is important to remember, however, that form dictates content in these instances. The imposition of the musical form, diction, rhyme is brings the military campaign or the funeral service he is on into contact with the military campaigns of the *Odes*.

Yu Guanying has noted that the distinction between *yuefu* poetry and the oldest (pre-Western Jin 西晉 c. 266–318) members of corpus called “ancient poems” is likely the difference between *yuefu* poems that retained their tune titles during transmission and those that did not.²⁷ Stephen Owen has raised the possibility that it was only when the musical repertoire began to be lost that all these into a single genre.²⁸ Thus the loss of the musical form and with it an attachment to the court as a site of performance was paradoxically instrumental in causing the genre we now call *shi*-poetry to coalesce. In his work on the history of ancient Greek lyric poetry, Gregory Nagy has rather suggestively shown that the very concept of genre in the early Greek context arises as “compensation for a lost occasion.”²⁹ We might think of the fully textualized genres we encounter in the late medieval period as so many *fossilized occasions*. Nagy points out that one of the ways rhapsodes in the Greek context established continuity with current site and mode of performance and past modes and sites was by saying in the course of your song that you are *singing* even though you are chanting or reciting and by saying that you are *composing* even though you are reciting a well-established and consistent version of a poem. This sort of disjunction between text and performance can only be established with reference to

²⁴ Yu Guanying 余冠英, “Yuefu geci bingcou he fenge,” 樂府歌辭拼湊和分割, *Han Wei Linchao shi luncong* 漢魏六朝詩論叢 (Shanghai: Tangdi chubanshe, 1952), 26.

²⁵ “Yuefu geci bingcou he fenge,” 26.

²⁶ *Sanguo zhi*, 1.54.

²⁷ Yu Guanying, “Yuefu shixuan xu,” in *Han Wei Linchao shi luncong* 漢魏六朝詩論叢 (Shanghai: Tangdi chubanshe, 1952), 5.

²⁸ Owen, *Making*, 301–7.

²⁹ Gregory Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer: The Lyrical Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 9.

practices. We will see evidence in Ruan Ji's poems of just such a reference back to musical performance from the medium of the text.

2.2 Elite Capture: Character Appraisal and Recruitment

As the trend of the centrifugal distribution of textual and ritual authority away from court beginning in the late Eastern Han continued through the Wei, the production and circulation of literary works was taken up in tighter and more regionally interconnected networks of officials. Wang Can's career is proof that one way to move between regional courts through a reputation for extraordinary literary talent. Texts in the still very broad genre of *shi*-poetry joined other repertoires such as modes of conversation, painting, came to be seen as part of a portfolio which opened onto the fundamental dispositions, attitudes, and talents of the speaker or writer. Under the Wei, an attempt to was made to subsume these regional networks and the shadow recruitment system that had grown up within them bring them under more centralized control. This meant monopolizing the ability to appraise talent and assign it to particular functions within the imperial bureaucracy. Two intersecting system of character appraisal, one tied to official organs and one still operating in regional peer networks, operated side by side for most of this period. It is clear from a number of anecdotes in the fifth century anthology *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, that Ruan Ji knew he was being appraised by people intent on recruiting him to serve on their staff (something he wanted to avoid at all costs and for understandable reasons) and he made calculated affronts to those who read him. Some of his pentasyllabic poems contain affronts of this kind: they turn a medium used to peer into the person and into a non-communicating surface. In order to understand the play of interior and exterior in Ruan Ji's poetry we need to look back at one of the earliest formulations of a recruitment strategy that tried to link them.

2.2.1 Early Paradigms: the *Guan ren* 官人 corpus

It is often assumed that the production of texts detailing the analysis of character types for the purpose of recruiting men to the civil service arose in connection with the operations of the Han empire. In fact, the earliest stratum of texts which develop a terminology for reading character date to the late Warring States period. In a monograph and series of closely related articles, Matthias Richter has examined a set of parallel texts scattered throughout the received tradition he calls the *Guan ren* 官人 corpus.³⁰ It will be useful for us to consider the difference between the pragmatic schemas these texts develop for character appraisal and the more metaphysically robust schemas developed in the context of empire such as the *Renwu zhi*.

In some cases, *Guan ren* texts are written from the perspective of someone who must select people from a pool of potential candidates to employ in his administration. Often this takes the form of a dialogue between a King and a minister who presents the King with a method which will allow him to read external patterns of speech and behavior as manifestations of deeper personality types which are held to be more or less constant. Once the underlying type has been identified, the candidate's

³⁰ For the full analysis of the corpus see *Guan Ren: Texte der Altchinesischen Literatur zur Charakterkunde und Beamtenrekrutierung* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005). Richter has also discussed features of these texts in two articles: "Cognate Texts: Technical Terms as Indicators of Intertextual Relations and Redactional Strategies." *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 54, no. 3 (2002): 549–572 and "Roots of Ru 儒 Ethics in *shi* 士 Status Anxiety," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137, no. 3 (2017): 449–471.

future performance in office can be anticipated. These diagnostic rubrics often consist of numbered lists of techniques, and formulaic often partially rhyming descriptions of different personality types, each followed by a term in the form “This is what is called an X-type person” 曰 X 者也. In other cases, the dialogue format has been dropped and method has been folded into a discursive passage.

Using philological analysis of technical terms, syntactical formulae, rhyme, Richter demonstrates that this *Guan ren* corpus has several sedimentary layers. He argues the earliest layer consisted of technical manuals for selecting officials consisting of easily memorized rhymed formulae linking behaviors and aspects of outward appearance with types. He speculates that members of the lower nobility, the *shi* 士, in the late Warring States period produced character appraisal manuals in the hopes that kings could be convinced to use them to select officials, probably in response to increased chances for members of this class to move up the social ladder through appointments at regional courts. Not coincidentally, if you follow the instructions for selecting officials laid out in the manuals, you will end up selecting people who embody *ru* 儒 (Traditionalist or perhaps merely “scholarly”) virtues and ideal character traits.³¹ At some point, heavily redacted and unredacted fragments of these manuals were incorporated into texts such as “Wen wang guanren” 文王官人 [King Wen Selects Men for Office], included in the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 and “Guanren jie” 官人解, preserved in the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書, where they are recast as dialogues between figures of antiquity.³² In these dialogues, the narrow prescriptive advice of the manual layer appears now in the form of general, argumentative claims. Often the results this kind of redactive strategy are quite messy, with the text of the dialogue going into and then falling out of verse and rhyme. Richter suggests that as the position of scholar-officials changed, these texts were further redacted and rewritten as discursive essays meant to convey general principals of self-cultivation and Ru ethics. In the process, the descriptions of ideal personalities were transformed into prescriptions about what kind of person one ought to aspire to be.³³

Importantly, Richter does not posit a strict chronology for these phases: technical manuals surely continued to exist alongside these more systematic, more literary redacted versions; the reality is that those texts were not transmitted to posterity, probably because there was no reason to preserve such texts in writing over long periods of time. In another article, Richter shows that the further the material drawn directly from manuals was removed from its original context the more unintelligible it became to later communities of readers, who were not familiar with that context.³⁴ The text “Wen wang guanren,” which Richter argues contains some early layers, puts a premium on habit and spontaneous response. It develops a testing regime for seizing on these moments of contrasting vulnerability to make an assessment of a potential candidate for office. Here is an example:

省其居處，	Inspect his living arrangements,
觀其義方；	see whether he is righteous and upstanding.
省其喪哀，	Inspect him in loss and mourning,
觀其貞良；	see whether he is steadfast and good.
省其出入，	Examine closely his social intercourse,
觀其交友；	observe his friends and colleagues.
省其交友，	Check his dealings with colleagues,

³¹ Richter, “Roots of Ru 儒 Ethics,” 463–9.

³² Richter, *Guan Ren*, 305–330.

³³ Richter, *Guan Ren*, 16–17.

³⁴ See “Cognate Texts: Technical Terms as Indicators of Intertextual Relations and Redactional Strategies.” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 54, no. 3 (2002): 549–572.

觀其任廉。	See whether he reliable and incorruptible.
考之以觀其信，	Grill him in order to see if he is trustworthy.
挈之以觀其知，	Probe him to see if he is smart.
示之難以觀其勇，	Present him with difficulties to see whether he is brave.
煩之以觀其治，	Vex with tasks him to see if he can set matters straight.
淹之以利以觀其不貪，	Innundate him with advantages to see whether he is not greedy.
藍之以樂以觀其不窳，	Flood him with delights to see whether he does not let himself go.
喜之以物以觀其不輕，	Delight him with things to see whether he is not reckless.
怒之以觀其重，	Enrage him to see what he values.
醉之以觀其不失也，	Intoxicate him to see whether he does not lose decorum.
縱之以觀其常，	Give him free reign to see if he remains constant.
遠使之以觀其不貳，	Send him on a far-away assignment to see whether he is not duplicitous.
邇之以觀其不倦，	Keep him close-by to see whether he does not get sick of you.
探取其志以觀其情，	Probe his mind in order to see how things are with him.
考其陰陽以觀其誠，	Examine manifest and hidden in order to see if he is sincere. ³⁵
覆其微言以觀其信，	Take him up on his offhanded remarks in order to see whether he is trustworthy.
曲省其行以觀其備成，	Closely examine his actions to see whether he is fully equipped for the job.
此之謂‘觀誠’也。 ³⁶	This is what is called “observing sincerity.”

These tests look for the base materials that make up character by pushing the candidate in various way to see whether a surface-level trait will breakdown and reveal a more basic level. What kind of positive knowledge be gained in the course of these tests is not specified. In other words, the responses to these texts do not correspond to types. In other sections of the text, however, a more systematic relationship between inner and outer is mapped. Different qualities or tenors of voice are considered to register character traits.

誠在其中，	If something truly is inside,
此見於外；	It will be manifested on the outside.
以其見占其隱，	Use what he manifests externally to divine what he hides.
以其細占其大，	use his minute traits to divine his grand traits,
以其聲處其氣。	use his voice to settle his fundamental disposition.
初氣主物，	A Primordial <i>qi</i> governs creatures.
物生有聲；	Creatures are born and have a voice.
聲有剛有柔，	Among voices, there hard and soft.
有濁有清，	there are murky and there are clear,
有好有惡。	there are good and there are bad.

³⁵ *Cheng* 誠 is more than sincerity. It is something like purposeful integrity, a quality that emerges as a result of application of a discipline

³⁶ *Da Dai Liji jiegou* 大戴禮記解詁, ed. Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 10.188.

咸發於聲也。	All of these qualities are emitted in voice.
心氣華誕者，	Those whose disposition is showy and boastful:
其聲流散；	Their voice is fluid and diffuse.
心氣順信者，	Those whose disposition is meticulous and solid,
其聲順節；	Their voice is concordant and measured,
心氣鄙戾者，	Those whose disposition is swindling and perverse,
其聲斯醜；	Their voice is hoarse and ugly
心氣寬柔者，	Those whose disposition is magnanimous and tender,
其聲溫好。 ³⁷	their voice is warm and pleasing.

In lists like this, we see a shift in attention from the straightforward production of character in outward behavior to qualities whose only relation to character is that they originate within the body. There is an exact symmetry between inner and outer traits, with tenderness of character manifesting as warmth in the voice. Voice, facial coloring, and eyes are already isolated as interchange points between inner dispositions and contingent outward behavior. Voice and eyes, especially, would continue to be a privileged site for character analysis. Crucially, no underlying metaphysical system corresponding to cosmic patterns or metaphysical stuff undergirds these features. In both their original form and the redacted form as dialogues and essays, these texts could be used by anyone. The openness of this system would ultimately provoke some anxiety within the imperial system once an apparatus began to exist through which people to operationalize these kinds schemas in the form of recommendations.

2.2.2 *Talent is in the Eye of the Sovereign: Character Appraisal in the Wei*

During the wars that followed the collapse of the Eastern Han, the routinized system of recommendations at the local level seized up and appointments had to be made largely on the fly. Already dispersed networks of powerful magnates discussed in Chapter 1 could now draw talented men to their courts from all across the empire. Once the Wei gained control over the north and facilitated the Cao Pi 曹丕 ascent to the throne as Wei Wendi 魏文帝, it became necessary to take back control of the state's monopoly on talent. This led to three developments. The first was the establishment of the so called Nine Ranks and Upright Assessors System 九品中正制度, which because of its structure did very little initially to wrest back control of the appointment process for the central government.³⁸ The second involved the creation imperially commissioned collections of dossiers (zhuang 狀) of past worthies under Cao Pi's successor Wei Mingdi 魏明帝. Nagata Takuchi 永田拓治 that collections such as the "Twenty Four Past Worthies" 二十四先賢 and the *Hainei shu* 海內書 represent the first attempt to place the Emperor at the center (at least symbolically) of the

³⁷ *Da Dai Liji jiegou*, 10.190–1.

³⁸ See Zhang Xuhua 張旭華, *Jiupin zhongzheng zhi yanjiu* 九品中正制研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 232–62.

recruitment process.³⁹ The third was Liu Shao's 劉邵 (180 ca. 245) creation during Mingdi's reign, of a seventy-two part set of standards for recruiting officials (ultimately rejected) and a treatise entitled *Renwu zhi* 人物志. This treatise formulated a new system mapped character traits with reference to the Five Phases 五行 and transformed the recruitment process into a branch of cosmic resource management to be overseen by the emperor. For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on the contribution of the *Renwu zhi*.

Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893–1964) points out that the core argument of the treatise is that different inborn abilities and are talented in different ways therefore there must be a way to name these differences and link them to professions. In fact, the structure of the imperial bureaucracy reflects this insight by dividing up the various tasks of governance and distributing it among differently knowledgeable people.⁴⁰ The argument of Liu Shao's "Preface" is that Confucius prepared the way for Han bureaucracy by rating and ranking and classifying his disciplines; this set the precedent of rule by a sage who rules by personally matching (or rather overseeing a system identified with his person) which matches people with positions which exactly fits their person. Tang notes a number of unique features of the text. First, it put forward a metaphysical explanation for the relationship between inside and outside. Second, unlike earlier schemas, talents were classified and assigned to specific posts. Third, conversation and behavior are used in tandem in assessment because rifts are liable to open between substance and performance. Fourth, assessments err when confronted with limit cases and thus regular men must serve as the standard for evaluation. Fifth, at the limits (with geniuses of various kinds) the relationship between substance and appearance is hard to qualify. Sixth, a living sage (i.e. the Emperor) is the only person capable of evaluating talent because only in this way is it possible to recruit those more talented than average men. If average men were in charge, they would only be able to recruit average men. Eighth, it is acknowledged that the fate of the realm is tied closely to the recruitment of "outstanding bravos" (*yingxiong* 英雄), that is, people with extreme tendencies which can be only be balanced by the sovereign, who encompasses all possible tendencies. On the model proposed by the *Renwu zhi*, the sovereign governs without governing, he balances forces already in play.⁴¹

The *Renwu zhi* pays a more attention to eyes and vision that do most of the texts in the *Guan ren* corpus. During this period, Jiang Ji 蔣濟 (d. 249) wrote a treatise on the way the pupils functioned to reveal character entitled the 眸子論.⁴² Here is the *Renwu zhi* on the manifestation of the emotions through the eyes.

夫色見於貌，所謂徵神，徵神見貌，則情發於目。故仁目之精惏然以端；勇膽之精，曄然以彊。⁴³

Now complexion can be seen in outward appearance, this is what is referred to as the manifestation of the spirit. The manifestation of the spirit can be seen in outward appearance, it

³⁹ Nagata Takuchi 永田拓治, "Jyō to 'Senkenden,' 'Kikyūden' no hensan: 'Gunkokusho' kara 'Kaidaisho' he" 「状」と「先賢伝」「耆旧伝」の編纂：「郡国書」から「海内書」へ *Tōyō gakubō* 91, no. 3 (2009): 1–32.

⁴⁰ Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 3–4.

⁴¹ *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao*, 3–8.

⁴² *Sanguo zhi*, 14.452. For an application of this method see *Sanguo zhi* 28.784.

⁴³ *Renwu zhi* 人物志, in *Sibu congkan chubian* 四部叢刊初編, vol. 429 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1919–22), *juan* 1.26.

follows that sentiments emerge through the eyes. Thus, the essence of the eyes of a benevolent or kind person are conscientious and upright. The essence of one who is valorous and bold is shining and vigorous.

The use of the the protocols for evaluation in the *Renwu zhi* were never put into practice, at least not as they were envisioned in the text. Ironically many of these techniques for appraising character were applied by peers to each other. Li Wai-ye draws a distinction between early evaluative schemas which focused on the “moral core” of the human and those deployed in the anecdotes that fill the *Shishuo xinyu* which are made “on the basis of style, appearance, talent, verbal expressions, the expressive-affective powers of the qualities, and self-conscious ruminations on the evaluative act itself.”⁴⁴ She claims that “what is new here is a heightened self-consciousness about the act of seeing (its nature, functions, contexts, consequences).”⁴⁵ This new emphasis on vision brought with it a new term: *mu* 目. “The term *mu* implies visual focus, deliberation, and felicitous verbal expression that capture the essence of a person or a spectacle.” One way to *mu* someone was to describe them as a kind of landscape or inhabitable space.⁴⁶ We can see an example of this in the following anecdote:

裴令公目夏侯太初：「肅肅如入廊廟中，不脩敬而人自敬。」一曰：「如入宗廟，琅琅但見禮樂器。見鍾士季，如觀武庫，但覩矛戟。見傅蘭碩，江廡靡所不有。見山巨源，如登山臨下，幽然深遠。」⁴⁷

Pei Kai categorized Xiahou Xuan as follows: “It’s austere and dignified; as though one had entered an ancestral temple: there is no effort at reverence, but people become reverential on their own.”

⁴⁸ Another version says, “Xiahou Xuan is like entering the ancestral temple—glittering and brilliant—all one sees is ceremonial musical instruments. Seeing Zhong Hui [Pei Kai] said “it is like surveying the interior of an arsenal, one can only see spears and glaives.” Upon seeing Fu Gu, [he said,] “Vast and limitless,”⁴⁹ there is nothing he does not encompass.” Upon seeing Shan Tao, [he said,] “He is like climbing a mountain peak and looking down. Serenely remote—it is deep and distant.”

Here the cultivated bearing registers as an architectural form. Xiahou Xuan puts his guests in the ancestral temple as soon as they come into his vicinity. Zhong Hui puts them in the arsenal. Unlike the appraisals found the *Guan ren* corpus and in *Renwu zhi*, these evaluations do not directly reproduce

⁴⁴ “Shishuo xinyu and the Emergence of Aesthetic Self- Consciousness in the Chinese Tradition,” in *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*, ed. Zong-qi Cai, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 262.

⁴⁵ “Shishuo xinyu and the Emergence of Aesthetic Self- Consciousness in the Chinese Tradition,” 252.

⁴⁶ “Shishuo xinyu and the Emergence of Aesthetic Self- Consciousness in the Chinese Tradition,” 253.

⁴⁷ *Shishuo xinyu* 8.8. See *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋, comp. Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, comm. Xu Zhen’e 徐震堃 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 230.

⁴⁸ Xu Zhen’e notes that Pei Kai is riffing on a passage in the *Li ji* 禮記: “Zhou Feng said to Lord Ai of Lu, “In the ancestral temple and the altars of the earth, without being made to effect reverence, the people become reverential on their own” 周豐謂魯哀公曰：宗廟社稷之中，未施敬而民自敬。

⁴⁹ Xu notes that Pei Kai’s biography in the *Jinshu* 晉書 has *wangxiang* 汪洋 for *jiangqiang* 江廡 which he further takes to be *wangyang* 汪洋, meaning “vast and limitless.”

the character traits they describe. We might say that these represent good assessments, assessments which were taken to have gotten to the heart of the person. They have an air of objectivity about them and do not seem keen on instrumentalizing the assessment. When we turn to the anecdotes in *Shishuo xinyu* featuring Ruan Ji, we must assume that a different kind of reading is taking place.

籍又能爲青白眼，見禮俗之士，以白眼對之。及嵇喜來弔，籍作白眼，喜不懌而退。喜弟康聞之，乃齎酒挾琴造焉，籍大悅，乃見青眼。由是禮法之士疾之若仇，而帝每保護之。⁵⁰

Ruan Ji was also able to make his eyes go from black to white [i.e. roll them back in his head], and whenever he encountered men with a vulgar conception of ritual propriety, he would face them with white eyes. When Ji Xi came to offer condolences [after a death], Ruan Ji made white eyes at him. Xi was unhappy and left. Ji's younger brother Ji Kang got word of this and went to see him bearing wine and carrying a zither. Ruan Ji was extremely pleased and when he met him showed him the blacks of his eyes. From this point on, the men who concerned themselves with the rites and the legal codes loathed him as though he was their enemy, but Jin Wendi [Sima Zhao] would always protect him.

The conventional reading of this anecdote is that it was considered rude to refuse to meet someone's gaze by rolling one's eyes back in one's head. But we should remember that visits like the one Ji Xi pays to Ruan Ji were semi-public performances. Going to pay condolences to someone after a death in the family is hardly equivalent to "dropping in" but would have involved ceremonially appropriate exchange of words or tokens. Ji Xi wishes to be seen doing the ritually sanctioned thing to do on such occasions just as he wants to see how Ruan Ji receives him. Such calls could double as opportunities to test one's interlocuter, to probe their character. Although we must always be careful not to put too much interpretative pressure on the wording of a passage in the *Jin shu* 晉書, since its editors were particularly careful with their sources, it is interesting that Ruan Ji shows the whites of his eyes to "men with a vulgar conception of ritual propriety." This suggests Ruan Ji takes offense at men whose relationship to ritual propriety is fastidious for the sake of being fastidious. To recall the vulgar men of the Hongdu Gate Academy discussed in Chapter 1, these are men who ape or instrumentalize the rites. We should read Ruan Ji's gesture of rolling his eyes back in his head a refusal to be read. The pupils of the eyes, as we remember from the *Renwu zhi* and from contemporary treatises like Jiang Ji's *Mouxu lun* were seen as portals through which one could gauge the talents and propensities of the other person. To show the whites of one's eyes to a person who wishes to stage a performance of ritual propriety is to remain off the grid of high stakes social interactions. It puts an uncommunicating surface in place of a window onto one's interior, one which will reflect the disingenuousness of the caller back at him. We the mirror reverse of this refusal of access to an interior by which one could be known in another anecdote, this time from the *Shishuo xinyu*.

阮籍當葬母，蒸一肥豚，飲酒二斗，然後臨訣，直言「窮矣」！都得一號，因吐血，廢頓良久。⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Jin shu* 晉書, comp. by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 19.1361.

⁵¹ *Shishuo xinyu* 23.9. See *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, 393.

When Ruan Ji was about to bury his mother, he steamed a fat suckling pig and drank two dippers of wine. Afterwards when he was on the point of saying his formal farewell, he cried, “It has come to an end!”

This kind of behavior is typically read as a straightforward violation of the prohibition on eating rich foods and wine in the period following the death of a parent. It is assumed that Ruan Ji wants to show his contempt for the constraints imposed on natural human emotion by ritual as such. There are number of anecdotes surrounding Ruan Ji in which he deliberately violates ritual protocol in ways seemingly designed to shock. His close friend Pei Kai excused these violations by drawing a distinction between those who dwell within the ceremonies and ritual codes and those, like Ruan Ji, who are “people who exist beyond the confines of the world” (*fangwai zhi ren* 方外之人).⁵² Pei Kai’s suggestion is that Ruan Ji has an entirely different ritual vocabulary, which must be interpreted in contradistinction to the canon of rites. The notion that Ruan Ji’s violations are coherent if viewed from the correct perspective can help us unpack this rather graphic performance of mourning. Blood is the immediate, pre-social relationship of parent and offspring flesh and blood (*gurun* 骨肉). Vomiting forth the very substance of that relation in place of the formal words of farewell ironizes conventional ritual expression which seeks to give an external form to our deepest feelings of loss and heartbreak. Ruan Ji has embodied (*ti* 體) the ritual so fully that his “violation” of the rules expresses the kind primordial affective core that the accepted ritual has surrounded and obscured like a crust. Those who would make a show of being in obsequious compliance with the letter of the law will be revealed as inauthentic. If rituals are taken to be the socially acceptable tokens of inner states, this performance shows such a currency to be worthless. It rather gruesomely moves the relationship of mother and child, which is that of sharing the same body, from within the body out into public view. The mourning rites exist to signify the depth of this relationship through an abstract and arcane system of symbols. This system has lost its reference point in human emotion and embodied experience. In this scene, Ruan Ji substitutes an index, in the Peircean sense of a thing which is its own sign. Here is the literal depth of my sadness. In the following section, I will argue that in at least some of Ruan Ji’s pentasyllabic poems, we can see a parallel attempt to bring something into legibility as illegible in a way that points to the absence of the felicity conditions for that legibility.

2.3 Strategies of Remediation: Music, Tears, and Birdsong in “Singing My Innermost Cares” 詠懷

One of the most striking features of Ruan Ji’s pentasyllabic poetry is his use of a shared repertoire of conventional images and formulas meant to facilitate the communication of an intention and simultaneously withhold the full communication of that intention. Often this is done by changing the medium in which the intention will be communicated from a signifying one (i.e. text, language) to a one which does not signify linguistically (i.e. music or birdsong). This operation has two functions in the poems analyzed below, though not all poems utilize both functions. First, it draws attention to the fact that something cannot be said in the manner of the *Odes*, by showing not telling that something is out of joint. This is what happens in #1 and #9 below. It can also raise what would normally be a straightforward signifying intent up to a higher and more transformative (in the literal sense) medium affiliated with lost modes of communication such as ancient musical repertoires. This is what happens

⁵² *Jin shu*, 19.1361.

in #22. Ironically, the more intently intent is withheld, the more usual sequences are scrambled, the more we are liable to sense the presence of a unique person behind the text.

2.3.1 “Singing of my Innermost Cares” #1 夜中不能寐⁵³

夜中不能寐，	In the middle of the night, I cannot sleep,
起坐彈鳴琴。	I sit up to pluck the singing zither. ⁵⁴
薄帷鑒明月，	The thin bed canopy reflects the bright moon, ⁵⁵
清風吹我襟。	A brisk wind blows my lapels. ⁵⁶
孤鴻號外野，	A lone swan howls in the wilds, ⁵⁷
翔鳥鳴北林。	Soaring birds cry out in the northern woods. ⁵⁸
徘徊將何見，	Pacing back forth—what did I expect to see?
憂思獨傷心。	These vexed thoughts injure my heart alone. ⁵⁹

Although we cannot guarantee that this poem was intended to be placed first in the series of poems titled “Singing of my Innermost Cares” or, indeed, if it was intended to be read as part of a series at all, we can see why it was its position at the head of this group in all extant editions beginning (for us) with the *Wen xuan* makes a kind of sense. It is clear that for early readers, this poem functioned as kind of an introduction to the way the poetic repertoire will be used in the other poems in the series.

⁵³ Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, comp. by Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 496. Ruan Bubing *Yonghuai shi zhu* 阮步兵詠懷詩注, annot. Huang Jie 黃節, in *Huang Jie zhu Han Wei Linchao shi liu zhong* 黃節注漢魏六朝詩六種 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 425–6. Ruan Ji *ji jiaozhu* 阮籍集校注, annot. Chen Bojun 陳伯君 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 210–211.

⁵⁴ This couplet very closely resembles a couplet used midway through the second poem of Wang Can’s “Sevenfold Sorrow” 七哀詩. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 366. In his excellent analysis of what he calls the “grammar” of early classical poetry, Stephen Owen examines every poem from the early medieval corpus that contains an image of the speaker unable to sleep at night. These lines formed a “template” or “topic.” Once introduced, poets could move through a sequence of closely related templates (wind-buffed robe, pacing, stargazing, weeping at loneliness) just as Ruan Ji does in this poem. My notes below reproduce his findings. See *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 77–95.

⁵⁵ Moonlight shines through curtains in the opening lines of the nineteenth of the “Nineteen Old Poems” 古詩十九首. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 334.

⁵⁶ In a poem simply called “Yuefu shi” 樂府詩 sometimes attributed to Wei Mingdi 魏明帝 (Cao Rui 曹睿), the image of a breeze brushing the bed curtains immediately follows an image of moonlight pouring down into the room and disturbing the sleeper. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 418.

⁵⁷ In an “unclassified poem” (zashi 雜詩) attributed to Cao Pi 曹丕, a “lone goose” flies south in the night. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 401.

⁵⁸ Birds calling in the night was a common topic in opening couplets. Hawks call in the northern woods in the evening in the opening lines of one of the pentasyllabic *shi*-poems transmitted as correspondence between Li Ling and Su Wu. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 340. A flock of birds cries out at night in the opening lines of the “Long Song” 長歌行 attributed to Cao Rui. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 340.

⁵⁹ An untitled poem attributed to Ruan Yu ends with the speaker returning to bed and to his “vexed thoughts” (you 憂). See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 380.

As Stephen Owen has pointed out, and as should be clear from the footnotes I have provided to my translation above, this poem consists almost entirely of template lines with near exact parallels in the pentasyllabic poetry of the period. While it is true, pace Owen, that all of the pentasyllabic poetry of this period draws on a shared bank of themes and topics, this poem presents the most deeply grooved or traditional set of images imaginable. So generic is it, that it seems almost to be without positive content. Where our other received texts which deploy the topic of sleeplessness array other topics in a kind of narrative sequence that first locate and then moves the speaker through a unified space and time and a corresponding series of reflections, this poem is marked by a mysterious and evocative stasis in which the speaker says as little narrative momentum as possible. Whenever we expect a topic to be unfolded, we move instead to the next topic. I want to suggest here that the use of topics in this poem approaches a musical mode of expression. Moreover, the poem thematizes this merger of a signifying text assumed to convey the thoughts of the poet and its non-signifying musical accompaniment. This musical accompaniment then merges with the disturbed crying of the birds as they circle the moon. The distinction between interior states and external form at both the level of content and of form has broken down.

This poem can be distinguished from other poems from the period is the fact that we see effects before their causes. Often in poems on the topic of sleeplessness, we are told that it is the bright moonlight or the chilly autumn wind that is keeping the poet awake. That is the case here but we find out only in the second couplet. The speaker is pacing in front of the window with the usual cues that he is moving from one place to another. In the first couplet, the poet rises with something on his mind and then sets about strumming a “singing” zither. As soon as the song that is the poem begins, we are told that it is the zither that is singing or crying out on behalf of the poet. The zither acts as the conduit for the pent-up emotions that cannot find their way into words. Of course, since the poem is presumably sung to the accompaniment of the zither, we have a variation on the *yuefu* trope in which a song ends with the singer declaring that they will now sing a song. The repertoire itself plays the same role as the zither, providing a framework for expressing a state of mind that is both inside the poet and external to him, contained in the template lines themselves. The second couplet plays with images that depict the porousness movement across boundaries. The thin bed curtain captures an image of the moon shining through it, catching the light and letting it through into the bedchamber. The breeze also penetrates the poet’s robe. These movements from outside to inside which parallels the movement from inside to outside of the poet/zither player’s pent-up feelings.

In the third, the calling or crying of the birds crosses the threshold into the speaker’s bedchamber. Since the same word is used for both acts of crying out (*ming* 鳴) we get an eerie sense that the bird and the zither-poet are communicating with each other. The entire scene is made to cry out for and with the poet. Like the poet, these birds are sleepless too. They have been duped by the moonlight into thinking it is day. I have translated the seventh line as though it is spoken by the poet but it could just as well be attributed to the birds. What did they expect to find, waking in the middle of the night. The loneliness of that follows signals to the reader that they have not been let in on the cause of the sadness. The conventions would suggest that the poet is traveling and misses his friends and family but there is no explicit reference to this in the poem. The use of allusions and topics are semiotically much closer to melodies than they are to language. In the same way that a zither player can strum a few bars and instantly establish a mood and communicate something to his listener without referring to a specific event, the poem conveys a sense of seeping dread that is not located in any one place in

the scene. In some sense, once we realize this, the more heavy-handed reading which wants the “northern wood” and the “crying goose” to have explicit reference points in the contemporary moment becomes unnecessary.⁶⁰ Much like the “Minor Court Songs,” animals are used here to signal that the natural cycles are out of sorts but never through exactly symmetrical symbolic relationships.

2.3.2 “Singing of my Innermost Cares” #9 步出上東門¹

步出上東門，	I step out of the Upper East Gate,
北望首陽岑。	And gaze northward to the peaks of Mt. Shouyang. ⁶²
下有采薇士，	At its base are those bracken-picking gentlemen, ⁶³
上有嘉樹林。	At its top are groves of fine trees.
良辰在何許，	Auspicious times— when will they come?
凝霜霑衣襟。	Congeaed frost sticks to the lapels of my robe.
寒風振山岡，	The frigid wind buffets the mountain ridges,
玄雲起重陰。	Black clouds rise up in layered darkness.
鳴雁飛南征，	Crying geese set flight on a southward journey,
鷓鴣發哀音。	The cuckoo sends forth a mournful sound. ⁶⁴
素質由商聲，	Something pure and unadorned arises from these <i>shang</i> tones, ⁶⁵
悽愴傷我心。	Despondent and painful, it wounds my heart.

The opening lines of this poem interweave the *yuefu* topic of walking out of a gate to notice the graves on the outskirts with a much more precise reference point in space than would usually be expected. Even if we are not dealing with an exact geographical location here, the first line of the second couplet, in which the speaker “sees” Bo Yi and Shu Qi in the scene suggests that this is the site of the tomb mound mentioned in Sima Qian’s dramatic account of the story of the recluses in his “Biography of Boyi and Shu Qi.” The conventional move we expect in the second couplet is a reflection on mortality. We get that but in form of words that recall the song Sima Qian reports the pair to have sung before their deaths. The gist of their song, in which they realize that no felicitous moment will arrive, is entirely contained in this line. This is a common trope in Ruan Ji’s pentasyllabic poetry, one which we will see again in Poem #11 below. Landscape is crossed with text. The poet’s thoughts about a scene intersect with the thoughts conveyed by a text in the poem. This moment which is now shared across

⁶⁰ Holzman, *Poetry and Politics*, 229–32.

⁶¹ *Ruan Bubing Yonghuai shi zhu* 476–8. *Ruan Ji ji jiaozhu*, 240–7. The numbers given correspond to the arrangement of the series in Huang Jie’s edition.

⁶² Commentators have made an extensive but largely inconclusive attempt to figure out how the poet stepping out of Luoyang’s Upper East Gate can face north to see the Mt. Shouyang the recluses Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊 withdrew to live on in protest of the founding of the Zhou dynasty. If we keep in mind Owen’s dictum that we are not dealing with a “referential” poetics, the exact location of the poet ceases to be an issue.

⁶³ Bo Yi and Shu Qi refused the grain of the Zhou, choosing to gather and eat “bracken” (*wei* 薇). They starved to death as a result.

⁶⁴ The call of the cuckoo heralds autumn.

⁶⁵ *Shang* 商 is the musical pitch corresponding to autumn. At its root *su* 素 refers to white, unpatterned or unadorned silk. White is also the color of autumn.

the two spaces is interrupted by a seasonal motif of the creaturely response to the coming of autumn and the end of the year.

Just as the poet notices the frost congealing on his lapel the mountain top becomes obscured by dark clouds. The birds in the fifth couplet are only identified by their sounds, suggesting that they are obscured by the clouds. There is something more violent and foreboding in these images than we would be likely to expect in conventional autumn scenery. These clouds cut the poet off from the mountain and the meditation on “auspicious moments.” In fact, insofar as he stops being able to see, he also disappears from view. We are left in a world of darkness and mysterious sounds. Like the birds in Poem #1, these birds articulate something the poet is about to articulate. Here the crying of the birds breaks in on the poet’s attempt to articulate the nature of good and bad times for service. The disjunction of scene and meaning the poet experience is put in parallel with the completely natural articulation of the coming of autumn by the birds. They sing the pure white *shang* note of autumn because it is in their nature to do so and yet their singing wounds the poet. Where is the sadness of the sound located? Again, the natural world is made to resonate with what should be the inner state of the poet.

2.3.3 “Singing of my Innermost Cares” #22 夏后乘靈輿⁶⁶

夏后乘靈輿，	Xiahou [Qi] rode in the Numinous Chariot, ⁶⁷
夸父為鄧林。	And Kuafu became Deng Forest. ⁶⁸
存亡從變化，	Living and perishing accord with transformation.
日月有浮沈。	The sun and the moon have their floating up and sinking down.
鳳凰鳴參差，	The phoenix sings in the “jagged pipes,” ⁶⁹
伶倫發其音。	Ling Lun [created pipes] to usher forth their notes. ⁷⁰
王子好簫管，	Crown Prince [Qiao] was fond of panpipes and flutes, ⁷¹
世世相追尋。	In every age, people have sought to recover him.
誰言不可見，	Although people say it cannot be seen,
青鳥明我心。	The bluebirds understand my heart. ⁷²

⁶⁶ *Ruan Bubing Yonghuai shi zhu* 493–4. *Ruan Ji ji jiaozhu*, 287–9.

⁶⁷ According to the *Shanhai jing* 山海經, the immortal Xiahou Qi 夏侯啟 rides a chariot pulled by two dragons.

⁶⁸ In the *Shanhai jing* account, Kuafu pursues the sun and dies of thirst. His staff transforms into the Deng Forest. As we will see, the poem makes more sense if we take Kuafu to have actually transformed into Deng Forest through his staff.

⁶⁹ “Jagged pipes” refers to a wind instrument consisting of pipes cut at different lengths, often translated “panpipes.”

⁷⁰ The Yellow Emperor 黃帝 commissioned Ling Lun to take bamboo from the slopes of Mt. Kunlun 崑崙 and cut into twelve pipes of varying lengths to reproduce the notes of the phoenix bird.

⁷¹ The Crown Prince is Wangzi Qiao 王子喬. According to the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, he was originally the crown prince of King Ling of Zhou 周靈王 (575–541 BCE) before attaining immortality.

⁷² From her dwelling on Mt. Kunlun the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 sends bluebirds into the human world to fetch food.

This poem also deals with the relationship between the music of birds, in this case phoenixes, and the music of man. Unlike the proceeding poems, where the poet's song merged with the birdsong to become an omen-like indicator of a generalized disturbance, this poem links poem and birdsong to a higher register of communication, beyond language because it is beyond the categories of time and space. The reading I present here relies quite heavily on Huang Jie's understanding of the sequence of couplets—as readings go, his leaves little room for improvement. Xiahou Qi and Kuafu here figure as beings who beyond the cycle of birth and death, but who leave no traces in the human world. Xiahou Qi moves eternally through the sky on his dragon-pulled chariot, beyond human sight. Kuafu has transformed his entire being into a forest. The second couplet then pulls back to say that these modes are but two aspects of a single cyclical process. Like the two immortal beings, phoenixes do not leave traces (i.e. sing) in the world of men very often. But Ling Lun has invented pipes that capture their sound in a format that makes it accessible to humans. Crown Prince Qiao understands the link between the pipes and the phoenixes, which is to say, between the visible and the invisible. People pay cult to Wangzi Qiao and have for centuries. This is yet again, another mode of making what is invisible visible. Those who are truly in the know recognize that no matter how tenuous the trace left in the world, that trace contains the Dao of the entire sequence. The role of the bluebirds, couriers for the Queen Mother of the West, link the poet to Mt. Kunlun, site of celestial wanderings with immortals and goddesses. The communication network which begins with otherworldly beings and ends with the proximity of nonverbal communication is capable of passing through multiple mediators without losing its form. Of course, in the final lines of this poem what has been communicated has been withheld from the listener or reader. We could say that this shows us that the poem itself is conveyed by the bluebirds to make clear or transparent the speaker's mind. The text is accessing a capacity music, and sound, and song have to make direct contact. This is a capacity poetry in a certain register has access to by its very nature.

2.3.4 “Singing of My Innermost Cares” #11 湛湛長江水⁷³

湛湛長江水，	Deep and clear flows the long river,
上有楓樹林。	On it banks there are maple tree groves.
皋蘭被徑路，	Marsh lilacs cloak the footpaths,
青驪逝駸駸。	And jet-black tracers go galloping rushing away. ⁷⁴
遠望令人悲，	Gazing far into the distance makes one sad,
春氣感我心。	Spring vapors stir my heart.
三楚多秀士，	The three regions of Chu there were many outstanding gentlemen, ⁷⁵

⁷³ Ruan Bubing *Yonghuai shi zhu*, 480–1. Ruan Ji *ji jiaozhu*, 251–6.

⁷⁴ The first two couplets are very close to the closing section of the coda (*luan* 亂) of the song “Calling Back the Cloud-Soul” (“Zhao hun”) 招魂 in the *Chuici* 楚辭, as the shaman looks out mournfully over the landscape at the conclusion of a hunt. “Marsh lilacs cover the paths, this road must be slow-going. / Deep and clear, the waters of the river, above them are maples, / Looking to the ends of sight, one thousand li, it pains my spring heart. / 皋蘭被徑兮，斯路漸。湛湛江水兮，上有楓。目極千里兮，傷春心。魂兮歸來，哀江南！ There is a reference to “black horses” earlier in the coda.

⁷⁵ The three regions of Chu were traditionally Jiangling 江陵 in the south, Wu 吳 in the east, and Pengcheng 彭城 in the west. According to Huang Jie, “outstanding gentlemen” is typically a reference to the men the sage king Shun 舜 drew into his orbit as he plowed the hills beneath Mt. Li 歷山. Here though, with reference to

朝雲進荒淫。	But their “morning clouds” encouraged depravity and excess. ⁷⁶
朱華振芬芳，	Crimson flowers spread their sweet fragrances,
高蔡相追尋。	In Gaocai, they pursued one another. ⁷⁷
一為黃雀哀，	As soon as we begin grieve for one of these “yellow sparrows,” ⁷⁸
涕下誰能禁。	Who will be able to stop the tears from flowing?

It is possible to read this poem as Holzman does entirely through the allusions it makes to other texts.⁷⁹ In that case, we have a relatively straightforward warning about the dangers of excess possibly in connection with a contemporary incident in which some group of officials failed to heed the warnings couched in these texts. But it is crucial to notice that this poem, which is so closely interwoven with its intertexts, never moves entirely out of the register of describing a landscape. This poem induces a kind of double vision in which every feature of landscape elicits a text which warns of impending danger. Like the landscape of Mt. Shouyang in Poem #9, the landscape itself takes on the emotional coloration of the poet. The first two couplets are straightforward landscape description. They draw on the language of the *Chuci*, but there is nothing in them that demands a particular allegorical reading. This stanza depicts an excursion in the southland in exactly the conventional language one would use to describe one. The second stanza, consisting of two couplets, takes the image as a kind of prompt. It is at this point that the landscape intersects with its textual double in the *Chuci*. The speaker has, in a sense, been pursued textual hunting excursions preserved in that anthology. The gazing afar at landscape is now a gazing afar at a textual landscape. The disturbing agency of the landscape which triggers its textual doubles is figured here as the spring vapors which stir the heart or the mind. The speaker is stirred to recall the men who described the landscape in the language in which the poem now speaks. The morning clouds are also doubled, both the clouds of the “Gaotang fu” 高唐賦 and the spring vapors in the landscape. The final stanza returns again to landscape description, but the crimson flowers elicit the canopies of carriage on the pleasure excursions like the one at Gaocai in the midst of a which Marquis Ling of Cai was himself chased down. The tenth line is once again ambiguous: the men at Gaocai pursue each other in all direction but so do the flowers in this Gaocai. The doubled hunt at Gaocai recalls the story in which yellow sparrows do not recognize the danger they are in. The sparrows are introduced into the landscape of this poem both literally and figuratively, which is to say they have merged with their real counterparts and so elicit real tears. While tears that cannot be stopped is a standard device for bringing a poem to an end, their cause is typically clear. Here the events or sequence of scenes and reflections are suspended between repertoire and reality. Which yellow sparrows elicit tears? Like Poem #1, the conventional images are made to bear the full weight of communication and yet they communicate very little besides the fact that they cannot say what is behind the sequence of images or, here, textual associations. In a poem like this, the

the following line, it would be best to follow Li Zhouhan 李周翰 (b. 1223 CE) and treat them as men like Song Yu 宋玉 (ca. 319–298 BCE), who wrote scintillating poetic expositions for the King of Chu.

⁷⁶ In Song Yu’s “Poetic Exposition on Gaotang” 高唐賦, a nocturnal tryst with a goddess leaves only “morning clouds” the next day.

⁷⁷ In an exchange recorded in the *Zhangguo ce* 戰國策, Zhuang Xin 莊辛 admonishes King Xiang of Chu 楚相王 (r. 298–263 BCE) that his kingdom is in peril, comparing to situation to a sparrow oblivious to the hunter in its midst and to Marquis Ling of Cai 蔡靈侯 (542–530 BCE) who, in the midst of a pleasure excursion at Gaocai 高蔡 did not realize that he was at that very moment being hunted down by the King of Chu.

⁷⁸ The “yellow sparrows” are Zhuang Xin’s analog for all ministers who believe that their power and position will protect them from harm as they take their pleasure, eating fine food and wine.

⁷⁹ Holzman, *Poetry and Politics*, 32–3.

conventional closing image of tears can take on its full power. As a somatic phenomenon tears that cannot be stopped point directly and unambiguously to an inner state and yet by their very nature, they reveal nothing about that inner state. Like the blood in the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote and the crying of the birds in autumn they are index rather than a sign. Ruan Ji's shi-poetry too strives for a level of indexicality that would alleviate it of the burden of being a sign.

2.5 Conclusion: Ruan Ji's Poetics—The Melancholy of Speaking in One's Own Voice

This chapter has argued that Ruan Ji's poetry must be positioned within two transitional moments in the history of *shi*-poetry: the loss of the genre's center of gravity in the musical performance repertoire of the Han court which filiated itself to the *Odes* and the rise of a use of textual performance within practice of character appraisal which threatened to further sever the form from its roots in antique channels for cultivation. The larger context for this process is the gradual dispersal of ritual and textual authority as a result of the wider use of paper as a medium of inscription. Many of Ruan Ji's pentasyllabic poems register this process of deracination by transferring the text of the poem into other media in ways that pry apart author and text to allow other modes of expression to become available. Of course, this process is largely futile. The intensity with which evasive maneuvers are undertaken comes to have its own character. This brings us, in closing, to the fact that despite his pushing *shi*-poetry as far back in the direction of the canonical modes of expression in (especially) the "Minor Court Songs," which were fundamentally meant to register norms and the breakdown of norms not individual speakers, he has nevertheless been read as having pushed *shi*-poetry in the opposite direction, toward more personal, lyrical modes of expression. But as we have seen, speaking alone is a state the speaker in Ruan Ji's poems is reduced to. If a lyric self emerges here, it points to the absence framework within which it could articulate itself otherwise. As we will see in the next chapter the further textualization of the *shi*-poetry repertoire, alongside the emergence of new formats for organizing texts would gradually open up a space in which a textual legacy would become an option alongside other modes of transmitting ones legacy to posterity, but the melancholy of speaking in one's own voice would continue to cling to it.

Chapter 3

Banquet of One: Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) and the Early Medieval Anthology

Over the span of roughly a decade near the beginning of the fifth century CE, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) produced what his contemporaries could already recognize as some of the most stylistically unique pentasyllabic *shi*-poems ever written.¹ The arcane yet precise diction, the architectonic deployment of parallel couplets to depict landscape forms, the distinctively arch use of allusions to describe and reflect on his subjects simultaneously—these are just a few of the most striking features of the poetry that, according to one source, spread in manuscript copies so quickly that Xie’s fame “shook the capital region.”² In Chapter Two, we saw how Ruan Ji’s skewed deployment of highly conventional language and images produced a distinctive authorial voice indexed to the breakdown of those very conventions, their termination, both literally and figuratively, in the poet who has been reduced to a state in which he has no choice but to speak for and as himself. By contrast, Xie’s style stood out among the many poems in circulation at the time because, to an unprecedented degree, it used the generic conventions of *shi*-poetry to record the discrete experiences of a namable, knowable historical individual, one who occupied a particular physical place and station in the world in a manner he desired his readers to recognize as unmistakably his own.

Scholars have lavished attention on the connection between the emergence of this more personal style in the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420) and the invention of new schemas for conceptualizing the relationship between self and nature in the Daoist and Buddhist texts that served as the prompt books for “pure conversation” (*qingtán* 清談), a highly choreographed form of philosophical debate popular among educated elites in this period.³ Comparatively less attention has been paid to the question of

¹ For an illuminating discussion of fifth and sixth century readings of Xie Lingyun’s poetry, see Wendy Swartz, “Naturalness in Xie Lingyun’s Poetic Works,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70, no. 2 (2010): 355–386.

² *Song shu* 宋書, comp. Shen Yue 沈約 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.1754.

³ Modern scholarship on Xie Lingyun has focused almost exclusively on his role in the creation of so-called “landscape poetry” or “nature poetry” as J.D. Frodsham calls it in his influential study and translation *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh Ling-yün (385–433)*, Duke of K’ang-Lo (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967). Scholars have suggested three main sources of inspiration for Xie Lingyun’s landscape poetry. For its roots in traditional sources such as the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), see Wendy Swartz, “Naturalness in Xie Lingyun’s Poetic Works,” and Francis Westbrook “Landscape Transformation in the Poetry of Hsieh Ling-yün,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100, no. 3 (1980): 237–54, and K’ang-i Sun Chang, *Six Dynasties Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 47–78. For its roots in Buddhist thought, see Richard Mather “The Landscape Buddhism of the Fifth-Century Poet Hsieh Ling-yün,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 18 (1958–59): 67–79, Xiaofei Tian *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth Century China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 118–41 and Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 321–368. For its roots in Daoist conceptions of nature see Obi Kōichi 小尾郊一, *Sha Reibun—kodoku no sansui shijin* 謝靈運—孤独の山水詩人 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1983), 253–332. Harrison Huang points out the anachronism of the “landscape poetry” label and the many blind spots it has created in our vision of Xie Lingyun’s poetic project in his “Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze: The Landscape Poetry of Xie Lingyun” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010). Since Huang’s reading of Xie’s *shi*-poetry is foundational to the account I offer in this chapter, I discuss his argument in more detail below. Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 has argued persuasively that “pure conversation” and “dark learning” (*xuanxue* 玄學) were primarily preoccupied with finding deep resonances between the Confucian classics, the *Laozi* 老子 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and

why a person of Xie Lingyun's elite status and means undertook to fashion such a distinctive poetic personality for himself in the first place. sixth century readers took such a project for granted because it seemed to them to contain the seeds of their own use of pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry. According to Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (d. 518), for example, every young man in the princely salons of the Liang dynasty imitated the aristocratic gusto and crackling turns of phrase of Xie Lingyun's excursion poems to the end of honing their own styles.⁴ But if we approach Xie's verse through a later poetic practice in relation to which his style had become something of an institution, we will fail to discern the unusual direction Xie took in then still marginal form of the pentasyllabic *shi*-poem. We will also miss the presence in his poetry of some of the same anxieties and misgivings about the act of speaking in one's own voice I argued can be detected in Ruan Ji's poems in the same form in Chapter Two, anxieties which had dissipated considerably by the middle of the sixth century. If we want to understand why Xie Lingyun wrote the way he did in the verse forms he chose, we must ask what prevented Xie from simply retiring to his palatial family estate in the turmoil following the founding of the Liu-Song dynasty 劉宋 (420–479) to enjoy life far from the "dust and noise" of the court and write the kind of anodyne occasional verse his friends and relatives regularly exchanged with him? The answer for some might be that he sought an outlet for his frustration in the face of the factional struggles that blocked his ambitions and claimed the lives of his political allies in a more fully self-expressive style of *shi*-poetry. This answer appeals to something like the lyrical version of historical necessity: the history of poetry as a series of paroxysms in which poets shatter one set of conventions after another in an asymptotic approach to authentic self-expression. But consider that Xie Lingyun's contemporary and one-time colleague Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384–456) endured many of the same setbacks and humiliating demotions and yet what survives of his pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry lacks the fanatical attention to persona and personal style that characterizes Xie's verse. The intensity of Xie's self-fashioning remains to be explained. Nor, finally, has very much been written on how Xie's literary style could have become an object of scrutiny already for fifth century readers with whom he seems to have had no close personal ties. The apprehension of style, after all, requires a certain density of examples. In what kind of texts—copied, formatted, and organized in what ways—does it become possible to read for individual literary style? In what kind of media environment does the quasi-public reception of an author's oeuvre become possible and how did it affect the way Xie Lingyun wrote? In this chapter, I offer some

Buddhist texts of all kinds. In fact, the word for such deep, mysterious resonance patterns was precisely *xuan* 玄. At no point were Daoist and Buddhist texts explicitly preferred to Confucian ones. On the contrary, this approach sought their recessed common foundation. See Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962). For an illustration of this interpretative strategy in Six Dynasties readings of the *Analects*, see Robert Ashmore, "Word and Gesture: On *Xuan*-School Hermeneutics of the *Analects* Philosophy," *East and West* 54, no. 4 (2004), 458–488.

⁴ In the prefaces to his *Shi pin* 詩品, Zhong Rong repeatedly characterizes Xie Lingyun as one of the three greatest and most influential writers of pentasyllabic *shi*-poetry since the genre's inception in the Han dynasty, adding that, "abundant and alluring [his poems] were difficult to follow [as a model]" 富艷難蹤. He also notes his contemporaries' pursuit of "startling whips [which send a horse speeding ahead of the pack]" (*jingce* 警策) a term for particularly polished *shi*-poems: "the rich and well-provided for young men are ashamed if their writings do not measure up [to their status], and this all morning they touch up and embellish [their poems], and at midnight they are still reciting and intoning" 膏腴子弟, 恥文不逮, 終朝點綴, 分夜呻吟. See Zhong Rong *Shi pin jianzheng* 鍾嶸詩品箋證, annot. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu suo, 1992), 7–8. For the metaphor of excellent literary compositions as horses speeding into the lead, noted by Li Shan in his commentary on the *Wen xuan* 文選, see Harrison Huang, "Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze," 39n2.

tentative answers to these questions in the hopes that they will complicate our hitherto primarily intellectual-historical characterization of Xie's poetic project.

3.1 Xie Lingyun in the Proxy Realm of His Poetry

In order to understand why Xie Lingyun circulated his *shi*-poetry far beyond the network of his close friends and how the media environment in which these poems circulated shaped his textual practice, we must first map the trajectory of his official career.⁵ In principle, it is always essential to grasp the shape of an early medieval writer's career relative to the expectations of those born at around the same time, in the same region, and with comparable family and educational backgrounds. Without this information, it is impossible to make connections between the texts they wrote and the people to whom these texts were addressed. This information is vital for understanding Xie Lingyun's writing because he was not *just* the son of a powerful and influential family, but a direct descendant of the two most powerful and influential families in the latter half of the Eastern Jin: the Xies of Chenjun 陳郡 and the Wangs of Langya 琅琊. We must therefore keep in mind that as recently as Lingyun's grandfather's generation, the Xie clan was not only positioned to steer the ship of state but could have stage-managed a "peaceful" abdication of the throne by the virtually powerless Sima ruling house and established its own dynasty.⁶ This is, after all, exactly what the Sima clan did in 265 CE and there are signs the Xies were in contention to play this role circa 383.⁷ For reasons that need not detain us here, however, they failed, with the result that the Xie family began to slip from power just as Lingyun and his cousins—then in their 30s—were preparing to take up their first high-level appointments.⁸ To add insult to injury, the man who did overthrow the Eastern Jin and establish his own dynasty, the Liu-Song, was none other than the generalissimo Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), a semi-literate, Chu-dialect-speaking former officer in Xie Lingyun's grandfather Xie Xuan's 謝玄 (343–388) Northern Garrison

⁵ Xie Lingyun's biography can be found in *Song shu* 宋書 67.1743–1779.

⁶ By far the best overview of the role of influential families as co-rulers during the Eastern Jin remains Tian Yuqing 田余慶, *Dong Jin menfa zhengzhi* 東晉門閥政治 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996).

⁷ Xie An 謝安 (320–385) and Xie Xuan's 謝玄 (343–388) victory over Fu Jian's 苻堅 (338–385) much larger Former Qin (351–395) forces in the Battle of Fei River in 383 CE is often pointed to as the event that catapulted the Xie family into power. See Tian, *Dong Jin menfa zhengzhi*, 189–243. Michael Rogers has argued that the pivotal nature of that battle has been greatly exaggerated, though in his zeal to disprove the official accounts, he is prone to exaggerations of his own. See "The Myth of the Battle of the Fei River (A.D. 383)," *T'oung Pao*, 54, no. 1 (1968): 50–72. Rogers suggests that the Xie family had sought a position from which they might fully control or even succeed the Eastern Jin relatively early in the course of their rise. Xie Shang's 謝尚 (308–357) recovery of the "seal of passing on the realm" (*chuanguo xi* 傳國璽) in 352, Xie An's key mediating role in the succession crisis of 372, and Xie Shang's repatriation of a group of court musicians along with their musical instruments after the Battle of Fei River helped their cause immensely. See *Jin shu* 79.2071, 79.2073–4, 23.698 and Rogers, 61–2.

⁸ For a brief overview of the rise and fall of the Xie family, see Cynthia L. Chennault, "Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment? Xie Family Members of the Southern Dynasties," *T'oung Pao* 85 (1999): 249–327. Dennis Grafflin has pointed out that the fall of the Xie family in fact marked the end of "great family control of southern society" as such. "From the rise of Ssu-ma Tao-tzu 司馬道子 in 385 to the extinction of the Ch'en dynasty in 589, aristocratic preeminence and its institutional fossil, the Nine Rank 九品 system, were short-circuited and ignored in the political arena by a variety of court and army factions drawn from sub-aristocratic sources." See "The Great Family in Medieval South China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981), 73. For a more comprehensive treatment focused on the Xie family's literary prowess, see Ding Fulin 丁福林, *Dong Jin Nanchao de Xieshi wenxue jituan* 東晉南朝的謝氏文學集團 (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998).

Army (*Beifu bing* 北府兵).⁹ As Song Wudi 宋武帝 (r. 420–22), Liu Yu filled the top government offices with his former army comrades and relatives while systematically removing members of the elite clans from positions of power.¹⁰ A select few members of the Wang and Xie families were retained in high posts, though usually as “imperial regalia” in Cynthia Chennault’s apt phrase.¹¹ With the establishment of the Liu-Song, in other words, the exchange rate which should have allowed the young men of the Xie clan to cash in their cultural capital for political capital had collapsed.

During the period of dynastic transition, Xie twice fell in with members and close associates of the Liu family who were later killed in attempts to purge rival factions: Liu Yu’s general Liu Yi 劉毅 (d. 412) and Liu Yu’s second son Liu Yizhen 劉義真 (407–424). The latter allegedly promised that when he became Emperor, he would give Xie and Yan Yanzhi high-level appointments in his administration. Later, when pressed on this, he recanted, saying he only kept these gentlemen on staff to accompany him on pleasure outings.¹² Xie was eventually exiled to Yongjia 永嘉 (near present-day Wenzhou 溫州, Zhejiang) where he immediately began to neglect his official duties, disappearing on long excursions through the mountains, before eventually retiring to refurbish his grandfather’s estate at Shi’ning 始寧 (near present-day Shaoxing 紹興). It was during this period that he wrote and began circulating what would become his most famous pentasyllabic *shi*-poems. In an effort to reestablish cordial relations with the remaining members of the educated elite, Song Wendi 宋文帝 (r. 424–453) called Xie back to Jiankang in 426, perhaps with the hint that if he accepted a preliminary appointment, he would receive a higher-level appointment in the future. Xie was thus stuck compiling an official history of the Jin dynasty and several literary anthologies in the role of Supervisor of the Imperial Archives (*mishu jian* 秘書監). He was eventually appointed Palace Intendant (*shizhong* 侍中)—not a low level post by any means, since it gave him direct access to the Emperor, but not high enough to suit his taste. In fact, this post seems only to have earned him a seat at the Emperor’s banquet table. Xie was on hand not to discuss matters of state but for entertainment and to compose the works Wendi called “double treasures” (*erbao* 二寶), equally valuable as poems and as works of calligraphy.¹³

⁹ Liu Yu and nearly all of his closest associates in the Northern Garrison Army were from Pengcheng 彭城 in what is now northern Jiangsu province. There is evidence that he and his colleagues spoke some variety of what sources call “Chu speech” (*Chuyan* 楚言), a dialect very different from that used to conduct affairs in Jiankang. See Andrew Chittick, *The Jiankang Empire in Chinese and World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 94–98.

¹⁰ For the role of Liu Yu’s former army officers in the Liu-Song administration, see “Ryusō seiken no seiritsu to kanmun bujin” 劉宋政權の成立と寒門武人 in Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄, *Rikuchō kizokusei shakai no kenkyū* 六朝貴族制社会の研究 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1982), 305–325.

¹¹ Chennault, “Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment? Xie Family Members of the Southern Dynasties,” 257–8.

¹² *Song shu* 61.1635–6.

¹³ “Since he believed that on account of his renown and family status as well as his talent and abilities he should participate in the current administration, when he initially responded to the summons [to the post of Palace Intendant], his expectations were based on a self-assessment of this sort; [but] when he arrived, Wendi only associated with him on the basis of his literary profundity, and each time [Xie] attended the Emperor’s banquets, it was just for polite conversation” 既自以名輩才能應參時政，初被召，便以此自許，既至，文帝唯以文義見接，每侍上宴，談賞而已。 *Song shu* 67.1772. According to the *Nan shi* 南史, Wendi once commanded Yan Yanzhi and Xie Lingyun to compose *yuefu* 樂府 to test their speed. Yan finished immediately while Xie worked on his for a long time before turning it in. We can either follow the *Nan shi* and interpret this to mean that Xie was the slower and more painstaking of the two writers or that he considered such “homework

Dejected, Xie withdrew again to his estate at Shi'ning where his excursions took on a kind of war-like ferocity: he illegally seized vast tracts of public land, had forest groves (and likely their indigenous inhabitants) hacked to pieces to create scenic vistas, attempted to drain lakes onto his own property, and rebuffed attempts by local officials to stop him. After receiving pardon from Wendi himself for amassing a corps of retainers the size of a small army, Xie was forced to take a rehabilitative post in Linchuan 臨川 (near present-day Fuzhou 撫州, Jiangxi). He behaved no differently there than he had in Yongjia and was subsequently banished to Nanhai 南海 (present-day Guangzhou 廣州). Once there, he allegedly began plotting a return from exile by armed rebellion. When this plot was discovered, Xie was marched into the local marketplace and publicly executed.

Looked at from this perspective, the founding of the Liu-Song dynasty was the single most decisive event in Xie Lingyun's life. The available evidence strongly suggests that Xie did not set off for the Jiangnan wilderness because he felt his true calling was a life of leisure and poetry-writing. On the contrary, humiliating *retreats* from Jiankang led to periods of intense excursion-making and *shi*-poetry writing. Harrison Huang has made one of the only scholarly attempts to read Xie's *shi*-poetry as a response to the gap between Xie's soaring expectations for himself as a young man (prime minister, Crown Prince, Emperor?) and the suffocating reality of his exile in Yongjia, cut off from power and patronage. Immediately setting aside the "landscape poetry" reading as an anachronistic projection, Huang instead situates Xie's poetry within the rich tradition of *youlan shi* 遊覽詩, the poetry of excursion and surveying; this is, after all, the category under which many of his most famous *shi*-poems were included in the sixth century literary anthology *Wenxuan* 文選. Huang demonstrates that this type of poem has its origins in accounts of the ruler's act of ritually surveying his territory, carried out in the form of a kind of military parade up onto a raised platform or "mirador" (*guan* 觀). He argues that what scholars have habitually treated as Xie's "landscape poems" all but explicitly code his excursions through the southern wilderness as imperial tours of inspection. In that case, the focal point of Xie's "landscape poetry" is not the landscape itself but the person moving through it, calling forth its cosmic patterns and evaluating its "personality" in an act of what Huang calls "imperial impersonation."¹⁴ This argument has the advantage of helping us see in Xie's excursion and estate poetry the central concerns of his life: family pedigree, patronage, and political power. Huang primarily concerns himself with a diachronic presentation of Xie's sources of inspiration; he does not tell us how Xie's poetry fit into the literary culture and textual mediascape of his own moment. But these are issues worth thinking about. How did the circulation of the texts of his *shi*-poems come to play such a key role in Xie's multi-media performance of prestige? What understanding of the relationship between literary style and personality in such texts must have been in place for such a performance to be successful? What kind of textual infrastructure made such connections possible?

This chapter will present two interrelated arguments aimed at answering these questions. First, I claim that Xie Lingyun's *shi*-poetry formed a space in which the elegant personal manner, or *fengliu* 風流¹⁵ of the Xie family, commensurate with high office and real political power, could be preserved in

assignments" beneath him. See *Nan shi* 南史, comp. Li Yanshou 李延壽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 34.881.

¹⁴ Huang, "Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze," 142.

¹⁵ No single word in the English language can register the range of meanings *fengliu* has in early medieval Chinese texts. It often names the "air" or "style" of a person, a group of people, or in this case a family. Such a person speaks and behaves in an extremely refined manner and yet seems unaware of the rules governing decorum. The ability to bend or ever break these rules such that others perceive you to be adhering to an even loftier set of standards was an important aspect of *fengliu*. The fifth century collection of anecdotes *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 contains hundreds of examples of such delicately transgressive behavior. "Suavity" and "panache"

the *compensatory medium* of an individual literary style. Xie Lingyun's poetics of distinction thus translates the pain and resentment he felt at having been prevented from acting within the hallowed ritual institutions of the state, institutions which shifted the merely or narrowly personal into a higher stylistic register. Second, I will argue that Xie Lingyun's individual literary style could only perform this function with reference to the then still relatively new archival format of the literary anthology. Two kinds of literary anthologies formed what I will call the material horizon of possibility for the recognition of an individual literary style: the comprehensive literary collection (*zongji* 總集) and the single-author literary collection (*bieji* 別集, literally "separate collection"). The latter kind of literary collection seems to have been in the process of formation and standardization during Xie's lifetime. Although we have no evidence that Xie Lingyun made a single-author collection of his own literary works—such collections were usually made posthumously—he undoubtedly encountered many such single-author literary collections as a young man polishing his verse in the Xie family compound in Jiankang and later in the process of overseeing the official compilation of one of the largest collections of *shi*-poetry that had ever been created in his role as Supervisor of the Imperial Archives in 426—the *Shi ji* 詩集 in fifty fascicles (*juan* 卷). A writer of Xie Lingyun's stature wrote within the forcefield of such new modes of editing and organizing texts.

In the first half of the chapter, I trace the roots of Xie's poetics of distinction to his often overlooked "Recounting the Virtues of my Grandfather in Two Poems" 述祖德詩二首 which I argue contains a characterization of the Xie family *fenglin* he sought to preserve in the compensatory medium of his estate poetry. I then examine his estate poem "South Of My Fields I Plant a Garden, Divert a Stream, and Set Up a Hedge" 田南樹園激流植援 within the real and symbolic economies of his sprawling mountainside retreat in Shi'ning, with its massive irrigated-field system, logging operation, private library, Buddhist monastery, and paper manufactory. This poem shows Xie in the process of transforming his grandfather's *ye* 業—both his legacy as a statesman and a paragon of aristocratic virtue and his literal estate bequeathed to his grandson—into a his own *ye* 業, which now must take the form of a legacy of texts about this estate written in a style emblematic of its origins. Although making texts would eventually become an acceptable pathway for commemorating and establishing a legacy in later periods, I will argue Xie had serious reservations about this process. In the second half of this chapter, I argue that Xie Lingyun made his most profound statement about the diminished status of literature at court, its degeneration into so many individual styles, in one of the strangest and most complex "imitation" (*ni* 擬) poems in the tradition. Xie's "Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei's Gatherings at Ye" 擬魏太子鄴中集詩 takes the form of fictional anthology of banquet poems by the members of Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) literary salon. Xie has also written a fictional preface to the anthology in the voice of Cao Pi looking back on the banquet poems a few years later as Emperor Wen 魏文帝 (220–226) in which he describes the process of compiling the anthology. This poem is thus a *ji* 集 in two sense, a banquet gathering and an anthology. Previous scholarship has not fully grasped the implications of the fictional preface for thinking about relationship between these two kinds of gatherings. In his preface, Xie's "Emperor Wen" mourns the fact that the first gathering—the gathering of talented gentlemen—is now only accessible through the fossilized remains of the second gathering in the form of the anthology of their texts. (All but two had died by the time Cao Pi became emperor.) For both Xie and his alter-ego "Emperor Wen," the banquet can only be reconvened in the compensatory medium of the anthology. This poem is more than an imitation of

fit some contexts, but doing what others deem uncool is also frequently also described as *fenglin*. Unlike elegance or gallantry, which we think of as contingent character traits, *fenglin* was thought to be the product of good breeding.

the great Jian'an 建安 era (196–219) poets; it is a poem about the very nature of the literary anthology, its relationship to the people and the occasion on which it was compiled, its way of giving access to and also denying full concourse with a moment in the past.

3.2 The Literary Anthology as a Site for the Production of Individual Style

Before we turn to Xie Lingyun's poems, a word on the mediascape in which he wrote. The late Eastern Jin is the first period for which we begin to see the manifold effects of the use of paper on textual practice. According to Xie Lingyun's *Song shu* 宋書 biography, "Every time one of his poems reached the capital [from his estate at Shi'ning], everyone, regardless of their social status, vied to copy it out, such that in the space of one night, gentlemen and commoners could all recite it by memory, people near and far deeply admired it, and his fame shook the capital region" 每有一詩至都邑, 貴賤莫不競寫, 宿昔之間, 士庶皆徧, 遠近欽慕, 名動京師.¹⁶ These poems would have arrived at the gates of their intended recipients in Xie's own excellent calligraphy, very possibly written on paper fabricated on his estate using a pulp made from chee grass fibers (*ji* 笮).¹⁷ Those who "vied to copy out" Xie's poems would also have aimed to copy Xie's calligraphy. Although no trace of Xie's calligraphy has survived, we should remember that his manuscripts would have carried a double stylistic signature for their initial readers, both calligraphic and literary.

Texts could also circulate more quickly through the riverine South than they could along the terrestrial postal routes of the North. There is evidence that Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming read each other's *shi*-poetry despite not residing in the same regions or maintaining a close personal relationship.¹⁸ We have, in other words, a media environment in which an ever-increasing proportion of literary texts in circulation were produced, copied, and stored *outside* of the imperial archives at Jiankang. This can be proved by the very existence of a work like Fan Ye's 范曄 (398–446) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, a text nearly twice the size of *Shiji* 史記 by character count, written using manuscript copies of the hundreds of works excerpted therein available to Fan in his offices at Xuanzhou 宣州, 150 km south of the capital. Fan's history was also the first to create separate collective biographies for Classicists ("Rulin zhuan" 儒林傳) and for those known especially for their literary prowess ("Wenyuan zhuan" 文苑傳). The implication seems to be that someone who excelled at writing memorials, inscriptions, funeral dirges, court hymns and so forth was worthy of recognition and yet qualitatively different from someone who excelled at classical learning. (Note, however, that Fan Ye includes masters of many genres of writing modern scholars would not typically consider "literary.") Given the number of excerpts Fan included in the "Wenyuan zhuan" and in his biographies of other figures, scholars guess that he must have relied on comprehensive anthologies such as Zhi Yu's 摯虞 (d. 311) *Wenzhang liubie ji* 文章流別集 in making his selections; likewise, his *pian*-counts may have been calculated with the aid of works like Xun Xu's 荀勗 (d. 289) *Zhongjing xinbu* 中經新簿 and Zhi

¹⁶ See *Song shu*, 67.1754.

¹⁷ Xie mentions stripping "chee grass" (*Achnatherum splendens*) in his "Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains" 山居賦 and adds in his auto-commentary that he harvests this grass to make paper. Gu, 460. Francis Westbrook translates *ji* 笮 as "birch-bark," perhaps anticipating that her readers will be more familiar with the paper birch tree as a plant used for making paper. See "Landscape Description in the Lyric Poetry and 'Fuh on Dwelling in the Mountains' of Shieh Ling-yun" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973), 288–9.

¹⁸ For clear echoes of Tao Yuanming's poetry in Xie Lingyun's verse, see Stephen Owen, "The Librarian in Exile: Xie Lingyun's Bookish Landscapes," *Early Medieval China* 10–11 (2004): 212–19.

Yu's *Wenzhang zhi* 文章志.¹⁹

Due to the paucity of surviving sources from this period, it is difficult to establish exactly when single-author collections (*bieji* 別集) first began to be compiled.²⁰ According to the *Suishu* 隋書 “Monograph on Bibliography” 經籍志, the practice dates back to the Eastern Han.²¹ If the preface excerpted in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 is genuine, Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) seems to have made a collection of his own *fu* 賦 compositions during his lifetime.²² After Cao Zhi's death, Wei Mingdi 魏明帝 (r. 226–239) ordered that a collection of his works be made and stored in the imperial archives. Cao Zhi's case is exceptional however and so cannot be used to establish the existence of a widespread practice of collecting texts into single-author anthologies. It is not until the Jin dynasty that single-author collections begin to appear with more frequency. Chen Shou's 陳壽 (232–297) submission of Zhuge Liang's 諸葛亮 (181–234) collected writings to the throne in 271 CE is often considered a precursor of this type of collection.²³ Yu Wanli 虞萬里 has rightly emphasized the ritual and historiographical function of such early single-author collections. He points out that prior to the sixth century these collections were always compiled posthumously, usually by family members or close friends. Furthermore, they were intended to function in tandem with a *zhuan* 傳, whether an official biography or a private account, for use in documenting and celebrating meritorious service, *not* exclusively or even primarily literary talent.²⁴ Even when people began to curate their own collections, they were still closely tied to official service. The Liang period writer Wang Yun 王筠 (481–549), for example, made a separate collection for each official position he occupied.

Yu also suggests that the practice of making single-author collections does not seem to have been very widespread prior to the sixth century; rather, large multi-author comprehensive collections organized by genre were the norm. As evidence, Yu points out that when the official histories list the quantity of writings in circulation by figures from the Eastern Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties, they almost invariably give the number of “pieces” (*wenzhang* 文章 or *pian* 篇) in circulation rather than specifying the length of a single collection (in *juan* 卷 or fascicles).²⁵ Fan Ye's history was one of the first to include this information. It is unclear, however, why he used *pian*-counts rather than *juan*-counts. Do the *pian*-counts indicate that such texts *originally* circulated individually because that is how they are listed in his Eastern Han and Western Jin sources? Is he telling us they *still* circulate as individual texts in the Liu-Song period? Or was “number of pieces” considered to be the most helpful figure given the large discrepancies in *juan*-length at the time? It would follow then that even if Fan Ye accessed an author's works in a single-author collection of a certain length, he would only have listed the total number of works included. Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 has analyzed a rubbing taken from a fragment

¹⁹ Yu Wanli 虞萬里, “Bieji liubian lun” 別集流變論, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化 33 (2011), 11.

²⁰ For an overview of the development of the literary collection, see Xiaofei Tian, “Collections (*ji* 集),” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)* eds. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-ye Li, and Xiaofei Tian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 225.

²¹ *Suishu* 隋書, comp. Wei Zheng 魏徵. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 35.1081.

²² *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, comp. Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1965) 55.996.

²³ *Jinshu* 81.2137.

²⁴ Pablo Ariel Blitstein has challenged the literary dimensions of *ji* in an illuminating article of the *Suishu* “Monograph on Literature.” See “The Art of Producing a Catalogue: The Meaning of ‘Compilations’ for the Organisation of Ancient Knowledge in Tang Times,” in *Monographs in Tang Official Historiography Perspectives from the Technical Treatises of the History of Sui* (Sui shu), eds. Daniel Patrick Morgan and Damien Chaussende (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), 323–41.

²⁵ Yu Wanli, “Bieji liubian lun,” 11.

of an ivory tag (*yaqian* 牙籤) of the kind that were affixed to archival copies of texts which seems to list the contents of a single-author collection of the Eastern Han figure Wang Yi's 王逸 (fl. 130–140) writings. Based on the calligraphy and the nature of the object, Zhang tentatively dates the tag to the fourth century CE.²⁶ At the very least, the above evidence suggests that single-author collections did exist during Xie Lingyun's lifetime and that if he encountered them at all it would likely have been during his time in the archives at Jiankang.

But what role did these anthologies play in bringing into focus an individual author's literary style? In single-author collections, poems, inscriptions, and letters would appear grouped by genre and laid out next to one another on pages pasted together to form a fascicle. In comprehensive collections, an author's poems would be placed sometimes together in groups and sometimes in isolation but always close to other works in the same genre by other writers from the same or earlier periods. The result in both cases was that the stylistic tendencies and idiosyncrasies of a particular author's works became all the more salient by sheer force of physical proximity on the same surface of inscription, within the same fascicle, and finally within the same collection.²⁷ With the aid of an anthology formatted in this way, a medieval reader perusing the forty *shi*-poems by Xie Lingyun collected in the *Wen xuan*—to take the best-preserved example of a comprehensive anthology—would have been able to discern his distinctive poetic personality in much higher definition than would have been possible in earlier periods when literary texts and other ephemera of a single author were rarely gathered in one place.²⁸ A reader with a copy of a *Xie Lingyun ji* 謝靈運集, from some Liang dynasty 梁 (502–557) version of which the selections included in the *Wen xuan* may have been culled, would have had a clearer picture of Xie Lingyun's stylistic profile still.²⁹ The single-author collection thus had the effect of transforming the author into the occasion of his own literary works. A reader in possession of such a collection could now scrutinize the author's response to a given generic type of occasion, such as a parting banquet or a visit from a friend, and, and at the same time, view the author himself as a kind of occasion, manifesting certain emotive tendencies and patterns of response in the style of his works.

In view of these tendencies in textual culture, it comes as no surprise that paratextual elements such as titles and prefaces became longer and more detailed in this period. This is especially true in

²⁶ Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺, “Wang Yi ji yaqian kaozheng” 《王逸集》牙籤考證, In *Zhang Zhenglang wenshi lunji zhang* 張政烺文史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 201–7.

²⁷ Olivia Holmes makes a related argument in her groundbreaking study of early troubadour verse anthologies. Holmes suggests that the sequential arrangement of texts by named authors in these anthologies facilitated an ever-closer identification between the speaker/singer of a poem and its implied author. “[The] newer, author-ordered sequences constitute events in themselves; not only does the poems’ placement in a larger macrostructure allow narrativity (and thus history) to enter the poems, but it permits the kind of intricate numerical planning and intratextual relations that enable the individual pieces to slip outside the immediate circumstances of performance or reception and to exist in a time frame that the cycle itself has defined. The text is no longer naïvely transitive, pointing beyond itself to the spoken or sung voice, but intransitive, pointing only to itself and the “voice”—or self—constructed in it.” *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3.

²⁸ On the compilation of the *Wenxuan*, see David Knechtges, “Culling the Weeds and Selecting the Prime Blossoms: The Anthology in Early Medieval China,” In *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600*, eds. Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 200–241.

²⁹ Two single-author anthologies of Xie Lingyun's writings circulated during the Liang dynasty: a *Xie Kangle ji* 謝康樂集, in five fascicles (*juan* 卷) with a preface (*lu* 錄) in one fascicle and a *Xie Lingyun ji* 謝靈運集 in twenty fascicles with a preface in one fascicle. See *Sui shu* 隋書, comp. Wei Zheng 魏徵 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 35.1072.

the poetry of Xie Lingyun and Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427). A poem which, in an earlier period, might have been titled “Ascending a Height” now included information about which peak was ascended, when, with whom, and in connection with what larger sequence of events in the life of the speaker the climb was undertaken. Such titling conventions reflect a desire to clarify for a reader outside of the circle of intended recipients the exact circumstances of the occasion described in the poem so that might be read alongside their other works as part of an oeuvre. Indeed, it might be argued that the very decision to include such specifiers in the titles was a sign that Tao and Xie anticipated that the poems would be included in a single-author collection of some kind. A poem titled simply “Ascending a Height” knowingly joins in the grand chorus of poems with this title in earlier periods. A poem with a more detailed title or preface can follow the generic conventions of poems on ‘ascending a height’ while also marking the treatment of the topic as somehow distinctive. These paratextual elements induced a kind of double-vision in the reader. They helped the reader see the conventions at work in the poem and the author’s signature way of approaching certain topics at the same time.³⁰ Since generic occasions (farewell banquet, festival day etc.) would continue to be the single most important factor in determining the shape of the *shi*-poem written to commemorate it, perhaps it would be better to say, then, that the author became a *co-occasion* for the writing of the work.

Comprehensive collections, on the other hand, placed works in the same genre written sometimes hundreds of years apart next to one another in a way that necessarily led to the discovery of stylistic trends arrayed in historical time. This reorganization of the literary heritage had been fully naturalized by the time Zhong Rong’s wrote *Shi pin* 詩品. In this work, each grade (*pin* 品) corresponding to the quality of a group of poets laid out chronologically. Author-names stand in for styles (*ti* 體). Whether the compilers of these anthologies intended to make such historical trends in poetic style evident is a question we cannot answer for the time being. In any case, the agency of the compiler is not the only agency at work in the creation of an anthology. The general practices used to prepare a text for storage in an archive as well as the physical limitations of scroll design must have played a role in shaping these texts. We might say that such trends are the result of what the literary theorist Hans Gumbrecht has called “effects of meaning” occurring in combination with the “effects of presence” of a particular “materiality of communication.”³¹ The cumulative impact of these effects on reading habits and on ways of conceiving authorship and literary-historical time will always exceed the compiler’s intention to put texts together in one place.

Literary texts were also collected in private anthologies to commemorate certain occasions. In his famous letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (178–230) Cao Pi mentions making a collection of banquet poems by those who accompanied him on excursions at Ye 鄴. Anthologies such as Shi Chong’s 石崇 (249–300) *Jingu yuan* 金谷園 served as the model for collections made on the occasion of a gathering at a private estate. Two prefaces to collections of this kind from the Eastern Jin survive—one attributed to Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) introducing the *You Shimen shi* 游石門詩 and another by Wang Xizhi’s 王羲之 (303–361) made for the *Lanting ji* 蘭亭集. Both prefaces explicitly tie the intimacy of such gatherings to the fleetingness of the festivities. The anthologies serve to capture this unrepeatable moment on paper and, perhaps in some cases, even in the hands of the poets themselves complete with the indelible marks of the occasion: scratch-outs and write-overs, traces of wine and sudden summer downpours. Given the frequency of such gatherings among the people in his set, Xie Lingyun

³⁰ This is not at all to say Xie Lingyun and Tao Qian expected their *shi*-poems to be read in strictly chronological order. Tao’s poems on drinking wine or tending his garden are often paratextually situated in ways that transform them into poems about not just anybody but *Tao Qian* drinking wine under some particular set of circumstances. The same could be said of Xie Lingyun’s excursion poems.

³¹ *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

probably encountered the poems of contemporaries he had no documented personal relationship with in these types of anthologies.

The official archives naturally grew alongside private collections. We might be tempted take the flurry of literary anthology-making in the first decades of the reign of Song Wendi 宋文帝 (r. 424–453) coupled with his decision to purge the remaining members of his father Liu Yu's army clique as evidence that a kind of literary and cultural renaissance was afoot. But we should be careful not to mistake the latter half of Wendi's reign for the first half, which was dominated by his brother Liu Yikang 劉義康 (409–451), an uneducated military man who ensured that Wendi's literary salon remained politically marginalized.³² While it is true that Xie Lingyun was offered and begrudgingly accepted an appointment at Wendi's court as Supervisor of the Imperial Archives, his talents were requested as an ornamental accessory to power not a tool to be used in the exercise of such power. His rather sulky, almost condescending poem "In Attendance on an Excursion to Beigu Hill at Jingkou, Written at Imperial Command," 從遊京口北固應詔 which looks to have been composed on an outing with Wendi and a number of other eminent talents, suggests he hardly saw himself as participating in a cultural or literary renaissance.³³

In addition to overseeing the compilation of a history of the Jin dynasty, Xie is credited with compiling several now-lost anthologies: the *Shiji* 詩集 [Collection of *Shi*-poetry] in fifty fascicles, the *Fuji* 賦集 [Collection of Poetic Expositions] in ninety-two fascicles, the *Shiying* 詩英 [Blossoms of *Shi*-poetry] in nine fascicles, the *Qiji* 七集 [Collection of Sevens Poetry] in ten fascicles, and a *Lianjuji* 連珠集 [Collection of Linked Pearl Verses].³⁴ The *Shiji* seems to have spawned a number of copy-cat anthologies and epitomes in the latter half of the Liu-Song and later dynasties. Significantly, in his preface to *Shi pin*, Zhong Rong criticizes the editorial procedures at work in the *Shiji*, saying that "[Xie] included any *shi*-poem he came across" 逢詩輒取.³⁵ Of course, Zhong Rong is in fact criticizing the editorial procedures of Xie's team of archivists. Someone of Xie's status would not have been expected to undertake such a project alone in the archives, nor would he necessarily have been able to determine the goal of the project. The implication of the criticism is that *shi*-poems have been selected from a very wide range of source texts and included in the anthology not because they will make excellent model texts or because they share some internal relationship to a particular kind of occasion but simply because they meet the textual generic criteria of *shi*-poetry. Two other anthologies compiled at around this same time—the *Jiyuan* 集苑 [Garden of Collections] compiled by Xie's cousin Xie Hun and the *Jilin* 集林 [Grove of Collections] compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444)—seem

³² *Song shu* 68.1790. See Chittick 157–9. Xiaofei Tian points out that Wendi is one of the first emperors to gather a group of elite literati figures around him to compose and exchange poetry that ratified Jiankang's status as the permanent capital of the legitimate dynasty over which he sought to exercise his authority. See "Representing Kingship and Imagining Empire in Southern Dynasties Court Poetry," *T'oung Pao* 102 (2016), 18–52. Although I agree that Wendi's personal participation in these salons is remarkable and the portrait which emerges in the poems he commissioned of Jiankang as the true capital of the dynasty in these poems undoubtedly signals an important shift in the ideology of at least some members of the court, I think it is important to keep in mind how much further Wendi's courtiers were from the levers of power by comparison with the members of Liang Wudi's 梁武帝 (r. 502–549) salons. In the latter case, the representation of dynastic prestige in verse and the administration of the realm were completely simultaneous activities carried out by the same people. As Tang-era historians were fond of pointing out, this did not end well.

³³ *Wen xuan* 22.1037–8. See Xiaofei Tian "Representing Kingship," 40–2.

³⁴ *Sui shu*, 35.1082–1087.

³⁵ Zhong Rong, *Zhong Rong Shi pin jianzheng* 鍾嶸詩品箋證, annot. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu suo, 1992), 100.

also to have been created with the intention of vacuuming up not just individual works but entire collections to store them in one place.³⁶

Whether they aimed to or not, these anthologies transform the literary heritage of past dynasties into a kind of Heideggerian “standing reserve.”³⁷ For Heidegger, a technology such as a hydroelectric dam placed on a river does not exist together with the river; it intervenes so fundamentally in the river’s nature that it alters its very ontological status. The hydroelectric dam transforms the river from a place where fish and plants and waterfowl live, where humans have gone for millennia to drink and eat and bathe and worship into “standing reserve,” a pure means to the end of providing electricity for a nearby city. Heidegger insists this is a characteristic of *modern* technology, though premodern technologies instrumentalize and transform nature too, albeit on a smaller scale. Archival technologies like these literary anthologies necessarily stripped away paratextual information and evaluative criteria (such as the order of selections) embedded in the very material form of earlier collections. This was done for the sake of creating a reference work filled with texts which no longer bore any relation to a particular occasion or preserved any material traces of the making of the authors of individual pieces, being as far as we know, copies of those texts. Such a collection would not embody a particular authority figure’s perspective on the tradition. Rather, anthologies like the *Shi ji* were meant to make fine phrases available to any author on any conceivable occasion. As we will see in the second half of this chapter, the creation of large literary anthologies in the Liu-Song court seems to have corresponded in Xie Lingyun’s mind with the foreclosure of an earlier mode of interacting with the texts of the past and of an earlier use of poetry in the life of the court. This realization forms the backdrop of his single-author counter-anthology “Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei’s Gatherings at Ye.”

3.3 The Xie Family Style: Living In The Shadow of Xie Xuan 謝玄

Xie Lingyun’s life was bound up with the life and legacy of his grandfather, the war-hero Xie Xuan, from the moment he was born. According to Zhong Rong, Xie Xuan died shortly after Xie Lingyun’s birth.³⁸ This was taken as evidence that Lingyun had been born under an unlucky astral configuration and carried its lethal energy in his person. He was therefore sent to live and study with Du Jiong 杜昺 (fl. 383), a libationer of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi* 天師).³⁹ At the age of 15, Xie rejoined his family in Jiankang. It was here that he began studying with his cousins in the famed Black Robe Lane (*Wuyi xiang* 烏衣巷) where members of both the Langya Wangs and the Chenjun Xies resided. A series of quatrains by Xie Lingyun’s uncle Xie Hun 謝混 (d. 421) entitled “Admonishing My Nephews” 誡族子, which apparently dates from this period, gives us an acute sense of the atmosphere that pervaded

³⁶ Xiaofei Tian, “Collections,” 225.

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1977), 20.

³⁸ Zhong Rong *Shi pin jianzheng*, 196.

³⁹ For a biography of Du Jiong (whose name is sometimes given as Du Bing 杜昺), see the *Dongxian zhuan* 洞仙傳 in *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, comp. Zhang Junfang 張君房 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 111.2413–15. For the Xie and Wang families’ close relationship with the Celestial Masters, see Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), 211–213. Xie Lingyun likely learned calligraphy under Du Jiong’s tutelage. Lothar Ledderose has pointed out the deep connections between mystical uses of calligraphy in Daoist sects in the area south and east of the capital and the stylistic innovations of members of families connected to the Celestial Masters such as the Langya Wangs. See “Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties,” *T’oung Pao* 70 (1984): 246–278.

their studies.⁴⁰ Acting as tutor and mentor, Xie Hun first provides an overall assessment of their personalities. His language in these quatrains strongly suggests this assessment is based on the boys' writing. He then follows this, in each case, with an assertion that if the boy can make certain adjustments, he will reach his full potential. For the sake of brevity, I have omitted the quatrains written for Xie Hongwei 謝弘微 (392–433), Xie Hui 謝晦 (390–426), Xie Zhan 謝瞻 (d. 421), and Xie Yao 謝曜 (d. 427). Xie Hun's appraisal of Xie Lingyun is as follows:

康樂誕通度，	Kangle was born with an unimpeded sensibility,
實有名家韻。	Indeed, he has the resonance of a famed clan.
若加繩染功，	If he can apply himself to the labor of restraining and tidying,
剖瑩乃瓊瑾。	Splitting the raw stone will yield fine gems.

Significantly, Xie Hun addresses Xie Lingyun by the title he inherited from Xie Xuan, the Lord of Kangle 康樂公, which entitled him to the income of 2,000 households. Xie's father died young—he was said to have been dim-witted and only reached the post of Assistant in the Imperial Archives (*mishu lang* 秘書郎)—and thus the title Lord of Kangle has, in a sense, the effect of making Xie his grandfather's son. In saying that Xie Lingyun was born with an all-encompassing capacity to grasp the underlying nature of things, Xie Hun is both praising him and issuing a word of caution: an inborn capacity for exceeding limits can easily run astray if it is not controlled. At the same time this preternatural talent is an indication that Lingyun does possess the “resonance” or “tenor” (but also the *rhymes*) of a renowned family. If he is to reach his full potential, he must take care to exercise his powers of insight by bringing them within the confines of normative forms. Xie Hun closes with a final exhortation addressed to the group:

數子勉之哉，	Sons of the clan, do your best!
風流由爾振。	And our refined style will be roused on your account.
如不犯所知，	If you do not offend those who recognize you,
此外無所慎。	Then, aside from this, there is nothing about which you need be cautious.

Xie Hun frames the goal of the boys' studies as a collective effort to ensure that the *fengliu* of the Xie family will be “roused” or “stirred into action.” To *zhen* 振 something is to set it into continuous motion. We see this in the phrase *zhengou* 振古, which, taken literally, describes something which was “set into motion from antiquity” and so continues on in the present. Xie Hun's poems use metaphors which pertain to study and literary composition as well as to moral cultivation: polishing, delineating, cleaning up, restraining. The practice of overcoming the self to the point that one need no longer be cautious about overstepping the line is first undertaken within the sphere of literary composition. The goal of this preliminary step is to prepare the boys to be the bearers of the *fengliu* of the clan in the wider sphere of political life. By implication then, literary composition and related activities such as classical learning and philosophical debate function here as the training ground for each boy to summon the Xie family's refined style in his own person. In order to truly “rouse” the Xie family *fengliu*, however, they will need to perform on a much larger stage.

Fortunately, we can get a very clear sense of what kind of family legacy Xie Lingyun saw himself

⁴⁰ *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, comp. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 935.

continuing from his “Recounting the Virtues of my Grandfather in Two Poems” 述祖德詩二首.⁴¹ Although we have no date for the composition of the poem, it seems reasonable that Xie wrote it in connection with a visit to his grandfather’s estate at Shi’ning where he would ultimately return to spend his retirement. Xie recorded his first visit to this estate on his way into exile at Yongjia in his poem “Passing By Shi’ning Estate” 過始寧墅. It is important to remember also that Xie Xuan’s tomb was located on the property and we can be certain that Xie would have paid many visits to the complex, any one of which could have occasioned these reflections.

The poems are introduced by a preface:

太元中，王父龕定淮南，負荷世業，尊主隆人。逮賢相徂謝，君子道消，拂衣蕃岳，考卜東山，事同樂生之時，志期范蠡之舉。

In the Taiyuan reign period (376–396),⁴² my grandfather pacified the Huainan region; taking the generational legacy on his shoulders, he elevated his lord and exalted the people. But when the worthy Prime Minister took leave of the court,⁴³ the way of the gentleman disappeared, and so Xuan dusted off his clothes [and departed] for the barrier peaks where he divined a residence at Dongshan. His act was the same as those in the era of Master Yue;⁴⁴ as for his aspirations, he set his mind on the undertakings of Fan Li.⁴⁵

3.3.1 “Recounting the Virtues of my Grandfather in Two Poems” 述祖德詩二首

I.

達人貴自我，	A man of penetrating understanding prizes himself.
高情屬天雲。	His lofty sentiments cleave to the cloudy heavens.
兼抱濟物性，	Embracing both in combination, he ferries living beings. ⁴⁶
而不纓垢氛。	He does not become entangled with ⁴⁷ filth and perfusion.

⁴¹ Gu Shaobo 顧紹柏, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu* 謝靈運集校注 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2004), 153–4. *Xie Kangle shizhu* 謝康樂詩注, ed. Huang Jie 黃節, in *Huang Jie zhu Han Wei Linchao shi liu zhong* 黃節注漢魏六朝詩六種 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 603–607.

⁴² The Battle of Fei River occurred in the middle of the Taiyuan reign period of Jin Xiaowudi 晉孝武帝 (r. 372–396).

⁴³ When it became clear that Sima Daozi’s 司馬道子 (364–403) faction had full control of Xiaowudi’s court, Xie An retired to Guangling 廣陵. He died later that year (385 CE).

⁴⁴ Master Yue refers to the general Yue Yi 樂毅 (fl. 284 BCE), who led the armies of six kingdoms to conquer Qi. Gu Shaobo points out that Yue Yi was later slandered by Tian Dan 田單 (fl. 284 BCE) and forced to flee to another kingdom. Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 156n.

⁴⁵ Fan Li 范蠡 (fl. 493 BCE) was a Warring States-era statesman and military tactician who helped King Goujian of Yue 越 defeat Wu 吳. He later withdrew from official life, became very wealthy, and spent his twilight years on a boat sailing around the “Five Lakes” region (Lake Tai 太湖, in present day southern Jiangsu).

⁴⁶ “Living beings” refers in this case primarily to people.

⁴⁷ *Ying* 纓 is probably a borrowed graph for *ying* 縈, meaning “to become entangled with.”

段生蕃魏國，	Master Duan bulwarked the kingdom of Wei. ⁴⁸
展季救魯人。	Zhan Ji rescued the people of Lu. ⁴⁹
弦高犒晉師，	Xian Gao held a victory feast for the troops of Jin. ⁵⁰
仲連卻秦軍。	Zhonglian repelled the armies of Qin. ⁵¹
臨組乍不緤，	Presented the seal-chords of office, unexpectedly, they did not tie them.
對珪寧肯分。	Facing the jade scepter, how could they assent to take their portion?
惠物辭所賞，	Though their kindness extended to all, they refused what they were awarded.
勵志故絕人。	In perfecting their aims, indeed, they surpassed all the others.
苕苕歷千載，	Far in the distance, it crosses a thousand-year span.
遙遙播清塵。	Across dizzying remoteness, they sent forth their pure dust. ⁵²
清塵竟誰嗣，	This pure dust, who in the end proved to be its inheritor?
明哲時經綸。	At the crucial moment, this enlightened man wove the threads. ⁵³
委講綴道論，	Abandoning his lectures, he left off his discourses on the Way,
改服康世屯。	He changed his garments to ease the world's travails.
屯難既云康	Once the travails were eased,
尊主隆斯民。	He venerated his lord and made prosperous these people.

The preface and first poem place Xie Xuan in a long lineage of men who stepped forward at critical moments to assist their lords and then, when the times turned against them, withdrew to live serene and luxurious lives far from the court. These men were not *hired* by their lords to protect the realm; they stepped effortlessly into this role and, when the task was finished, withdrew just as effortlessly as they came. This mode of behavior is figured as “pure dust,” a residue which stretches

⁴⁸ Duan Ganmu 段干木 retired to the Kingdom of Wei and refused to take an official post. He was so admired that the King of Qin refused to attack Wei after hearing of his reputation.

⁴⁹ Zhan Ji (720–621 BCE), better known as Liuxia Hui 柳下惠, was a high minister of the Kingdom of Lu. He managed to turn back Lord Xiao of Qi's 齊孝公 army.

⁵⁰ Xian Gao was a merchant from the Kingdom of Zheng who prepared a banquet for an invading army of Qin to delay them and spoil their chances of launching a surprise attack. Like Xie Xuan, Xian Gao was willing to set aside personal comforts and come to the aid of his kingdom. Gu guesses that Xie changed Qin to Jin to avoid repetition in the next line.

⁵¹ Lu Zhonglian 魯仲連 advised King Xiaocheng 趙孝成王 (r. 265–245 BCE) of Zhao 趙 against surrendering to invading Qin armies. When the siege of Handan 邯鄲 was broken by troops from Wei 魏, Lord Pingling 平陵君 of Zhao attempted to reward Lu for his excellent counsel. Lu refused.

⁵² “Pure dust” refers to a legacy or pedigree of exemplary conduct passed on by a person to future generations. The relevant passage occurs in “Far Roaming” 遠游 from the *Chuci* 楚辭: “I have heard of Red Pine's pure dust/I wish to carry on his spiritual tenor in relation to his bequeathed standards” 聞赤松之清塵兮，願承風乎遺則。

⁵³ These are the “threads” or “guide ropes” of political order as well as the teachings of the Classics which form the basis of that order.

far back into the past but must be taken up by an “inheritor” (*si* 嗣) in order to continue into the present. Xuan’s natural place in the world is not the battlefield or the court but the salon where he discourses on the Way. Andrew Chittick has shown that while no such rigid division between court culture and garrison culture ever existed in practice, it was, nevertheless, a key tenet of what he calls Zhongren 中人 ideology to insist that members of elite clans were above doing the dirty work of military service.⁵⁴ If their hand was forced, however, they could, as Lingyun portrays it here, stoop down to save the world with a quick change of clothing. A famous anecdote recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 captures this aspect of the Xie family *fengliu* quite well. Xie An is playing encirclement chess in his tent during the Battle of Fei River when news arrives that Xie Xuan’s troops have emerged victorious over Fu Jian’s supposedly much larger invading army. Xie An is unmoved and continues playing the game. When his opponent asks to know the status of the battle, Xie calmly responds, “My little boys have soundly beaten the bandits” 小兒輩大破賊.⁵⁵

II.

中原昔喪亂，	In former times, the Central Plains fell into ruin and chaos.
喪亂豈解已。	Ruin and chaos, have they ever ceased on their own?
崩騰永嘉末，	Collapsing and surging—the end of Yongjia (307–313).
逼迫太元始。	Hemmed in and pressed—the beginning of Taiyuan (376–396).
河外無反正，	Beyond the River there was no return to the upright. ⁵⁶
江介有蹙圯。	At the bounds of the Jiang there were aggressive despoliations. ⁵⁷
萬邦咸震懼，	The ten-thousand domains all trembled and shook.
橫流賴君子。	In such wild floods, one depends on a true gentleman. ⁵⁸

⁵⁴ “Zhongren” is Chittick’s term for descendants of the families that emigrated south after the fall of the Western Jin and whose identity remained tied to ancestral places in the Central Planes (*Zhongyuan* 中原 as *Zhongtu* 中土) region. The members of these families tended to support military campaigns to retake territory in the north. *The Jiankang Empire in Chinese and World History*, 150–9. For the intertwined nature of court culture and garrison culture in the Southern Dynasties, see also his *Patronage and Community in Medieval China: The Xiangyang Garrison, 400–600 CE* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Chapter 6, passage 35 in *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋, comp. Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, comm. Xu Zhen’e 徐震堃 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 203.

⁵⁶ In late Warring States texts, “beyond the River” refers to the regions south and west of the Yellow River. Here it refers to the Western Jin capital at Luoyang. The language of “returning to the upright” is borrowed from the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳, “In terms of bringing order to disorder and returning things to uprightness, nothing comes close to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*” 撥亂反正，莫近於春秋. Of course, “bringing order to disorder and returning things to uprightness” are the prerogatives of a ruler. As the “crownless king” (*sunwang* 素王), however, Confucius was only able to accomplish these things in the proxy realm of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

⁵⁷ “At the bounds of the Jiang” refers to the Eastern Jin capital Jiankang by its position relative to the Yangtze River.

⁵⁸ These are the “wild floods” as described in the *Mengzi* 孟子 which engulfed All Under Heaven and were subsequently tamed by the Sage King Yao 堯.

拯溺由道情，	He pulled ashore the drowning by means of the true way. ⁵⁹
龕暴資神理。	He overcame savagery through stores of divine understanding.
秦趙欣來蘇，	Qin and Zhao were delighted at the coming of relief. ⁶⁰
燕魏遲文軌。	Yan and Wei eagerly awaited standardized writing and wheel-ruts. ⁶¹
賢相謝世運，	But then that Worthy Minister took leave of the world cycle,
遠圖因事止。	In the wake of certain events, his far-reaching plans were halted. ⁶²
高揖七州外，	With a high salute, he was out beyond the Seven Provinces.
拂衣五湖裏。	Dusting off his clothes, he was amongst the Five Lakes.
隨山疏濬潭，	Following the mountains, he opened deep lochs.
傍巖蓢粉梓。	Close-by the cliffs, he planted elms and catalpa trees. ⁶³
遺情捨塵物，	Casting off his worldly sentiments, he abandoned dusty things.
貞觀丘壑美。	Upright, he views the beauty of the hills and gorges.

The second poem brings us more fully into the world of the Eastern Jin. The turmoil beginning with the Rebellion of the Eight Princes extends into the present in the form of the Former Qin's incursions into the Huainan region, which began in the Taiyuan reign period (376–396). The language particularly of the third “stanza” mimics the *Shang shu* 尚書 where it is the Sage Kings who step out of their ordinary existence to save the world from flood and social disorder. Xie An's death signals the end of the cycle in which it is possible for the upright gentleman to serve without compromising his integrity. The language at the close of the penultimate couplet is arresting. Xuan does not deliberate over the best course of action. He gently raises his hands in a salute and is, as though by magic, “out beyond the Seven Provinces.” In as little time as it takes to brush off one's clothing, he is “amidst the Five Lakes.” In the final stanza Xie Xuan appears engaged in a kind of excursion that exactly prefigures Xie Lingyun's own transformation of the Shi'ning estate. Xuan “follows” the natural topography of the mountains to make deep pools just as Xie will follow the traces of these interventions in the landscape to make his own. In order to track this process in which following the natural terrain entails

⁵⁹ Commenting on the sage kings of remote antiquity Mengzi says, “If All Under Heaven is drowning, then rescue them by means of the Way” 天下溺則援之以道。

⁶⁰ This phrase comes from the “Zhonghui zhi gao” 仲虺之誥 [Zhonghua's Proclamation] chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 “We waited on our prince, and when the prince came at ease were we.” 俟予后，後來其蘇

⁶¹ That is, they awaited reintegration into the empire.

⁶² “Events” (*shi* 事) points to a specific set of circumstances without naming them, with the expectation that the reader will fill in the gap. It functions here like the phrase “a certain person” in English, when it is assumed that everyone knows who is being referred to. The “certain events” in question are the death of Xie An in 385 and the rise of Sima Daozi. In the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, Rong Chengbo 榮成伯 says “As for distant planning, that is [a form of] trustworthiness” 遠圖者忠也。

⁶³ According to Li Shan's note, “the people of Chu call deep water *tan* 潭.” I am using “loch” here in its earliest sense, referring to pools formed by groundwater.

creating the natural terrain, we might retranslate the final line to say that in Xuan's newfound purity he “*causes* the beauty of the hills and gorges *to be seen*” 觀丘壑美, picking up a more archaic use of the verb *guan* 觀.⁶⁴ The landscape of the estate comes to be a landscape through Xie Xuan's act of viewing it, though this is captured through Xie Lingyun's act of recording it as its current inhabitant. Xuan's act of viewing the estate does not require the intermediary of a text—his legacy takes the form of the impact of his person and personality on the very physical form of the estate itself. These poems describe or transmit (*shu* 述) the legacy of his grandfather's virtue in the form of a text. This will be the work of Xie's own estate poetry.

3.4 Pathways to the Person: Xie Lingyun's Estate Poetry

Xie Lingyun first relocated to Shi'ning from Yongjia in 424. According to his “Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains,” Xie had a building constructed on the foundations of the original compound which sat at the base of a cliff facing south and provided views of the paddies and irrigation channels to the east and west. He also erected a new lodge south of the original building (and possibly connected to it) which overlooked a river flowing down from the mountains to cross just to its south.⁶⁵ Xie's retainers raised rice and vegetables in the paddies scattered throughout the river basin and ran trapping, fishing, and logging operations in the densely wooded hills surrounding the compound.⁶⁶ The library, lecture hall, meditation hall, and monastery were probably not completed until his second stay, following his full retirement in 426. As the estate grew, Xie began to advance a new theory of elite eremitism in his *shi*-poetry. He seems to have felt that his estate—so forbiddingly remote and yet so grandiose and luxurious—was out-of-category with respect to dominate modes of reclusion. It was neither a rustic hermitage of the “nest-dweller” variety, nor a modest country dwelling with quaint gardens and ponds, nor a mansion in the city from which one could withdraw into a figurative reclusion of the mind or spirit. Although this theory receives its fullest exposition in the “Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains,” the desire to discover and describe a mode of reclusion that will be his own runs through all of his estate poetry.⁶⁷ While in the process of constructing the newer of the two lodges—the one overlooking the river to the south—Xie wrote a *shi*-poem entitled “South Of My Fields I Plant a Garden, Divert a Stream, and Set Up a Hedge” 田南樹園激流植援.⁶⁸ I will quote the poem as a whole and then break it into sections. These sections roughly correspond to units of two couplets, or quatrains:

⁶⁴ The *Wang Li Gu Hanyu zidian* 王力古漢語字典 cites an example of this usage from the *Zhouli* 周禮. See *Wang Li Gu Hanyu zidian*, ed. Wang Li 王力 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1251.

⁶⁵ For the position of the two main lodges, see the text of “Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains” along with Xie's own commentary. Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 452–455.

⁶⁶ Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 452.

⁶⁷ For a full annotated English translation of the “Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains” and an illuminating discussion of its relationship to Xie's other estate/landscape poems, see Francis Westbrook, “Landscape Description in the Lyric Poetry and ‘Fuh on Dwelling in the Mountains’ of Shieh Ling-yun.” Wendy Swartz has discussed the underlying tensions in Xie's chosen mode of reclusion in “There's No Place Like Home: Xie Lingyun's Representation of His Estate in Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains,” *Early Medieval China* 21 (2015): 21–37.

⁶⁸ *Wen xuan* 30.1397. Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 168–172. Huang, *Xie Kangle shizhu*, 642–3.

3.4.1. “South Of My Fields I Plant a Garden, Divert a Stream, and Set Up a Hedge” 田南樹園激流植援.

樵隱俱在山，	Woodsmen and hermits both live in the mountains.
由來事不同。	But in terms of what brings them there, their affairs are not the same. ⁶⁹
不同非一事，	They are different not on one account only,
養痾亦園中。	As for “recuperating from my illness,” I do it in the garden.
中園屏氛雜，	In this garden I am screened off from bad air and bustle.
清曠招遠風。	Its pure spaciousness summons a far-off breeze. ⁷⁰
卜室倚北阜，	In divining this dwelling, I leaned it against the northern hills.
啟扉面南江。	When I open the gate, I face the river to the south.
激澗代汲井，	A turbulent stream takes the place of a well for drawing water,
插槿當列墉。	Interlocking shrubs act as arrayed walls.
群木既羅戶，	Clusters of trees just happen to flank the doorway.
眾山亦對牕。	And myriad mountains stand opposite my window.
靡迤趨下田，	Twisting and twining, I scurry down to the fields.
迢遞瞰高峰。	Far-off and indistinct, I peer at the lofty peaks.
寡欲不期勞，	As for making few my desires, I didn’t anticipate it would be so toilsome. ⁷¹
即事罕人功。	But responding to it in the moment requires little in the way of human effort.
唯開蔣生逕，	I have only opened a path for Master Jiang,
永懷求羊蹤。	But I have always longed for the footprints of Yang and Qiu. ⁷²
賞心不可忘，	As for the appreciative mind, he cannot be forgotten,
妙善冀能同。	With the wondrous and exceptional, I hope to be able to share this.

Like the twisting paths that lead from the river basin up to Xie’s mountain dwelling, this poem proceeds by wide turns, during which it is easy to lose sight of the destination. For this reason, I will break it down into stanzas for analysis.

⁶⁹ Li Shan cites a passage from Zang Rongxu’s 臧榮緒 now-lost *Jin shu* 晉書 in which he quotes He Qi 何琦: “Hu Kongming has a saying, ‘Recluses are in the mountains. Woodsmen are also in the mountains. Their being in the mountains is the same. The reason why they are in the mountains is different’ 胡孔明有言，隱者在山，樵者亦在山，在山則同，所以在山則異。

⁷⁰ Zhongchang Tong’s 仲長統 (180–220) *Hou Han shu* biography records that he “desired to divine a residence pure and spacious so as to take delight in his aims” 欲卜居清曠，以樂其志。癸卯歲始春懷古田舍。

⁷¹ The phrase comes from the *Laozi* 老子: “Reduce selfishness and make few one’s desires” 少私寡欲。

⁷² The *Sanfu jue* 三輔決錄 contains an entry on Jiang Xu 蔣詡 who went into reclusion at Duling 杜陵. His residence had three pathways leading to it, one for him and the others for his two closest friends Yang Zhong 羊仲 and Qiu Zhong 求仲. I take Xie to be saying that he has only made a path for Master Jiang (i.e. for himself) but looks forward to the day when those who recognize his worth will pay him a visit.

樵隱俱在山，	Woodsmen and hermits both live in the mountains.
由來事不同。	But in terms of what brings them there, their affairs are not the same.
不同非一事，	They are different not on one account only,
養痾亦園中。	As for “recuperating from my illness,” I do it in the garden.

The poem opens with a restatement of the identity crisis inherent in the very nature of reclusion, a topic of intense discussion in the early medieval period. The gentleman in retirement must figure out a way to blend in with his environment (which includes farmers and woodsmen) and yet also distinguish himself from that environment; he must shape that environment in such a way that what he is doing out there in the wilderness becomes clear without being directly divulged. Robert Campney has discussed this (following Hugh Urban) as the problem of “advertising the secret.”⁷³ In line 2, Xie plays on two related senses of the word *you* 由 to refer to the *paths* whereby we come to be where we are and the more abstract *reasons* that lead to a course of action. He then generalizes this insight in the next line: “woodsman” and “hermit” (or, more literally, “self-concealer” *yin* 隱) are both social labels which cover a variety of intentions and dispositions. Some gentlemen retire for fame, some because they have been exiled and have no choice. His own justification for withdrawing from the world is that he is sick and must have peace and quiet in order to recover. But this too, Xie wants us to notice, is also a socially acceptable reason for taking leave from the court, a standardized signal one can use to justify doing something else entirely. By their very nature as labels for socially recognizable choices, none can ever exhaust the intent of the person who uses them. By opening with the question of the ways people come to live a life in the mountains, Xie has led us, almost without our noticing it, into his garden where we will learn to read the signals, embedded in the landscape, that will tell us who he is.

中園屏氛雜，	In this garden I am screened off from bad air and confusion.
清曠招遠風。	Its pure spaciousness summons a distant breeze.
卜室倚北阜，	In siting this dwelling, I leaned it against the northern hills.
啟扉面南江。	When I open the gate, I face the river to the south.

The garden is screened off from the pollution of the mundane world, which threatens to seep in as smells or sounds and yet it not only permits but invites a “distant breeze.” This construction occurs in Tao Qian’s “Early Spring in the Year *guimao* [403], Yearning for Antiquity at My Farmstead in Two Poems” 癸卯歲始春懷古田舍二首 and it is hard to resist the urge to see Xie Lingyun as self-consciously channeling Tao here.⁷⁴ We can resolve the contradiction of a distant breeze blowing through a sealed garden by making *yuan* 遠 causative: a “far-away-making breeze,” that is, a breeze that gives one the impression of being farther away from everything than one was the moment before

⁷³ Robert Ford Campney, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 2009), 90.

⁷⁴ “The level field is crisscrossed by a distant breeze, / The fine sprouts also hold dear their newness” 平疇交遠風，良苗亦懷新。See *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 ed. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 3.77.

it arose. The dwelling has been divined and sited in such a way that it mimics its inhabitants' postures within it, leaning against the hills and facing south toward the river.

激澗代汲井，	A turbulent stream takes the place of drawing water,
插槿當列墉。	Interlocking shrubs act as arrayed walls.
群木既羅戶，	Clusters of trees just happen to flank the doorway.
眾山亦對牕。	And myriad mountains stand opposite the window.

We are now shown a kind of dwelling space in which the usual architectural structures necessary for human habitation are provided by natural features of the landscape, seemingly of their own agency. The syntax of the second couplet above illustrates this phenomenon. Instead of a door determining where the trees lining the entryway path will go, clusters of trees lead to a doorway. Xie has not installed a window in order to frame the mountains, the mountains for their part stand opposite the window.

摩迤趨下田，	Twisting and twining, I rush down to the fields.
迢遞瞰高峰。	Into the hazy distance, I peer at the lofty peaks.
寡欲不期勞，	As for making few my desires, I didn't anticipate it would be so toilsome.
即事罕人功。	But responding in the moment requires little in the way of human effort.

The first couplet of this stanza gives the space of the estate a new vertical and horizontal dimension. Viewed from the lodge, the paths coil endlessly down to the fields. Viewed from the fields, the mountains, which had just seemed so close from the window, now recede into a distance that grows hazier and more indistinct the further off one looks. "Making few my desires" in the next line refers not to asceticism but to the very act of going into reclusion. This process, which seems on the surface to be purely subtractive, has turned out to be quite laborious. Once the exterior structures are in place, however, the human response it elicits in the form of this poem requires no effort. These lines mark the point at which the dwelling space itself begins to reveal a mode of dwelling, a style of inhabiting a space, and through this the personality of the dweller. What we have up until this point taken to be features of the dwelling are in fact reflections of the dweller: it is from the perspective of someone who has succeeded in the labor of dwelling in this particular way that the stream replaces a well for drawing water, trees magically flank the doorway, and mountains gather in the windows. Likewise, it is through the circuitous and labor-intensive structure of the poem which opens with the impossibility of knowing what brought a person to dwell in the forest—whether as a woodsman or as a recluse—that the reader comes to realize that the description of the dwelling was in fact a description of Xie's *mode* of dwelling. This answers the question of who he is and what he is doing without directly answering it. His *style* of dwelling becomes legible entirely at the level of the stylized construction of the estate in the language of the poem.

唯開蔣生逕，	I have only opened a path for Master Jiang,
永懷求羊蹤。	But I still long for the footprints of Yang and Qiu.
賞心不可忘，	As for the appreciative mind, he cannot be forgotten,
妙善冀能同。	With the wondrous and exceptional, I hope to be able to share this.

The poem closes by re-invoking the image of paths of access with which it began. It is not enough for Xie to be known to his reader; a *fengliu* legible only in a style of dwelling and writing about dwelling has not yet gained full employment. He holds out the possibility that he others who have the acumen not just to see him for who he is but to make him who he is through patronage will find their way to him, perhaps along the second pathway he has laid out in the form of this poem. These early estate poems were, after all, precisely the poems Shen Yue claims Xie circulated in the capital region. In the final lines, Xie expresses the desire for a kind of gathering with the “wonderous and exceptional” with whom the talent and the legacy of the person revealed in the poem can be “shared.” The poem serves as a proxy space for this meeting with the “appreciative mind” (*shangxin* 賞心) but it is not, by itself, an adequate space.

We have seen how the delicate balance of natural and artificial structures in the architecture of his mountain hermitage can be read as an analog for the balance of spontaneity and artifice in the language of the poem. Like the longer “Fu on Dwelling in the Mountains” 山居賦, this poem advances a paradoxical argument. First, it is only by physically imposing the architecture of the estate onto the landscape that the natural beauty of the scenery it frames can be seen. Second, the spontaneous collaboration between the estate and the landscape can only emerge through the second-order imposition of the framework of the poem which records this interaction. Finally, both structures, estate and estate poem, terminate in the poet’s fleeting response to the very matter itself (*jishi* 即事). This moment is framed by the poem and yet exceeds it. The specificity of the circumstances of the poem and the singularity of the response no longer refer only to the landscape or the estate, which are made to merge and cancel each other out, but *back* to Xie Lingyun himself. The referential content of the poem exists as a prop for a momentary but powerful apprehension of a personal style expressed as a way of organizing and inhabiting both the space of the estate and the language of the response.⁷⁵ But the final lines of the poem mark this as a diminished state in Xie reminder that he has yet to encounter that “appreciative mind” that will grant him fuller recognition that comes with political patronage.⁷⁶ Poetic personalities were stitched together of such highly specific responses. The single-author collection, in which such moments could converge to produce an image of a recognizable person, served as their horizon of possibility. It seems that over the course of his life, Xie lost faith that such a moment of recognition could ever occur *except* in the realm of his texts. Xie’s most profound meditation on the difference between the realm in which he desired to be recognized and the realm in which he was recognized occurs in his “Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei’s Gatherings at Ye.”

3.5 Rising to the Occasion: *Ni* 擬 Before Stylistic Imitation

Before we turn to look at Xie’s fictive anthology of imitation poems more closely, we must first place Xie Lingyun’s suite within the broader history of imitation poetry. Scholars typically date the first imitation poetry to the late third century CE, pinning it to the appearance of a new titling convention

⁷⁵ Robert Ashmore has noted that in the rhetoric of medieval eremitism, the speaker of an utterance or the author of a poem is often figured as taking up temporary lodging (*ji* 寄 or *yu* 寓) or even perching (*qi* 棲) in the language of his text. See *Transport of Reading*, 58–69.

⁷⁶ Harrison Huang reminds us that “to *shang* 賞 is to ‘reward’ or ‘bestow’ a privilege performed by the ruler to recognize courtiers for achievements or services rendered to the state.” See “Excursions, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze,” 51.

consisting of the formula *ni* 擬 (usually translated “imitating”) followed by the title of a past work.⁷⁷ Fu Xuan’s 傅玄 (217–278) collection contains fragments of several explicitly marked “imitations” of this kind.⁷⁸ We should be careful however not to reify titling conventions when looking at the poetry of the Eastern Han period: a title of the form “*ni* X” is just as likely to have been supplied by a later reader or editor as it is to have circulated with the poem. In his classic article on imitation and forgery, Wang Yao 王瑤 argues that for much of the early medieval period, the compositional practice later writers and editors in the tradition referred to as “imitation,” precisely with reference to this titling convention, was not limited to poems explicitly marked as such.⁷⁹ Wang adduces a wide range of examples to show that the related compositional practices of “imitating” (*ni* 擬) earlier works, composing alternate versions (*dai* 代) of existing works, and “supplementing” (*bu* 補) missing or incomplete works were not rigorously distinguished from each other, nor were these practices considered fundamentally different from the ostensibly single-author practice of “composition” (*zu* 作).⁸⁰ Indeed, in many cases, works written “as” or “in the voice of” long-dead historical figures were taken to be the authentic works of those long-dead historical figures; the authentication of these works, Wang argues, was carried out with reference to the “thoughts” or “intentions” (*yi* 意) of the speaker on the particular occasion described or referred to in the title of the composition. It is important to remember as well that this practice of writing in the vein of earlier works was far from an end in itself. Rather it was but one aspect of a much broader practice of self-cultivation by means of “embodying” (*ti* 體) antique models of behavior and discourse. Robert Ashmore has shown that virtually the same set of concerns also guided the reading of the Confucian classics in the early medieval period.⁸¹

Stephen Owen has pointed out that the earliest examples of *ni*-poems, such as Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261–303) series entitled “Imitating the ‘Ancient Poems’” 擬古詩,⁸² were not concerned with reproducing

⁷⁷ In his book-length study of Jiang Yan’s 江淹 (444–505) “Diverse Forms” 雜體, Nicholas Morrow Johnson reminds us that the practice of literary imitation is the very mechanism through which a literary tradition changes and comes to understand itself. He attributes the first programmatic use of literary imitation to Yang Xiong 揚雄, but places the origins of the genre of “imitation poetry” in the third century. See *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 23–49.

⁷⁸ Yan Kejun 嚴可均 coll. *Fu Xuan Fuzi jiaodu* 傅玄傅子校讀, Gao Xinmin 高新民 and Zhu Yun 朱允 eds. (Ningxia: Ningxia renmin chubanshe), 205–6, 221. See Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 260, and Johnson, *Imitations of the Self*, 64–76.

⁷⁹ Wang Yao 王瑤, “Nigu yu zuowei” 擬古與作偽, in *Zhonggu wenxue shilun* 中古文學史論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1953), 199.

⁸⁰ Wang Yao, “Nigu yu zuowei,” 206.

⁸¹ See, in particular, the first and third chapters of *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365–427)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

⁸² Owen notes that the title of this series of poems is ambiguous. Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 260n4. It could be translated “Imitating the ‘Ancient Poems’” to suggest, as Owen does, that Lu Ji was working with a specific set of fixed texts circulating as *the* “Ancient Poems.” It might also translated “Imitating Ancient Poems” if we believe that Lu Ji was working with an unstable repertoire of poems called commonly referred to as Ancient Poems. This seems unlikely given the close correspondence in the order of couplets in both sets. It is not impossible though that the twelve poems which match the arrangement of Lu Ji’s imitations included in the *Wenxuan* 文選 in the “Nineteen Ancient Poems” existed in other versions (as did many Music Bureau poems in this period) and were chosen to match the couplet sequence of Lu Ji’s imitations. This is another way of saying our versions of these eleven “Ancient Poems” were fixed at the moment Lu Ji imitated them. Indeed, Lu Ji’s imitations of these particular ancient poems would have conferred upon them a certain level of authority in the eyes of an editor in the early medieval period. We must be mindful that editors

the literary *style* of the original works. Prior to the sixth century CE, the object of the verb *ni* was almost always a “title,” which is to say a specific poem presumed to be a “fixed text,” never an author. Owen demonstrates that Lu Ji’s poems were not stylistic imitations of the original poems but couplet by couplet “rewrites” or “recreations” in a higher register. We might add that for Lu Ji’s audience to get the full effect of this updated repertoire—the “same” poems but in the elevated register of Western Jin banquet poetry—they would have needed to know the originals. Owen concludes that it is not until the late sixth century CE that *ni* comes to designate a poet’s attempt to imitate the signature literary style of another poet. The preconditions for this kind of imitation are, first, what he calls “literary historical consciousness” or the very idea of periods with distinctive styles and, second, a “complex mapping of literary and authorial styles” as can be seen in sixth century works such as Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (465–532) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 and Zhong Rong’s *Shi pin*.⁸³ Like all pathbreaking research, these articles raise more questions than they are ultimately able to answer. Given the telegraphic nature of Wang’s article and the relatively narrow scope of Owen’s chapter on “imitation,” many of these questions deserve to be posed again in a wider context.

For the purposes of the present analysis, I will argue that in many of the extant examples of *ni*-poems, the object of *ni* is the *occasion* of the original utterance. It follows that the text of the poem being imitated is the analog of the thoughts and feelings of someone compelled to respond to a particular occasion. The original text serves as a guide for re-occasioning this response (which often implied updating or improving it) but need not be followed down to the word. There are two main kinds of occasion to which poems became affixed and which often overlapped in practice: “stereotypical occasions” (though not in the pejorative sense “stereotypical” has in modern English) and “historical occasions.” Stereotypical occasions are those upon which a young man in the early medieval period would have been expected to produce an impromptu poem or song: parting banquets, hunting excursions, climbing a tower or a city wall with friends and so forth. On these kinds of occasions, the writing or singing of poetry was a way of demonstrating a capacity for agile response, the skill or knack for making a shared repertoire of model texts and formulae speak *to* the present occasion not *of* the inner world of the poet.

Zhou Xunchu 周勰初 has convincingly argued that the phrase “Those who ascend to a height and are able to make poems, are suitable to be high ministers” 登高能賦可以為大夫 originally referred to stepping up onto the dais in the banquet hall to declaim a poem.⁸⁴ As conventions for the composition of occasional verse changed (i.e. moved out of the royal banquet hall), later poets took this phrase to refer to their own practice of climbing up mountains or to the top of wall-towers to respond, each in their own way, to the vista they beheld. For early medieval poets, certain occasions demanded certain kinds of responses almost irrespective of the private thoughts and feelings of the poet, though these inevitably showed forth in the execution of the response. In his article “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” David Schaberg has skillfully shown that the medley of early song-forms we now call *shi*-poetry took shape as a genre partly through the practice of matching popular songs or ballads attributed to culture heroes such as the tragic figure of Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–

frequently made such unconscionable (by modern text-critical standards) changes to even the most hallowed ancient texts.

⁸³ Owen, *The Making of Early Classical Chinese Poetry*, 261.

⁸⁴ The phrase 登高能賦 occurs in the *Mao Tradition* of the *Odes* (*Mao zhuan* 毛傳) in a comment on “Ding zhi fang zhong” (定之方中; Mao #50). See *Mao Shi Zhengyi* 3.236. For the full phrase quoted above see *Han shu* 30.1755. See Zhou Xunchu 周勰初. “Deng gao neng fu” shuo de yanbian he Liu Xie chuangzao lun de xingcheng” 登高能賦的演變和劉勰創造論的行程, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue luncong* 魏晉南北朝文學論叢 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 137–49.

202 BCE) and the Western Han general Su Wu 蘇武 (140–60 BCE) with the historical moment in which they were first sung.⁸⁵ When readers felt strongly that a song must have been sung on a particular occasion, they supplied one themselves. The corpus of poems later attributed to Su Wu, for example, was almost certainly written by others *as* Su Wu responding to particular events in this historical figure's life. The challenge for poets writing imitations of this kind was to anticipate what Su Wu might have said so well that the resulting poem would *become* Su Wu's poem. Notice that in order to describe this practice I have had to make a distinction between a poem by Su Wu and a poem written *as* Su Wu. It is possible that ancient readers had no use for such distinctions in regards to *shi*-poetry. We must keep reminding ourselves that in addition to the many differences between modern conceptions of authorship and early medieval ones, the thresholds for authorship were higher for certain genres than they were for others in the early medieval world.

Poems written for both kinds of occasions could serve to illustrate the response such an occasion was supposed to elicit in the participants and which, presumably, it did elicit in the form of the model text. Because *shi*-poetry is so often talked about together with other types of literary composition, it is easy to forget that *shi*-poetry was the most occasion-bound genre of verse in the early medieval period. A member of the educated elite needed constantly to find the words, the allusions, and the motifs that would enable him to rise to a particular occasion. As Stephen Owen shows so convincingly in *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, the still relatively new genre of informal occasional verse supplied learner's not so much with a canon of fixed texts as with a canon of words that were equal to the demands made of the speaker on some past occasion and that might still help him rise to an analogous occasion in his own life.

The aim of "imitation" and of other related practices such as writing "substitutes" and "supplements" to missing or even non-existent texts of the distant past was the creation of a separate but equally valid site for the re-presentation of a past but still efficacious occasion for the performance of *wen* 文, with all of its inwardly and outwardly transformative powers. Lost in the largely 20th century preoccupation with discovering an expressive theory of lyric poetry in the early Chinese poetic tradition is the fact that the most frequently cited piece of evidence for the existence of such a theory—the axiom that "poetry articulates intentions" 詩言志—occurs first in a passage in the *Shangshu* 尚書 where it has absolutely nothing to do with the practice of *composing* poetry. Instead, it refers to model texts and musical arrangements intended to shape the "royal sons" (*zhouzi* 冑子). Poems (*shi* 詩)—here referring to the Odes of the *Shijing* 詩經, not individually authored *shi*-poems by later poets—were intended to provide a channel for the communication of a normative intent. Channel is the appropriate word here because the intent passes through the singer or reciter, molding his character in the process. An early example of this dynamic can be seen in Shu Xi's 束皙 (261–300 CE) "Restoring the Lost Odes" 補亡詩六首, six poems written in the tetrasyllabic line for the purpose of supplying six Odes for which apparently only the titles remained. We learn from Shu Xi's preface that these restored Odes were to be performed at the "village wine-toasting ceremony" 鄉飲酒義, a very important coming-of-age ritual in which elite young men demonstrated proper deference to their elders.⁸⁶ Interestingly, Shu is following the Mao commentary in assuming that these six Odes originally had words in the first place; in other texts these Odes are simply "played" (*sheng* 笙) not "sung" (*ge*

⁸⁵ David Schaberg, "Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59, no. 2 (1999): 305–361.

⁸⁶ *Wen xuan* 文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shubanshe, 1985), 19.905–912.

歌).⁸⁷ Although it may seem counterintuitive, Shu Xi does not need to know the lyrics of the original song in order to imitate it. This is because the object of the “restoring” or “patching” (*bu* 補) is not a text considered in isolation but a ritual performance repertoire. The texts will work as long as they channel the normative intent of the lost Odes through the participants in the ritual. As Tom Mazanec has shown in a recent article, the need for ritual efficacy vastly outweighs the need for stylistic fidelity or period accuracy in such a compositional scenario.⁸⁸

Significantly, Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) and company chose Shu Xi’s “restored” poems to open the *shi* section of the *Wen xuan*. We might speculate that its placement functioned to emphasize the continuity between a more ancient ritual deployment of *shi*-poetry and the new but nevertheless still occasion-oriented deployment of *shi*-poetry in the Southern Dynasties. This continuity is established with reference to a practice of *recomposition*, that is, to the production of new texts in accordance with the demands of a present occasion. *Ni* in this context thus refers to the re-siting not of a particular “fixed” text but of a past performance in the body and mind of the poet, re-performing or composing it in the present.⁸⁹ To *ni* a past work was to re-compose it as oneself on the present occasion. Shu Xi’s preface makes clear that he prepared his “restored” Odes to accompany an actual ritual performance. Lu Ji’s “Imitating the ‘Ancient Poems’” seems to have been undertaken as a literary exercise intended to bring a selection of works in the corpus of “Ancient Poems” into the ambit of the present. Although Xie Lingyun’s anthology of imitation poems looks on the surface quite similar to these earlier *ni* compositions, I will argue that it cites this earlier practice but places itself in a new and troubling relation to the texts and the moment it seeks to imitate.

3.6 Banquet of One: Xie Lingyun’s Model Anthology

Let us now turn back to Xie Lingyun’s “Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei’s Gatherings at Ye” 擬魏太子鄴中集詩. In this series of poems, the object of *ni* is clearly the gathering itself; thus, the *ji* 集 of the title refers both to the banquet and to its analog in the collection of poems. At the same time, the retrospective framework established by the preface means that *ni* has a historical dimension that is absent in earlier forms of imitation. Xie has first written banquet poems in the voice of the young Cao Pi and the members of his court, one poem for each member.⁹⁰ This is the first sense of *ji* 集 in the title: banquet gathering. Had Xie stopped there, this series of poems could be

⁸⁷ The “Mao zhuan” 毛傳 gives the title and the Mao preface of these Odes with the note “incomplete” (*que* 闕). But they can only be incomplete if they are assumed to have originally had lyrics. See *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, comm. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 and sub-comm. Kong Yingda 孔穎達, in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 9.711 and 10.719.

⁸⁸ “Righting, Riting, and Rewriting the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*): On ‘Filling out the Missing Odes’ by Shu Xi.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews* 40 (2018): 5–32.

⁸⁹ My discussion of recomposition and reperformance as modes of continuity in primarily oral literary traditions is indebted to Gregory Nagy’s work on Greek lyric poetry. See especially his excellent discussion of mimesis in *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59–103.

⁹⁰ On the historical impossibility of these eight men being in the same place at the same time, see Tian Xiaofei, *The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 34. For reasonable doubts as to the existence of an anthology of poems called *Yezhong ji* 鄴中集 traceable to Cao Pi himself, see Rebecca Doran, “Perspective and Appreciation in Xie Lingyun’s ‘Imitations of the Crown Prince of Wei’s Gatherings in Ye,’” *Early Medieval China* 17 (2011): 54–6. Cao Pi does talk about gathering writings by his former courtiers in his famous letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (177–230). See *Wen xuan*, 42.1896–99. He mentions collecting their written works, not *shi*-poems per se.

fitted easily into the tradition of imitation poetry in which a talented writer deems some earlier text a worthy model for contemporary poetic practice. Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) "Imitations of 'Ancient Poems'" 擬古詩 conferred such a status on a subset of the group we now know as the "Nineteen Ancient Poems" 古詩十九首 by their inclusion in the *Wen xuan*. But Xie has also written a fictional preface in the voice of Cao Pi looking back on the banquet a few years later as Emperor Wen 魏文帝 (220–226) in which he describes the process of editing the manuscripts of the poems included in the anthology. This is the second sense of *ji* in the title of the poem: anthology. "Emperor Wen" (I will use scare-quote to denote Xie writing as Emperor Wen) has also supplied appraisals of each poet's personality and career. Xie Lingyun's poem is thus an imitation of *both* acts of gathering. It contains a retrospective glance (Xie's) cast through a retrospective glance (Emperor Wen's) at an earlier banquet scene. The presence of the banquet occasioned by the sagely governance of Cao Cao and the magnanimous stewardship of Cao Pi which Xie's poem-series takes as its (virtual) model points to the *absence* of such an occasion in the present. This series can thus be read as a commentary on the court culture of the Liu-Song and an expression of Xie's frustration at his own place in it.⁹¹ It is significant, in other words, that in this series of *ni*-poems, Xie Lingyun must act *as his own occasion*, inventing a quasi-fictional venue in which he plays the roles of both the talented guests and the host who recognizes and appreciates their talents. Xie Lingyun's nostalgia is not simply for a moment in which the wine and words flowed freely and people wrote good poetry. Rather this series is full of nostalgia for a moment in which the banquet served as the venue for the projection of sagely government and in which *shi*-poetry, court music, and banquet songs were important but nevertheless *auxiliary* elements of that larger occasion.

Scholars have attempted to account in other ways for Xie Lingyun's motivations. Mei Jialing 梅家玲 holds that Xie Lingyun's role as the host of the banquet points to his role as a host, in a deeper sense, of a literary tradition that is inherently polyvocal. She argues that the various elements of the series—"Emperor Wen's" main preface, his individual prefaces to each poem, and the poems by each of the guests—correspond to a different perspective; these perspectives interact to produce a densely-layered, cubist portrait of the salon at Ye.⁹² Rebecca Doran has argued that this series of *ni*-poems should be read as a work of literary criticism in which Xie Lingyun imitates not a particular poem or a particular poet but an "ideal literary community" characterized by the "perfect harmony of all within in group."⁹³ Doran rightly observes that the entire series is unified by the perspective of Cao Pi: Xie Lingyun's "imitation" is centered around Cao Pi's role as the "enlightened leader" of the group while the poems by the individual members of the salon imitate Cao Pi's poem and reflect upon his munificence.⁹⁴ On this reading, Cao Pi's desire to make a collection of poems to memorialize the gatherings at Ye reflects Xie's own concern with "literary memory and canonization."⁹⁵ Thus, Doran argues that Xie's collection functions to recollect the Jian'an moment in the inherently evaluative mode of "imitation." More recently, Xiaofei Tian has showed how the vision of "literary Jian'an" Xie Lingyun conjured up through his Ye anthology set the tone for later appraisals of the period, shaped later readers and editors senses of what was truly distinctive about the period.⁹⁶ She points out the irony that despite later readers' sense that Xie Lingyun had captured the essence of the unique mixture

⁹¹ See *Song shu*, 67.1772.

⁹² Mei Jialing 梅家玲, *Han Wei Linchao wenxue xinlun: nidai yu zengda pian* 漢魏六朝文學新論: 擬代與贈答篇 (Taibei: Liren shuju, 1997), 5–63.

⁹³ Rebecca Doran, "Perspective and Appreciation" 59–60.

⁹⁴ Doran, "Perspective and Appreciation," 62.

⁹⁵ Doran, "Perspective and Appreciation," 63.

⁹⁶ *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, 58.

of “conviviality, but also of nostalgia and mourning” of the Jian’an salon, his is a distinctly fifth century banquet scene. Tian means that instead of the overflowing wine goblets and raucous song and dance, Xie’s Jian’an poets “analyze principles” (*xili* 析理), though metaphysics does not seem to have been a common topic of banquet conversation in this period. And even though banquet host at Ye likely would have composed poetry along with the guests, in Xie’s anthology Cao Pi provides the model text for his courtiers much like a prince would at a Liu-Song era banquet gathering.⁹⁷ Despite the Liu-Song look of Xie Lingyun’s banquet, Tian does not see the poems as direct comments on the literary salons Xie Lingyun took part in briefly in the early 420s.⁹⁸

Although they do not propose a particular year, both Tian and Doran suggest that the impetus for this text may have come during Xie’s second stint in the archives at Jiankang. Doran argues that Xie shares Cao Pi’s concern with “literary memory and canonization,” basing this on the fact that Xie was compiling the *Jinshu* 晉書 at around the time she believes he wrote this series. This seems to me a risky hypothesis for two reasons. First, Xie Lingyun was placed in the post of Supervisor of the Imperial Archives as a transitional post while waiting to take the higher post of Palace Intendent.⁹⁹ Thus while he was there long enough to observe the state of affairs in the archives and begin overseeing a few projects, it seems to me inaccurate to characterize this series of poems as the culmination of those projects. Moreover, his work overseeing the compilation of the anthology *Shi ji* 詩集 does not seem to have been aimed at “canonization” per se, especially in light of Zhong Rong’s complaint (quoted above) that the editors of the anthology were indiscriminate in their selections. In what follows, I will argue that we have every reason to believe that Xie’s “Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei’s Gatherings at Ye” is a response to precisely these sorts of *merely* literary anthologies. Second, in his biography of Xie Lingyun, Shen Yue emphasizes the fact that Xie was extremely frustrated with both posts, not because they were low posts (they were not) but because they did not allow him to shape policy.¹⁰⁰ It seems unlikely that Xie considers his primary affinity with Cao Pi to be the fact that they were both involved in editorial projects aimed at constructing a vision of the “literary” past per se. This would be to reverse both Cao Pi and Xie Lingyun’s priorities. When Cao Pi says in his “Discourse on Writing” that “Literary writings are the great legacy of the administration of the realm, a magnificence that does not decay” 蓋文章經國之大業，不朽之盛事，he means that literary writings are valuable because *insofar as they are affiliated with the achievements of sagely governance*, they “do not decay” (*bu xiu* 不朽); it is only by participating in this larger, transhistorical enterprise of *wen* 文 that an individual author can outlive their own lifespan.¹⁰¹ Detached from the project of bringing order and patterning to the world, literary works stand no better chance of surviving than anything else. Xie Lingyun’s nostalgia for the Jian’an period is tied to the role cultivated gentlemen had in the projection of sagely government far more so than it is the quality of their poetry.

My own reading of the Ye anthology builds on those put forward by the early Qing scholar Wu Qi 吳淇 (*jinsu* 1658), Gu Shaobo, and Harrison Huang. Wu Qi argues that the contrast Xie Lingyun draws between the mistrustful emperors of the past and the charismatic Cao Pi is primarily aimed at the members of the Liu-Song court, whom Xie unambiguously places in the former category.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, 34, 37.

⁹⁸ Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, n34.

⁹⁹ The fact that he was unable to finish the *Jin shu* 晉書, having only “roughly established a basic outline” 粗立流條 suggests he was only in this post very briefly. *Song shu* 67.1772.

¹⁰⁰ *Song shu* 67.1772.

¹⁰¹ *Wen xuan*, 52.2271.

¹⁰² Wu Qi 吳淇, *Linchao xuan shi dinglun* 六朝選詩定論, ed. and coll. Wang Jun 汪俊 and Huang Jinde 黃進德 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2009), 381.

Following Wu Qi's lead and hewing closely to the account of Xie Lingyun's service under Emperor Wen of Song given in his *Song shu* 宋書 biography, Gu Shaobo reads the piece as Xie Lingyun's response to having been frozen out of the Liu-Song administration and relegated to the role of banquet performer.¹⁰³ Harrison Huang reads Xie's "impersonation" of Cao Pi as one episode in a fantasy he argues Xie returned to throughout his career in which he played the role of the overseer of excursions and so by extension the role of the emperor.¹⁰⁴ Huang suggests that for Xie, Cao Pi "combined in the figure of the emperor the comprehensive literary critic, the consummate personnel appraiser, and great patron of excursion."¹⁰⁵

We can now turn to look at the preface to Xie's "Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei's Gatherings at Ye," written in the voice of Cao Pi, now in his role as Emperor of the Wei dynasty.

3.6.1 Preface to "Poems Imitating the Crown Prince of Wei's Gatherings at Ye" 擬魏太子鄴中集詩

建安末，余時在鄴宮，朝遊夕讌，究歡愉之極。天下良辰、美景、賞心、樂事，四者難并。今昆弟友朋，二三諸彥，共盡之矣。古來此娛，書籍未見，何者？楚襄王時有宋玉、唐景，梁孝王時有鄒、枚、嚴、馬，遊者美矣，而其主不文；漢武帝徐樂諸才，備應對之能，而雄猜多忌，豈獲晤言之適？不誣方將，庶必賢於今日爾。歲月如流，零落將盡，撰文懷人，感往增愴。其辭曰：

Near the end of the Jian'an reign period (196–220), I was for a time in the palace at Ye. Going out on excursions in the mornings and banqueting in the evenings, we took to its limit the utmost of convivial delight. Fine hours, beautiful scenes, appreciative minds, and happy occasions—in this world, these four things are difficult to bring together. But now, we brothers and friends and select men of virtue, together drained them to the dregs. Since antiquity such delight has yet to appear in the records of the past. Why is this? In the time of King Xiang of Chu (d. 263 BC) there were [the likes of] Song Yu, Tang Le, and Jing Cha; and in the time of King Xiao of Liang (184–144 BC) there were [the likes of] Zou Yang, Mei Sheng, Yan Ji, and Sima Xiangru; as for those who went along on excursions, they were fine indeed, but their lord was not sufficiently cultivated. In the time of Han Wudi, Xu Yue and other great talents completely possessed the ability to respond and engage in witty repartee, but [Han Wudi] was brazenly suspicious and had many taboo subjects, so how could they obtain the comfort of friendly conversation? I do not want to mislead future generations, who, I daresay, will surely be better than we are today. The years and months rushed past like a stream; these companions have dwindled and fallen away nearly to the last. As I compile and write prefaces for these fine compositions, I remember these men and, stirred by the past, my sorrow increases. Our words were as follows:¹⁰⁶

We should first note the complexity of overlapping time frames for composition, reading, and editing Xie lays out in this preface. One can only say "the end of the Jian'an period" if the Jian'an period is over. The end of this period coincided with Cao Pi's ascension to the throne as Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 220–226). This tells us that the "Emperor Wen" of the preface and the "Crown Prince of Wei/Cao Pi" of the banquet gathering are located at different moments in time. The closing lines state that most of the people in the original circle have already died by the time "Emperor Wen" sits

¹⁰³ Gu, 200–1.

¹⁰⁴ Huang, "Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze," 40–51.

¹⁰⁵ Huang, "Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze," 47.

¹⁰⁶ Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 199–233.

down to edit the anthology, many in the plague of 217. Xie Lingyun knew that his readers knew that by the time Cao Pi took the throne as Emperor Wen, he had fallen out with his younger brother Cao Zhi. This might seem odd on its surface. Shouldn't Cao Zhi have been excluded? One could argue however that Xie Lingyun's poem is not and does not aim to be a rigidly historical document. If he is intent on creating an idealized portrait of the gatherings at Ye, by including Cao Zhi's poem in this virtual anthology, Xie makes Cao Pi out to be even more magnanimous and virtuous than he was in actuality. As we will see, Cao Zhi was the courtier whose real-life circumstances most closely resembled Xie's own: deprived of the office that was his birthright, exiled, doomed to make his legacy in verse. Cao Zhi functions as Xie Lingyun's double in the series. Cao Zhi's poem closes the anthology, bringing the banquet and with it the era in which such banquets were possible to an end.

"Emperor Wen" describes a hitherto impossible confluence of people and events that led to the gathering that served as the occasion for these poems. He remarks that such an occasion "had never appeared in the records of the past" 書籍未見. By this, he does not mean that no records of pleasure excursions exist, but rather, he points to a qualitative difference between the texts produced by the writers who accompanied their lords on pleasure excursions and wrote beautiful descriptions of them in *fu*-compositions and the texts produced by him and his courtiers at the end of the Jian'an reign period. The difference is that on no past occasion has the lord or emperor been capable of full participation in the outing. The reason he gives in the case of Han Wudi (and by extension King Xiang of Chu and King Xiao of Liang) is that they were not sufficiently "cultivated" or "lettered" (*bu wen* 不文). Although they could understand the compositions written about their excursions and compose excursion verses of their own, they had not developed the requisite level of sensitivity and capaciousness to understand what it was to be in their positions, what all of this poetry-writing was really all about. In the case of Han Wudi, this incapacity manifested itself as a tendency to misconstrue the words of his ministers, making frank, face-to-face conversation (*wuyan* 晤言) a high-risk activity. In Xie Lingyun's genealogy, this level of sensitivity and capaciousness on the part of an emperor is only attained in the Wei by Cao Cao and then by Cao Pi. Xie Lingyun explores this in his poem written as Cao Pi.

3.6.2 魏太子 *The Crown Prince of Wei*¹⁰⁷

百川赴巨海，	The myriad rivers all flow toward the vast sea,
眾星環北辰。	The many stars ring the Pole Star.
照灼爛霄漢，	Shimmering and blazing, glistens the Heavenly Han. ¹⁰⁸
遙裔起長津。	Far off and remote, rises the Long Ford. ¹⁰⁹
天地中橫潰，	When all amidst heaven and earth was swept asunder,
家王拯生民。	My father the king pulled the people to safety.
區宇既滌蕩，	When the world is washed clean,
群英必來臻。	The many fine talents will invariably converge.

¹⁰⁷ Gu Shaobo 顧紹柏 *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu* 謝靈運集校注 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2004), 200.

¹⁰⁸ The "Heavenly Han" refers to the Milky Way.

¹⁰⁹ Citing Wang Yi's 王逸 (89–158) commentary on the *Chuci* 楚辭, Huang Jie glosses the "Long Ford" as the "Heavenly Ford" 天津, another name for the "Winnowing Basket" 箕 asterism. See Huang Jie 黃節 ed. and comm., *Xie Kangle shizhu* 謝康樂詩注, in *Huang Jie zhu Han Wei Liuchao shi liu zhong* 黃節注漢魏六朝詩六種 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 683.

忝此欽賢性，	Unworthy though I am, it is in my nature to cherish worthies,
由來常懷仁。	All along I have been one to treasure good men.
況值眾君子，	How much the more now that I have encountered you cultivated gentlemen,
傾心隆日新。	Who pour out your hearts to exalt that which is daily renewed. ¹¹⁰
論物靡浮說，	In our discoursing on things, there is no empty theorizing,
析理實敷陳。	In our analyzing principles, indeed all things are carefully laid out.
澄觴滿金罍，	The clear cups are filled from golden pitchers,
連榻設華茵。	Set out on the linked couch are embroidered cushions.
急絃動飛聽，	The swift strings stir the flyers to listen,
清歌拂梁塵。	The clear-toned songs brush up dust from the rafters. ¹¹¹
何言相遇易，	How could one say that our meeting was easy?
此歡信可珍。	This joy is truly to be treasured!

This poem opens with conventional images of the sage as the unmoved-mover: rivers following their own course across the land flow into the sea and the stars in their trek across the night sky rotate around the Pole Star which does not itself move. Both are figures of the sage as the agent through whom others are set in motion and become what they are.¹¹² His mere presence causes the Milky Way to glisten and the Winnowing Basket constellation to rise. The sage figure in the opening lines operates within the poem at three levels. In the diachronic narrative of the poem, the sage is the historical Cao Cao who, like the sage-king Yu 禹 tamed the floodwaters of chaos causing the many fine talents of the realm to converge on his court at Ye. Within the banquet scene, that is, “Cao Pi” also acts as a sage figure who has caused the “many fine talents” to converge on his table to “pour out their hearts.” Finally, Xie Lingyun himself, writing as “Cao Pi” and standing outside of the anthology as its author hosting this fictive gathering of great men. The efficacy of the discussions and debates, the beauty of the music and the singing, and now the composition of banquet poems, are all spontaneous, natural human responses to the presence of sages. Here the performative dimensions of the ritual banquets memorialized in the *Odes* are still active. By describing the gathering in this way—as the natural response to sagely rule, as a joyful meeting among understanding friends—he has made it so.

The role of the sovereign in this anthology must be understood in terms of the role given to the “cultivated gentleman” (*jūnzǐ* 君子) in Cao Pi’s “Discussion of Writing.” Cao Pi characterizes the salon at Jian’an as subject to the same pettiness and infighting that can be found in any group of talented writers.¹¹³ It is the role of the gentleman to ensure that his stallions run abreast. It is taken for granted that each member of the party will act in his own way, according to his nature, and it is the role of the

¹¹⁰ “That which is daily renewed” is a kenning for *de* 德 (virtue, power, charisma). We see this in the Hexagram Statement (*tuàn* 夬) for Da Xu 大畜 “Each and every day renewing his virtue” 日新其德. The basin inscription of Tang 湯 cited in the “Great Learning” (*Da xue* 大學) chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記 also frames *de* framed in terms of a practice of daily renewal.

¹¹¹ In the *Liezi* 列子, the singer Han E’s 韓娥 voice is described as having lingered in the rafters for three days after her departure.

¹¹² This image is a direct reference to the characterization of sage rule in *Analects* 2.1. “The Master said: ‘To administer the realm with charismatic virtue, this is like the North Star which resides in its place while the myriad stars cooperate with it [by rotating around it].’ 子曰：為政以德，譬如北辰居其所而眾星共之。”

¹¹³ *Wen xuan*, 52.2270.

cultivated gentleman or ruler to “examine himself so as to take the measure of others” 審己以度人.¹¹⁴ The gentleman does not take sides; he merely facilitates. “Cao Pi” plays this role in the banquet setting of this series of poems by providing his courtiers with the narrative template each will follow in his own poem. The magnetic appeal of the sovereign plays out at the level of form as each poet writes himself into the template narrative recounting his difficult journey through the war-torn empire to finally end up in the city of Ye, in the presence of other great talents to drink and speak their minds freely in verse. The language and imagery of the courtiers’ response poems is stock for the Jian’an period. Like the corpus of Jian’an verse Xie clearly drew on in his imitation, stylistic differences between individual poets at the level of diction and phraseology are less pronounced than preferences for certain motifs and sentiments. The character appraisals “Emperor Wen” writes for each courtier as he compiles the collection are reflections upon the way these underlying tendencies are manifest in the general tone and content of the poem. We can see this delicate balance in which a distinctive personality is expressed in and harmonized with the language of the group in Xie’s poem written as Liu Zhen 劉楨 (186–217).

3.6.3 劉楨 *Liu Zhen*¹¹⁵

卓犖偏人，而文最有氣，所得頗經奇。

He was an outstanding and prodigally talented person,¹¹⁶ and his writing was the most vigorous [out of the six courtiers present]. As for what he came up with, it was canonical and yet extraordinary.¹¹⁷

貧居晏里閭，	Dwelling in poverty, I was content in my hamlet,
少小長東平。	As a young man, I grew up in Dongping.
河兗當衝要，	The Ji River in Yanzhou occupied a strategic point, ¹¹⁸
淪飄薄許京。	And so, cast adrift, I drew near the temporary capital at Xu, ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *Wen xuan*, 52.2270.

¹¹⁵ Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 219–223.

¹¹⁶ The *Remwu zhi* 人物志 uses *piancai* 偏材 to refer to men with unevenly distributed gifts. Talent-wise they are maxed-out in one category, but deficient in others. Their inborn genius is not subject to instruction. If paired with complementary talents which compensate for these excesses and deficiencies, their gifts can work to the advantage of the group. In isolation, they can be difficult to bring to heel. If we are keyed to early medieval terminology of character appraisal, to call Liu Zhen a *pianren* 偏人 is fact to give him a somewhat mixed review. See *Remwu zhi* 人物志, in *Sibu congkan chubian* 四部叢刊初編, vol. 429 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1919–22), *juan* 1.11–12.

¹¹⁷ *Jingqi* 經奇 is a very puzzling construction. Xiaofei Tian takes it to mean that his works “[constitute] the norm and yet [are] extraordinary.” See Tian, *The Halbred at Red Cliff*, 46. In light of the striking reverse deployment of a line from the *Odes* in this very poem, I have taken *jing* 經 to mean “canonical.” His lines have their roots in the Classics, but they bear new fruit.

¹¹⁸ The Ji 濟 River once flowed northeast through Yanzhou toward the sea. Dongping was positioned near the headwaters. Its status as a strategic point implies that it was the site of many battles. Liu Zhen was thus forced to flee.

¹¹⁹ Under Cao Cao’s direction, Han Xiandi 漢獻帝 left Luoyang in 196 to take up residence in the capital at Xu 許.

廣川無逆流，	That broad river did not reject this tributary stream, ¹²⁰
招納廁群英。	He summoned and accepted me and I took my place beside the many fine talents.
北渡黎陽津，	Campaigning in the north, we crossed Liyang Ford.
南登紀郢城。	Going south, we ascended the walls of Jiying. ¹²¹
既覽古今事，	Having surveyed affairs from antiquity to the present day,
頗識治亂情。	I can recognize the nature of order and chaos.
歡友相解達，	These like-minded companions understand me,
敷奏究平生。	And so, in setting forth proposals, I put my whole life into them.
矧荷明哲顧，	How much more so [am I willing to do this] in the caring regard of this enlightened man,
知深覺命輕。	His appreciative understanding is deep, and I feel my life has become light. ¹²²
朝遊牛羊下，	Starting at dawn, we rove until the cows and the sheep come down,
暮坐括揭鳴。	In the evening we sit in banquet until the rooster calls. ¹²³
終歲非一日，	We pass an entire year this way, not just one day,
傳卮弄新聲。	Passing the goblet, we play new music.
辰事既難諧，	Propitious moments and fine occasions are rarely in accord,
歡願如今并。	But today our convivial cheer coincides with our wishes.
唯羨肅肅翰，	I only envy those rustling pinions,
繽紛戾高冥。	In a dizzying flurry, they strike the lofty heavens.

Taken together, the first four couplets move from the cramped alleyways of Liu Zhen's childhood home to the fords and fortresses set against a vast landscape crisscrossed by armies. "Cao Pi's" grand image of rivers flowing toward the sea is deftly reworked here in a more humble register as Liu Zhen is "cast adrift" on dry land and later absorbed into the "broad river" of Cao Cao's favor. Liu Zhen is well-versed in the texts of the past and knows how to recognize a man capable of governing the world when he sees one. This mirrors "Cao Pi's" claim that despite having been one to cherish good men in the abstract, it is only now that he recognizes he is truly in the presence of worthies. The proof that Cao Cao is a just sovereign lies in the fact that "Liu Zhen" does not have dress his true thoughts in polite or indirect language. Quite significantly for thinking about Xie's investment in the court poetry of the Jian'an period, "Liu Zhen" characterizes the act of "setting forth proposals" i.e. to the throne in formal memorials as the peak moment of self-expression: he "puts his very life into them." This positions the banquet and the poems which commemorate it downstream from the courtiers'

¹²⁰ The Li Shan commentary to the *Wen xuan* quotes a passage from the *Guanzi* 管子 which does not appear in the modern standard citation edition of the text. This passage says that, "Rivers and seas do not turn away thin streams" 江海不逆細流. The "thin stream" in this analogy is Liu Zhen.

¹²¹ Liu Zhen accompanied Cao Cao on these campaigns, in the north and south respectively, early in the wars following the collapse of the Eastern Han dynasty.

¹²² *Ming* 命 denotes both life in general and the heaven-ordained lifespan or fate of an individual. The Li Shan 李善 *Wen xuan* 文選 commentary quotes a petition by Kong Tan 孔坦 appearing in Wang Yin's 王隱 *Jin shu* 晉書 which says, "A retainer dies on behalf of encountering someone who appreciates them, the grace he has received causes his life to be light" 士死知遇，恩令命輕. Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 222n17.

¹²³ This couplet reworks the language of "Junzi yu yi" 君子于役 (Mao #67) "The chickens perch in their hovels,/The day draws to a close,/Cows and sheep come down." 雞棲于桀，日之夕矣，牛羊下括。

participation in the affairs of state, where they can truly be recognized for who they are. “Liu Zhen” begins his account of the banquet with a highly conventional image of the revelry reaching such an intensity that the party continues through the day into the night and on into the next morning. The image of cows and sheep coming down out of the hills and chickens crowing in the morning is borrowed from the *Odes*, but here *both* the order of their occurrence and their time-association is reversed. Instead of the passage of time being illustrated by chickens crowing and animals returning at dusk, as it is in the *Odes*, the line that begins “morning” contains animals returning at dusk and the line which begins “evening” has chickens crowing. This might be taken as a case of *jingqi* 經奇, both canonical and unusual, even new. We should be able to sense “Liu Zhen” in this new shape the banquet repertoire has taken in his hands. The final couplet with the, once again, highly conventional closing image of birds soaring up into the sky. Here though they explode out of the somewhat dragging penultimate couplet, conveying something of the untamable vigor of the poet himself. At no point in the poem, however, has Liu Zhen broken free of the template or conventional banquet images; indeed, the very desire to break free can be fully expressed within the boundaries of the repertoire. This is the product of the historically unique confluence of “fine hours, beautiful scenes, appreciative minds, and happy occasions” described in the preface. The other poems in the series are likewise written in a language which mirrors that of “Cao Pi” and the other courtiers and yet contains some signature “Cao Pi” recognizes as his contribution (representing the contribution of his abilities and talents) to the banquet. The only exception is the final poem, written in the voice of Cao Pi’s younger brother Cao Zhi.

3.6.4 平原侯植 *The Marquis of Pingyuan* [Cao] Zhi¹²⁴

公子不及世事，但美遨游，然頗有憂生之嗟。

As a prince, he did not engage in the affairs of the world,¹²⁵ but only occupied himself with praising and making beautiful our romping and roving. However, he did have something of the sighs of a troubled life about him.

朝游登鳳閣，	Roving by morning, we ascend the Phoenix Gallery.
日暮集華沼。	At sunset, we gather around the Floriate Pool. ¹²⁶
傾柯引弱枝，	Tipping down the limbs, I gather the supple branches,
攀條摘蕙草。	Pulling on the boughs, I pluck sweet melilot.
徙倚窮騁望，	Halting and hesitating, I exhaust my roving gaze,
目極盡所討。	Looking to the limits of sight, I see all that I seek to find.
西顧太行山，	Westward, I turn to see the Taihang range.
北眺邯鄲道。	Northward, I gaze afar at Handan road. ¹²⁷
平衢脩且直，	The flat thoroughfares are long and straight.

¹²⁴ Gu, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 229–30.

¹²⁵ This phrase, *bu ji shishi* 不及世事, falls somewhere between not engaging (or, literally, “meeting”) with the affairs of the world and being prevented from engaging in the affairs of the world.

¹²⁶ I follow Gu Shaobo in taking Phoenix Gallery and Floriate Pool as generic names for palaces and pools. Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 231n5–6.

¹²⁷ The Taihang mountains and Handan road were located to the north and west of Ye respectively. See Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 232–3n11–12.

白楊信裊裊。	The white poplars indeed dance gracefully in the wind.
副君命飲宴，	The Lord's Assistant [Cao Pi] has ordered us to drink and feast.
歡娛寫懷抱。	These convivial delights give vent to what we keep pent-up inside.
良游匪晝夜，	Our free-roving does not distinguish between day and night,
豈云晚與早。	So who would think to speak of "late" or "early."
眾賓悉精妙，	The many esteemed guests are all exquisitely brilliant,
清辭灑蘭藻。	Their clear lyrics sprinkle bloom-scent and leaf-spangle. ¹²⁸
哀音下迴鵠	Our dolorous tones lure down homeward-bound geese,
餘哇徹清昊。	Our lingering insinuations penetrate the clear heavens.
中山不知醉，	Drinking the fine wine of Zhongshan, we do not know drunkenness. ¹²⁹
飲德方覺飽。	As soon as we sip your virtue, we realize <i>it</i> is what brings satiety.
願以黃髮期，	I wish to keep my appointment with my yellow-haired days, ¹³⁰
養生念將老。	And so, as for nourishing my life, I heed the coming of old age. ¹³¹

The first thing that strikes us about this poem is its refusal to harmonize with "Cao Pi's" template piece. Unlike the other courtiers, "Cao Zhi" makes no reference to the magnetic pull of Cao Cao or Cao Pi. The first five couplets describe an excursion that involves picking flowers and gazing into the distance. But the imagery in this section—of gathering fragrant plants, picking sweet melilot, *Chuci* 楚辭 motifs meant to suggest wandering exile, and climbing up to gaze out at the horizon—clash with the boisterous, extroverted nature of a pleasure outing. The physical space described in the third and fourth couplets seems vast and uninhabited. Contrast the physical intimacy of the banquet scene in "Liu Zhen" in which a goblet is passed from one participant to the next. These images evoke, and must surely have been meant to evoke, Xie's own lonesome excursions during his exile in Yongjia. When the festivities begin, "Cao Zhi" participates from a cautious distance. He supplies the requisite images drawn from the same banquet repertoire the other poets have pulled from. Then suddenly we are taken away from the celebration to contemplate the necessity of "nourishing life" and "heeding the coming of old age." As the final couplet by the youngest member of the salon, these lines are jarring. Despite saying in line 12 that "These convivial delights give vent to what we keep pent-up inside" the suggestion here is that he cannot give vent to those feelings without risking losing his appointment with old age. In lieu of full participation in the banquet spectacle, he has left a text. We might think of the last poem as pointed into the future, that is, into the moment and the particular forms of banqueting Xie is responding to in this series of imitations. In this final poem, the aura of Jian'an is already fading to reveal a relationship of courtier and sovereign closer to the kind found in Xie Lingyun's present.

¹²⁸ A more literal translation of the line would run, "Our clear lyrics sprinkle eupatorium and pondweed." Here the two plant names connote alluring, intricately patterned lines of verse.

¹²⁹ Zhongshan was famous for its fine wine. See Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 233n22.

¹³⁰ This line, which I have rendered somewhat awkwardly here to keep as close to the original language as possible, means simply that Cao Zhi wishes to reach the stage of human life at which the hair begins to turn yellow. He wants to keep his appointment (*qi* 期) with old age.

¹³¹ We might also hear in these final lines a direct address to Cao Pi. To paraphrase, "It is my sincerest wish that we will both keep our appointment with horary-headed old age [i.e. grow old together], but, as we know, I am prone to poor health so I am taking steps to nourish my life I am sure to pay heed to the nature of growing old [i.e. by doing what is necessary to stay healthy]."

In his fictive anthology, the preface acts to secure the collection in historical time, simultaneously providing Xie Lingyun access to the banquet setting and sealing it off from the moment in which the poems are compiled and from the present moment in which he writes his imitations. Unlike earlier imitators, he cannot slide effortlessly between his own present and a moment in the distant past. What was once an exercise in embodying the elevated thoughts and feelings of past worthies has become an exercise in literary imitation, a replica of the poetry of the past. Just as the living, breathing people gathered at the banquet in Ye now exist for “Emperor Wen” only as the texts of their poems, the gatherings which were possible during the golden age of the Jian’an period are now only conceivable as anthologies of poets. Such a melancholic relationship to the texts of the past is one of the recoil effects of an archival perspective on the history of poetry. Moreover, “Cao Zhi’s” proleptic awareness that he will be included in the anthology of banquet poems and yet excluded from the higher “banquet” of dynastic rule stands in for Xie’s own anxieties about his legacy as a “born” statesman general doomed to be a poet.

3.7 Conclusion

I would like to conclude by considering the radically changed circumstances from which Xie Lingyun views the literary heritage. The multiple intersecting temporal frames in the Ye anthology suggest Xie Lingyun was poised on the threshold between two very different conceptions of literary history. The first is governed by what the art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood call the “principle of substitution,” a mode of thinking about the temporality of artifacts in which they are seen as possessing a “double historicity” allowing them to suture or fold together at least two separate moments in historical time.¹³² Wood and Nagel are referring here to the peculiar phenomenon common in European renaissance art in which the dates given by early modern antiquarians for an artifact or a relic defy modern notions of linear historical time. They suggest that in these cases antiquarians and art historians “might *know* that [an artifact] was fabricated in the present or in the recent past but at the same time value them and use them *as if* they were very old things.” A Gothic cathedral built on site of a vanished temple could stand in for that ancient temple, indeed could be called by people who knew very well that it was not very old a “very ancient building.” Likewise, as Wang Yao has shown, a poem can be *by* Li Ling, even if it was written in the Western Jin dynasty. Nagel and Wood insist that this is “not a matter of self-delusion or indolence but a function of an entire way of thinking about the historicity of artifacts repeatedly misunderstood by the modern discipline of art history.”¹³³ But a new conception of literary history, one already flickering into existence in the anthologies of the period, operates according to what Wood and Nagel call the principle of “replication,” in which artworks (and, I am arguing by extension, literary works) are seen to be more “securely moored in historical time.”¹³⁴ On this principle, a poem can only have one origin in time; all subsequent versions are mere imitations. Just as in Nagel and Wood’s account, I would argue these two conceptions of literary history are not mutually exclusive and in fact operated side by side for many centuries.¹³⁵ The growth of paper archives in which stylistic variations between historical periods make the principle of substitution more difficult to apply. This conception of literary history

¹³² Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2010), 9–15. For more concise treatment of the concept of “double historicity” see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, “Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism,” *The Art Bulletin* 87.3 (2005), 405.

¹³³ Nagel and Wood, “Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism,” *The Art Bulletin* 87.3 (2005), 405.

¹³⁴ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 9.

¹³⁵ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 49.

in which one could only engage with the literature of the past by replicating it did not spring *ex niblo* from the minds of poets like Xie Lingyun but was created in the laboratory of the archives at Jiankang. It would spread not as ideas in the minds of writers but in the very material form and organization of the texts in their possession. Xie Lingyun had just enough exposure to these archives in his own lifetime to begin thinking within their forcefield.

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