



Lasting Ephemera: The Culture of Marginalia in Mid-Song Dynasty China (1050-1200)

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**Lasting Ephemera: The Culture of Marginalia
in Mid-Song Dynasty China (1050–1200)**

A dissertation presented

by

Chen Liu

to

The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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Lasting Ephemera: The Culture of Marginalia in Mid-Song Dynasty China (1050–1200)

Abstract

This dissertation explores the transformations in the boundaries of Chinese literary landscape during the Song dynasty (960–1279) by examining the emergence of a group of new genres such as letterets 簡, *tiba* colophons 題跋, remarks on poetry 詩話, and *biji* 筆記. These marginalia texts, casual in style, diverse in content, and rarely circulated widely in public before the Song, gained remarkable popularity from mid-eleventh century onwards and were compiled and published in large quantities. By tracing the textual history of these writings within the socio-political, intellectual and cultural contexts of the time, I argue that these genres flourished because they provided an alternative, non-public discursive space that was largely unpenetrated by the literary censorship that stormed traditional genres such as poetry. Given their restricted circulation without the expectation of publication, literati could dispense with certain moral judgments when writing in these genres and freely articulate their thoughts on subjects that were considered inappropriate for the more formal genres. In addition, following the cataclysmic Northern-Southern Song transition, people increasingly appreciated these writings as unembellished representations of literati life from the past era. Such nostalgia, coupled with the proliferation of printing during the Southern Song, stimulated a fervor among authors, compilers and publishers to amass these writings and set them to print, thus securing their establishment as new genres.

Drawing sources from original manuscripts, inscriptions on objects and artworks, as well as transmitted collections, my inquiry weaves together three interlocking themes: first, the contents, styles, and aesthetics that came to define these miscellaneous writings; second, the impact of the transition from manuscript culture to print culture on the production, transmission and reception of these texts; lastly, the changing political and intellectual milieu from late Northern to early Southern Song. To that end, Chapter 1 begins by looking at letterets, and argues that a hierarchical circulation network for these texts made possible an exclusive community of writers and readers, as well as the formation of unique aesthetic tastes in Song epistolary culture. Chapter 2 examines *tiba*, a type of short notes akin to the colophon in Western manuscripts but with a much wider range of target subjects, both tangible and intangible. By probing *tiba*'s functions of framing and replacing its subjects, I reveal the material basis of its transformation from a type of inscriptive writings *on* specific objects to a more general genre *about* objects and personal experiences. Chapter 3 examines "remark on poetry," and argues that it flourished in the hands of the transitional generation of writers who attempted to redefine the values of poetry against the draconian intellectual environment of the day. Chapter 4 looks at anecdotal writings or *biji*, particularly those that focus on representing the fall of the Northern Song. In contrast to other formal genres such as poetry and official history, *biji* constituted an indispensable venue for the transitional generation to make sense of and offer personal reflections on the traumatic dislocations of their time. Overall, this dissertation paints a dynamic picture of how a group of marginalia texts originally meant to be ephemeral adopted add-on cultural values and became lasting mementos of a lost era, and how generic categories, aesthetic yardsticks, and the very meaning of "literature" evolved as a result of emerging modes of textual transmission.

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Prologue

Centering the Marginalia

Introduction

Imagine yourself as a literary scholar a hundred years from now. By then, the Internet will be transformed, and many of the media of writing as we know today may no longer exist. Looking back at our age, you would like to account for the new writing space opened up by Twitter, an online platform that has drawn the largest number of writers and readers in early twenty-first century. After dashing out several obvious features of the Tweets, such as its brevity and instantaneous circulation, you find it rather difficult to come up with an accurate definition similar to those used for other genres, such as poetry and drama, to account for the textual features of these writings. You then dive into the historical database and try to read as many Tweets as possible, but soon concede to the fact that it will take more than your lifetime to even finish reading the Tweets produced in a single day. Finally, you come to realize that the key feature that defines this group of texts is the very platform that engendered it, Twitter.com, which created entirely new modes of writing, reading and sharing texts, and brought into question the very definition of “literature.”

In many ways, the world of Twitter described above resembles what I will examine in this dissertation: the miscellaneous prose writings of premodern China, such as *biji* 筆記, *tiba* 題跋, *xiaojian* 小簡, *shihua* 詩話, *cihua* 詞話, *yeshi* 野史, etc. These texts, generally short in length and written with a distinct sense of casualness and immediacy,¹ were rarely circulated within the conventional venues of transmission for the more traditional genres. More importantly, these texts are highly eclectic in nature, encompassing such a wide range of contents, styles, and forms that it is often difficult to attribute them to any single particular genre. Some of them are characterized by their distinct formal features, others by their occasions of composition, and yet others by the categories under which they were pigeonholed in literary collections. As such, similar to the oversimplified but highly likely scenario depicted above, we as literary historians of a later age also face the conundrum of coming up with an accurate and comprehensive definition to account for these non-traditional writings.

In this dissertation, I examine this messy yet exciting textual world during the Song dynasty (960–1279), a transformative period in their formation and flourishing. In particular, from early twelfth century onwards, these texts, which were previously considered marginal in the literary landscape, gained remarkable popularity and were compiled and published in large quantities. My exploration is guided by the following key questions: How did these new genres emerge out of the miscellaneous textual world in Song dynasty

¹ To borrow Michael Fuller's definition, "immediacy" here carries a sense of being "unmediated" and "what comes directly before the mind;" see idem., "Pursuing the Complete Bamboo in the Breast: Reflections on a Classical Chinese Image for Immediacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53.1 (Jun. 1993): 5–23.

China? What literary values were developed and negotiated in the new discursive space enabled by these emerging genres? And ultimately, how does an understanding of these texts inform us on the fundamental concept of “genre,” as well as on the constantly shifting meaning of “literature” in the Chinese tradition?

Marginal Texts and Evolving Boundaries of the Chinese Literary Landscape

In this dissertation, the term “marginalia” is used to highlight two fundamental features of the body of texts under examination.² First, it points out the fact that these writings lie outside of the realms of established literary genres, such as poetry and various forms of formal prose. In that sense, these texts are conceptually the “other,” the extraneous, and the uncharted territories in the literary landscape. While this negative definition seems to suggest a well-defined boundary between these two textual worlds, the demarcation between them is not always so clear-cut. In some way, this textual world resembles the top surface of a latte, with the traditional genres being the frothed milk floating in the center and the marginalia being the surrounding espresso. While at any point in time there seems to be a recognizable boundary between the two, it is constantly morphing in shape, forming

² While there exists no direct counterpart in the Chinese language for the term “marginalia”, several terms express similar ideas. The most commonly used is “*za*” 雜, which means mixed or miscellaneous, and is often used as a loosely defined textual “trash bin” to assign writings that do not fit into any conventional category. For example, Ouyang Xiu’s collection contains a category named “*za tiba*” 雜題跋, and the category of “*zawen*” 雜文 can be found in many of the Song authors’ collections. Another term used is “*cancong xiaoyu*” 殘叢小語, or “leftover mess and minor words,” which highlights the marginal nature and the often short length of these miscellaneous texts. The most vivid among all is the beautiful metaphoric term used by some writers in late imperial China, “*lingji sui jin*” 零璣碎錦, which means “scattered beads and fragmented brocade.”

new patterns, and crossing over into the territory on either side. Such generic borderline is a hallmark of the flexible nature of marginalia and of its fluid relationship with other established genres. The second distinctive feature of these texts refers to their physical conditions and modes of transmission. In some instances, these texts are attached to the margin of another object such as a scroll of painting or calligraphy; in other cases, they could be casual notes or commentaries jotted down on a separate piece of paper. In either case, their paratextual and marginal nature is unmistakable. As such, they often remain scattered, and are not expected to be circulated in public or preserved as literary creations.

As a consequence of these features, these marginalia texts are rarely considered appropriate or worthy to be incorporated into the “collected works” 别集 of their authors. Such act of incorporation carries far-reaching significance, since the preservation of writings for posterity has long been considered in pre-modern China as one of the three ways through which one could leave his mark in this world and become “immortal:” worth, works, words 立德、立功、立言.³ While the cultivation of one’s moral worth and the meaningful works he accomplishes in his lifetime do come before his words, it is the words, especially written words, that constitute the means by which the previous two accomplishments could be transmitted through time. Given the tremendous importance the Chinese attaches to the written words, great attention and efforts have been paid to the

³ This articulation was made by Shusun Bao 叔孫豹 (?-538 BCE) and recorded in *Zuozhuan* 左傳; see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 annot., *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, rev. ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1087-88. The translation used here follows that of Hu Shih 胡適. Note the specific order of these three ways to achieve immortality, which cannot be switched.

compilation and preservation of one's writings, either during his own lifetime or posthumously. However, when it comes to passing down to posterity, not all writings are considered equal. Writings that attest to one's moral qualities, such as commentaries on classics and histories or political treatises, are always readily preserved. As for literary writings, poetry is often considered to be a reflection of one's inner virtues, and is thus held in high regard. Other forms of prose and verse such as rhapsody are also regularly preserved. The marginalia writings, however, are rarely included in such collections. Even in cases where they were included, they were often put under different categories, as a casual perusal of some of the major bibliographies of pre-modern China would reveal, indicating a lack of shared understanding of the generic definitions of these texts.⁴

Despite their minor and peripheral status, these marginalia texts nonetheless hold unique appeals and values on their own. Together, they represent a distinct discursive space that was opened up during the Song and continued to be part of the literary landscape throughout late imperial China. The boundaries of this literary landscape are not fixed, as many of these texts gradually became accepted as indispensable categories in literary collections. It is such shifts in generic definitions and the judgment of literary value

⁴ For example, in *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目, *biji* texts are scattered among various categories such as "miscellaneous histories" 雜史 and "geographies" 地理 under the "Histories" 史 branch and "miscellaneous schools" 雜家 and "*xiaoshuo*" 小說 under the "Masters Literature" 子 branch. This is in fact a reflection of the difficulty faced by Chinese bibliographers in pigeonholing these marginalia texts within the classical tradition of bibliography, which has over time developed a sophisticated, multi-layered system to keep track of and categorize all extant writings. However, there always exist texts that simply do not belong to any category, no matter how hard they tried. To resolve such conundrums, bibliographers either had to create small and loosely defined sub-categories, or subsume all these texts under one "trash bin" category termed "*za*" as previously mentioned. Such strategy is the bibliographical equivalent of how our literary histories deal with these miscellaneous texts.

that will be the focus of this dissertation. An understanding of this transformation will in turn inform us on the changing meaning of “literature” in the Chinese tradition.

Political, Cultural and Intellectual Milieu of Song China

In order to better appreciate the historical contexts of the emergence of these marginalia texts, a brief survey of the political, social and cultural currents of the time is warranted. More specifically, we zoom in to the approximately 150-year period from mid-eleventh century to the end of twelfth century. This period, in addition to straddling the Northern-Southern Song transition, witnessed the blossoming of literary learning, shifts in the roles of traditional genres in the public realm, as well as the historic transition from manuscript culture to print culture. The convergence of these themes during this period stimulated the burgeoning of the genres under our examination.

The rise of literati and literati culture

Around one hundred years after its founding in 960, the Song dynasty had established a solid basis for a prosperous empire that many scholars believed to be the pinnacle of cultural development in Chinese history.⁵ By mid-eleventh century, the economy of the empire was developing steadily, social orders were restored, and the powers of large

⁵ The most famous among all is perhaps Chen Yinke’s 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) definitive statement “The culture of the Chinese people, after thousands of years of evolution, reached its peak during the Song” 華夏民族之文化，歷數千載之演進，造極於趙宋之世。See idem., “Deng Guangming ‘Songshi zhiguan zhi kaozheng’ xu” 鄧廣銘宋史職官志考證序, in *Chen Yinke ji: Jinmingguan conggao erbian* 陳寅恪集·金明館叢稿二編, 3rd ed. (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2015), 277.

military clans were kept under a tight leash. Commerce flourished, highly urbanized cities emerged, and education was widespread. Moreover, a sophisticated bureaucratic system was put in place to manage an unprecedentedly large cohort of officials from diverse backgrounds.⁶ In order to select the best talents for officialdom, policies that encourage literary learning were implemented, and individuals from humble backgrounds were given an equal chance to enter officialdom by passing the civil service examination, a meritocratic selection system considered by Frederick W. Mote to be the “defining social institution” of imperial China.⁷ Those who did enter civil service can then aspire to effect positive changes in public policies and societal ethos. As a result of such social mobility, the pursuit of an official career via learning and examination became a primary choice for educated elites, which in turn fostered a shared admiration for learning and an interest in culture from all social strata.⁸ It was against such backdrop that the group of literati 文人 as well as literati culture gradually took shape.

The flourishing of literati culture laid the foundation for much of the cultural and artistic efflorescence of later ages, as well as the Neo-Confucian transformation of China’s

⁶ For a survey of the structure, maintenance and evolution of the Song bureaucracy, see Winston W. Lo, *An Introduction to the Civil Service of Sung China: With Emphasis on Its Personnel Administration* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987).

⁷ Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 274.

⁸ For an overview of the Song education and examinations system, see John W. Chaffee, “Sung Education: Schools, Academies, and Examinations,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, pt. II, *Sung China, 960–1279*, eds. John W. Chaffee and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 286–320, while his classic *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) remains the best account of the socio-cultural impact of the civil service examination during the Song. In addition, for aspects of the examination related to the school system of the time, see Thomas H.C. Lee, *Government Education and Examinations in Sung China* (New York: St. Martin’s/Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1985).

ancient heritage.⁹ Among the many ways of characterizing the literati culture of the Song, three features are most pertinent for our purpose. First is the central stage occupied by politics in shaping the life choices and trajectories of literati, or scholar-officials 士,¹⁰ who considered serving in the court to be their lifelong goal, and that a political career was the best way to pursue their ideals of personal cultivation as well as achieve peace and prosperity for “all under heaven.” As Yu Ying-shih astutely points out, the scholar-official class “was not only the main cultural body but also, to a certain extent, the main political body 政治主體” of the Song, and “displayed more political initiatives than those during the preceding Han and Tang dynasties as well as the subsequent Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.”¹¹ Therefore, a wide range of aspects of Song literati’s lives revolved around and were to some extent dictated by their official roles and duties.

Second, Song literati formed close-knit communities among themselves. Compared to their counterparts in the Tang dynasty (618-907), the role of the leading figure of the group was more prominent, and his connections and interactions with his followers or disciples were more intimate. In the formation and functioning of these literati communities, both the

⁹ For an insightful analysis of the multifaceted influence of Neo-Confucianism on Chinese society, politics, and belief system from the Song onwards, see Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

¹⁰ The terms “literati” and “scholar-officials” are often used interchangeably to denote the same group of people, but as Peter Bol points out, they carry slightly different yet important implications especially with regard to the social element they represent. For an insightful analysis of the historical evolution and relationship between these concepts, see idem., *“This Culture of Ours:” Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 32-75.

¹¹ Yu 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 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004), 1. Yu’s *magnum opus* provides the most thorough examination to date of the interactions between Neo-Confucianism and the political culture of Song China, as manifested through members of the scholar-official class such as Zhu Xi.

self-identification of the central figure and recognition from others in the social and literary contexts played important roles. In particular, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007-1072) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) were the two centers among the literati of the Northern Song, while Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) was the pivot during the Southern Song. All three, together with the communities around them, were key in shaping the literary landscape and cultural memory of the Song.

The third key feature of Song literati culture concerns the rise of collecting and connoisseurship as passionate pursuits among literati,¹² and together with it the increasingly frequent interactions between literati (especially those with painting and calligraphic talents) and their admirers or fans. Their popularity derived from an increased obsession with material objects of aesthetic and cultural values, which was articulated in as well as shaped by an emerging discourse on material ownership. In particular, towards late Northern Song, the appreciation of the beautiful, the exotic and the wondrous has emerged as an alternative aesthetics to the pursuit of the meaningful, the moral and the useful in traditional discourse on similar objects.¹³ Developing in parallel was an aesthetics of the mundane, as quotidian or even trivial items and activities in daily life received increased

¹² For an in-depth examination of such activities among Song literati, see for example Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 76-101.

¹³ This topic is thoroughly analyzed in Ronald Egan's *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006). Although the main concerns and period of interest of this book are slightly different from ours, the textual spaces it examines overlap with ours to some extent. This work therefore provides an excellent platform from which to embark on our study.

attention from literati, and were portrayed in poetry, prose and painting in unprecedented ways.¹⁴

In the intellectual realm, Song literati made intense efforts to redefine their relationships with the legacy of the past.¹⁵ Among them, one prominent theme was to re-assess the authoritativeness of past interpretations of classical texts. In that respect, Ouyang Xiu was one of the pioneering voices who, in his *Shi benyi* 詩本義, or *Original Significance of the Classic of Poetry*, dissembled China's long hermeneutical tradition of the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經 into four layers: the original meaning of the poet, the duty of the officials in charge of collecting the poems, the intention of past sages, and lastly the interpretive efforts of later scholars. By dissociating the works of commentators before the Song from the original texts, Ouyang opened the possibility that contemporary readers such as himself in fact stood on equal ground with previous commentators in making sense of the original significance of classical texts. With such authority and confidence, Ouyang Xiu established a legitimacy to challenge the intellectual legacy of the past with his own interpretations and judgments.

¹⁴ This inclination was first pointed out by Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 using mainly Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 and Ouyang Xiu as examples; see idem., *An Introduction to Sung Poetry*, trans. Burton Watson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 14–19. Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 also raised similar points about Mei in his *Songshi xuanzhu* 宋詩選注, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1989), 14–15. For more nuanced analyses of this trend focusing on the works of Ouyang Xiu, see Colin Hawes, “Mundane Transcendence: Dealing with the Everyday in Ouyang Xiu’s Poetry,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (Dec. 1999): 99–129; and Zhu Gang 朱剛, “‘Richanghua’ de yiyi jiqi juxian: Yi Ouyang Xiu wei zhongxin” “日常化”的意義及其局限—以歐陽脩為中心, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 2 (2013): 51–61.

¹⁵ The intellectual implications of the Song people’s pre-occupation with the antiquity is insightfully analyzed in Peter K. Bol, “When Antiquity Matters: Thinking about and with Antiquity in the Tang–Song Transition,” in *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization*, eds. Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2008), 209–235.

Many Song scholars later shared such attitude, for it not only did not undermine the status of antiquity, but in fact raised its significance by redefining its meaning and relevance.

When it comes to the literary arena, the Song dynasty was an age when literati became increasingly aware of the activity of writing and the power of words. Echoing his efforts in the intellectual realm, Ouyang Xiu advocated for the writing style of “classical prose” 古文, a plain and simple style inspired by the writings of pre-Qin times and previously championed by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) during the Tang. These efforts in redefining one’s relationship with the past led to many changes in literary practice, such as the legitimization of using one’s personal life experiences as sources of reference in writings. The Song was also an age when the fundamental relationships between the writer, the world, and writing were re-evaluated. One example of such change is the rising interest in various paratextual accounts of poetry and poets, which flourished along with the art of poetry and the poetic culture. Such interest could be traced back to several literary trends before the Song, including the tradition of anecdotal records on topics such as the circulation of poetry, the life experiences of poets, and the making and interpretation of poetry, for which Meng Qi’s 孟啟 *Benshi shi* 本事詩 was a pioneering example.¹⁶ As the demand for these paratextual accounts grew, the genre flourished as well.

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that poets themselves were often the origin of such paratextual information. For example, they would take control over the understanding of their poems by writing long titles, prefaces, or even interlineal annotations for their works. Du Fu 杜甫 and Bai Juyi 白居易 exemplify such practice of self-commentating among Tang poets, while among poets of the Song Su Shi stands out for his continuation of such tradition, for example in his “Dongpo bashou” 東坡八首.

Such cultural backdrop sets the stage for us to explore, in this dissertation, the flourishing of some of the marginalia texts such as *shihua*, *tiba* and *biji*. Our focus will be placed on how these texts both reflect and are inspired by Song literati's newly acquired aesthetics, how shifting evaluation of literati's life experiences shaped their writings, and how the appreciation of material things led to re-definition of the human-object relationship.

Politics, literature, and the demarcation of textual spaces

As pointed out earlier, the literary world of the Song was very much intertwined with the political world of the time. As a series of major policy reforms and political movements that directly impacted literature unfolded, Song literati developed a heightened awareness of the political implications of writings, especially those in traditional genres such as poetry and official history. The first event that triggered concerns over the value of particular genres was the court debate regarding the track of "poetry and rhapsody" 詩賦 in the civil service examination. In particular, poetry has traditionally been perceived as a direct reflection of the personality and moral traits of the individual, and thus useful in selecting talents for officialdom since the Tang dynasty. The debates began in 1069 when officials such as Han Wei 韓維 (1017-1098), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085), and Su Shi presented memorials in court criticizing the various problems of keeping the track in the examination. The track was abandoned in 1072 when Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) instituted a new school curriculum using textbooks that he and his associates prepared, and re-designed the examination subjects accordingly to fit the ideals proposed

in his “New Meanings of Three Classics” 三經新義, leading to significant changes in literati’s conception of poetry in both literary and political realms.¹⁷ Although the track was reinstated in late Northern Song and continued throughout the Southern Song, its importance was never the same again.¹⁸

The political events that had an especially profound and lasting impact on literati’s attitudes towards literary genres were the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial 烏臺詩案 and the series of official bans on literary writings during late Northern Song. As the political atmosphere became increasingly draconian after the prolonged factional struggle following the disputes surrounding Wang Anshi’s New Policies 新法,¹⁹ the infamous Crow Terrace Poetry Trial broke out in 1079, during the reign of Emperor Shenzong.²⁰ The main figure indicted in the Trial was Su Shi, who was accused of offenses including “great irreverence toward the Emperor”, and the incriminating evidence was none other than his own poems

¹⁷ For an analysis of the impact of such reform on the literary arena, see Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書, “Lun Beisong keju gaizhi yu Nansong wenxue zouxiang” 論北宋科舉改制與南宋文學走向, *Xin Song xue* 新宋學 1 (2001): 61–73.

¹⁸ In fact, the track continued to be part of the civil service examination throughout late imperial China, but students passing this track were no longer considered as the best candidates for officialdom.

¹⁹ This episode in Song history has been insightfully analyzed in Ari Daniel Levine, *Divided by a Common Language: Factional Conflict in Late Northern Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008). For an in-depth account of the repercussions of factional struggle on the literary arena of the Northern Song, see Shen Songqin 沈松勤, *Beisong wenren yu dangzheng* 北宋文人與黨爭 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1998).

²⁰ The “Crow Terrace” was another name for the Censorate 御史臺, which presided over the Trial. For an overview of the political, legal, literary, and material cultural aspects of the Trial, see Charles Hartman, “Poetry and Politics in 1079: The Crow Terrace Poetry Case of Su Shih,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 12 (1990): 15–44; idem., “The Inquisition against Su Shih: His Sentence as an Example of Sung Legal Practice,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113 (1993): 228–243; Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994), 27–53; and Uchiyama Seiya 內山精也, *Chuanmei yu zhenxiang: Su Shi jiqi zhouwei shidafu de wenxue* 傳媒與真相: 蘇軾及其周圍士大夫的文學, trans. Zhu Gang 朱剛 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 140–292.

which, due to their sarcastic phrasing, were alleged to harbor seditious intentions. As a result, Su Shi was convicted and sentenced to exile. However, the real aftershock of the Trial came only in 1105 when Emperor Huizong 徽宗, at the suggestion of Grand Councilor Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126), erected a stele inscribing the names of the so-called “Yuanyou Faction” 元祐黨人.²¹ Rather than constituting a true political faction, these 309 people, including Su Shi and most of his close friends and associates, were blacklisted by Cai in order to attack his political rivals in court. As a result of this purge, writings of the members of this Faction as well as writings sympathizing them were subject to stringent scrutiny, and in 1123 a complete ban of all writings by or related to the Faction was imposed. It was not until Emperor Gaozong’s 高宗 reign during the Southern Song was the ban finally lifted.

The Crow Terrace Poetry Trial and the Yuanyou Faction incident represent a major landmark in the development of political culture in Chinese history. Not only did they set a negative precedent on the freedom of speech, they also led to shifting perceptions of the functions and capacities of poetry, as literati adopted a heightened sense of caution when writing on potentially problematic topics, as well as when circulating these writings both in public and in private. In other words, poetry was no longer a safe venue for literati to vent frustrations or voice dissent.²² In addition to passive measures such as self-censorship or simply remaining taciturn, literati also began to explore alternative venues of writing, and

²¹ Yuanyou refers to an era (1086–1094) in Emperor Zhezong’s 哲宗 reign, during which members of the Faction were most active.

²² The changing landscape of poetic interpretation and of the conception of poetry as a means of social criticism, as reflected by the Trial, are insightfully analyzed in Yugen Wang, “The Limits of Poetry as Means of Social Criticism: The 1079 Literary Inquisition against Su Shi Revisited,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 41 (2011): 29–65.

non-traditional genres, due to their amorphous and marginal nature, presented a relatively safe haven against potential censorship by the state.²³ In this sense, a demarcation of textual spaces gradually took shape during the late Northern Song, both as a consequence of and contributed to the tug-of-war between the political and literary worlds. Over time, these miscellaneous genres became an essential alternative to the traditional genres.

The Northern-Southern Song transition and the “transitional generation”

Another landmark in the history of the Song was the Northern-Southern Song transition, a historical watershed that witnessed not only the southward shift of the economic and cultural foci of China,²⁴ but also a series of profound changes that laid the foundation for the socio-political order of the late imperial era.²⁵ Towards late Northern Song, the Song was involved in a series of border wars, first with the Tangut Xixia 西夏 and Khitan Liao 遼

²³ Another alternative venue for voicing sensitive opinions and criticisms with relative impunity was through encoding indirect poetic allusions in paintings. This expressive capacity is best illustrated in Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).

²⁴ See for example the pioneering study of Zhang Jiaju 張家駒, *Liangsong jingji zhongxin de nanyi* 兩宋經濟重心的南移, rpt. in *Zhang Jiaju shixue wencun* 張家駒史學文存 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010), 105–208.

²⁵ The importance of these changes, particularly in the composition of China’s political elites, is perhaps most eloquently championed in Robert Hartwell’s landmark study “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (Dec. 1982): 365–442. Hartwell’s view was further elaborated by other scholars such as Robert Hymes (see his *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).) Beverly Bossler, however, proposes a different interpretation in her *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, & the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998) by arguing that these shifts are to some extent made more apparent by developments in historiography. For a succinct discussion of these differing views, see Hilde De Weerd, *Competition over Content: Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127–1279)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 7.

dynasties, and then with the rising Jurchen Jin 金 dynasty, which rapidly escalated into a full-scale assault by the Jurchens on Song territories.²⁶ The war culminated in the so called “Calamity of the Jingkang Era” 靖康之難 in 1127, during which the Jurchens besieged and sacked Song’s capital city Bianliang 汴梁 (present-day Kaifeng 開封), abducted Emperor Huizong and his successor Emperor Qinzong 欽宗 and brought them to the North together with some 3,000 others, including members of the imperial clan and court officials, as well as countless treasures such as gold, silk, books and art works.²⁷ In addition, all territories north of the Huai River were also lost to the Jurchens. The Northern Song dynasty fell.

Among the few members of the imperial clan who narrowly escaped the Calamity was Prince Zhao Gou 趙構 (1107–1187), who would later ascend to the throne as Emperor Gaozong, the founding emperor of the Southern Song. During the early years of the Southern Song, the restored court, having relocated to the city of Lin’an 臨安 (present-day Hangzhou 杭州) south of the Yangtz River, strived hard to re-establish political and social orders while re-asserting ideological legitimacy and cultural confidence.²⁸ At the same time, literati needed to grapple with the question of what actually went wrong that led to such tragic fall. Many leaned towards the official court discourse, which blamed the demise of

²⁶ See Ari Daniel Levine, “The Reigns of Hui-tsung (1100–1126) and Ch’in-tsung (1126–1127) and the Fall of the Northern Sung,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, pt. I, *The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279*, eds. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 556–643 (esp. 615–622 and 627–643).

²⁷ For a vividly detailed account of this humiliating tragedy, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 450–471.

²⁸ For an overview of these efforts, see Tao Jing-shen, “The Move to the South and the Reign of Kao-tsung (1127–1162),” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, pt. I, *The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279*, eds. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 644–709.

the Northern Song on Wang Anshi and the New Policies he championed, thereby quenching any hope for further reform. While many court officials shared the wish of reclaiming the *terra irredenta* in the North, some actively engaged themselves in military and strategic planning while others harbored a more conservative outlook and expressed such wish via nostalgic writings about the previous era.

Due to the rampant chaos and disruptions, it is not surprising that the accomplishments of the transitional generation of writers had long been eclipsed by those before and after them. As traditional studies of Chinese literature tend to focus on periods of efflorescence, the early Southern Song was often considered as a dull interlude between two peak periods, the late eleventh century and the Qiandao-Chunxi 乾道-淳熙 (1165–1189) era, and thus did not receive much attention from literary scholars. In recent years, however, there have been emerging interests in the literature of this period, with several book-length studies arguing for the key roles played by the transitional generation of writers in defining some of the characteristic features of Southern Song poetry and *ci* lyric.²⁹ The efforts of these writers also paved the way for the outburst of literary talents and productivity during the Qiandao-Chunxi era, when the “Four Great Masters” of Southern Song poetry, including Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) and Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206), were active. Moreover, early Southern Song poets also exhibited an interest in the relationship between the external world as

²⁹ See for example Wang Jiansheng 王建生, *Tongwang zhongxing zhilu: Sixiang wenhua shiyu zhong de Song nandu shitan* 通往中興之路: 思想文化視域中的宋南渡詩壇 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011); Gu Youze 顧友澤, *Songdai nandu shige yanjiu* 宋代南渡詩歌研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2014); and Wang Zhaopeng 王兆鵬, *Song nandu ciren qunti yanjiu* 宋南渡詞人群體研究 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2009).

perceived by us and the overarching principles of this world usually hidden from our eyes. Such a trend began with poets of late Northern Song such as Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), and continued to exert a great impact in both the literary and intellectual realms during the Southern Song.³⁰

In addition to poetry, the newly developed textual space of marginalia genres also served as an alternative arena for the transitional generation of literati to make sense of the calamitous transition. In this dissertation, I will examine how this under-studied group of texts was used to portray and commemorate literati's experiences during the transition in a highly personalized fashion. Moreover, by examining how marginalia texts were read and appreciated in early Southern Song, I will demonstrate how images of the Northern Song were appropriated and re-shaped by Southern Song people, and that many of the literary features which later people associate with the entire Song dynasty or consider to be foundational for late imperial China in fact took form during the Southern Song. In that sense, these marginalia texts are not at all marginal to the literary history of the Song.

The flourishing of printing and shifting modes of textual transmission

³⁰ For a succinct account of the literature of this period, see Michael Fuller and Shuen-fu Lin, "North and South: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol. I, *To 1375*, ed. Stephen Owen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 465–556 (esp. 465–475). For an in-depth discussion of Southern Song dynasty poetry and poetics, see Fuller's *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), the most thorough study of the literature of the Southern Song as well as the transitional period in English to date. In this work, Fuller also critically examines how the narrative of the "Jiangxi Poetry School" 江西詩派 formed and spread in early Southern Song, which we will discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

Another important engine for the blossoming of literary culture and the emergence of generic diversity during the Song is the widespread usage and accessibility of printing. In fact, the Song was the first time in Chinese history from which so many texts were preserved, in large part as a result of being set to print.³¹ Although it is difficult to estimate the extent to which woodblock printing was used in book production, numerous evidence have indicated that books became much cheaper and knowledge more widely accessible, and in the process a new reading and writing culture was fostered.

Although printing activities already existed outside of the court and Buddhist temples during the Northern Song and printed collections were known to be circulating, it was not until the Southern Song did a market for the printed book truly flourish.³² Given the monumental loss of books sustained during the chaos of the Jurchen invasion, the court issued several edicts during the early years of the Southern Song to amass books from around the country, in attempts to rebuild the imperial collection.³³ Such demand also stimulated the rapid development of the book printing industry in the South. As social and

³¹ For general overviews of the flourishing of printing during the Song, see for example Thomas Francis Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward*, 2nd ed., rev. L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), 82–102; Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 5: *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, pt. I: *Paper and Printing*, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 159–172; and Zhang Xiumin 張秀民, *Zhongguo yinshua shi (chatu zhencang zengding ban)* 中國印刷史 (插圖珍藏增訂版), suppl. Han Qi 韓琦 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2006), 40–161. However, to date the work that offers the most in-depth analysis of Song book printing and its significance in the history of the book in pre-modern China remains Susan Cherniack's seminal study "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54.1 (Jun. 1994): 5–125.

³² See Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," and Søren Edgren, "Southern Song Printing at Hangzhou," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 61 (1989): 1–212.

³³ It is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of the books in the Northern Song's imperial collections, as recorded in the official bibliography *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目, were lost. See Chen Dengyuan 陳登原, *Gujin dianji jusan kao* 古今典籍聚散考 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), 208–211.

economic orders gradually re-established, printing workshops flourished in both cities such as Hangzhou and Jianyang 建陽 as well as local schools and academies.³⁴ For example, in Hangzhou, official book printing was done by a variety of governmental bodies, both at the central level (among which the Directorate of Education 國子監 was the most prolific) and the regional level.³⁵ The book market of Jianyang, on the other hand, was more commercially oriented and ran in accordance with consumers' tastes and preferences, distinct from the educational presses.³⁶

The easy accessibility of books also led to increasing interests among literati to build up private libraries and book collections,³⁷ as well as to engage in activities such as compiling private bibliographies and editing literary collections and anthologies.³⁸ It is estimated that a total of approximately 1,000 collected works from the Song had been compiled, of which more than 740 are extant today.³⁹ These collections cover not only traditional genres such as

³⁴ For a succinct yet highly informative overview of these activities, see Su Bai 宿白, "Nansong de diaoban yinshua" 南宋的雕版印刷, in idem., *Tang Song shiqi de diaoban yinshua* 唐宋時期的雕版印刷 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 84–110.

³⁵ Edgren, "Southern Song Printing at Hangzhou," 23–30.

³⁶ Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th–17th Centuries)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 65–146.

³⁷ See for example Pan Mei-yueh 潘美月, *Songdai cangshujia kao* 宋代藏書家考 (Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe, 1980), 129–206; and Fan Fengshu 范鳳書, *Zhongguo sijia cangshu shi* 中國私家藏書史, rev. ed. (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2009), 60–131.

³⁸ For instance, three of the most important bibliographies from the Song, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 by Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105–1180), *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 by Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (1179–1262), and *Suichutang shumu* 遂初堂書目 by You Mao 尤袤 (1127–1194) were all compiled based on private collections.

³⁹ Statistics here are based on Shen Zhihong 沈治宏, *Xiancun Songren bieji banben mulu* 現存宋人別集版本目錄 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1990). According to Zhu Shangshu, the majority of these extant collections are either official editions printed during the Southern Song or based on such editions; see idem., "Lun Songren wenji de bianke" 論宋人文集的編刻, in idem., *Songdai wenxue tantao ji* 宋代文學探討集 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2007), 211–227 (esp. 219).

poetry and rhapsody, but also the less conventional ones such as court memorial and *ci* lyric, which were often included when the grand complete collection 大全集 of the author was compiled later on.⁴⁰ Moreover, in contrast to the severe paucity of collected works of Tang dynasty writers that are also annotated by Tang people, a large number of collected works and anthologies of Song writers had been selected, annotated or commentated on by Song (especially Southern Song) people.⁴¹ These editorial and annotating activities played a critical role in the preservation of the gargantuan corpus of Song literary texts to this day.

Another area where the impact of the widespread access to books and knowledge was palpable is the civil service examination, where the ever-increasing number of students stimulated an examination-oriented market. As a result, compilation and publication of all kinds of examination preparation materials, ranging from selections of sample prose and treatises to examination manuals, occupied a central position in the Southern Song book market.⁴² All these activities contributed to a readership previously unimaginable, and thus marks the Song as a watershed in the history of the book and printing in China, with a long-lasting impact on the book culture of subsequent dynasties.⁴³

⁴⁰ See Gong Bendong 鞏本棟, “Lun Songren bieji de bianzuan, kanke yu liuchuan” 論宋人別集的編纂、刊刻與流傳, in idem., *Songji chuanbo kaolun* 宋集傳播考論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 3–30 (esp. 7–14).

⁴¹ For a discussion of this unique phenomenon as well as some of the most important Song literary collections with Song annotations or commentaries, see *ibid.*, 21–30.

⁴² This subject, as well as how the resulting changes in curricular and examination standards impacted bureaucratic and intellectual agendas of the time, are treated in detail in De Weerd, *Competition over Content: Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127–1279)*.

⁴³ This has been pointed out by many studies on the book history of late imperial China, for example Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Joseph McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

It is against such historical background that we begin our examination of the modes of transmission of the marginalia texts, as well as how such modes shaped the literary spaces of these texts during the Song.⁴⁴ In particular, as literati of the Southern Song reflected upon the fall of the North, they also made judgments about the value of its textual legacy as manifested in the various forms of writings that survived. As such, we would like to probe how the various marginalia texts from the Northern Song were amassed, compiled, circulated, accessed, and preserved during the Southern Song, and what circumstances and considerations were involved in deciding what among these writings to select and print? An understanding of these decisions will in turn inform us on the mentalities with which Southern Song people perceived and shaped the textual legacy of the previous era. In my treatment of these questions, I will rely on the approaches of traditional Chinese bibliography and the conceptual framework of categorization embodied in them, as much as the methodologies of modern book history, so as to gain the most direct access to understanding the mindsets of these compilers, editors, and publishers.

Conceptualization of “Genre” and the Writing of Song Literary History

Given the diversity of the generic landscape as demonstrated above, genre studies have been gaining increasing attention from scholars of pre-modern Chinese literature over the

⁴⁴ For representative studies of how print culture during the Song influenced the practice of other literary genres, particularly poetry, see Chang Kao-ping 張高評, *Yinshua chuanmei yu Song shi tese: Jianlun tushu chuanbo yu shi fen Tang Song* 印刷傳媒與宋詩特色-兼論圖書傳播與詩分唐宋 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2008); and Yugen Wang, *Ten Thousand Scrolls: Reading and Writing in the Poetics of Huang Tingjian and the Late Northern Song* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

years.⁴⁵ However, the ways by which marginalia texts are treated in contemporary scholarships, either as part of an overall narrative of Song literary history or as individual genres, calls for reconsideration. A quick look at some of the influential general histories of Song literature in both Chinese and English languages reveals that most of them adopt a genre/author-centric framework, and share a similar organizational structure by first delineating the overall development of the main genres such as poetry, prose, *ci* lyric, *etc.*; within each section, discussions are often threaded together by prominent authors and literati groups of the time. It is usually only towards the end is there a separate chapter or section featuring the miscellaneous genres.⁴⁶ The very structure of these literary historical accounts prevents us from achieving a holistic understanding of these texts. For one thing, grouping them into one “miscellaneous” lump after the main genres gives the impression that these texts are auxiliary and inconsequential, and have made their way into the literary history merely by virtue of their collective quantity. More importantly, artificially severing

⁴⁵ Among them, the pioneering work of Chu Binjie 褚斌傑, *Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun* 中國古代文體概論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), which touches upon most of the miscellaneous genres covered in this dissertation, remains a classic study in the field.

⁴⁶ For example, two of the mainstream histories of Chinese literature in China, the four-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 (gen. ed. Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈; Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014) and the three-volume *Zhongguo wenxue shi xinzhu* 中國文學史新著 (gen. eds. Zhang Peiheng 章培恒 and Luo Yuming 駱玉明; Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007) both divide the Song into several sub-periods, and discuss the different genres and major authors within each sub-period. Yuan’s work has one section on “*Sanwen* and *Siliu*” (散文和四六) following Southern Song poetry and *ci*, while the book by Zhang and Luo devotes only a fraction of a small section within the chapter of “Evolution of Southern Song Poetry and *Ci*” 南宋詩詞的衍化 to Yan Yu’s 嚴羽 famous remarks on poetry, *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話. A similar approach is adopted by many literary histories with a more dynastic focus, such as *Liangsong wenxue shi* 兩宋文學史 by Cheng Qianfan 程千帆 and Wu Xinlei 吳新雷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991) which, for example, subsumes brief discussions of *biji* under various sections such as “*Sanwen* Schools” 散文流派 and “*Wenyan Xiaoshuo*” 文言小說 in separate chapters. In the English world, Ronald Egan’s chapter “The Northern Song (1020–1126)” in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* is divided into nine sections, with the first seven structured roughly chronologically and focusing on major poets and prose writers, the eighth on *ci*, and the last on “‘nonliterary’ prose,” *i.e.* the miscellaneous genres.

these texts from the traditional genres without considering the connections between them misses a key feature of the generic landscape of the Song, that the discursive spaces offered by the traditional and non-traditional genres were not only supplementary to each other but also mutually shaping and defining.⁴⁷ As they pervaded and bore witness to a wide range of activities in Song literati's lives, these two textual worlds had become inextricably entangled with one another. The miscellaneous texts are, therefore, integral to the collective literary output of the Song dynasty.

As for studies that deal with these genres on an individual basis, the dominant approach is often to outline how each genre formed, grew, and flourished over time, as if it always had a well-defined identity right from the beginning.⁴⁸ Such narratives often draw clear boundaries for these texts, boundaries which did not necessarily exist for their writers and readers at the time, and hence tend to obscure the numerous interconnections that originally existed between them. Moreover, such approach fails to consider how conceptions of new genres came about, or how it became possible to talk about these texts as genres with features that everyone recognized. Such problems are perhaps epitomized by the use of certain literary works or figures as symbols for the birth of a genre. For

⁴⁷ In that respect, another way that literary historians have dealt with these miscellaneous texts is to use them as raw materials for their narratives on traditional genres, be it as backgrounds on the composition of certain works, or biographical information of a particular writer, or as sources of literary theoretical accounts. While it is almost impossible to write a literary history of the Song without using these texts as raw materials, it is also problematic if we treat them only as raw materials, as we will touch upon later.

⁴⁸ Examples of such studies include Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋, *Lidai biji gaishu* 歷代筆記概述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980); Cai Zhenchu 蔡鎮楚, *Zhongguo shihua shi* 中國詩話史 (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1988); and Zhao Shugong 趙樹功, *Zhongguo chidu wenxue shi* 中國尺牘文學史 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1999).

example, Ouyang Xiu has often been credited for founding several of the marginalia genres such as *tiba* (with his *Jigulu bazwei* 集古錄跋尾 and *Za tiba* 雜題跋 as symbol) and *shihua* (with his *Liuyi shihua* 六一詩話 as symbol). While his pioneering efforts are certainly not to be downplayed, one thing that has often been neglected is the fact that such pioneers as Ouyang were not always fully aware of how original their writings were until others recognized them as so. In other words, there is often a temporal gap between the practice of writing something novel and the recognition of such novelty. Therefore, rather than being a quantum leap forward symbolized by a representative figure or work, the birth of a new genre is often a complex and extended process that mixes creative writing, retrospective internalization, follow-up imitations, and finally the establishment of distinct features associated with the genre.

In light of these deficiencies, a different framework for understanding this marginal textual space is warranted. This framework needs to recognize that a genre entails not only a set of formal and stylistic codes, but also specific modes of transmission, including the material aspects of writing, circulating, and preserving the texts.⁴⁹ In addition, the conceptual expectations of the authors, the readers, and anybody else involved in the chain

⁴⁹ This framework is inspired by several studies of manuscript culture in medieval China, in particular Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Stephen Owen, "The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang: The Case of Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67.2 (Dec. 2007): 295–326; and Christopher Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011). All three works reveal the critical roles the media of writing and transmission have played in the formation of literature as well as of readers' tastes and judgments. For a more focused discussion of this topic, see Nugent, "Manuscript Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, eds. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yee Li and Xiaofei Tian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61–75.

of transmission is also critical, for it is through their composition, selection and re-shaping of the texts that formal yardsticks of the genre come to be formed.⁵⁰ In that sense, the establishment of a new genre can only be claimed when both the authors become conscious of its distinctive generic features and a group of such texts become regularly circulated or preserved under one named category. By doing so, this framework recognizes the different routes through which generic categories can take shape. On one hand, new textual features can emerge when authors experiment with different writing styles and forms.⁵¹ In some cases, these writings would catch the attention of other readers and writers, who would either imitate or engage in theoretical discussions of them from the author's perspective, thus leading to a "genre consciousness." On the other hand, given that authorial elaboration may be rare in the early stages of a genre's development, the relatively frequent appearance of a particular category in literary collections, anthologies or bibliographies can also be taken as a sign of genre formation. This benchmark is especially meaningful in pre-modern China, given the long tradition of bibliographical compilation and the significance of the bibliographical structure in the hermeneutical framework of educated readers. Since compilation of bibliography is always a retrospective summary of the textual world of the time, only texts that had reached certain degree of maturity, quantity, and conformity would be singled out and grouped together as a generic category.

⁵⁰ This way of thinking is best illustrated in Stephen Owen's *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), which shows that the standard account of early Chinese poetry was made through a process of "reproduction" in the hands of those who read, transmitted, performed, copied or compiled the poems.

⁵¹ Ouyang Xiu, for example, is a classic example in this respect, although many of his literary experiments ended up in nowhere.

It is with this conceptualization of genre formation in mind that we begin our exploration of how some of the miscellaneous writings previously at the periphery of the Chinese literary landscape became established generic categories in the Song. In addition to examining the process through which certain kinds of writings metamorphosed from experimental or occasional compositions to regular and conscientious practice that follow established textual and stylistic standards, we will also pay particular emphasis to the role played by the changing modes of textual production and transmission in this process,⁵² so as to portray a more comprehensive and dynamic picture of the rise of this textual world.

Outline of Dissertation

In this dissertation, a total of four representative genres from the marginalia texts will be examined in detail. Chapter 1 looks at letteret 簡, *i.e.* personal correspondences that had been written in China for a long time but had rarely been systematically compiled or circulated. I argue that a hierarchical circulation network consisting of both official and unofficial couriers made possible an exclusive space for the transmission of letterets that was relatively free from state censorship. This in turn created a close-knit community of

⁵² In recent years, scholars of Song literature have begun to pay more serious attention to the importance of textual production and circulation. In addition to Gong Bendong's *Songji chuanbo kaolun* mentioned earlier, other examples include Wang Lan 王嵐, *Songren wenji bianke liuchuan congkao* 宋人文集編刻流傳叢考 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2003), and Wang Zhaopeng 王兆鵬, *Songdai wenxue chuanbo tanyuan* 宋代文學傳播探原 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2013). In the English world, see for example Charles Hartman, "A Textual History of Cai Jing's Biography in the *Songshi*," in *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, eds. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 517-564; and Alister D. Inglis, "A Textual History of Hong Mai's 'Yijian zhi'," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser. 93.4-5 (2007): 283-368.

writers, recipients and messengers, and led to the formation of unique aesthetic tastes in the epistolary culture of Song China.

Chapter 2 examines *tiba* 題跋, a type of short notes akin to the colophon in Western manuscripts and books but with a much wider range of target subjects, both tangible and intangible. By highlighting *tiba*'s functions in framing and replacing its subjects, exploring human-object relationships, as well as representing the image of self, I reveal the material basis of its transformation from a type of inscriptive writings *on* specific objects to a more general genre *about* both objects and personal experiences. Taking into account Song literati's diverse attitudes towards material obsession in an age of rising connoisseurship, I argue that the very act of detachment from its original context constitutes the key moment in *tiba*'s "birth" as a genre.

Chapter 3 examines "remarks on poetry" or *shihua* 詩話, which took shape in mid-eleventh century but flourished in the hands of the transitional generation of writers. I argue that the role of the often invisible narrator "I," which would later become a definitive feature of the genre, is critical to understanding its development. Serving as the witness, the recorder, or the judge of poetic aesthetics, the narrator assumes authority due to its retrospective stance and allows authors to record personal memories of poetic texts as well as contexts for their interpretation. By making lists of their favored poetic masters, models and ideals, *shihua* authors also sought to actively define their relationships with and positions in the poetic tradition, while reaffirming the value of poetry against the draconian

political atmosphere of the time. In that way, these remarks on poetry became a vehicle for value preservation.

Lastly, Chapter 4 looks at anecdotal writings or *biji* 筆記, particularly those that focus on representing the fall of the Northern Song. Through comparison with other formal genres, I demonstrate how *biji* constitutes an indispensable venue that is both alternative to and intricately intertwined with the textual spaces of official history and poetry. By recognizing the value of highly personal perspectives in constructing historical narratives, *biji* provides an arena for the transitional generation to record, commemorate, and make sense of their experiences during the Northern-Southern Song transition. In addition to being personal memories, these *biji* works also stand as testaments to the attempts by Southern Song compilers, editors and readers to reflect upon the traumatic dislocations of the previous era. This dissertation concludes with a retrospective examination of the shifting meaning of “literature” in the Chinese tradition, and demonstrates how this world of marginalia texts is not supplementary but integral to our understanding of Song dynasty literature as a whole.

My study draws from a wide range of sources including original manuscripts, inscriptions on objects and artworks (such as painting and calligraphy), as well as texts in transmitted literary collections. To ensure comprehensive coverage, I also utilized digital tools to analyze and delineate trends in large textual datasets such as *Quan Song wen* 全宋文. As such, this dissertation provides a dynamic portrait of how a group of informal texts originally meant to be ephemeral adopted add-on values and became lasting mementos of a

lost era, and how generic categories, aesthetic yardsticks, and the very meaning of “literature” could evolve as a consequence of emerging modes of textual transmission. By situating this textual world within the political, intellectual and socio-cultural currents of its time, my work also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Northern-Southern Song transition, a historical watershed that had a lasting impact on the cultural developments of late imperial China.

Chapter 1

“Unburnt” Epistles: The Emergence of Letteret 簡 in Song Dynasty China

Introduction

Most of us have probably sent or received short letters at some point in our lives (be it in paper or electronic form), such as this casual three-liner:

I got your letter, and appreciate your thinking of me. It is also very comforting to hear that you are doing well recently. I don't know when we will meet; I just hope you take care of yourself.

Few of us, however, would actually consider such writings as part of our “significant works,” something that is worth publishing with the hope of passing down to posterity. Yet, some eighteen thousand such non-official letters have been preserved from the Song dynasty, a key transformative period in the history of Chinese epistolary culture. Take for example this letter written by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) to a friend, which remarkably resembles the modern-day example above:

[Your] personal messenger has arrived, [and I] humbly received your letter. [I] appreciate [your] thinking of [me]. It is also very comforting to hear that you are doing well recently.¹ I don't know [when we will] meet, I just hope you take care of yourself.²

專使至，辱書，感服存記。且審比來起居住勝，甚慰馳仰。未卜會見，惟祈保練。

Preserved in Su's literary collections together with some fifteen hundred other letters, this letter has been widely circulated and read by countless readers over the past eight hundred years. While a small fraction of the letters from the Song still exist in their original manuscript form, the majority of them survive to this day because they were reproduced in various literary collections, both hand-copied and printed, as an independent literary genre most commonly referred to as *chidu* 尺牘.³ A term that literally means a slip of bamboo or wood a foot in length,⁴ *chidu* has been taken to refer to any form of non-official letters in general. Although the practice of letter writing in China could be traced back at least to the third century BCE, it was during the Song that *chidu* was established as a regular category in literary collections.⁵ This development heralded the advent of a new epistolary culture in

¹ The two formulaic expressions 起居住勝 and 甚慰馳仰 used here literally mean "daily life is going on very well" and "it comforts my longing [for you]," and are commonly seen in many Song letters. Here, they are translated loosely as "doing well" and "it is very comforting."

² "Yu Wang Daoji ershou" 與汪道濟二首, no.1, in *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, punct. and coll. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986) [hereafter SSWJ], 59.1803.

³ The term *chidu* was often used interchangeably with a variety of other names such as *jianchi* 簡尺, *daobi* 刀筆, and *shujian* 書簡, although in the Song context the more common name for these writings is simply *jian* 簡, as will be discussed later in this Chapter.

⁴ Before paper became widely available, bamboo and wood were the main media for letters, documents and other forms of writing. See Tsuen-Hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 96–125.

⁵ For a comprehensive overview of the history of epistolary writings in China, see Zhao Shugong 趙樹功, *Zhongguo chidu wenxue shi* 中國尺牘文學史 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1999). For more focused accounts of letter writing during the Song, see the chapter "Songren shuxin" 宋人書信 in Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, *Songwen tonglun* 宋文通論 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008), 779–827; Jin

which non-official letters were conscientiously compiled and regularly published for a large readership.⁶ In comparison, at around the same time, most Europeans would have considered only letters on religious issues, often dictated by priests and penned by professional scribes, to be worthy of preservation.⁷ It was not until some two hundred years later when Petrarch rediscovered Cicero's letters did Westerners begin to pay attention to personal letters.⁸ Why, then, did people in Song China take great interest in letters such as the one quoted above, so much so that they were not only painstakingly collected and printed in large quantities but also recognized as a new literary genre altogether?

To address this question, a brief survey of the evolution of letter categories and their relationship to other literary genres is in order. Since the early medieval period, the Chinese have put forth a number of theories regarding the classification and stylistic characteristics of letters, and taken significant interests in their political, moral, and literary significance.⁹

Chuandao 金傳道, "Beisong shuxin yanjiu" 北宋書信研究 (Ph.D. dissertation, Fudan University, 2008); and Lik Hang Tsui, "Writing Letters in Song China (960-1279): A Study of Its Political, Social, and Cultural Uses" (D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2015).

⁶ In the Anglophone world, the significance of this turn in Chinese epistolary culture was first pointed out by Ronald Egan, whose pioneering study uses Su Shi's *chidu* as an example to illustrate the largely untapped potential of the massive pool of letters preserved from the Song. See idem., "Su Shih's 'Notes' as a Historical and Literary Source," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50.2 (Dec. 1990): 561-588.

⁷ For an insightful comparison between the epistolary cultures of Song China and Western Europe around the same time, see Bernard Gowers 熊雍 and Lik Hang Tsui 徐力恆, "Shi'er shiji zhongguo he Xi'ou de shuxin wenhua: Yige bijiao" 12世紀中國和西歐的書信文化——一個比較, *Beida shixue* 北大史學 20 (2016), 328-343.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this discovery, see for example Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis eds., *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 196.

⁹ Some of the earlier theoretical discussions on epistolary writings include Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187-226) *Discourse on Literature* 典論·論文 and Lu Ji's 陸機 (261-303) *Poetic Exposition on Literature* 文賦, both of which touch briefly upon letters. However, the most influential work in this respect is Liu Xie's 劉勰 (ca. 465-ca. 520) *The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* 文心雕龍, which devotes an entire chapter on

At the core of these discussions is a hierarchical system of categorizing letters according to specific requirements in both form and diction. Materials from the Six Dynasties—including anthologies, theoretical treatises, and especially instruction manuals for letters—reveal that official letters often adhere to strict formal prescriptions; in contrast, non-official letters are more flexible in terms of form. This distinction is also reflected in the ways in which these letters were passed down. Official letters are always included in anthologies or individual collections under independent categories such as *qi* 啟, *biao* 表 or *zhuang* 狀. Non-official letters, on the other hand, are mostly harbored under the general category of *shu* 書 due to the lack of clear generic features and the flexibility of their contents.¹⁰

As records of formal correspondences within the imperial bureaucratic system, it is understandable that official letters have been consciously copied and preserved throughout Chinese history. This was practiced both by the court as well as by officials (and their families) who penned them.¹¹ In comparison, the preservation of non-official letters was

“*shu*.” As pointed out by Antje Richter, these are not literary criticisms in the strict sense, as most scholars would believe, but rather constitute a more general framework that covers the usage of letters as well as political reports or documents in various occasions, written in both plain and parallel prose. See idem., *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 49–62.

¹⁰ The boundary between official and non-official letters has also undergone continuous evolution over time, and is not always clear-cut. For example, many of the *shu* pieces sent to other officials concern political or career-related issues; as such, this category sometimes includes both official and non-official letters that cannot be easily distinguished simply from their format or title. On the other hand, the conventional definition of some official letter categories are also somewhat fluid; one such example is *zhazi* 劄子, which saw significant changes during the Song. See Lik Hang Tsui, “Bureaucratic Influence on Letters in Middle Period China: Observations from Manuscript Letters and Literati Discourse,” in Antje Richter ed., *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 363–397.

¹¹ For the transmission of information and official documents within the bureaucratic system during Tang-Song times, see the great collection of studies in Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, Cao Jiaqi 曹家齊, and Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹, eds., *Wenshu, Zhengling, Xinxi goutong: yi Tang Song shiqi weizhu* 文書·政令·信息溝通: 以唐宋時期為主 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2012).

practiced in a much less regular or sustained fashion. Although compilers of anthologies and encyclopedia had been collecting non-official letters before the Song, such process was often highly selective, as only those that could serve as exemplars of the author’s moral or intellectual virtues or as models of rhetorical and literary excellence were preserved by these collections. As such, the majority of non-official letters were filtered out in the process, and even some of the most extraordinary literary figures of pre-Song times only left behind no more than a few dozens of such letters. In light of this, the drastic increase in the output of non-official letters as well as their large-scale preservation during the Song represent an intriguing and significant development in the composition and reception of epistolary writings. Such a trend can be easily visualized in **Table 1.1**, which compares the number of extant non-official letters from the Song dynasty with those from previous eras:

Period	Number of extant non-official letters	
Early medieval period (220–618)		2236
Tang (618–907)		470
Song (960–1279)	<i>Shu</i> 書	8423
	<i>Tie</i> 貼	1840
	<i>Jian</i> 簡	1473
	Others	6222
	Total	17958

Table 1.1. Total number of extant non-official letters up to the end of the Song dynasty.¹²

¹² The pre-Tang data shown here are based on Antje Richter’s detailed survey of letters preserved in Yan Kejun’s 嚴可均 *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 and Ouyang Xun’s 歐陽詢 *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (see <http://spot.colorado.edu/~richtea/table.pdf>, accessed on June 30, 2017). Data on the Tang dynasty are derived from Feng Bingwen 馮秉文, ed., *Quan Tangwen pianmu fenlei suoyin* 全唐文篇目分類索引 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001) and Wang Fengling 王鳳玲, “Tangdai shuxin yanjiu: yi Ganye, Lunwen, Lunshi shuxin wei zhongxin” 唐代書信研究：以干謁、論文、論史書信

As can be seen, the amount of non-official letters preserved from the Song during a span of 300 years is more than six-fold larger than the total amount preserved from the preceding 700 years. The difference is even more striking considering that approximately 700 of the 2236 pieces from the early medieval period were contributed single-handedly by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361)—a contribution that far exceeds that of any other figure from the pre-Song era.¹³

In addition to the sharp rise in the number of non-official letters preserved, the Northern Song also witnessed the development of new sub-genres of non-official letters that were distinct from the traditional category of *shu*. As shown in the table above, instead of *shu*, a significant number of Song letters include in their titles the specifier word *tie* 帖 or *jian* 簡. Letters with such titles would later constitute the category of *chidu* as a new genre in

為中心 (Ph.D. dissertation, Wuhan University, 2009). Data on the Song are based on Chu Ping-Tzu's 祝平次 survey of titles in *Quan Songwen* 全宋文 (unpublished personal communication) as well as entries in the Chinese Biographical Database (CBDB; <http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb/home>). Despite all efforts to ensure accuracy, a small margin of error in the final numbers tallied here should be tolerated. For example, some political letters with the word *shu* in their titles might be mistakenly included, whereas those with unconventional titles might be missed. This problem is further complicated by the existence of letters that sit at the boundary between the official and non-official categories. A more thorough examination of the monumental, 360-volume *Quan Songwen*, for example with the help of the recently published *Quan Song wen pianmu fenlei suoyin* 全宋文篇目分類索引, gen. ed. Wu Hongze 吳洪澤 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2014), will need to be conducted in order to further improve the accuracy of the statistics.

¹³ This should not be surprising, given that the superb calligraphic value of Wang's handwritings would serve as the best motivation for their preservation. Most of Wang's surviving letters are in the form of simple notes called *tie* 帖, which is a measure word or classifier for calligraphic writing. For a discussion of the topicality, phraseology, communicative functions, and other textual features of these letters, see Antje Richter, "Beyond Calligraphy: Reading Wang Xizhi's Letters," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd series, 96 (2011): 370–407; and Qi Xiaochun 祁小春, *Maishi zhifeng: Youguan Wang Xizhi ziliao yu renwu de zonghe yanjiu* 邁世之風: 有關王羲之資料與人物的綜合研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012), 71–226. Besides Wang Xizhi, Lu Yun 陸雲 is another figure from the Six Dynasties who left behind a significant number of letters. Among the Tang authors, Han Yu 韓愈, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, and Li Shangyin 李商隱 take the top three spots in having the most surviving letter pieces.

the Southern Song. Together with those that did not originally have a title ¹⁴ (*i.e.*, those categorized as “others” in the table), these letters amount to more than half of the total output from the Song. In addition to title changes, there were also subtle differences in the content and format of these letters. Such distinctions are specified in detail in Sima Guang’s 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Shuyi* 書儀, or *Letter-Writing Etiquette*, an essential instruction manual for epistolary writings and social rituals in the Song. According to this work, within the bigger group of “personal letters,” ¹⁵ the term *shu* has been taken to refer to more formal and elaborate correspondences that often touch on more serious issues; whereas *chidu* letters, also termed *shoujian* 手簡 by Sima Guang, concern more personal communications often addressed to someone of equal or inferior social status.¹⁶ Such letters are associated with the least amount of formal requirements among all letter types.

Although a variety of terms had been used across the Song to denote this new group of non-official letters, including *jian* 簡, *shoujian* 手簡, *xiaojian* 小簡, *shujian* 書簡, *jianchi* 簡尺, *chidu* 尺牘, and *daobi* 刀筆, they all emphasize the brevity of the composition and the

¹⁴ In most cases, the titles of these letters were added later when compilers or publishers put them into circulation. Since different compilers from different periods were involved in this process, these titles do not reflect a systematic classification system; nevertheless, they do provide an indicator of the evolving norms of letter categories as well as of the shifting relationship among them.

¹⁵ In this work, Sima Guang first classifies letters into four large groups based on the occasions of their composition: “memorials” *biaozou* 表奏, “official writings” *gongwen* 公文, “personal letters” *sishu* 私書, and “family letters” *jiashu* 家書. The first two groups are obviously official correspondences, whereas the latter two correspond to the “non-official letters” discussed in this chapter. The group of “personal letters” is further divided according to the status of the addressee relative to the author. See *Sima Shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀, *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 1–3, 10–11.

¹⁶ Patricia Ebrey notes that the formal distinctions proposed by Sima Guang, which are less numerous than those from the Tang, are “concerned with formulating rituals that would fit the model of the classics” and reflect “changes in etiquette that may correspond to social changes between T’ang and Sung times.” See *idem.*, “T’ang Guides to Verbal Etiquette,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2 (Dec. 1985): 581–613.

flexibility of its format. Over the course of the Northern Song, *jian* and *xiaojian* gradually became the terms that were used more and more frequently to refer to this group of letters; *chidu*, on the other hand, caught up in popularity only in the late Southern Song, and it was not until the Ming that literati widely used this term in naming their letter collections. Therefore, in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I will use the term *jian* and its closest English rendition “letteret”¹⁷ to denote these short personal letters that were rarely preserved on a systematic level before the Song, and which became a new genre that was reproduced, circulated, and read as literature from the Southern Song onwards.

By using both original manuscripts as well as transmitted texts in literary collections, I argue in this chapter that Song people became so fascinated with the letteret because they recognized their unique literary and aesthetic characteristics. In this textual space, Song literati talked about clandestine literary adventures such as privately composing a dynastic history, transformed the bitterness of exile life into joy by creating and sharing laughter, as well as had both material and spiritual exchanges with their friends and families. This space, though not fully immune to political censorship, was relatively safe and to a large extent private, thanks to the hierarchical structure of the Song postal system. In addition to the official postal network, literati also relied heavily on personal messengers, friends, family

¹⁷ This term comes from a letter that Lord Byron wrote in 1817; see Leslie A. Marchand ed. *Byron's Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1973–1994) vol. 1, Let. 25, Mar. (1976) V: 188. Similar usages in English also include “letterling” and “letterlet.” For example, Robert Southey’s letter dated December 11, 1801 opens with: “Yesterday (the day after your letterling reached me) I journeyed to Johnson’s for my friend Thady” (Orlo Williams, *Lamb’s Friend the Census-Taker: Life and Letters of John Rickman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), III: 68). Samuel Coleridge’s letter to his wife dated April 24, 1812 also starts with “Dear Sara - whom I kissed seven times in the Shape of her pretty Letterlet” (Earl Leslie Griggs ed., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–1971), III: 385).

members, and even itinerant merchants as their couriers. As such, sending letterets became not only an important medium through which words and objects flowed among literati, but also was a textual witness of such exchange network. Therefore, when people of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries meticulously sought after and assembled the manuscripts of these letterets, their efforts could be likened to the search of invaluable time capsules from a previous age: to print them in collections, to read them, and to write following their styles would be similar to entering a timeless “Republic of Letterets”¹⁸ presided over by literary giants from the past, such as Su Shi.

1.1. The Hybrid Network of Letteret Transmission

A good place to begin our discussion of Song letterets is by surveying their modes of transmission. The postal system of the Song was established largely by restoring the institutional legacy of its predecessor, the Tang, which boasted a highly sophisticated and organized courier network throughout the empire.¹⁹ In order to gain a glimpse into the efficiency of this system, we could simply turn to the many literary works from the period, such as this famous poem by Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852):

¹⁸ The term “Republic of Letters” originally refers to an intellectual community of literary figures and scholars across Enlightenment Europe; see, for example, Dena Goodman’s “Introduction” to her *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1–11. While there are many interesting similarities between this community and the network of letterets in Song China, here this term is used to highlight the significance of hand-written letters as the primary means through which intellectuals within both communities corresponded with one another.

¹⁹ For a general introduction to the postal system in Chinese history, see Lou Zuyi’s 樓祖詒 classic though slightly outdated *Zhongguo youyi fada shi* 中國郵驛發達史 (Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1940), or Chao Hsiao-hsuan’s 趙效宣 *Songdai yizhan zhidu* 宋代驛站制度 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1983) for a more focused study on the Song postal network.

長安回望繡成堆， Turn and look back from Chang'an to embroideries heaped in piles;
山頂千門次第開。 on the hill's high crest are a thousand gates standing open in rows.
一騎紅塵妃子笑， Through red dust a man goes riding; the Consort smiles;
無人知是荔枝來。 and no one else there knows that her lychees are on the way.²⁰

In this poem, arguably among the most famous in criticizing the luxurious lifestyle of Imperial Consort Yang 楊貴妃, the beloved concubine of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756), Du Mu depicts a specific moment when the Consort smiled at the sight of a horseman carrying her favorite lychees, galloping through the gates leading up Mount Li. While most discussions of this poem have focused on the extravagance of delivering these rare fruits from the far south of the empire as an indirect reflection of the imminent crisis that was about to befall the Tang, the real alarm lies in the fact that these lychees were delivered by a special “horseman” within the Tang postal system.

By Emperor Xuanzong's time, the Tang had built up an efficient postal network across the whole empire, including basic infrastructures such as land and water routes, relay stations, as well as a hierarchical system of messengers. Overland, this system consisted of three ranks (in ascending order): walking messenger 步遞, horse messenger 馬遞, and fast-foot messenger 急腳遞. The horseman delivering the lychees presumably belonged to the top rank among the three. Although both horse messengers and fast-foot messengers used horses, fast-foot messengers had the highest priority in passage along the way; to maximize

²⁰ The translation here follows that in Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton & Company, 1996), 452.

speed, delivery was achieved as a relay between different postal stations.²¹ Such an accelerated mode of transmission was reserved for urgent military reports or important political messages such as decrees of exoneration,²² and one can imagine the resources the Tang government had to expend in managing these special routes and keeping the horses and messengers constantly ready for the relay. Therefore, the man rushing up Mount Li must have been the last courier in this elite relay team, but he would have been transporting fresh lychees for the Consort's enjoyment at the expense of the empire's welfare in a time of military emergency.²³

Despite the chaotic warfare that ensued following the collapse of the Tang, the effective postal system reflected in this poem was largely reconstituted after the establishment of the Song, and was put to heavy use.²⁴ Due to the development of a much more complicated bureaucracy, the Song postal system had to handle a larger volume of documents than had any previous regime. Along with the growing number of scholar-officials in service, new ways of transmitting personal letters and writings in addition to the official postal network were also developed. It is this hybrid system of official and non-official delivery methods that provides the backdrop for our analysis of the transmission of letterets.

²¹ Chao, *Songdai yizhan zhidu*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 32–56. See also Cao Jiaqi 曹家齊, “Songdai jijiaodi kao” 宋代急腳遞考, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1 (2001), 87–91.

²³ In this sense, the way this poem resonates with the story of Bao Si 褒姒 of the Western Zhou dynasty becomes even more ominous. The beacon fires that were lit in order to get Bao Si to laugh were the final signal in the alarm system of the Zhou; similarly, the fastest messengers of the Tang were used in order to please the Imperial Consort.

²⁴ Chao, *Songdai yizhan zhidu*, 1–6.

We can get a glimpse into this hybrid system from a letteret written by the famous poet Huang Tingjian after he was demoted to Rongzhou 戎州 (in present-day Chongqing) in the year 1094. Upon arriving, he wrote to his friend Wang Guanfu 王觀復 (fl. early 12th century) and commented on the postal routes that he saw on his way:

Tingjian kowtow [to you]: Have you decided when to depart? There is no need to feel regret for this separation. In the Central Plain, postal stations [line up] like streams, and even though the South and the North [are far apart], there could still be frequent letter [exchanges between them]. It is unlike the area beyond Jiange [where I am now],²⁵ which is as barren and uncivilized as Zangke and Yelang.²⁶ When the previous servant returned, I entrusted him with a letter to thank He Jingweng's carefully drafted letter,²⁷ but Jingweng said he had not received my letter. Could you get to the bottom of this [for me]? I am afraid some petty man might have already bought it with some goods.²⁸

庭堅頓首：公決行在幾時，此別不足恨。中原亭驛如流，雖南北可數書。不比劍外，乃牂牁夜郎之洪荒無詔也。前卒還，附書謝何靜翁不草草，而靜翁乃云不得不肖書，試為根究，恐小人輒以貨取之耳。

In this brief letter, Huang provides us with a succinct but vivid description of the network of postal stations that connect the entire Central Plain together; in particular, his use of the word “streams” 流 indicates both the high density of these stations as well as the smoothness of the transportation process. He also conveys the uneven accessibility of the

²⁵ Jiange 劍閣, also known as Jianmen 劍門, is a mountainous outpost known for its precarious location. Situated at the geographical bottleneck of the Sichuan basin, it has been a key passage route into and out of Sichuan since ancient times.

²⁶ Zangke 牂牁 and Yelang 夜郎 are both ancient kingdoms in South China bordering present day Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.

²⁷ The term *bu caocao* 不草草, which literally means “not casual or cursive,” refers here to a carefully prepared letter.

²⁸ “Yu Wang Guanfu shu” 與王觀復書, no. 3, in *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黃庭堅全集, coll. and punct. Liu Lin 劉琳, Li Yongxian 李勇先 and Wang Ronggui 王蓉貴 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001) [hereafter HTJQ], 473.

postal system by contrasting the place to which Wang was heading and which was accessible by mail, to the remote and barbarous Rongzhou that he himself was stuck in, a place where even imperial edicts 詔 could not reach. More importantly, with the concrete example of the servant who lost his letter to He Jingweng, Huang's piece reveals that, in his day, other designated messengers co-existed with the official postal system. Indeed, Northern Song officials could send letters to friends and families through the official postal system, which was often indicated in letterets as "in post" 遞中. These letters would be transferred together with other non-urgent official documents by messengers on foot—a process that could take a long time.²⁹ Sometimes, an author would even write a second or a third letter to inquire about the receipt of a letter that he had sent out earlier.

Although the official network was relatively safe,³⁰ it was limited in the number of locations it could reach, and not everyone had access to it. As a result, alternative delivery methods were developed. Court officials or prestigious families would often hire their own designated messengers, called *zhuanren* 專人 (which literally means "special personnel"), to deliver letters as well as objects for them. For example, a letter that Ouyang Xiu wrote to his friend Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068) begins with:

I have received two *zhuang* from you recently. Your *zhuanren* has arrived, and I humbly received your letter. I came to know that you are in good physical shape in this cold season.

²⁹ For more details on the Song administration of the official postal system, see Cao Jiaqi, *Songdai jiaotong guanli zhidu yanjiu* 宋代交通管理制度研究 (Zhengzhou: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2002).

³⁰ Despite that, risk was still present. For example, one of Fan Zhongyan's 范仲淹 letter ends with "Let's wait until we meet face to face; [I am] afraid of careless losses during posting" 俟面聞，恐遞中疎失. See *Fan Zhongyan quanji* 范仲淹全集, coll. and punct. Li Yongxian 李勇先 and Wang Ronggui 王蓉貴 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 672.

Also, I have been showered with the crispy pears and fresh bamboo shoots that you sent me. How could I bear to receive such precious gifts!³¹

近嘗兩奉狀。專人至，辱書。竊審經寒體履安和，兼沐寄惠酥梨、新筍，豈勝珍荷。

In case such designated messengers were unavailable, merchants or travelers could also be entrusted with the task. For instance, Ouyang Xiu once asked “someone carrying dates” 負棗人 to send a letter for him,³² and on another occasion an umbrella seller served as a messenger between him and Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060):

Shengyu, I kowtow and bow under your feet: Last month, Palace Attendant Wang sent me your letter. When the boat selling umbrellas arrived, I got another of your letters as well as the salted fish. When I asked the umbrella seller [about you], I came to know your recent activities in detail, and felt truly comforted.... When the umbrella seller was about to return, he came to ask for my letter. I casually wrote down this little bit. Who else would I want to speak to, if not you? I hesitated in front of this page, and could not help getting verbose.³³

某頓首再拜聖俞足下：去月，王侍禁者送及所惠書。販傘船至，又得書，并鮑魚。及問傘客，知動靜備詳，甚慰甚慰。... 販傘者回，來索書，聊寫區區。捨足下欲語誰邪？臨紙徘徊，不免忉忉。

Here, Ouyang Xiu seemed to personally know this umbrella merchant, who not only delivered Mei Yaochen’s letter and the gift of fish to him, but also waited for him to write a reply.³⁴ Since travelers and personal messengers were exempt from official supervision,

³¹ “Yu Liu Shidu ershiqi tong” 與劉侍讀二十七通, no. 27, in *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集, punct. and coll. Li Yi’an 李逸安 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001) [hereafter OYXQJ], 148.2429.

³² “Yu Chang Daizhi shi tong” 與常待制十通, no. 4, OYXQJ, 148.2432.

³³ “Yu Mei Shengyu sishiliu tong” 與梅聖俞四十六通, no. 6, OYXQJ, 149.2446.

³⁴ There are also many other occasions in which Ouyang Xiu did not mention the specific identity or name of the messenger, but simply said “the person arrived” 人至 or “the person returned” 人還. See for example his letter to Li Gongjin 李公謹, “Yu Li Liuhou ba tong” 與李留後八通, no. 4, OYXQJ, 147.2414.

they had the advantage of greater flexibility in carrying all kinds of things along with the letter. Items included such things as ink stones, dried pancakes, tea, or even fresh well water. This method also entailed a certain degree of privacy compared with the official postal system.³⁵ The downside, however, is also obvious. Personal messengers, being individuals without the supporting relay capability of the official postal system, could only reach a limited number of destinations on their routes, and it was not always easy to find travelers or merchants heading specifically towards the addressee's direction. Moreover, in an age like the Song when government officials were highly mobile, the longer the time one spent in finding a messenger, the greater the uncertainty that he might not reach the addressee, who could easily have moved on during the interim period.

Fortunately, there existed a third channel for letter delivery besides these two methods, one that was probably the most important for Song literati: sending items via networks of friends and family members. For example, most of the letterets from Ouyang Xiu to Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012-1067) and Mei Yaochen were delivered by their friends, as clearly mentioned in particular letterets. In fact, judging from their abundant appearance in the Northern Song letteret collections that have survived, this delivery method was utilized much more frequently than the sporadic cases of doing a favor for a friend.³⁶ The use of

³⁵ It was Song dynasty's official policy that a government official's private letters did not have to be opened for examination when going through the official system. However, when the volume of private letters became too heavy a burden for the official system, or when messages from the court were leaked by staff in the system, this policy would be tightened and letters would have to be checked.

³⁶ While it is hard to estimate the exact percentage of letterets delivered through this network, it is very likely the most frequently used channel among the three modes of transmission. In fact, most of the

acquaintances as couriers brought about a distinct milieu of personal touch and openness unseen in other channels. For example, Su Shi once described in a letter to Teng Dadao 滕達道 (1020–1090) his pleasant interaction with the acquaintance courier Jia Yunlao 賈耘老, who was a mutual friend of Su and Teng:

I present this letter [to you]: Yunlao has arrived, and I received your hand-written letter. When Yunlao told me about your daily life and activities in detail, the comfort I felt could not be described in words. ... As for the thirty jars [of wine] that you gave me, I will bring them back to feed my wife. The rest [of the updates about me] Yunlao will tell you, so I will not belabor here. I kowtow [to you].³⁷

某啟。耘老至，又辱手書，及耘老道起居之詳，感慰不可言。... 惠貺三十壺，攜歸餉婦矣。余耘老能道，不宣。某頓首。

Such highly personal exchanges are evident in many other Song letterets. Sometimes, the recipient and the messenger would exchange stories about the author or the content of the letter being transmitted, and the author was not only aware of but even took pleasure in such acts. Participation in such friendly exchanges and sharing helped forge strong bonds among the messenger, the recipient, and the author, and led to the formation of a close-knit community of friends bonded together through letters.

Overall, the existence of this hybrid postal system stretching across public and private spheres allowed literati flexibility in choosing a preferred mode of transmission for their letterets. More importantly, sending letters through trustworthy friends meant greater

letterets survived precisely because they were transmitted by friends, who copied and preserved them in various ways.

³⁷ “Yu Teng Dadao liushiba shou” 與滕達道六十八首, no. 41, SSWJ, 51.1488.

security and privacy as compared to the other methods; thus, in these letterets, people were more willing to share their thoughts on sensitive issues that might have gotten them into trouble had they expressed it in other forms of writing. It was such flexibility and freedom that provided the incubation ground from which the letteret would grow into a unique discursive space during the Song.

1.2. The “Unburnt” Letterets and a Textual Space of Privacy

The ability of letterets to accommodate sensitive issues is best illustrated by the interesting incident involving one of Ouyang Xiu’s extant letterets which should not have survived, because the author explicitly requested for its destruction. This letteret, written in 1053, was addressed to Mei Yaochen:

I present this letter [to you]: The funerary affairs [for my mother]³⁸ that I had been planning did not go as I had wished, and the days that followed became very annoying and depressing. Perhaps it is because the technique [of geomancy] is too complicated, of which I know nothing about. [Therefore] when someone else said that he (the geomancer) was not good, I became suspicious and did not dare to hire him. It was not because I was following the vulgar trend and wanted to seek a piece of auspicious land or a “*guanguo*”³⁹ site in the high mountains [for my mother]. Director of the Chancellery Xia [had to] bury his father in

³⁸ Ouyang Xiu’s mother, Madam Zheng, died in 1052. The funerary affairs mentioned here refer to the mourning as well as Ouyang’s efforts in finding her a good burial site around Jizhou 吉州 (in present-day Jiangxi).

³⁹ *Guanguo* 官国 probably refers to a type of landscape associated with some particular *fengshui* that could bring good fortune to the descendants of the buried with regard to bureaucratic promotion. Based on the tone of Ouyang Xiu here, this should be a term commonly used at the time, although we were unable to find any instance of usage in Song texts. The closest reference to this term we could find is from a Ming book on geomancy and astrology, which includes the following in the chapter on auspicious star combinations: “The *guanguo* [constellation] presides over bureaucratic fortune” 官國主官貴. See Wu Guoshi 吳國仕, *Zaoming zongjing ji* 造命宗鏡集, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1059 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–2002), 648–649.

the barbarian land,⁴⁰ since the Khitans would surely not let you pick a “*guanguo*” site in the mountainous area for burial.

In my leisure time, I did not write anything, but only re-organized my *History of the Five Dynasties*, which stands at a total of seventy-four *juan*. I did not dare to let too many people know about it, but I was seriously considering of letting you, my brother, to take a look at how they are. [This work] truly has many significant categories [of issues],⁴¹ which I need good people to discuss with. This book should neither be seen by vulgar people, nor should it be unseen by the good people. What should I do?

[Your] loss of voice is curable. I once noted down this prescription: simply take some fresh and good pagoda tree flowers, and stir-fry them on a piece of new tile over a slow fire. After they are cooked, put them in your sleeves and carry them while you walk, sit, or lie down. When you have time, put one or two flowers into your mouth, and chew and swallow them, so that [their] flavor always lingers in your throat. Over time, your voice will come back by itself. When you recover, I hope you could send me your new pieces. Please burn this letteret immediately [after reading], and do not leak any word about the completion of [my] *History*. And please tell the same to Junmo (i.e., Cai Xiang) as well. Both voice loss and foot inflammation⁴² are caused by “voids” [of *qi*] in the lower part [of the body]. We are old men, and should therefore avoid thinking too much. I am mourning and living alone here, and have been frequently ill because of worries. I suspect you would know.⁴³

某啓：謀葬事未得恐遂，後時日極撓悶，蓋以術者太精，自家又全不會，祇信他人道不好，便疑惑不敢使，非效俗流求吉地圖官國山高也。夏侍中父葬于虜，契丹必不與你擇官國山地葬也。

閑中不曾作文字，祇整頓了五代史，成七十四卷。不敢多令人知，深思吾兄一看，如何可得，極有義類，須要好商量。此書不可使俗人見，不可使好人不見，奈何奈何！

⁴⁰ The reference here is to Xia Song 夏竦 (985–1051), whose father Xia Chenghao 夏承皓 encountered the Khitan army unexpectedly in Daming (present-day Handan) during an attempted night raid, and fought his way to death. Xia Song got an official position because of his father’s bravery, and was later promoted all the way to the Director of the Chancellery. See Tuotuo 脫脫 et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 283.9571.

⁴¹ The word *yilei* 義類 here literally means “reaching an understanding through analogy and deduction,” Here it seems to also refer to significant categories, since Ouyang Xiu created several unique categories of biographies in his *History of the Five Dynasties*.

⁴² The exact equivalent of 脚氣 in modern sense of the word is athlete’s foot (or *tinea pedis*), although in imperial China this term could also refer to a range of symptoms associated with other ailments such as gout or beriberi. As such, it is translated loosely here as “foot inflammation.”

⁴³ “Yu Mei Shengyu sishiliu tong” 與梅聖俞四十六通, no. 23, OYXQJ, 149.2455–2456.

失音可救，曾記得一方，祇用新好槐花於新瓦上慢火炒令熟，置懷袖中，隨行隨坐卧，譬如閑送一二粒置口中咀嚼，咽之使喉中常有氣味，久之聲自通。病愈，新篇幸多為寄此。小簡立焚，勿漏史成之語，惟道意於君謨同此也。失音、脚氣，皆是下虛，吾徒老矣，省些斟酌斟酌。某此居哀獨宿，然以憂惱亦自多病，恐知。

Besides Ouyang Xiu's frustration over his mother's burial and his peculiar remedy for Mei's loss of voice, what stands out the most in this rather long letteret is perhaps his request for Mei to "burn" this letteret upon reading. Given the irreversible nature and the profound cultural significance attached to the act of "burning" one's writings,⁴⁴ Ouyang's request is an unusual measure that calls for serious pondering. The reason for such a request, as he stated in the letteret, was so as not to "leak any word about the completion of [my] *History*."

The book that Ouyang Xiu was so concerned about was his *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* 五代史記, more commonly known as the *New History of the Five Dynasties* 新五代史 (hereafter denoted as *New History*) to distinguish it from an earlier book bearing the same title, compiled by a group of Northern Song officials headed by Xue Juzheng 薛居正 (912-981). Unlike the official project of compiling the *New History of the Tang* 新唐書, in which Ouyang Xiu also participated, the *New History of the Five Dynasties* was his private

⁴⁴ Burning is often a strategy used by authorities to destroy documents or writings that they consider threatening. In the pre-printing eras when manuscript was the sole medium through which thoughts and ideas were preserved, setting manuscripts on fire would literally mean the complete and perpetual erasure of all traces of a person, a group, or a school of thought. At the personal level, burning one's writings up to a certain point in life was a common gesture used by literati to indicate their severance from their past, regardless the reason. For a wonderful discussion of the phenomenon of "burning" and "revising" one's works during the Song, see Asami Yoji 浅見洋二, "'Fenqi' yu 'gaiding': Lun Songdai bieji de bianzuan huo dingben de zhiding" "焚弃"与"改定"—论宋代别集的编纂或定本的制定, trans. Zhu Gang 朱剛, *Zhongguo yunwen xuekan* 中国韵文学刊 21.3 (Sep. 2007): 80-92.

project,⁴⁵ and is thus often considered as the best representative of his historiographical ideals. Taking Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 as his model, Ouyang's goal was to emulate what is believed to be the essence of that work, "lofty principles in subtle words" 微言大義, or in other words expressing morally guided historical judgments using the most concise language possible.⁴⁶ Following this ideal, Ouyang Xiu completed a history that is only half the length of its predecessor, and at the same time inserted his comments and critiques into almost every section of the book. His pursuit of this ideal went so far that his contemporaries as well as later historians often criticized him for freely omitting facts, deleting important materials, and including too many strong moral or even didactic opinions.⁴⁷ If Ouyang Xiu's purpose in writing his *New History* was to let his views and judgments be known to the world, why, then, would he have wanted to keep it a secret or only reveal it to a select few of "good people" 好人?⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The *New History of the Tang* was a large-scale official project sanctioned by Emperor Renzong 仁宗 and compiled by a team of scholars including Song Minqiu 宋敏求, Song Qi 宋祁, Ouyang Xiu, Fan Zhen 范鎮, etc. On the other hand, Ouyang Xiu's *New History of the Five Dynasties* is the only private work compiled since the Song that has been officially canonized as a "standard history" 正史 of imperial China.

⁴⁶ See Richard L. Davis' "Introduction" to *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), esp. xliii-lv.

⁴⁷ For more detailed discussion of the historiographical and stylistic features of *New History*, see James T. C. Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu: An Eleventh-Century Neo-Confucianist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 106-113; Higashi Hidetoshi 東英寿, "Ouyang Xiu shishu de wenti tese: 'Wudai shiji' yu 'Jiu Wudai shi' wenzhang biao xian shang de bijiao" 歐陽修史書的文體特色—《五代史記》與《舊五代史》文章表現上的比較, in idem., *Fugu yu chuangxin: Ouyang Xiu sanwen yu guwen fuxing* 復古與創新: 歐陽修散文與古文復興, trans. Wang Zhenyu 王振宇, Li Li 李莉, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 59-71; and Ding Seong Lin 陳湘琳, "Zai wuhu yu xixiao zhijian: Lishi de sizhuan yu xianbi" 在嗚呼與戲笑之間: 歷史的私撰與閑筆, in *Zhongguo gudai wenzhang xue de chengli yu zhankai: Zhongguo gudai wenzhang xue lunji* 中國古代文章學的成立與展開—中國古代文章學論集, gen. eds. Wang Shuizhao 王水照 and Zhu Gang 朱剛 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 240-258.

⁴⁸ Davis also summarized the timeline of the compilation and publication of *New History* in his "Introduction," xlvi-lviii.

As James Liu argued, Ouyang Xiu's reluctance might have something to do with his belief that "many prominent scholar-officials, his political adversaries in particular, would disapprove of it."⁴⁹ Another plausible reason is that a private history of a series of regimes immediately preceding the current dynasty might not be readily accepted by the imperial authority of the time, since such a history would inevitably need to provide justifications for the most recent dynastic turnover, and thus call into question the basis of the political legitimacy of the current regime. Therefore, starting from the Tang, "standard histories" of previous dynasties were almost always compiled by groups of state-appointed officials within the bureaucratic apparatus and under the supervision of the imperial court, if not of the emperor himself.⁵⁰ Private histories, while not banned, would have to be subjected to stringent official scrutiny before they could be publicly circulated. It is clear from the letteret that Ouyang Xiu's *New History* was "completed," and he was probably worried that if this news gets out, there might be pressure for him to submit his work to the court for examination. Such worry was not unfounded, since this scenario did occur later on.⁵¹

Regardless of the reason, the necessity of keeping messages and discussions about the *New History* secret was clear, and thus Ouyang's unusual request for Mei to 'burn' the letteret. Moreover, judging from the extant works of Ouyang Xiu, letters were the most important

⁴⁹ Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu: An Eleventh-Century Neo-Confucianist*, 107.

⁵⁰ See Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5-30.

⁵¹ In 1060, Fan Zhen submitted a memorial to the emperor, suggesting that Ouyang Xiu hand in his *New History* to the Bureau of Tang History Writing 唐書局, which would then make a copy and present it to the emperor. Ouyang Xiu refused by emphasizing that the book was not yet in good order, and promised that he would present a copy as soon as he finishes it. See "Mian jin Wudaishi zhuang" 免進五代史狀, OYXQJ, 112.1706.

non-verbal channel for such discussions. There are several other letters in which Ouyang Xiu discussed the *New History* with his friends. For example, a few years before his letter to Mei Yaochen, Ouyang Xiu talked about the difficulty of searching for materials for his *New History* in a letter to Wang Tao 王陶 (style name Ledao 樂道, 1020–1080):

Since I arrived here, I had nothing much to do, other than regretting that as I grow older, I become lazier. Spending days and months in vain, I did not get anything significant done,⁵² and only wrote some words. As for my *History of the Five Dynasties*, I only got hold of some materials recently, and could not obtain the books I lack. My life has just continued in the same old way for thirteen years already.⁵³ If you have any compositions in your office, please do not begrudge sending some to me. The preface to Li Xizhi's writings is attached here. The winter is cold; take care.⁵⁴

到此極無事，所恨漸老，益懶墮，空過日月，不曾成頭段，著得些文字。五代史近方求得少許，所闕書亦未能了。人生多因循，已十三年矣。足下幕中苟有著述，無惜寄示。李習之文字序附上。冬冷保重。

Ouyang Xiu began collecting materials for his *New History* in the 1040s, way before commencing his official duty in the compilation of the *New History of the Tang*. The tone of this letter suggests that Wang Tao was probably aware of Ouyang Xiu's project. Three years later, Ouyang Xiu told Mei Yaochen that the *New History* was "complete," and one more year later, he wrote to his student Xu Zai 徐宰 (style name Wudang 無黨, 1024–1086) and talked about its revision: "As for my *History of the Five Dynasties*, I met Zeng Zigu (*i.e.*, Zeng

⁵² The term "頭段" here is rather problematic. 段 is a variant form for *duan* 段, and there are different interpretations for the term *douduan*. In the translation here I follow Kang Peng's 康鵬 explanation that it means something important or significant. See *idem.*, "Touduan kao" 頭段考, *Beida shixue* 北大史學 11 (Jun. 2005): 232–236. Even so, the meaning of the sentence could differ depending on the punctuation.

⁵³ Roughly thirteen years ago in 1036, Ouyang Xiu was demoted to Yiling 夷陵 as a consequence of his support for Fan Zhongyan. That would have been Ouyang Xiu's first demotion.

⁵⁴ "Yu Wang Wenke gong jiu tong" 與王文恪公九通, no. 2, OYXQJ, 147.2401–2402.

Gong) yesterday and had a discussion with him, but today I started revising it from the beginning, and there seems to be no finishing date.” 《五代史》昨見曾子固議，今却重頭改換，未有了期。⁵⁵ All these three examples demonstrate that although Ouyang Xiu tried to keep the completion of his *New History* as a secret and refused to present it to the throne, there was a group of people with whom he had communicated and consulted regarding the work at different stages of his compilation.

Besides Ouyang Xiu⁵⁶, many other Northern Song literati had also requested the same sort of secrecy in their letterets. For example, when Su Shi sent his friend Qian Mufu 錢穆父 (1034–1097) a poem that he did not want to share with anybody else, he said at the end of the accompanying letteret: “[To your new poem] I have replied you with a piece, with the hope that you won’t show it to anybody.” 輒復一篇，惟不示人為望。⁵⁷ In another letter to Li Gongze 李公擇 (1027–1090), in which he vented out some straight-from-the-gut and potentially problematic comments, Su Shi ended the letter with “After reading, please burn it in fire; [otherwise] those who do not know [the situation] would criticize [me].” 看訖，便火之，不知者以為詬病也。⁵⁸ While most such requests were not as extreme as these, they nevertheless show that using letterets for private or even clandestine communications was a common practice in the Northern Song.

⁵⁵ “Yu Mianchi Xu Zai liu tong” 與澠池徐宰六通, no. 2, OYXQJ, 150.2473. This letter was dated 1054.

⁵⁶ Although such unusual request to “burn the letteret” is rarely mentioned in Ouyang Xiu’s other works, the existence of this piece suggests that these letterets provide a space in which Ouyang Xiu could comfortably talk about something without leaving any trace behind.

⁵⁷ “Yu Qian Mufu ershiba shou” 與錢穆父二十八首, no. 8, SSWJ, 51.1504.

⁵⁸ “Yu Li Gongze shiqi shou” 與李公擇十七首, no. 11, SSWJ, 51.1500.

Secretive letters are not a rarity in Chinese history. Classified military reports or political messages, for example, often had to go through special procedures of handling and transmission, and would probably be destroyed after they had served their purposes. As for non-official letters, we do not find any pre-Song *shu* letter that carries the message of a similar nature. Even during the Song, the number of “unburnt” letterets such as these was also extremely limited, suggesting that most secret letters were probably burnt. As such, the survival of these letterets was the combined result of a conscious decision made by the recipients to not follow the sender’s instruction, as well as later people’s effort in including them into literary collections. To fully appreciate why such letters, as well as letterets in general, were fondly sought after and deliberately preserved, we need to understand another key aspect of this genre, namely the witty and fun elements embodied in them.

1.3. “Just for a Laugh:” The Playfulness of Everyday Mundanity

In contrast to the first two parts of Ouyang Xiu’s letteret to Mei Yaochen quoted above, which focus on more serious matters such as his mother’s burial and his recently completed *History*, the final part touched on a lighter issue: to treat Mei’s voice loss, Ouyang gave him a rather unorthodox prescription using fresh pagoda tree flowers, which he claimed would help unclog (*tong* 通) his vocal track. This kind of intimate and mundane subject constitutes another essential feature of the letteret genre. Indeed, unlike other prose genres such as treatises, prefaces or epitaphs, in which Song literati liked to talk about topics such as moral principles, sages, as well as antiquity, there exists in the letterets a huge world of the

quotidian trivialities of everyday life, from chopsticks to forks, lamb to pork, and cash to patty fields. While letters of this kind to family members are more informational and down-to-earth, those addressed to friends are often tinted with a sense of self-mockery and humor. These features help create an intimate bond between the author, the recipient, and the other friends that the letteret might reach. Such intimate bond was revealed, for example, in Ouyang Xiu's somber sigh of "We are old men, and should therefore avoid thinking too much" in his letter to Mei Yaochen, but more often it was manifested in a light-hearted way through wittiness and fun. Su Shi's correspondences with his disciples, friends, as well as admirers during his long exile are most illustrative in this respect.

After the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial in 1079, during which Su Shi was on the brink of execution due to his supposedly slanderous poems and other writings, he was demoted to Huangzhou (in present day Hubei province) to serve the minor post of Military Training Vice Commissioner 團練副使.⁵⁹ The trial, which happened abruptly and quickly, shocked many people, including Su's friends. Although there had been a few cases before 1079 in which people got into trouble because of their writings,⁶⁰ a trial close to a full-blown literary censorship, even according to the modern standard of the word, was not something they

⁵⁹ This was a low-rank position at the prefectural level, often assigned to demoted or punished officials who would only get half the salary of a regular Commissioner. See Gong Yanming 龔延明, *Songdai guan zhi cidian* 宋代官制辭典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 614; and Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 549.

⁶⁰ For example, Ouyang Xiu once wrote a letter to the Remonstrator Gao Ruone 高若訥, criticizing him for not standing up for the wrongful accusation of Fan Zhongyan. Gao submitted this letter to the emperor and Ouyang Xiu was banished as a result. See Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 11.2783; and Ronald Egan, *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-72)* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 25.

could easily harbor. As a result, Su Shi deliberately resisted the “outflow” of his urge to compose, frequently refusing others’ requests for memorial or elegiac pieces, and the output of his social poetry and prose greatly dwindled during that period. Letterets, as it turned out, became the most important resort for his thoughts and words, and sometimes the only conduit that bound him with his friends who chose not to cut off textual relationship with him.

One such disciple and closest friend was Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), who continued to write to Su Shi with complete faith and support after the poetry trial.⁶¹ From Huangzhou, Su Shi wrote to Qin Guan in what was likely a reply to Qin’s concern about his mental and physical wellness:

Li Gongze passed by recently. We gathered for a few days, during which he was talking about you ⁶² all the time. Sun Xinlao has not received my letter, so I know you have not had the chance to pass it to him. Cheng Gongbi ⁶³ was waiting for the elegy for his son Lüzhong, which I originally asked to write myself, so how could I break the promise now? But since I was found guilty, I have not written a word, and have been restraining myself rather strictly. If I start writing again, then it will break the fence (i.e., my promise of self-restraint), and there will again be torrents of words flowing out [from me] in the future.

When I first arrived in Huangzhou, my salary had been suspended, but the number of mouths [in my family] was not any smaller, so I was very worried in private. I could only make a great effort to stay frugal, and restrict our daily expenses to be under one hundred

⁶¹ Qin Guan once wrote to Su Shi: “By the Way of you, my mentor, looking up there is nothing to be ashamed of to the heaven, looking down there is nothing to be regretful towards others, and looking inside there is nothing to be ashamed of to the heart.” 以先生之道, 仰不愧天, 俯不作人, 內不愧心。See “Yu Su Huangzhou jian” 與蘇黃州簡, in *Huaihai ji jianzhu* 淮海集箋注, coll. and annot. Xu Peijun 徐培均 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994) [hereafter HHJJZ], 30.1006.

⁶² Taixu 太虛 is one of Qin Guan’s style names.

⁶³ Here, Su Shi was referring to Cheng Shimeng 程師孟 (1009–1086), style name Gongbi 公關.

and fifty cash.⁶⁴ On the first day of every month, I would take out four thousand and five hundred cash, separate them into thirty bunches, and hang them on the beam of our house. Every morning, I would use a long-handled fork to take down one bunch and hide away [the fork]. The remaining cash were separately stored in a big bamboo bucket. The unused amount [from daily expenses] will be used to treat guests. This is the method used by Jia Yunlao. Estimating what I have now, I could still hold out for more than a year. After that, I will figure something else out. [Just like] when the water comes, the tunnel will form by itself; there is no need to worry beforehand. And because of this, there is not a single thing troubling my mind.⁶⁵

公擇近過此，相聚數日，說太虛不離口。莘老未嘗得書，知未暇通問。程公闢須其子履中哀詞，軾本自求作，今豈可食言，但得罪以來，不復作字，自持頗嚴，若復一作，則決壞藩牆，今後仍復袞袞多言矣。

初到黃，廩入既絕，人口不少，私甚憂之。但痛自節儉，日用不得過百五十。每月朔，便取四千五百錢，斷為三十塊，掛屋梁上。平旦用畫叉挑取一塊，即藏去，義仍以大竹筒別貯，用不盡者，以待賓客。此賈耘老法也。度囊中尚可支一歲有餘，至時別作經畫。水到渠成，不須預慮，以此胸中都無一事。

This letter opens by laying down a list of three issues: Li Gongze's visit, Sun Xinlao's letter, and the elegy for Cheng Lüzhong. The second is another illustration of the common practice of using friends as messengers, as well as the situation mentioned in the last section in which the author met or heard from the recipient before the messenger could deliver the letter.⁶⁶ The more important part is Su's clever way of broaching the last issue, which constitutes a gentle refusal to writing an elegy that he had agreed to compose probably

⁶⁴ To put this amount into perspective, in 1086 the price for one *dan* 石 (or ten *dou* 斗) of rice costs one hundred and fifty cash in remote areas. See Cheng Minsheng 程民生, *Songdai wujia yanjiu* 宋代物價研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 564. Cheng also estimated that a family with nine people needs two to three *dou* of rice every day (p. 123), and the minimum amount of money needed to sustain an individual's life is twenty cash per day (p. 567).

⁶⁵ "Da Qin Taixu qi shou" 答秦太虛七首, no. 4, SSWJ, 52.1536.

⁶⁶ Although Su Shi kept this brief and casual, we cannot help guessing whether this is a gentle reminder to Qin Guan to find a chance and deliver the letter.

before the poetry trial.⁶⁷ This well-designed, euphemistic refusal is crafted by carefully turning away from a promise to a friend that should not be broken, and towards another promise to himself about exercising self-control against the urge of writing. The conflict between these two promises was of course caused by the poetry trial. We know that his “self-control” was only exercised selectively since he was still exchanging poetry and other writings with certain people, albeit only within a limited circle.

The next part of this letteret turns to a lighter but no less problematic matter: saving money. Similar to Ouyang Xiu’s recipe for Mei Yaochen’s throat problem, Su Shi vividly described here a recipe that he used to effectively manage the daily expenses of his family. Starting from the rather desperate situation during his early days in Huangzhou, Su described how, using the method he learned from Jia Yunlao to implement a self-enforced daily allowance system, he cleared up all his mental anxieties and could finally save enough money so as not to worry about his finance for at least one whole year. The tone towards the end is one of satisfaction and relief, paving the way to the next part of the letteret⁶⁸ which touches upon the most jovial aspects of Su Shi’s exile life outside of the household:

On the bank opposite to where I live, the hills and rivers of Wuchang form a fine scene. There lives a young scholar from Shu (modern-day Sichuan) surnamed Wang. When I went into town, I was often obstructed by wind and waves and could not return immediately. [Under those circumstances], Scholar Wang would kill a chicken and cook

⁶⁷ Due to the lack of information on the date of Cheng Lüzhong’s death, this could only be a guess.

⁶⁸ There are different opinions as to whether the next part constitutes a separate letter, or part of a long letter that includes the passage quoted earlier.

meals for me, so much so that even [when I stayed] for a few days, he would not feel bothered. There is also a Scholar Pan who runs a tavern at Fankou.⁶⁹ [I would] row a boat and go straight to his tavern, where the village ale is pure and rich in its own way. Oranges and persimmons⁷⁰ are numerous here, while the big taro could grow to as long as over a foot, no shorter than those found in Shu. The rice from other counties costs twenty cash for a *dou*, and it can be fetched via waterway. The lamb is similar to that found in the North; pork, beef and venison are [as cheap] as the local fish and crabs, [for which you can get] without even counting money. Hu Dingzhi, the Supervisor of Wineries in Qiting, carries ten thousands *juan* of books around with him, and loves to lend them to other people along his trip. Some of the officials of Huangzhou all have families who are good at cooking, and love to hold gatherings.

Now that you have seen these few things, isn't it true that all my things have found their proper positions?⁷¹ What I want to say to you is endless, but I have got to the end of my paper. Unfolding [this letter] and reading it till this point, I can imagine that [you] must be stroking your beard and smiling!⁷²

所居對岸武昌山水佳絕。有蜀人王生，在邑中，往往為風濤所隔，不能即歸，則王生能為殺雞炊黍，至數日不厭。又有潘生者，作酒店樊口，棹小舟徑至店下，村酒亦自醇醞。柑橘棹柿極多，大芋長尺餘，不減蜀中。外縣米斗二十，有水路可致。羊肉如北方，猪牛麋鹿如土魚蟹，不論錢。岐亭監酒胡定之載書萬卷，隨行喜借人看。黃州曹官數人皆家善庖饌，喜作會。

太虛視此數事，吾事豈不既濟矣乎！欲與太虛言者無窮，但紙盡耳。展讀至此，想見掀髯一笑也。

This passage nicely picks up where the previous one ends by talking about what Su Shi could buy and eat with the little amount of money he had. First, there was Scholar Wang who was a native of Su Shi's hometown, and who frequently hosted him and treated him with fine meals whenever he could not return home due to bad weather. Then there was

⁶⁹ This is the place where Fangang river enters the Yangtze.

⁷⁰ *Beishi* 棹柿, also written as 棹柿, is a kind of small persimmon.

⁷¹ Here Su Shi used the term "*jiji*" 既濟, the name of a hexagram from the *Book of Changes* to describe the situation in which everything is under control.

⁷² "Da Qin Taixu qi shou", no. 4, SSWJ, 52.1536.

another young man Pan whose wine, despite being probably very cheap, was “pure and rich in its own way.” Su Shi also talked about the variety of local fruits as well as the various kinds of cheap meat, in which he made two interesting comparisons: the local taro was as big as those in his hometown, and the lamb was similar to that of the North. During his exile, Su Shi frequently made reference to specific plants and food items from the Sichuan area in his poetry and other writings, demonstrating his fond memory of his hometown, a place he never got the chance to return to since he and his brother sailed down the Yangtze River with their father when he was twenty-four years old. By emphasizing the similarity between the food in Huangzhou and those that Su Shi used to enjoy, he was reassuring Qin Guan that Huangzhou could provide the necessary material comfort for him.

The last two things on Su Shi’s list of activities in Huangzhou concern a certain Hu Dingzhi who “loves” lending books to others, and the families of local officials who “love” to hold banquets. The repeated use of the word “love” (*xi* 喜) emphasizes both the pleasure they derived from doing these things as well as the frequency with which they did it, suggesting Su Shi’s familiarity with these people and probably his joy in accepting their offer. The last two lines of this letteret are very powerful: while Su Shi seems to be sighing at the fact that he had reached the end of the letter paper, he subtly and skillfully reversed the tone by evoking the imagery of Qin Guan smiling while stroking his beard. This is like an invitation, for the power of resonance in this line would spontaneously bring out a smile from Qin Guan even if he had not already done so.

The use of such “witty or playful words” 戲語 constitutes one of the characteristic features of the compositions of the Su Shi circle. These writings span a range of genres including poetry, prose, and calligraphic work, and adopt a variety of names such as *xishu* 戲書, *xiti* 戲題 or *xida* 戲答. While such mode of writing was not uncommon before the Song, Su Shi and his friends pushed it to a new level with both their sheer number of compositions that self-referentially point out the playful mode, as well as the variety of such compositions that they accomplished. In the letterets composed in his exile, Su Shi often demonstrated his remarkable ability to transform the otherwise bitter moments of life into something uniquely tasty. For example, in a letter to Fan Zhen, also during the Huangzhou period, Su Shi wrote:

... Between the spring and the summer I often suffered from ulcer and conjunctivitis, [therefore] I shut the door to avoid guests. But then gossips began to circulate that I had passed away, which caused much worry for people around me. I heard this from Officer Li, [and am telling you here] just for a laugh. The praises and criticisms that I have received in my life are probably all similar to this. ...⁷³

... 春夏間，多患瘡及赤目，杜門謝客，而傳者遂云物故，以為左右憂。聞李長官說，以為一笑。平生所得毀譽，殆皆此類也。...

In another letter to Cheng Quanfu 程全父 (?-?) composed during his exile in Dan'er 儋耳 (in present-day Hainan province), the southernmost tip of the Northern Song empire, Su Shi wrote:

⁷³ “Dan Fan Shugong shiyi shou” 答范蜀公十一首, no. 2, SSWJ, 50.1446.

When I first arrived, I rented a few government-owned rooms. Recently, I was kicked out, and had to buy a plot of land and bundle thatch together [to build a simple house], barely enough to avoid having to sleep in the open. But [as a result] my pocket has become empty. In such difficult and distressful situation, what have I not got? [I would] put it aside as something not worth mentioning, [but tell it to you] just for a laugh! The old friends and acquaintances in my life, could I dream of them again? [I could only] recall our soothing excursions and often chant those refined lines, so as to relieve my boredom and solitude.⁷⁴

... 初至，僦官屋數椽，近復遭迫逐，不免買地結茅，僅免露處，而囊為一空。困厄之中，何所不有。置之不足道，聊為一笑而已。平生交舊，豈復夢見，懷想清遊，時誦佳句，以解牢落。

In both cases, Su Shi was facing a rather dire situation, either poverty or rumors about his death, but both times he conveyed through his letterets a sense of cheerful optimism by making fun of himself, culminating in the phrase “just for a laugh” 以為一笑/聊為一笑. In many ways, such witticism was meant more for Su Shi himself than for the addressee. By portraying himself in a way that would bring out laughter from his reader, Su Shi cleverly shifted his role away from the sufferer to that of a bystander, and the laughter he induced from his reader in turn helped him to forget, at least temporarily, the misery that he was in.

This uncanny ability to turn bitterness into fun, as demonstrated in these three letterets, also reinforces our deeply rooted impression of Su Shi was an “incorrigible optimist,” as Lin Yutang 林語堂 aptly characterized.⁷⁵ If we examine carefully the sources of evidence from the Southern Song onwards that were used to support this impression, we will find that almost all of them come from Su Shi’s letterets as well as a few anecdotes that were repeatedly quoted. As such, these miscellaneous writings provide a unique and invaluable

⁷⁴ “Yu Cheng Quanfu shi’er shou” 與程全父十二首, no. 9, SSWJ, 55.1626.

⁷⁵ Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* (New York: John Day Company, 1947), vii.

perspective to understand the banished Su Shi: among all the textual spaces in the post-Poetry Trial era of Northern Song, the letteret and the other miscellaneous texts that will be explored in later chapters provide some of the most significant space for Su Shi's self-representation. If not for these texts, the Su Shi we know today might be very different.

Since Su Shi could not always get the things he needed from friendly fellows like those in Huangzhou, another important feature of his letterets was to ask for everyday necessities or other items, thank those who sent him things, as well as talk about the price and value of things he had received. In a letter to Fan Bailu 范百禄 (1030-1094, style name Zigong 子功), for example, Su Shi wrote:

I have humbly received your letter, and known that you have been doing well recently. I have also received the round tea [cake], chest, aromatizing clip, etc. [that you sent me], and am truly grateful! [As for your] request for chestnuts, isn't it too cheap? Could I give you a bamboo fence as well? Haha! ⁷⁶

辱教，承晚來起居住佳勝。團茶及匣子、香藥夾等已領，珍感珍感。栗子之求，不太廉乎？便不得更送一箇篋籬耶？呵呵。

Compared with what Fan gave to Su Shi, some chestnuts in return were indeed very cheap. Su Shi clearly realized the imbalance in the exchange and directly pointed it out, albeit with a jocular tone. Moreover, he played with the sounds of two words: the character *li* 栗 in *lizi* 栗子 (chestnuts) is phonetically similar to *li* 籬 in *pili* 篋籬 (bamboo fence).⁷⁷ Such similarity highlights the drastic contrast between the size of a chestnut and a fence. This, together

⁷⁶ "Yu Fan Zigong liu shou" 與范子功六首, no. 4, SSWJ, 50.1450.

⁷⁷ In medieval Chinese, 栗 belongs to the rhyme group of 質, pronounced as [liēt], while 籬 belongs to the rhyme group of 支, pronounced as [liē].

with the impossibility of delivering a fence with a letter, would probably cause the reader to pause for a while. Then, Su Shi ended his letter with a self-mocking “*hehe*” 呵呵, which can be loosely translated as “haha.”⁷⁸ This would immediately smoothen out the contrast, transform Fan’s pause into a contented smile, and hence allow Su Shi to repay the favor.

Although there is no record of the date of this letter, such occasions involving the exchange of everyday necessities, medicines, as well as artistic objects occurred frequently during Su Shi’s exile. While poetry was often used to express gratitude, letter was always the medium of choice for making direct requests, recording items that were sent, as well as acknowledging receipt. For example, in the second half of a letter to Wen Tong 文同 (1018–1079), Su Shi asked for a painting of ink bamboo, for which Wen was famous:

I specifically sent this person to you [to get the painting]; please do not hide it any longer. If you do, not only am I going to go around everywhere painting in a slapdash manner and signing them off with the name Yuke, I will also take the quatrain you sent me and make an appeal, seeking two hundred and fifty bolts of silk [as compensation].⁷⁹ Haha!⁸⁰

專令此人去，請幸毋久秘。不爾，不惟到處亂畫題云與可筆，亦當執所惠絕句過狀索二百五十疋也，呵呵。

As is well known, Su Shi was not only a master of calligraphy and painting, but also a fervent fan of the artistic works of his friends. This is a vivid example of how he pushed

⁷⁸In medieval Chinese, 呵 belongs to the rhyme group of 歌, pronounced as [xA]. Thus, it is phonetically similar to “haha” in modern English, although it refers to a more subtle and lighter laugh. Sometimes, *hehe* also suggests a promise that will not be fulfilled, although simply entertaining the possibility of such a promise would be fun. An example of this is given in a letter to Cai Jingfan 蔡景繁, also written when Su Shi was in Huangzhou; see “Yu Cai Jingfan shisi shou” 與蔡景繁十四首, no. 9, SSWJ, 55.1663–64.

⁷⁹ 250 bolts of silk was a small fortune at the time compared to what Wen Tong would get for his painting.

⁸⁰ “Yu Wen Yuke san shou” 與文與可三首, no. 3, SSWJ, 52.1512.

Wen Tong, a famous painter who announced that he would no longer paint at the request of other people, for a scroll of ink bamboo, in a jocular way distinctive of Su Shi. The witty “ultimatum” in this letteret would only be effective if Su Shi were able to forge Wen’s painting, and the phrase “haha” at the end reflects Su Shi’s obvious confidence in doing so. By ending the letter in this way, Su Shi could almost foresee how Wen Tong would first frown and then smile when reading it, and reluctantly fulfill his request.

Besides instilling fun into letters about all kinds of trivialities of life as well as the exchanges of objects, Su Shi also frequently used the phrase “just for a laugh/smile” in letters accompanying his poems or calligraphic works that he sent to others. For instance, in a letter to Zhu Shouchang 朱壽昌 (1014–1083, style name 康叔) written in the second year after he was demoted to Huangzhou, Su Shi said:

[I have] already moved to Lingao Pavilion by the [Yangtze] River, and [the scenery is] clear and broad. On windy mornings or moonlit evenings, [I would] carry my cane and take a wild stroll, scooping up river water and drinking it. These are all ripples of your favor [to me]. Thinking about your charisma and righteousness brings comfort to my solitude. I found a poem scroll that I wrote in the sixth month of last year, and I am sending it to you just for a smile. In such a sultry summer, I truly hope you take care.⁸¹

已遷居江上臨臯亭，甚清曠，風晨月夕，杖履野步，酌江水飲之，皆公恩庇之餘波，想味風義，以慰孤寂。尋得去年六月所寫詩一軸，寄去，以為一笑。酷暑，萬乞保練。

In another letter to Diao Yue 刁約 (style name Jingchun 景純, ?–1082), Su Shi explained the contexts of the poems that he sent along:

⁸¹ “Yu Zhu Kangshu ershi shou” 與朱康叔二十首, no. 5, SSWJ, 59.1786.

... Although it has not been long since I came to this county, I have made dozens of poems. After a while, I have almost forgotten all of them, and could only remember four. I made a copy and sent to you, just for a smile. ...⁸²

... 在郡雖不久，亦作詩數十首，久皆忘之，獨憶四首，錄呈為一笑。...

Such letterets that serve as an accompaniment to poems are numerous among the writings of Song literati, and claims that the poems are “just for a laugh” also appear frequently in letters exchanged by those in Su Shi’s social circle. Interestingly, such claims were made regardless of the actual contents of the poems; in fact, from the titles of poems listed in some letters, we can tell that these poems do not deal with anything humorous and would not be considered funny were it not for the epistolary framework that claims them to be so. This illustrates one of the most important functions of letteret in the textual communication of the Northern Song: not only did they serve as a medium for poetry transmission, but they also provided contextual background about the poems for recipients.

One may disagree with the significance we have assigned to “haha” or “just for a laugh” by arguing that they are mere formulaic expressions in Chinese epistolary writings. However, if we trace the history of their usage, we will see that the Northern Song was the first time in history when “haha” was frequently used in letters.⁸³ Moreover, the association of poetry with fun or laughter was also a novel phenomenon. In poetry before the Song,

⁸² “Da Diao Jingchun er shou” 答刁景純二首, no. 2, SSWJ, 57.1715.

⁸³ The use of “hehe” as an onomatopoeia for laughter, however, began much earlier, as such usage was recorded in the Han dynasty dictionary *Erya* 爾雅, and continued throughout history till this day. Ouyang Xiu was among the earliest authors who used the term frequently in his letters.

jocular or playful content appeared only in a limited number of cases.⁸⁴ When it came to the Northern Song, however, not only was there a drastic increase in the number of poems that included in their titles the phrase “written in a witty tone” 戲作, but poets themselves also began to introduce their poems as only meant “for a laugh.” Such phenomenon is striking given that in traditional conception, the function of poetry lies in its ability to “incite people’s emotions, to observe their feelings, to keep company, and to express grievances” 興、觀、群、怨.⁸⁵ To consider poetry as merely for fun indicates a suspension of the moral judgments about poetry, thus making any attempt to link the poem back to the intentions of the poet difficult.

Because of this, the frequent usage of expressions like “haha” and “just for a laugh” among the Su Shi circle may have an added layer of significance, especially in the period after the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial. As aforementioned, Su Shi refused many requests from others after the Trial by claiming that he had stopped his composition activities. His self-restraint, however, was selectively exercised since he still sent poems to close friends and students. In such situation, the use of “haha” or “just for a laugh” in letters was also a strategy to avoid direct comment on the poems that were sent along, or even a deliberate downplay of the significance of poetry. On the other hand and perhaps most importantly, the appearance of such jocular phrases in letters brings the recipient closer to the author,

⁸⁴ For example, poetry puzzles like *lihe shi* 離合詩 or *dayan xiyan shi* 大言細言詩 from the Six Dynasties are obviously for fun. There were also poems written in a witty tone during the Tang, but never on the same scale as was in the Song.

⁸⁵ This concept was proposed by Confucius. The translation here follows that of Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938; rpt. Vintage Books, 1989), 212, with minor modification.

since they signal a strong sense of intimacy and a wordless bond, by excluding people who did not receive Su Shi's poems or his smile.

In summary, the various literary features of the letteret discussed so far, together with their unique mode of transmission through a hybrid courier network, gave the letteret an attractive aura of exclusivity and privacy. As such, letteret were often considered as a more faithful representation of the true author than other established genres. This, together with other reasons that will be detailed below, propelled people of late eleventh and twelfth centuries to fervently collect manuscripts of letterets and publish them in large quantities.

1.4. Collecting and Printing Letterets: A Case Study of Ouyang Xiu's *Shujian*

As presented in **Table 1.1** at the beginning of this chapter, an unprecedentedly large quantity of non-official letters have been preserved from the Song. **Tables 1.2** and **1.3** delineate those writers who each left behind more than two hundred letters, as well as the network of their epistolary exchange.⁸⁶ Such scale of preservation is in large part a result of the intense interest the Southern Song people took in these writings, as well as their relentless effort in collecting them. Among this corpus of letters, a point worth noting is their extremely uneven distribution among the authors: the number of letterets written by each author exhibits a distinctly bimodal distribution. At one extreme is a select group of authors who left behind hundreds and even thousands of letters, such as Zhu Xi and Su Shi;

⁸⁶ See note 12 earlier for sources for these Tables.

Author	No. of letters written	Author	No. of letters written
Zhu Xi 朱熹	2056	Qiang Zhi 強至	305
Su Shi 蘇軾	1557	Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙	299
Sun Di 孫覲	1350	Yang Wanli 楊萬里	291
Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅	1206	Huang Gan 黃榦	267
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩	643	Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵	263
Li Zhiyi 李之儀	470	Chao Gongshuo 晁公邁	260
Fang Dacong 方大琮	305	Chen Mi 陳宓	259

Table 1.2. The most prolific Song authors of non-official letters.

Recipient	No. of letters received	Most frequent sender(s)
Zhu Xi 朱熹	254	Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙, Zhang Shi 張栻
Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙	122	Zhu Xi 朱熹
Han Qi 韓琦	111	Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹
Zhang Shi 張栻	91	Zhu Xi 朱熹, Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙
Teng Dadao 滕達道	72	Su Shi 蘇軾
Lü Zujian 呂祖儉	67	Zhu Xi 朱熹
Wang Dingguo 王定國	61	Su Shi 蘇軾, Su Zhe 蘇轍
Hu Songnian 胡松年	61	Sun Di 孫覲
Chen Liang 陳亮	61	Zhu Xi 朱熹, Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙
Qin Hui 秦檜	58	Li Gang 李綱, Feng Shixing 馮時行
Lin Yongzhong 林用中	54	Zhu Xi 朱熹
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修	54	Wang Anshi 王安石, Zeng Gong 曾鞏
Zhou Bida 周必大	53	Zhu Xi 朱熹, Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙

Table 1.3. Song authors who received the most letters and their most frequent sender(s).

on the other end of the distribution, however, is a much larger group of authors who only left behind a dozen or a few letters. Moreover, if we look at the temporal spread of these letteret authors, we will see a drastic contrast between the Northern and the Southern Song: although much fewer of them come from the Northern Song, the size of the collection for the most prolific ones among them way surpasses that of their Southern Song counterparts, with Zhu Xi being the only exception. In addition, by the Southern Song, literati were regularly collecting their letterets and including them into their collections, as a glance at some of the Southern Song literary collections would tell. Therefore, an important transition occurred between the Northern and Southern Song, both in terms of people's perception of the letteret as well as the way in which they handled these texts.

To better illustrate how such a profound transformation took place over the twelfth century, we use the textual history of Ouyang Xiu's letteret collection as a representative example.⁸⁷ During his lifetime, Ouyang Xiu sorted out, edited, and finalized most of his major writings, especially those on classics, poetry, as well as political pieces composed while serving various official positions. These pieces served as the foundation for Ouyang Xiu's first literary collection, the fifty-juan *Jushi ji* 居士集, which was completed by his sons as well as his disciple Su Shi. Given the fact that the compilers not only had direct access to

⁸⁷ For detailed accounts of the textual history of Ouyang Xiu's various works, see Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, "Ouyang Xiu zhushu kao" 歐陽脩著述考, *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 復旦學報 (社會科學版) 3 (1985): 157-172; Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書, *Songren bieji xulu* 宋人別集敘錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 157-180; Higashi Hidetoshi, "Nansō-bon 'Ōyō Bunchūkō shū' no seilitsu katei ni tsuite" 南宋本『歐陽文忠公集』の成立過程について, *Kagoshima daigaku hōbun gakubu kiyō "jinbun gakkā ronshū"* 鹿児島大学法文学部紀要『人文学科論集』53 (2001): 1-30; and Wang Lan 王嵐, *Songren wenji bianke liuchuan congkao* 宋人文集編刻流傳叢考 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2003), 81-113.

the writings finalized by Ouyang himself but were also intimately familiar with him as a person, *Jushi ji* best captures what Ouyang Xiu had considered representative of his worth and the shape his literary corpus should take. In this collection, only eight letters were included.⁸⁸ In the meantime, a variety of other collections of Ouyang's works had been compiled and printed by people outside of his family, and were in circulation from the late eleventh to mid-twelfth century. Some of these collections also included letters that were not present in *Jushi ji*, although their numbers were limited.⁸⁹ By 1191, Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126–1204), together with a group of scholars, began compiling a complete collection of Ouyang Xiu's works. During the course of this compilation, which lasted for five years, Zhou and his colleagues searched widely and amassed a large number of Ouyang Xiu's letters from a variety of sources. Their efforts resulted in ten *juan* of *shujian* 書簡 (containing a total of 453 pieces) as part of the 153-*juan* *Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji* 歐陽文忠公集.⁹⁰ This

⁸⁸ See Wang, *Songren wenji bianke liuchuan congkao*, 81–86; and Higashi Hidetoshi, “Xinjian jiushiliu pian Ouyang Xiu sanyi shujian jicun gao” 新見九十六篇歐陽修散佚書簡輯存稿, trans. Chen Chong 陳翀, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 105 (2012): 1–29.

⁸⁹ For example, a twenty-*juan* *Bieji* 別集 had been compiled by Wang Ledao 王樂道 and his son, which contained pieces that were all not included in *Jushi ji*. While this collection is no longer extant, we know about its existence from the postscript, “Ouyang Wenzhong gong bieji houxu” 歐陽文忠公別集後序, that Li Zhiyi 李之儀 (1048–1117) wrote for it. See Li Zhiyi, *Guxi jushi houji* 姑溪居士后集, in *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 1120 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 15.693. According to Higashi Hidetoshi, this *Bieji* served as the foundation for the 25-*juan* *Waiji* 外集 in Zhou Bida's *Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji*; see idem., “Xinjian jiushiliu pian Ouyang Xiu sanyi shujian jicun gao,” 4.

⁹⁰ Wang, *Songren wenji bianke liuchuan congkao*, 86–89. For a more detailed examination of Zhou Bida's efforts, especially with regards to greatly expanding the *shujian* collection, see Higashi Hidetoshi, “Shokan yori mita Shū Hitsudai no ‘Ōyō Bunchūkō shū’ hensan ni tsuite” 書簡よりみた周必大の『歐陽文忠公集』編纂について, *Nippon Sōdai bungaku gakkai hō* 日本宋代文学学会報 1 (May 2015): 1–17. Zhu Gang 朱剛, however, has proposed that prior to Zhou's time, a sizable collection of Ouyang Xiu's letters close in scale to that included in *Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji* was already in existence. See idem., “Guanyu ‘Ou Su shoujian’ suoshou Ouyang Xiu chidu” 關於《歐蘇手簡》所收歐陽脩尺牘, *Wuhan daxue xuebao (renwen kexue ban)* 武漢大學學報 (人文科學版) 65.3 (May 2012): 39–42.

collection, which went to print in 1196, became the definitive edition of Ouyang's works, and laid out the main organizational framework that all subsequent collections inherited.

The growth of Ouyang Xiu's collected letterets, however, did not end with Zhou Bida. When Zhou's collection was later reprinted, one of the imprints, now known as the "National Library of China edition" 國圖本, added in nineteen new *shujian*.⁹¹ This edition was used as the base text for the "Ming Palace edition" 明代內府本 printed in 1420, which later served as the source for all modern editions of Ouyang Xiu's collections.⁹² Few people knew, however, that there existed another augmented edition following the National Library of China edition but before the Ming Palace edition, which added another ninety-six new pieces of *shujian*. This edition, printed sometime during late Southern Song, has been lost in China, but fortunately one copy was brought to Japan around 1259. Over the next 750 years, it has not received much attention, since it was considered to be identical with the 1196 print. It was only in 2011 were these ninety-six letters rediscovered by Higashi Hidetoshi while doing research on this edition, which is now held in the library of Tenri University at Nara (**Figure 1.1**).⁹³ The resurfacing of these previously unknown letters brought to light invaluable raw materials for understanding Song epistolary culture, and sheds key insights into not only the formation of Ouyang Xiu's complete collections but also the textual history of letterets in general.

⁹¹ This edition is currently kept in the National Library of China, thus its name. The year of its printing is uncertain. See *ibid*.

⁹² This edition is no longer extant today. See *ibid*.

⁹³ For a complete transcription and annotation of these letters, see Higashi Hidetoshi coll., Hong Benjian 洪本健 annot., *Xinjian Ouyang Xiu jiushiliu pian shujian jianzhu* 新見歐陽修九十六篇書簡箋注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014).

To begin with, these lost letters demonstrate that even for a literary giant such as Ouyang Xiu whose literary collection was compiled soon after his death using pieces selected and ratified by himself, only a small fraction of *shujian* were considered worthy of inclusion. Secondly, the successive albeit selective incorporation of newly amassed *shujian* during the Southern Song suggests that the idea of putting these writings into literary collection was something that only gradually developed from Southern Song onwards. Such cumulative process was in fact common to the compilation of most of the collections of Northern Song literati. While there were cases of letteret collection during the Northern Song, such practice was often sporadic efforts not aimed towards systematic anthologization.



Figure 1.1. Pages from the Tenri edition of *Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji*, showing a previously unknown *shujian* of Ouyang Xiu, “Yu Du langzhong” 與杜郎中.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Image adapted from Higashi and Hong, *Xinjian Ouyang Xiu jiushiliu pian shujian jianzhu*.

One such example was the Northern Song military general Gao Yongheng 高永亨 (style name Wuhui 無悔, ?-1082), who once asked Qin Guan to write a *tiba* 題跋 for his letter collection.⁹⁵ In this piece, Qin described the occasion of his composition as such:

One day, Wuhui took out all the letters that various gentlemen have sent him, which included more than one hundred pieces by [people like] Han Qi and others, and asked me to write a *tiba* at its end. I happily wet my brush, and recorded the accounts of the incident at Yongle.⁹⁶ These would probably demonstrate that what those gentlemen have praised Wuhui about are indeed not words in vain.⁹⁷

無悔一日出諸公所與尺牘，自韓魏公以下百餘番，屬余跋尾。余欣然濡筆，因以永樂之事載之，庶幾見諸公所以稱道無悔者，非虛語也。

In this case, Gao collected these hundreds of letters addressed to him not for their calligraphic value, but rather as a memento of the personal connections he had with those various officials. Qin Guan's *tiba* in turn served as a confirmation of the praise that others had showered on Gao in those letters, and added one more episode of Gao's gallantry in the Battle of Yongle. Judging from the wording in this *tiba*, Gao seemed to have kept the letters in their original forms and was showing them only to close friends who visited him, since if any compiling or printing attempt was involved, they would be reflected in Qin's *tiba*.

There is little evidence that people in the Northern Song were regularly making such letter collection or searching for letters except those by famous calligraphers. The situation,

⁹⁵ *Tiba* is a genre that resembles the postscript or colophon, and will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2, in which we will discuss another *tiba* by Qin Guan that was probably written for the same Gao Yongheng.

⁹⁶ Gao had an illustrious military career, and was renowned for his brave resistance against the Tangut Xixia army at the northern border town of Yongle (in present-day Shaanxi province).

⁹⁷ "Gao Wuhui bawei" 高無悔跋尾, HHJJZ, 34.1122-1123.

however, changed significantly at the turn of the Northern-Southern Song. As mentioned earlier, during the early years of Southern Song, the book printing industry gradually flourished in both major cities as well as local schools and academies. During the compilation of complete collections of works for various Northern Song authors, the letteret was one of the categories that were significantly expanded. The various reasons for doing so can be gleaned from their prefaces or descriptions of these collections. For example, Wu Fu 吳芾 (1104–1183), compiler of Li Zhiyi's collection *Guxi Jushi ji* 姑溪居士集, described how he managed to obtain Li's letters:

Li Duanshu (*i.e.* Li Zhiyi) was well known for his writings. During the Yuanyou reign, I first got hold of his letters and became fond of the clarity and elegance of his words and thoughts, which evoke the flavor of people from the Jin and Song⁹⁸ dynasties. I regretted that I did not see other writings of his. In the year of Dinghai (1167) during the Qiandao era, I served as the temporary prefect of Dangtu County (in present-day Anhui province). When I searched for [traces of] those literati who used to live here and left behind great reputation, there were only three: Li Taibai (*i.e.* Li Bai), Guo Gongfu (*i.e.* Guo Xiangzheng), and Duanshu. This county had the collections of Taibai and Gongfu, but only lacked that of Duanshu. I asked for his works from his family, but his children and grandchildren had already scattered, and no manuscript of his remained. Gradually, I amassed them from the local people and sorted them according to their kinds. I asked a scholar-official from the county Dai Hui to collate them and make corrections, arranged them into fifty *juan*, and had the [printing] blocks cut in the school.⁹⁹

李公端叔以詞翰著名。元祐間余始得其尺牘，頗愛其言思清婉，有晉宋人風味，恨未覩他製也。乾道丁亥，假守當塗，因訪古來文士居此邦而卓然有聲于世者，惟李太白、郭功父與端叔三人。郡舊有太白、功父集，而端叔獨缺然。求于其家，而子孫往往散落，無復遺藁。間得之邦人，類而聚之，命郡士戴翬訂正，釐爲五十卷，鋅板於學。

⁹⁸ The "Song" here refers to the Song dynasty (420–479) during the Six Dynasties period.

⁹⁹ See Wu Fu's preface "Guxi Jushi wenji xu" 姑溪居士文集序 in *Guxi Jushi quanji* 姑溪居士全集, *Congshu jicheng chubian* ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 1.

Here is an example of a local official's effort to perpetuate the legacy of a local literary figure, and it is obvious that Wu already considered letters to be part of Li Zhiyi's *cihan* 詞翰, which literally means "penned words." Note the search progress described here: Wu first asked Li's descendants, and when such efforts proved to be in vain, he then turned to the local people. Indeed, due to extensive losses during the war, family collections and materials scattered in the local regions or among friends were often the most common sources of Northern Song authors' writings.

Jia Chengzhi 家誠之, compiler of Wen Tong's collection *Danyuan ji* 丹淵集, mentioned a different reason for including letters when he explained his principle for organizing the collection: "I have also put the letters, poetry and prose that [Wen Tong] exchanged with various people at the end [of the collection], so as to [let people] know how the relationships [Wen had] with his mentors and friends came about" 復以諸公往來書翰詩文系之於末，庶知先生師友淵源所自。¹⁰⁰ In a sense, this reason is similar to what Qin Guan said about Gao Wuhui's collection, in that letters are a manifestation of the author's personality as well as his relationships with others.

If the efforts of these two compilers were mainly focused on searching for as many letters as possible, then Zhou Bida, at the end of the twelfth century, was already comparing variants of letters when he compiled Ouyang Xiu's complete collection. He said in his postscript to the collection:

¹⁰⁰ See Jia Chengzhi's appended note to the table of contents of *Xinke Shishi xiansheng Danyuan ji* 新刻石室先生丹淵集 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1973), 79–81.

I have now seen several versions of his hand-written “Rhapsody on the Sounds of Autumn.” One [of his] hand-written *tie* to Liu Yuanfu (i.e., Liu Chang) was also [rewritten] twice or thrice, and the words he used [in each version] are often different. As such, variant versions [of his works] are especially abundant.¹⁰¹

今觀手寫《秋聲賦》凡數本，劉原父手帖亦至再三，而用字往往不同，故別本尤多。

Evidently, the most important reason for Zhou to adopt such a compilation strategy was Ouyang Xiu’s compositional habit: he would repeatedly revise his writings, resulting in many different versions of the same piece. However, Zhou Bida’s practice also indicates that the idea that letters have a firm place in one’s literary corpus had already been widely accepted by the end of the twelfth century. In that spirit, Zhou Bida was editing Ouyang Xiu’s letterets with the same principles that Song people would normally use when editing a poetry collection: looking for textual variants, comparing different editions, and figuring out the textual relationships between them. That is, letterets have become a fully established genre by this time.

Such great interest in letterets continued all the way throughout late imperial China, and till this very day. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, there emerged elaborate theoretical discussions on the genre of letteret by scholars such as Wu Ne 吳訥 (1372–1457) and Xu Shizeng 徐師曾 (1517–1580).¹⁰² In addition, the types of letter collections also

¹⁰¹ Zhou Bida, “Ouyang Wenzhong gong ji ba” 歐陽文忠公集跋, OYXQJ, 2759. See also Zhu Shangshu, *Songren bieji xulu*, 159–160.

¹⁰² See Wu Ne and Xu Shizeng, *Wenzhang bianti xushuo/Wenti mingbian xushuo* 文章辨體序說/文體明辨序說, coll. and punct. Yu Beishan 于北山 and Luo Gengze 羅根澤 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962), 41, 128–129.

diversified, with some aiming to create a lineage of epistolary literature in China while others catered to special interests, such as letters by a group of close friends or by concubines.¹⁰³ As such, regardless of the constant shifts in the definition of letters or in the boundaries between official and non-official realms, the letteret has been firmly established as an integral part of Chinese epistolary literature.

Conclusion

Letteret was a new discursive space that developed during the Northern Song. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how it became an established literary genre as the result of the compilation and printing activities over the twelfth century. The main factors that powered Southern Song people's fascination with the epistolary world of the previous era lie in the complex interaction and mutual definition between the literary characteristics of letteret and the socio-cultural background of their transmission. Northern Song literati made use of the hybrid postal network to write about a wide range of topics. Through the frequent forwarding, sharing and transmitting of letterets, an intimate community was

¹⁰³ Examples of such collections include Wang Shizhen's 王世貞 (1526–1590) *Chidu qingcai* 尺牘清裁, Mei Dingzuo's 梅鼎祚 (1549–1615) *Shuji dongquan* 書記洞詮, and Zhou Lianggong's 周亮工 (1612–1672) *Chidu xinchao* 尺牘新鈔. An extreme example is a group of letter manuscripts collected by Fang Yongbin 方用彬 (1542–1608), a Confucian merchant from Huizhou (in modern day Anhui province) during the Ming dynasty. Unlike most letter collections which consist of letters written by a specific author, the Fang Yongbin collection consists of hundreds of letters addressed to him over the last forty years of his life. The authors were mostly local literati or educated merchants who exchanged writings with him, and who were not exactly famous for poetry or calligraphy. Fang's practice indicates that there was an awareness of accumulating personal correspondences even among the lower echelons of the educated class. See Chen Zhichao 陳智超, *Meiguo Hafo Daxue Yanjing Tushuguan cang Mingdai Huizhou Fangshi qinyou shouzha qibai tong kaoshi* 美國哈佛大學哈佛燕京圖書館藏明代徽州方氏親友手札七百通考釋 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2001).

formed between the author, the recipients, as well as with other parties involved in the process. This community was bonded together through the intensely personal tone of these letterets, especially through the witty elements and jocular atmosphere instilled into them in times of difficulty. In addition, through a close examination of the textual history of Ouyang Xiu's letter collection, I have analyzed the crucial roles played by twelfth-century compilers and readers in shaping the literary collections of the Northern Song literati that have been passed down to us today. Through persistent efforts in searching for letterets and incorporating them into literary collections, they preserved a key component of miscellaneous writings by Northern Song literati, which was especially important given that such writings were already rapidly scattering in late Northern Song due to the literary censorship as well as the political turbulence that plagued China during the Northern-Southern Song transition.

The letteret also serves as a best starting point for our effort to delineate the world of miscellaneous writings and define the fundamental issues related to the emergence of this textual world, since it lies at the boundary between the two worlds of traditional and non-traditional genres. In the next chapter, we move on to a genre that is very different from the traditional prose, and explore how Song literati used it to redefine various aspects of human-object relationship such as ownership and material obsession, as well as come to terms with the loss of their spontaneous self.

Chapter 2

“Colophons” Inscribed on Tombstones:

The Rise of *Tiba* 題跋 as a Literary Genre

Introduction

Among the countless treasures of Chinese art preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Night-Shining White 照夜白,” is one of the most famous extant brush-and-ink paintings from the Tang dynasty (618–907). Crafted by the eighth-century master court painter Han Gan 韓幹 (ca. 706–783), in its original form, this painting was rather simple and in a sense “clean”: on a rectangular piece of paper, it depicts a horse that appears almost ready to gallop forward—were it not for a rope that secures it to a wooden pillar (**Figure 2.1**). Starting from the ninth century, however, collectors or appreciators alike began to add various features to the painting. In addition to documenting its title and author, the more numerous additions were signatures of collectors in the forms of written words as well as inscribed seals. In the Song dynasty (960–1279), small chunks of words were appended to the painting. When blank space on the original paper was used up, a new piece of paper was

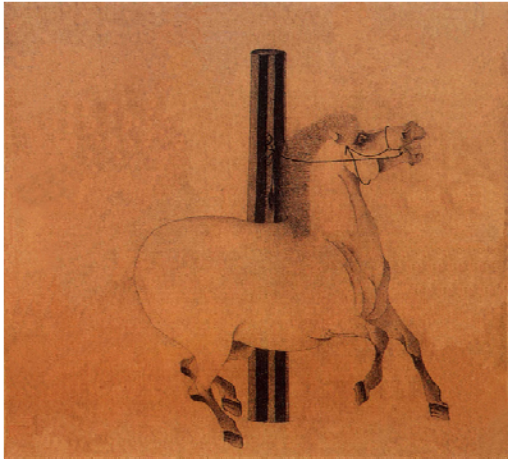


Figure 2.1. Han Gan's *Night-Shining White* (digitally modified to show its original form).



Figure 2.2. Han Gan's *Night-Shining White* (digitally modified to show its state by the end of the thirteenth century, with Zhang Yanyuan and Mi Fu's signatures and other inscriptions).



Figure 2.3. Han Gan's *Night-Shining White* (current state), handscroll, ink on paper, 30.8 × 34 cm. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1977 [197.78]).

attached to its side (**Figure 2.2**). Such practice continued, transforming the original painting into a scroll that kept on growing for many centuries (**Figure 2.3**).¹

These “add-on” inscriptions are termed *tiba* 題跋, a compound word of *ti* 題, which means to write on top of or at the beginning of, and *ba* 跋, meaning to write at the end of something.² Because *tiba* shares some key characteristics with the term “colophon,” which is widely used in the study of European manuscripts and books, most scholars translate *tiba* as “colophon.” *Tiba* provide not only basic information about the book or text to which they are attached, such as its title, author, transcriber, or date (or occasion) of its creation/circulation.³ *Tiba* also possess certain important features that distinguish them from colophons. To begin with, while most colophons are written by the scribe or printer of the book, *tiba* could be penned by either the author or, as in the case of “Night-Shining White,” by a collector or a reader. Moreover, a colophon is often written or printed to mark the completion of a text; in contrast, a *tiba* only marks a particular stage in its circulation and, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, illustrates a distinctive openness of the work with the possibility of continual addition. As such, in contrast to the explicitly bibliographic nature of colophons, *tiba* adopts a much more versatile and flexible textual form.

¹ Such “growth” came to an end only in the early twentieth century (as indicated by the date of the last inscription on the painting), when it became part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

² In modern Chinese, it is possible to directly translate the word *ba* translated as “postscript.” However, during the period under our examination, *ba* refers more generally to any kind of writing regarding a text or an object that could be either attached to its end or added as separate addition to it. The earliest explicit usage of the term “*tiba*” occurs in Shen Kuo’s 沈括 *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談. See Hu Daojing 胡道靜 coll. and annot., *Mengxi bitan jiaozheng* 夢溪筆談校證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 244–246.

³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines colophon as “the inscription or device, sometimes pictorial or emblematic, formally placed at the end of a book or manuscript, and containing the title, the scribe’s or printer’s name, date and place of printing, etc.”

Second, although the above discussion refers solely to “texts,” the subject of *tiba* goes beyond conventional books and manuscripts. In fact, during the Song dynasty, only a small number of *tiba* were written about books; the more dominant subjects were paintings, calligraphy,⁴ and other artistic objects such as writing brushes, paper, and inkstones.⁵ Composing *tiba* on such tangible items continued to flourish for the next millennium and became its definitive form. In addition, many *tiba* were also composed during the Song on various intangible things, including personal incidents, hearsay stories, random thoughts, and even dreams.⁶

Besides the form and content of *tiba*, it is also worth noting the textual condition of their preservation, especially the relationship they have with their target subjects. In that respect, the *tiba* on “Night-Shining White” serves as a rather unconventional example, since very few *tiba* pieces are preserved in their original format. Instead, the majority of those composed during the Song dynasty are preserved as texts in printed or hand-copied literary collections. As such, despite the fact that most of these *tiba* were originally attached or physically close to their target subjects, at a certain point, they were taken out of their

⁴ The term “calligraphy” here encompasses a wide range of writing forms. Since most books in imperial China were hand-written using brush and ink, the distinction between calligraphy and books is not always a clear-cut one. For an excellent review, see Frederick W. Mote, “Calligraphy and Books: Their Evolving Relationship through Chinese History,” preface to *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989). The dynamics between calligraphy and writing in general lies at the center of our investigation of *tiba* as well as of other miscellaneous prose genres dealt with in this study.

⁵ For a general description of the scope of contents of Song *tiba*, see Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, *Songwen tonglun* 宋文通論 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008), 908–929.

⁶ These *tiba* are often hard to distinguish from other *biji* 筆記 works written during this period. This fact stands as yet another testament to the absence of a clear boundary between the miscellaneous prose genres examined in this study. See Chapter 4 for more detailed discussions.

original contexts and reproduced as separate texts for reading.⁷ However, if *tiba* is by nature supplementary and its very *raison d'être* depends on its target, why were such a large amount of *tiba* read and circulated as independent texts?

In this chapter, I argue that the very act of detachment from its original context constitutes the key moment in *tiba*'s "birth" as a genre. I begin by analyzing the philological origin of the term. Next I trace the historical trajectory of *tiba*'s flourishing, starting from the fifth and sixth centuries when such pieces began to be written, though only occasionally, as signatures of painters or appraisers to prove the authenticity of paintings.⁸ It was not until the Northern Song, however, that a sharp rise is observed in both the practice of composing *tiba* as well as the number of pieces that were preserved. Modern scholars estimate that the total number of extant *tiba* pieces by Song writers amounts to more than 6,000,⁹ although at the individual level, there was still a big gap between the output of a relatively small group of literati who were usually famous calligraphers or poets¹⁰ and that of the rest, each of whom left behind only a few pieces, similar to the situation of letterets.

⁷ To be anthologized under a separate category in literary collections could be seen as a symbol of *tiba*'s acceptance as an independent genre, just like poetry and other genres established before the Song.

⁸ For an outline of the development of colophons and other forms of writing on Chinese paintings, see Xu Jianrong 徐建融, *Shuhua tikuan tiba qianyin* 書畫題款題跋鈐印 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2000), and De-nin D. Lee, "Colophons, Reception, and Chinese Painting," *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 28.1 (Jan-Mar 2012): 84-99.

⁹ See Zhu Yingping 朱迎平, "Songdai tibawen de boxing jiqi wenhua yiyun" 宋代題跋文的勃興及其文化意蘊, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 4 (2000): 84-93.

¹⁰ The *tiba* works of some of its most prolific practitioners during the Song were compiled by the late-Ming scholar and bibliophile Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599-1659) in his *Jindai mishu* 津逮秘書, which comprise a total of 76 *juan* of *tiba* from twenty prominent writers, including Su Shi, Ouyang Xiu, Huang Tingjian, Zhou Bida 周必大, Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊, Lu You 陸遊, Zhu Xi 朱熹, and Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁.

This phenomenal expansion has much to do with the rise of connoisseurship in the eleventh century, which prompted novel avenues through which literati could represent objects, explore human-object relationships, as well as negotiate self-image presentation in their writings. *Tiba*, as a new and flexible textual form, provided a unique discursive space beyond traditional genres such as poetry and formal prose that enabled these literary “experiments.” Through this space, Northern Song literati demonstrated more diverse attitudes towards material obsession, reflected on the meaning of self as a creator, admirer, and owner of objects. Through this space, they also lamented the loss of spontaneity as a result of the new culture of fans and followers. Towards the end of the eleventh century, *tiba* even assumed the additional role of providing a definitive narrative of a person’s life. This is demonstrated in a case study of the memorial writings for a protégé of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) in the last section of this chapter. All of these factors expanded the scope and shaped the aesthetics of the discursive space of *tiba*, which in turn led to the genre’s flourishing. Subsequently, during the Southern Song, these *tiba* writings were massively copied, compiled, and set to print. These efforts gradually established *tiba* as regular categories in literary collections and helped ensure the preservation of a large number of them to this very day.

2.1. From *Ti* and *Ba* to *Tiba*

To understand the historical context for the rise of *tiba* as a genre, a good way to begin is by analyzing the philological root of its name. For the two characters that constitute this

compound word, “*ti*” 題 refers to both the act of writing on top of something (e.g. a piece of calligraphy or painting, a standing screen, or a mountain cliff) as well as the text produced as a result of such writing. Traditionally, painting has been one of the earliest and most important subjects for such activities, and modern scholars have termed these writings “literature written on paintings” 題畫文學.¹¹ The second character, “*ba*” 跋, refers to notes or comments made after an event, such as reading a book or a painting. Unlike *ti*, *ba* only became a popular form of writing during the Tang dynasty; at that time, it was used mostly to refer to reading notes or memoirs; its physical connection to the target was not important.

In his *Wenzhang bianti* 文章辨體, or *Classification of Genres of Literary Writings*, one of the most important theoretical works on literary genres from late imperial China, Wu Ne 吳訥 (1372–1457) traces the origin of *tiba* as a literary term:

¹¹ See for example Aoki Masaru 青木正兒, “Daiga bungaku no hatten” 題畫文學の発展, in *Aoki Masaru Zenshu* 青木正兒全集, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1983), 491–504. Aoki first contextualizes the evolution of *huaba* 畫跋 into a historical account of writings on and about paintings, including both text-like titles and signatures that are part of a painting as well as texts outside of it. He then divides *huaba* into two categories: “self-*ba*” (*ziba* 自跋) written by the same author/artist as its target and “*ba* by others” (*taba* 他跋). Aoki’s is one of the earliest studies of this group of writings, and remains a foundational work for the field. For a thorough review of scholarship on “literature written on paintings,” see I Lo-fen 衣若芬 “Tihua wenxue yanjiu gaishu” 題畫文學研究概述, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu tongxun* 中國文哲研究通訊 10.1 (2000): 215–252. I’s other published works on this topic include *Guankan, Xushu, shenmei: Tang Song tihua wenxue lunji* 觀看, 敘述, 審美—唐宋題畫文學論集 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan wenzhe yanjiusuo, 2004), as well as a focused study on Su Shi’s works, *Su Shi tihua wenxue yanjiu* 蘇軾題畫文學研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999). In contrast to the various other genres grouped under this category, poetry has a relatively independent track of development, since poems about paintings (though not necessarily written on paintings) had been written long before the Song, as pointed out by both Aoki and I Lo-fen. While Du Fu is generally recognized as its first major practitioner, it was not until the works of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian did this sub-genre truly come of age. For detailed analyses of Su and Huang’s poems on paintings, see Ronald Egan, “Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang T’ing-chien,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43.2 (Dec. 1983): 413–451; and Stuart H. Sargent, “Colophons in Counterpoint: Poems by Su Shih and Huang T’ing-chien on Paintings,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.1 (Jun. 1992): 263–302.

In the various collections from the Han to the Jin dynasties, no *tiba* was included. When it came to Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan in the Tang dynasty, titles [of writings] such as “On reading the book of...” and “Upon reading the composition of...” began to emerge. It was only after the time of Ouyang Xiu and Zeng Gong in the Song Dynasty that there were writings of *ba*.¹²

漢晉諸集，題跋不載。至唐韓、柳始有“讀某書”及“讀某文題其後”之名。迨宋歐、曾而後，始有跋語。

In a way typical of this work, Wu Ne traced the lineage of the term that began with the “reading notes” of Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819). Most of these pieces are long and elaborate discussions of histories or other works that they have read and are still accessible to us through their collected works. The contents, length, and especially the tone of these writings are comparable to the more formal intellectual treatises by Han and Liu; they bear very limited resemblance to the *ba* writings by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007–1072) and other writers of the Song Dynasty. It is due to this reason that Wu Ne emphasized that only similar “titles” emerged during the Tang, and that the actual *ba* writings appeared “only after” Ouyang Xiu and Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019–1083).

Indeed, Ouyang Xiu is often credited by modern scholars as the first person to consciously write in the *tiba* genre on a large scale.¹³ For example, his notes and comments on his epigraphic collection, titled *Jigulu bawei* 集古錄跋尾 (hereafter denoted as JGLBW), or

¹² See Wu Ne and Xu Shizeng 徐師曾, *Wenzhang bianti xushuo/Wenti mingbian xushuo* 文章辨體序說/文體明辨序說, coll. and punct. Yu Beishan 于北山 and Luo Gengze 羅根澤 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1962), 45.

¹³ See for example Huang Guosheng 黃國聲, “Gudai tiba gailun” 古代題跋概論, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 中山大學學報 (社會科學版) 4 (1980): 97–105; and Zhu Yingping 朱迎平, “Songdai tibawen de boxing jiqi wenhua yiyun”.

Ending Ba to Records of Collecting Antiquities (Figure 2.4), amount to more than 400 entries in ten *juan*.¹⁴ However, it is important to note that Ouyang Xiu's literary collection, compiled in the early twelfth century, also includes another category titled "*Za Tiba*" 雜題跋, which contains twenty-seven pieces of notes of diverse nature. Some are very similar to Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan's elaborate reading notes, while others are simply jottings of Ouyang's thoughts or activities. Therefore, what we have here is an eclectic "trash bin"-like category created by later compilers for writings that could not be easily pigeonholed into established genres (aptly reflected by the merging of *ti* and *ba* in its name). As such, this challenges the conventional notion that Ouyang Xiu was writing *tiba* as a clearly defined genre.

Despite the difficulty in pinpointing the precise birthday of the genre, there is no doubt that Northern Song was the time when the new discursive space of *tiba* emerged and developed through the writing practice of literati, especially Su Shi and his friends and followers. When it came to the generation of Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who both grew up in the early years of the Southern Song, *tiba* had already become a standard category in the literary collections of Northern Song literati. Moreover, writing *tiba* represented a deliberate act of composition, in preparation for future anthologization. The subject scope of these writings also stabilized: topics such as painting,

¹⁴ Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 estimates that these entries cover a total of 381 pieces of epigraphic rubbing. See idem., "Ouyang Xiu zhushu kao" 歐陽脩著述考, *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 復旦學報 (社會科學版) 3 (1985): 157–172. These rubbings, no longer extant today, were derived from diverse sources, including steles, bronze vessels, and inscriptions from ancient times through the Tang, all of which were part of the "antiquity" 古 in Ouyang's eyes. For a close examination of the process through which *Jigulu* took form, see Wang Hongsheng 王宏生, "'Jigulu' chengshu kao" 《集古錄》成書考, *Shixueshi yanjiu* 史學史研究 2 (2006): 77–80.

右漢西嶽華山廟碑文字尚完可讀其述自漢以來六高祖初興改秦漢祀太宗承節各詔有司其山川在諸侯者以時祠之孝武皇帝脩封禪之禮巡省五岳立宮其下宮曰集靈宮殿曰存僊殿門曰望僊門仲宗之世使者持節歲一禱而三祠後不承前至於新帝用丘虛孝武之元事舉其中禮從其省但使二千石歲時往祠自是以來百有餘年所立碑石文字廢滅延熹四年弘農太守袁逢脩廢起損易碑飾闕會遷京北尹孫府君到欽若嘉業遵而成之孫府君諱琛其大略如此其記漢祠四岳事見本末其集靈宮他書皆不見惟見此碑則余於集錄可謂廣聞之益矣

治平元年閏月十六日書

右陸文學傳題云自傳而曰名羽字鴻漸或云名鴻漸字羽未知孰是然則宜其自傳也茶載前史自魏晉以來有之而後世言茶者必本鴻漸蓋為茶著書自羽始也至今俚俗賣茶肆中多置一甕偶人云是陸鴻漸至飲茶客稀則以茶沃此偶人視其利市其以茶自名久矣而此傳載羽所著書頗多云君臣契三卷源解三十卷江表四姓譜十卷南北人物志十卷吳興歷官記三卷湖州刺史記一卷茶經三卷占夢三卷崑止茶經而已也然佐書皆不傳獨茶經著於世

Figure 2.4. Two surviving entries of JGLBW, in Ouyang Xiu's own handwriting: "Hou Han xiyue Huashan miao bei" 後漢西嶽華山廟碑 (top) and "Tang Lu Wenxue zhuan" 唐陸文學傳 (bottom). (National Palace Museum, Taipei [00065]).¹⁵

¹⁵ Images adapted from Lin Po-Ting 林柏亭 gen. ed., *Daguan: Beisong shuhua tezhan* 大觀: 北宋書畫特展 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2006), 298–299. These entries are mounted together with two other surviving entries on the same scroll, followed by numerous *tiba* on them.

calligraphy and poetry continued to expand, whereas unconventional themes such as dreams and personal excursions were dropped. Therefore, to fully understand why Chinese literati were fascinated with *tiba* for hundreds of years, we would have to go back to the Northern Song, before attrition over the subsequent centuries gradually “trimmed” them to form a genre with a well-defined boundary as we see today. The representation of two themes, I argue, are critical to our examination of the *tiba* writings of the Northern Song: the relationship between human and objects, and that between self and community.

2.2. Redefining Human-Object Relationships

The nature of things, and especially the relationship between the human world and the natural world, was one of the central themes of Chinese philosophical discourse since ancient times. Based on various perspectives of the ontological nature of the non-human world, pre-Song scholars took diverse stances in their representation of human-object relationships. One such representation that is particularly relevant to our discussion is the broad spectrum of epistemological views regarding human’s attitudes towards material things as manifested in both philosophical and literary writings. On one extreme of the spectrum is the belief that man needs to “investigate things” *gewu* 格物, and that the understanding of nature and of the hierarchical principle of the material world is an essential part of one’s knowledge and a first step towards self-cultivation.¹⁶ On the other

¹⁶ The term “*gewu*” comes from a famous teaching in the *Great Learning* 大學 on a series of steps one needs to take in order to attain self-cultivation and ultimately build a harmonious society. In addition, there also

end of the spectrum is the attitude that one could “take pleasure in things” *wanwu* 玩物. Associated with this attitude is a sense that one should enjoy material possessions for the purpose of seeking pleasure without any associated moral or political obligations.¹⁷ This attitude sits on a perilous edge that separates such entertainment from indulging oneself to the point of becoming obsessed with material things, which generations of historians or admonishing ministers would consider as a moral threat to any educated person. As Wai-ye Li succinctly has summarized in her discussion of Zhang Yanyuan’s 張彥遠 (ca. 815–after 875) *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (or *Records of Famous Paintings through the Ages*), “denial of indulgence” and keeping a balanced and moderated attitude towards treasures or wealth are “recurrent themes in the Chinese discourse on objects and ownership.”¹⁸ This is especially relevant to the ruler, whose excessive infatuation with beautiful women or exotic items is often taken as a sign of moral decadence, or even as an omen for the fall of the regime if left unchecked.¹⁹ During the Tang, however, writings that advocate for the joy

exist many other teachings from pre-Qin times about knowing the natural world that do not carry such moral connotation. For example, Confucius is said to have told his son that one should read the *Book of Songs* 詩經 in order to widen his “acquaintance with the names of birds, beasts, plants and trees” 多識於鳥獸草木之名. See Arthur Waley trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938; rpt. Vintage Books, 1989), 212.

¹⁷ In a penetrating study using the case of Ouyang Xiu as example, Stephen Owen observes that in the Northern Song, possession, especially of material things, was often a condition of happiness and self-identity for the literati. See idem., “Kuaile, yongyou, mingming: Dui Beisong wenhuashi de fansi” 快樂, 擁有, 命名—對北宋文化史的反思, trans. Bian Dongbo 卞東波, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 古典文學知識 178 (2015): 113–117; 179 (2015): 88–97; 180 (2015): 99–102.

¹⁸ Wai-ye Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” *T’oung Pao*, 2nd ser. 81.4–5 (1995): 269–302.

¹⁹ Such an attitude is best reflected in the phrase “taking pleasure in things undermines the will” 玩物喪志, as well as in recurring narratives throughout Chinese history about emperors whose over-indulgence in the pleasure of objects led to the decline of the dynasty. For other works, in addition to Li’s, that touch on this issue, see for example Judith T. Zeitlin, “The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art, and Medicine,” *Late Imperial China* 12.1 (1991): 1–26.

of appreciating things without political or moral consequences began to surface. This was especially the case in treatises that argue for the value of art. As Zhang Yanyuan famously stated: “If I do not do that which is useless, how can I take pleasure in this life which does have a limit?” 不為無益之事，則安能悅有涯之生?²⁰ Despite such an eloquent proclamation, moral tones against indulgence were still very much present in many poetic writings, including the works of famous Tang poets who actively pursued material objects such as precious stones.²¹ Therefore, when literati of the Northern Song began to write about their relationships with material things, they had access to a wide range of earlier works as their reference, including philosophical discussions, encyclopedia, and literary representations in various forms. *Tiba* developed as a new mode of writing about objects by gradually absorbing and challenging these early discourses. Below I will analyze the relationship of *tiba* to its target object from two perspectives: as a frame and as a replacement.

2.2.1. *Tiba* as frame

When we think of paintings today, the first image that comes to mind is probably of one that a curator or collector has mounted in a finely carved wooden frame and hung on the wall of a museum or gallery. By its side, a small label informs us of the painting’s title, author, dating, provenance, and perhaps its artistic significance. Paintings and works of calligraphy in pre-modern China had no such associated paraphernalia; they were mostly

²⁰ Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, *Congshu jicheng chubian* ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 88.

²¹ See for example Xiaoshan Yang, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 91–148.

painted or written on a thin piece of paper that could be rolled up for convenient storage.²² As aforementioned, the number of inscriptions on scroll paintings before the Song is limited. As such, in its early stage of development, *tiba* served a similar function as that performed by frames and labels in a modern museum exhibit. In that respect, Ouyang Xiu's JGLBW provides the best example. Below is a *tiba* that demonstrates many of the characteristics shared by the hundreds of pieces collected in this book:

To the right lies the rubbing of the stele of Fan Changshi of the Han dynasty, which reads: "Here lies someone with the posthumous name An, style name Ziyou, who was a native of Huyang of Nanyang. He studied the Han [Ying] version of the *Book of Songs*, the *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety* in his childhood. He used to serve as ...²³ He died at the age of fifty-six, on the day of Jiachen of the fourth month of the fourth year of the Yongshou era (158)." He first served as "Zhong Huangmen," then "Xiao Huangmen" and "Xiao Huangmen youshi," which were probably positions in the Han official system, the rank of which could not be determined today. I used to live in Handong (in present day Hubei province) when I was young. In the fourth year of the Tiansheng era (1026) there was a *jinshi* examination, and I was on my way to the Ministry of Rites. I just passed Huyang (in present day Hunan province) and saw this stele standing on the left of the road. I got off my horse, read it, and lingered in front of it for a long time. Only thirty years later was I able to get hold of a rubbing of this stele and include it in my collection. Originally, [steles were] probably not recorded by people in the world. Since I started collecting ancient writings, people of my time slowly realized that they are something that should be cherished, and since then ancient steles were gradually collected and rubbed. Written this fourteenth day of the tenth month of the eighth year of Jiayou era (1063).²⁴

²² Wu Hung's fascinating study on screens in the history of Chinese painting provides the best reference for our analysis. By looking at screens as physical objects (i.e., furniture inside one's house) as well as screens portrayed inside paintings, Wu provides an illuminating analysis of how the screen connects the definite and the infinite through its metonymic and metaphoric roles in both physical spaces as well as in pictorial worlds. See Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Paintings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²³ Omitted here is a list of the official titles that Fan served in his lifetime.

²⁴ "Hou Han Fan Changshi bei" 後漢樊常侍碑, in *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集, punct. and coll. Li Yi'an 李逸安 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001) [hereafter OYXQJ], 135.2109.

右漢樊常侍碑，云：“君諱安，字子佑，南陽湖陽人也。君幼學治韓詩、《論語》、《孝經》。歷……年五十有六，永壽四年四月甲辰卒。”其先為“中黃門”，後為“小黃門”，又為“小黃門右史”，蓋漢官之制，今不詳其次序也。余少家漢東，天聖四年舉進士，赴尚書禮部，道出湖陽，見此碑立道左，下馬讀之，徘徊碑下者久之。後三十年始得而入《集錄》。蓋初不見錄于世，自余集錄古文，時人稍稍知為可貴，自此古碑漸見收采也。嘉祐八年十月十四日書。

The opening line here “To the right lies…” is a very common way to begin an entry in JGLBW, indicating that it was originally appended directly to the end of its subject, in this case, a rubbing of a biographical stele of a Han dynasty official. The first part of this piece consists of a transcription of the content of the rubbing, a necessary step since many steles were written using archaic scripts (*e.g.* seal script), and transcribing them into common script lays the groundwork for any future reading.²⁵ After clarifying the content, Ouyang points out the value of this stele that the list of official positions recorded on it may reflect the hierarchy in Han official ranking system, which had fallen into oblivion by his time. Similar attempts of assigning values to objects in his epigraphic collection by pointing out how they confirm, challenge or supplement the historical knowledge of his time are ubiquitous in JGLBW, in line with the conviction that Ouyang clearly states in the preface: “[I] also record those [epigraphs] that could correct mistakes and supplement deficiencies in histories, to pass them down to later scholars, with the hope that they will help to expand their knowledge” 因并載夫可與史傳正其闕繆者，以傳後學，庶益于多聞。²⁶ One of the

²⁵ In exceptional cases in which the inscriptions came from pre-Qin times, Ouyang Xiu would send them to his friends, ask for a transcription of the ancient characters, and then record them in his *tiba*. For example, Liu Yuanfu 劉原父 (also known as Liu Chang 劉敞, 1019–1068) and Yang Nanzhong 楊南仲 (fl. 11th century) were often mentioned by Ouyang as those who could understand and recognize ancient characters. See OYXQJ, 134.2062–2075.

²⁶ See “*Jigulu muxu*” 集古錄目序, OYXQJ, 42.600.

reasons for his repeated attempts is because people in the early Northern Song had little interest in epigraphic objects. As such, Ouyang Xiu was the pioneer in building up such a collection and articulating the value of these ancient inscriptions and artifacts. In many ways, his efforts paid off, for he successfully inspired many scholars and collectors to follow suit during the Song,²⁷ and ushered in an entire tradition of antiquarianism (or *jinshi* 金石) that persisted till the early twentieth century.²⁸

In the remaining part of this *tiba*, Ouyang tells us, in less than a hundred words, a story about how he encountered the stele thirty years ago: he “lingered in front of it” with affection, but ultimately had to let go of it. Thirty years later he was finally “able to get hold of” *de* 得 and own a rubbing from it. Ouyang Xiu weaves this account smoothly into the vicissitudes of his personal life, in which he rose from being a young and unrecognized examination candidate—similar to the uncelebrated stele—to becoming one of the most influential statesmen and literatus of his time. Towards the end, Ouyang Xiu summarizes this process by providing a casual narrative about the rising interest in epigraphic inscriptions among his contemporaries as a result of his collecting activities. As such, this *tiba* not only serves as an informative “label” delineating the collection history of this

²⁷ The most prominent among them is perhaps Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129) who, together with his wife Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1155), compiled the famous *Jinshi lu* 金石錄. In his preface to the work, Zhao wrote: “Since my youth, I liked to follow scholars and literati of the day to visit epigraphic inscriptions from past ages, in order to broaden my knowledge. Later on, I got hold of Ouyang Wenzhong’s *Jigulu*. After reading, I cherished it for its correction of mistakes, which significantly benefits later scholars” 余自少小喜從當世學士大夫訪問前代金石刻詞，以廣異聞。後得歐陽文忠公《集古錄》，讀而賢之，以為是正譌謬，有功於後學甚大。See Zhao Mingcheng, *Jinshi lu jiaozheng* 金石錄校證, coll. and annot. Jin Wenming 金文明 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 1.

²⁸ For a succinct account of the development of the *jinshi* tradition, see Shana J. Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 13–32.

particular stele rubbing but also “frames” this rubbing within the grander life trajectory of Ouyang Xiu as witnessed by this stele. It is such constant shifting and interaction between the object and the owner that sets *tiba* apart from other commentaries on classics or explanatory notes in early catalogs.

With the rise of connoisseurship in the early to mid-eleventh century, composing *tiba* gradually became a common practice among literati, with the majority targeted at paintings and calligraphy. Qin Guan’s 秦觀 (1049–1100) *tiba* for the famous painting “Wangchuan Villa” 輞川圖, believed to be the work of the great Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (701?–761),²⁹ stands as another good example of the increasingly complicated role of *tiba* in “framing” its target. Qin first encountered this piece in the summer of 1087, when he was suffering from illness and a friend brought him this painting as his “remedy”:

In the Dingmao year of the Yuanyou era (1087), I was the Director of Schools at Runan County (in present-day Henan province). In the summer, I was struck with digestive ailments and bedridden in my official abode. Gao Fuzhong,³⁰ whom I was close to, brought me the “Painting of the Wangchuan Villa”³¹ by Mojie (i.e., Wang Wei) and said: “**Reading** it

²⁹ There is in fact much controversy regarding whether the painting seen by Qin Guan, or for that matter any scroll painting of Wangchuan Villa, was indeed the work of Wang Wei. The Tang records of Wang Wei painting the Wangchuan area only mention that he painted on the walls of a temple. No indication on any hand scroll by him on the same subject has been found until the Northern Song, when such mentions were made, especially by Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, and Qin Guan. See the long *tiba* composed by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty at the end of a hand scroll alleged to be a Song imitation of Wang Wei’s “Wangchuan Villa,” in *Gugong shuhua tulu* 故宮書畫圖錄 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1989–2013), 17:62–70.

³⁰ According to Xu Peijun 徐培均, Gao Fuzhong was Gao Yongheng 高永亨, style name Wuhui 無悔; Fuzhong refers to his ranking as the second son in his family. See Xu Peijun, “Shilun xin faxian de Qin Guan ‘Wangchuan tu ba’” 試論新發現的秦觀《輞川圖跋》, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 1 (2011): 67–72. In addition, Qin Guan wrote another colophon for Gao Wuhui’s letter collection; see the discussion and footnote 98 in Chapter 1 for more details.

³¹ Wangchuan is a river in Lantian County of Shaanxi province. Wang Wei, who owned an estate near the river, composed the painting as well as a series of closely related poems on the scenery around the estate.

could heal your illness.” Since I am someone of the river and the sea,³² I was ecstatic to get the painting. I immediately made my two sons hold it on both sides [of my bed] and *read* it from my pillow. Entranced, I felt as if I was entering Wangchuan with Mojie, walking over the Hill of Huazi, passing through the Valley of Mengcheng, taking a break at the Manor of Wangkou, stopping at the Mansion of Wenxing, climbing up the Ridge of Jinzhu and the Gate of Mulan, crossing the bank of the Pond of Zhuyu, softly stepping on the Lane of Pagoda Trees, peeping into the Thatch of Luzhai, returning backing and forth between the hillocks in the north and south, boating in the Lake of Qi, playing among the waves of willow trees, pouring over the Rapids of Luanjia, drinking from the Spring of Jinxie, crossing the Shoal of White Stones, stopping at the Mansion of Bamboos, transiting at the Dock of Agnes, and finally arriving at the Garden of Lacquer. Having forgotten that my body was still shackled³³ in Runan, we were wearing our turbans and holding our walking sticks, playing chess and drinking tea, and composing poems to entertain ourselves. After a few days, my illness was indeed healed, and Fuzhong also came by to pick up the painting for Xiahou Taichong.³⁴ Hence, I wrote [this piece] at its end and returned it to Gao.³⁵

元祐丁卯，余為汝南郡學官，夏，得腸癖之疾，臥直舍中。所善高符仲攜摩詰《輞川圖》視余，曰：“閱此可以愈疾。”余本江海人，得圖喜甚，即使二兒從旁引之，閱於枕上。恍然若與摩詰入輞川，度華子岡，經孟城坳，憩輞口莊，泊文杏館，上斤竹嶺並木蘭柴，絕茱萸洪，躡槐陌，窺鹿柴；返於南北垞，航欽湖；戲柳浪，灌樂家瀨，酌金屑泉；過白石灘，停竹裡館，轉辛夷塢，抵漆園。幅巾杖履，期弈茗飲，或賦詩自娛，忘其身之匏系於汝南也。數日疾良愈，而符仲亦為夏侯太冲來取圖，遂題其末而歸諸高氏。

This *tiba* is first and foremost a “thank you” note to Gao Fuzhong. This is made explicit by the opening and ending words about how his illness was healed by reading the painting, presumably repeatedly over the course of a few days. Based on the last line, there was

³²The original phrase “Jianghai ren” 江海人 carries the connotation of someone who wanders in nature and lives like a hermit.

³³The term used here is *paoxi* 匏系, which literally means “hung-up gourd,” a famous allusion from chapter 17.7 of the *Analects*. The image of a gourd being hung up and not used is a symbol of talented people not being recognized.

³⁴It is not clear why Fuzhong was picking it up “for Xiahou Taichong,” although it is possible that this painting belonged to the latter.

³⁵“Shu Wangchuan Tu hou” 書輞川圖後, in *Huanghai ji jianzhu* 淮海集箋注, coll. and annot. Xu Peijun (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994) [hereafter HHJZ], 34.1120–1121. Italics in the text are mine. Similar to Qin, Su Shi also wrote about how his sickness was healed through reading; see “Ti Liu Zhuangyu wenbian hou” 題劉壯與文編後, in *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, punct. and coll. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986) [hereafter SSWJ], 66.2074.

probably some blank space at the end of the scroll, where Qin Guan wrote this piece.³⁶ Qin Guan knew very well that this “thank you” note would be read not only by Gao but also by any future reader to whom Gao might show the painting. So he created an extensive account of his healing experience through an imaginary journey elicited by the painting. Mentioned in the account is a series of place names in the Wangchuan area that anyone familiar with Wang Wei’s works could immediately identify: they form the subject of a group of poems exchanged between Wang and Pei Di 裴迪 (?-?). Altogether, Wang Wei wrote twenty poems, each titled with the location it depicts, and Qin Guan mentioned eighteen of them.³⁷ Moreover, Qin cleverly invoked these poems through the verbs he carefully chose for each location. For example, he used the word “softly stepping on” *nie* 躡 for the Lane of Pagoda Trees 槐陌, which Wang portrayed as “remote, shady, and lined with many green lichens” 幽阴多绿苔. As for Luzhai 鹿柴, the quiet and solitary thatch in Wang’s poems, Qin picked the very appropriate term “peeping into” *kui* 窺.

The original painting of the Wangchuan Villa has now been lost, but there are many imitation pieces from the Yuan and later dynasties. In all likelihood, none of these specific locations are explicitly marked on the painting.³⁸ Therefore, this *tiba* not only projects places onto the painting but also threads these otherwise ambiguous locations into a spatio-temporal sequence. Out of such sequence, it creates a virtual itinerary across the entire

³⁶ It is clear that this painting came in the form of a scroll, because Qin asked his two sons to hold its ends to unfold it.

³⁷ This reference is further strengthened by Qin Guan’s mentioning of Wang Wei as his travel companion.

³⁸ Not all of these locations are actually discernible on the painting, although some of the main mansions could probably be identified.

painting. In this way, besides telling about the magical journey of healing that Qin Guan had experienced, this *tiba* also provides future readers with a labeled guide for navigating the pictorial space, and allows them to take both Wang Wei and himself as travel companions.

A few years later, Qin Guan chanced upon this painting again, for which he wrote another *tiba*:

There was a time when I was bedridden with illness in Runan. My friend Gao Fuzhong brought Mojie's painting "The Wangchuan Villa" to my abode to show me, saying that [it] could heal [my] illness. I then ordered my sons to hold it beside my pillow and read it. Entranced, having forgotten that my body was still shackled, [I felt as if I] had entered the Hill of Huazi, was stopping at the Mansions of Wenxing and Zhuli, and was drinking and singing with Pei Di and others. Therefore, [I] realized that the meaning of Mojie's paintings lies beyond this dusty world, and with the scenery at the tip of the brush, it is sufficient to enliven [my] mood and please [my] senses. The title of "a painting master in a previous life" is indeed not wrong!³⁹

Now, how lucky [am I] to be able to see this painting again! [It is] as if the snow mountains from the Western Regions have been transplanted into my field of vision, and amidst the heat of this summer, I feel chilly in front of it as if standing in wind and snow. I realized what Huilian composed⁴⁰ has not exhausted the scenes of the mountains and the woods. Alas! In a touch of brush and ink, my illness was healed when I got it the last time, and when I get to see it now, the heat of the summer is dispelled. The skilled viewer should approach [this painting] with his spirit, rather than merely looking with his eyes! Noted on the twentieth day of the fifth month, by Qin Guan of Gaoyou [in present day Jiangsu province].⁴¹

³⁹ This term comes from a poem that Wang Wei wrote, which includes the following couplet: "In this life [I have] mistakenly become a poet;/In a previous life, I should have been a painting master" 當世謬詞客, 前身應畫師. See Zhang, *Lidai minghua ji*, 307-308.

⁴⁰ This is likely referring to the rhapsody "On Snow" composed by Xie Huilian 謝惠連 (407-433). See David R. Knechtges trans. and annot., *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21-30.

⁴¹ The piece is not collected in any edition of Qin Guan's collected works, but is instead found as a manuscript collected in a volume of Song dynasty calligraphies, now held at the National Palace Museum

余囊臥病汝南。友人高符仲攜摩詰《輞川圖》過直中相示，言能愈疾。遂命童持於枕旁閱之。恍入華子岡，泊文杏竹里館，與裴迪諸人相酬唱。忘此身之匏繫也。因念摩詰畫意在塵外，景在筆端，足以娛性情而悅耳目。“前身畫師”之語非謬已。

今何幸復睹是圖，彷彿西域雪山移置眼界。當此盛夏，對之凜凜如立風雪中。覺惠連所賦猶未盡山林景耳。吁！一筆墨間，向得之而愈病，今得而清暑，善觀者宜以神遇而不徒目視也。五月二十日。高郵秦觀記。

In this *tiba*, Qin Guan created another scene of his “reading” this painting, but this time, he did not “enter” it but only “faced” it. As such, the function of this *tiba* goes beyond that of the previous one in “framing” this painting in both physical and textual spaces. This piece adds a temporal framework for connecting two disparate experiences. Both experiences hinge on the same painting and yet each evokes very different emotions. Moreover, judging from the fact that Qin Guan repeated the details of his previous imaginary journey as well as the format of his final signature, it is unlikely that this piece was written for the same Gao Fuzhong or physically attached to the previous *tiba*. Instead, Qin probably encountered this painting in the hands of a different collector, or wrote this piece for a different occasion.⁴² It is also possible that Qin Guan mentioned his early encounter because his previous *tiba* had been detached from the painting, since it was not an uncommon practice for new owners of paintings and calligraphy to tear away an old *tiba*

in Taipei. See *Gugong shuhua lu* 故宮書畫錄 (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu weiyuanhui, 1956): 3.214–218. Xu Peijun discusses this manuscript in his abovementioned paper “Shilun xin faxian de Qin Guan ‘Wangchuan tu ba’.” Unfortunately he misread the text and claims that this manuscript is the *tiba* that was actually sent to Gao, whereas the one collected in Qin’s collection (which consists of only the part quoted above) is just a draft.

⁴² An unlikely, although not impossible scenario is that this piece may be a jotting that Qin wrote for himself to commemorate his two encounters with the painting, judging from the last word “noted” *ji* 記 that he used.

piece and attach or write a new one. This possible scenario reminds us that the framing role played by *tiba* is often a fluid one, for such detachment and re-attachment could fundamentally alter the presentation of the history or significance of the object. This fluidity allows the owner/collector to modify or even manipulate the angle from which he would like his collection to be viewed.

2.2.2. *Tiba as replacement*

As it turned out, this painting of Wangchuan Villa celebrated by Qin and many other Song literati was subsequently lost, and these two *tiba* became not only invaluable records of the transmission of this painting, but also a virtual replacement for it. Replacement is another important role that *tiba* plays in relation to its target. This is particularly the case for *tiba* on non-textual and non-pictorial objects. While it is relatively easy to attach a *tiba* to a piece of calligraphy or painting (or simply write directly on the same piece of paper), it requires much more effort to link a *tiba* physically to an object such as an inkstone or a zither. Although one could certainly inscribe a *tiba* onto them (which did happen during the Song), more often than not these sorts of *tiba* were written without any expectation that they would be preserved together with their target objects, or preserved at all. Among them, *tiba* on writing instruments are worthy of special attention, because they best illustrate two seemingly contradictory roles that *tiba* plays. Take for example a piece by Su Shi on half a stick of ink that he snatched from his close friend Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105):

Huang Luzhi (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian) learned from my calligraphic [style], and subsequently became famous in our time for [his own] calligraphy. Aficionados would vie with each other by bringing him the finest paper and ink to obtain his calligraphy. [Huang] would often take with him an ancient brocade bag filled with such things. One day during my visit to him, I searched through the bag and found half a stick of ink made by Li Chengyan.⁴³ Luzhi was rather reluctant [in parting with it], and said: “Kids always belittle their own family’s chickens and covet the wild ducks instead.” But I snatched it anyway. It is with this very ink that I am now writing. [Written on] the fourth day of the third month of the fourth year in Yuanyou era (1089).⁴⁴

黃魯直學吾書，輒以書名於時，好事者爭以精紙妙墨求之。常攜古錦囊，滿中皆是物也。一日見過，探之，得承宴墨半挺。魯直甚惜之，曰：“群兒賤家雞，嗜野鶩。”遂奪之。此墨是也。元祐四年三月四日。

Even at first glance of this *tiba*, one could not help but feel the witticism distinctive of Su Shi. This effect is skillfully achieved by his distinguishing himself from those aficionados 好事者; whereas the aficionados would bring fine paper and ink in exchange for Huang’s calligraphy, Su simply “snatched” this precious ink from him. Su Shi cleverly legitimized his act of snatching by providing a critical detail at the very beginning: Huang only became famous for his calligraphy after learning from Su Shi. Mutual teasing of this kind, be it on superiority in the mastery of poetry and painting or popularity among admirers, are omnipresent in many literary exchanges between Su Shi and his close friends. It is also a favorite subject in their writings about collecting and connoisseurship, a point that will be explored further in the next section.

⁴³ Li was a famous ink maker whose ink was considered by Su Shi as among the best of his time. See “Shu Li Chengyan mo” 書李承宴墨, SSWJ, 70.2228.

⁴⁴ “Ji duo Luzhi mo” 記奪魯直墨, SSWJ, 70.2226.

The crux of this *tiba*, however, lies in the last line before the date: “It is with this very ink that I am now writing.” This self-referential emphasis on the material aspect of this *tiba* distinguishes it from other records *about* ink, and makes it a *tiba of* the ink. Besides building a connection between the physical target and the *tiba* text, this line also draws our attention to the two contradictory forces at play in its creation. On the one hand, composing a *tiba* helps commemorate and even preserve the target object it records, but at the same time the very act of writing would inevitably lead to the consumption of this object. In other words, writing a *tiba* both *on* a target and *with* the target simultaneously commits it to memory and drives it to its annihilation. As such, in the process of composing, *tiba* transforms into a replacement for the object.

In many ways, the capacity to function as a replacement is fundamental to all *tiba* writings, as reflected by many writers’ acute awareness of the ephemerality of their target objects. Ouyang Xiu, for example, had articulated in his JGLBW that steles would decay, priceless objects would become lost, and the few hundreds characters in his *tiba* would perhaps become the only trace that any of these objects would leave in the world. This point is perhaps demonstrated to the extreme in cases of ink and paper, whose difficulty of preservation destines them to impermanence.⁴⁵ These reflective moments in *tiba*, therefore,

⁴⁵ In another *tiba*, Su Shi listed every single item he used during the writing process: “I took [a piece of] paper made by the Hall of Cleansing Heart 澄心堂紙 of the Li Family, a mouse-hair brush 鼠須筆 made by Cheng Yi in Hangzhou, the Gongtang ink from Yishui 易水供堂墨 given by my friend Chuanzheng.” The many brand names mentioned here not only highlight the value of the calligraphic piece he was writing, but also verbally concretize the various material features of the piece that would otherwise go unrecognized and forgotten. See “Shu Songlao fu hou” 書松醪賦後, SSWJ, 66.2071.

represent literati's contemplations on both the ephemerality of physical objects and the eternality of writing.

The role of *tiba* as a replacement also explains why some of the notes or jottings on intangible things such as thoughts, experiences, or unique moments from one's life were also included in the category of *tiba* by later readers. We can get a sense of such intangible subjects by glancing at the titles of some of the *tiba* on dreams written by Su Shi: "Record of a debate about *Zuozhuan* in my dream" 記夢中論《左傳》;⁴⁶ "Record of poems dreamed of" 記夢詩文; and "Record of lines from a dream" 記夢中句.⁴⁷ As an explanation for why he took the trouble to take notes of such dreams, Su Shi wrote at the end of his *tiba* on the *Zuozhuan* debate: "[I] woke up and thought about their words. They seemed to make sense, and therefore I put them down" 覺而念其言，似有理，故錄之. He also wrote *tiba* on interesting stories or incidents in his life, such as a good trip he made or witty comments made by a friend. At the end of such pieces, he would often justify them as "just for a laugh" 一笑, or as something for empathetic readers from the future to "clap their hands" 拊掌.⁴⁸

While such peculiar episodes in life are rather rare topics among the *tiba* that survived from the Northern Song and are mostly restricted to Su Shi's writings,⁴⁹ one common non-

⁴⁶ Ibid., 66.2076.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 66.2163.

⁴⁸ See for example "Ji you Dinghui yuan" 記游定惠院, SSWJ, 71.2257–2258; "Shu yi Cai Yunyuan" 書遺蔡允元, SSWJ, 71.2262; and "Shu Luzhi yushi timing hou" 書魯直浴室題名後, SSWJ, 71.2262–2263.

⁴⁹ These pieces on memories, hearsays, or dreams were included in both Su Shi's *tiba* collection, *Dongpo tiba* 東坡題跋, as well as his generically messy and inclusive *biji* collection, *Dongpo zhilin* 東坡志林. There is no clear textual marker to pin them to either category. This is probably the main reason that scholars of *tiba* have largely ignored them. I will argue in the next section, however, that their inclusion in the *tiba*

textual subject that appears more frequently in many literati's *tiba* writings is the places where they traveled. These pieces take a variety of forms, such as celebratory or commemorative pieces requested by their local hosts and friends, or inscriptions on mountains, rocks, or the walls of temples that they passed by during a journey.⁵⁰ Among the extant Su Shi collection, some of the *tiba* on such themes also have accompanying notes indicating that they derive from such inscriptions, although other pieces have ambiguous sources. Similar to *tiba* on peculiar life episodes, many of these travel notes have no clear textual markers to distinguish them from anecdotes or other forms of *biji* 筆記, as will be discussed in chapters four and five. Side by side with *ji* 記, another prose genre to which famous travel pieces such as "On Mountain Stone-Bell" 石鐘山記 belong, *tiba* fit perfectly when they are sufficiently long. Such ambiguity in the occasion of composition, the lack of information about textual transmission, together with the idiosyncratic practice of keeping brief journals of seemingly insignificant moments in one's life, are in fact the central features that tie all these pieces together. This probably constitute the main reason that these various items were all included in the same category of *tiba*.

The absence of clear indication of social occasion leads us to the final subgroup of *tiba* compositions, one that has a long history dating back to Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan. These

category is anything but random compilation. Rather, their inclusion reflects the textual history of many *tiba* pieces (as well as of the many other miscellaneous prose types examined in this dissertation). It also represents a significant stage in the formation of the genre.

⁵⁰ Take for example Huang Tingjian's "Ti Sanyou Dong" 題三遊洞, which even records details such as the date of his journey, the weather of the day, as well as the names of his travel companions. See *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黃庭堅全集, coll. and punct. Liu Lin 劉琳, Li Yongxian 李勇先 and Wang Ronggui 王蓉貴 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001) [hereafter HTJQ], 1618.

are the reading notes that often take the titles of “On reading...” 讀... or “Writing at the End of...” 書...後. For example, majority of the extant *tiba* by Zhang Lei 張耒 (1054–1114) are of such a kind.⁵¹ As Mao Jin aptly summarized in his preface: “The several pieces of *tiba* by him are all occasional compositions made while he was reading history. These “completed bamboos” in his chest are certainly not poems and prose for bureaucratic examinations or words to supplement deficiencies and clarify doubts [in historical sources]” 其題跋數條，皆讀史時偶書，其胸中成竹，絕無殿最詩文、補亡析疑之語。⁵²

Collectively, these *tiba* on dreams, excursions, reading, or other peculiar activities seem only to share limited commonalities with those on painting or calligraphy discussed earlier. They remind us of the amazing heterogeneities within the body of texts that Song people included in the category of *tiba*, which were composed in a variety of forms and under diverse occasions. All of these writings, however, do share a common central feature: through a process of materializing its target in words and articulating its value, they transform the physical object or the non-physical experience into a written record that is forever open to future dialogue. In that way, they become the immortal textual replacement for their often perishable targets.

⁵¹ Among the few extant *tiba* works of Zhang, examples of such include “Shu Han Tuizhi zhuan hou” 書韓退之傳後, “Shu Zouyang zhuan hou” 書鄒陽傳後, and “Shu Tang Tubo zhuan hou” 書唐吐蕃傳後. See *Zhang Lei ji* 張耒集, punct and coll. Li Yi’an 李逸安, Sun Tonghai 孫通海 and Fu Xin 傅信 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 53–54.806–825.

⁵² Zhang Lei, *Wanqiu tiba* 宛丘題跋, comp. Mao Jin, *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 7.

2.2.3. *Obsession and ownership*

As mentioned above, before the Song dynasty, discourse on ownership or obsession with material things had largely been associated with a tone of moral admonishment, a stance that was inherited by people of the Northern Song. As such, while collecting objects of aesthetic and cultural values was vogue among literati of the time, *possessing* things was often frowned upon in many literati's formal writings.⁵³ In many of Su Shi's poems on this theme, for example, a morally aloof stance is evident, and readers may get the impression that Su has indeed transcended such obsession with material things; instead of "clinging to things" 留意于物, he would only temporarily "lodges his feelings in things" 寓意于物, as he famously proclaims in his "Baohui tang ji 寶繪堂記."⁵⁴ In his *tiba*, however, Su Shi seems to have adopted a different persona and becomes someone who not only admits his fervent craving for precious objects but even boasts about it. One such *tiba* concerns a painting of bamboo by his best friend and relative Wen Tong 文同 (1018–1079):

In the past, Yüke (*i.e.* Wen Tong) painted bamboo with ink. Whenever he saw delicate silk or fine paper, he could not help waving his brush and start painting. The people present would fight with each other for the paintings, and Yüke did not begrudge it. Later, whenever he saw people setting up brush and inkstone, he would hesitate and withdraw himself. Those who sought his painting would not be able to get it for a whole year. Someone asked him for the reason. Yüke said: "I had been learning the Way but had not got it. Feeling frustrated in my heart and having no way to discharge it, I hence vented [this frustration] onto ink bamboos. That was a sickness. Now that I have recovered from my

⁵³ See Owen, "Kuaile, yongyou, mingming: Dui Beisong wenhuashi de fansi".

⁵⁴ For excellent analysis of these concepts, see Ronald Egan, "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (Dec. 1989): 365–419 (esp. 402–412), as well as the discussion of "Baohui tang ji" in *idem.*, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 165–170.

sickness, how could I do it?" However, in my view, perhaps Yüke's sickness has not been fully cured. Why, then, would it not recur? I will wait for such recurrence and grab his painting. He used to consider it as his sickness, and now I want to take advantage of his sickness; that is my sickness! Written this twenty-first day of the seventh month of the Gengxu year in the Xining era (1070), by Zizhan (i.e., Su Shi).⁵⁵

昔時，與可墨竹，見精縑良紙，輒憤筆揮灑，不能自己，坐客爭奪持去，與可亦不甚惜。後來見人設置筆硯，即逡巡避去。人就求索，至終歲不可得。或問其故。與可曰‘吾乃學道未至，意有所不適，而無所遣之，故一發於墨竹，是病也。今吾病良已，可若何？’然以余觀之，與可之病，亦未得為己，獨不容有發乎？余將伺其發而掩取之。彼方以為病，而吾又利其病，是亦吾病也。熙寧庚戌七年二十一日，子瞻。

In this *tiba*, written three years before “Baohui Tang ji,” Su Shi’s awareness of his “sickness of obsession” is blatant. By pointing out, using Wen’s own words, his ‘sickness’ of being unable to control the urge to “wave his brush” and his self-declared recovery from such sickness, Su Shi cleverly sets up a hilarious twist when he subsequently acknowledges that his craving for Wen’s paintings was so severe that his fervor for possession was no less “sick” than Wen’s fervor for painting. With such a self-mocking tone, Su’s smugness in his almost pathological obsession is fully revealed.

Su Shi was drawn not only to fine paintings and calligraphy but also to any fine items of the “Four Treasures of the Study” 文房四寶 that made such art possible. We can get a glimpse into such obsession in a *tiba* written by Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107), a great calligrapher and fanatic collector of precious rocks (including inkstones). In it, Mi told, in a humorous tone, an episode about a piece of purple-gold inkstone that Su Shi either “snatched” from Mi (like he had done with Huang Tingjian’s ink) or simply borrowed but refused to return:

⁵⁵ “Ba Wen Yüke mozhu” 跋文與可墨竹, SSWJ, 70.2209.

Su Zizhan carried off my purple-gold inkstone and ordered his son to put it into his coffin.⁵⁶ Now that I got it [back, I] would not let it be confined. How could an object that is passed down from generation to generation be dispatched to reside together with the purely pristine, wholly luminous, original, subtly perceiving, and true and eternal nature [that is, Su Shi's soul]?⁵⁷

蘇子瞻攜吾紫金研去，囑其子入棺。吾今得之，不以斂。傳世之物，豈可與清淨圓明本來妙覺真常之性同去住哉。

The purple-gold rock is considered by Mi Fu as “first grade” for inkstone,⁵⁸ and therefore he would not hesitate to do anything to retrieve it, even if it means pursuing all the way to Su Shi's grave. In this *tiba*, more popularly known as the calligraphic masterpiece *Zijinyan tie* 紫金研帖 (**Figure 2.5**), Mi teased Su for his obsession by contrasting the inkstone that should remain in this world with Su, whom Mi complimented as having a “purely pristine” nature and was, therefore, someone who could leave without any lingering desire or attachment to the material things of the world. Underlying such witty humor is a perfect mutual understanding of and empathy for each other's “sickness” in collecting objects. In contrast to the admonishing tone in poetry and prose pieces like the “Baohui tang ji”, *tiba* provided a textual space where they could openly make fun of each other while celebrating

⁵⁶ Su Shi seems to have borrowed or exchanged other inkstone with Mi Fu. Sometimes Mi Fu was not willing to give him particular inkstones, and Su Shi would ask other friends to approach Mi on his behalf. See Mi Fu, *Baojin yingguang ji* 寶晉英光集 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1979) [hereafter BJYGJ], 135.

⁵⁷ “Shu zijinyan shi” 書紫金研事, BJYGJ, 146. The translation here follows (with minor modifications) that of Peter C. Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), 196. Sturman also discusses in detail the important role inkstones played in Mi's artistic life.

⁵⁸ This assessment was made in an earlier *tiba* that Mi Fu wrote: “In my old age, I got hold of a purple-gold rock from Langya, which was no different from the Youjun inkstone that I have collected. Being first grade in the world, it dwarfs [the inkstones] from Duan[zhou] and She[zhou]” 吾老年方得琅琊紫金石，與餘家所收右軍硯無異，人間第一品也，端歛皆出其下。See BJYGJ, 131.

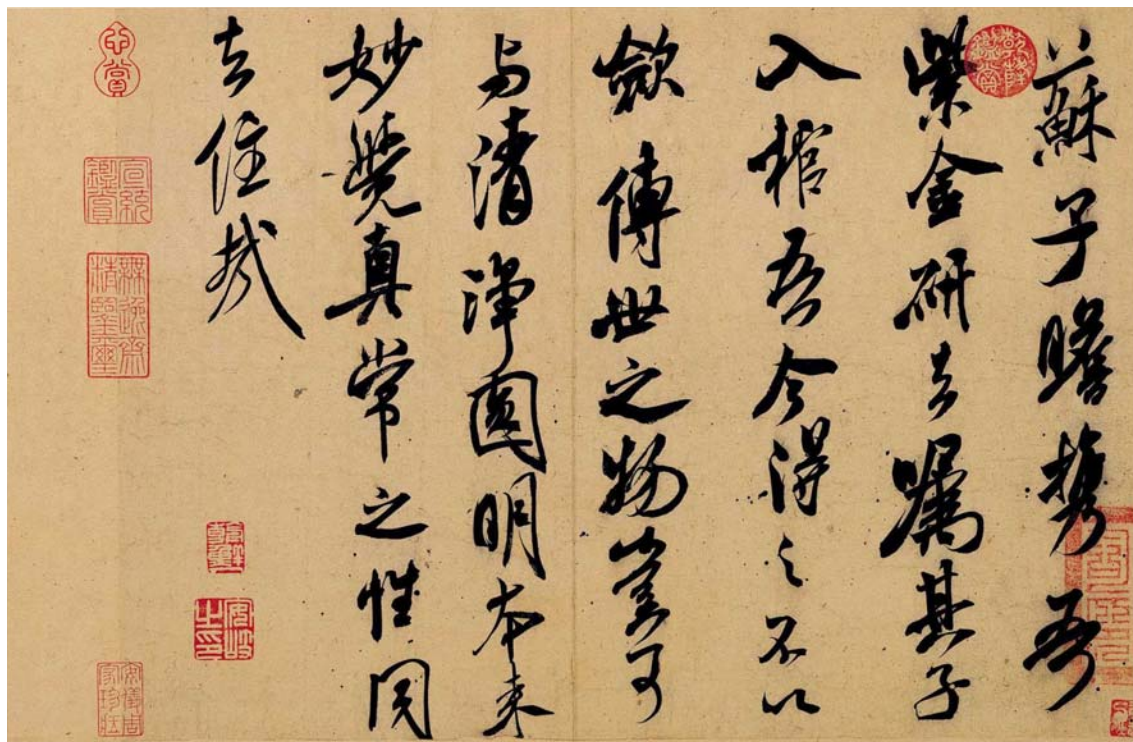


Figure 2.5. Mi Fu's *Zijinyan tie*, album leaf, ink on paper, 28.2 × 39.7 cm. (National Palace Museum, Taipei [00235-16]).⁵⁹

the fine quality of their material possessions, with the full awareness that every single word they jotted down in these *tiba* would in fact add value to these objects. In this sense, *tiba* is not merely an auxiliary category to literati's collection; rather, it functions as a central venue for them to articulate the significance of their collections, as well as a locus for recording the joys and frustrations of their obsessive pursuit of things, both tangible and otherwise.

2.3. Negotiating Self and Community

⁵⁹ Image adapted from Lin Po-Ting, *Daguan: Beisong shuhua tezhan*, 442-443.

2.3.1. Encountering oneself from the past

In addition to its role in providing an arena for freely exploring human-object relations, *tiba* also serves as a unique discursive space where literati could encounter their past, most of the time in an unexpected fashion. As touched upon in the analysis of *tiba*'s role as a frame, each piece of *tiba* could, in fact, be considered as a time stamp, and any reader in the future, including the author himself, would inevitably need to confront the temporal gap between the past and the present. Such encounters could engender a gamut of interesting responses, as exemplified by a *tiba* composed by Huang Tingjian in the year 1101 after reading a scroll of poems that he composed some years ago:

On the day of Jiawu of the twelfth month of the first year of Jianzhong jingguo era (1101), [I] looked at this scroll of poems [that I wrote before]. The touch of the strokes was dull and stagnant, and the application of the brush was often inadequate. At the same time, I am happy that my calligraphy shows some improvement since my middle age. An astrologer claim that if I do not die before sixty-two, I will live beyond the age of eighty. If this is indeed the case, then I would truly be known to the whole world as a fine calligrapher.⁶⁰

建中靖國元年十二月甲午觀此詩卷。筆意癡鈍，用筆多不到。亦自喜中年來書字稍進爾。星家言六十二不死，當壽八十餘。審如此，真當以善書名四海。

Unfortunately, Huang, who was fifty-six years old at the time of composing this *tiba*, died four years later before reaching sixty-two. Despite that, the smug boasting in this *tiba*, as shown by his comment on the inadequacies of his past work and his improvement over the years, sounds rather strange given the fact that he was at that time already enjoying a great

⁶⁰ "Ba jiu shushi juan" 跋舊書詩卷, HTJQJ, 679.

reputation for his calligraphy.⁶¹ Such comparison was made physically more pronounced by the fact that this *tiba* must have been written right at the end of the scroll, as indicated by the words “I looked at this scroll of poems.” As such, it provided a direct contrast to his old calligraphy and invited readers to make their own judgments. In this way, this piece not only records a joyful revelation in the present, but also projects into the future by foreshadowing another follow-up *tiba*, either by an appraiser, a collector, or by Huang himself. Unfortunately, in this case, no subsequent *tiba* was written as a follow-up, making this an invitation sent to the future without an echo.

The allusion Huang made above to his “middle age” is vague, but very likely this refers to his experience in the Huanglong Mountain 黃龍山 in Sichuan, where he attained something close to an epiphany in calligraphy, as he claimed in a previous *tiba*:

In the past, I wrote this calligraphy for Chen Chenglao, without knowing that, for a few years, it had already been in the possession of Yang Guangdao. When I was demoted to Qiannan Prefecture and visited Weishi, Yang brought it with him and visited me. Feeling at a loss, I felt as if it was not penned by me. Isn't this what the Buddhist saying “Am I still that person from the past, or am I not?” refers to?⁶² In the year of Jiaxu of the Shaosheng era (1094) in Mount Huanglong, I suddenly got the *samadhi* (*i.e.* true essence) of the cursive script and realized that my previous [calligraphic] works had too many exposed angles. If I could get [a place with] a bright window and a clean desk, and brush and ink in good order, I could write thousands of words without feeling tired. But such an opportunity is hard to come by.⁶³

⁶¹ One piece of evidence is that Huang Tingjian was aware that his letter might be stolen and sold because people wanted his calligraphy. See chapter one for more details.

⁶² This saying comes from a story that the monk Seng Zhao 僧肇 told in his “Wu buqian lun” 物不遷論. This treatise claims that things in the world do not continue moving forward, and things that existed in the past will stay in the past forever. See Seng Zhao 僧肇, *Zhao Lun jiaoshi* 肇論校釋, coll. and annot. Zhang Chunbo 張春波 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 9–31. This saying can be found on page 23.

⁶³ ‘Shu zizuo cao hou’ 書自作草後, HTJQJ, 676–677.

舊為陳誠老作此書，不知乃歸楊廣道已數年。余謫黔南道，出尉氏，廣道持以相訪，茫然似不出余手。梵志所謂‘吾猶昔人，非昔人者’邪？紹聖甲戌，在黃龍山中忽得草書三味，覺前所作太露芒角，若得明窗淨几，筆墨調利，可作數千字不倦，但難得此時會爾。

Evidently, the difference between the past and the present that Huang depicted in this *tiba* is much more drastic than that in the previous one—so much so that he was “at a loss” when confronted with his old work. Interestingly, the problems that Huang identified in his calligraphy from the past were also different. In the above piece, when he looked at the old scroll, he found that “the touch of strokes was dull and stagnant, and the application of the brush was often inadequate”; whereas here, he told a story about his “eureka moment” in Mount Huanglong and his realization that his old writing “had too many exposed angles.” With each of the two *tiba*, Huang recorded a fragment from his past that would forever be lost had they not been triggered by his old calligraphy. These two fragments, albeit very different from each other, are nonetheless both part of his life history.

This unexpected encounter with a piece of work from the past shocked Huang, and he resorted to an open question from a Buddhist text that resonated with the richness of his immediate feelings. For literati of the Song, the most familiar narratives about one’s life journey deal with either the unavoidable changes as one grows old or how the self remains the same even when one has to go through undesirable circumstances.⁶⁴ No matter which is

⁶⁴ Confucius’ autobiographical account in the *Analects*, starting from the age of fifteen, would probably explain why the first mode of narrative is influential. The second mode is frequently seen in narratives about abandoning official duty to seek retirement or recluse; Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 “The Return: A Rhapsody” 歸去來兮辭 and serial poems “Returning to Dwell in the Country” 歸園田居 are among the

the case, the self always stays as a continuous entity. This idea is also fundamental to the rich discourse about self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition: each person is born with something good at the core of his being, but that goodness may get lost or obstructed as one fares through life, and hence continuous cultivation to retain that goodness is possible and necessary.⁶⁵ What Huang nicely captured in this *tiba*, however, was a moment of discontinuity, a piece of his past that did not fit well into his memory about his life path. However, it was only a brief moment since he quickly moved on to expressing a comforting sense of relief that he had made progress over the years. By weaving his old writing (i.e., the target piece) and his present writing (i.e., the *tiba*) into a contrasting whole, Huang masterfully channeled the reader's attention towards the quality of his calligraphy. In the process, he elevated the value of the piece that his friend brought.⁶⁶

Such unexpected encounters with old works, as portrayed in these two *tiba*, were a rather common experience for famous painters and calligraphers of the late eleventh century. With the rise of connoisseurship, fervent admirers or collectors would often bring their collected works to their authors and ask for *tiba*, which would both verify the authenticity of the piece and make it more valuable. Sometimes, the authors may discover,

earliest examples. See J. R. Hightower trans., "The Return: A Rhapsody" and "Five Poems on Returning to Dwell in the Country," in John Minford and Joseph S.M. Lau eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, vol. I: *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty* (New York: Columbia University Press/Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2000), 499-502 and 517-519.

⁶⁵ See for example Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One's Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁶⁶ Other *tiba* that Huang wrote for his calligraphy or painting also had similar themes; see for example "Ba zishu suowei xiangshi hou" 跋自書所為香詩後, HTJQJ, 644; and "Lun Qianzhou shi zi" 論黔州時字, HTJQJ, 680.

with mixed feelings, forgeries, modifications, or even re-ordering of their works.⁶⁷ In other cases (such as these), they chanced upon old writings in their original, unaltered form, which would confront them with surprises no smaller than those caused by the forgeries. Such encounters often would evoke a series of subtle and transient emotions that emerge abruptly and evolve quickly: first the shock, followed by hesitation mixed with revelation, or doubt turned into comforting relief. *Tiba* provides the best arena where such ambivalent emotions can be freely grappled with, as well as cherished by the author and future readers alike.

2.3.2. *Losing the spontaneous self*

In contrast to those fragments from the past portrayed above, other changes broached in *tiba* evoke more troubling aspects of the self. One such theme that frequently appears in the *tiba* of the Su Shi circle is their lament about the loss of the “natural” or “unrestrained” self. In Su Shi's *tiba* on Wen Tong's bamboo painting discussed above, we have already caught a glimpse of such loss: once Wen realized the difference between his instinctual urge for painting and that which was forced onto him by his admirers, he refused to paint anymore. In that sense, his “recovery from the illness” of that irresistible urge had made him lose his spontaneous and ingenuous self. Such loss also experienced by many of Wen's contemporaries. For example, Huang Tingjian once wrote these words about Su Shi:

⁶⁷ Huang Tingjian described one such occasion when he saw forged letters that the collector believed to be Su Shi's authentic handwriting. See “Ba weizuo Dongpo shujian” 跋偽作東坡書簡, HTJQJ, 673.

The Layman of the East Slope never begrudged his calligraphic writings, yet they were not something that could be asked for. Whenever someone asked for his calligraphy, he would sternly scold him, and not part with even one character at the end. [Once] during the Yuanyou era, [we were] locked up in the Ministry of Rites [to supervise] the civil service examination. Whenever he came to visit me, he would fill up all the paper on my desk with his writing, regardless of whether the paper was fine or coarse. Although he liked to drink, he would become inebriated after just four or five cups.⁶⁸ Lying down without declining [my offer of letting him rest at my place], he snored like thunder. After a short while, he woke up and waved the brush [as swift as] the wind and the rain. Even though these were playful writings, they were all tastefully done. He is truly someone among the heavenly immortals. How could he be compared with other men of brush and ink today?⁶⁹

東坡居士極不惜書然不可乞。有乞書者正色詰責之，或終不與一字。元祐中鎖試禮部，每來見過，案上紙不擇精麤，書遍乃已。性喜酒，然不能四五龠，已爛醉，不辭謝而就臥，鼻鼾如雷。少焉蘇醒，落筆如風雨，雖謔弄皆有義味，真神仙中人。此豈與今世翰墨之士爭衡哉？

The spontaneous image of Su Shi is fully revealed in this piece by Huang's vivid description of how he would fill up all the paper within his reach with his writing, get totally drunk, and keep writing after waking up. Here he associated the superb and almost celestial quality of Su Shi's calligraphy with the natural and unrestrained state under which they were composed. Furthermore, in addition to claiming that those common "men of brush and ink" were incomparable to Su, Huang also made another less visible comparison between those people and himself: when pushed by others, Su Shi would refuse to write, but when he was in front of Huang he clearly felt no need to restrain himself and could behave naturally. Such a natural state was open exclusively to a group of very close friends, the same close-knit circle mentioned in our earlier discussion on the circulation of letterets.

⁶⁸ The original measure word used here is *yue* 龠, which is approximately 35 ml (one *yue* is one twentieth of a *sheng* 升, which is equivalent to 702 ml during the Song). See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 5th ed. (Endymion Wilkinson, c/o Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 612-613.

⁶⁹ "Ba Dongpo zi hou" 跋東坡字後, HTJQJ, 771.

Just like Su Shi, Huang also claimed similar factors that contributed to the success of his calligraphic writing:

My younger brother You'an likes to write in cursive style. He would bring his brush to homes from east to west, and always fill entire walls with strokes resembling dragons and snakes. [It was as if] his reputation as the "Sage of Cursive Style" would prevail over Jiangxi. He came to me asking for the rules [of writing]. My calligraphy has in fact no rule. [I] simply observe the myriad of karma in the world gathering and dispersing like mosquitoes and gnats, and never let any one thing get stuck in my chest. Therefore, I am not picky with brush or ink: I will write when I encounter a piece of paper, and stop when it is used up. Neither do I care [whether my writing is] skillful or clumsy, or how people praise or ridicule it. It is just like a wooden figurine: when it dances to the beats [of music], people marvel at its skillfulness; when the dance ends, it returns to quietude. Would You'an agree with what I said?⁷⁰

幼安弟喜作草。携筆東西家，動輒龍蛇滿壁，草聖之聲欲滿江西。來求法於老夫。老夫之書本無法也。但觀世間萬緣如蚊蚋聚散，未嘗一事橫於胸中。故不擇筆墨，遇紙則書，紙盡則已，亦不計較工拙與人之品藻譏彈。譬如木人舞中節拍，人歎其工；舞罷則又蕭然矣。幼安然吾言乎？

As Huang revealed here to his younger brother, the best "rule" for calligraphy is to have no rule at all. Like the dancing wooden figurine, the ideal way to write calligraphy is to act naturally according to the occasion, without being picky, calculating, or shackled down by concerns over worldly fame or the opinions of others. Indirectly, Huang is also criticizing the behavior of You'an, since he deliberately left traces of his writing on others' walls in the hope of attaining a reputation among the local community, a non-spontaneous act that in Huang's opinion runs counter to the ideal way of practicing calligraphy.

⁷⁰ "Shu jiadi You'an zuo cao hou" 書家弟幼安作草後, HTJQJ, 687.

As amply illustrated in these two cases and some of the *tiba* discussed above, those admirers and aficionados have become an influential and almost omnipresent existence in the textual world of *tiba*. Although their identity was not always clear, in the representations of both Su Shi and Huang Tingjian they embodied the impact of the connoisseurship market that made it no longer possible for a writer to act naturally. They were the cause of their loss of spontaneity. In depicting them, some fascinating tensions were created. First, since the author of a *tiba* often had an intended recipient in mind, any effort to separate the aficionados as the “others” is at the same time an affirmation of the recipient as one of “us,” even though the recipient was doing the same thing as the aficionados: requesting for calligraphy. Second, the natural state of the writer always needs an audience. The free dashing of Su Shi and Wen Tong are known to us because of their friends’ records, and such records always describe the spontaneous and natural state as something of the past, in contrast to the less favorable state in the present. In many ways, the moment the author became aware of the omnipresence of “others” and began lamenting over it in *tiba*, the spontaneous self in him is forever lost. As such, just like the poet born in an age of sentiment can no longer go back to the age of the natural, our literati can no longer be alone.

2.3.3. *Vignettes of friendship*

The many themes at play in the textual space we have discussed so far are also well grounded in the physical world. This is because the majority of *tiba* from the Song dynasty

were composed under certain social occasions. Among the examples discussed so far, Huang Tingjian wrote his at a banquet with his colleagues, while Qin Guan wrote the “thank you” note to his friend Gao Fuzhong when he came to take back his beloved painting. Under such circumstances, the author always had to point out the occasion as well as represent the group or community of which he was a part. The best examples to illustrate such occasional nature are perhaps those pieces that were written in response to earlier *tiba* by another author, and sometimes such an exchange would go back and forth several times. As such, these pieces together form a chain of dialogues very much similar to those commonly seen on Internet forums of our age. Reading them provides us with an invaluable glimpse into the dynamic interactions between their authors that gave rise to these exchanges. Only a handful of such examples have been preserved. Not surprisingly, one of them comes again from Su Shi and Huang Tingjian.⁷¹

The event that sparked this series of *tiba* took place during a banquet at the end of a long day of working for the civil service examination.⁷² Sensing that it was perhaps the best opportunity to ask for a painting from great painters such as Su Shi and Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049–1106), who were among the examination officials present that night, Liu Zhongyuan

⁷¹ There are a few other cases in which a member of the Su Shi circle wrote *tiba* to the *tiba* of other members. For example, in SSQJ there is a chain of *tiba* exchanges in which Zhang Dun 章惇 (1035–1105) wrote a *tiba* on Su Shi's *tiba*, and later Su Shi wrote another *tiba* in reply, which was again followed by a final *tiba* from Zhang. See “Ti Ziming shi hou” 題子明詩後, SSWJ, 68.2132, and “Shu Huang Luzhi huaba hou sanshou” 書黃魯直畫跋後三首, SSWJ, 70.2218–2220.

⁷² The Song system stipulates that examination officials cannot leave the compound of the Ministry of Rites during the examination period. See Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*, trans. Conrad Schirokauer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 74–101.

柳仲遠 (?-?)⁷³ took his chance. Su Shi recorded in the following *tiba* the birth of this painting:

On the twelfth day of the first month of the first year of Yuanyou era (1086), Su Zizhan (*i.e.* Su Shi) and Li Boshi (*i.e.* Li Gonglin) painted for Liu Zhongyuan a painting titled “Pines and Stones.” Liu picked out the following lines from a poem by Du Fu: “At the pines’ roots a Hu monk reposes in stillness,/ bushy brows, hoary head, no attachments of the passions./ His right shoulder is left bare, both his feet exposed,/ from among the needles a pinecone has fallen in front of him,”⁷⁴ and further asked Li to incorporate these lines in, [turning the painting into] “Resting in Solitude.” Ziyou (*i.e.*, Su Zhe) wrote the following [poem on the painting]: “Dongpo himself painted the stones in deep blue,/ Leaving the tall pines to Boshi./ [Liu Zhongyuan thinks that having] only these two figures is not enough,/ And incorporated Du Fu’s poem from the previous age.” [I] then matched his rhyme with [the following poem]: “Although Dongpo belongs to the Huzhou School,/ His bamboo and rocks are both splendid in their own ways./ The “painting master in a previous life” is now surnamed Li,/ Why not write some Wangchuan Poems [on this painting]?”⁷⁵ Wen Yüke used to say “My School of Ink Bamboo is now in Xuzhou.”⁷⁶ Although my painting of bamboo could not match him, my stones are probably better. For this *kōan*, we could not bear not to ask Luzhi (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian) to add some words.⁷⁷

元祐元年正月十二日，蘇子瞻、李伯時為柳仲遠作《松石圖》。仲遠取杜子美詩“松根胡僧憩寂寞，龐眉皓首無住著，偏袒右肩露雙腳，葉裏松子僧前落”之句，復求伯時畫此數句，為《憩寂圖》。子由題云“東坡自作蒼蒼石，留取長松待伯時。只有兩人嫌未足，兼收前世杜陵詩。”因次其韻云“東坡雖是湖州派，竹石風流各一時。前世畫師今姓李，不妨題作輞川詩。”文與可嘗云“老夫墨竹一派，近在徐州。”吾竹雖不及，石似過之。此一卷公案，不可不令魯直下一句。

⁷³ Liu Zhongyuan was probably the eldest son of Liu Jin 柳瑾, who was the brother-in-law of Su Shi. See Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Shu Dagang 舒大剛, *Beisong wenxuejia nianpu* 北宋文學家年譜 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999), 85–121.

⁷⁴ This is one quatrain from the poem “Xi wei shuangsong tu ge” 戲為雙松圖歌. The translation here follows Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 9.414–415.

⁷⁵ As mentioned in the discussion of Qin Guan’s *tiba* above, the “painting master in a previous life” here refers to Wang Wei.

⁷⁶ The “Huzhou School” mentioned in Su Shi’s poem above refers to Wen Tong, from whom Su learned to paint bamboo, as aforementioned. Once Wen was tired of being pursued by admirers, and told them to go instead to Su Shi, who had got the essence of his bamboo painting and could therefore represent his school. At that time, Su Shi was in Xuzhou, and thus Wen’s claim “My School of Ink Bamboo is now in Xuzhou”.

⁷⁷ “Ti Qiji tu shi” 題憩寂圖詩, SSWJ, 68.2138.

Packed into this highly information-rich *tiba* is a story about the remarkable transformation of a painting from a plain “Pines and Stones” into a more complex “Resting in Solitude” as a result of the collaborative effort of three individuals. In addition to Du Fu’s poem that formed the basis of this transformation, two more poems were composed as accompaniment. In the process, two other figures (Wang Wei and Wen Tong) were alluded to. As if the scene was still not “noisy” enough, towards the end, Su Shi asked Huang Tingjian to add in his contribution. Huang did respond, but unlike Su who wove his matching poem into his *tiba*, Huang instead wrote two matching poems and a *tiba* separate from them:

Someone said that [Su] Zizhan should not see Li Boshi as “the painting maser in a previous life.” For those vulgar people who could not get [his point], it would become a poetic defect.⁷⁸ [In my opinion] Boshi’s hills and valleys⁷⁹ are not inferior to those of [great painters of] ancient times. Who would consider him as the “infatuated”?⁸⁰ The words of Zizhan [reveal that he] truly understands [Boshi]. Written by Luzhi.⁸¹

⁷⁸ While in these few examples, the term “painting master” is used in a positive light, it could also have negative connotation on other occasions. For example, the famous Tang dynasty painter Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 601–673) was once humiliated by being called a “painting master”, a title which still carried some sense of derision to literati during the Song. See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555–1636)*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 30.

⁷⁹ The word “*qiuhe*” 丘壑 used here derives from the idiom “to have valleys and hills in his chest” 胸中有丘壑. It could refer both literally to the landscape that Li Gonglin painted, as well as figuratively to the landscape of Li’s mind (i.e., his sophistication and inner virtue).

⁸⁰ The word “*chi*” 癡 means being obsessed or infatuated with something. It could either be a compliment to someone who is excessively focused on one thing, or a derogatory remark for having disregard for other important things such as social rituals or moral cultivation. The latter connotation is suggested here, possibly alluding to the Eastern Jin dynasty painter Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之, who was considered by Song literati as one of the best painters in Chinese history. Gu was known for his “three extraordinary qualities” 三絕: talent, painting, and infatuation 才絕, 畫絕, 癡絕, with the “infatuation” being that he was easily tricked by others. See Gu’s biography in Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 92.2404–2406.

⁸¹ This piece was attached to Su Shi’s “Ti Qiji tu shi;” see SSWJ, 68.2138. Huang Tingjian has written another *tiba* titled “Ti Wangchuan tu” 題輞川圖, although it seems to have been composed for a different occasion; see HTJQJ, 730.

或言：子瞻不當目伯時為前身畫師，流俗人不領，便是詩病。伯時一丘一壑，不減古人，誰當作此痴計。子瞻此語是真相知。魯直書。

These two pieces, composed by different people on the same subject and the same occasion, together constitute a textual “symphony,” with the former piece introducing the latter and the latter piece echoing the former. From this example, one fundamental feature of such a *tiba* network that we can immediately grasp is its flexibility in accommodating a hybrid of genres. This is demonstrated by the fact that Su Shi incorporated all three poems (by Du Fu, Su Zhe 蘇轍, and himself) into his *tiba*. Instead of having these poems directly inscribed at different positions on the painting, which might lead to confusion in interpretation, threading them into a sequence provides not only a fascinating story of the genesis of the painting but also a specific framework to guide the future reader in approaching this work. With this *tiba*, we can now appreciate the fact that hidden beneath the current façade is an earlier version with very different content and a title that is not the same. We can also imagine the friendly verbal tug-of-war that must have taken place among this group of literati that led to the birth of this painting.

Another interesting feature to note here is Su Shi’s use of the Zen term “*kōan*” 公案 to describe this episode. The choice of this term could perhaps be understood through a detailed analysis of the back-and-forth exchanges recorded in these *tiba*. In the first poem in the sequence, Su Zhe started the exchange by teasing Liu Zhongyuan for being “greedy,” in that he was not satisfied with merely having a painting by two leading painters of the time,

and wanted to “bag” 收 the work of another great poet, Du Fu, as well. Su Shi’s matching poem inherits the jocular tone but shifts the focus instead to Li Gonglin and himself. After proudly boasting about his paintings of bamboos and rocks, Su put Li Gonglin on the spot. He compared him to Wang Wei, who dubbed himself “a painting master in a previous life,” and challenged Li to write a poem or even a group of poems on the painting similar to Wang’s serial poems on the “Wangchuan Villa,” knowing well that Li probably would not take up the challenge. Su’s pride was further revealed when he cited Wen Tong’s approval of his bamboo painting and added that his rocks might even be better. In this way, the “*kōan*” as built up by Su Shi does not have much to do with provoking doubt and revelation; rather, it resembles a witty request for a compliment, to which Huang Tingjian had to respond wisely. Indeed, in his two matching poems, Huang successfully managed to praise Su Shi, while at the same time defended Li Gonglin in one of his matching poem by comparing Li’s painting to “silent poetry”: “Marquis Li had a line that he did not want to spit out [in words],/ [Instead] he used light ink and penned down a silent poem” 李侯有句不肯吐，淡墨寫出無聲詩。⁸² His *tiba* furthers such a defense, albeit in a circumlocutory manner, by moderating Su’s joke into a compliment of Li Gonglin. At the same time, he did not forget to laud Su as someone who truly understood Li, thereby concluding this *tiba* dialogue on a happy note.

⁸² For Huang Tingjian’s two matching poems, see “Ciyun Zizhan Ziyou ti Qiji tu ershou” 次韵子瞻子由題憩寂圖二首, HTJQJ, 212.

Also evident in this example is the masterful way in which Su Shi took control of the textual exchange and defined his role among the group. To begin with, among those present at the banquet, only Su Shi and Huang Tingjian had the chance to actually write their compositions onto the painting. Moreover, as the recorder of the occasion and narrator of the story of this painting, Su cleverly presented a brief poetic sketch for each member of the group, but ultimately re-focused the limelight back onto himself. Portrayed as a master of poetry and painting, he is also unquestionably the central figure of the clique. Moreover, while Huang Tingjian had the final word in this sequence of *tiba* exchanges, he could not jump out of the frame set by Su Shi. In this way, these *tiba* become both a representation of Su himself and a vivid group portrait of a close-knit literati community, revealing the dynamic yet delicate interactions among its members in ways that no other genre could achieve.

2.4. Setting *Tiba* to Tombstone

So far, our discussion has been focused mostly on the eleventh century, during which the output of *tiba* works, especially from leading literati of the time, increased rapidly. Most of these compositions, however, were circulated within a sphere around its original context, either among the collector, the author, or the guest. Towards the end of Northern Song, literati started quoting *tiba* in their more formal writings such as prefaces, treatises, biographies, and even epitaphs. Instead of being considered as merely jottings scattered among manuscripts and paintings, they began to be used in ways similar to these formal

prose genres, and yet with their own unique characteristics. In extreme cases, *tiba* could even serve as replacements for biographical accounts in epitaphs, perhaps one of the most solemn prose genres of all. This is best captured in the intriguing case of Xing Jushi 刑居實 (?–1087, style name Dunfu 敦夫 or 惇夫), a talented poet who had an untimely death and whose dying wishes went unfulfilled for three decades.

Xing was a young protégé of some of the prominent scholars and poets of his day, such as Sun Jue 孫覺 (1028–1090) and Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110). In 1085, Xing reluctantly left Kaifeng for Suizhou (in present day Hubei province) following his demoted father Xing Shu 邢恕. Within one year after his departure from the literati community in the capital city, Xing suffered a serious illness that quickly proved fatal. On his dying bed, his father asked for his last wish, and Xing gave a list of individuals whom he wished would write his funerary pieces: Huang Tingjian for his epitaph, Sun Jue for inscribing the epitaph, and Chao Buzhi a preface for his writing collection.⁸³ Given Xing's acquaintances with these figures, one may expect that they would not refuse his dying wish, yet all of them ended up not writing any of the pieces as he had hoped. Instead, Chao and Huang each wrote a lamenting *tiba*. Chao's piece was written one year after Xing's death:

After Xing Heyang (*i.e.* Xing Shu) had lamented for his son Dunfu,⁸⁴ he sent a letter to Li Duanshu (*i.e.*, Li Zhiyi) of Shanyang, which reads: "On his death bed, [I] asked my son if he had any last words. [He] said: '[I] wish I could have Huang Luzhi of Yuzhang write a

⁸³ This wish was recorded in an epitaph written by Chao Buzhi's brother Chao Yuezhi 晁說之 (1059–1129) thirty-four years later (see discussion below).

⁸⁴ The word used here is *ku* 哭, meaning literally to weep. Here it probably refers to the funerary ritual. Hence, it is translated as "lament."

record of my life, could trouble Sun [Jue] of Gaoyou to inscribe it, and could ask Chao Buzhi for a preface for the works I leave behind.” Li Duanshu told me this, and I said: “In the past, Du Mu did not dare to write a preface for Li He. Now that Dunfu was not even twenty years old, and his writings were already catching up with those of the past. [If he could have] realized his ambitions, he would not have ended up like Li He.⁸⁵ Hence, how could I fail to fulfill Dunfu’s dying wishes? Someday when I meet Heyang, I shall hold his arm and cry, and take out all of Dunfu’s writings⁸⁶ and organize them.” Written on the fifth day of the twelfth month of the third year of Yuanyou era (1089), by Chao Buzhi, [Style named] Wujiu of Yingchuan.⁸⁷

邢河陽既哭其子敦夫，以書抵山陽李端叔，云：“吾兒垂絕時，問所欲言，曰：願得豫章黃魯直狀其行，以累高郵孫公銘之，而遺藁以屬補之為序。”端叔為補之言，補之曰：昔杜牧不敢序李賀。矧吾惇夫年未二十，文章便欲追逐古人，充其志，非特為賀者而已。然吾豈可以負敦夫將死託耶？他日見河陽公，當把臂痛哭，盡出敦夫書次第之。元祐三年十二月五日，潁川晁補之無咎題。

Chao’s account here is the earliest extant source that mentions Xing’s dying wishes.⁸⁸

With a rhetoric question, Chao explicitly said that he would not “fail to fulfill” (*fu* 負) Xing’s request, which turned out to be an empty promise. The last few lines suggest that he had not received the writings that Xing left behind at this moment. Although this *tiba* is ambiguously titled as “On the Writing(s) Left behind by Xing Dunfu,” it is highly possible that Chao Buzhi wrote this piece for “Nanzheng fu” 南征賦, or “Rhapsody on a Journey

⁸⁵ Like Xing, Li He (790–816) also died at the tender age of 27.

⁸⁶ The word *shu* 書 used here could mean either writings in general or letters in particular. Based on the context, I take it as referring to all of the writings of Xing Dunfu, and Chao is saying that he would fulfill Xing’s wishes by compiling his works and writing a preface for them.

⁸⁷ “Shu Xing Dunfu yigao” 書邢敦夫遺稿, in *Wujiu tiba* 無咎題跋, comp. Mao Jin, *Congshu jicheng chubian* ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 15.

⁸⁸ The several rounds of retelling involved here indicates that Chao did not get the request directly from Xing Shu, which could be because Li Zhiyi was closer to Chao and Xing Shu decided to seek his help in asking Chao for the favor.

Southward,”⁸⁹ the only surviving prose work composed by Xing before he left the capital with his father. The reason lies in the high level of similarity between this piece and two other *tiba* by Huang Tingjian and Su Shi. Huang’s *tiba* is titled “Writing at the end of Xing Dunfu’s ‘Nanzheng fu’”:

Xie Jinghui (style name Shifu) from Yangxia died before the age of twenty, but his writings are in no way like the words of a young student. I once wrote a preface for the manuscripts he left behind, which reads: “[He was about to] set out for ten thousand miles, but his axle broke after just stepping out of the gate. [That is something that I] would shed tears over.” Now I see that the poems and rhapsodies of Xing Dunfu stand as towering mountains and have developed a unique style. He really resembled my Shifu. [Once upon a time] the prognosticator went to examine the imperial horses and asked the horse-keeper [about them], who replied: “Colts that can run a thousand miles a day often die in the stable before they are even put on the carriage. Inferior horses, however, live in groups of tens and hundreds and never need the veterinarian.” Hearing this, [I] sighed: my Dunfu could be immortal.⁹⁰

陽夏謝師復景回年未二十，文章絕不類少年書生語。余嘗序其遺稿云：“方行萬里，出門而車軸折，可為實涕。”今觀邢惇夫詩賦筆墨豈，自為一家，甚似吾師復也。日者閱國馬，問諸圉人，曰：“千里駒往往不及奉輿，斃於阜櫪。驚蹇十百為羣，未嘗求國醫也。”聞之喟然曰：吾惇夫亦足以不朽矣。

This piece was probably written within two years of Xing’s death, since Su Shi mentioned it in the *tiba* for the same rhapsody that he wrote in the year 1089:

Since his boyhood, Xing Dunfu had associated himself with prominent seniors. How could we say that his ambitions were expressed only through his literary writings? It was only a short while that I had not seen him, and his life just perished with the grass and trees. *That is why Luzhi, Wujiu, and others all cried for him and felt the sadness even after the [mourning]*

⁸⁹ This was also confirmed in the epitaph that Chao Buzhi’s brother Chao Yuezhi wrote for Xing decades later. See below for more details on this epitaph.

⁹⁰ “Shu Xing Jushi ‘Nanzheng fu’ hou” 書邢居實南征賦後, HTJQJ, 667. Huang has two more *tiba* about Xing, titled “Shu Xing Jushi wenjuan” 書邢居實文卷 and “Ba suoxie da Xiao Xing ‘Zhi’zi yun shi’ bing he Chao Zhang ba shi yu Xu Shichuan” 跋所寫答小邢止字韻詩并和晁張八詩與徐師川, HTJQJ, 668.

period. Now reading this piece, I feel some comfort. I used to see how Li Taibo of Jiangnan described his writings: “Is Heaven going to bless me with longevity? What I have done [during the years I have been given] is certainly not enough. Otherwise, through [my writings] it would be sufficient to reveal the [spirit of the] ancient people.” I would say this to Dunfu as well. Written the sixteenth day of the fourth month of the fourth year of Yuanyou era (1089).⁹¹

邢敦夫自為童子，所與遊皆諸公長者。其志豈獨以文稱而已哉。一日不見，遂與草木俱盡，故魯直、無咎諸人哭之，皆過時而哀。今觀此文，亦足少慰。舊嘗見江南李泰伯自述其文曰：“天將壽我歟？所為固未足也；不然，斯亦足以藉手見古人矣。”吾於敦夫亦云。元祐四年四月十六日。

As is evident, there is a striking similarity or even continuity among these three pieces: each author mentions in his *tiba* another talented youngster who suffered an untimely death, and each quotes comments by or about that person to praise Xing. In particular, the mention of Huang and Chao in Su Shi’s piece (italicized line) very likely refers to the two previous *tiba* that they wrote, which Su Shi probably read before composing his own piece. Given the deep condolence expressed in these pieces,⁹² one could not help but ask: why did all three of these “prominent seniors” choose not to fulfill Xing’s dying wishes?

Two lines of evidence might give us some hints as to why this was the case. First, Xing Dunfu’s father Xing Shu was demoted to Suizhou because he was involved in a political scandal in 1085. During Emperor Shenzong’s 神宗 (r. 1067–1085) illness, he plotted to

⁹¹ “Ba Xing Dunfu ‘Nanzheng fu’” 跋邢敦夫南征賦, SSWJ, 66.2069–2070. Italics in the text are mine.

⁹² Xing’s death at a young age has elicited much pity from many later writers as well. For example, Hong Mai 洪邁 compared Xing to another prodigious poet Wang Fengyuan 王逢原 (1032–1059), who also died young, and attributed their death to the fact that “the poetry and prose they wrote are rife with complaints and anger, as well as sorrow and tears, as if they were toiling, worn out, and treated unjustly. Therefore, they could not reach longevity” 所為詩文多怨抑沉憤，哀傷涕泣，若辛苦憔悴不得其平者，故皆不克壽. See the entry “Wang Fengyuan” in Hong Mai, *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆, punct. and coll. Kong Fanli (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 16.214.

replace the ten-year-old crown prince Zhao Xu 趙煦 (1077–1100), who would later become Emperor Zhezong 哲宗. As such, his biography was included in the category of “Evil Ministers” 奸臣 in *Songshi* 宋史.⁹³ Second, according to an anecdote recorded in Chao Gongwu’s 晁公武 (1105–1180) bibliographical masterpiece *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志, Xing Dunfu’s death might have something to do with a disgraceful incident he was involved in while in Suizhou.⁹⁴ Both accounts point to the possibility that shady circumstances surrounding Xing and his family might have made Huang Tingjian and Chao Buzhi reluctant to fulfill Xing’s wishes. As such, the similar moves manifested in the three *tiba* quoted above might not be just a coincidence, but rather a strategy to avoid the awkward situation of having to make formal comments about Xing’s life. Why, then, did Su, Huang, and Chao decide to adopt *tiba* as the mode of choice to express their laments? Moreover, what does this tell us about the differences between *tiba* and the genres requested by Xing?

The most obvious difference between *tiba* and other funerary writings lies in their formal requirements and the social expectations and connotations associated with them. Formal funerary writings such as epitaph and biography would usually be inscribed onto steles or tombstones, and require the writer to go into detail about the ancestry and life

⁹³ See Tuo Tuo 脫脫 et al., *Songshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 471.13702–13705.

⁹⁴ In Chao’s account, Xing Dunfu became ill not long after his father was demoted to Suizhou. One day, he was confronted by an arrogant old soldier. Infuriated by his condescension, Xing Dunfu hit the soldier, who later died. Xing’s father had no choice but to hand him over to the local authorities, which aggravated his illness. Different versions of this story have been recorded in other works, such as Chen Zhensun’s 陳振孫 (1179–1262) *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題. No matter the actual situation surrounding Xing’s death, it is clear that since mid-twelfth century onwards, the image of Xing Dunfu as a talented literatus who suffered an untimely death was already established and widespread.

trajectory of the deceased, praising his virtues in the process. The overall tone is usually one of solemnity and extolment. They are often written by a close friend, a prominent official, a fine calligrapher, or a literary master, so as to both formally commemorate the dead as well as to glorify the family. During the Song dynasty, this process involves both complicated interpersonal relationships as well as considerations of commercial profit. Famous writers who did not write for profit were often more careful in picking the tasks they would accept because the social connotations of these genres mean that agreeing to writing such a piece signifies a bond of solidarity between the writer and the deceased (or, more often than not, to his family). Huang Tingjian and Chao Buzhi certainly belong to this category of writers, and given the shady situations surrounding Xing's father or his death, it is understandable why they chose not to respond to his dying wishes in the way he had hoped for.⁹⁵

Tiba, on the other hand, is almost free from all of the weighty considerations associated with these formal funerary genres. This relieves authors from the potential to face any awkward situations posed by attempting to write in those formal genres. Moreover, despite its strong occasional nature as mentioned above, *tiba*'s circulation at that time was often limited. This is because *tiba* on tangible and collectible subjects were often physically

⁹⁵ Along the same vein, Su Shi had even once refused a request directly from the emperor to compose a spirit way stele 神道碑 biography for an official named Zhao Zhan 赵瞻 (1019–1090). In the *zhuang* 状 he submitted to the emperor, he claims that “Throughout my life, I do not compose biography, tomb inscription or epitaph for other people; this is well known among the scholar-officials” 平生不為人撰行狀、埋銘、墓碑，士大夫所共知。There were only four exceptions: he wrote a biography for Sima Guang (who composed the tomb inscription for his mother), an epitaph for Fan Zhen (who was a close friend of his father), as well as tomb inscriptions for Sima Guang and Fu Bi 富弼 (1004–1083), but on order from the emperor and not his own volition. See “Ci mianzhuang Zhao Zhan shendaobei zhuang” 辭免撰趙瞻神道碑狀, SSWJ, 33.929.

attached to or displayed together with their subjects; in contrast, those on non-tangible or consumable subjects were often part of casual jottings that are easily scattered.⁹⁶ Moreover, while there were few examples in which *tiba* were quoted or alluded to in writings of other genres, there were many cases in which these genres were quoted in *tiba*. This is well illustrated by Chao Buzhi's mentioning of the case of "Du Mu did not dare to write a preface for Li He" 杜牧不敢序李賀 as an excuse for himself, while Huang Tingjian felt sufficiently comfortable with including what he wrote in the preface for Xie Shifu's works directly into his *tiba* for Xing. Such a choice reminds the reader, in an uncanny way, that although he was trying to fulfill Xing's wish, he was not writing in the formal genre that Xing had asked for, and that the sentiments expressed here, no matter transplanted from which genre, would not carry the same level of weight and authority.

However, Chao, Huang, and Su probably did not expect that three decades later, their *tiba* ultimately would enter Xing Dunfu's epitaph and become the central narrative. In 1122, Chao Buzhi's younger brother Chao Yuezhi 晁說之 (1059-1129) finally wrote an epitaph for Xing Dunfu.⁹⁷ In this epitaph, Chao quoted all three *tiba* (with minor omissions) as proof of Xing's ambitions and talents, as well as statements about how much prominent figures like Su Shi and Huang Tingjian appreciated him. Chao also explained that his reason for writing this epitaph was because "neither my elder brother, Sun [Jue] nor Huang [Tingjian] fulfilled the wishes of Dunfu" 吾兄暨孫、黃，俱不果成惇夫之所志, and that if he did not write it,

⁹⁶ This point will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

⁹⁷ See Chao Yuezhi, "Xing Dunfu mubiao" 邢惇夫墓表, in *Songshan Jingyusheng ji* 嵩山景迂生集 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 19.1031-1036.

Xing's name and writings would forever fall into oblivion. Towards the end, Chao also mentions that Xing's literary collection was titled *Shenyin ji* 呻吟集, or *Collection of Moanings*, which according to several Southern Song bibliographies and anecdotes was put together by Xing's friends and family members and went into circulation around mid-twelfth century.⁹⁸

From the above episode, we can discern that the mode of circulation of *tiba* writings had undergone a transformation; that is, in addition to being transmitted in their original manuscript form or as appendices to their target objects, *tiba* began to be quoted as independent texts and included in more formal genres and literary collections. Becoming separated from their original contexts, as well as from their original physical state, had a profound impact on the survival of these texts. In fact, judging from the close textual relationship and transmission history of those three *tiba* by Chao, Huang, and Su, it is highly likely that they were all originally appended to the same manuscript of Xing's "Rhapsody on a Journey Southward," or at least circulated together in their original manuscript form. However, it is precisely the fact that these *tiba* were frequently quoted in subsequent formal writings that led to their preservation and also to the preservation of Xing's Rhapsody, which stands today as the only surviving piece of Xing's prose work. In

⁹⁸ Wang Zhifang 王直方 (1069-1109), a poet famous for his remarks on poetry, had also claimed that "Upon [Xing's] demise, I amassed the manuscripts he left behind and compiled them into a collection called *Collection of Moanings*" 既卒，餘收拾其殘章，編成一集，號曰《呻吟集》. See "Xing Jushi Shenyin ji" 邢居實呻吟集, in *Wang Zhifang shihua* 王直方詩話, punct. and coll. Guo Xinhe 郭信和 and Jiang Fan 蔣凡, in *Song shihua quanbian* 宋詩話全編 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 1998), 1185. Wang's work played an important role in the subsequent developments of Xing's writings.

this sense, the physical and textual detachment of *tiba* not only drastically widened its own circulation but also aided in the preservation of other works by the author.⁹⁹

With such widening circulation and acceptance, *tiba* as an emerging genre quickly rose in popularity during the twelfth century. This is perhaps best illustrated by the expansion of its subjects as well as “ascendance” of its status from writings at literati gatherings to that at much grander occasions, such as courtly congregations or royal banquets. For example, Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126–1204) wrote many pieces of *tiba* on the hand-written texts of several Southern Song emperors, such as official documents signed by Emperor Gaozong (r. 1127–1162) as well as poems and prose written by Emperor Xiaozong (r. 1162–1189). Judging by their contents, it was quite common for Emperor Xiaozong to have asked him to look at his calligraphy and to write a *tiba* on the spot. These pieces all have formal endings like “Your subject ... kowtowed twice and humbly wrote this.”¹⁰⁰ Even more revealing of *tiba*'s popularity among people from very different backgrounds is the case of the Mongol Princess Sengge Ragi 祥哥刺吉 (ca. 1283–1331) of the Yuan dynasty, arguably one of the foremost female collector of art in Chinese history who loved to elicit *tiba* from leading scholars of the time on pieces in her collection.¹⁰¹ In 1323, the Princess invited a large group

⁹⁹ In fact, all of Xing's writings that have survived till today had been included in some form of occasional communications, such as matching rhyme poems or exchanges at social functions such as banquets or farewells, as well as *tiba*.

¹⁰⁰ See for example “Xingxue zhao yubi ba” 幸學詔御筆跋 and “Yushu Bai Juyi shi ba” 御書白居易詩跋 in Zhou Bida, *Yigong tiba* 益公題跋, comp. Mao Jin, *Congshu jicheng chubian* ed. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935–1940), 70–71.

¹⁰¹ For an insightful analysis of the Princess' art collection and collecting activities, see Shen C.Y. Fu, “Princess Sengge Ragi: Collector of Painting and Calligraphy,” trans. and adap. Marsha Weidner, in

of literati and officials of diverse ethnic origins to an “elegant gathering” 雅集 at Tianqing Temple 天慶寺. After the banquet, she took out dozens of paintings from her collection and requested her guests to write *tiba* for them. Among the guests was Yuan Jue 袁桷 (1266–1327), who recorded this historic gathering and claimed that he alone wrote forty-one pieces of *tiba* at the Princess’ behest the following year!¹⁰² With such great interests from across the social strata, it was no surprise that *tiba* became accepted as a standard category in literary collections, and its social connotations gradually became indistinguishable from those of the formal prose genres.

Conclusion

Today, as we open a book, we are probably used to encountering a variety of paratextual features such as introduction, preface, acknowledgments, and postscript. In pre-modern China, however, such features were far from common. It is therefore remarkable that *tiba* as a group of writing similar to these paratexts gradually flourished during the Northern Song dynasty and became an independent literary genre by the twelfth century. In this chapter, I have attempted to account for the rise of *tiba* as a new discursive space by analyzing its

Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1990), 55–80.

¹⁰² See Yuan Jue, “Luguo Dazhanggongzhu tuhua ji” 魯國大長公主圖畫記, in *Quan Yuan wen* 全元文 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2004), 727.483. More details on this event can be found in Fu, “Princess Sengge Ragi: Collector of Painting and Calligraphy,” 62–63; and Wang Shaohua 王韶華, *Yuandai tihua shi yanjiu* 元代題畫詩研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2010), 25. For a thorough account of the various forms of “elegant gatherings” as well as the *tiba* and other literary writings on paintings and calligraphy composed during the Yuan, see Hsiao Ch’i-Ch’ing 蕭啟慶, *Jiuzhou sihai fengya tong: Yuandai duozu shirenquan de xingcheng yu fazhan* 九州四海風雅同: 元代多族士人圈的形成與發展 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan/Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2012), 219–309.

evolving relationships with the target subject, the author, the owner/collector, as well as the overall literati culture of the time. With the flexibility in accommodating other genres such as poetry and letters, as well as the ability to connect with physical, textual, and pictorial media, *tiba* provided a unique venue for Song literati to freely explore and define various aspects of the human-object relationship, such as ownership and obsession. By instilling value and significance into material collections, especially those consisting of perishable items, *tiba* provided a textual framework for memorializing the ephemeral and engaging in conversation with an audience from the future. Moreover, in its self-referential narrative, *tiba* could also serve as a space beyond the traditional genres where Song writers could encounter themselves from the past, define their role in relation to the larger community, and celebrate the spontaneous state of the human mind. These multifarious roles gave *tiba* a versatility that few other genres could match.

Just like its versatile generic roles, the subject scope of *tiba* written during the Northern Song was also highly diverse and heterogeneous. Such diversity and heterogeneity were the results of the conscious choices made by later readers, compilers, and publishers since the twelfth century. As they determined which writing could be included in this category, their decisions reflected the evolving yardsticks used to judge the value of these writings and shaped the textual landscape of *tiba* as we see today. The process of selection and compilation also gradually detached *tiba* from their original textual and physical settings, broadening their transmission as independent texts and facilitating their survival.

As their circulation widened, more and more *tiba* were taken out of their original contexts. Sometimes they even would assume meanings and connotations far beyond what their authors had originally intended. Take for example this famous *tiba* by Su Shi about his own writings:

My writing is like a ten-thousand-*hu* spring,¹⁰³ gushing out of anywhere without preference. On plain ground, [it flows like] a torrential stream, and could [travel] a thousand miles a day without difficulty. When it winds through hills and rocks, it assumes the shape of the things [it runs into], [of which] there is no way of knowing. What can be known [about it] is that it always goes to where it should go, and stops where it has to stop. That is all. As for the rest, even I could not know.¹⁰⁴

吾文如萬斛泉湧，不擇地皆可出。在平地滔滔汨汨，雖一日千裡無難。及其山石曲折，隨物賦形，而不可知也。所可知者，常行於所當行，常止於不可不止，如是而已矣。其他雖吾亦不能知也。

This piece, written on an unknown occasion without any specified audience, has become the passage most frequently quoted by modern scholars as the definitive characterization of Su Shi's writing and personality widely shared among his contemporaries. But the question is this: Was this really Su Shi's original intention when he wrote this piece? If not, how did it come to metamorphose into something that represents the shared knowledge of the Song literati? To answer these questions requires us to probe into the spread of another genre of miscellaneous prose, anecdotes. We also need to look at the role of *tiba* in the making of literary reputations during the Song. These questions will be explored in the next chapter.

¹⁰³ One *hu* is equivalent to ten *dou* 斗, or approximately 70 liters during the Song. See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 5th ed., 612–613.

¹⁰⁴ "Zi ping wen" 自評文, SSWJ, 66.2069.

Chapter 3

“Leisure Talks” for Posterity: Remarks on Poetry

詩話 and the Song Articulations of the Poetic Past

Introduction

If one were to take a cursory survey of all extant poetry collections produced in pre-modern China, in both manuscript and printed forms, one will find that the poems in many of these texts are accompanied by notes of varying sorts and lengths. Reading poetry with these annotations, commentaries, prefaces, and even illustrations, as well as composing such textual paraphernalia, have been an inseparable part of China’s poetic history. For instance, the copious amount of commentaries on the *Book of Songs* 詩經 composed over the ages, beginning with the “Great Preface” 大序, constitute an uninterrupted literary lineage no less illustrious than the book itself,¹ and sometimes even become the definitive force in shaping the reading experience of the poems in it. When it came to the Song dynasty,

¹ For an insightful account of the hermeneutic tradition of the *Book of Songs* in pre-modern times, see Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

however, a different kind of commentary on poetry flourished, and gradually established itself as a major discourse of critical articulations on poetry in late imperial China. These writings are termed *shihua* 詩話 or “remarks on poetry,” which literally means sayings about poetry. The casualness of this term immediately suggests that they are not intended to be comprehensive theoretical treatises, nor do they resemble the “poetics” of Aristotle or the “apology” of Philip Sidney.² Rather, these remarks collectively refer to informal notes or jottings on diverse aspects of poetry, poets and poetics, penned under varying circumstances over a long period of time.

The vague name and varied nature of the texts grouped under the category of *shihua* are sources of continuous debates regarding the nature and origin of this genre. Even though generations of *shihua* authors since the Song had touched upon some of the characteristics of this textual form in the prefaces of their *shihua* collections, it was not until the Qing dynasty did serious theoretical treatment of the genre appear in Zhang Xuecheng’s 章學誠 *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義, or *General Principles of Literature and History*. In the entry titled “*Shihua*,” Zhang divides these texts into two groups: those that “talk about poetry and extend to events” 論詩及事, and those that “talk about poetry and extended to dictions” 論詩及辭.³ Such categorization points out two basic functions of *shihua*, namely in providing information about the occasions or contexts of poetic composition, and elucidating the

² Such comprehensive theoretical discussions indeed exist among the formal writings of Song literati. For example, Ouyang Xiu’s *Shi benyi* 詩本義 lays out the four layers of interpretation that shape one’s understanding of the *Book of Songs*, as aforementioned in Introduction.

³ Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, *Wenshi tongyi xinbian xinzhu* 文史通義新編新注, ed. and annot. Cang Xiuliang 倉修良 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 290.

syntactic or semantic aspects of the poetic language. This framework, very similar to the textual/extra-textual dichotomy commonly used today, has since formed the basis of modern scholars' approach to *shihua*, although under most circumstances such division exists not between different *shihua* collections but rather between the different entries within a collection. Each individual *shihua* collection, especially those from the Northern Song and early Southern Song, is rarely organized with a unifying theme.

Due to the lack of clear thematic or formal identifier, the search for a satisfactory definition of *shihua* has persisted since Zhang's time till this very day.⁴ Some consensus, however, have been reached among scholars. For example, it has now been agreed that *shihua* is not solely concerned with how to compose poetry using well-defined rules and techniques, a purpose that is the defining feature of *shige* 詩格, a popular and pedagogically motivated genre that flourished during the Tang and the Five Dynasties.⁵ Instead, *shihua* is

⁴ For example, a very recent article by Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書, one of the foremost scholars of Song dynasty literature in China, is still focused on answering the fundamental question of what constitutes *shihua*. See idem., "Lun Song *shihua*" 論宋詩話, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 1 (2016): 81-88.

⁵ Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, in his *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao* 全唐五代詩格匯考 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), defines *shige* as a group of instruction manuals that teach beginner writers on the techniques of poetic composition such as diction, imagery, rhythm, etc., often in the form of lists of rules. During late imperial times, the terms *shige* and *shihua* were often considered to be interchangeable by scholars and bibliographers (see for example the category of "Commentaries on Poetry and Prose" 詩文評 in *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目). The famous Ming scholars Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) and Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 (1569-1645) also both mistook *shige* for *shihua* in their critical treatises. See Hu Yinglin, *Shisou* 詩藪 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 272; and Hu Zhenheng, *Tangyin guiqian* 唐音癸籤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 329-332. Since the early twentieth century, however, there has been much efforts by modern scholars to clarify the distinctions between the two genres, especially following Yang Shoujing's 楊守敬 (1839-1915) serendipitous "re-discovery" of *Bunkyō hifu ron* 文鏡秘府論, a compendium of Tang *shige* texts brought over to Japan by the monk Kūkai 空海 (774-835). Among these studies, the most detailed analysis in English is given by Yugen Wang who, in addition to delineating in detail the distinctive formal characteristics of *shige*, attributes its waning from the critical discourse of Northern Song to the culturally elitist bias of Northern Song writers, who considered the genre vulgar

much broader in scope and encompasses accounts related to all aspects of poetry, poets, and poetics. In addition, although *shihua* includes ample discussions on poetic techniques as well as evaluations of good poems and poets, these discussions are often framed from the perspective of a reader hoping to appreciate and enjoy poems, rather than that of an instructor trying to train prospective poets.

With these key distinctions as a starting point, I propose that the search for a better understanding of *shihua* should go beyond debates over their terminological definition or textual ancestry,⁶ and focus instead on the times and processes through which *shihua* texts came to be established. In this chapter, I zoom into the period from late eleventh to early twelfth centuries, when *shihua* transformed from a makeshift pigeonhole for a loose collection of notes into an independent generic form. I argue that one of the most important factors for this transformation was the practice of the transitional generation of writers who actively sought alternative ways of engaging with the poetic past, and who explored *shihua* as a discursive space to both bear witness to as well as make sense of the poetic canon of the Northern Song. Situated within the political and intellectual milieu of the late Northern and

and obsolete and opted instead for the newly risen *shihua*. See idem., “*Shige*: The Popular Poetics of Regulated Verse,” *T’ang Studies* 22 (2004): 81–125. Despite such dramatic falling out of fashion, *shige* continued to hold appeal among the populace, and were composed and compiled well into the twelfth century, as epitomized by Chen Yingxing’s 陳應行 anthology *Yin Chuang Zalu* 吟窗雜錄, which devotes a significant portion to *shige*. For more discussion, see Zhang Bowei, “Lun ‘Yin Chuang Zalu’” 論《吟窗雜錄》, appendix to Chen Yingxing comp., *Yin Chuang Zalu*, ed. Wang Xiumei 王秀梅 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997); Wang, “*Shige*: The Popular Poetics of Regulated Verse,” 88–89; and Charles Hartman, “The *Yin Chuang Zalu* (*Miscellaneous Notes from the Singing Window*): A Song Dynasty Primer of Poetic Composition,” in *Recarving the Dragon: Understanding Chinese Poetics*, ed. Olga Lomová (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2003), 205–237.

⁶ For example, Kōzen Hiroshi 興膳宏 considers Zhong Rong’s 鐘嶸 (?–518) *Shipin* 詩品, or *Gradations of Poets*, to be the true textual ancestor of the *shihua* genre. See idem., “Shihin kara Shiwa e” 詩品から詩話へ, *Chūgoku bungaku hō* 中國文学報 47 (1993): 31–63.

early Southern Song, theirs was ultimately an effort to define one's position within the poetic tradition, as well as to confirm the values of poetry amidst the harsh literary censorship and political mayhem of the day.

This chapter weaves together two parallel narratives to illustrate the points mentioned above: a chronological outline of the shifting body of *shihua* texts, as well as the establishment of key features that characterize *shihua* as an independent generic discourse. It begins with an examination of the role of "I" in three of the earliest *shihua* collections, and discusses how this critical feature, which will become definitive of later *shihua*, was established during the Northern Song. I argue that the narrator, which most of the time represents the author, was set in *shihua* as the witness, the recorder, as well as the judge of poetry and poetic aesthetics. Moreover, the author affirms the legitimacy of such judgment by highlighting on one hand the temporal gap between the times when events took place and when he recorded them, and on the other hand his connections with the figures who experienced those events. The next part analyzes the most important theme in *shihua*, namely the evaluation of poetic models and master poets. By comparing the ways in which *shihua* authors talk about the poetry of the Northern Song as well as of the previous ages (especially the Tang), I argue that these texts delineate a temporally continuous poetic tradition in which poetic ideals and models of the Northern Song were defined and judged in relation to those of the previous eras. Using Ye Mengde's 葉夢得 (1077–1148) *Shilin shihua* 石林詩話 as a case study, I also examine how the competition between Su Shi and Wang Anshi for the poetic model of the time was constructed. The final section shifts focus to the

transitional generation of writers and analyzes the birth of the “Jiangxi Poetry School” 江西詩派, one of the most important concepts in the history of Song poetry and poetics. By examining how discourse of the School transformed and solidified in the *shihua* works of Lü Benzong 呂本中 (1084–1145) and Hu Zi 胡仔 (1095–1170), we will showcase Southern Song people’s conscious attempt to sort out the textual tradition of *shihua* writings as well as create a historical account of *shihua* as an independent genre.

3.1. Textual Conditions of Song Dynasty *Shihua*

The systematic compilation of *shihua* works from different periods began in the Qing dynasty, when He Wenhuan 何文煥 (fl. 1770) collected in his *Lidai shihua* 歷代詩話 twenty-seven *shihua* works dating from the Song to the Ming dynasties, to which another twenty-nine was added by Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874–1952) in his sequel, *Lidai shihua xubian* 歷代詩話續編. Systematic modern studies on the genre, however, only took off around 1930s with the pioneering works of Xu Ying 徐英, Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 and Luo Genze 羅根澤.⁷ When Guo wrote his foundational work *Song shihua kao* 宋詩話考 in 1971, he recorded a total of 139 *shihua* collections written during the Song. Among them, 42 have been preserved in

⁷ For a review of Chinese scholarship on *shihua* during the 20th century, see Cai Zhenchu 蔡鎮楚, “Shihua yanjiu zhi huigu yu zhanwang” 詩話研究之回顧與展望, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 5 (1999): 97–104. In contrast to the popularity of *shihua* studies in Chinese language, studies in English have been relatively sparse. By far the most important are Ronald Egan’s chapter, “A New Poetry Criticism: The Creation of ‘Remarks on Poetry,’” in idem., *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 60–108; and the translations of and commentaries on a selection of important *shihua* works in Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 359–450.

their entirety, another 46 either preserved partially or reconstructed from later anthologies and encyclopedias, and the remaining 51 are known only by their title or brief content as recorded in bibliographies or mentioned in other writings.⁸ A quarter century later, with the completion of *Song shihua quanbian* 宋詩話全編, the most comprehensive collection of Song dynasty *shihua* compiled to date, the total number of authors who left behind *shihua* works have risen to more than 560, including some 170 with previously compiled *shihua* collections.⁹ While these figures could be taken to indicate the flourishing of the genre, especially in contrast to the mere dozens of *shige* texts from the Tang and the Five Dynasties,¹⁰ the textual conditions of these *shihua* works that have come down to us today are in fact more complex than meets the eye, and thus warrant a closer examination.

The first issue concerns how to discern whether a particular text belongs to the genre of *shihua*, since there are many collections that have either titles that do not include the word “*shihua*” or multiple titles, leading to potential confusion in the tallying process. In addition, those reconstructed collections were often not simply re-assembled from scattered entries of *shihua* collections already in existence during the Song; in many cases, such reconstruction involved compilation of writings from a wide range of sources as well as prose genres. In

⁸ Guo Shaoyu, *Song shihua kao* 宋詩話考 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2015), 8. The numbers in Guo’s tally have increased in recent years, thanks to the efforts of many scholars in searching for previously unknown *shihua* texts, especially those preserved in Japan and Korea. Some of the important works in this respect include Zhang Bowei ed. and coll., *Xijianben Songren shihua sizhong* 稀見本宋人詩話四種 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002); and Bian Dongbo 卞東波 annot., *Xijianben Song shihua jianzheng* 稀見本宋詩話箋證, in idem., *Songdai shihua yu shixue wenxian yanjiu* 宋代詩話與詩學文獻研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 335–439.

⁹ See Wu Wenzhi 吳文治 gen. ed., *Song shihua quanbian* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 1998) [hereafter SSHQB], 1.

¹⁰ Zhang Bowei’s *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao* includes a total of 29 *shige* texts.

that sense, the reconstruction process in fact entails the making of a *shihua* collection *de novo*.¹¹ The second point of complexity lies in the dating of these *shihua* texts. While it is relatively easy to distinguish collections from the Song and those that were reconstructed later, it is often more difficult to pinpoint with accuracy the dates of composition for those composed during the Song, since some of them were circulated under different titles, others revised multiple times, and yet others were lost and reassembled altogether. Therefore, instead of simply claiming that *shihua* flourished during the Song, we have to pay close attention to the various forms that these *shihua* collections took, as well as the temporal gaps between actual composition, circulation, and the final formation of the collection.

The controversy surrounding the title of the earliest known *shihua* collection, Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi shihua* 六一詩話, serves as the best example to illustrate the importance of these issues.¹² Initially, Ouyang Xiu named his collection of notes on poetry simply as *Shihua*, one of the titles that he picked for the several collections of short notes he penned (others

¹¹ For example, the famous *Dongpo shihua* 東坡詩話 did not exist in Su Shi's time, according to Chao Gongwu's *Junzhai dushuzhi*. Another representative example is the *Yingxuexuan congshu* 螢雪軒叢書 compiled, edited and set to print by the Japanese scholar Kondō Gensui 近藤元粹 (1850–1922) who, in the process of compilation, expanded many of the *shihua* collections included in it and even renamed some. *Xu Er'an shihua* 徐而庵詩話 is one such example. For a detailed study of Kondō's views of Chinese poetic theory and his *Yingxuexuan congshu*, see Wang Bing 王兵, "Lun Jinteng Yuancui de Zhongguo shixue piping," 論近藤元粹的中國詩學批評, *Riben yanjiu* 日本研究 1 (2010): 103–106. A similar editorial approach as Kondō's is adopted in *Song shihua quanbian*. In fact, among the 560 or so authors included in the collection, almost 400 have never had their *shihua* works compiled before.

¹² For an excellent study of this work within the larger context of Song dynasty *shihua*, see Kōrzen Hiroshi, "Songdai shihua zhong Ouyang Xiu 'Liuyi Shihua' de yiyi" 宋代詩話中歐陽脩《六一詩話》的意義, in *idem.*, *Yiyu zhi yan: Xingshan Hong Zhongguo gudian lunji* 異域之眼: 興膳宏中國古典論集, ed. and trans. Dai Yan 戴燕 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 330–340.

include *Guitian lu* 歸田錄 and *Shibi* 試筆,¹³ which also have entries on poetry). As *Shihua* circulated in manuscript form among a group of literati close to Ouyang Xiu,¹⁴ one of them, Sima Guang, found this type of notes interesting and decided to write a sequel to it. In the preface to his *Xu shihua* 續詩話, which literally means *A Sequel to Shihua*, Sima Guang made it clear that he wanted to supplement what Ouyang Xiu had written in *Shihua* with more things of a similar nature that he himself found worth recording. Around the same time, Liu Ban 劉攽 (1023–1089), a close friend of Ouyang and Sima, also composed a collection of notes titled *Zhongshan shihua* 中山詩話, which derives from attaching his style name “Zhongshan” to the word “*shihua*.”¹⁵

In the few decades following these three earliest collections, no such usage of “*shihua*” appeared, and all mentionings of the term referred specifically to Ouyang Xiu’s work. Nevertheless, works bearing formal similarity to these three *shihua* collections were written during the period, albeit with different titles, such as *Tang Zixi wenlu* 唐子西文錄 by Tang Geng 唐庚 (1070–1120) and *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話 by monk Huihong 惠洪 (1071–1128). It was not until the turn of the twelfth century did Song authors begin once again to title their

¹³ The textual relationship between *Shihua* and *Guitian lu* has been subject to much debate; some scholars have argued that *Shihua* was originally part of *Guitian lu*, and that Ouyang took those entries on poetry out of *Guitian lu* and re-named them *Shihua*. For discussions on this issue, see for example Guo Shaoyu, *Song shihua kao*, 1–4; Li Weiguo 李偉國, “‘Liuyi shihua’ yu ‘Guitian lu’ ” 《六一詩話》與《歸田錄》, *Shanghai shifan xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 上海師範學院學報 (社會科學版) 1 (1981): 34–44; and Zhang Haiming 張海明, “Ouyang Xiu ‘Liuyi shihua’ yu ‘Zashu,’ ‘Guitian lu’ zhi guanxi: Jian tan Ouyang Xiu ‘Liuyi shihua’ de xiezuo” 歐陽脩《六一詩話》與《雜書》、《歸田錄》之關係—兼談歐陽脩《六一詩話》的寫作, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 6 (2009): 34–44.

¹⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ouyang Xiu’s miscellaneous writings, including *shihua*, were probably not printed until they were incorporated into his complete collection during the Southern Song.

¹⁵ See Toyofuku Kenji 豊福健二, “Öyō Shū · Shiba Kō · Ryū Han no Shiwasho” 歐陽修 · 司馬光 · 劉攽の詩話書, *Chūgoku chūsei bungaku kenkyū* 中国中世文学研究 45–46 (Oct. 2004): 254–268.

works *shihua*, such as *Shilin shihua* by Ye Mengde and *Shanhugou shihua* 珊瑚鉤詩話 by Zhang Biao Cheng 張表臣 (fl. 1120s). In the process, many important aspects of this textual form gradually stabilized. In that sense, although Ouyang Xiu's *Shihua* did symbolize the first conscious attempt to compose the sort of notes that would later be called *shihua*, as a generically unique category *shihua* did not appear until the end of eleventh century, by which time compilers and readers finally had to distinguish Ouyang's work by adding to its title his studio name "Liuyi," thus coining the name by which it has been known since.

In addition to these fundamental aspects, another important issue concerns *shihua* as a form of literary criticism, an issue that carries even greater weight mainly due to its implication in the controversy over whether traditional China had literary criticism in the sense comparable to Aristotle's *Poetics* or other similar works in the Western tradition.¹⁶ Even though many elaborate theoretical treatises such as *Poetic Exposition on Literature* 文賦 and *The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* 文心雕龍 had been composed since the Six Dynasties, the total output of *shihua* works as well as the number of active practitioners of the genre far exceed those of the treatises. Therefore, when scholars in twentieth century attempted to construct a history of Chinese literary theories, *shihua* were always used as a foundational pillar for this theoretical edifice. The lack of a coherent system in most *shihua* works, especially those written before the end of thirteenth century, however, poses serious

¹⁶ Some scholars have gone further to propose that *shihua* is broader in scope than that of "poetics" in the modern sense of the word, as it concerns not only poetry but also poets, readers, and other related elements at work. See for example Cai, "Shihua yanjiu zhi huigu yu zhanwang."

challenges for such efforts.¹⁷ In this chapter, I argue that the search for a coherent theoretic system or a consciousness of constructing theories in *shihua* in fact detracts us from understanding what was really happening in Song *shihua*. While topics such as what makes a poem good and how did master poets become great were indeed important concerns of Song literati, the main motivation behind their efforts in writing *shihua* was to define their relationships with poets in the past as well as to consolidate the value of poetry by offering personal memories and accounts, on which this chapter will focus.

3.2. The (In)visible “I” and the Subjectivity of the Narrator in Early *Shihua*

As delineated above, following the emergence of the three pioneering *shihua* works by Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang and Liu Ban, the few decades around the turn of the twelfth century stands as a critical juncture in the establishment of *shihua* as a genre. In this section, we begin our analysis by examining how literati active during this period read these earliest *shihua* works and continued to develop the genre by writing notes of similar content and style. In this process, certain characteristic aspects of early *shihua* solidified while others were dropped out, and the defining textual features of the genre gradually took shape. Chief among these features, I argue, is the role of the author “I”, which functions both as

¹⁷ Among the *shihua* works of the Song, Jiang Kui’s 姜夔 (1155–1209) *Baishi daoren shishuo* 白石道人詩說 and Yan Yu’s 嚴羽 (?–?) *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 are two examples that demonstrate conscious efforts to create a systematic theory of poetics. Such efforts are more obvious in the *shihua* of Ming and Qing dynasties, when authors such as Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627–1703) and Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) all attempted to create their own theories of poetic composition. For more details, see for example the relevant chapters in Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010); and Luo Genze, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2015).

the subject of experience as well as a first-person narrative voice in the text.¹⁸ The centrality of “I” in *shihua* texts was established through nuanced tones of the narrator as well as carefully designed alternations between the invisibility and appearance of the author. Such dynamics in turn established *shihua* as a discourse of personal witness and commentary.

In most *shihua* texts, the default setting for the narrative voice is a first-person account presented by an invisible narrator, namely the author. However, the subject “I” does appear from time to time, either as a participant in the story, a witness of the account, or a marker that separates past accounts from present comments. In this way, the author and the narrator are often merged in *shihua* texts as one, thus creating the effect of a monologue or personal memoir of things in the past and pointing to the unique role of subjectivity in *shihua*. Indeed, if we examine the incidences in which the author appears in the text as “I” and the ways in which he assumes authority even when he is invisible, we will discern a particular subjectivity revealed in the voice of the author/narrator consistent among many *shihua* texts. The narrative subject in *shihua* is one that gains authority because of his retrospective stance, and one that has an unconditional legitimacy due to the presumed space of “leisure talks”. Such memoir-like feature was already evident in Ouyang Xiu’s *Shihua*, as demonstrated by his extremely succinct “preface:”

¹⁸ Along similar lines, the usage of function words in general as an important stylistic feature of early *shihua* is analyzed in detail by Higashi Hidetoshi, using the works of Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang as examples. See idem., “Ōyō Shū ‘Rikuitsu shiwa’ buntai no tokushaku” 歐陽脩『六一詩話』文体の特色, *Chūgoku bungaku ronshū* 中国文学論集 34 (Dec. 2005): 106–118.

The Layman (*i.e.* I) retired to live in Ruyin (in present-day Jiangxi Province), and collected these [notes] for leisure talks.¹⁹

居士退居汝陰，而集以資閒談也。

Here, Ouyang Xiu claims, in a light-hearted tone, that the reason he compiled these notes is to supply raw materials for casual chats, either by himself or others in the future. What he was recording are episodes of various real life events and thoughts that he did not want to see forgotten. For example, he once recalled some Tang poets who had been popular during his childhood but later fell into oblivion. Among them was Zheng Gu 鄭谷 (ca. 849–911):

The fame of Zheng Gu's poetry was at its height at the end of the Tang. His collected works were called the *Cloud Terrace Collection*, but they were commonly referred to by Zheng's office title as *Poetry of Penal Administrator Zheng*.²⁰ His poetry was very thought-provoking and contained many excellent lines, but the style was not really elevated. Because it was so easy to understand, people used his poetry for teaching children – even when I was a child, we still recited his poems. Nowadays his works are no longer in circulation.

In the later days of his life, Mei Shengyu (*i.e.* Mei Yaochen) also rose to the position of penal administrator. One day, we were having a drinking party at my house, and Liu Yuanfu (*i.e.* Liu Chang) teased him by saying: "Shengyu's official career will surely stop here." The guests were all shocked, but Yuanfu went on: "Just as there was a Penal Administrator Zheng in the past, now we have Penal Administrator Mei." Shengyu was rather unhappy. Not long after that, Shengyu died of illness. I wrote a preface to his collected poems titled *Wanling Collection*, but people today refer to it only as *Poetry of Penal Administrator Mei*. A single line uttered in jest, and later on things turned out just the way it predicted. How lamentable it is!²¹

¹⁹ *Liuyi shihua*, in He Wenhuan comp., *Lidai shihua* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981) [hereafter LDSH], 264.

²⁰ Duguan 都官 is an administrator at the Criminal Administration Bureau, a subsidiary unit in the Ministry of Justice 刑部 during the Song in charge of the management of criminals and prisoners of war. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 540.

²¹ *Liuyi shihua*, in LDSH, 265–266. The translation here is based on that of Stephen Owen, with some modifications. See Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 363.

鄭谷詩名盛於唐末，號《雲臺編》，而世俗但稱其官，為“鄭都官詩”。其詩極有意思，亦多佳句，但其格不甚高。以其易曉，人家多以教小兒。余為兒時猶誦之，今其集不行於世矣。

梅聖俞晚年，官亦至都官。一日會飲余家，劉原父戲之曰：“聖俞官必止于此。”坐客皆驚。原父曰：“昔有鄭都官，今有梅都官也。”聖俞頗不樂。未幾，聖俞病卒。余為序其詩為《宛陵集》，而今人但謂之“梅都官詩”。一言之謔，後遂果然，斯可歎也！

This account lamenting the death of one of Ouyang Xiu's closest friends, Mei Yaochen, is framed into a story about the omen of words through clever juxtaposition with the life story of Zheng Gu. In addition to commenting on the literary quality of Zheng's poetry, Ouyang Xiu draws on his childhood experience reciting Zheng's works and contrasts it with their deplorable current situation, thereby pointing out his motivation for recounting Zheng's story. Such records of people and events from the past that may otherwise be lost are featured frequently in *Shihua*. Take for example an account of another late Tang poet, Zhou Pu 周朴 (?-878):

During the later years of the Tang, poets no longer had the grand, expansive style of Li [Bai] and Du [Fu], but they still held those [poems] with excellence in high regard. Poets like Zhou Pu worked very hard to develop thoughts in poetry; and in everything they did, we always find an intense craftsmanship. People of the time praised Zhou Pu's poetry by saying "He smelts it for a month, refines it for a season, and even before the poem is finished, it is already on everyone's lips" – such was his fame in his days. Nowadays, his works are no longer transmitted. When I was young, one could still find his collected poems. Among his couplets was one: "The wind is warm, the voices of birds shatter,/The sun high, the shadows of flowers heavy." And another: "As daybreak comes, birds of the hills make commotion,/A rain passes, the apricot blossoms grow fewer." These are truly fine lines.²²

²² *Liuyi shihua*, in LDSH, 267. The translation here is based on that of Stephen Owen, with some modifications. See Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 374.

唐之晚年，詩人無復李、杜豪放之格，然亦務以精意相高。如周朴者，構思尤艱，每有所得，必極其雕琢，故時人稱朴詩“月鍛季煉，未及成篇，已播人口”。其名重當時如此，而今不復傳矣。余少時猶見其集，其句有云：“風暖鳥聲碎，日高花影重。”又云：“曉來山鳥鬧，雨過杏花稀。”誠佳句也。

Here, the urge to bear personal witness to those poets on the brink of falling into oblivion is more explicit. The account that Ouyang Xiu provided, however, is as fragmented as the textual condition of Zhou Pu's poetic collection, for which only a few couplets remained. Regrettably, this was often the way by which many late Tang poems were remembered (or at least recorded) during the Song, namely through the best couplets in them. In that sense, these lines or couplets became segregated from the original poems and became the primary way by which these poems survived. Moreover, placed at the center of the narrative in both entries is Ouyang Xiu's personal reminiscence, on which the value of the poet and the accuracy of the poetic lines solely rely. This important point provides us with a different lens to look into the preface of this collection: even though Ouyang Xiu claims that the goal of his accounts is to supply raw materials for leisure talks, he is in fact making judgments, in each entry, about which account is trustworthy and thus worth preserving.

Along the same vein, Sima Guang began his *Xu shihua* with the following preface:

There are still things left out by *Shihua*. Although [I] cannot catch up with Ouyang Xiu's literary reputation, [my goal of] recording things is the same [as his]. Therefore, I dare to write a sequel [to his work].²³

《詩話》尚有遺者，歐陽公文章名聲雖不可及，然記事一也，故敢續書之。

²³ *Wengong xu shihua* 溫公續詩話, in LDSH, 274.

Three points are worth noting in this preface. First, when Sima Guang used the term “*shihua*” here, he was referring specifically to Ouyang Xiu’s work *Shihua*, rather than the genre in general. Second, Sima Guang identified the purpose of *Shihua* as “recording things,” which echoes one of the two basic functions proposed by Zhang Xuecheng. Third, Sima Guang seems to be suggesting, albeit subtly, a connection between Ouyang Xiu’s literary reputation and the popularity of his *Shihua*.

Besides preface, there exist ample textual resonances between the two works of Ouyang and Sima. Among them, the story of Mei Yaochen’s death is a particularly fascinating example. In *Xu shihua*, Sima Guang provided the following account:

When Mei Shengyu passed away, Song Xuan (style name Zicai), Han Zongyan (style name Qinsheng), Shen Gou (style name Wentong) and I were serving as fellow officials in the State Finance Commission²⁴ together, and we all felt great pity for him. Zicai said: “When I met Shengyu recently, his complexion was especially glowing. [I] thought that was [a sign of his] enrichment, but did not know that it was in fact ominous.” At that time, Qinsheng's complexion was also glowing. Wentong pointed at it and said: “Qinsheng will be the next then.” Everyone faulted him for the excessive joke. Within a few days, Qinsheng died of illness. I said to Wentong: “Even though you did not curse him, this is still killing by teasing.” Although this [account] is not relevant to the events of the time, it happened at the same time as [the death of] Shengyu, and the nature of the events was also similar, so I attach it here.²⁵

梅聖俞之卒也，余與宋子才選、韓欽勝宗彥、沈文通邁，俱為三司僚屬，共痛惜之。子才曰：“比見聖俞面光澤特甚，意為充盛，不知乃為不祥也。”時欽聖面亦光澤，文通指之曰：“次及欽聖矣。”眾皆尤其暴謔。不數日，欽聖抱疾而卒。余謂文通曰：“君雖不為咒咀，亦戲殺耳。”此雖無預時事，然以其與聖俞同時，事又相類，故附之。

²⁴ For a detailed description of this office, see Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 402.

²⁵ *Wengong xu shihua*, in LDSH, 274.

Similar to Ouyang Xiu's account quoted above, this is yet another story of ominous coincidence arising from casually passed jocular comments. In Ouyang's account, such coincidence was manifested at two levels: both Zheng Gu and Mei Yaochen terminated their official career at the post of Duguan, and that the poetic collections of both suffered a similar fate, namely with their original title forgotten. In Sima's account, a similarly casual joke was made at a gathering lamenting the untimely death of Mei Yaochen, which turned out to have unfortunately portended the death of Han Qinsheng. At the end of the piece, Sima Guang explained the reason for including this entry, an unusual act of justification that appeared only once in *Xu shihua*, suggesting the importance of its "relevance to things at the time" as well as re-affirming the goal of "recording things" he laid out in his preface.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that both Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang recounted the death of their close friends and colleagues with such unusual narratives. It is important to note, however, that they were the persons who created these omens, since for all other witnesses of these events, including Liu Ban and Shen Gou who made the jokes, the deaths of Mei and Han were probably due to entirely different reasons. By juxtaposing Zheng Gu's ill-fated poetic collection and Mei Yaochen's death, Ouyang Xiu threaded together a narrative of ominous coincidence between the two. Sima Guang's account further adds Han Qinsheng to this chain of incidents by making the same narrative moves. For both Ouyang and Sima, the real motivation for recording these events was not to provide justification for the deaths of their friends, but rather to offer personal witness accounts for their lives, which they considered worth commemorating.

Moreover, both Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang assumed a position of high authority in their accounts via two rhetoric strategies, namely the use of retrospective stance of the narrator and the emphasis on the sources of information. Given that almost all entries in early *shihua* collections deal with things and events in the past, a retrospective stance is therefore the default choice for narrative strategy. However, it is often difficult to identify the temporal gap between the occurrence of the events and the time of their recording in these *shihua*, because a significant portion of *shihua* entries are intentionally lacking in specific markers of time, particularly in entries about memorable poems, poetic techniques, and great poets of the past. Instead, the temporal framework of the narrative is only hinted at. It is only when such poetic omens 詩讖 are involved that the flow of time is indicated in the text. As we can see in the two examples, Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang both created a timeline connecting the prophetic jokes with their friends' deaths, and at the same time claimed that their versions of the story was indeed what had happened and thus worth passing down. By establishing an uncanny correlation across time between these poets, they created alternative biographical accounts for Mei Yaochen and Han Qisheng, distinct from what their families would have written for them.

Another strategy that contributed to the authoritarian appearance of early *shihua* works is the authors' mentioning of their information sources. Although offering personal witness to the events would carry the highest level of credibility, a significant portion of the entries in early *shihua* collections are derived from hearsays or recounting by other people. In such cases, the author often needs to reveal himself in the text to point out from where he gets

hold of his information. For instance, Liu Ban recorded a tale of an eccentric person in his

Zhongshan shihua:

Li Shining, a native of Shu (present-day Sichuan), likes to talk about ghosts, immortals, and strange tales. [Once] he told me: “Once I sailed on the sea and encountered wind; that was the King of Spreading Profit sending an envoy to greet me.” Another time [he said]: “There was a night when someone sent me a message that certain dukes asked for me. When I went with him, [I saw] a sumptuous banquet set up, and enjoyed the food and drink until I was full and drunk. When I woke up, I was outside the gate of a temple, so I suspected that the so-called ‘dukes’ were the two temple gods.”

People all say that Shining could read others’ minds. Once he visited me, and I deliberately said something silently, humiliating and teasing him for a whole day. Shining did not know. Where was his mind-reading capability? Literati often send him gold, silk and other valuables, and therefore he is always rich in money and possessions. People again think that he has the skills for gathering money. This is just like [what has happened to] Li Shaojun^{26, 27}

蜀人李士寧，好言鬼神詭異事。為予言“嘗泛海值風，廣利王使存問己；”又“嘗一夜，有人傳相公命己，及往，燕設甚盛，飲食醉飽。既寤，乃在梁門外。疑所謂相公者，二相神也。”

人皆言士寧能佗心通。士寧過余，余故默作念，侮戲之竟日，士寧不知，烏在其通也！士大夫多遺其金帛錢物，士寧以是財用常饒足。人又以為有術能歸錢，與李少君類矣。

An interesting feature of this entry is again the appearance of the narrator “I.” By making himself visible, Liu Ban highlights his personal relationship with Li Shining and lends credibility to his account. This is particularly effective when he mentions his prank in secretly checking Li’s mind-reading capability in order to debunk his fake reputation. This

²⁶ Li Shaojun was a geomancer during the time of Emperor Wu 武帝 of the Han dynasty. He claimed that he could transform cinnabar into gold, which could be made into food containers; people who eat from these gold containers would then be immortal. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 12.453–455.

²⁷ *Zhongshan shihua*, in LDSH, 299.

story of revealing fakeness would be much less believable and spicy if it were told from a third-person perspective. Moreover, this entry has nothing to do with poetry, nor does it seem to concern any poet in particular. This demonstrates that in Liu Ban's time, the name "shihua" was not yet a strict generic term but rather a makeshift category for an eclectic collection of notes and accounts, not all of which concern poetry.

Such narrative strategy involving the narrator "I" was frequently used in many subsequent *shihua* texts. For example, in Ye Mengde's recollection of some of the most famous poets of the Northern Song, personal connections with the characters under discussion play a key role, for example in the following account:

My maternal grandfather Chao Juncheng was good at poetry. Su Zizhan (*i.e.* Su Shi) wrote a preface for his collection, which said: "Gentle and kind, calm and deep, [the poems are] just like him as a person." Huang Luzhi (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian) used to recite his [poetic line] "Drizzling rain falls quietly, I cannot fall asleep;/Lying down, I listen to the lame horse chewing leftover vegetables," and loved it very much. One day, Huang got the following line: "The horse chewed on the dry straws, interrupting my afternoon dream,/Startled, I mistakenly [took the noise] to be waves billowing in wind and rain." He felt it was quite polished, and told it to my uncle Wujiu (*i.e.* Chao Buzhi), saying: "My poem was in fact inspired by a previous couplet of your father." When I heard this from my uncle, I did not understand the meaning of "waves billowing in wind and rain." One day, I was resting in a tavern, and heard in the neighboring shed a sound of something pounding, as if wind and waves were hitting on a boat. I got up to check it out, and found that it was a horse eating at a manger; the grinding of water and straws against the manger created the noise. At that moment, I understood Luzhi's interests in strange things. But such things could not be deliberately sought after, only encountered by chance.²⁸

外祖晁君誠善詩，蘇子瞻爲集序所謂“溫厚靜深如其爲人者”也。黃魯直常誦其“小雨愔愔人不寐，卧聽羸馬齧殘蔬，”愛賞不已。他日得句云“馬齧枯萁喧午夢，誤驚風雨浪翻江，”

²⁸ Ye Mengde, *Shilin shihua jiaozhu* 石林詩話校注, coll. and annot. Lu Mingxin 遯銘昕 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2011) [hereafter SLSHJZ], 33–36.

自以爲工，以語舅氏無咎曰：“吾詩實發於乃翁前聯。”余始聞舅氏言此，不解“風雨翻江”之意。一日憇於逆旅，聞傍舍有澎湃鞞鞞之聲，如風浪之歷船者。起視之，乃馬食於槽，水與草齟齬於槽間而爲此聲。方悟魯直之好奇，然此亦非可以意索，適相遇而得之也。

The crux of this story lies in a difficult couplet by Huang Tingjian, one that epitomizes an critical feature of Huang's poetry, namely strangeness 奇. By framing it in a complicated multi-layered structure, Ye Mengde successfully weaved together an interpersonal network involving Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, his uncle Chao Wujiu, his grandfather Chao Juncheng, and himself. Moreover, by emphasizing the close relationships his grandfather and uncle had with Su and Huang, who held Chao Juncheng's poetry in high regard, Ye effectively creates a bond between himself and these two master poets of the Northern Song, while recording an episode of his epiphanic understanding of Huang Tingjian's poetry. At the same time, he also kept himself at a fair distance from these characters, so as to be able to make objective assessment from the perspective of an intimate by-stander.

From the discussions above, I have demonstrated that the fusion between the author and the narrator, as well as the use of a carefully designed voice from this author/narrator, constitute a shared feature among early *shihua* works. Most of the time, the narrator is not visible and the account is presented in a seemingly detached manner. When the narrator does appear in the text as the first-person pronoun “I,” however, it often assumes the role of a specific witness who records things and events that he judges to be worth remembering for posterity. This witness carries with him a strong sense of authority, and often tells us, from a retrospective stance, things that he has experienced himself. In cases of indirect experience, the narrator would emphasize the credibility of his source of information, such

as family members or interlocutors, and present his own views from a carefully chosen position in the story, such as an admirer or a critical observer. In either case, there are considerable variations in both the themes and the narrator perspectives among *shihua* entries, as the only purpose shared by these texts is to provide for “leisure talks.” The key commonality among them, however, is the multi-faceted role of the author/narrator as the storyteller, the judge, as well as the transmitter of the account. As we will see later in this chapter, this peculiar role of subjectivity will become a central feature of subsequent *shihua* collections, and come to be established as a defining characteristic of the genre.

3.3. Situating Oneself within the Poetic Tradition

Following the three pioneering collections, an increasing number of *shihua* works emerged during late Northern and early Southern Song, in which the omnipresent author/narrator continued to play a critical role. At the same time, the reliance on this feature also brought greater diversity to the content of *shihua* pieces that did not conform to any unified theme, making it difficult to grasp the overall message of a *shihua* collection. In such cases, modern scholars often choose to focus on those entries with a distinct theoretical pitch on poetics and aesthetics. For those entries that lack such features but merely record couplets, compare poets, or provide contexts for poems, conventional scholarship often focuses on their roles in delineating lineages or classifying poets based on the poetic principles they advocated.²⁹

²⁹ The best example of such practice is the use of the many *shihua* pieces about the “Jiangxi Poetry School,” since most Southern Song poets could be classified based on whether he was influenced by its poetics. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Another approach frequently adopted by scholars to categorize *shihua* collections from this period is based on whether a particular collection or author was pro-Su Shi.³⁰ This is understandable in light of the devastating impact of the court-initiated literary censorship in late Northern Song that banned all writings of the so-called Yuanyou Faction, at the center of which were Su Shi and his disciples. As a result, most *shihua* authors (who were also among the most influential poets of the time) had to choose side in whether or not to clandestinely support the Su Shi group.³¹ While such approach correctly highlights one of the gravest challenges in the literary scene of late Northern Song, it falls short on its ability to take into account the diversity and complexity of the *shihua* corpus from this period.

In this section, I propose a different approach to look at the *shihua* of this period by examining the specific poetic issues under discussion, the poets and periods covered, and most importantly how such information is presented by the author of the *shihua*. Building upon our earlier discussion on the role of the author/narrator, I argue that the driving forces for *shihua* texts in late Northern and early Southern Song were to confirm the value of the poetic tradition as well as to establish a discourse of the Northern Song poetic canon.

3.3.1. *Preserving and interpreting poetry*

As mentioned in the analysis of Ouyang Xiu's accounts of late Tang poets, a significant portion of the early *shihua* entries are records of poets, poetic collections, and couplets from

³⁰ For example, Guo Shaoyu frequently makes such comments in his *Song shihua kao*.

³¹ This issue will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

poems that the author feels compelled to preserve. The entry in *Shihua* regarding an enigmatic group of poets called the “Nine Monks” 九僧 serves as another illustrative example:³²

Among the Buddhist monks of the present dynasty, nine were famous for their poetry, and thus the collection of their works was called “Poems of the Nine Monks.” It is no longer in circulation now. When I was young, I heard people praising them highly. One was named Huichong, but I’ve forgotten the names of the other eight. I even remember a bit of their poetry. There was a couplet that went: “Horse set to graze on the land since the surrender,/A hawk wheels through clouds after the battle.” And another: “Spring appears beyond Cassia Ridge;/But the person lies west of Seagate Mountain.” Most of their best lines were of this sort. With their collection lost, most people today no longer know there were these “Nine Monks.” This is lamentable!³³

國朝浮圖，以詩名於世者九人，故時有集號《九僧詩》，今不復傳矣。余少時聞人多稱之。其一曰惠崇，餘八人者，忘其名字也。余亦畧記其詩，有云：“馬放降來地，雕盤戰後雲。”又云：“春生桂嶺外，人在海門西。”其佳句多類此。其集已亡，今人多不知有所謂九僧者矣，是可歎也！

So far, it seems that Ouyang Xiu liked the poetry of these monks, but what follows greatly complicates this impression:

At the time, there was a *jinshi* named Xu Dong (976?-1017?), who was handsome and free-spirited. Once he met with these monks and they were composing poetry according to assigned topics, so he handed out a piece of paper and made an agreement with them: “None of these characters could be used.” [Written on the paper were] words such as mountain, water, wind, cloud, bamboo, rock, flower, grass, snow, frost, star, moon, poultry, bird, etc. The monks then all put down their brushes. When Xu Dong passed the *jinshi* examination in the third year of the Xianping era (1000), an anonymous person teased him

³² For more information on the Nine Monks and their poetry, see for example Zhu Shangshu, “Lun ‘Songchu Jiuseng’ ji qishi” 論“宋初九僧”及其詩, in *idem.*, *Songdai wenxue tantao ji* 宋代文學探討集 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2007), 303-316; and Ji Guangyu 吉廣興, “Songchu Jiuseng shiji kaoshu” 宋初九僧詩集考述, *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 2 (Mar. 2001): 167-208.

³³ *Liuyi shihua*, in LDSH, 266. The translation here is based on that of Stephen Owen, with some modifications. See Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 371-372.

with [the couplet]: “Zhang Kang gets carelessly wrapped in horse leather;/Xu Dong dresses up his wife with jeweled ornaments.”³⁴

當時有進士許洞者，善爲詞章，俊逸之士也。因會諸詩僧分題，出一紙，約曰：“不得犯此一字。”其字乃山、水、風、雲、竹、石、花、草、雪、霜、星、月、禽、鳥之類，于是諸僧皆闕筆。洞咸平三年進士及第，時無名子嘲曰“張康渾裹馬，許洞鬧裝妻”者是也。

Here, Ouyang Xiu first tells the story of how a scholar-official named Xu Dong made fun of the limited scope of the Nine Monks' poetry through a witty word game. Then with a clever twist, he puts Xu on the spot and makes fun of him through the mouth of an “anonymous person.” As layers of the story unfold, Ouyang Xiu conveys to his readers the sheer fun of finding out a fragment of the lives of these Nine Monks, whose names have escaped his memory. Among his readers was Sima Guang, who took it upon himself to dig up more information on these Nine Monks, and recorded his finding in his *Xu shihua*:

Ouyang said that the poetry collection of the Nine Monks has been lost. In the autumn of the first year of the Yuanfeng era (1085), I traveled to the Jade Spring Temple on the Wan'an Mountain, and obtained the collection from a *jinshi* named Min Jiaoru. These so-called “Nine Monks” are: Xizhou from Jiannan, Baoxie from Jinhua, Wenzhao from Nanyue, Xingzhao from Tiantai, Jianchang from Wozhou, Weifeng from Guicheng, Huichong from Huainan, Yuzhou from Jiangnan, and Huaigu from E'mei. Chen Chong, an auxiliary at the Institute for the Glorification of Literature,³⁵ collected their poems and wrote a preface for them. The good pieces among them are only limited to those few couplets praised by common people.

³⁴ *Liuyi shihua*, in LDSH, 266. The exact meaning of the last line is unclear, as we are unable to ascertain the identity of Zhang Kang. On the other hand, Xu Dong's biography can be found in *Songshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 441.13044. The term “guoma” 裹馬 here may refer to soldiers who die in battlefield and whose bodies are wrapped in horse leather, whereas “naozhuang” 鬧裝 refers to a belt or some other ornament woven together using jewels.

³⁵ The Institute for the Glorification of Literature was one of the Three Institutes 三館 during the Song in charge of imperial book collections. See Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 118.

Jiaoru liked studying Confucian classics, and his behavior was rather eccentric. He believed that he had obtained the subtle way of the sages, which could not be achieved by previous Confucian scholars. He was poor, unmarried, did not accept any official position, and often lodged and ate at temples, which the monks did not begrudge. Initially, he lived on the Longmen Mountain, but was bothered by the excessive tourists coming and going, and moved to the Wan'an Mountain. He shunned himself from people and activities, and concentrated on studying the Confucian classics for several decades. The greater his efforts, the further away he was from common sense of the world. People belittled and laughed at him, but Jiaoru remained unchanged and became even more determined. Even though [what he did] was not the behavior of "walking in the middle" (*i.e.* following the Doctrine of the Mean), his ambition was commendable.³⁶

歐陽公云九僧詩集已亡。元豐元年秋，余游萬安山玉泉寺，于進士閔交如舍得之。所謂九詩僧者：劍南茜晝、金華保暹、南越文兆、天臺行肇、沃州簡長、貴城惟鳳、淮南惠崇、江南字昭、峨眉懷古也。直昭文館陳充集而序之，其美者亦止于世人所稱數聯耳。

交如好治經，所為奇僻，自謂得聖人微旨，先儒所不能到。貧無妻兒，不應舉，常寄食僧舍，僧亦不厭苦之。始居龍門山，猶苦遊人往來多，徙居萬安山，屏絕人事，專以治經為事，凡數十年，用心益苦，而去人情益遠，眾非笑之，交如不變益堅。雖非中行，其志亦可憐也。

In this piece, Sima Guang opens by repudiating Ouyang Xiu's claim about the permanent loss of the Nine Monks' collection, and recounts how he himself managed to obtain a copy of the collection from an eccentric *jinshi* named Min Jiaoru. After listing the names of the monks that Ouyang was not able to identify and confirming the popular evaluation of their poetry, Sima Guang then shifts the focus to the life story of Min, and expresses sympathy for his social ineptitude and unwavering determination, as attested to by the use of words such as *ku* 苦 and *kelian* 可憐. However, hidden behind the story of Jiaoru's path to a social pariah is the unique relationship between him and Sima Guang. Although Sima Guang did not elaborate on this, it is almost certain that the two had ample interactions, chatting about

³⁶ *Wengong xu shihua*, in LDSH, 280.

the Nine Monks' poetry (and perhaps even Ouyang Xiu's *Shihua* entry) before Jiaoru would give him this rare collection. Therefore, in addition to providing supplementary information about the Nine Monks, this piece is about a hermitic scholar-official as well as Sima Guang's extraordinary encounter with a rare poetry collection. From the perspectives of Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, the stories of Xu Dong and Min Jiaoru are just as important as that of these monks. Despite the possible elements of hearsay, guesswork, and error in the accounts, they nevertheless recorded them down as a literary "treasure maps" filled with vivid information, bearing essential clues to an episode in poetic history that calls for future explorers to discover.

In addition to recording valuable information about poets and poetic texts, another main theme in Song *shihua* entries is to provide poetic interpretations and annotations (including analysis of difficult terms or allusions), clarifying the meaning or pronunciation of specific characters, as well as explicating contextual backgrounds that may impact the understanding of a poem. While anecdotal writings of such nature existed long before the Song, the scope of such interpretations was greatly expanded in Song *shihua* to include some rather unique features, such as misreading of early poems brought about by linguistic changes. For example, Liu Ban discusses in his *Zhongshan shihua* the various forms of animal messengers that had appeared in previous poems and writings:

As the ancient poem goes: "In my sleeve is a short letter;/Which I wish to entrust to the swallows flying in pair." Swallow is a seasonal animal, and is therefore used in this allegory. People of Shu (present-day Sichuan) used pigeons to send letters from the capital; within ten days it would reach the boats. When the boats sail in the sea, pigeons were also used to send letters. These are not false claims. History books take the "Yellow Ear" that

Lu Ji wrote about a dog that could send letters.³⁷ That was probably not the case. From Luoyang to Wu, one had to pass the Yangtze and the Huai Rivers, spanning several thousands of miles. How could [a dog] converse with humans and take boats? Perhaps it is the name of a slave. If not, that must be a magical dog.³⁸

古詩曰：“袖中有短書，欲寄雙飛燕。”以燕時物，故寓言爾。蜀人自京以鴿寄書，不泆旬而達船，船浮海，亦以鴿通信，非虛言也。史以陸機‘黃耳’為犬，能寄書，恐不然。自洛至吳，更歷江、淮，殆數千裏，安能論人而從舟楫乎？或者為奴名，不然，當為神犬也。

Liu Ban also wrote many *shihua* entries in which he offers insightful opinions regarding obscure terms and phrases in earlier writings, an apt reflection of his broad learning and vast knowledge in recognizing esoteric things.³⁹ Take for example this brief one-liner:

In Song Cidao's poem titled "Visiting the Western Capital," he uses "yehu luo" (the Residence of Wild Foxes) to match "wufeng lou" (the Tower of Five Phoenixes). "Yehu luo" was actually the name Tang people gave to [the place where] court ladies congregated.⁴⁰

宋次道《次西都詩》以“野狐落”對“五鳳樓”。言“野狐落”，唐人名宮人所聚也。

Another example concerns one of the most notoriously ambiguous poems in Chinese literary history:

Li Shangyin had a poem titled "Brocade Zither," and people do not understand the meaning [of the title]. Someone said that it is the name of a servant girl⁴¹ in the household of Linghu Chu.⁴²

³⁷ The story goes that Lu Ji once used his beloved dog "Yellow Ear" helped him pass letters back and forth between Luoyang and his home in Wujun (in present-day Jiangsu province). See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 54.1473.

³⁸ *Zhongshan shihua*, in LDSH, 292.

³⁹ Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 made the comment that Liu was "perhaps the most erudite person in the Northern Song in the studies of history and antiquities." See idem., *Songshi xuanzhu* 宋詩選注, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1989), 53.

⁴⁰ *Zhongshan shihua*, in LDSH, 296.

⁴¹ The original term used is *qingyi* 青衣, which literally means "black clothes," i.e. those worn by servants.

李商隱有《錦瑟》詩，人莫曉其意，或謂是令狐楚家青衣名也。

There are many other such examples in *Zhongshan shihua* where Liu Ban provides interpretations or clarifications for poems that he considered difficult for or easily misunderstood by his contemporaries. Very often, he merely makes a statement without giving any explanation for how he came to his understanding, as demonstrated in the two examples above. This type of annotative and exegetical analysis was adopted as a routine in most of the subsequent *shihua* works, and often occupied significant portions of the texts.⁴³

If we disassemble these exegetical commentaries in a *shihua* collection and insert them individually in between the poetic lines on which they annotate, then many of them would be formally indistinguishable from the traditional commentaries in many Confucian classics, especially those that exude a sense of unchallenged authority. There are, however, two fundamental differences between the two when we examine the body of *shihua* texts as a whole. First, *shihua* entries were separated from the original texts on which they comment, *i.e.* the poems, and were read on their own. This is significant as it signals a form of independent value in these entries even for readers who could not recall the original poem. The second distinction derives from the unique subjectivity of the author/narrator in *shihua*. While the commentaries in Confucian classics draw mostly from earlier canonical texts and

⁴² *Zhongshan shihua*, in LDSH, 287.

⁴³ For example, several *juan* of Ge Lifang's 葛立方 (?-1164) *Yunyu yangqiu* 韻語陽秋, an influential *shihua* work from the early Southern Song, are structured according to the types of topics that Ge singles out from poems and offers his annotations or interpretations, including for example geography, Buddhist and religious terms, and politics. See LDSH, 557-601.

historical precedents, *shihua* introduces a predominantly different source of interpretation, *i.e.* the author's personal experiences, which are often presented with equal authority as the insights drawn from textual and historical sources in the Classics. One form of such usage, for example, is by recounting the process of attaining epiphanic revelations or fresh understandings of specific poems from seemingly mundane encounters. Such cases are often highlighted with phrases such as "then I knew" 乃知 or "then it came to me" 方悟, as illustrated by Ye Mengde's piece on how he understood Huang Tingjian's strange couplet after hearing a horse eating at the manger.⁴⁴

In contrast to traditional poetic commentaries that often use texts and events from the past to interpret a poem, these annotative *shihua* entries tap on readers' experiences that took place after the composition of the poem and which could not have been foreseen by the poet. Such accounts are in some ways similar to the records of "poetic omens" discussed above, as both rely solely on the memories or stories told by the author/narrator, and hinge on a particular aspect of poetry reception, namely its unexpected and even uncanny engagement with the world. In this way, the judgment and testimony of any reader could be potentially important in the interpretation, and such judgment rests entirely in the hands of the reader. Therefore, these *shihua* pieces constitute an affirmation of poetry's influence that goes beyond its meaning, and show that a reader's encounter with the poem, regardless of when and where such encounter takes place, is equally worth remembering.

⁴⁴ Another *shihua* collection that contains many such personal revelations is Xu Yi's 許顛 (fl. 1130s) *Yanzhou shihua* 彥周詩話, which records many instances of comprehending obscure allusions in poems. See LDSH, 377-402.

3.3.2. Defining the Song poetic canon: Masters, schools, and lineages

Besides recording paratextual information relevant to the interpretation of poetry, the second main feature in *shihua* authors' efforts to reconfigure the value of poetry lies in their definition of the poetic canon, namely who are the master poets, which poems are held in high regard, and how to compose such poems. This is often the most important aspect of any *shihua* collection as well as the central theme that threads the many seemingly unrelated entries together. The most straightforward way to define one's poetic ideals is by making a list of the best couplets on a specific topic or the best poems that use a certain technique, such as the following two examples from Zhou Bida's *Erlaotang shihua* 二老堂詩話:

The quatrain "Frost and Moon" by Li Yishan (*i.e.* Li Shangyin) of the Tang dynasty has [the following line]: "The Blue Woman and Pale Maid both put up with the cold;/In moonlight and in frost they hold a contest of beauty and grace."⁴⁵ Shi Manqing (*i.e.* Shi Yannian) of our dynasty has [the line]: "The Pale Maid and Blue Woman are originally without peer;/ In frost and in moonlight they gracefully stand in their own melancholy." While their meanings are opposite, both lines are skillfully written.⁴⁶

唐李義山《霜月》絕句：“青女素娥俱耐冷，月中霜裏鬥嬋娟。”本朝石曼卿云：“素娥青女元無匹，霜月亭亭各自愁。”意相反而句皆工。

A poem by Tao Yuanming [has the line]: "Ale can drive out a hundred worries," while that by Du Zimei (*i.e.* Du Fu) has [the line]: "One draught [of ale] disperses a thousand cares."⁴⁷ Both lines got the fun [of ale].⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The translation here follows Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827–860)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 477.

⁴⁶ "Li Shi Shuangyue shi" 李石霜月詩, *Erlaotang shihua*, in LDSH, 668.

⁴⁷ The translation here follows Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), vol. 3, 9 (with slight modifications).

⁴⁸ "Tao Du jiushi" 陶杜酒詩, *Erlaotang shihua*, in LDSH, 668–669.

陶淵明詩：“酒能消百慮。”杜子美云：“一酌散千憂。”皆得趣之句也。

The elaboration of one's poetic ideals, however, does not stop at giving examples of great works but also inevitably leads to comparison of poets and picking favorites among them. For example, Chen Shidao 陳師道 (1053–1101) made the following comment on several poetic masters in his *Houshan shihua* 後山詩話:

If someone wants his poems to be good, then he would not be able to achieve such goodness. Wang Jiefu's (*i.e.* Wang Anshi) [poems are good for their] skills, Su Zizhan (*i.e.* Su Shi) for their freshness, and Huang Luzhi (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian) for their strangeness. As for Du Zimei's poems, whether it is the strange or the normal, the skillful or the fresh, the simple or the archaic, none of which is not good.⁴⁹

詩欲其好，則不能好矣。王介甫以工，蘇子瞻以新，黃魯直以奇，杜子美之詩奇常、工新、易陳，莫不好也。

In this entry, after laying out the particular strengths of a few Song poets, Chen Shidao finally makes his point that the greatest master of all in his mind is Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), who possessed all these strengths. Such comparative strategy is frequently used in *shihua* to highlight the strengths of certain poets. Similarly, the shortcomings of poets could also be compared in this way:

There is a popular saying that goes like this: “Su Mingyun (*i.e.* Su Xun) cannot write poetry, Ouyang Yongshu (*i.e.* Ouyang Xiu) cannot write rhapsody; Zeng Zigu (*i.e.* Zeng Gong) falls short on verse, Huang Luzhi falls short on prose; Su Zizhan's *ci* lyrics resemble poetry, Qin Shaoyou's (*i.e.* Qin Guan) poems resemble *ci* lyrics.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Houshan shihua*, in LDSH, 306.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 312.

世語云：“蘇明允不能詩，歐陽永叔不能賦；曾子固短于韻語，黃魯直短于散語；蘇子瞻詞如詩，秦少游詩如詞。”

In this list, the shortcomings of six extraordinary writers of the time are grouped into three pairs; the similar syntactic pattern used in each pair creates a strong contrast as well as correlation between the two figures discussed, in that they share a certain shortcoming but in opposing ways. Of special note is the third pair, which aptly points out the fact that both Su Shi and Qin Guan were breaking conventional generic expectations with their *ci* lyrics and poems. Also worth noting in this piece is Chen's clever use of the intentionally ambiguous phrase “popular saying” 世語 as his source of information, which sets himself some distance away from the opinions presented here. Chen may have found these opinions agreeable or problematic; we have no way to find out. The only thing we could ascertain is that he considered this saying worth recording.

As can be seen from these four short but representative entries, even a brief juxtaposition of a few poetic lines could convey a significant message about how the author views the connections between the poets and their respective poetic ideals. When we put many such pieces together and examine the most frequently used forms of comparison and juxtaposition, some larger patterns across different *shihua* works begin to emerge: while the contents of these evaluative entries vary widely, they share critical similarities in their fundamental understanding of the history of poetry and the ways by which the positions of the poets within the poetic tradition are perceived.

Another conspicuous feature among the *shihua* pieces we have examined so far is that most of them are poet- or figure-oriented; even those annotative entries are usually introduced as part of a story centered upon the life experience of a certain character involved in the poem. For example, almost all entries in the three earliest *shihua* works open with the name or biographical information of a poet or a key figure in the narrative, a trend that persists to a large extent in later *shihua* works despite the emergence of greater diversity in the ways of beginning an entry. Moreover, *shihua* authors also like to compare poets from previous ages with poets from the Song.⁵¹ The focus, however, tends to be on the continuation rather than distinction between the poetry of the Song and that of previous periods. In particular, both authors of *shihua* and those Song dynasty figures recorded in these *shihua* entries did not seem to withdraw themselves from the world of the Tang poets, but rather considered themselves as part of a long continuous poetic tradition of which the Tang poets constitute an integral part. Chen Shidao, for example, reflects on his own poetry in comparison with that of Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499) and Du Fu in the following entry:

Once I climbed up the Tower of Multiple Scenes and looked southward towards Dantu (in present-day Jiangsu province), and saw a big white bird flying close to the green woods. I got this line: “White birds, having crossed the woods, become especially bright.” Xie Tiao also had the line: “Yellow birds pass through green branches.” His language is clever but weak. Du Fu had the line: “White birds brighter, leaves the [slope’s] edges.”⁵² Even though his words are few, his meaning is nonetheless broad.

⁵¹ For example, discussions surrounding the distinctions between Tang poetry and Song poetry, which became one of the most intensely debated topics in the history of Chinese poetry since the Ming dynasty, often trace the emergence of many of the distinguishing features of Song poetry to Ouyang Xiu’s time.

⁵² The translation here follows Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), vol. 5, 311 (with slight modifications).

Every time I returned to my hometown, I felt I had grown older. Then I got this line: “Beneath my seat, more and more people are gathering.”⁵³ But Du Fu had the line: “With the respect from village folks, my seating position becomes increasingly senior,”⁵⁴ which has even more skillful language. I then know that there is nothing that Du’s poetry does not possess.⁵⁵

余登多景樓，南望丹徒，有大白鳥飛近青林，而得句云：“白鳥過林分外明。”謝朓亦云：“黃鳥度青枝。”語巧而弱。老杜云：“白鳥去邊明。”語少而意廣。

余每還里，而每覺老，復得句云“坐下漸人多，”而杜云“坐深鄉里敬，”而語益工。乃知杜詩無不有也。

Here, Chen Shidao directly juxtaposes two of his poetic lines inspired by events in his life with similarly themed lines from two poets whom he identified as his predecessors. Interestingly, the line that he takes to be Xie Tiao’s was actually written by Yu Yan 虞炎, a contemporary of Xie; this very line was in fact quoted by Zhong Rong as an example of poor imitation of Xie’s poetry.⁵⁶ While we cannot tell whether Chen mistook the authorship of the line by accident or intentionally attributed it to Xie, episodes such as this on the comparison and cross-inspiration between poems are common in *Houshan shihua* as well as many other Song *shihua* works.

Besides a few specific poets from the Six Dynasties such as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427) and Xie Tiao, Northern Song *shihua* authors’ focus is predominantly on Tang

⁵³ Given the social norm in traditional China of taking seats according to seniority, older people are often seated at the more central or prestigious positions within a room, and therefore the gathering of more and more people beneath one’s seat is an indication of his growing age.

⁵⁴ A variant of the character *li* 里 in this line is *dang* 黨. See Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, vol. 4, 308.

⁵⁵ *Houshan shihua*, in LDSH, 315.

⁵⁶ See Zhong Rong, *Shipin jianzhu* 詩品箋注, annot. Cao Xu 曹旭 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2009), 35.

poets. The way in which they juxtaposed Northern Song poets with Tang masters suggests that they perceived their own compositions as well as the poetry of the Song as a direct continuation of the poetic legacy of the Tang. Moreover, in many Song *shihua*, Tang poets were discussed with similar frequency as their Song counterparts: while a few Tang masters were often singled out (especially Du Fu), Northern Song poets also received ample limelight. By grouping them together with Tang poets and analyzing how they were influenced by their predecessors, many of the Northern Song poets, especially Su Shi, Huang Tingjian and Wang Anshi, were portrayed as equals to their Tang counterparts and became canonized in the process. These treatments, though not as systematic as those by many Southern Song scholars,⁵⁷ nonetheless demonstrate to us to whom Northern Song poets looked up as models, with whose poetry they would most closely associate their own works, and to which poetic lineage they envisioned themselves to belong. As such, by identifying their predecessors and defining their relationships with them through *shihua*, the pantheon of Song poets was created.

3.3.3. A case study: Ye Mengde and *Shilin shihua*

Throughout Chinese history, literature was always intertwined with politics. This was no exception for the authors of Song *shihua*, particularly the generations from late Northern to early Southern Song who witnessed the prolonged factional struggles and the repercussions

⁵⁷ See for example Yan Yu, *Canglang shihua jiaoshi* 滄浪詩話校釋, 2nd ed., coll. and annot. Guo Shaoyu (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1983).

of the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial and the Yuanyou Faction incident. In light of the fact that all writings by or related to the Yuanyou Faction were banned in 1123, literary writings from this period were often measured by later readers against one critical yardstick: were they for or against the Yuanyou Faction (which under most circumstances was equivalent to the Su Shi circle)? The actual situation, however, was not always clear-cut. In this section, we examine this unique feature through a case study of one of the most important *shihua* works from this period, namely Ye Mengde's *Shilin shihua*.

Ye, who was himself a good poet, served on a variety of important official posts during his eventful life. Highly learned in the classics and history, he wrote more than fifty works on a wide range of topics.⁵⁸ The writing of *Shilin shihua*, therefore, benefited from his broad knowledge, remarkable experience, and social network. The work is therefore important first for its content, as it contains many insights that inspired later commentators and became influential in the history of Chinese poetry. Another reason for its importance, however, was perhaps less expected by Ye. Due to his illustrious official career, later readers often read too much of his political views into this work, an unfortunate trend that probably derived from and contributed to its complex textual history.

Based on bibliographic records and preserved imprints from various periods, we now know that different versions of *Shilin shihua* belonging to two major editorial systems were in circulation during the Southern Song. The first was a three-juan system compiled into

⁵⁸ For a detailed study of Ye Mengde's life and works, see Wang Zhaopeng 王兆鵬, *Ye Mengde nianpu* 葉夢得年譜, in idem., *Liangsong ciren nianpu* 兩宋詞人年譜 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1994), 119-281.

Zuo Gui's 左圭 (?-?) *Baichuan xuehai* 百川學海, the earliest printed collectanea 叢書 in Chinese history, while the other was the version incorporated in Hu Zi's *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* 茗溪漁隱叢話, one of the three *shihua* anthologies compiled during the Song. All subsequent editions of the work were based on one of these systems.⁵⁹ These two versions differ in their total number of entries, order of arrangement, as well as specific word usage at numerous places, leading to controversy over Ye Mengde's attitude towards the Su Shi circle. For example, the Qing dynasty scholar Ye Tinguan 葉庭瑄 (1792-1866), citing Ye's family background as evidence,⁶⁰ claimed that he was an admirer of Su Shi and was thus secretly advocating Su's poetic ideals in *Shilin shihua*. On the other hand, the editors of *Siku quanshu* believed that Ye Mengde was a supporter of Wang Anshi and that his works downplayed Su Shi and Ouyang Xiu, based on the fact that Ye was favored by Cai Jing.⁶¹ The most critical evidence from both sides, however, was their respective theory about *Shilin shihua's* year of publication. The pro-Su Shi side believed that *Shilin shihua* appeared after the literary censorship against the Yuanyou Faction, and thus Ye may have revised or deleted any blatantly positive portrayal of Su Shi. The pro-Wang Anshi side claimed that this book was already in circulation before the censorship occurred, and therefore its contents were not intentionally altered to suit the needs of the time. Although scholars today have come to accept the latter opinion, this debate nonetheless correctly highlights

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the textual history of the work, see Lu Mingxin's extended preface to *SLSHJZ*, 1-87 (esp. 11-34).

⁶⁰ Ye Mengde was the niece of Chao Buzhi, who was a close friend and follower of Su Shi.

⁶¹ *SLSHJZ*, 69-85.

the harsh political environment that Ye Mengde faced when writing this book. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask whether Ye's writing of *Shilin shihua* was influenced by the political realities of the time, and if so, how did he choose to respond to them.

The best way to address this question is by examining how Su Shi and Wang Anshi, the two opposing figures at the center of this drama, are represented in Ye's book. Both Wang and Su are heavily featured in *Shilin shihua*, and Ye did not shun from broaching sensitive issues in their lives. For example, in one entry he talked about an incident during the Trial:

During the Yuanfeng era, Su Zizhan was imprisoned in the Censorate. Originally, Emperor Shenzong did not intend to severely punish him. When the Grand Councilor of the time came to report in court, he suddenly said: "Su Shi has been disrespectful towards Your Majesty." Emperor Shenzong's complexion changed, and said: "[Although Su] Shi was guilty, he should not have gone so far as to do this to me. How did you know about this?" The Grand Councilor then brought up the couplet in Su Shi's poem on the juniper tree: "Its roots have reached the Nine Springs and have nowhere to bend;/In this world only the hibernating dragon knows [it]," and replied: "Your Majesty is the dragon flying in the sky. Su Shi believes that [you] did not recognize his [talent] and resorts instead to the hibernating dragon underground. If this is not disrespectful, what is?" Emperor Shenzong said: "How could you interpret the words of a poet in this way? He was just writing about the juniper tree. What does it have to do with me?" The Grand Councilor was speechless, and Zhang Zihou (*i.e.* Zhang Dun) also helped to explain at the side, so [the Emperor] reduced his penalty. Later, Zihou told me this, and bad mouthed the Grand Councilor: "Some people have no scruples when trying to hurt others. This is what it is like!"⁶²

元豐間，蘇子瞻繫大理獄。神宗本無意深罪子瞻，時相進呈，忽言“蘇軾於陛下有不臣意。”神宗改容曰：“軾固有罪，然於朕不應至是，卿何以知之？”時相因舉軾檜詩“根到九泉無曲處，世間唯有螿龍知”之句對曰：“陛下飛龍在天，軾以爲不知己而求之地下之螿龍，非不臣而何？”神宗曰：“詩人之詞，安可如此論。彼自詠檜，何預朕事？”時相語塞，章子厚亦從旁解之，遂薄其罪。子厚嘗以語余，且以醜言詆時相曰：“人之害物，無所忌憚，有如是也。”

⁶² SLSHJZ, 1.36.

Here, Ye describes a specific and, if true, critical moment in the trial of Su Shi. At the time, Su was incarcerated in the Censorate without any idea of the seriousness of his situation. The scene described here represents one of the attempts by Su's political rivals to vilify him. While such an account is not documented in the official history or court records, similar versions of this story do exist in other texts from the Song.⁶³ The key point here is that Ye Mengde is presenting what he heard from Zhang Zihou as if it is a matter of fact, and only points out the source of his information towards the end. His sympathy for Su Shi is demonstrated by his comparison of Zhang with the evil "Grand Councilor of the time," whose identity is not revealed throughout the entry. The quotation of Zhang's acute criticism of the Grand Councilor at the end further accentuates the contrast between the two.

In another account that touches upon the Poetry Trial, Ye Mengde portrays Su Shi from the perspective of another key figure, Wen Tong:

Wen Tong, style name Yüke, was a native of Shu (present-day Sichuan). He and Su Zizhan were cousins, and they were very close. As a person, Wen was reserved, aloof, and clumsy at social interactions. He was good at painting ink bamboos, and his poetry was also extraordinary. In the early years of the Xining era, the political opinions of the time were divided, and literati's preferences also varied. Wen Tong served in the Imperial Academy together [with many literati], but showed no special inclination [towards any side]. At that time, Zizhan submitted several memorials commenting on national affairs. When he came back from court, he often made fun of current affairs when talking with his guests. Wen Tong considered that extremely inappropriate, and always warned him sternly, but Zizhan did not listen. [When Su] was dispatched to be the Prefect of Hangzhou, Wen Tong composed a farewell poem, which contains the line: "If guests come from the North, do not ask them about [court] affairs;/ Although the West Lake is wonderful, do not make poetry."

⁶³ For example, Wang Dingguo's 王定國 (1048?-1117?) *Wenjian jinlu* 聞見近錄 has a variant account of this story, which was quoted by Hu Zi. See Hu Zi comp., *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, coll. and punct. Liao Deming 廖德明 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962) [hereafter as TXYYCH], *Qianji* 前集, 46.312.

Later, Su was demoted to Huangzhou precisely because of the poems he wrote in Hangzhou. People then considered Wen Tong's words prescient.⁶⁴

文同，字與可，蜀人，與蘇子瞻爲中表兄弟相厚。爲人靖深，超然不撓世故。善畫墨竹，作詩騷亦過人。熙寧初，時論既不一，士大夫好惡紛然，同在館閣，未嘗有所向背。時子瞻數上書論天下事，退而與賓客亦言，多以時事爲譏諷。同極以爲不然，每苦口力戒之，子瞻不能聽也。出爲杭州通判，同送行詩有“北客若來休問事，西湖雖好莫吟詩”之句。及黃州之謫正坐杭州詩語，人以爲知言。

The fascinating similarity between these two accounts lies in the fact that although the person at the center of the drama was Su Shi, Ye Mengde did not let him speak much at all. In the first account, Su Shi's imprisonment and poem serve merely as background for the conversation between Emperor Shenzong and the court officials. In this piece, Su Shi's penchant for "commenting" on current affairs is used as a stark contrast to the reticence of Wen Tong who, despite his social ineptitude, saw through the political situation of the time. As such, if the first piece reveals Ye's sympathy for Su Shi, then the second one carries some criticism of him, albeit conveyed in a euphemistic manner.

In addition to failing to "listen" to Wen Tong, Su Shi is also depicted in *Shilin shihua* as having failed to recognize someone's writing, as demonstrated in this entry:

Li Zhi was a native of Yangdi (in present-day Henan province). When he was young, he brought his writings to visit Su Zizhan, and Su liked him. [When Su] was a civil service examiner during the early years of the Yuanyou era, Li Zhi happened to be taking the examination, and [Su] thought that he must select Zhi as the top candidate above the other candidates.⁶⁵ When [Su was] grading the prose Zhang Yuan submitted, he was greatly pleased and thought that it is doubtlessly Zhi's [work], and therefore picked it as the top. After the names of the candidates were revealed, [Su] left the compound [of the Ministry of

⁶⁴ SLSHJZ, 2.87.

⁶⁵ A variant of the character *guan* 觀 in this line is *guan* 冠, which is more likely. See SLSHJZ, 2.83.

Rites] sadly,⁶⁶ and wrote a poetic couplet to send Zhi off, which goes: “[I] used to casually claim of knowing the ancient battlefield;/When seeing it with my own eyes, I was confused by the dazzling colors of the sun.” He was probably expressing his original intention. Since then, Zhi made no more progress in his studies, and coming from a poor family, he did not take good care of himself. He used to write a letter to Zizhan faulting him for not recommending himself. Later, Zizhan thought quite lowly of him, and he in fact died without passing the examination.⁶⁷

李鷹，陽翟人，少以文字見蘇子瞻，子瞻喜之。元祐初知舉，鷹適就試，意在必得鷹以觀多士。及考章援程文，大喜，以為鷹無疑，遂以為魁。既拆號，悵然出院，以詩送鷹歸，其曰：“平時謾識古戰場，過眼終迷日五色。”蓋道其本意。鷹自是學亦不進，家貧，不甚自愛，嘗以書責子瞻不薦己，子瞻後稍薄之，竟不第而死。

Since the Southern Song, Li Zhi had been considered as one of Su’s most fond followers and a member of the “Six Disciples of Su Shi” 蘇門六學士.⁶⁸ The story recounted here, however, is one of sad misunderstanding and misrecognition. At surface level, Su Shi had failed to recognize Li’s examination prose out of the many pieces he had graded. Underlying this façade, however, is a deeper misunderstanding between the two, since Li gave up learning after this failure and even blamed Su for not helping him, despite all the help and recognition Su had showered upon him since his youth. As a result of this unfortunate incident, Ye is insinuating here a strong causal relationship between Li Zhi’s break-up with Su Shi and his eventual death, as indicated by the tone of the last sentence in this account.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ To ensure fairness, it was routine practice to cover the candidates’ names during grading, and all examiners were required to stay in the compound of Ministry of Rites during the entire grading process.

⁶⁷ SLSHJZ, 2.83.

⁶⁸ For more information on these Six Disciples, see Ma Dongyao 馬東瑤, *Sumen Liu Junzi yanjiu* 蘇門六君子研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005).

⁶⁹ This is especially obvious when compared with a variant version of this sentence in the *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* edition of *Shilin shihua*, which carries a slightly different albeit revealing tone: “Later, Zizhan thought lowly of him, and at the end he did not pass the examination and died” 子瞻後薄之，終不第而卒. See TXYYCH, *Qianji*, 40.274.

On the other hand, Wang Anshi is described in *Shilin shihua* as capable of recognizing someone's talent through poetry:

Liu Jisun, with the rank of Left Group of Palace Guard, was serving as Supervisor of Winery Affairs of Raozhou (in present-day Jiangxi province).⁷⁰ At the time, Wang Jinggong (*i.e.* Wang Anshi) was Judicial Commissioner of Jiangdong, and was on his way to Raozhou to inspect winery affairs. When he first arrived in office, he saw a small poem written on the screen, which goes: “Chirping and twittering, the swallows talk among the beams;/For what reason do they come to disturb my leisure in dream?/Other people will not understand if [I] tell them;/[I would rather] bring my staff and my wine, and go to visit the Zhi Mountain.” Wang praised it profusely, and asked the special officer who composed it. When told [that it was] Jisun, [Wang] immediately called for him and talked with him. Sighing with appraisal, he ascended the carriage and left, without inquiring about any official affairs. When Jisun returned to his abode, a county school student was waiting in the yard holding an official paper, inviting him to be in charge of county schools, as well as to supervise winery affairs. The whole county was shocked, and [Liu Jisun] thus became well-known.⁷¹

劉季孫初以左班殿直監饒州酒，王荆公爲江東提刑，巡歷至饒，按酒務。始至廳事，見屏間有題小詩曰：“呢喃燕子語梁間，底事來驚夢裏閑？說與傍人應不解，杖藜携酒看芝山。”大稱賞之。問專知官誰所作，以季孫言。即召與之語，嘉歎升車而去，不復問務事。既至傳舍，適郡學生持狀立庭下，請差官攝州學事，公判監酒殿直，一郡大驚，遂知名云。

Similar to the previous account, this is also a story about how an established official discovered a lowly but talented youngster. Even though this account does not tell us whether Liu Jisun turned out to be a good official, the concluding sentence “The whole county was shocked” implies that Wang Anshi was able to spot someone whom most people had overlooked. Although the description of Wang is terse here, it nonetheless

⁷⁰ The Left Group of Palace Guard was a prestigious rank for a military official. On the other hand, winery affairs were part of the jurisdiction of state bureaucracy since wine, like salt, was monopolized by the state in traditional China.

⁷¹ SLSHJZ, 3.179.

effectively creates an image of someone with extraordinary clairvoyance and confidence in recognizing talent. Such story is not singular in *Shilin shihua*, as there exist other vivid accounts of Wang's spontaneous appreciation and support of people who were either eccentric or unrecognized, such as Yu Zizhi 俞紫芝 (?-1086) and his brother Yu Dan 俞澹.⁷²

From our analysis so far, we can see that even though Ye Mengde lived through the long factional struggles and had personal connections with many important political figures of his time, he did not seem to have picked a particular side regarding the Yuanyou Faction when writing his *Shilin shihua*. Rather, he represents both Su Shi and Wang Anshi fairly and on their own merits. Even though Ye did harbor certain views about their political inclinations, he did not channel these views into his *shihua* pieces. What does stand out from these entries, however, is a strong interest in how poetry matters beyond the literary realm. For example, while the first entry depicting the confrontation in court seems to be criticizing the intentional twisting and over-reading of Su Shi's poetry, it also reminds us of a trial that took place precisely because such twisting worked in reality. The second piece, on the other hand, uses Wen Tong's warning poem to Su Shi, which turned out to be surprisingly prophetic, to confirm the power of poetry. The next two pieces contrasting Su and Wang's opposing experiences with talent recognition illustrate the unique role poetry (and literature in general) plays in revealing one's hidden aptitude and opening doors to otherwise unattainable opportunities. As such, through these dramatic stories, Ye Mengde

⁷² SLSHJZ, 2.149-150.

affirms the significance of poetry in these pieces by demonstrating its far-reaching impact in various corners of literati's life.

3.4. *Shihua* and the Birth of the “Jiangxi Poetry School”

With the knowledge of the development of *shihua* up to the end of Northern Song discussed so far, we can now examine with a fresh perspective one of the most important episodes in the history of Song poetry: the formation of the “Jiangxi Poetry School,” which has been widely accepted by scholars as a major school of poetic practice during the Song.⁷³ The concept of such a “School” originated from a rather mysterious text by Lü Benzhong titled “Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage” 江西宗派圖 (hereafter denoted as Chart).⁷⁴ Though no longer extant, key parts of this text have been preserved in Hu Zi's *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* and Zhao Yanwei's 趙彥衛 (fl. 1195) *Yunlu manchao* 雲麓漫鈔. Hu's entry goes like this:

The Fisherman-Recluse at Tiao Creek says: “Lü Juren (*i.e.* Lü Benzhong) has in recent times attained a reputation for poetry. He claims that he has “transmitted the robe” of the Jiangxi

⁷³ The Jiangxi Poetry School has been subject to intense studies from various perspectives. Some of the more in-depth ones in Chinese scholarship include Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, *Jiangxi shishe zongpai yanjiu* 江西詩社宗派研究 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1983); Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒, *Jiangxi shipai yanjiu* 江西詩派研究 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1986); Wu Xiaoman 伍曉蔓, *Jiangxi zongpai yanjiu* 江西宗派研究 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005); and Wei Haiying 韋海英, *Jiangxi shipai zhujia kaolun* 江西詩派諸家考論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005). The most thorough and insightful study in English language remains Michael Fuller's chapter “West of the River: The Jiangxi Poets” in his *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, 85–122. For a comprehensive collection of information on all aspects of the School, see Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 comp., *Huang Tingjian he Jiangxi shipai ziliao huibian* 黃庭堅和江西詩派資料彙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978).

⁷⁴ The precise name of this text is unclear. *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, the earliest extant record of this text, merely refers to it as “Lineage Chart” 宗派圖, while the name mentioned in later works varies from “Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage” 江西宗派圖 to “Chart of the Lineage of the Jiangxi Poetry Society” 江西詩社宗派圖, which is more commonly used by contemporary scholars. For an overview of these naming variations, see for example Mo, *Jiangxi shipai yanjiu*, 1–4.

[School], having once composed the 'Lineage Chart.' Starting with [Huang] Yuzhang (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian), he lists Chen Shidao, ..., ⁷⁵ all together twenty-five people who are successors of the doctrines [of the School], and asserts that its source and downstream currents all originate from Yuzhang. His preface to the 'Lineage Chart' is several hundred characters long. In brief, it says: 'In the Tang, Li [Bai] and Du [Fu] made their age resplendent, and those who spoke of poetry later could not reach them. When it came to Han [Yu], Liu [Zongyuan], Meng Jiao, and Zhang Ji, although they exerted great effort, in the end they could not match up to those former authors. From the Yuanhe era onwards till our dynasty, among those poems composed or transmitted, most imitated earlier writings but never fully exhausted that towards which they inclined. It was Yuzhang who began to emerge prominently and forcefully set [poetry] in motion. [His writing] rising and falling, moving back and forth, [he] had completely mastered the various forms. Later students then composed alike and responded in kind. Although their forms may differ, what they transmitted was still the same. I therefore record their names to leave to those who come [later].'" ⁷⁶

茗溪漁隱曰：“呂居仁近時以詩得名，自言傳衣江西，嘗作《宗派圖》，自豫章以降，列陳師道，…，合二十五人以為法嗣，謂其源流皆出豫章也。其《宗派圖序》數百言，大略云：‘唐自李杜之出，焜耀一世，後之言詩者，皆莫能及。至韓、柳、孟郊、張籍諸人，激昂奮厲，終不能與前作者並。元和以後至國朝，歌詩之作或傳者，多依效舊文，未盡所越。惟豫章始大出而力振之，抑揚反復，盡兼眾體，而後學者同作並和，雖體制或異，要皆所傳者一，予故錄其名字，以遺來者。’”

According to Hu Zi, Lü Benzhong listed a total of twenty-five people, including Chen Shidao, as the poetic “successors” of Huang Tingjian. Based on other *shihua* works from the Southern Song, we also know that Lü told other people that this Chart was merely “a trifling work from [my] youth” 少時戲作, for which he “felt much regret” 甚悔.⁷⁷ The main reason that Lü was not particularly proud of this Chart is perhaps because there was no actual “lineage” among these authors, as he had claimed. Rather, these twenty-five names

⁷⁵ Also listed here are the names of twenty-four other members of the School, which are omitted here.

⁷⁶ TXYYCH, *Qianji*, 48.327–328. The translation here is based on Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, 91–92, with some modifications.

⁷⁷ See Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, 94.

were grouped together into a “lineage” because he believed that they all admired Huang Tingjian and learned from his poetry. However, as his Chart became widespread later on, more and more people adopted this concept and the “Jiangxi School” gradually became a well-defined school in the poetic arena of the time, with four poets as the model in its pantheon, namely Du Fu as “One Ancestor” 一祖 and Huang Tingjian, Chen Yuyi 陳與義 (1090–1138) and Chen Shidao as “Three Masters” 三宗. The School also had its own poetic ideals and doctrines, based mainly on the poetics of Huang Tingjian. Over time, the Jiangxi School influenced almost all major poets of the Southern Song, but also attracted much criticism from those who made efforts to break free from its influence. As such, despite having originated from a nebulous terminology built on rather shaky foundation, the Jiangxi School became a *de facto* entity as influential to later poets as an actual poetry school.

Among the abundant studies on the Jiangxi School by modern scholars, most have focused on the relationship between Lü Benzong and the twenty-five figures listed, or address questions such as who should or shouldn't have been on the list and how major poets of the Southern Song, such as Lu You and Yang Wanli, were impacted by its poetics. Little attention, however, have been paid to the textual venues through which the School was born in the first place. In other words, what was the context from which Lü Benzong's “trifling work” emerged, and through what means did the poetic discourse of the School become widespread? Addressing these questions requires a close examination of the development of the *shihua* discourse on poetic models from late Northern to early Southern Song, since almost all discussions and criticisms of the Chart are recorded in *shihua* works.

In this section, I attempt to delineate the critical roles played by the discourse of Northern Song poetics, especially through Lü Benzhong's own works as well as Hu Zi's *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, in the reception and popularization of the concept of "Jiangxi School".

The first point that Lü made in his preface to the Chart is that Huang Tingjian was the only one who could reach the poetic standards that Du Fu and Li Bai had attained. As we have seen in our analysis earlier, it is a common narrative strategy among Song *shihua* works to praise a Song poet by comparing him to master poets from the Tang, or by singling him out for some unique accomplishment such as mastering a certain technique. Lü Benzhong was no exception. For example, in his *Tongmeng shixun* 童蒙詩訓, or *Poetic Instructions for Children*, he singles out Wei Yingwu 韋應物 (737–792) as the only poet since Li and Du who had adhered to the ways of composing poetry devised by "ancient people:"

Xu Shichuan (*i.e.* Xu Fu) said: "When people talk about the poetry of [Wei] Suzhou (*i.e.* Wei Yingwu), they often talk about it being archaic and plain. That is because they do not understand Suzhou's poetry. Since the time of Li Bai and Du Fu, the rules of poetry of the ancient people had been completely abandoned, except for Suzhou who possessed the elegant style of the Six Dynasties, the smoothest and most beautiful of all."⁷⁸

徐師川言：“人言蘇州詩多言其古淡，乃是不知蘇州詩。自李杜以來，古人詩法盡廢，惟蘇州有六朝風致，最為流麗。”

Here, Lü is quoting the words of Xu Fu 徐俯 (1075–1141), who was among the twenty-five people on the Chart. In another entry, Lü, speaking in his own voice, considers both Su Shi and Huang Tingjian as the loftiest model for literary writing:

⁷⁸ *Tongmeng shixun*, in SSHQB, 2895.

Since ancient times, whenever [people] talk about excellent writings that encompass the various forms and create endless surprises, there is only [Su] Dongpo; that which carry the transformations in the *Airs* and the *Odes* to the extreme, exhaust the forms of metaphor and evocation, and incorporate various works but grant them originality, there is only [Huang] Yuzhang. These two should always be taken as the model [for writing].⁷⁹

自古以來語文章之妙，廣備眾體，出奇無窮者，唯東坡一人；極風雅之變，盡比興之體，包括眾作，本以新意者，唯豫章一人，此二者當永以為法。

Although *Poetic Instructions for Children* is often not placed under the category of *shihua* as it does not include the term “*shihua*” in its title, its contents, however, are similar to the other *shihua* works by Lü Benzong. The only difference is that the entries in this collection may have been aimed specifically at those who have just begun learning poetry. In his *Ziwei shihua* 紫微詩話, a work with a more standard title and not targeted towards beginners, Lü also talks about how senior members of his family, which boasts an illustrious genealogy, learned from various poets such as Li Shangying 李商隱 (ca. 813–858) and Huang Tingjian:

Duke Donglai used to say that when he was composing poetry during his childhood, [his poems] were no different from those of others. Later on, when he got hold of the poetry of Li Yishan (*i.e.* Li Shangyin), he read it thoroughly and imitated it. Then he felt [his poems became] different.⁸⁰

東萊公嘗言，少時作詩，未有以異於眾人，後得李義山詩，熟讀規摹之，始覺有異。

Since my uncle Fan Yuanshi (*i.e.* Fan Wen) began learning poetry from [Huang] Shangu (*i.e.* Huang Tingjian), [he] wanted every word [in his poems] to have a source. He used to have a poem that goes: “[Wang] Yifu, with orpiment [in his mouth], needs to be stopped; [Lou] Junqing, [quick with his] tongue and lips, should put them to good use.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2903.

⁸⁰ *Ziwei shihua*, in LDSH, 367.

⁸¹ Ibid., 361. This couplet here is replete with allusions. Yifu is the style name of the Jin dynasty scholar Wang Yan 王衍 (256–311), famous for his “transcendental talks” on *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. When his words did not make sense to others, he simply changed them freely without any scruple, as if he had in his

表叔範元實既從山谷學詩，要字字有來處。嘗有詩云：“夷甫雌黃須倚閣，君卿唇舌要施行。”

At the same time, Lü also talks about “various Jiangxi people” 江西諸人, which refer to a few close friends of his, especially those who learned poetry from his grandfather Lü Xizhe 呂希哲 (1039–1116):

The poetry of the various Jiangxi people, such as Xie Wuyi [known for his] richness, Rao Decao [known for his] lack of restraint, are all not as intricate or painstaking as that of Pan Binlao, style name Dalin. But after Decao became a monk, his poetry became more advanced and skillful, and was unmatched by others'.⁸²

江西諸人詩，如謝無逸富贍，饒德操蕭散，皆不減潘邠老大臨精苦也。然德操為僧後，詩更高妙，殆不可及。

Xia Junfu (*i.e.* Xia Ni) claims that the poetry of Zhang Yanshi originates from that of the various Jiangxi people. Yanshi's poem “Sending off Junfu to be the Prefect of Jiangzhou” goes: “During normal time [you were] outspoken towards the various Dukes./In your old age [you are] still recommended to be governor of the prefecture./It is not that the court has neglected [you like they had] Ji An,⁸³/[But rather because they] need someone like Wenweng who knows the prefecture so well.”⁸⁴ Junfu often recited this piece.⁸⁵

夏均父稱張彥實詩出江西諸人。彥實《送均父作江守詩》云：“平時袞袞向諸公，投老猶推作郡公。未覺朝廷疏汲黯，極知州郡要文翁。”均父每諷誦之。

mouth orpiment, a yellow-colored mineral commonly used by ancient Chinese to correct writings. See his biography in Fang et al., *Jinshu*, 43.1235–1239. “Yige” 倚閣, which literally means leaning on the tower, is used here to mean putting aside or putting to stop. Junqing is the style name of the Han dynasty official Lou Hu 樓護, who was a famous interlocutor and thus quick with his tongue and lips. See his biography in Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 92.3706–3709.

⁸² *Ziwei shihua*, in LDSH, 363. The second half of this piece is a poem by Rao Decao, which is omitted here.

⁸³ Ji An 汲黯 (?–112 BCE) was a minister during the Western Han dynasty famous for his outspoken admonishments to the emperor, for which he was demoted several times. See his biography in Ban, *Hanshu*, 50.2316–2323.

⁸⁴ Wenweng was the governor of the Shu commandery during the Western Han famous for his efforts to elevate the living standard and education level of the commandery. See his biography in *ibid.*, 89.3625–3627.

⁸⁵ *Ziwei shihua*, in LDSH, 369.

All of the figures mentioned in the first piece are included in the Chart: Xie Yi 謝逸 (style name Wuyi, 1068–1112), Rao Jie 饒節 (style name Decao, 1065–1129), and Pan Dalin 潘大臨 (style name Binlao, 1060–1107). Interestingly, Xia Ni 夏倪 (style name Junfu, d. 1127) mentioned in the second piece is also on the list, but it is clear that here he is commenting on Zhang Yanshi and the “various Jiangxi people” from a detached, third-person perspective. In line with the aforementioned poetic ideal of having a source for every word, the poem that Xia appreciates is also replete with allusions to historical figures.

In addition to the “various Jiangxi people,” Lü Benzhong also talks about the “various Jiangxi schools:”

[Those writers who] learned from [Han] Tuizhi (*i.e.* Han Yu) but could not reach [his level] include Li Ao and Huangfu Shi. However, through [examining] the writings of Ao and Shi, it is sufficient to gain a glimpse into the methods of composing prose. In recent times, if one would like to learn poetry, then there is no better way than first examining the various Jiangxi schools.⁸⁶

學退之不至：李翱、皇甫湜。然翱、湜之文足以窺測作文用方處。近世欲學詩，則莫若先考江西諸派。

Here, Lü uses the same comparative strategy to convey an important message: while the style of Han Yu might be difficult to learn, one could start with learning from his followers such as Li Ao and Huangfu Shi; similarly, if the poetry of Huang Tingjian is too difficult to imitate, then one could start from his followers. The use of the term “various schools” 諸派 here suggests that there exist further distinctions among the poetry of these people, even

⁸⁶ *Tongmeng shixun*, in SSHQB, 2900.

though they may share the same poetic ideals, namely those of Huang. The flexible choice between “various people” and “various schools” in these few examples above also indicates that this is a rather loosely defined group.

The blurry boundary of the name list mentioned in the Chart is further illustrated in this piece by Lü:

When common people were learning from [Huang] Shangu’s poetry, Chao Chongzhi (style name Shuyong) was the only one learning from Du [Fu]. When common people were wishing to be reborn into the Western Paradise, Gao Xiushi was the only one wishing to be reborn into the Tushita Heaven.⁸⁷

衆人方學山谷詩時，晁叔用沖之獨專學老杜；衆人求生西方，高秀實獨求生兜率。

Chao Chongzhi, like Xia Ni, is also listed as one of the “successors” of Huang Tingjian in the Chart. Yet, he is depicted here as the odd one out among the group who, in the same spirit as the seeker of Tushita Heaven instead of Western Paradise, chose to learn poetry from Du Fu instead of Huang. All these textual evidence above show that Huang Tingjian is only one of the many poetic masters that Lü Benzong celebrates. Moreover, just like many other *shihua* works from the time, Lü also uses vocabulary such as “the only one” or “unmatched” routinely to emphasize the degree of his appreciation for a particular poet, rather than to make definitive statements about the ranking of poets or to indicate specific lineage of transmission. Therefore, even though the “Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage” is unique

⁸⁷ *Ziwei shihua*, in LDSH, 361. Tushita is the fourth level of the Six Heavens of Sensuous Realm 欲界六天 in Buddhist cosmology. It is the place where bodhisattva Maitreya is believed to be residing. As such, Buddhists aspire for rebirth into the Tushita Heaven, where they could enjoy unimaginable pleasure and live for hundreds of thousands of years. See Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 930.

in its explicit claim of a master-successor relationship between a large number of poets, its praise of a particular poet such as Huang Tingjian or identification of a singular line of poetic impact are not exceptional in the *shihua* discourse of the time.

Although the dating of the Chart is still open to debate, scholars generally agree that it was composed no later than 1110.⁸⁸ From then to the 1120s, many new *shihua* collections emerged, indicating the growing acceptance and popularity of this generic form. The best illustration of this trend is Ruan Yue's 阮閱 (*jinsi* in 1085) *Shizong* 詩總, the first ever anthology of *shihua* works. Compiled in 1123 but probably not printed, the first known imprint of the book was made in the Minzhong 閩中 area (in present-day Fujian province) during the Shaoxing era (1131–1162); in this imprint, the title of the work was changed to *Shihua zonggui* 詩話總龜, and has remained so since then. This edition was revised and expanded during the Southern Song and again during the Ming, making it impossible to restore the textual condition of Ruan's original work.⁸⁹ However, based on a hand-copied edition of the book from the Southern Song (now preserved in Taiwan) as well as Hu Zi's account of this work in his *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, we know that Ruan's original ten-juan compilation did not include any *shihua* by authors associated with the Yuanyou Faction, although many anecdotes from the Tang and Northern Song were included.⁹⁰ Despite the less-than-satisfactory selection and compilation standard, *Shihua zonggui* represents the

⁸⁸ For in-depth analyses of the year of writing of the Chart, see Wu, *Jiangxi zongpai yanjiu*, 4–16; and Wei, *Jiangxi shipai zhujia kaolun*, 256–263.

⁸⁹ For a brief textual history of this work, see the preface to Ruan Yue comp., *Shihua zonggui*, coll. and punct. Zhou Benchun 周本淳 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1987), 1–6.

⁹⁰ See TXYYCH, *Houji* 后集, 36.287.

earliest effort among Song people to collect and classify the various miscellaneous prose writings on and relevant to poetry.

During the early Southern Song, the composition of *shihua* continued to flourish, and along with it the efforts to sort out the textual tradition as well as the very definition of *shihua*. Xu Yi's *Yanzhou shihua* stands as a typical example in this respect. In the preface, Xu states:

[The objectives of] *shihua* is to clarify syntax, account for the past and the present, document moral distinctions, record strange happenings, and rectify errors. [Writings] that include sarcasms, advocate evilness, or ridicule mistakes are all not accepted. As a child, I was lonely and poor but loved books. In my home, there were writings from the Wei and Jin dynasties as well as the collections of only three hundred Tang poets.⁹¹ I was also able to get instruction several times and listen to the discussions of the seniors from the previous generation. Now my books are scattered, and my old learning forgotten and abandoned. Those that I can still remember, I record them down with my pen, since I could not bear to throw them away. Alas, what do I have to say? As far as poetry is concerned, people's preference and judgments are not necessarily the same, and one should not force others to agree with himself. [But keeping] one's own views and awaiting those who come later, why can't that be done?⁹²

詩話者，辨句法，備古今，紀盛德，錄異事，正訛誤也。若含譏諷，著過惡，誚紕繆，皆所不取。僕少孤苦而嗜書，家有魏晉文章及唐詩人集，僅三百家。又數得奉教，聞前輩長者之餘論。今書籍散落，舊學廢忘，其能記憶者，因筆識之，不忍棄也。嗟乎，僕豈足言哉！人之於詩，嗜好去取，未始同也，強人使同已則不可，以己所見以俟後之人，烏乎而不可哉！

Evidently, the reasons that Xu lays out here for composing his *Yanzhou shihua* is also to preserve for posterity his views on poetry, as well as to keep a record of his "old learning" derived from past experiences, similar to many of the Northern Song *shihua* writers we have

⁹¹ It is not clear from the context here whether the "three hundred" refers to the number of Tang poetry collections only or of all the books he owned.

⁹² *Yanzhou shihua*, in LDSH, 378.

discussed. The interesting part in this piece, however, lies in its opening, in which Xu defines what *shihua* should be about and what he considers unacceptable for the genre; the latter consideration is contradictory to the common practice of Northern Song *shihua*, since there are entries in many *shihua* works on how poets made mistakes and wrote poor poetry.

If *Yanzhou shihua* represents an early attempt to define *shihua*, then Hu Zi's *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* is by far the most systematic effort in sorting out the textual legacy of *shihua* and establishing the norms of this form of poetic criticism. By preserving Lü Benzhong's Chart, it also played a key role in shaping the discourse of the Jiangxi Poetry School in the Southern Song. The first half of the entry that cites the Chart has already been analyzed above. Immediately following that passage, Hu made the following comment:

I dare to assert that [Huang] Yuzhang has exceeded the [common] loom and shuttle,⁹³ and developed a style of his own. Pure, fresh, striking and crafted: these are his strengths. If one were to say that "Rising and falling, moving back and forth, [he] had completely mastered the various forms," then this is not so. From the Yuanhe era till now, the generations have not lacked masters of ink and lyric. When one observes their brilliant phrasing and outstanding couplets, they truly have been able to reveal what ancient people could not reach, and many had established themselves in grand ways. If one were to say that "Most [of these people] imitated earlier writings but never fully exhausted that towards which they inclined," this is also not so. Among the twenty-five men listed here, some are men of reputation and have poetic lines transmitted to our generation. Those that were praised in their own times, however, were only a few. The rest of them were not famous, but were nevertheless added superfluously to the list. In making this Chart, [Lü] Juren's selection has not been refined nor his discussion fair, and I have clarified it for this reason.⁹⁴

⁹³ As Fuller points out, the phrase *zichu jizhu* 自出機杼 used here comes from the biography of Zu Ying 祖瑩 in *Weishu* 魏書: "In compositions one ought to exceed the [common] loom and shuttle, and develop a style of one's own" 文章須自出機杼, 成一家風骨. See Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, 95, fn. 14.

⁹⁴ TXYYCH, *Qianji*, 48.328. The translation here is based on Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, 95, with minor modifications.

余竊謂豫章自出機杼，別成一家，清新奇巧，是其所長。若言“抑揚反復，盡兼眾體”，則非也。元和至今，騷翁墨客，代不乏人，觀其英詞傑句，真能發明古人不到處，卓然成立者甚眾。若言“多依效舊文，未盡所趣”，又非也。所列二十五人，其間知名之士，有詩句傳於世，為時所稱道者，止數人而已，其餘無聞焉，亦濫登其列。居仁此圖之作，選擇弗精，議論不公，余是以辨之。

In this piece, Hu Zi not only picks out a few chunks from the Chart and debunks the judgment Lü made in them, he also gives an overall evaluation towards the end to justify his entry. Importantly, the last sentence echoes nicely with the opening line “I dare to assert,” thus making the critical tone of the author especially prominent. In fact, throughout the book, Hu appears frequently as the commentator of the various *shihua* pieces that he quotes, sometimes partially and sometimes in their entirety. Moreover, his comments always start with the signature phrase “The Fisherman-Recluse at Tiao Creek says” 苕溪漁隱曰, which strongly echoes the signatory phrase for commentaries in the *Analects* (“The Master says” 子曰) and Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shiji* 史記 (“The Grand Historian says” 太史公曰), thus imparting a strong sense of authority.

Immediately after this “clarification” entry, Hu Zi made another follow-up comment pointing out the discrepancy between the two texts by Lü Benzhong:

The Fisherman-Recluse at Tiao Creek says: “The [*Poetic Instructions for Children*] was written by [Lü] Juren, and criticizes the poetry of [Huang] Luzhi for being too sharp, too novel and too skillful. Isn’t this contradictory to his saying in the ‘Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage’ that ‘Rising and falling, moving back and forth, [Huang] had completely mastered the various forms?’”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ TXYYCH, *Qianji*, 48.328. Besides these two entries, Hu Zi also quoted two letters that Lü wrote to Zeng Jifu 曾吉甫, in which he criticizes that recent learners of the Jiangxi School had lost the essence of Huang

茗溪漁隱曰：“《童蒙訓》乃居仁所撰，譏魯直詩有太尖新太巧處，無乃與《江西宗派圖》所云‘抑揚反復，盡兼眾體’之語背馳乎？”

Such authoritative voice from Hu Zi forms a common feature threading the various entries in *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* together. Some of them do not quote any earlier *shihua* piece but instead directly begins with Hu's own views, such as this one in which he confirms the poetic lineage from Du Fu to Huang Tingjian, a rather surprising gesture given his criticism of the Jiangxi School:

The Fisherman-Recluse at Tiao Creek says: “Poetry learners of recent times all take the Jiangxi [School] as their model, but they do not know that the Jiangxi [poets] originally learned from [Du] Shaoling (*i.e.* Du Fu). That is why Chen Wuji (*i.e.* Chen Shidao) said: ‘The learning of [Huang] Yuzhang was broad, but he got his method [of composing poetry] from Shaoling. Therefore, his poetry is similar to Shaoling’s.’ Today, even students and young people no longer lay their eyes on the poetry of Shaoling. This is perhaps missing the crux of the Jiangxi [School]? Normally, when the Jiangxi [School poets] talked to learners about the essence of making poetry, they also take Shaoling as the sole model. I am saying this because I hope those who want to learn poetry would treat Shaoling as the teacher and the Jiangxi [School poets] as friends. Then they can get both.”⁹⁶

茗溪漁隱曰：“近時學詩者，率宗江西，然殊不知江西本亦學少陵者也。故陳無己曰：‘豫章之學博矣，而得法於少陵，故其詩近之。’今少陵之詩，後生少年不復過目，抑亦失江西之意乎？江西平日語學者為詩旨趣，亦獨宗少陵一人而已。余為是說，蓋欲學詩者師少陵而友江西，則兩得之矣。”

As the second *shihua* anthology from the Song, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* is often treated by many pre-modern readers as well as contemporary scholars as merely a continuation of

Tingjian because they were too restrained by rules. See *ibid.*, 49.332–333. All these entries belong to the three *juan* titled “[Huang] Shangu,” which group together all entries related to Huang under one roof. Such organizational structure creates a thematically consistent category in the collection, and help with the projection of a powerful and authoritative voice.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.332.

Ruan Yue's *Shihua zonggui*, since this is also the objective that Hu Zi himself proclaims in his preface.⁹⁷ From our analysis so far, however, it is clear that Hu Zi assumed a much more active role in writing this work. Instead of simply collecting entries from various *shihua* works and grouping them according to themes and poets as Ruan did, Hu carefully determined which part of a *shihua* piece to include, arranged these entries into a meaningful sequence, and most importantly inserted his own authoritative voice with a distinctive signature. In this way, he was using previous *shihua* as raw materials to make his own "remarks of remarks on poetry." Since many of the sources that Hu consulted were subsequently lost, this anthology became the basis on which later access to many Northern Song and early Southern Song *shihua* rest, the "Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage" being one such example. As the work became increasingly influential during the Southern Song, many of Hu Zi's opinions and commentaries also became widely known. As it turned out, the lineage between Du Fu and Huang Tingjian did become the standard discourse for subsequent discussions of the Jiangxi School. The poetics of Huang was also distilled and grew into the foundational principles of the Jiangxi School. As these often scattered and contradictory "remarks on poetry" became part of the standard history of poetry as well as the model for Southern Song poets to either adhere to or rebel from, *shihua* became a fully established genre as well as a major form of literary criticism in late imperial China.

⁹⁷ For a useful comparison between the two works, especially in how *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* complements *Shihua zonggui* in both contents as well as form, see Yin Haiwei 殷海衛, "Tiaoxi yuyin conghua" yanjiu 《苕溪漁隱叢話》研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 40-47.

Conclusion

As far as poetry is concerned, standard literary histories of the Song dynasty is often filled with poetic groups and styles: the Xikun Style 西昆體, the Late Tang Style 晚唐體, the Chengzhai Style 誠齋體 (*i.e.* that of Yang Wanli), the School of Su Shi 蘇門, and of course the most influential of all, the Jiangxi Poetry School. Equally omnipresent in these histories are accounts of how latecomers were either impacted by or broke free from the influence of their predecessors. If we take a close look at how such discourse became widespread, we will notice that the various *shihua* works played no less significant a role than the poetry collections of the respective poets or poetic groups. This is just one example of how *shihua*, a seemingly eclectic and disconnected hodgepodge of casual remarks, is in fact at the very center of the literary history of the Song. Through detailed examination of various aspects of its textual history, this chapter traces the transformation of *shihua* from an incidentally used textual form to one that is widely and consciously employed as a *de facto* genre.

To do so, three critical junctures in the transformation process are identified: the fledgling stage of the genre marked by the three pioneering *shihua* works of Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang and Liu Ban; the transitional period from late Northern to early Southern Song; and mid-twelfth century when the transitional generation of writers had settled down on the land of the Southern Song. Each stage witnessed the development of a distinctive feature of *shihua*. To begin with, the subjectivity of the author/narrator is the most fundamental textual characteristic of the three earliest *shihua*, and one that is continuously explored in later *shihua* works. With the carefully designed appearance of the narrator in

the text, the entries in these *shihua* works are presented as personal and yet authoritative accounts of the author. This authority is constantly affirmed by the retrospective stance of the narrative as well as the reliable source of information frequently identified by the author.

Following the establishment of such authoritative narrative voice, subsequent *shihua* works serve as a platform through which the author could offer personal witness accounts to his own poetic experiences as well as views of the poetic tradition to which himself is a part. These include the memories of forgotten poets or poetry collections and evaluations of poets, couplets or poetic techniques, through which poetic canon, models, and lineages between poets are defined. Using Ye Mengde's *Shilin shihua* as an example, I argue that instead of choosing sides between Su Shi and Wang Anshi, Ye used his *shihua* to affirm the relevance and value of poetry that goes beyond its textual meaning, which was especially important considering the harsh political atmosphere and the literary censorship that was rampant towards the end of the Northern Song.

The last section of the chapter probes yet another development in *shihua* between the late Northern to early Southern Song, by examining the formation of the “Jiangxi Poetry School” through *shihua* narratives contemporary to Lü Benzhong’s “Chart of the Jiangxi Lineage,” as well as related entries in Hu Zi’s *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*. To that end, I demonstrate how Hu’s anthology of *shihua* pieces represents a conscious effort to sort out the history of the genre as well as to define its boundaries. The popularity and impact of this work marks the formal establishment of *shihua* as a discursive genre of poetic history.

Overall, the process through which *shihua* emerged from a form of eclectic paratextual notes in the Northern Song to a discursive genre that shaped Southern Song poets' understanding of poetic history is ultimately a process of accrument of independent value. Through this process, Song *shihua* became, to use Zhu Shangshu's words, primarily concerned with "the consumption of poetry," just as Tang *shige* works were concerned with "the production of poetry."⁹⁸ Often written from the perspective of a sophisticated reader who believes that his personal knowledge of and experience with poetry, no matter how trivial or episodic, is worth passing down to posterity, *shihua* itself became a vehicle for value preservation. Collectively, the common themes and narrative strategies shared by generations of *shihua* works reveal much about how poetry was perceived during the Song.

As demonstrated in this chapter, when authors of *shihua* identify their poetic models or delineate poetic lineages, they were also reflecting upon their relationships with their predecessors, as well as defining their positions within the transmission of poetic heritage. Sorting out the textual legacy and defining one's role in the textual tradition were two of the keenest concerns of the transitional generation. The literary articulation of such concerns went far beyond *shihua*, and was especially poignant in anecdotal writings penned by Song literati who had gone through the traumatic Northern-Southern Song transition. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

⁹⁸ Zhu, "Lun Song shihua."

Chapter 4

No “Minor Talks:” *Biji* 筆記 as Personal History of the Northern-Southern Song Transition

Introduction

In the year 1162, the Southern Song scholar-official and writer Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) published the first version of a compilation he titled *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, or *Record of the Listener*. The book, which comprises a diverse array of anecdotes and accounts of extraordinary things, became an instant best-seller, and soon Hong Mai compiled a sequel to it. In his preface to the sequel, Hong explained the rationale behind his collection:

When *Record of the Listener* was first completed, it circulated among the literati. Now, its printing blocks are being engraved in Fujian, Sichuan, Jinhua and Hangzhou, [almost to the extent that] every household owned one copy. People thought that I am fond of the strange and peculiar, and thus whenever they got hold of a story, they would send it to me across thousands of miles. Thus, within five or six years, I accumulated volumes that are increasingly bulky. As vast as there is under the Heaven, all that is strange have been exhausted in this book.¹

¹ This preface was written in 1162. Later Hong Mai added a note that the first two books of *Yijian zhi* had been printed again in 1172, and in 1180 once more. See Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, punct. and coll. He Zhuo 何卓 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 185.

《夷堅志》初成，士大夫或傳之。今鏤板於閩、於蜀、於婺、於臨安，蓋家有其書。人以予好奇尚異也，每得一說，或千裏寄聲，於是五六年間所得卷帙益覺煩夥。天下之恢恢，奇之盡策於是矣。

Remarkably, this compilation project would occupy the next forty years of Hong's life till his death, resulting in the publication of multiple sequels (with a total of 420 *juan* and 31 prefaces) and attracting readers from all social strata, including the emperor himself.² While collecting and composing anecdotes, hearsay, anomaly accounts and wonder tales had been practiced in China long before the Song,³ such conscientious and persistent effort that led to a work of such size and scope was quite unprecedented in the history of Chinese literature. In addition to *Record of the Listener*, Hong Mai also composed another work of notes titled *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆, or *Casual Jottings from the Rongzhai Study*, which was also followed by multiple sequels. Wang Mingqing 王明清 (fl. 1163–1224), one of Hong's contemporaries, also devoted a significant part of his life on a similar work with reading note-like entries titled *Hui zhu lu* 揮麈錄, or *Records of Waving the Duster*. These are just a few examples of a large corpus of anecdotal writings that emerged during the Song. In terms of output, the total number of such works from the Song surpasses that from the Tang and the

² For an excellent study (and the only book-length one in English) of this text, including analyses of its scope, genre, as well as textual history, see Alister D. Inglis, *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener and Its Song Dynasty Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

³ See, for example, Robert Ford Company's in-depth study *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), which traces the origin of the genre to the Han and the Six Dynasties, as well as Sarah M. Allen's *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014). To date, the conference volume *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdote in Traditional China* edited by Jack W. Chen and David Schaberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) provides the only book-length overview in English of the place of anecdotal writings within the literary and cultural history of premodern China.

Five Dynasties by several folds.⁴ More importantly, the early to mid-twelfth century saw not only increasing involvement of literati in the composition of these works, but also the formation of a mature market of readers. These all point to the coming of age of anecdotal writings as a full-fledged discursive space, later termed *biji* 筆記, with its own mode of production and circulation. It is this transformation that will be the focus of this chapter.

The textual identity of *biji*, however, has been ambiguous and in a state of constant flux throughout history. In fact, compared with the other genres discussed in the previous chapters, the textual features that distinguish *biji* are far more eclectic and ill-defined, making it a true epitome of messy “marginalia” texts. In particular, the definition of *biji* has been inextricably intertwined with that of *xiaoshuo* 小說 (which is now universally used as the translation for fiction and novel), a vivid reflection of the struggles of the literary scholars since the early twentieth century in adopting and accommodating Western literary terminologies and theories in the study of Chinese literature. As such, a brief review of the conceptual history of these two terms is called for.

The earliest known mention of the term *biji* as a type of writing occurs in Liu Xie’s *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. In the chapter on “Literary Talents” 才略, Liu uses the term in his discussion of the key features of several writers from the Jian’an 建安 period:

⁴ The *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記 series, launched in 2003, aims to compile all of the extant *biji* works (approximately 500 in total) from the Song in a total of 100 volumes; to date, 80 volumes have been published. See Fu Xuancong’s 傅璇琮 preface to Zhu Yí’an 朱易安, Fu Xuancong, Zhou Changlin 周常林, and Dai Jianguo 戴建國 gen. eds., *Quan Song biji* (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2003–) [hereafter as QSB], ser. I, vol. 1, 1–11. In comparison, the completed *Quan Tang Wudai biji* 全唐五代筆記 (gen. ed. Tao Min 陶敏; Xi’an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2012) contains a total of 143 works.

Lu Cui and Yang Xiu are well-versed in the craft of writing letters and records; Ding Yi and Han Dan, on the other hand, display beauty in writing treatises.⁵

路粹、楊修，頗懷筆記之工；丁儀、邯鄲，亦含論述之美。

Rather than denoting a specific genre, the term “*biji*” here (as well as elsewhere in the book) is a compound word referring loosely to written records and letters, likely correspondences and documents for the court.⁶ Subsequently, due to the flexible nature of the term, the word *biji* appears in the titles of many later prose works, among which are the famous *Qiuchi biji* 仇池筆記 by Su Shi, *Lao xue'an biji* 老學庵筆記 by Lu You, as well as *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 by Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805), just to name a few. Sharing this common term in the title, however, does not automatically attribute these works to the same generic category; in fact, they were later placed in traditional Chinese bibliographies under various different categories within the “Four-fold Classification” 四部 system, such as the “miscellaneous histories” 雜史 and “geographies” 地理 categories under the “Histories” 史 branch, and the “miscellaneous schools” 雜家 and “*xiaoshuo*” categories under the “Masters Literature” 子 branch. It was not until the early twentieth century did the term *biji* begin to be used as a generic category, but that usage is often mixed with that

⁵ Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證, ed. and annot. Zhan Ying 詹鏜 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 47.1802.

⁶ For example, later in the same chapter, Liu uses the term again to characterize the works of several Eastern Jin writers: “Yu Yuanguì’s memorials are cogent yet relaxed and smooth-flowing; Wen Taizhen’s letters and records, on the other hand, adhere to principles and are lucidly written. Both are fine craftsmen of the pen” 庾元規之表奏，靡密以閑暢；溫太真之筆記，循理而清通，亦筆端之良工也。 The features of “adher[ing] to principles” and being “lucidly written” suggest the practical functionalities of *biji*, pointing to its identity as a type of prose writing for presenting opinions and arguments, likely in a court setting.

of *xiaoshuo*; in fact, the two terms are often used interchangeably in academic discourse or grouped together as one compound term, *biji xiaoshuo*.⁷

The term *xiaoshuo* is more heavily loaded than *biji*, as it has been used to translate “fiction” and “novel” since the early twentieth century. While a detailed conceptual history of this term is beyond the scope of this Chapter,⁸ a few examples showcasing its usage in specific historical contexts relevant to our discussion of *biji* are warranted. The earliest known instance of usage of the term *xiaoshuo*, which literally means “minor talks”, can be traced to *Qi lüe* 七略 (or *Seven Branches*), the first imperial bibliography in Chinese history compiled by Liu Xin 劉歆 (?–23 AD), based on his father Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (77 BCE–6 BCE) earlier work. Later Ban Gu 班固 developed the categorizing system based on *Seven Branches* and singled out *xiaoshuo* as one of the various schools of thoughts and knowledge of the day. In it, Liu accounts for this category of texts as follows:

The *xiaoshuo* school probably originated from petty officials; [they are] roadside chitchats and alleyway gossips, made up by those engaging in conversations along the streets.⁹

小說家者流，蓋出於稗官，街談巷語，道聽途說者之所造也。

⁷ For example, this compound term was used as a generic indicator in the title of several major anthologies published in the twentieth century, such as the 35-volume *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 (Yangzhou: Guangling guji keyinshe, 1983–1984).

⁸ The evolving definition and boundary of this term has been subject to intense debate by generations of scholars, beginning with Lu Xun’s 魯迅 (1881–1936) groundbreaking study *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略. For a succinct account of how *xiaoshuo* came to be used to denote fiction in the Chinese tradition, see Sarah M. Allen, “Narrative Genres,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, eds. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-ye Li, and Xiaofei Tian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 273–287.

⁹ See “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志, in Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1745. “Yiwen zhi” is known to include many excerpts from the *Seven Branches*.

This account highlights the folk origin of these “minor talks” as well as the largely dubious nature of their contents. Throughout pre-modern China, the scope of this term has remained fluid. For example, an elaborate definition was laid out in the Ming dynasty by the scholar and bibliophile Hu Yinglin, which well illustrates the broad range of this term’s usage:

The *xiaoshuo* group could be further divided into several subgroups. The first is called “records of anomalies,” which includes works such as [*Accounts of*] *the Search for Spirits*, [*Accounts of*] *Telling Abnormalities*, [*Records from*] *Xuanshi Hall*, and [*Miscellaneous Morsels from*] *Youyang Mountain*. The second is called “tales of the strange,” which includes works such as [*Tale of Zhao*] *Feiyan*, [*Tale of Yang*] *Taizhen*, [*Tale of*] *Cui Ying[ying]*, and [*Tale of*] *Huo [Xiao]yu*. The third is called “miscellaneous accounts,” which includes works such as [*New Account of*] *Tales of the World*, *Forest of [Tang] Tales*, *Trivial Sayings [of the Northern Dreamer]*, and *Accounts of Consequences* 因話錄. The fourth is called “collected talks,” which includes works such as [*Casual Jottings from the*] *Rongzhai Study*, [*Penned Talks by the*] *Dream Creek*, [*Seeings at the*] *Eastern Valley*, and [*Clear Talks at*] *Mount Dao*. The fifth is called “exegetical clarifications,” which includes works such as *The Uncured Mouse*, [*Compilation of*] *Chicken Ribs*, [*Collection*] *for Leisure*, and [*Records of*] *Clarifying Doubts*. The sixth is called “moral admonitions,” which includes works such as *Family Instructions [for the Yan Clan]*, *Precepts for Social Life [for the Yuan Clan]*, [*Accounts of*] *Admonitions for Goodness*, and [*Accounts of*] *Reflecting on the Mind*. The two subgroups of “collected talks” and “miscellaneous accounts” intermingle most easily, and often bear characteristics of the other four subgroups. However, the other four subgroups tend to be self-contained, and could not be mixed into those two. As for “records of anomalies” and “tales of the strange,” they are especially easy to get mixed up. Sometimes, occurrences belonging to both groups are recorded within one work; in other cases, features befitting both types exist within one tale. [When classifying them, we] should just weigh what [feature] predominates.¹⁰

小說家一類，又自分數種。一曰志怪，《搜神》、《述異》、《宣室》、《酉陽》之類是也。一曰傳奇，《飛燕》、《太真》、《崔鶯》、《霍玉》之類是也。一曰雜錄，《世說》、《語林》、《瑣言》、《因話》之類是也。一曰叢談，《容齋》、《夢溪》、《東谷》、《道山》之類是也。一曰辯訂，《鼠璞》、《雞肋》、《資暇》、《辯疑》之類是也。一曰箴規，《家訓》、《世範》、《勸善》、《省心》之類是也。“叢談”“雜錄”二類最易相

¹⁰ “Jiuliu xulun” 九流緒論, in Hu Yinglin, *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 374. The translation here is modified from Laura Hua Wu, “From *Xiaoshuo* to Fiction: Hu Yinglin’s Genre Study of *Xiaoshuo*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.2 (December 1995): 339–371.

素，又往往兼有四家。而四家類多獨行，不可攙入二類者。至於“志怪”“傳奇”尤易出入，或一書之中，二事並載；一字之內，兩端具存。姑舉其重而已。

As can be seen, Hu uses *xiaoshuo* to include a wide scope of prose including historical anecdotes, exegetical discussions, as well as moral admonitions. By taking under its wing most of the non-traditional prose types that cannot be easily pigeonholed into the more classical genres, Hu's classification appropriately captures the eclectic and "boundaryless" nature of this group of "minor talks" texts. Given the fact that *xiaoshuo* was later taken to denote the rather unrelated Western term "fiction," in this chapter we will use the term *biji* to denote those miscellaneous anecdotal writings, regardless of the generic labels they have been assigned in traditional Chinese bibliographies.¹¹

Despite their thematic amorphousness, these *biji* texts still share some textual and formal commonalities, as pointed out by scholars such as Li Jianguo 李劍國 and Tao Min 陶敏.¹² To begin with, they were often not consciously preserved or published, nor were they readily compiled into literary collections. In that sense, they sit at the margin of the world of classical genres, similar to the other prose writings examined in this dissertation, such as *tiba* colophon and letteret. More importantly, in comparison to the other genres, *biji* as a

¹¹ In an influential pioneering study of *biji*, Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋 (1917–1988) streamlined Hu's framework into three categories: historical anecdotes 歷史瑣聞類, fictional stories 小說故事類, and exegetical commentaries 考訂辯證類. He, however, removed the moral admonitions category. See Liu Yeqiu, *Lidai biji gaishu* 歷代筆記概述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 3. Some of the stricter classification schemes proposed by modern scholars even single out the first two groups in Hu's definition as an independent genre, *xiaoshuo*, separate from *biji*. These schemes, unfortunately, impose unnecessary boundaries within this eclectic group of texts, contrary to the intended all-inclusive nature of this term in premodern times.

¹² See Li Jianguo, "Wenyan xiaoshuo de lilun yanjiu yu yanjiu jichu" 文言小說的理論研究與研究基礎, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 2 (1998): 30–37; and Tao Min and Liu Zaihua 劉再華, "'Biji xiaoshuo' yu biji yanjiu" "筆記小說" 與筆記研究, *Wenxue yichan* 2 (2003): 107–116.

discursive space flourished through the establishment of a series of associated core values, as well as the conscientious exploration, expansion, and transmission of these values by a large group of writers. In other words, while the transition from manuscript to print culture led to wider circulation of *biji*, it was ultimately through the conscious choice of many *biji* practitioners did this form of writing gain widespread recognition and acceptance. The key moment for this formation, as mentioned earlier, occurred during the transitional period between the Northern and Southern Song.

Even though most modern scholars recognize *biji* as a treasure trove of information on all aspects of society and life in Song China and have extensively drawn source materials from them for historical research, as a genre on its own right Song *biji* has received much less attention. One of the pioneering studies of Song dynasty *biji* was undertaken by Zhang Hui 張輝(暉), who systematically analyzed, among other things, the varying features in form, authorship, and content between *biji* from the Northern and Southern Song as well as the transitional period.¹³ Among the works in English, Cong Ellen Zhang's articles explore many specific and important aspects of this group of texts, such as their prefaces and their relationship to literati's ideals about scholarship and knowledge accumulation.¹⁴ Recently, Hilde De Weerdts took a fresh approach to the composition and distribution of *biji* as a

¹³ See Zhang Hui, *Songdai biji yanjiu* 宋代筆記研究 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1993). The precise Chinese name of Zhang has been a source of some confusion. While the name written in the book *Songdai biji yanjiu* is 張暉, it is most likely a misprint of his actual name 張輝, as judged from a photo of a copy of the book autographed by him, as well as the name used in his other publications such as "Shilun Nan Bei Song biji de butong" 試論南北宋筆記的不同, *Sichuan daxue xuebao* (zhexue shehui kexue ban) 四川大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 1 (1988): 68-73.

¹⁴ See Cong Ellen Zhang, "To Be 'Erudite in Miscellaneous Knowledge': A Study of Song (960-1279) *Biji* Writing," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 25.2 (2012): 43-77; and idem., "Things Heard in the Past, Material for Future Use: A Study of Song (960-1279) *Biji* Prefaces," *East Asian Publishing and Culture* 6.1 (2016): 22-53.

means of information management and she reads *biji* as “purposeful recollections of meaningful social relationships, conversations, and engagements with the writings of named authors and texts.”¹⁵ Based on detailed statistical analyses of 121 *biji* works that have either extant Song editions or Song editions that are recorded in later works, she traces the spread of *biji* writings during the Song and reconstructs the complex networks of *biji* authors, printers and readers. She found that the 13th century was the time when the printing of *biji* became widespread among all major printing centers of the time. While most of these works were published by non-official or commercial publishers, local governments as well as academies at the county or prefectural levels often participated in the printing and distributing process. De Weerdts analysis, however, adopts “a narrow definition of *biji*” and leaves out “reporting genres such as historical and geographical memoirs, encyclopedic works, envoy reports” as well as “fictional narratives.”¹⁶ Moreover, De Weerdts does not take into account the often complex textual history of many of the *biji* works, especially those that had multiple revised editions or underwent various textual transformations from manuscript to the final imprint, which could take the form of independent circulation, compilation into the author’s collected works, or as part of a compendium of *biji* works.¹⁷

As such, while the larger chronological, geographical, as well as thematic landscapes of Song *biji* painted by these works provide a great starting point for this chapter, the aforementioned blank warrant a closer look at this important genre of marginalia texts. In

¹⁵ Hilde De Weerdts, *Information, Territory, and Elite Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 18–22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 290–91.

¹⁷ For an explanation of why De Weerdts excludes manuscript editions of *biji* in her study, see *ibid.*, 290.

this chapter, we explore the rise of *biji* during the Song by examining both the conscious choices by authors to write in *biji* (as opposed to other genres) and the layered transformations these texts went through during their journey of publication. In particular, we focus on *biji* writings consisting of primarily historical anecdotes (namely the third and fourth categories in Hu's classification), which exemplify a narrative space based on individual experiences as well as representations of such experiences. This space is both alternative to and intricately intertwined with the worlds of official history and poetry, and provides an arena for literati of the transitional generation to record, reflect upon, and commemorate their experiences during the Northern-Southern Song transition. The choice to discuss these issues in *biji*, as opposed to the more traditional genres, illustrates the distinct values this form of writing offers.

4.1. Portraying the Transition: A Case Study of Li Gang

To address these important issues, we use as example the *biji* works of Li Gang 李綱 (1083–1140), a renowned scholar-official, military general, as well as accomplished poet during the late Northern and early Southern Song. A major reason for choosing to focus on Li Gang is because Li wrote on many key events of the time pertaining to the catastrophic fall of the Northern Song as well as the policy failures of the early Southern Song, using both *biji* and other classical genres (such as poetry). By comparing his *biji* works on these events with his poetry as well as with the writings of his contemporaries, I will demonstrate how the choice of *biji* has much to do with the differing roles of poetry and historical writing during late

Northern and early Southern Song in bearing personal witness to events in life. Moreover, by tracing the afterlives of Li Gang's *biji* works, in particular the extensive revisions made to them when they were incorporated into his literary collections as well as major historical records of the Song dynasty, we will get a glimpse into how these marginal writings were judged and selected by readers of the twelfth century and onwards, and how the world of *biji* has come to be recognized as a legitimate source of historical and literary reference.

4.1.1. Contextualizing the past in poetry and *biji*

Li Gang came from a notable family that traces its roots to the imperial clan of the Tang dynasty. After obtaining his *jinshi* degree in 1112, he gradually rose up the bureaucratic ladder to become Investigating Censor 監察御史 and Palace Censor 殿中侍御史. In 1126, when the Jurchen army invaded the northern provinces and was marching towards Bianliang, Li was appointed by Emperor Qinzong to be in charge of guarding the capital.¹⁸ The battles of resistance Li led against the Jurchens were successful, and earned him an enormous reputation among the residents of the capital. A righteous and straight-from-the-gut man, he was also highly vocal in criticizing the corrupt officials and the policies of surrender he witnessed at court. This attracted animosity from many high-ranking officials at court, who found every chance to get rid of him. In the second month of 1126, when general Yao Pingzhong 姚平仲 hastily led a raid on the Jurchen camp and failed, Li Gang

¹⁸ For a succinct account of the critical events during this period, see Li Gang's preface to *Jingkang chuanxin lu* 靖康傳信錄, punct. and coll. Zheng Mingbao 鄭明寶, in QSBJ, ser. III, vol. 5 [hereafter as JKCXL], 6.

was taken as the scapegoat and fired from the position as the leader of the defense army. Hundreds of students from the Imperial Academy went on protest against his demotion, and later residents of the capital city also joined. The court succumbed to the overwhelming pressure and reinstated him. Despite that he had led a few successful defense campaigns, the officials advocating surrender won over and Li Gang was ultimately demoted again in the ninth month, this time out of the capital altogether. Soon, the Northern Song fell to the Jurchens. After Emperor Gaozong of the Southern Song ascended to the throne in 1127, he immediately invited Li Gang back and appointed him as one of the top ministers. Immediately, Li devoted himself to a series of major reforms to consolidate the new regime, even with the hope of re-taking the lost northern territories. This time, however, his tenure at court lasted for only seventy-five days, for he was again slandered by his jealous colleagues. Realizing that he no longer had the ear of the emperor, Li resigned his post with great disappointment, putting a reluctant end to a highly illustrious political career.¹⁹

As someone right at the center of the turbulent court politics during the most dramatic moments of between the Northern and Southern Song, Li Gang chose to write about his experiences during these significant years in both poetry and prose, in particular *biji*. His choice of these generic forms was a highly deliberate one, for he, like many literati of his time, was known for his broad learning and skillful writing in many genres (for example, he was once put in charge of composing official histories). Among his 170-*juan* literary

¹⁹ For more details on Li Gang's life and career, see his biography in Tuotuo 脫脫 et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 358–359.11241–11274; and Chao Hsiao-hsuan 趙效宣, *Li Gang nianpu changbian* 李綱年譜長編 (Kowloon: Xin Ya yanjiusuo, 1968).

collection *Liangxi ji* 梁溪集, twenty *juan* consist of poems arranged chronologically; the two years between 1126 (when he was summoned by Emperor Huizong to guard the capital city) and 1128 (when he was distanced again by Emperor Gaozong and left the court), however, was a total blank. Why did Li Gang not leave any poems on this most eventful period of his life, a period replete with both personal vicissitudes as well as national trauma? He explained this briefly in a preface he wrote in 1130:

In the past, I liked composing poetry. Since I was demoted during the Jingkang Era to avoid slander, I no longer wrote poetry. When it came to the Jianyan Era, in the autumn following the change of the reign name, I pleaded to be relieved of my political duties, and was demoted to Wuchang that winter, to Lifu (in present-day Hunan province) the following year, and to beyond the sea the following year.²⁰ [On the way, I] trod across rivers and lakes, ridges and seas, all of which places where poets were exiled, deserted and bleak, all too desolate for human beings to dwell. Feeling depressed and lonely, I therefore relied again on poetry to express my worries, relieve my sorrows, and to cultivate myself.²¹

余舊喜賦詩，自靖康謫官以避謗，輟不復作。及建炎改元之秋丐罷機政，其冬謫居武昌，明年移澧浦，又明年遷海外。自江湖涉嶺海，皆騷人放逐之鄉，與魑魅荒絕、非人所居之地。郁悒亡聊，則復賴詩句摠憂娛悲，以自陶寫。

In this preface, which was written for a collection of poems entitled *Collection from Lakes and Seas* 湖海集,²² Li also expressed his opinions on the functions and significance of poetry, identifying strongly with the ideals laid out in the “Great Preface” of the *Book of Songs* that

²⁰ In 1129, Li was demoted to Wan’an jun 萬安軍 (a county-level unit) in present-day Hainan province, thus the phrase “beyond the sea” 海外.

²¹ This preface is dated the fifth day of the fourth month of 1130, when Li Gang was allowed to return from the South. In it, he also mentions that he has put together this *Collection* in order to “show to various brothers” 以示諸季 what he has accomplished while “going back and forth across ten thousand miles within four years” 往返萬里四年間. See “Xu” 序, in Li Gang, *Li Gang quanji* 李綱全集, punct. and coll. Wang Ruiming 王瑞明 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004) [hereafter as LGQJ], 17.213.

²² This collection, though no longer extant today, is supposedly the source of the poems in *Liangxi ji* between the years 1126 and 1130. See Zhu Shangshu, *Songdai bieji xulu* 宋代別集敘錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 767-777; and Wang Ruiming’s “Dianjiao shuoming” 點校說明 in LGQJ, 1-6.

poetry could express the complaints of the people and to connect them, to reveal the reality of the society. Therefore, it was his belief that the poet has the responsibility to both record and reflect on what he has witnessed as well as to warn and admonish the ruler. Among the poets from previous times, Li Gang highlighted Du Fu as his model for accomplishing these goals. All of these point to the fact that Li took poetry writing seriously, which in turn reveals the heavy heart with which he chose to stop writing poetry in order to “avoid slander” during those two years.²³

Even though Li Gang could not express himself during this “blank period”, he did later find other ways to record his experiences during those two years. For example, on what he had witnessed during the “Calamity of the Jingkang Era,” he wrote a *biji* collection entitled *Jingkang chuanxin lu* 靖康傳信錄, or *Accounts of Transmitting the Credible of the Jingkang Era* (hereafter as *Transmitting the Credible*), which we will return in the next section. As for his seventy-five-day stint in the court of Emperor Gaozong during the newly restored Southern Song, his reflections began right after his demotion out of the capital. Below we will examine both his poetry as well as his prose compositions. On the way of his exile southward, he constantly looked back to the north with deep regret and longing. For example, the sight of a snow, a rare scene in the South, evoked his thoughts about the lost North:

南人共訝何曾見， The southerners are all surprised by what they had never seen,
北顧深顰有所思。 looking north and frowning deeply, I felt a longing in my heart.

²³ This deliberate choice also had much to do with the shifting roles of poetry within the political milieu of the time, which we will touch upon later.

牢落無言自搔首， Feeling forlorn and speechless, I simply scratch my head,
卻驚華髮頓成絲。 only to be startled that my hair has suddenly turned into gray strands.²⁴

When spring came, Li, lodged at a country inn at that time, thought instead about the desolate imperial garden where the chariots of the Emperor used to be parked, as well as the lamentable life of the two Emperors who were imprisoned in the Jurchen camp. He wrote:

緬懷沙漠寒， I long for [the two Emperors in] the cold dessert,
矯首望漢月。 with their heads up, gazing at the moon above the land of the Han.
杳無鴻鴈來， No wild goose [carrying letters] ever came to visit,
寧不野鼠掘。 How could they bear to dig up [the food buried by] wild mice?²⁵
何時金鳳輦， When would the chariots with golden phoenixes,
復返蒼龍闕。 return to the Palace of Blue Dragon?²⁶

Crowning this reflective oeuvre of Li is a 121 couplet-long poem entitled “Ballad of the Jianyan Era” 建炎行 (hereafter denoted as “Ballad”). Written in the style of “ballad” 歌行, a form popular during the Tang dynasty for long narratives about historical figures and events, this piece documents the entirety of Li Gang’s seventy-five-day service in the court of Emperor Gaozong. Remarkably, this poem is accompanied by a long preface that recounts the same story in prose form. Roughly during the same period, Li Gang also wrote another collection titled *Jianyan jintui zhi* 建炎進退志, or *Records of Advancement and*

²⁴ “Shanquan jishi shishou” 善權即事十首, no. 5, in LGQJ, 17.219.

²⁵ This line alludes to the story of Su Wu 蘇武 (143? BCE–60 BCE) of the Han dynasty, who was sent to the Xiongnu as an envoy and detained there for nineteen years. He remained loyal to the Han all along, and when the Xiongnu cut off his food supply, he dug out the grass that wild mice hid in their caves. See Ban, *Hanshu*, 54.2462–63.

²⁶ “Xifeng xing” 西風行, in LGQJ, 19.251. Another example on a similar theme is his “Ningguo xian pu zahua shengkai ershou” 寧國縣圃雜花盛開二首, which describe how the peach and plum flowers in Jiangnan reminded him of the spring in the imperial garden in Bianliang. See *ibid.*, 17.222.

Withdrawal during the Jianyan Era (hereafter as *Advancement and Withdrawal*), again to chronicle this tumultuous period.²⁷ As such, we have at our disposal a rare set of three parallel texts written by the same author from which to dissect the distinct roles played by each of these three genres, as perceived by Li Gang and literati of the time.

Both the preface and the body of the poem follow a similar sequence of events in chronological order. The preface opens with a very brief account of the fall of the Northern Song:

In early summer last year, I heard of my appointment as Governor of the capital city while in Changsha, and led a righteous army to offer support to the imperial household.²⁸ As we were making a stop at Fanchang, I received an official declaration from the Headquarter of the Marshals, and knew that the capital had fallen to the barbarians and the two Sages (i.e. the Emperors) were moved north. I cried desperately almost to death.²⁹

余去歲夏初，自長沙聞尹京之命，率義旅入援王室。次繁昌，得元帥府檄，審虜破都城、二聖北遷，號慟幾絕。

Similarly, the poem also begins with the invasion of the Jurchen army and how Li got the heartbreaking news on his way to rescue the capital. In addition, it also includes an elaborate section depicting, in gory details, the fall of the capital:

忽傳元帥檄， Suddenly I received the declaration from the Marshals,

²⁷ According to Li's own account, which we will discuss below, the original *Advancement and Withdrawal* consists of ten *juan*. The first part is a chronological narrative of key events of the time, which constitutes the four *juan* of prose that come down to us today. The second part is a compilation of original court records and various other documents, which are no longer extant today. See "Dianjiao shuoming," in Li Gang, *Jianyan jintui zhi*, punct. and coll. Zheng Mingbao, in QSBJ, ser. III, vol. 5 [hereafter as JYJZ], 49–50.

²⁸ This is referring to Li's second return to the capital in 1127. For his own account of the events in these few months, see *ibid.*, 1.51.

²⁹ "Jianyan xing bing xu" 建炎行並序, in LGQJ, 19.253.

果有城破語。	which indeed contained words about the fall of the [capital] city.
鑾輿幸沙漠，	The imperial chariots thus graced the desert,
妃后辭禁籞。	and concubines and empresses left the forbidden chambers.
皇孫與帝子，	From the imperial grandsons to the princes,
取索及稚乳。	those who were taken included even infants,
禮文包旂裳，	objects for rituals including flags and clothes,
樂器載筍簞。	musical instruments including bamboo stands.
金繒罄公私，	Gold and silk were emptied from official and private [collections],
技巧到機杼。	so were craftsmen and handymen, together with their tools and looms.
空余宗廟存，	What was left was only the ancestral temple,
無復薦簋簠。	no longer filled with offerings in baskets and vessels.
淒涼蒼龍闕，	The Palace of Blue Dragon stood desolate,
寂寞玉華廡。	the Hallway of Jade Flower remained forlorn. ³⁰

Not only is the siege of the capital depicted in an elaborate manner, Li's reaction to it is also portrayed more vividly in the poem: "Crying desperately beyond recovery,/[I] shed tears like pouring rain!" 號慟絕復蘇，灑淚作翻雨。The story then continues with Emperor Gaozong's ascension to the throne, Li's summon to the court, as well as a broad range of strategies and reform policies that he proposed to consolidate the new regime and accomplish a "restoration" 中興 of the dynasty. This section of the poem resonates much with the preface. However, when Li Gang goes into how he found himself attacked by the vicious slanders of his colleagues in court and his gradual disillusionment with the Emperor, the poem again presents a more colorful picture than the preface, as he alludes copiously to the rich tradition of imageries in Chinese poetry about righteous and loyal officials who were unfortunately vilified and exiled. For example, when depicting the court struggles that led to his demotion, Li writes rather emotionally in the poem:

³⁰ Ibid., 19.255.

豈知肘腋間，	How would I know that within arm's length from me,
乃有椒蘭妒。	lies the jealousy of pepper and orchid. ³¹
含沙初射影，	[They] first attack me through sneaky insinuations, ³²
聚毒陰中蠱。	and vilify [me] by gathering and setting up malicious plots.
規模欲破碎，	The institutions [I established] were about to collapse,
謀議漸齟齬。	and my discussions [with the emperor] gradually became stalled. ³³

The preface, on the other hand, recounts this episode in a less emotional and more matter-of-fact manner, and explicitly names all of his attackers. Li Gang then goes on to describe what he saw during his demotion trip southward, invoking again multiple imageries of fleeing and departure from poetry of the past, ranging from the *Book of Songs* to Du Fu. The preface ends with Li's deep lament that the cause of all the deaths and suffering on this scorched land goes beyond the human realm: "Alas, heaven did it. What do I have to say!" 噫！天實為之，謂之何哉。The poem, however, expresses this sentiment in a more restrained manner: "Alas, Azure Heaven! It is you who made the continuing process of this country so difficult" 吁嗟乎蒼天，乃爾艱國步。Moreover, it goes beyond such accusation of heavenly forces and compares the Song regime to a critically ill patient in dire need of the healing hands of a good doctor, as shown in these ending lines filled with Li's desperate hope:

又如抱羸瘵，	[This regime is] also like a person with a debilitating illness,
邪氣久已痼。	in whom the vicious miasma has persisted for long.

³¹ The phrase "pepper and orchid" *jiaolan* 椒蘭 is an allusion to Qu Yuan's 屈原 *Li sao* 離騷. According to Wang Yi's 王逸 commentary, this refers to two evil officials from the state of Chu 楚, Zi Jiao 子椒 and Zi Lan 子蘭. Other scholars, however, do not agree with this. In any case, this term refers to someone who slanders good people. See "*Li sao*", in *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*, trans. and annot. David Hawkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 77 and 94.

³² The phrase *hansha sheying* 含沙射影 used here refers to *yu* 蜮, a kind of aquatic mythological creature that squirts streams of sand at the shadow of people to kill them. This term is later used to denote those who vilify other through sneaky schemes and innuendos.

³³ "Jiayan xing bing xu", in LGQJ, 19.256.

不能親藥石，	Unable to treat himself with medicine,
乃復甘粬糲。	[he] still repeatedly [indulge himself] with honey pastries. ³⁴
膏肓骨髓間，	The illness has encroached into the heart and marrows,
性命若絲縷。	and his life hangs by a thread of silk.
安得和緩徒，	Where can he find [a good doctor] like He and Huan, ³⁵
舉手為摩拊。	who could just rub with his hands [and heal the illness].
馴致海宇康，	Gradually, all under heaven comes to peace, ³⁶
蒼生有環堵。	and the common people would have shabby houses [to call home]. ³⁷

In comparison to the poem, *Advancement and Withdrawal*, while also depicting more or less the same main events, is more comprehensive in its coverage and often goes into far greater detail when describing events that the “Ballad” only touches upon in passing. These include, for example, how Li Gang accepted the summon of the Emperor despite doubts and worries about potential opposition from other officials, and how he was cast aside from many of the policy-making processes when the Emperor decided to follow the strategies proposed by other ministers.

Although such contrast may not seem surprising due to the differing nature of poetry and prose writings, Li Gang’s choices in selecting and arranging specific materials for these two genres were certainly not made casually, especially in light of the precedents set by *biji* writings before his time. Unlike many of the earlier *biji* works, such as Sun Guangxian’s 孫

³⁴ “Junü” 粬糲, which comes from Song Yu’s 宋玉 (ca. 298 BCE–222 BCE) *Zhao hun* 招魂, is a type of fried cake made of honey and rice flour. See Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*, 228.

³⁵ He 和 and Huan 緩 were two renowned doctors from the state of Qin 秦 during the Spring and Autumn period. For example, Zhi Yu 摯虞 (250–300) mentions them in his “Rhapsody on Healing Ailments” 疾愈賦. See Yan Kejun 嚴可均 comp., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, 76.1897.

³⁶ “Xunzhi” 馴致, which comes from the hexagram “kun” 坤 in the *Book of Changes* 易經, means gradually become or continue. See Richard Wilhelm trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, rendered into English Cary F. Baynes, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 389.

³⁷ “Jiyan xing bing xu”, in LGQJ, 19.256.

光憲 (900–968) *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 and Sima Guang's *Sushui jiwén* 涑水記聞, which are collections of short and often independent entries, *Advancement and Withdrawal* not only arranges its entries chronologically but also carefully designs the level of detail for each entry. As such, these entries, while still relatively independent from each other, are interwoven into a coherent overall narrative while each developing and unfolding at its unique pace, thereby allowing Li Gang to encode his own interpretation of the causal relationships between these events.

In this respect, the “Ten Strategies” 十策 that Li proposed to Emperor Gaozong serve as an illustrative example. As something that he apparently took tremendous pride in coming up with, Li wrote about these strategies in all three places, the *biji* work, the preface and the body of the poem. For example, in the “Ballad,” he delineated his opinions on reclaiming the lost land in the North and picking a new capital for the fledgling Southern Song:

河外須救援，	The [land] beyond the [Huai] River must be claimed back,
屏蔽資捍拒。	[to serve as] a barrier to defend against [invasion of the enemy].
問誰可驅策，	[If you were to] ask who could lead this [assault],
因薦亮與所。	[I would] then recommend [Fu] Liang and [Zhang] Suo. ³⁸
京師當一到，	[As for] the capital city, [Your Majesty] should visit there once,
九廟陳鼎俎。	to offer sacrifice in ritual tripods and vessels at the nine ancestral temples.
卻為巡幸計，	As for the imperial touring [in search of a new capital],
不可去中字。	[Your Majesty] must not leave the Central Plains.
南陽光武興，	Nanyang was the place where Emperor Guangwu rose to power, ³⁹
形勢亦險阻。	an inaccessible location with a precipitous topography.
西通關陝區，	To the West, it connects to the regions of Guanzhong and Shaanxi,

³⁸ Fu Liang 傅亮 (?–?) and Zhang Suo 張所 (?–1127) were both generals renowned for their valorous resistance against the Jurchen invasion.

³⁹ Emperor Guangwu 光武帝 (5 BC–57 AD), founder of the Later Han dynasty, was a native of Nanyang, and rose to prominence when he launched a rebellion there in 22 AD.

東與江淮距。	while to the East, it borders the Yangtze and Huai Rivers.
三巴及嶺海，	[From] Sichuan, Guangxi and Guangdong,
寶貨可運取。	treasured goods can be obtained and transported there.
據要爭權衡，	With this strategic location as a base for our fight for control,
點虜謀必阻。	the plots of the cunning enemy could surely be thwarted. ⁴⁰

In comparison with the other parts of the “Ballad,” the language used in this section is distinctively plain and unpoetic, almost to the extent of sounding oddly prose-like, similar to the corresponding entries in *Advancement and Withdrawal*. What is unique to *Advancement and Withdrawal*, however, are the detailed accounts that Li Gang gave on the rather convoluted process of pushing his recommendations through in court. Among the “Ten Strategies,” Emperor Gaozong approved five of them and immediately issued orders for their execution. Each of the remaining five, however, went through rounds of heated debate at court as well as laborious deliberations subsequently. To illustrate the difficulty in convincing the Emperor, Li Gang even included original memorials that he submitted (some in excerpts while others in entirety) into *Advancement and Withdrawal*. These, together with the choice of a narrative voice with a limited perspective give the reader a strong sense of the lengthy and often tiring tug-of-war in the policy-making process, replete with back-and-forth bargaining and compromising, aspects that are not normally revealed in standard historical records. In that way, Li Gang consciously constructed a narrative that is distinct from what would be kept in official court records and dynastic histories.

In fact, this intention of Li has been laid out in his preface to *Advancement and Withdrawal*. In it, Li traces his urge for writing the book to his trip southward, during which

⁴⁰ Ibid., 19.255–256.

he read through the journals that he kept while serving as minister,⁴¹ a practice which probably had roots in his earlier involvement as a court historian during Emperor Huizong's reign. After pointing out the grave realities he had witnessed or learned during the trip, such as the collapsing defense at the northern border and the further retreat of the court, Li puts forward the rationale behind his composition of *Advancement and Withdrawal*:

I therefore picked out those main events during the advancement and withdrawal [of the state], arranged them in order, and provided an overall account for them. As for those memorials, imperial edicts, official correspondences, and documentary records, I compiled them as an attachment to the book, which amounts to a total of ten *juan*. I have titled it *Records of Advancement and Withdrawal during the Jianyan Era*, with the hope that those who read it would have something to check against. As for the proposals of my ministerial colleagues, the appeals from four corners [of the country], promotion and demotion of various people, and issues related to reform and policy, the official historians will write about them, so I will not repeat them here.⁴²

因取進退之大槩，次第而總敘之。與夫制誥、詔命、書疏、表劄編纂附著，合為十卷，目之曰“建炎進退志”，庶幾覽者有所考焉。至於臣寮之所建明、四方之所陳請、陟降人材、改革政事，自有史官書之，此不復錄。

From this preface, it is evident that *Advancement and Withdrawal*, in its original ten *juan* form, consists of two parts. The first is a chronological narrative of the key events of the time, followed by a compilation of original court records and various other documents.⁴³ More importantly, in this rather personal statement, Li Gang sets himself apart from court historians in two fundamental ways. First, while both his book and official histories deal with court politics as well as the various associated documentary records such as proposals

⁴¹ The term Li Gang uses here is “*beiwei zaisi riji*” 備位宰司日記; see JYJZ, 4.96.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.97.

⁴³ Such separation of original documents from the “overall account” also occur in Li Gang's other *biji* works, which we will examine in the next section of this chapter.

and memorials, the fact that Li either personally took part in these events or composed these documents give him a uniquely credible vantage point as well as a personal touch to these otherwise inanimate records. In other words, while court historians need to incorporate sources from “four corners of the country” and strike a balance among them in their narratives, *Advancement and Withdrawal* is quintessentially a personal historical account of Li Gang. Second, while such original documents could normally be preserved in court annals, official histories or relevant categories in the author’s literary collection, the contexts of these records are often lost. By selecting, sorting, and arranging these records according to a narrative outline, as well as providing key background details, Li Gang contextualizes these records while weaving in his own life stories and opinions that otherwise would not have been preserved in any official histories.

As we have demonstrated in this section, in order to portray a multifaceted picture of the Northern-Southern Song transition as he experienced it, Li Gang deftly appealed to various generic forms ranging from poetry, preface and *biji*, taking advantage of their respective textual prowess and unique functionalities. In particular, using the *biji* form, he constructed a highly personal account with unique first-hand perspectives, distinct from the standard court records and dynastic histories. In a sense, the word “*Advancement and Withdrawal*” in the title of his *biji* is an illustration of his own life stories intertwined with that of the dynasty during the transitional period. Li Gang’s portrayal, however, was not yet complete, for a few years later he composed another closely related work covering approximately the same period entitled *Jianyan shizheng ji* 建炎時政記, or *Accounts of*

Current Politics of the Jianyan Era (hereafter as *Current Politics*). It is through comparison with this work that we can appreciate the unique role the genre of *biji* plays in the creation of a historical record written for posterity, as opposed to one submitted to the court.

4.1.2. Notes for posterity versus notes for the court

“Accounts of current politics” 時政記 is a type of account for political discussions and policy decisions that took place in court. They were often composed by the highest ministers and would serve as references for official dynastic histories. In 1134, Li Gang compiled his *Current Politics* at the request of the court, as he was one of the highest-ranking ministers of the time. In the preface, he explains the composition of the book as follows:

Now I received the imperial edict requesting me to recall and record past events, and compile them into a book to be passed on to the court historians. However, since I went through hardships, I am now both feeble and ill, with a restless mind that easily gets lost. Frequently visited by thieves, my books and writings have been scattered. Even if I try as much as I can to recall, I could not remember even one or two [events] out of ten. As for [the time that] I served daily under [Your Majesty's] splendid complexion and received orders and instructions in person, it has been indelibly etched in my heart, which I dare not forget for a moment.⁴⁴ Therefore, I put in writing a brief outline of what I remember from my days as minister, including Your Majesty's words that I have received, the policies I have carried out, as well as the rewards, punishments, promotions and demotions [I have witnessed]. As for those dates that I could not recall, I simply omit them. It is my hope that [my book could] transmit the credible [in cases that I find] credible, and transmit the doubts [in cases that I find] doubtful.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The phrase “*qingguang*” 清光, translated as “splendid complexion” here, literally means “bright light.” It is used here to refer to the face of the emperor.

⁴⁵ Li Gang, *Jianyan shizheng ji*, punct. and coll. Zheng Mingbao, in QSB], ser. III, vol. 5 [hereafter as JYSZ], 102.

今者又奉詔旨，俾臣追記往事，編錄成書，將以付之太史氏。顧臣自經憂患，衰病交攻，心志不安，動輒廢失；屢遭盜賊，文籍散亡。極意追思，曾不能省記十之一二。至於日侍清光，親承訓敕，則銘鏤心腑，豈敢彌忘。謹以省記到昨任宰相日所得聖語、所行政事、賞刑黜陟之大略，著於篇。至於日辰有不能省記，則闕之。庶幾信以傳信、疑以傳疑之意。

Originally, the work that Li Gang submitted to the court in 1135 consisted of only two *juan*. The court, however, considered it too short and requested a supplement, so Li expanded the work to six *juan*, with the first two being narrative accounts followed by four *juan* of official court documents.⁴⁶ Judging from the similar coverage and organizational structure between the two works as well as the many similarities in content and language, it is likely that Li Gang referred heavily to *Advancement and Withdrawal* when composing *Current Politics*, and selectively adapted many parts from it. The various changes that he carefully made during the adaption process then serve as a best lens to glimpse into the differences between the more personal *biji* and the more official accounts of current politics, as perceived by Li Gang and the literati of his time.

Such differences are most pronounced in the passages that may reflect unfavorably on the Emperor, as well as those in which Li Gang expressed strong personal opinions. An illustrative example is the incident involving the defected minister Zhang Bangchang 張邦昌

⁴⁶ The *Current Politics* collected into *Liangxi ji* consists of only three *juan*, so are the entries of this work recorded in Song bibliographies such as *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志 and *Yuhai* 玉海. This is the version of *Liangxi ji* that comes down to us today (through the *Siku quanshu*), a version that perhaps more closely resemble the original unexpanded edition. The expanded version was never circulated in its entirety, and is no longer extant today. It is suspected that the three-*juan* *Current Politics* we see today corresponds to the first two *juan* of the expanded version, whereas the remaining four *juan* have been compiled into the various personal collections of Li Gang. Such selective compilation also occurred to the ten-*juan* *Advancement and Withdrawal*, which, when included in *Liangxi ji*, was heavily redacted and altered. In addition to the various linguistic and tonal modifications discussed above, most of the redactions involve the original documents. See “Dianjiao shuoming”, in JYSZJ, 101.

(1081–1127), who was forced by the Jurchens to briefly serve as the puppet emperor during the “Calamity of the Jingkang Era,” but who later promptly relinquished the throne upon the retreat of the Jurchens and ascension of Emperor Gaozong. Given Zhang’s traitorous deeds, Li Gang vehemently and repeatedly pushed for punishing him in order to set a high moral standard for officials of the newly established Southern Song, but Emperor Gaozong was rather reluctant in taking actions against Zhang until he found out that Zhang had meddled with two court ladies, Li and Chen, during his short reign. In *Advancement and Withdrawal*, this episode is vividly recorded with rather dramatic twists:

Initially, when Zhang Bangchang left the Imperial Palace and returned to his residence, Lady Li escorted him and said words which called the emperor directly by name.⁴⁷ When His Majesty heard of this, he ordered the Regency and the Imperial Dispensary to interrogate [Li] at the Eastern Inner Gate. Lady Li sincerely pleaded guilty, and mentioned that when Bangchang had resided in the Hall of Fortune and Serenity, she used to let her adopted daughter, Lady Chen, serve him in bed. Later, when Bangchang’s sister came into the Imperial Palace, he left her attending servant [in the Palace], and in exchange brought Lady Chen back to his residence. His Majesty was shocked and furious, and said: “Bangchang was audacious enough to reside in the bedchamber of the Imperial Palace, and commit adultery with court ladies, the situations [of his puppet regime] can thus be discerned.” I then said: “Since Bangchang dared to overstep the bounds and steal the reign, these are trivial matters.” But His Majesty still punished Bangchang severely for these matters. It was decreed that Lady Li was to be caned on the back, and demoted to army camp to serve as the wife of a petty soldier.⁴⁸

初，張邦昌退歸府第，出禁中，李氏送之。有語指斥乘輿。上聞之，命留守司同御藥院於內東門推治。李氏款服，且言邦昌居福寧殿，李氏嘗以養女陳氏侍邦昌寢。其後邦昌之姊入禁中，乃留其親隨人，而易以陳氏歸府第。上震怒，謂：“邦昌敢居宮禁寢殿，奸私宮人，可以見其情狀”。余奏曰：“邦昌既敢僭竊位號，此乃細故耳。”然上竟以此深罪邦昌。有旨：李氏決脊，降配軍營務下名為妻。

⁴⁷ The phrase “zhichi” 指斥 here could mean to call somebody directly by name or to criticize; “chengyu” 乘輿 refers to the imperial carriage or objects used by the emperor in general, and is thus used here as an metonymic reference for the emperor himself.

⁴⁸ JYJTZ, 4.84.

In *Current Politics*, however, the whole event is portrayed in a plainer tone:

Initially, Zhang Bangchang overstepped the bounds and stole [the throne], and stayed in the Hall of Fortune and Serenity. Lady Li attended to him, and offered him fruits from time to time; Bangchang also repaid her handsomely. [She] then let her adopted daughter, Lady Chen, serve Bangchang in bed. Later, Bangchang wanted to return to his residence, but as his sister had come into the Imperial Palace, he left her attending servant [in the palace], and in exchange brought Lady Chen out. As Bangchang was leaving the Palace, Lady Li escorted him to the Eastern Inner Gate, and said words which called the emperor directly by name. When His Majesty heard of this, he ordered the Regency and the Imperial Dispensary to interrogate [Li] at the Eastern Inner Gate. Lady Li sincerely pleaded guilty, and mentioned the incidences of Bangchang riding on the imperial horse carriage, as well as that of Lady Chen. His Majesty then decreed: Bangchang was audacious enough to reside in the bedchamber of the Imperial Palace, and commit adultery with court ladies, the situations [of his puppet regime] can thus be discerned. It was decreed that Lady Li was to be caned on the back, and demoted to the camp of the imperial guards to serve as the wife of a petty soldier.⁴⁹

初，張邦昌既僭竊，居福寧殿，李氏奉之，時以果實為獻，邦昌亦厚答之。遂以養女陳氏侍邦昌寢。其後邦昌欲退歸府第，因其姊入禁中，乃留親隨人，易陳氏以出。邦昌出禁中，李氏送至內東門。有語指斥乘輿。上聞之，命留守司同御藥院於內東門推治，李氏款服，且言邦昌用乘輿服御及陳氏事。上宣諭曰：邦昌敢居宮禁寢殿，奸私宮人，可以見其情狀。有旨：李氏決脊，降配禁營務下名為妻。

As can be seen, not only was the original account streamlined into a plain chronological narrative, the critical detail on how Li Gang reminded the Emperor that the true crime of Zhang lies not in his improprieties but rather in his traitorous deeds is deleted in *Current Politics*. In addition, some key aspects of the Emperor's behavior that might potentially besmirch his image, such as the highly colorful descriptor "His Majesty was furious" 上震怒, as well as the fact that he chose to ignore Li's suggestion, as reflected by "But His Majesty still punished Bangchang severely for these matters" 然上竟以此深罪邦昌, are also

⁴⁹ JYSZJ, 2.133-134.

removed. After such trimming, the Emperor's actions are presented in entirely positive light, and his final decision on this matter appears rational and legitimate.

Another example that demonstrates the more nuanced differences between Li Gang's representations of the image of Emperor Gaozong involves a secret message sent by Emperor Huizong who, together with his successor Emperor Qinzong, was kidnapped and brought to the North by the Jurchen army during their raid of the capital city in 1127. Given the utterly shameful nature of this calamity, a key consideration in many of the subsequent policy debates at the Song court regarding re-claiming the lost North naturally concerns the rescuing of the two Emperors, or the "Two Sages" 二聖 as they were commonly referred to in many writings. Not long after the founding of the Southern Song, Emperor Gaozong decided to send two envoys to the Jurchens to find out about the conditions of the Two Sages. Li Gang composed two official letters on behalf of Emperor Gaozong, and entrusted them to the envoys to be delivered to the two Emperors. The reply came sometime later in a rather dramatic way. In *Advancement and Withdrawal*, this episode was recounted as follows:

One day, I was reporting matters with the other ministers in the side hall. His Majesty took out a silk vest, and decreed: "The Daoist Emperor ⁵⁰ secretly sent an envoy from Yanshan (in present-day Beijing) to bring over [this vest]; in its collar are eight characters that he wrote in person: 'Expedient to ascend the throne, come and rescue [your] parents'." The other ministers and I all wept, and said: "This is what [proves] that Your Majesty received the mandate from the Daoist Emperor. It should be kept in the ancestral temple and be shown to future generations. The Taoist Emperor, far out in the desert, still harbor such hopes as these in Your Majesty, how dare we not exhaust our obtuse minds and resolve the border matters, so as to assist in [fulfilling] Your Majesty's longing and wishes for filial piety."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Emperor Huizong was a known to be a devout Taoist, hence the title.

⁵¹ JYJTZ, 3.81.

一日，與執政奏事便殿，上出絹背心一，宣諭曰：“道君自燕山密遣使臣賚來，領中有親書八字，曰‘便可即真，來救父母。’”余與執政皆泣涕，奏曰：“此乃陛下受命於道君者，宜藏之宗廟，以示後世。道君遠幸沙漠，所望於陛下者如此，臣等敢不竭盡駑鈍，措置邊事，以副陛下聖孝思慕之意。”

In *Current Politics*, several important details in this account are altered:

On certain day of the seventh month, I was reporting matters with the other ministers. His Majesty took out a silk vest to show us, and decreed in tears: “The former Daoist Emperor secretly sent an envoy named Cao Xun from Yanshan prefecture to bring over this vest; in its collar are eight characters that he wrote in person: ‘Expedient to ascend the throne, come and rescue [your] parents’.” All of the ministers shed tears and said: “This is what [proves] that Your Majesty received the mandate from the former Daoist Emperor. It should be kept in the ancestral temple and be shown for ten thousand generations.” An imperial order was issued to follow this.⁵²

七月某日，臣同執政官奏事。上出絹背心宣示，泣諭臣等曰：“道君太上皇帝自燕山府密遣使臣曹勛賚來背心，領中有親書八字，曰‘便可即真，來救父母。’”群臣皆泣奏曰：“此乃陛下受命於道君太上皇帝者，宜藏之宗廟，以示萬世。”有旨從之。

The rationale for recording this episode, especially in *Current Politics*, is self-evident, as it is the first incidence in which Emperor Huizong officially indicated his wish to pass the throne to Emperor Gaozong. Such declaration carried particularly symbolic significance as Zhao Gou, before becoming Emperor Gaozong, was the ninth son of Emperor Huizong and thus low in the line of succession to the throne. However, out of sheer luck, he was the only member of the imperial clan who was not kidnapped by the Jurchens, as he was not in the capital at the time of the raid. Since both former Emperors were still alive and did not formally pass the throne to him, the legitimacy of Emperor Gaozong’s ascension had always been in question. In fact, before this incident, Emperor Gaozong had to declare in all

⁵² JYSZJ, 2.132–33.

official documents that he was merely ruling on behalf of the real Emperor. As such, his father's own words of "expedient to ascend the throne" were tantamount to an official affirmation of the transfer of mandate, at a time he most needed it. Naturally, Emperor Gaozong would like this vest, the best proof for the legitimacy of his rule, to be preserved and displayed to all.

Comparing the two accounts, several differences are immediately noticeable. In addition to minor differences such as the mentioning of the location of the conversation and the identity of the secret messenger, as well as the title used to address Emperor Huizong, a more important change in *Current Politics* is the portrayal of Emperor Gaozong as being strongly emotional, since he too was "in tears" when he showed the vest to the ministers; in contrast, in *Advancement and Withdrawal*, he merely "took out" the vest and "decreed." Moreover, in *Current Politics*, Li Gang also downplayed the involvement of the ministers by shortening their response to the Emperor's emotional decree, and ended the episode with a simple but firm statement that the Emperor approved the suggestion to display the vest in the ancestral temple. This nuanced alteration projects an image of the Emperor who was more assertive and in control of the situation, without too much input from his ministers.

In fact, what Li Gang cut short in *Current Politics* is a lot more than just the ministers' response; he also removed a long discussion between Emperor Gaozong and himself, which took place after the "secret vest" episode and is recorded in *Advancement and Withdrawal*. Upon dismissing the other ministers, Emperor Gaozong kept only Li Gang behind, and posed to him a difficult question:

Emperor Qinzong was industrious with state affairs; when reading and examining memorials and proposals, [he would] sometimes stay up all night without sleeping. Yet, such calamity of dislocation (*i.e.* the “Calamity of the Jingkang Era”) still occurred. Why? ⁵³

淵聖勤于政事，省覽章奏，有至終夜不寢，而卒有播遷之禍，何也？

To answer this question, Li Gang gave an elaborate explanation of how the Song court had lost two precious opportunities to reverse the deteriorating situation of the regime, and ultimately attributing the calamity to Emperor Qinzong whom, he claimed, “was unable to distinguish the loyal from the evil and, when differing opinions poured in, was misled by vile people” 不能分別忠邪，羣言紛至，為小人之所惑。⁵⁴ Emperor Gaozong then asked a second question:

In the beginning of the Jingkang Era, we were able to defend [the capital city], but when the Jurchens came back again, we were unable to defend it. Why? ⁵⁵

靖康之初能守，而金人再來，遂不能守，何也？

This time, Li Gang answered by listing five differences between the two attacks of the Jurchen army. This episode between the Emperor and him, however, is still not over, for *Advancement and Withdrawal* documents yet another court meeting the following day, when Li Gang presented his old memorials and proposals on defense strategies against the Jurchen army to Emperor Gaozong, who was interested in Li’s effort during the Jingkang Era.

⁵³ JYJZ, 3.81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.82.

This lengthy episode, beginning with the secret message from Emperor Huizong and later developing into an extensive reflection upon the fall of the Northern Song, is one of the most in-depth exchanges between Emperor Gaozong and Li Gang. In fact, this issue has pre-occupied Li Gang's mind for a long time, as evidenced by its many appearances in his *biji* works. In his search for answer on what had gone wrong, he was convinced that even in the heat of the defense of the capital, the fate of the Northern Song could be savaged if his line of policies and measures had been followed. For example, in *Transmitting the Credible*, he invoked again the analogy comparing the situation of the time to that of a critically ill patient, this time in need of a strong (or even potentially poisonous) dose of medication:

It is just like a sick person, whose symptoms are clear and for whom poisonous medicine is necessary. If not used, even though he might be well for the time being, the illness will surely come back. This is the undoubtable truth.⁵⁶

譬犹病者，證候既明，當用毒藥而不用，虽暫得安，疾必再来，此必至之理也。

The “poisonous medicine” here no doubt refers to drastic measures that were necessary in order to save the problematic regime, such as the large-scale reforms that Li Gang championed at time, many of which would sacrifice the interests of court officials and imperial clan members. When his suggestions were not heeded to by the Emperor, Li again invoked a metaphor of a doctor who correctly diagnosed the condition of a patient but whose proposed plan for treatment was ignored.⁵⁷ Considering how frequently Li Gang has

⁵⁶ JKCXL, 7.

⁵⁷ See JYJTZ, 4.95.

evoked this analogy, he probably considered himself the doctor who holds the medicine.⁵⁸ When he realized that the Northern Song was doomed because the Emperor would not listen to him, all he could do was only to cry to the heaven to vent out his disappointment and regret, as we have seen earlier.

All these vivid details, however, are absent in *Current Politics*. Instead, what is recorded in *Current Politics* is just that succinct passage quoted above, which stands as an isolated episode among a series of political debates and court proceedings. By excluding details on these potentially sensitive discussions and disputes, *Current Politics* portrays a more neutral and objective image of the Emperor who, in addition to being a highly filial son, also wields undoubted authority in court. Moreover, Li Gang also erased many traces of his own presence in this lengthy episode, since such focused spotlight on any one minister, let alone the author himself, is inappropriate for official court records such as *Current Politics*.

4.1.3. *Transmitting the truth with personalized history*

The two examples discussed above illustrate the nuanced yet critical deliberations that Song literati needed to consider when making their generic choice: potentially sensitive details or strong personal opinions are better left to the more lax and inclusive platforms such as *Advancement and Withdrawal*. However, *Advancement and Withdrawal* is by no means the only work in which such “inappropriate” details are featured. In fact, the presentation of highly

⁵⁸ Li Gang also wrote a treatise titled “Yiguo shuo” 醫國說, in which he elaborates on the idea that the state resembles a sick person in urgent need of good doctor. See LGQJ, 157.1457-1458.

personal perspectives has been a prominent feature among many of the *biji* works from the Song. While their topicality or focus may vary widely from one another, these *biji* works share something fundamental in common: their authors were all attempting to keep a record of the history as they themselves lived, and that such personal accounts have an intrinsic value precisely because they are distinctively personal. The conviction in such value is perhaps best manifested in the preface Li Gang wrote to his *Transmitting the Credible*, the sole record of his experience defending the capital city in 1127. In it, he points out how his own work would be different from those written by many others on the same events:

The change of reign name during the Jingkang era and the invasion of the Jurchens into the imperial palace were indeed monumental transitions for the Middle Kingdom. Nothing like these has ever been recorded in books and documents. Regarding the essence of the responses and measures taken by the court, people all knew them and often wrote about them in secret. However, as for [what happened] in court or behind the curtains [of the palace], those debates, compromises, issues and situations on which the security of the state and the interests of the folk relied, people had no way of knowing. Even if they did write about them, they often missed the truth. This is my reason for writing the *Accounts of Transmitting the Credible*.⁵⁹

靖康改元，金人犯闕，實中國之大變，典籍所載，未之有也。朝廷應變設施大略，衆人所共知者，往往私竊書之；至於廟堂之上，帷幄之中，議論取舍，事情物態，爲宗社安危、生民利害之所係者，衆人所不得而知，書之或失其實，此《傳信錄》所為作也。

An important fact to note here is that the main events covered in Li's book had in fact been written about "in secret" by many people. However, Li Gang also pointed out two key factors that distinguish his own writing. First, despite the many previous attempts, those decisive moments and deliberations that shaped the fate of the Song during the Jingkang

⁵⁹ JKCXL, 6.

era remained unknown to the crowd. Second, apart from the “essence” of main events that were already known publicly, these previous writers had gotten many of the facts and details wrong, likely due to their use of rumors or unreliable accounts as their sources. Therefore, it would take someone who actually lived through those decisive moments like himself to render a truthful account, as he had blatantly indicated in the title of his book, *Accounts of Transmitting the Credible of the Jingkang Era*. Towards the end of the preface, Li Gang reiterated his conviction in his obligation to posterity with the following declaration:

Therefore, I record here the truth without any reservation, and hope that those who read this writing in the future will have something to ponder upon.⁶⁰

故余于此錄記其實而無所隱，庶幾後之覽者有感于斯文。

Like *Advancement and Withdrawal*, *Transmitting the Credible* is also a chronologically structured first-person narrative, which begins from the winter of 1125 when the Jurchen army broke the Song-Jurchen alliance, and ends with Li Gang’s demotion after his failed attempt to revive the regime. Of particular note is its portrayal of the chaotic and messy court politics, presented in its ugliness, in a direct and highly detailed manner rarely seen in other works on similar themes. Yet, despite its focus on major historical events, *Transmitting the Credible* is also a highly personal account, in its own unique ways.

Firstly, in this work Li Gang cleverly used the relative voices of the Emperor and himself to suggest the delicate shifts in their relationship. In the first few *juan*, Li Gang often described friendly conversations between the Emperor and himself, quoting their words

⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

directly and in full. For example, a most vivid account took place when he first met Emperor Qinzong, who mentioned that he had actually read one of Li's memorials when he was still the prince and had written a poem on it.⁶¹ As time went by, however, the Emperor became more silent in Li's account as we hear fewer and fewer words from him directly, whereas Li's own voice was often made more conspicuous by including complete memorials that he had submitted or lengthy speeches that he made in court. When it comes to the last *juan*, Emperor Qinzong no longer "speaks" directly in the narrative. Instead, in response to Li's many proposals on various political and military issue, which were convincingly argued, the Emperor actions were often portrayed simply and bluntly as "His Majesty issued a hand-written edict in a few hundred words, disapproving [the proposal]" 上降手詔數百言，不允，⁶² or that he had put an important "discussion to halt" 議寢".⁶³ Such striking contrast suggests the gradual evolution of the Emperor's attitude towards him from one of mutual trust and appreciation to one of dismissal.

In addition to fine-tuning the balance of voices between the Emperor and himself, Li Gang also included in *Transmitting the Credible* many emotional, monologue-like expressions scattered throughout the book. For example, during the early days when he had direct interactions with the Emperor who followed many of his proposals, he would often express his heartfelt elation by saying "I secretly sighed that His Majesty had handled

⁶¹ Ibid., 1.10.

⁶² Ibid., 3.32.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.34.

[the issue] appropriately” 余竊歎上裁處之當,⁶⁴ or “I therefore secretly sighed that the heavenly judgment of the Daoist Emperor was incomparable” 余於是竊歎道君天度之不可及也。⁶⁵ However, over time, as many of his proposals became ignored or poorly executed, we begin to see unsettling comment such as “I secretly worried about it” 余竊私憂之。⁶⁶ At times when Li Gang thought that he had convinced the Emperor on an issue with his arguments, the court decree that was issued would prove otherwise. Knowing that his time in court had passed, he submitted an appeal for retirement, lamenting: “I secretly sighed: there is nothing more left for me to do” 余竊嘆曰: 事無可為者矣。⁶⁷ These highly emotional, monologue-like exclamations all share a very similar linguistic pattern, and all appear rather incongruous with the main narrative flow. They not only form an annotative thread connecting the development of events with the fluctuations in Li Gang’s feelings, but also serve as a guide for his actions at each of these critical junctures, ultimately leading towards his resignation. In this way, Li Gang also projects an image of himself as someone who had the full autonomy in deciding his own fate.

This thread of Li’s relationship with the Emperor as depicted in *Transmitting the Credible* also functions in a nuanced yet significant way in *Advancement and Withdrawal*. Similarly, in the beginning of Li’s tenure, Emperor Gaozong had frequent personal interactions with him, and provided the much-needed support that relieved his doubts about potential opposition from other court officials. During the deliberation of the “Ten Strategies,” Li Gang was

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1.18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.28

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.34.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.44

often kept behind after regular court sessions (as we have seen earlier); during these private conversations with the Emperor, he managed to persuade him to reverse his court decisions several times. Over time, however, Li Gang was gradually sidelined, as he noticed that many policy decisions were made without him being present. Correspondingly, the Emperor appears less and less frequently in Li's account, and his assessments of the situation relied more and more on his inference and guess, rather than direct communications with the Emperor. In such way, by carefully designing the appearance and image of the Emperor, Li Gang euphemistically encoded in the narrative his changed position in court politics as well as his personal attitude towards the Emperor, forming a narrative thread that runs parallel to the main sequence of events documented in the book. In that sense, both *Transmitting the Credible* and *Advancement and Withdrawal* have become personalized histories of a grand national tragedy.

4.2. Making the Generic Choice among the Transitional Generation

Among the transitional generation of writers, the case of Li Gang is a rare one due to his first-hand experience at the center of the political whirlpool of the time. He is, however, by no means the only writer among his generation who wrote in *biji*, as many others also chose this genre to document different aspects of the Northern-Southern Song transition. A brief examination of their generic choices will therefore shed light on both the characteristics common to this form of writing as well as the factors that helped shape them during the Song. Among them, a group of officials stand out for a unique experience they shared,

which put their identity, loyalty, as well as the issue of how to remember the Northern Song on the spot. They were the Song envoys to the Jurchens,⁶⁸ many of whom stayed in the North for many years (mostly against their will), and wrote on diverse topics either during their stay or upon returning to the Southern Song to record their observations. Take for example Hong Hao 洪皓 (1088–1155), the father of Hong Mai and a loyal official who was detained in Jurchen land for fifteen years and was only released back to the Song after the signing of the Shaoxing Peace Treaty 紹興和議.⁶⁹ His *biji* collection titled *Songmo jiwén* 松漠紀聞, or *Record of What I Heard in Songmo* (hereafter as *Record of What I Heard*),⁷⁰ whose textual history will be discussed below, contains a wealth of precious information on geographical, political, legal and cultural aspects of the Jin, ranging from military organization and social customs to its ways of selecting personnel for bureaucracy.⁷¹

Another representative figure among these envoys, Zhu Bian 朱弁 (1085–1144), wrote about very different things. Zhu, a native of Wuyuan 婺源 (in present-day Jiangxi province), was a scholar-official who entered the imperial academy when he was around twenty years old. During that period, he got to know Chao Yuezhi and became his follower. Over time, Zhu grew closer to Chao and his friends, which included the extraordinary Chao family

⁶⁸ For an excellent discussion of these diplomatic missions during the Song, see Herbert Franke, “Sung Embassies: Some General Observations,” in *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 116–148.

⁶⁹ See Tuotuo et al., *Songshi*, 373.11557–11562.

⁷⁰ “Songmo” was originally the name of a military commandery 都督府 in the Tang dynasty in charge of the Khitan tribes. See Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 219.6168. The term was later used to generally denote the land of Khitans and Jurchens in the northeast.

⁷¹ See Hong Hao, *Songmo jiwén*, punct. and coll. Zhang Jianguang 張劍光 and Liu Li 劉麗, in QSBJ, ser. III, vol. 7, 111–142 [hereafter as SMJW]. In fact, even during his time in the North, Hong had repeatedly sent secret reports on the Jurchen court back to the Song.

and other famous literati such as Su Shi. During the Jingkang era, Zhu Bian lost his wife and son in the war and the turmoil. Bereft by the tragedy and propelled by sorrow and anger, he volunteered to go to the Jin court in 1127 as a deputy peace emissary 通問副使. He was also detained by the Jurchens, and was only released back some sixteen years later.⁷² During his detainment in the North, Zhu exhibited unbending resolve and loyalty towards the Song. Not knowing whether he would be able to return to the South alive, he very likely felt a strong urge to record down his experience and thoughts. Unfortunately, his poetry collections are no longer extant today; all we have is a ten-juan collection of *biji* titled *Quwei jiuwen* 曲洧舊聞, or *Old Information from the Meandering River Wei* (hereafter as *Old Information*), named after River Wei in Xinzheng 新鄭 (in present-day Henan province), where Zhu used to enjoy the mentorship and company of Chao Yuezhi and other literati.⁷³

While the phrase “old information” generally refers to anecdotes from the past, in this case it more specifically refers to the many stories about Northern Song court politics that Zhu had experienced or heard from Chao Yuezhi. In fact, more than half of the entries in the book deal with various aspects of the Northern Song court, ranging from the more serious behind-the-curtain debates on major policies to trivia such as hobbies of the Emperors and personal relationships between ministers. The remaining parts of the book are anecdotal accounts of literati life during the Northern Song as well as the usual comments on poetry and prose. Among these entries, the figure that receives the most

⁷² See Tuotuo et al., *Songshi*, 373.11551–11553.

⁷³ See Zhu Bian, *Quwei jiuwen*, punct. and coll. Zhang Jianguang, in QSB], ser. III, vol. 7, 1–91 [hereafter as QWJW].

attention is Su Shi, with 21 entries featuring him at the center and 19 more in which he was involved, which together account for almost one seventh of the entire book. Although *Old Information* contains no preface or postscript for us to probe into Zhu's motives behind his composition, evidence scattered in the main text indicate that he wrote this book as a memoir, for the Southern Song readers, of what he personally considered to be significant episodes, moments, or details in Northern Song history that should not fall into oblivion. For example, one entry in the book recounts Chao Yuezhi's words about an unusual event during Emperor Renzong's reign:

During Emperor Renzong's time, the person who first proposed the selection of an heir to the throne was the defender of the Yin District from Mingzhou Prefecture (present-day Ningbo), whose name was not recorded. Chao Yidao (*i.e.* Chao Yuezhi) once told me [this story]. Now that a long time has passed, and with all the chaos and losses, [such detail] is no longer recorded by historians. It is truly a pity.⁷⁴

仁宗時，最先言立皇嗣者，明州鄞縣尉，不記姓名。晁以道嘗為予言。閱歲久，又經此喪亂，史家又復不載，可惜也。

All three sons of Emperor Renzong (r. 1022–1063) died very young and he did not have any brother, therefore, choosing an heir was probably a highly sensitive matter even for court officials in charge of ceremonial rituals to broach, let alone a lowly district defender. Despite his courage, his name had unfortunately been forgotten by the time of Chao, and so would this entire incident had it not been for Zhu Bian. Like the many other seemingly inconsequential people and moments in the history of the previous dynasty, Zhu believed that they are still worth remembering, and therefore recorded them in his *Old Information*.

⁷⁴ QWJW, 1.11.

This episode, while trivial in appearance, serves as a best footnote for why Zhu compiled such a book. As someone trapped in a foreign (and perhaps in his mind uncivilized) land, Zhu took these anecdotes on court politics and literati life as precious mementos from the past era to relieve his nostalgia for the homeland. More importantly, recording these things was his way of keeping himself connected with the culture from which he had been exiled. Moreover, compared with other Song writers who wrote *biji* on the literati world, Zhu Bian possessed a uniquely strong sense that he was standing at the end of an era, looking back at the Northern Song and portraying multiple figures over a long temporal span. Such a *longue durée* perspective allowed him to distill long-term trends and changes in the history of the Northern Song, similar to his notes on the different fashions in writing letters that we have discussed in Chapter 1.

So far, having examined several *biji* works, an official historical record,⁷⁵ as well as a long narrative poem, all covering similar period, we have glimpsed into their many shared commonalities (e.g. in themes, imagery, and expression) as well as the various differences. Equipped with an understanding of the textual boundaries of these respective genres as perceived by literati of the time, it is perhaps an appropriate place for us to pause and reflect on the unique discursive space provided by *biji* as well as the considerations behind these literati's choices of adopting a particular genre.

⁷⁵ In fact, *Current Politics* is also collected by QSBJ. This, however, does not change its nature as a collection of reference materials for official dynastic histories.

As we have touched upon in the Introduction, since the art of poetry had been developed to a very advanced level during the Tang dynasty, poets of the Song were seeking new and untrodden paths for further exploration. However, an aspect intrinsic to the poetic tradition that was rarely challenged up to the Song was the ways in which the emperor, or any ruler in recent history for that matter, could be portrayed. Given the fact that the composition and consumption of poetry were very much a court activity up to the mid-Tang, a fundamental assumption for all poets composing on courtly occasions (such as banquets or ceremonies) was that the emperor could be one of the readers of the poem, and thus the poet could not speak evil of him freely. While it was true that the writer could always appeal to history and draw upon allusions of either sage or inept rulers from the past as models for their admonitions, such course of action was not possible when writing about the current ruler or his ancestors. Moreover, the possibility of social criticism in poetry further collapsed since late eleventh century, especially after the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial and the several cases of literary censorship during Emperor Huizong's reign, as discussed in detail in Introduction and Chapter 1. As far as the court was concerned, what was most troubling in Su Shi's poetic works under the spotlight was neither the popularity nor the witticism, but rather the ambiguity in these poems, which left open myriad possibilities for interpretation and thus made the court vulnerable to potential criticism or ridicule. As such, the Trial led not only to a heightened sense of insecurity associated with the genre of poetry (as evidenced by Li Gang's conscious avoidance of composing poems during the Jingkang Era), but also an urge among writers to self-censor and eliminate ambiguities in their works (as evidenced by the many plain or even unpoetic parts in Li's

“Ballad”). Such a “crusade” against ambiguity fundamentally limited the role of poetry both as a literary form and as a discursive platform for political remonstrance.

In addition to the limitations imposed on poetry, writing private history continued to be a taboo in the Northern Song. As discussed in Chapter 1, while there was never any explicit policy banning the compilation of unofficial histories, in practice the court constantly paid close attention to any such project undertaken by an individual or a group, and would not hesitate in summoning or even confiscating such works.⁷⁶ All these factors acted in concert and made Song literati increasingly wary of the potential sensitivity of their writings, as well as exceedingly cautious when adopting traditional genres for their compositions.

It is perhaps against such a historical backdrop that we could better appreciate why many authors of the transitional generation dived into *biji* when writing about this period. In previous scholarship on Song dynasty *biji*, these works, which had been grouped under the umbrella of “*biji* during the Southward Retreat period” 南渡时期筆記, were often considered to have limited thematic scope as well as low output, as compared to the periods before and after the transition.⁷⁷ While it is true that a significant fraction of the *biji* from this period focus on the war of the Jingkang Era, and that many of them may have been lost in the turmoil and dislocation, the fact that so many writers still chose this form of

⁷⁶ For more information on the composition of official histories and state control of private histories in the Song dynasty, see Song Limin 宋立民, “Songdai shiguan yange kao” 宋代史館沿革考, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 1 (1994): 156–161; and Wang Sheng'en 王盛恩, “Songdai ‘Sishi zhi jin’ qi yuan xianyi” 宋代“私史之禁”起源獻疑, *Lishi wenxian yanjiu* 歷史文獻研究 32 (2013): 204–210.

⁷⁷ For such periodization of Song *biji*, see for example Zhang, “Shilun Nan Bei Song biji de butong.”

writing in fact attests to its coming of age as a mature genre and a ready option for literati. In a chaotic time when court documents were scattered and official discourse brought to a halt, *biji* provided an avenue to record those momentary episodes in the life of each author, with the posterity, and not the court, as their target audience. Such conscious choice reveals a conviction in a narrative form based on personal experience and judgment, and one that values history as was lived, witnessed, or remembered by each author. In their hands, *biji* was transformed into a space for writing historical accounts that are both parallel and supplementary to official histories, but nonetheless have intrinsic values in its own right.

4.3. The Making and Remaking of *Biji* Collections

Although the *biji* we have discussed so far have all fortunately survived the war and chaos during the transitional period, it would be naïve to assume that these works we see today are the same as the manuscripts on Li Gang's table or the pile of notes Zhu Bian brought back from the Jurchen land. In fact, the majority of the *biji* works attributed to Northern Song or the transitional generation of writers had undergone numerous alterations in the hands of Southern Song people, and were heavily edited or recompiled before being finalized as "fixed editions" 定本, from which most of the Song *biji* works we have today are derived. In this section, we examine two major modes involved in the preservation and formation of these *biji* texts: the continuous editing, expanding and trimming of individual *biji* collections, and the quotation or usage of *biji* as sources in major historical works.

Most of the *biji* works written during the Northern Song were initially circulated independently from the literary collections of their authors; in some cases, they could even remain buried among the unsorted manuscripts of the author. As we have repeatedly pointed out in the previous chapters, when Southern Song people avidly amassed the writings of Northern Song literati, a wide range of miscellaneous texts were collected, streamlined and compiled into collections by a variety of people, including the author's family members, friends, admirers, enthusiastic collectors, as well as publishers seeking to profit from publishing these works. This was the process by which many *biji* works took their definitive shape. Sometimes, the expansion or editing done to the work was so extensive that we could almost say that they were “remade”. In that respect, Huang Bosi's (1079–1118) 黃伯思 *Dongguan yulun* 東觀余論, or *Remaining Remarks of the Eastern Hall* (hereafter as *Remaining Remarks*) serves as an illustrative example.⁷⁸

Huang, a native of Shaowu 邵武 (in present-day Fujian province) just like Li Gang, was a talented calligrapher and antiques scholar. Moreover, he was also a connoisseur of calligraphy, having honed his skills by frequently hanging out with many literati friends and looking at their rich private collections. During his tenure as editor 校書郎 and assistant 秘書郎 in the Palace Library 秘閣, he further took advantage of the rare opportunity to closely examine the vast imperial collection of antiques and calligraphy. Having developed a superb judgment and a pair of discerning eyes that allowed him to

⁷⁸ See Huang Bosi, *Dongguan yulun*, punct. and coll. Chen Jinlin 陳金林, in QSB, ser. III, vol. 4, 15–168 [hereafter as DGYL]. The Eastern Hall 東觀 refers to the imperial library during the Song.

spot mistakes that Ouyang Xiu and Mi Fu made in their notes,⁷⁹ he undertook a project to go through the famous *Calligraphic Masterpieces from the Palace Library during the Chunhua Era* 淳化閣帖, a massive imperial collection of some of the most famous calligraphic pieces up to the Song compiled in 992 under the direct order of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976–997). Although Mi Fu had previously pointed out more than a hundred mistakes in the old dating or author attribution of these pieces, Huang considered the task of correcting mistakes unfinished, and spotted many more, some even made by Mi Fu himself. He put his detailed notes into a collection titled *Correction of Errors in Calligraphic Masterpieces* 法帖刊誤. In the meantime, he kept writing *tiba* colophons on the calligraphy, paintings, inscriptions and other antiques that he had seen both in private as well as imperial collections. These notes, not compiled during his lifetime, were kept as manuscripts in his family, and were only published in 1147 when his son Huang Reng 黃訥 grouped them with *Correction of Errors in Calligraphic Masterpieces* and published them together under the title *Remaining Remarks of the Eastern Hall*.⁸⁰ The book became very popular in the Southern Song, since we know that there were at least three printed editions by around 1210.⁸¹

In light of these information, our understanding of *Remaining Remarks* as a *biji* work by Huang Bosi needs to be carefully reconsidered. First, while its individual entries were

⁷⁹ See Huang Bosi, “‘Fatie kanwu’ xu” 《法帖刊誤》敘, in DGYL, 1.26; and Lou Yue’s 樓鑰 (1137–1213) *ba* in *ibid.*, 158–159.

⁸⁰ See Huang Reng’s *ba* in *ibid.*, 157. For a more detailed account of how *Remaining Remarks* took its current form, see Wang Hongsheng 王宏生, *Beisong shuxue wenxian kaolun* 北宋書學文獻考論 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2008), 300–304.

⁸¹ They are the original “Jianyang edition” 建本 printed by Huang Reng, the “Shu edition” 蜀本, and the “Three Liu’s edition” 三劉本. See Zhuang Xia’s 莊夏 (1155–1223) *ba* in DGYL, 159–160.

indeed written by Huang, the work owes its overall organization to Huang's son.⁸² Second, the *Remaining Remarks* as we know today is an amalgamation between a small collection of *biji* notes and a group of scattered *tiba* entries. In fact, as far as the contents are concerned, this book is perhaps more appropriately termed as a *tiba* collection. The reason that it did not come down to us as one is probably due to the title that Huang Reng picked for it: the phrase "remaining remarks", which was originally intended to point out its supplementary nature to the few more important works that Huang Bosi had written, inevitably makes it sounds more like a general collection of *biji*. Such extensive textual transformations are in fact common for many of the *biji* works made and remade during the Southern Song. While the benchmarks used by the editor, the compiler or the publisher on what to include vary, they nonetheless involve some forms of selection from a large pool of miscellaneous entries and re-structuring them according to certain thematic or formal guidelines.

Hong Hao's *Record of What I Heard* is another example of such textual changes. As mentioned earlier, during his fifteen-year detainment in the North, Hong kept extensive notes on what he had experienced and learned about the Jurchens. When he was finally permitted to return to the Song in 1143 together with Zhu Bian, he however chose to burn all but one piece of his writings, out of the fear that they might put his trip in jeopardy should the Jurchens find out about them.⁸³ After Hong returned, he suffered from

⁸²Ibid., 157.

⁸³Hong's worry was not unwarranted as he had heard of the experience of Meng Yu 孟庾, another Song official sent to the Jurchens. When Meng was about to return, the Jurchens searched his luggage and found his writings, and almost did not allow him to return. The only piece of writing that Hong did not burn and managed to bring back (possibly by hiding well) was *Jinguo wenju lu* 金國文具錄, a piece on the

continuous political setback due to his opposing opinions against powerful minister Qin Gui 秦檜 (1091–1155). Later, during his demotion to the south, he would occasionally recount his experience in the North to his eldest son Hong Kuo 洪遵 (1117–1184), who would then write them down.⁸⁴ After Hong Hao passed away in 1155, Hong Kuo compiled these notes together and published them as *Record of What I Heard*. The book was printed multiple times during the Song and remained popular. One of the reprints was done in 1173, when Hong Hao's second son Hong Zun 洪遵 (1120–1174) was serving as prefect of Jiankang 建康. He searched the manuscripts left by his father and found eleven more entries related to his Jurchen mission, which he subsequently included into the reprint as a “supplement” 補遺.⁸⁵ As such, *Record of What I Heard* is in fact the collective work of a father and his two sons, who took part in the recounting, recording, compiling, and publishing of the work as well as expanding it to its final form.

The textual histories of *Remaining Remarks* and *Record of What I Heard* are perhaps extreme cases of how a *biji* collection was made and remade in the Southern Song. There were indeed many authors who managed to organize and revise their writings into their finalized form during their own lifetimes.⁸⁶ They, however, could not control the ways in which their works might be transformed posthumously. Take again for example the works of Li Gang, whose *Current Politics* was presented to the court while *Advancement and*

bureaucratic system of the Jin which he later presented to Emperor Gaozong. See Hong Hao, *Jinguo wenju lu*, punct. and coll. Zhang Jianguang and Liu Li, in QSBJ, ser. III, vol. 7, 143–145.

⁸⁴ In fact, Hong Kuo wrote a note accounting for this process and attached it to the end of his father's work. See SMJW, 138–139.

⁸⁵ See “Dianjiao shuoming,” in *ibid.*, 113–114.

⁸⁶ One example is Ouyang Xiu, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Withdrawal and *Transmitting the Credible* were probably kept in his family. By 1209, these three *biji* works had been trimmed down to 4 *juan*, 3 *juan*, and 3 *juan*, respectively;⁸⁷ the original dossiers of official documents as well as the many lengthy quotations of proposals that Li included in them were taken out, and only the narrative accounts were kept.⁸⁸

Even within those parts that remain, alterations to the language and details were also made. For that matter, *Transmitting the Credible of the Jingkang Era* provides us with a rare window. The different editions extant today belong to two textual systems originating from early Song texts. Based on taboo words and usage of dates, we know that one system took shape probably before Emperor Gaozong's enthronement, and the other during or after the Jianyan era.⁸⁹ The earlier system was probably very close to Li Gang's original composition. By comparing editions from the two systems, we can see the editing and cutting that took place in early Southern Song. Besides minor changes such as deleting the names of officials or modifying the strategies for defending the capital city, a more illustrating revision pertains to the mentioning of Prince Kang 康王, who would later become Emperor Gaozong. For example, regarding how he was sent to the Jurchens as a hostage, the account changed

⁸⁷ We know this from a note written by Li Gang's grandson Li Dayou 李大有, dated 1209. See LGQJ, 1765–1766. It is not clear who did the trimming, although it was likely Li Gang's son Li Xiuzhi 李秀之. The first known time that these three *biji* works were printed was 1213, as part of *Liangxi ji*. For an account of the transformation of Li Gang's literary works and collections, see Zhu Shangshu, *Songdai bieji xulu*, 768–769.

⁸⁸ In 1176, Li Xiuzhi compiled his father's official court writings into an eighty-*juan* *Collection of Court Memorials and Proposals* 表劄奏議集. See Chen Junqing 陳俊卿, "Zouyi yuan xu" 奏議原序, in LGQJ, 1–2. The voluminous original documents that were taken out from his three *biji* works were very likely compiled into this collection.

⁸⁹ The pre-Gaozong system includes the *Shaowu Xushi congshu* 邵武徐氏叢書 edition (on which the edition in QSBJ is based), *Siku quanshu* edition (as part of *Liangxi ji*), and *Song Li Zhongdinggong wenji xuan* 宋李忠定公文集選 edition. The post-Gaozong system includes the *Daguantang* edition 大觀堂刊本, *Haishan xianguan congshu* 海山仙館叢書 edition (on which the editions used in *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 and *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 are based), and *Hanhai* 函海 edition. See "Dianjiao shuoming," in JKCXL, 3–4.

from “The Emperor’s younger brother Prince Kang and Vice Grand Councilor Zhang Bangchang were made hostage in the Jurchen army” 以皇弟康王、少宰張邦昌為質于金人軍中 to “His Majesty, who was still Prince Kang at the time, was made hostage in the Jurchen army together with Grand Councilor Zhang Bangchang” 今上皇帝方在康邸，俾同宰相張邦昌為質于金人軍中.⁹⁰ Besides using honorific term to refer to the emperor, this change also highlights the ruler-subject relationship between Emperor Gaozong and Zhang Bangchang. Differences as such do not mean that the editions from the early system did not go through revision. If we compare the extant editions with the corresponding parts quoted in major histories compiled in Southern Song, important changes can be discerned. The most illustrative case concerns what happened while the Jurchen army surrounded the capital. For example, when the Song court demoted Li Gang and Chong Shidao 種師道 (1051–1126) as an apologetic gesture for the raid led by Yao Pingzhong on the Jurchens, students of the imperial academy protested. Xu Mengxin’s 徐夢莘 (1124–1207) *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編, or *Collection of Documents Relating to Treaties with the North during the Three Reigns*, quotes Li Gang’s account in *Transmitting the Credible* on this event, and adds that when their appeal to see Li Gang was denied, the students “slayed more than twenty eunuchs” 殺傷內侍二十餘人, and “dismembered all [their bodies], until no hair or bone remained” 皆臠割之, 雖毛骨無存者.⁹¹ The latter line is no longer in any of the extant editions, and we could only surmise how many other similar details had been deleted from the book.

⁹⁰ JKCXL, 1.17.

⁹¹ Xu Mengxin, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), vol. 1, 34.238.

Besides Xu Mengxin's important collection, many other historical works composed in the Southern Song also made extensive use of *biji* as their source, mainly due to the scarcity of official historical records of the transitional period. For example, another such major historical work is Li Xinchuan's 李心傳 (1167–1244) *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* 建炎以來繫年要錄, or *Chronological Record of Important Events since the Jianyan Era*, a critically important annals of early Southern Song history as well as Song-Jin relations. While both Xu and Li recognized that there were mistakes and inaccuracies in *biji*, they nevertheless took these works with the same level of seriousness as other historic records and court documents, and thoroughly examined their sources in order to ascertain their reliability. In this way, these historians indirectly helped preserve many *biji* works through their lengthy and unredacted quotations, which in many cases became the only trace of the original work. More importantly, being included into major historical works legitimizes the status of *biji* as a valid and valuable source of historical records, and fulfills the wishes of many *biji* authors for their writings to “supplement history” 補史, as we have mentioned earlier. In a similar manner, the publication of *biji* works (albeit in their trimmed versions) as part of the literary collection of the author, as in Li Gang's case, serves also as a recognition of *biji* as an integral part of the writer's corpus as well as a mature genre worthy of preservation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we used those *biji* works with a historical focus as a lens to probe into the flourishing of the genre during the Song dynasty. After clarifying the terminological

differences between *xiaoshuo* (or minor talks) and *biji*, we pinpointed early to mid-twelfth century as the critical juncture in the development of the genre. Using three *biji* works by Li Gang as case studies, we addressed two questions central to our inquiry: what considerations prompted literati of the time to use *biji*, as opposed to other more traditional genres, to write about the transitional period between the Northern and Southern Song? And how did these *biji* writings portray and represent aspects of the transitional period that the other genres could not?

To that end, we first looked at Li Gang's representations of his short political tenure as a top-ranking minister in Emperor Gaozong's court during the early days of the Southern Song. By juxtaposing his long poem "Ballad of the Jianyan Era" with the *biji* work *Advancement and Withdrawal*, we illustrated unique features of the *biji* genre for representing nuanced facades of his experiences and opinions as compared to poetry, whose capacity for criticizing current affairs had been severely limited due to the harsh political atmosphere towards poetic writing in the late Northern Song. We then compared *Advancement and Withdrawal* with *Current Politics*, a collection in preparation for official history that Li submitted to the court. By analyzing the selective inclusion and exclusion of key details as well as the differential treatment of the same historical events, we demonstrated how *biji* could serve as a platform for portraying the Emperor in ways that official histories could not, and more importantly for reflecting upon the underlying causes of the Calamity of the Jingkang Era that brought the Northern Song to its end. Together with a third *biji* work by Li Gang, *Transmitting the Credible*, as well as works by other writers of the transitional

generation such as Zhu Bian and Hong Hao, our analyses revealed the multifarious textual characteristics of this genre while tracing its development into an indispensable discursive space for constructing historical narratives from a personal perspective, where the individual experience of the author is highly valued and considered worth preserving for posterity. These seeming marginal writings, therefore, are no “minor talks” after all.

Following close reading and comparison of these *biji* works, we then moved on to examine the often convoluted textual history of *biji* works from the Northern Song and the transitional period. Using the works of Huang Bosi, Hong Hao and Li Gang as examples, we showed how Southern Song people played significant, if not definitive, roles in the making and remaking of many *biji* collections into their finalized forms, a testament to the fluidity of the boundaries of this genre. Many *biji* entries also found their way into major historical works of the time, as they were often quoted in different lengths as valuable sources, an act that indirectly aided in the preservation of these texts.

As the culture of printing became more widespread during the Southern Song, more and more *biji* works were composed, published, and became accessible to a much wider readership. For literati who grew up in the second half of the twelfth century, reading and writing *biji* gradually became a common activity. The popularity of the genre also spurred more literati to join the ranks of *biji* authors, or to even write sequels to their old *biji* works that had become bestsellers. Among them were Hong Mai, the grandson of Hong Hao, and Wang Mingqing, whose father Wang Zhi 王銍 (?-1144) wrote a famous *biji* work of Northern Song anecdotes titled *Moji* 默記. While there is no evidence to indicate that the

interests in *biji* of Hong and Wang were stimulated by their grandfather and father respectively, it is perhaps safe to say over the period of these three generations of writers, *biji* as a literary form had greatly expanded its scope and took on new features and functionalities, allowing it to reach and influence a broader range of readers.

Epilogue

Marginalia, Genre, and the Boundaries of “Literature” Revisited

In this dissertation, I have delineated the process through which a group of miscellaneous texts that had previously been considered marginal and rarely circulated in public became established as new genres in Chinese literature. My inquiry into this cultural transformation integrates approaches from literary studies, book history and material culture, and weaves together three interlocking themes: first, the contents, styles, and aesthetics that came to define these marginalia writings; second, the impact of the transition from manuscript culture to print culture on the production, transmission and reception of these texts; lastly, the changing political, cultural and intellectual milieu from late Northern to early Southern Song. In contrast to previous studies that emphasize certain key works or figures as indicators of the birth of a genre, I approach genre formation as an extended and dynamic process, during which the author's occasional or spontaneous writings are first recognized, then imitated, and finally stabilized as a textual form by becoming a regular category in printed collections.

With this premise, I identified the period from mid-Northern Song to early Southern Song as the critical juncture in the establishment of these genres. Literati of this period actively explored these marginalia texts as a fluid and non-public discursive space largely unpenetrated by the literary censorship that stormed traditional genres such as poetry. Within this new space, they experimented with various forms or possibilities of representation, often without consciously harboring any conception of a new genre. As these texts existed mainly in the form of hand-written manuscripts and were circulated only within a small community without the expectation of publication, literati could dispense with certain moral judgments when writing in these genres, and use them to freely articulate their thoughts on subjects that were considered inappropriate for the more formal genres.

Following the fall of the Northern Song, the marginalia genres were also used by the transitional generation of literati to both offer personal witnesses to as well as make sense of the traumatic dislocation they had experienced. At the same time, a market for the miscellaneous writings from the Northern Song took shape as literati increasingly cherished them as unembellished mementos of literati life before the fall, and consciously inherited them as surviving textual legacies of the past era. The widespread accessibility of printing further stimulated publishers and editors to compete with one another to amass, sort and compile these writings and set them to print, stabilizing their textual and stylistic features in the process, and turning them into regular categories in literary collections throughout late imperial China.

Mechanisms of Genre Formation

Having examined a wide range of factors that are involved in the establishment of marginalia genres, it is appropriate at this point to make a theorizing summary of three main mechanisms at work in this process, as well as some general lessons that could be drawn regarding the study of genres in pre-modern China. The first mode of genre formation begins with shifting aesthetic conceptualizations or ways of appreciation, which may lead to changes in the status of a group of writings, for instance from serving mainly practical or functional purposes within a specific social sphere to becoming subjects of a wider literary readership. The development of letteret is one such example. Even though the change in this case was triggered by a fervent urge to collect calligraphic works handwritten by famous literati, the act of composing such texts itself was also changed in the process. In such case, the practice of compiling and reading by the reader and the practice of writing by the writer are mutually defining, as the identities of the author, the collector, and the reader are often interchangeable.

The exploration of new textual forms to record spoken words 記言 provides the second mechanism for the development of new genres. Although written composition had over the ages become the central venue for transmitting ideas, the importance attached to the spoken words never quite diminished in the Chinese tradition. Over time, the genre of *yulu* 語錄, as epitomized by works such as the *Analects* and *Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu* 朱子語類, gradually emerged as one way to record down the sayings of a master by his disciples. In a similar way, the interest in recording down anecdotal hearsays is perhaps an

equally old tradition. However, sustained attempts over a long period of time in collecting, writing and compiling such anecdotes on a large scale was a new trend that emerged during the Song. As our discussions of *biji* and *shihua* have shown, Song authors used these short prose forms to record both words and conversations that they directly heard or had and those that were recounted to them, and further developed these genres to encompass many other themes and functionalities.

The third driving force for the creation of new generic categories comes from the rising interest in paratextual information, in both material and textual forms. For example, poetry is often sent together with an accompanying letter; a piece of fine painting or calligraphy often comes with a *tiba* colophon on its margin, with more and more of them being appended over time. In the beginning, people might have kept these textual paraphernalia on grounds of their relation to the central object, but gradually these writings took on values on their own. As much as fans want to own a work by a great writer or painter, they also want to own any accessory piece that provides the background stories behind that work or stands as a witness to its transmission between the hands of successive collectors. In that sense, a unique paratextual accompaniment to a piece of work or object has come to be as valuable as the piece itself.

As we have pointed out in the Introduction and illustrated throughout this dissertation, a genre is a set of norms, both for the composition as well as the transmission of the text, to which writers adhere, either consciously or unconsciously. For any genre, the set of norms consists of several core characteristics as well as some loosely defined peripheral features,

which sometimes can be shared with other genres. Therefore, every new genre can have multiple textual loci of origin, where certain novel features are experimented. But the defining moment of "birth" comes when this set of norms changes from being explorative and unconsciously followed to widely recognized and consciously followed by all, as best reflected by its categorization in the anthologies or bibliographies of the time.

Revisiting the Meaning of "Literature" and Song Literary History

How, then, does such stories of change in the generic landscape inform us on the grander theme of the meaning of "literature", or *wen* 文, both in Song time as well as in the Chinese tradition at large?¹ As a central intellectual and literary concept in pre-modern China, the significance of *wen* has undergone many transformations through the ages, for which many explanatory frameworks have been put forth. The framework that is perhaps most relevant to our study approaches *wen* as a discursive field that consists of a core of established categories as well as a flexible perimeter. These categories would keep on expanding as new discursive spaces formed at intersections with the perimeter and interacted with established categories.² This is not a definition based on creativity, fictionality, or other aesthetical

¹ There is a significant hermeneutical gap between "literature" as a discipline rooted in the Western tradition and "*wen*" as perceived in pre-modern China, which carries a much wider range of meanings including patterns, culture, and writings. The most thorough analysis on this concept is provided in Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Given the complex and shifting meaning of this term, defining what constitutes "*wen*" for the Song people is a question that no scholar of this period can avoid.

² See Stephen Owen, "Key Concepts of 'Literature,'" in Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yee Li and Xiaofei Tian eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3–12.

standards that have been argued as core yardsticks for literature, but rather a framework that treats genres as dynamic entities with blurry boundaries that exist in a relational structure within the field of writing as a whole. In that sense, the formation of the various marginalia genres during the Song delineated in this dissertation can be seen as part of the continuous expansion of field of *wen*. Texts that were initially not considered as literature or worthy to be incorporated into literary collections were, over time, taken into the territories of *wen*, as a consequence of the interactions among authors, readers, and compilers, as well as the changing ways in which they conceive these texts.

With such an understanding of genre formation, we can then ask ourselves how different will our account be if we were to re-write the literary history of Song from the perspective of the marginalia world, or from the grey area where established genres and new discursive space are most interactive. One obvious difference is that such a literary history will inevitably have a very different pantheon of literary figures or protagonists. For example, as we have shown, many of the receivers of letterets by major writers in the Song were in fact minor figures, even those outside of the cliques of the famous writers. It is through the epistolary network that we have come to know the key roles played by these people who would have otherwise received little attention, such as Xu Wudang and Li Qingchen. From the various *tiba* and *shihua*, we have come to hear the opinions of Liu Ban on poetic history, and see how some of the young poets of the transitional generation contributed to the formation of the narrative on the "Jiangxi Poetry School." As for the literary memory of the Northern-Southern Song transition, our account would be

incomplete and less vivid if not for people like Li Gang, Hong Hao and Zhu Bian who recounted their personal experiences as well as what they heard from others in their *biji* works. Almost all of these figures were well-educated literati who also composed a significant amount of poetry, most of which unfortunately did not survive till today. In light of their relatively minor status in the conventional history of Song dynasty literature, it is evident that their choice of writing in these marginalia genres not only preserved for posterity invaluable literary accounts complementary to those recorded in traditional genres, but also helped shape their own legacy in the literary history of the Song.

Another area that distinguishes such literary historical account as ours is the emphasis on the often-neglected material aspects of literature, in particular the roles played by such materiality in the transmission and reception of literary works. For example, in the age of manuscript culture, the potential calligraphic value of many works of literature would play a significant part in the possibility of their preservation, even though the reason for such preservation might be unrelated to the content of the piece. Moreover, in the process of categorizing or copying a hand-written piece, certain parts, especially the opening and ending (for example the addressee in a letteret), could be cut out and thus become lost. Such changes could drastically alter the tone of the piece, for example make it look like a note that records the author's words directly rather than expressing them in the form of a letter to another person. In that sense, the material conditions of a work's preservation, as dictated by the process of compiling it, could fundamentally determine the shape, category, and genre this piece turns out to belong.

Limitations and Outlook

As much as we would like to be comprehensive in our coverage and thorough in our treatment, the scope of this dissertation is fundamentally limited by what can be encompassed in these four modest chapters. One key limitation concerns the extent to which the few works discussed in these chapters can be representative of the vast corpus of marginalia texts produced during the Song. While the sheer amount of these texts makes them indispensable to our understanding of the literary landscape of the Song, it also poses tremendous challenge on coming up with a comprehensive framework to account for these diverse texts. This problem of representativeness stands out especially in Chapter 4, as we only focus on one sub-type of *biji* works, namely those of a historical nature, although such works constitute one of the largest themes in all Song *biji* works. While we have used a few representative works from the Northern-Southern Song transition as examples to argue that the urge to offer personal historical account is essential for understanding not only the *biji* works we have discussed but also for any *biji* writings from the period, more *biji* works on other themes need to be examined in order to convincingly demonstrate the general applicability of such argument.

For future research, one potential follow-up is to look into the portrayal of Su Shi and his literary community in *biji* works from the transitional period up to the early Southern Song. By examining how his image was shaped through the continuous telling and retelling of anecdotes on him by his followers and admirers, we can gain a glimpse into the ways Northern Song literati culture was remembered in the Southern Song. Another theme that

merits further look is the development of an appreciation of craftsmanship and polymathic knowledge in the Southern Song. This was important partly as a result of the impact of Shen Kuo's *Mengxi bitan* (or *Penned Talks by the Dream Creek*), but also because of the popularity of the many *biji* works with specialized knowledge, ranging from tea to bamboo shoots, and from ink to stone.

Overall, this dissertation has taken a preliminary step in shedding light on how judgments of literary values were constructed in pre-modern China, and how boundaries of the literary landscape shifted as a consequence of the ever-evolving human-text-object interactions. Such questions are particularly pertinent to the age we live in, where the definition of literature and even of writing is being fundamentally challenged by emerging new media, as well as by new modes of writing and reading literature via online mechanisms such as commenting, liking, sharing and a wide range of fan activities. It is my hope that such preliminary exploration will not only elicit further research on relevant issues, but also help us reflect what it means to write and create, as well as what is transient and what is long-lasting in this Internet era.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

- CSJCCB: *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編
- LDSH: *Lidai shihua* 歷代詩話
- QSBJ: *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記
- SKQS: *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書
- SSHQB: *Song shihua quanbian* 宋詩話全編
- XXSKQS: *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書

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