

# The Narration of China (Part 2)

*Medieval and Early Modern China,  
Expanding Horizons*

*Edited by* Chen Zhi

*Editorial support by* Yuet Ngo Leung, Yiwen Qiao,  
Sicong Shen and Xuemei Wu



ANCIENT LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

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## The Narration of China (Part 2)

# Ancient Languages and Civilizations

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*A Festschrift in Honor of William H. Nienhauser*

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Yiwen Qiao

Xuemei Wu



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Publication of this volume was generously sponsored by the HKBU Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology – Amway Development Fund.

Cover illustration: Confucius and Disciples at the Apricot Altar. Woodblock-printed illustration in Kong Chuan 孔傳, *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記. Qing dynasty, reproducing a manuscript copy made from a Song edition, in *Linlang mishi congshu*, ser. 1 琳琅秘室叢書(第一集) (Guiji 會稽; Dong shi 董氏, 1888). Photo courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library of the Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <https://catalog.loc.gov>  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025002945>  
LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025002946>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 2667-3770

ISBN 978-90-04-72240-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-72241-5 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004722415

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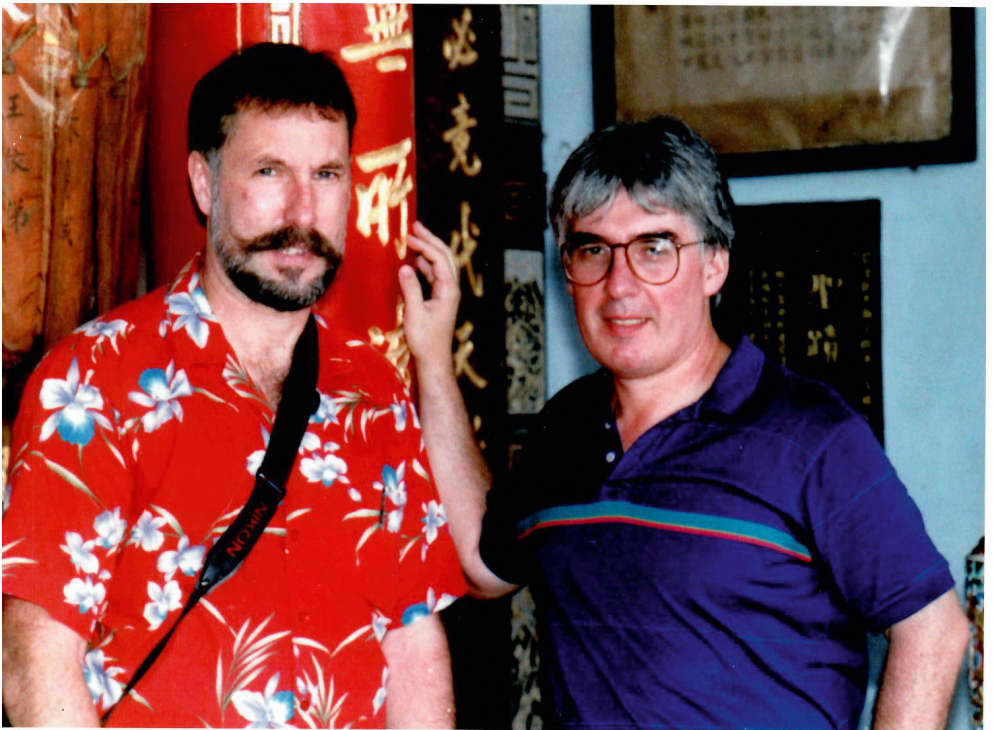


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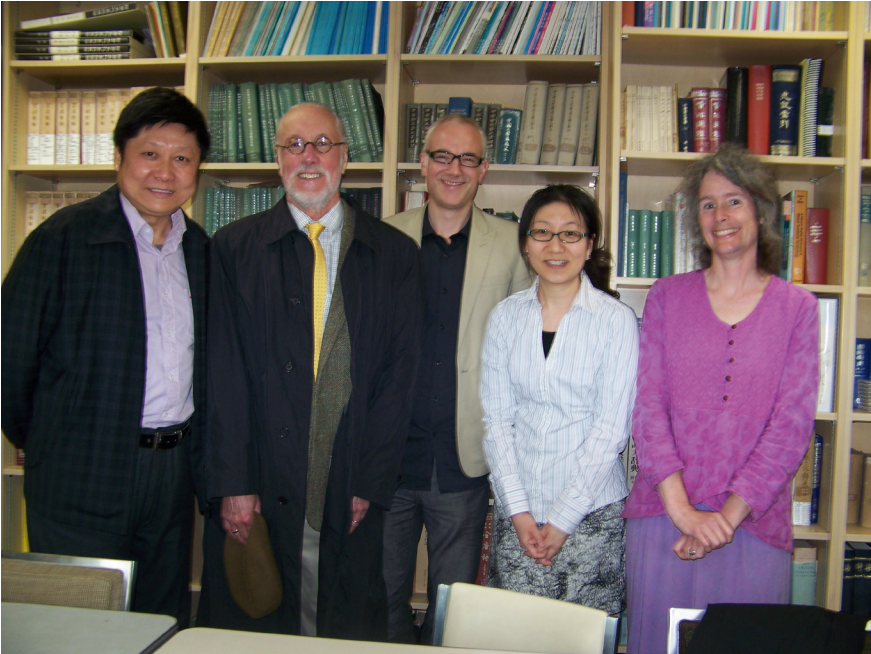


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## Preface

Professor Nienhauser (William H. Nienhauser, Jr., 1943–) is an internationally renowned sinologist and emeritus professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is known for his exceptional contributions to the study of classical Chinese literature, particularly his comprehensive translation project of the monumental history *Shiji*, *The Grand Scribe's Records*. His research on traditional Chinese fiction and classical poetry, including his study of the Tang *chuanqi* tales, also attracted considerable attention. In 2020, he won the 14th China Book Special Contribution Award.

To celebrate Professor Nienhauser's 80th birthday and honor his celebrated career and remarkable contribution to the study of Chinese history and literature, The Hong Kong Baptist University Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, is honored to compile a special volume titled *In between the Lines: The Narration of Ancient China*. This volume is included in "Ancient Languages and Civilizations," a peer-reviewed book series at BRILL.

The festschrift contains a total of 22 academic papers written by long-term friends, old colleagues, students, and junior scholars of Professor Nienhauser. While editing and compiling this volume, we are so delighted to have received support from Professors David Knechtges, Robin Yates, Victor Mair, Christopher Beckwith, Charles Hartman, Hans van Ess, Haun Saussy, Julia Murray, Edward Shaughnessy, Rania Huntington, Chen Zu-yan, Scott Cook, Nicholas Koss, Qu Jingyi, Li Jia, Amelia Qin, Zou Xin, Wang Jing, Tan Mei Ah, Nicholas Williams, Liu Qian, Sun Bao, Guo Zihan, hence making this volume splendid and invaluable.

In the process of compiling and publishing this book, I would like to thank Dr. Wu Xuemei, my colleague from The Research Centre for History and Culture of Beijing Normal–Hong Kong Baptist University, and Ms. Qiao Yiwen, my research assistant, as well as Dr. Leung Yuet Ngo, Dr. Shen Sicong, and Dr. Richard Joachim Sage from The Hong Kong Baptist University Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, who have worked tirelessly to communicate, liaise with scholars, compiling and collating these papers into a wonderful addition to the book series. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Dr. Uri Tadmor, Ms. Elisa Perotti, who have rendered their strongest support all along. My dear colleagues and fellow editors of this book series, Professors Carlotta Viti and Shawn Wang, have also offered their continual support as always. Without their concerted and dedicated effort, this book will absolutely not be able to come into being.

Looking at the catalog of the manuscript, I feel as if I have returned to the time when I was studying in Madison (Wisconsin) 30 years ago. I will always remember how Professor Nienhauser sometimes moved his literature classes and *Shiji* (Grand Scribe's Records) translation workshops to his residence. Judith (Mrs. Nienhauser) prepared a variety of wine and beer at home, as well as a variety of delicacies. A dozen of our colleagues and classmates discussed various issues in Chinese literature together. Teachers and students were also invited to present their recent research and discoveries.

I remember on an extremely frozen winter day, we were invited to go to Nienhauser's residence to spend Christmas Eve, but none of the invited students could start their cars, and they all lay flat in front of their houses at Eagle Heights. Professor Nienhauser personally drove his famous pickup truck to the home of each invited student, took everyone home one by one, and we had such a wonderful time celebrating Christmas Eve.

In addition to teachers and students from the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin, there are often visiting scholars from other schools. Many of the authors of this festschrift were guests of the Nienhauser Residence. I met David R. Knechtges, Edward Shaughnessy, Haun



PHOTO 24 *Shiji* Translation Workshop in Saint-Julien-de-Lampon, France (2013). From left to right: Lü Zongli, Jakob Pöllath, Bernhard Fuehrer, Chen Zhi, Hans van Ess, William Nienhauser

Saussy, Hans van Ess, Scott Cook, Qu Jingyi, Li Jia and many others there. At times, the Nienhauser classroom would move around the world; Professor Nienhauser's *Shiji* translation seminars were held at Hong Kong Baptist University, Nanjing University, Nankai University, University of Munich, Florida State University, and more. To me, the most memorable one was the translation seminar held at the estate of Professor Bernhard Fuerher in the countryside near Salat in southern France. At that time, Professor Lü Zongli and I travelled from Hong Kong to attend, we had such fun appreciating the beautiful scenery in the countryside while having thoughtful conversations about Chinese classics and literature.

I hope this volume, as invaluable as it is in terms of academic merit, would also be a treasured memento to the audience, to those who have been dear colleagues, students, and good friends of the Nienhausers, and to those who will always remember their hospitality and kindness, as well as Professor Nienhauser's serious dedication to scholarship. I am certain that this collection will bring back fond memories and wonderful times with both Professor and Mrs. Nienhauser, just as it has for me.

*Chen Zhi*

Director of Research Centre of History and Culture, BNU

Director of Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, Hong Kong Baptist University

President of Beijing Normal–Hong Kong Baptist University

# Illustrations

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## Notes on Contributors

*Zu-yan CHEN*

holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor at the State University of New York, where he also serves as a Professor of Chinese Literature at Binghamton University, SUNY. He obtained a Master's degree from Fudan University and later earned his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Chen's extensive body of work comprises eight books and many articles encompassing a wide range of disciplines, including literature, history, Confucianism, translation, and language pedagogy.

*Christopher I. BECKWITH*

PhD (1977), Indiana University, is Distinguished Professor of Central Eurasian Studies at that university. He has published 7 monographs and many articles on Central Eurasia and neighboring regions, including East Asia. His most recent book is *The Scythian Empire: Central Eurasia and the Birth of the Classical Age from Persia to China* (Princeton, 2023).

*Jing WANG*

PhD (2009), University of Wisconsin, Madison, is Senior Lecturer and Director of the Chinese Language Program in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University. Her research primarily centers on Tang Song tales, as well as modernization of the Chinese language and Chinese pedagogy. Her recent books include *Song Dynasty Tales: A Guided Reader* (World Scientific, 2017), *Lens on China: Intermediate and Advanced Readings on Film for Learning Chinese* (Hong Kong University Press, 2020).

*Mei Ah TAN*

PhD (2008), University of Wisconsin, Madison, is Associate Professor of Chinese, Programme Director of the Master of Arts in Chinese, and Associate Director of The Institute for Chinese Language and Culture at the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong. Her research is multidisciplinary, exploring the intersection of linguistics, literature, and history. She has published on classical Chinese language and literature, including articles on Yuan Zhen and Han Yu and *A Dictionary of High Frequency Function Words in Literary Chinese* (Routledge, 2023).

*Nicholas Morrow WILLIAMS*

PhD in Chinese literature (2010), University of Washington, is Associate Professor of Chinese at Arizona State University. Among his numerous studies and translations of Chinese literature is the new version of the *Chuci* anthology entitled *Elegies of Chu* (Oxford World Classics, 2022).

*Amelia Ying QIN*

PhD (2013), University of Wisconsin-Madison, is Assistant Professor of East Asian History and Culture at California State University, Sacramento. She has published translations of Chinese history and poetry, articles on the culture and literature of the Tang and Song dynasties, and works from her digital humanities projects.

*ZOU Xin*

PhD (2017), University of Wisconsin-Madison, teaches at New York University Shanghai. Her research primarily centers around Tang narratives and poetry, with additional interests in language reforms in modern China and Chinese language pedagogy.

*Victor H. MAIR*

is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. He graduated from Dartmouth College and holds a master's degree from University of London and a PhD from Harvard University. Professor Mair specializes in early vernacular Chinese and has translated the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. He is founder and editor of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, an academic journal of Chinese, East Asian, and Central Asian linguistics and literature, and has edited the standard *Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, the *Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, and the *ABC Chinese-English Comprehensive Dictionary*.

*Zihan GUO*

is a PhD candidate in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University. She received her MA in East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania in 2022. She focuses on Song period poetry and aesthetics and has published on the Tang vernacular poet Wang Fanzhi and other medieval topics.

*Julia K. MURRAY*

PhD (1981) Princeton University, is Professor Emerita of Art History, East Asian Studies, and Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin, and a Non-Resident Associate of Harvard's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies. She has published books and many articles on visual and material aspects of Confucianism, including *The Aura of Confucius: Relics and Representations of the Sage at the Kongzhai Shrine in Shanghai* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), and *Ma Hezhi and the Illustration of the Book of Odes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

*Charles HARTMAN*

PhD (1975), Indiana University, is Professor Emeritus of Chinese in the Department of East Asian Studies, the University at Albany. His research focuses on middle-period Chinese history. His most recent publications include *The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narratives* (2021) and *Structure of Governance in Song Dynasty China* (2023), both published by Cambridge University Press.

*Nicholas Koss*

PhD (1981), Indiana University, is Distinguished Professor, Fu Jen Catholic University and James and Margaret Tseng Loe Chair Professor, St. Vincent College. He has published many articles related to the image of China in Western texts and the book *The Best and Fairest Land: Images of China in Medieval Europe* (Bookman, 1999).

*Rania HUNTINGTON*

PhD (1996) is a Professor of Chinese Literature in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her research focuses on Ming and Qing literature, especially as related to the supernatural, memory, and geography. Recent publications include *Ink and Tears: Memory, Mourning, and Writing in the Yu Family* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018); and "Charting a Strange Garden: Mapping the *Kuai yuan zhi yi*," in *Late Imperial China* 42.2 (December 2021).

*Haun SAUSSY*

PhD (1990) Yale, is University Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages & Civilizations and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. His books include *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, *Translation as Citation*, *Are We Comparing Yet?* and *The Making of Barbarians*.



# A Confucian Poem by Li Bai: Translation and Commentary

*Zu-yan CHEN*

## Abstract

This article highlights Li Bai's references to Confucius, which occur six times in his renowned poem, "Ancient Airs, #1," both explicitly and implicitly. The remarkable frequency of allusions to Confucius lends support to an alternative interpretation of the clause "I am feeble," and sheds light on Li Bai's Confucian inclination. This fresh perspective offers a holistic understanding of the ideological spectrum of this esteemed poet, who is often, albeit overly simplistically, characterized as a devout Daoist.

## Keywords

Li Bai – Confucian poetry – allusion – Daoism – ancient air

Li Bai 李白 (701–762) did not participate in the civil service examination, but his choice did not indicate a refusal to seek a prominent position and climb the social ladder. Instead, he aspired to advance his career through his exceptional poetic talent and the reputation it garnered. Remarkably, he achieved success on two significant occasions. The initial triumph marked the pinnacle of his career when Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) appointed him as a scholar at the prestigious Hanlin 翰林 Academy (742–744). However, the second position turned out to be a nadir for Li Bai. He received an invitation from Prince Yong 永 (d. 757) to serve as his staff advisor (756–57), which ultimately led to Li Bai's subsequent arrest and exile.<sup>1</sup> These brief yet intense periods of

---

1 After the An Lushan Rebellion broke out in 755, Emperor Xuanzong appointed his sixteenth son, Prince Yong or Li Lin 李璣, to be the Commander-in-Chief stationed in Jiangling 江陵 (today's Jingzhou 荊州 City of Hubei 湖北 Province). Emperor Suzong 肅宗, Xuanzong's third son, (r. 756–762), fearing that his throne was threatened, later defeated Prince Yong's military forces. As a result, Li Bai was arrested and exiled.

service unveiled Li Bai's political ambitions and intricate philosophical inclinations. Although he is widely renowned as an ardent Daoist believer, he also embraced Confucian concepts, which he eloquently conveyed in his poetry and prose writings.<sup>2</sup>

### 1 Ancient Airs #1 古風其一<sup>3</sup>

大雅久不作，	The Great Odes have long ceased, <sup>4</sup>
吾衰竟誰陳？	"I am feeble!"—then who would present the Poems? <sup>5</sup>
王風委蔓草，	The Folk Songs of the Kingdom were abandoned amongst creeping grasses, <sup>6</sup>
戰國多荆榛。	As brambles infested the Warring States.
龍虎相啖食，	Dragons and tigers devoured each other,
兵戈逮狂秦。	Armed hostilities endured and met violent Qin.
正聲何微茫，	How weak had the orthodox voice grown!
哀怨起騷人。	Then sorrow and lament inspired the <i>sao</i> poet. <sup>7</sup>
揚馬激頽波，	Yang and Sima surfed against the ebbing tide, <sup>8</sup>
開流蕩無垠。	And opened new currents which reached a boundless swell.
廢興雖萬變，	Although poetry rose and fell a thousand times,
憲章亦已淪。	The poetic tradition has already sunk into oblivion.
自從建安來，	Ever since the Jian'an period,
綺麗不足珍。	The ornate style has been unworthy to cherish.

2 A good example in this regard is Li Bai's "Yu Han Jingzhou shu" 與韓荆州書, in which Li Bai asked for Han's help in career advancement. See Dong Gao 董誥 (1740–1818), ed., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 348.3531b.

3 See Cao Yin 曹寅 (1658–1712), et al., ed., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, 900 *juan*, 25 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 161.1670–71.

4 The "Great Odes" 大雅 is a part of the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經 but here refer to the tradition of the *Classic of Poetry*.

5 Confucius said: "How feeble I am!" 甚矣，吾衰也。See Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010), ed., *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Ruan Yuan 阮元 [1764–1849], et al. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980. 2 vols. 2: 2453–2536), 7.2481c. The use of verb *chen* 陳 as presenting poems to the ruler is originated in *Liji* 禮記: "The King ordered the Grand Scribe to present poems in order to observe common people's custom" 命太史陳詩以觀民風。See Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), ed., *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 11.1328b.

6 The "Folk Songs of the Kingdom" 王風 refers to the folk songs in the Luoyang 洛陽 area, which is one of the 15 State Folk Songs 國風 in the *Classic of Poetry*.

7 The "*sao* poet" 騷人 refers to Qu Yuan 屈原 (343–278 BCE), who wrote the long poem "Lisao" 離騷 during his exile.

8 Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 BCE) and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) are both *fu* 賦 writers of the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE).

聖代復元古，      Our hallowed dynasty has returned to antiquity,  
 垂衣貴清真。      The emperors value purity and truth.<sup>9</sup>  
 群才屬休明，      Flocks of talents encounter a prosperous and brilliant age,<sup>10</sup>  
 乘運共躍鱗。      Availing themselves of the fortuitous trend, they all leap  
                                  like dragons.<sup>11</sup>  
 文質相炳煥，      Together, refinement and substance glow bright and  
                                  radiant,  
 眾星羅秋旻。      Like galaxies of stars put on display in the autumn sky.  
 我志在刪述，      I strive to “delete and transmit,”<sup>12</sup>  
 垂輝映千春。      So that my writing may shine through a thousand springs.  
 希聖如有立，      Aspiring after the sage, if my words can be established,<sup>13</sup>  
 絕筆於獲麟。      I shall lay down my brush at the “capture of the unicorn.”<sup>14</sup>

- 9 “Flowing robes” 垂衣 alludes to the *Book of Changes* 易經: “Huangdi, Yao, and Shun let down their flowing robes and the world under heaven was in order” 黃帝、堯、舜垂衣裳而天下治. See Kong Yingda, *Zhou Yi Zhengyi* 周易正義, “Xici” 繫辭, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 8.87a. It originally refers to the transition in the sage kings’ clothing style from primitive short leather jackets to long, flowing garments, but here in Li Bai’s poem it describes the Tang emperors’ dignified demeanor and simple ruling style.
- 10 “Prosperous and brilliant age” 休明 alludes to Pan Yue’s 潘岳 (247–300) “Xizheng fu” 西征賦: “At the prosperous and brilliant age” 當休明之盛世, in Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), et al., ed., *Liuchenzhu wenxuan* 六臣注文選, 60 juan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 10.188.
- 11 The same line appeared in Wang’s Gui’s 王珪 (570–639) “Yong Han Gaozu” 詠漢高祖, in *Quan Tangshi*, 30.2: 429.
- 12 To “delete and transmit” 刪述 refers to the two of Confucius’ main scholarly activities. “Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家 states: “In the ancient times, there were more than 3,000 poems. Up to the time of Confucius, he deleted the repetitive ones” 古者詩三千餘篇，及至孔子，去其重. See Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–ca. 86 BCE), *Shiji* 史記, 130 juan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 47.1936. Also, Confucius said: “I transmit but not create” 述而不作. See Xing Bing, ed. *Lunyu zhushu*, 7.2481c.
- 13 “If there is an establishment” 有立 alludes to *Zuozhuan*: “The greatest is to establish virtue, the next is to establish merits, after that is to establish words. These establishments will not perish even after a long time. This is called immortality” 大上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言，雖久不廢，此之謂不朽. See Kong Yingda, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 35.1979b.
- 14 *Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) recorded that in the fourteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (ca. 508–468 BCE), “A unicorn was captured while hunting in the west” 西狩獲麟 (Kong Yingda, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi*, 59.2172b). “Kongzi shijia” states: “Having seen the unicorn on a hunting trip in the west, Confucius said: ‘My Way is exhausted!’” 吾道窮矣 (Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 47.1942). It is said that Confucius then stopped writing the *Spring and Autumn* that same year and died two years later. In alluding to this, Li Bai imagines that he will follow Confucius’ model to end his career when prompted by a significant event.

## 2 Commentary

The English translation of the second line of the poem stands out for its fresh interpretation of the original meaning. The key words are “I am feeble” 吾衰. The question arises here: who is the speaker of “I” in this context? According to Wang Qi 王琦 (1696–1774), a Qing dynasty scholar, who annotated the *Complete Work of Li Bai* 李太白全集, this line represents Li Bai’s lamentation over his own aging.<sup>15</sup> Wang’s interpretation found resonance among many scholars, both Chinese and American,<sup>16</sup> leading to a cohesive reading of the initial two lines. Yet, a closer examination of the poem’s structure may yield an alternative perspective.

The poem can be divided into two distinct parts. The first 20 lines provide a concise chronological overview of poetry writing, tracing its evolution from the *Classic of Poetry* tradition to Li Bai’s era. The final four lines express Li Bai’s aspiration to initiate a new chapter in the history of poetry. Notably, as mentioned in Note 5, the phrase “I am feeble” is quoted from a Confucius’ saying. Considering the chronological order of the poem, the second line should be attributed to Confucius’ lament rather than Li Bai’s. This establishes a clear narrative sequence, presenting a timeline that commences with the Spring and Autumn period (Lines 1 and 2), followed by the Warring States period (Lines 3 and 4), the Qin dynasty (Lines 5 and 6), the Han dynasty (Lines 9 and 10), the post Jian’an 建安 period (Lines 13 and 14), and ultimately culminating in the Tang dynasty (Lines 15–20).

Furthermore, within this poem, Li Bai references Confucius six times, both directly and indirectly. First, he quoted Confucius in line 2, as discussed above. Second, he extols the excellence of Tang poetry as an embodiment of “refinement and substance” 文質, a distinct feature of Confucian aesthetics.<sup>17</sup> Third,

15 See Wang Qi 王琦, ed., *Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, 3 vols.), 1:89.

16 For example, An Qi 安旗, *Li Bai quanji biannian zhushi* 李白全集編年注釋 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1990, 3 vols.), 2: 941; Victor Mair, *Four Introspective Poets: A Concordance to Selected Poems by Ruanjyi, Chern Tayy-arng, Jang Jeouling, and Lii Bor* (Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Asian Studies Monograph No. 20, 1987), 92; and Paula Varsano, *Tracking the Banished Immortal: The Poetry of Li Bo and Its Critical Reception* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 141. Based on this interpretation, An Qi even decided that Li Bai wrote this poem in his late years and further dated this poem to 750, when Li Bai was 50 years old (2: 941). This inference is too far-fetched.

17 The origin of these two concepts can be traced back to as early as the *Book of History* 尚書: “The poetry expresses aspirations, the song intones the expression, the sound accords with the intonations, and the metrics harmonizes with the sound” 詩言志，歌詠言，聲依永，律和聲 (Kong Yingda, ed., *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, in *Shisanjing*

Li Bai strives to practice “deletion and transmission” 刪述, which were two scholarly commitments embraced by Confucius. Fourth, Li Bai declares his desire to “aspire after the sage” 希聖, expressing his determination to follow in Confucius’s footsteps. Fifth, he hopes that his “words can be established” 有立, representing one of the three “immortalities” 不朽 pursued by Confucian scholars. Lastly, Li Bai articulates his longing to continue along Confucius’ path until “the capture of the unicorn” 獲麟. The impressive density of allusions to Confucius supports the alternative interpretation of the line, “I am feeble,” and shows Li Bai’s strong Confucian inclination. This provides a holistic observation of the ideological spectrum of this great poet, who is generally and, probably too simplistically, labeled as a Daoist believer.

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*zhushu*, 3.131c). These four three-character sentences can be read in two parts: the first two sentences refer to the content of poetry and the last two to poetic style, where sound (*sheng* 聲) and regulations (*lü* 律) appear side by side as form considerations for the first time in Chinese history. This balanced aesthetics was further elucidated by Confucius: “When substance overwhelms refinement, the result is a rustic; when refinement overwhelms substance, the result is a pedant. Only when refinement and substance are perfectly mixed and balanced do you have an exemplary person” 質勝文則野，文勝質則史，文質彬彬，然後君子 (Xing Bing, ed., *Lunyu zhushu*, 6.2479). Here Confucius promotes a holistic approach to evaluate personal character, manner, and cultivation, but this approach certainly affected literary writing and appreciation.

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# The Sound of T'ang Poetry: Three Poems in Attested T'ang Pronunciation

*Christopher I. BECKWITH*

## Abstract

Recent work on the pronunciation of T'ang period Chinese, as attested in segmental (alphabetic) foreign scripts, has shown that traditional Middle Chinese reconstructions are misleading. This paper is a rough preliminary attempt to transcribe three poems based on Old Tibetan transcriptions of Middle Chinese.

## Keywords

T'ang Dynasty – poetry – Middle Chinese pronunciation

It is traditional today for us to read poetry of the T'ang period (618–907) in Modern Standard Chinese (Mandarin), though this gives the poetry a radically different sound than it had when it was written well over a millennium ago. A few efforts have been made to present poems with *reconstructed* pronunciation based on the highly theoretical medieval rhyme table method,<sup>1</sup> mainly because there seemed not to be any real alternatives. The most important work on T'ang poetry that uses this tradition is by the late Elling Eide,<sup>2</sup> who also pays much attention to the Central Asian background of Li Po and his poetry.

However, traditional reconstructions hide much of the “T'ang sound”—the dialect of the capital and the official class used by poets. Recent work on contemporaneous transcriptions of Sui-T'ang Middle Chinese in the segmental (alphabetic) writing systems of languages spoken and written in Central Asia

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1 As developed by Bernhard Karlgren and followed with modifications by all since. See Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica recensa* (Stockholm: MFEA, 1957).

2 See Elling O. Eide, “On Li Po,” in A. F. Wright and D. Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 367–403.

near the capital, especially Old Tibetan,<sup>3</sup> shows that the traditional reconstructions are often *fundamentally* different from the actual attested sound of the language. More recent traditional-style reconstructions of Chinese diverge even more from the hard data.

Foreign peoples, especially Central Eurasians, heard Middle Chinese in their regular interaction with T'ang Chinese people, and they recorded words and even whole texts in their segmental (alphabetic) writing systems. This paper presents three T'ang poems in preliminary “attested T'ang pronunciation” with a few forms in *bold italics* provided from reconstructions based on other attested forms.

### 1 Li Po 李白 (701–ca. 763)

The single most brilliant—and certainly the most famous—of all Chinese poets, Li Po, was born in the trading city of Sûyâb in Central Asia (what is now Kyrgyzstan), and lived his early life there. He was a personal friend of Tu Fu 杜甫 (712–770), the “other greatest” T'ang poet, who was influenced by Li Po.<sup>4</sup>

The character *Po* 白 (Standard Mandarin *bái*) in his name was read *beg*,<sup>5</sup> identical to the Old Turkic word *beg* ‘lord’, and it is thought that he may have known a Central Asian language. His full given name is T'ai-po (太白), which means ‘the star Venus’ in Chinese, and ‘Great *Beg* (lord)’ in Sino-Turkic. When he was still a child, his family moved to Szechuan, where he lived for a time in the town of *Ch'ing-lien* 青蓮 ‘Green Lotus’, so the first half line of the poem

3 For sources see Takata Tokio 高田時雄, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru chū kuni-go-shi no kenkyū: Kyū-jusseiki no Kasai hōgen* 敦煌資料による中國語史の研究: 九・十世紀の河西方言 (A Historical Study of the Chinese Language Based on Dunhuang Materials) (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1988). Takata Tokio, “Chibetto moji shosha ‘Chōken’ no kenkyū (honbun-hen)” チベット文字書寫「長卷」の研究(本文編) (A Study of the Chinese “Long Scroll” in Tibetan Script: Text and Facsimile), *Tōhō Gakuhō* 東方學報 65 (1993): 313–380. The Middle Chinese values given here are actually attested, but their analysis is still provisional; see Beckwith, Kiyose, Shimunek in the Bibliography below.

4 See Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). William Hung, *Tu Fu, China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), etc., plus translations and studies by many specialists in T'ang literature.

5 Takata Tokio, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru chūgokugoshi no kenkyū*, 402–3.

given below also means 'I'm a Green Lotus resident'. The poem is his answer to the official's question, "Who are you?"<sup>6</sup>

答湖州迦葉司馬問白是何人

**"Reply to Vice-Prefect Kāśyapa of Lake Province, Who Asked Me Who I Am"**

青蓮居士謫仙人

I'm the Green Lotus Man, an exile from  
fairy heaven.

酒肆藏名三十春

For thirty years in wine shops I've been a  
hidden star.

湖州司馬何須問

Vice-Prefect of Lake Province, what  
need is there to ask?

金粟如來是後身

I'm the incarnation of the Buddha of  
Golden Grain!

In attested T'ang pronunciation, as recorded in Old Tibetan script,<sup>7</sup> it sounds like this:

青 蓮 居 士 謫 仙 人  
*tseng len ki ši tik syan žin*  
酒 肆 藏 名 三 十 春  
*dziu sī dzang meng sam žip č<sup>h</sup>un*

6 Chinese text: *Li Taibai quanji zhu* 李太白全集注 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1974), 19.3. My translation is based on the inspired version of Obata Shigeyoshi, *The Works of Li Po, the Chinese Poet* (New York: Dutton, 1922).

7 Chinese text: David Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1987), 200. The T'ang Chinese words in italics are not attested in published segmental script transcriptions. They are based on the traditional reconstructions by Edwin Pulleyblank and on homonyms that are transcribed. See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991). In Old Tibetan transcriptions of *Chinese*, the vowel written ⟨i⟩ \* [u] (Beckwith Christopher I., "The Earliest Transcriptions of Middle Chinese," paper presented at the Attested Middle Chinese Symposium, Berlin, May 20–22, 2022) is *not* a purely graphic variant as previously thought. A few forms are post-T'ang in date, e.g., those from Takata Tokio, "Chibetto moji-shosha 'Chōken' no kenkyū (honbunhen)." The slightly different transcription system used for some phones in this particular poem was suggested to me by Andrew E. Shimunek, whom I would like to thank for it and note that many other improvements are in our forthcoming co-edited volume of papers from the 2022 Attested Middle Chinese Symposium.

湖	州	司	馬	何	須	問
<i>yu</i>	<i>ču</i>	<i>sī</i>	<i>mba</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>mbun</i>
金	粟	如	來	是	後	身
<i>kim</i>	<i>suk</i>	<i>že</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>še</i>	<i>hao</i>	<i>šin</i>

## 2 Tu Fu 杜甫 (712–770)

Tu Fu and Li Po were friends and wrote poems to each other. Each poet's actual experience in life was very different, so not surprisingly Tu Fu's poetry has a very different character than Li Po's. Like Mozart in music, Li Po appears to be the brilliant cosmopolitan poet celebrating life, and when he suffered it too was spectacular. Tu Fu more often expresses his personal suffering and that of his friends and family.

### 旅夜書懷

### “Writing My Thoughts While Travelling by Night”

細草微風岸、危檣獨夜舟

Slender grasses, slight breeze on the shore,  
lofty-masted lone night boat.

星垂平野闊、月涌大江流

The stars hang over the flat vastness of the  
plain, the moon bobs on the great river  
flowing.

名豈文章著、官應老病休

Fame from writing? I've hardly achieved it,  
and from old illness I've had to resign my  
post.

飄飄何所似、天地一沙鷗

What am I like, flit-fluttering about? Between  
heaven and earth, a single sea gull.<sup>8</sup>

細	草	微	風	岸	、	危	檣	獨	夜	舟
<i>se</i>	<i>ts<sup>h</sup>eu</i>	<i>mbyi</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>uŋ</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>an</i>	,	<i>ʔgu</i>	<i>dzyaŋ</i>	<i>duc</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>čeu</i>

星	垂	平	野	闊	、	月	涌	大	江	流
<i>syen</i>	<i>ju</i>	<i>byen</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup>war</i>	,	<i>ʔgwar</i>	<i>yun</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>kaŋ</i>	<i>leu</i>

名	豈	文	章	著	、	官	應	老	病	休
<i>meŋ</i>	<i>gi</i>	<i>mbun</i>	<i>čaŋ</i>	<i>či</i>	,	<i>kwan</i>	<i>iŋ</i>	<i>lau</i>	<i>beŋ</i>	<i>heu</i>

8 I follow Hawkes' reading 飄飄.

飄 飄 何 所 似 、 天 地 一 沙 鷗  
*p<sup>h</sup>yau p<sup>h</sup>yau ɣa še si , t<sup>h</sup>en di ir ša eu*

### 3 Meng Hao-jan 孟浩然 (689/691–740)

The older T'ang poet Meng Hao-jan, who was also a friend of Li Po, wrote one of the most famous of all Chinese poems. Highly impressionistic and nature-oriented, this poem and others like it had a strong influence on Japanese poetry, most famously on the *haiku*.

#### 春曉 “Spring Morning”

春眠不覺曉	In spring I'm sleeping—suddenly it's dawn,
處處聞啼鳥	everywhere I hear the birds singing.
夜來風雨聲	Night comes, with sounds of wind and rain;
花落知多少	flowers falling—who knows how many? <sup>9</sup>

In actual attested T'ang period pronunciation it sounds like this:

春 眠 不 覺 曉 、 處 處 聞 啼 鳥
<i>čhun myen pu kak heu , čhi čhi mbun de teu</i>
夜 來 風 雨 聲 、 花 落 知 多 少
<i>ya le phung yu šeng , hwa lak či ta šeu</i>

The three poems presented here display the characteristic sound of T'ang Chinese and thus reveal sound patterns available to T'ang poets which have been lost in Mandarin, as for example in Li Po's poem, where *sī-mba, su-mbun* in line 3 and *kīm-suk* in line 4 chime together in ways that do not happen in Mandarin. And of course, certain sounds characteristic of Mandarin clearly did not exist in the capital dialect during the T'ang period.

Moreover, until the twentieth century poems were typically not read aloud in Chinese as if they were restaurant menus or tax registers. Poetry was usually sung, chanted, or “hummed,” not read as prose,<sup>10</sup> whether the poet or

9 My translation does not do this poem justice. Text: Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*, 86, (357), q.v. for his interpretation.

10 The term “song lyrics” reveals the musical background of “lyric poetry.”

performer was alone or in the company of others. That points to a vital facet of T'ang poets' interaction with neighboring cultures: Central Asian musicians and poets contributed directly to T'ang poetry and music, as we know because many of the musical compositions are preserved in Japanese transcriptions down to the present, while Chinese sources have preserved some T'ang period Central Asians' poems written in Chinese.<sup>11</sup> For an idea of what a performance would have sounded like, listen to traditional Japanese poetry chant.<sup>12</sup>

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# Transgression and Restoration: Narratology and Gender Identity in Four Tang Narratives of a Woman Avenger

*Jing WANG and Mei Ah TAN*

## Abstract

This article examines a set of four narratives from the Mid-Tang era that relate the same story about a woman avenging her father. What makes this story unique is that the heroine ultimately murders her own son. This paper analyzes the four narratives, focusing on textual comparison and the significance of the satellite events that relate to the characterization of the heroine. It examines the characterization of the female protagonist from the perspective of gender, addressing topics such as general expectations for men and women; the social confinement that the woman avenger must face after her revenge; and how her unconventional actions break and then restore the status quo of gender roles in Tang society.

## Keywords

Woman avenger – Tang tales – gender

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Violating the law to avenge one's father is an exemplary form of filial piety in traditional Chinese culture. It is a common motif in Chinese literature and historical records. During the Tang Dynasty, there were numerous legal cases that called on the emperor to determine what punishment was to be levied on

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1 We began working on this set of narratives while we were graduate students under the guidance of Professor Nienhauser. Over time, the paper underwent several revisions, but our progress was frequently interrupted by our respective pursuits. We are thrilled that the paper can be published in celebration of Professor Nienhauser's accomplishments, and we extend our gratitude to the reviewers for their valuable feedback.

those who took justice into their own hands. This phenomenon finds its way into Tang tales.

One spectacular example of this theme is a set of four narratives from the Mid-Tang era that relate the same story about a woman avenging her father. What makes this story unique is that the heroine ultimately murders her own son. The four texts that narrate this story include “Qie bao fuyuan shi” 妾報父冤事 (An Event of a Concubine Avenging Her Father), “Guren qi” 賈人妻 (A Merchant’s Wife),<sup>2</sup> “Cui Shensi” 崔慎思,<sup>3</sup> and “Yi ji” 義激 (Stirred by Righteousness). Among them, “Yi ji” is the most elaborate version and was composed by Cui Li 崔蠡 (fl. 810–827).<sup>4</sup>

These texts were composed within a span of twenty years and were very likely sourced from the same real-life event. As Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱 has argued, it is rather impossible for this many similar events to have taken place in the capital within such a short period of time.<sup>5</sup> This opinion is supported by the fact that the event is recorded in *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 (Supplementary Record to the Official History).<sup>6</sup>

Storytelling was a popular form of entertainment at gatherings of scholars at the time, as revealed in the epilogues of many Tang tales and anecdotes. When a story was retold and reformatted by story tellers at various occasions, verbatim recitation was not required, and it was expected that story tellers or performers would make minor revisions in the process. As Sarah Allen argues, “the material we read today as Tang tales was intimately connected to the social exchange of stories among elite men. Such storytelling might occur orally or in writing.”<sup>7</sup> This explains the similarities and differences in this set of female knight-errant narratives.

2 The text, originally from *Jiyi ji* 集異記, is preserved in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 196.1471–72.

3 The text, originally from *Yuanhua ji* 原化記, is preserved in the *Taiping guangji*, 194.1456.

4 Cui Li, style name Yueqing 越卿, served in a series of positions at the imperial court and in the military provinces after he passed the Civil Service Examination in 810. See his biography in Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946), et al., comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 117.3404.

5 Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱, “Zenyang jianbie Tang chuanqi youwu yuyi” 怎樣鑒別唐傳奇有無寓意, in *Tang chuanqi xintan* 唐傳奇新探 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 368–75, 373.

6 See Li Zhao 李肇 (fl. 818), *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補, in *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 187. This book is considered a collection of anecdotes that supplement the official historical records.

7 Sarah Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 25.

Comparing these four narratives, many common features of the female protagonists in each and their overlapping plotlines may be readily observed. These four texts can be regarded as a set of anecdotes, for which there is no single authoritative version. All four narratives contain the same central motifs and kernel events but differ in length and complexity. It is worth considering why this incident of revenge attracted so much attention from the literati that four different narratives were composed about it and preserved up to this day. One reason must be its unconventional denouement, in which the female protagonist abandons her husband and kills her offspring. Although the theme of infanticide is rare in Chinese literature, it frequently appears in Western literature. The story of Medea from Greek mythology is a representative example. In Euripides's fifth century BCE tragedy *Medea*, the titular character is a maiden who falls in love with Jason and uses her magic to help him in his search for the Golden Fleece. After ten years of marriage, Jason abandons Medea and their sons to wed the King of Corinth's daughter. Medea murders her sons in retaliation before fleeing for Athens, where she eventually marries a king.<sup>8</sup> Although the story of Medea and these four Tang narratives share the same motif of infanticide, they differ in terms of the heroine's identity, her motivation for murder, and the role of her husband. Thus, they reflect different cultural connotations and compositional intentions.

Previous scholarship on this set of Tang narratives comments on their oral transmission,<sup>9</sup> the allegorical meaning of "Yi ji" by Cui Li,<sup>10</sup> and discourse that reveals the gender tensions and ambiguities of the woman avenger.<sup>11</sup> This paper will compare the story and discourse of the four narratives concerned, as well as their relation to gender-based characterization, paving way for an interpretation of the unconventional actions of the female protagonist from the perspective of gender norms. Through narratological analysis, this study proposes that "Guren qi" and "Cui Shensi" share the same narrative pattern, whereas "Yi ji" significantly differs in its representation of gender roles and the fact that its narrative form is shaped by the author's intentional weaving of his

8 For the text of *Medea* edited with introduction and commentary, see Denys L. Page, *Euripides Medea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

9 Sarah Allen argues that these texts could be products of oral circulation among the Tang literati. See Sarah Allen, "Tales Retold: Narrative Variation in a Tang Story," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66.1 (2006), 105–43.

10 According to Bian Xiaoxuan, Cui Li used this story as an allegory to lament the fate of his ancestor. See Bian, "Zenyang jianbie Tang chuanqi youwu yuyi," 368–75.

11 Manling Luo, "Gender, Genre, and Discourse: The Woman Avenger in Medieval Chinese Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134.4 (October–December 2014): 579–99.

own family history into the story. The remarkable ending, as an unavoidable result of the transgression and restoration of gender roles, justifies the inclusion of this set of narratives in the repertoire of Tang tales, a genre known for its elaborated depiction of the extraordinary.

This paper shall begin with a textual comparison and analysis of the four narratives, focusing on the significance of the satellite events that relate to the characterization of the heroine. Since these four narratives likely take their source from the same event, they have almost identical kernel events. Although *Tang guoshi bu* is succinct, the other three texts clearly show the authors' elaboration on the story. Normally kernel events hold critical value in literary analysis. However, in this case satellite events are more important to readers' understanding of the authors' different motives and the resulting characterization of the heroine. A close analysis of discourse in these texts provides further evidence of the differences in plot structure. Based on plot, the three extended versions may be divided into two narrative patterns. An allegorical reading of Cui Li's "Yi ji" constitutes the second part of this paper. As proposed by Bian Xiaoxuan, connections exist between historical records of the Cui clan and the story's plot. The last part of the paper will continue to examine the characterization of the female protagonist from the perspective of gender, addressing topics such as general expectations for men and women; the social confinement that the woman avenger must face after her revenge; and how her unconventional actions break and then restore the status quo of gender roles in Tang society.

## 2 Textual Analysis

### 2.1 *The Anecdote*

Although "Qie bao fuyuan shi" is the shortest text in the series, it includes all the essential elements of the story. In order to investigate the significance of the satellite events introduced in the other texts, a careful review of this anecdote is necessary. The text reads:

During the Zhenyuan 貞元 era (785–804), there was a visitor in Chang'an who purchased a concubine. He lived with her for several years, until one day he suddenly did not know where she went. One night, she came back holding a man's head and reported to her husband, "I endured the injustice done to my father until now. That is why I came here. Now I have avenged him!" She politely requested to leave, bade him farewell with

tears running down her face, and rushed out of the door like a gust of wind. In a short while she returned, cut the throats of the two children to whom she had given birth, and left.

貞元中，長安客有買妾者，居之數年，忽爾不知所之。一夜，提人首而至，告其夫曰：「我有父冤，故至于此，今報矣！」請歸，泣涕而訣，出門如風。俄頃却至，斷所生二子喉而去。<sup>12</sup>

This record primarily consists of three kernel events: A woman was sold to a visitor of Chang'an as a concubine; she disappeared one day, only to come home one night with a human head claiming that she had avenged her father; she departed but returned later to kill her children before leaving for good. The woman is undoubtedly the protagonist, yet she is only referred to as "a concubine," and no further information about her is provided. The setting is Chang'an, capital of the Tang dynasty.

A notable formal feature of this short anecdote is its narrative ellipsis. There is a gap in narration between her initial sudden disappearance and unexpected return. Such a textual flashforward creates suspense for the audience. Her act of revenge is only revealed by her own monologue after the shocking scene of her carrying a head is presented. At the end of the anecdote, the woman bids farewell to her husband, but subsequently returns only to kill her two sons. The pace of narration accelerates dramatically in this text, jumping from "a few years" to "one night" and eventually to "a short while." The narrowing of the narrative scope directs the readers' attention to the woman's killing of her children, which not only constitutes the climax of the story, but is also the most important part of the text. However, no explanation—either in a first-person confession or third-person omniscient narration—is offered regarding why she changes her mind and return to kill her children. There also appears to be no reference or cultural code that provides a concrete explanation of her action. According to Roland Barthes, a reference code is the scientific or moral authority that a story is founded upon, whereas a cultural code is the numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which a text continually refers.<sup>13</sup> This may account for the author-narrator's comments about the heroine's actions in the narrative variants "Cui Shensi" and "Yi ji." These comments are the "reference codes" serving as a moral authority within the text to justify the heroine's actions. This genre of Tang tales has made the incorporation of reference codes convenient because it borrows from the historical writing the convention of giving authorial comments at the end of the text.

<sup>12</sup> Li Zhao, *Tang guoshi bu*, in *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 187.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (1990; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 18.

In addition to the anecdote's kernel events, some satellite events, although minimal, contribute to the characterization of the female protagonist. The most noteworthy is her respectful and submissive attitude towards her husband. After the woman secretly completes her plan of revenge, instead of leaving directly, she returns home and informs her husband of the offence she has committed, and she requests his permission to let her go. Such details show that in spite of her decisiveness and determination, she complies with the social expectation that a female should be subordinate to her husband.

### 2.2 *Female Avenger: the Male Perspective*

"Guren qi" and "Cui Shensi" are both extended versions of the same story. In these two narratives, the point of view is still that of the male character. Contrary to "Qie bao fuyuan shi," the male characters are given a specific identity in these two texts, but the women remain anonymous. Moreover, both men seek an official position and are financially dependent on the women, and even move into the women's residences. In the beginning of the stories, both female protagonists are depicted as submissive concubines whose behavior conforms to social expectations: They subordinate themselves to their husbands, even though they demonstrate great financial abilities.

"Guren qi" is narrated from the male protagonist Wang Li's 王立 point of view. Wang Li, the former Magistrate of Yugan 餘干 County, is poverty stricken when he fails to secure another government appointment. The beautiful woman whom he meets on the street claims to be a widow of a merchant and becomes his material provider for two years.

The woman is characterized in a way that combines both female virtue and male social responsibility. She bears children for her husband and takes care of the family. At the same time, she diligently attends to business without a day of rest and plays the role of bread-winner for the household, responsibilities that are usually associated with men in traditional society.

When she decides to leave for good, she gives all her properties to Wang, informing him that her property is worth at least 500 strings of copper coins and that the deed of the land is hidden in the room divider. She also bids Wang to take care of their baby, saying, "He is your son as well. I bid you to love him!" 亦公之子也，公其念之。<sup>14</sup> The character 亦 (also) is used to remind her husband of his responsibility to raise his son, as the child is a male descendent who will continue the family's bloodline. Her immediate return to kill her son is left unexplained.

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14 *Taiping guangji*, 196.1472.

“Cui Shensi” goes a step further in highlighting the male protagonist. Not only is the text named after the male protagonist, but his social status is also greatly elevated. Cui Shensi is a member of the prominent Cui clan from Boling 博陵. As Patricia Ebrey has pointed out, Boling, located in the area between modern Anping 安平 County and Ding 定 County of Hebei Province, was the home base of the influential aristocratic Cui clan. The history of the prominent Cui clan can be traced back to the Han dynasty. According to Ebrey’s study, a branch of the Cui clan became one of the highest aristocratic families in the Northern Dynasties. After the loss of privileged access to office in the Sui Dynasty, they regained a secure hold on eminence in the Tang. By the early Tang, they married only among themselves for the sake of preserving exclusiveness.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore peculiar that in the Cui Shensi story, Scholar Cui proposes to a woman over thirty years old, which was certainly above usual marriage age by Tang standards. According to the story, she was the landlord of the Chang’an place that Cui resided in while he prepared for the prestigious *jinshi* 進士 (Presented Scholars) Examination. The narrator does not explain the reason for his marriage proposal, but comments that the woman is beautiful and affluent. When Scholar Cui proposes to the woman, she refuses to reveal her family name and makes it clear that she is not a proper match for him because she does not come from a family of literati, and that Cui will regret it in future. Although she has properties for rent, two maiden servants, and is affluent enough to satisfy all of Cui’s material requests, her financial superiority does not make up for her inferiority in social status.

In this text, the story provides more of clues as to the woman’s identity and the cause of her resentment. After her father is unjustly executed by the governor of a commandery, she moves to the capital to avenge his death. At the end of this text there is a comment from the narrator that explains her motive for killing her son: “She killed her child so as to repudiate her longing for him. Even ancient knights-errant could not surpass her” 殺其子以絕其念也，古之俠莫能過焉。<sup>16</sup>

Putting the different identities of the characters aside, these two narratives, “Guren qi” and “Cui Shensi,” share the same sequence of actions leading up to the climax: the woman bids farewell to her husband only to return to kill their child shortly after. Similarity between the two texts can also be found at the level of diction, to the point that identical phrases are used in both narratives:

15 For more details, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts’ui Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 34–115.

16 *Taiping guangji*, 194.1456.

“Guren qi”     *yanqi, shoulei er bie* / *yu yuan* / *juwen que zhi*  
 言訖，收淚而別 / 逾垣 / 遽聞卻至<sup>17</sup>  
 As she finished talking, she stopped her tears and bid farewell /  
 jumped over the parapet / returned shortly.

“Cui Shensi”     *yanqi er bie* / *yu qiang* / *shaoqing que zhi*  
 言訖而別 / 逾牆 / 少頃卻至<sup>18</sup>  
 As she finished talking and bidding farewell / jumped over the  
 wall / returned in a short while.

The similarity in phrasing supports the hypothesis that these two narratives came from the same source. The same limited third person point of view and the characterization of a relatively ordinary male figure are deliberate attempts to create suspense. This is pointed out by Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 in his brief comment on “Cui Shensi,” but can also be applied to “Guren qi.”<sup>19</sup> “Cui Shensi” has a tag-on comment at the end, marking the switch from a covert narrator to an overt narrator.

### 2.3 “Yi ji”: Subversion of Gender

“Yi ji” is the most complex version of the story, but it has the earliest date of composition, written during the Yuanhe 元和 era (806–820).<sup>20</sup> This text is sourced from a written record that is dated earlier than “Qie bao fuyuan shi.”<sup>21</sup> The first

17 Ibid., 196.1472.

18 Ibid., 194.1456.

19 Chen Pingyuan, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中國小說敘事模式的轉變 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 2003), 65.

20 Bian Xiaoxuan briefly discusses these four texts and their time of composition. See *Tang chuanqi xintan*, 373. Sarah Allen also discusses the composition time of these narratives. Her conclusion is similar to Bian’s; she proposes that the first three versions appeared around 820s and that “Cui Shensi” came considerably later, sometime between 836 and 840 when the *Yuanhua ji* in which the narrative was included was completed. Allen, “Tales Retold,” 19–20.

21 In the commentary on “Yi ji,” the author-narrator points out that Li Duanyan 李端言 of Longxi 隴西 had written a biography of the woman; it was then followed by Cui Li, who composed “Yi ji.” Li Jianguo 李劍國 notes that Li Duanyan’s “Shu furen zhuan” 蜀婦人傳 (Biography of a Woman from Shu) initiated the composition of knights-errant in Tang tales and that its influence is significant, although the biography is no longer extant. See Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (Tianjin: Nankai Daxue chubanshe, 1993), 340. The tale is preserved in *juan* 39 of the *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 and *juan* 718 of the *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (1983; rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 7389.

part of the text resembles the other three narratives in its plot line. The female protagonist, originally from the Shu 蜀 area, comes to Chang'an and marries a local man. Soon after their child is born, her husband finds her missing late at night and becomes doubtful of her chastity. The situation continues for some time until she comes back one night with a man's head, claiming that she has just avenged the death of her father, who had been wrongfully executed when serving as an official in Shu. She then kills her son and leaves for good. In this tale, her marriage and family are used as camouflage to hide her true identity and intention and to avoid raising the suspicion of her neighbors.

This tale differs from the other versions in its narratological technique. It has an overt narrator throughout the story. The author even presents himself as the narrator to comment on the story at the end. The omniscient narrator sometimes withholds information to create suspense. He starts by introducing the heroine, stressing her ordinary features, including how she looks, what she wears and eats, and how dutiful she is as a servant. What sets her apart is that she shuts herself in, has no visitors, and does no such thing as knitting and washing. Furthermore, her attitude is solemn and circumspect, so that even unrestrained and strong young men dare not mess with her. The description of her appearance and behavior distinguishes her from normal women, foreshadowing the extraordinary and unexpected action that she will take in the latter part of the story.

The narrator creates suspense through carefully chosen diction. The repetitive use of the word *chang* 常 (ordinary) as in *changren* 常人 (ordinary person) and *chang yongju zhi furen* 常傭居之婦人 (ordinary women who work as servants) or its antonym *yi* 異 (different) as in *wu you yi* 無有異 (to have no abnormality), *da you yi* (to have great difference) and *yilü* 異慮 (different plans) suggest that there is indeed something unusual about her. Furthermore, the use of *si* 似 (as if) in the sentence “*guan qi fu fu zhi yi, si mo shen bu gan er zhe*” 觀其付夫之意，似沒身不敢貳者<sup>22</sup> (observing her intention to attach herself to her husband, it looks as if she dares not betray him throughout her life) hints that her devotion to her husband may not be what it seems. At the end of the tale, the narrator lets the female protagonist explain her actions. She reveals that she has been planning her revenge for a long time and that the murder of her son is premeditated. She advises her husband to devote himself to benevolence and righteousness and to prioritize others. She even promises to help him if he meets with danger in the future.

22 *Quan Tang wen*, 718.7389.

The author presents a comprehensive commentary at the end of the tale in praise of the woman's behavior. This is unique to "Yi ji" and separates it from the other texts in the series. The author-narrator explains why she may be considered a filial and righteous woman. The following epilogue of the tale merits a closer look:

Remarks: The woman of Shu sought to avenge her father for years. She finally fulfilled her wish; furthermore, she killed her son and abandoned her husband so that the son would not be a source of obligation and the husband would not be a source of burden.<sup>23</sup> If we evaluate her actions in the context of filial piety, she is filial; if we evaluate them in the context of righteousness, she is righteous. Filial and righteous, this is a filial woman! From the beginning of the Tang till now, only two hundred years have passed. However, there have been loyal, righteous, filial, and spirited women and girls whose deeds cannot be surpassed even in tens of thousands of years. Representatives of such filial women include the girl of Gao Min celebrated for her filial piety and the spirited woman of Yang celebrated for her righteousness. Now the woman of Shu should be paired with these two to make three.

按：蜀婦人求復父仇有年矣，卒如心；又殺其子，捐其夫；子不得為恩，夫不得為累，推之於孝，斯孝已；推之於義，斯義已。孝且義，孝婦人也！自國初到於今，僅二百年，忠義孝烈婦人女子，其事能使千萬歲無以過。孝有高愍女，義歸楊烈婦，今蜀婦人，宜與三婦齒。<sup>24</sup>

The author-narrator is amazed by the woman's resolution to completely sever family ties in terms of both *en* 恩 (obligation/favor) and *lei* 累 (burden). Her killing of her son may be considered righteous by the author-narrator because she has spared the child from what she claims to be a foreseeable life of misery: to be despised for being the son of a murderess.

The author-narrator puts the heroine in the same class as the girl Gao Min and the woman of Yang. The name Gao Min refers to Gao Meimei 高妹妹,

23 Another possible reading of this sentence would be "she killed her son and abandoned her husband so that she did not induce any obligation of the son to her and did not create any burden on the husband." Here *en* refers to the love and favor that children receive from their parents and *lei* refers to the burden that a husband suffers in caring for his wife and children.

24 Wang Meng'ou 王夢鷗, *Tangren xiaoshuo jiaoshi* 唐人小說校釋 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1994), 270.

daughter of Gao Yanzhao 高彥昭. Gao Meimei had great insights at a young age, knew ritual proprieties by heart, and chose to die with her family. She was held hostage by Li Na 李納 (ca. 787–ca. 820), who appointed himself as successor after the death of his father Li Zhengji 李正己 (ca. 734–ca. 783), Military Governor of Pinglu 平盧. When her father refused to comply with Li Na, Li had Gao's family executed. Although Gao Meimei was only seven years old, she chose to die with her family even though she had been exempted. Considering that her mother and elder brother had prayed to the deities in vain, she criticized the deities for turning a blind eye to the fate that befell her loyal and righteous family. Before she subjected herself to execution, she inquired about the whereabouts of her father. Then, facing west, she cried and bowed twice with respect. She was given the posthumous title Min (to be grieved) as a sign of Emperor Dezhong's sympathy for her death.<sup>25</sup>

The spirited woman of Yang was the wife of Li Kan 李侃 (fl. 786), Magistrate of Xiang City 項城. She was insightful and brave. When Li Xilie 李希烈 (d. 786) rebelled, she persuaded her husband to stay and guard the city, explaining that all the people and resources of the city would become the property of the rebels if he left. She recommended that he should recruit brave men with generous awards to guard the city walls, and that he should stay and fight with them even when he was shot. She also cooked for the soldiers. It was with her help and advice that Li Kan successfully fended off the rebels.<sup>26</sup>

The difference in diction and the author's candid expression of his personal emotions in "Yi ji" suggest that the tale underwent a different route of transmission and invites an allegorical reading of the tale that relates extraordinary events to the author's family background and personal experiences.

### 3 Allegorical Reading of "Yi ji"

As the above discussion of "Yi ji" has shown, what distinguishes this tale from the others in terms of plot development is the heroine's premeditated killing of her child, her reasoning about the killing, the author's commendation of her actions, and the explanation of his motive for composing the tale. The heroine's place of birth and where she grows up, i.e., the Shu area, is specified in the story. This is a small yet essential detail not included in the other texts.

The author Cui Li provides readers with more information about the heroine's background and sets up the stage for her to later justify the act of

25 See "Gao Minnü" of "Lienü zhuan" 列女傳, in *Xin Tang shu*, 205, 5825.

26 See "Yang Liefu" of "Lienü zhuan," in *Xin Tang shu*, 205, 5825–26.

infanticide. In the epilogue of the tale, Cui Li explains his motive for composing it, noting that he had been moved by the female protagonist's righteous deeds. Such intense involvement of the author's emotions does not exist in the other texts. According to Bian Xiaoxuan, Cui Li did not simply write a story about an extraordinary female knight-errant, but used the story as an allegory to lament the fate of his ancestor. The author's memory of his family's misfortune motivated him to elaborate on the heroine's motives. The title of the story itself is a direct expression of his fervent emotion.

Bian's linkage of the tale to Cui Li's personal experience is convincing, as the unjust execution of the heroine's father bears resemblance to that of Cui Ning 崔寧 (723–783), the elder brother of Cui Li's grandfather Cui Mi 崔密. Cui Ning began his career in the army after being dismissed from a magistrate position. He ascended in rank from a soldier to Military Governor of Xichuan 西川, where he governed for over a decade. His local influence and military power increased over the years, to the point that his prowess became a threat to the emperor. The rebellion of Zhu Ci 朱泚 (742–784)<sup>27</sup> in 783 was a turning point in Cui Ning's life that eventually led to his execution. According to *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Official History of the Tang), Cui Ning held Vice Censor-in-Chief Lu Qi 盧杞 (d. ca. 785) responsible for Emperor Dezong's 德宗 (r. 779–804) exile during Zhu Ci's revolt. To protect himself, Lu Qi conspired with Wang Yi 王翊 (d. 802) to frame Cui. At the time, Zhu Ci deliberately assigned posts to officials who remained loyal to Emperor Dezong in order to create dissension. He assigned Cui Ning to be the Secretariat Director. Wang Yi seized this opportunity to force Cui Ning's head secretary to compose a letter in the name of Cui Ning to Zhu Ci, thus making it impossible for Cui Ning to exculpate himself. Emperor Dezong became suspicious of Cui Ning's loyalty and ordered him to be secretly strangled to death. Cui Ning's innocence was not declared until 796, when Han Tan 韓潭 (fl. 787–798), a former general of Cui Ning and

27 See "Cui Ning zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, 117.3402. The rebellion broke out in 783 when the government was confronted with rebels of the northeast. When the Shuofang 朔方 army passed through the capital on their way to Henan, they "mutinied over the inadequate provision of rations and found a willing leader of their revolt in Zhu Ci." Zhu Ci, the former military governor of Youzhou 幽州 (southwest of modern Beijing city) and the previous leader of the Shuofang army, was the elder brother of Zhu Tao 朱滔 (746–785), who was at the time the military governor of Youzhou and participated in the northeast rebellion in 782. Widespread unrest in the capital forced the imperial court to flee to nearby Fengtian 奉天 (in present-day Shaanxi 陝西), where the court was besieged by Zhu Ci, who announced himself the founder of a new dynasty. The court returned to the capital in 784 when the rebellions came to an end. Zhu Ci was defeated and assassinated. See Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3:501–7.

military governor of Xia 夏, Sui 綏, and Yin 銀 prefectures, reported to the court and asked the emperor to dismiss Cui Ning's offense. Han Tan had recently been appointed Grand Master of Rites and he requested the restoration of Cui Ning's fame as a favor bestowed on himself. Only then did Emperor Dezong allow the Cui family to collect his body for a proper burial.<sup>28</sup>

It is likely not a coincidence that the author's prominent clansman Cui Ning shared a similar fate as the heroine's father in the tale: he also spent his heyday in the Shu area before meeting a tragic and unjust death. Although Cui Ning was described as "indulging himself in luxury and extravagance" in his official biography,<sup>29</sup> the reaction of contemporary officials toward his fate must have been shared by his relatives. They believed that Cui Ning was not guilty of treason and that he did not deserve a secret execution. His early glory and eventual downfall brought great misfortune to his family and must have made his clansmen hold mixed feelings toward him. In "Yi ji," the woman claims that her father was a minor official in Shu who had committed an offence not subject to capital punishment. He was wrongfully executed by a cruel official who did not act according to the law. It is understandable that the unusual and unfortunate experience of the Shu woman would remind Cui Li of his granduncle's unjust death, and therefore motivate him to write her story to commemorate and lament over his ancestor. Even at a young age the woman is determined to avenge her father's death and finally succeeds in doing so. On the contrary, there was no one from the Cui clan who could avenge Cui Ning. It was only his former subordinate commander who succeeded in pleading for his exoneration. This happened just a few years before Cui Li's composition of this tale. The author's memory of his clan's painful experience is woven into the "filial and righteous" behavior of the Shu woman. The author's intense emotions differentiate this tale from the other three narratives.

28 See "Cui Ning zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, 117:3397–3403. His biography in *Jiu Tang shu* precedes the biography of Cui Li. *The Cambridge History of China* has a brief description of the political crisis in Jiannan 劍南 (modern Sichuan province, or the Shu area in "Yi ji") where Cui Ning was the governor. Cui Ning was described as "a usurper who had achieved power in a local civil war against court-sponsored rivals but who had subsequently remained essentially loyal to the Tang." See Twitchett and Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China*, 3:509–10.

29 The following passage provides a general picture of his character and the central court's attitude toward him. "Ning spent over a decade in the Shu area. Relying upon a strategic location with difficult access and a powerful army, he indulged himself in luxury and extravagance. He raped the wives and concubines of many of his generals and subordinate officials. The court worried about the situation but could not condemn him 寧在蜀十餘年，地險兵強，肆侈窮欲，將吏妻妾，多為所淫汙，朝廷患之而不能詰。 See "Cui Ning zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, 117:3400.

## 4 Gender Transgression and Restoration

### 4.1 *The Woman Avenger and Sanctioned Violence*

On one hand, the woman avenger in this group of four narratives represents an exemplary model of filial piety. However, on the other hand, the woman's deployment of extreme violence creates emotions of pity and fear that shocks both the writers and the audience. As demonstrated in previous discussion, the authors attempt to explain and legitimize her cruel action of killing her son by making it consistent with motherly sacrifice. Such a contradiction makes her a profoundly complex character in the rich tradition of woman avengers in Chinese literature.<sup>30</sup> Although the identity of the key figures in the story and details associated with the revenge are different in various versions, these texts share the same core plot to successfully portray an unconventional image of a daughter, wife, and mother, while simultaneously challenging social expectations for women and Confucian ethics during the Tang era.

Traditional Confucian ideology emphasizes and advocates for filial piety. Avenging one's parents is a special form of filial piety that goes beyond daily attendance upon one's parents or observing the proper mourning ritual after their death. It is the son's obligation to avenge his parents' unnatural death, and therefore violent retribution by a son for his parents' unrightful death was sanctioned and even expected. The following passage in *Li ji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) explains this social expectation:

Zixia consulted Confucius, saying, "What should be done to a parent's murderer?" The Master said, "People should sleep on straw mats and use a shield as pillow, not serve in government office, and not share the same Heaven with the murderer. When running into the person, regardless of markets and court, fight him without returning home for weapons."

子夏問於孔子曰：「居父母之仇，如之何？」夫子曰：「寢苦枕干，不仕，弗與共天下也；遇諸市朝，不反兵而鬥。」<sup>31</sup>

30 Manling Luo examines representations of the woman avengers in official biographies, Music Bureau poetry and unofficial prose accounts in the medieval era, including the set of narratives studied in this paper. Through cross-genre comparison, she presents various narrative conventions in the controversial stories of female vengeance and explores the subject's gender tensions. Luo, "Gender, Genre, and Discourse," 579–99.

31 "Tangong shang" 檀弓上, in *Liji*, 7.17, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, collated Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1980), vol. 5: 133.

As revealed in this passage, avenging one's parents is endorsed by the Confucian tradition. To sleep on straw mats and to use a shield as pillow vividly depicts the filial son's vigils. To not serve in government office is probably to avoid having to comply with a royal order and violating the law as an official. To not return for weapons indicates the immediacy of actions, bearing in mind the mission of revenge and seizing every opportunity to carry it out.<sup>32</sup> The passage subsequently stipulates what proper actions one should take in order to avenge the death of one's siblings and cousins. As Manling Luo points out, there is a hierarchy of duties among which avenging one's parents is the most urgent and takes priority over all other social obligations.<sup>33</sup> As an extension of the same concept of filial virtue to the public sphere, officials viewed their relationship with the sovereign in moral terms. Officials should be committed to acting with loyalty and thereby maintained a harmonious system of order and hierarchy.

In the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), Confucianism was established as the orthodox school of thought, and the value of filial piety was highly elevated.<sup>34</sup> Avenging one's parents was claimed to be a brave and courageous action, which inevitably resulted in many deaths.<sup>35</sup> Even if one was timid, one would have to force oneself to abide by this tradition.<sup>36</sup> In the Tang dynasty,

32 Taking revenge for one's parents is considered a filial act, but it challenged the law and often created a dilemma for the ruler to decide how to punish the offender. Lee Long-Shien 李隆獻 has conducted considerable research output on this phenomenon. He eventually compiled much of his research into two books. Lee Long-Shien, *Fuchouguan de xingcha yu quanshi: Xian Qin liang Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao Sui Tang bian* 復仇觀的省察與詮釋：先秦兩漢魏晉南北朝隋唐編 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Daxue chuban zhongxin, 2012); *idem*, *Fuchouguan de xingcha yu quanshi: Song Yuan Ming Qing bian* 復仇觀的省察與詮釋：宋元明清編 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Daxue chuban zhongxin, 2015).

33 Luo, "Gender, Genre, and Discourse," 579–80.

34 Confucius is a supporter of justice in human relationships. Confucius said, "What, then, do you repay a good turn with? (In response to the idea of repaying an injury with a good turn) Repay an injury with straightness, but repay a good turn with a good turn" 何以報德？以直報怨，以德報德。See *Lunyu* 論語, 14:34. The translation is based on D. C. Lau, *The Analects* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), 143.

35 The *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 notes an enactment of "Qingwu fa" 輕侮法 (The Law Concerning Insult and Humiliation). During the reign of Emperor He 和帝 (88–105), Zhang Min 張敏 proposed to abolish the law, as it encouraged personal revenge that went beyond the control of the government. See "Zhang Min zhuan" 張敏傳, in Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 44.1502–3.

36 The *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳 quotes Zi Shen Zi's 子沈子 saying, "When the ruler is assassinated, if his subject does not send a punitive expedition against the rebel, he is not a subject. If a son does not take revenge for his father, he is not a son" 君弑，臣不討賊非臣也；子不復讎，非子也。See *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan*, Duke

although the influence of filial piety was not as strong as before,<sup>37</sup> filial conduct was still highly praised. Biographies of filial people, such as “Xiaoyou zhuan” 孝友傳 (Biographies of the Filial and the Brotherly) in *Jiu Tang shu*, are included in the dynasty’s two official histories. There is a record in this collection of the biographies of the siblings Zhang Xiu 張琇 and Zhang Huang 張瑄, who killed Wan Qing 萬頃 to avenge their parents’ death during the Kaiyuan 開元 era (713–741). Although people at the time deeply sympathized with them,<sup>38</sup> the siblings were eventually sentenced to death to affirm the authority of law. The following passage illustrates how their contemporaries reacted to their execution.

After Huang and Xiu had died, scholars and common people mourned and sympathized with them. They wrote elegies and dirges for the two and posted them on the streets. The residents of the city raised funds to build a public well in the place where Huang and Xiu died and buried them in Mount Beimang. They also feared that the family members of Wan Qing might destroy the tombs, so they built several fake tombs. The Zhangs were mourned by their contemporaries in this manner.

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Yin 隱公 11, 3.17a, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, vol. 7, 42. This idea is demonstrated by the Music Bureau poem “Du lu pian” 獨漉篇 (Filtrating Alone) that describes the agony of an orphan and his resolution to avenge his father’s death. See Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041–1099), *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 3:54.790. The note points out that the protagonist’s father is unjustifiably killed but the protagonist cannot clear his father’s name. He therefore lives as a wanderer, intending to avenge the enemy, but fails to do so. Thus, his heart is troubled, and he compares himself to a ferocious tiger that wants to bite people.

- 37 Modern scholars generally agree that the influence of filial piety was relatively weak during the Tang dynasty. See Zhu Lan 朱嵐, *Zhongguo chuantong xiaodao de lishi kaocha* 中國傳統孝道的歷史考察 (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2003), 212–21.
- 38 According to Zhu Lan, there were three recorded cases on the avenging of one’s father. Among them, avengers were executed in two cases. In two hundred years’ time, from the beginning of the dynasty till the reign of Muzong 穆宗 (r. 821–824), there were altogether eight revenge cases reported to the emperor. The number of avengers executed equaled the number of those exempted. See Zhu, *Zhongguo chuantong xiaodao de lishi kaocha*, 238. The modern scholars Wang Li 王立 and Hao Ming 郝明 argue that, in the early Tang, the influence of ritual was stronger than the law. Those who avenged their fathers’ death were usually exempted from punishment. However, beginning from Xuanzong’s 玄宗 (r. 712–756) reign, the officials tended to execute the avengers, despite praising their filial act. See Wang Li and Hao Ming, “Fuchou baoyuan muti yu Tangdai haoxia jingshen” 復仇報怨母題與唐代豪俠精神, *Guizhou shehui kexue* 貴州社會科學 2004.1: 59–64.

瑄、琇既死，士庶咸傷愍之，為作哀誄，榜于衢路。市人斂錢，于死所造義井，並葬瑄、琇于北邙。又恐萬頃家人發之，並作疑冢數所。其為時人所傷如此。<sup>39</sup>

Unlike male heirs who had an undeniable duty to avenge their parents, daughters and wives, whose role was limited to the family sphere and who were supposed to practice unconditional obedience, were not expected to commit violent acts of revenge. However, there are cases of women avengers in many medieval texts, including in official historical records. The following record from “Lienü zhuan” 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women) in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New Official History of the Tang*) illustrates how the imperial court valued and promoted filial piety in the early Tang era. A woman avenged her father by killing his murderer. She was fortunate to be exempted from punishment and was even rewarded for her deeds.

The filial woman from Wei was a native of Xia in Jiang prefecture. Her style name was Wuji. Her father was murdered by a villager named Wei Changze. Wuji was just six years old and had no brothers. Her mother remarried. After she had grown up, she constantly thought of avenging her father's death. It happened that the cousin of her father invited many guests to feast and Changze was sitting among them. Wuji struck him with a brick and killed him. She went to see the legal officials, claimed that she had avenged her father's death, and requested to be punished. Touring Surveillance Commissioner Chu Suiliang (596–659) reported the event to the emperor. Emperor Taizong (r. 627–649) extolled her filial piety and righteousness, issued a special edict to exempt her offense, gave her a horse to move to the Yong prefecture, and bestowed upon her fields and a residence. The officials of the prefecture and county arranged for her marriage with appropriate rituals.

絳州孝女衛氏，字無忌，夏縣人也。初，其父為鄉人衛長則所殺。無忌年六歲，母又改嫁，無兄弟。及長，常思復仇。無忌從伯常設宴為樂，長則時亦預坐，無忌以磚擊殺之。既而詣吏，稱父仇既報，請就刑戮。巡察大使、黃門侍郎褚遂良以聞，

39 See *Jiu Tang shu*, 188.4934. Zhang Xiu and Zhang Huang were executed in 735 during the reign of Xuanzong.

太宗嘉其孝烈，特令免罪，給傳乘徙于雍州，並給田宅，仍令州縣以禮嫁之。<sup>40</sup>

It is important to note that in this record Wuji did not have any brothers, which means that there were no male members in her family to take revenge. She also could not depend on her clansmen, as it was stated in the record that her father's elder cousin let the murderer join the feast as if nothing had happened. She was the only one in her clan who remembered the injustice done to her father. Wuji and her mother, as the two female members in the family, form a stark contrast in their reaction to Wuji's father's death. Wuji's mother remarried, but Wuji was determined to avenge her father's death. Her determination and persistence in carrying out her plan are similar to those of the female avenger depicted in the narrative series under discussion. After killing the murderer at the feast, she turned herself in to the local government, ready to receive severe punishment. She was exempted only through a special edict from the emperor. In addition, she was given fields, residence and a proper marriage for her filial acts. Wuji submitted herself to the judgement of the law, but the government bestowed upon her royal favor. It seems that both sides tacitly collaborated to restore the social order disturbed by the woman avenger's transgressive violence. The woman eventually returned to the realm of boudoirs and inner family, where convention dictated that she belonged, retreating from her identity as a violent knight-errant. The edict to move her from her hometown in the Jiang prefecture to the neighboring Yong prefecture in the capital area was not just a reward for her "filial piety and righteousness" but also a strategic way to remove a social outcast from the local community and reestablish balance and peace.

Wuji's sanctioned violence to avenge her father's death and eventual successful return to secular society through the implicit agreement between herself and the government qualified her to be included in the official history and secured her place in "Lienü zhuan." Compared to Wuji, the heroine in our set of narratives is more disturbing. After she has fulfilled her filial duty by beheading her enemy, she kills her innocent baby by slitting his throat before she departs for good, which terrifies her husband. Such a merciless act not only differs from the conventional image of *xia* 俠 (knight-errant),<sup>41</sup> but also seriously chal-

40 See Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), *Xin Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 205.5818.

41 The character of *xia* was depicted as early as the pre-Qin era and reappeared in historical and literary works of later periods. Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280–ca. 233 BCE) commented that *xia* "uses swordplay to infringe on the forbidden" 俠以武犯禁. See "Wu du" 五蠹,

lenges the social norm of and secular expectation for an affectionate mother and a submissive wife. This holds true for both the story's contemporary and current audience.

#### 4.2 *Gender Neutrality and Femininity*

In most records about man and woman avengers, either in official histories or in tales, no obvious differences in the description of their strong-willed resolution and heroic actions can be discerned. Readers cannot determine the gender of the avenger if gender-specific characteristics are not included in the text. The woman avenger is consistently portrayed as a determined, powerful, mysterious, and even violent figure. Thus, gender neutrality is a major characteristic of Tang tales and historical records pertaining to woman avengers or knights-errant. The stories focus on the act of revenge and depict female protagonists similarly to their male counterparts.

The characterization of the female avenger in these four Tang narratives conforms to and reinforces the typical image of female knights-errant portrayed in various Tang tales of this category.<sup>42</sup> However, what is unique about the woman avenger in the three Tang narratives, excluding the brief account in *Tang guoshi bu*, is that in addition to the cliché personality traits often associated with avengers, complex gender-specific features are provided. These features paradoxically define the woman avenger's role as that of a wife and a mother, and eventually lead to the story's unexpected ending.

As Luo points out in her study, "'Guren qi' shifts the focus of the story by linking female violence to sexuality."<sup>43</sup> Sarah Allen compares the different versions of this story and analyzes the structure of each text in detail. She pays attention to the description of the woman's appearance and the initial meeting between the male and the female protagonists. She interprets these texts as a "liaison story," which brings with it certain narrative conventions such as a

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in *Han Fei zi jishi* 韓非子集釋, coll. Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), 2:19.1057. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE), on the other hand, emphasizes that *xia* are faithful to their missions and come to the rescue of others, complying with the Confucian idea of benevolence and righteousness. See "Taishigong zixu" 太史公自序, in *Shiji* 史記, 10.3318. Sima Qian notes that wandering knights-errant align their moral principles with Confucianism, although their behavior has diverged from standards of propriety and righteousness. See "Youxia liezhuan" 遊俠列傳, in *Shiji*, 124.3181.

42 Such famous Tang tale works include "Nie Yinniang" 聶隱娘 (194.1456–59) and "Hong xian" 紅線 (195.1460–62), and two other minor pieces "Juzhong nüzi" 車中女子 (193.1450) and "Jing shisanniang" 荊十三娘 (196.1472) preserved in the "Haoxia" 豪俠 chapters in the *Taiping guangji*.

43 Luo, "Gender, Genre, and Discourse," 590.

public encounter that leads to flirtation and intimacy. The texts also fit another model of knights-errant stories by “substituting a heroic woman for the figure of unsolved mystery.”<sup>44</sup>

The awe-inspiring quality of bloody revenge and the moral value associated with such action are softened by the external wrappings of a love affair between the merchant’s widow and an incompetent low-level official in dire straits. The female avenger in “Guren qi” is described as “a beautiful woman” who fulfills her wifely duty by taking care of her husband every day. There are details in the story that portray the female knight-errant in the idyllic family sphere and grant her qualities of a wife and a mother. She manages the household and gives birth to a child. The detail of her “nursing the baby” is mentioned twice in the story. In order to demonstrate the protagonist’s maternal love, the author writes that she returns home twice a day just to nurse the baby. The author mentions breastfeeding again when the protagonist uses it as a pretext to kill the baby. Such a striking contrast presents to readers the tension between the gender-specific features of a woman and the gender-neutral character of a knight-errant. It illustrates the conflict between the social expectation of a dutiful and loving mother, and the self-imposed aspiration of the female avenger to rid herself of the maternal obligations that might weigh her down.

The emphasis on feminine beauty and the highly symbolic behavior of a mother nursing her baby is shared by the text of “Cui Shensi,” although in less detail. A social and moral dimension is incorporated into the tale through its description of the woman avenger’s character. She refuses to marry scholar Cui as his principal wife because she does not come from a family of court officials and therefore is not a proper match for him. In order to justify her infanticide, the author compares her to ancient knights-errant in his concluding comments and explains that “she killed her child so as to repudiate her longing for him.” The emotional attachment of a mother to her child is severed by rational self-discipline and concerns regarding possible future entanglements.

The heroine’s feminine features are further reduced in “Yi ji.” As has been discussed in the previous section on textual analysis, the woman avenger’s average appearance is stressed and features that highlight gender roles are reduced to the minimum. She does not weave or sew, which are skills that women at the time were thought to excel in. The author does not invest her with feminine attractiveness. Instead of labeling her as an enchanting beauty, Cui Li depicts her as a solemn and respectable person. The action of nursing her baby, which

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44 Allen, “Tales Retold,” 116.

is closely associated with maternal love in the other two texts, is presented only as a reason for her husband not to drive her out of the household. Her nightly outing angers him and makes him doubtful of her fidelity. Feeding her baby was not invoked at the end of the story as an excuse for her to return and kill the baby. Instead, Confucian concepts of “benevolence,” “righteousness,” and “bravery” are adopted in the author-narrator’s explanation of the woman avenger’s murder of her own child and her abandonment of her husband.

#### 4.3 *Parental Love and the Restoration of Gender Roles*

The varying degrees of femininity depicted in this set of narratives reveals the authors’ different approaches in grappling with the disturbing conflict between the gender expectations generally held for the woman avenger and her cruel actions. Cui Li, the author of “Yi ji,” tries to legitimize the woman avenger’s extreme actions on the pretext that she does not want her son to be despised when he grows up. This is a more elaborate version of what is presented in “Cui Shensi.” The child is the ultimate symbol of her identity as a woman and a mother. Therefore, leaving her husband and killing her son are symbolic gestures to cut off her last connection with society and to destroy the last trace of her gender identity. When she departs at the end of the story, she either wanders into the social underworld to which knights-errant belong or ascends to the world beyond. This enables the woman avenger to find absolute freedom for herself and allows for equilibrium between gender and social norms to be restored.

Parental love is one of the most compelling human emotions that can be experienced and carries a special significance to the Tang literati. In the Taoist faith, parental love is considered the final and often unconquerable obstacle that prevents one from achieving his or her goal of transcendence. This idea is played out in the story “Du Zichun” 杜子春, a well-known Tang dynasty tale influenced by Indian legends.<sup>45</sup> After the titular character Du Zichun turns himself from a profligate young man to a responsible person, he is selected by a Taoist priest to help him make elixirs for immortality. At the priest’s mountain grotto, Du is given drugs which induce a visionary trance. He is instructed not to speak during the trance because nothing he sees is real. Du holds to his oath and passes seven trials of horrific visions without speaking a word. In

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45 “Du Zichun” is preserved in the *Taiping guangji*, 16.109–113, under the category “Shenxian” 神仙 (Immortals). For in-depth discussions on the transmission of the story and the messages presented in the tale, see Carrie Reed, “Parallel Worlds, Stretched Time, and Illusory Reality: The Tang Tale ‘Du Zichun,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 69.2 (December 2009): 309–42.

the eighth vision, he is reborn as a girl who gets married and gives birth to a son. After two years, her husband becomes enraged because she never speaks and violently kills their child. Du cannot help crying out and thus breaks his silence. He awakens from his illusion and finds himself back in the grotto. The Taoist priest tells him that even though he has forgotten the emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, disgust, and desire, he cannot reach the level of perfection necessary to free himself of love, for which reason he still belongs to this mortal realm.

The story of “Du Zichun,” as well as its Indian and Chinese analogues, clearly expresses that motherly love is the strongest human emotion and that it goes beyond the limit of any other feeling or social norm. Its superior power and poignancy mark the barrier between this world and the next. The failure of the elixir making and pursuit of immortality in the Du Zichun story signifies one’s unbreakable attachment to this world in the symbolic form of parental love, because of which it is impossible for a woman to cross over that barrier to achieve transcendence. The scene of killing the child is vividly described in the “Du Zichun” text, which increases the intensity of the final trial: “Her husband then held the baby by its two feet and dashed its head against a rock. The head broke into pieces in his hand and its blood splattered for several paces” 乃持兩足，以頭撲于石上，應手而碎，血濺數步。<sup>46</sup>

Compared to the dramatic description in “Du Zichun,” the lack of detail in the four woman-avenger stories’ killing scenes makes the texts unsophisticated and coarse. Du Zichun’s profound love of his child in his incarnation as a mother in the illusory world, which destroys his chance to escape from the mortal world, is similar to the female knight-errant’s ruthless killing of her child that allows her to transcend this world. They are two sides of the same coin. Both stress the significance of a mother’s relationship with her child. It is only through detachment from parental love that the woman avenger can find an escape from her dire situation.

It is interesting to note that in contrast to the strong-minded and even cruel female protagonist, the male characters in the three longer versions of the story are depicted as passive, obedient and timid. In “Yi ji” and “Guren qi,” the men are terrified by the women’s bloody revenge. In the latter text, the man even flees for good in fear of being implicated.

The sharp contrast between the iron-willed, capable, and ruthless woman avenger and her timid husband who even has to depend on her for a living must have been quite disturbing for contemporary audience who either read

46 *Taiping guangji*, 16.111.

these written records or heard the stories they described. The final child-killing scene is the most appalling and unique part of the tales, so much so that it has been immortalized in literary works by at least four literati. The scene also elevates the tension and imbalance between the two genders to an irreconcilable state. How can a woman who has been deprived of all the gendered characteristics of a wife and a mother fit into a society that emphasizes strict gender roles and female virtue? Her eventual departure is an inevitable conclusion for such a non-conforming figure and the only way to restore the balance between genders and reestablish society's challenged order. The destiny of the woman avenger in this series of narratives is very different from that of Wei Wuji, whose record is preserved in "Lienü zhuan" in *Xin Tang shu*. Although both of them avenged their father's unjustified deaths with sanctioned violence, the former became an outcast while the latter was glorified and exemplified through royal recognition. Moving Wuji to the capital prefecture and marrying her off with proper ritual reincorporated her into the societal mainstream, both geographically and culturally. Her involuntary departure from her clan and hometown where the violence took place makes it possible for peace to be restored. Her identity as an unmarried and innocent girl paves the way for her reacceptance by authority. The reader can easily predict that she will turn into a good wife and mother in the future. However, the female knight-errant's path to revenge in this narrative series is considerably more difficult. Marriage, childbirth, and nursing all constitute part of her plan to realize her goal. Under such circumstances, it is impossible for her to win endorsement by the royal authority through a proper marriage. There is no chance for her to re-construct herself as a submissive wife and loving mother. There is no way out for her but to permanently depart, which will simultaneously restore societal peace and order.

## 5 Conclusion

The story of a woman who avenges her father's death and eventually kills her own son before departing attracted the attention of literati during the Mid-Tang era and gave rise to a set of four narratives. Examined from the perspective of discourse analysis, although these texts share a common core plot, their satellite events are more significant. A close reading of the satellite events and word choice in the texts reveals that there are two sources of transmission for these narratives. "Yi ji," the most elaborate of the four narratives, is closely related to the author's family history and thus invites an allegorical reading.

The story's climax lies in the woman avenger's murder of her own son. Authors of the narratives tried to legitimize her disturbing action with traditional Confucian ethical concepts such as benevolence, filial piety, and righteousness. Through the lens of gender norms, readers will readily notice the contrasting images of the heroine being a dutiful wife or concubine and a loving mother in the first part of the story, and a ruthless gender-neutral knight-errant in the second part. The woman avenger's action of killing her own son can be considered a self-initiated severance from society by cutting off her emotional ties and family bonds.

The woman shoulders the responsibility of avenging her father's death, which should have been carried out by a son or a male member of the family. This is the fundamental act of gender transgression performed in these narratives. Furthermore, unlike the bravery, perseverance, and unusual capabilities of the woman avengers, the husbands in these narratives are depicted as timid, doubtful, dependent, and incapable men. Such disregard for and transgression of gender roles seriously challenges and even overturns conventional expectations about women, thus making both the writers and contemporary audience uneasy. The woman avenger's permanent departure is the only solution to restore social norms and gender equilibrium, since she is unable to be reincorporated into the main stream society through royal recognition or a proper marriage. She can only be celebrated as a filial daughter, and a complete severance from the mundane world is the only option. This transcendence without the chance for an alternative path shows the restrictions women faced in medieval China.

As Simone de Beauvoir points out in her book *The Second Sex*, a woman is exclusively defined by her relation to man: "she is everything he is not and wants to have, his negation and his *raison d'être*."<sup>47</sup> Thus it is possible that in depicting and admiring this potent and righteous female figure, the male writers and the literati audience realized their pursuit of such qualities. Similarly, Daniel Hsieh points out that "Men at times were very aware of their suffering and frustration and thus the figure of the female *xia* may be a fictional image created to compensate and remedy these realities."<sup>48</sup> The male scholar found an outlet for his oppressed emotions by means of storytelling, whether he wrote fiction or adapted wide-spread anecdotes. The female protagonist revolutionized the traditional representation of women, who were often placed in

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47 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1974), 162.

48 Daniel Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008), 146.

passive and inferior roles. By speaking in the voice of the heroine, the male author avenged the injustices done to him, rectified his maltreatment, and fulfilled his ambition. When the weaker, gentler sex is transformed into a powerful, mysterious, and sometimes even violent avenger, both the effect of the narrative as a tale of the extraordinary and the realization of the male scholar's fantasy are intensified. Killing her own son and thus severing her last connection with femininity, the female knight-errant symbolizes the attainment of ultimate righteousness for her author.

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## Reading Li Shangyin without Doubt: A Foray in Humanistic Sinology

*Nicholas Morrow WILLIAMS*

### Abstract

Late Tang poet Li Shangyin was understood in English-language scholarship of the 20th century as a case study in “ambiguity,” and it is frequently asserted that his poetry intentionally leaves many fundamental questions unanswered or mysterious. While Li’s poetry is often challenging, I argue that its difficulty is not primarily a matter of ambiguity at all, and that this view originates in excessive attention on the part of Western scholars to the circumstances of composition for his poems. While these circumstances are often unknown, this does not much affect the interpretation of his poems, which instead must focus on their literary inspiration. My positive contribution here is to show how much several representative poems by Li owe to *fu* poems in the *Wenxuan* anthology, as well as the further sources cited in their medieval commentaries. The reading of a Chinese poem ought properly to be a humanistic enterprise that proceeds by consulting all the intellectual sources available to the poet.

### Keywords

Li Shangyin – ambiguity – *fu* genre – Chinese poetry – hermeneutics

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The interpretation of the common world in which we participate is certainly not in the first place the objectifying task of methodical thinking. That may certainly be included, but it is not the *raison d'être* of our activity. When we are interpreting a text, it is not to prove “scientifically” that *this* love poem belongs to the genre of love poems. That is an objective statement and nobody can doubt it; but if that conclusion is the only result of investigating a poem, then we have failed. The intention is to understand *this* love poem,

on its own and in its unique relation to the common structure of love poems. It is an absolutely individualized particular form, so that one participates in the utterance or message which is there embodied by the poet. Participation is indeed a better formulation of what is going on in our life experience than is the foundationalist account of the apodictic evidence of self-consciousness.

HANS-GEORG GADAMER<sup>1</sup>



Though the insights and approaches of Western sinology in the past half-century have been varied, it would be fair to describe the general trend in scholarship on Chinese literary tradition as being historicist, some of its primary goals being the identification of period styles, location of individual authors in historical context, and the examination of the contemporary meaning of key terms and concepts.<sup>2</sup> Historicist scholarship is certainly indispensable to any serious reading of classical Chinese texts, and yet, as German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) reminds us in the pregnant quotation above, objective historical scholarship cannot in itself be the “*raison d’être* of our activity.” Identifying objective historical features of a particular Chinese reign period is a worthwhile task, but the interpretation of an individual poem is not at all the same kind of task. It requires proper appreciation of that individual poem, not just its place within an oeuvre, or genre, or discursive system; and it requires participation, a kind of intellectual engagement, with the whole *Weltanschauung* of the original author.

Rather than objective historical understanding, what we ought to be pursuing in our interpretation of classical Chinese poetry is a comprehensive humanistic reading; recognizing the author as a creative individual with whom

1 Gadamer, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 65. So far as I am aware, this essay seems to be not a direct translation from German, but rather an English synthesis of some of Gadamer’s arguments in *Wahrheit und Methode* and elsewhere.

2 Portions of this study were originally presented at “Philology and the Study of Classical Chinese Literature: An International Symposium on the Future of Sinology in the 21st Century in Honor of Paul W. Kroll,” held in 2018 at the University of Colorado-Boulder, and at the panel “Problematising the Periodization of Tang Poetry” held at the 2019 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Denver. I’m grateful to the organizers of the Boulder conference and to Liu Chunxiao for organizing the AAS panel.

it is possible to engage in some kind of linguistic rapprochement. For a poem is after all not only a historical object, but a melding of intellectual horizons; especially in the case of the erudite poetry of the Tang, so richly embellished with references to the literary canon, to worlds of religious belief, to the intellectual cathedrals of previous scholarship. A poem is not an encapsulation of a single moment in its author's life, because a single moment of experience is itself of one piece with the entire current of existence leading up to that moment. So the reading of a poem is a humanistic exploration that takes into account historical background, and philosophical debate, and art history, and material objects, and cosmological speculations, and beliefs in afterlives and previous incarnations, of cabbages and kings, insofar as all or any of these may be relevant. The scholarly trajectory of Bill Nienhauser, which started out focused on Tang literature, but has culminated with a copiously annotated translation of the *Shiji* 史記, is a good illustration of what we are all fated to discover in our interpretations of individual poems: there is a great deal more in these pieces than what an individual author put there.

The application of a historicizing lens to Chinese poetry has brought out many significant facts, but also produced muddled and misguided statements about the meanings of key works. A telling case is the poetry of Li Shangyin 李商隱 (ca. 813–ca. 858). Li Shangyin is of course one of the great Tang writers, the prolific author of verse and parallel prose on many topics.<sup>3</sup> His poems are particularly noted for their difficulty and use of allusion, matters on which critics past and present are agreed. In modern times, though, it has been popular to characterize them also for their “ambiguity,” not so much in the sense of the linguistic polysemy admired by the New Critics, as in an uncertainty of historical referent.<sup>4</sup> The trend continues in the 21st century with scholars asserting

3 I have found particularly useful the recent monograph by Kako Rī'ichirō 加固理一郎, *Ri Shōin shibun ron* 李商隱詩文論 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2011), for its balanced survey of his writings in different genres.

4 James J. Y. Liu has an entire essay on this topic: “Ambiguities in Li Shang-yin's Poetry,” *Wen-lin: Studies in the Chinese Humanities*, ed. Chou Ts'e-tzung (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 65–84. See also his study, *The Poetry of LI Shang-yin, Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). The origin of the “ambiguity” discourse lies of course in William Empson's classic *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (first published 1930; third edition, New York: New Directions, 1966). But the ambiguities discussed by Empson are almost totally unrelated to the ones identified in Li Shangyin's poetry by American scholars. In particular, Empson emphasizes that his ambiguities contain multiple senses fully necessary to proper understanding of the poem, and fully active in the poet's mind simultaneously. In most cases the ambiguity is meant to and can be appreciated even without any additional context, as in the lines “Our Natures do pursue / Like Rats that ravyn downe their proper Bane / A thirsty evil, and when we drinke we die” (*Measure of Measure*,

“the indeterminacy of poetic meaning” as characteristic of Li’s poems.<sup>5</sup> Some of Li Shangyin’s most famous poems are “Untitled” 無題, while others have titles like “Emblazoned Zither” 錦瑟 that provide no hint at circumstances of composition. The fact that some of Li’s best-loved poems seem coyly to refrain from describing their biographical basis has led readers to focus on this very issue. As Stephen Owen rightly notes, “Once the possibility of concealed referents has been introduced in a poetic oeuvre, it easily comes to haunt other poems that might otherwise be read more straightforwardly.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, it is arguable to what extent this kind of speculation dominated traditional appreciation of Li Shangyin’s verse. Owen identifies the following remark by Liu Bin 劉邠 (1022–1088) as the “paradigmatic” “earliest comment on the poem”: “No one understands what it means; some people claim that it [Brocade Zither] was the name of a servant girl in Linghu Chu’s household” 人莫曉其意，或謂是令狐楚家青衣名也 (Owen’s translation).<sup>7</sup> But the second clause of this quotation makes clear that the referent of “it” (*qi* 其) in the first clause is not the poem as a whole, but merely its title, so that the actual meaning is more like, “No one knows the referent of the title ‘Emblazoned Zither’, but a good guess would be the name of the serving girl ...”. While a certain degree of biographical speculation has no doubt been inherent in traditional exegesis, this has not been the dominant way of reading Li

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i.ii, quoted in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 155). Empson uses this example to introduce his fifth type of ambiguity, in which a simile occurs in relation to two different and originally separate ideas within the larger work. Here, the “proper Bane” poisonous to rats is originally supposed to be a specific sinful desire, but expands within two and a half lines to become thirst itself, and thus an image for the Fall of Man, in which all are afflicted by original sin. In general, Empson’s ambiguities are the polysemy achieved by great writing of many kinds, while the ambiguities scholars have tended to identify in Li Shangyin are nothing more than an absence of specific biographical information they are curious to know. This is all the more unfortunate because Li Shangyin is as capable of Empsonian ambiguity as any English poet except, perhaps, Shakespeare himself.

- 5 Robert Ashmore, “Recent-Style *Shi* Poetry: Heptasyllabic Regulated Verse,” in Cai Zong-qi, ed., *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 197. In the same volume we read that Li “deserves his reputation as one of China’s most obscure poets.” See Charles Egan, “Recent-Style *Shi* Poetry: Quatrains,” *How to Read Chinese Poetry*, 219. Even more recently, Chloe Garcia Roberts writes of the “ambiguity inherent in the original texts” in her preface to a new translation, *Li Shangyin, Edited and Translated from the Chinese, with Additional Translations by Lucas Klein and A.C. Graham* (New York: New York Review Books, 2018), xii.
- 6 Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827–860)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 347.
- 7 Owen, *The Late Tang*, 392–93; this source is cited in *Li Shangyin shige jijie* 李商隱詩歌集解, ed. Liu Xuekai 劉學鐸 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 1422.

Shangyin in Chinese criticism.<sup>8</sup> Looking for representative comments from the critical tradition, I might nominate instead the comments of Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), who is contemptuous of these speculations about a serving girl, and offers instead the straightforward proposal that the poem is about “remembrance” (*zhuiyi* 追憶).<sup>9</sup> Hu’s conclusion is indeed not at all unlike Owen’s own interpretation of the poem as being about “the relation between experience and memory.”<sup>10</sup>

It is certainly true that traditional critics appreciated the poem’s difficulty. An early such judgment can be found in the twelfth poem in Yuan Haowen’s 元好問 (1190–1257) series of “Poems on Poetry,” which quotes directly from “Emblazoned Zither,” before concluding: “I only regret there is no one to write a commentary like Zheng Xuan’s for it” 獨恨無人作鄭箋.<sup>11</sup> John Timothy Wixted describes the sense of the poem as being “Yuan’s contention that Li Shangyin’s poetry, though beautiful, is in fact frustratingly polysemous.”<sup>12</sup> But the implication of the final line of Yuan’s poem is not so clear, as it might well be referring to the plethora of challenging allusions in the poetry, for which anyone might desire a detailed commentary. It does not necessarily have anything to do with the lament of later readers that the *topic* of Li Shangyin’s poem was obscure. After all, it is the Mao 毛 commentary that tends to make peremptory assertions about the topic or substance of the *Book of Odes*, while Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127–200) subcommentary more often provides philological detail. Indeed, Yuan Haowen’s famous line might imply rather that what Li Shangyin’s poetry needs above all is the erudite linguistic, historical, and

8 Owen has frequently asserted that traditional interpretations of Chinese poetry relied on an assumption of historical actuality, as when he writes of a Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) poem, “The greatness of the poem emerges not through poetic invention but through the happy chance of this poet meeting this moment and this scene.” See *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: The Omen of the World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 13. This approach to Tang poetry has been skillfully critiqued in a recent article by Lucas R. Bender, “Against the Monist Model of Tang Poetics,” *T’oung Pao* 107 (2021): 633–87. To my utter bewilderment, however, Bender ascribes belief in what he terms the “monist model” and even the “standard model” to Western scholars in general. In actuality, most Western scholars writing in the past half-century, like the dedicatee of this volume, have interpreted Tang poetry in a variety of creative ways without subscribing to the Owenist model.

9 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1423.

10 Owen, *The Late Tang*, 397. This of course also relates the topic of the poem to Owen’s masterpiece, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

11 John Timothy Wixted, *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yuan Haowen (1190–1257)* (Pinyin Updated Edition, Melbourne: Qirin Press, 2019), 100–7.

12 Wixted, *Poems on Poetry*, 104.

comparative commentary of Zheng Xuan, rather than airy speculation about Li Shangyin's life.

I will return to this specific issue later in the paper, and elaborate in more detail on Hu Yinglin's suggestion about the essential meaning of "Emblazoned Zither." My point here is simply to show that a humanistic criticism that looks beyond immediate historical context or biographical speculation has ample precedent in both East and West. Chinese scholars from Zheng Xuan to Hu Yinglin and into modern times have frequently explored the philological intricacies of their texts so as to appreciate a poetic achievement that reflects back on its place in a whole civilization; Western scholars like Owen and Wixted themselves have frequently delved into the intricately-articulated intertextual references behind classical poems rather than reading them in biographical context.<sup>13</sup> Both Chinese and Western critics have long practiced the kind of "humanistic" criticism I advocate here; I mean only to make more explicit what sensitive readers have always recognized, which is that the understanding of a poem—whether late-Tang regulated verse, or a love poem, or a narrative ballad—must make reference to the full range of learning and intuition that were accessible to the original author, even if no modern person is capable of acquiring knowledge in quite the same range. Just as a reader of Tolstoy must concern herself not only with peace but also with war, and not only with love but also with agricultural reform, so a reader of Chinese poetry must concern himself not only with tonal prosody, but also with the whole textual tradition on which those poets so frequently and so passionately drew.

In other words, the critical context for a Chinese poem lies not in the poet's life as narrowly construed but rather in the whole intellectual world that is reflected in, and notionally reinscribed in the monad of the single poem.<sup>14</sup> In this sense few poems are truly "ambiguous"; perhaps no well-crafted poem in

13 Wixted's *Poems on Poetry* is a classic work of scholarship that explicated Yuan's compressed verse criticism in great detail. Among Owen's various modes of scholarship he has produced classic studies like "Deadwood: The Barren Tree from Yü Hsin to Han Yü," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) 1.2 (1979): 157–79, where he writes of how "a sensitive reader must hear the various threads of the literary past which weave into a poem and are changed by it" (179), and the aforementioned *Remembrances*, where he shows, channeling Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), how Yang Hu 羊祜 (221–278) "failed to understand the true form of memory in repetition and constant renewal" (30).

14 In the Leibnizian sense, in which a monad reflect the multiplicity of the universe beyond it. See his *Monadologie*, para. #56: "Or cette liaison ou cet accommodement de toutes les choses créées à chacune, et de chacune à toutes les autres, fait que chaque substance simple a des rapports qui expriment toutes les autres, et qu'elle est par conséquent un miroir vivant perpétuel de l'univers." See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Opera philosophica quae exstant latina, gallica, germanica omnia* (Berlin: S. G. Eichler, 1840), 709.

the Chinese tradition even *can* be ambiguous, in the sense of leaving critical pieces of its interpretation uncertain. Rather, a great poem, even one as brief as a quatrain or an octave, includes everything that might seem relevant to its interpretation: not just the author's own experience, which may indeed be opaque to us a century or a millennium after, but all the experiences of other men and women known to that author; and not just his own love and loss but ours as well, even if only notionally and potentially, *in absentia*. And, most significantly for reading the erudite masters of classical Chinese verse, the poems include the experiences portrayed in *earlier* literary works to which they make such frequent allusion.

What texts and facts, what sites and memories, may be relevant to the interpretation of a particular work will naturally depend upon the idiosyncratic details of that piece. But one of the overriding imperatives for any reader of Chinese literature is to be familiar with the textual corpus to which an author frequently refers. Thus, in the remainder of this paper, I will use several poems by Li Shangyin to illustrate the depths of reference and knowledge relevant to the interpretation of Tang literature which extend far beyond the Tang dynasty itself. In the case of Tang poetry as exemplified by one of its great masters, Li Shangyin, I will argue that the careful reader must also be a student of Han literature, and of the Han rhapsody above all. After all, "Tang poetry" is not just *shi* 詩 poetry: many other genres of Tang literature are equally versified, but even apart from the *fu* 賦, epitaph, and so on, the *shi* itself is deeply intermeshed with all the other genres.<sup>15</sup> But neither is "Tang poetry" simply of the Tang dynasty, not just because literary trends do not move in tandem with political ones, but more importantly, because it is embedded so deeply in the pre-Tang literary tradition that its key authors, when read within the interpretive framework of Tang poetry alone, are frequently illegible. Here I will illustrate both these principles on the basis of Li Shangyin's poetry, arguing that his poems become much more comprehensible when read from the point of view of classical Chinese humanities, within a broad cultural tradition, not as moments in the biography of an individual or reflections of an isolated consciousness.

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15 Paul W. Kroll has made this point in studies like "The Significance of the *fu* in the History of Tang Poetry," *Tang Studies* 18–19 (2000–2001): 87–105 and *Dharma Bell and Dhāraṇī Pillar: Li Po's Buddhist Inscriptions* (Kyoto: Scuola italiana di studi sull'Asia orientale, 2001). See also my "Quasi-Phantasmal Flowers: An Aspect of Wang Wei's Mahāyāna Poetics," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) 39 (2017): 27–53.

## 1 “Emerald Walls” 碧城

We may think of Li Shangyin as a Tang poet, but Li Shangyin himself directs us in many of his poems towards famous writers of the *fu* or “rhapsody” from before the Tang: Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE), Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE), Song Yu 宋玉 (n.d.).<sup>16</sup> Though Li Shangyin himself may not have been a prolific writer in this genre, he conceptualized his own compositions as being continuous with the *fu* tradition.<sup>17</sup> For instance, he writes: “Don’t ask the former guests of the Liang Park, / A Xiangru suffering a sickness in the autumn rain at Maoling” 休問梁園舊賓客，茂陵秋雨病相如；<sup>18</sup> presenting himself implicitly as a latter-day Sima Xiangru, *fu* master of the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) in the Western Han, who professed sickness in order to live in retirement. Li also refers to himself frequently by means of reference to an earlier *fu* writer, as in the following quatrain:<sup>19</sup>

宣室求賢訪逐臣	Looking for worthies in the hall of state,
	The banished minister was consulted:
賈生才調更無倫	Master Jia’s talent and quality
	Were altogether peerless.
可憐夜半虛前席	What a pity that that at midnight,
	nudging the seat needlessly nearer,
不問蒼生問鬼神	The Emperor asked not of mortal men
	but of the ghosts and spirits.

16 See my edited volume, *The Fu Genre of Imperial China* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019) for the enduring significance of the *fu* genre. The *fu* of Sima Xiangru and Jia Yi are relatively well known to Western readers familiar with the English edition of Gong Kechang’s 龔克昌 *Studies on the Han Fu*, ed. David R. Knechtges (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1997) and other works. The world awaits a sophisticated study of Song Yu in English, but important recent publications include Su Hui-shuang’s 蘇慧霜 *Chu sao hun: Qu Song cifu de shuqing jingshen yu shengming meixue* 楚騷魂：屈宋辭賦的抒情精神與生命美學 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2015), and Kōzen Hiroshi’s 興膳宏 “Sō Gyoku zō no suii” 宋玉像の推移, in *Matsumoto Yukio sensei, Shima Hajime sensei tsuitō kinen ronshū* 松本幸男先生島一先生追悼記念論集, *Gakurin* 53–54 (2011–2012): 233–61.

17 The *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 contains two fragments of rhapsodies by Li Shangyin on the louse and the scorpion, respectively. See *Quan Tang wen* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 771.1a/b.

18 His poem to Linghu Tao 令狐綯, “For Gentleman Director Linghu” 寄令狐郎中, *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 529. Probably composed in 845.

19 “Jia sheng” 賈生, *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1518.

This quatrain is based closely on a passage from Jia Yi's biography.<sup>20</sup> Historical allusions to the dissatisfactions of Han poets may be relevant to Li Shangyin's own career as well, implicitly reflecting on the blind spots of his own sovereign; but it is striking how precisely Li Shangyin here delineates the episode from Jia Yi's life. One might compare Li Bai's parallel use of Sima Xiangru as a model, with the redoubtable Tang poets finding precedent for their poetic achievement in these Han models.<sup>21</sup>

Even more consistent and revealing in Li Shangyin's oeuvre is his use of self-comparison with the quasi-legendary poet of ancient Chu, Song Yu. Though Jia Yi and Sima Xiangru were commonly cited by other Tang poets as exemplars, Li's favoring of Song Yu distinguishes his own literary inclinations.<sup>22</sup> Evidently one aspect of this admiration is simply Song Yu's precedent as a poet of physical desire, but Li Shangyin's admiration for the paradoxical aspirations of the rhapsody, which can be eulogistic and satirical simultaneously, is also at work, as in "Stirred to Write" 有感:<sup>23</sup>

非關宋玉有微辭	It was not that Song Yu had subtly disparaging remarks,
却是襄王夢覺遲	Just that King Xiang had awoken late from dreaming.
一自高唐賦成後 楚天雲雨盡堪疑	Ever since the "Gaotang Rhapsody" was completed, "Clouds and rain" in the heavens over Chu are ever suspect. <sup>24</sup>

20 See *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 84.3017: "After more than a year, Master Jia was summoned to an audience. Filial Emperor Wen had just received an offering, and was seated in the hall of state. Since his Highness had been stirred by the affairs of the spirits and gods, he asked about the origin of spirits and gods. Master Jia then spoke all about the circumstances behind them. By the middle of the night, Emperor Wen had moved his seat forward. When Jia was done, the emperor said, 'I have not seen Master Jia for a long while, and I had thought that I surpassed him, but now I see I cannot even match him.' 後歲餘，賈生微見。孝文帝方受釐，坐宣室。上因感鬼神事，而問鬼神之本。賈生因具道所以然之狀。至夜半，文帝前席。既罷，曰：「吾久不見賈生，自以為過之，今不及也。」

21 For some examples of this relationship see Nicholas Morrow Williams, "Li Bai's 'Rhapsody on the Hall of Light': A Singular Vision of Cosmic Order," *T'oung Pao* 101.1-3 (2015): 35-97.

22 David McMullen points out, for instance, that Du Fu's references to Sima Xiangru, Jia Yi, and Yang Xiong are conventional for Tang literati. See McMullen, "Du Fu 杜甫 on the Han Dynasty: A Medieval View of the Classical Chinese Empire," *Early China* 45 (2022): 126.

23 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1484.

24 Referring to its famous opening, in which the movements of cloud and rain are compared to romance with the goddess of Mount Wu 巫. See *Wenxuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986, 2nd ed. 2019), 19.889-90.

As with any allusions to classic figures, there is also a more superficial dimension of reusing these figures as cultural tags; frequently recurring in verse of any period, in other contexts they become floating signifiers of attitudes and sentiments rather than specific literary references.<sup>25</sup> But Li Shangyin's specific references tend to be more complex, frequently turning into oblique self-reference while also offering searching comments on the earlier poets.

Li Shangyin's engagement with Song Yu's writings was not just long-sustained but profoundly considered, as in his multi-dimensional line: "Even if Song Yu had no sorrows he would nonetheless be sorrowful of his own accord" 宋玉無愁亦自愁.<sup>26</sup> These references to Song Yu are significant for the broader interpretation of Li Shangyin, and could perhaps even be central to such an interpretation. Since that task would outstrip the scope of this paper, though, I will [for now] choose a less challenging avenue, though one suggested indirectly by Song Yu, beginning from a hint in the final couplet of Li Shangyin's "Peony" 牡丹:<sup>27</sup>

我是夢中傳彩筆	I was bequeathed that many-colored brush within a dream;
欲書花葉寄朝雲	I will use it to write of flowers, to convey the dawn clouds.

Interweaving the classical reference to Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505) with another to Song Yu, after Li's densely allusive composition of peony references in the preceding lines, draws our attention to the parallel inspiration of Jiang Yan.<sup>28</sup> Even more than Song Yu, this is interesting because Jiang Yan has rarely been accused of obscurity; to the contrary, his two most famous pieces literally announce their themes in the titles "Bitter Regret" 恨賦 and "Parting" 別賦. But in fact the associative method of those same *fu* is very similar to that of a number of Li Shangyin's poems, not just "Peony" but also, e.g., "Tears" 淚, itself

25 As in the way that so many of the references to Tao Qian 陶謙 (132–194) collected in Wendy Swartz's *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception* (427–1900) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008) are basically *pro forma* signifiers for "recluse." Swartz writes regarding Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365–427) retirement that "These questions met with uninteresting answers in the Tang dynasty, whose writers generally focused more on Tao's life in retirement than on the causes underlying it" (55).

26 *Li Shangyin shige jiji*, 793.

27 *Ibid.*, 1724.

28 For the anecdote in which the brush of many colors represents Jiang Yan and his poetic talent, see Nicholas Morrow Williams, *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 173.

perhaps related to Jiang Yan's *fu* on "Weeping" 泣賦.<sup>29</sup> The similarity lies not just in the formal matter of arranging material around a single abstract theme, but also in the subject matter of romantic longing and flowery imagery in tandem with one another.

Li Shangyin, then, frequently and explicitly asserts his own comparability to classic *fu* writers from throughout the pre-Tang literary tradition, from Song Yu to Jiang Yan. Though writing in the quatrain or octet forms of the Tang, it may be that Li is aiming at similar goals as these earlier poets. Like these predecessors, he is exploring a mode of writing that depicts romantic longing through more tangible images of loss and grief. He is drawn to the image of Song Yu—perhaps not fully realized in his extant corpus, but nonetheless part of his literary legacy—as a rhapsodist whose gorgeous flood of verse is tempered by subtle critique. Perhaps the most significant of these relationships, though, is that with Jiang Yan. Like that master of the multi-colored brush, Li is also exploiting literary and historical allusion to create a palimpsest of related emotions and affects borrowed from different sources. But this is a relationship that has to be examined, not so much at the level of overall literary effect, as in the more localized plane of the resonant echo and individual intertext.

For while Li Shangyin often employs references to the earlier poetic tradition, in many cases he is not referring explicitly to poets or poems, but instead delineating a web of interrelated references that construct a kind of mood or overall impression continuous with earlier poetry. This associative mode is a feature of many of Li Shangyin's most celebrated poems, and it might be viewed as a kind of obscurity or ambiguity. Instead, I would like to argue that this kind of poem is similar to those we have read about, discussing antecedent poets like Jia Yi or Song Yu, in that it borrows the compressing effect of the cross-temporal allusion to condense multiple threads of signification into one overwhelming combination. As the anonymous narrator of "Heart of Darkness" writes, preparing us for a convoluted fiction that will conclude with a frustratingly oblique denouement:<sup>30</sup>

... to him [Marlow] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow

29 "Quan Liang wen" 全梁文, in Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 33.8a. Unfortunately the text of Jiang Yan's *fu* may not be complete.

30 *Heart of Darkness*, comp. Joseph Conrad, ed. Ross C. Murfin (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 20.

brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

There is no central, hidden meaning to the story; the meaning lies all around, in the haze of associations, in the interstices of the misty haloes only indirectly revealed to us by the moonlight. But Conrad might equally well have been preparing us to read Tang poetry—not as texts that have some kernel of meaning in their original setting, but ones whose meaning builds up gradually according to that which is outside and beyond it, including the cultural heritage of Chinese poetry.

If we read a Tang poem as bounded by a particular historical moment, or even an entire historical era, we are willfully ignoring the halos of meaning and penumbras of allusion behind it. Take the first of Li Shangyin's three poems on the "Emerald Walls" 碧城, a set of poems for which one of the most recent publications on Li Shangyin has revived the trope of his "ambiguity":<sup>31</sup>

碧城十二曲闌干	The twelvefold turnings of the railing on the emerald walls;
犀辟塵埃玉辟寒	Rhinoceros horn protects from dust and grime just as jade from chills.
閨苑有書多附鶴	In Sky Garden messages are passed on often by a crane; <sup>32</sup>
女牀無樹不棲鸞	On Lady's Couch no tree lacks a phoenix perched atop. <sup>33</sup>
星沉海底當窗見	As stars plunge to the bottom of the sea you watch by the window,
雨過河源隔座看	Rain filling up the river's source you see from across the seat.
若是曉珠明又定	Were it as brilliant and as fixed as the pearl of the dawn [the sun?],

31 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1847. Chloe Garcia Roberts identifies this set as "particularly ambiguous" in her volume *Li Shangyin*, 148. James J. Y. Liu had earlier called them "highly ambiguous" (*The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 89).

32 Sky Garden (Langyuan 閨苑) is a habitation of the immortals, apparently derived from Skywind (Langfeng 閨風), a peak on Mount Kunlun mentioned in "Lisao" 離騷, line 214. See Nicholas Morrow Williams, *The Elegies of Chu: An Anthology of Early Chinese Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 9.

33 Lady's Couch 女牀 Mountain is mentioned in the *Shanhajing* 山海經. See *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 (Beijing: Beijing lianhe, 2014), ed. Yuan Ke 袁珂, 2.31; trans. Anne Birrell, *Classic of Mountain and Seas* (London: Penguin, 1999), 18.

一生長對水晶盤      I'd face for a whole lifetime that platter of crystal  
[the moon?].

The first thing to ask about the poem is the setting, locale, or frame of reference. The title itself, though perhaps referring specifically to the heavenly palace of the deity Primordial Sovereign of Heaven (Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊), is simply drawn from the first two characters of the poem as with the *Book of Odes*. The early Qing commentary of the Xu brothers (Xu Shugu 徐樹穀 and Xu Jiong 徐炯) suggests a text for comparison, though, which sheds light on the first line and hence provides a frame of reference for the broader poem. This is the “West Isle Tune” 西洲曲, a *yuefu* 樂府 piece attributed to Jiang Yan in the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠.<sup>34</sup> It may not actually have been written by him, but Li Shangyin would presumably have associated it with Jiang Yan. The poem consists of eight quatrains mainly linked by anadiplosis (elements repeated in the final line of each quatrain and the first line of the succeeding one). Of relevance to our argument here are just the final three quatrains:<sup>35</sup>

## #6

鴻飛滿西洲  
望郎上青樓  
樓高望不見  
盡日欄干頭

The wild goose flies all the way to West Isle,  
I wait for my lover to ascend the blue tower.  
The tower is so high you cannot see to the top,  
The whole day staying at the railing's edge.

## #7

欄干十二曲  
垂手明如玉  
卷簾天自高  
海水搖空綠

Over the railing's twelfold turnings  
You drop your hands, bright as jade.  
Rolling up the curtain Heaven suddenly rises above;  
The waters of the sea rippling the green of the void.

## #8

海水夢悠悠  
君愁我亦愁

The waters of the sea are a dream of endlessness,  
When you feel sorrow I feel sorrow also.

34 It is omitted from extant editions other than the Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 woodblock print edition of 1540, however, and identified only as *guci* 古辭 in the *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集. See *Yutai xinyong huijiao* 玉臺新詠彙校, ed. Wu Guanwen 吳冠文, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011), 531, 569. See also discussion of the same piece's use of anadiplosis in Nicholas Morrow Williams, “A Conversation in Poems: Xie Lingyun, Xie Huilian, and Jiang Yan,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127.4 (2008): 505.

35 *Yutai xinyong huijiao*, 532.

南風知我意  
吹夢到西洲

The southern wind knows just how I feel,  
For it blows my dream all the way to West Isle.

The first line of quatrain #7 has been incorporated wholesale into Li Shangyin's "Emerald Walls." The translation might appropriately use quotation marks there. As the Xu commentary also points out, this reference seems to indicate that the twelve turnings refer not to the walls but to the railing. But, more importantly, it gives us several other indications of the sense in which we ought to read Li Shangyin's "Emerald Walls." In both cases we have lovers separated, a lady waiting in a remote place, attempts at communication and expression that are blocked. In this context the bold images of stars sinking into the sea, and the final kennings for sun and moon, "dawn pearl" and "crystal platter," can be read just as in the "West Isle Tune," as references to vast distances of space and time, representing both separation from the object of desire and also the scope of the imagination, which even has the potential to "blow back the dream," to pass on messages via crane, to fill the trees with phoenixes.

One prominent element in the "Emerald Walls" that is missing from "West Isle Tune" is the language of the Daoist immortals—a major subject for Li Shangyin, of course, who among other things had undertaken Daoist studies in youth, and alludes to the *Zhengao* 真誥 in his poetry.<sup>36</sup> The "Emerald Walls" themselves form part of the scenery of a Daoist heaven, like the cranes and the crystal. The theme of separation from the immortals is prominent in several of Li Shangyin's much debated poems, and often tied to discussions of his love affairs with Daoist nuns. But these themes are also, of course, traditional, and indeed were crystallized already in some of Jiang Yan's best-known poems, above all the description of the immortal departing his friends in the "Rhapsody on Parting" 別賦.<sup>37</sup>

駕鶴上漢  
驂鸞騰天  
暫遊萬里  
少別千年

Riding his crane up to the Milky Way,  
Driving simurghs before him he ascends to Heaven.  
In a moment's roaming he has gone one thousand  
miles,  
An instant's separation lasts for a millennium.

36 At Mount Yuyang 玉陽 near Huaizhou 懷州, Henan. See Fakuzawa Kazuyuki 深沢一幸, "Ri Shōin to *Shin koku*" 李商隱と「真誥」, in *Rikuchō Dōkyō no kenkyū* 六朝道教の研究, ed. Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1998), 397–433.

37 *Wenxuan*, 16.769–70. Not to mention the five poems on "Purifying Thoughts" 清思.

In context of the rhapsody this seems like a fanciful digression from the tearful stories of abandoned concubines, but from a broader perspective this is no isolated episode, but already a standard poetic trope, identifying the isolation of heavenly immortals with that of palace ladies.<sup>38</sup>

Having established these poetic associations, it should no longer be surprising that Li Shangyin refers to another trope from the very same “Rhapsody on Parting” in the second poem of “Emerald Walls”:<sup>39</sup>

對影聞聲已可憐	Facing reflected images, hearing only voices, but already lovable:
玉池荷葉正田田	The lotus leaves around the jade pond blooming lush and bold.
不逢蕭史休回首 莫見洪崖又拍肩	If you don't meet Xiao Shi don't look back down; Don't look at Broadcliff but slap him on the shoulder.
紫鳳放嬌銜楚佩	Purple Phoenix displays her charms, offering Chu pendants; <sup>40</sup>
赤鱗狂舞撥湘絃	Scarlet scales dance furiously to the plucking of Xiang River strings.
鄂君悵望舟中夜	At the Prince of E gazing in longing on the mid night boatride; <sup>41</sup>
繡被焚香獨自眠	Amid embroidered quilts and burning incense you sleep all alone.

The reflections that open the poem seem to follow from the conclusion of the previous poem but also to provide a transition into a daytime scene of lush growth, echoing the old song “In the Southland you can gather lotus ...” 江南可採蓮. In the second couplet, though, Li Shangyin gives us playful allusions to two immortals. Though Xiao Shi 蕭史 and Broadcliff (Hongya 洪崖) are both recorded in prose sources, they also figure prominently in poems: Broadcliff in

38 Zornica Kirkova points out that in early medieval verse it is already true that “The opposite sex is ubiquitously integrated in accounts of entertainment of the immortals.” See Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 32.

39 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1847.

40 Allusion to the story of Zheng Jiaofu 鄭交甫 meeting two immortal maidens.

41 A reference to the “Song of the Yue Boatman” 越人歌, composed for the Prince of E on a boatride in the Yue language, and then translated into Chinese. See *Shuoyuan shuzheng 說苑疏證*, ed. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 11.277–79. See also Haun Saussy, “Song of the Boatman from Yueh,” in *Poetry* 220 (May 2022): 148–49.

the third of Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) "Roaming with Immortals" 遊仙 poems, which shares with "Emerald Walls" a fascination both with transcendence and with its inherent unattainability;<sup>42</sup> and Xiao Shi and his wife in the third of Jiang Yan's own "Poems in Diverse Forms" 雜體詩, where concubine/poet Ban Jieyu's 班婕妤 fan is inscribed with a painting of these two.<sup>43</sup> Xiao Shi was an expert flautist who ascended to immortality with his wife, so the source poem already integrates the key themes of parting, transcendence, and musical performance.

The second half of "Emerald Walls" #2 turns more explicitly to the self-reflexive theme of artistic performance, with a wide array of interrelated images, including the goddess of the Xiang River singing (a reference not to the "Nine Songs" 九歌 but again to the "Far Roaming" 遠遊), and the Prince of E, object of the famous "Song of the People of Yue" 越人歌, and an allusion also featured in Li Shangyin's aforementioned "Peony." The scarlet-scaled fish that dance furiously in time with the music are an old trope that appears in the *Han shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, but their specific visual features are thusly described in, once again, Jiang Yan's "Rhapsody on Parting."<sup>44</sup>

What links all of these references and literary echoes is a tradition that compares the parting of immortals from the dusty world to that of lovers in the palace, inside or outside of "Emerald Walls." Li Shangyin's poem becomes a rhapsodic synthesis of images and turns of phrase related to this theme, following the inspiration of numerous Han and Six Dynasties precedents. These poems are then coherent *qua* poems without attempting to place them in any particular context—just like, not incidentally, Jiang Yan's "Rhapsody on Parting." That is not just to say that the endless debates about whether Li's poems are about particular romantic connections, say, or political frustrations, often turn out to be futile; it is to say that even the context hinted at obliquely by the text of the poem may not be particularly relevant to our reading.<sup>45</sup>

The third poem in the series actually addresses these issues itself, playfully suggesting that there is a secret behind these poems, but at the same time that it is readily available to all in the *Wudi neizhuan* 武帝內傳 (Secret history of

42 *Wenxuan*, 21.1039.

43 See Williams, *Imitations of the Self*, 102.

44 *Wenxuan*, 16.751 and note.

45 It follows that Qing and modern critics have sometimes missed the point of these poems by attempting to identify historical contexts for them. Of course any poem was produced in a historical context, but that inevitable truth does not determine the relevance of the initial context to our interpretation of them. See my review essay "Chinese Poetry and Its Contexts: On Two New Textbooks of Chinese Poetry," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) 40 (2018): 125–39.

Emperor Wu), the Daoist fiction about Han Emperor Wu's training in Daoist techniques with Xiwangmu 西王母, which was very popular in the Tang:<sup>46</sup>

七夕來時先有期	On the Seventh Night there was already a rendezvous;
洞房簾箔至今垂	The curtain screens of the inner chamber lowered until now.
玉輪顧兔初生魄	From the downstaring rabbit in the Jade Ring the new crescent just born, <sup>47</sup>
鐵網珊瑚未有枝	Coral in the net of iron does not yet extend branches.
檢與神方教駐景	Examining those divine means to keep constant one's luminescence, <sup>48</sup>
收將鳳紙寫相思	You receive the phoenix missives that tell of longing.
武皇內傳分明在	The <i>Secret Biography of Emperor Wu</i> tells it all in detail;
莫道人間總不知	Don't say that there is no one in the world who knows.

Liu Xuekai and Yu Shucheng, in their encyclopedic commentary, list over a dozen elaborate interpretations of these poems, before concluding with the agnostic judgment that the poems might refer to Li Shangyin's own private affairs, or to some court gossip, but that the likelihood of the form is lesser.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Sun Changwu 孫昌武 approves of He Zhuo's 何焯 (1661–1722) view that the poems are meant as a satire/critique of contemporary palace ladies who had taken up a monastic order.<sup>50</sup> James Liu asserts confidently that the final poem “appears to be concerned with an abortion.”<sup>51</sup>

46 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1847. On this text and the enormous importance of the Emperor Wu legend in the Tang, see Thomas E. Smith, “Ritual and the Shaping of Narrative: The Legend of the Han Emperor Wu” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1992).

47 The moon-rabbit appears in “Heavenly Questions” 天問, quatrain #9. See Williams, *Elegies of Chu*, 37.

48 *Jing* 景, “luminescence,” here has special Daoist significance, as a set of internal divinities used in practices to extend longevity.

49 *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1675.

50 Sun Changwu, *Daojiao yu Tangdai wenxue* 道教與唐代文學 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2001, 2017), 261. But I find this interpretation surprising considering that a few pages later Prof. Sun sensitively analyzes the complex emotions of “Chang’e” 嫦娥, which strike me as similar to those presented in “Emerald Walls.”

51 *Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 93.

These “circumstances of composition” are mysterious, but I am not sure that these issues were central to the reading of this or other of Li Shangyin’s poems in the Tang; the most passionate speculation about the lives of Tang poets seems to date to Qing. And even Qing commentaries mostly start out, not by investigating the medical history of the author, but rather with *Quellenforschung*, identifying precedents for turns of phrase and allusions in the manner of Li Shan’s 李善 classic *Wenxuan* commentary, and thereby reaffirming the centrality of literary tradition to the reading of poetry.<sup>52</sup> But even if we had some new evidence that identified the specific circumstances of composition, this would not transform the poems’ meaning, because there is no hidden kernel of meaning that is their true subject. Another way of looking at the reference to the *Wudi neizhuan* would be to see it not just as a coded political message, but as yet another intertextual layer, adding new themes and associations.

In reading Tang poetry, we talk of form, and we talk of history, but to some extent these are themselves well-fashioned barriers interposed between us and the expressive means accreted over the millennium up to Li Shangyin’s time. By contrast, reading these poems in a continuous tradition highlighted by precedents like Song Yu, Sima Xiangru, Jiang Yan, we trace the relations among the individual components “in the likeness of one of those misty haloes” of a coherent set of themes. These relations are associative more than symbolic or allegorical, a whole web of images that collectively construct an imaginative complex like the music of the Goddess of the Xiang River. Or, as John Livingstone Lowes writes in *The Road to Xanadu*, his study of the formation of Coleridge’s masterpieces “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Kubla Khan”: “In the weaving of the most ethereal fabric of imagination an almost magical potency is exercised by the associative links.”<sup>53</sup> Up to this point I have shown that it is the associative links with Jiang Yan’s and others’ poetry that produces so much of the effect of Li Shangyin’s poems, and that tracing these links may be a more productive way of understanding these poems than keeping them sealed up behind the exquisitely impenetrable walls of the Tang.

52 On the Li Shan commentary, see the recent monograph, Tominaga Kazuto 富永一登, *Monzen Ri Zen chū no katsuyō: Bungaku gengo no sōsaku to keishō* 『文選』李善注の活用: 文學言語の創作と繼承 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2017).

53 Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 352.

## 2 “Emblazoned Zither” 錦瑟

No approach to Li Shangyin's poetry would be satisfactory, though, if it did not prepare us for an account of “Jin se” 錦瑟. While a reasonable account of this masterpiece is a *sine qua non* for any systematic study of Li's poetry, reason is hard to find in the hermeneutical record surrounding this poem. It is true that the relatively difficulty of this poem has been widely asserted since the Song dynasty, but in modern times, both Chinese and Western readers have responded to the difficulty of the poem in increasingly bizarre ways. In Chinese scholarship there has been a hyperactive quest to identify the true meaning of the poem: is it an elegy for Li Shangyin's wife, the epigram to his poetry collection, a coded political critique? Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 once humorously mocked the riddle-solving interpretive techniques applied by Zhang Caitian 張采田 (1874–1947), style name Mengqu 孟劬.<sup>54</sup> But then, even Qian Zhongshu proposes to read the poem as a manual of poetry composition, a theory which, though appealing on its face, grows increasingly strained in the course of the exposition.<sup>55</sup>

Anglophone scholars have generally refrained from making overly bold claims about the intention of the poem. But they have often gone to the opposite extreme of exaggerating the poem's difficulty and obscurity. James J. Y. Liu's admirable reading of the poem nonetheless treats it as one his “most difficult and ambiguous poems,” and, as we have seen, Liu has another entire article on “ambiguities” in Li Shangyin's poetry.<sup>56</sup> Zhang Longxi calls the poem “virtually untranslatable,” even though it contains some of the most vivid and obviously poetic images of any Chinese poem (and even though he cites Qian Zhongshu pointing out that the pearl/tear imagery has many counterparts in European poetry).<sup>57</sup> The studies of both Liu and Zhang are full of insight, but in terms of their fundamental interpretive stance, they both rely on the ambiguity of the poem as a kind of crutch, allowing them ultimately to take refuge in

54 Qian Zhongshu, *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), 286.

55 *Tan yi lu*, 288–89.

56 Liu, “Li Shang-yin's Poem ‘The Ornamented Zither’ (chin-sê),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965): 129–38. See also Francois Cheng's reading in *Chinese Poetic Writing* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), trans. Donald A. Riggs and Jerome Seaton, 122–30, which proclaims “ambiguity” while also explicating the structure of the poem in great detail.

57 Zhang, *Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 148–49. In this sense it is more readily translatable than, say, Du Fu's regulated verse, much of which is comparatively bland.

literary self-referentiality, as when Liu says, “But instead of asking for whom or for what the poem was written, as most previous commentators seem to have been bent on doing, should we not rather ask what this poem means to us?”<sup>58</sup> Zhang, meanwhile, relies on the concept of the hermeneutic circle, and builds on Qian Zhongshu’s hypothesis, concluding that, “In reading Li Shangyin’s ‘The Patterned Lute’ as a poem about poems, we turn all its difficulties in structure and imagery into characteristics of the poetic language itself.”<sup>59</sup>

While it is surely true that it is possible to read the poem this way, I do not think it advisable, in part because the metaliterary approach overlooks so much of the actual, exceedingly memorable, content of the poem, beginning with the specific title, extending to the memorable allusions and images, and then beyond them to their original cultural contexts and the interrelations among these. While there is no denying that “Emblazoned Zither” is difficult, complex, perhaps even obscure in places, the more obvious qualifier would be that it is profoundly moving and unforgettably beautiful, so to emphasize its ambiguity is misleading. Moreover, while I agree with James Liu’s objection that it is impossible to reconstruct the circumstances of composition of the poem, that does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to find out more about what it meant in the Tang. The way to do that is, of course, through philological study of the poem’s specific references and use of language.

Rather than ambiguity, then, perhaps what we are looking for is depth. We may take inspiration here from Paul W. Kroll’s insight in his lecture “Between Something and Nothing,” that the word *xuan* 玄 in classical Chinese does not properly mean “dark, obscure,” “abstruse, arcane, mysterious,” but to be “translucent,” to be seen but indistinctly.<sup>60</sup> Medieval Chinese poetry is not *xuanxue*, but it owes a great debt to it,<sup>61</sup> and later interpreters may fall into some of the same traps in facing the challenges of these texts: to mistake profundity for lack of clarity, or the absence of an obvious interpretation for the impossibility of a coherent one. In the same way, the difficulty of the great Tang poems should not be described as blurriness or lack of clarity. Kroll has also analyzed a particular usage in Li Bai’s poems, his description of the purple glow of the sky after sunset, “varying from salmon- or rose-pink to the faintest lilac, from

58 Liu, “Li Shang-yin’s Poem ‘The Ornamented Zither’ (chin-sê),” 136.

59 Zhang, *Tao and the Logos*, 155.

60 Kroll, “Between Something and Nothing,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127 (2007): 409.

61 Nicholas Morrow Williams, “The Metaphysical Lyric of the Six Dynasties,” *T’oung Pao* 98.1–3 (2012): 65–112.

lavender to diffused violet”—and demonstrates conclusively how Li Bai’s celebrations of this visual impression are shaped by the trajectory of medieval Daoist belief.<sup>62</sup> One notable point about this argument, though, is that understanding the complex lore of the heavens in Daoist tradition is not just a kind of cultural enrichment to supplement our readings of Li Bai’s poems, but is indispensable to understanding even just their surface meaning. Even leaving aside what are still too often compartmentalized as “religious” influences of Daoism or Buddhism—as if Confucianism were simply an objective description of reality—the debt of Tang poetry to the earlier literary tradition also illustrates how the language of Tang poetry is not obscure but translucent, containing and representing multitudes.

When Li Shangyin wrote “Emblazoned Zither,” he did not simply create new images as the objective correlative of his emotions, nor describe what he was seeing, nor employ a synchronic language of Tang poetry; he employed a set of complex references to the textual and cultural tradition accumulated by the Tang. Here I want to highlight the role of the *fu* poems preserved in the *Wenxuan*, but of course the same point could be extended to the historical corpus, the *leishu* commonplace books, the Daoist and Buddhist canons, and so on. Finding out more about what these mean is one way to understand what the poem has signified in the past and also what it can mean for us today, beyond our preconceptions.

My claim here is not that earlier works can enrich our understanding of later ones, which would be utterly obvious; but rather that that recent interpreters of these poems have often run aground on ambiguous phrases whose meaning seems to be underdetermined by the poetic context. Yet many of these cruxes can be resolved when one recognizes that these works do not belong to a shared poetic discourse of the Tang at all, but rather define themselves within a much broader literary and cultural tradition.

To begin, my translation of the title of “Emblazoned Zither” is based on the traditional gloss of *jin* 錦 as “pattern,” in a sense extended from its original referent of a kind of silk (not, incidentally, “brocade” but rather a compound-weave silk).<sup>63</sup> The title of the poem is thus synaesthetic, combining the visual and the auditory.

62 Kroll, “Li Po’s Purple Haze,” *Taoist Resources* 7.2 (1997): 21. This article is also noteworthy for its description of a Daoist technique for “ingesting the ‘seed-germ of the sun,’ this time snorted up the nose like a line of astral cocaine” (27).

63 Incidentally, note that in the Tang 琴 \**gim* and 錦 \**kimX* were even closer in sound than today, so the sound of the title is close to *qinse* 琴瑟 \**gim-srit*.

Li Shangyin, “Emblazoned Zither” 錦瑟<sup>64</sup>

錦瑟無端五十絃	The emblazoned zither, inexplicably, has fifty strings;
一絃一柱思華年	With each string and each fret I recall the splendid years. <sup>65</sup>
莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶	Master Zhuang dreamt at dawn he was a butterfly astray;
望帝春心託杜鵑	King Wang’s springlike passion was imbued in the cuckoo.
滄海月明珠有淚	The moon bright on the watchet ocean, the pearls shed tears; <sup>66</sup>
藍田日暖玉生煙	The sunlight warm over Lantian, its jade gives rise to mist.
此情可待成追憶	This feeling could be grasped and transformed into memory—
只是當時已惘然	Yet even at the time it was already disconcertingly unsure.

The title has given us clear indication that the topic of the poem is a musical instrument; not just any ordinary one, but an elegant and refined one. The first lines of the poem describe the instrument and its effect, not on their own terms but through a textual reference. The *Shiji* records that one of Emperor Wu’s officials told him: “The Supreme Lord caused the Plain Maiden to play a fifty-stringed zither. His lordship was so melancholy afterwards that he could no longer bear it, and broke the zither in half leaving just fifty strings” 泰帝使素女鼓五十弦瑟，悲，帝禁不止，故破其瑟為二十五弦。<sup>67</sup> This is not a historical event, of course, but a colorful legend associating the musical instrument with unbearable sorrow. Note that the legend itself only occurs within quotation marks; it is inaccurate to say that “according to the *Shiji*” the instrument originated in this fashion. Thus the opening line refers to an evocative

64 *Li Shangyin shige jishi*, 1420.

65 “Fret” can be used for the ridges on a zither. *OED* cites Cary’s translation of Dante from 1814: “As sound Of cittern, at the fret-board ... Is ... modulate and tuned.”

66 Zhang Longxi elaborates on Qian Zhongshu’s interpretation of this line in an entire essay, “Faire une perle d’une larme”: Reading Across Cultures,” in *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 29–59. The title comes from Alfred de Musset (already cited by Qian as well).

67 “Basic Annal of Filial Emperor Wu” 孝武本紀, *Shiji*, 12.593; and also mentioned in the “Treatise on the Feng and Shan Succession Rites” 封禪書, *Shiji*, 28.1669.

legend and itself comments on it that it is *wudian* 無端, that is, without certain origin or function.

Next, Li Shangyin presents two parallel references about physical transformation into flying animals: Zhuangzi's famous parable of the butterfly dream,<sup>68</sup> and the ancient King Wang of Shu (Shu Wangdi 蜀望帝), who entered into an adulterous affair with an advisor's wife, and whose spirit after his death was transplanted into the cuckoo.<sup>69</sup> By qualifying the butterfly as "astray," Li relates both to the same theme of transformation and loss resulting in uncertainty.

The third couplet then presents two complex images, whose source is not entirely clear. A legend tells of shark-people whose tears are pearls. This entire legend is mentioned in the *Bowu zhi* 博物志 catalogue of exotics.<sup>70</sup> Dai Shulun 戴叔倫 (ca. 732–ca. 789) is also quoted as describing the visions of poets as being like a warm day in Lantian, when mist rises from the jade.<sup>71</sup> But it is not clear that this is exactly what Li has in mind.

It is at first difficult to find a single common thread among these different allusions. The idea that they are all metaphors for Li Shangyin's poetry is attractive, but overly powerful. Perhaps the third couplet contains the key, with its picturesque local legends of uncanny phenomena. In the submarine land of the shark-people, weeping produces pearls; the pure jade of Lantian produces mist on a warm day. Even if the latter is a conscious reference to Dai Shulun, it may not refer to the function of poetry *per se*. Instead, these are both cases of marvelous transformations within the natural world. By contrast, the second couplet employs two proper names and so identifies its sources more explicitly. There is no problem at all in identifying the *Zhuangzi* allusion, from the second chapter of that book. But there remains a complex set of images for us to process.

I should note in passing that Yeh Chia-ying 葉嘉瑩 cautions against overinterpreting these allusions and also those in one of the "Untitled" poems.<sup>72</sup> This warning of overinterpretation might be considered an objection to the whole approach I will pursue below. And yet this cannot be the end of the story; Zhuangzi's butterfly dream does not *only* represent a dream. Moreover, it is precisely the additional depths behind the Zhuangzi story, as the other

68 *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 2.119.

69 Du Yu was not just any king of Shu but apparently the first to declare himself Di 帝. See Kao Kuei-hui 高桂惠, *Zuo Si shengping ji qi sandu fu zhi yanjiu* 左思生平及其三都賦之研究 (MA thesis, Guoli Zhengzhi Daxue, 1981), 77.

70 *Bowu zhi* 博物志 (*Siku quanshu*), 2.4a.

71 He is quoted in a letter by Sikong Tu 司空圖. See *Quan Tang wen*, 807.11b.

72 *Jialing lunshi conggao* 迦陵論詩叢稿 (Taipei: Dakuai wenhua, 2002), 121. Yeh mentions in particular the poem on *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1451, which like "Emerald Walls #3," also mentions the "new moon" 月魄.

allusions, that make this poem what it is, something considerably more meaningful than just, say, a story of a romantic dream. I would agree about the danger of settling on a mechanistic, allegorical interpretation in which everything in the poem is said to support some philosophical thesis, but there is an equal danger in asserting that a poem about signification and memory is exactly what it seems to be on the surface.

Instead of treating the images as ambiguous or resistant to interpretation altogether, I want to suggest that the images were actually already linked together in a single textual source. This approach requires knowledge, but not guesswork. Moreover, what seems like the obvious and plain meaning of an allusion is not always so, as we can see even better by pursuing the other image in the second couplet, the story of King Wang of Shu, which turns out to relate to a number of other images tied to the exotic culture of Shu, modern Sichuan. Most commentators simply treat the episode of King Wang as a well-known event, but it turns out that its literary pedigree is of interest.<sup>73</sup> One familiar and authoritative source for the story of Du Yu 杜宇 in the Tang would have been the following passage from Zuo Si's 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305) “*Fu* on the Shu Capital” 蜀都賦:<sup>74</sup>

Such things

Are the comfort and delight of those who dwell here,

Thrill and excite those who see and hear them.

Why is only Three Rivers the court and market of the realm?<sup>75</sup>

Now as for

Outstanding rarities and oddities,

Things most uncommon and strange—

On each warp supernatural wonders,

To each weft human relations.<sup>76</sup>

73 Robert Ashmore, for instance, explains this allusion as if it were simply well-known history: “Emperor Wang, legendary ruler of Shu, sent his minister Bie Ling to work on irrigation and flood control ...” See Ashmore, “Recent-Style *Shi* Poetry: Heptasyllabic Regulated Verse,” 196.

74 *Wenxuan*, 4.189. Translation modified from Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, Vol. 1: *Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 367–69.

75 Three Rivers (Sanchuan 三川) Commandery, later renamed Henan 河南 Commandery, included the highly developed area of modern Luoyang and Zhengzhou. It earned its name from the confluence of the Yellow, the Luo 洛, and the Yi 伊 Rivers at Luoyang.

76 According to Wuchen commentator Lü Xiang, these lines sum up the succeeding ones, which first present supernatural marvels (the warp), and then turn to outstanding human talents (the weft).

## In the distant past

The spiritual essence of the Min Mountains  
 Ascended to become the Well Network.<sup>77</sup>

The Celestial Emperor controlled the cycles and gathered felicity in  
 this land;

Great blessings profusely spread, rising and emanating from all  
 directions.

Green jade from Chang Hong's blood,

The bird born from Du Yu's soul,<sup>78</sup>

Inexplicably transformed, anomalous,

Oh, how they were admired in ages past!

斯蓋宅土之所安樂，觀聽之所踴躍也。焉獨三川，為世朝市？若乃卓  
 犖奇譎，倜儻罔已。一經神怪，一緯人理。遠則岷山之精，上為井  
 絡。天帝運期而會昌，景福胙饗而興作。碧出萇弘之血，鳥生杜宇之  
 魄。妄變化而非常，羌見偉於疇昔。

Notably, the following passage goes on to cite Sima Xiangru, Yang Xiong, and other outstanding writers of Shu as its distinctive products, thus giving it a more literary emphasis than other passages in the grand *fu*.

This passage refers to Du Yu, but the broader context also has several suggestive parallels to “Emblazoned Zither.” First, Zuo Si mentions him in parallel with Chang Hong 萇弘, a man of Shu whose blood is said to have transformed into green jade (*bi* 碧).<sup>79</sup> This story resembles Zhuangzi dreaming himself a butterfly in that is another parable showing that appearance is not reality,

77 This fascinating theory derives from the weft text *Hetu kuodi xiang* 河圖括地象, cited by Liu Kui 劉逵 in the *Wenxuan* commentary. The Well Constellation (or Eastern Well, Dongjing 東井) consisted of eight stars in Gemini, and may have been so called because of a tradition that when the Emperor went on an excursion, he would make a spontaneous stopping-place by gathering the imperial carriages around a well. See Gustave Schlegel, *Uranographie chinoise* (Leiden: Brill, 1875), 410. In the Han, Shu belonged to the territory of Qin, whose corresponding astral field was that of the Well. See *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 28B.1641. But the idea that the Min Mountains in particular rose up to form the Well constellation may have been an astrogeographical way of conceiving of the Shu region as an alternative center of power, distinct from but comparable to the capital.

78 For this couplet, see more detailed discussion below.

79 *Zhuangzi jishi*, 26.921. He is also mentioned in *Han Feizi*, and several times in *Zuozhuan*, notably when his violent death is foretold, accurately, in Duke Ding, Year 1. See *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 31.258; Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li,

and in fact the earliest reference for this story turns out to be the *Zhuangzi*. Thus the whole couplet is actually very similar to the second couplet of “Emblazoned Zither.” Comparing the couplets helps us to see the internal logic of both, as well.<sup>80</sup>

The important point here is not just that Du Yu is mentioned, though, but that the Liu Kui 劉逵 (Western Jin) commentary also cites one of the earliest extant accounts of the legend involving the cuckoo, attributing it to the *Shu ji* 蜀記.<sup>81</sup>

In ancient times there was a man named Du Yu. As king of Shu, his title was Lord Wang. When Yu died, there was a popular legend that he had transformed into a *zigui* [cuckoo]. The *zigui* is a bird name. When Shu people hear the cry of the *zigui*, they all say—aha, it is Lord Wang!

昔有人姓杜名字，王蜀，號曰望帝。宇死，俗說云宇化為子規。子規，鳥名也。蜀人聞子規鳴，皆曰望帝也。

This might refer to the earliest known source for the legend, a text called the “Basic Annals of the Kings of Shu” 蜀王本紀 attributed to Yang Xiong.<sup>82</sup> There is also an account of this story in the *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志, also compiled in the Jin, by Chang Qu 常璩.<sup>83</sup>

The note to this passage does not explain the key background to Du Yu’s transformation, however, which involves his adultery with a key minister’s

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and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition | Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 1733.

80 Pace Zhang Longxi, who says that the story of Emperor Wang is “totally unrelated” (*Tao and the Logos*, 150).

81 *Wenxuan*, 4.189.

82 Surviving only in fragments, but part of this particular quotation is quoted in the commentary to Zhang Heng’s “Contemplating the Mystery,” *Wenxuan*, 15.662. The key point about the cuckoo, though is quoted only in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 923.8a. See “Quan Han wen” 全漢文, in Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, 53.5b. It survived in the *Jiu Tang shu* bibliography, in a single *juan*; *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 46.2016. It could also be another work, such as a book known by that title and attributed to Wang Yin 王隱 of the Jin dynasty. David Knechtges suggests it might have been part of the *Yizhouji* 益州記 by Li Ying 李膺 (Later Han). This is also identified as written by Li Chong, in the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 bibliography. See *Xin Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 58.1503.

83 See *Huayang guozhi jiaozhu* 華陽國志校注, comp. Chang Qu 常璩, ed. Liu Lin 劉琳 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1984), 182.

wife. The *Shu wang benji* 蜀王本紀 is cited explicitly and in more detail in the Li Shan commentary to Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78–139) “*Fu* on Pondering the Mystery” 思玄賦 (in a speech put in the mouth of the Yellow Emperor, advising the protagonist):<sup>84</sup>

“Bieling died, and his corpse disappeared,  
 Yet later he assumed the Shu succession, and for many generations his  
 clan ruled.  
 The process of life and death is complex and uneven;  
 Even the Master of Fate does not comprehend it.”

鼈令殮而尸亡兮，取蜀禪而引世。死生錯其不齊兮，雖司命其不瞞。

That the full title is cited by Li Shan may be significant, since the story about Du Yu is cited in the earlier commentary of Liu Kui; it could potentially be the same book under the two different titles. These lines are actually referring to a different part of the legend of Du Yu. To cite the story as explained in Knechtges' note:<sup>85</sup>

Bieling 鼈令, a man of Jing 荆, died, and his corpse disappeared. During this time Wangdi ruled the town of Pi 郫, at the foot of the Min Mountains in Shu. Bieling's corpse floated down the river to Pi; where it was found by Wangdi. Wangdi had the corpse revived, and he appointed Biding his minister. Bieling was able to tame a great flood that soon inflicted the Pi area. Later, Wangdi had sexual relations with Bieling's wife. Ashamed of his conduct, Wangdi abdicated his throne to Biding.

It is only after this series of events that Lord Wang was transformed into a cuckoo. It is this whole story of resurrection, metamorphosis, adultery, and estrangement that provides the fertile ground of Li Shangyin's poem.

The story was surely well known to Tang literati, and transmitted independently in works like the *Shu wang benji*, which still survived intact. Nonetheless, it may also have held some particular associations with the *Wenxuan* anthology, given its prominence appearance in these two great *fu* poems. Moreover, if we look beyond this story to the remainder of the passage from the “*Fu* on

84 *Wenxuan*, 15.676–77; Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, 3: 119.

85 Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, 3:118. This also appears to come from the *Shu wang benji*. See also *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校注, ed. Zhang Zhenze 張震澤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 245–46.

the Shu Capital,” beyond this specific similarity, the “rarities and oddities” of Shu are mentioned by Zuo Si as the most perfect examples of Shu’s fecundity, which of course also includes its prosperous silk industry. In this broader context, the passage is celebrating the strange, magical transformations of Shu’s past, but in spite of the eulogistic tone that ought to prevail, there is a hint of something stranger as well, in the images of death and loss, and in the adverb *wang* 妄, “inexplicably” or “mysteriously,” itself both synonymous with *wuduan* 惘然 in Li Shangyin’s poem and also homophonous with *wang* 妄 in the adverb *wangran* 惘然 of the final line.

These parallels are highly suggestive, but we can go further. Li Shangyin would probably not have read the *Wenxuan* text on its own, but rather in one of the annotated editions popular in the Tang. Zuo Si’s poem had an original commentary attributed to Liu Kui 劉逵 (fl. 295 CE) of the Jin, further supplemented by Tang commentators.<sup>86</sup> For instance, Li Shangyin might have read

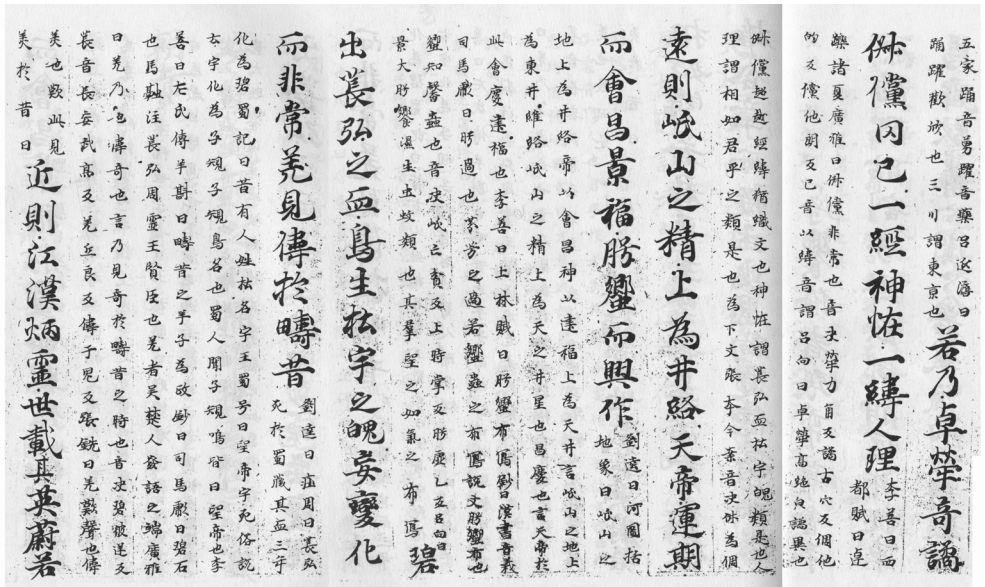


FIGURE 4.1 *Tang chao Wen xuan jizhu huicun* 唐鈔文選集注彙存, ed. Zhou Xunchu 周勛初 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 8.72–74

IMAGE COURTESY OF SHANGHAI GUJI CHUBANSHE 上海古籍出版社,  
NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

86 Knechtges cites evidence that it actually includes other commentaries. See Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, 1: 337–39n.

the Liuchen edition of the *Wenxuan*.<sup>87</sup> In the *Wenxuan jizhu* 文選集注 text, which dates approximately to the Tang, though there is still debate about where and when it was compiled, we can also observe how the original *fu* appears in tandem with its commentaries (see figure 4.1).

Both of these are close to Li Shangyin's own time, and both editions quote Liu Kui's original commentary, identifying *Zhuangzi* as the source of the Chang Hong legend, and citing the Jin text *Shu ji* 蜀記 as the source of the Du Yu legend. Between the actual couplet referring to both Chang Hong and Du Yu, and the further elaborations cited in the commentary, this would seem to be one of the most thorough references for the Du Yu story available in medieval China.

Notably, both also include Liu Shan's supplementary commentary after the original note by Liu Kui, which cites, strangely, an early source for the simple phrase "to see and hear" (*guan ting* 關聽). The source cited is a couplet from Liu Xiang's 劉向 (79–8 BCE) *fu* poem "Elegant Zither" 雅琴賦, not transmitted in its entirety, which reads, "From what you perceive in seeing and hearing, you appreciate its beauty" 觀聽之所至，乃知其美也. Liu Xiang's "Elegant Zither" unfortunately survives only in seven brief quotations, so we can barely guess at its full content.<sup>88</sup>

Altogether, then, the passage about the marvels of the Shu region from Zuo Si's poem, as presented in the *Wenxuan* with its commentaries by Liu Kui and Li Shan, corresponds closely to the "Jin se" in the following three ways:

- 1) The reference to King Wang and the cuckoo occurs in parallel with a reference to *Zhuangzi* about transformation of humans into material objects, just as in Li Shangyin's poem, though with a different *Zhuangzi* reference.
- 2) The larger context is about wondrous and mythical things from the Shu region, and in particular about metamorphoses (*bianhua* 變化).
- 3) In Li Shan's commentary to the same larger passage, he cites a *fu* by Liu Xiang about *qin* music.

My claim is not that "Emblazoned Zither" is a poem about reading the *Wenxuan*, nor even that Li Shangyin necessarily had in mind this page of the *Wenxuan*, though that is not implausible. It is more that the comparison of these two texts produced in the Tang places the "Emblazoned Zither" in a radically different light, illuminating the linkages between its images and allusions. For the reader familiar with the grounding of the poem's content in these historical sources and literary works, many of which were already tied together

87 For instance, the relatively early Kyujanggak edition of 1428, based on a Xiuzhou printing of 1094. For more on this text, see David R. Knechtges, "The *Wen xuan* Tradition in China and Abroad," *Bulletin of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 2 (2015): 228.

88 "Quan Han wen," 35.2b–3a.

on this page of the *Wenxuan*, the poem is not nearly as difficult as it seems for today's reader. It remains a profound and complex poem, but not an ambiguous one in the sense that it is hard to understand Li's topic.

Of course, it remains necessary to recognize historical difference. It is striking to note how unlike Li Shangyin's poem is from the Six Dynasties discourse on the zither; Ronald Egan has traced the development of *qin* lore from the 3rd century through the 11th, and shown convincingly how it was not till quite late in this period that discourse on the *qin* began to emphasize the expression of emotion.<sup>89</sup> While Liu Xiang's poem appears to focus on aesthetic and perhaps ritual propriety, it likely lacked the type of romantic longing, and in particular the references to adultery and self-destruction, of Li Shangyin's verse. Or again, the relative place of once-independent kingdoms like Shu in the larger culture had shifted along with the new centralization of the Sui and Tang. So it would be well worth reading "Emblazoned Zither" in relation to the development of Shu symbolism.<sup>90</sup>

What I mean to emphasize here is the merit of studying Li Shangyin's difficult poem by the humanistic method, examining the relevant sources and inspirations of the text, and then returning to the poem with all that knowledge in mind. We treat the poem not as a coded message referring to something else but as an artifact, of its time of course, but also referring back to the lore from other times. This does not quite get us to a simple summary of the poem's meaning, either different or identical with those proposed by previous interpreters. But this philological approach at least clarifies the sense of the poem by unveiling layers of meaning beneath the surface, beyond the incident of Li Shangyin's own life, separate from our preconceptions as modern readers. It is a poem about how art, music, and poetry—not unlike the strange myths and magical forces found in Shu—are strange and marvelous transformations wrought by unseen forces, leaving us only with tentative hints of their uncertain origins, only traces of the passions that are buried and replaced. But to say that the poem is about obscure and supernatural things is not to say that it is in itself obscure or supernatural. It is a poem that only gains depth and significance when it is read in light of the literary tradition that precedes it, read according to the old philological methods that look for order within disparate materials, and, by identifying the untold layers of meaning personal, cultural, and spiritual, within an eight-line poem, thereby rediscover what is truly strange within the apparently familiar.

89 Egan, "The Controversy over Music and 'Sadness' and Changing Conceptions of the *Qin* in Middle Period China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57 (1997): 5–66.

90 See Kroll, "The Road to Shu, from Zhang Zai to Li Bo," *Early Medieval China* 10–11 (2004): 227–54. Kroll mentions Du Yu on p. 235.

### 3 Conclusion

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
 Floated midway on the waves;  
 Where was heard the mingled measure  
 From the fountain and the caves.

COLERIDGE, "Kubla Khan"

Some of the greatest poems possess a mystery inextricable from their perennial allure. We are able to know in great detail the circumstances of Coleridge's composition of "Kubla Khan," from his own 1816 preface to the poem beginning, "In the summer of the year 1797, the author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire ..." and then relates how the whole poem appeared to him in an opium-infused dream, but these facts in themselves give us little direct insight into the poem's meaning. On one hand we have the alluring images ("the shadow of the dome of pleasure") but these are not just random symbols so much as intentional conjunctions of disparate ideas, both cosmic visions and evocative allusions ("the mingled measure"), which are not so much mysterious as they are profound. Just as Coleridge's masterpiece exploits often very simple and straightforward language to convey a sense of inchoate longing for a state of bliss only to be achieved in dreams of the imagination, so Li Shangyin's poetry makes out of quite explicit and unambiguous statements a rich evocation of complex emotional states.

The method of humanistic sinology—to which I would argue the best Western scholarship on Chinese literature belongs—must certainly rely on exact historical data about the life of the author, and differentiate historical fact from subjective speculation. But literary research ought to be wary of, and frequently to shun, either cultural or historical essentialism. A fifty-page long diary account of the day when Li Shangyin composed "Emblazoned Zither" would not necessarily improve our interpretations of it, because the poem is not ambiguous in the sense of leaving questions unanswered, but in the sense of evoking multiple reservoirs of signification, all of which would remain relevant to our understanding regardless of what events in Li's personal life triggered his composition of the poem. Once the poem is written, it belongs not to Li Shangyin but to the reader; the facts behind it may or may not be relevant, but the stories of Du Yu and Chang Hong, and by extension Zuo Si's evocation of the marvelous metamorphoses of Shu geography and culture, necessarily *are* relevant.

A mystery presents a vacuum of knowledge into which the researcher may fill his own imaginative inklings; an ambiguity presents a choice for the

reader to make. But the profundity of literary excellence offers a different kind of task for the scholar, the task of understanding. It is a matter of pursuing the necessary constituents of the horizon of expectations that existed for the author at the original moment of composition. This may require borrowing from all the pseudo-disciplines of academia, but only to the extent that they already correspond to the substantive layers of classical Chinese learning, and without ever being confined by the expectations of our so-called history or so-called literary theory. The one *sine qua non* of humanistic sinology is to keep one's attention fixed unshakably on the unimaginably strange world that is another human mind, possessing its own "Outstanding rarities and oddities, / Things most uncommon and strange. ... Inexplicably transformed, anomalous!" That pearl at the bottom of the sea reflects in its own momentous singularity a limitless vista of other worlds.

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# The Anecdotal Past: Unofficial History and “Minute Cultural Memory” in the *Tang yulin* (Forest of Conversations on the Tang)

*Amelia Ying QIN*

## Abstract

This essay is a preliminary study of the anecdotal past from the Tang 唐 (618–907) as constructed in the *Tang yulin* 唐語林 (Forest of Conversations on the Tang), a Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127) collection of anecdotes. It measures the “distances” between the contents in the first eighteen transmitted categories of the *Tang yulin* and the official historical narratives about the Tang by estimating the numbers and percentages of their overlapping accounts. Foregrounding key voices from the past, these anecdotal memories present a cultural image of Tang political and social life and serve the crucial function of conveying popular opinions, collective feelings and perspectives, as well as lasting cultural values and significance. Thus, these fragmentary, miscellaneous accounts, as a whole, constitute a special type of cultural memory that offers a fluid representation of the past in “minute” (*wei* 微) forms. Rather than a “counterhistory” in the sense of the New Historicist reading, this “minute cultural memory” 微文化記憶, as I term it here, overlaps with and seeps into official historical narratives, and is both factual and fictional: factual in preserving small capsules of cultural reality and emotional and ideological truth, and fictional in integrating its cultural basis with narrative manipulations and embellishments, blurring the boundaries between history, memory, and invention.

## Keywords

Anecdotes – minor discourses – unofficial history – minute cultural memory – Tang dynasty

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Anecdotal narratives, as a form of writing in between historical records and fictional accounts, have recently captured the scholarly interest in the field of premodern Chinese studies. They have been examined as literati gossip, fragmentary sketches of historical figures and cultural icons, alternative narratives for literary and intellectual history, as well as a unique genre and textual space that accommodates the cultural and “mosaic” memories of the past.<sup>2</sup> Building

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- 1 This study originated from my dissertation project. An earlier version was presented at the 2016 AAS Conference, on a panel I organized under the title “History and Memory: The Making of the Past in Early Modern China.” I would like to thank Professor William H. Nienhauser, Jr. for his guidance on my dissertation research and his support over the years, and also thank Professors Charles Hartman, Rania Huntington, Mark Meulenbeld, Hongming Zhang, Joseph Dennis, Cong Ellen Zhang, Ari Daniel Levine, and the reviewers of this article for their comments and suggestions. I especially thank Professor Zhi Chen for his support and help throughout the revision and finalization of this article for the *festschrift* volume. All remaining errors and infelicities are entirely mine.
- 2 “Mosaic memory” is Manling Luo’s term for these historical anecdotes. See Luo, “Remembering Kaiyuan and Tianbao: The Construction of Mosaic Memory in Medieval Historical Miscellanies,” *T’oung Pao* 97 (2011): 263–300. For recent works on anecdotes, see Jack W. Chen, *Anecdote, Network, Gossip, Performance: Essays on the Shishuo xinyu* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2021); multiple papers in the special issue on Song dynasty *biji* of the *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 清華學報 48.2 (2018); Rebecca Doran, “‘Filling in That Which is Missing’: A Discussion and Selected Translation of *Ci Liushi jiuwen*,” *The AALITRA Review* 13 (2018): 134–45; Xin Zou, “Collecting Memories of a Fading Glory: A Translation of Li Deyu’s (787–850) *Ci Liushi jiuwen*,” *Tang Studies* 36 (2018): 121–49; Anna M. Shields, “The ‘Supplementary’ Historian? Li Zhao’s *Guo shi bu* as Mid-Tang Political and Social Critique,” *T’oung Pao* 103 (2017): 407–47; Amelia Ying Qin, “Particularly Unusual, Definitely True: Anecdotes as Political Criticism in the Late Tang Miscellany *Songchuang zalu* 松窗雜錄,” *Oriens Extremus* 56 (2017): 117–70; multiple papers in the special issue on *biji* of *East Asian Publishing and Society* 6 (2016); Manling Luo, *Literati Storytelling in Late Medieval China* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2015); Sarah Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center and Harvard University Press, 2014); Jack W. Chen and David Schaberg, eds., *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdote in Traditional China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2014); Glen Dudbridge, *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China: From the Memoirs of Wang Renyu (880–956)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alister David Inglis, “Luo Ye’s ‘Zuiweng tanlu’ and the Culture of Romance,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 35 (2013): 97–122; Cong Ellen Zhang, “To Be ‘Erudite in Miscellaneous Knowledge’: A Study of Song (960–1279) *Biji* Writing,” *Asia Major* 25.2 (2012): 43–77; Chengjuan Sun, “The Hidden Blessing of Being a Last Ruler: Anecdotes and the Song Dynasty Interpretation of Li Yu’s (937–978) Lyrics,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) 34 (2012): 105–29; Manling Luo, “Remembering Kaiyuan and Tianbao” (2011) and “What One Has Heard and Seen: Intellectual Discourse in a Late Eighth-Century Miscellany,” *Tang Studies* 30 (2012): 23–44; Robert Hymes, “Gossip as

upon existing studies, this essay highlights the nature of anecdotal collections as material selected from the kind of cultural archives of a society largely aside from official venues of historiographical practice and serious scholarship. It proposes that anecdotal material constituted a fluid representation of the past in a “minute” (*wei* 微) form of cultural memory<sup>3</sup> circulated and transmitted

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- History: Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi* and the Place of Oral Anecdotes in Song Historical Knowledge,” *Chūgoku shikagu* 中國史學 21 (2011): 1–28; Kai Vogelsang, “From Anecdote to History: Observations on the Composition of the *Zuozhuan*,” *Oriens Extremus* 50 (2011): 99–124; Victor Cunrui Xiong, “The Miscellaneous Record of The Reign of the Great Enterprise and Sui Luoyang,” *Tang Studies* 29 (2011): 6–26; Linda Rui Feng, “Unmasking *Fengliu* in Urban Chang’an: Rereading *Beili zhi* (Anecdotes from the Northern Ward),” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 32 (2010): 1–21; Sarah Schneewind, “Reduce, Re-use, Recycle: Imperial Autocracy and Scholar-Official Autonomy in the Background to the Ming History Biography of Early Ming Scholar-Official Fang Keqin (1326–1376),” *Oriens Extremus* 48 (2009): 103–52; Yue Hong, “A Structural Study of Ninth Century Anecdotes on Original Events,” *Tang Studies* 26 (2008): 65–83; Fu Daiwie, “A Flourishing of *Biji* or Pen-notes Texts and Its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960–1279),” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 1 (2007): 103–30; Wai-ye Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Alister David Inglis, *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener And Its Song Dynasty Context* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006); Rania Huntington, “Chaos, Memory, and Genre: Anecdotal Recollections of the Taiping Rebellion,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 27 (2005): 59–91; Carrie E. Reed, “Motivation and Meaning of a Hodge-podge: Duan Chengshi's *Youyang zazu*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123.1 (2003): 121–45; David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1996); Peter K. Bol, “A Literary Miscellany and Sung Intellectual History: The Case of Chang Lei's *Ming-tao tsa-chih*,” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 25 (1995): 121–51; Leo Tak-Hung Chan, “Narrative as Argument: The *Yuewei caotang biji* and The Late Eighteenth-Century Elite Discourse on The Supernatural,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53.1 (1993): 25–62; and many other studies.
- 3 Here, and in my forthcoming book that offers more detail, “minute” stands for *wei* 微 in the terms I use: “minute culture” 微文化和 “minute cultural memory” 微文化記憶. This term is chosen to distinguish it from the meanings and connotations in existing terms such as “minor culture” and “microculture” that often refer to the culture of specific small groups of people. For example, see Françoise Lionnet, and Shu-mei Shih, “Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally,” in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–23. For the concept of “cultural memory,” see Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (Spring/Summer 1995): 130–32; *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); and *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Jeffrey K. Olick, and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40; Astrid Erll, and Ansgar

through both oral and textual means. Collections were compiled through selective recycling and re-organization of such material, and can be viewed as constructions of their own images of the “minute cultural memory” 微文化記憶 of the past. During this restructuring of such “minute cultural memory,” categories—created, used, and re-used—functioned to impose order and offer guidance on how to remember and interpret the past. In addition, this study takes an approach similar to the New Historicist pursuit of “counterhistory” through anecdotal accounts,<sup>4</sup> in that the focus here is also the relationship between historical writings and the anecdotal past. The New Historicist counterhistory “opposes itself not only to dominant narratives, but also to prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research,” and, when successful, “ceases to be counter.”<sup>5</sup> The anecdotal narratives examined here often also seem to “disrupt” historical narratives and “tantalize with flashes of an always inaccessible ‘real’.”<sup>6</sup> But rather than a “counterhistory,” this study treats these anecdotal accounts as the fragmentary and miscellaneous “minute cultural memory” of the past that is neither factual nor fictional—or both factual *and* fictional.

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Nünning, eds. *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). For works on memory, and especially on cultural memory by sinologists, see Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Huntington, “Chaos, Memory, and Genre,” and other articles in the *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 27 (2005) special issue on memory studies; K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China and Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011 and 2014); Rens Krijgsman, “Traveling Sayings as Carriers of Philosophical Debate: From the Intertextuality of the \* Yucong 語叢 to the Dynamics of Cultural Memory and Authorship in Early China,” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 68.1 (2014): 83–115; David R. Knechtges, “Ruin and Remembrance in Classical Chinese Literature: The ‘Fu on the Ruined City’ by Bao Zhao,” in *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture*, edited by Paul W. Kroll (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 55–89; Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: A History of Early Muzhiming* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Wendy Swartz, “Intertextuality and Cultural Memory in Early Medieval China: Jiang Yan’s Imitations of Nearly Lost and Lost Writers,” in *Memory in Medieval China: Text, Ritual, and Community*, edited by Wendy Swartz and Robert Ford Campany (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 36–62 and many articles in this collection; as well as Maria Khayutina, “The Beginning of Cultural Memory Production in China and the Memory Policy of the Zhou Royal House During the Western Zhou Period,” *Early China* 44 (2021): 19–108; Martin Kern, “Cultural Memory and the Epic in Early Chinese Literature: The Case of Qu Yuan 屈原 and the Lisao 離騷,” *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 9.1 (April 2022): 131–69; and other studies.

4 Catherine Gallagher, “Counterhistory and the Anecdote,” in *Practicing New Historicism*, eds. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49–74.

5 *Ibid.*, 52.

6 *Ibid.*, 51.

These narratives are organic integrations of historical occurrences and fictional exaggerations, and they are as true—and, at the same time, as false—as personal memory. As vehicles of memory, they are truthful insofar as they represent small capsules of cultural reality, and emotional and ideological truth, rather than historical reality and empirical truth, just as episodes of personal memory can be more true to one's mentality than one's factual experience.

In his article, "Historiographical Anecdotes as Depositories and Vehicles of Cultural Memory," Harald Hendrix discusses the genre of "historiographical anecdotes" in biographies of leading intellectuals of the European Renaissance. He points out that they are particularly effective in producing cultural memory,<sup>7</sup> and such effectiveness shows that historical anecdotes "must possess qualities that are judged more essential than the historian's search for empirical truth."<sup>8</sup> While Hendrix mainly addresses the biographical "historical anecdotes" closely associated with the life and personality of the historical figures they depict, and in particular, the biographical anecdotes intentionally created by historical biographers, his ideas prove useful to the study of general historical anecdotes as well. Though the miscellaneous narratives in an anecdote collection are not particularly related to a single historical figure, nor set in any specific biographical context, they also possess a "truthful" quality that transcends the factual concerns of their narratives. Often, they do not function to communicate historical or empirical facts, but rather the cultural reality and emotional and ideological truth embedded in them as *interpretations* of the past. They perpetuate and preserve the fragmented collective voices and memories of a society, and produce the special type of "cultural memory" of the past that I call the "minute cultural memory" in the forms of such miscellaneous writings as *xiaoshuo* 小說, "minor discourses," and *zashi* 雜史, "miscellaneous histories," outside of official historiographical venues.

The concept of cultural memory has been developed recently as a result of the growing scholarly attention to the collective and cultural aspects of memory. Ever since Maurice Halbwachs started to emphasize the social nature of memory in the 1980s,<sup>9</sup> scholarly attention has increasingly turned to social

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7 Harald Hendrix, "Historiographical Anecdotes as Depositories and Vehicles of Cultural Memory," in *Genres as Repositories of Cultural Memory*, the Proceedings of the xvth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association "*Literature as Cultural Memory*," Leiden, 16–22 August 1997, vol. 5, eds. Hendrik van Gorp and Theo D'Haen (Amsterdam/Atlanta, Ga.: Rodopi, 2000), 20.

8 *Ibid.*, 21.

9 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 1992) and *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1980).

practices of commemoration, to concepts of “collective memory,” or “social memory.”<sup>10</sup> In addition to formal discourses produced by official historiography, these social practices, in forms such as tradition, myth, and anecdotes, produce what is identified as “collective,” or “cultural,” memory.<sup>11</sup> This contrasts with the highly-selective collective memory that is associated with the formation of collective, cultural identity.<sup>12</sup> The concept of “cultural memory,” on the other hand, “takes a major step beyond the individual who alone possesses a memory in the true sense,” and sets up a needed “symbolic and cultural framework” for the operations of memory.<sup>13</sup> Assmann states, “cultural memory, in contrast to communicative memory, encompasses the age-old, out-of-the-way, and discarded; and in contrast to collective, bonding memory, it includes the noninstrumentalizable, heretical, subversive, and disowned.”<sup>14</sup> While Assmann’s “cultural memory” seems to be rather inclusive, other scholars seem to use the term specifically to refer to Assmann’s categorization of the “stored” or “archived” memory. For example, Marita Sturkin, in her study of the Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering, defines cultural memory as memory “shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse, yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning.”<sup>15</sup> Just as this type of cultural memory largely exists in cultural archives outside of official venues of historiographical practices, most anecdotal narratives are left out of official histories and are passed down as memories “archived” in miscellaneous collections that often are placed in inferior categories such as *xiaoshuo*, “minor discourses,” and *zashi*, “miscellaneous histories,” by official dynastic bibliographies. Therefore, the “minute cultural memory” comprised of anecdotal material about the past constitutes a new category of cultural memory distinct from the cultural memory contained in such “monumental” forms as literary canons, religious traditions, and major “sites of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*), which include monuments, museums,

10 For Halbwachs’s “collective memory,” see *On Collective Memory*, 38. For “social memory,” see James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ix–x. For a survey on the working definitions, traditions, lineages of enterprises, disputes, approaches, and sociological theories concerning social memory, see Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies.”

11 Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies,” 109–12.

12 See Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 132; *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 3–7; Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies,” 110.

13 Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 8.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

15 Marita Sturkin, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), 26.

historical markers, and special places of cultural significance.<sup>16</sup> As I offer more detailed discussions on this in my forthcoming book on the “minute culture” 微文化 of Tang and Song times, these anecdotes, viewed as a collective whole, integrate factual and cultural basis with fictional embellishment and bridge the gap between history and imagination.

This essay is a preliminary study of the minute cultural memory of the Tang 唐 (618–907) as constructed in the *Tang yulin* 唐語林 (Forest of Conversations on the Tang), a late Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127) collection of anecdotes.<sup>17</sup> Different from most of the “brush jottings” of the time, in which compilers frequently penned their anecdotes afresh, the *Tang yulin* is a collection whose contents were entirely selected from previous collections. Different from some collections in which anecdotes were simply accumulated without any organization, the *Tang yulin*, by recycling the minute cultural memory of the past from a wide range of sources, made considerable effort in restructuring its representation of the Tang under a framework of categories. This study surveys the content of the collection to find out how much of it overlaps with accounts in official histories such as the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Completed in 945), the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Completed in 1060), and the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Original published in 1084).<sup>18</sup> The goal is to discern the nature of the anecdotal past in relation to official historical representations of the Tang. In addition, the *Tang yulin* should be viewed as a Song scholar’s effort to selectively recycle fragmented memories about the Tang, give these discontinuous narratives structure, and bestow meaning through this structure. Therefore, it represents, first and foremost, a Song perspective on the historical and

16 Pierre Nora, and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Lieux de Mémoire)*, 3 vols. (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998).

17 Wang Dang 王讜 (d. ca. 1106), *Tang yulin jiaozheng* 唐語林校證, coll. and ed. Zhou Xunchu 周勛初 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987). For research related to the *Tang yulin*, see Zhou Xunchu’s extensive work on its author, textual history, and textual problems, as cited below; He Zihui 何姿慧, “*Tang yulin* suojian Tang dai shehui shenghuo shiliao kaoshu” 《唐語林》所見唐代社會生活史料考述 (MA thesis, Guoli Zhongxing Daxue 國立中興大學, 1998); Kuang Mingyue 鄺明月, “*Tang yulin* yanjiu” 《唐語林》研究 (MA thesis, Huazhong Shifan Daxue 華中師範大學, 2003); Amelia Ying Qin, “An Introductory Study of the *Tang yulin*: Textual History, Source Material, and the Influences It Received,” *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 清華學報 (Special Issue on Song Dynasty Brush Jottings) 48.2 (June 2018): 419–56; See also Zhang Jianguang 張劍光, *Song ren biji shiyu xia de Tang Wudai shehui* 宋人筆記視域下的唐五代社會 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2006) for related sections.

18 The editions used are Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946), *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, rpt. 2012); Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1062), *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, rpt. 2012); Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956, rpt. 2005).

anecdotal representations of the past.<sup>19</sup> As a result, through selectively recycling and systematically restructuring these “minute” memories from the Tang, the compiler constructed his own “minute cultural memory” about the past dynasty, offering a unique kind of unofficial history from outside of the official venues of historiographical practices of his time.

## 2 The Text

The *Tang yulin* was compiled by Wang Dang 王讜 (ca. 1046–ca. 1106), a minor court official of the Northern Song, about whom not much biographical information is known.<sup>20</sup> The collection is estimated to have been compiled after the Shaosheng 紹聖 (1094–1098) reign of Emperor Zhezong 哲宗 (r. 1085–1100) when Wang Dang entered old age, and the completion and circulation of the collection was unlikely to have come later than Huizong’s 徽宗 (r. 1101–1126) reign.<sup>21</sup> The text contains over eleven hundred anecdotes in the most recent modern edition collated and annotated by Zhou Xunchu 周勛初. These anecdotes are mostly about historical figures, events, traditions, and customs of the Tang dynasty. Wang Dang’s original preface to the collection provides a list of fifty source texts, most of which were compiled during the Tang and Five Dynasties, with only a few from the early Song. Listing his “fifty schools of minor discourses” 小說五十家, Wang Dang noted that he “took the most important [accounts] from these and compiled them [into this collection], dividing them into fifty-two categories” 取其尤要者編之，分為五十二門.<sup>22</sup> Though the genre of “minor discourses” was marginalized in the Chinese textual tradition and largely left out of the venues of official historiography and serious scholarship, this brief comment still suggested that there were things Wang Dang deemed “important” (*yao* 要) to be gleaned from these cultural archives. Most of *Tang yulin*’s source texts did not offer much of a structure to

19 For a detailed discussion on the Song perspectives, with examples from the *Tang yulin*, see Amelia Ying Qin, “Restructuring Cultural Memory in the *Tang yulin*,” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013).

20 For a detailed study on Wang Dang’s dates and life, see Yan Zhongqi 顏中其 (1926–2000), “Guanyu *Tang yulin* zuozhe Wang Dang” 關於《唐語林》作者王讜, in *Zhongguo lishi wenxian yanjiu jikan* 中國歷史文獻研究集刊 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1980), 219–24. For a study on Wang Dang’s family in the Northern Song, see Amelia Ying Qin, “Molded by Culture: Memories of the Wang Family from Taiyuan in Northern Song Genres and Networks,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 47 (2017–2018): 33–84.

21 Yan Zhongqi, “Guanyu *Tang yulin* zuozhe Wang Dang,” 224.

22 “*Tang yulin* yuan xumu” 唐語林原序目, in *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1–2.

their contents, some simply recording anecdotal accounts one after another, some in roughly chronological order, most without any categories at all. Wang Dang, however, took care to provide a structured depiction of the “important” anecdotal memories on the Tang, and in so doing, offered a certain degree of guidance to the interpretation of the selected anecdotal representations of the past.<sup>23</sup> After offering a complete list of his categories, Wang Dang acknowledges, “The first thirty-five categories are from the *Shishuo* [*xinyu*], the following seventeen categories are added by Zhengfu [myself]” 其上三十五門出世說，下十七門正甫所續。<sup>24</sup>

Wang Dang’s time saw a significant increase in the number of private anecdote collections that formed the genre *biji* 筆記, “brush jottings,”<sup>25</sup> with Ouyang Xiu’s 歐陽修 (1007–1072) *Guitian lu* 歸田錄, Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037–1101) *Qiuchi biji* 仇池筆記 and *Dongpo zhilin* 東坡志林 as representative works. Wang Dang’s friend, Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲 (*jinshi* 進士 1065), compiled the *Xu shishuo* 續世說, with a structure also based on that of the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, shortly before Wang Dang’s *Tang yulin*. Therefore, the *Tang yulin* was not an isolated project, but rather a product of a literati community with shared literary and intellectual interests.

The *Tang yulin* has a complicated textual history, which resulted in a first part (the first eighteen categories and their contents) that survived transmission, and a latter part, which was lost and only later reconstructed and restored.<sup>26</sup> Most of the present editions of *Tang yulin* are based on the Wuying

23 Tian Xiaofei notes that categories form “a set of interpretive frameworks” and editorial arrangement is a way of “managing the unruly force of anecdotes.” See Tian Xiaofei, “Tales from Borderland: Anecdotes in Early Medieval China,” in *Idle Talk*, 41–42.

24 For a detailed discussion of the textual history of the *Tang yulin*, its selective use of source material, and influences on its organizational structure, including translated lists of categories and fifty source books identified by Wang Dang at the end of his preface (*Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1–2), see Qin, “An Introductory Study of the *Tang yulin*,” 419–56.

25 Li Yumin 李裕民, *Songyuan biji xiaoshuo daguan* 宋元筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001). Zhang Hui 張暉, *Songdai biji yanjiu* 宋代筆記研究 (Wuchang: Huazhong Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 1993).

26 As early as the twelfth century, about fifty years after the death of Wang Dang, there were already at least two different complete editions (in ten *juan* or eight *juan*) and one incomplete edition (in eleven *juan*) in circulation. Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (ca. 1105–1180) recorded an edition in eleven *juan* in his *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 (1151); Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162) recorded another complete edition in eight *juan* in his *Tong zhi* 通志 (1161). The *Zhongxing shumu* 中興書目 noted an incomplete eleven-*juan* edition with the contents of fifteen categories lost. Different new editions again appeared in the bibliographical records of the thirteenth century. Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (1183–ca. 1262) recorded a complete edition in eight *juan* in his *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題, and Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) recorded in his *Yuhai* 玉海 an incomplete eleven-*juan*

武英 Hall edition collated by Qing (1644–1911) dynasty editors of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. The first, transmitted part of the text (the first eighteen categories from “Virtuous Conduct” 德行 to “Worthy Beauties” 賢媛) was based on the incomplete two-juan edition printed in 1523 by a certain Qi Zhiluan 齊之鸞 of Tongcheng 桐城, while the lost latter part of the text was restored by *Siku quanshu* editors by combining and organizing the entries of the *Tang yulin* cited in the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (1408) into a rough chronological order.<sup>27</sup> This effort produced the Wuying Hall edition that became the basis of later Qing dynasty editions and modern editions of the *Tang yulin*.<sup>28</sup> Due to the hectic textual history of loss and restoration, the *Tang yulin* we have today is rather different from its original compilation completed by Wang Dang. The circulation of multiple editions of the *Tang yulin*, along with the reconstruction of lost sections of the text, signifies that the transmission of the minute cultural memory worked against the concept of an original or even a stable textual form that strived to offer it structure. The work of this paper is based on the extensive collation work done by Zhou Xunchu in his modern edition of the *Tang yulin*, focusing on the first eighteen categories whose contents were transmitted, more or less without significant damage.

### 3 The “Minute Cultural Memory” of the Tang

For each of the first eighteen categories with their contents transmitted, this study surveys the rough percentages of their contents that overlap with official histories and the percentages of material that are outside of official historical accounts, to identify the characteristics of the anecdotal past of the Tang (as depicted in the collection) and its relationship with official historical narratives. The following Table 5.1 shows the “distances” between official historical accounts and the contents in the first eighteen categories of the *Tang yulin*, roughly measured by the numbers and percentages of overlaps.

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edition with five categories missing. After the Song dynasty, most of the bibliographical records noted editions in ten *juan* or eight *juan*. The complete edition of the text became lost during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). For details, see *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 810–14; *Zhongxing guange shumù* 中興館閣書目 in Tuotuo 脫脫, etc., *Song shi yiwenzhi guangbian* 宋史藝文志廣編, vol. 2 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), 525.

27 For detailed analysis, see Zhou Xunchu, “*Tang yulin* de banben wenti” 唐語林的版本問題, *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 25–34.

28 For more details of various editions, such as the *Shoushangge congshu* 守山閣叢書 edition, Li Xiling’s 李錫齡 (1794–1844) *Xiyinxuan congshu* 惜陰軒叢書 edition, Zhang Ruoyun’s 張若雲 (fl. ca. 1805) *Mohai jinhu* 墨海金壺 edition, and others, see *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 813–22.

TABLE 5.1 Content overlap with official histories in the first eighteen categories

<i>Tang yulin</i> categories	Total number of anecdotes	Column A: number and percentage of anecdotes that do not appear in official histories	Column B: number and percentage of anecdotes that appear in or overlap with official historical writing
“Dexing” 德行 (Virtuous Conduct)	43	29 (~67%)	14 (~33%)
“Yanyu” 言語 (Speech and Conversation)	41	20 (~50%)	21 (~50%)
“Zhengshi” 政事 (Administrative Affairs)	92	56 (~61%)	36 (~39%)
“Wenxue” 文學 (Literature and Scholarship)	108	98 (~91%)	10 (~9%)
“Fangzheng” 方正 (The Upright and the Proper)	65	30 (~46%)	35 (~54%)
“Yaliang” 雅量 (Cultivated Tolerance)	22	15 (~68%)	7 (~32%)
“Shijian” 識鑒 (Insight and Judgment)	37	24 (~65%)	13 (~35%)
“Shangyu” 賞譽 (Appreciation and Praise)	24	20 (~83%)	4 (~17%)
“Pinzao” 品藻 (Grading Excellence)	13	8 (~62%)	5 (~38%)
“Guizhen” 規箴 (Admonitions and Warnings)	9	5 (~56%)	4 (~44%)
“Suhui” 夙慧 (Precocious Intelligence)	21	16 (~76%)	5 (~24%)
“Haoshuang” 豪爽 (Virility and Boldness)	23	21 (~91%)	2 (~9%)
“Rongzhi” 容止 (Appearance and Manner)	11	7 (~64%)	4 (~36%)
“Zixin” 自新 (Self-renewal)	6	5 (~83%)	1 (~17%)
“Qixian” 企羨 (Admiration and Emulation)	51	46 (~90%)	5 (~10%)
“Shangshi” 傷逝 (Grieving for the Departed)	10	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
“Qiyi” 棲逸 (Solitude and Disengagement)	13	13 (100%)	0 (0%)
“Xianyuan” 賢媛 (Worthy Beauties)	22	14 (~64%)	8 (~36%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>435 (~71%)</b>	<b>176 (~29%)</b>

Of those anecdotes that are also found in the official histories (Column B), some appear as precisely the same accounts with only minor textual variations; some appear as rewritings of the same accounts; some appear as different, but still recognizably the same accounts; and some only partly appear in or overlap to different degrees with accounts in the histories. Although these *Tang yulin* anecdotes might have different sources than the corresponding accounts in the official histories, their core content does not diverge wildly from the official accounts. For those anecdotes counted as not appearing in the histories (Column A), a small number appear to contradict the historical records that address the same incidents. (Some of these, for example, were quoted by Sima Guang in his “Kaoyi” 考異 comments on the *Zizhi tongjian*.) Therefore, these anecdotes’ contents are considered to be quite “far” from, or outside of, what was taken as official history. Other than the “The Upright and the Proper” category, all the rest of the eighteen categories have at least 50% of their contents outside of the official histories, with four categories having percentages above 90%.<sup>29</sup> On average, over 70% of the material included in the first eighteen categories was not included in the official histories. Still, almost 30% of the contents overlap with official historical writings, which is still a considerably high rate. The rest of this article will present a series of translated anecdotes from representative categories to illustrate the features of the “minute cultural memory” of the Tang in this collection.

### 3.1 “Virtuous Conduct”

The “Virtuous Conduct” category contains 43 anecdotes with 67% of the material outside of official histories about the Tang. Its content focuses on moral self-cultivation, especially one’s behavior toward family members, clan relatives, and, sometimes, complete strangers. Stories include regulating self and family against material luxury, refraining from self-indulgence, practicing fraternal love and filial piety, carrying out charitable and honorable deeds for strangers without taking reward, and acting charitably and virtuously toward family members and within one’s clan. The exemplary individuals in this category mostly include emperors and important ministers of the Tang dynasty. For example, anecdote no. 26 in this category reads:

Emperor Xuānzong’s (r. 846–859) nature was friendly and affectionate. [He was] amiable and harmonious in relationship with his brothers. In the first year of the Dazhong reign (847–860), he had the Yonghe Palace

29 “Wenxue” 文學 (Literature and Scholarship), “Haoshuang” 豪爽 (Virility and Boldness), “Qixian” 企羨 (Admiration and Emulation), “Qiyi” 棲逸 (Solitude and Disengagement).

constructed within the Sixteen Residences,<sup>30</sup> and several times favored [the palace] with his visits. [Whether] the various princes were [his] younger or older [brothers], he allowed all to be seated [with him]. He would put on music and the one hundred kinds of entertainment [all day long, only] stopping at dusk. If any of the princes had an illness,<sup>31</sup> he would dismiss the entertainment and music, go to his bedchamber, lean over [the bed] and tend to him in person with an expression of concern.<sup>32</sup>

宣宗天資友愛，敦睦兄弟。大中元年，作雍和殿於十六宅，數臨幸，諸王無少長，悉預坐。樂陳百戲，抵暮而罷。諸王或有疾，斥去戲樂，即其臥內，躬自撫之，憂形於色。<sup>33</sup>

The *Tang yulin* account appears to be a combination of different texts, and only a different, very brief version of the construction of Yonghe Palace as an illustration of Emperor Xuānzong's affection toward his brothers is found in the late-Tang collection *Dongguan zouji* 東觀奏記.<sup>34</sup> Even though this is an example illustrating the fraternal virtue of a Tang emperor, it is nonetheless not found in official histories about the Tang.

Anecdote no. 24 offers an example of an anecdote partially finding its way into the official histories:

Councilor Lu Sui was orphaned when he was young. His mother asked him, "Do you remember your father[’s face]?" He said, "I do not." His mother said, "[His face] looked exactly like yours." [Hearing this, Lu] Sui wailed [so sadly] that he fell unconscious for quite a while; afterwards, for the rest of his life, he would never again face a mirror. Li [Deyu], the Duke

30 The Sixteen Residences were built during the latter half of the Tang dynasty as the residence compound where all imperial brothers and princes lived together. Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840–846) and Emperor Xuānzong 宣宗 (r. 846–859) both lived there before they were enthroned. During the times of Emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888–904), as a result of power struggles with the imperial brothers and princes, Han Jian 韓建 (855–912) surrounded the Sixteen Residences and wiped out all the imperial brothers and princes, the residence compound was then left in dilapidation.

31 The Qi Zhiluan 齊之鸞 edition and the *Lidai xiaoshi* 歷代小史 edition of the *Tang yulin* read "he would favor [him] with a visit right away" 以時臨幸 after this. See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.18.

32 The Qi Zhiluan edition and the *Lidai xiaoshi* edition do not have the sentence "with an expression of concern" 憂形於色. See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.18.

33 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.17–18.

34 *Ibid.*, 1.18.

of Wei, so admired the purity and integrity of his character and conduct that he married his daughter into the Lu family to form kinship ties.

路相隨幼孤。其母問：「汝識汝父否？」曰：「不識。」母曰：「正如汝面。」隨號絕久之，終身不照鏡。李衛公慕其淳素篤行，結為親家，以女適路氏。<sup>35</sup>

Both the *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Xin Tang shu* briefly mention Lu Sui not facing a mirror ever again upon hearing his mother's words as an illustration of his high reputation of filial piety.<sup>36</sup> But Li Deyu making marriage ties with Lu Sui's family is not noted in Lu Sui's official biographies. Also omitted from the official histories are the voices of Lu Sui and his mother. The key line, "[His face] looked exactly like yours" 正如汝面, that triggers strong emotion and resolution in Lu's act of filial piety, fades into silence in official historical writings.

In depicting the anecdotal past of the Tang in terms of virtuous conduct, this Song dynasty collection took a perspective that distinctively focused on filial piety, fraternal relations, cultivating the self and regulating one's family, and behaving with frugality, sympathy, and charity. Many of these accounts, whether they overlap with official historical records or not, repeat the same principles and virtues with different people and happenings fitting into very similar narrative frameworks, or even narrative templates. To some extent, the factual significance of these anecdotal accounts gave way to their cultural value, and as a whole, they represented an exemplary image of the virtues of Tang rulers and ministers, as constructed from this Song dynasty compiler's perspective. Whether these accounts were recognized as official historical material or not, they conveyed a cultural impression of the Tang in terms of virtuous conduct, mediated by the preferences of the Song time.

### 3.2 "Speech and Conversation"

The "Speech and Conversation" category contains 41 anecdotes; around 50% of the material overlaps with official historical accounts. This is the second-highest percentage among all eighteen categories, with the "The Upright and the Proper" category holding the highest overlap percentage of 54%. This could indicate that these accounts, originating from gossip and transmitted orally, contributed significantly to both official and unofficial records. It would suggest that these two types of records, compiled via very different channels, also shared materials from common origins.

35 Ibid., 1.16–17.

36 See Lu Sui's official biography on *Jiu Tang shu*, 159.4191; *Xin Tang shu*, 142.4677.

Anecdotes in this category that overlap with historical writings emphasize the effects of well-spoken words, especially those from ministers that influenced the decisions of their rulers. These include advice on the rulers' activities such as hunting, inspection tours, entertainment, filial piety, construction projects, and especially on the relationship between ruler and minister. They record conversations where rulers appreciated the merit of their ministers and regarded them highly, recognizing their indispensable place in assisting rulers to become sagely emperors. These stories often end with short conclusions stating that rulers accepted the ministers' advice or remonstrations, and that the ministers were promoted, awarded, or praised. Phrases such as "[the emperor] deemed it[the advice] good" 善之, "deemed it excellent" 嘉之, "accepted his words" 納其言, "accepted it" 納之, "followed it" 從之, and "followed his words" 從其言 are frequently used to highlight rulers' approval. The following anecdote may serve as an example:

During Emperor Gaozong's reign, the earth quaked in Jinzhou, the sound rumbling continuously for ten days. Gaozong asked Zhang Xingcheng about it and Xingcheng replied, "Your Majesty was originally enfeoffed as [the Prince of] Jin. Now the earth quaked in Jinzhou. This omen must signify something, how else could [Heaven] have made this happen! That which is called the earth belongs to the *yin* element. It is fitting for the earth to remain secure and motionless, but recently it has been moving frequently. Since ancient times, [whenever] calamities arise within the Inner Palace and disasters originate among relatives of the royal lineage, the reasons are not formed in one day. One must fear that various princes and princesses might repeatedly seek your audience, wait for their chance, and take advantage of any opportune moment [to make a move]. Moreover, one should also fear that [powerful and favored] women might interfere with your decisions and take charge of state affairs, or that your ministers and servants might conspire secretly. Your Majesty should contemplate and reflect deeply [upon these possibilities] and cultivate your virtue in order to forestall what has not yet materialized." Gaozong took [his advice] to heart.

高宗朝，晉州地震，雄雄有聲，經旬不止。高宗以問張行成，行成對曰：「陛下本封於晉，今晉州地震，不有徵應，豈使然哉！夫地，陰也，宜安靜而乃屢動。自古禍生宮掖，釁起宗親者，非一朝一夕，或恐諸王、公主謁見頻煩，乘間伺隙；復恐女謁用事，臣下陰謀。陛下宜深思慮，兼修德，以杜未萌。」高宗深納之。<sup>37</sup>

37 See anecdote no. 56 in *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 32–33.

This story was originally recorded in the Tang anecdote collection *Da Tang xinyu* 大唐新語. Not only is this account found in the official biographies of Zhang Xingcheng in both the *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Xin Tang shu*, but Zhang's words of advice here is a similar, though slightly shortened, version of the one recorded in the official histories.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these, the collection contains many more anecdotes that do not explicitly praise the ministerial advice, but instead demonstrate through the plot and meaning of their stories rulers' positive responses to their ministers' influence. This feature is significant enough to indicate that literati writers of late Tang, when recording these anecdotes, hoped to present an image of ideal ruler-minister relationship where rulers listened to and readily accepted advice and remonstrations.<sup>39</sup> While the *Jiu Tang shu* account does not include "Gaozong took [his advice] to heart" 高宗深納之, the later *Xin Tang shu* notes "the Sovereign approved this [advice] and sent an edict to order officials of ranks five and above to thoroughly discuss the gains and losses" 帝然之，詔五品以上極言得失.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps this is an illustration of how the cultural perspective and value orientation attached to such anecdotes gradually made their way into later official histories.

The following example is a case where a whole anecdote left out by an earlier official history was later accepted into a new compilation of official Tang history:

Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649) stopped under a tree and rather admired it. Yuwen Shiji (d. 642) was in the company [of the emperor] and also praised it, compliments overflowing from his lips. With a severe countenance, the emperor said, "Wei Zheng (580–643) often advised me to keep my distance from the sycophant and I couldn't figure out who the sycophant might be. In my thoughts, I suspected you but it was not clear. Only now do I see it is indeed so." Kowtowing, [Yuwen] Shiji explained, "The

38 See Zhang's official biographies on *Jiu Tang shu*, 78.2705 and *Xin Tang shu*, 104.4013.

39 For studies on ruler-minister interaction and the ideal constructions of such relationship, see Howard J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974); Denis Twitchett, "How to Be An Emperor: T'ang T'ai-Tsung's Vision of His Role," *Asia Major* 9 (1996): 1–102; Xiao-bin Ji, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005); Ari Daniel Levine, *Divided by a Common Language: Factional Conflict in Late Northern Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 71–128, 317–42, among many others.

40 *Jiu Tang shu*, 78.2705; *Xin Tang shu*, 104.4013.

officials of the Southern Offices<sup>41</sup> object [to you] face-to-face and argue [with you] in court. Your Majesty is often unable to raise your head. Today your servant is fortunate to be among your attendants, and if I don't yield and agree the least bit, then even though Your Majesty is revered as the Son of Heaven, what is the fun of it?" [The emperor's] thought was again dispelled.

太宗止一樹下，頗嘉之，宇文士及從而頌美之，不容於口。帝正色曰：「魏徵常勸我遠佞人，我不悟佞人為誰，意疑汝而未明也，今乃果然。」士及叩頭謝曰：「南衙群官面折廷爭，陛下常不能舉首。今臣幸在左右，若不少順從，陛下雖貴為天子，亦何聊乎？」意復解。<sup>42</sup>

This story of a clever speech, worth noting for its ability to relieve the ruler's suspicion, is originally found in the *Sui Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話 and the *Da Tang xinyu*, both collections of anecdotes compiled during the Tang times. The account was not included in the *Jiu Tang shu*'s official biography of Yuwen Shiji, but it was picked up by the *Xin Tang shu* compiled a little over a century later.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps as time went by, the anecdotal memories of the past, and the value attachments they brought, gradually gained cultural significance and became accepted into later official histories.

Many of the accounts in this category overlap with the content of the *Tang huiyao*, the *Zizhi tongjian*, and especially the biographies of ministers in the two official Tang histories. While many official biographies recorded lengthy remonstrations, memorials, and dialogues, the anecdotes in the *Tang yulin* and its source books often omitted the details. In some cases (such as nos. 65, 66), Wang Dang even further deleted explanatory details from his source texts. Therefore, this aspect of the anecdotal image of the Tang focuses more on its cultural significance than on its historical details and textual veracity when compared to representations in the official histories. It depicts an ideal image of the literati scholar-official's relationship with their rulers in which their value and merit were fully appreciated. The positive effects of their advice to

41 *Nanya* 南衙 was an unofficial reference to the main agencies of the central government, which were headquartered in the southern sector of the imperial palace grounds, as opposed to the *Beisi* 北司 (the Northern Offices) which was an unofficial reference to the Palace Domestic Service located in the northern section of the palace grounds. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 342, 373.

42 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.27.

43 *Jiu Tang shu*, 63.2409–11; *Xin Tang shu*, 100.3935–36.

their rulers were welcomed and passed down in the cultural memory of the Tang while cumbersome details were filtered out.

Still, some speeches and comments remain left outside of official historical narratives. These include light-hearted remarks, gossip, widely-circulated comments that became popular or fashionable, as well as smart but trivial strategies and responses in conversations. Anecdote no. 80 in this category serves as an example:

Li Zhifang (*jinshi*, 785) used to rank fruits as if they were successful examination candidates. He took the green plum as the top, the ridged pear as second place, the cherry as third, the tangerine as fourth and the Surinam cherry as fifth. Someone recommended the lychee and he said, “[It should be] the first of the ranked candidates.” [Someone] again asked, “What do you do with the chestnut?” He said, “It is most certainly of solid material, should not be ranked beyond the eighth or ninth.” Previously, Fan Ye (398–445) appraised his contemporaries according to various kinds of incense and Hou Weixu (d. 696) wrote *Baiguan bencao* (The Materia Medica of the Hundred Officials)—both were this kind of thing.

李直方嘗第果實，若貢士者。以綠李為首，楞梨為二，櫻桃為三，柑為四。蒲桃為五。或薦荔枝，曰：「寄舉之首。」又問：「栗如之何？」曰：「最有實事，不出八九。」始范曄以諸香品時輩，侯味虛撰百官本草，皆此類也。<sup>44</sup>

This account was originally recorded by the *Guoshi bu* 國史補, there it had the title “Ranking Presented Fruit-Scholars” 第果實進士. It is not found in any official histories of the Tang. However, the story supports the significance of its own content by tracing similar ranking practices through history. Here Li Zhifang was a descendant of the Tang ruling house and an official at Emperor Dezong’s 德宗 (r. 779–805) court, while Hou Weixu was a court official of the Tang during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 683–705), and Fan Ye an official of the Song 宋 court during the Southern Dynasties 南朝 (420–589). Thus, the anecdote itself makes sure to situate Li Zhifang’s practice in a long-lasting tradition with its own cultural significance and memories.

44 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.48.

### 3.3 “Administrative Affairs”

The “Administrative Affairs” category contains a total of 92 anecdotes of which 61% are outside of official historical records. Those that overlap with accounts in official histories mostly tell stories related to emperors and court affairs, while those that do not overlap with official histories tend to feature less significant officials, regional and local affairs, and deal with less weighty matters such as trading and market, shamanic practices (e.g., no. 121), Buddhist and Daoist tricks (e.g., nos. 94, 114, 123, 124), etc. Therefore, there was still a line, no matter how vague and shifting, between major historical narratives and the “minor discourses” with regard to their use of anecdotal material. Many of the anecdotal accounts in this category tend to highlight the unusual or strange nature of these happenings and their solutions. Some even romanticize these accounts with dramatic conclusions or comments at the end. The exaggerated, sensational nature of these anecdotes, and their apparent discrepancies with verifiable facts, betray their origins in gossip and rumor rather than responsible records of administrative affairs as the title of the category might suggest. Anecdote no. 130 in this category serves as an example:

The Metropolitan Governor [of the capital] lived at his private residence and only went to the Governor’s Office on odd days, and on even days he went to the office in charge of the delivery of government documents. When Cui Ying served as the Metropolitan Governor, some prisoners in custody escaped. For the first time, [the Sovereign] ordered the Government Residence for the Metropolitan Governor to be constructed and [decreed that] the Metropolitan Governor shall not leave the Office. Because both Cui Han and Cui Ying failed their official duties, Emperor Xuānzong summoned Wei Ao the Hanlin Academician for an audience, appointed him to the position, and ordered him to assume his post immediately. The Sovereign bestowed upon him twenty thousand strings of cash from [the Ministry of] Revenue and ordered him to construct the Government Residence at the Governor’s Office.

京兆尹在私第，但奇日入府，偶日入遞院。崔郢爲京兆尹，囚徒逸獄，始命造京兆尹廨宅，京兆尹不得離府。宣宗以崔罕、郢併敗官，面召翰林學士韋澳授之，便令赴任。上賜度支錢二萬貫，令造府宅。……<sup>45</sup>

45 Ibid., 1.83.

This account was originally recorded in the *Dongguan zouji*, and also found in the *Zhenling yishi* 貞陵遺事, but not in the two official Tang histories. Sima Guang's "Kaoyi" points out that the accounts in both these Tang anecdote collections were mistaken because, according to the collection of edicts from the Dazhong reign era, Cui Han was replaced by Wei Ao, and then Wei Ao was replaced by Cui Ying in the post of the Metropolitan Governor of the capital.<sup>46</sup> Thus Sima Guang refuted the validity of these anecdotal accounts and his *Zizhi tongjian* narrative followed the records from the *Veritable Records* compiled by official historical institutions of Tang court.<sup>47</sup> Here, the anecdotal memories of Tang's past events certainly lacked historical veracity, but rather sought to inflate the severity of the situation by claiming that the cause of this policy change was the failure of two major officials to fulfill their duties. Anecdote no. 114 offers another example of such embellished memories of the past:

During the Baoli reign (825–827), it was said that Bozhou produced holy water, [those who] took it were cured of their chronic illnesses, without a single fail. From Luo[yang] to the several dozens of commandaries west of the Yangtze River, people strove to donate clothes—[that were later] traded for money—in order to drink [the water] there.<sup>48</sup> [Those who had the water] obtained profits in thousands and tens of thousands of cash, and the people defrauded one another. Li Deyu was [serving] in the Zhexi region. He ordered people to gather at a big market, where he had a cooking pot set up and the water [from Bozhou] brought to fill it. Then he designated officials<sup>49</sup> to get five *jin* of pork to be boiled [in the pot], saying [to the people], "If this is [indeed] holy water, the meat should stay as it is." In a short while [the meat] became thoroughly cooked. From this time on, people's minds gradually calmed down and those [who practiced] evil [crafts] soon were found out.

46 *Zizhi tongjian*, 249.8059.

47 Ibid.

48 The *Da Tang zhuanzai* 大唐傳載 reads "money, goods, and clothes" 金貨衣服, which Zhou Xunchu takes as the correct text. According to Zhou, the Qi Zhiluan edition and the *Lidai xiaoshi* edition of the *Tang yulin* reads "people strove to donate money and send servants to go and fetch water in order to drink there" 人爭施金貨人使往汲以飲焉. See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.71.

49 Instead of "designated officials" (*shesi* 設司), the *Da Tang zhuanzai* reads "from the Market Administrator's Office" (*yu shisi* 於市司), which Zhou deems correct. See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.72.

寶曆中，亳州云出聖水，服之愈宿疾，亦無一差者。自洛已來及江西數十郡，人爭施金貸之衣服以飲焉，獲利千萬，人轉相惑。李德裕在浙西，命于大市集人，置釜取其水，設司取豬肉五斤煮，云：「若聖水也，肉當如故。」逡巡熟爛。自此人心稍定，妖者尋而敗露。<sup>50</sup>

This entry was originally from the *Da Tang zhuanzai* 大唐傳載. The official biography of Li Deyu in the *Jiu Tang shu* does recount this happening in Bozhou, where local water was claimed to be holy and capable of healing diseases. What Li Deyu did was to memorialize the throne, refute the claim, and present the harms of supernatural beliefs. In his memorial, he proposed that the court should order Lihu Chu 令狐楚, the Surveillance Commissioner in charge of the region, to stop that water (possibly a spring). The court thus ordered.<sup>51</sup> His biography in the *Xin Tang shu* identifies the origin of such delusion by noting “at the time, the Buddhist temples at Bozhou concocted a claim that the water there could cure illnesses and called it ‘Holy Water’” 時亳州浮屠詭言水可愈疾，號曰聖水，and in addition to shortening the quoted text from Li Deyu’s memorial, adds that Li Deyu sent stern orders to arrest all those who promoted such belief and sold the so-called holy water.<sup>52</sup> The anecdote here, however, sets up a vivid scene where Li Deyu ordered a demonstrative experiment to be performed in the market right in front of the eyes of common people in order to reveal the folly of such delusional claims. Indeed, a story about refuting delusion this way certainly makes a more sensational, and thus long-lasting memory than those recorded in historical records.

### 3.4 “Literature and Scholarship”

This category, with a total of 108 anecdotes, focuses on miscellaneous information and remarks related to literary composition and scholarship. Understandably, due to its subject matter, 91% of this category’s content lies outside of official historical narratives. These accounts often overlap with such works as the *Shihua zonggui* 詩話總龜, the *Tang shi jishi* 唐詩紀事, the *Liu gong jiahua lu* 劉公嘉話錄, and other minor works of *shihua* 詩話. They record terms, phrases, calendar rules, choices of diction, couplets of poetry, literary and scholarly works, stories about historical sites, how people composed poetry, comments on and lists of notable writers, learned monks (nos. 239, 272), as well as random examination rules (e.g., nos. 278, 279). They served the function of “remarks on poetry” (*shihua* 詩話) in conversations among literati

<sup>50</sup> *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 1.71–72.

<sup>51</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, 174.4516.

<sup>52</sup> *Xin Tang shu*, 180.5330.

scholars. These two categories with the rather serious titles, “Administrative Affairs” and “Literature and Scholarship,” depict two important aspects of Tang literati scholar’s life in a leisurely manner of remembrance. These anecdotal memories of Tang often were results of casual conversations and, after being circulated and transmitted in writing, could easily be brought back again into conversations by people of later times or of different places.

Maybe an anecdote (no. 227) about turnips in the “Literature and Scholarship” category can illustrate the discussion here:

At the places where Zhuge Liang’s [troops] stopped, he ordered the soldiers to grow turnips only. Why? [Wei Xuan] said,<sup>53</sup> “To peel the [turnips’] skin and eat it raw,<sup>54</sup> this is one [reason]; to boil the broad-leaved [turnip] greens for food,<sup>55</sup> this is the second [reason]; if [the troops] stayed there long the turnips would then grow and spread with time, this is the third [reason]; it would not be regretful if they left them behind, this is the fourth [reason]; it would be easy [for the troops] to find and gather them when they returned, this is the fifth [reason]; in the winter, there were [turnip] roots they could dig out and eat, this is the sixth [reason]. Compared with the various kinds of other vegetables, the advantages [of turnips] are extensive.”<sup>56</sup> Now the people of the three Shu regions call the turnip “Zhuge [Liang’s] Vegetable.” So do [the people of] Jiangling.

諸葛亮所止，令兵士獨種蔓菁者，何也？曰：取其甲生啖，一也；葉舒者煮食，二也；久居則隨以滋長，三也；棄去不惜，四也；回則易尋而採之，五也；冬有根可斲食，六也。比諸蔬屬，其利博哉！三蜀之人今呼蔓菁爲諸葛菜，江陵亦然。<sup>57</sup>

53 The *Liu gong jiahua lu* 劉公嘉話錄 attributes the question to Liu Yuxi and the answer to Wei Xuan. See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2.144.

54 The *Liu gong jiahua lu* reads “Could it not be that they took those [turnips] with their skin freshly peeled off and ate them raw” 莫不是取其纔出甲者生啖。 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2.144.

55 The original text in the *Liu gong jiahua lu* reads “when the leaves spread out, they could be boiled for food” 葉舒可煮食。 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2.144.

56 The text quoted in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 reads, “Are not its advantages extensive?” 其利不亦博哉 which is followed by an extra line reading “Liu Yuxi said, ‘True’ 劉禹錫曰信矣。 Zhou Xunchu comments that the extra line should be added to the text accordingly. The original text in the *Liu gong jiahua lu* and the quoted account in the *Shuo fu* 說郛 read similarly to the account, simply without giving the name “Liu Yuxi” 劉禹錫。 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2.144.

57 See *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2.143–44.

There is nothing wrong with growing turnips, especially from the perspective of the anecdote above. But it is slightly baffling when one encounters this anecdote among the many accounts in the category of literature and scholarship that quote lines of poetry and discuss allusions to classical texts. This entry is identified as being taken from the *Liu gong jiahua lu* where the original text includes the line “the revered gentleman said” 公曰 at the beginning and the line “[Wei] Xuan said” 絢曰 before the list of advantages of growing turnips.<sup>58</sup> It appears to be a short excerpt from a conversation between Liu Yuxi and Wei Xuan. Moreover, in the “Literature and Scholarship” category, the two anecdotes (nos. 225 and 226) before the turnips are also about Zhuge Liang.<sup>59</sup> Anecdote no. 225 is Liu Yuxi’s comment on Zhuge Liang’s “Diagram of the Eight Battle Formations” 八陣圖 that ends with a quotation of Huan Wen’s 桓溫 (312–373) poem. It does have recognizable connections to the topic of the category—literature and scholarship. Anecdote no. 226, an account about someone digging up some of Zhuge Liang’s left-behind arrows buried in the ground, however, seems to have none. After the discussion on turnips in anecdote no. 227, entry no. 228 is an account about the peony’s nature as a medicinal herb and how one line of Wei Xuan’s poem properly reflects such nature.<sup>60</sup>

The short digression from the topic of literature and scholarship may have resulted from the fluid nature of both leisurely conversations and the workings of memory. Wei Xuan recorded these anecdotes in writing for the compilation of the *Liu gong jiahua lu* in 856, some twenty years or so after he heard them during the casual conversations in Liu Yuxi’s literary circle at Liu’s regional office. When Wei Xuan sat down to record these accounts from memory, the three anecdotes about Zhuge Liang probably came to his mind together by rule of free memory association, which is the way memory works when retrieving information from a long time ago. It is also possible that at the time when Liu Yuxi and his friends and students had their literary discussions, Liu commented on the Diagram of the Eight Battle Formations and Huan Wen’s poetry was quoted. The topic then triggered someone’s—perhaps also Liu’s—memory of the buried arrows. The person could have simply jumped in saying, “You know what? About Zhuge Liang, I just heard the other day that someone found his left-behind arrows. . . .” and the anecdote about the arrows was then thrown in the discussion. Subsequently the discussion might have wandered off topic, from poetry to various anecdotal memories related to Zhuge Liang and his troops, and at some point, the advantages of growing turnips turned up.

58 Ibid., 2.144.

59 Ibid., 2.141–43.

60 Ibid., 2.144.

According to Zhou Xunchu's notes, the anecdotes about the Diagram of the Eight Battle Formations (no. 225) and the buried arrows (no. 226) are combined as one entry in the transmitted Qi Zhiluan edition of the *Tang yulin*. Though not found in the extant transmitted edition of the *Liu gong jiahua lu*, anecdote no. 225 is quoted and identified to be from the collection by the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Tang Lan 唐蘭 (1901–1979) restored both no. 225 and no. 226 to his collated edition of the *Liu gong jiahua lu* based on the *Tang yulin* text.<sup>62</sup> It is likely that in the original *Liu gong jiahua lu* Wei Xuan initially recorded these two entries next to each other as well. The anecdote (no. 227) about the turnips is found in the extant transmitted (partially restored) edition of the *Liu gong jiahua lu*; whether it immediately follows the two restored entries (no. 225 and no. 226) in the original edition of the text is unknown. But based on its position immediately following those two accounts in the *Tang yulin*, it is reasonable to view it as one of a series of anecdotes that, based on free memory association, turned up together in the conversations between Liu Yuxi and his students or in Wei Xuan's memory when he tried to record conversations from the past. The workings of memory and the original conversational context embedded a kind of natural logic of association in these three anecdotes that allowed them to be presented together as a set. They were put in the same category in the *Tang yulin* even though the two accounts about arrows and turnips (no. 226, no. 227) were off the topic of literary and scholarly discussions. There is also the possibility that no. 227 was not in a series of anecdotes together with no. 225 and no. 226 in the original *Liu gong jiahua lu*. In this case, its position right after those two accounts in the "Literature and Scholarship" category would indicate that Wang Dang explicitly put an account about turnips in the category of literature and scholarship together with the other two accounts because of their shared focus on Zhuge Liang and their shared conversational context and information source within Liu Yuxi's circles. Miscellanies and brush jottings (*biji* 筆記) can work this way. This example reveals an explicit case of the rule of association at work in Wang Dang's collecting and organizing anecdotal memories of the past. Interestingly, it went against his own categorizing system, which makes an even stronger case that the workings of memory and the leisurely oral culture where these anecdotes originated determined the minute cultural memory's resistance to systematic categorization.

61 Ibid., 2.142.

62 Ibid., 2.143.

### 3.5 From “The Upright and the Proper” to “Worthy Beauties”

The first four categories, “Virtuous Conduct,” “Speech and Conversation,” “Administrative Affairs,” and “Literature and Scholarship,” originated from the “four divisions of the Confucian School” 孔門四科 and, to some extent, carried with them a distinct undertone of Confucian values. As shown in the *Lun yu*, it was Confucius who first used these four categories to evaluate the abilities of his disciples.<sup>63</sup> As the earliest categories for character evaluation, they were used in the *Shishuo xinyu* as the first four of a series of thirty-six categories on human characteristics, and subsequently, became part of the organization scheme of the many later works within the genre that followed the structure of the *Shishuo xinyu*. Thus, over the time, the categories used again and again themselves became symbols that contributed to the establishment of this very tradition. During this process, these categories, as symbols, also gained rich layers of cultural and intellectual connotations during the development and transformation of the tradition.

In the case of the *Tang yulin*, the following series of categories from “The Upright and the Proper” to “Worthy Beauties” offers anecdotal memories of Tang scholar officials, of members of the royal family and distinguished clans, as well as their female family members through a set of lenses of character evaluation. Overlapping contents with official historical records range from 0% in the “Solitude and Disengagement” category to around 54% in the “The Upright and the Proper” category.

The “Solitude and Disengagement” category gathers miscellaneous accounts about deeds and names that, understandably, would not usually be considered for inclusion in official histories. Some list the names of monks and Daoist adepts who enjoyed wide reputation among people of the time; some recount the deeds of reputable individuals who did not or refused to serve offices and those who turned away from official career. For example:

Li Zhan, the son of Li Han, was capable in literature and scholarship; his bearing and appearance were as pure as that of men in ancient times. He would not associate with people who were not of his quality, despite their wealth or status. He was promoted multiple times at court, reaching the position of Director of the Bureau of Honors [in the Ministry of Personnel]. He then retired to live at Mount Mao. The court summoned him and appointed him Supervising Secretary but he refused. Later, when

63 See *Lun yu*, 11.3, in James Legge (1815–1897), trans. *The Confucian Analects*, in *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), 1: 237–38.

the two capitals fell to the rebels, he was able to avoid all the calamities caused [by holding office].

李瞻，漢之子，有文學，氣貌淳古。非其人，雖富貴不交也。累遷司封郎中。歸茅山，徵拜給事中，不就。後兩京亂，竟不罹其禍。<sup>64</sup>

The origin of this account is unknown. Li Zhan did not have a biography in the official histories of the Tang, but his character was appreciated in the anecdotal memories of the past and his choice of renouncing public service was represented as an unexpected advantage in the face of political and military turmoil.

While “Solitude and Disengagement” would not be the desired character of a court minister, “the Upright and the Proper” would certainly be approved by official historiography. Therefore, it is not surprising that 54% of the stories in the “The Upright and the Proper” category find parallel or overlapping accounts in the official histories, constituting the highest percentage of overlaps across all categories in the *Tang yulin*. After all, this was a highly cherished characteristic that was frequently highlighted in the biographies of those worthy of inclusion in official histories. Here, however, is an example to illustrate the type of stories, though about upright and proper ministers, not included in the official Tang histories:

Emperor Taizong obtained an extraordinarily handsome sparrow hawk and, hidden from public view, he allowed it to perch on his own arm. When he caught sight of His Excellency Wei [Zheng], he then hid the hawk in his bosom. His Excellency knew this and went forth to mention a few things. Accordingly, he talked about the diversions and amusements of emperors and kings from antiquity on and subtly used them as an indirect admonition. The Sovereign pitied the sparrow hawk, afraid that it would die, but he also had always greatly feared [Wei] Zheng, [so] he tried to bring an end to his lecture. [Despite his effort, Wei] Zheng spoke even longer, and the sparrow hawk eventually died in [the emperor's] bosom.

太宗得鷓子俊異，私自臂之，望見魏公，乃藏於懷。公知之，遂前白事，因話自古帝王逸豫，微以為諷。上惜鷓子恐死，而又素嚴憚微，欲盡其言。徵語愈久，鷓竟死懷中。<sup>65</sup>

64 See anecdote no. 581, *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 4.398.

65 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 3.217.

This account was originally recorded in the *Sui Tang jiahua*. Though remonstrating against wonton diversions unfit for a ruler was often deemed courageous and applauded in official historical narratives, this account was nonetheless left out of the two official Tang histories. Only in the late eleventh century did it make its way into the *Zizhi tongjian*.<sup>66</sup>

Within these different categories, many anecdotes depict the desirable qualities, enviable aspects, and even random luck of Tang figures that were recognized, if not by official historiography, then by popular opinion of the time, and which were therefore passed down in the minute cultural memory about the Tang. In addition to quoted comments, evaluations, comparisons, and contrasts that would highlight these characteristics, a good number of these accounts indicate appreciation or recognition by public opinion. For example, several accounts in the “The Upright and the Proper” category end with “people of the time commended [this] among them” 時人稱焉 (e.g., nos. 304, 314, 324) after telling stories of Tang figures’ upright behavior. This feature is especially salient in the “Admiration and Emulation” category, which contains a total of 51 anecdotes with 90% of its content outside of the official histories. Accounts in “Admiration and Emulation” are about how people of the time admired those who passed the examinations, those with outstanding talents and high status, those of fame and popularity, and those from distinguished clans. Such admiration often took the form of names and titles recognized by public appreciation and listed with comments starting with “people of the time held the opinion that ...” 時人以為, “(people of) the time called it/this/the person(s) ...” 時(人)謂之, “(people of) the time referred to it/this/these as ...” 時(人)稱, “people of the time talked about ...” 時人語, “people said that ...” 人曰, “people commented that ...” or “people called it/this/these ...” 人謂, “at that time it was called/entitled/referred to as ...” 時謂/時稱/時號, “at that time it/this/these was/were given the title/name ...” 當時號為, “there were talks that ...” 語曰, “[people of] the time talked about it and said ...” 時為語曰, and even more specific ones such as “there were talks during the Yuanhe reign era that ...” 元和中語曰, etc. These accounts indicate how popular memories of Tang figures’ reputation and fame circulated. Indeed, many of these cases involve popular sayings, nicknames, and idioms of the time shared by the anonymous public—the so called “people of the time” 時人—and these widely-circulated terms often became labels, or symbols, that carried with them cultural significance and valuations. For example, from category “Grading Excellence” 品藻 anecdote no. 442 reads:

66 *Zizhi tongjian*, 193.6059.

The four brothers of the Mu clan: [Mu] Zan, [Mu] Shang, [Mu] Zhi and [Mu] Yuan. People of the time said that Zan, worldly but with style, was “cheese;” Zhi, beautiful and highly cultured, was “butter;” Yuan was “the finest cream,” meaning refined and [only] used sparingly; and Shang was the “fermented bean curd,” meaning most common and rustic.

穆氏兄弟四人：贊、賞、質、員。時人謂：贊俗而有格，為「酪」；質美而多文，為「酥」；員為「醍醐」，言粹而少用；賞為「乳腐」，言最為凡固也。<sup>67</sup>

This entry is originally found in the *Guoshi bu* with the title “Four Brothers of the Mu Clan” 穆氏四子 and the later *Shuo fu* 說郭 offers the title “[Distinguishing the] Qualities of Brothers” 兄弟優劣.<sup>68</sup> Interesting enough, the lively and vivid rankings, full of flavors from the populace’s everyday life, were also cited in the two official histories of the dynasty.<sup>69</sup>

The “Worthy Beauties” category presents an interesting and more complicated case. While this was a category of character evaluation within the long tradition of the *Shishuo xinyu*’s structural framework, the “Worthy Beauties” did have a parallel, and contrasting, category in the official histories: the “Exemplary Women” 列女. I have addressed the anecdotal memories of Tang women in more detail in a separate article. Here, in the *Tang yulin*, female qualities of “worthiness” 賢 encompass a wide range of characteristics and deeds, including: literary talent; modesty and ritual propriety; sympathy; beauty and embroidery skills; distinguished family background; ability to counsel and remonstrate with their husbands; mothers’ abilities to instruct and discipline their sons; humble service to one’s brother; and devotion to Daoism. Only eight out of the twenty-two entries in this category find parallels and overlaps in the official histories. Anecdote no. 610 is the only account with parallels in the “Exemplary Women” chapters in both Tang official histories:

During the rebellions in the area south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, a woman of the Bo clan, wife of a Commandant of Jiangyin named Zou Daizheng, was kidnapped by the bandits. She secretly entrusted Daizheng’s appointment documents to an old village woman, then committed suicide. Li Hua (715–766) composed the “Rhapsody Lamenting the Chaste Woman” and circulated [her story] in the world.

67 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 3.300–301.

68 For details see *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 3.300.

69 *Jiu Tang shu*, 155.4116–17; *Xin Tang shu*, 163.5016.

江左之亂，江陰尉鄒待徵妻薄氏為盜所掠，密以待徵官告託於村媪，而後死之。李華為哀節婦賦以行於世。<sup>70</sup>

The entry was taken from the *Guoshi bu* narrative with only a couple negligible textual variations. The accounts in the “Exemplary Women” biographies of the two official histories, however, are much longer, with a lot more details of how she was kidnapped and committed suicide to preserve her chastity, both quoting her declaration that her righteousness was not to be violated.<sup>71</sup> Though their accounts could be taken from a different source, it is also possible that the official histories inserted the details and the wife’s words to pinpoint the moral of the story and serve the purpose of the “Exemplary Women” biographies. If so, this would be a case where the official histories did exactly the opposite to their normal practice—normally they would only briefly mention the events that anecdotal accounts embellished.

Those left out by official historiography sometimes also carried surprisingly strong cultural and political opinions. For example, in anecdote no. 592, the hostility against Empress Wu Zetian’s claim to the throne is voiced by a figure who is herself female—the aunt of Di Renjie 狄仁傑 (630–700):

When Di Renjie served as the Councilor, his aunt, née Lu, who was his mother’s cousin, lived in a villa to the south of the Wu Bridge. She only had one son, but he had never come to his relatives’ residence inside the capital city. Whenever it was time for the summer and winter sacrifices, as well as the first and last day of the month, the Duke of Liang [i.e., Di Renjie] would very diligently perform the duty of ritual propriety [toward his aunt]. At one point after heavy snow, he had a long period of time when he was released from official duty, and thereby went to inquire upon the wellbeing of Aunt Lu. He happened to see his cousin coming back home for his meal, bearing a bow and arrows; carrying pheasants and rabbits, he presented his game to his mother at the northern hall. He looked at the Duke of Liang and paid his respect, in a very arrogant manner. His Excellency thus proposed an idea to his aunt, “Now that I am serving as the Councilor, if my cousin has any [official posts] he would like to pursue, I would do my best to follow his instructions.” His aunt said, “You, Councilor, may enjoy your prestige alone! I [only] have one

70 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 4.418.

71 The *Jiu Tang shu* version quotes her saying “[I am] righteous and will not be defiled” 義不受辱 and the *Xin Tang shu* account quotes “I am righteous and am not defiled” 我義不辱 before she commits suicide. See *Jiu Tang shu*, 193.5148–49; *Xin Tang shu*, 205.5824.

son and do not want to make him serve a female ruler.” His Excellency was greatly ashamed and withdrew.

狄仁傑之為相也，有盧氏堂姨居於午橋南別墅。姨止有一子，而未嘗來都城親戚家。梁公每遇伏臘晦朔，修禮甚謹。嘗經甚雪多休暇，因候盧姨安否，適見表弟挾弓矢攜雉兔來歸膳，味進於北堂。顧揖梁公，意甚輕簡。公因啟姨曰，「某今為相，表弟有何樂從，願悉力以從其旨。」姨曰，「相自貴爾，有一子，不欲令其事女主。」公大慚而退。<sup>72</sup>

The veracity of this account, originally from a small late-Tang collection *Songchuang zalu* 松窗雜錄,<sup>73</sup> is highly suspicious and it is not found in the official Tang histories. But this bit of dramatic conversation became a popular memory of the Tang and was included in multiple later collections including *Taiping guangji*, *Ganzhu ji* 紺珠集, *Lei shuo* 類說, *Shuo fu*, *Zhiyi ji* 摭異記, and *Gujin hebi shilei beiyao* 古今合璧事類備要.<sup>74</sup> Apparently, the denunciation of female political power, especially voiced by a woman, became a long-standing favorite in the minute cultural memory of the dynasty.

Perhaps it is appropriate to conclude the presentation of examples with anecdote no. 568 from the category “Grieving for the Departed,” which is a story about memory itself:

When [Emperor] Dezong first ascended the Mansion of Diligent Governance, there was no one outside who knew [that he was there]. He gazed down and saw a person in green clothes riding on a donkey and wearing a hat. [The person] reached the foot of the mansion, looked upwards for a long time, lowered his head and went away eastward. The Sovereign immediately sent [messengers] to notify the Metropolitan Governor and ordered [the Governor] to seek out the person based on what he saw. The Governor summoned Li Ming, Metropolitan Police Official of the Wannian [county], and sent him to hastily inquire and seek [the person] out. Officer Li stood still and thought about it, then said, “I’m certain to capture him.” He headed out and summoned the Administrative Clerks and various officers concerned. [By his estimation],

<sup>72</sup> *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 4.404.

<sup>73</sup> For a study of this collection, including translations of its anecdotes, see Qin, “Particularly Unusual, Definitely True.”

<sup>74</sup> *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 4.404.

within several *li* outside of the Gate of Luminous Spring,<sup>75</sup> there should be people who used to serve as entertainers at the various offices [of the old court]. They thoroughly searched through these people and the man in green was indeed among them. They interrogated him and he said, “I was previously a [court] musician during the Tianbao reign. At that time, the Retired Emperor ascended this mansion several times, and every time he came, the owls would surely gather on top of the mansion, thus they were called ‘Old Owls Accompanying the [Imperial] Carriage.’ Ever since my service at court stopped and I moved to live outside of the city, I never saw them again. Today [when I saw] flocks of owls gathered in great number I again felt the scene was exactly like that of past times. I knew for sure that the Son of Heaven was up there. Sorrowful and joyous all at once, I was on the verge of tears.” Because of this, [Emperor Dezong] decreed to gather all these kinds of people and register them with the Imperial Music Office. Officer Li was also promoted by the Metropolitan Governor, and later reached the rank of prefecture governor.

德宗初登勤政樓，外無知者。望見一人，衣綠乘驢戴帽，至樓下，仰視久之，俛而東去。上立遣宣示京尹，令以物色求之。尹召萬年捕賊官李銘，使促求訪。李尉佇立思之，曰，「得必矣。」出召幹事所由，春明門外數里內，應有諸司舊職事伎藝人，悉搜羅之，而綠衣果在其中。詰之，對曰，「某天寶舊樂工也。上皇當時數登此樓，每來，鷓必集樓上，號隨駕老鷓。某自罷居城外，更不復見。今群鷓盛集，又覺景象宛如昔時，必知天子在上，悲喜且欲泣下。」于是敕盡收此輩，卻係教坊。李尉亦為京尹所擢用，後至郡守。<sup>76</sup>

This account is not found in the official Tang histories. It was originally recorded, with the title “Li Ming Catching the Man in Green” 李銘捕綠衣人, in the *Yin hua lu* 因話錄 and later was included in the *Tang yulin*. Here, an old court musician recounts his memory of when he served Xuánzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) during the emperor’s Tianbao 天寶 (742–756) reign era right before the An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757) rebellion brought the Tang dynasty from its pinnacle of prosperity and glory into great turmoil and subsequent decline. At exactly the same place, where the mansion became a site of memory, he maps the auspicious scenes from the past—old owls signifying the presence of the sovereign—to the post-rebellion present, to the scene right before his

75 The East Gate, also the main gate, of the Tang Capital Chang’an. The Gate of Luminous Spring was often used to refer to the capital city itself.

76 *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 4:388–89.

eyes. The return of past memories evokes strong emotions in the old musician, which, as the story tells, are shared by the current ruler, Emperor Dezhong. Touched by the old musician's memory, the emperor then decrees to bring all former musicians back to his court.

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

The writing of anecdotes and compilation of collections flourished after the An Lushan rebellion. This phenomenon was closely related to two social and cultural factors of the mid- and late Tang: first, the wide circulation of gossip and anecdotes about the court and the royal house, and second, the literati scholars' efforts, under the influence of a late-Tang "historian's culture" 史官文化, to search for and collect anecdotal accounts about the dynasty's recent past. These scholars compiled private collections to compensate for their regret that many historical records were damaged and lost, and that Tang official institutions of historical writing had sunk into dysfunction during the post-rebellion tumult.<sup>77</sup> The Northern Song collection, *Tang yulin*, in reconstructing its image of the Tang by recycling anecdotal source material, also reflected the historical factors that governed the late-Tang development of anecdotal narratives.

The survey of this study measures the "distances" between the contents in the first eighteen transmitted categories of the *Tang yulin* and the official historical narratives about the Tang by estimating the numbers and percentages of their overlapping accounts. Other than the "The Upright and the Proper" category, none of the eighteen categories have more than half of their content included in the official histories. Some have less than 10% included, and for one, "Solitude and Disengagement," none of its anecdotes are included. On average, around 70% of the contents of the first eighteen categories are out of official histories by later compilers, while around 30% of the contents are found in official historical writing in the form of overlapping accounts with varying degrees of similitude.

The first four categories set the underlying tone for the image of the Tang the collection depicts and for the perspective it takes when remembering the anecdotal past. The category "Virtuous Conduct" shows a clear influence of the Song dynasty focus on literati self-cultivation, since the category focuses on stories of moral virtues, charitable deeds, and the regulation of self and

77 Zhou Xunchu, "Tang dai biji xiaoshuo de juexing yu chuanbo" 唐代筆記小說的崛起與傳播, in *Tang ren biji xiaoshuo kaosuo* 唐人筆記小說考索 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 22–38.

family. In the selection of material, the historical veracity of these anecdotes gives way to their moral values, and as a whole they represent a cultural image of the Tang which corresponds with the Song dynasty literati's appreciation of virtuous conducts. The category "Speech and Conversation" reveals an aspect of the image of the Tang where one finds the ideal cases for the relationship and interaction between the literati scholar official and his ruler. The stories focus on the ideas and effects of the scholar officials' words, and on their values and merit being appreciated by the ruler, while also filtering out cumbersome historical details. The categories "Administrative Affairs" and "Literature and Scholarship" depict the two serious and important aspects of Tang literati's life in leisurely settings of remembrance such as casual conversations and gossip. The anecdotal image of the Tang here appears to be a *cultural* memory of the past originating from and transmitted as material for gossip and leisurely diversion and of somehow sensational embellishments, rather than for weighty discussions of history, literature, and scholarship.

The rest of the categories on human characteristics and their evaluations offer a glimpse of popular opinions from Tang times. These stories indicate the anecdotal memories of the Tang first gained the recognition of their own time, became widely circulating, and thus worth recording for a collective group of people, before they were transmitted in writing and selectively recycled by later times to reconstruct the minute cultural memory of the past. As the series of categories was built upon the structural framework of the long-lasting *Shishuo xinyu* tradition, over time, the categories themselves also became symbols that contributed to perpetuating the cultural significance of the genre. Through this process of reuse and adaptation these categories in turn gained additional layers of cultural and intellectual meaning during the transmission and transformation of the tradition.

While each aspect of the *Tang yulin's* reconstructed image of the Tang needs to be discussed within its own particular contents and context, it can be observed, as shown above, that the collection sought out its material in cultural archives of the past that were largely outside official venues of historiographical practices. First of all, this material includes accounts whose values counter those championed by official historiography—for example, stories about those who embraced solitude and disengagement instead of serving the court. But these people, such as Li Zhan, who is reported here as having benefited from his turning away from officialdom, were commemorated in the minute cultural memory of the past. Secondly, also often neglected by official historical narratives, one finds miscellaneous, fragmentary accounts that grew out of less serious social contexts, resulting from casual conversations, leisurely discussions, gossip, and random diversions within literati circles. These were

often recorded in a disorganized way by the rules of free association of topic and memory, full of digressions, reflecting the fluid nature of both the leisurely oral culture and the workings of memory, which naturally resisted the effort of systematic categorization. Thirdly, accounts that focus on sensational effects rather than factual veracity were popular in anecdotal memories, even though their more serious, and likely factual, versions were presented in official historical records. Precisely because of their sensational nature, these memorable stories, such as the exaggerated but untrue cause for the construction of the Metropolitan Governor's office residence, the embellished account of Li Deyu's meat-boiling experiment in front of all the people at the market, and Aunt Lu's dramatic reproach of Di Renjie, circulated widely and made salient contributions to the cultural images of historical figures and to the minute cultural memory of the Tang. Fourthly, there are also cases that were surprisingly left out of official histories, such as the story of Xuānzong's fraternal affection and that of Wei Zheng's remonstrance causing the death of a sparrow hawk. The latter, though possessing a rather sensational touch, nonetheless made its way into the later historical work, *Zizhi tongjian*. With Yuwen Shiji's clever response to ease his ruler's suspicion as another example, it appears that, sometimes, some of the anecdotal accounts of the past, though less serious, would gradually gain narrative authority and cultural significance and, even if rejected earlier, eventually became accepted by later official historical compilations. While some of the anecdotal narratives do seem to "disrupt" historical narratives the way the individual New Historicist anecdotes do, the study here finds these anecdotal accounts form, rather than a "counterhistory," a fragmented kind of "cultural memory" of the past that to some degree overlaps with official historical narratives. These anecdotes, viewed as a collective whole, integrate their factual and cultural basis with fictional embellishments and bridge the gap between history and imagination. Therefore, I term them here, as a collective whole, "minute cultural memory" to distinguish this particular type of fragmentary memories in their "minute" forms from other vehicles and forms of cultural memory.

A key feature of this "minute cultural memory" in the *Tang yulin* is that it preserved and foregrounded key voices of the past that carried strong emotions, public opinions, and shared memories with lasting impressions. Quoted utterances, punch lines, witty remarks, and popular terms make anecdotal memories of the past vivid and memorable, capable of being transmitted across the long duration of time. Here the reader hears from Lu Sui's mother, "[His face] looked exactly like yours"; gasps at Aunt Lu's disdain in her barbed reply, "You, Councilor, may enjoy your prestige alone. I [only] have one son and do not want to make him serve a female ruler"; and smiles at the amusing reasoning, "If this is [indeed] holy water, the meat should stay as it is." Moreover,

who would ever forget the Mu brothers when they were put in rankings full of popular flavor as “cheese,” “butter,” “finest cream,” and “fermented bean curd”? Or those “Old Owls Accompanying the [Imperial] Carriage” when they were given such an endearing name? Perhaps this is precisely why the *Tang yulin* is entitled *Forest of Conversations on the Tang*, with *yu*, “conversations,” being the key of both the title and content of the collection. The minute cultural memory of the Tang comes to the page in memorable voices, light-hearted or barbed remarks, trivial but smart conversations, and amusing practices such as ranking fruits, which, though not included in official histories, nonetheless was part of a tradition of its own. It also presents collective voices and opinions via the cited sayings and comments from “people of the time.” These accounts indicate popular circulation of the memories of the Tang shared by the anonymous public.

On the other hand, official histories also offer ample voices, though with a different emphasis. The popular rankings of the Mu brothers were included in the two official histories of the dynasty as well. But compared to their anecdotal parallels, accounts in official histories tend to favor long passages, if not quoted in whole, of memorials presented to the throne, such as Zhang Xingcheng’s interpretation of the earthquake in Jinzhou. The memorial was only partially included in the anecdotal version of the story which turns quickly instead to place its emphasis on the ruler’s appreciation. And compared to the brief anecdote about the chaste wife, the much more detailed parallels in official histories offer her words, “[I am] righteous and will not be defiled,” to highlight her exemplary virtue. Despite the possibility of different sources, the official histories here can perhaps also be suspected of intentional character development. It appears that these fragmentary memories about the past, when used as historiographical anecdotes and embedded in official writings, could serve to blur the boundaries between historical records and fictional embellishments.

Notably, those outside venues of official historiography sometimes carried surprisingly strong cultural and political sentiments, such as the hostility against female political power voiced by none other than a woman herself, and emotions of nostalgia shared by musician and ruler alike. Though not accepted into official histories, and of questionable veracity, they were welcomed memories in literati circles that conveyed collective feelings and perspectives, as well as lasting cultural values and significance. The old musician’s words, “... the scene was exactly like that of the past times” and his surging emotion “... sorrowful and joyous all at once, I was on the verge of tears” could become the voice and sentiments of many post-rebellion visitors to the capital. The account itself, transmitted in the form of a memorable anecdote, would serve to transplant the nostalgia and memory across time to late Tang literati who could find in the old musician’s story a channel to project personal feelings

about the dynasty's past that they did not directly experience, but could not help but look back to.

Indeed, late Tang compilers of historical anecdotes were fascinated by Xuánzong's reign. The prosperity and glory of Xuánzong's reign, and the devastating calamity and decline that followed, furnished many popular stories that promised insider knowledge and aroused mingled feelings of amazement, pride, pity, and nostalgia. My recent study, a distant reading of the "conversations" in the *Tang yulin*, reveals the dominating presence and influence of Xuánzong across the dialogue networks in this Song dynasty collection of the anecdotal representations of the Tang.<sup>78</sup> As Paul W. Kroll has pointed out, for ninth-century writers, Xuánzong's time was very different from their own, an era on the other side of the historical watershed of the An Lushan rebellion: a time chronologically close, but psychologically already distant.<sup>79</sup> The largely anecdotal "unofficial or submerged histories"—the "broad sea of other texts swept by additional or competing currents" beneath the surface of "sanctioned narratives" such as the standard histories—reflect the ninth century's retrospective view that came to dominate interpretations of Xuánzong's era in later times.<sup>80</sup> Many of the collections of such miscellaneous accounts share the dual nature, identified by Kroll, of "memory and invention."<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, by elevating cultural significance and value orientations attached to the past above the complex interplay of factual details, historical anecdotes functioned as repositories of and vehicles for the creation, preservation, and transmission of the minute cultural memory. They often originated from material outside of official historical compositions but were also employed by traditional historians as historiographical illustrations. Hendrix notes that these historiographical anecdotes "should be examined as such: not as true or false stories—like so many historians have been investigating them—but as indications of ideologies, ... at least in origin, during the period in which they are being conceived," and that they "have the rhetorical function of an exemplum: with great efficiency they convey the inner logic of historical facts, and in a way that people will easily remember it. This makes the factual basis of anecdotes

78 Amelia Ying Qin, "Tang yulin zhong duihua wangluo de keshihua he tongji fenxi chutan" 《唐語林》中對話網絡的可視化和統計分析初探, in *From Metaphor to Model: Humanities Network Analysis as an Approach to Research and Criticism* 從隱喻到模型：作為研究和批評路徑的人文網絡分析, edited by Song Chen and Zhao Wei, *Shuzi renwen* 數字人文 (Special Issue on Network Analysis) 1 (2022): 53–86.

79 Paul W. Kroll, "Nostalgia and History in Mid-Ninth-Century Verse: Cheng Yü's Poem on 'The Chin-yang Gate,'" *T'oung Pao* 89.4 (2003): 286–87, 307.

80 Kroll, "Nostalgia and History," 289–90.

81 *Ibid.*, 297.

virtually irrelevant, since it is not their function to communicate empirical facts. They communicate an interpretation of empirical facts.”<sup>82</sup> The minute cultural memory of the Tang dynasty was indeed more truthful to a cultural reality than to historical empirical reality and, to a considerable extent, the factual significance of these anecdotes gave way to their cultural values. Whether or not these accounts were recognized as official historical material, in conveying a cultural impression of the Tang they constituted an image of the past mediated by the preference of the present that reused them. As a collective whole, they perpetuated and preserved the fragmented memories of the society and formed a “minute cultural memory” of the past that was often rather unsatisfactorily labeled as “minor discourses” and “miscellaneous histories” by traditional bibliographical systems.

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82 Hendrix, “Historiographical Anecdotes,” 22.

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# Reading Tang Anecdotes in the Northern Song: The Case of Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography of Yang Taizhen”

Zou Xin

## Abstract

This essay seeks to understand *waizhuan* 外傳 (unofficial biography) in the context of the Northern Song reading of Tang anecdotes. Through the case study of Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography of Yang Taizhen,” I argue that unofficial biography served as an apt genre in the Northern Song to accommodate a plethora of existing Tang records, official or unofficial, centered around the subject. In terms of structure, Yue Shi employed a multi-layered textual system to collect, classify, and differentiate his source materials; content-wise, he also endeavored to recontextualize previously unrelated anecdotes, bringing them under the overarching framework of the unofficial biography. Drawing on internal and external textual evidence, I further suggest that this practice of composing an “unofficial biography” both reflected and contributed to an emerging new reading culture, wherein Northern Song readers were not merely passive receivers of these anecdotes but were actively engaged in the reimagination of the Tang period through their reading and writing about Tang anecdotes.

## Keywords

Tang and Song literature – Unofficial Biography of Yang Taizhen – Song *chuanqi* tales – anecdotes – transmission

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Yang Taizhen 楊太真 (Yang the Grand Verity) was the religious name of Consort Yang, more often known as the Precious Consort (*guifei* 貴妃) of

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1 I am indebted to my colleagues Charles Rippin and Jin Chow 周縉雲 for their gracious help and insightful comments for corrections and improvement. I would also like to thank

Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) of the Tang.<sup>2</sup> The “Unofficial Biography of Yang Taizhen” 楊太真外傳 (hereafter “Unofficial Biography”) is attributed to Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007), a scholar who was an Assistant in the Palace Library (*mishu lang* 秘書郎) of the Southern Tang (937–976) before he joined the Northern Song (960–1127) court and continued to serve in its history office (*shiguan* 史館) under Emperors Taizong 太宗 (r. 976–997) and Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997–1022).<sup>3</sup> This experience gave Yue Shi access to various resources for writing the “Unofficial Biography” in the south and later at the Northern Song capital, and formed the basis of this current text, most likely completed during Emperor Zhenzong’s Xianping 咸平 reign (998–1003).

Modern readers have become familiar with the “Unofficial Biography” thanks to the efforts of Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936). This text is now typically seen through Lu Xun’s lens as an exemplar of the Song *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmission of the strange) tales. These *chuanqi* tales hold a crucial place in Lu Xun’s *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi lie* 中國小說史略 (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction). Tang *chuanqi* tales, in particular, were regarded as “consciously created” works, and therefore, a prototype of fiction in China.<sup>4</sup> The Song *chuanqi* tales, conversely, are often perceived as lacking the imaginative liberty and narrative intricacy found in their Tang predecessor, as Lu Xun outlined in his preface to the *Tang Song Chuanqi Ji* 唐宋傳奇集 (Anthology of Tang and Song Tales):

Song writers were enthusiastic about admonition and moral teachings (upholding the virtuous, and denouncing the evil). They collected materials from real life and adhere rigidly to them, as a result, the charm of thought flying and the quality of vividness can no longer be expected. Consequently, the bloodline of the *chuanqi* tales came to an end at this point.<sup>5</sup>

宋好勸懲，摭實而泥，飛動之致，眇不可期，傳奇命脈，至斯以絕。

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members of our writing group—Chen Liu 劉晨, Ted Hui 許明德, Kou Lu 寇陸, and Ni Yun 倪雲 for reading and discussing the “Unofficial Biography” with me.

- 2 For a complete translation of Lady Yang’s two biographies in *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*, see Howard S. Levy, “The Career of Yang Kuei-fei 楊貴妃,” *T’oung Pao* 45.4/5 (1957), 474–89.
- 3 For a brief biography of Yue Shi, see E. D. Edwards, *Chinese Prose Literature of the T’ang Period* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1938), vol. 2, 120–22.
- 4 For a translation and discussion of Lu Xun’s often cited argument about Tang *chuanqi*, see William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “Creativity and Storytelling in the Ch’uan-ch’i: Shen Ya-chih’s T’ang Tales,” in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Review* (CLEAR) 20 (Dec. 1998), 32.
- 5 Based on Mair and Zhang’s translation with some minor modifications. See Victor H. Mair and Zhengjun Zhang, eds., *Anthology of Tang and Song Tales: The Tang Song Chuanqi Ji of Lu Xun* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co Pte Ltd, 2020), xxix.

While Lu Xun criticized Song *chuanqi* tales for their insistence on moral teachings and over-dependence on inherited records, modern scholar Li Jianguo echoed these sentiments in his own study of Tang and Song narratives, particularly criticizing Yue Shi's writing methodology. In Li's view, Yue Shi struggled to synthesize received materials into a coherent account with a clear structure and necessary narrative complexity:

This account combines both true records and hearsay, often involving strange and peculiar matters. Thus it was called "Unofficial Biography" (*waizhuan* 外傳), and was likely one of the *chuanqi* tales at the time. However, it remained a hodgepodge of old stories as the materials were simply patched together without a clear thread to bind them all. This problem can also be found in Yue Shi's "The Biography of Lüzhū (Green Pearl)."

所述事跡，實錄、傳聞並存，又頗涉怪異，故名「外傳」，蓋傳奇之流。只是綴合舊聞的痕跡過重，拼湊成篇，不能融會貫通，與《綠珠傳》是同一毛病。<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, while literary scholars criticize the "Unofficial Biography" for sticking to "real life" and received records, historians often disparage this tale for its chronological inconsistency and lack of factual reliability. Howard S. Levy's comment below is representative of the genre's disrepute among historians, though Levy himself was comparatively more accepting, acknowledging the "Unofficial Biography's" value in "recapturing some of the atmosphere of the Tang court":

Yue Shi was interested in the occult and the supernatural, and at certain places in his account of Yang Guifei, he *failed to distinguish between fact and fiction*. For example, he presented as actual occurrence the materialization of a dragon lady and the coming forth of courtesans from painted screens.<sup>7</sup>

These conflicting evaluations of the "Unofficial Biography" highlight the challenges associated with placing this text within established disciplinary and genre categories. Yet I maintain that these scholars' assessments serve as a valuable starting point in framing salient questions regarding Yue Shi's "Unofficial

6 Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Songdai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 宋代志怪傳奇敘錄 (Tianjin: Nankai Daxue chubanshe, 1997), 27.

7 See Levy, "The Career of Yang Kuei-fei," 455.

Biography” and similar texts dealing with Tang anecdotes that flourished at the beginning of the Northern Song.

This essay seeks to understand Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography” in the context of the Northern Song reading of Tang anecdotes. Yue Shi was, first and foremost, an avid reader of Tang anecdotes, and his “Unofficial Biography” in turn offered more Northern Song readers a convenient text through which they could readily access and engage with these materials. In line with this perspective, I will explore three questions in this essay:

- Firstly, what does *waizhuan*, commonly translated as “unofficial biography,” mean in the Northern Song context? How did Yue Shi position his writing in relation to other existing works about Yang Taizhen?
- Secondly, how was the “Unofficial Biography” constructed? Was Yue Shi’s writing process merely a monotonous task of piecing together received materials, as some scholars suggest, or did he also strive to embed his own voice within the inherited materials and how?
- Finally, how was “Unofficial Biography” perceived in the Northern Song? How did Northern Song readers read and interpret the wealth of Tang anecdotes it provided? What insights does the “Unofficial Biography” provide regarding the reading of Tang anecdotes during the Northern Song?

Through the case study of Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography of Yang Taizhen,” I argue that unofficial biography served as an apt genre to accommodate a plethora of existing records, official or unofficial, centered around the subject. In terms of structure, Yue Shi employed a multi-layered textual system to collect, classify, and differentiate his source materials; content-wise, he also endeavored to recontextualize previously unrelated anecdotes, bringing them under the overarching framework of the unofficial biography. Drawing on internal and external textual evidence, I further suggest that this practice of composing an “unofficial biography” both reflected and contributed to an emerging new reading culture, wherein Northern Song readers were not merely passive receivers of these Tang anecdotes but were actively engaged in the reimagination of the Tang through their reading and writing about Tang anecdotes.

## 2 *Waizhuan* in the Context of the Northern Song

Although often conveniently translated as “unofficial biography,” *waizhuan* is in fact only one form of *zhuan* 傳, a polysemic term which on the one hand means works that “transfer” (*chuán* 傳) the ideas of the classics (*jing* 經) to posterity, and on the other hand is associated with “biography” ever since *Shiji* 史記 (Grand Scribe’s Record) and especially so in the *Old History of the Tang*

(*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, *JTS* hereafter).<sup>8</sup> Under both meanings, *waizhuan* is often paired up with, and used as the opposite of *neizhuan* 內傳. Under the first meaning of *zhuan*, it is generally believed that *neizhuan* (internal commentary) focuses on explaining the subtle meaning of the classics, while *waizhuan* (external commentary) “derive” the meaning of the classics through supplementing the original text with rich accounts of events and speeches.<sup>9</sup> However, the differences between *neizhuan* and *waizhuan* as subcategories of biography have never been clear. Lu Xun did not give any formal definition of *neizhuan* nor *waizhuan* in his *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, but he made some interesting observations about different kinds of *zhuan* at the beginning of his fiction “The True Story of Ah Q” 阿 Q 正傳:

There are many types of biographies: official biographies, autobiographies, legends, unauthorized biographies, supplementary biographies, family histories, sketches ... but unfortunately none of these suited my purpose. “Official biography?” This account will obviously not be included with those of many eminent people in some authentic history. “Autobiography?” But I am obviously not Ah Q. If I were to call this an “unauthorized biography,” then where is his “authenticated biography”? The use of “legend” is impossible, because Ah Q was no legendary figure. “Supplementary biography”? But no president has ever ordered the National Historical Institute to write a “standard life” of Ah Q. It is true that although there are no “lives of gamblers” in authentic English history, the famous author Conan Doyle nevertheless wrote Rodney Stone; but while this is permissible for a famous author it is not permissible for such as I. Then there is “family history”; but I do not know whether I belong to the same family as Ah Q or not, nor have his children or grandchildren ever entrusted me with such a task. If I were to use “sketch,” it might be objected that Ah Q has no “complete account.”<sup>10</sup>

8 For an in-depth discussion on *zhuan* in the Tang and Song dynasties, see William H. Nienhauser, “A Structural Reading of the *Chuan* in the *Wen-Yuan Ying-Hua*,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 36.3 (1977): 443–56.

9 For example, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Tradition), a commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals” (*Chunqiu* 春秋) is often considered a “*neizhuan* (internal commentary) of *Chunqiu*” 春秋內傳 while *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States) is considered a “*waizhuan* (external commentary) of *Chunqiu*” 春秋外傳.

10 Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1972), 65–66.

傳的名目很繁多：列傳，自傳，內傳，外傳，別傳，家傳，小傳……，而可惜都不合。「列傳」麼，這一篇並非和許多閩人排在「正史」裡；「自傳」麼，我又並非就是阿Q。說是「外傳」，「內傳」在那裡呢？倘用「內傳」，阿Q又決不是神仙。「別傳」呢，阿Q實在未曾有大總統上諭宣付國史館立「本傳」——雖說英國正史上並無「博徒列傳」，而文豪迭更司也做過《博徒別傳》這一部書，但文豪則可，在我輩卻不可。其次是「家傳」，則我既不知與阿Q是否同宗，也未曾受他子孫的拜託；或「小傳」，則阿Q又更無別的「大傳」了。

Here, Lu Xun argues that *waizhuan* was often written when there was already an “authorized biography” (*neizhuan*).<sup>11</sup> This argument applies to the case of “Unofficial Biography” because when Yue Shi was writing his account of Consort Yang, an official biography of the consort was already completed in the *JTs*. Moreover, he had at his disposal a huge textual world of hundreds of poems, including both *shi* 詩 and *fu* 賦, and unofficial histories about Emperor Xuanzong’s reign accumulated over the past 250 years. Unlike Tang writers who lived either in or shortly after Xuanzong’s reign, or claimed to record living memories of that era passed on to them orally, Yue Shi, just like us today, only had access to this period through texts. But let us not forget that Yue Shi was writing his “Unofficial Biography” during a time when the Northern Song court just launched a series of large-scale cultural projects, including the compilation of *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Reign of Great Tranquility), *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperial Digest), *Wenyuan Yinghua* 文苑英華 (Finest Flowers of the Garden of Letters), and *Cefu Yuanguai* 冊府元龜 (Models from the Archives), to document and reorganize its intellectual and literary legacies. Thus, Yue Shi’s writing of “Unofficial Biography” may be regarded as a similar albeit smaller-scale project that aims to preserve and examine all available writings and knowledge about Consort Yang and her time. As we will see in the analysis below, Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography” can also be comprehended in the sense of *waizhuan* (external commentary) to the classics. That is to say, Yue Shi attempted to derive an understanding of the past by supplementing the official account with “rich accounts of events and speeches.”

The “Unofficial Biography” follows the basic framework and generic conventions of a standard biography in the dynastic history including 1) the introduction of the subject’s full name, style name, place of origin, and some details of

11 In 1931, Lu Xun also made this point in a memo he sent to a Japanese translator of his “True Story of Ah Q.”

immediate ancestors; 2) the trajectory the subject's life in the official hierarchy, in this case, Consort Yang's rise and fall in the emperor's harem; and 3) the historian's comments, often passing a final judgment on the subject, or pointing out moral lessons to be taken. The "Unofficial Biography" inherited *JTS*'s overall structure, followed the timeline of Consort Yang's life, and supplemented the core story with illustrative examples and vivid details. These differences can be seen from the very beginning of the "Unofficial Biography," which is more than twice the length of the *JTS* account:

*JTS*: Xuanzong's Precious Consort (*guifei* 貴妃) Yang's great-great-grandfather Lingben was a Prefect of Jin Prefecture. Her father Xuanyan was the Finance Bureau of Shu Prefecture.<sup>12</sup>

《舊唐書》：玄宗楊貴妃，高祖令本，金州刺史。父玄琰，蜀州司戶。

The "Unofficial Biography": Precious Consort Yang, whose childhood name was Yuhuan, was originally from Huayin in Hongnong. Her ancestors moved to Pu Prefecture and lived in Dutou Village of Yongle County. The consort's great-great-grandfather was Lingben, a Prefect of Jin Prefecture. Her father Xuanyan was Finance Bureau of Shu Prefecture. The Precious Consort was born in Shu. She once accidentally fell into a pond, which later became known as "The Pond of Fallen Consort." The pond was located in front of the Daojiang County (This is like the case that Wang Zhaojun was born in Xia Prefecture, and there is now a Zhaojun Village named after her; and likewise, Lüzhū was born in Bai Prefecture, so there is now a Lüzhū River in her honor).<sup>13</sup>

《外傳》：楊貴妃，小字玉環，弘農華陰人也。後徙居蒲州永樂之獨頭村。高祖令本，金州刺史。父玄琰，蜀州司戶。貴妃生於蜀。嘗誤墜池中，後人呼爲落妃池。池在導江縣前。（亦如王昭君生於峽州，今有昭君村；綠珠生於白州，今有綠珠江。）

12 See Levy, "The Career of Yang Kuei-fei," 474.

13 See Zou Xin, trans., "Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (A)" 楊太真外傳 (上), in *Anthology of Tang and Song Tales*, 612; For other translations, see Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trans., *Selected Chinese Short Stories of the Tang and Song Dynasties* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2001), 190-207.

The sentences highlighted in bold in the “Unofficial History” reveal the “new information” Yue Shi provided for his readers: First, Consort Yang’s childhood name, as readers will later see, derived from an anecdote about a geomancer who predicted the consort’s death. Next, Yue Shi traced Consort Yang’s ancestry to the prominent Yang clan of Hongnong 弘農楊氏, and added further information on the consort’s birth, so detailed he even went so far as to identify the specific village where she was born. Then we are told about the pond, most likely from a local gazetteer. The fact that this pond could still be located in Yue Shi’s time creates a strong emotional connection between the reader of the biography and the subject matter. Such intimacy is further enhanced by details such as Consort Yang’s childhood name and birthplace.

### 3 Yue Shi’s Source Materials and His Multi-layered Textual System

How was the “Unofficial Biography” constructed? To reimagine the making of the “unofficial biography,” it would be ideal to have a catalog of Yue Shi’s source materials. But as the case with most Tang-Song texts, we can only reconstruct such a catalog today, in part, through checking internal textual evidence, where Yue Shi explicitly cited his sources in the “Unofficial Biography.” The rest can only be inferred through comparison with texts to which Yue Shi had access in his time.<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I will compare “Unofficial Biography” with two sets of Tang texts revolving around Consort Yang—The first, Consort Yang’s official biography in *JTS*; and the second, Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772–846) “The Song of Lasting Regret” 長恨歌 along with Chen Hong’s 陳鴻 (fl. 805) accompanying piece “The Account of The Song of Lasting Regret” 長恨歌傳, to show how Yue Shi position his writing in relation to other existing texts at the time. I will also examine the relationship between the main text and Yue Shi’s

14 Scholars have identified with some confidence the following texts as source materials for the “Unofficial Biography”: 1) official biographies of Lady Yang, Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (d. 756), An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757), and Chen Xuanli 陳玄禮 (d. 762) in *JTS* (completed in 945); 2) anecdotes circulated in collections or compendiums, such as Li Zhao’s 李肇 (d. after 827) *Guoshi bu* 國史補 (Supplement to the History of the State), Zheng Chuhui’s 鄭處晦 (d. 867) *Minghuang zalu* 明皇雜錄 (Miscellaneous records on the Bright Emperor), Duan Chengshi’s 段成式 (803–863) *Youyang zazu* 西陽雜俎 (Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang), Zheng Qi’s 鄭棨 (fl. late ninth century) *Kai Tian chuanxinji* 開天傳信記 (Record of transmitted facts from Kaiyuan and Tianbao); 3) long tales such as Chen Hong’s *The Account of Lasting Regret*, as well as 4) Zheng Yu’s 鄭嵎 (fl. mid-ninth century) “The Jinyang Gate” 津陽門詩, Bai Juyi’s “The Song of Lasting Regret” and poems by Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) and Zhang Hu 張祜 (ca. 785–849).

self-commentary within the “Unofficial Biography” to explore the purposes of these interlinear commentaries and the effect they have on our reading of the “Unofficial Biography.”<sup>15</sup>

We will now turn to the scene of Consort Yang’s death, examining how various texts present this significant historical moment. When An Lushan led his large, battle-hardened army onward to Chang’an, the emperor hastily abandoned his capital and fled west to Shu. Then, only two days later, he lost his Precious Consort and Chief Minister, Yang Guozhong, at Mawei 馬嵬, a post-station thirty miles west of the capital. Bai Juyi, in his poem “The Song of Lasting Regret,” describes this tragic moment in four couplets:

翠華搖搖行復止，	The halcyon-plumed banners jounced and joggled along, moving and stopping again,
西出都門百餘里。	as they went forth westward from the metropolis’ gates, something more than a hundred <i>li</i> .
六軍不發無奈何，	And then the Six Armies would go no farther— there was no other recourse,
宛轉蛾眉馬前死。	but the fluently curved moth-eyebrows must die before the horses.
花鈿委地無人收，	Flori-form filigrees were strewn on the ground, to be retrieved by no one,
翠翹金雀玉搔頭。	Halcyon tailfeathers, an aigrette of gold, and hairpins made of jade.
君王掩面救不得，	The sovereign king covered his face—he could not save her,
回看血淚相和流。	When he looked back, it was with tears of blood that mingled in their flow. <sup>16</sup>

Here, the poet first gives a “wide-angle” shot of the emperor’s entourage: moving and stopping again, clearly a bumpy journey filled with obstacles. But the biggest problem has been deferred until the tension breaks between the emperor’s escorting troops and his favorite consort. The word choices

15 Zhao Xiupei 趙修霽 conducted a meticulous comparison of Yue Shi’s account and other relevant materials. While my approach in this section shares similarities with Zhao’s methodology, I present a distinct example and emphasize the analysis of structural devices. For more examples, see Zhao Xiupei, *Shen Fu Dian Ya: Bei Song Fuyan Gushi Chuanqi Xitun* 深覆典雅：北宋敷衍故實傳奇析論 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 2016).

16 See Paul Kroll, trans., “The Account of the Song of Lasting Regret,” in Mair and Zhang, *Anthology of Tang and Song Tales*, 255.

here—“the Six Armies” versus “the fluently curved moth-eyebrows”—further intensifies the contrast between the toughened troops and the consort’s delicate beauty. Readers are not confronted with the details of the consort’s death. Instead, we, like the emperor, are left with the aftermath of this tragedy—a static scene of the consort’s filigrees and hairpins on the ground. The brutality of this incident is only suggested by the emperor’s covering his face and the shedding of tears of blood. Chen Hong’s accompanying account for this poem describes this episode as below:

1) When the Tong Barrier was no longer defended, the monarch’s halcyon-fringed conveyance graced a southward course. Departing Xianyang, it stopped enroute at the Mawei post-station. 2) There the imperial armies paused, vacillating, gripping their halberds but advancing no more.// Bowing before His Highness’s horse, the attending officials and gentleman functionaries requested that “Chao Cuo be executed” in order to make amends to the empire; Guozhong submitted to the censure and punishment due a malefactor and died by the bend of the road.// But the sentiments of those close at hand were not appeased and those who dared speak up requested that the Precious Consort be made to expiate the complaints of the empire. His Highness realized it was unavoidable, but he could not bear to watch her die; covering his face with his sleeve, he had her taken away, and amid the flush and fluster of milling turmoil she breathed her last, strangled at the end of a foot-long cord.<sup>17</sup>

1) 潼關不守，翠華南幸，出咸陽，道次馬嵬亭。六軍徘徊，持戟不進。2) 從官郎吏伏上馬前，請誅晁錯以謝天下。國忠奉犛纓盤水，死於道周。// 左右之意未快。上問之。當時敢言者，請以貴妃塞天下怨。上知不免，而不忍見其死，反袂掩面，使牽之而去。倉皇展轉，竟就死於尺組之下。

Chen’s prose version can be divided into 1) exposition (the first three sentences until “advancing no more”), setting the stage for the escorting troops’ mutiny; and 2) resolution of this conflict, unlike the poetic version, is carried out in two steps—the death of Yang Guozhong and demise of the consort. Chen Hong gives his readers some grim details here—the consort was strangled and struggled before meeting her death. This narrative structure also appears in the official biography of the *JTs*:

17 See Kroll, “The Account of the Song of Lasting Regret,” 246.

(1) When Tongguan lost its defenses, [the Yangs] followed the imperial procession to Mawei.//<sup>18</sup> (2.1) Chen Xuanli, the Grand General of the Forbidden [Palace] Armies, secretly advised the Heir Apparent to execute [Yang] Guozhong and his sons. (2.2) And still the four armies refused to disperse. Xuanzong sent Lishi to make a formal inquiry and [the military] replied: “The root/cause of [this] banditry still exists.” They referred [in this way] to the Precious Consort. (2.3) Lishi again memorialized and the emperor could not help himself. He gave orders to the consort and she was consequently strangled to death at a Buddhist shrine.// (3) She was thirty-eight years old at the time, and was buried alongside the road west of the post-station.<sup>19</sup>

(1) 及潼關失守，從幸至馬嵬，／／(2.1) 禁軍大將陳玄禮密啟太子，誅國忠父子。(2.2) 既而四軍不散，玄宗遣力士宣問，對曰「賊本尚在」，蓋指貴妃也。(2.3) 力士復奏，帝不獲已，與妃詔，遂縊死於佛室。／／(3) 時年三十八，瘞於驛西道側。

Those faceless soldiers vaguely referred to as “those close at hand” 左右, and “those who dared speak up” 當時敢言者 in Chen Hong’s account are replaced here by a clearly recognizable historical figure—Chen Xuanli, the Grand General of the Forbidden Palace Armies, as well as Gao Lishi, through whom the emperor speaks to the angry troops, also fully known in history. The soldiers’ request to kill the consort, an indirect speech in Chen’s account, now becomes a direct quote in a strong tone—“The root/cause of [this] banditry still exists” 賊本尚在 and should be removed immediately. However, *JTS* does not include such details as the consort’s death-struggle but instead chooses to end the scene citing the consort’s age at her death and burial place, all described matter-of-factly.

Now we can see how Yue Shi synthesized all these materials and converted them into a memorable episode of deep feeling and narrative complexity in his “Unofficial Biography”:

18 For the convenience of comparison and discussion, I divided the *JTS* account and the “Unofficial Biography” excerpt into units using the same classification system. Numbers 1 to 3 present the major part of the story—beginning (presenting the conflict), Yang Guozhong and the consort’s death, and the ending (the handling of the consort’s death), which can be further divided into subplots, represented by numbers such as 2.1, 2.2, etc.

19 Based on Levy’s translation with minor modifications. See Levy, “The Career of Yang Kueifei,” 480–81.

(1) In the sixth lunar month of the fifteenth Tianbao year (756), when Tongguan lost its defenses, His Highness made his way to Ba Shu, and the Precious Consort followed. // (2.1) When they reached the Mawei post-station, Chen Xuanli, Commander on the Right of the Militant as Dragon Army, fearing the army's revolt, declared to his soldiers, "Now the whole empire has fallen apart, and the imperial authority is shaken. Didn't Yang Guozhong's exploitation of common people bring about this? If we don't execute him, how could we then apologize for the offence to all under heaven?" The public responded, "We have been yearning for this for a long time." (2.1a) At that time, an ambassador from Tibet happened to stop Yang Guozhong at the post-station gate to discuss matters with him, and the soldiers shouted, "Yang Guozhong is plotting treason with Tibetans!" The soldiers then besieged the post-station and killed Yang Guozhong, his son Yang Xuan, and several others. (Yang Guozhong's previous name was Yang Zhao. He was originally Zhang Yizhi's son. During the Tianshou era (690–692), Yizhi enjoyed incomparable imperial favor. After he returned to his personal residence, the imperial decree always commanded him to stay in the tower. Moreover, the ladder to his room was removed, and the tower was enclosed by thistles and thorns, with no female servants attending him. But his mother was afraid the Zhang family might have no offspring, so she hid a serving maid named Pin Shu between the double walls of the tower. Thereafter, the maid became pregnant and bore Yang Guozhong. She was later married into the Yang family.) His Highness had no choice but to come out to the entrance of the post-station and reward the Six Armies. // (2.2) The Six Armies refused to raise the siege. His Highness turned to his attendants and asked why. (2.2a) Gao Lishi replied, "Yang Guozhong committed a crime, so these generals punished him. The Precious Consort is Yang Guozhong's sister, and she still remains at Your Majesty's side. How can the ministers be free of fear and concern? We beg Your Majesty to consider this fact and make a decision." (According to another record, [The soldiers said,] "The root/cause of the banditry still exists. How do we dare dissolve?" They blamed [in this way] the Precious Consort.) (2.2b) His Highness walked back into the post station. There was a small lane next to the post-station gate. His Highness could not bear to go back to his temporary palace, so he stood alone in the lane, leaning on a stick and bending his head on his chest. The emperor felt dizzy and kept silent, and for a long time he did not move forward. (2.2c) Wei E, the Metropolitan Record Keeper (E was Wei Jiansu's son), remonstrated, "We beg Your Majesty to give up

personal affection and bear the pain to make a decision, so as to bring peace to the empire.” (2.3) After a short while, His Highness entered his temporary palace. With his hand on the consort’s back, he gently took her out through the gate of the hall, reached the horse track before the north wall, bid her farewell and sent Gao Lishi to end her life. (2.3a) Choking with tears in her throat, the consort was devastated with grief when she made this speech, “I hope Your Majesty will take good care of yourself. I have indeed failed to live up to the expectations and have no regrets of my own death. I beg to be allowed to pay my respects to the Buddha.” The emperor replied, “I hope you will be reincarnated to a good place in your next life.” Then Gao Lishi strangled her under a pear tree in front of the Buddhist worship hall. (2.3b) When she had barely expired, a tribute of lychees was presented from the south. Seeing the lychees, His Highness gave several loud wails. He ordered Gao Lishi, saying, “Offer sacrifice to her on my behalf.” (2.3c) After the sacrifice, the Six Armies still did not raise the siege. With an embroidered quilt covering her in a bed, [the consort’s body] was placed in the post-station’s courtyard. By imperial order, Chen Xuanli and several other officers entered the post-station to check on the consort. Xuanli lifted her head and knew she was dead. He said, “It is true.” Then the siege was raised.// (3.1) The consort was buried in a pit north of the road about one *li* away from the west outer wall of the town. She was then thirty-eight years old. (3.2) On horseback and holding the lychees in his hand, His Highness said to Zhang Yehu, “All the way from here to Jianmen, those twittering birds and fallen flowers, clear waters and green mountains will do nothing but cause me to grieve over my consort.”<sup>20</sup>

(1) 十五載六月，潼關失守，上幸巴蜀，貴妃從。／／(2.1) 至馬嵬，右龍武將軍陳玄禮懼兵亂，乃謂軍士曰：「今天下崩離，萬乘震蕩，豈不由楊國忠割剝毗庶，以至於此？若不誅之，何以謝天下？」衆曰：「念之久矣。」(2.1a) 會吐蕃和好使在驛門遮國忠訴事。軍士呼曰：「楊國忠與蕃人謀叛！」諸軍乃圍驛四合，殺國忠并男暄等。(國忠舊名釗，本張易之子也。天授中，易之恩幸莫比，每歸私第，詔令居樓，仍去其梯，圍以束棘，無復女奴侍立。母恐張氏絕嗣，乃置女奴嬪姝于樓複壁中。遂有娠，而生國忠。後嫁于楊氏。) 上乃出驛門勞六軍。／／(2.2) 六軍不解圍，上顧左右責其故。

20 Based on Wu Chen’s translation with minor modifications, see Wu Chen, trans., “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (B)” 楊太真外傳 (下), in Mair and Zhang, *Anthology of Tang and Song Tales*, 648–50.

(2.2a) 高力士對曰：「國忠負罪，諸將討之。貴妃即國忠之妹，猶在陛下左右，群臣能無憂怖？伏乞聖慮裁斷。」（一本云：「賊根猶在，何敢散乎？」蓋斥貴妃也。）(2.2b) 上迴入驛，驛門內傍有小巷，上不忍歸行宮，於巷中倚杖欹首而立。聖情昏默，久而不進。(2.2c) 京兆司錄韋鏐（見素男也）進曰：「乞陛下割恩忍斷，以寧國家。」(2.3) 逡巡，上入行宮。撫妃子出于廳門，至馬道北墻口而別之，使力士賜死。(2.3a) 妃泣涕嗚咽，語不勝情，乃曰：「願大家好住。妾誠負國恩，死無恨矣。乞容禮佛。」帝曰：「願妃子善地受生。」力士遂縊于佛堂前之梨樹下。(2.3b) 纔絕，而南方進荔枝至。上覩之，長號數息，使力士曰：「與我祭之。」(2.3c) 祭後，六軍尚未解圍。以綉衾覆牀，置驛庭中，勅玄禮等入驛視之。玄禮擡其首，知其死，曰：「是矣。」而圍解。／／(3.1) 瘞于西郭之外一里許道北坎下。妃時年三十八。(3.2) 上持荔枝於馬上謂張野狐曰：「此去劍門，鳥啼花落，水綠山青，無非助朕悲悼妃子之由也。」

The “Unofficial Biography” borrows the *JTS* three-part structure though much elaborating each part. Thus, compared with *JTS*, Yang Guozhong’s death in the “Unofficial Biography” becomes even more dramatic with the soldier’s plot to assassinate him. The consort’s death is also heavily embellished and its embedded conflict intensified. Following Yang Guozhong’s assassination, the troops demanded the consort’s death. The *JTS* relates “The emperor could not help himself” 帝不獲已, and gave orders to strangle the consort. The “Unofficial Biography,” however, portrays the emperor’s struggle through his words, actions, and back-and-forth negotiations. The narrative slows down and almost freezes when the emperor, now a powerless and solitary old man unable to protect his loved one, “stood alone in the lane [outside his temporary palace], leaning on a stick and bending his head on his chest” 於巷中倚杖欹首而立. Meanwhile, the troops now appear to be even harder to satisfy. Time and time again, readers encounter the sentence “The Six Armies refused to raise the siege” 六軍不解圍 or “The Six Armies still did not raise the siege” 六軍尚未解圍. Not until General Chen Xuanli enters the temporary palace and lifts the deceased consort’s head, is he assured of her death and raises the siege. There are indeed many such points of comparison, but this episode below, in particular, illustrates how Yue Shi pruned and tailored his source materials to invoke his own voice.

When the emperor turns to his attendants and asks why the troops refused to raise the siege after Yang Guozhong’s death, Gao Lishi replies: “Yang Guozhong committed a crime, so these generals punished him. The Precious Consort is Yang Guozhong’s sister, and she still remains at Your Majesty’s side. How can the ministers be free of fear and concern? We beg Your Majesty to consider

this fact and make a decision.” Directly after this quote, Yue Shi observes in his self-commentary, “According to another record, [The soldiers said,] ‘The root/cause of the banditry still exists. How do we dare dissolve?’ They blamed [in this way] the Precious Consort” 一本云：「賊根猶在，何敢散乎？」蓋斥貴妃也。 Here, Yue Shi moved the *JTS* account into his self-commentary, and placed in the main text another source he found, suggesting he was promoting an interpretation of Consort Yang’s death that differs from the official account. The biggest difference between these two records lies in the connection between the death of Yang Guozhong and Consort Yang. In the *JTS* record, the consort was the rebelling soldiers’ real target and Yang Guozhong’s death was but a “prelude” to the consort’s death. In Yue Shi’s version, however, Yang Guozhong became the primary target, and the soldiers sought the consort’s death fearing she would avenge her cousin’s brutal death. In fact, this subtle change is essential to the overarching moral teachings of the “Unofficial Biography,” most poignantly expressed in “the historian’s comment” at its end:

The historian says: ritual is what is used to distinguish noble from humble and to manage the household and the state. If a ruler does not act like a ruler, how could he rule his nation? If a father does not act like a father, how could he regulate his family? [Any emperor] who fails to perform well in either case will inevitably lead his empire to perish. The Brilliant Emperor Xuanzong made this error and disgraced himself in front of the empire. Therefore, An Lushan rebelled in the name of punishing three people (i.e., Yang Guozhong, Lady of Guo State, and Consort Yang). Now I write this unofficial biography, not only to collect old anecdotes about Consort Yang, but also to admonish people to guard against originating such a disaster.<sup>21</sup>

史臣曰：夫禮者，定尊卑，理家國。君不君，何以享國？父不父，何以正家？有一于此，未或不亡。唐明皇之一誤，貽天下之羞，所以祿山叛亂，指罪三人。今為外傳，非徒拾楊妃之故事，且懲禍階而已。

Unlike earlier writers who would often blame the incapability of Chief Minister Yang Guozhong, the devastating beauty of Consort Yang or the indolence of emperor for causing An Lushan rebellion, Yue Shi deemed Lady of the Guo State, one of Consort Yang’s sisters, as a leading culprit for the rebellion. This can only be explained by Yue Shi’s ideas about *li* 禮, or ritual, as the foundation

21 See Wu, “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (B),” 659.

of a stable household, society and empire. The corruption of *li*, on the contrary, leads to political disorders. Earlier, Yue Shi recorded that Lady of Guo had an inappropriate relationship with her cousin Yang Guozhong, a transgression of *li*. The two further interfered with imperial marriages and even made a profit out of it, also a violation of *li*. Needless to say, their stunning clothes, special treatment, and all the extravagances they enjoyed did not suit their ranks and positions, thereby overstepping *li*. An Lushan's rebellion later destroyed the long-established relationship between ruler and subject, was also a violation of *li*, which in this sense, was only following the examples set by the Yangs, only that he took it to the extreme.

After relating Yang Guozhong's death in the "Unofficial Biography," Yue Shi inserted another self-comment—an anecdote about Yang's birth, a fact that readers would normally expect towards the beginning of the story. One interpretation is that Yue Shi was using this self-comment to achieve a different goal. The anecdote claims Yang Guozhong is "in truth" the secret son of the notorious Zhang Yizhi, Empress Wu's male lover. The fact that Yue Shi did not weave this anecdote into his narrative but still chose to include it as a side note in the "Unofficial Biography" shows that while he may have had some reservations about its credibility, he still saw some explanatory power in the anecdote: If Yang Guozhong was born out of ritual inappropriateness, the danger of transgressing *li* was already in his blood from the very beginning.

As a historian, Yue Shi crafted his "Unofficial Biography" with a keen focus on preserving as much historical data as possible. This becomes apparent when comparing his account of Lady Yang's death with pre-existing records. He was able to do so through his application of the multi-layered textual structure, which allowed him to record multiple sources under a single episode. At the same time, he also employed this structural framework to subtly shape the narrative surrounding Lady Yang, for instance, by relegating the account from official history to a note, while elevating his own source to the main text. This example demonstrates how he exerted authorial influence over the presentation of events in his account, thereby articulating his personal judgment on the matter. Yue Shi also conveyed his judgment of historical figures by integrating pertinent anecdotes upon their introduction in the narrative. As illustrated, these anecdotes are far from arbitrary. Rather, they effectively contribute to the overarching theme of the biography.

These examples suggest that Yue Shi's connoisseur-like approach to Tang anecdotes demands a unique reading approach from the readers. If we prioritize narrative fluidity and structural coherence, traits often emphasized in our literary reading, we are most likely to dismiss Yue Shi's writing as coarse and unpolished. However, when we regard his multi-layered textual structure not

as a problem, but as an intentional strategy, we begin to appreciate the intricate interaction it fosters—between main texts and notes, and between the reader and the text.

#### 4      **Recontextualize Old Anecdotes in a New Tale: The Stories of Things**

In the preceding section, we explored how Yue Shi embedded his own voice within the narrative through structural devices. In this section, we will delve further into the content of the account, investigating how Yue Shi recontextualized the anecdotes he received for his “Unofficial Biography.” Upon reading the “Unofficial Biography,” readers will immediately notice that it is replete with “things,” particularly exotic treasures.<sup>22</sup> Yue Shi’s fascination with “things” becomes especially apparent when compared with other writers. For instance, Chen Hong’s “Account of the Song of Lasting Regret” describes Consort Yang’s first entrance into the emperor’s harem as follows:

The day she was presented in audience, the tune “Rainbow Skirt and Feathered Vestment” was performed to guide her entrance. The night the emperor promised his love, [he] bestowed a two-pronged hairpin of gold and a filigreed cosmetic case to pledge her, conferring also a hair-ornament that quivered when she walked and earrings of gold that hung down.<sup>23</sup>

進見之日，奏《霓裳羽衣曲》以導之；定情之夕，授金釵鈿合以固之。又命戴步搖，垂金璫。

The *JTS* account, however, depicts the same scene in only one sentence: “After [Consort Yang] was presented in audience, Emperor Xuanzong was greatly pleased” 既進見，玄宗大悅. Yue Shi conveys the emperor’s ecstasy through his actions and words, borrowed from Chen Hong’s account while adding other striking details:

22 Liao Ting 廖婷 conducted a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of the various gifts and their symbolic significance in the “Unofficial Biography.” For details, see Liao Ting, “Yang Taizhen Waizhuan’ de Liwu Xushi” 〈楊太真外傳〉的禮物敘事, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 46 (2018): 1–31.

23 Kroll, “The Account of the Song of Lasting Regret,” 244.

On the day the consort was presented in audience, they performed the tune “Rainbow Skirt and Feather Vestments” ... That evening, a two-pronged hairpin of gold and a filigreed cosmetic case was bestowed on her. Then his Highness, holding in his hand a dangling hair-ornament carved out of top-grade gold from the warehouse of Lishui Town, came to her dressing-room and put the hair-ornament on for her. The emperor was extremely pleased, and he commented to the attendants of the inner palace: “My having Precious Consort Yang is like finding a most valuable treasure.” Thus, he composed a tune and named it “Obtaining Treasure,” also called “Obtaining *bengzi*.”<sup>24</sup>

進見之日，奏《霓裳羽衣曲》……是夕，授金釵鈿合。上又自執麗水鎮庫紫磨金琢成步搖，至粧閣，親與插鬢。上喜甚，謂後宮人曰：「朕得楊貴妃，如得至寶也。」乃製曲子曰《得寶子》，又曰《得鞞子》。

Note how, on the one hand, the emperor extolled the consort by comparing her to a most valuable treasure. On the other hand, the hair-ornament, one of the emperor's many gifts to the consort in Chen Hong's account, is now “singularized” under the pen of Yue Shi.<sup>25</sup> By delineating the hair-ornament's origin and how it finally ended up in the consort's hands, Yue Shi, in effect, creates its mini biography and restores its singularity, that is, the hair-ornament is no longer merely a random piece of jewelry, but “the one” imbued with personal feeling and unique meaning. The question that needs to be asked here is how these stories about *things* come together in Yue Shi's hands to form a biography of a *person*?

The first half of the “Unofficial Biography” dazzles its readers with all kinds of exotic artifacts. In his heyday, the emperor ordered his officials to “seek rare and novel objects as offerings to the court everyday” 日求新奇以進奉。The Yang family also enjoyed “rare goods from the four regions” 四方奇貨 that their “young servants raced down the roads on horseback to bring to their doors every day” 僮僕馳馬，日輸其門。In skillfully connecting these

24 Zou, “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (A),” 615.

25 Here I borrowed Igor Kopytoff's concept of “singularization,” a cultural process in which an object becomes de-commodified after being exchanged and brought to a new setting. Huijun Mai creatively applies this concept to her analysis of anthropomorphic biographies of the Song dynasty and argues that these biographies restored the singularity of things by giving a personality to the object and by imagining the social and the inner life of the object-person. See Huijun Mai 麥慧君, “The Double Life of the Scallop: Anthropomorphic Biography, ‘Pulu,’ and the Northern Song Discourse on Things,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 49 (2020): 149–205.

discrete records, Yue Shi presents a corrupt value system in the entire empire, where a person's value is defined and made manifest through exotic gifts: The emperor recognized the value of his Precious Consort by lavishing exotic treasures on her and her family; The Yangs distinguished themselves in acquiring and ostentatiously displaying such gifts. Officials got promoted through their tributes of exotic objects to the court, surpassing offerings from other prefectures, and ceaselessly competing with even more exotic artifacts in exchange for political recognition, favor, and advancement.

If the first half of the “Unofficial Biography” focuses on how things transform people, who, in some cases are even transformed *into* things, the second half cites cases where singularity is returned to things and people. In Bai Juyi's poem and Chen Hong's accompanying account, there is also a distinctive thing—the two-pronged hairpin of gold—a love token the emperor gave to his consort that reemerged as a narrative tread in the later part of Chen and Bai's writings. Towards the end of their accounts, Chen and Bai both write of the successful efforts of a Taoist priest, who at the request of the emperor, finds at long last Consort Yang in the immortal world. The consort entrusts the Taoist priest to return half of this two-pronged hairpin to the emperor, exclaiming in tears that she “cannot do much but taking up this familiar old object to attest to [her] deepest feelings” 惟將舊物表深情.

Yue Shi inherits this motif of “old objects” and in the second half of the “Unofficial Biography,” artfully highlights the return of a series of old objects to the emperor's hands after the consort's tragic death. For example, a red-jade arm *bracelet*, first appearing at a court concert before the An Lushan Rebellion, well conveys this motif:

At the time, a female dancer, Xie Aman, had just been presented from Xinfeng to the emperor. She excelled in dancing. Both His Highness and the Precious Consort doted on her, so they kept her in the palace. One time, the emperor arranged a special performance in the Qingyuan Palace Hall ... The princes, princesses, and the consort's sisters all took the Precious Consort as their master and studied pipa under her. Each time they learned a melody, they would present the consort with expensive gifts. That day, after the performance, the consort said to Xie Aman, “You, poor girl, must be unable to afford any gift to your master, so let me give you something instead.” She told her maid, Hongtao, to bring a red-jade golden grain arm bracelet.<sup>26</sup>

26 Zou, “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (A),” 625.

時新豐初進女伶謝阿蠻，善舞。上與妃子鍾念，因而受焉。就按於清元小殿，寧王吹玉笛，上羯鼓，妃琵琶，馬仙期方響，李龜年箏篋，張野狐箏篋，賀懷智拍。自旦至午，歡洽異常……諸王，郡主，妃之姊妹，皆師妃，為琵琶弟子，每一曲徹，廣有獻遺。妃子是日問阿蠻曰：「爾貧，無可獻師長，待我與爾為。」命侍兒紅桃娘取紅粟玉臂支賜阿蠻。

This same red-jade arm bracelet reappears in the second half of Yue Shi's biography when the emperor, now "retired," is welcomed back to the capital by his son after pacification of the An Lushan Rebellion:

During the Zhide era (756–758), [Emperor Xuanzong] again graced the Huaqing Palace with his imperial presence. Most of those in his entourage of officials and palace maids were no longer acquainted with him ... Xie Aman, a female performer from Xinfeng, was good at dancing to the melody "Over the Waves." She was once a frequent visitor to the imperial harem, and the Precious Consort treated her generously. On that day, she was asked to dance under imperial order. After the performance, Aman took the opportunity to present a gold grained arm bracelet to His Highness, explaining, "This was bestowed upon me by the Precious Consort." His Highness held it, sadly shed tears, and said, "This is one of the two treasures my grandfather, the great emperor, obtained when he conquered Goguryeo. One was the purple gold belt, and the other was this red jade arm bracelet. I bestowed the gold belt upon Prince Qi for the 'Dragon Pond' piece that he presented, and bestowed the red jade arm bracelet on the consort. Later when the Goguryeo learned that these treasures now belonged to me, they sent a memorial, saying, 'Since our nation lost these treasures, we are having abnormal weather, our people are displaced, and our military power weakened.' I often thought we should not value this kind of things, so I ordered the return of their purple gold belt, but I kept the bracelet. Now that you obtained it from my consort, when I see it again today, it just awakens my sad feelings." When he finished speaking, he shed tears again.<sup>27</sup>

至德中，復幸華清宮。從官嬪御，多非舊人……新豐有女伶謝阿蠻，善舞《凌波曲》，舊出入宮禁，貴妃厚焉。是日，詔令舞。舞罷，阿蠻因進金粟裝臂環，曰：「此貴妃所賜。」上持之，淒然垂涕曰：「此我祖大帝破高麗，獲二寶：一紫金帶，一紅玉支。朕以岐王所進

27 Wu, "Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (B)," 654.

《龍池篇》，賜之金帶。紅玉支賜妃子。後高麗知此寶歸我，乃上言：『本國因失此寶，風雨愆時，民離兵弱。』朕尋以為得此不足為貴，乃命還其紫金帶。唯此不還。汝既得之於妃子，朕今再觀之，但興悲念矣。」言訖又涕零。

Like Chen Hong's two-pronged hairpin, this red-jade arm bracelet is also an "old familiar object" that brings back the memory of Consort Yang. But more importantly, this pair of anecdotes also form a mini "biography" of the red-jade arm bracelet that gradually unfolds as the narrative unwinds. Not until the second appearance of the arm bracelet does Yue Shi disclose that the bracelet originally came from Goguryeo 高句麗 and is believed to be the treasure of the greatest importance to the peace and stability of the country. The emperor, at the request of the Goguryeo people, returned one of the treasures, commenting, "I often thought we should not value the possession of this kind of [exotic] things" 朕尋以為得此不足為貴.

If the possession of the exotic artifact should not be valued, then what should be valued? In the end, the commercial and political value of this exotic artifact gave way to its sentimental and emotional value. This seems to be the proper attitude towards material possessions and people that Yue Shi wanted to restore through his stories of things.

The stories of "things" that we encounter in Yue Shi's "Unofficial Biography" can be found abundantly in collections of Tang anecdotes. Yue Shi's focus on "things"—the careful attention to detail, meticulous descriptions of their origin and transmission, and the value assigned to these objects—might indeed echo the heightened interest in cultural artifacts during the Northern Song period. By incorporating these stand-alone stories into his "Unofficial Biography," Yue Shi not only infuses them with new significance but also enhances the overall consistency and coherence of his work. Yue Shi interweaves these stories into the fabric of his entire narrative, allowing each to contribute its own unique thread to the tapestry of this "Unofficial Biography."

## 5 Reading "Unofficial Biography" in the Northern Song

In this section, our focus shifts towards the readers' perspective to understand the practice of reading and writing about Tang anecdotes in the Northern Song. My intention isn't to engage in a conventional "reception history" of Yue Shi's "Unofficial Biography"—a method often concerned primarily with the process of a literary work's canonization. Instead, I will mine both internal textual cues and external evidence, using them as windows to comprehend

how Tang anecdotes were perceived and utilized in the Northern Song era. Understanding how readers interacted with the text could offer valuable insight into the nature of the text itself and the broader cultural practices underpinning it.

In concluding the first part of his “Unofficial Biography,” Yue Shi documents a story about “screen of beauties”:

The screen took its name from the rainbow. It was carved with figurines of great beauties of the past, each about three inches tall. Their jewelry, artware, and clothes were made from an assortment of treasures. The screen, made of crystal, was intricately edged with tortoise shell and horn, and twined with rustling pearls. It was so exquisite that even the most skilled craftsmen could not produce it. This screen was made in response to the order of Emperor Yang of the former Sui dynasty and was later given to Princess Yicheng and followed her to the realm of the northern “barbarians.” In the early years of the Zhenguan Era (627–649), the northern “barbarians” were vanquished, and Empress Xiao was returned with the screen to the court. Hence, the emperor gave it to his consort.<sup>28</sup>

屏風乃虹霓爲名，雕刻前代美人之形，可長三寸許。其間服玩之器、衣服，皆用衆寶雜廁而成。水精爲地，外以玳瑁、水犀爲押，絡以珍珠瑟瑟。間綴精妙，迨非人力所製。此乃隋文帝所造，賜義成公主，隨在北胡。貞觀初，滅胡，與蕭后同歸中國，因而賜焉。

The context of this episode above depicts a minor friction between the emperor and the consort that later morphs into affection: Emperor Xuanzong is reading an unofficial biography about another ruler—Emperor Cheng of the Han. He teases Consort Yang about her plumpness and to console her, he gifts her this painted screen. Yue Shi showed particular interest in this painted screen and discovered another anecdote about this screen, which he added as a note under the first story:

When the consort returned home to visit the Duke of the Wei State (*i.e.* Yang Guozhong), she brought the screen with her and set it on a high tower. Before the consort had time to carry it back, Guozhong took a nap in the tower one day at noon. As he reached his bed, he saw the

28 Zou, “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (A),” 629.

screen standing there. Just as he put his head on his pillow, the beauties on the screen suddenly all walked down to the foot of his bed. They began informing him of their sobriquets (literary names) one by one: "I am called 'the person who loves the sound of breaking tabby silk.'" "I am 'the person from Dingtao.'" "I am 'the one dwelt in a domed tent.'" "I am 'the one in the wine-shop.'" "I am 'the person who brought down the Kingdom of Wu.'" "I am 'the one walking on the golden water lily.'" "I am 'the one from the Peach Blossom Spring.'" "I am 'the one whose tears spotted the bamboo trees.'" "I am 'the one who served the Gentlemen of Household for All Purposes.'" "I am 'the one with smooth and warm skin.'" "I am 'the girl from Cao Family who threw herself into the river.'" "I am 'the one without any rivals for whom the emperor burned incense to summon her spirit.'" "I am 'the one picking up the feathers of green birds.'" "I am 'the one who stole the aromatic.'" "I am 'the one who was put in a golden house.'" "I am 'the one who gave away her pendants by the Han River.'" "I am 'the one who becomes clouds in the morning [and passing rain in the evening].'" "I am Dong Shuangcheng." "I am 'the one who turned into mist.'" "I am 'the one who is good at painting long eyebrows.'" "I am 'the one who plays the pipes.'" "I am 'the one who once laughed at a cripple.'" "I was 'the one who was trapped in Gaixia.'" "I am Xu Feiqiong." "I am Zhao Feiyan." "I am 'the one who resided in the Garden of the Golden Valley.'" "I am 'the one with beautiful temple hair.'" "I am 'the one with glossy hair.'" "I am Xue Yelai." "I am 'the one who resided in the Jieqi Pavilion.'" "I am 'the one who resided in the Linchun Pavilion.'" "I am the woman from Fufeng." Although Guozhong's eyes were wide open and clearly saw all that was happening in front of him, he could not move his body, nor could he speak. These beautiful women all found something to sit on and sat in a row. Shortly thereafter, about ten courtesans, all slim-waisted, came forward and said to him: "We are performers of 'the court stomps' from the state of Chu." With that said, they then stood arm in arm and started to sing: "The 'three lotuses' were also of our kind, [the screen] built by the elder Yang is now possessed by the younger Yang." Then another two or three courtesans came forward and announced: "We are the bow-waist dancing women from the Chu Palace. Didn't you see there is a line in the 'unofficial preface' to the *Chuci* that reads: 'Her poise is charming, her bearing graceful, just like a flower; her waist bends like a bow and her skin shines like jade'? With these words, each of these dancing ladies came to offer their specific skills. When their performance ended, they returned to the screen one by one." It was not

until then did Guozhong wake up. Terrified, he hurried downstairs and ordered to immediately put away and lock up the screen. Having heard about this incident, the Precious Consort decided she, too, would not see the screen again. The screen survived the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) and found its way into the household of Chief Minister Yuan Zai 元載 (713–777). Since then, however, no one knows its whereabouts.<sup>29</sup>

妃歸衛公家，遂持去。安於高樓上，未及將歸。國忠日午偃息樓上，至牀，觀屏風在焉。纔就枕，而屏風諸女悉皆下牀前，各通所號，曰：「裂繒人也。」「定陶人也。」「穹廬人也。」「當壚人也。」「亡吳人也。」「步蓮人也。」「桃源人也。」「班竹人也。」「奉五官人也。」「溫肌人也。」「曹氏投波人也。」「吳宮無雙返香人也。」「拾翠人也。」「竊香人也。」「金屋人也。」「解佩人也。」「爲雲人也。」「董雙成也。」「爲煙人也。」「畫眉人也。」「吹簫人也。」「笑躋人也。」「垓中人也。」「許飛瓊也。」「趙飛燕也。」「金谷人也。」「小鬟人也。」「光髮人也。」「薛夜來也。」「結綺人也。」「臨春閣人也。」「扶風女也。」國忠雖開目，歷歷見之，而身體不能動，口不能發聲。諸女各以物列坐。俄有纖腰妓人近十餘輩，曰：「楚章華踏謠娘也。」迺連臂而歌之，曰：「三朵芙蓉是我流，大楊造得小楊收。」復有二三妓，又曰：「楚宮弓腰也。何不見〈楚辭別序〉云『淖約花態，弓身玉肌』？」俄而遞爲本藝。將呈訖，一一復歸屏上。國忠方醒，惶懼甚，遽走下樓，急令封鎖之。貴妃知之，亦不欲見焉。祿山亂後，其物猶存。在宰相元載家，自後不知所在。

Yue Shi's anecdote grew out of a stock story. A shorter version of women coming off an ancient screen appears in Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (ca. 800–863) *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Miscellaneous Delicates from the South Slope of Mount You) and likely existed in the repertoire of many Tang literati:

At the beginning of the Yuanhe era, there was a scholar, whose name has been lost. One day, intoxicated, he lay down in the hall. When he sobered up, he saw ladies from the ancient screen all came to stomp a song before his bed. The song ran:

Girls of Chang'an stomped the "the spring vigor [song],"  
 Now there is no such place where the spring's vigor does not break  
 one's heart.  
 Sleeve dancing and "bow-waist" almost forgotten,

29 For a complete translation and detailed annotations of these figures, see Zou, "Unofficial Biography of Yang the Great Varity (A)," 629–34.

Their moth eyebrows bear in vain the frosts from the ninety days of autumn.

One lady with her hair piled high in two coils from their midst asked: “how does a ‘bow waist’ look like?” With a smile, the singer said, “Haven’t you seen me do the ‘bow-waist?’” With that, the lady bent her head back until her chignon touching the ground, and the posture of her waist resembled that of a compass. The scholar was startled, and accordingly shouted at them, when they suddenly climbed back onto the screen as if nothing had happened.<sup>30</sup>

元和初，有一士人，失姓字，因醉臥廳中。及醒，見古屏上婦人等悉於牀前踏歌，歌曰：「長安女兒踏春陽，無處春陽不斷腸。舞袖弓腰渾忘卻，蛾眉空帶九秋霜。」其中雙鬟者問曰：「如何是弓腰？」歌者笑曰：「汝不見我作弓腰乎？」乃反首，髻及地，腰勢如規焉。士人驚懼，因叱之，忽然上屏，亦無其他。

Stark differences can be found between the initial story and Yue Shi’s version, particularly in the character portrayals, narrative perspective, and the symbolic interpretations of “stomping song” and “bow-waist.” In this early version, there are merely two ordinary-looking women (*furen* 婦人), whereas, in Yue Shi’s rendition, they transform into legendary beauties, often blamed for the downfall of a city, country, or dynasty. The nameless protagonist in the initial story simply “overhears” two women in a private conversation, while the beauties in Yue’s version come to perform for Yang Guozhong, the protagonist. But most importantly, “stomping song” and “bow-waist”—the women’s performance in both versions—convey distinct messages. The “key word” in the initial story is “forgotten”: since the “stomping song” and “bow-waist” were associated with the High Tang, their loss expresses the writer’s lament for the fading of the High Tang’s glories.

In Yue Shi’s rendition, however, the performance of “stomping songs” and “bow-waist” traces all the way back to the State of Chu in the Warring States Period, perhaps because King Ling of Chu was notoriously fond of a “slim waist.” The narrator also refers to a certain preface to the “Unofficial Collection” of the *Chuci*, a book not seen in any historical record. Moreover, the lyrics of the stomping songs no longer mourn the passing of a golden era, but rather deliver a “prophecy” for its listeners to decipher. Not to mention the names of those beauties coming back to life from the painted screen, all of which

30 Based on Nienhauser’s translation with minor modifications. For Nienhauser’s original translation and his discussion of this anecdote, see Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chih’s T’ang Tales,” 45.

require readers' knowledge of "unofficial" literature. Although we cannot know for sure whether Yue Shi invented this anecdote or simply inherited it (this anecdote doesn't appear in any other existing collections of anecdotes before Yue Shi's time), it signals a noteworthy change in the culture of reading unofficial histories. In addition to gaining an understanding of the past, it seems that Song readers were also invited to have fun with and even "fabricate" rare knowledge of the past. This, I would argue, indexes an undercurrent in the creation and reception of "unofficial" literature that was to develop into a new trend later during the Northern Song.

More than half a century later, the poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) and his friends encountered Yue Shi's "Unofficial Biography," leaving us with their reflections. Huang's suite of poems are preserved to this day, titled "A Companion Piece to Chen Junyi's 'Reading the Unofficial Biography of Taizhen'" 和陳君儀讀太真外傳. Regrettably, Chen Junyi's poems are no longer extant. In addition to Huang and Chen, the eminent Song poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) also composed a series of three poems, known as "On Reading Uncollected Stories from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao era" 讀開元天寶遺事. These poems all attest to a prevalent interest in reading and writing about Tang anecdotes during this period.

Before delving into each poem, let us consider first Huang Tingjian's choice of format for conveying his reaction to the "Unofficial Biography." The poem suite in question—multiple poems under an overarching theme—provides the poet with both a panoramic view of the entire biography and a more focused perspective on specific sections. This multi-part structure, unified by a central topic, also mirrors the composition of the "Unofficial Biography." As we will later see, the five poems follow a similar creation mode: A particular line, or moment, in the "Unofficial Biography" stimulates the poet, driving the creation of the poem. This line or moment from the original narrative is then translated into poetic language, woven into a new context, and subjected to a new poetic logic. Upon completion, each poem becomes a reflection of the original line, moment, or indeed, the entire "Unofficial Biography."

Huang Tingjian's first poem in this series presents a bird-eye view of the entire An Lushan rebellion: the emperor and his court, bathed in unparalleled peace and prosperity until the An Lushan suddenly brings all this splendor to a violent, crashing end:

朝廷無事君臣樂，  
花柳多情殿閣春。

The court, free of troubles, is where the ruler and  
his officials take pleasure,  
Flowers and willows, full of emotions, brings  
spring to the palace tower.

- 不覺胡雛心暗動，<sup>31</sup> Unaware that the barbarian chick has been  
aroused in secrecy,  
綺羅翻作墜樓人。<sup>32</sup> The lady in satins became “the one who leapt to  
her death from a high tower.”

The third line of the poem reveals the propelling force behind this devastating rebellion and corresponds to a specific anecdote in the “Unofficial Biography,” which uncovers a more personal reason for An Lushan’s revolt: his desire for the consort. In the eyes of the poet Huang Tingjian, this piece of new information in the “Unofficial Biography” makes the case of Consort Yang analogous to that of Lüzhū (the Green Pearl), another historic beauty whose allure spelled disaster. In the last line, Huang alludes to Lüzhū through the term *zhuilou ren* 墜樓人—the one who leapt to her death from a high tower. Given that Yue Shi also wrote a biography for Lüzhū, Huang Tingjian’s choice of this specific allusion perhaps encourages his readers to read Yue Shi’s two biographies in conjunction, considering how they shape the meaning of each other.

The second poem reads:

- 扶風喬木夏陰合， Shadows of the tall trees at Fufeng merge on a  
summer day,  
斜谷鈴聲秋夜深。 Sound of the ringing bells in the Sloping Valley  
ran deep into an autumn night.  
人到愁來無處會， A person, when in deep sorrow, encounters  
sorrow wherever he goes—  
不關情處總傷心。 even places that never stirred the mind now  
pain his heart.

31 This line corresponds to an anecdote in the “Unofficial Biography,” which relates, “Earlier, when An Lushan was called before His Highness, he responded with wisecracks and jokes. The consort was often present, and An Lushan was tempted by her. When An Lushan learned of the consort’s death at Mawei, he sighed with regret for several days. Although [he rebelled because] Li Linfu appeased him and Yang Guozhong infuriated him, there was additionally a more personal reason for him to do it. 初，祿山嘗於上前應對，雜以諧謔。妃常在座，祿山心動。及聞馬嵬之死，數日嘆惋。雖林甫養育之，國忠激怒之，然其有所自也。 See Wu, “Unofficial Biography of Yang the Grand Verity (B),” 651.

32 墜樓人 refers to Lüzhū, the favorite concubine of Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300). Lüzhū’s beauty attracted Sun Xiu 孫秀, a general under Sima Lun 司馬倫 (d. 301), King of Zhao and one of the leaders during the Rebellion of Eight Kings (291–306). When Shi Chong refused to give Lüzhū to Sun Xiu, Sun sent troops to seize Lüzhū, who in the end leapt to her death from a high tower in Shi Chong’s “Garden of the Golden Valley” 金谷園.

This poem depicts at the outset two different natural scenes—one in summer, the other in fall. Readers will soon learn that the tall trees at Fufeng and the sound of ringing bells have their textual basis in the “Unofficial Biography”: Following the consort’s tragic death, the emperor comes across a tall tree at the Fufeng Circuit and names it after a tower in the Huaqing Palace, where he and the consort spent their most cherished times. Later, he composes a tune (*diao* 調) upon hearing ringing bells echo across the mountains in the rain at Sloping Valley. Here the poet does more than simply quoting the original text, rather, he “normalizes” the scenes, imagining how the trees at Fufeng might appear on a typical summer day, and what the ringing bells might sound like on a regular autumn night. These are ordinary scenes if not viewed from the emperor’s lens. Here Huang Tingjian makes an interesting interpretation of the anecdotes through his poem: what the emperor created in these moments had nothing to do with the inherent qualities of the tree or the ringing of bells. Simply put, his sorrow was so profound that he would have been moved by any encounter with the world around him.

The third poem grows out of another anecdote reported in the “Unofficial Biography,” in which Consort Yang composes lyrics for the tune “Liangzhou.” In the original narrative, however, the consort’s contribution to “Liangzhou” is only briefly described in a flashback. Huang Tingjian seizes this fleeting moment and spotlights it in his poem:

梁州一曲當時事，	The melody of Liangzhou—one of those things back then:
記得曾拈玉笛吹。	Remember when [she] picked up the jade flute to play?
端正樓空春晝永，	Now the Duanzheng Tower is empty, yet spring days never end—
小桃猶學淡燕支。	Budding peach blossoms still imitate [her] mellow rouge style.

Huang Tingjian’s poem recreates the moment when the consort performed this tune on her jade flute at the Duanzheng tower. The tower, according to the “Unofficial Biography,” was where “the Precious Consort washed and dressed herself” 華清宮有端正樓，即貴妃梳洗之所 when she and the emperor visited the Huaqing Palace in the winters. The jade flute appears several times in the “Unofficial Biography,” mostly played by the emperor.<sup>33</sup> Thus, although the

33 According to the “Unofficial Biography,” one time, after Li Bai 李白 (701–762) composed new lyrics to praise the beauty of the consort, the emperor ordered court musician to set the lyrics to tunes and he himself further “accompanied the tune on his jade flute, and slowly ending the note of each verse to please the consort” 上因調玉笛以倚曲，每曲

tower and the flute appear in the “Unofficial Biography,” they are not explicitly associated with the consort’s performance of “Liangzhou.” Here we see how Huang Tingjian transitions from a reader of anecdotes about the consort to a creator of such anecdotes through his poem.

In the poem’s last line, Huang envisions a current moment at the Duzheng tower: with the consort gone forever and the tower deserted, how could we latecomers access this past history? The poet, directing us to the budding peach blossoms that he himself added to the textual world of consort Yang, suggests that through these spring flowers, we might still get a glimpse of the consort’s beauty, and the life she once lived.

The fourth poem in this series picks out two items the consort once possessed according to the “Unofficial Biography” and imagines their “afterlife” after the consort’s death:

高麗條脫瑠紅玉，	With this Goguryeo bracelet carved out of red jade,
邏紗琵琶捻綠絲。	On this <i>Pipa</i> from Lhasa, [she once] tweaked its green strings.
蛛網屋煤昏故物，	Spider webs and soot darkens these former things,
此生惟有夢來時。	In the remaining years, [they/I/He] only wait for her return in a dream.

We have previously discussed the arm bracelet from Goguryeo to illustrate how Yue Shi creatively converted exotic treasures into “old familiar things” 舊物／故物 which the emperor later encountered after the consort’s death. Here Huang Tingjian continues this motif from the original narrative but goes one step further: now even those “old familiar people” 故人 who once kept the consort’s old belongings in the “Unofficial Biography” are gone. These old things are deserted, losing their luster with each passing day. The poem’s last line is ambiguous, as we don’t know the subject of the sentence. Regardless, the poet extends the timeline of the “Unofficial Biography” and returns readers to an imagined historical moment shortly after the ending point of the “Unofficial Biography.” In this sense, this poem can be read as a sequel, albeit on a much smaller scale, to the original narrative.

The last poem in this suite, like the other four poems discussed above, also begins with an anecdote in the “Unofficial Biography.” It states that the

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遍將換，則遲其聲以媚之。Here, in this episode relating the emperor’s reencounter with an old court musician and the “Tune of Liangzhou” after the consort’s death, we see the emperor once again, “accompanied the old musician’s singing on the flute” 上親御玉笛，為之倚曲。

emperor once read an unofficial biography of Emperor Cheng of the Han and his favorite consort Zhao Feiyan:

上皇曾御昭儀傳，	His August Highness once read the “Biography of Lady of Bright Department,”
鏡裡觀形隻眼前。	As if looking at himself in a mirror—it was merely what was happening before his eyes.
養得祿兒傾四海，	He raised his “Lu-boy,” who toppled this sea-grit world,
千秋更有一伶玄。	A thousand autumns later, here came another biographer, Ling Xuan.

The biographer Ling Xuan is credited with the “Unofficial Biography of Emperor Cheng of the Han,” alluded to in the first line of this poem by its alternative title, “Biography of Lady of Bright Department.” Interestingly, the emperor’s episode of reading this unofficial biography is just one of numerous anecdotes within the “Unofficial Biography.” Here Huang Tingjian enhances this anecdote, elevating it to the stature of a grand allegory encapsulating the entirety of the “Unofficial Biography.” The poet further aligns Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography” within a genealogical lineage of unofficial biographies initiated by Ling Xuan, contending that it continues the admonishing tradition of this genre.

Through this newly framed lens, what was once an ordinary anecdote of the emperor reading an unofficial biography for leisure takes on a new significance: the Tang emperor is immersed in an admonishing biography, yet entirely oblivious to its intended message. The poet then poses a question to his readers, who have similarly journeyed through the “Unofficial Biography”: what lessons do we extract from Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography”? Are we akin to the emperor who failed to recognize his own reflection within this writing?

Huang Tingjian’s poetic dialogue with Yue Shi’s “Unofficial Biography” offers a compelling case study to illustrate how Northern Song readers navigated, interpreted, and creatively engaged with the rich textual legacy from the Tang dynasty. The way Huang extrapolates anecdotes, distills their essence, and resituates them in an innovative poetic context underlines the fluidity of these anecdotes in their transition from the original form into new artistic expressions.

## 6 Towards a Conclusion

Yue Shi’s objective in writing the “Unofficial Biography,” according to his own account, was “not only to collect old anecdotes about Consort Yang, but also to admonish people to guard against a similar disaster.” In this paper, I have

sought to illustrate that Yue Shi's work is far more than a mere receptacle for collected material; it is an articulation of his understanding of the causes of the An Lushan rebellion, achieved through the careful selection and arrangement of sourced materials. Throughout the process, a balance had to be struck: how to include as much material as possible while maintaining focus? Yue Shi's multi-layered textual system in the "Unofficial Biography" partially alleviates this tension. However, preserving the "original flavor" of source materials posed the question as to how to fit heterogeneous material into the text's central theme and overall framework. As observed, many of Yue Shi's anecdotes about Consort Yang's death grew out of the "romantic culture" of the mid-Tang, thus exhibiting deep sympathy for the consort and powerful nostalgia for the High Tang. When incorporated wholesale without extensive rewriting, these materials are almost inevitably at odds with the moral lessons needed for the Northern Song period.

When viewing the "Unofficial Biography" from a reader's perspective, the issues that modern readers face while reading the biography—historical inaccuracies and structural inconsistencies—don't seem to have troubled Song readers, who approached this unofficial biography in a distinct way. More crucially, through the medium of the unofficial biography, Song literati carved out a new literary space for engaging with the past and interacting with inherited texts. In this process, they read, wrote, reinterpreted, and even devised new anecdotes about the past. This exploration seeks to pave a new path towards understanding the interplay between authorship, readership, and the construction of historical knowledge during this period, thereby enriching our understanding of the narratives from the Tang and Song dynasties.

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# Imagistic Wordplay: Decoding Examination Dreams in *Yijian zhi*

Victor H. MAIR and Zihan GUO

## Abstract

The civil service examination system is one of the most remarkable aspects of traditional Chinese culture, but it was not until the Song Dynasty (960–1279) that examination life evolved into a common topic in anecdotal writings. The fortune and esteem it promised and the trials and tribulations it posed were woven into the socio-cultural fabric of this vibrant era. Examination candidates, simultaneously attracted to an official career yet anxious of their prospects for success within it, explored a broad spectrum of outlooks between determinism and human effort that they expressed through creative storytelling. Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi*, an eclectic opus of nearly three thousand extraordinary tales, contains over six hundred accounts of dreams, with themes covering every aspect of people's daily life. Those that foretell the results of examinations abound, with a wide variety of approaches ranging from divination to outright skepticism. In this paper, we investigate the psychological and narratological dimensions of the dream tales in Hong Mai's capacious collection, with a surprising diversity of attitudes and outlooks.

## Keywords

civil service examinations – Hong Mai – *Yijian zhi* – dreams – divination – tales

The civil service examination has long been a remarkable tradition in Chinese culture, but it was not until the Song Dynasty (960–1279) that the examination life evolved into a common topic in anecdotal writings. The fortune and esteem it promised and the contest and exertion it demanded all wove into the socio-cultural fabric of this vibrant era. Examination candidates, simultaneously attracted to an official career and anxious of their own lot within it, explored a wide spectrum between determinism and human effort through storytelling. Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123–1202) *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (*Record of the*

*Listener*),<sup>1</sup> an eclectic collection of nearly three thousand unusual tales, contains over six hundred accounts of dreams, with themes covering every aspect of people's daily life. Those that portend the result of examination abound. As variegated as these stories are, they demonstrate how the examination culture had been ingrained in the mind of the Song candidates and how its influence permeated the Song society. In spite of their trepidation confronting the unknown force dictating destiny, the candidates also held a skeptical attitude toward it and at times played an active role in deciphering and utilizing the divine messages to justify their own deeds.

Our focus in this paper is dreams about examination, especially those that are not in themselves transparent predictions but puzzles to be unraveled.<sup>2</sup> Of all the six hundred dream stories in *Yijian zhi*, one fifth are related to examinations, where dreamers receive various hints on their career prospects. They all rest upon the premise that dreamscape is a dense symbolic universe brimming with signs both humanly and heavenly. These accounts, however, do not exhibit a consistent well-worn pattern of explicit portents. The dreamers have drastically different reactions ranging from wholehearted acceptance to unreflecting rejection. Dreams relate to many aspects of examinations: exam questions, examiners, final rankings, year of passing the exam, locations of official posts, and so on. Most of the time the dream messages are secretly coded. To one's astonishment, the actual results might turn out to be the exact opposite, whether success or failure. Such a gap between appearance and reality

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1 For a general introduction and comprehensive survey of the scholarship, see Alister David Inglis, *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener and Its Song Dynasty Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). See also Cong Ellen Zhang, ed. and trans., *Record of the Listener: Selected Stories from Hong Mai's Yijian Zhi* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018). For a study that uses *Yijian zhi* as historical sources to illuminate interactions between social and religious changes, see Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). For a recent study of women and gender that uses *Yijian zhi* substantially, see Hsiao-wen Cheng, *Divine, Demonic, and Disordered: Women without Men in Song Dynasty China* (University of Washington Press, 2021).

2 For studies on Song candidates' recourse to divine aid, which usually included praying for prophetic dreams, see chapter 7 of John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), which proposes that Song candidates turned to religious realms under pressure from the competitive examination system. See also chapter 2 of Hsien-huei Liao, "Popular Religion and the Religious Beliefs of the Song Elite, 960–1276" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), which probes into the interactions between Confucian-educated elite and popular religion. For the birth of a particular patron deity for examination candidates, the Zitong 梓潼 (also Wenchang Dijun 文昌帝君), who was believed to bestow blissful dreams, see Terry Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

suggests varied degree of interpretive ambiguity and predictive accuracy. In the case where a candidate does succeed, the chronological manner of narration makes his success seem destined, and yet his interpretive ingenuity merits attention as well.

Dream as a quotidian phenomenon has been featured in literature since ancient times, be it records of mantic practices or anecdotes of oneiric experiences.<sup>3</sup> The Song was certainly not a unique era where examination dreams were recorded in the genre of *biji* 筆記 (Brush Notes), but their large percentage is remarkable compared to previous times. In Song tales, such dreams share some unique traits as well. Tang stories of examination, such as those collected in *Tang zhi yan* 唐摭言 (*Tang Gleanings*), often contain unequivocal dream messages in the way they are worded and retold. However they are unveiled and fulfilled, they usually lead to success. Stories in *Yijian zhi*, however, are distinct to some extent. Narratologically, the real meanings of dreams are always deferred, sometimes by a time span of several decades. The result is not always desirable either. Stylistically, the narrator's presence becomes conspicuous at times and seems to offer a personal opinion on the protagonists in the narratives.<sup>4</sup> In terms of the kinds of dreams recorded, one finds numerous cases where dreamers imagine themselves as being confronted by riddles. They approach the seemingly inscrutable signs in an imagistic way, dismantling and reconfiguring individual words and characters in order to make sense of them, sometimes in a labored way. This reliance on visuality is interesting to ponder in relation to the fact that most sources in *Yijian zhi* are believed to have been collected orally. These attempts suggest that candidates strive to understand the unknown through their limited knowledge, and that decoding dreams becomes a game that engages them.

The distinctiveness of these tales has to do with the distinctiveness of *Yijian zhi* itself. As scholars have remarked, this voluminous collection is polyvocal and its worldviews can be conflicting. Hong Mai's rationale for compiling

3 For a historical overview of the dream motif, see Fu Zhenggu 傅正谷, *Zhongguo meng wenhua* 中國夢文化 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1993) and Fu, *Zhongguo meng wenxueshi* 中國夢文學史 (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1993). For a recent study on dream as human experience during early medieval China, see Robert Ford Campamy, *The Chinese Dreamscape, 300 BCE–800 CE* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2022).

4 For a study that broaches the issue of the narrator's voice in *Yijian zhi*, see Ronald C. Egan, "Crime, Violence, and Ghosts in the Lin'an Stories in *Yijian zhi*," in Joseph S. Lam, et al., eds., *Senses of the City: Perceptions of Hangzhou and Southern Song China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2017), 149–78.

such a work was his self-professed love of the extraordinary and unusual.<sup>5</sup> Supernatural elements are frequently included, but Hong's purview of the extraordinary and unusual is much broader and more fluid than the modern category of the "supernatural," and the incidents were recorded to have happened in people's everyday lives. Although such an emphasis would likely be aligned with the *zhiguai* 志怪 (accounts of anomalies) tradition, Hong's work distinguishes itself by his selection criterion of contemporary hearsay as well as his effort to ensure reliable sources and faithful recording.<sup>6</sup> Hong often identified his informants and stressed the fact that he had gone an extra step to verify the veracity of his stories.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of their themes, *Yijian zhi* stories reflect a world full of skepticism and ambiguity. Many depictions of the extraordinary incidents, such as those of butchered animals turning into haunting ghosts or deceased persons coming back to life and reappearing on the street, point to a uniform belief in an unflinching order of karmic retribution. However, as Robert Hymes suggests, though gods and supernatural forces are prevalent in *Yijian zhi*, doubts about them are ubiquitous as well.<sup>8</sup> This is strengthened by a prevalent feature of the "deferral of truth," namely, that the truth is revealed only at the end of the story. In the dream stories, the significant temporal gap between the utterance of prediction and its fulfillment leaves room for doubt and refutation of the efficacy of the prediction. On other occasions, the exact nature of the anomalous happenings is simply not explained at all. Alister Inglis terms this narratological ambiguity the "fantastique," which is premised upon the narrator's limiting the reader's knowledge to that of certain characters.<sup>9</sup> In accounts of examination dreams as well, the narrator's role is noteworthy. As will become clear, specific ways of storytelling instill expectations in readers, only to be subverted as the story unfolds. Though minute details seem to account for the development of the story, there is no way to confirm what actually transpired.

5 Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, ed. He Zhuo 何卓 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), "yizhixu" 乙志序, 185.

6 Edward L. Davis has noted that while Hong focused on recording what people hear and say, *zhiguai* genre aimed primarily at "sheer storytelling." See Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 18.

7 For a discussion of the diverse social background of Hong Mai's informants as well as an index of them, see Alister D. Inglis, "Hong Mai's Informants for the *Yijian zhi*," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 32 (2002): 83–125.

8 Robert Hymes, "Truth, Falsity, and Pretense in Song China: An Approach through the Anecdotes of Hong Mai," *Chugoku shigaku* 15 (2005): 1–26.

9 Inglis adapts this idea from Tzvetan Todorov's theory of "fantastic" literature, see Inglis, "Narratological Ambiguity in Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi*," *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies* 59 (2015): 24–46.

Although stories in *Yijian zhi* are thought to represent voices from a wide range of social echelons in the Song, the majority of them depict literati who encounter supernatural forces.<sup>10</sup> Their intertwined social, cultural, and political roles often make them the target of specific demonic assaults.<sup>11</sup> Three types of encounters between them and the spiritual beings occur repetitively in literature, as Hsien-huei Liao thoroughly analyzes, with each corresponding to different facets of their lives. Those who hold official positions are likely to confront vengeful ghosts due to the judicial pressure imposed on them. Wandering specters sometimes haunt them in the public domain, demanding proper burials. Examination candidates and low-ranking officials are also harassed by seductive apparitions, which reflects their sexual repression while devoting themselves to officialdom away from home. In the face of demonic assault, the literati show rather submissive attitudes, as they have internalized the karmic order and often treat their sufferings as punishments for misconduct. This mentality merits special attention as it seems a pervasive theme also in stories of the examination life in *Yijian zhi*. Candidates in these stories believe wholeheartedly in predeterminism regardless of the scope of its significance.<sup>12</sup> For this reason they often seek divine enlightenment on their fate through varied measures, the most common one being to pray for prophetic dreams. On the other hand, dream stories suggest that the candidates are also active in decoding the dream messages, which they further utilize to explain and justify their life trajectory. More importantly, their volitional effort plays a part in the fulfillment of the prophecies, complicating the belief that they are entirely subject to divine dictates.

10 Though even the class of literati is very diversified, as they all come from different social backgrounds through the meritocratic examination system, as distinguished from previous aristocratic mechanisms. Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (1982): 365-442. It is also possible that Hong Mai collected his sources primarily from literati.

11 Hsien-huei Liao, "Encountering Evil: Ghosts and Demonic Forces in the Lives of the Song Elite," *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 37 (2007): 89-134.

12 For example, the story of Wang Anxing records Wang's dream that foretells his "assignment" to the Directorate of Education, which turns out to be merely a grader's position in the examination hall. The comment at the end of the story goes: "Who says that trivia are not predetermined?" 孰謂小事非前定乎。"Guozijian meng" 國子監夢, *Yijian zhi*, "Dingzhi" 丁志, 16:674. Another remark in the story of Liu Pu: "Since time immemorial, for those who receive superior positions and generous salary and are influential, it is all granted by the creator. It may be talking about destiny, but it is as much about some kind of cosmic workings (*zaohua* 造化). Those who wander in distress and destitution should not blame Heaven or grumble at others" 然則古往今來，蒙高爵厚祿，巍巍如山者，皆賦於造化，其棲遲厄窮，不怨天尤人可也。"Dahe Liu wei" 大和劉尉, *Yijian zhi*, "sanzhi ren" 三志王, 5:1504.

Much ink has been spilled on the cultural importance of the examination system during the Song as well as its laborious scholars who craved for social ascendancy. There were both subjective and objective factors that affected the literati mindset concerning it. Besides one's own desire to enter officialdom, the urgent demand for passing the examination also derived from practical concerns of the long-term financial burdens and time costs (completing a full cycle of examination amounts to nearly a year).<sup>13</sup> Career and age expectations were also crucial elements that added to candidates' anxiety. Success in examination signified not only a transition from the common to the official, but also a transformation from youth to manhood. In many ways, the failure to advance through multi-layered examinations symbolized a failure to enter adulthood.<sup>14</sup> These aspects contributed to the necessity for the Song literati to pass the examination and in turn prompted them to appeal for divine aid and illumination. As recorded in the *Yijian zhi*, their contact with the divine often takes place in dreams, where they receive omens about the future. Though auspicious omens do not exempt candidates from taking the examination, they do offer reassurance that dilutes the anxiety and insecurity. Compared to precedents of recorded prophetic dreams in the Tang, which tend to foretell unambiguous success and reflect the Tang candidates' innate Confucian pursuits,<sup>15</sup> accounts in *Yijian zhi* contain less transparent predictions and more enigmatic messages. They depict a complex interiority of the candidates and turning their dream interpretation into riddle-solving that resembles the strenuous process of taking the examination itself.

## 1 Hidden Voice and Moral Criticism

A common feature of stories about examination dreams, and in general, is the "deferral of truth," meaning a significant gap between the utterance of the prediction (or general representation of truth) and its fulfillment. This gap leaves room for dreamers to suspect the validity of the dream and is significant in understanding Song people's co-existing belief and disbelief toward the unknown world. This is nowhere more evident than in the following story

13 Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, 161.

14 *Ibid.*, 171.

15 Chen Jinfeng 陳金鳳, "Tangdai shizi de keju jiaolü yu mengjing qiqiu" 唐代士子的科舉焦慮與夢境祈求, in Zhan Shichuang 詹石窗, ed., *Meng yu dao: Zhonghua chuantong mengwenhua yanjiu* 夢與道：中華傳統夢文化研究 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2009) 1: 343–56.

where a candidate receives omens twice about the examination, which he is able to realize only after thirty years:

Lin Xiaoyong, style name Tianhe, was from Mingzhou (Ningbo, Zhejiang Province). In the seventh year of the Zhenghe period (1117), he attended the Imperial University as a candidate and prepared to take the examination for the Upper Hall. When Lin was younger, he once received a recommendation that could exempt him from the prefectural examination. Some advised him to use this privilege to take the prefectural examination first, and if he did not pass, he could retain the candidacy and participate in next year's examination. Lin did not heed their advice. Yang Gongquan, his classmate, asked for the reason. Lin said: "When I was just twenty, I took the prefectural examination. I dreamed of being tested on devising policies at a grand hall and sitting in the southwestern corner. When I was about to leave, a eunuch followed me and asked for my ink-stone. I was very proud and thought that I would definitely succeed. I inquired from various diviners and they said: 'Sir, when you turn forty-eight you will receive a position, not yet now.' I was not satisfied at all. Then I failed at the Ministry of Rites, and thereon I have been unsuccessful for nearly thirty years. Now I am already forty-seven and should be able to hope for a good fortune and will no longer need to retake the prefectural examination." On that year he indeed passed the examination. After taking the palace examination, he told Gongquan: "On the day of examination I was indeed sitting on the southwestern corner. A eunuch asked for my ink-stone. It was all like what happened in my dream." His dream thirty years before, as well as the diviners' words, was not a bit different from reality.

林孝雍，字天和，明州人。政和七年，貢入辟廱學，將試上舍。林少時嘗預薦書，應免解。或勸其先以免舉試，如不利，則留今貢以待來年，林不聽。同舍生楊公全扣其故，林曰：「吾年甫二十蒙鄉舉，夢對策大廷，坐于西南隅。將出，有小黃門從吾求硯，心頗自負，以為必擢第。訊諸筮人，筮人曰：『君年四十八乃得官，今未也。』吾意殊不平。訖黜於春官，自是連蹇，幾三十年。今春秋四十七矣，當可覬倖，不為再戰地也。」是歲果中選。廷試出，又告公全曰：「試日正坐西南隅，小黃門乞硯，皆如夢中所覩。」三十年前夢，與卜者所言，無毫釐差。<sup>16</sup>

16 "Lin Xiaoyong meng" 林孝雍夢, *Yjian zhi*, "Jiazhi" 甲志, 18.158.

This is a typical story of a predictive dream that comes true, albeit after a long time. Two aspects remain fascinating: the change in Lin's self-perception and the contention between dream and divination. When Lin first has the dream, he confesses that "in his mind he was very proud" 心頗自負, thinking that he "would definitely make the pass list" 以為必擢第. Note that his pride and confidence are not as unswervingly adamant as they may seem, otherwise he would not have had to seek further confirmation from the diviner. While both the dream and the diviner are believed to carry prophetic power, Lin places his faith in the former when the two seem contradictory, even though the diviner gives clearer predictions. As the divinatory message does not accord with his expectation, he feels "extremely unsatisfied" 殊不平. Belief and doubt in supernatural forces feature simultaneously: the dream seems to promise a propitious future, but its message is still not clear or certain enough and has to be concretized and further corroborated by divinatory result. It is only after his successive years of unsuccessful examination, which correspond to the divination, that his initial conceit turns into humble acquiescence. His speech then expresses a drastically different modesty, as passing the examination is no longer something he takes for granted but something for which he can only "pray for luck" 覬倖. He completely believes in the divination and follows its prescription to participate at the right age and thus passes the examination. The discord between the dream and divination turns out to be an imagined one as a result of misinterpretation.

As a narrative device and a stamp of verisimilitude, the term *guo* 果 signals the realization of the dream portent. Its effect lies not only in indicating the fulfillment of the prior prediction but also in establishing a causality between a series of chronological events. The meaning of *guo* can be rendered as "indeed as it turned out" and "just as had been said / predicted / dreamed / thought."<sup>17</sup> Without such an instrumental indicator, the succession of the events might appear as mere coincidence rather than definite causality. Nonetheless, the causality suggested by *guo* is not entirely infallible. This narrative device can be deceptive, when two outcomes are associated with one prediction, resulting in an ambiguity concerning the real referent of the prediction:

The numen of Zitong's divine dream had been recorded in previous accounts. Luo Yanguo, a local from Chengdu (in Sichuan Province), had taken the examination many times but did not succeed. Once he had taken it the fourth time, he fasted and prayed for a dream. He dreamed

17 Hymes, "Truth, Falsity, and Pretense in Song China," 7.

of Cai Jing (1047–1126) saying to him: “I have put forward a recommendation that you be appointed as the Auxiliary Academician of the Bureau of Military Affairs.” The following year, Luo failed the prefectural examination again. He then, by imperial grace, received the position of instructor in Mizhou (in Shandong Province).<sup>18</sup> Shao Yundao was a local from Xipu (a district in Chengdu). In the seventh year of the Shaoxing period (1137), he was recommended by the prefect and also prayed for a dream from the deity. He dreamed that the deity told him: “I have arranged for you a top rank in a distinguished family (Jia Gate).” When he took the examination, he *indeed* ranked first, whereupon he inscribed this experience on a stone in the western veranda of the temple. Later he was dismissed as an assistant to Meizhou (in Sichuan Province) and was transferred to Lin’an (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). When his boat arrived at Zhakou county (in Hubei Province), he died of an illness.<sup>19</sup> Only then were the words about the Jia Gate proved. In fact, it referred to the word “Zha” (as in the name of Zhakou county).

梓潼神夢之靈，前志已載矣。成都人羅彥國，累試不第，既四舉，齋戒乞夢。夢蔡魯公謂曰：「已奏除公樞密直學士矣。」次年省試又下，乃以累舉恩，得密州文學。犀浦人邵允蹈，紹興七年被鄉薦，亦乞夢于神。夢神告曰：「已與卿安排甲門高第矣。」及類試，果為第一，乃刻石紀于廟西廡。後罷眉州幕官，赴調臨安，舟行至閘口鎮，病死。始驗甲門之語，蓋閘字也。<sup>20</sup>

In the Southern Song, the Lord of Zitong had been transformed from a local deity to a god of examinations, to whom candidates often prayed for blessings.<sup>21</sup> The widespread belief in Zitong and the popular practice of worshipping it are reflected in many *Yijian zhi* stories. The beginning of this entry asserts the empirically tested power of Zitong’s prophetic dream and prepares the reader for yet another story of the same pattern. The first story presents no surprise, where the dream is relatively transparent and eventually realized. Luo dreams of the prime minister of the Northern Song, who directly nominates him as an

18 *Leijuen* 累舉恩 (also known as *tezouming* 特奏名) was a Song administrative practice to grant special positions to candidates who had failed multiple times, in order to prevent them from making relentless attempts.

19 The name of the place is “Zhakou” 閘口. The dream prediction contains the term “Jia Gate” 甲門 that can also mean a distinguished family.

20 “Zitong’s Dream” 梓潼夢, *Yijian zhi*, “Yizhi” 乙志, 5:223.

21 Zhang Zehong 張澤洪, “Daojiao de ‘Zitong meng’ yu Wenchang Dijun chongbai” 道教的「梓潼夢」與文昌帝君崇拜, in Zhan, *Meng yu dao*, 121–42.

academician. There can be no confusion or ambiguity over the dream message. Its promise is further evinced by the prominent title of “Duke of the Lu state” 魯國公 that Cai Jing was addressed as in Luo’s dream.

The second story, however, ends in a divergent direction. The deity’s seemingly plain prediction in Shao’s dream is followed by two opposite outcomes. The word *jiamen* 甲門 can refer either idiomatically to a distinguished family (where *jia* means “first-class, superior” and *men* means “family, clan”) or, more literally, a gate with the name “Jia.” Given that it is paired with the word *gaodi* 高第 (top-ranking), referring clearly to prominence in examinations, one is prone to understand it in the former sense and expect the phrase *jiamen gaodi* 甲門高第 to be a single positive prediction. After the dream, Shao ranks first. The term *guo* implies that this prediction has been fulfilled, and it is for this reason that he believes in the efficacy of the dream and inscribes it to commemorate it. Nevertheless, it is a partial, if not misleading, fulfillment in hindsight. As the dramatic and tragic ending shows, one quickly realizes that the often-significant indicator *guo* is dubious. *Jiamen*, in fact, refers to the name of the place where Shao eventually dies, Zhakou 闡口. The graph of the word *zha* 闡 is a combination of those of the words *jia* and *men*. The phrase *jiamen gaodi* turns out to have contained two separate predictions, both of which have come true. Compared to the mortal historical figure that appears in the first dream, the more elusive god in the second tale seems to have played a prank by ambiguating the correct information; there is indeed more than one way to interpret the message. In this case, the dreamer does not grasp the wordplay but simply follows what is on the surface.

Juxtaposing these two diagonally different stories in one account speaks to the level of dubiousness of prescient dreams. Even though the first story ends on a satisfactory note, the means to reach that end is not what one would normally expect. Luo Yanguo, having attempted four times to no avail, is hoping to succeed the fifth time, but still fails. The position granted to him by grace is not a result of his competence but a recognition of his perseverance. This is more likely done to prevent candidates like him from taking the examination for endless times and thus complicating the reviewing process. The position he eventually obtains, a prefectural instructor, is also by no means comparable to the Auxiliary Academician that he is promised in the dream.<sup>22</sup> In other words,

22 “Auxiliary Academicians of the Bureau of Military Affairs” 樞密直學士 provided general aids to the executive officials of *Shumiyuan* 樞密院, the agency for important and confidential affairs. “Instructors” 文學 were educational officials in units of territorial administration. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), n. 5449, 7704.

Luo's story is not as honorable or favorable as it seems, though it is certainly more fortunate than ending up with no position at all. In both accounts, the dream messages seem simple, yet the dreamers have to go through a circuitous detour to arrive at their real meaning.

Stories like these illustrate how candidates strive to find associations between their dream and destiny in order to obtain a sense of certainty. Nonetheless, not all the dreams convey limpid messages that corroborate the theory of predetermination. Neither are they all about the dreamers themselves. In fact, some accounts record equivocal dreams that await decoding, which usually involves wordplay as the previous account of Shao Yundao's Zitong dream. Such stories appear to grant some degree of agency to the dreamer as their interpretation and corresponding action also appear to have influenced the outcome. The following story exemplifies such dreams:

Wu Qi, style name Yuanhan. During the Zhenghe period (1111–1118) he was admitted into the Imperial University to study the *Book of Music*. He ranked first in the Upper Hall and was appointed as an instructor in Zhenjiang prefecture (in Jiangsu Province), replacing Li Boji. When Wu moved into the governmental residential hall, Boji had not yet moved out and resided in the study. Qi dreamed of a ghost dressed in purple robe and golden belt, kneeling down in the hall and saying: "In fifteen years shall be a Palace Secretary."<sup>23</sup> Qi woke up and was extremely delighted. Thereon he became increasingly proud, thinking that he could expect to soon gain political power. Later he was not successful in his official career. In the first year of the Jingkang period (1126), he arrived at Dingzhou (in Hebei Province), served as the prefect of Huolu, and then died. It was in that year that Boji was appointed as the Palace Secretary. Told by Qi's nephew Wu Yi.

吳圻元翰，政和中以太學錄習樂恩，得上舍及第，為鎮江府教授，代李伯紀。已入官舍，伯紀館書室未去。圻夢一鬼，紫袍金帶拜廷下曰：「後十五年當為樞密使。」寤而甚喜。由此益自負，意執政可指期得。既而仕官殊不進，靖康元年，至定州獲鹿令以死。伯紀乃以是年知樞密院。圻之姪億說。<sup>24</sup>

23 The lack of subject in this sentence, though ungrammatical in English, is intentionally maintained from the original line to replicate the same ambiguity, which is key to the whole story.

24 "Wu Qi meng" 吳圻夢, *Yijian zhi*, "Yizhi," 2:201.

Wu's dream is eventually realized, though not as he has expected. The ending might seem peculiar at first glance, but upon careful reflection on the narratological details it might not be so astounding. When Wu first moves into the residential hall, the story leaves a subtle note that the previous official, Li Boji, has not yet moved out and still lives in the study. The ghost in Wu's dream merely kneels down in the hall, rather than to Wu or anyone in particular, and utters an ambiguous prediction. The absent object of its act of veneration implies that though Wu is the dreamer, his dream needs not be related to himself. More importantly, its prediction does not indicate a subject either, further complicating the dream. In other stories of examination dreams, the divine being often directly addresses the dreamer through a second-person honorific like *qing* 卿 or *gong* 公 (sir). The prediction in this story is left open-ended at the time of utterance. It would essentially make no difference whether it was Wu or Li who has the dream, as its ambiguity also suggests arbitrariness. The prediction seems yet to be completed at this point.

What is remarkable about this ironic story is the characterizational detail that Wu, after having had the dream, "became increasingly proud" 由此益自負. Different from the previous story of Lin Xiaoyong where Lin himself confesses directly that he became too proud, Wu's pride is retold by the narrator, rendering it vague whether it represents Wu's self-criticism or the narrator's judgement. Although Hong Mai's stories were received and compiled from various informants, a distinct narrator's voice expressing preferences is not uncommon. This comment on Wu's change of behavior makes one wonder if his later debacle is a result of his excessive pride. The equivocal prediction might have been indecisive at the time of his dream, leaving the possibility that Wu's character flaw plays a vital role in shaping his fate. Without this comment, the story might simply be understood as a misinterpreted dream, where the dreamer becomes a hapless plaything of divine whim. Wu's disconcerting death comes without further explanation, possibly because the informant, namely, Wu's nephew, did not wish to disclose such private information. Nonetheless, the way Wu's death is so briefly, nonchalantly, but abruptly mentioned contrasts sharply with his previous assertiveness. His dream does not foreshadow or hint at his eventual end, yet the narrator's choice to include this piece of unrelated information is worth noting. It might be extrapolating too far to establish a correlation between his death and his character defect, but it is logical to think that the stark contrast between Wu's self-expectation and his actual trajectory tells a cautionary tale about relying on dubious dreams and acting upon them. The final line solves the mystery in a terse yet effectively ironic way. Li Boji is appointed the promised position in the exact same year Wu dies. Again, no more explanation is given. Readers are left with the epiphany that the dream

is eventually fulfilled. Whether the dream is indeed ambiguous and undecided or is intended for Li in the first place, one will never know.

Stories of pride and its potential cost sometimes involve conscious violation of rituals, where the causal relationship between transgression and retribution becomes more conspicuous. Chen Maolin 陳茂林, a candidate from Fuzhou (in Fujian Province), dreamed of arriving at a palace where he saw a tablet reading “Official position is first approached, and court etiquette is not yet familiarized” 官職初臨，朝儀未熟. He was elated and regarded it as an auspicious omen. Later he ranked first in the prefectural examination. While at an official banquet along with other candidates, he insisted that “I am the first-ranking candidate, so I should lead all the scholars” 吾為舉首，應率先多士, which was against the precedent of arranging the order by age. When they were supposed to bow twice during the ceremony, Chen mistakenly bowed thrice. Others laughed at him saying that this was what his dream referred to. Eventually Chen “indeed failed the advanced examination” 果不第.<sup>25</sup>

First of all, this story demonstrates the importance of ritual in the examination system, as the examination system was initially placed under the Board of Rites upon its creation in the Sui Dynasty (581–618).<sup>26</sup> The “Banquet of Deer Barking” 鹿鳴宴, where successors in the prefectural examinations were congratulated, as well as the following ceremonies of incense-burning and bowing were all vital constituents of the examination ritual. Chen’s repetitive misconduct, then, is not simply a social blunder but a serious breach of the fundamental principles that underlie the examination system. Secondly, though not explicitly discussed, Chen’s self-importance is reminiscent of Wu Qi’s pride mentioned previously. While bowing thrice seems an unintentional “mistake” 誤 due to insufficient ceremonial knowledge, Chen is certainly aware of the “conventions” 舊例 of letting the eldest be the lead. It is likely that the seemingly favorable dream, suggesting the accession to an official post, prompts him to defy the ritual convention. Furthermore, though the dream correctly predicts Chen’s improper behavior, it does not imply that Chen will eventually fail at the advanced examination. When others laugh at Chen’s gaffe, he is also “perplexed” 陳亦惘然 and “suspected that the dream has already been fulfilled” 疑為已應夢. Based on his own logic, his transgression signifies the realization as well as the completion of the prophetic dream, which should mark the end of the supernatural intervention. Nonetheless, the final description that Chen “indeed failed (the advanced examination)” suggests otherwise. One recalls that the term “indeed” 果 evokes the contingent causality that links successive

25 “Chen Maolin meng” 陳茂林夢, *Yijian zhi*, “Jiazhi,” 17:153.

26 Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, 158.

events. Here the result is Chen's failure, but the story does not indicate the cause. It is tempting to attribute Chen's failure to his pride and conscious violation of the party conventions. It is likely Chen's own deeds, rather than a predetermined fate, that result in his ultimate failure. His previous achievements and success foretold and dictated by the dream are counteracted by his volitional violation, suggesting at once a moral criticism and a fuzzy boundary between random determinism and human agency.

## 2 Words and Play

Most of the dreams analyzed so far are directly related to examination results or assignment of official position. Nevertheless, many other tales in *Yijian zhi* are not as straightforward but more about solving the riddles in order to derive the divine hint. They reflect the belief that dream maps a meaningful universe, where every sign is revelatory, albeit in an indefinite way. The imagistic quality of Chinese characters enables intricate wordplay, where a subtle alteration in radicals or strokes may lead to a complete change in meaning.<sup>27</sup> This also poses challenges for dreamers to address through both intuition and intellect. The following story shows how the protagonist strives and struggles to understand the conundrum of his dream:

Ju Fang, style name Gongsu. His surname was originally "Gou," which was tabooed by the emperor's name so he added the radical "xi" to the word and made it "Ju." It sounded like "ju" in the word "zhangju" (annotation and punctuation). During the Jiachen year of the Xuanhe period (1124), he participated in the prefectural examination and dreamed that someone told him: "Swiftly will you get it, once you *fengzhou* you will get it." Fang was elated and thought that the message "swiftly will you get it" meant that he would soon pass the examination. However, he failed. During the *wushen* year of the Jianyan period (1128), he took the examination in Weiyang (Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province) and had the same dream. Fang said: "The 'ju' (swiftly) refers to 'ju' (his new surname). My surname is already 'Ju.'" Then he took the examination again in Yangzhou, confident that he would certainly pass it, but he failed again. After a long time, he dreamed of that person again, who came to tell him the truth: "Only when you turn forty-eight will you pass, not yet now." At that time Fang

27 Campamy discusses some modes of wordplay in pre-Song tales of dream. See Campamy, *The Chinese Dreamscape, 300 BCE–800 CE*, 98–104.

was thirty-eight. Calculating that there were still ten years, he thought that he would not pass and dared not to harbor further ambitions. He retreated to live in Daozhou (in Hunan Province). A wealthy man invited him to teach his son. In the *jiayin* year of the Shaoxing period (1134), a decree of the examination was issued. Fang was forty-five. Thinking that he certainly would not succeed, he did not want to participate. The family head insisted: "The reason why I invited you was because I wanted you to take the examination along with my son. You must go."<sup>28</sup> The family head secretly made his son submit a report of familial history to sign up for the examination. Fang had no choice but to comply and was recommended to take the examination with the wealthy man's son. The following year, Fang went to the Ministry of Rites to hand in the official statement. The officer carelessly opened and read the age recorded on it, mistaking that Fang was forty-seven. That year Fang was actually forty-eight. He was inwardly delighted and thought that it was a divine aid. Now only the phrase "once you *fengzhou*, you will get it" puzzled him. The seat map of the examination was then announced. The person to Fang's left was a Feng, and the person to his right was a Zhou. That year Fang passed the examination. Only after a total of twelve years, when all three of his dreams were verified, did he understand the twists and turns like this.

絢紡，字公素，元姓句，犯上嫌名，遂增系為絢，其音如章句之句。宣和甲辰，赴省試，夢人告曰：「遽得，逢州便得。」紡喜，謂遽得者，即得也。已而不利。至建炎戊申，試維揚，夢如初。紡曰：「遽者，絢也，我已姓絢。」又試於揚州，其必得，又不利。久之，復夢其人來，以實告曰：「君年四十八方登科，今未也。」紡時三十八矣，度猶有十年，以未可得，不敢萌進取意，屏居道州。富家翁召教其子。及紹興甲寅科詔下，紡四十五歲矣，以為必無成，不肯往。主人強之曰：「所以延君者，正欲挾小兒俱入舉場，君必行。」陰令其子自為下家狀求試。紡不得已從之，遂與富子俱薦送。明年，繳公據納禮部，漫啟視，則所具年甲，誤以為四十七，是年正四十八也。默喜，以為神助，獨未曉逢州便得之語。及坐圖混榜出，紡名之左一人姓馮，右一人姓周，是歲遂登第。首尾十二年，凡三見夢方驗，曲折明白如此。<sup>29</sup>

This is a lengthy story, spanning the transition between the Northern Song and the Southern Song, where the divine intention and attitude toward the

28 The last phrase 君必行 can also be interpreted as "you will certainly succeed."

29 "Ju Fang sanmeng" 絢紡三夢, *Yijian zhi*, "Jiazhi," 9:74.

dreamer remain ambiguous. The first dream message that Ju receives consists of two phrases. His intuitive reaction to the first part, *jude* 遽得, is to interpret it literally and semantically as “swiftly getting (it).” Ju’s following failure invalidates this interpretation. The second time he interprets the same dream message with deliberation, treating it as a phonetic wordplay. The character *ju* 遽 shares the same pronunciation as his new surname *ju* 絢, rendering the phrase as “*ju* will get it,” which seems to foreshadow his success. His affirmation that “My surname is already Ju” 我已姓絢 expresses an attitude both resolute and skeptical at the gap between the surface of dream message and reality. Upon his second failure, he has a third dream where the same foreteller “told him the truth” 以實告曰 that he is not yet at the age to pass the examination. This is a protracted revelation of *shi* 實 (truth) hitherto withheld from Ju for unknown reasons. It turns out that his previous attempts of decoding are futile and that incorrect interpretations are not the reason why he fails twice. One wonders why the foreteller gives the same equivocal message twice without illuminating its real significance, only to wait until Ju has made two attempts in vain to tell him the truth. The foreteller in his dream seems to have played a joke with him.

The chronological method of narration is meaningful in upholding the law of determinism, and for this reason candidates’ own effort and agency in their fate often become blurred. The humility and obedience Ju displays distinguish him from the arrogant protagonists previously analyzed. The information imparted through his third dream that he will succeed in his forty-eighth year matches reality, as Ju is only thirty-eight at the time and indeed has not yet passed the examination, which leaves him no doubt about the trustworthiness of the dream message. He then reasons that he “would not pass and dared not to harbor further ambitions” 以未可得，不敢萌進取意. The key to the second part of the dream message, “once you *fengzhou*, you will get it” 逢州便得 is not revealed until the very end of the story. The disyllabic phrase *fengzhou* 逢州 turns out to be wordplay as well, referring to the two surnames “Feng” 馮 and “Zhou” 周 that are homophones of each part of the phrase. It is only when Ju sits between a Feng and a Zhou in the examination that he will succeed. The explanation of the puzzling dream message comes after Ju’s success. Rather than relying on the dream as guidance for his action and an assurance of a favorable outcome, Ju uses it retrospectively to justify his success and attest to the existence of “divine aid” 神助.

Solving the wordplay evinced through dream forms a major theme in the voluminous tales of examination. The significance in deciphering the dream riddles as a way to rationalize one’s success is more pronounced in the following story:

Fu Shixiu was a local from Kuaiji (in Zhejiang Province). He failed in the prefectural examination, and dreamed of sitting in the departmental examination, where he was tested on “Rhapsody on Flourishing Virtue and Star Sundial.”<sup>30</sup> The next night, he had the same dream as before: on the exam paper a huge hook was drawn, under which a bearded dragon’s claws covered Li Boshi’s (Li Gonglin, 1049–1106) horse painting. Fu thought that the second dream was a bit unusual (or different) and thus recorded it. After three years he was recommended to the court by the prefecture. The next year he took the departmental examination, where he was tested on “Rhapsody on the Son of Heaven Taking Virtue as Carriage.”<sup>31</sup> He silently mouthed: “The carriages have tracks. ‘Tracks’ (*gui*) sounds the same as ‘sundials’ (*gui*).” He thought that he would pass but then he failed.<sup>32</sup> After another three years, he participated in the departmental examination again, and was tested on “Rhapsody on Grand Virtue of Heaven and Earth in Giving Life.”<sup>33</sup> The policy question asked about rearing horses. Then he passed, and eventually comprehended the previous dream. He explained on his own: “‘Flourishing Virtue’ referred to ‘Grand Virtue.’ ‘Stars’ referred to ‘Life.’ The horse drawn on the exam paper referred to horse rearing.” However, he did not understand the meaning of the bearded dragon. Once his name was announced, he visited and thanked the examiner. He saw the editing clerk Goulong (literally, hooked dragon) Tingshi, who said that Fu’s exam paper was in his room. Goulong’s appearance was majestic with bushy beard. Then Fu

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- 30 From a line in Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) *Fayan* 法言 (*Exemplary Figures*): “If a person’s character is truly imposing, then the stars shadow him. But when the stars are deemed the more imposing, this casts a shadow over his character” 德隆則畧星，星隆則畧德也。See Yang Xiong, “Wubai” 五百, in *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏, ed. Chen Zhongfu 陳仲夫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 11.265–66. Translation adapted from Michael Nylan, trans., *Exemplary Figures / Fayan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 128–30.
- 31 From a line in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*): “The son of Heaven takes his virtue as a chariot, with music as his driver ...” 天子以德為車，以樂為御…… See Sun Xidan 孫希旦, “Liyun” 禮運, in *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 22.620–21.
- 32 There are two missing characters in the original line “當□□已而不利。” The translation represents our best guess considering the context.
- 33 From a line in chapter “Xi ci” 繫辭 in the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Change*): “The great virtue of heaven and earth is called ‘generation.’ The great treasure of the sage is called ‘position’” 天地之大德曰生，聖人之大寶曰位。 Translation adapted from Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 77.

thoroughly realized the meaning of the drawing in his dream. It was the twelfth year of the Shaoxing period (1142) at the time.

傅世修，會稽人。鄉舉不利，夢入省闈，試德隆則晷星賦。次夜，又夢如初。試卷內畫巨鉤，鉤下有髯龍用爪覆李伯時馬五六紙。傅以夢稍異，因志之。後三年鄉貢，明年省試天子以德為車賦，默念車有軌，軌者，晷也。當□□已而不利。又三年，復赴省，試天地之大德曰生賦，策問馬政，遂中第。乃悟昨夢，自解曰：「德隆者，大德也。星者，曰生也。卷中畫馬，馬政也。」而不了髯龍之義。既奏名，謁謝坐主。見勾龍庭實校書，言傅所試卷，在其房中。勾龍狀貌甚偉而富髯須，乃盡曉畫中意。時紹興十二年。<sup>34</sup>

On the surface, Fu's dream is equally mysterious yet more detailed than Ju's in the previous story, as Fu dreams of complete and vivid scenes rather than merely a terse line. When Fu first has the dream of being tested on the rhapsody, he does not pay attention to it. When he has the dream again, he records it only because it is slightly different from the first time, not necessarily because he considers it a prophecy about whether he will succeed. Whereas Ju in the previous story readily and speedily interprets his dream as an optimistic omen, Fu does not do so even though his dreams are explicitly related to the examination. For Fu, dreams are but quotidian phenomena. Probably because he has just failed the prefectural examination, he does not believe that his dreams will be promising in any way. It is only after he is recommended by the prefect that he starts to seriously ponder the potential significance of his dream. When he takes the departmental examination in the following year, he associates the examination question with his dream in a way that recalls Ju's homophonous interpretation, though less intelligible.

This story diverges from the previous ones in that the dream message is regarded not as a prior prediction but a retrospective explanation, where the dreamer is no longer passively receiving a divine dictate but deploying the dream to justify his success. To unpack the meaning of the "Rhapsody on Flourishing Virtue and Star Sundial" in his dream, Fu makes two attempts using different strategies. The first one is a phonetic interpretation. The words "sundials" 晷 in his dream and "tracks" 軌 from his actual exam are homophones, so he thought that they were related only to be proven wrong. He then shifts his interpretive strategy. When Fu passes the departmental examination, he finds

34 "Fu Shixiu meng" 傅世修夢, *Yijian zhi*, "Jiazhi," 13:110.

perfect parallels between his dream and the examination questions, which he explains in three parts. The first part derives from a variation in meaning: “Flourishing Virtue” 德隆 corresponds to “Grand Virtue” 大德. The second part is a pictorial reading of the word “star” 星, where the upper and lower components, when separated, become *yuesheng* 曰生. The third part identifies a painting with the policy question, both of which are related to horse. His artful interpretations combine knowledge in semantics and characters and, albeit contrived, manage to rationalize his dream. The fact that he is “explaining on his own” 自解 indicates that the function of the dream lies precisely in justifying his own achievements instead of providing a prophecy to be fulfilled, since he initially does not consider it prophetic.

By the time Fu pays a visit to the examiner, he is already convinced of an association between his dream and his fate. Therefore, he is determined to find further correspondences of the “huge hook” 巨鉤 and the “bearded dragon” 髯龍 from his dream in reality. It turns out that the key to unraveling this remaining segment of the riddle lies in the editing clerk, whose disyllabic surname Goulong 勾龍 is a combination of the homophones “hook” (*gou*) and “dragon” (*long*) and who has a “bushy beard” 富髯須. This clerk holds Fu’s exam paper, on which he answered questions about horse rearing, which corresponds to the painting in his dream, where a bearded dragon lays its claws on a horse painting. Every detail of the dream is thus explained in a way that fits the reality. This meandering way of detecting traces between dream and reality shows Fu’s active engagement with the supernatural realm through interpretive ingenuity. Dreams like Fu’s are not transparent portents of success in examination but instead are utilized at dreamers’ disposal as means to justify their actions and achievements. The conscious act of solving riddles in dreams comes to resemble the process of taking the examination, as they both require intellectual exertion that is not predetermined but volitional and that maneuvers between random determinism and human agency.

Another category of wordplay frequently seen in *Yijian zhi* revolves around names. Candidates receive intimation through dreams and subsequently change their names in order to succeed in the examination:

Zhang Wang, a local from Shaowu (in Fujian Province), prepared to take the examination in the autumn of the *dingmao* year of the Shaoxing period (1147). He dreamed of someone who inserted a chopstick on his hair bun saying: “Sir, if you wish to rank high on the examination, you should do like this and then you will achieve it.” When he woke up, he deliberated over it and said: “My name is Wang. If I add one stroke to the

character's top, then it becomes Zhu." Therefore, he changed his name to Zhu.<sup>35</sup> That year he was indeed recommended. When he was about to take the examination on the Ministry of Rites, he had another dream about a child swaddled in green cloth who tugged his garment and said: "Don't hurry off. You should wait for me." Then he failed. It was only in the *jichou* year of the Qiandao period (1169) that he participated in the examination again. A neighbor of his, Ding Chaozuo, also prepared to take the examination together with him. They both passed. Chaozuo was born exactly in the *dingmao* year. Zhang then understood his previous dream and joked with Ding: "It was only for you, little one, that I was delayed for twenty-one years." They both laughed at each other.

邵武人張汪，紹興丁卯秋試，夢人以箸插于髻，曰：「子欲高薦，當如此乃可。」既寤熟思之，曰：「吾名汪，若首加點則為注。」乃更名注，是年果薦送。將試春官，又夢綠衣小兒自裸中曳其衣，曰：「勿遽往，可待我也。」既而不利，至乾道己丑，始以免舉再行，而同里丁朝佐，亦預計偕，二人同登科。朝佐正生於丁卯，始悟前夢，戲謂丁曰：「為爾小子，遲我二十一年。」相與大笑而已。<sup>36</sup>

Though Zhang's second dream is undoubtedly a prophecy to be fulfilled, the first half of the narrative stresses his creative effort. The mysterious figure in his first dream utters a clear prediction but with vague instruction: "Sir, if you wish to rank high on the examination, you should do like this and then you will achieve it" 子欲高薦，當如此乃可。It obviously demands obedience, but what is meant by "like this" 如此 remains imprecise as the person merely "inserted a chopstick on his hair bun" 以箸插于髻。In a literal sense, the dream could be inviting Zhang to imitate this puzzling action. Zhang, however, treats it as more than a superficial command but a sophisticated riddle to be unraveled. He "ponders it deeply" 熟思之, as if decoding the dream has become part of the process of examination. He relates it to his name and reasons figuratively that the act of inserting a chopstick in one's hair bun symbolizes adding one stroke to the top of one's name: "My name is Wang. If I add one stroke to the character's top, then it becomes Zhu" 吾名汪，若首加點則為注。He thus changes his name and is then indeed recommended for the examination. Again, one cannot be entirely sure if Zhang's recommendation is the direct result of having interpreted the dream and followed its hint in his particular way, but the word *quo* prompts one to believe that it is indeed so. This is another instance where

35 His original name was Wang 汪 and his new name Zhu 注.

36 "Zhang Zhu meng" 張注夢, *Yijian zhi*, "Dingzhi" 丁志, 2:550.

the dreamer's interpretive creativity proves instrumental and his corresponding reaction appropriate.

Vignette though it be, Zhang Zhu's story brings to the fore the dreamer's role in the fulfillment of prophetic dreams. Among the various possibilities to unlock Zhang's dream, there can only be one correct answer that leads to success. Zhang's decoding the dream creatively and responding to it accordingly seem vital in determining his fate. The dream, albeit prescient, does not grant automatic success but relies on correct interpretation as well as devout adherence. In this light, the dream becomes more of a negotiable divine aid rather than fixed prediction, which allows space for candidates to maneuver and takes into consideration their capability along their paths to succeed.

In these dream tales in *Yijian zhi*, two concurrent ideas about the relationship between humans and their dreams surface. On the one hand, accounts with explicit dream messages foreshadowing the dreamer's official career seem to validate the theory of determinism through the fulfillment of the predictions. Narratological details, the term *guo* in particular, strengthen the sense of inevitability of the events. However, a perusal of these stories yields an alternative causality where, through the narrators' hidden voices, instead of divine prophecy, the dreamers' own character flaws shadow their destiny. On the other hand, many tales contain equivocal dreams open to debate, which are readily regarded as riddles to solve through intellect and intuition. In these stories, the dreamers are no longer purely subject to divine messages but actively engage in the signification of their dream. Whether as foresight that prescribes candidates' paths or hindsight used to explain and justify their achievements, the dream might at first seem to reinforce the belief of predestination. Nevertheless, when elusive dreams are transformed from straightforward predictions into wordplays that demand correct interpretation, dreamers' creative efforts are highlighted as vital to the fulfillment. Quite remarkably, this interpretation often involves an imagistic play with Chinese characters, demanding ingenuity and visual memory. The act of riddle-solving comes to resemble the process of taking the examination: both require active engagement and intellect, mirroring the Song candidates' conscientious commitment to officialdom and their struggle that is situated between determinism and agency. These dream riddles, not as portents of effortless success, eventually create room for dreamers to exercise their creativity that also shapes their destiny.

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# The Formation and Significance of Images of Confucius and Disciples at the Apricot Altar (*Xingtán tu* 杏壇圖)

*Julia K. MURRAY*

## Abstract

This paper explores depictions of Confucius seated outdoors with a group of disciples, a genre that first appeared in the visual and textual record during the Southern Song period. Some compositions bear titles specifically identifying the location as Xingtán, usually rendered in English as the Apricot Altar or Apricot Platform. The name evokes a reference in the *Zhuangzi* to a place where Confucius was said to have sat with his disciples in the ancient state of Lu (centered on today's Qufu, Shandong). In the early eleventh century, this association was commemorated with a physical structure called “Xingtán” that was added in a major reconstruction of Qufu's primordial Temple of Confucius. Portrayals of Confucius with disciples at the Apricot Altar subsequently became one of several ways of visualizing him, joining older types of imagery such as temple icons and depictions of his meeting with Laozi. Variations of Apricot Altar pictures evolved in different contexts and served a range of purposes over the course of the Southern Song through early Qing periods, sometimes influenced by political events or changes in ritual protocols. To reconstruct the origins of the subject in Song architecture and pictorial art and trace its subsequent development and significance, I analyze evidence from several different editions of the genealogy of the Kong lineage; the *Gazetteer of Queli*; popular handbooks such as *Shilin guangji* and *Santai wanyong*; and miscellaneous paintings, woodblock prints, and rubbings. I also examine the complicated edition history of Kong Chuan's twelfth-century genealogy, *Dongjia zaji* and highlight its connection with the Southern [Kong] Lineage Family Temple in Quzhou, Zhejiang, which served as a substitute for the Qufu temple during the Southern Song period.

## Keywords

Confucius – Apricot Altar – *Xingtán tu* – *Dongjia zaji* – *Kongshi zuting guangji* – Qufu – Quzhou



FIGURE 8.1 Confucius and disciples at the Apricot Altar. Woodblock-printed illustration in Kong Chuan 孔傳, *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記. Southern Song period, preface dated 1134, with later additions PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CHINA, BEIJING, NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

Among the visual portrayals of Confucius that originated in the Song dynasty is a composition that depicts him seated outdoors with a group of disciples at the Apricot Altar (Xingtán 杏壇), after he had retired to his home state of Lu 魯 (centered on today's Qufu 曲阜, Shandong) (Fig. 8.1). For many viewers, the subject probably evoked an anecdote from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, in which the elderly Confucius encountered a mysterious old fisherman whom he recognized as a true sage, and from whom he gained deep insight into the meaning of the Way.<sup>1</sup> The story begins by setting the scene. While Confucius was visiting the Ziwei Forest 緇帷之林 with some of his disciples, he stopped to

1 *Zhuangzi* "Yufu pian" 漁父篇; see Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/old-fisherman/zh>, 1. For detailed discussions of the encounter, see Imre Galambos, "Confucius and Laozi at the Altar: Reconsidering a Tangut Manuscript," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 2.3 (2016): 237–64, and Kirill Ole Thompson, "What is the Reason of Failure or Success? The Fisherman's Song Goes Deep into the River," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 23–26.

rest on the Apricot Altar. As he sat there, he strummed his *qin* 琴 and began to sing, while they read their books. The story makes no further mention of the Apricot Altar, nor suggests that the place itself was significant. From the name, it could have been the site of an ancient open-air platform for offerings to local spirits, as prescribed in Zhou ritual texts,<sup>2</sup> and thus entirely incidental to the episode described in the *Zhuangzi*. An alternative and less well-known tradition, probably originating in the Song period, says that Confucius drove his carriage out the eastern gate of Lu and stopped at the Apricot Altar, which he told the disciples was the oath-altar of Lu general Zang Wenzhong 魯將臧文仲誓盟之壇 (fl. seventh cent. BCE), who may have been an ancestor of Confucius.<sup>3</sup> In any event, the location was associated in the Han dynasty with a hall where Confucius was said to have lectured to his disciples and that became his memorial temple after his death. The hall later figured in a much-repeated fourth-century anomaly tale (*zhiguai* 志怪) about a Han official who came to inspect its upkeep and discovered a prophetic message left by Confucius in a suspended urn beside his lecture seat.<sup>4</sup>

The Han and later dynasties and regimes provided Kong descendants in Qufu with varying levels of support to maintain sacrifices to Confucius and tend his grave on behalf of the state, but the lineage came close to extinction

2 See Tracy Miller, "The Architecture of the Three Teachings," in *Modern Chinese Religion: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960–1368 AD)*, eds. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone, v. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 729.

3 Robert Eno, "The Background of the Kong Family of Lu and the Origins of Ruism," *Early China* 28 (2003): 15. A variant account calling the place a platform (*tai* 臺) that had a stele commemorating General Zang Wenzhong's sacrifice to Heaven appears in a text called *Laojun xingtanjì* 老君行壇記, probably also of Song date, which is preserved in a Ming collection of popular secret-society literature; see Galambos, "Confucius and Laozi at the Altar," 246–47. As he points out, the *xing* 行 in the title probably should be its homophone, 杏, evidence of oral transmission.

4 See Gan Bao 干寶, *Soushenji* 搜神記, rpt. in *Tang Song chuanqi ji* 唐宋傳奇集, ed. Lu Xun 魯迅 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 3.1 (26); translated by Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J. I. Crump Jr., *In Search of the Supernatural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 28–29 (3, 49). Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527) also collected the story; see Wang Guowei 王國維, *Shujing zhu jiao* 水經注校 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1984), 25.807. Kong Chuan 孔傳 includes a version of it in his entry for the Apricot Altar in *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記 (1134; Qing recut of a late Southern Song woodblock-printed edition), B.1b–2b. This version is repeated in a late Southern Song encyclopedia under the heading "Numinous anomalies of the sage's hall" ("Shengdian lingyi" 聖殿靈異); see *Xinbian zuantu zenglei qunshu leiyaoshilin guangji*, *Houji Shilin guangji* 新編纂圖增類羣書類要事林廣記, 後集事林廣記, comp. Chen Yuanjing 陳元靚 (rev. ed. Xiyuan jingshe 西園精舍, ca. 1333), 3.4b, reproduced from the Naikaku bunko 內閣文庫 (National Archives of Japan) exemplar, accessed May 10, 2023, [https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/DAS/meta/listPhoto?LANG=eng&BID=F100000000000102987&ID=&NO=4&TYPE=JPEG&DL\\_TYPE=pdf, image 48/100](https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/DAS/meta/listPhoto?LANG=eng&BID=F100000000000102987&ID=&NO=4&TYPE=JPEG&DL_TYPE=pdf, image 48/100).

during the turbulent tenth century.<sup>5</sup> Revived and stabilized by renewed patronage from the Latter Zhou regime and its successor, the Song dynasty, the Kongs rebounded in numbers and strength, and imperial support for the cult culminated in Song emperor Zhenzong's 宋真宗 (968–1022; r. 997–1022) visit and sacrifice in 1008. In 1016 Zhenzong approved a memorial requesting permission and funding to renovate and enlarge the temple, submitted by Kong Daofu 孔道輔 (986–1039, *jinshi* 進士 1012), a forty-fifth-generation senior descendant serving as prefect of Qufu (renamed Xianyuan 仙源 in 1012). Undertaken in 1018, the ambitious project included replacing the old memorial shrine with a larger and grander sacrificial hall north of its previous site, on which Kong Daofu then constructed a three-tiered brick Apricot Altar and planted flowering apricot trees around it to enhance the associations of the name.<sup>6</sup> The new Main Hall (Zheng dian 正殿), Apricot Altar, and Ceremonial Gate (Yi men 儀門) at the entrance to the courtyard were aligned on a north-south axis, an arrangement associated with the prestigious architecture of imperial palaces and ritual structures.<sup>7</sup> As a holder of the *jinshi* degree who supported education for local descendants, Kong Daofu also successfully petitioned to establish a school affiliated with the temple as part of the renovations. Song literati and Kong descendants who were responsible for managing the temple complex furthered their mutual interests by gaining support and recognition for it.<sup>8</sup> After the Jin 金 conquest of North China in 1126–1127 left the temple in ruins for several decades, local Kongs and scholar-officials sought approval and funding to make substantial repairs. In the late 1190s, the Apricot Altar acquired a pavilion and a commemorative stele inscribed by the noted Jin literatus and calligrapher Dang Huaiying 黨懷英 (1134–1211), who wrote the two large characters “Xing tan” in 1198 (Fig. 8.2).<sup>9</sup> These developments form the background to the emergence of pictures showing Confucius sitting on the altar, accompanied by varying numbers of disciples.

5 For analytic scholarship on the history of the Kong lineage and the cult of Confucius, see Christopher Agnew, *The Kongs of Qufu* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019); Thomas A. Wilson, ed., *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002); and Chin-shing Huang, *Confucianism and Sacred Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

6 Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, B.2b (106); also see James A. Flath, *Traces of the Sage* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 28–29 and 112–13.

7 For detailed discussion of the ritual origin and symbolism of the courtyard configuration, see Miller, “The Architecture of the Three Teachings,” 728–31.

8 Flath, *Traces of the Sage*, 29.

9 See Jesse D. Sloane, “Rebuilding Confucian Ideology,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 14.2 (2014): 242.



FIGURE 8.2  
 “Xingtán” 杏壇, seal-script calligraphy  
 by Dang Huaiying 黨懷英 (1134–1211).  
 Jin dynasty, dated 1198. Stone tablet inside  
 the Apricot Altar pavilion, Temple of  
 Confucius, Qufu, Shandong  
 PHOTO TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR

## 1 Diagrams of the Qufu Temple and the Apricot Altar

Two thirteenth-century diagrams illustrate the configuration of the Qufu temple and auxiliary buildings during the Northern Song and Jin dynasties, respectively, with titles that refer to the area as “Queli” 闕里, the name of the district under Qufu county that evoked the full range of cult sites associated with Confucius. Both diagrams appear in the front-matter of *Kongshi zuting guangji* 孔氏祖庭廣記, a Kong genealogy and cult history initially published in 1227 and again in 1242 by Kong Yuancuo 孔元措 (1181–ca. 1251), the last Jin Duke for Perpetuating the Sage (*Yanshengong* 衍聖公), who went on to serve the Mongols.<sup>10</sup> The diagram representing the temple’s Song layout (Fig. 8.3) matches a detailed description of its assorted structures in an earlier Kong genealogy, *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記, published in 1134 (Southern Song) by Kong

10 Kong Yuancuo initially compiled *Kongshi zuting guangji* as part of an intra-Kong struggle for recognition and power as the rightful duke in the mid-1220s, when Southern Song and Mongol incursions installed two rival claimants in Qufu; see Agnew, *The Kongs of Qufu*, 21–23. In the extant edition of the book, which dates from 1242, the temple diagrams appear in a plates section (*tu ben* 圖本) at the front as pictures 8 and 10; see Kong Yuancuo, *Kongshi zuting guangji* 孔氏祖庭廣記, in *Zhonghua zaizao shanben, Jin Yuan bian, Shi bu* 中華再造善本, 金元編, 史部, v. 82 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005).

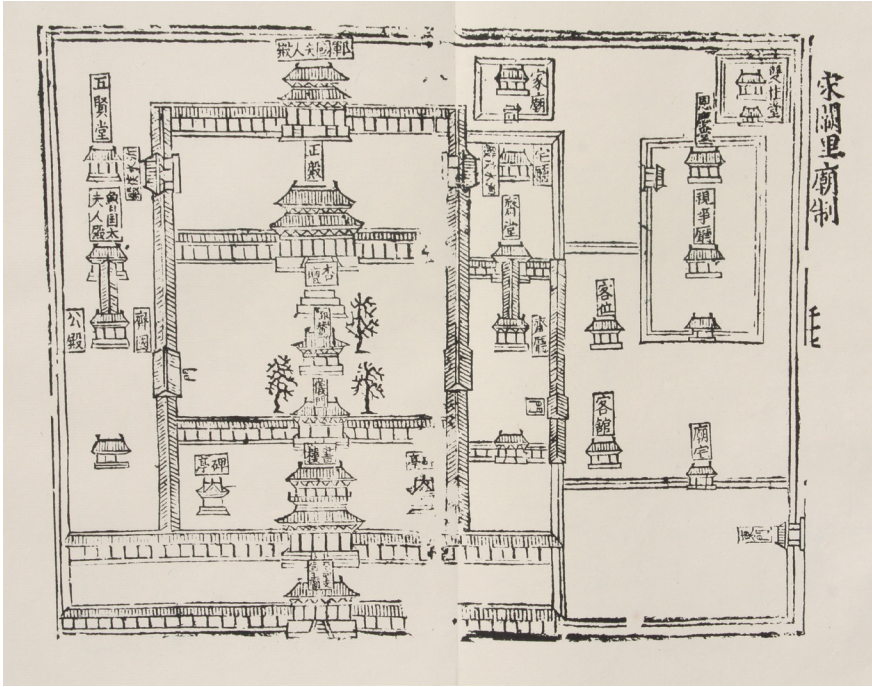


FIGURE 8.3 Plan of the Qufu temple during the Northern Song period. Woodblock-printed illustration from facsimile of Kong Yuancuo 孔元措, *Kongshi zuting guangji* 孔氏祖庭廣記, picture no. 8. Jin-Yuan period, 1227/1242  
PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CHINA, BEIJING,  
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Chuan 孔傳 (ca. 1059–ca. 1134), a forty-seventh-generation descendant and grandson of Kong Daofu.<sup>11</sup>

Although Kong Yuancuo does not cite that source, one of the prefaces he reprinted in *Kongshi zuting guangji* had been written in 1124 for Kong Chuan's *Zuting zaji* 祖庭雜記, evidently an earlier edition that Kong Chuan compiled just a few years before he fled to the South to escape the Jin invasion, and its wording is virtually identical to his preface in *Dongjia zaji*, dated 1134.<sup>12</sup> The

11 The description appears in Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, B.16a–17a. Kong Chuan's original name was Ruogu 若古, which he changed when he became assistant magistrate (*zhubu* 主簿) of Xianyuan 仙源 (i.e., Qufu) in 1089; Idem, A.36b. For additional biography, see Kong Decheng 孔德成, comp., *Kongzi shijia pu* 孔子世家譜 (Qufu, 1937), rpt. *Kongzi wenhua daquan* 孔子文化大全 (Ji'nan: Shandong youyi shushe, 1990), *chu ji* 初集, 2.5b (86), and *er ji* 二集, 17.11a (2381); also *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 宋人傳記資料索引, comp. Chang Bide 昌彼德 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1977), 387–88.

12 The 1124-dated “old preface” (*jiu yin* 舊引) for *Zuting zaji* credits the book to Kong Chuan but bears the name of Kong Gui 孔瓌 (d. 1173), a forty-ninth-generation descendant who

bibliography section (*yiwenzhi* 藝文志) of the official Song history confirms Kong Chuan's authorship of two genealogies, *Queli zuting ji* 闕里祖庭記 and *Dongjia zaji*, the former title plausibly referring to *Zuting zaji*.<sup>13</sup> The now-lost work would have contained a description of the Qufu temple very like the account that appears in *Dongjia zaji*, and it may have also included a pictorial diagram; indeed, *Dongjia zaji*'s description of the temple is titled "Zhai tu" 宅圖 (Picture of the residence), and a picture may even have come from one of Kong Chuan's sources, a 1085-dated genealogy by his uncle, Kong Zonghan 孔宗翰 (1016–1105), simply called *Jia pu* 家譜.<sup>14</sup> In any case, Kong Yuancuo's illustration of the temple under the Song depicts the Apricot Altar, labeled by name, as three rectilinear slabs that diminish in size toward the top. It occupies a central space just below the Main Hall, in line with a structure labeled Tower of Writings (Shu lou 書樓) housing Song Zhenzong's commemorative stele,<sup>15</sup> and the Ceremonial Gate. Three large trees stand in the courtyard.

Additional indirect evidence that the late Northern Song version of Kong Chuan's genealogy included a diagram of the Qufu temple comes from *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記, an illustrated compendium of useful information for the aspiring literatus, initially compiled and published by Chen Yuanjing 陳元靚 around 1269 in late Southern Song Fujian.<sup>16</sup> Although the extant commercial editions from the Yuan and Ming periods display many differences from one another, they coincide in reproducing an illustration of the Qufu temple that shows the Song layout (Fig. 8.4).

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remained in Qufu under the Jin; compare Kong Yuancuo, *Kongshi zuting guangji*, "Zuting zaji jiu yin," 1a–b (4) with Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, 1.1a–b (13–14). The words *chong bian* 重編 (re-edited) follow Kong Gui's signature, but the only significant difference between the two prefaces is that Kong Gui's omits the honorific word *ju* 巨 (great) before "Song" 宋, making it suitable for a Jin publication.

- 13 *Song shi* 宋史, comp. Toghto 脫脫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 203.5122 or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=61100&page=60#>.
- 14 The temple description appears in Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, B.16a (133). An example of a passage citing Kong Zonghan's *Jia pu* by name appears in B.3b (108); the 1085-dated preface is transcribed in *hou xu*, 1a–b (165–166).
- 15 According to Yang Huan 楊奐 (1186–1255), who visited Qufu in 1252, the stele bore the encomium to Confucius composed by Zhenzong himself and the encomia composed by his courtiers for each of the seventy-two disciples; see Yang's "Dongyou ji" 東遊記, in his *Huanshan yigao* 還山遺稿, rpt. *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1983), v. 1198, A.22a (1198–1234) or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=86655&page=43>.
- 16 The evolution of *Shilin guangji* through strikingly disparate successive editions is analyzed by Hu Daojing 胡道靜, "Yijiuliusan nian Zhonghua shuju yingyin ben qianyan" 一九六三年中華書局影印本前言, in *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 559–65; and Morita Kenji 森田憲司 in "Guanyu zai Riben de *Shilin guangji* zhuben" 關於在日本的《事林廣記》諸本, in *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 566–72. The earliest extant exemplars date to the late Yuan.

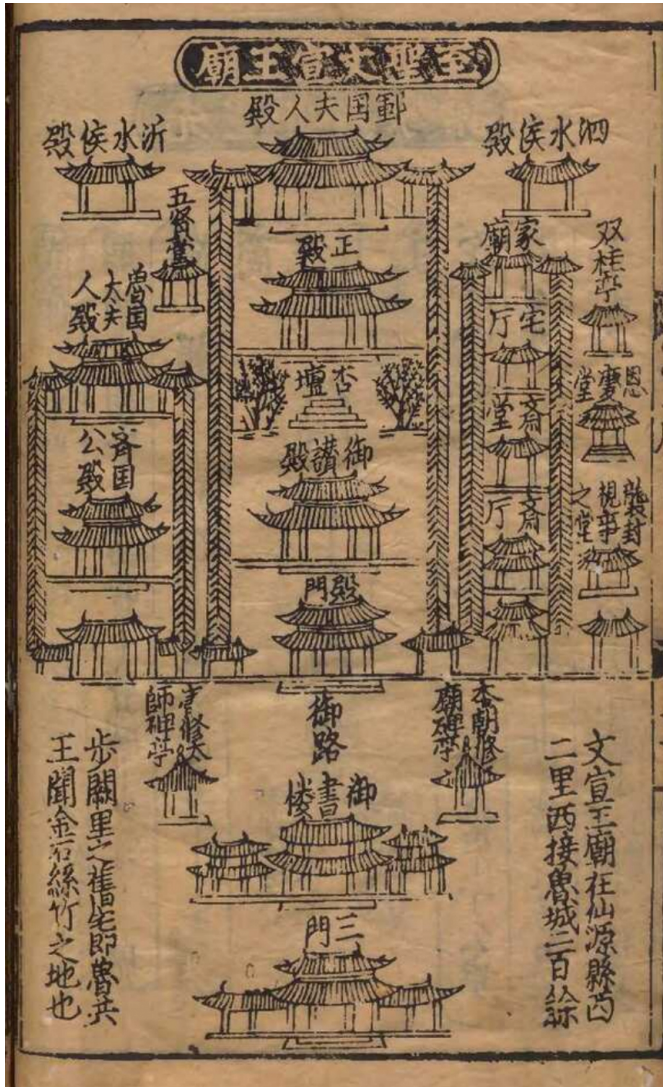


FIGURE 8.4 Plan of the Qufu temple during the Northern Song period. Woodblock-printed illustration in Chen Yuanjing 陳元靚, comp., *Xinbian zuantu zenglei qunshu leiya Shilin guangji, hou ji* 新編纂圖增類羣書類要事林廣記 (後集). Xiyuan jingshe 西園精舍 edition, 3.2b. Yuan dynasty, ca. 1333. Naikaku bunko 內閣文庫, Tokyo, Japan  
 PHOTO COURTESY OF KOKURITSU KÖBUNSHO-KAN 国立公文書館 (OPEN ACCESS)

A Song prototype for the image is suggested not only by the specific configuration of the depicted structures but also by a couple of names. For example, the Tower of Writings is here called Tower of Imperial Writings (Yu shu lou 御書樓), a reference to the Song that Kong Yuancuo omitted in deference to the Jin; the note underneath the picture refers to Qufu as Xianyuan *xian* 仙源縣, its official designation only from 1012 to 1142, when the Jin changed it; and the sacrificial hall is labeled “Zheng dian,” which Song Huizong had changed in 1102 to Dacheng dian 大成殿 (Hall of the Great Ensemble) for all Confucian temples around the realm.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Kong Yuancuo’s diagram of the temple

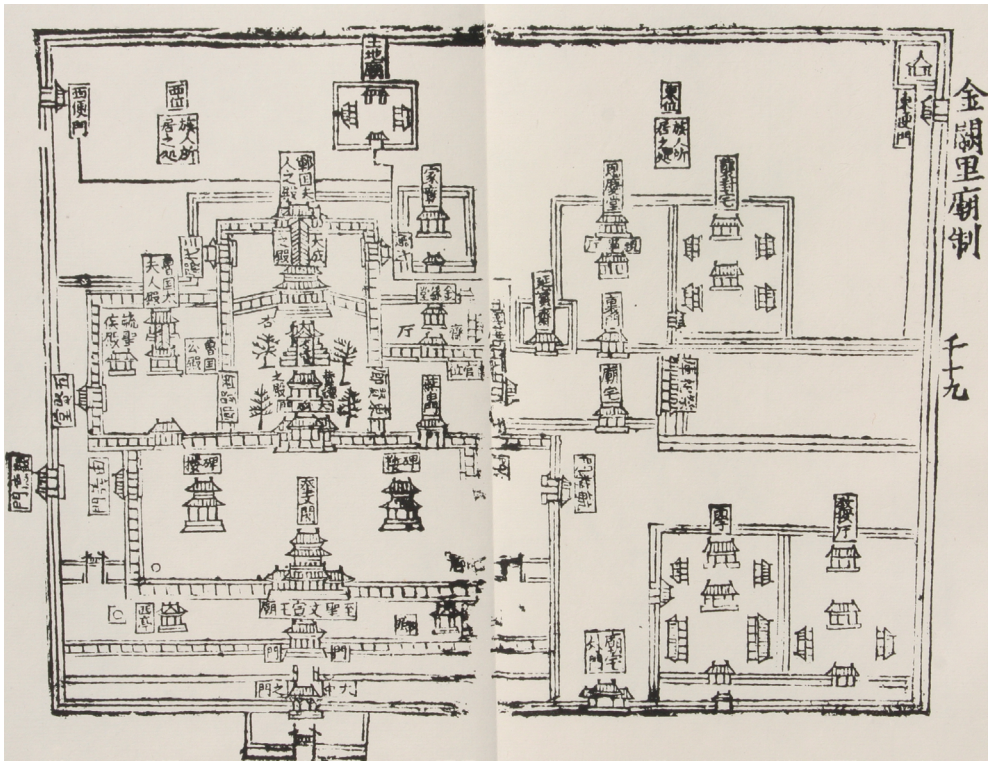


FIGURE 8.5 Plan of the Qufu temple during the Jin dynasty. Woodblock-printed illustration from facsimile of Kong Yuancuo 孔元措, *Kongshi zuting guangji* 孔氏祖庭廣記, picture no. 10. Jin-Yuan period, 1227/1242

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17 Song Zhenzong ordered the county’s name changed after his visit to Qufu in 1008, but it reverted under the Jin; see Kong Yinzhi’s 孔胤植 expanded Qing edition of *Queli zhi* 闕里誌, 8.4a (page reproduced at Harvard Yenching Library, accessed May 10, 2023, [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:23514034\\$1731](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:23514034$1731)). For the name change

as rebuilt under the Jin includes the pavilion added on top of the three-tiered Apricot Altar and Dong Huaiying's stele, which doubles as an identifying label, and the main hall is labeled as "Dacheng zhi dian" 大成之殿 (Fig. 8.5).<sup>18</sup> The courtyard now contains four trees.

## 2 Kong Chuan's *Dongjia zaji* and the Emergence of the Apricot Altar Picture (*Xingtian tu*)

At least six different versions of Kong Chuan's *Dongjia zaji* are extant, three of which include very similar pictures of Confucius seated on a three-tiered platform playing the *qin* in his lap,<sup>19</sup> flanked by five standing disciples on each side (Fig. 8.6; cf. Fig. 8.1). All three include a preface by Kong Chuan (dated 1134) and postface inscriptions by other descendants that are labeled as prefaces (*xu* 序): Kong Zonghan (dated 1085), Kong Duanchao 孔端朝 (dated 1132), and Kong Ni 孔擬 (dated 1178). The earliest exemplar is in Beijing's National Library of China and observes taboos for the personal names of Song emperors through Gaozong 宋高宗 (1107–1187; r. 1127–1162), supporting a date of initial compilation between 1127–1162. However, it also includes descendants through the late Southern Song as well as pages cut in different typefaces, suggesting supplements added from multiple sources.<sup>20</sup> One of the other illustrated editions is based on a manuscript copy that the bibliophile Qian Zeng 錢曾 (1629–1701) made in 1682 from a late Southern Song edition owned by Ye Yibao 葉奕苞 (1629–1686); Zhang Jinwu 張金吾 (1787–1829) subsequently acquired this manuscript copy for his *Airi jinglu* 愛日精廬, and it was later published in Hu Ting's 胡珽 (1822–1861) collectanea *Linlang mishi congshu* 琳琅秘室叢

from Zheng dian to Dacheng dian, see *Song shi* 宋史, 105.4b or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=67564&page=19>. Since Kong Yuancuo's diagram of the Song temple (i.e., Fig. 8.3) labels the hall "Zheng dian," the picture may have originated in Kong Zonghan's 1085 *Jia pu*.

18 For the Jin reconstruction, see Sloane, "Rebuilding Confucian Ideology," 245–46.

19 Most paintings of men playing the *qin* for an audience show the instrument lying flat on a table, which allows the sound to resonate properly. A well-known example is the Palace Museum's *Tingqin tu* 聽琴圖, attributed to Song Huizong; reproduced in *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Huihua bian* v. 3: *Liang Song huihua, shang* 中國美術全集：繪畫編3兩宋繪畫（上）(Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), 89, pl. 44.

20 It is described as a "Song edition with ongoing revisions" (Song ke dixiu ben 宋刻遞修本); see facsimile reproduction in *Zhonghua zaizao shan ben* 中華再造善本 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2006), v. 142. At the end are brushwritten colophons by Yuan Zeming 袁則明 (dated 1485), who refers to several earlier owners, and the Qing bibliophiles Huang Pilie 黃丕烈 (1763–1825; as transcribed by Qu Yong 瞿鏞 [1794–1846]) and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804; dated 1801).



FIGURE 8.6 Confucius and disciples at the Apricot Altar. Woodblock-printed illustration in Kong Chuan 孔傳, *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記. Qing dynasty, reproducing a manuscript copy made from a Song edition, in *Linlang mishi congshu*, ser. 1 琳琅秘室叢書 (第一集) (Guiji 會稽: Dong shi 董氏, 1888)  
PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD YENCHING LIBRARY  
(OPEN ACCESS)

書 (the source for Fig. 8.6).<sup>21</sup> The third illustrated exemplar is a late Ming or early Qing manuscript version that was copied from a Song edition and is now in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> Except for details of execution, the contents of all three illustrated versions are virtually identical, exhibiting only the most minor differences from one another, which suggests that they reflect the same late Southern Song prototype.

An unillustrated edition of *Dongjia zaji* was submitted to the Qianlong emperor and copied into the imperial collectanea *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 between 1772 and 1783.<sup>23</sup> This version starts with Kong Chuan's 1134 preface, followed by the Song imperial clansman Zhao Quji's 趙去疾 1251-dated discussion of different dates for Confucius's life given in various texts, which is not in the illustrated versions; on the other hand, several sections that those versions do include are omitted. The postfaces also are completely different. Of particular significance is imperial clansman Zhao Ruteng's 趙汝騰 "Nandu jiamiao" 南渡家廟 (Family Temple of the Southern Crossing), dated 1254, because it was written for the Southern Lineage Family Temple (Nanzong jiamiao 南宗家廟), which Kong descendants had established in Quzhou 衢州 (Zhejiang) after fleeing from Qufu. The book ends with a 1265-dated colophon by Feng Mengde 馮夢得 (*jinsi* 1238), who mentions that worn-out blocks had been recarved. In their critical remarks, the Qing court editors express puzzlement that this

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- 21 Hu Ting 胡珽 (1822–1861), comp., *Linlang mishu congshu* 琳琅秘室叢書 (Guiji 會稽: Mr. Dong 董氏, 1888); also reproduced in *Kongzi wenhua daquan* 孔子文化大全. It omits the "Explanation" (說) that precedes the Apricot Altar "Song" (歌) in the Beijing and "Peiping" versions (see notes 20 and 22, respectively), and has more characters per column of text than those versions.
- 22 Acc. no. 國立故宮博物院圖書文獻處 · 平圖005563. This manuscript version was part of the large group of rare books from the National "Peiping" Library 國立北平圖書館 that were sent to the U.S. Library of Congress for safekeeping during the Second World War and microfilmed. The text follows the format of the Beijing version, with ten columns per half-folio and eighteen characters per column, but the hand-drawn Apricot Altar picture more closely resembles its counterpart in the *Linlang mishu congshu* version, with a *wutong* 梧桐 tree beside the altar and a staircase that looks fully three-dimensional. The transcription of the text does not observe Song taboo characters but must predate the Kangxi period (1661–1722), because the character *xuan* 玄 (for the Kangxi emperor's name) is not avoided. I do not know whose name is avoided by omitting the last stroke of *ju* 巨 before "Song" 宋 in the date of Kong Chuan's preface.
- 23 The exemplar came from the Tianyi ge 天一閣 library of Fan Mouzhu 范懋柱 (1718–1788) in Ningbo; see *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要, comp. Ji Yun 紀昀, et al. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1931), 57, *Shi bu* 史部 13. 3a, or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=76363&page=6>. For the text, see *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, "Shi bu" 史部 204, "Zhuanji lei" 傳記類, v. 446, or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=197177&page=1>.

book did not match earlier bibliophiles' descriptions of an edition that had an illustration and different paratexts.<sup>24</sup>

Although the relationship between illustrated and unillustrated versions is indeed unclear, their core contents are very similar, probably reflecting Kong Chuan's initial genealogy of 1124. The initial version may or may not have included an Apricot Altar picture; or, the image may have been added to the 1134 version, either immediately or at some later time. Because the two texts at the end of the unillustrated edition relate specifically to the Southern Lineage Family Temple in Quzhou, located far from Qufu, it seems reasonable that this version would not include an Apricot Altar picture or irrelevant textual material. Whatever the explanation, the version of *Dongjia zaji* associated with the Southern Lineage Family Temple evidently did not have an Apricot Altar illustration in the Southern Song period. However, Zhang Runshen 張潤身 (*jìnshi* 1514), a Ming magistrate of Xi'an county 西安縣 (under Quzhou prefecture), added a standing solo portrait of Confucius to a Ming woodblock-printed edition of this version.<sup>25</sup> Titled *Xuansheng xiaoying* 宣聖小影, the portrayal closely resembles Confucius's image in a composition that also included his disciple Yan Hui 顏回, versions of which had been carved on stone tablets in schools since the late Northern Song period and were ultimately based on a picture transmitted by Kong descendants in Qufu.<sup>26</sup> A lifesize portrait of Confucius

24 The Qing editors' discussion of discrepancies in recorded descriptions of *Dongjia zaji*, which precede their transcription of the text itself, is analyzed by Quan Jianwei 全見為, "Song Kong Chuan zhuan *Dongjia zaji* er jian huiji huiding huikao" 宋孔傳撰《東家雜記》二卷匯輯匯訂匯考, *Nanjing Shifan Daxue wenxueyuan xuebao* 南京師範大學文學院學報 2017.1: 86–89.

25 The book is now in the National Central Library, Taiwan (call no. 205.24 02663); the portrait is reproduced online at Taiwan National Central Library, which can be accessed by searching under the author and title at <https://rbook.ncl.edu.tw/NCLSearch/Search/Index/1>. The text is very similar to the one reproduced in *Siku quanshu* (see note 23). Besides adding the standing solo portrait and Song Gaozong's 1144 encomium to Confucius on the verso, Zhang Runshen may have been responsible for having the entire work published in a woodblock edition. He served as magistrate just after the local Kong descendants had gained a prestigious hereditary title and the Southern Lineage temple was being rebuilt; for details of this background, see Thomas A. Wilson, "The Ritual Formation of Confucian Orthodoxy and Descendants of the Sage," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55.3 (1996): 574–76.

26 The earliest of several extant or recorded examples depicting the standing figures of Confucius and Yan Hui, also titled *Xuansheng xiaoying* 宣聖小影, is an incised stone tablet erected in the Gaoping 高平 (Shanxi) county school by magistrate Zhang Chi 張持 in 1088; see *San Jin shike daquan: Jincheng shi Gaoping shi jian* 三晉石刻大全：晉城市高平市卷 (Taiyuan: Sanjin chubanshe, 2011), v. 1, no. 25. Zhang's inscription says that the image was copied from a rubbing of a tablet in the prefectural school at Dizhou 棣州

alone, perhaps inspired by this family heirloom, was also carved on a lifesize stone tablet in the Southern Lineage Family Temple, where Magistrate Zhang would have participated in sacrifices.<sup>27</sup>

In the illustrated versions of *Dongjia zaji*, the Apricot Altar is rendered as consisting of three patterned tiers that decrease in size toward the top, with a staircase at the front, suggesting a more elaborate structure than the schematic form depicted in the temple diagrams. The details of the structure and adjacent tree differ among the three versions of the composition, but the basic iconography is identical.<sup>28</sup> The picture is not mentioned anywhere in the main text, which has an entry for the Apricot Altar and separately describes four portrayals of Confucius with varying numbers of disciples.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the accompanying “Explanation and Song of the Apricot Altar” (Xingtán shuò, gē) is rendered in a style of calligraphy notably different from the rest of the text, suggesting that the blocks originated separately.<sup>30</sup> Thus the illustration could well have been inserted after 1134, like the entries added for five later

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(Yangxin 陽信, Shandong), which in turn was copied from the Kong duke's “*Xiaoying*” 小影 by Wu Daozi 吳道子 (ca. 689–after 755).

- 27 For detailed discussion, see Julia K. Murray, “Heirloom and Exemplar: Family and School Portraits of Confucius in the Song and Yuan Periods,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 41 (2011): 254–258 and fig. 11; or Julia K. Murray 孟久麗, trans. Wu Chen 吳晨 and You Yang 游洋, “Yizhen yu kaimo: Song Yuan shiqi Kong yi zu zhong ji shuyuan zhong de Kongzi yixiang zhi yanjiu” 遺珍與楷模：宋元時期孔裔族中及書院中的孔子「遺像」之研究, *Meishushi yanjiu jikan* 美術史研究集刊 (*Taida Journal of Art History*) 34 (2013): 18–20 and 40, fig. 11.
- 28 The Beijing version (i.e., Fig. 8.1) displays cruder drawing and carving techniques, which modern commentators take as evidence of Southern Song date. The Airi jinglu / Linlang mishi congshu version (i.e., Fig. 8.6) is an acknowledged Qing recut of a manuscript copy of a Song edition, so its more refined appearance may result from subtle changes introduced in the copying or carving process. The hand-drawn picture in the manuscript formerly in the “Peiping” Library (see note 22) is extremely similar to the latter.
- 29 Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, B.1b–2b and B.3a–4b, respectively, probably copied from Kong Zonghan's 1085 genealogy, rather than his own observations; I analyze the four portrayals in “Heirloom and Exemplar.” One is the *Xiaoying* portrait of Confucius with Yan Hui, which is described as the most faithful depiction but is not attributed to Wu Daozi (see note 26).
- 30 The Beijing Library's exemplar (see note 20) exhibits several styles of calligraphy throughout the text, as well as different treatments of the margins (*banxin* 版心), so it is obvious that the contents were assembled from several sources. The calligraphy of the “Explanation” and “Song” in the former “Peiping” Library manuscript version (see note 22) is only slightly larger and thicker than the rest of the text, suggesting that the copyist moderated whatever differences existed in his printed model. The woodblock-printed Airi jinglu / Linlang mishi congshu version (see note 21) does not include the prose “Explanation,” but the “Song” is transcribed in a distinctively blocky nineteenth-century style, possibly added at that time and quite different from the main text.

generations of Kong descendants in the South. In addition, Feng Mengde's 1265-dated colophon to the unillustrated version in *Siku quanshu* mentions that the book's printing blocks had become illegible from use and had to be recarved.<sup>31</sup> It is evident that the book not only was in demand but also that its contents were subject to modification over the course of the Southern Song.

The inclusion of ten disciples in the putative Southern Song "Apricot Altar" illustration at the front of *Dongjia zaji* may have been inspired by an untitled earlier picture recorded in Kong Zonghan's 1085 *Jia pu* and repeated in Kong Chuan's *Dongjia zaji*. It is described as a picture of Confucius seated with a jade baton at a small, curved table and attended by ten disciples, one of them holding the pole of a canopy.<sup>32</sup> Kong Yuancuo illustrated such a picture under the title *Leaning on a small table* (*Pingji* 憑几) in *Kongshi zuting guangji* (Fig. 8.7), and it was later reproduced in all editions of the local gazetteer *Queli zhi* 闕里誌.<sup>33</sup> As printed in these sources, the composition shows seven disciples clustered around the master, one of them holding a wrapped *qin*, while three others stand facing the group. Confucius sits under the canopy on a dais with notched openings, resting against the curved frame of a low support and grasping a slender baton. The single-tiered platform with decorative openings, curved low table, and overarching canopy evoke depictions of the Buddhist layman Vimalakīrti in his debate with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, a subject that was popular during the Tang-Song period.<sup>34</sup> Visually close to the portrayal of

31 For reproduction and OCR transcription of Feng Mengde's colophon, see Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=197177&page=144> and <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=197177&page=145>. Feng's comment about illegible print could equally describe the characters in the Beijing exemplar (see note 20), many of which are very blurry, and several pages have been patched with recut sections.

32 Kong Chuan, *Dongjia zaji*, B.4a (in a section taken from Kong Zonghan's 1085 *Jia pu*). The terse description suggests that the picture was a small painting, but no artist is named.

33 *Queli zhi* presented a history and inventory of the Kong temple, cemetery, and mansion in Qufu; a chronology of the life of Confucius and successive generations of descendants, and the honors bestowed on them; details on procedures, liturgies, and paraphernalia for sacrificial rituals; transcriptions of stele inscriptions and other important records; and an unusual number of illustrations. Heavily based on Kong Yuancuo's genealogy and other Kong sources, the first of several editions was compiled in 1505 under the supervision of Chen Hao 陳鏞 (*jinsshi* 1487), an Education Intendant in the Shandong Provincial Surveillance office. Later editions were published by various Kong descendants; for an overview, see Agnew, *The Kongs of Qufu*, 125–31.

34 Fan Lin gives an extensively illustrated and thorough analysis of the origins, evolution, and cultural significance of this important subject in Chinese Buddhist visual art in "Visual Images of Vimalakīrti in the Mogao Caves (581–1036)" (MA thesis, McGill University, 2006).

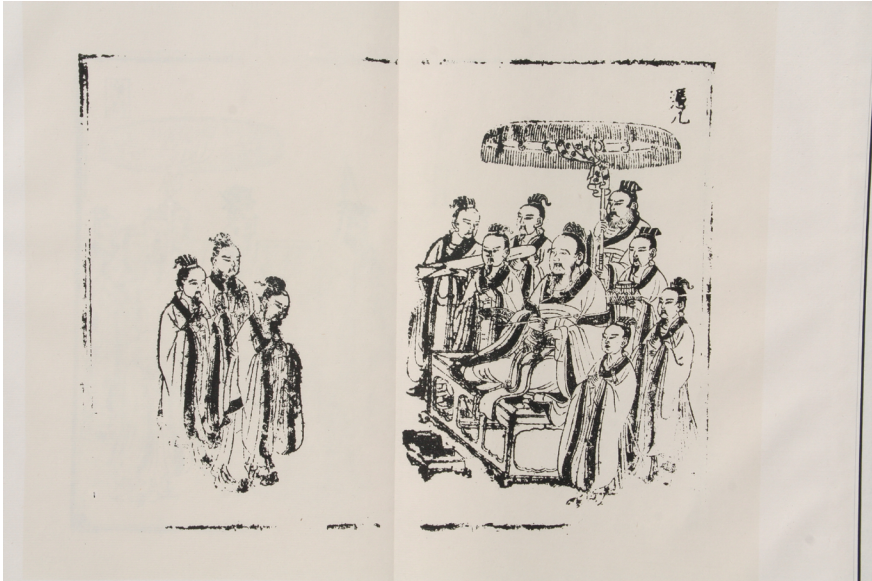


FIGURE 8.7 *Leaning on a Small Table* 憑几. Woodblock-printed illustration from facsimile of Kong Yuancuo, *Kongshi zuting guangji* 孔氏祖庭廣記, picture no. 2. Jin-Yuan period, 1227/1242

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CHINA, BEIJING,  
NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

Confucius is the representation of Vimalakīrti in the monochrome handscroll now known as *Weimo yanjiao tu* 維摩演教圖 (Picture of Vimalakīrti teaching) in the Palace Museum, Beijing.<sup>35</sup> Although unsigned, its colophons credit it to the Northern Song artist Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1049–1106), but some scholars have reattributed it to the Jin court artist Ma Yunqing 馬雲卿 (fl. twelfth century), whose copy of Li Gonglin's version is documented in a 1308-dated inscription on yet another example.<sup>36</sup> Ma Yunqing also painted a recorded portrait of Confucius that Kong Yuancuo inscribed, and his brother Ma Yunzhang

35 Painted in ink on paper; reproduced and discussed in *Zhongguo huihua quanji* v. 5: *Wudai Song Liao Jin* 中國繪畫全集：五代宋遼金 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 1999), pls. 134–136 on 156–59; detail reproduced at Baidu, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://baike.baidu.hk/pic/%E7%B6%AD%E6%91%A9%E6%BC%94%E6%95%99%E5%9C%96/22714006/1/8694a4c27d1ed21b93053109a16eddc450da3f09?fr=lemma&ct=single#aid=1&pic=8694a4c27d1ed21b93053109a16eddc450da3f09>.

36 See Wang Zhenpeng's 王振鵬 (fl. ca. 1285–1330) *Vimalakīrti and the Doctrine of Nonduality* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc. no. 1980.276), at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40513>.

馬雲章 prepared the illustrations for Kong's *Kongshi zuting guangji*, so the similarities between the depictions of Confucius in *Leaning on a small table* and *Vimalakīrti* may reflect these connections.<sup>37</sup>

Kong Yuancuo's illustration purporting to represent the family's picture of Confucius seated on a dais under a canopy seems likely to have been created from its textual description in the Northern Song edition of the genealogy rather than depicting an extant work, given the extensive destruction in Qufu during the Jin conquest. Earlier, however, forty-sixth-generation descendant Kong Zongshou 孔宗壽 (fl. 11th cent.) had had a similar composition attributed to the Tang master Wu Daozi 吳道子 (ca. 689–after 755) incised on a stone tablet in 1095, when the family picture probably still survived, shortly after Kong Zonghan described it in his 1085 genealogy.<sup>38</sup> Expressing his concern to preserve and keep portraits of Confucius from being muddled by forgeries, Kong Zongshou erected the incised tablet in the Qufu temple, where it remains today, although it has been moved at least once and is now in extremely poor condition.<sup>39</sup> His accompanying inscription does not mention the Apricot Altar, nor is that name part of the description of the picture in Kong genealogies. Rubbings of the tablet inspired replications elsewhere, however, and writers have referred to it as Wu Daozi's portrait of Confucius at the Apricot Altar since at least the twelfth century. The earliest extant example is a very battered stone tablet in the Hengxian Museum 橫縣博物館 that was carved in 1154 under the Southern Song for the government school of Ningpu county 寧浦郡學 (subsequently Hengzhou 橫州; now Hengxian 橫縣, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) (Fig. 8.8).<sup>40</sup>

37 For Kong Yuancuo's connections to pictures of Confucius by the Ma brothers and for portrayals of Confucius attributed to Li Gonglin, see Murray, "Song Paintings of Confucius," *Zhejiang University Journal of Art and Archaeology: Supplementum* 1 浙江大學藝術與考古研究 (特輯一): *Proceedings of the International Conference on Song Painting* 宋畫國際學術會議論文集 (2017): 270, 277–78, and 283.

38 For an old rubbing of this now very battered stone and further discussion of Wu Daozi's various connections to portraits of Confucius, see Murray, "Heirloom and Exemplar," 238–48 and fig. 6. The composition is slightly different from the illustration in Kong Yuancuo's *Kongshi zuting guangji* (i.e., Fig. 8.7) because it shows all ten disciples around Confucius's dais, instead of three standing opposite him.

39 Describing his 1252 visit to the Qufu temple, Yang Huan recorded two stone tablets portraying Confucius, one of which he called Wu Daozi's *Small Portrait*, meaning Kong Zongshou's 1095-dated stone; see "Dongyou ji," A.22b (1198/234) or Chinese Text Project, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=232203&page=56>. The tablet was later moved into the temple's Hall of the Sage's Traces (Shengji dian 聖蹟殿), which was built in 1592–1593 to enshrine pictures of the life of Confucius.

40 Although the stone tablet must have been accessible when the Princeton rubbing (Fig. 8.8) acquired by George Rowley (1892–1962) was made, it was subsequently buried, but



FIGURE 8.8 *Picture of the Master at the Apricot Altar* 夫子杏壇圖. Southern Song, dated 1154. Late 19th–early 20th cent. rubbing of incised stone tablet, with design attributed to Wu Daozi (ca. 689–after 755) and inscriptions by Kong Zongshou (dated 1095) and He Xianjue (dated 1154). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of George Rowley, y1958–143

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM (OPEN ACCESS)

On the same surface, the tablet combines the title *Picture of Confucius at the Apricot Altar* (*Fuzi Xingtān tu* 夫子杏壇圖), the pictorial composition from Kong Zongshou's tablet in the Qufu temple, his 1095-dated inscription attributing the portrayal to Wu Daozi, and a dedicatory inscription by the 1154 replica's sponsor, He Xianjue 何先覺 (*jinshi* 1128), the acting administrator of Hengzhou prefecture and its military affairs (Hengzhou junzhou shi 橫州軍州事).<sup>41</sup> He writes that the image was based on an "old version" (*jiu ben* 舊本) in his family's collection, which probably was a rubbing from Kong Zongshou's stone tablet. As Galambos has written, even though the composition differs from typical images of Confucius and disciples at the Apricot Altar, the title indicates that the subject was already known in the mid-twelfth century, leading him to suggest that the illustration in *Dongjia zaji* could have been part of the book from the outset.<sup>42</sup>

Although it is impossible to determine precisely when *Dongjia zaji*'s picture of Confucius sitting on the Apricot Altar flanked by two groups of disciples under an overarching tree was created, the image notably was not reproduced in *Kongshi zuting guangji*, which Kong Yuancuo compiled in the North at the end of the Jin dynasty, so it probably had not been part of Kong Zongshou's 1085 *Jia pu*. Nor was it included in any edition of *Queli zhi*, which incorporated Kong Yuancuo's Qufu-centric illustrations as well as many others. However, the Apricot Altar picture does appear in most versions of the popular handbook

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it re-emerged during a construction project in 1987, showing much more damage; see Wikimedia, accessed May 10, 2023, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/%E7%88%B6%E5%AD%90%E6%9D%8F%E5%9D%9B%E5%9B%BE\\_4224.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/%E7%88%B6%E5%AD%90%E6%9D%8F%E5%9D%9B%E5%9B%BE_4224.jpg). For detailed analysis, see Li Wenzong 黎文宗, et al., "Hengxian 'Fuzi Xingtān tu' bei xiaokao" 橫縣「夫子杏壇圖」碑小考, *Guangxi wenbo* 廣西文博 1 (2017): 245–49. It is now designated a Second-class Cultural Relic (二級文物).

41 Kong Zongshou's and He Xianjue's inscriptions are transcribed in Xie Qikun 謝啟昆, *Yuexi jinshi lue* 粵西金石略 (Tonggu ting 銅鼓亭, 1801), 8.1a–b. Following He's lengthy signature is a note reading "Xianggong jinshi Yanzhou xuezheng Gan Yan mo" 鄉貢進士兗州學正甘彥摹, which I interpret to mean that the "old version" in He's family collection had been copied for carving by Gan Yan 甘彥 (dates unknown), a provincial degree candidate who had been an instructor in the Yanzhou (Shandong) school, very close to Qufu. Li Wenzong et al. suggest that Gan Yan painted a copy of Kong Zongshou's tablet at the Qufu temple in 1154 for He Xianjue to replicate in Hengxian; see "Hengxian 'Fuzi Xingtān tu' bei xiaokao," 247. Since the Jin regime controlled the area around Qufu at that time, it seems much more likely that Gan had served in Yanzhou prior to 1127; moreover, the note is a postscript after He Xianjue's signature, a placement typically used for crediting copyists or carvers involved in transferring a design to a stone tablet.

42 Although Galambos was troubled that the 1154 Hengxian picture did not include an apricot tree, he considered the title as supporting his argument for a twelfth-century cult of the Apricot Altar that was responsible for a 1122-dated Tangut manuscript; see "Confucius and Laozi at the Altar," 255.

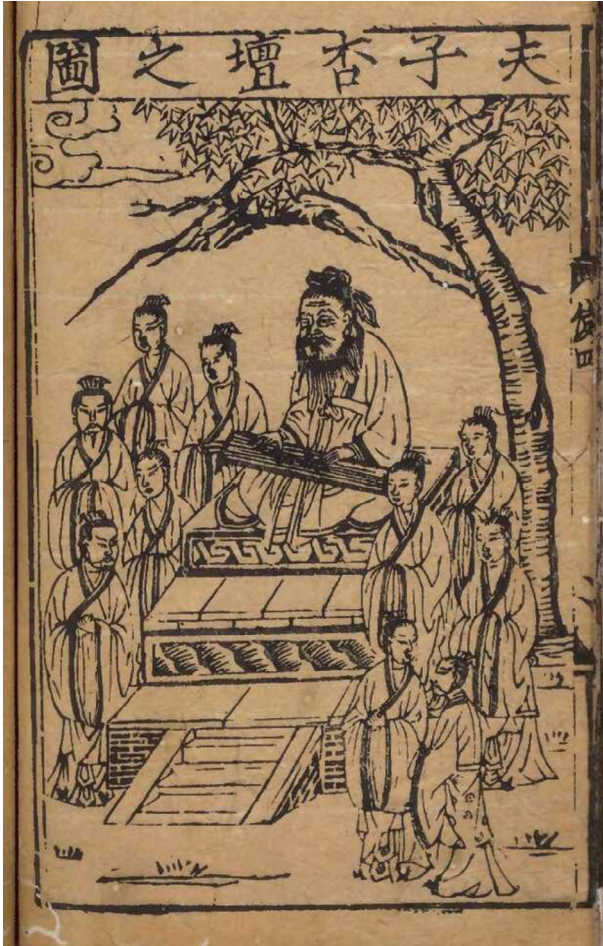


FIGURE 8.9 *Picture of the Master at the Apricot Altar* 夫子杏壇之圖. Woodblock-printed illustration in Chen Yuanjing 陳元靚, comp., *Xinbian zuantu zenglei qunshu leiyao Shilin guangji, xu ji* 新編纂圖增類羣書類要事林廣記 (續集). Xiyuan jingshe 西園精舍 edition, 4.2b. Yuan dynasty, 14th century. Naikaku bunko 內閣文庫, Tokyo, Japan

PHOTO COURTESY OF KOKURITSU  
KÖBUNSHO-KAN (OPEN ACCESS)

*Shilin guangji* (Fig. 8.9), compiled in the late Southern Song period, suggesting that the image had become known in the South.<sup>43</sup>

43 See note 16.



FIGURE 8.10

*Legacy Portrait of the Former Sage*  
先聖遺像. Woodblock-printed  
illustration in Chen Yuanjing  
陳元靚, comp., *Xinbian zuantu*  
*zenglei qunshu leiyaoshi*  
*Shilin guangji, hou ji* 新編纂圖增類  
羣書類要事林廣記 (後集),  
3.1b. Xiyuan jingshe 西園精舍  
edition. Yuan dynasty, ca. 1333.  
Naikaku bunko 內閣文庫, Tokyo,  
Japan

PHOTO COURTESY OF  
KOKURITSU KÖBUNSHO-KAN  
(OPEN ACCESS)

In *Shilin guangji* it has an explicit title, “Picture of the Master at the Apricot Altar” (*Fuzi Xingtán zhi tu* 夫子杏壇之圖) and appears in a section treating music for the *qin*, rather than in the chapter on the cult of Confucius with the Qufu temple diagram (i.e., Fig. 8.4) and a solo standing portrait (Fig. 8.10).<sup>44</sup> Perhaps *Queli zhi* did not include the Apricot Altar picture because its association with instruction on playing the *qin* did not fit the gazetteer’s purpose, or perhaps the compilers simply were unaware of its existence. In any case, Qing bibliophiles, court editors, and modern scholars all agree that Confucius definitely did not compose the Apricot Altar song, although certainly he did play the *qin*, the quintessential instrument by which a superior man regulated his emotions and harmonized Heaven and earth.

44 The inclusion of this standing portrait of Confucius in *Shilin guangji* is additional evidence that the solo image originated in the South, discussed in my “Heirloom and Exemplar” (as in note 27), 254–59.



FIGURE 8.11 *Apricot Altar* 杏壇 (Confucius and eleven disciples). Woodblock-printed illustration in *Yuanzhen xinkan Lunyu zuantu* 元貞新刊論語纂圖. Yuan dynasty, dated 1296. Hōsa Bunko 蓬左文庫 collection

PHOTO COURTESY OF NAGOYA HIDEYOSHI KIYOMASA MEMORIAL MUSEUM 名古屋市秀吉清正記念館, HŌSA BUNKO 蓬左文庫, AND NAGOYA CITY MUSEUM 名古屋博物館, JAPAN, NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

Indirect evidence that the picture of Confucius sitting on a reconstructed Apricot Altar originated under the Southern Song comes from an edition of the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects) published in 1296 in Pingyang 平陽, Shanxi (Fig. 8.11).<sup>45</sup> Clearly meant for instruction, this book is annotated with explanatory notes and guides to pronunciation. The illustration includes a title cartouche that identifies it as “Apricot Altar,” and eleven disciples stand around Confucius, who is seated on a tripartite brick or tiled platform strumming his *qin*. The figural group is framed within a cloud-bubble in a landscape that includes a meandering stream, clumps of grass, a large orchid plant, and two blossoming trees under a swirling sky, a setting more elaborate than the *Dongjia zaji*'s version. The disciples are labeled by name, perhaps to help students visualize them or associate them with dialogues in the text. Their identities are significant because they also received sacrifices with Confucius in the main sacrificial hall of Confucian temples around the empire. Yan Hui 顏回 was designated as a Correlate (*pei* 配), and the other ten as Savants (*zhe* 哲).<sup>46</sup> Thus the picture also introduced readers to the Confucian temple, whose rituals they would participate in if they became officials or succeeded in civil examinations. However, the absence of the disciple Zi Zhang 子張 suggests that the picture was based on a prototype created before 1267, the year that the Southern Song elevated Zeng Zi 曾子 from Savant to Correlate and added Zi Zhang as a Savant.<sup>47</sup> After 1267, illustrators would have been unlikely to compose a group portrait with an uneven number of named disciples closely flanking Confucius. Accordingly, even though this edition of the *Lunyu* was published in the North under the Yuan dynasty and the illustration's setting is embellished, it reflects a ritual configuration that was current through most of the Southern Song.

45 Published by the Liang Mansion of Pingshui (Shanxi) 平水梁宅, the full title is *Yuanzhen xinkan Lunyu zuantu yi juan*, *Lunyu shiwen yinyi yijuan* 元貞新刊論語纂圖一卷，論語釋文音義一卷; the only known exemplar is in the Hōsa Bunko 蓬左文庫 in Nagoya, Japan (acc. no. 119–21). This library was formerly the collection of Tokugawa Yoshinao 徳川義直 (1601–1650), the founder of the Owari 尾張 branch of the Tokugawa shogunate 徳川幕府 (1603–1868).

46 In Confucian temple rituals, varying numbers of important disciples received sacrifices in the main hall as Correlates or Savants. Between 1126 and 1267, there were two Correlates, Yan Hui 顏回 and Mengzi 孟子, and ten Savants, corresponding to the disciples pictured with Confucius at the Apricot Altar. (Since Mengzi lived in a later century, there was no reason to include him in that group.) Zi Si 子思 and Zeng Zi 曾子 were added as Correlates in 1267, and the four retained this ritual status thereafter.

47 Thomas A. Wilson provides a convenient chronology of the major developments in temple ritual on his “Cult of Confucius” website, at Hamilton College, accessed May 10, 2023, [https://academics.hamilton.edu/asian\\_studies/home/chrono.html](https://academics.hamilton.edu/asian_studies/home/chrono.html).

### 3 The Evolution of the Apricot Altar Theme

A later illustration of Confucius at the Apricot Altar that includes the post-1267 group of Correlates and Savants appears in a late Ming popular encyclopedia, *Leiju santai wanyong zhengzong* 類聚三台萬用正宗 (The three officials' orthodox instructions for myriad usages, topically arranged) (Fig. 8.12). Issued in 1599 by Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 (ca. 1560–1637), a prolific Jianyang commercial publisher, the book was an illustrated compendium of useful information comparable to *Shilin guangji*.<sup>48</sup> The picture shows Confucius backed by a screenlike rock and wearing the cloth cap of a retired scholar, directly facing the viewer as he plucks the *qin* on his lap. He is flanked by four men (the Four Correlates) and ten more below (the Ten Savants), evenly divided by an altar table holding books, an incense burner emitting propitious characters in smoke, and a recumbent *qilin*. The hieratic frontality and the bilateral symmetry of the figures evoke the layout of altars in a Confucian temple's main sacrificial hall, although figural icons were no longer displayed there after the 1530 reform of state ritual.<sup>49</sup> The title above the picture, "The Ultimate Sage Kong Xuanni establishing his doctrine at Apricot Altar" 至聖孔宣尼杏壇設教 uses an anachronistic designation for Confucius, but the explicit reference to his teachings, along with the depiction of Ming-style books, a wafting censer, and the auspicious *qilin*, implies that the picture signifies success in the civil examinations.

The Ming print differs from the earlier illustrations in showing Confucius sitting on a rock, rather than on top of a three-layer manmade structure that evoked the physical Apricot Altar in the Qufu temple under the Song. The change suggests a shift of focus to Confucius's association with the Apricot Altar as a place in the landscape, rather than with the Qufu temple's commemorative architecture. The connection with landscape is made more emphatically in a colorful hanging-scroll painting that depicts him in a scenic locale

48 The exemplar in the Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo Niida bunko 東京大学東洋文化研究所仁井田文庫, University of Tokyo, is completely reproduced in *Chūgoku nichiyō ruisho shūsei* 中国日用類書集成 (Collection of Chinese daily-use encyclopedias) (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2000), vols. 3–5. Suyoung Son analyzes Yu Xiangdou's enterprise and its market in "Publisher at Work: Yu Xiangdou's Self-Images," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 82.1 (2022): 37–76.

49 Confucius, the Four Correlates, and Ten Savants were portrayed as seated figures in the main hall of Confucian temples before 1530, when the Jiajing emperor abolished anthropomorphic icons as a contamination from Buddhism and allowed only the Qufu temple to retain them for ancestor worship; see Wilson, "The Ritual Formation of Confucian Orthodoxy and Descendants of the Sage," 567–71.



FIGURE 8.12 *Ultimate Sage Kong Xuanni establishing the teaching at the Apricot Altar* 至聖孔宣尼杏壇設教. Woodblock-printed illustration from facsimile of *Leiju Santai wanyong zhengzong* 類聚三台萬用正宗, Yu Xiangdou 余象斗, comp. Ming dynasty, dated 1599. Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo Niida bunko 東京大学東洋文化研究所仁井田文庫, University of Tokyo. (After *Chūgoku nichiyō ruisho shūsei* 中国日用類書集成 [Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2000], 3:215)  
 PHOTO COURTESY OF KYŪKO SHOIN 汲古書院 AND INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES ON ASIA, THE UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO 東京大学東洋文化研究所 (COLLECTOR), NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.



FIGURE 8.13 Anonymous, formerly attributed to Li Tang 李唐 (ca. 1050–after 1130). *Confucius lecturing to his disciples* 孔子講學圖. Ming dynasty, ca. 16th cent. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk. Confucius Museum, Qufu, Shandong  
 PHOTO COURTESY OF CONFUCIUS MUSEUM 孔子博物館, NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

accompanied by four disciples, one of whom carries an incense burner on a tray, and sixteen more are coming to join them, led by one carrying a wrapped *qin* (Fig. 8.13).<sup>50</sup> Holding a *ruyi* 如意 scepter, Confucius wears the angular head-dress referring to his brief service as minister of justice in Lu and leans against a curved low table, as in compositions related to *Leaning on a small table* (e.g., Figs. 8.7 and 8.8). Although no title is written on the hanging scroll itself, it is recorded as Li Tang's *Portrait of [Confucius] discussing ritual at the Apricot Altar* 杏壇講禮像 in a 1762 inventory of portraits possessed by the lineage in Qufu, compiled by Kong Jifen 孔繼汾 (1725–1786), a sixty-ninth generation descendant.<sup>51</sup> Despite the alleged signature of the late Northern Song–early Southern Song court painter Li Tang 李唐 (ca. 1050–after 1130), the fancifully dramatic landscape setting and pictorial technique point instead to a Ming artist of the Zhe School 浙派, which flourished in fifteenth century.<sup>52</sup> According to the inscription on a stele erected in 1468 to commemorate a rebuilding of the Qufu temple, pictures based on *Leaning on a small table* and *Apricot Altar* were displayed in the Beijing palace, the former where the heir-apparent received lectures and the latter where books were kept.<sup>53</sup> The convergence of features from both subjects in the hanging scroll painting suggests that both themes had become closely associated with the transmission of Confucian learning by the mid-Ming period.

Images of Confucius at the Apricot Altar also became part of serial illustrations treating his entire life in varying numbers of scenes, a theme that became widespread in Ming and Qing painting, woodblock-printing, and carved stone tablets. An authoritative version consisting of 112 pictorial tablets and eight with ancillary inscriptions was installed in the Shengji dian 聖蹟殿 (Hall of the Sage's Traces), built specifically for this purpose in 1592–1593 at the north end of the Qufu temple's main axis.<sup>54</sup> Many events included in this expansive

50 I have analyzed this painting in detail in Wensheng Lu and Julia K. Murray, *Confucius: His Life and Legacy in Art* (New York: China Institute, 2010), cat. 7.

51 Kong Jifen 孔繼汾, *Queli wenxian kao* 闕里文獻考 (Taipei: Zhongguo wenxian chubanshe, 1966), 12.11b (230). Modern publications use the Confucius Museum's preferred title, *Confucius Lecturing to His Disciples* 孔子講學圖.

52 For a summary of characteristic features, see James F. Cahill, *Parting at the Shore* (New York: Weatherhill, 1978), 50–51.

53 Kong Gongxun 孔公恂 (*jinsi* 1454; d. 1468), “Chongxiu Queli Xiansheng miao bing yuzhi bei ji” 〈重修闕里先聖廟并御製碑記〉; cited in Gao Mingyi 高明一, “Pingji yu Xingtian” 憑几與杏壇, *National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art* 故宮文物月刊 418 (2018): 104.

54 For detailed discussion, see Julia K. Murray, “The Temple of Confucius and Pictorial Biographies of the Sage,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55.2 (1996): 269–300.



FIGURE 8.14 *Establishing the teaching at the Apricot Altar*  
 杏壇設教. Woodblock-printed illustration and  
 text from *Shengji quantu* 聖蹟全圖, ce 1: 22b.  
 Qing dynasty, 18th cent. Harvard Yenching Library  
 PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD YENCHING  
 LIBRARY (OPEN ACCESS).

pictorial biography portray Confucius seated outdoors with disciples clustered around him, but even the most concise versions contain at least one scene of this type. Sometimes the title or text accompanying the picture identifies it explicitly with the Apricot Altar or with Confucius editing the Classics. Depending on the sponsors or intended viewers, the scene may be drawn to suggest archaic simplicity, as in compositions where Confucius and his disciples sit on the ground (Fig. 8.14).



FIGURE 8.15 Confucius and his disciples in Lu, scene 36 in *Illustrated Traces of the Sage Confucius* 孔子聖蹟之圖. Ming, early 16th cent. reprint of Jifu 吉府 woodblock edition. Adapted from Sima Qian 司馬遷 by Zhang Kai 張楷 (1444), expanded by He Xun 何珣 (ca. 1485), and reproduced by Zhu Jianjun 朱見浚, the Prince of Ji 吉王 (1497). Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of the Hofer Collection of the Arts of Asia PHOTO © PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, 1985.842. NO UNAUTHORIZED REPRINT IS PERMITTED.

Other versions, particularly those produced for princely patrons or literati connoisseurs, updated the setting with contemporary furnishings such as large screens, chairs, tables, and bound books (Fig. 8.15). Although unknown during Confucius's lifetime, these anachronistic elements made the image more relatable for contemporary viewers.

#### 4 The Resonance of Images of Confucius at the Apricot Altar

Depictions of Confucius seated with disciples invoked his archetypal identity as a teacher, and the Apricot Altar theme signified the importance of learning and self-cultivation, core values of Chinese civilization. However, because Confucius devoted his later years to teaching after abandoning his quest to

serve a ruler, such images also implied an alternative for educated men when political conditions made it difficult to serve in government. Pictures of Confucius with his disciples in a landscape setting may have been particularly congenial models for private academies (*shuyuan* 書院), which often were located in scenic areas and flourished during the fractious later decades of the Song dynasty. Some were associated with Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and the Learning of the Way (Daoxue 道學), whose adherents focused on learning more as a mode of self-cultivation than as a means of preparing for a career as a government official.<sup>55</sup> Factional conflicts and treacherous politics made periods in the Ming and Qing dynasties likewise conducive to withdrawal into academies and literary societies, whose members engaged in various forms of self-cultivation and ritual practice.<sup>56</sup> In political environments that made governmental careers perilous, the ideal of retiring from political involvement resonated with Confucius's late-life abandonment of his quest for official position to focus instead on teaching and transmitting the wisdom of ancient sages. Scenes depicting Confucius as a teacher seated outdoors with his disciples captured the spirit of scholarly fellowship and congenial withdrawal, while also subtly conveying political dissent. James Cahill has suggested that members of one such late Ming association had recognizable portraits of themselves painted into a hanging scroll depicting Confucius with a very large group of disciples around him at the Apricot Altar (Fig. 8.16).<sup>57</sup>

By contrast with pictorial evocations of the Apricot Altar, its physical instantiation inside the Qufu temple became ever more elaborate and impersonal. Under the Jin dynasty, a building and commemorative stele were added over Kong Dao-fu's simple three-tiered brick structure, transforming it from an open-air altar into a pavilion. By the mid-18th century it had gained imperial accoutrements, including a marble balustrade around the perimeter of the terrace, a double-eaved pyramidal roof of imperial-yellow glazed tiles, and

55 See John W. Chaffee, "Chu Hsi and the Revival of the White Deer Grotto Academy, 1179–1181 AD," *T'oung Pao* 71 (1985): 40–62; Xin Conan-Wu, *Lure of the Supreme Joy: Pedagogy and Environment in the Neo-Confucian Academies of Zhu Xi* (Leiden: Brill, 2024); Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "Some Reflections on Confucian Academies in China," in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, eds. Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee, and Martin Gehlmann (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 21–44; and Linda A. Walton, *Academies and Society in Southern Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

56 See Benjamin A. Elman, "Imperial Politics and Confucian Societies in Late Imperial China: The Hanlin and Donglin academies," *Modern China* 15.4 (1989): 379–418.

57 James F. Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 126.



FIGURE 8.16 Cheng Yi 誠意 (dates unknown), *Strumming and Singing at the Apricot Altar* 杏壇弦歌圖. Ming dynasty, 17th cent. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk. Current whereabouts unknown. (After *Tō Sō Gen Min Meiga Taikan* 唐宋元明名畫大觀 [Tokyo, Ōtsuka Kōgeisha, 1929], v. 4, no. 22)



FIGURE 8.17 The Apricot Altar, Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong  
 PHOTO TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR, JULY 2016

a caisson ceiling with gilded dragons in the coffer surrounding the central coiled dragon (Fig. 8.17). Alongside Dang Huaiying's simple stele naming the structure, the Qianlong emperor added an imposing tablet carved with his "Encomium on the Apricot Altar" (*Xingtán zan* 杏壇贊), topped by dragons in high relief. As Jesse Sloane points out, literati pilgrims to the temple sometimes ignored such monuments as incongruous with the true spirit of Confucius, instead seeking to make a personal connection with him from the numinous aura of the place itself.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, the *Shengji dian*'s gallery of biographical

58 Sloane, "The Cosmic, Political, and Personal in Late Ming Travel Narratives to the Home of Confucius," *Ming Studies* 76 (2017): 53 and 68; also his "Confucian Pilgrimage in Late

pictures enabled them to “see and visit him” (*ke zhan er ye* 可瞻而謁), as the censor Zhang Yingdeng 張應鄧 (*jinsi* 1583) affirmed in a dedicatory inscription.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, so many visitors came to the Shengji dian and made rubbings from the incised stones that the pictures were rubbed almost completely away.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

The depiction of Confucius and disciples at the Apricot Altar, highlighting his identity as a mentor, is just one of the many ways that he was visually represented in the middle and early modern periods. A much more common image, also attributed to Wu Daozi, is the *Portrait of the Former Teacher, Confucius, Practicing the Teaching* (*Xianshi Kongzi xingjiao xiang* 先師孔子行教像) (Fig. 8.18), which has become ubiquitous in recent decades. Although the title verbally invokes Confucius’s role as a teacher, his full-length figure stands alone on a blank background, shorn of any context. Formally dressed and bending slightly forward in a dignified posture, he raises his hands together before his chest as if addressing a superior. Versions of this image, sometimes lifesize, circulated as paintings or rubbings and were most often displayed on school walls or over the altars of Confucian temples, where they might serve as the focus for ritual veneration. By contrast, depictions of Confucius seated among his disciples visually captures the collegial communion between a master teacher and his students, preserving it for all time.

## Acknowledgments

I chose this topic as my contribution to the Festschrift volume while reflecting on the experience of co-teaching the seminar “Representations of Confucius in Text and Image” with Bill Nienhauser at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 2012. It was a collegial setting where we learned from each other and from the students, who brought diverse viewpoints and talents from their varied backgrounds, like the disciples of Confucius. Pictures of the ancient fellowship at the Apricot Altar inspire my memories of our stimulating collaboration.

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Imperial and Republican China,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 17.2 (2017): 163–90.

59 I discuss Zhang Yingdeng’s “Record of the Hall of the Sage’s Pictures” (*Shengtu dianji* 聖圖殿記) in “The Temple of Confucius and Pictorial Biographies of the Sage,” 277–79.



FIGURE 8.18 *Portrait of the Former Teacher, Confucius, Practicing the Teaching* 先師孔子行教像, attributed to Wu Daozi 吳道子 (ca. 689–after 755). Qing period, 1644–1911. Rubbing of incised stone tablet in the Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong. Harvard Yenching Library, acc. no. TP0901  
PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD YENCHING LIBRARY (OPEN ACCESS)

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*Unillustrated Versions of Dongjia zaji*

Kong Chuan 孔傳. *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記. Facsimile reproduction in *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, "Shi bu" 史部 204, "Zhuanji lei" 傳記類, v. 446. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1983.

Kong Chuan 孔傳. *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記. Woodblock printed edition from the Ming Dynasty, preserved in the National Central Library, Taiwan, call no. 205.24 02663. Fulltext online at Taiwan National Central Library can be accessed by searching under the author and title at <https://rbook.ncl.edu.tw/NCLSearch/Search/Index/1>.

# Imperial Abdication and Dual Sovereignty in the Southern Song

*Charles HARTMAN*

## Abstract

In contrast to the theory that there could only be one simultaneously ruling “Son of Heaven,” many imperial structures in pre-modern China exhibited patterns of dual sovereignty with two functional centers of governance. This article focuses on the Southern Song period when this pattern of dual sovereignty persisted through four reigns, from 1125 through 1194.

## Keywords

Southern Song Dynasty – dual sovereignty – Chinese emperorship – monarchy – imperial abdication

## 1 Introduction

A basic principle of political theory in imperial China stipulated that there can only be one emperor at the same time. Multiple late Zhou sources attribute this principle to Confucius himself: “As there are not two suns in Heaven, so there cannot be two kings over the land” 孔子曰：天無二日，土無二王。<sup>1</sup> With a small but significant variation, Mencius wrote: “Confucius said: ‘As there are not two suns in Heaven, so there cannot be two kings over the people’” 孔子曰：天無二日，民無二王. Mencius cited the master’s dictum as evidence in a discussion about the political status between Emperor Yao 堯 and Emperor Shun 舜 after the former abdicated his position to the latter. Although Yao had abdicated to Shun, Mencius insists that since there can be only one emperor at

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<sup>1</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏 (*Siku quanshu* edition) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986), 18.25a, 51.15b, and 63.17a.

a time, Shun can only have served as regent prior to Yao's death.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, this principle of unitary emperorship was applied both to the succession of individual dynasties and to the individual successions from emperor to emperor within each dynasty. As is well-known, Confucian historiography worked to determine an unbroken succession of legitimate dynasties: in theory, only one of multiple simultaneously existing emperors could be judged historically legitimate. In turn, most Confucian politicians insisted that only one person at the same time could function as emperor.

Yet, as is well-known, despite these theoretical principles, China experienced long periods when contending "emperors" ruled over various areas within what is now recognized as "China." Most historians recognize the Song dynasty (960–1279) as such a period and acknowledge that the Chanyuan 澶淵 treaty of 1005 between the Song and the Liao dynasty (916–1127) to the north ushered in a "multi-state system" that, behind a plethora of rhetorical circumlocutions, accepted the simultaneous de facto existence of two states led by two emperors.<sup>3</sup> Less readily acknowledged was the acceptance in Southern Song of dual sovereignty, a form of governance in which imperial administration was divided between a "retired emperor" and a chosen successor to whom he had transferred his position. There were four such imperial transitions between 1125 and 1194: Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135; r. 1100–1125) to Emperor Qinzong 欽宗 (1100–1161; r. 1125–1127) in 1125; Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (1107–1187; r. 1127–1162) to Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (1127–1194; r. 1162–1189) in 1162; Emperor Xiaozong to Emperor Guangzong 光宗 (1147–1200; r. 1189–1194) in 1189; and Emperor Guangzong to Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (1168–1224; r. 1194–1224) in 1194. In each case, a sitting emperor ceded his position to a chosen successor, and the two "emperors" then co-existed as dual loci of imperial authority.

Lau Nap-yin coined the term "dual sovereignty" (in Chinese, *shuangchong huangquan* 雙重皇權) in 1986 to describe the political dynamic after Emperor Gaozong's abdication to Emperor Xiaozong in 1162. Subsequently, Teraji Jun extended the concept to the Xiaozong-Guangzong transition; and Yü Ying-shih developed the idea at great length in his psychohistorical analysis of Xiaozong's relationships both to his "father" (Gaozong) and to his son (Guangzong).<sup>4</sup>

2 D. C. Lau, trans. *Mencius* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 142.

3 Wang Gungwu, "The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire: Early Sung Relations with Its Neighbors," in *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 47–65.

4 Lau Nap-yin, "The Absolutist Reign of Sung Hsiao-tsong (r. 1163–1189)" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1986), 4–56, at p. 44; Liu Liyan 柳立言, "Nan Song zhengzhi chutan—Gaozong yinying xia de Xiaozong" 南宋政治初探——高宗陰影下的孝宗, *Songshi yanjiu*

“Retired emperor” paraphrases the Southern Song title Most High August Emperor (*Taishang huangdi* 太上皇帝) that Emperor Huizong adopted for himself in 1125 and that each of his three successors likewise assumed upon their own abdications. Historians trace this designation to the title The Most High August One (*Taishang huang* 太上皇) that the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇帝 (259–210 BCE) accorded his father in 221 BCE and that the founding Han Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 (256–195 BCE) likewise extended to his own father in 201 BCE. In the latter case, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE) explains that Emperor Gaozu conferred this title upon his father in order to mediate the ritual conflict between their familial relationship, in which Gaozu stood in the inferior position to his father (as son to father), and their political relationship, in which Gaozu stood in the superior position to his father (as ruler to subject).<sup>5</sup>

Since the Qin First Emperor and Han Gaozu were both dynastic founders, the elevations of their fathers’ ritual status carried no transfer of political authority, and the title *Taishang huang* remained a ritual honorific for the sitting emperor’s father. In 471 CE, however, Emperor Xianwen of the Northern Wei 魏獻文帝 (454–476; r. 465–471), then age seventeen, adopted the title *Taishang huangdi*, transferring formal sovereignty to his son, who was then four, but retaining de facto governing authority for himself. In this case, Xianwen’s purpose was to fix in advance a direct transfer of authority to his own son, rather than to risk a subsequent contentious and divisive lateral transfer to one of his brothers or cousins. Eisenberg thus distinguishes between a Sinitic mode of “vertical” succession via primogeniture versus a “horizontal” mode of transfer to a brother or cousin typical of the Altaic steppe cultures, to whom the ruling class of Northern Wei belonged.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, vertical succession constrains the number of possible heirs and thus increases the political power of imperial affines, especially the mother of the designated heir.<sup>7</sup> On the other

*ji* 19 (1988): 203–56, at p. 224; Teraji Jun 寺地遵, “Kan Takuchū senken no seiritsu” 韓侂胄專權の成立, *Shigaku kenkyū* 247 (2005): 24–25; Yü Ying-shih 余英時, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie: Songdai shidafu zhengzhi wenhua de yanjiu* 朱熹的歷史世界：宋代士大夫政治文化的研究 (2 vols. Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2003): 2:410–532. For a critique of Yü’s argument see Hartman, “Zhu Xi and His World,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 36 (2006): 119–21.

5 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 8:382; William H. Nienhauser Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe’s Records. Volume 11. The Basic Annals of the Han Dynasty* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 69–70.

6 Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 23–60.

7 To avoid this tendency, the birth mother of a new Northern Wei emperor committed suicide. Emperor Xianwen, for example, forced his son’s mother to commit suicide, and the son was raised by a foster mother, who, nonetheless, subsequently became regent. See Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, 50–53.

hand, horizontal succession, by admitting a much wider pool of potential successors, increases the political power of imperial agnates. In modern China, the designation *Taishang huang* has also been used, pejoratively, to refer to PRC leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin who continued to wield power after their formal retirement from the top leadership position.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent cases of “retired emperors” in the northern dynasties all involved transfers of authority to children under ten, but the first case in Tang, in 626, involved transfer to an adult son with shared authority.<sup>9</sup> As for the Song dynasty, a review of the seventeen successions among the eighteen emperors reveals wide variation among criteria for selection and modalities for the transfer of authority, and these variations blur the distinction between vertical and horizontal succession. Under these circumstances, and especially during the dual monarchies of Southern Song, tension remained between the familial and political ritual status of a sitting (son) and a retired (father) emperor. In structural terms, this tension can be understood as a variation on the conflict, analyzed in Sarah Allan’s classic study that posited early Chinese abdication legends as mediations between the conflicting principles of rule by heredity and rule by virtue as criteria for succession: “... in any society that differentiates one kinship group from another there is an inherent conflict between the obligation to one’s own family or kinship group and the obligation to the larger community or state that includes other kinship groups.”<sup>10</sup> Although Allan’s legends derive from the pre-imperial Warring States period in which multiple kinship groups contended for power, a similar dynamic can be ascertained within the single Zhao kinship group that produced the eighteen Song emperors.

A fundamental division in the Song imperial house of Zhao occurred after the first transition in 976 when, upon the death of the first emperor Taizu 太祖 (927–976; r. 960–976), his younger brother Taizong 太宗 (939–997; r. 976–997) claimed the throne rather than permitting transfer to any of Taizu’s three surviving sons. The death of these sons shortly afterwards raised questions about the nature of this lateral brother-to-brother succession, questions that remain to this day. The genealogy of the Zhao emperors reveals the subsequent divide between the successors of these two branches of the Zhao royal house—between the eight emperors descended from Taizong who ruled until

8 “Taishang Huang,” Wikipedia, accessed July 12, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taishang\\_Huang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taishang_Huang).

9 Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, 24, 167–94.

10 Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981), 10. For a detailed analysis of newly discovered late Zhou documents concerning the doctrine of abdication see Yuri Pines, “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign’s Power,” *Young Pao* 91 (2005): 243–300.

1162 when Emperor Gaozong, through his own abdication, returned the position to the Taizu lineage. As we shall see, the rhetoric of Gaozong's decision foregrounded the principle of virtue over heredity and showcased parallels to the legend of the Yao/Shun abdication.

Laying rhetorical parallels aside for the moment, all four Southern Song abdications were rooted in very practical political considerations, both external and internal to the state and the monarchy. Without doubt geopolitical considerations surrounding the Jurchen military incursions in 1125 and 1162 precipitated the abdications of Huizong and Gaozong, while internal tensions within the monarchy factored strongly in the abdications of 1189 and 1194. We will examine each of the abdications in detail below. We will also examine the political involvement of civil literati officials in the abdications. Analogous to the conflict within the monarchy between heredity and virtue, civil literati were concerned that emperorship should pass to a candidate they deemed qualified on merit to assume the position. They warned, however, about the dangers that the institution of the dual monarchy—itsself a mechanism to pass authority to a trained and qualified candidate—presented to the unified imperial authority upon which literati notions of governance depended.

## 2 The Year 1125

The first abdication in 1125 was a direct consequence of the Jurchen invasion of Song territory in the eleventh month of that year. Word of Song military failures to halt the incursions reached the capital on 1125/12/16. A week later, on 1125/12/23, Emperor Huizong abdicated.<sup>11</sup> The decision was thus forced and precipitous. Despite the position of Zhao Huan 趙桓 (1100–1161), the future Qinzong, as Huizong's oldest son and designated heir apparent—a status he was conferred in 1115 and had held for a decade—his choice as successor was problematic and contested.<sup>12</sup> Many Southern Song sources cast

11 For a detailed review see Ari Daniel Levine, "The Reigns of Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung," in *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 5, Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279*, eds. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 633–39.

12 For detailed studies of the Huizong-Qinzong transition see Zhang Bangwei 張邦煒, "Jingkang neihong jiexi" 靖康內訌解析, *Sichuan Shifan Daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 四川師範大學學報 (社會科學版) 28.3 (May 2001), reprinted in Zhang Bangwei, *Songdai hunyin jiazou shi lun* 宋代婚姻家族史論 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 2003), 461–502 and Wang Zengyu 王曾瑜, "Song Huizong he Qinzong fuzi shenshang" 宋徽宗和欽宗父子參商, in Wang Zengyu, *Sihao bian* 絲毫編 (Baoding: Hebei Daxue

the personality and politics of Zhao Huan as a contrast object to those of his father.<sup>13</sup> Huizong's oldest son is portrayed as patient, cautious, and disinclined toward the physical and emotional pleasures his father found in sensual and artistic pursuits. He disagreed with Huizong's embrace of Daoism and his persecution of Buddhism, and he disapproved of Huizong's lavish spending on state construction projects. During his decade as heir, Zhao Huan's Eastern Palace establishment was reputed to be frugal and lean; and he avoided the sumptuous banquets and ostentatious ritual festivals that his father promoted and enjoyed.

He also demonstrated a concern for better governance. When floods inundated Kaifeng in 1119, he quietly supported the call of Li Gang 李綱 (1083–1140) for criticism, and he commiserated when Li was dismissed for his suggestion for remedies.<sup>14</sup> Other long-term supporters were Geng Nanzhong 耿南仲 (d. 1129) and Li Bangyan 李邦彥 (*jinshi* 1108), both of whom held appointments in the Eastern Palace and “followed the dragon” into powerful positions when Zhao Huan became emperor. When Emperor Gaozong later asked Li Gang why Zhao Huan, despite his best efforts as emperor had been unable to avoid the disaster of 1127, Li replied that Zhao Huan had established an unmatched reputation for hard work and thrift during his decade as heir. But, as emperor, in the face of the Jurchen challenge, he had proved a bad judge of character, trusted the wrong people, and lacked the discernment to make major decisions correctly. And Li cautioned the new Emperor Gaozong that no amount of hard work can compensate for a ruler's inability to “distinguish the loyal from the villainous.”<sup>15</sup>

Given Zhao Huan's austerity in an age of opulence, many magnates at Huizong's court, including apparently Huizong himself, agitated against his continuation as the heir apparent and instead promoted the emperor's third son, Zhao Kai 趙楷 (b. 1101), for the position. The sources portray Zhao Kai as the antithesis of Zhao Huan: outgoing and brilliant, he enjoyed the same pursuits and pastimes as his father Huizong. More importantly, he had the support of the major power players at Huizong's court—Cai You 蔡攸 (1077–1126), the eunuchs Tong Guan 童貫 (1054–1126) and Liang Shicheng 梁師成 (d. 1126),

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chubanshe, 2009), 146–57. In English see John W. Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven: A History of the Imperial Clan of Sung China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 112–18.

13 See the primary sources cited in Zhang Bangwei, “Jingkang neihong jiexi,” 470–72.

14 Anonymous, *Songshi quan wen* 宋史全文 (9 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 14.968. Li Gang, “Jingkang chuanxin lu” 靖康傳信錄, in Li Gang, *Liangxi ji* 梁谿集 (*Siku quanshu* edition), 171.6a.

15 Li Gang, “Jiyanan jintui zhi zongxu” 建炎進退志總叙, in Li Gang, *Liangxi ji*, 176.16b–17a.

and Wang Fu 王黼 (1079–1126), all of whom worked to destabilize Zhao Huan's position as heir and thus clear the eventual path for Zhao Kai. On 1116/11/19 Zhao Kai was appointed director of the Capital Security Office (*Huangcheng si* 皇城司), an agency that employed 3,000 personnel and was responsible for police, surveillance, and security functions for the inner palace compound. As an imperial prince, Zhao Kai's appointment was unprecedented. Leadership at the Capital Security Office was usually reserved for trusted imperial affines or eunuchs but never to such a well-positioned imperial agnate, who might easily marshal the agency's strategic resources to mount a coup against the sitting emperor. Zhao Kai held the position for nine years until Zhao Huan removed him on the same day he became Emperor Qinzong.<sup>16</sup> The modern scholar Wang Zengyu, no doubt rightly, concludes that Zhao Kai's appointment in 1116, only a year after Zhao Huan became heir, signaled Huizong's second thoughts about which son should be his ultimate successor.<sup>17</sup> The emperor reinforced Zhao Kai's bona fides again in 1118 when he permitted his favored son not only to sit for the *jinsi* 進士 examination—from which imperial agnates were usually excluded—but also to place first in a field of 783 laureates.<sup>18</sup> In addition, since Zhao Kai's backers—Cai You, Tong Guan, and Wang Fu—were all pro-war advocates, they lobbied to boost his political capital by creating for him in the early 1120s a position as field marshal of the northern campaign against the Liao empire.<sup>19</sup>

But the support for Zhao Kai was not universal. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) related that Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126), largely because of the political rupture with his son Cai You and his misgivings about the northern military campaigns, continued to support the heir.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Li Bangyan, chief councilor since 1124, because of his political opposition to Wang Fu, declined to join the anti-Zhao Huan forces.<sup>21</sup> The result was that, as the Jurchen army approached Kaifeng, Zhao Huan remained in his position as heir apparent; and there was

16 Xu Song 徐松, *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (16 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), *zhiguan* 職官, 34.33a.

17 Wang, "Song Huizong he Qinzong," 148–49.

18 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, xuanju* 選舉, 7.35b–36a, 8.39a; Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, *Song dengkeji kao* 宋登科記考 (2 vols. Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 586–87. The sources do not agree on the priority of Zhao Kai's exam success and his appointment to the Capital Security Office. His biography in the *Song History* places his appointment after and as a result of his 1118 examination success. See Toghto 脫脫, *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 246.8725.

19 Toghto, *Songshi*, 246.8725; Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jixi," 462–67.

20 Li Jingde 黎靖德, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (8 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 130.3127.

21 Wang, "Song Huizong he Qinzong," 150–51.

no time to attempt the complex political switch to Zhao Kai. According to Li Gang, Huizong admitted that he had long planned to abdicate in favor of Zhao Kai and to rule in consort with him, but the press of the invasions forced him to abdicate in favor of his long-established heir, Zhao Huan.<sup>22</sup>

The traditional historical account of the abdication derives from the chronological history of the Northern Song by Li Tao 李燾 (1115–1184), the *Long Draft Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror that Aids Administration* (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編), completed in 1183.<sup>23</sup> The portions of this work that covered the Huizong and Qinzong reigns are lost, but selected records concerning the abdication are preserved in the *Topical Narratives from the Long Draft Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror that Aids Administration* (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian jishi benmo* 續資治通鑑長編紀事本末), completed by Yang Zhongliang 楊仲良 (fl. ca. 1170–1230) about 1210.<sup>24</sup> As might be expected, this narrative focuses on the efforts of civil literati officials to persuade Huizong to abdicate in favor of Zhao Huan. These conversations took place against the backdrop of frenzied preparations for Huizong and the court to relocate southward in advance of the Jurchen army's approach to Kaifeng. As preparation for this departure, Zhao Huan was appointed on 1125/12/20 metropolitan governor of Kaifeng where he was to remain as the monarchy's representative in the looming confrontation with the Jurchen.<sup>25</sup> On 1125/12/22 Huizong issued an edict in which he accepted responsibility for past policies that he acknowledged had led to the crisis. The edict reflected the severity of the political crisis that the Song military defeat had precipitated. Since Huizong disbanded many of the imperial agencies that were central to the institutional structures through which his favored administrators—Cai You, the eunuchs,

22 Li Gang, "Fengying lu" 奉迎錄 in Li Gang, *Liangxi ji*, 83.6b–71.

23 For a detailed study of the work see Charles Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narratives, 960–1279 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 49–102.

24 For the work see Charles Hartman, "Bibliographic Notes on Sung Historical Works: *Topical Narratives from the Long Draft Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror that Aids Administration* (*Hsü tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien chi-shih ben-mo* 續資治通鑑長編紀事本末) by Yang Chung-liang 楊仲良 and Related Texts." *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 28 (1998): 177–200. For material on the 1125 abdication see Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 146.1a–11a. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 422–34 translates much of this material.

25 Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo*, 146.1b.

and Wang Fu—had maintained their power, the edict laid the groundwork for a major political reversal.<sup>26</sup>

Li Tao's narrative gives credit for convincing Huizong to abdicate to a mid-level official named Wu Min 吳敏 (1089–1132) who also drafted the necessary documents. These arrangements took only two days, from Wu Min's initial talks with Huizong until the abdication on the following evening of 1125/12/23.<sup>27</sup> The extant record depicts a negotiation between Huizong, Wu Min and Li Gang over the terms and procedure for the abdication. Huizong would later insist that the decision to abdicate had been entirely his own; and the record indeed contains his own list of conditions under which the abdication should proceed. As for his title, he wished to be called merely "Lord of the Dao" (*daojun* 道君) not *Taishang huangdi*, although Wu Min pushed back on this request. On the question of where he should reside, Chief Councilor Li Bangyan, a supporter of Zhao Huan, advised that a residence inside the palace would be "inconvenient," and Huizong agreed that he and Empress Zheng 鄭皇后 (1082–1133) would reside in the Palace of Dragon Virtue (*Longde gong* 龍德宮). The compound had once been Huizong's residence as heir apparent and had been remodeled as a temple to Taiyi 太乙 in 1118. The area was adjacent to the park-like Genyue 艮岳, northeast beyond the palace walls, that had been completed in 1122. Huizong agreed to monitor the eunuchs assigned to his residence at the Palace of Dragon Virtue, to remove Zhao Kai from his position as director of the Capital Security Office, and to appoint Wu Min to the Council of State.<sup>28</sup>

The formal edict of abdication, written by Wu Min, stated that, by acknowledging his internal political and external diplomatic and military failures, Huizong was following the will of Heaven and the people that he abdicate in favor of Zhao Huan, "not daring to act in my personal interest," a possible allusion to his latent preference for Zhao Kai. The edict expressed the hope that his abdication would ensure the continuity of the dynasty and the security of the Central Plains, an apparent reference to the hope that his abdication would convince the Jurchen to withdraw.<sup>29</sup> There is no mention in the negotiations leading up to abdication nor in the formal edict of any parallel to Yao

26 Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo*, 146.1b–4a; Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 424–25.

27 Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo*, 146.5a–9a; Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 426–34 translates the most important primary documents.

28 Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo*, 146.7b–8a; Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 429–30.

29 For the edict see Yang Zhongliang, *Xu zizhi tongjian jishi benmo*, 146.5a–b; Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 432.

and Shun. Zhao Huan strenuously resisted the abdication, and court eunuchs had to physically force him to participate in the ceremony. There was far from unanimous consent for his elevation. Many of Huizong's retainers still supported Zhao Kai, who led his eunuch supporters in an unsuccessful effort to break into the hall and thwart the ceremony.<sup>30</sup> The Lord of the Dao and his entourage departed Kaifeng on the evening of 1126/1/4 and arrived at Zhenjiang on the south bank of the Yangzi River on 1126/1/15. The Jurchen arrived and laid siege to Kaifeng on 1126/1/7 three days after Huizong had left the city.

The new Emperor Qinzong thus confronted two interrelated crises: how to devise a military or diplomatic means to lift the Jurchen siege of Kaifeng, all the while working with the fractured government that resulted from his ambiguous relationship to the now "retired emperor" in Zhenjiang. The abdication edict granted the new emperor supposed full administrative authority. Yet Huizong's entourage included Cai You, Tong Guan, Zhu Mian 朱勳 (1075–1126), and Gao Qiu 高俅 (d. 1126), all officials who had long dominated civil, military, and financial administration and who maintained extensive family and political networks in the Zhenjiang area. Despite the abdication agreement, this southern "court" continued to issue edicts and govern the lower Yangzi area as if Huizong were still emperor. Some opinion in Kaifeng held that these officials had in fact kidnapped Huizong and intended to establish another capital in Zhenjiang, should Kaifeng fall, or, if the monarchy survived the Kaifeng siege, return Huizong to Kaifeng as emperor.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, in Kaifeng, Qinzong's advisors were split on both issues. Some advocated military resistance against the Jurchen, others negotiation; some advocated for strong measures against the Zhenjiang court; others, less concerned over the danger of imminent civil war, urged restraint. Qinzong vacillated on both issues, and thus Li Gang's ultimate appraisal that he lacked political judgement. But, because he had long suffered in the shadow of Zhao Kai, whose supporters still dominated the Huizong "court" at Zhenjiang, after negotiating the withdrawal of the Jurchen army on 1126/2/11, Qinzong, prodded by Li Gang and others, marshaled popular hostility against the "Six Thieves" (the major power brokers of the Huizong court) who were now blamed for the supposed excesses of Huizong's reign and for the Jurchen invasion.<sup>32</sup> Shortly

30 Toghto, *Songshi*, 357.11227; Wang Mingqing 王明清, *Huizhu lu* 揮麈錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), *yuhua* 餘話, 1.281; Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jiexi," 474.

31 Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jiexi," 476–82.

32 The six included two former chief councilors (Cai Jing and Wang Fu), two eunuchs (Tong Guan and Liang Shicheng), and two regional administrators (Zhu Mian and Li Yan). See Charles Hartman and Cho-ying Li, "The Rehabilitation of Chen Dong," *HJAS* 75.1 (June 2015): 84–88.

after the Jurchen departed, Qinzong began a series of demotions and punitive confinements against Huizong's supporters that by autumn would culminate in their execution and/or suicide.<sup>33</sup>

He began negotiations, finalized by Li Gang a month later, for Huizong's return to Kaifeng.<sup>34</sup> Major issues were the final disposition of Huizong's retainers, his political status as a "retired emperor," and most importantly, how to ensure the unity of the imperial administrative apparatus, a prime concern for Qinzong's advisors—all within the confines of Qinzong's mandated "filial" treatment of his father. A letter from Wang Zao 汪藻 (1079–1154) to the chief councilors summarized the feelings of many officials. Wang began by citing the example of the Yao/Shun abdication, pointing out that Shun put the order of the realm before his filial duty to his father. Unlike other men, a ruler exercises filial piety by maintaining political and social order. Wang went on to point out that since Huizong and his entourage had abandoned Kaifeng, Qinzong had no obligation towards them. In Wang's view, the presence of the Huizong court imposed excessive, unnecessary burdens on the Zhenjiang area, confused local officials, and scrambled the lines of imperial authority. Unless Huizong returns and his entourage is disbanded and punished, there can never be "a unity of intent from above and a unity of command below."<sup>35</sup>

Several days after Wang's letter, on 1126/3/10 a note arrived from Huizong that appeared to back-track from the agreements he had made in the abdication edict drafted by Wu Min. He ordered that when Empress Zheng returned to Kaifeng she should enter through the central gate (that was reserved for the emperor's use) and that she should reside in the Great Inner (*danei* 大內). Qinzong and his officials recognized at once that to acquiesce to these demands would undermine his own status as emperor. His advisors saw behind the order a plot to pressure the emperor to accept a regency in which Empress Zheng would rule on his behalf. They noted that previous Song regencies had been undertaken on behalf of very young emperors (the young Renzong 仁宗 [1010–1063; r. 1022–1063] and Zhezong 哲宗 [1077–1100; r. 1085–1100]); but Qinzong was an adult emperor who had successfully negotiated the withdrawal of the Jurchen and established himself as "a Restoration ruler" (*zhongxing zhi zhu* 中興之主). They cited the classical injunction against "two kings

33 Toghto, *Songshi*, 23.425, 430; Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 590 n. 62.

34 Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, 439–46; Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jixi," 484–90.

35 Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 (2 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 43.3b–7a; and discussed at length in Patricia Ebrey, "Imperial filial piety as a political problem," in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, eds. Alan Chan and Sor-Hoon Tan (London: Routledge, 2004), 130–31.

over the people”. ... They concluded (generously) that since Huizong would never personally sanction such a plot, its perpetrators must be the same officials against whom the Kaifeng populace had recently demonstrated, in other words, those officials now surrounding Huizong, on whom they requested the severest of punishments be imposed.<sup>36</sup>

Li Gang went south to meet the empress and, after insisting that she abide by the prior arrangements, conducted her to her new quarters adjacent the Palace of Dragon Virtue outside the Great Inner. Attention then turned to preparing for Huizong’s own return. On 1126/3/17 Chief Councilor Xu Churen 徐處仁 (1062–1127) was appointed “protocol officer” (*liyi shi* 禮儀使) to oversee the return, and Li Gang left Kaifeng to negotiate with Huizong. They sent Huizong a memorial that set forth the conditions for his return.<sup>37</sup> They pointedly refused to abide by his earlier order, which hinted at a regency, and insisted that he abide by his earlier agreement: “for as there is only one sun in Heaven, so there can be only one king over the people; for as political stability emerges from the one, chaos proceeds from the several.” They repeated that no ruler can establish good political order without this unity of command. They praised Huizong’s earlier decision to abdicate and compared him to Emperor Yao. They sung the virtues of Qinzong and proclaimed his filial concern for Huizong. In the interest of stopping the political uncertainty and division that rumors of Huizong’s vacillation had generated they urged him to withdraw completely from active administration and leave the details of his return to the proper officials (i.e., themselves).<sup>38</sup>

Huizong returned on 1126/4/3. Qinzong received him in the suburbs and escorted him to the residence that had been prepared for him in the Palace of Dragon Virtue. But Qinzong’s advisors continued to press for enhanced retaliation against Cai You and Tong Guan. In turn, Huizong’s eunuchs continued to work against the new regime. Qinzong reacted by closely surveilling his father’s “court” and, under the guise of frequent “filial” visits, inserted spies into his palace and closely monitored and curtailed his activities. As the military situation again deteriorated in the autumn of 1126, Huizong proposed that

36 Wang Zao 汪藻, *Jingkang yaolu* 靖康要錄 (3 vols. Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue chubanshe, 2008), 3.462–64. See also the letter of Censor Yu Yingqiu 余應求 (*jinshi* 1106) that equates Huizong’s abdication to “the great virtue of Emperor Yao” and makes similar arguments against Empress Zheng, at Wang Zao, *Jingkang yaolu*, 3.472.

37 Toghito, *Songshi*, 23.426.

38 This memorial is included in Li Gang, *Liangxi ji*, 83.11a–13a. The editors of the *Complete Song Prose*, however, give the text to Xu Churen; see Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳, eds., *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (360 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe; Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 133:2872.156–57.

he go to Luoyang and organize a military offensive against the Jurchen; but Qinzong, fearing to allow the retired emperor to leave the capital and command army forces, declined the offer.<sup>39</sup> Somewhat later, according to some sources, Huizong attempted to poison Qinzong at a banquet, after which relations between the two imperial establishments ended.<sup>40</sup> The following month, the Jurchen again besieged Kaifeng, captured both emperors, and brought the Northern Song to a close.

Both modern scholars Zhang Bangwei and Wang Zengyu view the conflict between the two emperors as a major factor in the fall of Northern Song.<sup>41</sup> In this view, Zhang acknowledges the opinion of the thirteenth-century historian Lü Zhong 呂中 (fl. 1250) that if Qinzong had been willing to leave Kaifeng and establish a temporary headquarters elsewhere he might have had time and space to coordinate successful military resistance against the Jurchen.<sup>42</sup> But Qinzong declined because he was afraid to leave the retired emperor, even with his weakened entourage, in Kaifeng. And so he refused to permit Huizong to leave Kaifeng. Thus, the mutual mistrust between father and son imprisoned them both together in Kaifeng, and the Jurchen transported both father and son together into perpetual captivity in the north.

### 3 The Year 1162

Thus, even though the 1125–1126 abdication was the direct result of external military pressure from the Jurchen invasion, internal circumstances within the monarchy determined the political outcomes of the transfer of imperial authority. As might be expected, top civil officials were deeply involved in this transfer, which in turn reflected their own internal political differences and thus precipitated changes in state policy. This dynamic was repeated in the next abdication from Emperor Gaozong to Zhao Shen 趙昚 (1127–1194), the future Emperor Xiaozong in 1162. Externally, the Jurchen invasion of the Huai River valley began in 1161/9, and Gaozong abdicated eight months later on 1162/6/2. Initially, Song forces responded more successfully than they had in 1125 and, blocking the Jurchen attempt to cross the Yangzi River at the battle of Caishi

39 Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jixi," 491–95.

40 Xu Mengxin, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 57.6b–7a.

41 Zhang Bangwei, "Jingkang neihong jixi," 495–97; Wang Zengyu, "Song Huizong he Qinzong fuzi shenshang," 156–57.

42 Lü Zhong, *Leibian Huangchao dashi ji jiangyi. Leibian Huangchao zhongxing dashi ji jiangyi* 類編皇朝大事記講義·類編皇朝中興大事記講義 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2014), 384.

采石 on 1161/11/8–9, they halted the enemy's advance south. Although the Jurchen retreated, their violation of the Song-Jin peace treaty of 1142 undermined the Song political alliance between Emperor Gaozong and those officials, led by his long-serving chief councilor Qin Gui 秦檜 (1090–1155), who had negotiated the treaty and advocated peaceful co-existence. A major reason for the invasion was the Jin perception that the political influence of this Song pro-peace coalition had waned in the years after Qin Gui's death in 1155, and they feared a return to power of those officials who had proposed a more aggressive military stance during the 1130s, now led by Zhang Jun 張浚 (1097–1164). Jin's fears were justified, since the victory at Caishi for the first time in Southern Song sparked calls not simply to defensively repulse invasion but to launch aggressive warfare that would reclaim the northern territories that the Song had lost in 1125–1127.<sup>43</sup>

Within the monarchy, in 1127 the Jurchen installed a puppet government in Kaifeng under the quisling Zhang Bangchang 張邦昌 (1081–1127) and transported the two emperors and thousands of their imperial kinsmen into northern captivity. Zhao Gou 趙構 (1107–1187), Prince Kang 康王, was by good fortune outside the city and managed to elude capture and re-found the dynasty at Yingtian 應天 on 1127/5/1.<sup>44</sup> Huizong's ninth son, Prince Kang was a Taizong descendant, like every emperor since Zhenzong 真宗 (968–1022; r. 997–1022). Because Huizong and Cai Jing had privileged the Taizong descendants by granting them residence in Kaifeng, while ordering Taizu descendants to the provinces, most of those captured by the Jurchen were Taizong line kinsmen.<sup>45</sup> Many blamed the debacle of 1125–1127 on the displeasure of Heaven and the anger of Taizu's spirit over this mistreatment of his offspring. When Gaozong's only son died in 1129, and he had difficulty conceiving more children, he adopted a strategy to return the monarchy back to the Taizu line. The move was part of a multi-pronged propaganda drive to claim political legitimacy by forging a link for himself as emperor and his Restoration government back around the Taizong line of emperors directly to the legacy of Taizu, thus distancing himself from the failed governance of the Taizong lineage, represented

43 For general background see Tao Jing-shen, "The Move to the South and the Reign of Kao-tsung," in *Cambridge History of China. Volume 5, Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 703–9. The following paragraphs are heavily indebted to Teraji Jun 寺地遵, *Nan-Sō shoki seijishi kenkyū* 南宋初期政治史研究 (Hiroshima: Keisuisha, 1988), 445–53.

44 Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, 114–15; Hartman and Cho-ying Li, "The Rehabilitation of Chen Dong," 77–159.

45 Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, 95–103.

by Huizong and Qinzong, both still alive in northern captivity. But, because Prince Kang was, like all the other political actors of his generation, a creature of the Huizong court, his political pivot required historiographical revisions and policy re-formulations that enhanced the image and legacy of Taizu as founder.<sup>46</sup>

The most detailed histories of the abdications in 1162 and 1189 are the lengthy narratives of the early lives of Emperors Xiaozong and Guangzong in the *Diverse Notes on Court and Province since 1127* (*Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記) by the great historian Li Xinchuan 李心傳 (1167–1244).<sup>47</sup> Li Xinchuan portrays the 1162 abdication as the culmination of a three-decade process in which Gaozong, encouraged and assisted at key moments by Empress Meng 孟皇后 (1077–1135), Empress Wu 吳皇后 (1115–1197), and three chief councilors, Fan Zongyin 范宗尹 (1098–1136), Zhao Ding 趙鼎 (1085–1147), and Chen Kangbo 陳康伯 (1097–1165), eventually made the final decision to choose Zhao Shen as his successor. Once Gaozong decided in 1131 to transfer emperorship to the Taizu line, he ordered that selected boys from the Taizu line be brought into the palace and raised by his consorts, where they could be constantly observed and evaluated. Two of the boys, Zhao Shen and Zhao Qu 趙璩 (1130–1188), eventually emerged as top contenders. Both official and unofficial sources are rife with stories of how Zhao Shen, the future Xiaozong, bested his rivals in this competition. Whatever the truth to these stories, there seems little doubt that Zhao Shen was the best prepared of any Song emperor to assume his station, having been groomed in the palace for the position since he was a small child.<sup>48</sup> Formal tutoring began in 1135 under the direction of Fan Chong 范冲 (1067–1141), Gaozong's principal historian and cultural commissar.

A critical moment in the succession process was the naming of an imperial prince as formal heir apparent (*huang taizi* 皇太子). Perhaps with the memory of Huizong's hasty decision in mind, Gaozong resisted formally naming his heir until just days before the abdication in 1162, although indications are that he had essentially decided in favor of Zhao Shen a decade earlier. But there were many complications. First, Zhao Shen supported a more aggressive military stance toward the Jurchen and had clashed with the sole councilor Qin Gui, who favored postponing naming an heir in the hope that Gaozong

46 For details, see Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 279–80.

47 Li Xinchuan, *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記 (2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), yi 乙, 1.495–514 (*Remwu neichan lu* 壬午內禪錄) and 2.515–35 (*Yiyou chuanwei lu* 已酉傳位錄). The official Song history account of Xiaozong's ascension parallels Li Xinchuan; see Toghto, *Songshi*, 33.615–18.

48 Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, 179–81. For a detailed study of Xiaozong's early life see Yü Ying-shih, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 2:410–34.

might still produce a natural son. Second, Gaozong was also reportedly hesitant to abdicate while Qin Gui was still in power, fearful that the powerful councilor would dominate the young emperor. Historians more hostile to Qin Gui claim Gaozong feared that Qin Gui intended to usurp the throne for himself. Third, Empress Wu, who was allied with Qin Gui, favored Zhao Qu, whom she had raised in her own household. Lastly, Gaozong's mother, Empress Wei 韋皇后 (1080–1159), who had returned from Northern captivity in 1142, opposed abdication, which would have reduced her own stature as mother of the sitting emperor. Qin Gui's death in 1155 and Empress Wei's death in 1159 eased these complications and tilted the momentum in favor of Zhao Shen, whom Empress Wu eventually came to support.<sup>49</sup>

The ceremony of abdication took place on 1162/6/11, and the ritual is described in detail in Li Xinchuan's *Diverse Notes* and in the *Song History*.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the 1125 transition, when there was scarce mention of Yao and Shun, the return of the Song monarchy to the Taizu line brought the ancient sovereigns to the center of Song political rhetoric. At the abdication ceremony, the Council of State declared "We respect and applaud that Your Majesty with lofty manner and under his sole authority has chosen to tread high on the path of Yao and Shun."<sup>51</sup> A week later, a deliberative assembly met to formulate a descriptive prefix for Gaozong's new title as "retired emperor" (*taishang huangdi*). They eventually settled upon "the Venerable Sage Who Illumines Yao" (*guang Yao shousheng* 光堯壽聖). Despite objections that no one could "illumine" Yao, the title was adopted, reinforcing the analogy between the now retired emperor Gaozong who had abdicated to Xiaozong just as Yao had abdicated to Shun.<sup>52</sup>

This analogy was quickly adopted and broadened in the first pass at a history of the Gaozong reign, a work that Xiaozong ordered less than two weeks after his ascension. The poet Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) worked on the compilation for several months and submitted his draft on 1162/12/6. His commentary on the first entry in the work, Gaozong's ascension as emperor at Yingtian on 1127/5/1 reads as follows:

We may understand why Yao and Shun alone surpassed all other sovereigns by looking at how they attained the world and how they passed it on. Tang [the founder of the Shang dynasty] was ashamed of his virtue, and Wu [the founder of the Zhou dynasty] was not perfectly good. And

49 Li Xinchuan, *Jiyanan yilai chaoye zaji, yi*, 1.495–505.

50 Li Xinchuan, *Jiyanan yilai chaoye zaji, yi*, 1.510–11; Togtho, *Songshi*, 110.2642–45.

51 Togtho, *Songshi*, 110.2642.

52 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, yizhi* 儀制, 8.20a; Togtho, *Songshi*, 32.611.

later ages? Gaozu of the Han and Taizong of Tang have been called virtuous rulers, but they attained the world through conquest, and there was near chaos when they passed it on. But awesome—our Emperor Taizu's receipt of the mandate and its Restoration by our Most High August Emperor [Gaozong]! Singers [of their praise] and litigants [seeking their judgment] flocked to them and would not disperse, so they could not choose but to accept the emperorship. And later, when they had found the best person for the world, having established our foundations, they passed these on to him, neither planning with advisors nor consulting oracles. They simply looked to where Heaven's will reposed. Several thousand years after Yao and Shun how extraordinary and flourishing are these times of Taizu and our Most High August Emperor.<sup>53</sup>

Lu You's commentary draws a direct line between the initial Song founding under Taizu and the Restoration under Gaozong: both became emperor not through violence but in response to the support of Heaven and the people and both transmitted the empire to successors they themselves had chosen for their virtual and ability.<sup>54</sup>

The completed work, including Lu You's draft entries, was submitted on 1166/9/29 in sixty *juan* entitled *The Sagacious Administration of the Most High August Emperor, the Venerable Sage Who Illumines Yao* (*Guang Yao shousheng taishang huangdi shengzheng* 光堯壽聖太上皇帝聖政).<sup>55</sup> The surviving preface, ghost-written for Xiaozong, and the postscript by the sitting chief counselor Jiang Fu 蔣芾 (*jinshi* 1151), both reinforce the links between Yao, Taizu, and Gaozong, to which they add the additional and corresponding parallels between Shun, Taizong, and Xiaozong, and the classic *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經) (which describes the governance of Yao and Shun) and the *Sagacious Administration*.<sup>56</sup> These links reinforce both the (now completed)

53 Xie Jin 解縉 and Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝, eds., *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 12929.1a; see also anonymous, *Huang Song zhongxing liangchao shengzheng jijiao* 皇宋中興兩朝聖政輯校 (5 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 1.4–5. See also Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 282–83.

54 Lu You refers to the Song founding at Chen Bridge in 960 where Taizu accepted the emperorship at the urging of his soldiers; Gaozong's retainers in 1127 generated propaganda and omens of Heaven's support for his assumption of the emperorship. See Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 287–95; Hartman, "Cao Xun and the Legend of Taizu's Oath," in *State Power in China, 900–1325*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Paul Jakov Smith (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 62–98.

55 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, zhiguan*, 41.70b–71a, 73a.

56 For the texts see Qian Yueyou 潛說友, *Xianchun Lin'an zhi* 咸淳臨安志 (1830 edition, rpt. *Song Yuan difangzhi congshu* (Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1990), 7.2a–4b; see also Hartman,

transition to the Taizu line and the filial relationship between Xiaozong (Shun) and Gaozong (Yao). These rhetorical structures soon became essential both to Song imperial rhetoric and to the developing historiography of the dynasty.<sup>57</sup>

Given the intensity of this political rhetoric, contemporaneous sources are silent on the reasons for Gaozong's abdication. Fifty-five years old at the time and apparently healthy, he would live another quarter century in "retirement." Modern historians, however, have speculated on his motivations and rationale. Typical is the thinking of He Zhongli. First, since Gaozong had been a hostage during the 1125–1126 siege of Kaifeng and had been forced to flee on the open sea to avoid the Jurchen advance south in 1130, he feared capture and northern captivity, should the Jurchen again take Lin'an. Second, the breakdown of the Song-Jin peace treaty forced him to make good on his promise to return the emperorship to the Taizu line. Many officials resented that Gaozong had slow-walked efforts to recover Huizong and Qinzong from captivity when they were still alive. These officials supported a more aggressive stance toward the Jurchen and continuation of the Taizong line, but Gaozong had no natural son. Third, Gaozong had groomed two Taizu line princes and preferred Zhao Shen, who was thirty-six, in 1162. If he postponed the abdication, his preferred candidate would be too old to become emperor. (Xiaozong was indeed sixty when Gaozong died in 1187 and sixty-two when he himself abdicated in 1189.) Fourth, Gaozong knew that, with Zhao Shen as emperor, he and Empress Wu could live as retired emperor and empress yet still exercise considerable political power.<sup>58</sup>

The protocols that were established to govern the relationship between Xiaozong as sitting emperor and Gaozong as retired emperor emphasized the inferior position of Xiaozong as "son" to Gaozong as "father." Furthermore, Xiaozong's status as "Shun" to Gaozong's as "Yao" also implied, as Mencius had insisted, Shun's (Xiaozong's) political inferiority to Yao (Gaozong). This relationship is also implied in Gaozong's new title: the Most High August Emperor, the Venerable Sage Who Illumines Yao. Although, as we have seen, *taishang huangdi* was an old title for the emperor's father, when Huizong adopted the title in 1125, he certainly had in mind the Daoist meaning of the term *taishang*, which designated the oldest, most revered class of Daoist divinities—the Most High Venerable Lord (*Taishang laojun* 太上老君) being, for example, the

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"Lou You's *Draft Entries for the Sagacious Policies of the Restoration* (*Zhongxing shengzheng cao*)," *Asia Major*, 3d ser. 34.1 (2021): 33–59.

57 Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 282–87.

58 He Zhongli 何忠禮, *Nan Song zhengzhi shi* 南宋政治史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 214–17.

personification of the *dao* 道 and the supreme deity of the Daoist pantheon.<sup>59</sup> Since Huizong's existing title was "Lord of the Dao" (*daojun* 道君), this new title can be seen as a promotion that clearly implied the anteriority and superiority of the retired over the new, sitting emperor.

With these new imperial titles, the ritual rhetoric, and the historical legacy of the 1125 abdication, Gaozong established the monarchical and political scaffolding for the next half century. After abdication, he and Empress Dowager Wu moved to the newly renamed and remodeled Palace of Virtuous Longevity (*Deshou gong* 德壽宮), the former residence of Qin Gui, on the imperial way north of the Great Inner, and this location now became popularly known as the "northern inner" (*beinei* 北內). The palace was staffed largely by eunuchs, the first director being Gaozong's chief eunuch Zhang Quwei 張去為 (d. unknown).<sup>60</sup> Imperial affines, the "favored close" (*jinxi* 近習), female officials (both for secretarial and other functions), technicals, and a large contingent of entertainers rounded out the personnel.<sup>61</sup> In short, with his abdication, Gaozong separated the functions of his inner and outer court, moved key inner court personnel and functions to the "northern inner," from where he and Empress Dowager Wu continued to perform many of their former functions. At the same time, the move left Emperor Xiaozong a hollowed out inner court capacity with which to balance and address his outer court responsibilities. For example, in 1163/10 Xiaozong upgraded Empress Wu's administrative documents as equal to those that expressed the "sagacious will" (*shengzhi* 聖旨), the same genre that Northern Song empress-regents had used to rule in the minor emperor's name. When Hu Quan 胡銓 (1102–1180) objected that emperor (Heaven) and empress (Earth) could not occupy equal positions, Xiaozong insisted his filial responsibility trumped Hu's theoretical reservations.<sup>62</sup> As late as 1187/10, the diary of Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126–1204),

59 Anna Seidel, *La divinization de Lao Tseu dans le taoïsme des Han* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969), 1, *passim*.

60 Li Xinchuan, *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* 建炎以來繫年要錄 (8 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 200.3942.

61 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, zhiguan*, 36.27a, 53.1a–6b; Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhu Xi ji* 朱熹集 (10 vols. Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 96.4919–20; Zhou Mi 周密, *Wulin jushi* 武林舊事, in *Zhou Mi ji* 周密集 (6 vols. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2015), 4.73–89. The second two of Xiaozong's three empresses originated from the circle of Empress Dowager Wu and the *Deshou gong*; see Toghto, *Songshi*, 243.8652; Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, jia* 甲, 1.37–38.

62 Toghto, *Songshi*, 33.624; Yue Ke 岳珂, *Kuitan lu* 愧郟錄 (*Congshu jicheng* edition), 2.14–16; Yang Wanli 楊萬里, *Chengzhai ji* 誠齋集 (*Siku quanshu* edition), 118.14b–15a.

then chief councilor, shows him reluctant to resist Empress Wu's "sagacious will" when she appointed the eunuch Gan Bian 甘昇 (d. unknown) as director of the Palace of Virtuous Longevity.<sup>63</sup>

Gaozong also retained authority to intervene in the appointment of senior officials. The latter were required to present themselves for interviews at the Palace of Virtuous Longevity, where he often proffered advice and instructions, a tradition that Xiaozong himself continued after his own abdication.<sup>64</sup> The "northern inner" also intervened in the appointment process on behalf of its employees and allies.<sup>65</sup> It received copies of official historiographical works and also replicated this function by compiling a record of its own activities. The eunuch Chen Yuan 陳源 compiled a *Palace of Virtuous Longevity Diary of Activity and Repose* (*Deshou gong qijuzhu* 德壽宮起居注); and Wu Ju 吳琚 and the eunuch Gan Bian compiled a work entitled *Good Fortune Encountered* (*Fengchen* 逢辰). Zhou Mi 周密 (1232–1308) saw these works in the house of Chen Yuan's descendants and took some of their contents into his own account of the Southern Song capital.<sup>66</sup> These records mostly concern details of ritual celebrations, birthdays, parties, and outings; but they do contain interesting details, for example, Gaozong's ordering Xiaozong to upgrade the protocols for receiving the Jin ambassador at New Year.<sup>67</sup>

The Palace of Virtuous Longevity received an annual allowance of 1.2 million strings, a sum equal to the monthly pay roster of all capital-based officials.<sup>68</sup> In addition, on birthdays and ritual occasions Gaozong and Empress Wu received both regular and special transfers of gold, silver, cash, paper currency, silk, and monk certificates from the Left Reserve Treasury (*Zuozang fengzhuang ku* 左藏封樁庫). Surviving records of these transfers total 6.4 million strings in value between 1172 and Gaozong's death in 1187.<sup>69</sup> This treasury had been established in 1170 for the dual purpose of supporting the Palace and preparing for military emergencies. Li Xinchuan wrote that its funds were systematically

63 Zhou Bida, *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集 (*Siku quanshu* edition), 172.20b–21a; also SS, 400.12142.

64 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, yi*, 3.538–39.

65 For example, anonymous, *Songshi quanwen* 宋史全文 (9 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 26B.2228, 27A.2258.

66 Chen Kui 陳騏, *Nan Song guan'ge lu, xu lu* 南宋館閣錄·續錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), *xulu*, 4.198; Zhou Mi, *Wulin jiushi*, 7.163.

67 Zhou Mi, *Wulin jiushi*, 7.164, 170, 172.

68 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, jia*, 1.40, 17.379.

69 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, zhiguan*, 27.54a–55a; Wang Shengduo 汪聖鐸, *Liang Song caizheng shi* 兩宋財政史 (2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 144. Units of commodities have been converted into cash strings using the prices quoted in Cheng Minsheng 程民生, *Songdai wujie yanjiu* 宋代物價研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 242, 272, 275.

transferred over the next two decades into the Inner Treasury, against the wishes of Ministry of Revenue (*Hubu* 戶部) officials, for use by inner court agencies such as the Hall of Profound Thought (*Ruisidian* 睿思殿) and the Palace Maintenance Agency (*Xiunei si* 修內司). He concluded that the monarchy by this means came to control an ever-greater share of state revenue.<sup>70</sup>

In 1170, Wang Yingchen 汪應辰 (1118–1176), then a Hanlin 翰林 scholar, raised to Xiaozong the issue of unseemly commerce at the Palace of Virtuous Longevity. His memorial reported that the Palace had erected stalls in the Lin'an market, presumably using the Palace's tax-exempt status to undercut other vendors. Eager to help, market officials had placed "Deshou Palace" signs everywhere, including over the bathrooms in the alley. Xiaozong took offense when Wang suggested that the public might think the emperor, by depriving his "parents" of proper support, had thus forced them to grub for money in the market. Learning of Wang's memorial, Gaozong and the favored close, devised a plan to engineer his removal. They floated to Xiaozong the information that the Palace had sold all its stock of Sichuan brocade and needed a new supply. When Xiaozong inquired how he could help, Gaozong then replied that the Palace had already replenished its inventory by buying a lot from Wang Yingchen, a Sichuan native. Angry over Wang's supposed hypocrisy, the emperor removed Wang from his court position and sent him to the provinces as prefect of Suzhou.<sup>71</sup> This story highlights commercial activities of Gaozong and Empress Wu's Palace of Virtuous Longevity that perpetuated functions of Gaozong's former inner court and that Xiaozong was reluctant to curtail.

Slightly before Wang's memorial, Chen Liangyou 陳良祐 (*jinshi* 1154) described powerful imperial kinsmen and affines who used their influence to compete with merchants. They usurped farmland, appropriated water and forest resources, and even launched overseas trading missions. They used the Palace and the office of the empress as covers to evade regulations. Chen warned that such violations endangered the system (*jigang* 紀綱) and urged Xiaozong to terminate imperial patronage if warnings failed to produce reform.<sup>72</sup> As an example of Palace involvement in such operations, Zhu Xi reported that he had seen "Deshou Palace" flags in Zhedong circuit placed on barges of nightsoil: persons eager to avoid taxes had apparently connived with eunuchs to obtain tax free passage.<sup>73</sup>

70 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, jia*, 17.383–84.

71 Zhou Mi, *Qidong yeyu* 齊東野語 (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 1987), 1.15–16; Toghto, *Songshi*, 387.11881–82.

72 Toghto, *Songshi*, 388.11902.

73 Li Jingde, *Zhuzi yulei*, 11.2714.

It is difficult to determine from these stray accounts which enterprises the retired emperor and empress sanctioned and which merely reflect individual corruption among the Palace's largely eunuch staff. However, the attack by Zhao Ruyu 趙汝愚 (1140–1196) in 1180–1181 on Chen Yuan, the eunuch director of the Palace of Virtuous Longevity, hints at the larger structural issue behind the many vivid accounts of petty corruption. On 1180/11/18, Zhao, then serving as Chancellery supervisory secretary with “seal and refute” (*fengbo* 封駁) authority, endorsed a request from the retired Emperor Gaozong that Chen Yuan be promoted two personal rank grades as reward for his long years of service. However, when Chen's new patent of office passed Zhao's desk on 1181/1/6 he noticed that, in addition to Chen's promotion, the patent included two functional positions, one the eunuch's existing directorship of the Palace but also a new appointment as “supernumerary vice-commander in chief of the Zhexi circuit army headquartered in Lin'an,” a post that granted the eunuch access to the most important military base in the capital. Zhao objected that eunuchs should not be involved in military affairs and cited an edict that Gaozong had himself issued in 1129 on the subject. That earlier edict, attempting to end Huizong era practices, forbade eunuchs to associate with military commanders, to lend or give them money, or to requisition troops for corvée. Concluding with a reference to the eunuch Tong Guan and the military debacle of 1125–1127, Zhao concluded not only by declining to endorse Chen Yuan's new functional position but also by requesting termination of any similar existing appointments for other eunuchs.<sup>74</sup> After consulting with Gaozong, Emperor Xiaozong approved Zhao's request.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4 The Year 1189

In short, Gaozong's 1162 abdication established a pattern of bifurcated imperial governance that endured for the entirety of Xiaozong's reign and then inspired Xiaozong himself to perpetrate a similar model on his chosen successor. As we

74 Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 273:6186.411; anonymous, *Huang Song zhongxing liangchao shengzheng jijiao*, 59.1345–46; anonymous, *Songshi quanwen*, 27A.1859.

75 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, zhiguan*, 48.118a–b. The *Song huiyao* is the only source that mentions that Xiaozong consulted Gaozong before taking action. Zhao's full memorial presents Chen Yuan's appointment as representative of a systemic problem that dated back to the Shenzong era, worsened considerably under Huizong, and, despite Gaozong's good intentions in 1129, continued to the present. The *daoxue*-influenced sources—*Zhongxing shengzheng* and *Songshi quanwen*—edit Zhao's memorial to present the event as Zhao Ruyu's unique moral struggle against the individual eunuch.

have seen, Gaozong divided the capacities of his inner court administration, retaining many of its most powerful functions and personalities for himself and Empress Dowager Wu to exercise in the Palace of Virtuous Longevity. This division left Xiaozong with a hollowed-out shell of an inner court with which to confront the enhanced capacities of the outer court that had once again gained vitality after the demise of Qin Gui and his network. Gaozong's program of dual sovereignty played upon the ambiguous, dual status of Xiaozong as both "ruler" and "son." In addition to the legitimizing value of the Yao/Shun analogy, this rhetoric, backed up by the political power of the Palace, forced Xiaozong consistently to maintain a "filial" (that is "subservient") role in relation to his "father and mother." And Gaozong enforced this ritual subservience in order to maintain his own political and financial influence.<sup>76</sup>

Yü Ying-shih has described the 1189 abdication as a "three acts drama" that began with Gaozong's death in 1187/10.<sup>77</sup> In Yü's analysis, Xiaozong planned to impose a bifurcated administration upon the future Emperor Guangzong and in this way continue to politically dominate his "son," just as Gaozong had dominated him. Yü also maintains that Xiaozong, from his perch as "retired emperor," planned to activate a coalition of *daoxue* 道學 officials to implement a regimen of political reform during his successor's reign. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the former scenario is quite plausible, the latter much less so.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, the *daoxue* movement had grown during the 1170s and 1180s into a substantial political force that complicated the earlier binary division within officialdom between the civil literati of the outer court and the imperial technocrats of the inner court. Yet even more problematic for Xiaozong's transition plan was the ever-changing and increasingly complex cast of characters within the monarchy itself. Although Gaozong's death removed the immediate "filial" pressures on Xiaozong, it also freed Empress Dowager Wu to operate as a fully independent actor, and she quickly emerged as a third locus of power within the already bifurcated monarchy. In addition, whereas none of Xiaozong's primary consorts were politically active, the future Emperor Guangzong's spouse, née Li 李 (1145–1200), asserted her prerogatives as soon as she became empress in 1189 to challenge both the now retired emperor Xiaozong and the empress dowager for control of the monarchy and its resources.

Emperor Xiaozong's options for a successor could not have been more different, and more limited, than those that Gaozong had created for himself.

76 For a still insightful analysis see Lau Nap-pin, "The Absolutist Rule of Sung Hsiao-tsung," 4–56.

77 Yü Ying-shih, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 2: 384–99.

78 Hartman, "Zhu Xi and His World," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 36 (2006): 118–21.

Gaozong faced unlimited choices among potential Taizu heirs, settled upon Zhao Shen only after twenty years of observation, and withheld heir apparent status until only days before the abdication ceremony. Xiaozong, on the contrary, now the first Taizu line emperor since Taizu himself, had only his own natural sons as potential successors. He and his first consort née Guo 郭 (1126–1156) had three sons: Zhao Qi 趙愷 (1144–1167), Zhao Kai 趙愷 (1146–1180), and Zhao Dun 趙惇 (1147–1200). The consensus within the monarchy early in his reign settled upon the first-born, Zhao Qi, but after Zhao Qi's untimely death in 1167, this consensus shifted to the third son Zhao Dun, who was made formal heir apparent in 1171, a full eighteen years before his eventual ascension. Although circumstances internal to the monarchy, namely the support of retired Emperor Gaozong and Empress Dowager Wu for Zhao Dun, were paramount in his choice over the second son Zhao Kai (who seems to have been Xiaozong's sentimental favorite after 1167), external geopolitics also played a role. When Yu Yunwen 虞允文 (1110–1174) became sole chief counselor in 1170/5, he and Xiaozong began concrete plans to launch a military invasion of the north. In light of the events of 1125 and 1162, they discussed the advantages of having an heir in place during the coming campaign and agreed that Zhao Dun seemed a better choice than Zhao Kai for this role. Accordingly, soon after his elevation as heir apparent, Zhao Dun was appointed mayor of Lin'an on the expectation that Xiaozong might be away from the capital on military campaign.<sup>79</sup>

The second act in the three-act drama of abdication was Xiaozong's decree on 1187/11/2 that, because he intended to maintain a strict three-year mourning period for his departed "father" that included seclusion and a vow of silence, Zhao Dun, the heir apparent should "participate in the determination of routine matters" (*canjue shuwu* 參決庶務). The edict referenced the Tang dynasty precedent from the 640s whereby Tang Taizong had ordered court officials to decide matters together with the heir apparent and the Song precedent from 1020 whereby the ailing Emperor Zhenzong had ordered his chief counselors to meet with the heir apparent in the heir's study, the Hall for Aiding Goodness (*Zishan tang* 資善堂) and decide administrative issues. The 1187 edict appears to have envisioned a scenario whereby Xiaozong and his inner court staff would retain silent administrative authority but shift routine outer court audience functions downwards onto the heir apparent. The edict ordered the appropriate officials to work out detailed procedures.<sup>80</sup>

79 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, yi*, 1.516–22.

80 Xu Xong, *Song huiyao jigao, li* 禮, 49.49b.

Leading civil officials raised immediate alarms. The most detailed came from Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206), who was then the heir's Classics Mat tutor, in letters he wrote both to the heir and to the emperor. To Xiaozong, Yang wrote that although his intention to maintain strict mourning was laudable, it was merely the opinion of "average Confucians" that he needed to curtail his outer court audiences in order to remain secluded and silent, since these were merely the mourning requirements for ordinary people. Echoing earlier warnings from Li Gang and Xu Churen to Emperor Qinzong in 1126, he wrote:

I am particularly concerned about the language of the edict which states the heir will "participate in the determination of routine matters." Just what is a "routine matter?" Do these not involve matters of social policy and warfare; actions that involve rewards and punishments and the management of state revenue?<sup>81</sup> Such matters and actions must issue from one authority; they cannot issue from two. When they issue from a single authority, there is good order, peace, and stability; but when they issue from two, there is chaos, crisis, and dissolution. For when government proceeds from a single authority, then the mind of the empire will heed that one authority, but when it proceeds from two, then it will heed two. And so the *Zuo Tradition* writes: "A domain cannot bear divided allegiance."<sup>82</sup> And it is further written, "there cannot be two kings over the people."

Yang warned that the proposal, by setting up dual centers of imperial authority, invited factionalism, which invites slander and discord between father and son. He further maintained that similar arrangements in Chinese history had never ended well. He attacked both the Tang and Song precedents cited in the edict. Tang Taizong's conferral of authority upon his heir apparent Li Chengqian 李承乾 (618–645) during the emperor's absence in Korea had left imperial decisions in the hands of the heir's advisors and sparked factional discord that

81 The sentence quotes a list of government actions from the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Classic of Documents* that only the emperor, and never his minister, can perform; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics. Volume III. The Shoo King* (reprinted: Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 334.

82 See Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, translators, *Zuo Tradition. Zuozhuan* 左傳. *Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 10–11.

quickly destroyed the heir and led to a chaotic succession.<sup>83</sup> Nor had the Song precedent been an “edifying affair.” During an illness in 1020, Zhenzong conferred decision-making authority on the heir apparent, but since he was only ten, de facto authority fell into the hands of Empress Liu 劉太后 (969–1033) and his nominal tutors Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025) and Ding Wei 丁謂 (966–1037), who dispensed 5,000 *liang* of gold from the imperial treasury up and down the bureaucracy and even among army officers as “grants” to build up their own political network.<sup>84</sup> Yang pointed out that Gaozong had mourned for the death of his father Huizong in 1135 and his mother Empress Wei in 1159 without interrupting his official duties. He concluded by urging the emperor to accept the heir’s declination and maintain his normal outer court audience activity in order to preserve the stability that Gaozong had bequeathed to him and prevent any discord between himself and the heir.<sup>85</sup>

Yang Wanli’s letter to Zhao Dun repeated the same points, albeit in more simplified language and absent the classical citations. Insisting that the emperor’s is the only position in government whose duties cannot be divided, he urged the heir to resist the edict and decline the arrangement. He reminded him they had read together in the Classics Mat the account by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) in his *Comprehensive Mirror* of the fate of Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei 魏太武帝 (408–452) dynasty and his son, Huang 晃 (428–451). The emperor, often away on campaign, had made Huang heir and deputed many functions to him. But because Huang over-relied upon his associates and permitted them to exploit their positions, they came into conflict with the powerful eunuch Zong Ai 宗愛 (d. 452). The eunuch then slandered Huang’s advisors to the emperor who executed many of them, including, in some accounts, the heir himself. The following year, the eunuch, fearing that the emperor would realize his error and install Huang’s son as heir, murdered him. After reminding Zhao Dun of this narrative, Yang Wanli suggested the heir have his staff check and report back on the problematic history of the two precedents that the edict had cited.<sup>86</sup>

Li Xinchuan’s account of these events relates that Xiaozong had wished to abdicate even before Gaozong’s death; and he asked Hong Mai 洪邁

83 For details see Howard J. Wechsler, “T’ai-tsung (reign 626–49) the Consolidator” in *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 3. Sui and Tang China, 589–906, Part 1*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 236–41.

84 For background see Li Tao, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (2nd ed. 20 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 96.2226, 2232–33.

85 Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 237:5290.80–82.

86 Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 237:5110.87–88; Sima Guang, 126.3970–92.

(1123–1202), the “average Confucian” in Yang Wanli’s letter, to draft the edict assigning imperial functions to the heir. According to this account, Xiaozong himself suggested the Tang precedent, and Hong Mai added the Zhenzong precedent. Councilor Zhou Bida responded to the request for guidelines for the new arrangement by questioning both precedents. He called for the establishment of a Hall for Deliberating Events (*Yishi tang* 議事堂) distinct from the heir’s Classics Mat establishment. The hall was erected within the confines of the Inner East Gate Office (*Nei dongmen si* 內東門司), the eunuch headquarters within the Great Inner. The heir was to meet there every other day with the Council of State members in full court attire. They were authorized to process mid and lower-level court and provincial appointments and inform Xiaozong of their decisions. They could also discuss higher level personnel actions but were required to obtain Xiaozong’s approval before finalization. The heir could reply with directed edicts (*yubi* 御筆) to memorials and audience submissions concerning noncritical matters.<sup>87</sup> The heir was also ordered to attend the few regular court audiences that Xiaozong continued to hold. Many civil officials continued to warn against any division of imperial authority. You Mao 尤袤 (1124–1193), for example, advised the heir to submit all matters, no matter how trivial, for Xiaozong’s approval.<sup>88</sup>

It is not certain how this division of imperial authority functioned in practice; but by year’s end and the approaching conclusion of the mourning period for Gaozong, Xiaozong decided to proceed with the third act of his drama, his formal abdication. He planned the event together with his now sole councilor Zhou Bida whom he entrusted with drafting the formal edict of abdication. Xiaozong ordered retrieved from the family of Chen Kangbo a copy of the 1162 edict that Chen had composed for Gaozong’s abdication and sent the copy secretly to Zhou. By early 1189 rumors circulated of the impending abdication, which was announced in open court on 1189/1/20, and the ceremony took place on 1189/2/2. The heir apparent, Zhao Dun now Emperor Guangzong, moved into the Great Inner; and the now retired emperor Xiaozong moved into the former Palace of Virtuous Longevity, the “northern inner,” dividing the space with Empress Dowager Wu and renaming his portion of the compound the Palace of Repeated Splendor (*Chonghua gong* 重華宮).<sup>89</sup>

87 For details see Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao, zhiguan*, 1.67a–b.

88 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, yi*, 1.522–23.

89 Li Xinchuan, *Chaoye zaji, yi*, 1.523–25. The name “repeated splendor” alludes to Emperor Shun, Xiaozong’s parallel in the Yao/Shun—Gaozong/Xiaozong analogy; see Legge, *The Chinese Classics. Volume 111. The Shoo King*, 29.

## 5 The Year 1194

The imperial transitions of 1125, 1162, and 1189 were clearly abdications (*neichan* 內禪) in which the sitting emperor willingly and publicly transferred his authority. By contrast, the transition of 1194 was a much murkier event, perhaps more coup than abdication, during which the Empress Dowager Wu, leading a coalition of inner and outer court officials, forced the resignation of Emperor Guangzong and the installation of Zhao Kuo 趙擴, Prince Jia 嘉王, the future Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (1168–1224; r. 1194–1224). Writing several decades after the event, Luo Dajing 羅大經 (*jìnshì* 1226) quoted Yang Wanli's letter to the heir and drew a direct line between Emperor Xiaozong's bifurcation of imperial authority in 1187 and the political crisis of 1194 that had brought about Guangzong's downfall. In Luo's view, Xiaozong's "three-act drama" in 1187 had accelerated the centrifugal tendencies inherent in the dual monarchy. One may indeed read the literati opposition in 1187 to Xiaozong's premature transfer of authority to the heir as an implied criticism of the quarter-century-long existence of the Palace of Virtuous Longevity and literati dismay over the prospect that, after Gaozong's death had ended the dual monarchy, Xiaozong intended to continue the institution.<sup>90</sup> That said, the traumatic events of 1194 ended the dual sovereignty that had existed since 1162 and in this way marked a catharsis in the overall trajectory of the Song monarchy.

The two decades between 1187 and 1207 remain among the most confusing and opaque in Song history.<sup>91</sup> The convoluted historiography of the 1194 transition and the period of the subsequent regime under Han Tuo Zhou 韓侂胄 (1152–1207), the imperial affine and nephew of Empress Dowager Wu, lasting from 1194 through his death in 1207, is the major source of this confusion. Following the disastrous northern invasion of 1206 and Han's assassination

90 *Helin yulu* 鶴林玉露 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 6.104–5.

91 For a general overview see Richard L. Davis, "The Reigns of Kuang-tsung and Ning-tsung," *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 5, Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors*, 756–75; for a detailed reinterpretation see Yü, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 2:181–587. For recent scholarship that views the events of 1194 as the culmination of latent political tensions between the "close favorites" (*jinxì* 近習) and Confucian officials see Teraji Jun, "Kan Takuchū senken no seiritsu," Kobayashi Akira 小林晃, "Nansō chūki ni okeru Kan Tachū senken no kakuritsu katei" 南宋中期における韓侂胄專權の確立過程, *Shigaku zasshi* 115 (2006): 30–52, Kobayashi Akira, "Nansō Kōsōchō ni okeru Taijōkōtei no eikyōryoku to kōtei sokkin seiji" 南宋孝宗朝における太上皇帝の影響と皇帝側近政治 *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 71.1 (June 2012): 69–97, and Chang Wei-ling 張維玲, *Cong Nan Song zhongqi fan jinxì zhengzheng kan dao xue xíng shidafū dui "huifu" taidu de zhuanbian* (1163–1207) 從南宋中期反近習政爭看道學型士大夫對「恢復」態度的轉變 (1163–1207), *Gudai lishi wenhua yanjiu jikan*. Third series, vol. 17 (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2010), 119–48.

in 1207, the new administration under Shi Miyuan 史彌遠 (1164–1233) undertook a massive purge and rewriting of the preceding period's official history. Motives were to cast those whom Han Tuozhou had oppressed as moral heroes, to camouflage the complicity of the revisers and their allies who had supported the northern invasion, and to frustrate the potential comeback of Han's remaining supporters (who could use the existing positive official record of their past actions as justification for their future political rehabilitation). In 1208/1, as a deliberative assembly approved delivery of Han's lacquered head to the Jurchen and rehabilitated Zhao Ruyu, the new historiography's hero of 1194, Qiao Lingxian 譙令憲 (1155–1222), an official in the history office, drafted "Refuting Slander in the Imperial History of 1194" as a guide for revising the historical record; and the next month the court ordered the revisions to begin.<sup>92</sup>

A year later, Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235), then posted to the Imperial Library, wrote to speed the revisions along. He affirmed as common knowledge that in 1194 Emperor Guangzong had sincerely intended to transmit the throne to Prince Jia (the future Ningzong), that Empress Dowager Wu had helped to carry out the transfer, and that the chief councilors had faithfully executed his intentions. Historians, Zhen wrote, bore a responsibility to transmit these facts to posterity. But, Zhen lamented, the existing histories cater to Han Tuozhou and exaggerate his contributions to the transition, "deceiving both Heaven and men."<sup>93</sup> Zhao Ruyu's son, Zhao Chongxian 趙崇憲 (1160–1219), also demanded the destruction of accounts that were favorable to Han Tuozhou and urged revisions to the official daily calendar.<sup>94</sup> In 1210 the Zhao family also commissioned Liu Guangzu 劉光祖 (1142–1222) to write a funeral epitaph for their father that framed Zhao Ruyu as the hero of the 1194 transition; and this narrative was taken verbatim into what eventually became Zhao's *Song History* biography.<sup>95</sup> However, as the thirteenth century progressed, private sources recorded rumors of other scenarios, memories of other participants, and

92 For Zhen Dexiu's funeral epitaph for Qiao, see Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 314:7194.145; anonymous, *Xubian liangchao gangmu beiyao* 續編兩朝綱目備要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 193–94; and Toghto, *Songshi*, 39.749. For a detailed study of this historical revisionism see Jia Liangang 賈連港, "Han Tuozhou shiji" de xingcheng ji liuzhuan 韓侂胄事迹的形成及流轉, *Shixueshi yanjiu* 155 (2014): 27–33. For the larger political context and relation to *daoxue* see Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 318–23.

93 Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 312:7143.173.

94 Toghto, *Songshi*, 392.11990–91; see Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 4.121 for the pro-Han Tuozhou character of the work that Zhao demanded be destroyed.

95 Zeng and Liu, eds., *Quan Song wen*, 279:6318.83–87; Toghto, *Songshi*, 392.11984–87. The *Song History* biography of Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223), however, writes that the crisis flummoxed Zhao Ruyu who was at a loss how to proceed (see *Songshi*, 434.12891).

reconstructed their own versions of the events.<sup>96</sup> Modern scholars continue to sift through these sources, adjusting their focus to generate new interpretations of the period and evaluations of its key players.<sup>97</sup> A full review of these issues remains beyond the scope of this article, which will focus on the 1194 transition as a culmination (and end) of the dual monarchy and on the role of Empress Dowager Wu.

Given this historiography, most interpretations of the 1194 transition adopt a middle-of-the-road scenario that emphasizes cooperation between the major players to achieve a smooth imperial transition under difficult circumstances. They emphasize collaboration between Han Tuozhou of the inner court and Zhao Ruyu of the outer court as the product of literati pressure to resolve an impossible ritual stalemate whereby the ailing Emperor Guangzong was unable and/or unwilling to preside at the funeral of his father, Xiaozong.<sup>98</sup> While these external forces no doubt played some role, more consequential as precipitators of the transition were tensions within the monarchy that threatened dynastic stability. Sources hint darkly of rebellion in the provinces, troop movements in the capital, and the “great houses of the imperial favorites fighting for wagons to move and hide their wealth in the countryside.”<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the revised post-1208 official narrative, the private sources, especially Ye Shaoweng 葉紹翁 (d. unknown), hint that Guangzong was reluctant to yield power, that Prince Jia was not the consensus choice as heir, and that Empress Dowager Wu decided who would be emperor and dominated the transition process.<sup>100</sup>

Xiaozong’s death in 1194 altered the power dynamic within the dual monarchy and precipitated the crisis. His death left the empress dowager the sole

96 For a brief review of the principal sources see Teraji Jun, “Kan Takuchū senken no seiritsu,” 21–22. These are: Ye Shaoweng 葉紹翁, *Sichao wenjian lu* 四朝聞見錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 12–13, 133–41; anonymous *Xubian liangchao gangmu beiyao*; Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu* 鶴林玉露 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 63–64; and Zhou Mi, *Qidong yeyu*, 3:37–45. Xiao Jianxin 肖建新, “Nan Song Shaoxi neichan” 南宋紹熙內禪, in Xiao Jianxin, *Songdai fazhi wenming yanjiu* 宋代法制文明研究 (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2008), 165–79 provides a close, virtual hour-by-hour reconstruction of the crucial days of the transition based mainly on official sources.

97 The historiography of the 1194–1207 period is inextricably bound with the supposed disconnect between Han Tuozhou’s perceived persecution of *daoxue* and his invasion to recover the north, an avowed *daoxue* objective. On this problem see Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, 321–23.

98 Davis, “The Reigns of Kuang-tsung and Ning-tsung,” 770–73; He Zhongli 何忠禮 and Xu Jijun 徐吉軍, *Nan Songshi gao* 南宋史稿 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou Daxue chubanshe, 1999), 241–43; Teraji, “Kan Takuchū senken no seiritsu,” 26–29.

99 Zhou Mi, *Qidong yeyu*, 3:39; Ye Shaoweng, *Sichao wenjian lu*, 134–35; Toghto, *Songshi*, 392.11986.

100 Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu*, 63–64; Ye Shaoweng, *Sichao wenjian lu*, 12–13.

denizen of the “northern inner” and portended to tilt the delicate balance of power between the two imperial centers toward the “southern inner,” where Emperor Guangzong and Empress Li 李皇后 (1145–1200) reigned. Empress Li’s official biography writes that Guangzong’s illness rendered him unable to hold court after late 1191, and so the empress herself “decided many matters of state.”<sup>101</sup> Although Prince Jia was Empress Li’s son, and she would become herself Most High August Empress upon his ascension, Empress Dowager Wu, confident she could control the future emperor and thus degrade the source of Empress Li’s power, preferred to risk another imperial transition than to acquiesce in the continuation of Empress Li’s domination and the gradual erosion of her own political network.

This scenario supports the view that Empress Dowager Wu was not, as the traditional sources allege, a passive partner who merely assisted in the 1194 transition, but its active agent. For example, the post-1208 narrative emphasized widespread literati support for Prince Jia to become emperor in 1194. This claim flattered Emperor Ningzong, who at that point had reigned for fifteen years, but sidestepped evidence that he had not been the unanimous choice as emperor in 1194. As we have seen earlier, as early as 1171, Gaozong and Empress Wu had backed Xiaozong’s third son, Zhao Dun, as heir. Xiaozong had originally preferred his second son, Zhao Kai and, after the latter’s death in 1180, apparently transferred his support to Zhao Kai’s oldest son, Zhao Bing 趙昉 (d. 1206). But, just as Huizong had been unable in 1125, Xiaozong was ultimately unable in the late 1180s to force a change of course.<sup>102</sup> Later sources allege that Ningzong was “not smart,” and that Guangzong had warned against making him emperor.<sup>103</sup> More significantly, Ye Shaoweng relates that Zhao Bing—passed over for emperor in 1189—was a significant contender again in 1194. Ye describes a dramatic scene in which Empress Wu, after agreeing with her nephew Wu Ju that a regency was not a long-term option and that a successor to Guangzong must be chosen, summoned both Prince Jia and Zhao Bing. She emotionally acknowledged to Zhao Bing that he enjoyed outside literati support. However, she continued, taking all the circumstances into consideration, the best long-term plan was first to install Prince Jia as emperor, then, following the custom of the founders, Zhao Bing could become emperor after Prince Jia, alluding apparently to the sibling relationship between the founding

101 Toghto, *Songshi*, 243.8654.

102 Ibid., 246.8733–34.

103 Zhou Mi, *Guixin zazhi* 癸辛雜識 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 190–91; Luo, *Helu yulu*, 63–64.

emperors Taizu and Taizong. Crestfallen, Zhao Bing departed, and the terrified Prince Jia was forcibly enthroned.<sup>104</sup>

Among the many circumstances that the empress dowager no doubt considered was the relationship of the Wu family to the two contenders for the throne. Since she and Gaozong had long supported Zhao Dun (i.e., Guangzong) as heir, they had in the early 1180s married their grandniece (daughter of Han Tongqing 韓同卿 [ca. 1121–1198]) to Prince Jia; and Prince Jia's elevation would thus transform his consort, née Han, into Empress Han 韓皇后 (d. 1200). Given the weak-willed personality of the prince, the Wu family could thus easily control the new imperial couple. Zhao Bing, on the contrary, a favorite of the now deceased Xiaozong, had no marital or political connections to the Wu family. Thus, Empress Dowager Wu's choice of Prince Jia, by prolonging and extending her political network from the erstwhile Palace of Virtuous Longevity, merged the former divide between the northern and southern inners of the dual monarchy.

For example, Kobayashi Akira has demonstrated that for six months after Emperor Ningzong's ascension in 1194/7, the new emperor resided and occasionally held court in the "northern inner," which, after the coup, became the temporary seat of government.<sup>105</sup> The new emperor was thus cut off from traditional inner court resources—female secretaries and eunuchs—and dependent on (if not being a prisoner of) the empress dowager and the Wu family. As many scholars have pointed out, Han Tuo Zhou, who had already acted in the runup to the transition as liaison between Empress Dowager Wu and Chief Councilor Zhao Ruyu, was ideally positioned to liaise between the new emperor and the outer court. Han Tuo Zhou was not only Empress Wu's nephew; Han's wife was also from the Wu clan, and he was thus an uncle of the new Empress Han. In his capacity as an affinal Postern officer, Han was able—doubtless sanctioned by Empress Wu—not only to transmit but also to generate inner directives in the new emperor's name.<sup>106</sup>

Although Guangzong and Empress Li were now, in name, Most High August Emperor and Empress, Guangzong's illness and Empress Li's loss of access to the bureaucratic capacity of the imperial palace in the southern inner removed the retired couple's ability to function as an alternative center of power to the Wu family. With Empress Dowager Wu still dominant over the northern inner and Han Tuo Zhou now in control at the southern inner, the coup of 1194 ended

104 Ye Shaoweng, *Sichao wenjian lu*, 12, 133. Ye indicates later in this account that Zhao Bing had already begun preparations to move from his residence into the imperial quarters.

105 Kobayashi Akira, "Nansō chūki ni okeru Kan Tachu senken no kakuritsu katei," 37–47.

106 Teraji, "Kan Takuchū senken no seiritsu," 29–34.

the need for dual sovereignty. The regime they forged in 1194 replicated in many ways the governance of an earlier time when Empress Wu, with Gaozong's permission, had allied herself with the sole autocratic councilor Qin Gui to dominate the Song state.<sup>107</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Each dynasty in the two millennia of imperial rule in China used the institution of *Taishang huangdi* in attempts to resolve specific conflicts in the transfer of imperial authority. Over the course of the Tang-Song transition, the position of emperor evolved from an aristocratic *primus inter pares* to the executive head of a complex, technocratic state.<sup>108</sup> The “dual sovereignty” that resulted from the succession of four retired emperors in Southern Song is best understood as a temporary easing of the conflict between the dual role of emperor as state sovereign and as *paterfamilias* of the large corporation that the monarchy had become. To some degree, the two roles correspond to the emperor's outer role as the presiding chief executive in “public” audiences in the outer court with senior civil officials versus his inner role as head of the imperial corporation in “private,” inner court audiences with personally selected advisors.<sup>109</sup> Although Confucian political theory regarded these two venues as dual aspects of a unified rule, in practice most emperors found it difficult to fulfill both roles simultaneously and effectively.

Such long-term considerations were hardly in play during the chaotic events of 1125, but Gaozong in 1162 embraced the concept of abdication to establish a system of bifurcated imperial governance that endured until 1194. As in other dynasties, an important goal was to ensure a smooth transition in leadership that enhanced the legitimacy and stability of the dynasty and, at the same time, ensured the intact continuation of his own influence—much as did the “retired emperors” in the PRC of the twentieth century. Although the traditional sources—largely written from the perspective of the Confucian literati—condemned the cost and corruption of the Palace of Virtuous Longevity, Gaozong's division of imperial capacity postponed, at least for his lifetime, the family fissures that had doomed the Huizong/Qinzong abdication.

107 For a developed discussion see Hartman, *Structures of Governance in Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 341–83.

108 See Hartman, “Tang Dynasty Origins of Song Technocracy,” *T'oung Pao* 108 (2022): 369–407.

109 For this distinction see Hartman, *Structures of Governance in Song Dynasty China*, 55–79.

The Southern Song dual sovereignty ended, not principally because Gaozong died, but because the Wu family under the leadership of his empress dowager emerged as the definitive victor in the internal struggles among the imperial affines for control of the monarchy.

Both the monarchy and the Confucian literati utilized the rhetoric of the Yao/Shun legends to frame the Song discourse on abdication. If, as Allan suggested, the fundamental conflict in the classic legends was between family and merit as dueling qualifications for leadership, then we may understand Gaozong's focus on the "merit" aspect of Xiaozong (Shun) as a vehicle to enhance his own legitimacy as the founding monarch of the Restoration (in the mold of Yao and Taizu): he forewent the narrower interests of "family," in this case his own Taizong line, to bring together his larger house, the entire house of Zhao, under the meritorious rule of Emperor Xiaozong, thus resolving the tension between family and merit. At the same time, the Mencian insistence that, because "there are not two suns in Heaven," Shun can only have been a regent during Yao's lifetime, granted Gaozong ultimate superiority over Xiaozong.

At the same time, despite the profound political differences of 1125 and 1187, the warning that dual sovereignty created two potentially competing sources of authority is a consistent theme in the Confucian discourse from Li Gang through Yang Wanli. These writers distrusted dual sovereignty because it reduced the power of their own political class—civil literati with *jinshi* degrees—a power that resided ultimately in the audience protocols of the outer court. Anything that diminished or marginalized the authority and capacity of the outer court reduced literati political power by shifting more of that power beyond literati reach into the inner court. The many accusations against the Palace of Virtuous Longevity speak not merely to venial corruptions but to the wholesale consignment of state capacity into the unfettered hands of the "retired emperor."

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# The Narrator in Samuel Purchas' English Version of *Peregrinação* by Fernão Mendes Pinto and the Image of Beijing

*Nicholas Koss*

## Abstract

This study will consider how the narrator of *Peregrinação* by Fernão Mendes Pinto, which was first published in 1614, though written many decades earlier, is transformed in the English version of this travel account published by Samuel Purchas in 1625 in his *Hakluytus Posthumus* or *Purchas his Pilgrimes* under the title of "Observations of CHINA, TARTARIA, and other Easterne parts of the World, taken out of FERNAM MENDEZ PINTO his Peregrination." I will also refer to the image of Beijing preserved in this English text.

## Keywords

Fernão Mendes Pinto – *Peregrinação* – Samuel Purchas – *Hakluytus Posthumus* or *Purchas his Pilgrimes* – narrator – image of Beijing

Since my days in graduate school studying Chinese-Western literary relations, I have been interested in the image of China in Western texts. In more recent years, I have also started to pay attention to the persona of the narrator of these texts, such as that, in the Medieval period, of Odoric of Pordenone, who in the final version of his account, has become a saintly character, which was not the case in what I see as the original version of his description of his trip to China and other places in Asia. Then, with *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, we have the redactor of this text creating a persona for the purported narrator. Besides these Western travel accounts, I have also looked at characters in traditional Chinese fiction to see how travel has changed their personality, such as the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), who in his trip to India as presented in the famous 16th-century Chinese novel *Journey to the West* became a much more open person and, though a monk, is even able to interact well with females.

In this study, I want to consider how the narrator of *Peregrinação* (hereafter the *Travels*) by Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509–1583), which was first published in 1614, though written many decades earlier, is transformed in the English version of this travel account published by Samuel Purchas. I will also refer to the image of Beijing preserved in this English text.

Samuel Purchas (ca. 1575–1626) published his *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes* in 1625, his three-volume anthology of mainly English travel accounts and died the following year. It has been suggested the demands of preparing this anthology hastened his death. The title *Hakluytus Posthumus* reveals Purchas' debt to Richard Hakluyt (ca. 1552–1616) who had brought out in three volumes the second edition (1598–1600) of his monumental *The principall navigations, voyages and discoveries of the English nation, made by Sea or ouer Land, to the most remost and farthese distant Quarters of the earth at any time within the compsse of these 1500 Yeeres*. Most Medieval and 16th-century travel narratives related to China were in this anthology. Hakluyt and Purchas had met but there must have been some sort of misunderstanding regarding whether Purchas would be the one to continue Hakluyt's work.<sup>1</sup> After the death of Hakluyt, Purchas probably purchased the papers Hakluyt had been gathering for a new edition of *The principall navigations, voyages and discoveries of the English nation*.<sup>2</sup> Altogether Purchas got 121 documents from Hakluyt.<sup>3</sup>

I do not think that Purchas got the *Travels* from Hakluyt since it was only published in 1614, two years before the death of Hakluyt. Pinto wrote the *Travels* between 1569 and 1578.<sup>4</sup> At the author's instruction, after his death, his daughters gave the manuscript "to the Casa Pia das Penitentes, a charitable house for wayward women in Lisbon."<sup>5</sup> He thought it would be "suitable reading for these women."<sup>6</sup> Finally, in 1603, perhaps because the work was becoming known, the Casa Pia applied for permission to publish it, but the actual publication only occurred in 1614.<sup>7</sup> The manuscript was prepared for publication by "the royal chronicler, Francisco de Andrade," who died the

1 C. R. Steele, "From Hakluyt to Purchas," in *Richard Hakluyt and His Successors*, ed. Edward Lynam (London: Hakluyt Society, 1946), 76–77.

2 Steele, "From Hakluyt to Purchas," 78.

3 *Ibid.*, 84–96.

4 Rebecca D. Catz, "Introduction to *The Travels of Mendez Pinto*," in *The Travels of Mindez Pinto*, comp. Fernão Mendes Pinto, trans. Rebecca D. Catz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xxiv–xxv.

5 Catz, "Introduction," xxiv.

6 Maurice Collis, *The Grand Peregrination: Being the Life and Adventures of Fernão Mendes Pinto* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 295.

7 Catz, "Introduction," xxiv–xxv.

year after publication.<sup>8</sup> His main work on the manuscript was “dividing the work into chapters and composing relevant chapter headings or titles.”<sup>9</sup> The Spanish translation, by Francisco de Herrera Maldonado (1584–1633), came out in 1620.<sup>10</sup> It was followed by translations “in six languages between 1614 and 1700.”<sup>11</sup> Collis observed that “most educated people in Europe had read it before 1700.”<sup>12</sup>

There has been much debate as to the historical accuracy of the *Travels*. Henry Cogan, in the preface to his English translation (1653), argues that the text is “reliable history.”<sup>13</sup> But during the 18th century the reliability of the *Travels* was questioned. In the nineteenth century, however, historians were “astounded to find that the *Peregrination* was concerned with real events.”<sup>14</sup> Collis is probably too optimistic when he writes: “As a result of the investigations of the twentieth century it is now known that he invented nothing; his description of sixteenth-century Asia is authentic to the last detail.”<sup>15</sup> It is agreed that Pinto used sources in writing his *Travels*, such as Gaspar da Cruz’s *Tractato ... da China* (1569)<sup>16</sup> and *The Travels* of Odoric Pordenone.<sup>17</sup>

## 1 Purchas’ Version

Neither Maurice Collis in his retelling of “the life and adventures” of Pinto nor Rebecca Catz in her marvelous translation of the *Travels* mentions Purchas’ English version of the *Travels*, so it has not received much attention. Purchas’ English rewriting of the *Travels* is in Volume III of *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*.<sup>18</sup>

Purchas has his presentation of Pinto’s text neatly divided into six sections of between four and five pages each. The first section includes material from the first sixty chapters of the original. In the second section, Chapter 61 to

8 Ibid., xxvi.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Collis, *The Grand Peregrination*, 297.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 298.

14 Ibid., 300.

15 Ibid., 302.

16 Ibid., 296.

17 Catz, “Introduction,” xxxv.

18 Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (London: Imprinted for H. Fetherstone, 1625), 3: 252–81.

Chapter 78 of the original are covered. Here Pinto has already arrived in China. The third section is based on Chapter 79 to Chapter 95 of the original and goes into more detail about China. Beijing is the focus of the fourth section which covers Chapter 96 to Chapter 105. The fifth section is entirely on Beijing and offers material from Chapters 108–114. The final section deals with Tartars, the siege of Beijing and Tartary, which is based on Chapter 115 to Chapter 128 of the original. Purchas does not include anything from Chapters 129 to 226 of the original. From the structure of Purchas' version, it is clear that his main purpose is a description of Beijing.

Here is the title of Purchas' version of Pinto's account.

Observations of CHINA, TARTARIA, and other Easterne parts of the World, taken out of FERNAM MENDEZ PINTO his Peregrination.

The titles for the six sections are:

I

MENDEZ his many miserable adventures, his strange expedition with ANTONIO DE FARIA; divers coasts visited, Pirats tamed, miseris suffered, glorie recovered.<sup>19</sup>

II

ANTONIO FARIA his taking of NOUDAY a Citie in CHINA, triumph at LIAMPOO; strange Voyage to CALEMPLOY, miserable shipwracke.<sup>20</sup>

III

Their Shipwracke in which FARIA and most of them were drowned; the miserable wanderings of the rest to NANQUIN: **their Imprisonment, sentence and appeale to PEQUIN**; rarities observed in those places and ways; of the beginnings of the CHINA Kingdome, and of their admirable Wall.<sup>21</sup>

IIII

MINDO Salt-pits; Mines of CORETUMBABA, Copper works; Idolatry and Christianitie; CHINA Trades, and River Faires; their coming to PEQUIN, tryall and sentences. **Rarities of PEQUIN.**<sup>22</sup>

19 Ibid., 3: 252–58.

20 Ibid., 3: 258–63.

21 Ibid., 3: 263–69.

22 Ibid., 3: 269–73.

## V

**Foure Buildings incredibly admirable in PEQUIN, and divers of their superstitions: their Hospitals and provisions for the Poore. The Kings revenues and Court; their Sects.**<sup>23</sup>

## VI

Their remove to QUANSY, quarrels, miseries; huge Armie, and losse at **the siege of PEQUIN**, reported. Their entertayment by the TARTAR King, and going to CAUCHINCHINA with his Embasadours, with many TARTARIAN observations.<sup>24</sup>

Let us now look at how Purchas deals with the original Portuguese text. In his note to the Reader that begins his text, he explains how he has “been much troubled to give thee this Author” because the original is in Portuguese.<sup>25</sup> He does not state directly that he did the rewriting but it is clear that he did so.

For the seventh paragraph of Section I, Purchas' version is:

Proceeding along the Coast of *Campaa*, from *Pullo Cambim*, we came to a shelve called *Saleyiaccuu*, and the next day to the River *Toobasoy*, in the mouth whereof a Iunke passed by, to which we offered the courtesie of the Sea, and they in scorne made shew of a *Negroes* Buttockes, with many trumpets and other iollities. Hence grew displeasure: in the night three Barks came to assaile us, which we tooke, with the Captain, two *Acheners*, a *Turke*, & the *Negro*. This *Negro* confessed himselfe a Christian, slave to *Gasper de Mello* a Portugall, whom that dogge (he pointed to the bound Captaine) slew two yeeres since in *Liampoo*, with sixe and twentie *Portugals* besides with him in the Ship. What said *Faria*, is this *Similau*? Yea, said he, and he had thought in so small a Barke, there had not been above sixe or seven, and he would have bound your hands and feet, and impaled you as hee served my master. *Faria* having served him and his with the same sauce, tooke the Iunke, in which was thirtie six thousand Taels of *Japon* Silver, which make fiftie foure thousand Cruzados or Duckets, besides much good merchandize.<sup>26</sup>

This paragraph is a summary of Chapter 40 in the original. Chapter 40 is three pages in length and has about 2,400 words. Purchas reduced it to around

23 Ibid., 3: 273–77.

24 Ibid., 3: 277–81.

25 Ibid., 3: 251.

26 Ibid., 3: 253.

200 words. At times, Purchas gives a shortened translation of the original; for example, the paragraph begins: "Proceeding along the Coast of *Campaa*, from *Pullo Cambim*, we came to a shelve called *Saleyjacuu*, ... ."27 The modern English translation of the original reads: "After we departed from the Pulo Cambim River, we navigated along the coast of the kingdom of Campa until we came to a bay called Saleyjacau ... ."28 Later in this paragraph, there is this clause: "and the next day to the River *Toobasoy*, in the mouth whereof a Iunke passed by, to which we offered the courtesie of the Sea, ... ." This is a summary of the second paragraph and the first half of the third paragraph of Chapter 40 in the original.

In the passage in Section IIII on the city of Pequin [Peking], two paragraphs (10 and 11) are a summary of the Ch. 105 of the original. Paragraph 10 begins: "Pequin may be called the Mother Citie of the Worlds Monarchie for the wealth, government, greatnesse, justice, provisions."29 This sentence is from these clauses of the original:

the city of Peking—which can indeed be called the capital of the monarchy of the world—and about some of the things that I observed there, not only about its wealth, government, and grandeur, but also about the workings of its great system of justice, the admirable way they have of providing for the general welfare.<sup>30</sup>

The second sentence in Purchas goes: "It stands at the height of 41. degrees to the North; it contayneth in circuit ... thirtie leagues, ten in length, and five in bredth, all of which space is environed with two Walls, and innumerable Towers and Bulwarkes."<sup>31</sup> It follows the original closely but omits six lines:

is situated at latitude forty-one degrees north ... it is surrounded by walls measuring thirty leagues in circuit, ten in height, and five in width  
OMISSION OF SIX LINES and is completely surrounded by two rows of very sturdy walls constructed with an infinite number of towers and bulwarks.<sup>32</sup>

27 Ibid., 3: 253.

28 Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, ed. and trans. Rebecca D. Catz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 69.

29 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 272.

30 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 212.

31 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 272.

32 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 213.

## 2 The Narrator's Persona

Catz, in the introduction to her translation of the *Travels*, suggests that there are four voices to the narrator or "fictive author":

1. the voice of the stoic *vir bonus*, or the 'good man' ...
2. the voice of the ingenu, the naif who wins our sympathy by presenting an image of himself as an innocent man, ...
3. the voice of the hero, the patriot, the defender of the faith ...
4. voice of the picaro, ...<sup>33</sup>

None of these voices, in my reading, are preserved in Purchas' version, but he does create a narrative voice.

Section I of Purchas' text begins in the third-person singular. The original is written in the first person singular and begins "Whenever I look back at all the hardship and misfortune I have suffered ..."<sup>34</sup> With Purchas, however, the account begins in the third-person singular briefly telling the events of his early life. But in the third paragraph of this section, an "I" appears: "I with three others were sent some dayes journeys."<sup>35</sup> The original reads: "the four of us—for I was one of them."<sup>36</sup> But then Purchas switches back to the 3rd person. Then, in paragraph 5, an "I" appears again but immediately afterwards Purchas starts to use "we": "From Patane we set forth ..."<sup>37</sup> This "we" is the group of soldiers, 55 in all, that Antonio de Faria has gathered and includes the narrator. "We" then continues to be used in this first section, except for the "he's" referring to Faria. Near the end of this section, the "we" has become a group of survivors, including the narrator, from a shipwreck.

"We" continues mainly to be used in section II. At times, however, an "I" appears when the narrator makes a comment on what has happened in the narrative as in paragraph 9: "but I suppose the most savage that ever yet were discovered,"<sup>38</sup> which in the English translation of the original is: "But still, I believe that they are a very crude, primitive race, of far less intelligence than all the other people discovered up till now in our conquests or anyone else's."<sup>39</sup> The "I" is now used to express the narrator's opinion.

33 Catz, "Introduction," xl.

34 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 1.

35 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 253.

36 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 6.

37 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 253.

38 *Ibid.*, 3: 261.

39 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 142.

“We” continues to be mainly used in Section III. But there is an “I” expressing a comment on how the description is being made, as in paragraph 5 describing the city Nanjing: “... the value to the King three thousand Cruzados a day, or two thousand Tais, I can but touch. The rarities of *China* compared with the things seen at home, seeme doubtful or incredible.”<sup>40</sup> The English translation of the Portuguese is: “They also told us that this city provided the king with a daily income of two thousand silver *taels*, which are equivalent to three *cruzados*, as I have said many times before.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly in paragraph 12, Purchas has: “These two Cities occasion mee to recite what I have heard often heard read in the thirteenth Chapter of the first Chronicle ...,”<sup>42</sup> which in the English translation of the Portuguese is: “With regard to these two cities, I will relate what they told us there and what I have heard a few times afterwards. ... In chapter 13 of the first of the eighty chronicles devoted to the kings of China, which I heard read many times ... .”<sup>43</sup>

The most “I’s” are in Section IIII and function to comment on the accuracy of the description as well as the source of the description. For example, on the accuracy of the description there is:

I have in one and twentie yeares unfortunate travels seen a great part of *Asia*, and the riches of *Europe*, but if my testimonie be worth credit, all together is not comparable to *China* alone. ... Yet such is their bestial ad Devillish Idolatry ... that I cannot but grieve at their ungratitude.<sup>44</sup>

The English translation of the original is:

I shall not fail to say—that is, if my personal testimony is worthy of belief—that in the twenty-one years that my misfortunes lasted, during which time ... I traveled over much of *Asia* ... I can solemnly declare, in all truth, that not even all of them put together ... can compare with what *China* alone has to offer of these things ... it fills me with great pain and sadness to see how ungrateful they are for all these blessings.<sup>45</sup>

40 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 265.

41 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 171.

42 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 267.

43 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 180.

44 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 271.

45 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 199.

A similar example is in Paragraph 10. An “I” is also used to present the source of what is being described. In Paragraph 11, there is “which I have seene and heard read.”<sup>46</sup> The original has “And according to what the Chinese told us—and as I read late on in a little book ...”<sup>47</sup>

Section v has an “I” that also offers evaluation and comments on the accuracy of the description. For instance, in Paragraph 1, there is “But nothing seemed to me more admirable, than the Prison ...”<sup>48</sup> The English translation of the original is: “... the first of these buildings that I saw which I said were among the most noteworthy and memorable was a prison ...”<sup>49</sup> A source which is referred to by an “I” is also in Paragraph 10: “For the provision of the poore I have further heard read out of their Chronicles ...”<sup>50</sup> In the original there is: “Also, it is only right to let people know about the highly organized and marvelously efficient manner in which this heathen Chinese king provides food for his kingdom so that the poor do not suffer for want of it. And to that end I will relate what their chronicles have to say on the subject ...”<sup>51</sup>

Section v also has a long passage by “I” on the accuracy of the description:

Indeed I feare to particularize all that we saw in this Citie, lest the Reader should doubt or mutter at the raritie, measuring things by that little they have seene, and judging by their owne curtalled conceits the truth of those things **which mine eyes have seene**. But high capacities, haughtie spirits, and large understandings, that measure not other states by the miseries and meannesse before their eyes, will perhaps be willing to heare things so rare; which I hold the more pardonable in others to doubt of, forasmuch as I verily confesse, that I myself which beheld them **with mine eyes**, am often amazed, when **with my selfe I recount** the greatness of Pequin.<sup>52</sup>

The English translation of the original is:

I fear that if I were to give a detailed description of everything that we saw in this city the reader might doubt what I say because of the rare splendor of all those things; moreover, since I do not wish to provide

46 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 272.

47 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 213.

48 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 273.

49 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 221.

50 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 276.

51 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 232.

52 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 276.

an opportunity for the gossip-mongers and backbiters—who base their opinions on their limited experience and the little that their narrow, evil minds are capable of understanding—to pass judgement on the truthfulness of what I saw with my own eyes, I will refrain from describing many things that would perhaps afford great pleasure to those people who are high-minded, who possess a broad, profound intelligence, and who do not measure things in other countries solely by the meanness and misery they see in front of their eyes, for I know that these people, not only because of their loftiness of spirit, but also because of their natural curiosity and intellectual capacity, would really enjoy knowing all about them.

But on the other hand, I cannot blame anyone either who doubts or finds it difficult to believe what I say when I myself, who saw it all with my own eyes, often become confused when I recall the splendors of this city of Peking.<sup>53</sup>

In Section VI, paragraph 2 has an “I” when a story is told of “I” and Gaspar de Meyrelez.

How then can this “I” narrator be explained? The “I” functions to express the narrator’s opinion, to comment on the narrative, to explain an aspect of the process of narration, to comment on the accuracy of the narrative, and to relate the source of the narrative. Of these, it is his comments on the accuracy of the narrative that are made on the basis of what he has seen. Accordingly, we see that the result of his seeing many marvels in China not seen in Europe make him emphasize that what is being described is actually true. Therefore, his travels have made him aware of much that most Europeans would find hard to believe and have made him very different from his fellow Europeans. The “other” has fundamentally changed his “self.”

### 3 Image of Beijing

The first mention of Beijing, which is called Pequim, is in the title to Section III: “... their Imprisonment, sentence, and appeal to Pequim ... .”<sup>54</sup> In paragraph 5 of this section Pinto and fourteen other survivors of a shipwreck find themselves in China. They are eventually arrested and after being tried in Nanjing are sent to Beijing to lodge an appeal to the sentence given on them in Nanjing.

53 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 233–34.

54 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 262.

We are not told anything about Beijing; it is simply indicated that they are going there. The motif of foreigners being arrested and sent to trial in China first appeared in Portuguese in the account of Galeote Pereira.

Paragraph 13 of Section III presents the “Legend of Pequim [sic].” Here the story of the founding of Beijing is given. The title of Section IIII concludes with “their coming to Pequin, tryall and sentence. Rarities of Pequin.”<sup>55</sup> In paragraph 8, Pinto and his fellow Portuguese prisoners arrive in Beijing: “we came to the great Citie of Pequim [sic].” Paragraphs 10–12<sup>56</sup> offer a general description of outside the city; and there is reference to the book used for this description. Here it should be noted that Catz thinks Pinto never actually was in Beijing: “It is doubtful that Pinto ever saw Peking with his own eyes. His description is not to be trusted any more than that of some of his contemporaries who, like him, were in China, but based their accounts on hearsay.”<sup>57</sup>

Section V is entirely devoted to Beijing as is shown by the title for this section.

Foure Buildings incredibly admirable in PEQUIN, and divers of their superstitions: their Hospitals and provisions for the Poore. The Kings revenues and Court; their Sects.<sup>58</sup>

As already mentioned, a description of Beijing appears to be the focus of Purchas' version. Why does he want to do this? If we look at 16th-century English texts that describe Beijing, we will see that there is no description as detailed as what is given in Purchas' version. These earlier texts include Medieval accounts that were translated into English in the 16th century: Mandeville's *Travels* (De Worde: 1499, 1503, ca. 1510; Thomas East: 1568, 1582, 1583) and the first English translation of Marco Polo: *The most noble and famous travels of Marcus Paulus* [Marco Polo] (London, 1579). Also, in the last quarter of the 16th-century, because of England's great interest in establishing trade with China, English translations of Spanish and Portuguese accounts of China were published: “Certain reports of China, learned through the Portugals there imprisoned” by Galeote Pereira (London, 1577); *A discourse of the nauigation which the Portugales doe make* by Bernardino de Escalante, (London, 1579); *The historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China* by Juan Gonzalez Mendoza (London, 1588); and “An excellent treatise of the kingdome of China,” in Haklyut (London, 1600). None of these English translations had as full a description of

55 Ibid., 3: 269.

56 Ibid., 3: 272–73.

57 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 633.

58 Purchas, *Haklytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 273–74.

Beijing as in Purchas' version. It must have been to give English readers the latest account of Beijing that Purchas went to the trouble of preparing an English version of Pinto's *Travels*.

According to Catz's English translation of Pinto's original Portuguese text, these chapters deal with PEQUIN (Peking or Beijing):

- Ch. 107 "Sightseeing in Peking"
- Ch. 108 "Prison of the Outcasts"
- Ch. 109 "Treasure House of the Dead"
- Ch. 110 "Shrine of the Queen of Heaven"
- Ch. 111 "Shrine of the 113 Kings"
- Ch. 112 "Social Welfare in China"
- Ch. 113 "Provisions against Famine"
- Ch. 114 "Farewell to Peking"

The original of these chapters has about 12,000 words; and in Purchas's English version of them there are around 5,000 words. Among the passages omitted by Purchas are those with a Catholic significance. For example, Purchas did not include the explanation near the beginning of Chapter 108 that Pinto was writing about Pequin so that the Portuguese might "make these barbarians see the truth of our Catholic faith."<sup>59</sup> Nor did Purchas present the concluding paragraph of Chapter 113 which offers Francis Xavier's most positive view of China.<sup>60</sup>

Purchas even pays attention to short passages from Pinto expressing a negative view of the Chinese from a Christian perspective. An example is in Chapter 109, where the original has:

Apart from all this beastly nonsense they told us many other things in a similar vein which these miserably blind people believe so fervently that there is no way of convincing them otherwise because that is what they are taught by their priests, who assure them that all they have to do for the salvation of their souls is to have their bones brought there. As a result, not a day goes by without two thousand skeletons of these poor misguided creatures arriving there.<sup>61</sup>

Purchas omits the negative aspect of the passage and simply has: "This their *Bonzos* preach, and that those soules shall bee happie, whose bones are thither brought, so that no day passeth in which two thousand bones are not brought

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59 Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, 247.

60 Ibid., 261.

61 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 3: 274.

thither" (274). Thus, the image of Pequín in Pinto is structured along a Catholic or Christian perspective, but this dimension is removed by Purchas so that a more neutral image of the city is given.

The title for Section v of Purchas' account of China taken from Pinto's chapters on China conveys clearly the content of Purchas' narration on China:

**Foure Buildings incredibly admirable in PEQUIN, and divers of their superstitions: their Hospitals and provisions for the Poore. The Kings revenues and Court; their Sects.**<sup>62</sup>

The first part of the title—**Foure Buildings incredibly admirable in PEQUIN, and divers of their superstitions**—is covered in these chapters from Pinto:

- Ch. 108 "Prison of the Outcasts"
- Ch. 109 "Treasure House of the Dead"
- Ch. 110 "Shrine of the Queen of Heaven"
- Ch. 111 "Shrine of the 113 Kings"

As for the next part—**their Hospitals and provisions for the Poore**, this material is taken from these two chapters:

- Ch. 112 "Social Welfare in China"
- Ch. 113 "Provisions against Famine"

**The Kings revenues and Court** is based on these two chapters:

- Ch. 113 "Provisions against Famine"
- Ch. 114 "Farewell to Peking"

Finally, **their Sects** is found in this chapter:

- Ch. 114 "Farewell to Peking"

Various amounts of the content of each chapter are preserved in Purchas. For Chapter 107, "Sightseeing in Peking," keeps the description of Pequín as the greatest city in the world and that of the city walls, the pagodas to gods, and the streets, but omits the recounting of the canals, the public squares and much of the material on the slaughterhouses.

Chapter 108, "Prison of the Outcasts," is a description of a prison in Pequín. In one paragraph, Purchas presents a summary of this chapter: the prison building, the number of prisoners, their work on the Great Wall, a fair with the participation of the prisoners, and more on what is within the prison's wall. Omitted are the opening remarks on how Pinto hopes his account will enable to bring Christianity to China and many of the details about the prisoners, the army that guards them, and the fair. Pinto's version has approximately

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62 Ibid., 3: 273.

2,200 words which are reduced to 350 in Purchas. As to why Purchas would have interest in this prison, it could be to be a kind of suggestion as to what prisons in England could do.

In Chapter 109, "Treasure House of the Dead," there is a report on another walled area in the city, giving a description of the building and explaining how it is filled with human skulls. There is also a large bronze snake and bronze man. Purchas, in two paragraphs of about 700 words altogether, faithfully renders most of the content of this chapter with its 1400 or so words. This is the second of the four buildings mentioned in the title for Section v and suggests that Purchas wants to show to the English readers the architecture of Pequin as well as to explain the vastly different religious beliefs of the Chinese.

For Chapter 110, "Shrine of the Queen of Heaven," Purchas again preserves most of the content of the original of 1400 or so words in two paragraphs with a total of about 700 words and includes all the main points in the chapter: it is a compound outside the city walls; there are 140 monasteries for men and women; beheadings were carried out here by king of Tartars in 1544; and in an enclosure in the middle, there are two "hideous" figures, many statues of gods including the God of Rain and the Queen of Heaven plus statues of 12 Chinese kings. This is the third building described by Purchas and again demonstrates his curiosity about Chinese religion as well as his concern about the Chinese government.

As for the final building of interest to Purchas, it is in Pinto's Chapter 111, "Shrine of the 113 Kings," which describes in approximately 1500 words the building, the chapels of the 113 kings, 340 bells, and the statue of Amida. It also offers an account of the flood that once destroyed China. Purchas offers this material in two long paragraphs with a total of around 700 words, showing his interest in the Chinese government with its kings and in the story of the flood with a Biblical analogue.

Chapter 112 "Social Welfare in China" in Pinto's approximately 1150 words is about schools for the poor, houses for poor women, how the handicapped of various types, such as the crippled, deaf and dumb, are treated, help for elderly prostitutes and orphans. Purchas presents all this material in one paragraph of about 360 words. His interest could be to make suggestions to the English government on how to handle such situations.

How the Chinese government looks after the poor is the focus of Chapter 113, "Provisions against Famine," and has approximately 700 words which explains what an earlier king had done to provide money for the poor, how grain is given to the poor in times of want, and how in general government funds are used. Purchas uses around 270 words to present the content of this chapter

in one paragraph. Again his interest in this material might have been to make suggestions to the English government.

In Chapter 114, "Farewell to Peking," after indicating that he cannot describe everything that he had seen, Pinto mentions the splendors of the Pequin and the richness of the land. Much of the chapter is devoted to three religious sects. Purchas includes all of this material of around 1400 words in his rendition with 450 or so words. Here we see Purchas' attentiveness to the religious situation in China.

Overall, Purchas presents an image of China out of the material he found in Pinto, preserving the main items from each chapter in Pinto. He has removed the Catholic framework in Pinto's account and so offers a more neutral view. But his main purposes seem to be to present the architecture of Pequin, to explain the religious practices in the city, and to note how the Chinese government takes care of social problems, which could be a suggestion to the English government as to what it could do.

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*the World. Some left written by M. Hakluyt at his death. More since added. His also perused & perfected. All examined, abbreviated., Illustrated with Notes. Enlarged with Discourses. Adorned with pictures and Expressed in Mapps. In fower Parts. Each containing five Bookes.* London: Imprinted for H. Fetherstone, 1625.

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# Premonition, Transmission, and Infection: Narration of Epidemic Disease in Late Ming Tales of the Strange

Rania HUNTINGTON

## Abstract

As a recurring but remarkable event that creates a contact zone between the human and external forces on the level of the human body, epidemic disease intersects with the concerns of the strange tale (*zhiguai*). This paper shows how the narration of epidemic disease in Ming collections gives structure to the fear of epidemics by exploring the role of individual agency, helplessness, and fate.

## Keywords

disease – epidemic – *zhiguai* – narration – Ming

## 1 Introduction

Disease, whether on the level of the individual or the population, is both a disruption of normalcy and a common occurrence. It thus intrinsically shares a great deal with the genre of *zhiguai* 志怪 (tales of the strange), which describes intrusions of the strange into the everyday. Furthermore, in the cosmos of Chinese popular religion, disease creates a contact zone with the beings at the center of *zhiguai*'s topical interests, be they gods or ghosts, in the human body itself. The causal relation between illness and nonhuman intervention is bi-directional. Divine punishment or ghostly/demonic mischief are likely causes of disease,<sup>1</sup> but gods and ghosts also respond to preexisting maladies:

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1 For a study of one medical genre's presentation of the demonological view of disease, see Ying Zhang, "Combating Illness-Causing Demons in the Home: *Fabing* Treatises and their Circulation from the Late Ming Through the Early Republican Period," *Late Imperial China* 39.2 (2018): 59–108.

ghosts by taking advantage of a sufferer's weakened state to possess or torment, gods by responding to their worshippers' prayers for cure.

Tales about disease are a particular case revealing how strange tales both express and assuage human fear, pain, and loss. I have written elsewhere about the ghosts of suicides who persuade others to commit suicide in turn, and about the story fragments left behind by civil war.<sup>2</sup> A community struck by epidemic disease, and an individual in that community confronting their own vulnerability, stand in the space between the lone suicide struggling with a ghost and the mass casualties, refugees, and survivors of historical trauma.

My sources are largely two late Ming collections, Wang Tonggui's 王同軌 (ca. 1530–after 1608) *Ertan leizeng* 耳談類增 (Tales for the Ear, Expanded by Categories, 1603) and Qian Xiyan's 錢希言 (1562–ca. 1638) *Kuaiyuan zhiyi* 豢園志異 (Records of Marvel from the Garden of Cunning, 1613), with Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123–1202) vast Song dynasty collection *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (Records of the Listener, different sections completed 1161–1198) and additional mid and late Ming collections for comparison.<sup>3</sup> I begin with *Yijian zhi*, rather than going back further to Tang or Six Dynasties tales, because many of the motifs used by the Ming tales seem to first appear there; whether this has more to do with historical changes in the experience of disease or the evolution of the *zhiguai* genre awaits further research.<sup>4</sup>

The late Ming is a significant period in the history of epidemics, both in terms of frequency of outbreaks, and innovations in the discourse surrounding disease.<sup>5</sup> Some epidemics were considered to contribute to the dynasty's

2 Rania Huntington, "Ghosts Seeking Substitutes: Female Suicide and Repetition," *Late Imperial China* 26.1 (June 2005): 1–140. "Fragments of an Age of Chaos: Anecdotal Memories of the Taiping Rebellion," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews* 27 (2005): 59–90.

3 For the estimated dates of Qian Xiyan's life I am following Yuan Yuan 袁媛, "Wan Ming xiaoshuojia Qian Xiyan shengping shiji kaolue" 晚明小說家錢希言生平事迹考略, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 2013.1: 215–26. For general background on these two collections, see Chen Guojun 陳國軍, *Ming Qing zhiguai chuanqi xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清志怪傳奇小說研究 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006), 419–29, 448–68.

4 Demonstrating the perceived importance of the topic in the collection, the Ming dynasty categorized edition of *Yijian zhi* makes "disease ghosts" 疫鬼 a distinct topic, the last subcategory of the larger category of ghosts. Hong Mai 洪邁 and Ye Zurong 葉祖榮, eds., *Xinbian fenlei yijian zhi* 新編分類夷堅志 (N.p.: Qingping shantang 清平山堂, 1566), *geng* 庚, 5.1a.

5 For historical background on epidemic disease in the Ming, see Helen Dustan, "The Late Ming Epidemics: A Preliminary Survey," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 3:3 (November 1975): 1–59; Chen Xu 陳旭, *Wenyi yu Mingdai shehui* 瘟疫與明代社會 (Chengdu: Xinan Caijing Daxue chubanshe, 2016); Andrea Janku, "Living in Dangerous Times: Liu Rushi and the Late Ming Epidemics," SOAS History Blog, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/soashistoryblog/2021/06/01/living-in-dangerous-times-liu-rushi-and-the-late-ming-epidemics/>. For a

fall. As Marta Hanson has discussed, the late Ming physician Wu Youke 吳又可 (ca. 1592–1672) had new insights attributing the causes of disease to abnormal *qi*, often linked to geography.<sup>6</sup> In the *Ming shi* 明史, epidemics belong to the category of water among the five phases, listed in the same fascicle as floods and lightning strikes.<sup>7</sup> They are a recurring disaster worthy of note but with a place in established frameworks and the natural order. Endemic high infant mortality, often caused by smallpox, is usually not worth recording in official history at all. Wang Tonggui quotes a knowledgeable acquaintance stating the Manchus do not suffer from pox and measles, understanding these ailments as an inherent feature of civilized life in the Chinese cultural and geographic sphere, linked to the consumption of cultivated grain.<sup>8</sup>

Although Wang and Qian's books are arranged by topic, disease is not its own independent category, but appears among tales of gods, ghosts, monsters, destiny, rebirth, and virtue. Although *Ertan leizeng* includes a category devoted to abnormalities of the body, the ailments it discusses are individual rather than pandemic.<sup>9</sup> The terms used for disease in these tales are inexact, and, other than smallpox, hard to match up with a contemporary diagnosis, all the more so because the stories are not primarily concerned with precise description of symptoms.<sup>10</sup> The vocabulary used makes certain broad distinctions: *yi* 疫 refers to epidemic disease, killing both adults and children; *wen* 瘟, "hot" ailments, a more specific variety of epidemic febrile/upper respiratory disease, also affecting all ages; and *dou* 痘, smallpox and related ailments, can be endemic or epidemic, primarily but not exclusively killing the young.

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study of religious responses to epidemics in a particular region from the Southern Song on, see Paul Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

6 Marta Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics in Chinese Medicine: Disease and the Geographical Imagination in Imperial China* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 92–103.

7 "Wuxing yi: shui" 五行一：水, Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, ed. *Mingshi*, in *Bai na ben Ershisi shi* 百衲本二十四史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1977), 28.18a–19a.

8 "Lu su ye tan ji" 虜俗夜談記, Wang Tonggui 王同軌, *Ertan leizeng* 耳談類增 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1994), 40.326. For more on the Manchus and smallpox, see Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics*, 108–10.

9 *Ertan leizeng*, 18:155–56.

10 See Hanson's discussion of the problems with projecting contemporary biomedical disease concepts back onto earlier historical moments. Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics*, 7–9. See also Chen Hao 陳昊, *Ji zhi cheng shang: Qin Song zhi jian de jibing mingyi yu lishi xushi zhong de cunzai* 疾之成傷：秦宋之間的疾病名義與歷史敘事中的存在 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2020).

I am not analyzing these texts for medical information.<sup>11</sup> Instead I ask: how do these tales imagine an unseen and unpredictable force that both strikes individual bodies and causes collective calamity? How do they make sense of what has happened, and at the same time grapple with senseless loss? How does depiction of intermittent epidemics compare to that of the unrelenting toll of high infant and child mortality? A shared vocabulary of types of divine and ghostly beings, of systems of predestination and the cracks in those systems, allows for nuanced reflection on survival and loss.

## 2 The Routine Losses of Contagious Disease

Before turning to the collective disasters of the epidemic, I begin with a tale of smallpox casualties from the “returning to life” category of *Ertan leizeng*.

In Tongcheng 同城 County of Anqing 安慶, a family at the East Gate and a family at the West Gate each had a daughter who died of pox, each of them a bit over ten years old.<sup>12</sup> When the girl from the East Gate presented herself to the infernal official, he checked the roster and said, “Your good fortune is just beginning, you shouldn’t die yet.” He sent her back, but her corpse had already been cremated, so she returned and told the infernal official this, asking, “What can I do?” The infernal soldiers said to him that the corpse of the girl from the West Gate had not yet been destroyed. The infernal official checked the roster about the girl from the West Gate and said, “This is one who is supposed to die.” Then he had her borrow this body for her soul to return.

The girl as the West Gate had been dead for a while and then returned to life, so her family was overjoyed. But the girl was paralyzed in embarrassment, not knowing who they were. She just remembered her parents at the East Gate and wanted to go to follow them. When the family at the East Gate heard of this, they welcomed her home; her feelings and manners were precisely as before, but it was not their daughter’s face. The

11 For discussion of the presentation of medical information in *xiaoshuo*, including *zhiguai*, see Andrew Schonebaum, *Novel Medicine: Healing, Literature, and Popular Knowledge in Early Modern China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016). *Zhiguai* can also contain precise descriptions of prescriptions and medical interventions, but that is generally not the mode of these tales about epidemic disease.

12 Tongcheng is to the northwest of Anqing in present-day Anhui.

family at the West Gate also didn't want to give up their daughter. They brought a suit to court.

At that time the remonstrator Zhou from Jingling 景陵 was magistrate of the county.<sup>13</sup> His judgement said, "She has the body of the girl from the West Gate, the soul of the girl from the East Gate. The two families should take her in and together treat her as a daughter, this will bring peace by both sentiment and principle." From then on the two families treated her as their daughter. When the time came for her to marry, they competed to complete her trousseau, and their son-in-law regarded them equally in his heart. Min Sixue 閔思學 from Jingling told this story.<sup>14</sup>

In this story it is not remarkable that two girls of the same age in different parts of the city die of the same disease on the same day; what is remarkable is that one of them recovers. The swift cremation of the East Gate girl's corpse was likely prompted by fear of contagion. Errors by the netherworld's bureaucracy are a common trope. The roster of life and death, rather than the unerring and inalterable inscription of fate, presents the policy guidelines to which functionaries must strive to make messy reality confirm. In this process souls must be accounted for, but bodies are fungible resources.

In the aftermath, two families pool what they have lost and what remains. In the family system such sharing is only possible for an unmarried girl, who belongs to her natal family only until she goes with her dowry to her husband's house. A married woman or a man of any age could not belong to two families equally.

That the tale is told by a man from the same hometown as the presiding official reveals whose perspective is central: a wise mortal judge can repair the mess that endemic disease and the bureaucrats of the underworld made. There is presumably a moral justification for the death of one girl and the survival of the other, but that is not where the interest of the tale lies. Once the decision is made the soul of the girl from the West Gate vanishes from the story just like the burned corpse of her East Gate counterpart. The survivor gets to tell her story of embarrassment and homesickness, waking among strangers. The story does not say it, but I imagine: when she wakes in a strange body, the only familiar feature is the scars of pox on her face. Sentiment and principle enable the reconciliation of survivors with changed bodies and families, but do nothing to alleviate the enduring danger of disease.

13 Jingling is west of Wuhan and east of Jingzhou in present-day Hubei.

14 "Tongcheng nü" 同城女, *Ertan leizeng*, 9.75.

### 3 The Self-Congratulations of the Survivors

The most conventional explanation of disease is moral retribution: sin is pathogenic and virtue immunizes. Wang Tonggui relates these two stories in his opening category of virtue:

Sir Huang Su'an 黃素庵 from Jinjiang 晉江, whose personal name was Chuanxiao 傳孝, was exceptionally filial, friendly, kind, and cautious, with no ill will against anyone.<sup>15</sup> Yet when he encountered the wicked young men of his town doing all kinds of lawless things, then his anger showed on his face. Because of this, he was not accepted by all the wicked youths.

There was a famine, and an epidemic broke out. He dreamed he and his elder sister entered an official court, where a person in crimson clothes sat presiding, commanding countless fellow townsmen of Huang's to kneel in the courtyard below him. He then weighed them in a balance. The rule was that those whose evil amounted to four *liang* would be ill, those who had twice that would die. Only Huang himself and his sister were spared. The god said, "These two people are good, and will not go on to the scale."

At that time there were many people renting the separate chamber behind the Huang's residence, and they were all ill from the epidemic. Huang brewed alcohol there, and wanted to go to decant the wine. A female tenant spoke in her sleep as she lay ill, saying to the ghost who was standing watch over her, "If you want to drink, then the Huang family's wine is here, I am a poor person, what do I have?" The ghost said, "His wine has guardians, I can't carelessly drink it." Huang decanted wine as before.

Later among more than 400 families in their village, half died and half were sick. Only Huang and his sister were without illness. The elder sister was the grandmother of the Erudite of the Ministry of Ceremonies Li Fanlian 李范廉, and Huang was the great-grandfather of Huang who is now the Vice Censor of Shandong. This is what his self-authored funerary epitaph says.<sup>16</sup>

The scale of judgment in the otherworldly law court is an established image, here marked by a precise conversion rate between sin and illness. Only the good are not quantified.

15 Jinjiang County is north of Quanzhou, Fujian.

16 "Huang Su'an" 黃素庵, *Ertan leizeng*, 4.32.

There is a division of labor between gods and ghosts in the epidemic: gods, manifested only in rare visions, decide who will suffer, and ghosts, though often unseen, inflict that suffering in the everyday world. Although the unnamed sick woman tries to buy off her tormentor with her more affluent neighbor's homebrew, the protective radius of virtue falls over Huang's possessions as well as his person. As the punished and the spared live at close quarters, they are made aware of their difference.

This is a story already four generations remote from the epidemic, hallowed with the respect due to ancestors of accomplished men. Survival and commemoration justify Huang's judgement of, and conflict with, other members of his community. Clearly this is not the story the rest of the village would choose to tell.

The following story is from the subcategory devoted to female exemplars:

The palace graduate Yan Yuzhang 顏欲章, style name Ri'an 日闇, talked about his grandmother Liu. When she was just over 20, she lost her husband, and endured hardship while she maintained her chastity. Her elders often wanted to make her remarry against her will, but she didn't obey. Later she died at the advanced age of 87, and her corpse lay in her coffin in the main hall.

That year, the wife of a clansman dreamed of a god in gold armor accompanied by a large mounted entourage. When they reached the village gate, they tied two people between the shafts of their cart. Wherever they went, they beat and caned people there, and sometimes tied people up, cursing and railing without stopping. When they reached Liu's home, only there did he signal to the followers, bidding them not to enter, saying, "The chaste wife's coffin is here." The whole clan called Liu "third sister-in-law", when they heard the clansman's wife's tale, they didn't know to whom "chaste wife" referred.

The next spring, there was a great epidemic, the two who were tied between the axles of the cart died first, and the others who had been whipped, caned, or tied up died in order, all exactly as the clansman's wife had said. Only great-grandmother's family and more than sixty who had taken shelter there were without illness. In the time of the epidemic, in the village there were several people who heard of the words in the dream. They rented rooms from her family to live in, and they were also able to be spared.<sup>17</sup>

17 "Yan jinshi zeng zumu" 顏進士曾祖母, *Ertan leizeng*, 5:37. Yan was from Anfu 安福, Jiangxi, and passed the *jinshi* exam in 1601.

Both of these stories provide ways of visualizing members of the community undergoing suffering at the hands of superhuman powers. The two frames are a court case, from the perspective of the accused, or a military/police action. In the first story humans are weighed like meat or produce in a marketplace; in the second they endure treatment usually reserved for beasts of burden. Widow Liu's story is a more vivid and visceral image of how disease invades a community, and how individual bodies are subjected to pain and powerlessness. Although these storytellers did not share our current conception of germ theory, the two people tied between the carriage shafts unwillingly play a part in bringing this destruction to their fellows, acting as patients zero and one. There are two different logics of infection, one based on judgement of the individual, one on proximity to the spared. The latter shows the power the story of someone granted immunity has in the community.

With Liu's story a young wife gets to contribute to the hagiography of an older member of her husband's clan. The privation and self-sacrifice of a widow over years of her life wins her corpse talismanic, prophylactic power. The next part of the story (not translated here) describes her spirit informing her grandson in a dream that the gods were rewarding her chastity with his exam success.

These tales show the longevity of self-congratulatory family history. Survivors are not inclined to consider their survival arbitrary, because that would mean there was no guarantee of future survival. The dark side of this self-deception is the risk of losing compassion for others by thinking that survival means that we are worthy instead of lucky, and that illness equates with guilt.

#### 4 Guardians at the Border

The following *Kuaiyuan* tale, the first story about Guan Yu in the category of gods, shifts to a regional, rather than familial, perspective on the epidemic:

##### “Guan Hanshou #1”

In the beginning of the Wanli Reign (1570s), a certain Vice Director of the Bureau of Operations was in charge of affairs at Shanhaiguan 山海關.<sup>18</sup> One night, he dreamed of Lord Guan descending to his courtyard, summoning him to say, “Tomorrow at noon, a person of a strange manner will approach the pass, carrying seven cartloads of cow heads.

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18 The point where the Great Wall meets the sea.

You must adamantly block him, he can't be let in." He respectfully assented, and then startled and awoke. At dawn, he immediately commanded the soldiers and honor guard to protect the pass, warning them not to recklessly let merchants' carts enter. After the order had been sent down, the time gradually neared noon, and indeed they saw people pushing seven carts straight up to the pass. When they inspected them, they all contained cow heads, matching with the words of the god in the dream. Then the guard grew more strict, and they adamantly would not let them in. Only when it was nearing twilight did the merchants shove the carts back, saying, "If this place won't take them, we'll carry all of them to the west for people there to eat." Once the dust rose up, the guards could no longer see where they were.

That year it was reported that regions to the west suffered from cow-head plague, with seven out of ten people dying, but in Jizhen 薊鎮,<sup>19</sup> Beijing, and its environs the people were without ailment. Then they knew that this was Lord Guan's silent assistance. Legend has it that at the gate at Shanhaiguan there was a shrine to Lord Guan, his heroic spirit has long been manifest there; that the northeast relies on him to act as shield and city wall is not a falsehood.<sup>20</sup>

At a crucial boundary between China proper and the threatening frontier region, the exorcist violence of Lord Guan is translated into customs enforcement.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the visions of the coming of disease in the guise of justified state-sponsored violence in the tales discussed above, here it comes in the form of merchants and their goods, and the state is the force of protection.

This type of story appears several times in *Yijian zhi*, with different geographic boundaries threatened to be crossed, and different divine figures either blocking the passage of the disease or instructing humans how to ward it off. In one tale, a monk warns a ferryman at a ford leading to Yuzhang 豫章 (the Nanchang area in Jiangxi) not to allow five men dressed in yellow carrying baskets on their back to cross, also giving him a talisman to repel them. When he turns them aside as he had been instructed, he discovers their baskets contain hundreds of tiny coffins. That year Zhejiang had great outbreaks of disease,

19 Roughly the area between the capital and Shanhaiguan.

20 "Guan Hanshou yi" 關漢壽一, Qian Xiyuan 錢希言, *Kuaityuan* 猗園 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2014), 11, 351.

21 On Guan Yu as a power fighting disease, see Barend J. ter Haar, *Guan Yu: The Religious Afterlife of a Failed Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 170–72.

but Yuzhang was spared.<sup>22</sup> In another case, a fisherman in Jingdezhen 景德鎮 glimpses a great struggle on the river which in retrospect he realizes was between local gods and the demons bringing hot diseases; the disease demons also turned into oxen at one point.<sup>23</sup> In a third case, figures seeking to spread disease apply to the temples of several local and city gods across Jiangxi and what is now Anhui, are turned away repeatedly until finally given permission to claim victims in Xuanzhou 宣州.<sup>24</sup>

Disease is a force coming from the outside of a community under false pretenses, but the combination of divine revelation and human vigilance can maintain borders to hold it back. Nonetheless the epidemic is diverted rather than denied; there is a grim zero-sum calculation of allowing others elsewhere to suffer, just not us here.

## 5 Petty Functionaries of the Epidemic

Parallel tales from *Ertan* and *Kuaiyuan* show the spreaders of disease interacting with chance bystanders, rather than border guardians, which diminishes the possible scale of intervention:

### “The Woman Driving Geese in Huarong”

In Huarong 華容 county there was an old village woman.<sup>25</sup> One summer night when she got up to take advantage of the cool, she saw a young woman who looked like a maidservant holding a small bamboo pole, driving a flock of geese by herself. She was surprised by this, saying, “It is the middle of the night, how could a family still be bringing their geese in

22 “Yi seng fu” 異僧符, in Hong Mai 洪邁, *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), *Yijian yizhi* 夷堅乙志, 1:5, 226–27. The motif of the tiny coffins and the ferryman is shared in the *Liaozhai* tale “Xiaoguan” 小棺, but in that case the coffins foretell deaths in the suppression of Wu Sangui’s rebellion rather than an epidemic, demonstrating a kinship among types of mass casualty. Pu Songling 蒲松齡 and Zhang Youhe 張友鶴, eds., *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋志異會校會注會評本 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), 8.1139.

23 In central Jiangxi. “Jingdezhen gui dou” 景德鎮鬼鬪, *Yijian zhiyi* 夷堅支乙, 2:3, 813.

24 In northeastern Anhui. “Xuanzhou Meng langzhong” 宣州孟郎中, *Yijian yizhi*, 1:17, 327–28. A story which Hong Mai notes is very similar in plot has the disease-bringers trying to find a target in the villages in Leping county, Northwest Jiangxi. “Liu Shijiu lang” 劉十九郎, *Yijian dingzhi* 夷堅丁志, 2: 14.660. A *Kuaiyuan* tale has an official in Songjiang 松江 displace disease ghosts to a particular local strongman’s house. “Yigui er” 疫鬼二 *Kuaiyuan*, 15.532.

25 In the northeast of present-day Hunan.

at this time? Some family must have lost them, or brought them in late, and this maid must have grabbed them and left." So she scolded her for theft, and forced her to share the geese. The young woman had no choice, so gave her a goose. The old woman said more, and she gave another. The old woman was very happy. The young woman drove away the flock of geese as if they were flying, and geese honk-honked audibly. When the light came out, the old woman went to look at the geese, and they were two infants who had died of the pox. After that there was an epidemic of pox and hot ailments, and very few infants survived. Huang of the General Bureau told this story.<sup>26</sup>

### "Basket of Ghosts"

When Huang Jiuyang 黃九陽 from Suichang 遂昌 was a licentiate, one day he was confused and befuddled, as if sleeping or dreaming.<sup>27</sup> He saw himself rushing to the ancestral shrine, arranging the offerings, and the entire clan gathered to sacrifice. After the sacrifice was over he hurried home, and midway he met a bearer carrying two baskets as he walked along. Listening closely at the basket, there was a peeping sound, like ducklings. When he pressed close and opened the basket to look, they were all tiny people 2 or 3 *cun* high, all of them with matted hair and filthy faces, like prisoners in torment. Seeing Licentiate Huang they competed to yell and weep, begging to be rescued. When he looked carefully to recognize them, his wetnurse's son, a tenant farmer, and a son of his clan were all there, all with their forms shrunken. Startled, he asked the reason. The bearer said, "I'm a ghost messenger, all of this lot have accumulated a great deal of sin. They have earned the wrath of God, and he's going to kill them with plague. What I have in my baskets is really their living souls; not something it is appropriate for you to ask about." Then he wanted to carry them away. Huang stopped him firmly, saying, "This one is my tenant, this one is my wetnurse's son; in their everyday lives they have no great sins, please do the favor of letting them go." The bearer had no choice, so he released them according to Huang's words. Huang said again, "This one is my clansman, I beg you for the favor of releasing him from the net." The bearer said very angrily, "I have received God's command, the records have names and numbers, how could I listen to all your interference and cast this aside!" He put his baskets on his shoulders and left without looking back.

26 "Huarong qu e fu" 華容驅鵝婦, *Ertan leizeng*, 42.360.

27 In southwestern Zhejiang.

Suddenly Huang awoke startled, thought this matter strange, and called for a brush and paper to record the gist of it. After more than a month, there was a great epidemic in the village, and those who died sooner or later numbered more than 300. His clansman was among them. His tenant and his wetnurse's son both were dangerously ill but got up again. Only the Huang clan of more than 270 people had no one who died of illness. The magistrate Huang Jiuding 黃九鼎 recorded this event.<sup>28</sup>

The same underlying pattern is worked out at different levels of detail. Qian's more explicit story makes Wang Tonggui's cryptic one more clear, but it also tames the raw shock and revulsion of finding the corpses of poxy infants in an enclosure for geese. Like the workmen carrying a load of oxhead or tiny coffins, the emissary of the plague comes in a humble guise: not the god in golden armor, nor the presiding judge, but a servant girl and a day laborer. The harmless-appearing underlings of fearsome forces, they are merely doing their jobs, and can yield to pressure.<sup>29</sup>

There is a difference in gender and class, as well as motivation, between the one who can recognize the victims and is told that what he is seeing are souls, and the one who sees no revelation until morning light. Licentiate Huang lifts his writing brush to record the tale. His dream is introduced by proper completion of ancestral sacrifice, the story closed by survival of the Huang clan. The old woman and the nameless infants in contrast stand at the margins of the patriarchal family and the written tradition.

In tales of intercepting the transmitters of disease, the burdens they carry first appear in a metaphorical form, representing either the disease, as the ox heads, or the victims.<sup>30</sup> Strikingly the tales of the opportunistic old woman and licentiate Huang represent the plague victims as geese or crying and carried like ducklings. Although neither writer is so prescient as to imagine avian flu, in the days of the epidemic human life is as cheap as domestic poultry. Both

28 "Gui long" 鬼籠, *Kuaiyuan*, 13.407-8.

29 A related story subtype depicts hapless mortals pressed into service to spread disease under the direction of otherworldly overseers. "Yi xiao mian yi" 以孝免疫, Pan Shizao 潘士藻, *Anran tang leizuan* 闡然堂類纂, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, zi bu* (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1997), vol. 242, 6.5a. "Tuzhe san yi" 屠者散疫, Wang Zhaoyun 王兆雲, *Shuopu shiyu* 說圃識餘, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, zi bu*, vol. 248, B.36b.

30 A similar tale in terms of the animal associations of disease in *Yijian zhi* describes a boatman who carries the bearer of disease from the city of Huzhou to the surrounding villages. She appears as a young woman, but while she sleeps her body is transformed to thousands of writhing snakes. She later admits has come to transmit "snake plague." "Yicun furen" 易村婦人, *Yijian zhi jing* 夷堅支景, 2:2.892.

texts provide specific onomatopoeia for the sounds of ducks and geese: the victims of disease cry out, but can we understand them?

## 6 The Ghost Buys Coffins

The stories discussed so far reversed the usual temporal order of ghost tales, with the apparition anticipating loss rather than echoing it. The following tale instead addresses the aftermath of the epidemic. A story of the same outline appeared in both *Ertan* and *Kuai yuan*, as well as an earlier collection from Suzhou 蘇州:

### “The Old Man Buying Coffins”

In the spring of 1482, an epidemic was rampant in central Wu. There happened to be an old man who entered the marked at daybreak, saying to the carpenter, “My home is at Wucongjing 五淙涇,<sup>31</sup> I want to buy seven coffins.” The carpenter asked for the price, the old man said, “Just transport the coffins and come with me and I’ll pay you immediately.” The carpenter did as he asked and went hauling them. The old man entered first, saying, “I only have twenty bushels of grain. I’ll trouble you to discuss it with my relative so-and-so from behind this room.” The carpenter entered the empty room and saw seven corpses. The old man was among them. The relative from behind the room immediately arrived, and paid him with 20 bushels of grain, which was all the family had.<sup>32</sup>

### “The Ghost Buying Coffins”

In Shatou village 沙頭鎮 of Taicang 太倉, about fifteen *li* from the village is Xinyang town 新洋村.<sup>33</sup> There was a householder named Xie Jia who had a magnificent beard, but often did indiscreet things. In the third month of the *guichou* year in the Wanli reign [April–May, 1613], the whole household, young and old, 11 people in all including Jia were sick from an epidemic. Jia died, and his wife and children died in succession. The count was nine casualties, with only two old women surviving moaning

31 Northeast of Suzhou.

32 “Mai guan laoren” 買棺老人, *Ertan leizeng*, 44:376. The same plot with the same location and date, with slight differences in wording, is found in “Gui mai guan” 鬼買棺, Zhu Yunming 祝允明, *Zhuzi zhiguai lu* 祝子志怪錄, *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, vol. 1266 (Shanghai: Shanghai guiji chubanshe, 1995), 1.17b–18a.

33 Also to the northeast of Suzhou, further than Wucongjing.

in their beds. When their clansmen and in-laws went to inquire about their illness, they all saw two disease ghosts with red hair, green faces, and teeth like swords or halberds squatting to either side of the door. Each and every one who saw them trembled with fear, and left tripping over themselves. All those who encountered them fell ill and died. Then as a month passed their door was closed, the corpses heaped upon each other, and no one dared to bury them.

Suddenly one day, the ghost of Xie Jia walked straight out into Shatou village, entered the shop for funerary supplies, and haggled facing the monks. He untied his money belt from his waist, and took out large and small silver ingots to be weighed. They numbered 42 taels. After he used 6 taels and change to buy nine coffins, he kept half a tael separate and grasped it in his fist, putting the rest of the money away in his belt as before. Suddenly he summoned the boatman Big Zhu, and had the coffins that he bought carried into the boat one by one. When they were all in place, he commanded, "You can carry them to Xinyang Town. When you reach a place where the gate faces a clear stream, the buildings are tall and beautiful, beside it is a bamboo wood of several tens of acres, ask if it is the Xie household, then carry them in. I'll go ahead along the shore." Then he took out the half a tael in his fist and showed it to Zhu, saying, "The payment for your hire is all here, don't worry."

Zhu transported the coffins as he'd been told. Once he got to Xinyang town and entered among the settlements, there indeed an estate with tall gates and large houses, fine woods and beautiful bamboo, and when he checked if it was the Xie house, it matched in every detail, but in the silence he couldn't hear a sound. In his heart he thought this was strange and couldn't guess why, so he pushed on the door and entered. After passing through 3 or 4 layers of gates, when he entered the bedchambers, the ground was full of corpses, deserted without signs of human life. When he counted them male and female, young and old, there were indeed nine of them, and Xie Jia with the long beard who had come into the village to buy the coffins was among their number. When Zhu looked close, Xie's moneybelt was on his waist as before, and the half a tael in his fist was plainly there. Zhu kept yelling, "A strange thing! A strange thing!" but no one came out to answer. After a while, he could faintly hear that there seemed to be the sound of human breath, so he went through the east and west chambers to look. Eventually he could hear someone answering, "We are two old women lying ill here, guest what are you doing here?" When Zhu asked about their master and mistress, [he learned] they had been dead for a month.

Zhu was a man who had long maintained a vegetarian diet, and he came out reciting the name of the Buddha loudly. As he came out he saw the two ghosts hiding in the corner of the wall. He looked carefully at their hideous appearance and then berated them, “Cursed beasts! Cursed beasts! You’ve wrongly taken countless human lives, why haven’t you left yet?” Once he was done speaking, the two disease ghosts vanished in an instant. Zhu figured there was no arrangement for the coffins, so he left his boat behind and walked into the village, talking to everyone, looking for Xie’s wife’s elder brother and his cousins, and went with them to the hall to place the corpses in the coffins. By then the two old women could with effort get up, speak, and move, and only then did they realize the disease ghosts had been dispelled. Opening up the beam of the room, they found more than 2000 in silver, on inspection all of it official. Zhu didn’t dare take it, and finally returned to Shatou village. Everyone in Shatou clamored to tell the story of a ghost buying a coffin, some saying that the corpse itself could walk. Chen Juesheng 陳覺生 and Shen Gongsheng 沈公繩 both rode on Big Zhu’s boat and heard him tell the story themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Qian Xiyan’s version adds the vivid perspective of the boatman, the confidence that a devout and courageous working man can chase away ghosts. The two disease ghosts suggest a limited idea of infection: anyone who sees them dies, but it does not spread from those witnesses to their own families.

As in the world of the girls from Tongcheng, where their simultaneous deaths were not outside the norm, in the time of an epidemic no one is surprised that a man would need to buy seven or nine coffins at the same time. The repetition of the same story across the gap of 130 years illustrates the continuity of this fear. The location in the two stories is not identical, but in the same area; the story apparently kept circulating in the narrow waterways and villages to the northeast of Suzhou. This story writes the unnamed rural dead into the record, and offers further comfort: the patriarch of the family is able to take care of his own.<sup>35</sup>

34 “Gui mai guan” 鬼買棺, *Kuai yuan*, 13.439–40.

35 The *Zhiguai lu* version is copied into a Qing collection of accounts of disasters from the Ming. Sun Zhilu 孫之驥, *Ershen yelu* 二申野錄 (Yinxiang guan 吟香館 1867, on Google Books) 2.38a/b. From there the deaths at Wucongjing, but not the incident of the ghost buying the coffin, are collated into the modern compilation *Zhongguo sanqian nian yizai shiliao huibian*, which also states that they appear in the Republican era *Wuxian zhi* 吳縣志. Gong Shengsheng 龔勝生, ed., *Zhongguo sanqian nian yizai shiliao huibian: Xianqin zhi Mingdai juan* 中國三千年疫災史料彙編：先秦至明代卷 (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe,

The settling of debt for the coffins takes the place of moral justice. The difference between the means of payment in the two versions is a vivid illustration of the monetization of the Ming economy. The amounts of silver and Xie's gestures handling it are subjects of minute attention in the second tale. The money at the waist and in the fist of the corpse is the final confirmation of his identity. Whether grain or silver, men and ghosts have a commonly recognized standard of value.

## 7 The Father's Nightmare

The tales discussed so far are placed at a certain distance from their collectors, whether in time or acquaintance with the people involved. Qian Xiyan wrote another text that shows him grappling with his culture's shared ideas about deaths from disease in a highly personal way. *Ting lan zhi* 聽濫志 (Record of Listening to Nonsense, preface 1614) is biography of his son who died in childhood. None of Qian's children had lived to adulthood, but this son at first appeared to have hope to survive longer than the others. This text is a desperate attempt to chronicle his short life and explain his death.<sup>36</sup>

The figures of children are a disturbing link to disease in several tales from *Kuaiyuan* and other collections, in an ambivalent role as both victims and carriers.<sup>37</sup> In a telling example in *Yijian zhi*, when the city god announces a planned epidemic, a local god, protesting that the citizens of his neighborhood are all virtuous, offers to fill the quota with children instead.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that deaths of already vulnerable children were somehow more tolerable for the community as a whole. In one *Kuaiyuan* tale, a child describes a fearsome ghost he alone can see. His description resembles the Star of Literature *kuixing* 魁星, so the family is delighted, thinking this promises a brilliant future for the boy. But when he dies of smallpox shortly afterward, they realize it had been

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2019), 1:226, demonstrating the point about *zhiguai* serving to create a place in the textual record for these dead.

36 See discussion in Chen Guojun, *Mingdai zhiguai chuanqi xiaoshuo yanjiu*, 454–58.

37 A boy who had died of pox is sent to claim the souls of other children. “Xuanzi er meng” 宣子兒夢, *Zhuzi zhiguai lu*, 4.10. In a tale of a hell journey, a man sees a throng of children who had died of pox playing together in the “Bureau of Disease.” Liu Xiucan ru ming” 劉秀才入冥, *Kuaiyuan*, 9.294–95. A child who had died of pox is a servant in a local god's temple. “Song xianggong san” 宋相公三, *Kuaiyuan*, 12.388.

38 “Xiaoyi fang tudi” 孝義坊土地, *Yijian zhi jing juan*, 2:6.927.

a smallpox ghost.<sup>39</sup> For Qian Xiyan this has heart-rending resonance with his personal experience.

This passage describes a dream after the onset of his son's fatal illness.

That night he had a fever, and after three days the pox appeared on his face. That was the Grain Festival (8th day of the first month). That night I again had an inauspicious dream. I dreamed that I climbed to the peak of a mountain. Looking down the world below in fog and mist, indistinguishable in the distance. Suddenly I saw several tens of boys going in order into an official residence. Looking close, my son was among them. I hurried to follow them and went in with them. There was a man presiding who looked like a great official, his clothes and cap imposing. I immediately went forward to bow. The official invited me to sit beneath him. To both sides underlings circled on guard, very stern. He held more than 1000 pages of records which he placed on the desk in front of him as he checked and marked them. Suddenly there was someone with flowers at his temples who called out the names of all the children one after another. He dragged a great piece of cloth like a bolt of raw silk and began to write their names on it. I got up and asked, "My wretched child doesn't have a name yet, I won't trouble you to record it." The official looked down at his work without any answer. I saw that his appearance looked like the examiner of licentiates in a play. He called out the three sections of heaven, earth, and men, and my son was in the heaven section. In my heart I was secretly delighted, thinking, "Is my son taking part in the autumn exams?" After a while many of those who had come in together with my son were led down into the courtyard; only a few people accompanied my son to stand between the screens. Suddenly I heard a tumult in the central courtyard; I left my seat to look. There were more than ten guards, their faces dark as indigo, their bills like birds, in an uproar like drunkards, crossing back and forth and piling onto each other, and the flowers all fell to the ground. They led several tens of the children to enter a dark well, where they vanished without sound or trace. I got up hastily to embrace my son from between the screens and take him away, but before he was in my hands I suddenly startled awake. The whole night I trembled, my sweat flowing like rain. This dream was close to riding in

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39 "Dou gui" 痘鬼, *Kuaiyuan*, 13.422.

a cart of ghosts. Then in my heart I understood that “heaven” meant the worst kind of pox.<sup>40</sup>

His son dies ten days later. Here two visions of the epidemic are linked: an orderly process with documents, and chaotic violence, ending with children drowning in a well. Qian makes the same error of conflating of the greatest hopes of a literati-class parent, exam success, and the greatest fear, death from disease, as in the tale of the false Star of Literature. His son is one among many victims, and the father is nothing more than a hopeless bystander. A dream born of the father’s anxiety has become dreadful prophecy in retrospect. As far as we can tell from the historical record, Qian Xiyan died childless, his funeral managed by the charity of a distant relative.<sup>41</sup>

Later in the text Qian reaches a conclusion about where the blame for his son’s death lay: when a servant in his household made offerings to the illicit Wutong spirits in an attempt to protect the child, inviting them in became a source of disease rather than protection.<sup>42</sup> Other people’s wrongheaded beliefs (or, in the language of our world, misinformation) become pathogenic.

## 8 Summioned from Bed

The final tales I discuss begin with a moment we have already seen, an ordinary person summoned to come outdoors and witness something terrifying. This is the beginning of many stories of death, dream, and near-death.

### “Disease ghost (#1)”

A son of the Jiang clan in Jingshan 京山, Huguang 湖廣, was at home when suddenly someone led him outdoors. Outside the door he saw several hundred small children, wearing bright clothes of every color. In a blink of an eye they were gone, but suddenly he saw stuck into the ground several hundred small red flags, written on them the four words, “world in great chaos.” Jiang’s heart was shaken, and he lowered his head to look at them closely. Then they slowly faded in the sunlight. The next night he dreamed of going to a place, and what he saw was exactly the

40 Qian Xiyan, *Tinglan zhi* 聽濫志 (N.p.: Songshu shijiu shan 松樞十九山 edition, 1614), A.13a–14a.

41 This was Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664). See Yuan Yuan, “Wan Ming xiaoshuo jia Qian Xiyan,” 218.

42 Qian Xiyan, *Tinglan zhi*, A.14a–15b.

same. Before long, an epidemic spread in their town, and several tens of household members in the Jiang clan died. Only then did he realize this was done by disease ghosts. This story was told by Li Weizhen 李維楨 on the boat at Fengqiao 楓橋.<sup>43</sup>

The children are here not the victims but the harbinger in a vision both ephemeral and repeated. The succession of the children in their many colors with the flags all in red, then fading, have a dreamlike logic. The texts on the flag are legible but still inexplicable in the moment. Numbers are important: several hundred, several hundred, four words, several tens. We have seen the concern with numbers repeatedly in the tales, both in the initially baffling omen and its realization in death toll.

Flags are a common means of visualizing heavenly decrees: affixed to the back of those who should be struck by lightning for their sins, or those who should pass or fail the civil service exam.<sup>44</sup> There is an eerie coincidence with the memorial art installation for the American Covid dead, with a small white flag for each victim, by Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg.<sup>45</sup>

#### “The Man in the Cart Rut”

There was a petty merchant from East River Rice Alley 東江米巷 was lying at home.<sup>46</sup> Before dawn two men called him to come out, and he immediately followed. They bound him and placed him in the ruts left by carts. Once they were done, a small cart came, directly crushing his back. It seems he could still endure it. The rumbling sound rose again, a large cart was approaching. He was extremely afraid, but heard a voice saying from the distance, “Don’t fear, this will save your life.” The cart came, his bones were broken and his flesh was torn, his back and abdomen sticky [with gore]. The pain was unbearable, but fortunately he did not die. The sky grew very light. His family sought him, then lifted him out of the rut. After 10 days his flesh gradually grew back. After months he was restored. But just after he had risen from his sickbed, a serious seasonal

43 “Yigui yi” 疫鬼一, *Kuaiyuan*, 14.498–99.

44 For lightning strikes, see the influential Ming dramatic edition of the story cycle about the monk Mulian rescuing his mother from hell. Scene 22 “Sheling cha qi” 社令插旗 in Zheng Zhizhen 鄭之珍, *Xin bian Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen* 新編目連救母勸善戲文, *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, vol. 1744. For examination results, see “Changzhong shen” 場中神, *Kuaiyuan*, 10.334–35. “Wang pu yijin” 王僕一斤, *Ertan leizeng*, 11.91.

45 Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg, “In America: How Could this Happen ...” See <https://www.suzannefirstenberg.com/in-america>, accessed March 17, 2024.

46 In Beijing, near the imperial palace.

epidemic broke out. Of the men and women in his family, more than ten mouths, only this man survived. We don't know who the two people who summoned him were, or who the distant voice was. Shen Tailü discussed things that happened in the alley where he lived. Being placed in the place of death but surviving, this can be called "being delivered from adversity" 度厄.<sup>47</sup>

The image of the cart from the story of the chaste great-grandmother repeats. Yet here, being run over by the cart, despite physical agony and complete loss of control, represents not disease, but, inexplicably, the path to survival. His experience, though it starts with him in bed, seems physical rather than a dream: his body is really injured, his family has to go find him. Sound is important here, the menacing rumbling of the unseen approaching carts, as it was in the helpless cries of the endangered souls turned to poultry. Looking at it from our contemporary perspective his earlier injuries kept him in isolation from potential sources of infection. Yet in the world of the story, the forces that allow his survival are even more mysterious than the causes of the epidemic.

## 9 Among Them (Conclusions)

In a medical almanac attributed to Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), prescriptions to avoid infections with *wen* are placed at the end of the emergency medicine section, right before a general prescription for combating the harms caused by miscellaneous ghosts. This suggests the cultural space assigned the epidemic, an emergency but closer to the supernatural than burns, drowning, or cuts.<sup>48</sup> The tales I have discussed themselves have a particular place in the ecosystem of genres dealing with disease: they are not practical texts prescribing specific medicinal or religious intervention, either for specialists or lay people. They are tools for reflecting on epidemics but not for treating them. Despite sometimes straightforward didactic messages, the uncertainty about why some survive while others perish often lingers. The stories look at the epidemic as past, perhaps very recent and perhaps longer ago, but a past that always has the potential to recur.

47 "Che gou zhong ren" 車溝中人, *Ertan leizeng*, 11.89.

48 Pu Songling, *Yaosui shu* 藥崇書, in Sheng Wei 盛偉, ed., *Pu Songling quanji* 蒲松齡全集 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1998), 3:286.

In several of the tales a phrase recurs, “(to be) among them” 與焉. Huang recognized his kinsmen and acquaintances among the souls in the carrying basket, Qian Xiyan saw his son among the children being summoned for the examination, the man who purchased coffins was among the unburied corpses lying in his house. This phrase captures the dread of the epidemic: you find yourself suddenly connected to its ravages in a different way than you had thought.

The stories discussed here happened in multiple provinces, from the capital to Fujian, from the central Yangtze valley to its delta. There are tales of disease outbreaks three or four generations earlier, and some a scant few years before they were written down. The outbreaks described in these stories map only inexactly onto those mentioned in official histories. Despite all the suffering history records, it omits so much more. These stories do not provide complete explanations of the epidemic; instead they delineate the unfathomable. They mark a limited hope: sometimes a child who seemed dead of pox revives, or a stranger calls out to you in your lost daughter’s voice. Sometimes you can persuade the functionaries of death to let a few souls go. Under certain conditions the good can be spared, and the dead can still take care of their own. Only the bereaved father Qian Xiyan remains inconsolable. Yet now I think that it is more the stories’ mere existence than their content that reveals this flickering light of hope. Despite the death toll that defied commemoration, someone lived to tell a tale, and others lived to pass it down.

### Acknowledgments

In the summer of 2019 I was fortunate enough to travel together with Professor Nienhauser and other colleagues to a conference at Nanjing University, coinciding with events celebrating the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s long tradition of collaboration with that institution, in which Professor Nienhauser’s ongoing translation projects play a central role. I gave a version of this paper there, then continued travels on my own elsewhere in China, eventually giving a fuller version at Wuhan University. I could not have imagined how crucial epidemic disease and the stories we spread about it would become to all of us in the following years. In one telling this paper itself becomes a strange tale, an unwitting harbinger of what was to be recognized only in retrospect. Although my focus remains on sources from the Song through the Ming, the experiences from spring 2020 to the present inevitably shape my interpretation, reducing my distance from these stories in an unsettling way.

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# Fictive Language and Vulgar Words 假語村言: The Tendentious Ambiguity of Zhang Xinzhi's Commentary to *Honglou meng*

Haun SAUSSY

## Abstract

The *Honglou meng* has given rise to many schools of interpretation, each with its own theories of what the novel “is about,” or “is really about.” Quite possibly, these debates will never come to an end, considering that characters in the novel are often led to discover that their own lives and desires are actually “about” something else, something that lies beyond the scope of their normal awareness! For a reader familiar with works like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* or Kafka’s *The Castle*, it does not seem absurd to call such a work an allegory. In response to scholars who have contended that reasons of worldview make proper allegory impossible within Chinese culture, here we will look at the language of one of the most famous nineteenth-century commentaries on the novel as a kind of sustained, punning, translation.

## Keywords

*Dream of the Red Chamber* – allegory – commentary – fiction – fictional characters – Confucian philosophy

The vast, polyphonic novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (also known as *Shitou ji* 石頭記, among other names) has long been suspected of containing hidden meanings—indeed the work’s first chapter says as much, without however offering a definitive key for access to those meanings. Schools of interpretation have developed with many conflicting theories of what the novel “is about,” or “is really about,” and characters in the novel are often led to discover that their own lives and desires are actually “about” something else, something that lies beyond the scope of their normal awareness. For a reader familiar with works like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* or Kafka’s *The Castle*, it does not seem absurd to call such a work an allegory. The claim has often been made that no Chinese

work can be allegorical, on the basis that Chinese reality is entirely immanent and does not permit the imagination of realms beyond the here and now.<sup>1</sup> This objection, however, can easily be overruled. No one needs to know what an allegory encodes in order to recognize it as allegory, as “speaking otherwise” or suggesting a further domain of reference outside its immediate frame of reference. The fact that such a narrative or discourse unsettles primary meaning, shadows it with difference, is enough to earn it the label of allegory. A better path of definition is to think of genres such as realism, romance, allegory and the like as characterized not by their fields of reference—their subject matter, what they refer to—but by their modes of referring, in other words by their use of language. Allegory, like commentary, is an actualization of metalanguage, that is, of equivalences or translation-values within a single language.

Translation within a single language? As much as to say, a translation that lacks the defining property of translation for a conventional understanding, namely that it goes between different languages. But once we accept the notion of intralingual translation, translation in the standard sense will appear to us as one of a wide class of linguistic operations ranging from the quotidian (repetition, mockery, paraphrase, correction, artistic adaptation) to the Oulipian (for example, turning a text with the normal proportion of *e*'s into a text with zero *e*'s).<sup>2</sup> Allegorical reading and writing take their places somewhere in the constellation of these practices, which I propose to consider without the usual move to aesthetic judgment. Are the transpositions performed by allegorical writing and reading nonsense, the fruit of delusion, self-indulgent, futile, ahistorical, “unsubstantial,” “shameless,” “empty echoes”<sup>3</sup>—in short, bad examples

1 For an expression of this view in relation to *Honglou meng*, see Andrew Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in 'Dream of the Red Chamber'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976): “When we speak of allegory in the Western context we mean the creation of a two-level literary universe (in mimesis of an ontologically dual cosmos) by means of the projection into a hypothetical plane of structural patterns actually presented in the images and actions of narrative (the author's fiction)” (93). The generality of such a definition, in Plaks's view, is belied by “the fact that the Chinese world-view simply does not utilize the two-level cosmology that we have found at the heart of Western allegory” (109). See also *ibid.*, 125–26.

2 For an account of translation that sets it among other linguistic and artistic practices, while nonetheless marking “translation proper” off from the rest, see Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *On Translation*, ed. Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 232–39. On Oulipian transformations, see Oulipo, *La Littérature potentielle: créations, récréations, récréations* (Potential literature: creations, re-creations, recreations) (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

3 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual; or the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816), 36–37.

that must be excluded for the future health of literature? No; they are simply attested practices which merit analysis for their own sake.

The theory of allegory exhibits a remarkable stability over its first two thousand years or so. As epitomized in Quintilian's *Institutiones*, allegory "says one thing in words and another in meaning," it is a "continued" or "drawn-out" metaphor (*metaphora continua*). Since Quintilian's Latin equivalent for the Greek term *metaphora* is "translatio" we might on sheerly algebraic grounds describe allegory as a "continuous translation."<sup>4</sup> But no one seems to have done so, presumably because the exclusive application of the term "translation" to operations substituting one language for another has reigned for so long. For centuries, then, discussions of allegory turned on the generally accepted proposition that an allegorical text refers to two objects simultaneously, one explicitly and the other implicitly, inviting point-for-point correlations among their parts. Thus, in the standard view, Prudentius's *Psychomachia* refers on one level (the notion of "level" is key to this traditional account) to the customs of gladiatorial combat and on another to those of moral or spiritual struggle. Allegory is historically associated with the European Middle Ages, a circumstance that did nothing to discredit the alleged causal link between religious background and literary form. Hence the doubts as to whether allegory is even possible in cultures that do not insist on a sharp distinction between the physical and the spiritual. But an unbiased observer must also remark that the genre of allegory in its post-medieval European versions takes on connotations far from Christian transcendence, such as satirical implausibility or world-weary melancholy; either way, for modern people allegory betokens "a time out of joint." Examples of these states of mind condensed in a figure include Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*; Coleridge's famous repudiation of allegory in contrast to prophecy and symbol, cited above; Charles Baudelaire's "Le Cygne" ("Tout pour moi devient allégorie" / "Everything [in the Parisian streetscape] turns to allegory for me"); and the chapters on "Allegory and *Trauerspiel*" in Walter Benjamin's *Origins of German Tragic Drama*.

The first profound innovation (as I see it) in the theory of allegory to occur in quite a long time came with Maureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory* in 1979. "The vertical conceptualization of allegory and its emphasis upon disjunct 'levels' is absolutely wrong as a matter of practical fact," Quilligan observes. "Meaning accretes serially, interconnecting and criss-crossing the

4 Quintilian, *The Orator's Education, Books 6–8*. Trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 450, 429. On the history of the allegorical mode, see for example Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), and Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

verbal surface long before one can accurately speak of moving to another level 'beyond' the literal." Only in imagination can the reader visit various "levels" and check them against one another. "While the habit of talking about the action of allegorical narrative as simply a baseline for thematic translation into another set of terms is an old one and therefore exceedingly difficult to break, break it we must if we are ever to perceive the organic coherence of a genre which consistently pays the most profound attention to the radical significance of that much-dismissed literal surface."<sup>5</sup> By "literal surface" Quilligan does not mean the pebbles of the road trod by Dante's pilgrim or the Red Cross Knight; she means the words of the text, coming one after another in sentences and paragraphs. That surface is riddled with puns: knots of speech-sound that send the hearer in pursuit of two different objects at the same time. "Tell me, where is fancy bred?" asks the Shakespearean actor (*The Merchant of Venice*, III.ii.63). "You could try the pastry shop around the corner," answers a member of the audience. What occurs at such moments—and Quilligan asserts that these moments are the building-blocks of allegorical narrative—is not at all a metaphor, *pace* Quintilian. No similarity is being asserted between the *topics* of breeding and bread. Identity between the *sounds* "bred" and "bread" is being demonstrated, and the absurd consequence followed up on. It is not through metaphor but through pun that the allegory "says one thing in words and another in meaning." Indeed if the device at work had been metaphor, we could hope for an eventual convergence of the two "levels" or domains, as would happen if the "diritta via" missed by the pilgrim led also to some rectitude of the moral life (if it led, that is, to paradise, or to some other conceptual site of justice and piety). Just such a convergence is hinted at one book answering and contesting Quilligan's. Carolyn Van Dyke's *The Fiction of Truth* (1985) holds that allegories must be predicated on Realism in the medieval sense of the word. "If a text says one thing it also means that thing: we cannot separate speech from meaning. Thus if it says one thing and means another, it both says and means two things. And unless we are linguistic schizophrenics or are willing to ignore half of what we read, a text that says and means two things must say and mean one complex thing."<sup>6</sup> Very well then: puns make schizophrenics of us all. A chain of such puns produces the allegory and forces the reader to confront, moment by moment, the possibility of nonsense. *Reference*, within language, is at issue, not *ontology*, exceeding language.

5 Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 28, 29.

6 Carolyn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 42.

Allegory, as expanded pun, is necessarily self-referential. “All allegorical narrative unfolds as action designed to comment on the verbal implications of the words used to describe the imaginary action.”<sup>7</sup> The inescapable linearity of narration doubles back on itself. “Readers must immediately become sensitive to the horizontal macaronic verbal mechanisms at work.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the “other” reference of allegorical narration is not necessarily “other” in some psychological, axiological or religious sense, nor is “language” to be taken too generally: it is not the human capacity for speech that grounds the allegory, but the words and meanings of one idiom, indeed of one text, that is quoted and embroidered upon. Allegories are rewritings of a pretext, a powerful, regulative text that the immediate text repeatedly echoes. The pre-text, for Quilligan, “always stands outside any allegorical narrative and becomes the key to its interpretability.”<sup>9</sup> An allegory is thus a rewriting, through puns and self-commentary, of an authoritative text. It both says the same as that text and says something other (thus, for example, the *Divine Comedy* repeatedly cites the Israelites’ liberation from Egypt, a plot which structures the story the *Comedy* tells but is not identical to that story).

In Quilligan’s recasting, an allegory adapts or translates a text (A) into another text (B). Why would one do such a thing? I speculate: to conceal impermissible meanings or to address a different public; to claim the virtues of (A) for (B); to overcome poetic belatedness; to allege that the author of (B) really intended to write about the subject of (A), but could not, for some reason that now can be put aside; to explore the possible repercussions of considering (B) in terms of (A) and vice versa. I make here no distinction between allegory and allegoresis, since the difference is usually held to lie in authorial intention—the intention, that is, of the author of text (B). I consider the commentator to be an author too, the author of a new hybrid text (A + B). But how are A and B to be combined? Some methods may now be explored through an example.

The *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 circulated in manuscript for the first forty years of its existence. It appears that the versions passed from hand to hand and copied for personal use reflected various stages of the writing process and were probably most often handfuls of chapters rather than anything approximating the whole book. What with borrowing, correcting, annotating, recopying, and loss, the various manuscripts diverged from one another. At the time of the first printed edition in 1791, which had been augmented and polished by a literatus named Gao E 高鶚 (ca. 1738–1815), the original author’s name was

7 Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*, 53.

8 *Ibid.*, 36.

9 *Ibid.*, 23.

buried in the narration, and in any case was not a name that most readers had heard of: Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1710–1765). With little information to go on, readers had to interpret the work as best they could. Perhaps the author was counting on his near-unknown status to bewilder the reader, for the novel is full of ironic remarks, false leads, parodies, caricatures, satires, seeming allusions, self-contradictions—all the devices used in Chinese writing to produce a kind of playful hostility between writer and reader.<sup>10</sup> In response, a number of commentaries were produced and added to later editions of the book.

I will here concentrate on one commentator in particular, Zhang Xinzhi 張新之 (fl. 1828–1850), studio name Miaofoxuan 妙復軒, additional name Taiping xianren 太平閒人, whose arguments about the form and purpose of the novel circulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I take as my sample his notes to chapters 1 and 13 of the novel, as well as the prefatory “Dufa” 讀法 (Reading Guide).<sup>11</sup> Although they have been dropped from standard reading texts of the novel today (an effect of the author-centered hermeneutics newly applied to vernacular fiction in twentieth-century China), Zhang’s comments are easily available to contemporary readers in such editions as *Honglou meng Sanjia ping ben* 紅樓夢三家評本 or Feng Qiyong’s 馮其庸 *Chongjiao bajia pingpi Honglou meng* 重校八家評批紅樓夢. In these compilations Zhang’s views rub up against those of Huhua zhuren 護花主人 (Wang Xilian 王希廉 [1805–1877]), Damou shanmin 大某山民 (Yao Xie 姚燮 [1805–1864]), and others, giving the reading of the novel a contrapuntal texture that is also absent from present-day standard editions. The counterpoint must not have been original to the composition of each author’s commentary: most likely the comments were not written in dialogue with one another, but were brought together by publishers eager to cash in on the market for annotated editions of this pleasing and slippery novel.

10 For another testimony to this enjoyable antagonism, see Li Zhi, *A Book to Burn and a Book to Keep (Hidden)*, trans., Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 245–46.

11 Zhang Xinzhi’s *Miaofoxuan ping Shitou ji* 妙復軒評石頭記 (*Shitou ji* as Commented by the Master of the Studio of Wonder Upon Wonder) has a preface dated 1850 but was first printed in 1881. The Peking Library manuscript copy is described in David Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 475–76. It is contemporary with Yao Xie’s 姚燮 commentary, with which it is often reprinted. On Zhang, see *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 316–22. Zhang’s “Taiping xianren ‘Shitou ji’ dufa” 太平閒人石頭記讀法 (The Way to Read *Shitou ji* According to the Idler of Great Peace; henceforth “Dufa”) is translated by Andrew Plaks as “How to Read the *Dream of the Red Chamber*” in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 323–40.

Early readers of the *Honglou meng* often wondered who the originals of its characters might have been. After all, the narrator describes himself in the work's very first lines as having “concealed the true facts” (*jiang zhen shi yin qu* 將真事隱去),<sup>12</sup> a phrase that puns on the name of Zhen Shiyin 甄士隱, one of the two compères who opens the novel. The other compère's name, Jia Yucun 賈雨村, can be read as the phrase “false language subsists” (*jia yu cun* 假語存). To account for the self-reference in these names, then, the title couplet of chapter 1 should be translated as “Zhen Shiyin [‘True-events-concealed’], in a dream illusion, gets knowledge of the numinous [Stone]; / Jia Yucun [‘False-words-subsist’], in wind and dust, comes to desire a secluded beauty.”<sup>13</sup> The narrator (or some proxy for the narrator) tells us that the novel's “fictive language and village [i.e., uncouth] words” (*jia yu cun yan* 假語村言) are a disguise. Behind them are “all those girls from long ago,” whose actions and characters he has called up from memory and “examined and compared one by one” 當日所有之女子，一一細考較去。<sup>14</sup> It seems self-evident that this novel must be a *roman à clef*, even if the key is lost.

Zhang Xinzhi moves to block that plausible but too facile interpretation.

“Concealing real events”—this states as clearly as possible that in the whole book there is not one true fact to be seen, and that the reader is specifically instructed not to interpret it as referring to so-and-so or such-and-such a place. The first half of the title couplet follows precisely this line. [It is then to be read as: “By obscuring real events, a dream illusion gives knowledge of the numinous.”] “The numinous” [as mentioned in the couplet] is none other than the “illustrious virtue” [*ming de* 明德, as spoken of in the *Da xue* 大學 or “Great Learning”]. The book borrows the fiction of “numinous jade” to illuminate “illustrious virtue”; the “stone” corresponds to the “renovation of the people” [*xinmin* 新民, also from the “Great Learning”]. But even I feel the mortal absurdity of using the “Great Learning” as a gloss for the *Red Chamber*.

「真事隱去」明明說出，則全部無一真事可見。看者正不必指為某氏、某處解。目錄上句，只此一行。通靈，明德也，借通靈「明明

12 Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Honglou meng Sanjia ping ben* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 1: 3.

13 David Hawkes elects to omit the opening lines, which frees him to translate the title couplet without obvious meta-reference: “Zhen Shi-yin makes the Stone's acquaintance in a dream / And Jia Yu-cun finds that poverty is not incompatible with romantic feelings” (Hawkes, trans., *The Story of the Stone* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973], 47).

14 Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Honglou meng Sanjia ping ben*, 1: 3. Henceforth referenced in the text as *Sanjia*.

德」也。說石頭，「新民」也。以《大學》評《紅樓》，我亦自覺迂闊煞人。<sup>15</sup>

However unlikely, this is the line Zhang Xinzhi will stick to. It is proclaimed early on in his “Dufa” or statement of interpretive principles: “The *Story of the Stone* is a book that sets forth the latent patterns of nature and reason (*xingli* 性理). In this it traces its ancestry to the *Daxue* 大學 (The Great Learning) and derives its lineage from the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean). That is why it states, through Baoyu. ... ‘Nothing but the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong*.’ The main purpose of this book is to elucidate the teachings of the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong*” 石頭記乃演性理之書，祖《大學》而宗《中庸》，故借寶玉說……「不過《大學》、《中庸》」是書大意闡發《學》、《庸》……<sup>16</sup> “Latent patterns of nature and reason,” in Plaks’s translation of the passage, is a little verbose. *Xingli* is the premodern designation of that field of activity known today (after Westernization via Japan and academic professionalization) as *zhexue* 哲學, philosophy.

To observe Zhang Xinzhi’s method it is well to pause a moment over this proof-text. Does the book, through Baoyu, declare its fidelity to the philosophy found in *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*? In chapter 23 Daiyu comes upon Baoyu in the garden gathering up fallen flower-petals, exactly what she, coincidentally, has come out to do. Baoyu has just been reading the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記, a play that with its plot of spontaneous courtship one cannot imagine Qing-dynasty aristocratic parents putting in the hands of impressionable teenagers. Asked what he has been reading, Baoyu is embarrassed.

Daiyu asked: “What book is that?” At this question, Baoyu scrambled, not quite successfully, to hide it away, and said: “Nothing but the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*.” Daiyu said: “You just can’t stop lying to my face.”

黛玉道：「什麼書？」寶玉見問，荒得藏之不迭，便說道：「不過是《大學》、《中庸》。」黛玉道：「你又在我跟前弄鬼。」<sup>17</sup>

15 *Sanjia*: 1: 3.

16 Zhang Xinzhi, “How to Read the *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” trans. Plaks, in Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 323; “Dufa,” in *Sanjia*, 1: 2. (The *Sanjia* edition paginates the prefatory materials separately from the novel.) For a reading of Zhang Xinzhi’s commentary emphasizing his systematic references to the *Yi jing* 易經, see Rainer Lanselle, “La fille est forte. Ne pas l’épouser, ou les inforts du désir—Notes de lecture du *Rêve du Pavillon rouge*,” *Cahiers du Centre Marcel-Granet* 1 (2003): 151–93.

17 Chapter 23, in *Sanjia*, 1: 358. The parallel is also noted by Plaks, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 323 n. 6. There may be a further hint of Baoyu’s limited attainments as a scholar,

The novel stresses the antagonism between *Xixiang ji* and the venerable Classics: ashamed of reading such prurient, vulgar literature, Baoyu covers up the fact by pretending to be reading what he ought to be reading (but is not). In the novel, then, the irony is between Baoyu as he really is (a reader of erotic plays) and as he wants Daiyu to see him (as a hard-working student with impeccable reading habits). Daiyu is not deceived; she knows the two sets of texts are not interchangeable under any circumstances. There's a primary deception (*nong gui* 弄鬼) in the episode, then. Baoyu thinks he will get away with something and Daiyu calls him out. Zhang Xinzhi, however, places the line of irony differently. Commenting on Baoyu's predicament, he says: "This clearly describes a hastily blurted-out answer, but what is the book that Baoyu cannot name but must name, the book he must not name? By saying '*Daxue* and *Zhongyong*' the author makes his intentions clear. The whole of the *Honglou meng* is nothing but *Zhongyong* and *Daxue*" 此固形容倉猝語，但何書不可說而必說，寶玉必不說之書？曰《中庸》、《大學》，作者之意可知矣。一部《紅樓夢》不過是《中庸》、《大學》。<sup>18</sup> In the novel, the ironic depiction of insincerity opposes erotic fiction and classical moralizing as *antitheses*; the commentary surcharges that irony with another irony that treats them as *equivalents*. Zhang Xinzhi, on this point, makes the novel say more or less the opposite of what it was saying; but it's all the same, since the novel is, from one end to the other, for Zhang Xinzhi a colossal self-undermining lie. "Only by dwelling on the places where the narrator contradicts himself," says Zhang Xinzhi, "can you break through the emptiness. The whole book proceeds in this way" 要看他自相矛盾處，方能揉碎虛空。通部書皆是如此。<sup>19</sup> If Baoyu lies about what he's reading, he tells the truth about what he's reading; the Liar Paradox looms.

As a commentator, Zhang Xinzhi has taken on the task of demonstrating that this work of fiction, classed by some as pornography, has a redeeming hidden message. He is convinced of the urgency and importance of the task, "morally absurd" though it be. For "the *Shitou ji* is not only a book that people find

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since *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* were seen, ever since their consecration among the "Four Books" of Zhu Xi's pedagogy, as the entryway to learning.

18 *Sanjia*, 1: 358; punctuation slightly altered.

19 Zhang Xinzhi, interlinear comment on chapter 1, *Sanjia*, 1: 3. The interplay between the categories of real and unreal and the two main frame-stories enclosing the novel proper is the concern of Liao Hsien-hao's 廖咸浩 extraordinary rereading of the novel as being about Ming loyalism, for which it offers both an elegy and a critique. See Liao, *Honglou meng de butian zhi hen: guozu, yuyan yu yimin qinghuai* 《紅樓夢》的補天之恨：國族寓言與遺民情懷 (Unable to repair the heavens: nation, language, and loyalist sensibility in *Honglou meng*) (Taipei: Lianjing, 2017).

gratifying to their taste; it carves itself on people's hearts, and there it alters their basic natures to a more pernicious degree than even *Jin Ping Mei* 《石頭記》一書，不惟膾炙人口，移易性情，較《金瓶梅》尤造孽。<sup>20</sup> Harm is done because people “know only the obverse of the book, but not its reverse” 但知正面，而不知反面。<sup>21</sup> Zhang Xinzhi proposes to replace the appetizing poison of the novel's outward appearance with the wholesome nutrition of moral philosophy. But because of his ingenuity as an interpreter he succeeds, I think, in doing this without washing away the flavor of the original. “Now that the Idler of Great Tranquility has added his notes and comments, they cause the author's correct intent and the hidden side of the book to burst altogether into view, so that ‘the hearer is adequately warned and the speaker is without blame’—is this not a great wonder?” 得聞人批評，使作者正意，書中反面，一齊湧現，夫然後聞之足戒，言者無罪，豈不大妙？<sup>22</sup> Echoing the moralizing *Prefaces* to the often not very moral *Airs of the States* 國風, Zhang Xinzhi promises to work a transformation on the reader by transforming the experience of reading the book. He will translate the romance *Honglou meng*, episode by episode and remark by remark, into the moral-philosophy texts *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*.

A first step is to evacuate the representational premises of the novel. Does it depict real people and places, or places and people that we could imagine as real? “All the names of people and places in this book are puns, with divergent meanings; you have no handhold with which to grasp them” 此書凡人名，地名，皆有借音，有寓意，從無信手拈來者。<sup>23</sup> For Zhang there is no “original” behind any of the characters or events in the book, and the author is constantly reminding us of that fact. Even inconsistencies that look to be effects of distraction on the novelist's part draw from him the protest, “Some persistently try to account for every character's birthdate and verify the facts, and find that overall the ages are inexact. The author deliberately contradicts himself and makes a virtue of it; how could he have been confused?” 為諸人年歲小作周施，及考其事實，則年紀全然不對，故意以矛盾見長也。作者何嘗忽略？<sup>24</sup> Fictional realism is not to be trusted.

20 “Zhang Xinzhi ping” 張新之評, in Guo Yushi 郭豫適, ed., *Honglou meng yanjiu wenxuan* 紅樓夢研究文選 (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 1988), 81.

21 Ibid.

22 Zhang Xinzhi, “Dufa,” in *Sanjia*, 1: 2. The words “the hearer is adequately warned and the speaker is without blame” are quoted from the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Songs*. “Wonder,” *miao*, echoes Zhang Xinzhi's studio name, *Miaofu xuan*.

23 Zhang Xinzhi, interlinear comment on chapter 1, *Sanjia*, 1: 4.

24 Ibid., 1: 28.

Next, a network of puns and allusions will insistently bring the novel back whenever possible to the “reverse,” to the imputed pre-text, the message of moral duty and social-cultural renewal. See for example the comment appended to chapter 13:

I say that the core of this book is the two words “filial piety” [*xiao*] and “teaching” [*jiao*], as established in the *Daxue* and similar books. Those who disagree call the Idler a misguided pedant. But look at this chapter, how it takes Xifeng and Qinshi, such as they are, and nonetheless brings them into the same dream and in that dream [Qinshi] offers [Xifeng] counsel with the aim of ensuring that the ancestral sacrifices and the family school will continue forever, adopting exactly the sound and temper of men who, concerned for the state of the empire, sit and discuss policy. And the one who bears “blame for the decline” [i.e., Qinshi, see chapter 5] speaks, while the one who “abuses power” and “brings on disaster” [i.e., Xifeng] listens, exactly as if to act out the pertinence of “deliberation,” to quote the *Daxue*. *Qin/qing* is the “seed of passion,” or desire. But when things reach their fulfillment they turn into their opposites, they become abstract and spiritual. Thus the author says that [Qinshi], in the very moment after her death, begins an interchange between one “seed of passion” [i.e., Qinshi’s promiscuity] and the other “seed of passion” [i.e., Xifeng’s greed] and the pivot is the word “deliberation.” The stages of “resting,” “determining,” “unperturbedness,” and “repose” are all wrapped up in “deliberation.”<sup>25</sup> Qinshi was incapable of “deliberating”; that is why she is the “seed of passion” and a suicide; her death is caused [as her doctor says] by “too much worry affecting the spleen” [chapter 10]. Now “to invest ... in as much property as possible—land, farms, and houses” will regulate the spleen by strengthening the humor of Earth. To “set aside a special income” is prudent management. Thus “acquiring earth” is “acquiring wealth.” The *Daxue* is definitely a work of financial management theory; it is just a matter of seeing it with or without benevolence.

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25 The terms are drawn from the *Daxue* again: “The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end” (“The Great Learning” in James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics* [London: Trübner, 1861], 1: 356).

我言此書重「孝」字「教」字以《大學》等書為究竟，無有心者，以閒人為怪誕迂腐。看此回，鳳姐、秦氏是何等樣人，偏要寫他兩人一夢，而夢中叮嚀，乃為祖塋家塾計長久，一若與人家國而論道氣象。而造釁開端者言之，弄權致禍者聽之，是蓋演《大學》一「慮」字也。秦為情種，乃即人欲，物極則反，仍歸虛靈，故作者言於即死之後，見這情種與那情種相為倚伏，其轉機在一「慮」字，「知足」、「定」、「靜」、「安」逐層工夫，一「慮」字周匝之矣。秦氏不能慮，故為情種，為自殺，而定其死於「思慮傷脾」之一言。今言置莊天地畝，無非理脾也，乃「有土」；備錢糧供給，無非理財也，乃「有土此有財」。《大學》固理財之書，視仁與不仁而已……<sup>26</sup>

Zhang's reading-method pits itself against what most readers must think is the essence of a novel, the fact that it is about people, their lives and conversations. For Zhang, character is structural, relational, relative, divisible. Every major person in the book is the shadow of a concept or a word, or exists as a projection of features of another character in the book. Persons are nothing other than personifications. Chapter 13 offers several opportunities to put this reading protocol into practice:

Here occurs a roster of the Jias, to demonstrate what a flourishing family they are. Where their names contain allusions, I have added notes in this commentary. Where their names simply derive from the names of people, from literary texts, from words for gems or herbs, this is mere elaboration and there is no need to force a special meaning out of them.

賈氏族人總提，言其盛也。其名義有事跡者則有評在本傳，餘不過人文玉草，各從其類數衍而已不必強為解釋。<sup>27</sup>

Qinshi's maid Gem commits suicide after her mistress's death, an event taken by the Jia family as evidence of extreme loyalty. Jia Zhen decides to have her encoffined alongside Qinshi as if she were his own granddaughter. Another maid, Jewel, will stand in for Qinshi's nonexistent daughter, lead the mourning, and henceforth bear the title of *xiaojie*. Zhang Xinzhi sees systematic punning here:

The name given to Ruizhu ["Gem"] is as if to say, a demon that must be executed [*zhu*]. Many things that have been going on in the dark here

<sup>26</sup> Zhang Xinzhi, concluding comment on chapter 13, *Sanjia*, 1: 201.

<sup>27</sup> Zhang Xinzhi, interlinear comment on chapter 13, *Sanjia*, 1: 195.

will never come out; this event is a reminder of them, and Qinshi in her lifetime must have been aware that someone would see them. ... The *rui* in Ruizhu's name is the same as that in Jia Rui's name—that Jia Rui who meets Xifeng in a dream and is done to death by the harassment of Jia Rong and Jia Qiang; so [Ruizhu] stands for Xifeng. The *bao* in Baozhu's name ["Jewel"] is the same as that in Baoyu's—Baoyu who in a dream shouted out Qinshi's childhood nickname. Both of them should be executed [rather than given places of honor in the family].

瑞珠，猶言人妖當誅也。許多曖昧，唯恐不出，特作此以顯之，而秦氏生前可想見矣……前瑞珠之瑞，即賈瑞，鏡中會鳳姐而受芙蓉之毒者，則鳳姐也；此寶瑞之寶，即寶玉，太虛幻境呼可卿小名者，皆當誅也。<sup>28</sup>

Ruizhu and Baozhu are not being accused of complicity in Jia Zhen's incestuous pairing with Qinshi, at least not directly; their names are sufficient to condemn them, as the author has created them as labels for the improprieties on the Ningguo side of the house. They are semiotic puppets. Minor characters, one might think, exist for just that sort of purpose; but Zhang Xinzhi's hermeneutic net wraps around bigger fish as well.

Shi Xiangyun suddenly appears, and in this chapter of all places! Xiangyun is one of the book's command centers. She is a shadow cast by the composite personality of Baoyu, Daiyu, and Baochai; thus she can dress in boys' clothes, and it falls to her to expound the theory of *yin* and *yang* [in chapter 21]. Her name has the connotation of *xiaoxiang yunmeng* ["clouds and dreams of the Xiao and Xiang river valleys," referring to short-lived sexual encounters between goddesses and men]. Omitting the word "dream" makes it a riddle. Thus the poem in the *Main Register of the Beauties of Jinling* [in chapter 5] contains the words: "The Xiang flows on and the Chu clouds fly away."

突出史湘雲亦在此回。湘雲亦夢中人主腦，寶、黛、釵三人共為一影身者，故好作男子裝，又有陰陽一理之談。名義取瀟湘雲夢，乃「夢」字歇後語，故冊中詩有「湘江水逝楚雲飛」之詞。<sup>29</sup>

28 Zhang Xinzhi, interlinear comments on chapter 13, *Sanjia*, 1: 196–97.

29 Zhang Xinzhi, interlinear comment on chapter 13, *Sanjia*, 1: 198.

To fold a lively three-dimensional character in this way to the dimensions of a dictionary reference may seem to destroy the work of fiction. Or else it can spur us to admire the craft and imagination that can breathe such life into the bare traces of words. Zhang Xinzhi is not monomaniacally devoted to the reduction of stories to concepts. He often pauses to applaud the author's genius: "Extraordinary!" he exclaims, or "That's odd," or "Like a picture!" The mimetic texture of the narration is not there simply to be punctured. Between author and commentator takes place a dialogue not exempt from rivalry.

Zhang Xinzhi relies on the term "the author" (*zuozhe* 作者) to ground his judgments. "The author" has invented this captivating world of people and scenery and also laced it with hidden messages. By pointing out the messages again and again, Zhang hopes to give his profile of authorial intent plausibility. But "the author" can also be understood as a projection of exactly the same kind as his characters, when Zhang Xinzhi uses authorial irony to bring discredit to certain statements in the text or to assert that they mean the opposite of what they say. Here again Maureen Quilligan's revision of the traditional theory of allegory explains what might seem dogmatism or interpretive imposition. When Zhang Xinzhi, in pressing his case, says that "the author intended to say this, or that," we do not necessarily have to take it as a statement of historical fact—that there was, at a certain time, a particular person who, in writing the first version of *Honglou meng*, communicated this and that intention by putting the following words on paper. ... The "author" in Zhang Xinzhi's commentary is a straw man who does what Zhang needs him to do in order to support the back-translation of statements in the mode of vernacular fiction into statements in the mode of classical moral philosophy. Zhang's "author," in other words, is an agent of rewriting. Zhang, as an author himself, creates an allegory by inventing a context and a story in which the statements of the novel *Honglou meng* can be taken punningly and ambiguously, as pointing to the same referents as the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and other works of doctrine. He transforms the givens of the vernacular novel into a different kind of text, moral philosophy. The result, Zhang's commentary, is a counterpoint, hybrid or bundle consisting of (novel + moral philosophy). The *Honglou meng* is the pre-text of an allegorical text consisting of text with commentary. To present his commentary as credible, however, Zhang must also assert that the author of the *Honglou meng*, in writing the work, was himself rewriting a pre-text. One must imagine the novelist starting with a pre-text, classical Confucian moral philosophy, and rewriting it into the form of a vernacular love story, resulting in a work that most readers know only as a love story but which the well-advised reader can perceive is really the hybridized (moral philosophy + love story).

To sum up, then, Zhang's own text is a composite structure (novel + commentary) structure where the first subpart, the novel, is itself a composite of (novel + moral philosophy). The author of the *Honglou meng* and its commentator mirror each other's movements: they perform the same interpretive acts, but in opposite directions (moral philosophy → narrated love story *versus* narrated love story → moral philosophy), like the contrary motion or crab canons of baroque music. Whether or not the *Honglou meng* was actually written to an allegorical program (something that we can never know), Zhang Xinzhi's rewriting certainly results in one. Primordial truth is no part of the matter; the allegory is something that happens through a process of literary production.

We are used to see vernacular narrative emerging out of classical-language narrative. We recognize this pattern sometimes in the specifics of textual provenance: novels that present themselves as *yanyi* 演義, "expansion and elaboration" from a baseline of historical fact; the notion of the fiction genre as *baiguan xiaoshuo* 稗官小說, "the small talk of minor officials" inscribed in the margins of orthodox history; fiction as vulgar entertainment set next to the respectable texts of education and public service. Sometimes we see it in the longer and larger developments of literary history: the classical-language story giving way, over the centuries, to vernacular long-form fiction resembling the novels of twentieth-century *baihua* 白話 literature. Rewriting, in these typical cases, occurs in one direction, from classical to vernacular, in keeping with the general tendency of Chinese literary history as it has been outlined by modernist scholarship. With Zhang Xinzhi's commentary we have the atypical inverse: the translation or back-translation of a vernacular fictional text into the language and concerns of a classical text.<sup>30</sup> The destination text is not only in classical language, but moreover belongs to a non-narrative type of text that stands as far from fiction as possible in the premodern Chinese system of genres. The enterprise is, to be sure, against the trend, and its motivations elusive. Jorge Luis Borges, in a story that some have taken to be nihilistic or absurdist, invites us to imagine a country where "the critics often invent authors: they select two dissimilar works—the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Thousand and One Nights*, say—attribute them to the same writer and then determine most scrupulously the psychology of this interesting *homme de lettres*."<sup>31</sup> It is no refutation

30 For other kinds of interchange between classical and vernacular language in Chinese fiction, see Saussy, "Unspoken Sentences."

31 Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 13.

of Zhang Xinzhi's undertaking to put him among the Tlönian critics. Stranger things have been known to happen in the vicinity of the *Honglou meng*.<sup>32</sup>

### Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Barbara Bisetto, Rainier Lanselle, and the Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale (CRAO) for hosting the 2017 workshop on vernacular writing at which this essay was first outlined, and to the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin where it was completed. I am grateful to Stephen West and Tina Lu for many conversations about the *Honglou meng* commentary tradition.

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32 With this essay I wish to thank Bill Nienhauser for nearly forty years of friendship and encouragement—which happen to be, more or less, the forty years of my keeping company with *Honglou meng*. Bill has been engaged with *Shiji* for about the same length of time. Maybe, lurking in the wings, there's an allegorical commentator who can show that these two great narratives are equivalent.

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# Curriculum Vitae of Professor William H. Nienhauser, Jr.

William H. Nienhauser, Jr. 倪豪士

William H. Nienhauser, Jr. 倪豪士 (b. 1943) is married with two children and three grandchildren. After three years in the U.S. Army, he majored in Chinese literature at Indiana University and Bonn University receiving his BA in 1966 (summa cum laude), his MA in 1968, and his PhD under Professor Liu Wuji 柳無忌 in 1972. After a year as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of German at Indiana University, Nienhauser joined the faculty of the Department of East Asian Language and Literature (University of Wisconsin); he was promoted to Full Professor in 1983 and was Halls-Bascom Chair Professor of Chinese Literature there from 1995 until his retirement (Emeritus since 2020); he also taught or held research grants in Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, the UK and Germany. His publications include the *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (2v.), 9 volumes of translations from the *Shiji* (*Grand Scribe's Records*, 1994–2021) as well as studies of *P'i Jih-hsiu* (Pi Rixiu) and *Liu Tsung-yuan* (Liu Zongyuan), and the *Biographical Dictionary of Tang Dynasty Literati* (2022), in addition to more than 100 articles and reviews. Nienhauser was a founding editor of *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) and served the journal until 2013 as co-editor. He has held grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Japan Foundation, the Fulbright Program, the German Research Foundation, Committee on Scholarly Communication with China, the Center for Advanced Studies (Munich), and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In 2003 he was awarded a Forschungspreis (Research Prize) for lifetime achievement from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and in 2020 received the Special Book Award of China.

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**CHEN ZHI**, PhD (1999), University of Wisconsin at Madison, is president of Hong Kong Chu Hai College, Chair Professor and Director of Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, Hong Kong Baptist University. Editor of *Jao Tsung-I Library of Sinology*, *Bulletin of Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology*, *Old World Journal of Ancient Africa and Euro-Asia*, *Ancient Languages and Civilizations*.

ISBN 978-90-04-72240-8



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ISSN 2667-3770  
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