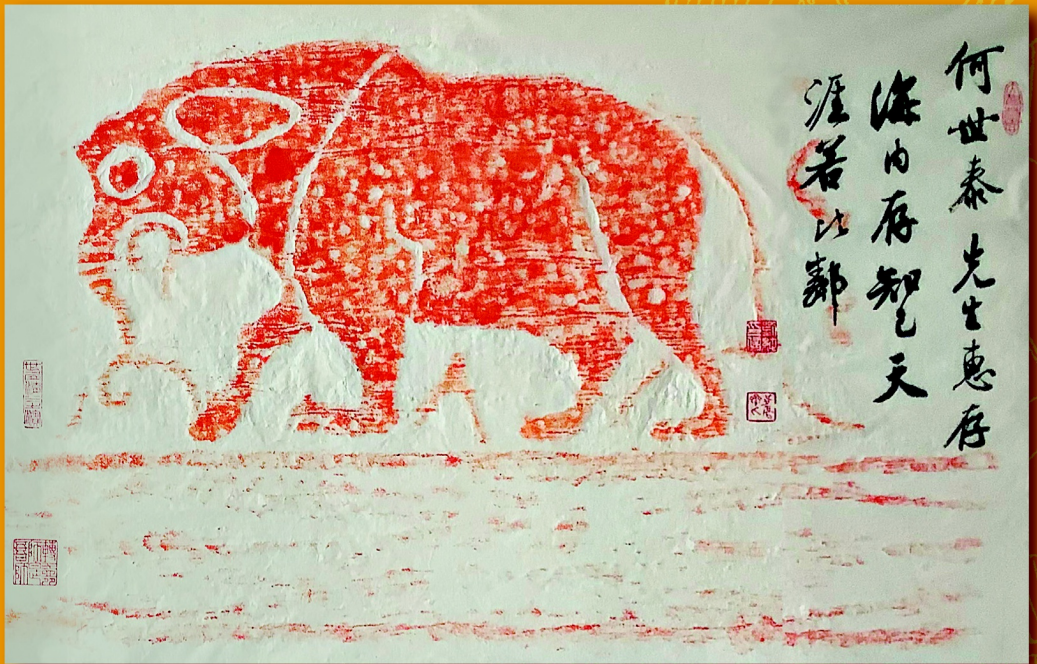


“At the Shores of the Sky”

Asian Studies for Albert Hoffstädt

Edited by

Paul W. Kroll and Jonathan A. Silk



“At the Shores of the Sky”

Sinica Leidensia

Edited by

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Cover illustration: Detail of calligraphy scroll presented to Albert Hoffstädt by a Chinese friend. Photo: Albert Hoffstädt.

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Albert Hoffstädt, holding a traditional wooden Skittles pin.

Albert Hoffstädt: A Tribute

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), the finest Latinist of Christendom, leading light in his time of the pan-European Republic of Letters, and still today one of the most famous of Dutchmen, concluded the first full edition of his *Adagia* in 1508 with comments about the term *auris Batava*, “Batavian (i.e., Dutch) ear.” Disputing Martial’s use of the phrase to caricature the Dutch as unrefined and brutish, he praises his countrymen as being the most humane and generous of all peoples, by nature straightforward and untainted by deceit or serious vices, fitted with a high level of education, as well as appreciative of good food and fine wine. Such a description would more than fairly embrace some of the fine qualities of the Dutchman whom we celebrate with this volume of essays, without by any means exhausting them; but there is much more to say about him. Let us begin.

Albert Hoffstädt, editor at the renowned Leiden publishing house of Brill, has done more in his twenty-five years with the company than any other individual in the world of publishing to advance and put before the academic public the widest range of scholarly studies pertaining to East and South Asia. For several centuries Brill had already been known as a leader in the publishing of Asian (as well as Western) humanities. In recent decades Albert Hoffstädt has been the worthy heir and guardian of that lineage, and indeed one might well acknowledge that by dint of his acumen, insight, and good sense, he made himself the very face of Brill’s Asian endeavors. A brief survey of his career is required.

After postgraduate work in classics at Utrecht University and eight years with Van Dale Lexicografie where his linguistic expertise resulted in his eventually taking responsibility for Van Dale’s German and Dutch dictionaries (the lexicographic passion has stayed with him always), Albert came to Brill in October 1995. For a year he was acquisitions editor for classical antiquity, a field still very close to his heart, but early in 1997 became senior editor for Asian Studies. This included for the first five years responsibility also for Ancient Near East Studies. On and off, due to staff changes, he was heavily involved with Islamic Studies, particularly the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. In 2004 he became publishing manager (i.e., head of the department) for Asian Studies, a position he held until 2013. This role entailed supervision not only of individual monographs but also volumes in various established and newly begun series (among the older, e.g., *Sinica Leidensia*; among the newer, the *Inner Asian Library* and the *Tibetan Studies Library*), as well as all sections except the Ancient Near East and Middle East for the venerable *Handbuch der Orientalistik*.

His portfolio has included at one time or another oversight of seven scholarly journals, perhaps the most notable being *T'oung Pao*, the oldest (founded 1890) and most prestigious international journal of sinology, the supervision of which he exercises to the present day, and *NAN NÜ*, founded under his hand in 1999 as the first international journal devoted to gender studies in sinology. Since 2013 he has returned to his earlier role as senior acquisitions editor for Asian Studies. Representing Brill internationally, Albert has traveled many times to China as well as to India, Tibet, Nepal, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, and Armenia (not to mention of course to North America and most of Europe), in all of which countries he has established both professional and personal bonds. For most of his years superintending Asiatica at Brill, he has been assisted by Ms. Patricia Radder, a shining star in her own right, who ably matches him in her unstinting professionalism, practical judgment, and editorial acumen.

The tales to tell of Albert's kindness, generosity, and encouragement as an editor are countless. One of the editors of the present volume, for instance, can recall how Albert pursued a decade-long persuasion for him to author a dictionary of premodern Chinese and how, once the project was agreed to and underway, Albert advocated successfully for it to be published not only in the usual hardcover format but also as an affordably priced paperback (one of the few ever published by Brill) so as to prove true to its title, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*. The other editor recalls Albert's indispensable role in bringing about *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. It was the synergy of this editor's presence in Leiden, Albert's unwavering drive for reliable works on Buddhism, and their long friendship which afforded many opportunities for casual conversations to turn into impromptu planning sessions, that formed the actual genesis of the massive project, two volumes of which, each over a thousand pages, have so far appeared. It was in belatedly and inadequately recognizing Albert's central role in the project, in the Preface to Volume 2, that its author first had the idea for a more substantial public appreciation, an aspiration which has come to fruition with the present volume. While China has been in some ways the central focus of Albert's editorial work, his interest and influence in the areas of Central Asian and Indic studies have been no less important, one of the best examples of the latter being the monumental seven-volume series of books by Walter Spink on the history and development of the Ajanta caves and their paintings and sculptures, which he was instrumental in bringing to publication.

A fact little-known save to his Dutch colleagues is that Albert is also a published author in his native language. In addition to introductory essays to several publications, from 1996 to 2002 he wrote a monthly column on language

and wrong thinking for the *Van Dale Taalbrief*, and from 2012 to the present he has authored a quarterly column of observations on social and linguistic issues in the bulletin of the Amicitia Society. Twenty-four of these latter columns were collected in the booklet *Ieder zijn Grutto*, published in 2018. He has also published short stories in Dutch literary journals. He modestly refers to all of these writings as “nugae.” In English he is the author of “Dutch Sinology and Brill,” a fascinating essay on the long history of Brill’s involvement with Chinese studies (in *Chinese Studies in the Netherlands: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. W. Idema [Leiden: Brill, 2014]).

The twenty-two individuals whose offerings to Albert appear in the book at hand could easily have been increased many times over, since so many scholars are in his debt. While it is true that in his editorial capacity he has shepherded more than seven hundred works and authors in the past twenty-five years, his impact does not end there, since at every scholarly congress or meeting he has attended he made a special effort to sit down with scholar after scholar, listen to their interests, and encourage their research. Not all of these discussions resulted in Brill publications, and in this respect his overall impact on Asian studies in particular is not captured even by the impressive number of volumes that have appeared under his direct guidance, and certainly not by the small number of authors who have contributed their studies to him here. We sincerely regret that it was not possible to invite all of those who would surely have wished to express their appreciation. The contributors to this volume are a subset of those who have enjoyed the special pleasure of knowing not only Albert the editor of genius but also Albert the lifelong classicist, fine conversationalist, lover of the arts, urbane polyglot, sly wit, and dear friend. He has a particular gift for invoking in those he favors with his confidence the highest ideals of learning and humanism. If anything approaching a Republic of Letters can be said to exist today in the field of Asian Studies, Albert is the individual who has most fostered it. He is a gentleman at home in several languages and cultures, a connoisseur of literature in French, German, and English, in addition to his native Dutch (and not coincidentally a fluent speaker of all those languages), and forever a devotee of the Greek and Latin classics. One feels better and wiser for knowing him.

We are proud and honored to present to him this volume containing textual tokens of our esteem, in heartfelt gratitude and, above all, friendship.

The Editors

A Note on the Title and Cover. The title of this book derives from a couplet in a famous poem by the seventh-century Chinese poet Wang Bo 王勃 (649–676), written upon seeing off a friend on a distant journey. The lines read “If within the seas there remains one who truly knows me,/ At the shores of the sky we’re as though nearby neighbors” (海內存知己, 天涯若比鄰), and they have become almost proverbial as a statement of enduring friendship, regardless of physical separation. The cover of the book reproduces these lines from a calligraphy scroll presented to Albert Hoffstädt by a Chinese friend and includes from the same scroll an ink-rubbing of an Indic elephant, surprisingly portrayed in a Han-dynasty tomb.

What Language was Spoken by the People of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex?

Alexander Lubotsky

Albert Hoffstädt was the architect of a unique cooperation between Brill publishers and the Leiden Department of Comparative Indo-European Linguistics, a cooperation that has so far resulted in a series of twelve etymological dictionaries and an online publication of fifteen etymological databases (<<https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/iedo>>). In all the years that Albert was directly involved in the Indo-European Etymological Dictionary project, we often had discussions about languages and cultures of long-gone civilizations and about the linguistic methodology for reconstructing them. It is therefore my pleasure to offer in his honor some considerations about the language of an intriguing new civilization, relatively recently discovered in Central Asia.

The Russian archaeologist V.I. Sarianidi has localized dozens of settlements on the territory of former Margiana and Bactria and has proven that they belong to the same archaeological culture, which he labeled “Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex” (BMAC). At the end of the 1970s he managed to find the probable capital of this culture, a settlement called Gonur-depe. Gonur is located in the old delta of the Murghab River, on the border of the Karakum desert. The city was most likely founded around 2300 BCE and experienced its heyday between 2000 and 1800. Somewhere around 1800, the riverbed of the Murghab began to move eastwards, which eventually led to the city being abandoned by its inhabitants. Already very soon the whole BMAC civilization started to decline, and we see few traces of it after 1600 BCE.

At the beginning of the second millennium, Gonur was one of the largest cities in the world. The citadel alone with its royal palace, temples and surrounding buildings occupies an area of ten hectares. The city also included a separate temple complex (the so-called Temenos), a 1.5 sq. km necropolis with about three thousand burials, water reservoirs, squares, hundreds of artisan’s houses, etc. Since there was no stone nearby and hardly any wood, the whole city was built of unbaked bricks: clay was mixed with straw, put into special forms and dried in the sun.

Over the forty years of excavation of Gonur, a wealth of material has been collected about the city¹: we learned about its luxurious architecture, the highest level of its artisans—potters, metallurgists, jewelers—, the complex temple and funeral rituals, the extensive contacts with the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Indus. And the more we learn about this wonderful culture, the more urgent the question becomes: where did the people who created it come from, what language did they speak? Can linguists contribute to the discussion on this subject?

At first glance, this question may seem premature, because, despite all efforts, archaeologists have not yet been able to find any written documents either in Gonur or in other settlements of the civilization of Bactria and Margiana. Nevertheless, it seems possible to draw some linguistic conclusions.

In discussions about possible candidates for founding the ВМАС, we often come across Indo-Iranians or Aryans. For example, Sarianidi himself was convinced that they were the ones who founded Gonur.² Who were the Aryans and what could be their involvement with this civilization?

The Indo-Iranian languages belong to the Indo-European language family and are divided into two branches: Indian and Iranian. The main representative of the Indian branch is Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas, the oldest of which, the *Rigveda*, was created around 1200 BCE. The Iranian languages include primarily Avestan (the sacred language of the Zoroastrians, around 1000 BCE) and Old Persian, the language of inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings (VI-V century BCE). Among modern Iranian languages the best known ones are Persian (Farsi), Tajik, Pashto, Kurdish (See Fig. 1.1).

The breakdown of the Indo-Iranian branch into Indian and Iranian occurred somewhere between 2000 and 1600 BCE, when future Indians left their tribesmen and crossed the Hindu Kush on their way to India. Before that, Indo-Iranians had lived in Central Asia. We can thus conclude that the Indo-Iranians or Aryans (as they called themselves) were not far from Gonur when it was founded around 2300 BCE. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the Aryans had nothing to do with the foundation of this city.

As a matter of fact, linguists can describe the life and culture of a people in some detail on the basis of its vocabulary. The idea of the method is fairly simple. Consider, for instance, the Germanic words for 'bread': Old Norse *brauð*,

1 V.I. Sarianidi, Маргуш: Древневосточное царство в старой дельте реки Мургаб (= *Margush: The Ancient Kingdom in the Old Delta of the Murghab River*) (Ashgabat: Turkmenöwlethabarlary 2002); V.I. Sarianidi, Гонур-депе, город царей и богов (= *Gonur-depe, city of kings and gods*) (Ashgabat: Turkmenöwlethabarlary, 2006).

2 See Victor Sarianidi, *Margiana and Protozoroastrizm* (Athens: Kapon edition, 1998) and idem, *Necropolis of Gonur* (Athens: Kapon edition, 2007).

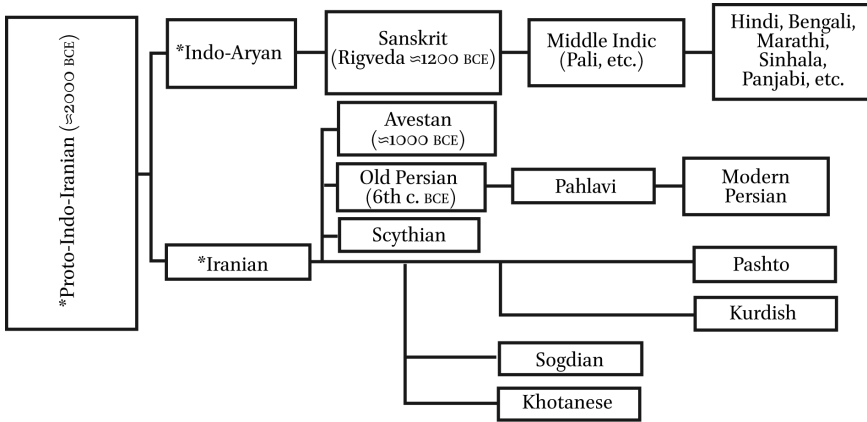


FIGURE 1.1 Genealogical tree of Indo-Iranian languages

Old English *brēad*, English *bread*, Old Frisian *brād*, Old Saxon *brōd*, Dutch *brood*, Old High German *brōt*, German *Brot*. It is clear that all these terms are related and go back to a Proto-Germanic word which looked something like **brauda-*. With some degree of certainty we can assign it the meaning 'bread' and assume that the Proto-Germans in the first century BCE had a kind of bread, although we do not know either its recipe or the flour it was made of. However, on the basis of morphology, we can conclude that since this **brauda-* evidently is a derivative of the verb **brewwan-* 'to brew', the Proto-Germans must have already used yeast to bake the bread.

If we apply this method to the Indo-Iranian vocabulary, we come to the undeniable conclusion that the Aryans were nomadic pastoralists. They had dozens of words related to horses, harness, chariots, all sorts of cattle, and very limited agricultural terminology. Besides, there were practically no terms in their language relating to permanent houses, let alone words like 'palace' or 'temple'. The only conclusion we can draw is that the Aryans were simply unable to build a city like Gonur. Moreover, they as nomads did not even need such a city.

Therefore, most scholars believe that the Indo-Iranian way of life much better matches the Andronovo archaeological culture, which was located north and east of Bactria and Margiana.³ The Andronovans lived in the steppes, raised horses and cattle, and used chariots, whereas farming played a relatively

3 See Elena E. Kuz'mina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

small role in their lives. Importantly, Andronovans maintained intensive contacts with farmers in Bactria and Margiana: archaeologists have established that by the beginning of the second millennium BCE, each BMAC settlement was surrounded by Andronovo camps.⁴ If the Andronovans were indeed Aryans, then these contacts should have left traces in the Proto-Indo-Iranian language in the form of loanwords. In order to identify these traces, we must analyze the Indo-Iranian vocabulary in search of foreign elements.

Loanwords often have an unusual form in the target language. So, if an English word contains a *z* (e.g., *zen*, *zeal*, *frenzy*) or it ends in *-tion* (*revolution*, *civilization*), we can tell with confidence that this word is borrowed.

Thus, we must find Indo-Iranian words that meet the following conditions:

1. The word is found in both Indian and Iranian languages, so it probably existed in the common Indo-Iranian period.
2. The word has no Indo-European etymology, i.e., it has no cognates in other Indo-European languages.
3. The word has an unusual appearance.

As it turns out, there are several dozens of such words,⁵ and if our previous inferences are correct, these are exactly the words that the Aryans may have borrowed from the Bactria-Margiana language. In this unusual way, we can for the first time get to know the language spoken in Gonur, at least partially.

What words did the Aryans borrow from the Gonur people? These are, above all, words related to house construction: **jharmya* ‘permanent house (i.e., not a yurt)’, **ištya* ‘brick, clay’, **sikatā* ‘sand, gravel’, **mayūkha* ‘wooden pin’. Of course, the nomads who lived in yurts had a lot to learn from the architects of Gonur and other cities.

They also borrowed words related to water supply: **khā* ‘source’, **čāt* ‘well’, **yawīyā* ‘drain channel’. Excavations have shown that the people of Gonur achieved amazing skill in handling water. In order to prevent water from eroding the walls of houses, the architects laid a whole system of drainage channels under the royal palace.⁶

The most extensive category of loanwords refers to religion and ritual, which is not surprising. Gonur and other cities in Bactria and Margiana were full of temples. Sarianidi discovered many different temple complexes in Gonur: the

4 The Andronovans traded cattle, horses, and metal for agricultural products and luxury goods.

5 A. Lubotsky, “The Indo-Iranian Substratum,” in *Early Contacts between Uralic and Indo-European: Linguistic and Archaeological Considerations. Papers presented at an international symposium held at the Tvärminne Research Station of the University of Helsinki 8–10 January 1999*, ed. Chr. Carpelan, A. Parpola, P. Koskikallio (Helsinki: Suomalais-ugrilainen seura, 2001), 301–17.

6 Sarianidi, *Margush*, 222–23.

temple of fire, the temple of water and yet another temple, which he called the temple of Soma/Haoma. In one of the premises of this temple, archaeologists found “a brick elevation with vessels embedded in it; the whole structure is fixed with a thick layer of plaster smear. The laboratory analysis of the vessel contents revealed hemp residues.”⁷ Similar temple premises were found during the excavations of a huge cult complex Togolok-21, where, in addition to hemp, the remains of ephedra and poppy-seeds have been preserved.⁸ These rooms were used to prepare intoxicating cult drinks, which were then used in ritual ceremonies. According to Sarianidi, this ritual can be directly compared to the well-known Aryan ritual of the cult drink, called Soma by the Indians and Haoma by Iranians. This view is difficult to disagree with, but it does not imply that the people of Gonur were Aryans. It is much more probable that the Aryans first got acquainted with the Soma/Haoma cult in Central Asia, because other Indo-European peoples do not have these traditions. The secondary nature of this cult among the Aryans is eloquently illustrated by Indo-Iranian loanwords.

The word *soma/haoma* (Sanskrit *sóma*, Avestan *haoma*) itself is inherited and simply means ‘squeezing, juice, extract’, but the name of the plant from which this juice was prepared is most likely borrowed (**anću*). Also borrowed are the words **magha* ‘ritual offering, sacrifice’, **atharwan* ‘priest’, **ućig* ‘priestly function’, **ṛši* ‘seer’, **bhišaj* ‘medicinal herb’ (medicine was always the work of priests) and the names of some deities **Ćarwa*, **Indra*, **Gandharwa*.

Thus, we can conclude that the Indo-Iranian cult of Soma/Haoma, described in detail in the Vedic texts and in the *Avesta*, the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, was adopted by the Aryans from Bactria and Margiana.

What other words did the Aryans borrow in Central Asia? Quite many names of animals and birds: **uštra* ‘camel’, **khara* ‘donkey’, **kaćyapa* ‘turtle’, **kapauta* ‘pigeon’, **jařhuka* ‘hedgehog’, **matsya* ‘fish’, **warāřha* ‘wild boar’. Since the Aryans came to Central Asia from the north, it is clear that they were not familiar with camels and donkeys. Camels, which had been domesticated in Turkmenistan at the beginning of the third millennium BCE, played a particularly important role in the culture of Bactria and Margiana. They were placed in graves as sacrificial animals, and their images were used for decorating vases and other household items⁹.

As is usual in such cases, the Aryans also adopted the urban fashion: hair-styles (**kaića-/gaića* ‘hair’, **stuka* ‘plait of hair’), clothes (**atka* ‘cloak’, **pawastā*

7 Ibid., 189.

8 Ibid., 174.

9 Sarianidi, *Gonur Depe*, 237–38.

‘fabric’, **sućī* ‘needle’, **daćā* ‘frills’), and utensils (**kapāra* ‘dish’, **naij(s)* ‘spit’, **wāćī* ‘axe, knife’). It is quite possible that this last word refers to typical cult axes found in large numbers by archaeologists in Bactria and Margiana.¹⁰ From an archaeological point of view, the word **gadā* ‘mace, rod’ is also interesting, since it may designate stone rod-scepters of Bactria and Margiana.¹¹

Let’s summarize. Analysis of the vocabulary of the Indo-Iranian languages shows that the Aryans were nomadic pastoralists and can be identified with the Andronovo steppe culture. Although they could in no way have been involved in the foundation of the BMAC civilization, the Aryans were in Central Asia at the beginning of the second millennium BCE and maintained close contacts with the people of Bactria and Margiana, who were culturally much more advanced in some areas. These contacts led to a large number of loanwords in the Proto-Indo-Iranian language. In this way, we were able to compile a list of BMAC words, albeit refracted by the prism of borrowing.

Of course, the next obvious question is whether we can determine what language it was, on the basis of this list. Unfortunately, all attempts so far have been in vain: these words do not resemble any other known language. There is yet another way: to identify the phonetic and grammatical peculiarities of the list and try to compare them with existing languages. But even here the efforts of the linguists have not led to the desired result, with one exception: the linguistic peculiarities of the list fully coincide with the peculiarities of words borrowed by Indo-Aryans after their separation from Iranians, that is, those words that were borrowed into Sanskrit when future Indians crossed the Hindu Kush and settled in the Punjab, in present-day Pakistan.¹²

For instance, in the oldest Sanskrit text, the *Rigveda*, we find a considerable number of agricultural terms, which are all clear borrowings: *lāṅgala-* ‘plough’, *sīrā-* ‘ploughshare’, *kīnāra-* and *kīnāśa-* ‘ploughman’, *ūrdara-* ‘granary’, *khārī-* ‘measure of grain’, *khāla-* ‘threshing floor’, *odaná-* ‘rice-dish’, *tīlvila-* ‘fertile’, *ulúkhala-* ‘mortar’, *kārotará-* ‘sieve’, *mūla-* ‘root’, *phāla-* ‘fruit’, *púṣpa-* ‘flower’, *píppala-* ‘sweet fruit’, *urvāruká-* ‘cucumber’, etc. These words have no Indo-European etymology and many of them have a strange appearance: voiceless aspirates *kh*, *ph*, long vowels in unusual positions (type *kīnāra-*), “suffixes” *-śa-*, *-pa-*, to mention but a few features.

If we look at this state of affairs from the viewpoint of Sanskrit, we can discern two different layers of loanwords: one of the Indo-Iranian stage (shared

10 A. Parpola, “The Mohenjo-Daro axe-adze: A Vestige of Aryan Immigrations to Central and South Asia?” *Current World Archaeology* 7.2 (2015): 14–15. Compare also Sarianidi, *Gonur Depe*, 281; Sarianidi, *Margush*, 102–3.

11 Sarianidi, *Margush*, 228–29.

12 Lubotsky, “The Indo-Iranian Substratum,” 305–6.

with Iranian languages), and one of the Vedic stage (without Iranian cognates). These two layers are distinguished not only by the presence vs. absence of Iranian cognates, but also by their semantics. The layer of agricultural terms in Vedic Sanskrit signals a change in the lifestyle of Indo-Aryans and the growing importance of agriculture in their subsistence.

How can we account for the peculiar fact the two layers look as if they have been borrowed from the same language (or from two closely related languages)? This would mean that the language spoken in the BMAC and the language which was spoken in the Swat valley and the Punjab were quite similar, if not identical. The similarity of the two languages is all the more surprising as the BMAC and the Indus Valley Culture do not have much in common archaeologically, and it seems unlikely that their inhabitants spoke the same language.

It seems therefore worthwhile to seriously consider another scenario.¹³ It seems attractive to assume that the southward movement of Indo-Aryans was simultaneous with the decline of the BMAC and was even triggered by it, since the profound changes in the economy of the BMAC would have forced the Indo-Aryan pastoralists to look for new markets. In the situation of an economic and political crisis, it is only to be expected that in their movement, the Indo-Aryans were joined by a sizable group of the BMAC people, who would bring their culture and the agricultural lifestyle with them.

This scenario may account for the prolonged contacts of the Indo-Aryans and the BMAC people in the Swat valley and the Punjab and, consequently, for a large number of loanwords when the Indo-Aryans started to get settled and to learn agriculture. At the same time, it perfectly explains the fact that “intrusive BMAC material is subsequently found further to the south in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.”¹⁴ As we know from major people movements of the past, they often were multiethnic, and a joint movement of Indo-Aryans and the BMAC people would not be surprising at all.

It would be nice to hear from the geneticists whether this scenario is in line with the genetic evidence. In view of the many samples from the necropolis in Gonur, we will undoubtedly hear more about this issue in the future. Up till now, the linguistic scenarios have time and again found support in the analyses of ancient DNA. Will this also here be the case?

¹³ This scenario has been suggested to me by my colleague Maarten Kossmann.

¹⁴ J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams, *Encyclopedia of Indo-European culture* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 73.

India's Past Reconsidered

Johannes Bronkhorst

The Brahmanical tradition has exerted a profound influence on India, from an early time onward.¹ This tradition, like all traditions, had a certain vision of the past, and its enormous success has given it ample opportunity to impose that vision. The task of the historian, here as elsewhere, is to verify the prevailing vision of the past, and correct it where necessary.

One of the features of Brahmanism is that it has always presented itself as old and unchanging. Indeed, the claim was made, at least since the grammarian Patañjali in the second century BCE, that Sanskrit, the language of Brahmanism, was not just old but beginningless. The same view came to be held with regard the Veda, the literary corpus connected with Brahmanism: the Veda was not just old but beginningless.

Inevitably, Brahmanical civilization was also thought of as tremendously old, and as the background of other cultural and religious movements in India. This view came to prevail and has survived until today. Buddhism, in particular, was thought of as a reaction against Brahmanism; it was taken for granted that when Buddhism arose, Brahmanism had been around for a very long time, also in the region where the Buddha preached.

My research over the years has convinced me that this vision of the past is not correct. It is true that Brahmanism had existed for a long while when Buddhism arose, but not in the region where the Buddha preached, nor in many other regions of India. Brahmanism is an ideology that in due time spread all over India and over much of Southeast Asia, but this spread had hardly begun at the time of the Buddha. At that time Brahmanism was largely centered in one part of the subcontinent, its northwestern corner. At the time of the grammarian Patañjali in the second century BCE, some two and a half centuries after the death of the Buddha, the term Āryāvarta was used, and Patañjali gives a rather precise description of the extent of this Āryāvarta, which shows that it covered only a part of the Ganges plain. (GM, Introduction)

¹ This contribution lays out some conclusions based on evidence presented in three books: *Greater Magadha* (Leiden: Brill 2007; henceforth GM), *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden: Brill 2011; henceforth BSB), *How the Brahmins Won* (Leiden: Brill 2016; henceforth HBW).

Brahmanism, then, was a *regional* ideology, still during the last centuries preceding the Common Era. All this changed in subsequent centuries, but we do not know in detail just how, when, why, and where. We only know that the spread of Brahmanism owed nothing to conquering armies, as was the case much later with Islam. Nor was it imposed by an existing empire, as happened to Christianity during the days of the Roman Empire. It was also not spread by religious missionaries. Indeed, the spread of Brahmanism had very little to do with religious conversion. No one converted to Brahmanism in the ordinary religious sense of the term. In fact, it is not very useful to think of Brahmanism as a religion at all. Brahmanism was primarily a socio-political ideology, with clear ideas as to the correct order of society and the correct way of running a state. In this ideology the role of Brahmins was central (GM, ch. II; BSB, ch. 2).

It is true that some of the activities that Brahmins engaged in, especially ritual activities, can rightly be considered religious. But accepting the elevated position of Brahmins in society and making use of their ritual and other services did not require a change in belief. Numerous inscriptions testify to the fact that many Indian kings made use of these services without rejecting movements such as Buddhism and Jainism (BSB, p. 64). On the religious level, Brahmanism was not, or barely, in competition with these alternative movements. We have the names of scholars who were Buddhists and Brahmins at the same time, without the slightest awareness of a contradiction: socially these scholars were Brahmins, philosophically they were Buddhists. Note that the reverse situation is impossible, and therefore never recorded in our sources: one cannot be socially a Buddhist while at the same time a Brahmin by conviction. This, incidentally, is an asymmetry that historians of Indian philosophy rarely take into consideration: in the debates between Brahmins and Buddhists, Brahmins could be convinced by Buddhist arguments and yet remain Brahmins; Buddhists who were convinced by Brahmanical philosophical arguments, on the other hand, did not become Brahmins, nor could they remain Buddhists. (Remember that there was only one way to become a Brahmin, viz. through birth to parents who are both Brahmins.)

The spread of Brahmanism is a historical phenomenon that is, as yet, only little known and poorly understood. At the same time, it is a phenomenon of a vast scale that does not appear to have any parallel in world history. Invaders before and after the Maurya Empire, and the Maurya Empire itself, had been little sympathetic to Brahmanism, and often hostile. And yet, in as little as six or seven centuries, this threatened regional ideology spread over the whole of the Indian subcontinent and into Southeast Asia right up to Vietnam and the farther reaches of Indonesia. That is to say, an area as large as, if not larger than, the Roman empire and with presumably more inhabitants underwent, for a

varying but substantial number of centuries, the determining imprint of an ideology that had succeeded in imposing itself without the help of armies, an empire, or religious conversion (HBW, ch. IV). Future research, I hope, will tell us more about how this could happen. All I can do here is draw attention to some specific developments.

Consider first the use of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was the language of Brahmanism. Others did not use it. The oldest texts of Buddhism and of Jainism used different forms of Middle Indic, languages different from Sanskrit. The oldest inscriptions in India are not in Sanskrit either: for some four hundred years inscriptions were made, but virtually none of them in Sanskrit. The reason is obvious: Sanskrit was the language of a regional ideology, i.e., of Brahmanism, that exerted little influence (BSB, ch. 3.3).²

All this changed around the second century CE, in northwestern India. All of a sudden, political inscriptions in Sanskrit make their appearance. What is more, the Buddhists of that part of the subcontinent change to Sanskrit. They already possessed an extensive literature in different languages but decided there and then to translate much of that into Sanskrit. What had happened? It appears that Brahmanical ideology had succeeded in gaining the upper hand in the political centers of northwestern India. Accepting the Brahmanical socio-political ideology implied using the language of Brahmanism, namely Sanskrit. The Buddhists of this region may initially not have accepted this ideology, but they did need the support of the royal court and this, it appears, induced them to start using Sanskrit.

The adoption of Sanskrit, both in political inscriptions and in Buddhist scriptures, implied far more than a mere change of language. It implied the adoption, at least in part, of the Brahmanical vision of society. Most of the early political inscriptions, which are not in Sanskrit, show no sign of being aware of the most fundamental Brahmanical social doctrine: that society is divided into Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras. Aśoka's famous edicts, for example, mention Brahmins on a number of occasions, most often together with Śramaṇas, but they never ever use the terms Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. Clearly, society in his time and in most of his empire was not divided into these four so-called *varṇas*, "caste-classes." These are a Brahmanical superimposition, part of their social ideology, to which Aśoka did not feel beholden, and that he presumably was not even aware of. Brahmanism subsequently imposed this division of society wherever it could, not because society was really divided in this manner, but because Brahmanism maintained that it should be. As a

² See also Vincent Eltschinger, "Why Did the Buddhists Adopt Sanskrit?" *Open Linguistics* 3 (2017): 308–26.

result, we find these four classes only mentioned in Brahmanical inscriptions (BSB, p. 42).

I pointed out above that Brahmanism, even where it innovated, maintained that nothing had changed, that the world had always been like it is. Brahmanism had always been there and was the background for all other developments that had taken place. Brahmanism, seen this way, was the background from which Buddhism arose. We have already seen that this is not correct, historically speaking. Buddhism arose in a part of the Ganges plain that had not been brahmanized, and that would remain outside the core area of Brahmanism for at least three further centuries. However, when Buddhism started using Sanskrit, around the second century CE, it adopted along with this language other Brahmanical notions. It came to think of *itself* as having arisen in Brahmanical surroundings. We see this most clearly if we contrast the accounts of the Buddha's life composed in Sanskrit with those composed in other languages. Aśvaghōṣa may have been one of the first Buddhists to write in Sanskrit. His "Life of the Buddha" (*Buddhacarita*) describes the life of the Buddha before his enlightenment. In its initial chapters it speaks in most laudatory terms about the kingship of the Buddha's father, Śuddhodana. Kingship and society are here presented as pervaded by Brahmanical ideas and customs. Not only does his kingly father receive Brahmins to pronounce on the future greatness of his newborn son. Śuddhodana has the birth ceremony (*jātakarman*) carried out, and performs Vedic murmuring (*japa*), oblations (*homa*), and auspicious rites (*maṅgala*) to celebrate the event. All this is followed by a gift of a hundred thousand cows to Brahmins. Later in the story he pours oblations into the fire and gives gold and cows to Brahmins, this time to ensure a long life for his son. He drinks soma as enjoined by the Vedas. He performs sacrifices (even though only non-violent ones). He has a Purohita, described as being "in charge of the sacrifices" (*havya ... adhikṛta*). Brahmanical elements show up in other chapters as well, though less frequently. When King Śreṇya of Magadha gives friendly advice to the Bodhisattva, he counsels him to pursue the (Brahmanical) triple end of life (*trivarga*), i.e., pleasure (*kāma*), wealth (*artha*), and virtue (*dharma*). King Śreṇya further points out that performing sacrifices is his *kuladharmā* "family obligation." Māra, the Buddha's archenemy who tries to prevent him from attaining liberation, calls upon him to follow his *svadharmā*. These are all Brahmanical terms and concepts. All this shows, not just that Aśvaghōṣa was familiar with Brahmanism (which has been known to scholars for a long time), but that he and his readers situated the Buddha in brahmanized surroundings (BSB, p. 154, with detailed references).

Our reflections so far show that the process of brahmanization was both subtle and profound. Buddhism did not disappear in the early centuries CE.

Quite the contrary, it went on to flourish in India for many centuries to come. And yet, it had changed the way it perceived itself. Perhaps this is a general feature of brahmanization: it does not necessarily replace other movements and worldviews, but it affects them from within.

How did Brahmanism succeed in exerting such a profound effect on other worldviews and ideologies? I pointed out already that Brahmanism did not spread through armies, imperial imposition, or religious conversion. The question of Brahmanism's success requires more study, but some observations can already be made.

We start from the observation that Brahmanism, though it may not have had an army or an empire of its own, was no stranger to political power. Indeed, one of the mechanisms of its spread, probably the most important one, passed through the various royal courts in South and Southeast Asia. Inscriptions in both these areas mention kings who invite Brahmins to their courts, sometimes from afar. Once established at the royal courts, Brahmanical influence could filter down, helped by royal largesse (HBW, ch. IV).

The comparison with Christianity can yield some further insights. The conversion of Emperor Constantine imposed this religion upon the Roman Empire. Brahmanism, too, was introduced from above, but not in one single empire. Brahmanism passed through numerous kingdoms of relatively limited size. And there is a further difference: Constantine personally converted to Christianity, but no king needed to convert to Brahmanism. Brahmanism is quite simply not the kind of thing one could convert to. As I said earlier, calling it a religion is stretching the meaning of this term, and I prefer to call it a socio-political ideology, with a variable religious dimension. Central to Brahmanism is a vision of society, in which Brahmins occupy a preeminent position. This vision covers ideas as to how society is or should be organized, about rituals that must be performed, and much else, but deities play at best a marginal role. Some of the most orthodox (or rather orthoprax) Brahmins were or could be atheists—among them early Mīmāṃsakas and Lokāyatas. Brahmins expected that others accepted their superiority and their vision of society. In principle there was no expectation that people change their mode of worship. Indeed, one might combine sympathies for Brahmanism and, say, Buddhism. Inscriptions confirm that certain rulers had such combined sympathies (BSB, p. 64).

So, if kings did not convert to Brahmanism, why did they bother to invite Brahmins and promote their vision of society? Why should they accept the claim that Brahmins are superior to everyone else, including the king himself?

The problem that confronts historians of early India is that most of our information is profoundly one-sided. Most early literature is Sanskrit literature, and most Sanskrit literature is Brahmanical literature. As such it will give us

little information about what went on in the heads of kings. Most of the remaining literature belongs to Buddhism and Jainism, and that does not help us much either in this respect, especially since these religions became profoundly brahmanized themselves. The only textual sources that present us, usually indirectly, with the point of view of rulers who supported Brahmins, are inscriptions. Many inscriptions concern gifts to Brahmins, usually in the shape of *agrahāras*, tax-free land for the benefit of Brahmins, frequently inhabited by people who were expected to provide the Brahmins with their needs. Such gifts were meant to provide a reliable source of support to Brahmins for the pursuit of their sacral responsibilities.

What were such gifts expected to bring the donor? A theme that often recurs is increase of merit. To some extent this begs the question. Why should a ruler wish to obtain the kind of merit that Brahmanism promised? They hoped for a better afterlife, to be sure. But clearly, they had to believe first that gifts to Brahmins were the way to attain this. As usual with claims about the afterlife, there was no way to verify their efficacy. We may assume that rulers expected also more visible results from their largesse—such as the magical protection of their kingdom and kingship. But even such practical expectations were and had to be built on a reputation that preceded the Brahmins. Somehow it should be “known” that the presence and support of Brahmins was good for a kingdom before a ruler would get involved with them.

How did Brahmins succeed in building such a reputation for themselves? The details of this process will probably forever remain unknown. We may surmise that pure chance played a role, perhaps followed, after initial successes, by a snowball effect. The early Buddhist texts tell us that there were Brahmins traveling beyond their core area who promoted their vision of society to whom-ever was ready to listen to them. Most of the discussions of Brahmins with the Buddha, if the texts are to be believed, turned around the superiority of Brahmins. These Brahmins combined this missionary activity with certain services they provided to the population: the sages who predicted the future of the newly born Bodhisattva were Brahmins. Other services involving access to higher knowledge and higher powers were also no doubt part of their arsenal.

Brahmanical access to higher powers was clearly an attribute that would interest many, including rulers. It is also an attribute that is given much emphasis in stories that Brahmins succeeded in bringing into circulation and in which they play important roles. Many of these stories were or became part of the Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These are epics about warriors and fighting, but one cannot read them without being struck by the powerful Brahmanical figures that play prominent roles in them without participating in the fighting. Stories that illustrate this Brahmanical power are

numerous. My favorite occurs in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.84 ff.) and tells how the Brahmanical sage Bharadvāja entertains King Bharata and his army. To cut a long story short, Bharadvāja invokes the help of a number of gods, and offers the soldiers the best meal they ever ate, including meat and alcoholic drinks. Following that, there are pleasures for all the senses, including music, and, last but not least, beautiful damsels, fifteen for each man. Not surprisingly, the soldiers have the time of their life, and express their intention never to return to the capital, nor to move on, saying: “This is heaven.” Bharata only gets his army back because Bharadvāja’s hospitality comes to an end the next day.

There are numerous other stories in the Sanskrit epics and elsewhere that emphasize Brahmanical power. Presumably such stories spread and were appreciated, creating in many the conviction that one should not cross Brahmins, and that it was always better to have them on one’s side. This would be a good reason for rulers to support Brahmins, and if there were none around, to invite them to come to their kingdom.

Brahmanism, as it presented itself, was not a new phenomenon, and had never been. Brahmanical literature is at pains to point out that it had been around for a long time. The main events of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are situated in an imprecise but remote past. Quite apart from the main story, the *Mahābhārata* reminds its readers and listeners of the fact that a Brahmin (Paraśurāma) had killed off all warriors, i.e., kings, seven times over because they had misbehaved. Clearly Brahmanical power was already superior to royal power in the remote past, and it was in the interest of all to maintain good relationships (HBW, ch. IV).

Brahmins therefore pose a threat. But they can also be of great help. Once again history as presented by the Brahmins can illustrate this. The great Maurya Empire—that to the modern historian looks like something that had been a disaster for Brahmanism—was presented as a Brahmanical creation. The founder of this empire, Candragupta, had succeeded in creating this empire, supposedly by following the advice of his Brahmanical counsellor, Cāṅkya. What is more, this same Cāṅkya, who had as much as created the Maurya Empire, was also thought of as the author of the classical Sanskrit text on statecraft, the *Arthaśāstra*. All the wisdom united in this work was at the disposition of rulers who were ready to appoint a Brahmin as chief advisor. None of these claims are confirmed by modern scholarship (BSB, pp. 66–74).

If it slowly becomes clear what risks can be avoided and what advantages gained by pleasing Brahmins, there is one other factor that must have played a role in their extraordinary success. At least in theory, Brahmanical advisors do not aspire to kingship. Brahmins are therefore not only the most competent and most powerful advisors, they are also safe in the sense that they will not try to replace the king they advise.

Our reflections so far explain more or less why a king might wish to be assisted by Brahmanical advisors. It does not yet explain why he would reward Brahmins with *agrahāras*, that is, estates, with sources of steady income away from the capital. Clearly *agrahāras* were often rewards for services rendered, but not only that. Many *agrahāras*, it appears from the inscriptions, were given to Brahmins who were not involved in the running of the state, but who excelled in this or that aspect of traditional Brahmanical learning. The recipients of *agrahāras* were supposed to live lives dedicated to ritual practice and Brahmanical learning, following the example of the Brahmanical sages in their hermitages (*āśrama*) depicted in the epics and elsewhere. This, as we have seen, was deemed to increase the merit of the donor or of those close to him. We may conjecture that kings somehow felt they could harness Brahmanical power in this way (even though I am not aware of any texts that explicitly put it this way).

It appears, then, that Brahmins often came to be asked by local rulers to settle in their kingdoms. In such cases they were most typically provided with the usufruct of a village and land, which allowed them to concentrate on other matters. These “other matters” would normally involve performing rituals, reciting their holy texts, i.e., the Veda, teaching their *śāstras*, “sciences,” and other such things. The underlying supposition was that the presence of a ritually active community of Brahmins would be advantageous for the kingdom. Some Brahmins, moreover, would play a role at the royal court, as advisors in both ritual and political matters (HBW, p. 411).

There is another reason why rulers may have been keen to have Brahmins at their courts. We know that the political history of South and Southeast Asia during the first millennium CE saw the rise and decline of numerous regional kingdoms. Inscriptions report *ad nauseam* the military feats of rulers, who conquered and destroyed each other's territories without restraint. Assuming that these inscriptions are to at least some extent reliable, the military competence of many of these rulers left little to be desired. But more is required than mere military competence for acquiring and maintaining a kingdom. What these rulers needed, once they had won their battles, was practical advice as to how to run their kingdom, and how to protect it against unforeseen dangers. Brahmins were specialized in these two realms. Their undisturbed ritual occupations provided the best supernatural protection imaginable, and they combined that with theoretical competence in matters of polity.

It is interesting to compare these Brahmanical skills with those that Buddhists had on offer. Buddhism had begun as a religion of people who had left society, and who had therefore very little to say about how society should be run. It is true that Buddhism did not remain for long a movement exclusively

of renouncers. It may still have been like that during the realm of Aśoka, but there are clear indications from northern India that this changed during the last centuries BCE. Buddhism at that time came into the possession of monasteries and much else, and this is no doubt a reason why it came to depend ever more on the active support of political rulers. We have already seen one of the consequences of this new dependence: Buddhism adopted the language of the Brahmins, Sanskrit, because like the Brahmins it sought access to the centers of political power.

Buddhism, then, needed the support of political rulers. What could it offer in return? The Brahmins could offer a lot, enough to convince most rulers that they could not risk *not* to support Brahmins. How about the Buddhists?

It appears that the Buddhists had a hard time competing with the Brahmins at the royal courts, and that this became, in the long run, one of the reasons why Buddhism did not survive in India (BSB, ch. 3.8). Brahmanism offered, apart from supernatural protection, much practical advice to rulers: how to organize society, how to run their kingdom, etc. Buddhism, still during the early centuries of the Common Era, offered nothing of the kind. As stated earlier, Buddhism had no vision of society and of how it should be run. True, there are a number of Buddhist texts that proffer advice to rulers, but close inspection only shows how useless this advice is. Kings should give money to the poor and avoid violence. This is hardly the advice that will assure a king long control in the ruthless environment of incessantly competing kingdoms characteristic of India during those centuries. Some of these Buddhist authors admit, though implicitly, that their advice is totally unrealistic, by recommending kings to become monks instead. With regard to the ritual protection offered by Buddhism to rulers we can be brief: during the early centuries of the Common Era they offered next to nothing of the kind (BSB, ch. 3).

An inspection of the sources has led me to conclude that for a long time, say during the first five centuries of the Common Era, Buddhism left many of the skills that might be useful for rulers to Brahmins. We saw that Buddhism came to adopt a semi-Brahmanical vision of society. This implied that certain activities were left to Brahmins. These included, of course, ritual activities and political counseling, but many other activities as well, among which are predicting the future on the basis of various indications and astrology. One of the surprising consequences of this is that there are practically no surviving names of Buddhists who engaged in astronomy and mathematics, this in spite of the fact that Buddhists were active in other sciences, such as medicine and, of course, philosophy. Astronomy and mathematics, in the Indian context, were inseparable from astrology, and astrology was the domain of Brahmins, not of Buddhists. In short, for a number of centuries Buddhism in India did not intrude

into the realms of activity that the Brahmins considered their own. By the time they tried to change this, with the advent of Tantrism, it was too late. Buddhism had not been able to compete credibly with Brahmanism, and its decline may be looked upon as its inevitable consequence (BSB, pp. 244–46).

In contrast to Buddhism, Brahmanism offered advantages that rulers could scarcely do without. This was not the result of historical coincidence. It can be argued that to at least some extent Brahmanism during the last centuries preceding the Common Era had prepared the ground, that it had developed the tools and methods which in due time turned out to be very efficacious. It is possible to look upon the Brahmanical literature composed during the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era as playing a role in the project Brahmanism was entering upon. This literature shows that the Brahmins of that period had two major concerns. On the one hand, they were concerned to create a separate identity for themselves: Brahmins are expected to follow a lifestyle that is different from all others. Purity plays a central role in this lifestyle and finds expression in the observance of numerous rituals and sacraments, through the Brahmins' purity of descent both on the paternal and maternal side, and through the distance maintained from persons and things that are considered polluting. This concern finds expression in those texts that were primarily meant for internal consumption, among them various texts on *dharma* and ritual. Beside this, there are Brahmanical texts from this period that concentrate on the image that Brahmins were concerned to project onto society at large. A text like the *Mahābhārata* projects an image of Brahmins as sometimes wise, sometimes unpredictable, but always powerful and scary; Brahmins like to live in peace in their hermitages, and may seem in this way inoffensive, but numerous stories remind us that they can be deadly if crossed. Political advice is given much attention, as are indications of how to fit into the social hierarchy that is the hallmark of Brahmanism (HBW, ch. 11).

It would be worth a detailed study to analyze the model of Brahmanism that arose during the crucial centuries around the beginning of the Common Era. This model referred back, at least in part, to the Vedic tradition, but other aspects were quite new. Even new notions—such as the idea of the Brahmanical *āśrama* “hermitage,” an idea that is absent from Vedic literature—were presented as old, as having been in existence from time immemorial. This model was to become surprisingly successful in subsequent centuries.

Such a detailed analysis has not yet been undertaken. I hope that scholars will take up the challenge and join me in rethinking India's past along the lines here suggested.

By way of conclusion I wish to draw attention to some independent evidence showing the profound influence that Brahmanism exerted on Indian society. I had occasion to mention its emphasis on purity of descent. Strict rules applied not only to Brahmins, but also to other groups in society. Numerous texts warn that not abiding by these rules has dire consequences, in that offspring will not be accepted in the social groups to which their parents belong.

These warnings had their effects. Genetic research shows “that the practice of endogamy was established almost simultaneously, possibly by decree of the rulers, in upper-caste populations of all geographical regions, about seventy generations before the present, probably during the reign (319–550 CE) of the ... Gupta rulers.”³ Other studies appear to confirm this, so that it seems safe to conclude that a shift to endogamy took place during the first half of the first millennium CE in northern India. We are permitted to assume that the growing influence of Brahmanism played a role in this.

3 Analabha Basu, Neeta Sarkar-Roy, and Partha P. Majumder, “Genomic Reconstruction of the History of Extant Populations of India Reveals Five Distinct Ancestral Components and a Complex Structure,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113 (2016), 1595. The fact that “Steppe ancestry in modern South Asians is primarily from males and disproportionately high in Brahmin and Bhumihar groups” (Vagheesh M. Narasimhan et al., “The Formation of Human Populations in South and Central Asia,” *Science* 06 Sep 2019: Vol. 365, Issue 6457, eaat7487) does not of course demonstrate that Brahmins practiced strict endogamy already before this date.

A Trust Rooted in Ignorance: Why Ānanda’s Lack of Understanding Makes Him a Reliable Witness to the Buddha’s Teachings

Jonathan A. Silk

Whatever may be the truth of its posited etymological connection with the term “religion,” there is no doubt that the Latin behind the English word “reliable” is *religāre*, originally meaning something like a strong binding together, later pointing to association and confident dependence. We normally judge persons—friends, for instance—to be reliable for various positive reasons, such as because of their wisdom, compassion or honesty, but it is probably rare that we place our deep trust and reliance in an individual because of their *ignorance*. But paradoxically, it may indeed sometimes be precisely ignorance that is held up in justification of faith. The present small contribution offers an example from the Indian Buddhist commentarial tradition of one such case.¹

Canonically accepted Indian Buddhist scriptures—in the first place, *sūtras*—are universally held within the tradition to be reliable accounts of the salvifically potent teachings of the Buddha, and the reasoning behind this is relatively clear. A popular American Christian hymn of 1859 avers: “Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”² The same logic applies to Buddhist scriptures: the Buddha is to be trusted, he is omniscient, and he is infinitely compassionate—and we know this since the *sūtras* tell us so. But how do we know that the scriptures themselves are reliable? No doubt precisely in order to forestall such potential challenges, Buddhist scriptures assert their reliability by means of an internal seal of their own authenticity, namely the stock phrase with which they regularly begin: “Thus I have heard” (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*). Commentaries on Buddhist scriptures discuss this opening stock

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- 1 I am preparing an extensive study of commentarial interpretations of the opening stock phrase of Buddhist *sūtras*, on which the present contribution may be seen as a report on one small issue. My thanks to my colleagues Rafal Felbur, Peter Szanto, Gregory Forgues, Berthe Jansen, and especially Michael Radich, for kind corrections, particularly to my translations, and to Maghiel van Crevel for suggestions toward clarity and style.
 - 2 Wikipedia tells us that its author was the American Anna Bartlett Warner (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Bartlett_Warner>), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Loves_Me>. Accessed 27.10.2019.

phrase in detail, and interpret the “I” here to verify the validity of the ensuing discourse in the following manner: the account is authentic because the speaker, the Buddha’s amanuensis (so to speak) and the compiler of his sermons (the *saṃgītīkāra*, the reciter, that is, at the First Council), the monk Ānanda, who accompanied him through most of his preaching career, reliably reports what he heard directly from the Buddha—that is, he reports it *thus* (Sanskrit *evam*), precisely as he heard it. Ānanda, however, although he recounts and reports the teaching, is clearly not its author. He merely conveys. What becomes important for some commentators is the question whether Ānanda *understood* what the Buddha preached. The point of the present contribution is to show how the answer given by some commentators converts what could have been a potential weakness into a great strength, via what we might think of as a sort of rhetorical Aikidō.

The link between reliability and understanding is not limited to Buddhist lore. The great Indian Epic the *Mahābhārata* contains a passage—which clearly very much post-dates the composition of its core—that depicts the seer-poet Vyāsa employing the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa as his scribe. In this passage we read:³

... *vyāsenoktas tadānagha* ||
lekhako bhāratasyāsyā bhava tvaṃ gaṇanāyaka |
mayaiṃva procyamānasya mahasā kalpitasya ca ||
śrutvaitat prāha vighneśo yadi me lekhanī kṣaṇam |
likhato nāvatiṣṭheta tadā syāṃ lekhako hy aham ||
vyāso 'py uvāca taṃ devam abuddhvā mā likha kvacit |
om ity uktvā gaṇeśo 'pi babhūva kila lekhakaḥ ||

Vyāsa then said to him, “Gaṇeśa, you must be the scribe for this *Bhārata* as I compose it in my head and speak it forth.” The lord of obstacles replied, “If my pen does not stop for an instant as I write, I shall be the

3 The passage, belonging only to a few of the collated manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, is found in an appendix to Vishnu S. Sukthankar et al., *The Mahābhārata: For the First Time Critically Edited*, vol. 1 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), 884, in the note to line 36 of passage 1, lines 6–12. The translation is that of James L. Fitzgerald, “India’s Fifth Veda: the Mahābhārata’s Presentation of Itself,” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 20.1 (1985): 125, and see also 138nn. See also the interesting observations of Bruno Lo Turco, “The Divine Scribe: A New Interpretation of the Gaṇeśa Episode from the *Mahābhārata*,” in A. D’Ottone Rambach, ed., *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* n.s. 90 (2018) Supplemento 1, *Palaeography Between East & West. Proceedings of the Seminars on Arabic Palaeography at Sapienza University of Rome* (Pisa & Rome: Fabrizio Serra Editore), 153–78, many of which bear on questions of orality and related issues. I owe the idea to refer to this passage to my colleague Peter Bisschop.

scribe.” Vyāsa replied to the god, “But never write without having comprehended.” “Om,” said Gaṇeśa and he became the scribe.

The key phrase here is “never write without having comprehended” (*abuddhvā mā likha kvacit*), a command to which Gaṇeśa formally agrees. For the author of this passage, it is essential that the scribe understand what he is recording. While this stipulation has been understood to justify the sometimes obscure or even corrupt passages in the text, another way to interpret it is to link the reliability of the whole *Mahābhātara* to this initial complete comprehension of the Epic’s first listener, and the individual to whom we owe our very knowledge of the text. Of course, it is perhaps needless to mention that, as for Ānanda so for the earlier reciters of the *Mahābhārata* as well, the text was oral and not written, and thus this portrayal of the role of a scribe in a late addition to the Epic is absolutely anachronistic. Be this as it may, the question of interest to us here remains the same: does reliability rely on understanding?

All philologists are well aware of the dictum that it is better to have a manuscript of an ignorant scribe than a clever one, or rather we might say, one who thinks himself clever, for the clever scribe may attempt to correct or improve a text, while an ignorant scribe, perhaps transcribing nonsense, nevertheless offers the philologist the raw materials necessary to evaluate the underlying source. While there is, then, at least from the philologist’s point of view, certainly something to be said for naive transmitters, one cannot correspondingly find that this is necessarily desirable in the oral transmission of the Buddha’s sermons.

Now, some Indian Buddhist authors do seem to assume that, being in some respects the Buddha’s closest disciple, Ānanda certainly well understood what his master taught. In fact, we find this stance even in canonical literature, that is, in a stratum of scriptural development at least logically, if not also chronologically, prior to the commentarial project. We read, then, the following in a passage in the *Ekottārikāgama*, perhaps relatively late as an Āgama text but nevertheless significantly earlier than the other materials we will notice here:⁴

過去時，諸佛侍者，聞他所說，然後乃解。然今日，阿難比丘如來未發語，便解。如來意須是不須，是皆悉知之。由此因緣，阿難比丘勝過去時諸佛侍者。

4 T. 125 [35.5] (11) 746c16–19, reading with the variant in the notes. I translated this passage on p. 199 as part of its larger context in Jonathan A. Silk, “Dressed for Success: The Monk Kāśyapa and Strategies of Legitimation in Earlier Mahāyāna Buddhist Scriptures,” *Journal Asiatique* 291.1–2 (2004): 173–219, but here thanks to Rafal Felbur I have improved my understanding.

In former times, the attendants of all buddhas listened to what [those] other [buddhas] preached, and only thereafter understood it. But in these days, the monk Ānanda already understands even before the Tathāgata speaks. He knows through and through everything the Tathāgata intends and does not intend [to convey]. For this reason, the monk Ānanda is superior to the attendants of all buddhas of former times.

Here it is emphasized that Ānanda did more than understand what the Buddha preached, he knew thoroughly everything that he meant (皆悉知之), and for this reason Ānanda is superior even to all attendants of former Buddhas. But perfect understanding is not necessarily obligatory, since it is also taken as a given that the understanding of even the most accomplished disciple is, in some respects, not equal to that of a buddha. In the Pāli commentarial tradition, the relevant portion of the interpretation of the opening stock phrase in commentaries attributed to Buddhaghosa runs as follows:⁵

*vāyam idha ākāranidassanāvadhāraṇesu daṭṭhabbo |
tatha ākāratthena evaṃsaddena etam athaṃ dīpeti nānāyanipuṇaṃ
anekajjhāsayasamuṭṭhānaṃ atthabyañjanasampannaṃ vividhapāṭihāri-
yaṃ dhammatthadesanāpaṭivedhagambhīraṃ sabbasattānaṃ sakasa-
kabhāsānurūpato sotapatham āgacchantānaṃ tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ
sabbappakārena ko samattho viññātuṃ sabbathāmena pana sotukāmataṃ
janetvāpi evaṃ me sutānaṃ mayāpi ekenākārena sutānaṃ ti | ...
evaṃ me sutānaṃ ti iminā pana sakalena vacanena āyasmā ānando tathā-
gappaveditaṃ dhammaṃ attano adahanto asappurisabhūmimā atikka-
mati sāvakattaṃ paṭijānanto sappurisabhūmimā okkamati | tathā asad-
dhammā cittaṃ vuṭṭhāpeti saddhamme cittaṃ paṭiṭṭhāpeti | kevalaṃ su-
taṃ evetaṃ mayā tasseva pana bhagavato vacanaṃ ti dīpento attānaṃ
parimoceti satthāraṃ apadisati jinavacanaṃ appeti dhammanettaṃ
paṭiṭṭhāpeti |
api ca evaṃ me sutānaṃ ti attanā uppāditabhāvaṃ appaṭijānanto purima-
vacanaṃ vivaranta sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ idaṃ mayā tassa bhaga-
vato catuvesārājjaṃ sāradaṃ dasabaladharassa āsabhāṭṭhānaṭṭhāyino*

5 All four of Buddhaghosa's Nikāya commentaries are here virtually identical; see the beginnings of the commentaries on the first suttas in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, *Papañcasūdanī*, *Manorathapūraṇī*, and *Sāratthappakāsinī*. I consulted the editions of the Vipassana Research Society, Igatpuri India, 1993–1995. My debt to the translation of Peter Masefield, *The Udāna Commentary (Parammatthadīpanī nāma Udānaṭṭhakathā)* by Dhammapala, vol. 1 (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), 21, 35–36 (with detailed notes, 151–52, 172–73–86), is profound.

sīhanādanādino sabbasattuttamassa dhammissarassa dhammarājassa dhammādhīpatino dhammadīpassa dhammasaraṇassa saddhammavara-cakkavattino sammāsambuddassa vacanaṃ na ettha atthe vā dhamme vā padevā byañjanevā kaṅkhāvā vimativā kattabbāti sabbadevamanussānaṃ imasmīṃ dhamme assaddhiyaṃ vināseti saddhāsampadaṃ uppādeti |

[There are many senses in which the word “Thus,” *evaṃ*, can appear.] Here [in the context of the opening phrase of a scripture] this same [word, which has many meanings] should be seen as depicting (1) manner, (2) explanation, and (3) emphatic affirmation.

With respect to that [list of possible senses, Ānanda] using the word “Thus” illustrates this sense in the meaning of (1) manner [as follows]: Who is capable of cognizing in all its aspects the speech of the Blessed One, [speech which is] subtle in its many methods, that arises [to accord with] the many aspirations [of beings], that is perfect in letter and sense, [productive of] diverse miracles, profound in its teaching, sense, instruction and intellectual penetration, and which reaches the ears [of beings] in conformity with their own individual manner of speech? [No one is really capable of doing so,] still, with all my strength producing [in others] the desire to hear [the preaching], [I say] “Thus I have heard, [meaning] I too have heard in one particular manner [although there are other aspects of the teaching I have not grasped].” ...

Again, with the entire expression “Thus I have heard” the Venerable Ānanda, not appropriating as his own the Teaching revealed by the Tathāgata, transcends the stage of the unworthy person, and asserting his status as an Arhat enters the stage of the worthy person. Thus he turns his mind away from what is not the True Teaching, and settles his mind in the True Teaching. Illustrating the claim “all this was only heard by me, while the expression is that of the Blessed One,” he frees himself [from any blame], refers to the teacher [the Buddha, as the source of the teaching], points to the expression of the Victor [as the authority], and establishes the Teaching as the guide.

Moreover, denying with the words “Thus I have heard” that [the contents of the scripture] are something produced by himself and disclosing that [they are rather] past utterances [of the Buddha], [he says] “I received this expression face-to-face from the Blessed One ... [and so] in this regard there should not be any doubt or perplexity with regard to meaning, doctrine, word or letter,” so removing disbelief in this Teaching from all gods and humans and producing an excellence of belief [in that Teaching].

Here we see clearly that for this commentarial tradition, Ānanda avers that while he cannot fathom the Buddha's teaching in its entirety, nevertheless he does his very best. Moreover, he is, for this commentary, an Arhat, an individual on the stage of a worthy person (*sappurisabhūmi*), that is to say, well advanced on the path, an issue to which we will return below, since it holds the key to our argument. So for Buddhaghosa—or let us say more carefully, for the tradition which records its ideas under his name—Ānanda understood as much of the Buddha's teaching as was possible for any non-buddha, yet he claims no role in the production of the preaching which he heard, remembered and transmits. His reliability hinges on his accurate transmission of what he heard directly, and his strict transmission of only that.

In a similar vein, the later Pāli commentator Dhammapāla in his remarks on the *Udāna* offers the following:⁶

me sutan ti sāvakasampattiṃ savanasampattiñ ca niddisati paṭisambhīdāpattena pañcasu ṭhānesu bhagavatā etad agge ṭhapitena dhammabhaṇḍāgārikena sutabhāvadīpanato tañ ca kho mayāva sutam na anussutikaṃ na paramparābhatan ti imassa catthassa dīpanato |

“I have heard” shows [Ānanda's] excellence as an auditor and [his] excellence at hearing, since it illustrates the fact that it was heard by one who has mastered the [four] special knowledges, one who was placed first by the Blessed One in five categories,⁷ the treasurer of the Teaching, and since it illustrates this sense by saying “And that I myself heard; it is not hearsay, it was not passed down in a traditional lineage.”

Here, even more emphatically than in Buddhaghosa's text, the excellences of Ānanda are emphasized, and his profound understanding is brought forward as a reason to trust him. Ānanda is a special individual, and by virtue of his mastery reliable, though again, his role as transmitter is not overlooked.

The same notion is found in the (mostly but not exclusively Mahāyāna) commentarial traditions to which we now turn, first (chronologically) in Jñānagarbha's eighth-century *Anantamukhanirhārādhārāṇī-ṭīkā*, in which,

6 *Udānaṭṭhakathā*, also cited after the edition of the Vipassana Research Society. The date of Dhammapāla is not known, but Kenneth Roy Norman, *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 137, speculatively puts him in the middle of the sixth century, and Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), §307, 370, in the second half of the same century.

7 I believe the reference is to *Aṅguttara-nikāya* i.24–25 (i.xiv.4), in which five categories are listed in which Ānanda is the first among monks. All other monks listed are mentioned under just one heading. Masfield, *The Udāna Commentary*, has no note.

in commenting on the portion of the expression which follows “Thus have I heard”—namely, “at one time” or “on one occasion,” *ekasmin samaye*—the commentator states that this expression may be construed either with the preceding verb “heard” or with the following “dwelt.” That is, Jñānagarbha understands that the scripture begins by stating either that Ānanda heard the Buddha preach at one time, or that the Buddha on a certain occasion dwelt in a specific place, at which he preached. Therefore, Jñānagarbha states:⁸

de yang gang gi tshe gong ma dang sbyar na de'i tshe 'khor rnams kyi nges pa bskyed pa'i phyir bdag nyid mang du thos par bstan te | 'di ltar bdag gis dus gcig na thos kyi | dus gzhan na yang gzhan dag thos so || de bas na bdag ni mang du thos pa yin te | de'i bdag gi tshig ni yid ches par bya ba yin par bstan pa'i phyir ro ||

When the [statement of time] is related to the preceding [clause], in order to produce certainty in the assembly it is taught that he himself [Ānanda] has heard much (**bahuśruta*) [= is very learned]. Because it is taught: “Thus I have heard at one time, but at other times I heard other things. Therefore I have heard much [= I am very learned], and the speech of such an individual as I is trustworthy.”

Here the Tibetan *yid ches par bya ba* perhaps points to something like Sanskrit *pratyetaṃ*, and means “is to be trusted or believed in.” The speaker Ānanda is made to assert, quite directly, his trustworthiness and reliability, solidly based in his learning.

Several other commentators also emphasize the great learning of Ānanda as a basis for his trustworthiness, but as I have discussed the status of Ānanda as a reliable witness in detail elsewhere,⁹ I here concentrate instead on another interesting approach taken by one line of commentarial tradition which turns what should, we might imagine, have been a great handicap into the ultimate virtue.

The problem is this: tradition holds that Ānanda, at the time of the Buddha's death and until immediately before the opening of the so-called First Council, was not an Arhat, that is, he was not awakened. (When the Pāli commentary cited above refers to him as an Arhat, it is anachronistic, since this attainment comes only after the Buddha's death.) Ānanda was even at first refused entry

8 Hisao Inagaki, *The Anantamukhanirhāra-Dhāraṇī Sūtra and Jñānagarbha's Commentary* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshodo, 1987), 116.1–6.

9 Jonathan A. Silk, “Possible Indian Sources for the Term *Tshad ma'i skeyes bu* as *Pramāṇapuruṣa*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30.2 (2002): 111–60.

into the Council, disqualified to join this conference of saints because of his lack of ultimate understanding. How, therefore, being himself unable to access the real meaning of the Buddha's teaching, could he be relied upon to transmit that teaching to others?

Passages hinting at the crucial formulation are found for perhaps the first time in the late eighth century commentaries of Kamalaśīla. In his commentary on the the *Śālistamba-sūtra* he writes:¹⁰

bdag gis thos pa zhes bya ba 'di gnyis kyis ni | bdag gis mngon sum du thos pa dang | rtogs pa ma yin par ston te | bdag nyid kyis thos kyi thos pa gcig nas gcig du brgyud pa las 'ongspa ni ma yin no || thos su zad kyi rtogs pa ma yin te | sangs rgyas ma gtogs par gzhan kyis 'di lta bu'i don rtogs mi srid pa'i phyir ro || de yang yid ches par bya ba'i rgyu yin te | gzhan du na mi srid pa'i don smras na yid ches par mi gyur ro ||

These two [words], "I heard," indicate that I heard directly and that I did not understand [its meaning]; I myself heard, but what was heard is not passed down through a traditional lineage from one person to another. It was merely heard, but not understood, because it is impossible that another besides the/a Buddha [could] understand a matter such as this. That [statement that the reciter is not responsible for the contents, but rather the Buddha himself]¹¹ also is a cause for inducing belief; otherwise, if an impossible matter were stated, it would not be convincing.

We are fortunate that, in the absence of a known Sanskrit version of this commentary, we do have a Chinese translation, produced by the famous 'Gos Chos grub (Chinese Facheng 法成), a bilingual monk living in Tibetan-occupied Dunhuang in the ninth century.¹² In light of the fact that Kamalaśīla lived in

10 Jeffrey D. Schoening, *The Śālistamba Sūtra and Its Indian Commentaries* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1995), 455-4-9.

11 See Schoening, *The Śālistamba Sūtra*, 202 n. 9.

12 The existence of this translation was discovered by Yoshimura Shūki 芳村修基, and edited by him in a bilingual edition, *Kamarashira-cho Daijō Tōkangyō no Chūshaku: Chibetto-bun to Hōjō-shi no Kanshakubun Taishō* カマラシーラ著大乗 稻芋經の註釋: チベット文と法成師の漢釋文對照 (Kyoto: Ryūkoku Daigaku Tōhō Seiten Kenkyūkai, 1959). It was studied by Ueyama Daishun 上山大峻 in his comprehensive study of Chos grub, "Daiban-koku Daitoku Sanzō Hōshi Shamon Hōjō no Kenkyū" 大蕃國大徳三藏法師沙門法成の研究, *Tōhō Gakuhō* 東方學報 38 (1967), 133-98; 39 (1968), 119-222. Reprinted in *Ajia Bunkashi Ronsō* アジア文化史論叢 I [Contributions to West, Central and North Asian Studies: Collected Papers of Liu-sha Hai-hsi (流沙海西) Scholarship Prize Winners] (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppan, 1978), 1-179; in the latter the relevant pages are 96-105.

the late eighth century, and that Facheng was active during the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang around 780–850, we may tentatively conclude that our manuscripts of the text date almost to the lifetime of Kamalaśīla himself. The Chinese version corresponding to that translated above from Tibetan has the following:¹³

言「我聞」者，此二顯其親聞，非自證也。爲自親聞，無傳聞過失，所以立「我」。但聞非證故，立於「聞」，除佛一人，餘則不能了此義故。若言「自證」，不生信故。

As for saying “I heard,” these two [words] make clear that he heard it directly, and not that he himself understood it. As he himself directly heard it, without errors of transmission, thus [the text] speaks of “I.” Because he merely heard it, but did not understand it, [the text] speaks of “hearing,” because with the sole exception of the/a Buddha, no one is capable of fully penetrating this meaning. So if [the text] were to say “I understood,” this would not engender trust [in the audience].

The argument is clear: if Ānanda were to claim his own presentation of the teaching, when difficult points would arise, listeners would doubt their validity and veracity. Only by denying not only authorship but even understanding, and maintaining that his role is nothing more than accurately transmitting what the Buddha said, can Ānanda ensure the trustworthiness of his account. His reliability, therefore, is assured precisely by his *lack* of (complete) understanding. We might, then, articulate this argument more fully as follows: If I, Ānanda, were to claim understanding, you might wonder whether I were paraphrasing the Buddha’s teachings, and then, when you had doubt, you might blame me. But I do not claim understanding or authorship, and my own lack of understanding (which you will expect, knowing that I am not an Arhat) assures this.

In his commentary on the *Vajracchedikā*, Kamalaśīla deploys some of the same terminology as that in the passage quoted immediately above, and seen earlier in a Pāli passage:¹⁴

13 *Dasheng Daoyujing suiting shoujingji* 大乘稻芋經隨聽手鏡記, T. 2782 (LXXXV) 546c14–17. The facing Chinese and Tibetan texts are found in Yoshimura, *Kamarashīra-cho Daijō Tōkangyō no Chūshaku*, 35–38. Ueyama, “Daiban-koku,” 101, contains a table with a Japanese translation of our passage from the Tibetan (of the Peking Tanjur) and the corresponding Chinese text (from the Taishō edition), with the correspondences marked in the Chinese (although not entirely clearly).

14 *Derge Tanjur* 3817, *shes phyin, ma*, 205a4–5; Dh = IOL Tib J 177 57b1.

thos pa zhes bya ba ni rtogs pa dgag par byed de | sangs rgyas ma gtogs par chos 'di lta bu dag rang gis rtogs pa gzhan med pa'i phyir ro || 'dis ni yid mi ches pa sel bar byed do ||

“Have heard” eliminates [the notion of the contents being] understood, because besides the/a Buddha there is none other who can understand such teachings as these on his own. This clears up [whatever] distrust [there might be in the authority of the teachings].

Again, in his *Saptaśatikā-Prajñāpāramitā-ṭīkā* Kamalaśīla expresses the same idea in slightly different terms:¹⁵

thos pa zhes bya ba ni rna ba'i rnam par shes pas rjes su myong ba yin gyi | rtogs pa ni ma yin te | chos 'di lta bu de bzhin gshegs pa ma gtogs par gzhan gyis khong du chud pa'i mthu med pa'i phyir ro ||

“Have heard” means experienced through the aural cognition (**śrotra-vijñāna*), but not ‘understanding,’ because no one other than the/a Tathāgata has the power to fully comprehend teachings such as this.

Finally, in his *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī-ṭīkā* Kamalaśīla refers to others who heard and transmitted sūtras from the Buddha, asserting that like Ānanda they too did not fully understand what they heard:¹⁶

thos pa zhes bya ba 'dis ni bdag gis ma rtogs so zhes bya ba bstan pa ste | thos par zad kyi rtogs pa med par rnam pa gcod pa'o || chos kyi dbyings thugs su chud pa 'phags pa 'jam ba'i dbyangs la sogs pa theg pa chen po yang dag par sdud par byed par grags mod kyi | 'on kyang sang rgyas dang 'dra bar 'di 'dra ba'i chos rnam pa thams cad du rtogs pa gzhan la mi srid de | de bas na de dag gis kyang | bdag nyid yang dag par sdud par byed par khas blangs pas mdo sde'i don rnam pa thams cad du ma rtogs so zhes ston to || gzhan du na ni de nyid ston pa por 'gyur te | yang dag par sdud par byed pa ma yin no || de nyid ni yid ches par byed pa'i rgyu ste | gzhan du na mi srid pa'i don smras na yid ches par mi 'gyur ba'i phyir ro ||

With this “Have heard” [the reciter] indicates “I did not understand”; this specifies that [I] only heard but am without understanding. Although the

¹⁵ Derge Tanjur 3815, *shes phyin, ma* 89b3–4.

¹⁶ Derge Tanjur 4000, *mdo 'grel, ji*, 124b4–7.

Noble Mañjuḥoṣa and others who comprehend the *dharmadhātu* are indeed celebrated as reciters of Mahāyāna [scriptures], nevertheless those other [than the/a Buddha] do not have the comprehensive understanding in all its aspects of such a teaching as does the/a Buddha, and therefore since they too acknowledge “I indeed am [no more than] a reciter,” this indicates that [they] do not understand the meaning of the scripture in all its aspects. Otherwise, the focus here would be on the teacher, not the reciter. Precisely [the reciter] is the cause of inspiring confidence, since otherwise if [some seemingly] impossible matter were mentioned, there would be no confidence.

Here Kamalaśīla offers an example of the kind of difficult teaching he imagines might provoke doubt in an audience, namely the idea that some things are, or seem to be, impossible (**asambhava?*). As above, if upon encountering such a teaching one were required to trust Ānanda or another reciter as the ultimate authority, one might hesitate to trust the truth of the teaching, a potential problem avoided by stressing that both the teaching and its interpretation are solely the responsibility not of the fallible reciter but rather of the Buddha, who is of course omniscient and inerrant.

Vīryaśrīdatta, also belonging to the eighth century and author of the *Nibandhana* commentary to the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra* (incidentally a non-Mahāyāna text, demonstrating that the arguments offered here are in no way exclusively Mahāyāna), begins to point out the logic at play in this argument, when he writes:¹⁷

śrutam iti śrotravijñānenodgrhītam | anena tasmin sambhave 'dhigamābhāvaṃ darśayati | paścād adhigamasambhave balavaiśāradya-dīnām buddhadharmānām āveṇikānām anabhisamayāt śrutam iti na virudhyate |

“Have heard” means acquired by aural cognition. This points out with this [expression] that on that occasion he had not obtained the state of comprehension [of the teaching, he merely heard it]. Even if there is the possibility of comprehension later [after the Buddha’s death, when Ānanda finally became an Arhat], because [at the time he heard this preaching] he had not realized the particular qualities definitive of a

¹⁷ N.H. Samtāni, *The Arthaviniścaya-sūtra and Its Commentary (Nibandhana)* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1971), 75.5–8. I read with the manuscript *sambhave* against the editor’s *samaye*.

buddha, the powers, fearlessnesses and so on, it is not inconsistent to say “Have heard” [rather than “understood”].

What is explicitly denied here is any *adhigama*, “understanding” or perhaps even better “mastery.” Ānanda is not an Arhat at the time he hears the Buddha’s teachings, so he cannot claim to have understood them, only to have heard and memorized them.

Another (anonymous) commentary to the same scripture, the *Arthaviniścaya-ṭīkā*, goes all the way and connects the dots:¹⁸

*thos zhes bya ba ni rna ba'i dbang po rnam par dag pa dang ldan pa'i rna
ba'i rnam par shes pas don dang tshig ma nor bar gzung zhes bya ba'i don
te | des ni khong du chud pa med par ston to || de ci'i phyir zhe na | gang gi
tshe bcom ldan 'das las 'phags pa dga' bos mdo 'di mngon sum du thos pa
de'i tshe | 'phags pa dga' bos bden ba rtog pa med de bcom ldan 'das mya
ngan las 'das pa'i 'og tu bden pa mthong ba'i phyir ro ||*

“Have heard” means the meaning and the words were grasped without error by the aural cognition possessing the correct faculty of hearing, and not understood [by the reciter, who has merely reported and not interpreted through his understanding]. Why? Because at the time when the Noble Ānanda heard this scripture directly from the Blessed One the Noble Ānanda lacked understanding of the truth, and [only] after the nirvāṇa of the Blessed One did he come to see the truth [and become an Arhat].

Although we need not consider the complex and in some respects different Buddhist tantric tradition in detail here, in order to illustrate the generalities of this view across Buddhist traditions we might just briefly cite from the tantric Candrakīrti, who in his *Pradīpodyotana* commentary to the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* says the following:¹⁹

māyeti sākṣān na paramparayā śrutam nādhigatam |

“I” means that it was heard directly personally by me, not through a traditional lineage, nor did I understand it.

18 Derge Tanjur 4365, *sna tshogs*, nyo 3a7-b1.

19 Anonymous edition in *Dhīḥ* 48 2009, 132.15. This is apparently a revised edition of Chintaharan Chakravarti, *Guhyasamājatāntrapradīpodyotanaṭīkā-ṣaṭkoṭivṛyākhyā* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1984), in which the passage with several mistakes is found at 11.25–26.

Finally, while not, to be sure, an Indian text, the Korean Wōnch'ūk's (613–696) 圓測 commentary on the *Sandhinirmocana-sūtra*, the *Haesimmilgyōng so* 解深密經疏, is nevertheless worthwhile briefly noting for its treatment of the relevant portion of the opening passage:²⁰

又微細律明其阿難當登高座出法藏時，身即如佛，具諸相好。若下高座，還復本形。眾見此瑞，有三種疑。一疑，大師釋迦，以慈悲故，從涅槃起，更宣深法。二疑，諸餘世尊從他方來。三疑，阿難比丘既是佛弟，堪代其兄，轉身成佛。今欲遣三疑，故云「如是我聞」等七事。明「乃是我親從佛聞，非關慈悲從涅槃起，亦非餘佛他方來，又非我已轉身成佛，自說經也」。

Again, the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the [Mūlasarvāstivāda] Vinaya tells the story that at the time when Ānanda was about to mount the high seat to proclaim the Dharmapiṭaka [at the First Council], his body was just like that of the/a buddha, replete with the major and minor bodily marks. When he descended from the high seat, his body returned to its original form. When the assembly saw this wonder, they had three kinds of doubts. 1. They wondered whether the great Śākya teacher, out of compassion, had arisen from nirvāṇa to once again proclaim the profound teaching. 2. They wondered whether other Blessed Ones had come from another world. 3. They wondered whether the monk Ānanda, being the younger brother of the Buddha, had been able to take the place of his elder brother, transform his body and become a buddha. Now, in order to remove these three doubts [Ānanda] states the seven items [making up the nidāna] beginning “Thus I have heard.” He does so to clarify that “Precisely, I heard it directly from the Buddha; it is not the case that out of compassion he arose from nirvāṇa; it is not that other buddhas came from elsewhere; and again it is not that I myself transformed my body, became a buddha and [now] preach the sūtra myself.”

Here in this rich passage the text makes clear that in no way is the teaching to be attributed to Ānanda and that, while his preaching might be confused with

20 Found in the *Zokuzōkyō*, X21n0369_p0180b12–19, online at <http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/X21n0369_001>. Its Tibetan translation at Derge Tanjur 4016 was made from the Chinese by the above-mentioned Facheng, this passage being found at *mdo 'grel, ti* 38a2–6. When the Chinese is open to interpretation I allow myself to be guided by the Tibetan. A very similar though abbreviated version is found in the *Ārya-Laṅkāvatāra-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtravṛtti Tathāgatahrdayālamkāra-nāma* attributed to Jñānavajra, Derge Tanjur 4019, *mdo 'grel, pi* 6b3–6; I do not know if the debt of this commentary to that of Wōnch'ūk has been studied.

the preaching of a present buddha, perhaps because the act of preaching carries with it such gravitas, Ānanda was no buddha and did not preach on his own accord, offering merely a repetition of what he had learned.

The lesson to be gained from the short survey here is that commentators within the Buddhist tradition faced a problem: Ānanda is the authority for the Buddha's teaching for later audiences, since it was he who recited the sermons at the First Council, where they were canonized. However, he was known by the tradition to have been unawakened during the Buddha's lifetime, that is, at the time he actually heard these preachings. The authority for the Buddha's word, then, was explicitly not authoritative. But this is where the genius of the commentarial mind shows itself: what could have been a weakness—and we might contrast the thoroughly comprehending Gaṇeśa here—is deftly turned into a strength: it was precisely Ānanda's *lack* of ability to understand, and thus inability to paraphrase, to cite one key implication, that made necessary his rote recital, and it is precisely this, in turn, that made possible all later access to the *exact words* spoken by the Buddha: all reliable transmission of the Buddha's teachings, and our consequent justified confidence in that transmission, was made possible precisely and only by Ānanda's ignorance.

The brief series of passages surveyed here raises a small but interesting point in the rhetoric and exegetical logic of Buddhist commentarial tradition, which in a broader frame is, of course, unsurprising: nothing in the tradition cannot be explained (away) as perfectly in harmony with a grand plan, so to speak, or put another way, there are no inconsistencies, if only one looks from the correct perspective. (This attitude is of course not unique to the Buddhist tradition, and one might think immediately of the Talmudic traditions as offering another vivid example of the same reasoning.) It is well known that in many circumstances Buddhist authors appeal to the notion of skillful means (*upāya*), through which any apparent inconsistency or contradiction in the Buddha's teaching may be shown to be nothing other than a manifestation of the flexibility and adaptability of his salvific efforts. The approach in the passages cited above is different, but in at least one dimension similar: what seems like a problem is shown, when seen correctly, to be not a deficiency but rather on the contrary its polar opposite, an essential building block of the tradition. The trust engendered by this logic is the key to the strong binding that defines reliability, something one feels as well, though on a less empyrean level perhaps, with friendship. It is, of course, needless to say that most feelings of respect, trust and appreciation do not normally stem from perceptions of ignorance or other weaknesses, and they require no rhetorical gymnastics to justify their counterintuitive conclusions. Indeed, if we can trace their roots at all such feelings appear to grow from shared worldviews, perhaps manifest in a

sense of humor or common value system. With all this in mind, it is with overwhelming pleasure that, with sincerest wishes for the long continuation of a real bond of heartfelt friendship, I offer this small paper to the health and happiness of my dear friend Albert Hoffstädt.

On the Early History of the Brahmanical Yugas

Vincent Eltschinger

Albert Hoffstädt's best friend, Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70–19 BCE), repeatedly dealt with the Hesiodic myth of the metallic races and its conception of a Golden Age (*aurea aetas*), making himself responsible both for its “integration into the Roman history and *imaginaire*”¹ and for influential innovations in its narrative structure and meaning. Like his near contemporaries Catullus, Horace, and Ovid, Virgil made frequent use of this myth to express his feelings and inclinations in the much troubled political circumstances of the end of the Republic and the early years of the Empire. Catullus and Horace had resorted to the motif of the Iron Age to describe the climate of moral depravation and political violence that, due to the neglect of *pietas*, threatened civil institutions and freedom. From his very first remarks on the Golden Age in the fourth *Eclogue*, and probably still in support of Antony, Virgil repeatedly expressed his belief in a possible restoration of the Golden Age. In the *Aeneid*, the advent of Augustus coincided with the return of the *aurea aetas*, which rural Italy had been embodying since the very foundation of the *Urbs*. Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid* thus came close to the new regime's propagandistic uses of the myth, whereas Ovid argued that the Augustan restoration of peace and laws was not to be confounded with the spontaneity of justice that characterized the Golden Age. A few decades later, Seneca and others welcomed Nero as the founder of a *saeculum felix*, which, again, coincided with the regime's ideology and self-legitimation strategies, often resorting to prophecies.

In Virgil as well as in his influential model, Aratus's *Phenomena*, the four main features of the *aurea aetas* are the absence of war, the absence of travels (made unnecessary by autarchy), nature's spontaneous abundance, and the humans' natural practice of piety and justice (other motifs include vegetarianism and the commensality of gods and humans). While yielding a similar picture of the Golden Age, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.90–150) provide a more systematic account of the gradual degeneration of human society. In the Silver Age (or race, *argentea proles*) the four seasons make their appearance with hot summers and cold winters forcing humans to seek shelter, whereas the Bronze Age

1 Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, *Mythologie et littérature à Rome: La réécriture des mythes aux Iers siècles avant et après J.-C.* (Lausanne: Éditions Payot, 1998), 29.

(*aenea proles*) sees an increase in cruelty. The fourth and last period, the Iron Age (*aetas ferrea*), characterizes itself by the disappearance of all virtues (honor, truthfulness, faith) and their replacement by vices such as treachery, violence and greed; crime, theft, and mistrust are substituted for justice; war and seafaring appear together with land allotment, agriculture, and mining.

Directly or indirectly, all known versions of the myth go back to Hesiod's (seventh century BCE) original account in the *Works and Days* (106–202). Here, the history of mankind is divided into five successive states referred to as “races,” with heroes or demi-gods (many of them died at Troy, the survivors living in secluded islands under king Kronos) appearing between the Bronze and Iron Races. In the time of Kronos, the Golden Race, dear to the gods, lived a god-like life without fear, misery, illness, and old age. This age of peace and beauty was made especially prosperous thanks the earth's spontaneous and abundant production. A most violent Silver Race succeeded it; created by Olympian gods whom, in its impiety, it failed to honor properly, it was destroyed by Zeus, who replaced it by the belligerent Bronze Race. Born from ash wood, this strong and ugly race disappeared into black and silent Hades. Finally, the short-lived Iron Race knows almost only suffering and worries with neither love nor friendship; offending their parents, its representatives are envious, violent and mischievous, plundering neighboring cities and paying no respect to oaths and justice.

The Graeco-Roman myth of the metallic races has long been recognized to bear close resemblance to the ancient Indian doctrine of the four *yugas*—“ages,” “eons,” “(cosmic) periods”: *kṛtayuga*, *tretāyuga*, *dvāparayuga*, and, most famous among them, *kaliyuga*.² In spite of the fact that the metallic symbolism is conspicuously absent in the Indian context (the four *yugas* are traditionally reported to borrow their names from the dice game, from the winning throw to the losing throw, see below), the *yugas* have, from the earliest days of Western indological scholarship as well as among esoteric circles,³ been com-

2 By far the best study to date is Luis González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India's Greatest Epic Poem and the Hindu System of the World Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). See also Luis González-Reimann, “Cosmic Cycles, Cosmology, and Cosmography,” in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 1, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 411–28.

3 This was the case, e.g., of William Jones (1746–1794) and Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo (1748–1806; *Systema Brahmanicum liturgicum mythologicum civile* [Romae: Apud Antonium Fulgonium, 1791]; note, e.g., p. 209—for you Albert: *Adde his, aetates indicas in quatuor disper-tiri, et primam quidem kṛdayugam, vel satyayugam seu veritatis & iustitiae aetatem usque ad diluvium perdurasse, secundam dvidiayugam dictam, a diluvio seu prima incarnatione Vishnu in piscem incepisse, tertiam tredayugam seu aetatem cupream triginta annis post mortem dei Krshnae, quae ad annum circiter 1000 ante Christum natum reicienda est, sinivisse, ad circa id tempus kaliyugam seu aetatem ferream incepisse...*). Note also René Guénon, *La Crise du monde*

pared if not identified with the Hesiodic races/ages. The doctrine finds its first but already mature expression in two closely related second- to third-century CE (parts of) texts, the *Manusmṛti* (*Laws of Manu*, 1.81–86) and the third book of India's great epic, the *Mahābhārata* (e.g., 3.148, 186–189). The four *yugas* are ascribed descending durations (4,000, 3,000, 2,000, 1,000 years). Each of them being preceded by a period of dawn (400, 300, 200, 100 years) and a period of dusk (same duration), the aggregate period, referred to as a *yuga* (and later as a *caturyuga*, “fourfold *yuga*,” or a *mahāyuga*, “great *yuga*”), amounts to 12,000 years (a thousand such *yugas* amount to a Day of Brahmā). The criterion most commonly resorted to in order to estimate this degeneration is the Law (*dharma*, behavioral, ritual, social and cosmic order, including, first and foremost, the integrity of the caste-classes and the stages of life), which is said to be diminished by one fourth in each successive *yuga*. In the same way, “age after age ... virility, wisdom, strength, and influence shrink by one-fourth.”⁴ Cosmological and apocalyptic/millenarian uses of the doctrine can be distinguished according to whether it is intended as a relatively neutral account of the cosmic time structure or, rather, as an *ex post facto* description (generally in the future tense of prophecy) of the *present* in terms of the scenario of the End.

If, in spite of ancient India's reluctance for seafaring, the absence of navigation seems not to characterize the *kṛtayuga*, the absence of fear and conflicts, the spontaneity of both the Law and nature (with or without sowing and labor) are recurring features of the first age. Other aspects include the absence of gods, diseases, suffering, discontent, pride, envy, and trade. Sacrifice appears in the *tretāyuga* together with austerities and donations. During the *dvāparayuga*, the Veda becomes fourfold, truthfulness collapses as diseases and disasters increase. Among the countless features of the *kaliyuga* (or of the *yugānta*), mention can be made of the fatal deterioration of Law and truthfulness; the end of the Vedic life-rules and rituals; crop failures and drought; social, sexual and dietary disorders; foreign invasions, false policies and plunder; trade, game and taxes, etc. In this dreadful last period, people are short-lived (men turn grey in their sixteenth year), of little vigor and valor; seven or eight-year-old girls become pregnant; women cast off all morals, have intercourse with the mouth

moderne (Paris: Gallimard, 1973 [1946]), 21: “La doctrine hindoue enseigne que la durée d'un cycle humain ... se divise en quatre âges, qui marquent autant de phases d'un obscurcissement graduel de la spiritualité primordiale; ce sont ces mêmes périodes que les traditions de l'antiquité occidentale, de leur côté, désignèrent comme les âges d'or, d'argent, d'airain et de fer.” Most sincere thanks are due to Christophe Vielle for his generous help with these and other fascinating materials.

4 *Mahābhārata* 3.188.13, translation J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 2: *The Book of the Assembly Hall*; 3: *The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 594.

and, “secretly deceiving their husbands, lasciviously fornicate with slaves and even cattle”⁵; Vedic students drink liquor and swive their teachers’ wives, while the aged behave like children; odors become stench and flavors putrid; the crossroads bristle with jackals, the cows give little milk, and the trees yield few flowers and fruits.

To the best of my knowledge, the two dispositifs have no common Indo-European ancestry.⁶ The origins of the four-*yuga* system remain shrouded in mystery even after Luis González-Reimann’s path-breaking study of the ways in which the doctrine made its way into the *Mahābhārata*. In spite of various uses of the word *yuga* as early as the *R̥gveda* (1,500–1,000 BCE; in the sense of a human generation or of an undefined time period) and the mention of longer periods of time (a hundred and ten thousand years) in the *Atharvaveda* (around 1,000 BCE?), “Vedic literature shows no awareness of large recurring time cycles [and does not] seem interested in the possibility of world destruction” (González-Reimann, “Cosmic Cycles,” 412b). Even if Babylonian influences have been postulated concerning the duration of *yugas* in later, Purāṇic materials (417b), and if Greek influence on the four descending ages is perhaps not to be entirely ruled out according to González-Reimann (*ibid.*, 416b), hypotheses concerning the origin, the formation and the early history of the doctrine are still very much a desideratum.⁷

To begin with, most scholars seem to take a simultaneous appearance and parallel, organic growth of all four *yugas* for granted. This scenario looks very unlikely to me. Let me consider first Aśvaghōṣa, a celebrated Buddhist monk, poet and dramatist whose works cannot be later than 100–150 CE, i.e., about one century earlier than the *Laws of Manu* and the relevant sections of the *Mahābhārata* (the latter could be even younger). To begin with, the two intermediate ages, the *tretāyuga* and the *dvāparayuga*, are conspicuously absent from Aśvaghōṣa’s extant writings (the *Buddhacarita* or *Life of the Buddha* and the *Saundarananda* or *Handsome Nanda*; two fragmentary dramas have come down to us as well). On the contrary, Aśvaghōṣa is well acquainted with the *kr̥tayuga*, to which he alludes several times, e.g., while describing king

5 *Mahābhārata* 3.186.55; trans. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 588.

6 Note, however, that Michael Witzel holds the four ages to belong to what he calls “Laurasian mythology.” See Michael Witzel, *The Origins of the World’s Mythologies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 86–87.

7 González-Reimann’s insightful remarks concerning the *Mahābhārata* as a “Kali” poem (conflict, war, bad luck, misfortune) and the felt necessity to “codify” and make time predictable are extremely useful in this connection. See González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 138–163. On Johannes Bronkhorst’s views on the passage from conceptions of the (near) end of the (*kali*)*yuga* to conceptions of a (long) *kaliyuga*, which I endorse, and which the present essay makes even more likely in my opinion, see below.

Śuddhodana, the Buddha's father, as "abiding by the law of righteousness of the golden age,"⁸ or the king's subjects as rejoicing in Kapilavāstu (Śuddhodana's capital city and the Buddha's birth-place, so to say) "as in the golden age of Manu, in happiness, plenty and virtue."⁹ What about the *kaliyuga*? As far as I can see, the expression does not occur in the *Saundarananda* and the first part of the *Buddhacarita*, which has been preserved in its Sanskrit original, but verse 21.64 of the *Buddhacarita*, which has been preserved in Tibetan,¹⁰ likely reflects Aśvaghōṣa's use of the expression, provided that the Tibetan expression *rtsod ldan dus* renders the Sanskrit *kaliyuga*. J.S. Negi's *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary* (vol. XI [2003], 4756a) records at least one occurrence of Tibetan *rtsod ldan dus* used to translate *kali(yuga)*, and Tibetan *rtsod pa'i dus* is well attested as a standard rendering of *kaliyuga* in other Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries. The same stanza (*Buddhacarita* 21.64) provides us with an additional allusion to the *kṛtayuga* (Tibetan *rdzogs ldan [gyi] dus*) in Aśvaghōṣa's writings. As we shall see, the *Mahābhārata* and other Brahmanical sources not only describe the *kaliyuga*, but also the *yugānta* or "end of a/the *yuga*," where *yuga* is likely intended in the sense of the entire four-*yuga* pattern, or as an unspecified era.¹¹ To put it briefly, the *yugānta* "is a time of great destruction, caused mainly by natural forces: torrential rains, implied by the rolling clouds and the thunder; earthquakes ...; terrible winds ...; and an intense, resplendent Sun; but most of all fire, an all-consuming fire that destroys everything. There are also comets and meteors, as well as negative planetary configurations."¹² In *Buddhacarita* 16.30, Aśvaghōṣa compares the imperturbable Buddha with Brahmā who "at the end of the great eon ... shines sitting when the conflagration dies down."¹³ The Tibetan expression E.H. Johnston translates with "(conflagration at) the end of the great eon" is *dus mtha'i me*, which almost certainly renders the ubiquitous Sanskrit expression *yugāntāgni*, literally "the fire at the

8 *Saundarananda* 2.25c, translation E.H. Johnston, *The Saundarananda or Nanda the Fair, Translated from the Original Sanskrit of Aśvaghōṣa* (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), 10.

9 *Saundarananda* 3.41cd-42, translation Johnston, *The Saundarananda*, 19.

10 Derge edition of the Tibetan canon (*Bstan 'gyur*) Ge 77b6-7.

11 On the *yugānta*, see González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 64-73, Johannes Bronkhorst, "The Historiography of Brahmanism," in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), and below.

12 González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 71.

13 Derge edition of the Tibetan canon (*Bstan 'gyur*) Ge 60a3, translation E.H. Johnston, *Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha (in three parts: Sanskrit Text of Cantos I-XIV with English Translation of Cantos I-XXVIII, Cantos I to XIV translated from the Original Sanskrit supplemented by the Tibetan Version and Cantos XV to XXVIII from the Tibetan and Chinese Versions* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 17.

end of a/the *yuga*.” To sum up, Aśvaghōṣa is familiar with the *kṛtayuga*, the *il-lud tempus* of ideal kings and seers (*ṛṣi*), the *kalīyuga*, and the *yugānta*, but never refers to the intermediate periods of the *tretā*- and *dvāparayugas*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, ancient India’s second great epic, reveals roughly similar tendencies. Although the *Rāmāyaṇa*, like the *Mahābhārata*, cannot be dated with any degree of certainty (between 500 BCE and 500 CE?) and has undergone much reworking, it looks like significant parts of the core narrative (cantos 2–6) were known to Aśvaghōṣa in pretty much the same form as the ones we now read, as Gawroński and others have demonstrated.¹⁴ A quick search into the electronic text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*¹⁵ entirely confirms reading notes and impressions: *tretāyuga* occurs six times in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, all of them in book 7 (17.31, 65.11–12, 65.17, 67.18, 68.1); *dvāparayuga* presents the same overall distribution with only four occurrences in book 7 (65.19, 20, 21, 23). Either alone or in compound expressions, *kali(yuga)* surprisingly only occurs at 7.65.22 (for *tiṣya*, a synonym of *kali[yuga]*, see below). Now, the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s books 1 and 7 are almost unanimously regarded as later additions.¹⁶ In other words, the totality of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s allusions to the *tretā*-, *dvāpara*- and *kaliyugas* (with the possible exception of the *tiṣya* occurrence) can safely be considered later additions reflecting conceptions widely attested in the *Mahābhārata* and early Purāṇas. The *kṛtayuga* is only slightly better represented with six occurrences in book 7 (2.4, 17.31, 53.3, 65.9, 70.5, 88.8), two in book 1 (1.73, 44.14) and two in books 5 (1.108) and 6 (26.13), the only ones justified to claim some antiquity. *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.26.13 is certainly the most interesting among them. After revealing that the Blessed One had created two parties, the dharmic gods and the adharmic anti-gods, Mālyavat, a parent of cruel Rāvaṇa, explains that “[when]

14 See Andrzej Gawroński, *Studies about the Sanskrit Buddhist Literature, Collected Papers*, ed. Marek Mejer (Warsaw: Research Centre of Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Univ. Warsaw, 2012 [the article “Studies about the Sanskrit Buddhist Literature” was initially published in 1919]), 102. Gawroński’s systematic research was based on book 2.

15 See the digitized Poona critical edition at <<http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html#Ram>>, last accessed 26 December 2019.

16 See John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 379–83 and 391. These two books are regarded as the third stage of growth of the epic, the second stage consisting of various types of inflation (expansion, interpolation) in books 2–6, criteria for which can be either formal/stylistic (ornateness in language and style, long compounds, prosody) or material (Purāṇic elements, divinity of Rāma, etc.). The addition of stage three is not earlier than the first to second century CE and may very well be dated to the fourth century CE, if not later. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* as in the *Mahābhārata*, this addition “seems ... to be linked with passing from the hands of their traditional reciters ... into those of the brāhmanas as the guardians of all traditional learning,” and reflects a “process of adaptation to brāhman values” (religious, ethical, cosmological) (Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 394). This process also reflects a “shift from oral to written transmission” (p. 395).

dharma eclipse[d] *adhharma*, then the *kṛtayuga* prevailed, [but when] *adharmā* eclipses *dharma*, then *tiṣya* (= *kali[yuga]*) breaks out.” What we actually find in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are comparatively abundant references to the *yugānta* or “end of a/the *yuga*,” only six of which occur in book 7 (6.55, 7.10, 15.9, 32.38, 61.20, 61.31), and none in books 1–2. Among the twenty-six occurrences of *yugānta* in books 3–6, twelve refer to the *yugāntāgni* (“the fire at the end of the/a *yuga*”) that we have already encountered in Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita*, the remaining fourteen referring to other aspects of the final cataclysm (suns, winds, clouds, lightning). The two occurrences of *yugakṣaye* (“at the close/consumption of the/a *yuga*”) in book 6 (82.38, 88.4) point in the same direction. To sum up, the early portions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reflect no awareness of the *tretā*- and *dvāparayugas*. They only rarely allude to the *kṛta*- and the *kaliyugas* (in the form of *tiṣya*), operating almost exclusively with the *yugānta*. The evidence from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the works of Aśvaghōṣa suggests that in first-century CE Ayodhyā/Sāketa (the Rāmaite center, of which, according to colophons, Aśvaghōṣa was a native), cosmological and eschatological conceptions revolved around the three motifs of an “Edenic” *kṛtayuga* (widely used in reference to ideal kingship), a cataclysmic *yugānta* (most often in the context of similes and metaphors) and a still very discrete *kaliyuga/tiṣya* with unspecified mutual connections and no organic pattern of gradual degeneration.

Close attention should be paid in this connection to a curious little text, the so-called *Yugapurāṇa*, which, if its tentative dating by its learned editor could be confirmed, would be the earliest extant source concerning the four *yugas*.¹⁷ The 115-verse *Yugapurāṇa* forms section 41 of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*, a bulky treatise (6,500 verses) on astral science twice referred to in the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁸ Given that the *Mahābhārata* explicitly refers to the text’s sixty-four divisions, the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* likely was known to its redactors “in a form at least very similar to its present form” (Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 10). From the fact that the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* and the *Yugapurāṇa* refer to the Indo-Greeks (*yavana*) and the Indo-Scythians (*śaka*) but not to later groups of foreign invaders such as the

17 See González-Reimann, “Cosmic Cycles,” 415a, and John E. Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa, Critically Edited, with an English Translation and a Detailed Introduction* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1986), vii. The overall interpretation of the *Yugapurāṇa* is my main, and basically unique, point of disagreement with González-Reimann, who, while apparently assenting to Mitchiner’s chronology, regards the text as a forerunner and possible source for the *Mahābhārata*’s (and, for this reason, the *Vāyuproktam purāṇam*, “the *purāṇa* revealed by [the god] Vāyu”) attempt to locate the epic events in the *yuga* scheme (see below). See González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 98–99 and 142.

18 For a summary of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*, see David Pingree, *Jyotiḥśāstra, Astral and Mathematical Literature (A History of Indian Literature VI, 4)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), 69–72.

Pahlavas, the Kuṣāṇas, the Tuṣāras and the Hūṇas, J. Mitchiner deems it “reasonable to suggest at this stage a date of the composition of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* as a whole during the period of Indo-Greek rule and presence in India, and before the Indo-Parthian and Kuṣāṇa invasions: namely some time prior to c. AD 25” (p. 11). Mitchiner’s final estimate is 25 BCE, about one century before Aśvaghōṣa. Mitchiner (pp. 14–16) sees no reason to doubt the authenticity of the *Yugapurāṇa* as an integral and original part of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*: this section conforms in language, form and style to the rest of the treatise; the name *purāṇa* is given to other sections of the work as well; all extant complete manuscripts of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* contain the *Yugapurāṇa* chapter; no independent manuscript of the *Yugapurāṇa* or any other part of the work has come to light. As for the unity of composition of the chapter, it has received only little attention from the editor: judged on metrical criteria, “the text of the *Yugapurāṇa* is on the whole reasonably unitary” (p. 14).

The text presents itself as a cosmological-historical exposition delivered by Śaṅkara/Śiva in answer to a set of questions posed by Skanda: “What was the nature of the Time which has gone by in the past, and what is to be the nature [of Time in the future]? What [will be] the length of life and what the bodily form of living beings: and what also will be the strength of *tapas* (ascetic practices) at the end of the Yuga? What [will be] the degree of authority at the start of the Yuga, and the *dharma* (forms of righteous conduct) in each Yuga: and at the end of the Yuga, [what] will be the state of affairs at that time, O Lord of Creatures?”¹⁹ Śiva’s answer consists in an account of the four *yugas* (vv. 6–37): *kṛtayuga* (vv. 6–14), *tretāyuga* (vv. 15–22), *dvāparayuga* (vv. 23–36), and *kalīyuga* (vv. 37–113). During the *kṛtayuga* of supreme virtue, fear, death, thieves, greed, anger, passions, deceit, depravity and sexual union were unknown; trees bore fruit at will and the earth was full of corn; gods and other supernatural beings were born, and the humans’ life-span amounted to 100,000 years.

The *kṛtayuga* ended with a big battle at the end of which Brahmā created the aristocratic and military caste (*kṣatra*, i.e., *kṣatriyas*). Women, the four caste-classes, sacrifices, treatises and mantras appeared during the *tretāyuga*; humans were upright and not deceitful, dedicated to *dharma* and their own socio-religious duty; their life-span decreased to 10,000 years as anger and greed descended upon the surface of the earth. Rāma (Paraśurāma or Jāmadagnya, not the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) caused the disappearance of the entire caste of the warriors (likely to avenge the death of his father at their hands). In spite of the fact that truth, righteousness and sacrifices remained, and one quarter of the *dharma* was left, the *dvāparayuga* proved “terrible” (*ghora*), with

19 *Yugapurāṇa* 1cd-3, translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 87.

a decrease of the life-span to 1,000 years and an apocalyptic war causing the destruction of the earth, men, and kings.²⁰ This war is none other than the one narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, the most important characters of which are mentioned by name, including Keśava (= Viṣṇu) in the form of Vāsudeva (= Kṛṣṇa). The description of the *kaliyuga*, starting with king Pārīkṣit (vv. 38–39), occupies the rest of the chapter, where general descriptions of the gloomy last age (vv. 50–55, 82–86, 90–94) alternate with seemingly historical characters and narratives.²¹ The *Yugapurāṇa*'s description of the *kaliyuga* ends with an optimistic note. Calm, patience and self-restraint, as well as the firm upholders of Brahmanical values, will remain at the consumption of the *yuga* as twelve regions (*maṇḍala*) are created with a view to the welfare of surviving living beings (vv. 95–113) in a climate that is evocative of the dawn of a new *kṛtayuga* (the expression does not occur in this context).

The *Yugapurāṇa*'s account of the *kaliyuga* seems odd. The expression *kaliyuga* appears three times at the very outset of the account (vv. 37, 38, 40) and then entirely disappears.²² What one finds instead are repeated allusions to the end of the *yuga*, most of which occur in refrain-like manner at the end of (half-)verses in the form *yugakṣaye*, “at the consumption/close of the *yuga*.” This pattern is reflected in no less than eleven verses (50–51, 95–97, 99, 102–104, 110, 113), an additional one consisting in the equally formulaic *yugānte samupasthite*, “when the end of the *yuga* is at hand” (v. 53). This, together with the “*yuga*'s end” of v. 91, suggests that the major part of vv. 37–113 was intended as a description, not of the *kaliyuga*, but of the *yugānta*.²³ The pattern is clearly reminiscent of at least two passages in the Mārkaṇḍeya section of the *Mahābhārata* (3.186–189). In 3.186, the relevant segment (vv. 24–55) occurs immediately after a general outline of the four-*yuga* system (vv. 17cd–23) that reflects the same doctrine as the *Laws of Manu* (1.81–86). Eight references to the

20 The use of the future tense starts with the description of the end of the *dvāparayuga*, suggesting that Śiva's exposition takes place before the *Mahābhārata* battle. The *Yugapurāṇa* is thus as much a narration of the past as a prophecy.

21 Foundation of Pāṭaliputra by Udāyin together with subsequent events connected to kings Śālīśūka, Sādhuketa and Vijaya (vv. 40–46), disorders caused by the invasion of the Indo-Greeks (vv. 47–48 and 56–57), the desolation caused by the seven mighty kings of Sāketa and the Agniveśyas (vv. 58–61), appearance of the king of the Śakas (vv. 62–65), events connected with kings Āmrāṭa/Lohitākṣa, Gopāla, Puṣpaka, Anaranya, Vikuyaśas, Agnimitra (vv. 66–78), Agniveśya and his struggle against the Śabaras (vv. 79–81), king Śatuvāra and the massacres caused by the Śakas (vv. 87–89).

22 I am not inclined to interpret *kalipriyam* in v. 96 as a reference to the *kaliyuga*.

23 An additional feature of the passage is the repeated, here again refrain-like occurrence of *na (atra) saṁśayah*, generally at the end of the verse. The pattern is reflected in vv. 38, 42, 48, 50–52, 54, 57, 64, 78, 85, 92.

yugānta can be numbered (against one for the *kaliyuga*, v. 27), three of which consist of end-of-verse *yugakṣaye*, “at the consumption/close of the *yuga*” (vv. 35, 42, 48). Most striking is, however, 3.188. The passage presents itself as Mārkaṇḍeya’s answer to Yudhiṣṭhira’s question about the *kaliyuga*, which he makes every impression of deliberately equating with the end of the *yuga* (see vv. 4–7). Here again, the passage opens with a short outline of the four *yugas* (vv. 9–12). This short introduction, in which the *kaliyuga* is not explicitly mentioned, reflects the “orthodox” doctrine of the descending four quarters of the *dharma*. The seventy-one verses that follow (vv. 13–84) contain no less than thirty-eight explicit references to the end of the *yuga*,²⁴ all of them in the locative, and more or less with the same meaning (“at the end of the *yuga*): *yugānte paryupasthite* (vv. 19, 35–37, 39, 43–44, 47, 54, 76, 81, 83), *yugakṣaye* (vv. 20–23, 25, 32–33, 41, 50–51, 78, 85), *yugānte* (vv. 49, 53, 66, 73, 79), *yugasankṣaye* (vv. 55, 62, 64), *gate yuge* (v. 69), *yuge kṣīṇe* (v. 66), and *tadā sankṣepsyate yugam* (“then the *yuga* will end,” vv. 59, 67–68). There is little doubt in my opinion that the original intent of this passage was the *yugānta*, not the *kaliyuga*. *Yugapurāṇa* 37–113, *Mahābhārata* 3.186 and 3.188 thus seem to exhibit a very similar structure in which a lengthy development dedicated to the *yugānta* is introduced, and sometime concluded, by a generally much shorter and ideologically standardized outline of the four (or only three) *yugas*. In all cases, this reorganization results in the *yugānta* becoming the end, not of an unspecified era, as it originally was in my opinion, but of the *kaliyuga*, hence of a four-*yuga* period. I cannot resist the impression that, in those three passages, original apocalyptic/prophetic accounts of the *yugānta* were provided with a new meaning by incorporating them into the alien and most probably more recent framework of the four *yugas*.

These three passages have another feature in common. As we have seen, the *Yugapurāṇa* lays strong emphasis on the political events to take place at the end of the *yuga*. Some at least among these events pertain to intruding barbarian (*mleccha*) kings or groups such as the Indo-Greeks, the Indo-Scythians, and king Āmrāṭa/Lohitākṣa. The Indo-Greeks, “infatuated by war,” (v. 56), are made responsible for the ruin of Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna), various disorders, and a great war. The mighty king of the Śakas is “greedy for wealth,” “vicious,” “evil” and “goes while plundering,” and “when the Śaka realm has been destroyed, the earth will be desolate.”²⁵ “Then the terrible Śaka will cause the peoples, acting for their own destruction..., to be also scattered.... He will destroy a quarter of living beings by arms; [while] the Śakas will take a quarter of the

24 Including *paścime kāle*, “in the final period/time” (v. 52).

25 *Yugapurāṇa* vv. 62–64, translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 93.

wealth to their own city.”²⁶ As for Āmrāṭa the Mleccha, “red-eyed and wearing red garments, having robbed the helpless people, [he] will then cause them to be destroyed. Then that king will destroy the four *varṇas* [caste-classes, VE].”²⁷ To be sure, the barbarian kings have no monopoly over political and social violence in the *Yugapurāṇa*, but they are indiscriminately regarded as evil. Consider now *Mahābhārata* 3.186.29–31: “Many barbarian kings, O overlord of men, will rule the earth with false policies, being given to evil and lies. Āndhras will be kings then, Scythians, Pulindas, Greeks, Kambojas, Auruṅikas, serfs, and Ābhīras. Not a brahmin then lives by his own Law, and likewise the barons and commoners work at the wrong tasks, O king.”²⁸ As for *Mahābhārata* 3.188, it exhibits a refrain-like statement to the effect that at the end of the *yuga* “the entire world is/will be barbarized” (*mlecchabhūtaṃ jagat sarvam*, vv. 29, 37, 45). Other references to barbarians in 3.188 include vv. 52 (“all men will be omnivorous barbarians, cruel in all their deeds”) and 70: “The earth will soon be overrun by barbarians, while the brahmins, out of fear of the tax burden, flee in all the directions.”²⁹ The *Yugapurāṇa* is certainly unique in its insistence on the political factors at play at the end of the *yuga*, but all three texts refer, sometime in a fairly insisting manner, to barbarian rule and habits as sure signs and decisive causes of the End.³⁰

As suggested above, *Mahābhārata* 3.186 and 188 seem to betray a recontextualization of passages originally dedicated to the *yugānta*. Now, can the *kaliyuga*/*yugānta* part of the *Yugapurāṇa* (vv. 37–113) be shown to have undergone a similar process of “adaptive re-use”? In other words, can the initial outline of the first three *yugas* and the beginning of the “*kaliyuga*” section be shown to be anachronistic? Towards the end of the *tretāyuga* section, the *Yugapurāṇa* mentions (Paraśu)rāma (v. 22); a few verses below, at the end of the *dvāparayuga* section (v. 30), it refers to Vāsudeva (≈ Kṛṣṇa). At least as far as Vāsudeva is concerned, these allusions have nothing anachronistic in themselves: by the putative date of the text (25 BCE), Vāsudeva was a well-known figure referred to not only by the grammarian Pāṇini (fourth century BCE; *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.3.98), but also by several second- to first-century BCE epigraphs such as, e.g., Heliodoros’s (a Greek ambassador in Taxila) famous Garuḍa pillar inscription at

26 *Yugapurāṇa* vv. 88–89, translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 95.

27 *Yugapurāṇa* vv. 68–69, translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 93.

28 Translation van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 586–87.

29 Translation van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, 595–96.

30 See Vincent Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014), 34–72, Bronkhorst, “Historiography,” 29–32, González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 97.

Besnagar.³¹ In addition, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is represented with four arms, a conch, a disk, and a mace (the attributes of the “future” Hindu god Viṣṇu) from the end of the first century BCE (Malhār/Bilaspur in Central India; see Schmid, *Don de voir*, 112–118), so that at least part of what follows need not surprise us (*Yugapurāṇa* vv. 29–30): “Keśava will arise at the end of the Dvāpara, in order to destroy horses and elephants, princes and men; [he will be] four-armed, of great valour, bearing the conch, disk and mace: [and he will be] called Vāsudeva, the strong one, dressed in yellow clothes.”³² What is striking about this passage is that it opens the *Yugapurāṇa*’s detailed account of the *Mahābhārata*’s plot and personnel (vv. 31–36), which the text thus locates at the close of the *dvāparayuga* (this has been the most current view about them from Purāṇic Hinduism onward):

Then, resembling Kailāsa, wearing a garland of flowers [and] bearing the plough as weapon, there will arise Yudhiṣṭhira—the excellent king of the Pāṇḍavas—for the purpose of slaughter at the end of the Dvāpara, together with [his] four brothers: [namely] both Bhīmasena the son of Vāyu, and Phālguna of severe *tapas* [austerity, VE], and the two brothers Nakula and Sahadeva, born of the Aśvins. Also Bhīṣma, Droṇa and others, and the prince Dhṛṣṭadyumna: and Karṇa, the king of Aṅga, together with Aśvatthāman the invincible; Devala and Śatadhanvan, and Dārūka the illustrious—they will arise at the end of the Yuga, in order to protect the world of men. So too Śakuni and Dantavakra, and Śiśupāla the haughty: together with Śalya, Rukmi, Jarāsandha, Kṛtavarman [and] Jayadratha. The cause [of strife] of these mighty kings will be Kṛṣṇā, the daughter of Drupada: [and] the earth will go to [her] destruction.³³

As demonstrated by González-Reimann,³⁴ however, the *Mahābhārata*’s own statements to the effect that its plot would belong to the end of the *dvāparayuga* (and that Kṛṣṇa’s death would open the *kaliyuga*) are extremely scarce, isolated, and demonstrably late—as is, of course, the *Mahābhārata*’s own summary of contents at 1.2 (Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 135), where such claims find their first expression in the great Epic (*Mahābhārata* 1.2.9: “And once the junc-

31 On the early history of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, see Charlotte Schmid, *Le Don de voir: Premières représentations krishnaïtes de la région de Mathurā* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2010). See also Gérard Colas, “Bhāgavatas,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 3, ed. Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 295b.

32 Translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 90.

33 Ibid.

34 See González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 86–107.

ture of the *kali* and the *dvāpara* was reached, there was a war between the armies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas in Samantapañcaka"). In other words, if Mitchiner's early chronology were to be accepted, the author(s) of the *Yugapurāṇa* would be the first witness(es), and likely inventor(s), of a central theological-mythological complex that only appears about three centuries later in the *Mahābhārata* itself. Considered in this light, the verses on Keśava appearing as Vāsudeva (vv. 29–30) are perhaps liable to a different interpretation. The text's reference to the four arms, the conch, the disk, and the mace could very well refer to Viṣṇu himself, in which case Vāsudeva(-Kṛṣṇa) could be understood as a manifestation of the latter (Keśava appears *with the name* Vāsudeva), even if the vocabulary of traditional Vaiṣṇava theology (*avatāra*, *prādurbhāva*, *vyūha*, etc., all meaning something like "manifestation" or "embodiment") is not represented in our text. Now, this would be incompatible with a late first-century BCE date given that even the *Bhagavadgītā* (first to second century CE) does not consider Kṛṣṇa, its main protagonist, to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu.³⁵ Clear allusions to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa being a manifestation of Viṣṇu seem not to be attested before late strata of the *Mahābhārata* such as the first (1.61.90, *aṃśāvatarāṇa*, "partial embodiment") and especially the twelfth books (12.326.61, etc., *prādurbhāva*, "appearance"). According to A. Malinar, "[a]lthough there are some epic passages in which Kṛṣṇa is considered to be identical with the god Viṣṇu or is addressed as Viṣṇu, this identification, making Kṛṣṇa an embodiment (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu, seems to have been a later development. The earliest sources, in which Kṛṣṇa becomes part of a Vaiṣṇava genealogy and which turn him into one of the various embodiments of Viṣṇu, are the *Harivaṃśa* (second to third cents. CE) and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (third to fourth cents. CE)."³⁶ As we have seen, moreover, the *Yugapurāṇa* describes Vāsudeva as "dressed in yellow clothes." The motif may presuppose passages such as *Mahābhārata* 3.148, which associate different colors (and names) with Viṣṇu in each *yuga*: Nārāyaṇa is white in the *kṛtayuga*; Acyuta is red in the *tretāyuga*; Viṣṇu is yellow in the *dvāparayuga*; and Keśava is black (*kṛṣṇa*!) in the *kaliyuga*. As for the *Yugapurāṇa*'s allusion to Rāma (v. 22–23a), "at the end

35 The *Bhagavadgītā* (vv. 4.6–7), however, is often regarded as providing a first general concept of the motif: "Although I am unborn and imperishable and the lord of the creatures indeed, I transform nature (*prakṛti*) that is mine and take birth through an appearance of myself (ātmanāyā). For whenever the Law (*dharma*) languishes, Bhārata, and lawlessness (*adharmā*) flourishes, I create myself. I take on existence from eon (*yuga*) to eon, for the rescue of the good and the destruction of the evil, in order to reestablish the Law." Translation as in André Couture, "Avatāra," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 2, ed. Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 702a.

36 Angelika Malinar, "Kṛṣṇa," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 1: 609b.

of the Tretā Yuga ... the earth was made devoid of kṣatriyas thrice-seven times by Rāma. Then, when the Kṣatra had been destroyed...³⁷ it is likely to presuppose passages such as *Mahābhārata* 3.117.9: “Twenty-one times the lord emptied the earth of barons [kṣatriyas, VE].” As far as I can see, however, this passage of the *Mahābhārata* does not associate the famous episode of Rāma’s revenge with the *tretāyuga*. Such an association seems only to appear, again, in the Epic’s summary of contents at *Mahābhārata*’s 1.2.3: “At the juncture of the *tretā* and the *dvāpara* [*yugas*], Rāma the best among warriors several times destroyed all the terrestrial kṣatriyas (*pārthivaṃ kṣatram*).” The parallelism cannot be clearer: in addition to the episode itself, both passages refer to the earth (*mahī, pārthiva*) and to the *kṣatra* (military order/power; the *kṣatriyas* as a whole). In both *Mahābhārata* 1.2 and the *Yugapurāṇa*, the only two stories narrated in this particular context are those of Rāma and Vāsudeva.

To sum up, close consideration of the *tretā*- and *dvāparayuga* sections of the *Yugapurāṇa* suggests their author’s likely indebtedness to late (second to fourth century CE?) strata of the *Mahābhārata* and perhaps other texts such as the *Harivaṃśa* and early Purāṇas. Alternatively, if the *Yugapurāṇa* is to be regarded as the source of the epic and early Purāṇic accounts, as Luis González-Reimann is inclined to believe, its elaboration on the four *yugas*—say, perhaps vv. 1–46—must postdate 25 BCE, unless one has to credit this short and rather isolated text with several major innovations in Indian religious history, such as Vāsudeva(-Kṛṣṇa) as a manifestation of Keśava(-Viṣṇu) and the assignment of Rāma to the juncture of the *tretā*- and *dvāparayugas* and of Vāsudeva and the *Mahābhārata* to the juncture of the *dvāpara*- and *kalīyugas*. In addition, the *Yugapurāṇa* would have to be the model for these two stories’ being the only ones narrated at the outset of *Mahābhārata* 1.2; for the episode of Rāma Jāmadagnya emptying the earth of all kṣatriyas; for other aspects such as the role played by Time (*kāla*) in the two accounts (compare v. 28 with *Mahābhārata* 1.2.25); and for numerous aspects of the legends of kings Janamejaya Pārīkṣit, Udāyin, and Śālīsūka that seem only to be attested in Purāṇic literature (Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 51–55). In short, the presence of all these motifs in a text from the first century BCE looks very implausible to me. To be sure, the *Mahābhārata* twice refers to the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*, but this does not mean that the author(s)/compiler(s) of the relevant sections of the Epic were acquainted with the *Yugapurāṇa*, at least in its present form. There are in my opinion some reasons to believe that the four-*yuga* framework of the *Yugapurāṇa* is a late addition intended to recontextualize an older, possibly end-of-the-first-century BCE account, not of the four *yugas*, but of the *yugānta*, “the end of the *yuga*.”

37 Translation Mitchiner, *The Yuga Purāṇa*, 89.

The formal, compositional and doctrinal features of the *Yugapurāṇa*, *Mahābhārata* 3.186 and 3.188 seem to point to two distinct layers: older apocalyptic accounts of the *yugānta* (first century BCE to second century CE?),³⁸ and a later reframing of these prophecies made in order to align them with the new Brahmanical, essentially Vaiṣṇava ideas concerning cosmology and, in one case at least, the historical manifestations of Viṣṇu (second to fourth century CE?).³⁹ In my opinion, this is likely to give even more weight to J. Bronkhorst's hypothesis that the (late Epic/early Purāṇic) conception of a long *kaliyuga* with a distant end imposed itself when apocalyptic expectations relating to the near end of the (*kali*)*yuga* proved wrong.

I am inclined to believe that the doctrine of the four *yugas* was still unknown to the authors/redactors of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (books 2–6) and Aśvaghoṣa in first-century CE Sāketa/Ayodhyā and surroundings, even if, strictly speaking, their silence does not make such a conclusion necessary. Their eschatological conceptions revolved around fairly widespread ideas concerning a cataclysmic *yugānta*; both texts testify to a belief in a “Golden Age” of celebrated kings and *ṛṣis* increasingly referred to as the *kṛta*(*yuga*) and, albeit sparsely, to some acquaintance with a degenerate time period named the *kali*(*yuga*), which could correspond in time with the *Mahābhārata*'s ubiquitous allusions to its own events as being *kali*, i.e., entailing conflict, war, bad luck, and misfortune. In addition, the chronology of the *Yugapurāṇa* (or at least parts of it, 25 BCE), a text that has often been regarded as the earliest extant witness to the four-*yuga* system, is far from warranted. I would thus hypothesize that the doctrine of the four *yugas* developed some time between the late first century and the late second century CE, likely on the basis of an analogy with the dice game. Once *kṛta* and *kali* were, so to speak, posited, those who created the new cosmology could easily resort to the terminology of the dice throws in order to fill in the new structure and give it a more distinctly degenerative physiognomy.⁴⁰ As shown by González-Reimann, the *Laws of Manu* testify to a similar attempt while reinterpreting two verses from the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (600 BCE?) in which this terminology was used in order to indicate good and bad fortune. In

38 For a partial anticipation of this hypothesis, see González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 72.

39 On the “Vaiṣṇava appropriation” of the Epic by means of the doctrines of the *avatāras* and the *yugas*, see González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 103 and 151.

40 Think of the four Dalton brothers in the French comic book *Lucky Luke* by Morris and René Goscinny: only the smallest (Joe, the most stubborn and cruel of the four) and the tallest one (Averell, the most stupid and tender of the four) matter. The two intermediate brothers Jack and William play no other role in the narrative than suggesting a gradation in stupidity and cruelty.

the *Brāhmaṇa*, these verses are as follows: “The fortune of one who is sitting down, sits down; that of one who is standing, stands up. That of one who is lying down, lies down; the fortune of one who keeps moving, moves. Lying down one becomes Kali; getting up, Dvāpara. Standing, one becomes Tretā; by moving, one becomes Kṛta.”⁴¹ While reinterpreting these stanzas in the framework of political theory, the *Laws of Manu* (9.301–302) turn the metaphor of the dice throws into a *yuga* metaphor⁴²: “The sum of the king’s actions determines the Kṛta, the Tretā Yuga, the Dvāpara and the Kali, for the king is said to be the yuga. Asleep, he becomes the Kali; awake, the Dvāpara Yuga; ready to act, the Tretā; and when acting, the Kṛta Yuga.”⁴³ As we have seen, the *Laws of Manu* are generally regarded, together with the *Mahābhārata*, as the earliest extant witness to the conception of the four *yugas*. This is not to say that the author(s) of the *Laws of Manu*, or of the relevant sections of the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, were the creators of the motif (Mārkaṇḍeya claims his revelation at *Mahābhārata* 3.186–189 to be based on the *Vāyuproktaṃ purāṇam*, “the *purāṇa* revealed by Vāyu,” *Mahābhārata* 3.189.14), but it seems very likely to me that they belonged to the same milieu, and lived very close in time to its invention.

Whatever the relevance of the chronology suggested above, it seems likely that the four *yugas* did not originate as an organic system, but as a result of gradual accretion and ideologically motivated decisions made in order to update older cosmological and eschatological conceptions. Such a scenario is very unlikely to have led to the formation of the Hesiodic myth of the metallic races/ages, whatever the merits of Jean-Pierre Vernant’s hypothesis.⁴⁴ The Greco-Roman myth of the four/five ages and the Indian system of the four *yugas* present a clear case of superficially comparable structures, close historical analysis of which betrays logics and ideologies divergent enough to ruin every attempt at a heuristically fruitful comparison.

41 *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* 7.15 (33.3.3–4), translation González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 122.

42 Adapted from González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 123.

43 Translation, *ibid.*

44 Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Le mythe hésiodique des races. Essai d’analyse structurale” (1958), in Vernant, *Oeuvres, Religions, Rationalités, Politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 1: 255–80.

Size Matters: The Length of Korea's History and the Size of Its Historical Territory

Remco Breuker

The Korean peninsula has a long history. One may quibble about its precise length of course. Little credence should be attached to the conclusions of South Korean pseudo-historians maintaining that the Korean peninsula, its people, and its culture (all proudly singular as if to offer a stark contrast to today's sad duality)¹ are 5,000, 7,000, or even 9,000 years old.² But serious assertions may be as long as 1,500 to 2,000 years, the precise number also depending on the precise definitions one uses. Even if one finds oneself forced by reason and fact to position oneself at the shorter end of the bandwidth of potential historical length, as I find myself, the limit of a thousand years is easily crossed.³ This, of course, does not mean that human inhabitation of the Korean peninsula only began a mere thousand years ago. Recent archaeological excavations have shown that the Korean peninsula was inhabited by homo sapiens as early as 40,000 years ago.⁴ This must have given occasion for joy among the more jingoistically inclined elements of the Korean population,

1 Or even its triality, if one includes the *chosŏnjok* or the ethnic Korean Chinese in Yanbian who now see themselves as a nation separate from both North and South Korea.

2 Although I have to confess that the precise mathematics behind this phenomenon escape me, it seems clear that in the discourses of the pseudo-historians, the imagined length of Korean history increases exponentially rather than, as it should, linearly with the passing of the years. While it was still considered properly nationalist in the early 1990s to state that Korean history was 5,000 years long, ten years later this had increased to 7,000 years, while at present it is set at about 9,000 years. For an informative discussion of pseudo-historians, what they write, and how they behave, see Andrew Miles Logie, *Popular Korean Historiography in Northeast Asia: A Critical Survey from the 13th Century until the Present, Pertaining to Early Korea* (Helsinki: Univ. of Helsinki, 2016); idem, "The Politics of Feigned Impartiality: A Critical Response to 'The Politics of Historical Knowledge,'" *Journal of Asian History* 53.1 (2019): 117–50.

3 The conquest of much of what is now seen as the historical territory of the Korean peninsula by Wang Kon in 935 was accompanied by unprecedented (and mostly lasting) territorial, economic, cultural, linguistic and social consolidation across the conquered territory. As such, it makes sense to understand this moment as pivotal in the later emergence of a Korean nation.

4 The perhaps unexpected benefit of a strictly enforced law that obliges a land developer to do an archaeological scan of the land soon to be covered by buildings and, if necessary, carry out long and undoubtedly costly professional archaeological excavations.

who have a history of consistently and unproblematically bestowing on any group living on the Korean peninsula in prehistoric times the distinction of being Korean, more or less in the contemporary sense of the word (ironically, this distinction is not conferred on more recently arrived groups now living on the Korean peninsula). If, or perhaps when, the alleged total length of Korean history until today is updated to plus-40,000 years, this should not come as a surprise.

Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that the precise length of the history of the Korean peninsula is indeed an important issue, and not merely because of the purely historical significance (if such a thing *an sich* exists) of this particular factum. By now, there has been sufficient research to ascertain an all too common observation that in ultranationalist historiography (I use this term with more than a modicum of caution here, given the often stunning lack of even the most basic of historical methods the authors of ultranationalist historiography seem to possess) the length of the nation's history and the size of the nation's territory matter like little else.⁵ Length matters; size matters.

This observation could perhaps have been made as long as four-and-a-half millennia ago, when the mythical emperor Yao 帝堯 ruled China, while on the Korean peninsula Tan'gun 檀君, the progenitor of the Korean people and offspring of a bear-turned-human female and the son of godly being Hwanung, ruled, starting his reign on the third of October in 2333 BCE, a mere four decades into the reign of Yao in China. Emperor Yao and Tan'gun were turning out to be contemporaries. The stage had been set for what has essentially turned out to be a still on-going *Pisswettbewerb*⁶ that entered its fifth millennium over three centuries ago. If, of course, one subscribes to the view that Tan'gun existed (probably not in the form of the son of a former bearess and the son of

5 Although I would be hard put to come up with a rational explanation other than that this is an observable trait, I do wonder whether it is not at some level comparable to the humanities scholar's barely suppressible need to exhaustively and lengthily footnote everything he or she writes, long past the point of useful verification or complementation.

6 I hesitated to use this word in an academic paper, but it cannot be denied that this is an "argument that for most observers struggles to establish any importance beyond the overwhelming sense of its self-importance," as was suggested to me by @KleinpasteThijs on Twitter (<<https://twitter.com/KleinpasteThijs/status/1224003672264318977>>, accessed on 02-02-2020). Further suggestions included "pee-r review," "pointless pedantic pedagogy," and "TED talk" (see <<https://twitter.com/bluyckx/status/1224033212047011843>>, <https://twitter.com/DennisG_Shea/status/1224024040064671746>, <<https://twitter.com/SiccodeKnecht/status/122402063174193156>>, last accessed on 02-02-2020). The relevance and pertinence of these suggestions is hard to deny, but I decided to stay with the original term in German; its connotations are identical to the original term, while its claim to suitability for an academic paper is perhaps even stronger.

the Heavenly Ruler, but perhaps as a continuous line of proto-Korean shaman-rulers, who had taken “Tan’gun” as their title),⁷ even though the first mention of him is in a text dating from almost four millennia after his supposed procreation of the Korean people. If one doubts the early emergence of the Tan’gun myth—it should not pass unnoticed that I am now referring to the emergence of the Tan’gun *myth* and decidedly not to any kind of historical interpretation of a person or an unbroken line of rulers called Tan’gun—and dates its origin to its first verifiable emergence in the sources (otherwise a well-attested manner of constructing a historical argument), this *Pisswettbewerb* is younger, though still of a venerable age—about eight hundred years—and lands us smack in the middle of the Koryŏ 高麗 period (935–1392).

The Koryŏ period is in many ways a relatively forgotten and understudied period in Korean history. It was followed by the Chosŏn 朝鮮 period (1392–1905), which with its mixture of endless—surviving—archives, traumatic events (such as the Japanese invasions of the late sixteenth century), and a five-century-long presence right before the twentieth century has drawn historians to it as moths to a candle flame. The Koryŏ period is bookended on the other side by a period usually referred to as the Antiquity of the Korean peninsula. Despite the lack of archives and other sources, this period also basks in the attention of scholars, amateur historians, and television producers—although one also has to wonder if it is not precisely the absence of sources that makes this period so attractive. The Koryŏ period’s relative absence of source materials (for example, when set next to comparable periods in Japan, China, and other regions) has not led to much scholarly or other interest in the period. The reason for this is *prima facie* paradoxical, but in fact is not. The contemporary Korean obsession with the size of the nation’s territory and the length of its history dates from the Koryŏ period, while later nationalist thinkers designated decisive relevance to certain historical moments in the Koryŏ period, as a consequence of which the period before Koryŏ inevitably came to function as the antecedent for the projection of all kinds of wild historical dreams,

7 There is an embarrassment of riches with regard to theories on Tan’gun Chosŏn 檀君朝鮮, whether it existed at all (although usually this premise is a *sine qua non* for the construction of serious theories), how it was structured, who ruled it, and of course where it was situated. For completeness sake, it should be mentioned here that just as the 1,500-year long reign of Tan’gun is now understood as mythical and symbolizing the concatenated historical succession of forty-seven different rulers each bearing the title of Tan’gun, Hwan’in 桓因 and Hwan’ung 桓雄 are now seen as *pars pro toto* for the combined reigns of seven Hwan’in and eighteen Hwan’ung. Of course, one peruses the spurious texts from which the above information has been culled at one’s own risk. There is a good reason why these texts were never published in Brill’s Korean Studies Library. Its stern but fair gatekeeper A. Hoffstädt made sure of that.

ambitions, and misinterpretations. Most attention, then, has been lavished on Korean Antiquity, rather than on Koryŏ.

Before I discuss what happened in the Koryŏ period, let me first refer to some relevant literature on the topic. In a volume on the structural behavior of new religions in Buddhist environments, Blezer et al. argued that “traditional religious histories and antecedents typically are created some time after the facts. Simply put: religious groups start writing respectable histories and laying out their antecedents only somewhat later, when the necessity arises to formulate a self-conscious separate identity, such as may be the case when they are confronted by the presence of an ‘other.’”⁸ The topic here is religious groups but might as well have been other sorts of group: the mechanism holds for all groups establishing and maintaining their identities, it seems. The studies in the Blezer volume make another important observation, succinctly worded in the introduction as follows: “Nativist notions of a local ‘self’ are systematically reinvented in communication with a dominant foreign ‘other.’ Identity implies difference after all. Thus nativist discourse is fundamentally predicated on categories of ‘self and other.’ Emergence of nativist identity discourse is therefore by definition a dynamic and dialogic or multi-logic process.”⁹ Lastly, the introduction notes that “paradoxically and typically, following the power of established discourse, nativist identity discourse tends to frame itself in key terms from the discourse of the dominant other, from which it wishes to stand apart in the first place.”¹⁰ Keeping the above in mind, it is no wonder, then, that the thirteenth-century Tan’gun myth followed Sinitic examples closely, to the extent of Tan’gun becoming a contemporary of Yao.

The Koryŏ period seems to have been the nursery for all subsequent origin stories, historical fakes and forgeries, et cetera, but it is never acknowledged as such—and it could not possibly be, because for maximum legitimation (or just for the bragging rights) the origins of the nation must be sought as far away as possible, in terms of time and paradoxically also in terms of place. Koryŏ was for all intents and purposes the perfect place for this, because the period of roughly one hundred years between 935 and the 1030s had seen the creation of the nation of the Three Han or Samhan (三韓),¹¹ the nation that inhabited Koryŏ state and society and would be the historical community that developed into later forms of the nation on the Korean peninsula, including

8 Henk Blezer and Mark Teeuwen, *Challenging Paradigms: Buddhism and Nativism: Framing Identity Discourse in Buddhist Environments* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 16.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Remco E. Breuker, *Establishing a Pluralist Society in Medieval Korea, 918–1170: History, Ideology, and Identity in the Koryŏ Dynasty* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). See the first chapter.

contemporary North and South Korea. So it is from this period onward that we see a systemic “tradition of inventions” emerge, whenever the party responsible for an invented tradition or historical forgery saw no other way of convincing the majority, of refuting mainstream opinion, of rallying the people, or of defending the country, and chose to depend on a forged artefact or tradition to strengthen its cause.

Koryŏ’s “Three Han” nation was codified in the *Ten Injunctions* (*Hunyo ship-cho* 訓要十條), the alleged deathbed testament of Koryŏ founder T’aejo Wang Kŏn, but in fact an early eleventh-century forgery.¹² Simultaneously, the borders of the Koryŏ state were set, both in writing and in physical reality: interestingly, the stability of the Koryŏ frontier (which was inherited by Chosŏn, and then after liberation by North and South Korea together) is nothing short of amazing. In the thousand years since the borders crystallized (really only the northern border counts, since Korea is a peninsula), they have hardly changed (ironically, this is a facet of Korean history that often is missed in nationalist discourse).¹³

The stability of the historical Koryŏ territory was an excellent platform for its subsequent imagined expansion. Myoch’ŏng 妙清 (?–1135), Koryŏ rebel, geomancer, and perhaps also monk, built a short-lived rebel movement on the dream of expanding Koryŏ into Manchuria and becoming the center of the world.¹⁴ Eight centuries later, his dramatic failure to do so (the rebellion started with Myoch’ŏng losing his head and then failed to get significantly better after that) was reified by Korea’s great anti-colonial and anarchist thinker Shin Ch’aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936) as *the* defining moment when the Korean nation had lost its chance to occupy the territorial size it really deserved.¹⁵ Shin’s arguments are still extremely influential today, in particular but not exclusively among the pseudo-historians who work tirelessly to augment Korea’s historical territory and lengthen its history.

Myoch’ŏng had emphasized a strong “us-versus-others” dichotomy in his ideology, recognizing the necessity to formulate a self-conscious separate identity in opposition to the Song Chinese and Jurchen Jin “others,” which according to

12 Remco E. Breuker, *Forging the Truth: Creative Deception and National Identity in Medieval Korea*, special issue of *East Asian History* 38 (Canberra: Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National Univ., 2008).

13 Breuker, *Establishing a Pluralist Society*.

14 Remco E. Breuker, “Landscape out of Time: ‘de-Chronicling’ the Landscape in Medieval Korea,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 7.2 (2007): 69.

15 Shin Ch’aeho 申采浩, *Tanjae Shin Ch’aeho chŏnjip* 丹齋申采浩全集, ed. Tanjae Shin Ch’aeho sŏnsaeng kinyŏm saŏphoe 丹齋申采浩全集先生記念事業會 (rev. ed., Seoul: Hyŏngsŏl ch’ulp’ansa 형성출판사, 1995), 2: 103–24.

his logic must end in the physical conquest of the territories of at least some of the “others” (whose territories were also, confusingly, thought to be ancient Korean territories, inhabited by peoples related to the Korean nation), and had managed to invent a national geomancing tradition that stretched back further than Koryŏ was old. In the early years of the twentieth century, Shin, again, had recognized this and in effect did something very similar, when he emphasized in his writings that “history is a struggle of us and those who are not us.”¹⁶ His work then laid the intellectual and ideological (not so much historical) foundation for others to claim even more size and even more length for the Korean nation: to Shin, Myoch'ŏng's failure was the “most important event in the last thousand years of Korean history” and the moment when everything could have gone in a better—dare one say expansionist and imperialist—direction. Imagined imperialism is, then, I think, one way to characterize Shin's longing for a Great Korea. It should not escape notice that these longings were formulated in the context of a colonial situation, a colonial prison, and exile abroad.

In the meantime, in the realm of imagined communities, Great Korea has since been realized time and again. Building on Myoch'ŏng's failed first attempt and Shin's canonization of Myoch'ŏng's notions as normative for nationalist historians, even in Shin Ch'aeho's own time intellectuals such as Ch'oe Namsŏn 崔南善 (1890–1957) had taken up the challenge of enlarging historical Korea's size and age.¹⁷ Ch'oe's far-fetched hypotheses, based on the application of historical linguistics as practiced in Japan at that time by famous scholars such as Shiratori Kurakichi 白鳥庫吉 (1865–1942) but with a Korean inflection, proved popular; but other intellectuals quickly spotted the fatal weak link in Ch'oe's (and Shin's, for that matter) armor: a lack of hard facts to support their grand narratives of the rise and fall of the ancient Korean empire. Commensurate with the rediscovery (although it never had been really lost), reevaluation, annotation, and publication of the first authentic Korean historical text to mention Tan'gun (the thirteenth-century *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事, *The Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*), other “ancient texts” began to surface, each one filling in more gaps of Korea's grand past before Koryŏ. The rediscovery of ancient texts continues until today, although strikingly, with the loss of active

16 Shin Ch'aeho, *Tanjae Shin Ch'aeho chŏnrip*, 1: 31.

17 Interestingly, Ch'oe was one of the historians who did so in a format and with a methodology immediately recognizable to the colonizer, confirming the theory that “following the power of established discourse, nativist identity discourse tends to frame itself in key terms from the discourse of the dominant other, from which it wishes to stand apart in the first place.” Blezer and Teeuwen, *Challenging Paradigms*, 16; Remco E. Breuker, “Contested Objectivities: Ikeuchi Hiroshi, Kim Sanggi and the Tradition of Oriental History (Tōyōshigaku) in Japan and Korea,” *East Asian History* 29 (2005): 69–107.

command of Literary Chinese by Korean intellectuals, which was the distinctive ability of the Korean intellectual, these days conveniently the Korean translations of ancient texts are found—their original versions in a lost Korean script and language and subsequent translation in Literary Chinese long lost. While texts such as the *Hwandan kogi* 桓檀古記, *Kyuwŏn sahwa* 揆園史話, and *Pudoji* 符都誌 have generally been recognized as forgeries, other such texts, such as *Tan'gi kosa* 檀奇古史 or *Hwarang segi* 花郎世記, are still receiving academic attention.¹⁸ A quick Google search for the “Hwan Empire 桓帝國” teaches that this ancient Korean empire—where the Hwan'in, Hwangun, and Tan'gun had ruled for many generations—is thought to have encompassed the lands of Asterix and Obelix, at least by some ultranationalist groups.¹⁹ This, incidentally, would explain the presence of uncannily similar menhirs and dolmens in both ancient Korea and ancient Gaule²⁰—as ancient Korea's possession of Siberia (for which many colorful theories have found linguistic evidence, mainly on the Korean side) would explain the presence of shamans among Native Americans.

The Hwan Empire—which incidentally bears an interesting cartographical resemblance to the Mongol Empire, but which other than the aforementioned empire seems to have left no archaeological or textual traces—was built on the spurious historical forgeries of the early twentieth century, which in turn built upon the work of serious scholars and nationalists such as Ch'oe Namsŏn and Shin Ch'aeho. Their work, which given its contents and obsessive navel gazing may perhaps be somewhat reductively understood as nativist (or neo-nativist) historiography, built upon the in-principle solid foundations of a classical education and traditional source materials, as well as on the fleeting dreams of tragically failed imperialists such as Myoch'ŏng. It was done so in extreme urgency; the Korean state had disappeared and the nation was in danger of

18 Although admittedly situated more towards the margins of the discourses of professional historians, nonetheless the authenticity of these texts—which both in terms of provenance stories and with regard to their contents immediately invite extreme scepticism about their status as bona fide historical documents—is defended by members of the community of professional historians.

19 Try it yourself by clicking here: <https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&ei=TIU4XoqYKO6arfAPhN2e4Aw&q=korean+hwan+empire&oq=korean+hwan+empire&gs_l=psy-ab..33i160l2.3i16.6i56..6i51...0.4..0.118.1789.5j12.....0.....1.gws-wiz.....0i71jojo167joiz2i3ojoiz2i1oi3oj33i2i.SSmjrUAVPJQ&ved=0ahUKEwiK7vP_nrbnAhVuTRUIHYSuB8wQ4dUDCAs&uact=5>.

20 I wish to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who turned out to be an expert in Astérix and Obélix and pointed out that I had made a serious error in mistakenly identifying ancient Bretagne as the place they lived, while it should have been Gaule or Armorique (or “Gaule armoricaine”).

undergoing the same fate. Respectable historical narratives were needed, but the established discourse was now Japanese, Western, foreign by any account, and nativist historians framed their own history using the methodology and terminology of others. As a result, it became impossible for nativist or nationalist Korean historians to distinguish themselves through the methodology and frameworks they used: these had after all been taken from mainstream colonial(-ist) discourse to ensure maximum prestige. The only avenue left to plead Korean distinctiveness, then, was by appealing to facts no other nation could lay claim to or could possibly rival. Hence the insatiable need of nationalists for a longer history, a larger territory, more battles won, and so on and so forth. The irony is killing: for the facts used to bludgeon any opposition to nationalist narratives of Korean history (which would morph into the ultranationalist narratives of contemporary South Korea, but without a mitigating context to make them understandable and reasonable), were by necessity fake facts. The Korean nation (or one of its antecedents) had emerged in Koryŏ. From there, a search for a longer history had started, by definition by looking backwards, even if there was little to no empirical evidence to suggest success.

The inevitable conclusion is that size matters. Length matters. Facts, only insofar as they support the empirically demonstrable ever increasing of the size of a nation's territory and the length of its history. And while reaching back chronologically should only have to give rise to *imagined* clashes over contested territories in time, the same is not true for size. One's neighbor's borders usually provide a firm obstacle on the path to territorial expansion; hence, perhaps, the fanatical occurrence of imagined territorial expansions, such as that of the Hwan empire—an imagined empire then to be defended against the assaults of the professional historian. It is clear that the world at large is better off with imagined imperialism, rather than its real, off-line cousin. It does keep professional academics quite busy, though, given the efforts and time they must continue to put in debunking pseudo-histories and the like. A corollary conclusion to the above is that good intentions do *not* matter. The seriousness and integrity with which scholars such as Shin Ch'aeho thought and wrote has proven to be no match for all those after him who have lionized his work and made off with it. A somewhat somber conclusion to end this essay with, perhaps, but also one that amply demonstrates—as do the references cited herein—that in this struggle, the availability of thoroughly reliable studies, texts, libraries, et cetera, meticulously curated by a highly-skilled editor remain of the utmost importance.

Polyglot Translators: Chinese, Dutch, and Japanese in the Introduction of Western Learning in Tokugawa Japan

Martin J. Heijdra

The life of an area studies librarian is not always excitement. Yes, one enjoys informing bright graduate students of the latest scholarship, identifying Chinese rubbings of Egyptological stelae, or discussing publishing gaps in the current scholarship with knowledgeable editors; but it involves sometimes the mundane, such as reshelving a copy of a nineteenth-century Japanese translation of a medical work by Johannes de Gorter.¹

It was while performing the latter duty that I noticed something odd. The characters used to write Gorter were 我爾德兒, which indeed could be read as Gorter. That is, if read in modern Chinese; if read in the usual Sino-Japanese, it would be **Gajitokuji*, something far from the Dutch pronunciation. A quick perusal of some scholars of *rangaku* 蘭學, “Dutch Studies,” revealed a general lack of awareness of this question, why a Dutch name in a nineteenth-century Japanese book would be read in modern Chinese. Prompted to write an article in honor of a Dutch editor of East and South Asian Studies, I decided to investigate this more thoroughly. There are many aspects to consider, and I must confess that the final reason is hard to come by; but while I have not reached a final conclusion, I hope that in the future scholars will at least recognize the phenomenon when encountered.

The issue turned out to be difficult to investigate, and it is instructive to first discuss why.

First, let’s blame librarians and bibliographers. They, in modern reference works and catalogues, are very helpful in identifying the same author behind the various ways original works refer to them, generally to the benefit of the user. They call this the authorized form of an author. Thus, Johannes de Gorter in Western catalogues, or Goruteru, in *katakana*, in Japanese ones. Beneficial,

1 The Princeton edition I used is Johannes de Gorter, *Zōho jūtei naika sen’yō* 増補重訂内科撰要, tr. Udagawa Genzui 宇田川玄隨 et al. (Edo: Suharaya Ihachi, after 1822), a translation of *Gezuiverde geneeskunst*, 1761.

except for when one wants to investigate which exact characters were used originally....

Blame even more the scholars. There exists a widespread division between those scholars investigating the place of Chinese thought in Tokugawa Japan and those scholars investigating Dutch or Western learning. The former do not know Dutch, the latter often consider any sign of Chinese influence an indicator of sadly incomplete replacement by Western thought; they rarely talk to each other.

Finally, let's blame the editors. They often have modern scholars rewrite original texts so that current readers can easily follow such texts; therefore, someone for whom the main object of study is exactly the original format is out of luck. To give a hypothetical Western example: it is sometimes difficult to decide what is a given, and what is a family name, and one possible solution is to write the family name in capitals: Paul KROLL or Stephen TEISER (for an example, see the Contents Table in *East Asian Publishing and Society*). Now imagine we want to investigate the history of this solution. Library catalogues, scholarly bibliographies, or specialized monographs rarely maintain such a distinction: one will have to go back to the original work. The possible gap between the originally printed format and the text as spelled out in a modern monograph is especially large in Japanese because much writing was done in a Japanese version of Classical Chinese. I must beg the reader's forgiveness to try to explain, in however simplified a manner, the complicated way a Japanese reader approaches such a text, called *kanbun* 漢文.²

One method was to mark the original characters with special small, secondary marks called *kaeriten* 返り点, telling the reader how to change the original word order, and where to put in particles or verb endings. By juggling the sentence around according to those signs, a rather stiff resemblance to a proper sentence in Japanese results. Alternatively, one could spell out the resulting Japanese sentence, which I call here for simplicity's sake the *kundoku* 訓読 method. The original Chinese characters would be pronounced either in Chinese adjusted to the Japanese phonetic system (Sino-Japanese, hereafter SJ), or in "pure" Japanese (hereafter J) using a standardized Japanese translation. Thus the word *kanbun* itself is SJ. When considered helpful, such SJ or J pronunciations were written in small kana syllables next to the character, which is called *furigana* 振り仮名. Currently SJ usually uses the angular *katakana* script, pure Japanese the round *hiragana* script, and the small syllables are to

2 In order to stress the separation from any spoken Chinese form, current scholars often use the term "Sinitic" instead of Classical Chinese. See, e.g., Peter F. Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

the right of the character. In Tokugawa times, *katakana* was the usual form for all cases, and could be to either side of the character. And the “pronunciation” could almost imperceptibly verge into explanations rather than pronunciations. Thus, the word usually read as *sōmokufu* 草木譜, “botanical treatise,” when it was used in the translated title of an early Dutch imported book into Japan, had in *furigana* the Dutch word *kuroitobukku*, *Kruidboek*.³

And finally, let’s blame the printers. Although Japan has a printing environment that at least in principle could faithfully reproduce the original formats, a Western author rarely has such options. Efforts to escape the difficulty often force one to choose an explicit reading that a Japanese reader may not have made. Thus, using a modern pinyin transliteration in a Japanese context for a title “really” written in Chinese may give the wrong impression that a Japanese reader would have known Chinese pronunciation.

Unlike what the division among modern scholars could imply, China and Holland (the term I will use here) were not always separated that clearly in Tokugawa Japan.⁴ Both were seen as exotic, and fulfilled the role of the “other” that gradually also resulted in a higher appreciation for the “Japaneseness” of Japan. What is especially important to realize is that there existed an influence of Western studies on Japan through Chinese works translated by Jesuit writers predating any Dutch *rangaku* influence.⁵ A Dutch interpreter such as Nishikawa Joken 西川如見 (1648–1724) could write on both China (the work *Ka’i tsūshō kō* 華夷通商攷, “A Study of the Commercial Intercourse with the Chinese and Other Foreigners”) and Holland (*Nagasaki yawagusa* 長崎夜話草, “Twilight tales of Nagasaki.”)⁶

3 For the introduction into Japan of this 1554 *Cruydt-boeck* of Dodoens, see the articles in *Dodonaeus in Japan: Translation and the Scientific Mind in Tokugawa Japan*, ed. W. F. Vande Walle (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2001), and Federico Marcon, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2015). For *furigana*, see Konno Shinji, 今野真二, *Furigana no rekishi* 振仮名の歴史 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2009).

4 See, for a few attempts to interlink the study of the two, Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), and Okada Kesao 岡田袈裟男, *Edo igengo sesshoku: Rango, Tōwa to kindai Nihongo* 江戸異言語接触：蘭語・唐話と近代日本語 (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2006).

5 A few hundred such works must have been translated in the seventeenth century, see W. F. Vande Walle, “Linguistics and Translation in Pre-modern Japan and China: A Comparison,” in *Dodonaeus in Japan*, 123–47.

6 Goodman calls Joken probably the first popularizer in Japan of European scholarship: Grant K. Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch 1600–1853* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 93. This is a revised version of Goodman, *The Dutch Impact on Japan, 1640–1853* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

To answer the Gorter-in-Chinese question we will need to ask first, to what extent did Tokugawa Japanese know Modern Chinese? There certainly was a great interest in novels written in *baihua* 白話, a Chinese written style closer to, but not equivalent to, spoken Chinese. Those novels were, however, rarely read using modern Chinese pronunciation, although the increased interest in reading “vernacular” Chinese novels is often wrongly assumed to also be true for the interest in modern Chinese as an oral language.⁷ Studies on so-called modern Chinese in the Tokugawa period, therefore, usually treat only the reception and occasionally, surprisingly, production of *baihua*-style novels.⁸

True, there was some real knowledge of spoken Chinese in Tokugawa Japan, closely linked with the Ōbaku 黄檗 (Chinese [hereafter, C] Huangbo) Zen sect. The sect had entered Japan early in the seventeenth century through Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (1592–1673), because of the demand of the Chinese resident population in Nagasaki, largely composed of Ming exiles. The *bakufu* 幕府 recruited its official group of Chinese interpreters from these circles; close to two thousand members would be officially listed as interpreters until the end of the Tokugawa period, although the number of real appointees seems to have been only half that number.⁹

Originally the interpreters were divided into speakers of the Fuzhou, Zhangzhou, and Nanjing dialects, each linked with their own temple.¹⁰ But while those dialectical divisions remained on paper, in fact all interpreters started to learn Southern Guanhua 官話, Mandarin, that is, largely Nanjing dialect

7 By conflating the two under such unifying terms as “vernacular Chinese” or “vernacularization,” one can easily be led astray, as is Clements in her study on translation, Rebekah Clements, *A Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015). That those *baihua* novels were read in straight *kanbun* or *kundoku* style is shown by Kawashima Yūko 川島優子, “Hakuwa shōsetsu wa dō yomerareta ka 白話小説はどう読められたか,” in *Zoku “Kundoku” ron 続「訓読」論: 東アジア漢文世界の形成*, ed. Nakamura Shunsaku 中村春作 et al. (Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2010), 31–38. In the teaching material she uses, modern Chinese pronunciations were only given when homonyms explain the use of certain wrong or aberrant characters.

8 In Japanese, Okumura Kayoko 奥村佳代子, *Edo jidai no Tōwa ni kansuru kiso kenkyū* 江戸時代の唐話に関する基礎研究 (Suita-shi : Kansai Daigaku Shuppanka, 2007), or the classic Ishizaki Matasō 石崎又造, *Kinsei Nihon ni okeru Shina zokugo bungakushi* 近世日本に於ける支那俗語文學史 (Tokyo: Kōbundō Shobō, 1940). In English, Emanuel Pastreich, *The Observable Mundane: Vernacular Chinese and the Emergence of a Literary Discourse on Popular Narrative in Edo Japan* (Seoul: Seoul Univ. Press, 2011).

9 Ishizaki, *Shina zokugo bungakushi*, 24–25.

10 *Ibid.*, 15–19.

deprived of its purely Nanjing characteristics (much as current Mandarin, *pǔtōnghuà* 普通話, is Beijing dialect without the purely Beijing characteristics).¹¹

Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728) may be the best-known author who paid attention to the pronunciation of modern Chinese. He took up spoken Chinese from Chinese Ōbaku monks, and insisted famously that Chinese had to be treated as a foreign language, and needed to be read using its own pronunciation, without any *kanbun*-related reorganization. For him, the *kanbun* tradition was a predigested interpretation while the reader should instead have a direct relationship with the original.¹² Yet, the passage in which he thus exhorts his fellow scholars is very much written in *kanbun*, without even the assistance of any *furigana*, as was an extant exchange in spoken Chinese between Sorai and the Ōbaku monk Yuefeng 悅峰 (1655–1734), also noted down in *kanbun* with *kaeriten*.¹³ (Sorai was much less well-disposed to Dutch: “in lands like Holland, in which human nature differs from the normal, there are indeed languages which are difficult to understand; they are like birds calling and animals roaring; they do not approximate human feelings. But when it comes to China and Japan, all things are similar.”)¹⁴

Sorai would form a school in which especially Okajima Kanzan 岡島冠山 (1674–1728), who had started his career as a professional Dutch translator, stood out. This Kanzan, the foremost scholar of modern Chinese as a separate language after Sorai, created no less than six modern Chinese vocabularies. Yet, aside from some of the vocabulary entries themselves, texts such as prefaces

11 Kizu Yūko 木津祐子, “Tōtsūji no ‘kanwa’ jūyō 唐通事の「官話」受容,” in *Zoku “Kundoku” ron*, 260–90, points out that the interpreters were well aware of the differences between *Guanhua* and *baihua*, and studied the former. W. South Coblin has investigated the status of *Guanhua* during Ming and Qing times in several studies; see especially *Modern Chinese Phonology: From Guānhuà to Mandarin* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2007). He shows how the Nanjing-based *Guanhua* changed slowly after the move to Beijing through the influence of Northern speakers.

12 Emanuel Pastreich, “Grappling with Chinese Writing as a Material Language: Ogyū Sorai’s *Yakubunsentei*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61 (2001): 119–70.

13 Text in Ishizaki, *Shina zokugo bungakushi*, 56–61. Tao Demin gives an interesting overview of the discussion on how to teach Classical Chinese since Ogyū Sorai, and an explanation why *kundoku* rather than “direct reading” persisted. Tao Demin 陶德民, “Kindai ni okeru ‘kanbun chokudoku’ ron no yuisho to yukikata 近代における「漢文直読」論の由緒と行方,” in “*Kundoku*” ron: *Higashi Ajia kanbun sekai to Nihongo* 「訓読」論: 東アジア漢文世界と日本語, ed. Nakamura Shunsaku 中村春作 et al. (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2008), 49–85.

14 Richard H. Minear, “Ogyū Sorai’s Instructions for Students: A Translation and Commentary,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 36 (1976): 65.

are also in *kanbun*.¹⁵ But by the time the movement was more widely taken up by the later followers of Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627–1705), the learning of modern Chinese pronunciation was already thought unattainable.¹⁶

Dutch, of course, was known even less. Originally, the Dutch had relied upon Portuguese in their dealings with the Japanese, and Dutch only gradually eclipsed Portuguese among the hereditary Nagasaki interpreter families which had been appointed by the *bakufu*.¹⁷ By later years, there might have annually been 100–150 Dutch interpreters. Outside these interpreter circles, learning Dutch was forbidden, but by 1720 the possibility of studying Dutch from the Nagasaki interpreters was permitted, and works useful toward such study began to appear openly. The Edo scholar Ōtsuki Gentaku 大槻玄澤 (1757–1827), whom we will encounter again shortly, went to Nagasaki to learn from such famous translators as Motoki Ryōei (or Yoshinaga) 本木良永 (1735–1794), Yoshio Kōgyū 吉雄耕牛 (1720–1800), a Dutch interpreter well versed in many disciplines, and Ishii Tsuneemon 石井恒右衛門 (1743–?).¹⁸ It is important to emphasize these contributions by the Nagasaki interpreters, since for a long time the word *rangaku* came to be associated not with the works by those interpreters, but with the Edo scholars only, who adopted and printed scientific works in medicine, physics, botany, pharmacy, and chemistry.¹⁹ The 1774 work *Kaitai shinsho* 解體新書 (hereafter, *KS*), “New Book on Anatomy,” translated by a group around Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白 (1733–1817) in Edo, is thus often taken as the beginning of the scholarly *rangaku* field, although much of that impression is based upon a partly purposefully, partly accidentally biased overview by Sugita himself called the *Rangaku shiji* 蘭學事始, better known as

15 Okada, *Edo igengo sesshoku*, 246, finds sixty-two “modern Chinese” dictionaries published in Tokugawa times, including guides to read the *baihua* novels, of which only twenty-two had modern Chinese in *furigana* (hereafter, *MCK*) in part or in total.

16 Pastreich, *The Observable Mundane* 163, 175.

17 For the Dutch-Japanese relations in general, see the articles in *Bewogen betrekkingen: 400 jaar Nederland-Japan*, ed. Leonard Blussé et al. (Hilversum: Teleac, 2000).

18 For more on the hereditary translator families, see Katagiri Kazuo 片桐一男, *Oranda tsūji no kenkyū* 阿蘭陀通詞の研究 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985), and Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ, *Nagasaki tsūji monogatari: kotoba to bunka no hon'yakusha* 長崎通詞物語: ことばと文化の翻訳者 (Tokyo: Sōtakusha, 1990). The word *tsūji*, “interpreter” is, strangely, written differently for Chinese (*tsūji* 通事) and for Dutch translators, 通詞; *ji* for the Chinese means “things,” that for the Dutch translators “words.” For a discussion, see Ishizaki, *Shina zokugo bungakushi*, 20.

19 For *rangaku* studies, see Numata Jirō, *Western Learning: A Short History of the Study of Western Science in Early Modern Japan*, tr. R.C.J. Bachofner (Tokyo: Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1992), Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch*, and Clements, *Cultural History of Translation*.

Rangaku kotohajime.²⁰ The Edo scholars were of a socially much higher standing than the interpreters, but the largely held perception that the latter did not have any interest in translating scientific works is just plain wrong.²¹

Translators faced several issues when confronted with an unknown Western term or concept, and in various different works a remarkably similar tripartite strategy was sought. One could use an existing word as a translation; create a *calque* or plain neologism, using characters for their semantic value; or, finally, one could use characters (or occasionally *kana*) for their phonetic value, with which we arrive closer to the topic of this article.²²

What do I mean here by *calque*? A calque is a translation of a compound or phrase, whereby each part is individually translated, resulting in a special kind of neologism. Calques were created quite early. Motoki Ryōi used them already around 1682 in his *Oranda Zenku Bungōzu*. For the *twalfvingerige darm* (duodenum, lit. “twelve-finger intestine”) he used *yubi jūni haba no chō* 指十二幅腸, and for the *blinde darm* (cecum, lit. “blind intestine,” i.e., without opening) he created *mōmokuchō* 盲目腸.²³ Another such calque was *trommelvlies* (mem-

20 *Shiji* seems to be original SJ reading; *kotohajime* would be pure Japanese; without original *furigana*, it would be difficult to decide; see Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ, *Edo yōgaku jijō* 江戸洋学事情 (Tokyo: Yasaka Shobō, 1990). For a translation, Sugita Genpaku, *Dawn of Western Science in Japan: Rangaku kotohajime*, tr. Ryōzō Matsumoto (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1969). The book was written before 1815, but remained in manuscript, and was only published in 1869.

21 See especially Sugimoto, *Edo yōgaku jijō*. One of such much earlier translations by a Nagasaki interpreter is Motoki Ryōi's 本木良意 *Oranda zenshu naigai bungōzu* 和蘭全軀内外分合図, a translation of a 1667 work by Johann Remmelin, *Pinax microcosmographicus*. Translated in 1682, it was only printed in 1772. This Motoki family, hereditary Dutch translators, to whom also Motoki Ryōei, already mentioned above, belonged, is also the family of Motoki Shōzō 本木昌造, about whom I have written previously as being the introducer of modern Western type and typography in Japan: see Martin J. Heijdra, “The Development of Modern Typography in East Asia, 1850–2000,” *The East Asian Library Journal* 11.2 (2004): 100–68. The Motoki family is special for researchers, since its family records are still intact, and therefore a figure such as Motoki Ryōei can be vividly brought to light, as was done in a 1998 exhibition in Kobe; see *Nichi-Ran kōryū no kakebashi: Oranda tsūji ga mita sekai* 日蘭交流のかげ橋: 阿蘭陀通詞がみた世界, ed. Kōbe shiritsu hakubutsukan 神戸市立博物館 (Kobe: Kōbeshi supōtsu kyōiku kōsha, 1998).

22 Seian Tatebe 清庵建部 and Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白, *Oranda iji mondō* 和蘭醫事問答 (Edo: Suharaya Zengorō, 1795), call the three solutions *taiyaku* 對譯, *giyaku* 義譯, and *chokuyaku* 直譯 (Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ, *Kokugogaku to Rangogaku* 国語学と蘭語学 [Tokyo: Musashino Shoin, 1991], 377), while Motoki Ryōei uses *honyaku* 翻譯, *giyaku*, and *chokuyaku*. See Sugimoto, *Nagasaki tsūji monogatari*, 136–44, and Vande Walle, “Linguistics and Translation in Pre-modern Japan and China,” 134–41.

23 Sugimoto, *Nagasaki tsūji monogatari*, 100–105. Sugita Genpaku and his *KS* group did not much use these translations, rather inexcusable for Gentaku, who actually personally did meet with the interpreters.

brana tympana, lit. “drum-skin”) which he translated syllable by syllable as *ko-maku* 鼓膜, a word still in use. Such Japanese-inspired *calques* would also move into Chinese, largely after 1905.²⁴

Now, for us, the most interesting principle is the third, phonetic one. It is here that the relationship to modern Chinese rather than to SJ becomes most visible, whether through accompanying *furigana* or not.²⁵ Thus, the post-1828 *Shintei zōho Oranda yakkyō* 新訂增補和蘭藥鏡, “Newly Revised Dutch Pharmaceutical Mirror”²⁶ has MCK *ipekakoana* 乙百葛格安 for *ipecacuanha*, with C *yibaigegeanna* closer than SJ **ippakukokkakuanna*; or MCK *Reiden* 戾鄧 for Leiden, with C *leideng* rather than SJ **Reitō*. It also has the interesting MCK *shike-uruboiku* 失苟兒陪苦 for *suikerbuik* (diabetes, “sugar belly”), with C *shigourpeiku*, rather than SJ **shikkōjibaiku*. In addition to Dutch, Latin was also sometimes involved. The 1837 *Oranda Yōyaku benran* 和蘭用藥便覽, “Easy Guide to Dutch Pharmaceutical Drugs,”²⁷ has Chinese character entries, with to the right in *katakana* the Latin, and to the left in *katakana* the Dutch name. A “vomit-wine-stone” 吐酒石 has MCK *tarutarisu wemechikisu* for the Latin (*tartaris emeticus*), and MCK *burākuweinstewen* for the Dutch, *braakwijnsteen*.

Finally, an interesting example where a calque and phonetic loan have been combined, is the word *pijnappelklier*, written in the *Oranda jji mondō* as *tsūka-kirūru* 痛果機里兒, in which *pijn*, “pain,” is rendered as *tsū* 痛; *appel*, “fruit,” as *ka* 果; and *kirūru*, “gland,” as MCK *kilir* (not SJ **kiriji*.) A good example, were it not that the *pijn-* in *pijnappel* really refers to the shape of a pine-cone, not to pain at all.

Thus, modern Chinese, usually explained by *furigana*, was used for many such phonetic loans, and not only for the names of authors. One of the few scholars who has pointed out that modern Chinese was used for such transcriptions is, not surprisingly, a Dutch sinologist, Koos Kuiper, in a study where he traces Dutch loanwords and loan-translations in Modern Chinese by way of

24 Koos Kuiper, “Dutch Loan-Words and Loan-Translations in Modern Chinese: An Example of Successful Sinification by way of Japan,” in *Words from the West: Western Texts in Chinese Literary Context: Essays to Honor Erik Zürcher on his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Lloyd Haft (Leiden: Centre of Non-Western Studies, 1993), 135.

25 Motoki Ryōei is said to have even made a table of such Chinese characters corresponding to Dutch syllables, based upon the modern Chinese then current: *Tōon kashaku moji*, 唐音假借文字. Since this was created probably around the same time as the *KS*, it should best be seen as another effort to formalize an already existing practice. I have not yet seen the work.

26 Udagawa Genshin 宇田川玄真, *Shintei zōho Oranda yakkyō* 新訂增補和蘭藥鏡 (n.p., not before 1828).

27 Hidaka Ryōdai 日高涼臺, *Oranda Yōyaku benran* 和蘭用藥便覽 (Edo: Suharaya Ihachi, 1837).

Japan.²⁸ In studying such phonetic loans, we have to keep in mind, of course, that each language concerned in this triangle has its own phonetic structure, which also has undergone historical changes, all of this influencing to what extent current readings make past pronunciations visible. To simplify enormously, current modern Chinese *j-* and *q-* (pronounced as palatalized *ch-*) often correspond to words starting with *k-*; current *x-* (pronounced as palatalized *sh-*) may correspond to *h-* and vice-versa; *r-* and *l-* are often interchangeable, as are, in Japanese, *f-* and *h-*, or *ji* and *di*. To recognize past “modern Chinese” in Japanese, most indicative are the endings 爾 or 兒, *-l* or *-r*, read in MCK as *ru* rather than *sj* **ji*.²⁹

A particular subgroup where words read in MCK originate from actual direct loanwords from Chinese, and are not Japanese creations, is formed by place names. They occur much more widely than in just *rangaku* works. They go back to early circulated Jesuit-produced maps, or Chinese and Japanese geographical works based upon such maps.³⁰ Hence such terms as MCK *Zermania* 入爾馬泥亞 for Germania, or MCK *Nān-Yamerrikyā* for 南亞墨利加.³¹ This common practice, together with the long-standing way of Chinese phonetic renderings for Buddhist terms, may very well have been the reason why MCK came to be used for other foreign, *c.q.* Dutch, loanwords as well.³²

Let us see how this all works out in the 1774 *Kaitai shinsho*, already mentioned.³³ It was a translation, or at least an interpretation, of Johann Adam Kulmus’ *Ontleedkundige Tafelen*, itself a translation of the pre-1722 *Tabulae*

28 “Loan-translations” is the term he uses for what linguists usually call calques. For more calques and phonetic loanwords in Japanese itself from Dutch, see F. Vos, “Dutch Influence on the Japanese Language,” *Lingua* 12 (1963): 341–88.

29 And in Southern Guanhua the current final *-ei* was often pronounced with a short *-e*; and here, keeping in mind that Chinese does not have voiced initials, we arrive at the pronunciation Peking for Beijing: Peking was the correct pronunciation in sixteenth-century Southern Guanhua. In Japanese, *Pekin*.

30 See for the influence of Matteo Ricci on East Asian cartography, including its later Chinese, Dutch and Japanese versions Helen Wallis, “The Influence of Father Ricci on Far Eastern Cartography,” *Imago Mundi* 19 (1965): 38–45.

31 *ks* has MCK *Arumaniya* 亞爾馬泥亞 for Germany, reading in the same word 亞, *C ya*, as *a* and *ya*.

32 While it can be occasionally difficult to decide whether a particular phonetic word needs a reading in modern Chinese, or whether *sj* would suffice, I have rarely come across cases where a *sj* reading is the only possible one. One example is in the 1866 *Seiri hatsumō* 生理發蒙 (tr. Shimamura Teiho 島村鼎甫 [Kyoto: Katsumura Yauemon, 1886], orig. *Eerste grondbeginselen der natuurkunde van den mensch*, 1855), where the last name of its original author, Douwe Lubach, is written as Ribakku 李邈, the “*bakku*” clearly a *sj* reading only (*C mao*).

33 For various aspects of the *ks*, see Gabor Lukacs, *Kaitai shinsho, The Single Most Famous Japanese Book of Medicine, & Geka sōden, An Early Very Important Manuscript on Surgery*

Anatomicae, hence it is also known in MCK as *Tāheru Anatomii* 打係縷亞那都米. From 1826 various revised, updated translations were published by Ōtsuki Gentaku 大槻玄澤 as *Chōtei Kaitai Shinsho* 重訂解體新書, for which the notes to the original illustrations had been translated too, which was not the case for the *KS*. I use here an Edo edition from 1843, published by Suharaya Mohē.³⁴

Now, what is often overlooked is that the editorial principles (*hanrei* 凡例) of the *KS* and the *CKS* are very different, despite the author of the latter blithely referring to his rewrite as constituting “the editorial principles of the old version.” And, most interestingly, they differ exactly in the topics we are interested in.

Both sets of principles mention that they used the three modes of translations we already saw; the *KS* calling them *honyaku* (“transposed translation”), *giyaku* (“semantic translation”), and *chokuyaku* (“direct translation”). Sugita Genpaku means with these terms pure translation, calques, and phonetic loans, respectively. Ōtsuki Gentaku lists the three divisions as *chokuyaku*—*giyaku*—*taiyaku*, thus changing the referent of *chokuyaku* from phonetic to pure translation, and he revises the example for the second mode causing it to change from a calque into a pure neologism. And indeed, Genpaku had misunderstood one Dutch word, translating *kraakbeen*, cartilage, as *nankotsu* 軟骨 (“soft bones”), on the misunderstanding that *kraak* means “soft” (it doesn’t, it means “to crack”). But by seeing *kraak*=soft=*nan*, and *been*=bone=*kotsu*, he applies the calque principle correctly. Gentaku, perhaps realizing Genpaku’s mistake, replaces it with another example, which however is a pure neologism: *shinkei* 神經 for Dutch *zenuw*, nerve (“divine-fluid flow,”)³⁵ also a word still in current Japanese and Chinese use. But that is not the meaning of *zenuw*, the Dutch word for “nerve,” and hence, it is not a calque.

What is immediately transparent when comparing the *KS* and the *CKS* is that the *CKS* uses a quite different set of characters to render names or terms. The author’s name, Johann Adam Kulmus, is transcribed as 玉函亞聃鳩盧模斯 (C Yuhan Yadan Jiulumosi) rather than 與般亞單闕兒武思 (C Yuban Yadan

(Utrecht: Hes & De Graaf, 2008), who gives an account of how the work came into being, and also places the content of the work in an Asian context, 170–71.

34 A close study of the *CKS*, by Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ, *Edo jidai Rangogaku no seiritsu to sono tenkai* 江戸時代蘭語学の成立とその展開, 5 vols. (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1976–1982), 5: 227–55, compares in detail the editorial principles of the *KS* with those of the *CKS*. To Sugimoto, Ōtsuki comes across as rather pedantic in some of his revisions. The *CKS* replaces many phonetic loans with existing or new Chinese terms. See Mieko Macé, “Le chinois classique comme moyen d’accès à la modernité,” *Daruma* 4 (1998): 79–103.

35 Both words are still in current Japanese and Chinese use. Earlier works on Dutch medicine used a MCK phonetic loan for *zenuw*: *senyū* (or *sēnyū*) 泄奴.

Que'erwusi). The MCK reading for either is Yohan Atan Kyurumusū, while a SJ pronunciation would have been something like *Gyokuhan Atan Ketsujimushi. In this, the CKS seems more consistent (the KS mixes some characters better read as Japanese—般 J *han* reads better than C *ban*, 武 J *mu* better than C *wu*), but the KS uses a better character *er* 兒 for *-l*, rather than 盧 C *lu*. Other changes seem superfluous: 與 and 玉, 單 and 聃, 思 and 斯 are homonyms. “Our” author Gorter, read MCK Koiteru in both, is changed from KS 故意的爾 (C *Guyider*) to 歌乙的盧 (C *Geyidelu*), with both versions differing from the (better) form we encountered above.

Gentaku in his editorial principles claims that his pronunciations are based on Hangzhou speech—and indeed, as we saw, he had gone to Nagasaki to confer with Chinese speakers there. The choice of Hangzhou pronunciation by itself seems idiosyncratic; that never was an established dialect in Nagasaki, and moreover, Southern Guanhua was in general use. However, some of Kanzan’s vocabularies are said to be based upon the Hangzhou dialect; perhaps Hangzhou, close to Nanjing, stands for Southern Guanhua after all.

Sakai Kazuko has listed all phonetic transliteration examples in the KS and the CKS.³⁶ Certainly many characters are used similarly in the two works, such as 東 for *ton*, 達 for *da*, 的 for *te*, 百 for *pe*, 列 for *re*, all which are common in other works as well, and clearly point to modern Chinese pronunciations (*dong*, *da*, *de*, *bai*, *lie* instead of SJ **tō*, **tatsu*, **teki*, **haku*, **retsu*). There are also systematic improvements: the KS writes all Latin *-us* name endings somewhat surprisingly as *-tosu* 都私, while the CKS gives the much better *-usu* 烏斯. But there are other less defensible changes: almost all final endings *-n* are changed into a final *-ng*, which usually is further from Dutch pronunciation.

Sakai also raises the hypothesis that in both the KS and CKS first the Japanese approximation of Dutch was decided upon, and that appropriate Chinese characters were chosen later. I would suggest that this is only true for the CKS, not for the KS; and it is especially because of the final *-r* or *-l* that I think this. In the KS, the typical MCK character *er* 兒 or 爾 is used for final *-r* or *-l*. Their Chinese pronunciation approximates Dutch, even if they are necessarily transcribed as *-ru* in Japanese katakana. In the CKS however, the 兒 or 爾 disappear, and are replaced by another character altogether, pronounced in Chinese *lu* 蘆, to approximate that Japanese *ru*. Thus that Chinese character was chosen not to conform with Dutch, but to conform with Japanese.

36 Sakai Kazuko 酒井 和子, “Kanji ni yoru gaikoku'on no onyakuho: ‘Kaitai shinsho’ to ‘Chōtei Kaitai shinsho’ 漢字による外国音の音訳法-「解体新書」と「重訂解体新書」,” *Tōkyō kokusai daigaku ronsō Kyōyō gakubu-hen* 東京国際大学論叢教養学部編 49 (1994): 69–83.

I cannot but ask one more question which to the best of my knowledge has never been posed. Why were calques so often used by the Japanese for translating Dutch, but less so for translating Latin or later English? The reason is, I think, simple: Dutch had undergone a similar movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of creating easy-to-understand compound neologisms to replace Latin and Greek scientific terms, unlike English.³⁷ New vocabularies made of such compounds are the norm in many fields such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, botany, and zoology: indeed, the names of those disciplines themselves indicate that: *wis-kunde*, *natuur-kunde*, *scheikunde*, *aard-kunde*, *plant-kunde* and *dier-kunde*. The principle is the same, and accounts for the fact that many scientific terms, so complicated in English, are easy to understand in Dutch, Chinese, or Japanese. It is this tendency which, to take a random example, allows a modern author to make such new compound words as *kegeloproer* (“bowling brawl.”)³⁸

The use of Chinese in phonetic loans from Dutch or other Western languages can be linked to, and might have derived from, earlier ways of using particular Chinese characters to phonetically correspond to Sanskrit syllables, such as 佛陀 C Fotuo, for Buddha. Genpaku himself referred to the way Buddhist monks had translated from Sanskrit, and indeed, Buddhist sutras are still read in *ondoku* 音讀, that is, using Japanese approximations of early Chinese pronunciations meant to approximate the Sanskrit; such readings are often different from the common SJ. Thus, anyone in Japan would have been familiar with those characters, some common, some mostly encountered only in this context. Some standardization had taken place for such sets of characters, and in Tokugawa times there existed a lively field of *siddham* studies on how best to pronounce Sanskrit phrases in order to make mantras magically effective.³⁹

37 One reads often that the Flemish polymath Simon Stevin (1540–1620) stands behind this movement, and indeed, he created neologisms in many fields. Chinese readers may like the fact that he sought to prove the superiority of Dutch by pointing out the large number of single syllables with complete meanings. See especially E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin* (’s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1943), 298–320. But the movement was larger, and e.g., Dodoens and his *Cruydt-boeck* already was another example of the same movement. Cf. note 3.

38 Albert Hoffstädt, “Menig Heer Wankelt,” in *De Vriendschap die Ons Bindt: Amicitia 1768–2018*, ed. Jan van Rijckevorsel and Paul Menken (Leiden: Amicitia, 2018), 25.

39 Zürcher has argued for early standardization; see E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 40. An eighth-century table I consulted exists in the Buddhist Canon: the *Yujie jing-gangding jingshi zimu pin* 瑜伽金剛頂經釋字母品 by Amoghavajra (T. 880). For a historical overview of Chinese and Japanese studies on *siddham*, see R. H. van Gulik, *Siddham: An Essay on the History of Sanskrit Studies in China and Japan* (Nagpur: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1956).

There generally existed two such tables, called southern and central. But while they certainly have characters we encounter in Dutch transcriptions too, such as 都 for *tu*, there does not seem to be much overlap; e.g., the *u*, which we frequently encounter as 烏 to render Dutch, is 甌 in the southern, and 塙 in the central system.⁴⁰ Similar transliteration tables, transmitted through Korea, were also in use for *man'yōgana* 万葉仮名, a system whereby particular characters were used to write Japanese names phonetically in early texts.⁴¹ But also in this case it must be said that when we look at the actual characters concerned, there seems to have been no direct influence: while 烏 for *u*, or 泥 for *ni* is common both in Tokugawa medical texts and *man'yōgana*, the ubiquitous 亜 for *a/ya* or 的 for *de/te* are not encountered in *man'yōgana*—and certainly there is no provision for *-r* 爾/兒. In any case, the references to Buddhist precedents occasionally mentioned by Sorai or other *rangaku* scholars usually refer to the earlier translation movement of the sutras, not to contemporary *siddham* studies.

Thus, we may tentatively conclude that to render foreign loanwords, the earlier Buddhist and Jesuit practices may have induced the Dutch specialists to use modern Chinese transliterations for rendering Dutch or Latin as well, even if they differed in the actual characters used.

Let us finish this article by looking once more at an example of the complex ways *kaeriten* and *furigana*, and Dutch and Chinese could play together, by noting how a kind of *kanbun* practice could be used to translate Dutch sentences as well. I use an example from an 1856 Dutch textbook *Rangaku hitori annai* 蘭學獨案内.⁴² First, we have in Dutch, written vertically: *Hij is de ergste man, die ik ooit gezien heb.* (which means: He is the worst man, that I ever saw [=seen have]). This sentence has two lines in small characters to its left. The inner one reads: ***Karewa aru Ø mottomoashiki hitode tokoronohitodewa ware imamade mi taru*** (with the parts written with Chinese characters bolded, and the remainder written in katakana; and to correspond one-by-one to the Dutch words, with all syllables corresponding to one Dutch word spelled together). The outer line to the very left gives numbers, in Chinese characters, just before the words in the inner left line start: 1 9 7 8 6 2 3 4 5. Reordered, this finally gives us the Japanese reading: *Karewa ware imamade mi taru mottomoashiki*

40 Mabuchi Kazuo 馬淵和夫, *Shittanshō no kenkyū* 悉曇章の研究 (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2006), 50–51.

41 John R. Bentley, “The Origin of *man'yōgana*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 64.1 (2001): 59–73.

42 Kano Ryō 可野亮, *Rangaku hitori annai* (Edo: Izumi Hanbee, 1856). Example taken from Sugimoto, *Kokugogaku to Rangogaku*, 382.

hitode aru, or in more proper punctuation, *Kare wa ware ima made mitaru mottomo ashiki hito de aru*, which is more or less a proper Japanese translation corresponding to the Dutch. Of course, in a festive work such as this, perhaps I should have changed *ashiki* into *yoki*, “good.” But as scholars, librarians, and editors know, one always has to stay true to the primary sources.

Overcoming Distance

Richard Bowring

A recent book review reminded me once again of the strange things that can happen when alien cultures come into contact. The book being reviewed was a study of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (it sounds better in German) in Japan of the Japanese classic the *Pillow Book* (Jpn. *Makura no sōshi*), but the reviewer's main interest was not in fact the book in question but the *Pillow Book* itself and, by extension, its putative author, the Heian court lady Sei Shōnagon (966?–1017?). The reviewer had clearly found Sei Shōnagon herself a fascinating figure to such a degree that the editor of the highly respected journal in question had felt it appropriate to give the review the title “Shōnagon is Hot.” My heart sank, of course, but it is a good example of how reception and interpretation is always work in progress, whatever one might think of the direction of travel.

The *Pillow Book* has enchanted and engaged readers abroad ever since it was first translated into English by Arthur Waley in 1928. How can you not be drawn to a passage such as the following?

A night when the moon is very bright. You are crossing a stream and as the oxen tread along, water goes scattering through the air like a shattering of crystal—how magnificent!¹

A curious *mélange* of such descriptions, anecdotes, and vibrant vignettes of life at court, mixed in with a series of apparently random lists and catalogues, which recount likes and dislikes, annoying things, pretty things, the acceptable and the unacceptable, this work tells us much of life in the Heian court as seen through the sharp eyes of someone on the margins, a highly placed female companion/servant to an imperial consort. Almost inevitably, the disparate nature of the material—reportage, notes, a guide to manners—together with the disconnectedness that moves us this way and that at random, has always shifted the attention of the reader onto the character and personality of the implied author, and thence, with hardly a breath, onto the author herself as a historical figure.

¹ Mark Morris, “Sei Shōnagon’s Poetic Catalogues,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40 (1980): 37.

Now there can be no doubt that Sei Shōnagon was indeed a real person. We know that she served in the entourage of Teishi (977–1000), the main consort of Emperor Ichijō (980–1011). But apart from one or two indirect and questionable references, the only substantial proof of her existence comes from the brush of her contemporary Murasaki Shikibu (973?–1014?), the author of the *Tale of Genji*, who in her diary had some rather unkind things to say of her. There are mitigating factors, for they were serving rival consorts and had a vested interest in being critical of each other:

Sei Shōnagon ... was dreadfully conceited. She thought herself so clever and littered her writings with Chinese characters, but if you examined them closely, they left a great deal to be desired. Those who think of themselves as being superior to everyone else in this way will inevitably suffer and come to a bad end, and people who have become so precious that they go out of their way to try and be sensitive in the most unpromising situations, trying to capture every moment of interest, however slight, are bound to look ridiculous and superficial. How can the future turn out well for them?²

In Japan today it is difficult to find anyone who has not heard of these two women, and for many they simply define the culture of eleventh-century Japan. By the same token, however, it is equally difficult to find anyone who has encountered either the *Pillow Book* or the *Tale of Genji* in the original Japanese, were it not for the fact that everyone is forced to struggle with one or two short extracts in one of the high-school language textbooks. Today, anyone interested in reading the *Pillow Book* will do so either in a purely modern Japanese translation, or in an edition encrusted with headnotes, footnotes, and a running literal translation along the bottom to aid comprehension. Fortunate indeed is the foreign reader who can pick up his or her translation into English, or Dutch, or French, or German, and read away. To this extent the English *Pillow Book* is and always will be far more approachable than the Japanese *Makura no sōshi*. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the *Tale of Genji*.

Once we have accepted that Sei Shōnagon existed, what ties her to the *Pillow Book*? Unfortunately, the answer is very little. We must start with the knowledge that there are hundreds of different manuscripts of this work, the earliest of which does not predate the thirteenth century. Among these, scholars have identified four main variant textual traditions: two groups organized on a more or less logical basis, collecting lists with lists, and stories with stories;

² Richard Bowring, trans., *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 54.

and two characterized by a sense of dislocation, randomness, and surprise. It has become accepted scholarly practice to argue that the more organized examples must necessarily have been of later provenance, representing a male attempt to edit and improve the work of a rather scatty woman. This is, of course, why translators always prefer to use an edition that comes from the random group. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that we have no way of knowing the truth of the matter.

The only other sign of a link between Sei Shōnagon and the *Pillow Book* is the following passage, which can be found at the end of some, but by no means all, manuscripts. The most recent translation handles it as follows:

Palace Minister Korechika one day presented to the Empress a bundle of paper. “What do you think we could write on this?” Her Majesty inquired. “They are copying the *Records of the Historian* over at His Majesty’s court.” “This should be a ‘pillow,’ then,” I suggested. “Very well, it’s yours,” declared Her Majesty, and she handed it over to me. I set to work with this boundless pile of paper to fill it to the last sheet with all manner of odd things, so no doubt there’s much in these pages that makes no sense.”³

It may be of some interest to reveal some flavor of the raw material the translator is forced to work with. In the original it is presented as a single sentence:

Regarding some notepaper that the Minister of the Interior had given to Her Majesty—“What shall we write on this?” “Well, at His Majesty’s they are copying something called the *Records of the Historian*,” she said. “So let’s making a ‘pillow!’” “In that case, take it,” she said, handing it over. How odd. What to do? In trying to fill this endless pile of paper, how many trivialities!⁴

The mention of a “pillow” here has provided endless fodder for scholarly debate. There are at least eight different theories as to what it might refer (only one of which has anything to do with a real pillow), the most likely being a word play on the *Records of the Historian* (Jpn. *Shiki*), which can also mean “bedding.” Even so, the passage is proof of nothing, since it may have been

3 Meredith McKinney, trans., *The Pillow Book* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 255.

4 Matsuo Satoshi, et al., eds., *Makura no sōshi*, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1974), 463–464.

added by a later reader. We have absolutely no way of knowing. The sober fact is that any connection between Sei Shōnagon and the *Pillow Book* is tenuous at best and must remain a matter of conjecture, no matter how much this flies in the face of commonly accepted “truth.” A better approach would be to ignore both Sei Shōnagon (the historical figure) and “Sei Shōnagon” (the implied author constructed from inside the text). These figures merely exist as the product of a desire to bring coherence to an otherwise incoherent, unstable text, for such is the anxiety that a work like this engenders that the natural reaction is always to try and stabilize. One can do this using one of two strategies, both of which were, and still are, practiced by generations of readers, be they Japanese or (given the universality of such anxiety) foreign. Either one rearranges the work so that it appears more organized and “rational,” or one provides it with an authorial voice, the product of which it then becomes. In this sense, “Sei Shōnagon” is a fiction created to give the text a sense of structure and meaning that it may never have had.

Extra evidence for this emerges when we turn from the modern translation, be it into a European language or Japanese, to the classical “original.” Disconcertingly, the text immediately starts to float free, to the extent that “Sei Shōnagon” disappears almost without trace. I say “almost” because sheer force of habit makes it difficult for us to completely negate the presence of the implied author, even though the signs of that presence are nowhere near as obvious in the classical Japanese as they are in English. Translators, as we see in the above excerpts, can try and do clever things to avoid an excessive sense of personalization, to avoid the insistent “I” around which character tends to coalesce, by saying “you,” or by objectifying with the judicious use of the passive voice, but in the end Indo-European sentences will always be in need of a subject and, as should be clear from my own attempt at a literal version, the “I” is always screaming to get out. How does this happen? Not only is Japanese a language the syntax of which operates more on the basis of topic + comment than with subject + predicate, there has always been a strong preference for avoiding expressing subject wherever possible. A Japanese sentence can, when it wants to, lie like a boat without an anchor, and the genius of whoever compiled the *Pillow Book* was to take full advantage of this intentional indeterminacy.

The *Tale of Genji* presents similar problems, although here the question of how to represent realia takes on greater significance. Take for example, Waley’s 1935 translation of this lengthy tale. One of the aspects of Waley that stands out today is that he felt impelled to transpose the story into an essentially non-Japanese setting. Heian houses and mansions had few solid walls, the buildings were on low stilts, and rooms were divided off from the outside by blinds and a broad wooden veranda. Inside there was little more than a series of screens

and flimsy partitions. When inside, everyone spent most of their time at floor level, and women in particular had to take care they were not seen standing when men were present. How do you naturalize into English a scene in which Japanese architecture of the eleventh century plays a major role, when you cannot rely on any of your audience having the slightest idea of what it might have looked like? Later translators could rely on more knowledge and so, by and large, managed to avoid the problem, but Waley did not have the option. His answer was to use a small catalogue of words and phrases that eventually transposes us into a Mediterranean setting: there are “porticos,” “terraces,” a “loggia,” and “borders” and “moats” in the garden: people sit on “chairs,” look through “windows,” recline on “couches,” and retire into their “chambers.” “Genji flung himself onto a divan.” “He descended the long stairs.” “There was the clatter of hoofs in the courtyard.” And whenever someone writes anything, a desk with drawers invariably materializes. Yes, it brings it alive for us, but we end up at the wrong eye level and in the wrong environment. It is difficult, for example, to imagine from his translation that when a man stood outside by the veranda his eyes would have been level with the skirts of the lady kneeling on the floor of her room some four feet off the ground, with no “wall” between them.

I would now like to shift perspective for a moment, and go to the other end of the telescope. What must it have been like for those Japanese in the eighteenth century who suddenly found they had to come to terms with a West of which they knew little? Along with fear comes the fascination that drives youth to plough into the unknown. I began my academic career some fifty years ago with a study of the life and work of one such youth: the army doctor and eminent man of letters Mori Ōgai (1862–1922). Ōgai’s father was a doctor trained in traditional Chinese medicine, so it was natural for the son to study the new medicine, taught by those German medical scientists who had been invited to come and teach the best and brightest students in Tokyo. He later reminisced how difficult it was to deal with a father whose understanding of hygiene remained stubbornly limited and who, when finally persuaded that hands should always be washed in clean water, found him drying them on a dirty cloth. Ōgai was sent abroad for an extended period of study (1884–1888) and had the good fortune to conduct research in some of the most advanced universities in Europe, in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Munich. He happened to be in Munich when the eccentric Bavarian monarch King Ludwig drowned in mysterious circumstances in the Starnbergersee in 1886, an event that he later immortalized for Japanese readers in a romantic tale to which he gave the very Buddhist title “Utakata no ki” (A Tale of Transience). Given his official stipend as a government scholar, he was also in a position to mix in the highest

diplomatic and military circles, but above all he took full advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to absorb as much as he could. He read voraciously, and when he returned to Japan he led a double life, as an army doctor but also as a virtual conduit for the introduction of European literature, philosophy, and the arts. The timing was perfect, for the German Empire was only thirteen years old, in the middle of forging a nation-state out of a series of smaller states. It could hardly have escaped his attention that Meiji Japan was involved in a similar process, creating a nation out of a collection of previously disparate domains with different dialects, climate, and customs.

To understand the ideological underpinnings of European culture, there was an intellectual battle to be fought, a battle that involved language. Not so much the learning of a foreign language, but the far more difficult task of translation, of transferring into Japanese a whole vocabulary that covered not just everyday objects, but unfamiliar ideas such as law, liberty, love, literature, God, religion, and democracy. And when it came to translating stories and novels, there was a whole host of difficulties to be overcome, from the banal to the sophisticated. When describing a scene in a Bierkeller, for example, how could you give the reader some idea of what a *Stein* was? Ōgai's first attempt ended in periphrasis: "earthenware beer mugs, cylindrical in shape, the equivalent of four or five sake warmers, with bow-shaped handles and hinged metal lids." How could one render the speech patterns of a Russian female character in a story by Turgenev, a truly alien species, if she were "speaking" in Japanese? In the end you had to invent an artificial speech that would eventually become accepted but never lose the scent of translationese. In this never-ending battle, Japanese had one secret weapon up its sleeve that was not available to other languages but which proved to be surprisingly effective in speeding up the process of assimilation. This was not, of course, the first time Japan had been faced with the daunting task of absorbing foreign vocabulary. The first encounter with a written culture in the sixth century had been an even greater shock, the result of which had been the slow development of an extraordinarily complex method of writing Japanese. One trick to emerge from this nightmare was the judicious use of the word-gloss (*furigana*), the habit of writing down the pronunciation of an unfamiliar Chinese compound word next to it in a smaller syllabic *kana*. This resulted in a form of double writing, which often made for a very busy-looking page. In the early-modern period this technique was often put to good use by writers who wished to subvert the norm by attaching unusual readings to words in the interest of either comic or critical intent. One might consider this as little more than a game, but men like Mori Ōgai recognized its potential. The word-gloss could be used to show either that a new word was being used with a new meaning, or to give a meaning to a completely

unfamiliar compound, both of which had the effect of speeding up the process of naturalization. To take just one example. There was much discussion as to how to translate the dreaded word “nature,” which had such a long and complicated history in Europe. Which aspect did one choose? What was the context? Should one use 性 (a Confucian term signifying “human nature”), or 天然 (with connotations of Nature as opposed to Man), or 自然 (with connotations of naturalness, spontaneity, but also selfishness)? By the time of Ōgai, the consensus had hardened around the last of these but to make sure, to guide the reader to the correct interpretation, he decided to gloss it in *katakana* with the German *Natur*. There can be little doubt that the more writers adopted this technique, the quicker a new word might gain currency.

There are many other surprises in store for the student of language contact. Who would have thought, for example, that the process of opening up to the West would bring an explosion in the use of Chinese characters? One might have thought that something so redolent of all that was to be rejected would have been avoided. But there are some things about a language that cannot be changed. In much the same way that English (but not, as it happens, German) expanded its vocabulary by returning to Greek and Latin roots, Japanese, the core of which has always been highly resistant to change, expanded its vocabulary by having recourse to the vast reservoir of Chinese characters, creating neologisms and calques according to traditional Chinese word-formation. So successful indeed was this strategy that when China itself was forced to face the outside world, it “re-imported” much of this modern vocabulary from its Japanese neighbor. Japanese has continued to resist forming new words using purely native elements, although the outside resource has, of course, shifted from Chinese to English. Where will it end? Impossible to tell. And that is good news for those of us who are dedicated to doing what we can to overcome distance.

Beyond Nativism: Reflections on Methodology and Ethics in the Study of Early China

Martin Kern

Complementing or Questioning Traditional Knowledge and Authority?

In the study of Chinese antiquity, ours is a time of great excitement: a rare historical moment of tectonic shifts in knowledge, where we feel the ground under our feet moving in unpredictable ways, and where the thrill of new discoveries is paired with uncertainty and, indeed, anxiety. Our work today is comparable in significance to the foundational commentaries from the Han that established the textual tradition, the monumental scholastic summation from the early Tang, the philosophical rethinking from the Song, the systematic philological examination from the Qing, and the vigorous critiquing of antiquity from the early twentieth century.

Thanks to Chinese archaeology—but, sadly, also to the looting and illegal selling of ancient artifacts, including manuscripts—today we work with an ever-growing body of newly discovered materials unknown to previous generations. Suddenly, we face some of the actual remnants of an ancient textual world. We see not merely early texts stripped bare of the layers of later commentary: we see different texts as they existed prior to the scholarly activities of collecting, editing, compiling, ordering, analyzing, and commentating that had shaped and reshaped these texts over time. And yet, we cannot naively claim to have access to the “original” texts of the Chinese tradition: we do not know how to contextualize the newly discovered manuscripts in their own time, and more profoundly, we must stop reading them in a hermeneutical teleology that essentializes “the original text” as an independent, pre-commentarial entity. Instead, the manuscripts teach us that the text itself was often only constituted, or re-constituted, through the transformative appropriation of commentary.

Through which methodologies shall we then try to understand these textual artifacts? Is it even possible to read a pre-imperial text strictly without its early imperial commentaries, as the glosses in these commentaries provide our

most authoritative lexical definitions of the graphs and words in question? How can we read such a manuscript text independently from the commentarial and lexicographical tradition that from its inception involved the wholesale interpretation and rewriting in the emerging standardized script of the imperial state, the reorganization of the textual content, and the definition (or redefinition) of the very words that constituted the text proper? What kind and degree of agency do we assign to the imperial state with its new institutions of learning designed to appropriate the pre-imperial textual past? And, most fundamentally: should we use the newly discovered texts to complement the tradition as we know it, which itself is an *interpreted* artifact of cultural memory? Or should we use them to question that very tradition? When in 1925 Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) proposed his “method of twofold evidence” (*erchong zhengjufa* 二重證據法), he did not advocate a merely affirmative use of archaeology to “complement” (*buchong* 補充) or vindicate the textual tradition. Instead, he spoke of a critical principle of “supplemental correction” (*buzheng* 補正), just as Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), in his further elaboration on Wang’s “method,” used the terms “explanatory verification” (*shizheng* 釋證), “supplemental correction,” and “evidential verification” (*canzheng* 參證). However, Wang—an ardent nationalist—pushed well beyond the evidence of newly discovered texts (that at his time were still extremely limited in scope):

From these materials, my generation has obtained with certainty the evidence to supplement and correct the materials on paper, and we can further prove certain parts of the ancient writings to be true records entirely.... *Even books for which we have not yet attained proof, we cannot subject to denial; and for those that have already been proven, we can state categorically that they must be considered confirmed.* (Wang Guowei, *Gushi xinzheng* 古史新證)

How can one argue that because *some* ancient texts, or just *parts* of some ancient texts, have been validated, *all* received ancient texts should *prima facie* be considered reliable witnesses of their purported time? Today, much is at stake for those Chinese colleagues who feel the responsibility of protecting and carrying the hallowed tradition forward to future generations. This conviction is not to be taken lightly. As humanists, we are critical readers of texts past, but we also are their curators. Thus, in a scholarly tradition that views itself as continuous over millennia—a continuity created from layers of retrospective construction—modern Chinese scholars might see themselves as the intellectual descendants of Kongzi. By contrast, scholars looking at China from the

outside—people like myself—do not work under this responsibility and do not feel the same weight and demands of tradition. We are free to question everything and anything, though we are not free to do so recklessly or frivolously. We come from a European tradition that has always been polycentric and multicultural; it is not that long ago that scholars worth their salt were simply expected to be conversant in the major “European dialects.” That much of Western Sinology nowadays appears as a bilingual affair—Chinese and English—is largely due to the shift of the field toward the United States, which in turn was fueled by the German emigration during the 1930s. European multilingualism in general has not done well under the depressing state of language education in the United States, but for reasons discussed below, the dominance of English in Sinology exceeds that in other fields of the humanities.

Yet regardless of the regression of academic multilingualism, Western scholars stand outside the traditional Chinese perspective that, in sharp contrast to Europe, since pre-imperial times has idealized unity as the absolute precondition for both political stability and cultural glory, despite and against the historical experiences of disunity and discontinuity that since Warring States times have repeatedly produced the richest tapestry of culture. A Western humanist may not easily share the desire to impose unity upon diversity; instead, we hold dear our differences and cherish—with pride refracted through self-irony—our idiosyncracies even within our many countries. The ongoing Chinese debate over “doubting” or “trusting antiquity,” concerned with contemporary identity and claims for an unbroken continuity with antiquity, only bewilders people like me. And yet, our field cannot simply divide the labor between Chinese curators and non-Chinese critics. Just as Li Ling 李零 from Peking University has noted, “scholarship has no ancient or modern, Chinese or foreign [or “inner and outer”]” (*xue wu gujin zhongwai* 學無古今中外). Our responsibilities as both curators and critics are shared, or we may go our separate ways and abandon all pretense regarding our shared historical endeavor.

We would miss a fabulous opportunity. For the first time in history, China is concurrently studied by scholars around the globe, all of them anchored in their own traditions, and all potentially responding to one another. This leads to moments of frustration: we can find it difficult to respect premises we do not share. But the experience of alterity and distance is not a problem: it is a perspective and it is a promise as long as we are willing to recognize strengths that are not our own. No Western scholar can hope to match the rich intuitive understanding of Chinese texts that defines the very best of Chinese work. But our initial disadvantage can quickly turn into strength, as can be seen in translation and systematic textual analysis: the best Western translations and

studies are based in rigorously analytic methodology because we cannot simply “translate” the graphs of a classical Chinese text into the identical ones of a modern text (quietly suggesting the identity of the classical and modern words written by them, a problem also pervasive in Japanese translations). Instead, we must make precise decisions that no modern Chinese reader needs to make, and only in making these decisions do we realize their importance. The foreign scholar faces questions that the text itself has never asked but that nevertheless must be answered in order to understand the historical specifics of cultural practice and knowledge represented, however imprecisely, in the word. Even where we cannot reach definite answers, we go through processes of analysis and methodological reflection that generate additional layers of understanding—layers we cannot unfold otherwise. We can only, and must, read slowly.

These processes of reasoning transcend translation. Yet translation illustrates and embodies how the “outside” perspective generates meaning *differently*, and often *different meaning*. For this reason, much of non-Chinese scholarship appears profoundly distinct from the learning that arises from within the tradition. The insistence on methodology is itself a clear sign of an “outside” perspective, but this does not mean it can only come from the outside. To the contrary, just as no “outside” interpretation can ignore the inexhaustible accomplishments of two millennia of scholarship, traditional learning must embrace methodology in ever renewed acts of self-distancing. This is the ground where all of us can meet: methodology does not displace accumulated knowledge but generates perspectives, questions, and possible answers that cannot be discovered otherwise, and that are certainly not available to a tradition that operates strictly on its own terms. In a dialectical turn, the “outside” must become part of the “inside”: not subsumed or appropriated but, to the contrary, as a transformative force of internalized alterity. The “inside” cannot remain an unreconstructed “inside”; and likewise, the “outside perspective,” in an eternal feedback loop, is continuously informed and reshaped by whatever “inside” phenomena it is meant to illuminate, and by whatever “inside perspective” it tries to respond to.

It should be clear that however alien some of the thoughts expressed in my own work may sound to the consummate cultural insider, they are meant to contribute new possibilities of understanding to our common project. What is more, my perspective is not just that of a China scholar looking from the outside in. I talk as much to colleagues in fields like Classics and Comparative Literature as I talk to fellow Sinologists, and I try to read as much on antiquity in general as I do on Chinese antiquity in particular. These wider

cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural experiences are transformative. Global humanistic scholarship is not bipolar, with Chinese and non-Chinese scholars looking at China in different ways; instead, it is multipolar, with China being one subject among many. Just as I “look in” on China, a colleague in Shanghai may “look in” on ancient Greece, India, or Egypt, and we both then “look in” on the global possibilities of antiquity altogether where “our own” part may be central but only as one smaller part of the much larger whole. This is why comparative knowledge and perspective are indispensable: by offering alternatives to the specific choices each ancient culture has made for itself and has considered self-evident ever since, cross-cultural comparison helps all of us to defamiliarize the familiar, be it in China or anywhere else.

In the globalized study of China today, we can cooperate much more efficiently because of the availability of electronic resources. The major Chinese and foreign institutions subscribe to powerful databases that make our scholarship readily available online. There is no excuse not to be aware of recent Chinese journal articles; and while the situation in China beyond Beijing and Shanghai is not yet comparably convenient, Chinese scholars have various institutional and personal ways to get access to foreign scholarship. (Strangely and regrettably, the exception is Japan; there is no Japanese online infrastructure to provide full-text scholarly articles.)

The digital humanities are rapidly transforming our access to original texts. All known ancient Chinese writings, including recent paleographic materials, have been digitized and are easily available to, and searchable by, every scholar of ancient China. With the press of a button, we can now search the entire Chinese written tradition at a scale and speed far beyond the memory of the most learned eighteenth- or nineteenth-century scholar. On my phone, I can within seconds look up a word in the *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大辭典, the *Grand Ricci*, the *Oxford Chinese Dictionary*, and the new *Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* all at once, plus some others. Meanwhile, as our databases are getting “smarter” by the day, we can detect literary patterns and perform “fuzzy” linguistic searches and analyses that were unimaginable with the printed concordances of old. In our classrooms and at academic conferences, we can instantly pull up both classical sources and their modern scholarship—and if we don’t do it, our students most assuredly will. Technology has thus leveled the field in all directions. While no database search can replace the slow reading of entire texts, to “know texts” and, most importantly, to find connections among an infinite number of texts, now takes on entirely new forms. As we all can discover textual patterns and relationships across the entire body of ancient Chinese writing, the formerly vast advantage enjoyed by a Chinese scholar who had started memorizing the classics in elementary school

has shrunk dramatically. Digital competence has its own limitations and problems, and is not the same as the accumulation of knowledge, but it is now an incredibly powerful tool for methodology- and data-driven analytic research, that is, scholarship much less dependent on traditional learning.

Taken together, new sources, new methodological approaches, and new technologies are rapidly transforming what we study about ancient China and how we study it. No enterprising student today is confined to the printed resources I had available when writing my dissertation, and as a result, our students can chart paths of study that were impossible to even imagine just a few years ago. Some of these paths lead to surprising discoveries that unsettle received wisdom, but we should embrace the spirit of letting go of traditional beliefs and false certainties that with every passing day are getting a little bit more difficult to cling to. The exacting philology devised by the great scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is still important, but it no longer dominates critical inquiry to the degree it once did. Now placed into dramatically wider horizons, many of its basic assumptions are again thrown into the open. Likewise, the linguistic analyses of mid-twentieth century giants like Wang Li 王力 (1900–1986) and Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978) were the best of their time, but their time is over. One reason is the development of much more refined analytical instruments; another is the discovery, in epigraphic sources, of much more diverse linguistic data. Significant parts of what seemed settled fifty years ago are no longer certain. Yet while we already have enough new evidence to question the old orthodoxy, we do not have nearly enough to establish a new one—nor do we need one. Ours is an exciting time of Socratic insight where new knowledge only reveals how little we truly understand.

A Dead End: The New Traditionalism and Fundamentalism

When speaking, one should know one's audience: what it expects and takes for granted, what it holds as true and what it will not accept. Yet as a foreign scholar speaking on China in China, I resist its nativist discourses. The most powerful of these discourses is captured in the late Li Xueqin's 李學勤 (1933–2019) enormously influential claim, first advanced in 1992, that the study of ancient China has now reached the time of “walking out of the age of doubting antiquity” (*zouchu yigu shidai* 走出疑古時代). While Li's book of the same title offered a sophisticated analysis that did not reduce early China to simple truths, his slogan—appropriated by others to advance claims far beyond Li's original position—has become the new Chinese orthodoxy. At conference after conference, it is now routinely called upon to “prove” (*zhengming* 證明) the true

antiquity of whatever later tradition claims as such, and to silence uncomfortable questions.

“Walking out of the age of doubting antiquity” is typically concerned with proving the authenticity of transmitted texts. It explicitly rejects the indigenous “doubting antiquity” (*yigu* 疑古) discourse of the 1920s and 1930s where scholars led by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and others subjected the texts from Chinese antiquity to radical questioning. The “doubting antiquity” movement was itself nationalistic as it tried to attack the foundations of traditional learning in order to build a new intellectual basis for the emerging post-imperial, post-traditional Chinese nation-state. Today, the attacks on “doubting antiquity” reflect the radical ideology of rejecting modernity itself: the rejection of the project that recognizes the unbridgeable gulf between the distant past and its modern interpreters. In contrast to “doubting antiquity,” the powerful movement of “walking out of the age of doubting antiquity” reflects a premodern mind that insists on a mythological, idealized past that cannot be questioned, and where tradition must be taken as literally “true” as long as it is not “proven” otherwise. In suspending the critical facility of probing questions that are not a priori geared toward a desired result, prominent scholars have taken their place *within* the hallowed tradition instead of assuming a self-reflective distance to it. Their ideology has not emerged by coincidence: two generations after the end of the “century of national shame” (*bainian guochi* 百年國恥), i.e., China’s military and political humiliation by Western and Japanese imperialists, and a generation after the anti-traditionalism of the Cultural Revolution, it marks the needs of a newly rising China. Intellectually, this new China is a China without recent history—as if eager to prove Hegel right after all, it connects back to nothing but a set of timeless beliefs about antiquity, represented by a revered “Confucius” and similar icons. Historically, “walking out of the age of doubting antiquity” is the answer to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the “doubting antiquity” movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and the collapse of the traditional empire. There is thus no modern intellectual tradition that current Chinese scholarship can (or is willing to) claim as its foundation. This is the problem contemporary traditionalism seeks to resolve, and does so exclusively on premodern Chinese terms. Furnishing the ideological underpinnings of a new China, the embrace of antiquity has little use for non-Chinese ideas: it insists on a Chinese monopoly on interpreting China. Instead of embracing the rich tapestry of antiquity that includes China, its neighbors, and other civilizations, and instead of valuing scholarship from abroad, those who define their own cultural identity on purely Chinese terms routinely deploy three tactical moves: first, while paying obligatory lip service to foreign scholarship, they rarely ever read any of it; second, they do not learn

any foreign languages; and third, they show no interest in other ancient cultures, or in the highly inspiring study of these cultures. The result is a body of scholarship that is defensive, nativist, self-marginalizing, monolingual, and monocultural. Looking toward the future, I find it difficult to see how such scholarship can continue to succeed even for one more generation.

An example of how this plays out is a paper for which I served as commentator at a conference in Beijing. The paper was designed to “prove” that certain parts of the ancient *Classic of Odes* and *Classic of Documents* constitute part of “Shang dynasty literature,” pushing these texts back by centuries to a time from which no other works of comparable language, size, or type are known. Such a claim would not have been acceptable for at least the last hundred years but is now advanced by reference to new archaeological evidence. Recent archaeology has indeed produced a wealth of data that teach us much we did not know before—though literally nothing about “Shang dynasty literature.” However, the mere general reference to archaeology, echoing Wang Guowei’s claims cited above, provides broad rhetorical coverage under the umbrella that *in general* archaeology can now be used to refute *any* positions associated with the earlier “doubting antiquity” movement. Thus the argument for “proof” is simply reversed: “since archaeology has now proven so many things, how can you *disprove* that something is as old as I claim it to be?” I cannot, of course, because quasi-religious beliefs, as opposed to scientific hypotheses supported by explicit evidence, are not open to be disproven.

The new traditionalism is not merely about proving the age of classical texts. It operates on simplistic assumptions that “earlier” means “better,” “more reliable,” and “more true,” all the way to the deeply held but obviously fallacious belief that texts must be contemporaneous with the events they describe, and spoken by the historical actors to whom they are attributed. Such assumptions may be considered hopelessly naïve; they may be called implausible in the extreme; by a very large margin, the preponderance of evidence may speak against them; but they cannot be disproven. And thus, the traditional speech attributed to the ancient Shang king Pan Geng 盤庚 becomes a Shang speech. It does not help to protest that no evidence exists for the language and rhetoric of the Pan Geng speech during the Shang. “How can you say it did not exist? The proof is right here!” Related to such arguments is the willingness to accept any later source, even if it postdates the matter in question by a millennium or more, as “evidence.” The question then turns to what counts as proof, and whether rules of argument and evidence are universally agreeable. If not, then no scholarly dialogue is possible. For perspective, how would we judge Biblical scholars using a random selection of medieval European writings as “evidence” to “prove” something about the earliest layers of the Hebrew Bible? We would

not be able to disprove them, but perhaps we would ask them a question: “Why is this so important to you?”

At stake is not so much the validation of three millennia of textual tradition but a fundamentalist belief about the origins of that tradition. Perhaps one may choose to participate in “proving” Chinese antiquity, but I won’t, nor do I think it has any future in the global humanities. We cannot apply one set of “critical” modern methodological principles to ancient civilizations around the world, and then have a second “faithful,” premodern set of principles that applies only to China (and some other places where scholarship is pursued as the practice of faith). The latter does not have a passport and cannot travel. Its relevance ends at the border.

A vision of Chinese antiquity that *does* have such a future in the global humanities, and that could help us to correct the still pervasive Western idea of antiquity as simply Mediterranean, can only be one that foregoes claims of Chinese exceptionalism and instead participates in comparative discussions with other academic fields as they are pursued outside of China: Classics, ancient history, archaeology, anthropology, comparative literature, and so on. No ancient civilization is most productively interpreted through faithful devotion or within the confines of the particular academic tradition it has engendered over time. All of them benefit from an awareness of the ancient world broadly conceived, as comparative research frequently opens prospects that are not overtly suggested by the material specific to any place or time. The famous dictum by Max Müller (1823–1900), Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford University, that “He who knows one [religion], knows none” remains our most productive guide, including for those scholars who study “their own” culture and history. Only the non-nationalistic, non-exceptionalist study of Chinese antiquity that opens itself to comparative questions and perspectives is one that can succeed globally, and that may challenge the Eurocentric hegemony over the study of the ancient world. In studying China, those who reject comparative thinking are not doing their own field, or their students, a favor.

Fortunately, there is some hope. Today a number of major Chinese universities are beginning to build departments of Classics, Egyptology, and so on, and no few foreign specialists have been invited to China to share their knowledge and provide inspiration. We should welcome this exciting prospect: just as the study of Chinese antiquity has much to gain from dialogue and cross-cultural comparison, the study of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world can benefit enormously from the engagement of scholars informed about China. To date, a field like Classics—institutionally configured, in one way or another, around the study of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern history, philosophy, literature, archaeology, and religion, but often even more narrowly

concentrated on just Greece and Rome—easily dominates any thinking about antiquity in the West. As that field now gradually develops at the best Chinese universities in mutual exchange with the study of Chinese history, literature, archaeology, and philosophy, I suspect that we all will be better for it.

Essentializing Discourses: “Sinology” versus “National Learning”

It is not my goal to deny the validity of traditional claims, or to align myself with a particular scholarly movement of the past. Writing from the American East Coast, I am not personally invested in discourses that answer the needs of Chinese cultural and political identity. My own identity as a scholar is grounded in forms of inquiry that expose my assumptions and biases as transparently and self-critically as possible. This is not only a method but also a meta-method: to the faithful, the principles of critical inquiry are in themselves partisan and oppositional.

On the other hand, rigorous critique is not a license to run roughshod over the traditional views that have formed through millennia of traditional scholarship. Without this scholarship since the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), our understanding of ancient texts would be incomparably poorer. Powerful traditions endure for good reasons and their accomplishments deserve profound respect. To some extent, though bent by ideologies and institutions, the survival of scholarship follows a Darwinian logic: that we can still access explanations from very early periods means that they have been considered plausible and worthy of transmission ever since. Unless we can show how our judgment surpasses that of our predecessors, we should not lightly abandon their convictions, especially since ancient and medieval scholars worked with a wealth of historical materials long lost to us. We must ask, however, how their exploits hold up to critical reasoning that places methodology above identity and inquiry above acceptance. In this, all contemporary scholars, Chinese or not, are looking at antiquity from the outside in: we all are foreigners to the ancient lands and must acknowledge the fundamental remove that defines our position. This remove of two millennia is far greater than the distances between contemporary cultures or languages. Regardless of our identities, we all have more in common with one another than any of us has with the ancients. This becomes obvious in anachronistic projections of our own assumptions into antiquity. Especially for a native scholar, the appeal of such projections lies precisely in their seeming naturalness. An ancient Chinese graph is easily misread in its modern meaning even though that meaning had entered the Chinese language only recently, often from Japanese. Thus, *wenxue* 文學 in the

Confucian *Analects* does not mean “literature”; it means “the learning of cultural patterns.” Modern Chinese is not helpful here.

In my academic exchanges, I find myself talking to (a) academics working on China within China, (b) those in Europe and North America (and to a far lesser extent also Japan) working on China, and (c) those who specialize in other fields such as Comparative Literature, Classics, Near Eastern Studies, and so on. Each time, I find myself addressing a discursive field not merely separate but radically different from either one of the other two. Far more often than not, local scholars in China are only concerned with China and feel perfectly justified to read only Chinese scholarship; and likewise, most American and European humanists who know nothing about China seem entirely at ease that way. As I try, separately, to converse with both, the ways in which I present my work are asymmetrical and mutually incompatible. What makes sense to one group of learned scholars can make no sense whatsoever to the other.

Of course, “Western scholars”—including Chinese scholars based at European and North American institutions—in my field all realize that they operate in separate discourses and hence speak in different idioms, depending on whether for Western or Chinese academic audiences. This is true particularly with audiences in Mainland China where departments especially of Chinese language and literature can be decidedly nativist and inward-looking, and where the study of China is a monocultural, monolingual affair with little use for outside perspective. This is not true of all such departments across Mainland China, but it is overwhelmingly the rule. Not too long ago, I experienced the following at a conference in Beijing: in the session I happened to chair, a senior professor from a major Chinese university admonished a younger colleague that his way of analyzing a text was not right; it was something one could accept from a foreigner, but not from “us Chinese” (*women Zhongguoren* 我們中國人). Without a second thought—but then visibly embarrassed when I joked about it in response—he insisted on the separation of our discourses and made it clear which side of the gap he considered the right one. His strategically deployed essentialism and uncontained sense of superiority shielded him from “foreign” readings of “his” traditional Chinese texts. Meanwhile, put firmly in his place within the local hegemonic discourse, the young assistant professor was reminded that he was still one of “us Chinese,” not “them.” And in some sense his senior colleague was not entirely wrong: our different readings often reflect strikingly different sets of questions, interests, and motivations, and within the confines of our communities and academic institutions, these cannot be taken lightly by a young scholar standing early in his or her academic career. The risks of looking like “one of them” are enormous, while the possible rewards for even considering “their” readings are negligible.

The distinctions I have introduced so far are, however, somewhat crude: they catch some but not all of reality. Hegemonic discourses exist everywhere, from the powerful cultural and academic influence that the rest of the world recognizes in contemporary U.S. American scholarship to the nativism of certain Chinese scholars who are not shy to express their disdain for non-indigenous thought. But in the learned communities I travel in, there also are scholars who—for better or worse—defy the expectations of their own academic communities, even to the extent that they live and teach in one community while adhering to the ideological norms of another one. This is not a question of race or ethnicity. There are, of course, numerous Chinese scholars working at European and North American universities, where they function smoothly according to local expectations; there are Chinese scholars who take up positions at universities in China after having received their doctoral degrees in the West; there is a growing number of Western scholars who hold appointments—regular or honorific—at Chinese institutions; there are Western scholars teaching at U.S. institutions who subscribe to the traditionalist Chinese agenda; and there are Chinese scholars teaching in China who push the limits of Western theory. We all overlap in interesting ways and share ample opportunities for both inspiration and frustration. These experiences easily cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries, and they subvert the fields and identities we construct for ourselves and cast into terms like “Sinology” in the West or “national learning” (*guoxue* 國學) in China. And yet, these constructions are powerful.

The newly minted discipline of “national learning” in China—at major institutions a degree-awarding field now often framed as the indigenous study of the Chinese classics—by definition stands separate from “Sinology” (*hanxue* 漢學), a field generally defined as the study of premodern China “from the outside.” But what is “the outside”? It cannot just refer to work done outside of China or to scholars who are not ethnically Chinese. A field like “Sinology”—which in the West is distinguished from social science-driven “Chinese studies”—cannot be defined in terms of the national or racial identity of its practitioners or of geographical location but only by way of methodological difference. Only in this sense *hanxue* is “outside” and *guoxue* is “inside.” No Chinese scholar working in China calls himself or herself a *hanxuejia*, or “Sinologist.”

Both “Sinology” and “national learning” have complicated origins and epistemological perspectives. “Sinology” or *hanxue* literally means “Han studies”; the Japanese pronunciation of the term is *kangaku*. In Meiji Japan, the term *kangaku* was used for the earlier Tokugawa period study of China (with *kan* referring to “China”), similar to how Western scholars began to use “Sinology.” Yet in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China itself, *hanxue* was a branch

of historical-philological studies that referred back to scholarship from the ancient Han dynasty in opposition to the more recent, and more philosophically inclined, Song dynasty learning (*songxue* 宋學). When Jesuit and other Western scholars adopted *hanxue* for themselves, they conflated the historical-philological orientation of *hanxue* with the meaning of *kangaku* as “the study of China,” or “Sinology.” Thus came about the definition of Sinology as the historical-philological study of premodern China from abroad, focused above all on the written sources from the past. In other words, the epistemological core of Sinology is both Japanese (as the study of China from the outside) and Chinese (as a particular methodology). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this kind of “traditional Sinology” is often derided as antiquarian, methodologically naïve, and generally obsolete; in its pejorative use in contemporary cultural studies or the social sciences, the word reeks of disdain.

On the other hand, “national learning” started not only as a non-Chinese term but as one opposed to Chinese learning: when Meiji period Japanese scholars in search of Japan’s cultural identity rejected *kangaku* and its implied veneration of China as Japan’s classical antiquity (and even more so “Western” studies), they promoted as an alternative “national learning” (*kokugaku* 國學) focused on a newly invented canon of Japan’s own indigenous classics. Only in the early twentieth century, after the end of the Chinese imperial state, *kokugaku*—written in Chinese graphs and pronounced *guoxue* in Chinese—was then introduced into China to denote Chinese learning focused on the Chinese classics. Just as *kokugaku* as *Japanese learning* served the cultural and political identity of the Japanese nation-state in the nineteenth century, *guoxue* as *Chinese learning* served the same purpose for the Chinese nation-state in the early twentieth century; both were focused on the respective “national essence” (jpn. *kokusui* 國粹, ch. *guocui*) as the nativist study of one’s own civilization. Today, after *guoxue* had been nearly forgotten in China for more than half a century, its revival serves the same purpose once again.

The convoluted histories of these words stand metaphorically for the methodological and ideological uncertainties in the study of premodern China. Both “national learning” and “Sinology” remain contested concepts: many Chinese scholars reject the “national learning” pursued and celebrated by their colleagues, while in the West, depending on whom one talks to, the designation “Sinologist” can be a badge of honor or the kiss of death. In addition, both within and outside of China, the notion of a “New Sinology” (*xin hanxue* 新漢學) has been proposed, though different scholars use the term in rather different ways, just as “national learning” and “Sinology” mean different things to different people.

A Personal Reflection: Why I Must Oppose the Politics of Traditionalism

Let me conclude with some personal reflections. Here, I only speak for myself and for the way I myself experience the academic field of early China. Others in my field—let alone those in other disciplines—have different experiences, and they certainly have different convictions. I cannot be a representative of “Western Sinology” in any way; not only are there many different “Sinologies” in “the West,” but with my dual citizenship and two passports, I belong to more than one. Born, raised, and educated in Germany, I was twenty-five years old when I arrived at Peking University in 1987; I left two years later, after the trauma of Tiananmen. But it was not until January 1, 1997, that I arrived in the United States, where I have remained ever since: first for eighteen months at the University of Washington in Seattle, then for two years at Columbia University, and since then, finally, at Princeton.

Soon after my arrival in Seattle, I was confronted with the history of German and American Sinology I had not known, but which, as was clear immediately, I could not escape. At the time, I was a member of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Chinastudien (German Association for Chinese Studies) that had been founded in the Spring of 1990, just months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In early 1997, the Association prepared its annual meeting on October 24–26, 1997, in Berlin, dedicated to the history of German Sinology, seven years after the German unification. Revising my German dissertation from Cologne University, I spent my days in the East Asian library of the University of Washington where every once in a while, I found handwritten remarks penciled into a book: traces left by Professor Hellmut Wilhelm, the German Sinologist who in 1948 had moved from Beijing to Seattle. The indirect encounter with Wilhelm sparked my interest in his life. Soon I learned that he was only one of several German or Austrian Sinologists who had ended up in Seattle during or shortly after the Nazi Regime, and who in turn made up a fraction of the dozens of scholars in Chinese studies who had left Nazi Germany, never to return.

Just as I learned about this history—which nobody in Germany had ever taught me—I received the preliminary announcement of papers for the 1997 Berlin meeting. There was nothing about the large-scale emigration in the 1930s that had completely eviscerated the field in Germany. Was this not part of the century-long history of German Sinology? Through some initial research, I then discovered an entire sequence of scholarly articles that German Sinologists—West-German Sinologists, to be precise—since 1945 had written about the history of our field. For more than fifty years, the authors of virtually all of these articles had skillfully avoided any reference to the fundamental

rupture that had occurred, depicting instead a false continuity from the very early to the very late twentieth century. In their deafening silence about the emigration of German Sinologists, these postwar scholars exiled and erased their own predecessors from the field once again, and then again and again, in article after article. Their history of German Sinology was a lie and a betrayal.

As this shameful situation was about to repeat itself yet again, I researched and wrote the first extensive study on the emigration of German Sinologists. While for lack of funds I could not leave Seattle to join the Berlin meeting, the paper was presented in my absence. In addition to the German version, I then also wrote a more substantial one in English: my first scholarly article written and published in the United States, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. While this article has been translated into Chinese and published in three different books and journals in China, none of my Chinese colleagues has ever mentioned reading it.

The history of German Sinology is also my own history—not just in the way one considers one's national history one's own or because I made it a topic of my research. I do believe that the flight of Sinologists from Nazi Germany continues to exert its painful influence on the present state of German Sinology. After its near-total collapse, the field never regained or developed a stature similar to other fields in the classical humanities or created a comparable number of career opportunities at German universities. No Sinologist who had fled from the Nazis ever went back. Instead, these scholars contributed greatly to the development of Sinology especially in the United States. They left behind not just a country and an academic field, but also a language: their switch to English initiated the rapid decline of German as a major academic language in our field, while their new publications strengthened the status of English, a process that also has taken its toll on other European languages in Sinology. In Chinese studies today, almost no Chinese scholars or students, and very few Americans, read German.

At the same time, the rapid development of the field in North America widened the gap. As a result, another generation of young Sinologists left Germany over the past three decades, and I am just one of them. The number of German scholars working on Chinese antiquity and holding tenured positions at universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere surpasses the number of those who do so in Germany. While the economic and political rise of China has led to the creation of positions on contemporary China at German universities, part of this growth has come from the conversion of former positions in classical Sinology. Berlin in particular, once the proudest place of German Sinology, is a wasteland: with some eighty thousand students at the Free University and Humboldt University, the German capital currently

has but a single professor in the study of premodern China. (Princeton, with altogether less than seven thousand undergraduate and graduate students, has eight.)

How does all this affect my own perspective on the study of Chinese antiquity? First, I experience Sinology as a global field embodied in my biography. Second, I have learned to look at Germany from the outside. And third, for being aware of my country's history, I can never accept "tradition" in any simple, unreconstructed sense. The first two of these points give me perspective; but the last gives me identity: the identity of someone whose national heritage is always broken and fragmented, and remains powerfully present just as such. "Walking out of the age of doubting" is never an option. I viscerally reject nationalistic scholarship in the service of political and cultural identity, and I do not consider a term such as "national learning" innocent.

Sadly, some current Chinese scholarship on ancient China is driven by precisely those ideological abuses of "tradition" that deep in my heart I despise the most. Yet I also understand the desire for an unquestioned, perhaps even unquestionable, tradition in response to the vast destruction of cultural and personal identity during the Cultural Revolution's "ten years of madness." The foundational myth of the Chinese classics and Chinese scholarly identity is the story of the Qin First Emperor "burning the books and burying the scholars." Invented in the Han dynasty, this narrative resonates with scholars of traditional China who suffered in fear through the Cultural Revolution, who saw lives destroyed, and who will forever miss the education so viciously denied. In the overwhelming combination of life experienced and history imagined, scholars had to survive the Qin First Emperor just as they had to survive Chairman Mao—the man who, two thousand years later, saw himself proudly in that ancient emperor's image. Just as I cannot bear the ideological construction of tradition as something that must not be doubted, some of my Chinese friends cannot allow a radical questioning of tradition they perceive as purely destructive. They have seen the annihilation of traditional culture.

In the end, we all are scarred and scared in our own ways. Our debates over tradition can lead to moments of raw emotion. Both privately and in public responses, Chinese colleagues have spoken movingly of the unresolved trauma of the Cultural Revolution and the resulting feeling of misery. I think I can understand this. And yet, I do not believe that the false promises of traditionalism provide an answer they can sustain, or an answer that can sustain them.

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Taking Horace to the Yellow Springs: Notes on Death and Alcohol in Chinese Poetry and Philosophy

Jan De Meyer

Vivre est une maladie dont le sommeil nous soulage toutes
les seize heures. C'est un palliatif. La mort est le remède.

CHAMFORT, *Suite des maximes générales*



1 Horace to Postumus

Among the most powerful of Horace's Odes is that in the second book addressed to a man known as Postumus (the name means "born after his father's death"), which begins with the words *Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume / labuntur anni nec pietas moram / rugis et instanti senectae / afferet indomitaeque morti*, or, in the translation by David West:

Ah how quickly, Postumus, Postumus,
the years glide by, and piety will not delay
the wrinkles, and old age, and death, the unsubdued,
pressing at their heels¹

It is an ode about the passing of time, and even more so about the inevitability of death. Indeed, the poem is a veritable patchwork of death-related imagery and references, including Pluto, ruler of the underworld; cypresses, trees commonly associated with mourning; and Cocytus, one of the rivers surrounding Hades. In Horace's poem, the concept of "afterlife" conjures up images of eternal punishment for those who faulted gravely. Hence the references to the

¹ Horace, *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, tr. David West (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997; rpt. 2008), 68. All fragments of this ode cited in the next paragraphs are West's translation.

arrogant and crafty Sisyphus, forced to roll a boulder up a hill and repeat that into infinity, and to forty-nine of the fifty daughters of King Danaus, eternally punished for having murdered their husbands on their wedding night. But even for those who live pious lives, for those willing to sacrifice three hundred bulls every day in order to placate Pluto, for those who manage not to die in wars or drown in the Adriatic, and for those who care about their health chilly autumn after chilly autumn, death is ineluctable. All of us, “whether we be kings or poor tenant farmers,” know that we must cross “those gloomy waters” leading to Hades, writes Horace, and he repeats this message twice: “We must go and see black Cocytus meandering in its sluggish flow,” and again, “We must leave the earth, our home, and the wife we love.”

The grimness of this ode is hardly mitigated by the evocation, in the final lines, of one of the best wines known to Horace and his contemporaries of the first century BCE, a strong, sweet white wine from coastal Latium:

Your heir, worthier than yourself, will drink off
the Caecuban you laid down behind a hundred locks,
and stain your paving with proud wine undiluted
and too good for the banquets of priests.

If any consolation is to be found in these final verses, it would seem to be a meager one. Once one has left this earth, one is no longer conscious of what will happen to one’s most treasured belongings: Postumus’ heir will stain the paving with the precious Caecuban wine that once rested “behind a hundred locks.” To some, the poem’s tone here merely moves from grim to sneering, but others interpret its conclusion as an exhortation to do exactly as Postumus’ worthier heir will, and drink wine while one still can. To me, this ode brings to mind certain passages from classical Chinese literary sources that deal with the realization of the brevity of life and what may be done in order to assuage the potential feelings of frustration resulting from it. I will turn to two genres that may seem unrelated—philosophy and poetry—but which often touch upon common themes.

2 Zhuangzi’s Equanimity in the Face of Death

Death and alcohol—and a few related images—being our main concern, we shall devote no attention to arguments in favor of the non-existence of death. “Human existence being an hallucination containing in itself the secondary hallucinations of day and night (the latter an insanitary condition of the

atmosphere due to accretions of black air) it ill becomes any man of sense to be concerned at the illusory approach of the supreme hallucination known as death,” says De Selby at the outset of Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*, but, just like the argument that man (meant is his physical person) cannot die because he has always been dead, developed by the ninth-century Daoist Wunengzi 无能子 (“Master Incompetent”), we will not discuss them in these pages.²

The eighteenth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, titled “Perfect Happiness,” contains a famous anecdote relating a conversation between Zhuangzi and his friend Hui Shi 惠施, a philosopher ranked among the Dialecticians (“School of names,” *mingjia* 名家). Zhuangzi has just lost his wife, and when Hui Shi visits him in order to convey his condolences, he finds Zhuangzi sitting with his legs stretched out and singing a song while accompanying himself by beating on a tub—hardly the sort of behavior one would expect from a mourning man. When Hui Shi remarks that Zhuangzi is excessive in his seeming lack of respect, Zhuangzi replies, in Burton Watson’s translation:

“You’re wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn’t grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born. Not only the time before she was born, but the time before she had a body. Not only the time before she had a body, but the time before she had a spirit. In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery a change took place and she had a spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there’s been another change and she’s dead. It’s just like the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter. Now she’s going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don’t understand anything about fate. So I stopped.”³

不然。是其始死也，我獨何能无慨然！察其始而本无生，非徒无生也而本无形，非徒无形也而本无氣。雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生，今又變而之死，是相與爲春秋冬夏四時行也。人且偃然寢於巨室，而我嗷嗷然隨而哭之，自以爲不通乎命，故止也。

2 As yet, there is no good English-language translation of *Wunengzi*, only the very imperfect rendition in John A. Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism: Critiques of State Autonomy in Ancient and Modern China* (London: Continuum, 2012), 231–62. In Dutch there is the translation by De Meyer, *Nietskunner: Het taoïsme en de bevrijding van de geest* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2011). The argument mentioned above is, respectively, on pp. 236 and 69.

3 *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, tr. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), 192.

Equanimity in the face of death is a theme often encountered in the *Zhuangzi*, and on some occasions, the dying are even portrayed as capable of a measure of good-humored wonderment, as in the sixth chapter (“The Great and Venerable Teacher”), where we meet four sages—Masters Si, Yu, Li, and Lai—who become friends, as all four of them understand that “death and life, existence and extinction, form one single body” (死生存亡之一體者). When Master Yu falls ill, he exclaims: “Amazing, how the Fashioner of Things is making me all bent and contorted like this!” (嗟乎！夫造物者又將以予爲此拘拘也) When Master Si asks him if his condition is cause for resentment, Master Yu answers that it is not, and he fantasizes about how different parts of his body will be transformed into new beings after his death. One obtains life, he also explains, when one’s time has come, and one loses life because that is the natural order of things. Finding peace in this means that neither sorrow nor joy are able to enter. Some time later, it is Master Lai’s turn to fall ill. When he is about to breathe his last, and his wife and children surround him sobbing, Master Li enjoins them to go away so as not to disturb the transformation (*hua* 化).⁴

The acceptance of death as part of a greater natural process is thus intimately related to the awareness of the necessity of change and transformation. The equanimity resulting from it is what the ancients called “liberation from being suspended” (*xuanjie* 懸解), with “being suspended” having connotations of worries and anxieties. But who, save for a true sage, would be capable of Master Yu’s detachment and self-control? In the opening paragraphs of the sixth *Zhuangzi* chapter (“The Great and Venerable Teacher”), the ability to remain emotionally unaffected by life and death is attributed to the Perfected Men of Antiquity (*gu zhi zhenren* 古之真人). In the *Zhuangzi*, this term indicates one of the highest categories of human beings, beings so fully realized that, though they might have had the appearance of man, they were actually inhabited by the emptiness of Heaven (*ren mao er tian xu* 人貌而天虛).⁵ In the spiritual hierarchy of Daoist religion, the appellation of “Perfected” was reserved for beings ranked even higher than the immortals (*xian* 仙, also translated as “transcendents”). But what about us mortals, who may not yet have liberated ourselves from being suspended?

4 Ibid., 83–85.

5 The description is from *Zhuangzi* 21 (“Tian Zifang”); *ibid.*, 221.

3 Alcohol and Ordering Oneself in the *Liezi*

In a number of passages from another Daoist classic, the *Liezi* 列子, we encounter an attitude toward death quite different from that in the *Zhuangzi*, an attitude that brings us closer to Horace's ode. These passages are found in the *Liezi*'s penultimate chapter, titled "Yang Zhu" 楊朱, in reference to the philosopher of that name who became infamous in Confucian as well as in Mohist circles for his perceived egoism or hedonism: he is remembered by many as the philosopher who refused to sacrifice one single hair on his body in order to save the world.⁶ The *Liezi* is a curious book in eight chapters, that may contain materials ranging from ca. 300 BCE to ca. 300 CE. Some of the oldest fragments of the book are believed to have originally belonged to the *Zhuangzi* in fifty-two chapters, that was cut down to its current size (thirty-three chapters) around 300 CE. But quite a high percentage of the text must be from the third century CE, and that helps to explain the apparent differences in worldview we encounter throughout the book, e.g., why *Liezi*'s first chapter stresses the acceptance of death, and the sixth chapter is largely fatalistic in tone, whereas many anecdotes in the seventh chapter advise one to enjoy wine and women, because life is short and the things we do in order to gain a good reputation for ourselves are, in the final analysis, utterly futile.

In the previous sentence I spoke of "apparent differences" because I am convinced that, despite the presence of many diverging voices throughout the *Liezi*—and in the "Yang Zhu" chapter in particular, where we hear both a "Daoist" and a "hedonist" Yang Zhu, and perhaps even a few others—a rather coherent vision underlies the book as a whole. To limit our discussion to the "Yang Zhu" chapter, it is noteworthy that when the "hedonist" Yang Zhu is speaking, his hedonism is frequently tempered by considerations regarding the equality of life and death, the futility of striving for wisdom and fame, the necessity of acting spontaneously (*ziran* 自然, "so-out-of-itself") and without

6 Yang Zhu was derided by both Confucians and Mohists because they were unable to grasp the meaning of his reaction to a question by the Mohist Qin Guli 禽滑釐. When Qin Guli asks Yang Zhu whether he would cut off a single hair from his body in order to save the world, Yang answers that the world can certainly not be saved by one single hair. "But supposing it could save the world, would you do it?" insists Qin. Yang Zhu refrains from replying. Mengsun Yang 孟孫陽, a disciple of Yang Zhu, continues the discussion with Qin Guli, defending the viewpoint that even a single hair has its importance and must not be looked down upon. The historical Yang Zhu espoused a philosophy not of egoism or hedonism but of absolute respect for the integrity of every living being, coupled with the conviction that in a world well-ordered, even the sacrifice of one single hair would be superfluous. See Angus C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (London: John Murray, 1960), 148–49 and Jan De Meyer, *De geschriften van Liezi* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2008), 184–85.

ulterior motives (*wuwei* 無爲, also: “non-action,” “non-interference”) and regarding the prison that is conformism, in other words, arguments that one may also encounter in the writings attributed to Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi. At times, the “hedonist” Yang Zhu’s cogitations about the brevity of life, and what little time we have to ourselves because of all the days, months, and years we waste on things non-essential, come very close to what the Stoic Seneca wrote in his *De brevitae vitae*.⁷

One long passage from the seventh *Liezi* chapter is of particular significance to us here, as it combines the themes of the elusiveness of life and the pleasure found in alcohol (as well as in sex). Its protagonists are Zichan 子產 (courtesy name of Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑, prime minister of the state of Zheng 鄭 in the second half of the sixth century BCE), his older brother, Gongsun Chao 公孫朝, and his younger brother, Gongsun Mu 公孫穆. After having brought order to his state, Zichan continuously worries about the behavior of his two brothers. Mu, the younger one, is addicted to women, and Chao, the older one, to wine. This is how Angus Graham translates the *Liezi*’s description of Gongsun Chao:

Chao had collected in his house a thousand jars of wine and a whole hill-ock of yeast for brewing; and for a hundred paces outside his door the smell of the dregs came to meet men’s nostrils. When he was carried away by wine, he did not know whether there was peace or war in the world, he did not notice mistakes which he had time to repent, he forgot the possessions in his own house, the degrees of affinity of his kinsmen, and that it is better to live than to die. Even if he had stood in water or fire with sword blades clashing before him, he would not have known it.⁸

朝之室也聚酒千鍾，積麴成封，望門百步，糟漿之氣逆於人鼻。方其荒於酒也，不知世道之安危，人理之悔吝，室內之有亡，九族之親疏，存亡之哀樂也。雖水火兵刃交於前，弗知也。

In an attempt to bring his brothers to reason, Zichan pays them a visit, promising them that if they live properly and with a sense of duty, they will gain for themselves a good reputation and high office. The brothers reply by saying that life is only obtained with difficulty, whereas death catches up with one easily, and that it makes no sense for a man with an easily lost life to sit around and wait for death. The brothers have made their choice: to enjoy to the full the single life that is theirs. But their reasoning does not end there. Looking upon

⁷ Graham, *Lieh-tzu*, 139–40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

the way in which they give in to their respective passions as a means of acting in accordance with their own nature, and thus of “ordering themselves,” they compare themselves favorably to their deadly serious brother:

He who is good at ordering what is outside himself will personally encounter bitterness, whereas the other beings will not necessarily be brought to order. He who is good at ordering his own interior sets his nature free, without necessarily bringing disorder to the lives of other beings. Your method of ordering what is outside yourself may be put into practice temporarily in a single state, but it doesn't correspond with men's minds. Our method of ordering ourselves may be extended to all under heaven, and the Way of ruler and subject will be brought to rest.

夫善治外者，物未必治，而身交苦。善治內者，物未必亂，而性交逸。以若之治外，其法可暫行於一國，未合於人心。以我之治內，可推之於天下，君臣之道息矣。

Let us be clear about one thing: Zichan's brothers are *not* advising everybody on the planet to become addicted to wine or women, but to give freedom (*yi* 逸, also translated as “uninhibited,” “unconfined,” or “unattached”) to their own nature, whatever that nature may be. Some will find out that they excel at carpentry or at catching cicadas, others that they are good swimmers, and still others will develop the art of butchering oxen to such a level that they will be able to use the same knife for nineteen years without having to sharpen it even once.⁹ Some, like Zichan's brothers, will become fornicators and inveterate wine bibbers, but as long as they do what they like to do in a way that doesn't harm others, they are just parts of the seeming Chaos that is the natural order. The brothers' final words are an indication that this fragment of the *Liezi* is quite late, probably belonging to the third century: in that era, the topic of ending or “bringing to rest” the Way of ruler and subject—in other words, espousing anarchism—was hotly debated.¹⁰ But I fear we are straying from our topic. We started out with poetry on death and wine, and to poetry on death and wine we shall return.

9 All examples of self-cultivation as found in the *Zhuangzi*.

10 See, e.g., Etienne Balázs, “Entre révolte nihiliste et évation mystique: Les courants intellectuels en Chine au III^e siècle de notre ère,” *Etudes asiatiques* 2 (1947–48): 27–55, and Jean Lévi, *Eloge de l'anarchie par deux excentriques chinois* (Paris: Editions de l'encyclopédie des nuisances, 2004), which contains (pp. 33–54) a full translation of chapter 4 of the *Baopuzi waipian* 抱朴子外篇 by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), consisting of a discussion of the ideas of the proto-anarchist Bao Jingyan 鮑敬言.

4 Life's Brevity in the Nineteen Old Poems of the Han

A very fitting point of departure is the group of “Nineteen Old Poems from the Han” (*Gushi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首), also known affectionately as the “Mother of poetry” (*shimu* 詩母). Traditionally considered the oldest examples of pentasyllabic Chinese verse, these poems may have been composed during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220). Anonymous and without indication of the speaker’s gender, the old poems are clearly indebted to folk songs as well as to the poetry of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the *Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辭). Highly influential in the shaping of *shi*-poetry, the old poems owe their immense popularity to the way in which they manage to express universal emotions. Separation and death are the major themes of the Nineteen Old Poems, and, as Jean-Pierre Diény stresses in his masterful study and translation, many links tie these two themes together.¹¹

The brevity of life is coupled with an exhortation to drink wine in the third of the Nineteen Old Poems. The relevant fragment (verse 3 to 6), translated below, opens with a nod to chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi* (“Knowledge Wandered North”), where we read: “Man’s life between heaven and earth is like the passing of a white colt glimpsed through a crack in the wall: all of a sudden it’s gone” (人生天地之間，若白駒之過郤，忽然而已).¹²

人生天地間，	Man’s life, between heaven and earth,
忽如遠行客。	speeds by like a traveler with a long road to go.
斗酒相娛樂，	Let this peck of wine bring merriment to us;
聊厚不爲薄。	a moment of generosity, not to be despised.

A poignant image of life’s impermanence is found in Old Poem number 4: “Man’s life: a temporary stay, one generation long / sudden and swift like dust in a whirlwind” (人生寄一世，奄忽若飈塵). And in the eleventh Old Poem we read: “Man’s life is neither metal nor stone / How would one be able to lengthen one’s life span?” (人生非金石，豈能長壽考) Nowhere do we find more parallels with Horace’s ode, however, than in Old Poem number 13, which I translate in its entirety:

驅車上東門，	Spurring on my carriage, past the Upper Eastern Gate,
遙望郭北墓。	I gaze at distant graves, north of the outer walls.
白楊何蕭蕭，	White poplars—how they rustle in the wind!

¹¹ Jean-Pierre Diény, *Les dix-neuf poèmes anciens* (1963; rpt. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010).

¹² Tr. Watson, *Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 240.

- 4 松柏夾廣路。 Pines and cypresses at both sides of the avenue.
 下有陳死人， Beneath them are people who died long ago,
 杳杳即長暮。 in the dark and gloom of the enduring night.
 潛寐黃泉下， Deep they sleep, down by the Yellow Springs,
 8 千載永不寤。 never to be woken, not in a thousand years.
 浩浩陰陽移， Vast and endless is the shifting of yin and yang,
 年命如朝露。 our fate-allotted years are like the morning dew.
 人生忽如寄， Man's life speeds by, a temporary stay,
 12 壽無金石固。 his days lack the solidity of metal or stone.
 萬歲更相送， Ten thousand years have been seeing each other off,
 賢聖莫能度。 yet no worthy or sage was able to find a cure.¹³
 服食求神仙， Ingesting substances, some seek immortality,
 16 多爲藥所誤。 but many have been deluded by their medicine.
 不如飲美酒， Better it is to drink an excellent wine,
 18 被服納與素。 and clothe ourselves in fine white silk.

The Upper Eastern Gate has been associated with Luoyang 洛陽, the capital under the Eastern Han dynasty, and the “distant graves, north of the outer walls” refer to the hill known as Beimang 北邙, where Luoyang’s dead were buried for countless generations. Besides the common theme of life’s impermanence, the three elements connecting Horace’s ode with the thirteenth Old Poem are the cypresses as markers of gravesites, the reference to excellent wine, and the mention of the underworld, which in ancient China was known as the Yellow Springs (*huangquan* 黃泉). *Huangquan* is an interesting name, as it combines earth or soil (the color of which is yellow) with the watery element of the spring. The oldest occurrence of the Yellow Springs as a place for the dead is in the ancient narrative history known as the “Tradition of Zuo” (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), first year of Duke Yin 隱公 (c. BC 721).¹⁴ It is also known as the “Nine Springs” (*jiuquan* 九泉), perhaps because *jiu* 九 (“nine”) was pronounced in a similar fashion to *jiu* 久, meaning “persistent.” He who enters the realm of the dead, will forever be the resident of the “terrace of enduring night” (*changyetai* 長夜臺), as the grave was often called.

13 This line about the powerlessness of worthies or sages when confronted with death was echoed in the third of Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 pallbearers’ songs (*wan’ge* 挽歌), beautifully translated in all its starkness by Wai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 111.

14 For a useful overview of early occurrences of *huangquan* in literature, see Jue Guo, “Concepts of Death and the Afterlife Reflected in Newly Discovered Tomb Objects and Texts from Han China,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. Amy Olberding and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2011), 109–10, n. 49.

5 Sidetracked: Wine as Bringer of Death

Searching for more classical Chinese verse combining death, the underworld, cypresses, and wine, I came upon a poem by Li He 李賀 (790–816), one of the most singular voices in Tang dynasty poetry—perhaps even in the entire history of classical Chinese literature. There is something almost violent in the wild flights of Li He’s shamanism-influenced imagination, causing literary critics to describe his poetry as “demonic” and resulting in centuries of relative neglect, until his rediscovery in the twentieth century.¹⁵ The title of the poem in question is “Song by Palace Lady Tang of the Han while the Wine is Drunk” (Han Tang ji yinjiu ge 漢唐姬飲酒歌), and in order to fully understand what is being said, some background information and additional explanation are, alas, necessary. Palace Lady Tang 唐姬 was the spouse or concubine of Liu Bian 劉辯, the penultimate Eastern Han emperor, who is remembered as Shaodi 少帝, the “Young Emperor.” In the fourth lunar month of 189, Liu Bian was put on the throne, aged 13. Barely five months later, he was deposed by the ruthless Dong Zhuo 董卓 (?-192), a warlord who wanted to replace Liu with another, even younger, member of the imperial clan (Liu Xie 劉協, aged 8), and who appointed himself prime minister. Early in the year 190, Dong Zhuo forced Liu Bian to commit suicide by drinking poisoned wine. Li He’s poem is a recreation of the song which Palace Lady Tang may have sung to her husband while she danced for him during the final farewell banquet in the palace.

	御服沾霜露，	The emperor’s clothes are imbued with frost and dew,
	天衢長藜棘。	On Heaven’s Crossroads, ¹⁶ long thorns proliferate.
	金隱秋塵姿，	When gold lies hidden beneath autumn’s dust,
4	無人爲帶飾。	No one will use it as an ornament for one’s belt.
	玉堂歌聲寢，	In jade halls, the sound of singing lies down to sleep,
	芳林煙樹隔。	In fragrant forests, fog separates the trees.
	雲陽臺上歌，	A song from Yunyang ¹⁷ Terrace:
8	鬼哭復何益。	A ghost wailing, to no one’s benefit.
	鐵劍常光光，	Iron swords forever shine and glow, ¹⁸
	兇威屢脅逼。	Fiendish forces repeatedly menace.

15 See J.D. Frodsham’s translation of Li He’s entire poetic oeuvre, *The Collected Poems of Li He* (1970; rpt. Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 2016). The translation of this poem is on p. 275.

16 Heaven’s Crossroads (*tianqu* 天衢) is here to be understood as the avenues of the imperial palace.

17 Yunyang 雲陽, where criminals were executed when Li Si 李斯 (died 208 BCE) was prime minister of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BCE), may here be understood as “jail.”

18 Another version reads: “Weapons and swords, bright as autumn water” (仗劍明秋水).

- 疆梟噬母心， Powerful owls gnawing at their mother's heart,¹⁹
 12 奔厲索人魄。 Hideous specters seeking out human souls.
 相看兩相泣， Looking at each other, we weep for one another,
 淚下如波激。 Tears running down like waves spouting.
 寧用清酒爲， Why was this limpid wine tampered with,
 16 欲作黃泉客。 Making you a guest of the Yellow Springs?
 不說玉山頹， No question here of a jade hill about to cave in,
 且無飲中色。 Your cheeks will not flush like one who's getting drunk.
 勉從天帝訴， I exhort you to complain to the God in Heaven,
 20 天上寡沈厄。 In Heaven, calamities should be fewer.
 無處張總帷， No place to spread out a fine muslin curtain,
 如何望松柏。 No prospect of cypress and pine.
 妾身晝團團， My days will be all pain and sadness,
 24 君魂夜寂寂。 Your soul will be nightly forlorn.
 蛾眉自覺長， I feel my moth-like eyebrows lengthen,
 頸粉誰憐白。 Who will admire my white-powdered neck?
 矜持昭陽意， I shall hold fast to the moods of Zhaoyang,²⁰
 28 不肯看南陌。 Refusing to look at the road to the South.²¹

Li He's poem is a clever mix of outbursts of sadness, loneliness, and indignation, as well as images of death. Some of the allusions are very clear: when we read about a "ghost wailing," we know that the Young Emperor is meant, and we understand that when powerful mother-eating owls and "hideous specters seeking out human souls" are mentioned, the cruel Dong Zhuo is meant. Two allusions are of a more hidden kind, but very interesting as they both point toward an unjust or undeserved death. The first is in the initial verses of the poem (The emperor's clothes are imbued with frost and dew / On Heaven's Crossroads, long thorns proliferate). These lines are inspired by a passage from the biography of Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), the Prince of Huainan 淮南王, under whose auspices the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 was written and compiled.²² As is well known, Liu An committed suicide after accusations of treason. The second

19 It was believed that some species of owls ate their mother once they had reached adulthood. In China, the owl is an inauspicious bird.

20 Zhaoyang 昭陽 was one of the imperial palace halls under the Han.

21 Palace Lady Tang hailed from Yingchuan 潁川, southeast of Luoyang. If the Lady is suggesting she will not return to her hometown in order to remain closer to her murdered husband, this does not tally with the recorded facts. Lady Tang did return to Yingchuan, but refused to remarry.

22 Compare the lines 今臣亦見宮中生荆棘，露霑衣也 in *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 118.3085.

allusion is in the line “No question here of a jade hill about to cave in.” According to the great early-fifth century collection of anecdotes *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, the poet, musician, philosopher, and great drinker Ji Kang 嵇康 (223–262)—together with Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) the most famous of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢—resembled “a jade hill about to topple” when he was drunk.²³ Outspoken and defiantly unconventional as he was, Ji Kang once angered an official, who later took his revenge when Ji Kang came to the defense of a friend who had been wrongfully accused. Both Ji Kang and his friend were sentenced to death and executed.

6 A Poetic Philosophy of Wine

The previous pages have taken us from philosophical considerations about the brevity of life and the acceptance of death to poetry in which the insight into life's impermanence is teamed up with exhortations to drink. An interesting question is: is there any common ground between Zhuangzi's philosophical acceptance of death, on the one hand, and the perceived escapism of the Nineteen Old Poems of the Han, where alcohol brings temporary solace but little more, on the other? Or, to put it in other words, is there some form of poetic philosophy of wine, where drinking is taken not as a means to forget the human condition but as leading to a higher understanding allowing one to be at peace with it? The answer is yes, and the first poet to effectuate this was Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427), also known as Tao Qian 陶潛. A poem by Tao, titled “Drinking alone in continuous rain” (*Lianyu duyin* 連雨獨飲) and translated below, demonstrates this very nicely. It opens with a statement about the cyclical experience of time and life, whereby death, the end, is seen as a return, and it questions the existence of immortality. “Song and Qiao” are Chisongzi 赤松子 and Wangzi Qiao 王子喬, two legendary immortals of Chinese antiquity frequently mentioned together since Han times. Tao Yuanming, who cannot believe that immortals could exist in the world of his day, shifts his attention to the wine given to him by an old man, with the promise that drinking it can confer immortality. Tao tries a few cups, and the experience he then describes could come straight out of the *Zhuangzi*. All thoughts (or worries) disappear, and even Heaven is forgotten. Heaven (*tian* 天), it should be pointed out, is not to be understood here as primarily indicating the realm of the gods

23 Xu Zhen'e 徐震堉, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 14.335; Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, 2nd ed., rev. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, Univ. of Michigan, 2002), 331.

but rather as Nature. Heaven-as-Nature surrounds and penetrates all that exists, and can therefore never be “removed from all this,” even though it may at times be forgotten. The advice which Tao gives us—to trust in what’s True—is very close to Zhuangzi’s philosophy of Nature. What is True (*zhen*) is what is “realized” or “perfected”; it is the quality distinguishing the “Perfected Men of Antiquity”—humans who have developed to perfection the talents which Nature has endowed them with. Also the final verses are steeped in Zhuangzi’s thought: although Tao realizes that his body has been transforming (like that of Masters Yu and Lai mentioned above) ever since achieving the “solitary” state of every individual human being, consolation comes from the fact that his mind (*xin* 心) is still there.

	運生會歸盡，	Whatever is fated to live will return to its end:
	終古謂之然。	Since earliest times this is said to be so.
	世間有松喬，	If Song and Qiao ever lived in this world,
4	於今定何間。	Where would they be staying now?
	故老贈余酒，	The old fellow who gave me this wine,
	乃言飲得仙。	Said that drinking it makes you immortal.
	試酌百情遠，	I try a cup, and all my thoughts are far away,
8	重觴忽忘天。	Pour another one, and suddenly I forget Heaven.
	天豈去此哉，	But how could Heaven be removed from all this?
	任真無所先。	Trust in what’s True—there is no better way.
	雲鶴有奇翼，	The cloud-crane, with its wondrous wings,
12	八表須臾還。	Reaches outer space in the blink of an eye.
	自我抱茲獨，	Since I first embraced my solitude,
	僂俛四十年。	I’ve been toiling for forty years. ²⁴
	形骸久已化，	Long since, my body’s been transforming,
16	心在復何言。	But my mind is here—what more needs to be said?

Tao Yuanming had countless followers and imitators, but few developed Tao’s attitude toward alcohol in the way Wang Ji 王績 (c. 590–644) did.²⁵ Wang Ji was

24 Tao Yuanming’s toiling would last two more decades. The poet died in his sixty-third year, or the “grand climacteric year” as it is known to some. Climacteric years are multiples of seven or nine, and it is believed that they present more dangers than other years. Two remarkable works of contemporary French literature, both written by mathematician, poet, and prominent Oulipo member Jacques Roubaud (born 1932), were inspired by climacteric misgivings, at ages 63 (7 times 9) and 81 (9 times 9): *Labominable tisonnier de John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart et autres vies plus ou moins brèves* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), and *Octogone: Livre de poésie, quelquefois prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014).

25 For a history of the reception of Tao Yuanming’s poetry, see Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East

the younger brother of Wang Tong 王通 (c. 584–617), a well-known Sui 隋 dynasty Confucian scholar. After three false starts in official life, Wang Ji, also known as Wang Wugong 王無功, that is, Wang-without-merit, retired to the family estate in order to write and drink profusely. About one third of Wang Ji's collected works is devoted to alcohol, and the theme pervades all literary genres practiced by Wang: poetry, short prose, and letters. A "Rhapsody on Alcohol" (Jiu fu 酒賦) is lost, but fortunately we still possess Wang's idealized self-portrait, the "Biography of Master Five Dippers" (Wudou xiansheng zhuan 五斗先生傳),²⁶ and the magnificent "Record of Drunkland" (Zuixiang ji 醉鄉記), besides dozens of poems, some of them reportedly written on the walls of the taverns where Wang Ji used to get drunk. It is important to stress that, in these writings, Wang Ji develops a veritable philosophy of inebriation, wherein, as Ding Xiang Warner explains, drunkenness becomes a metaphor for enlightenment.²⁷ Knowing that all these wonderful literary creations exist, and being able to relish and study them, at times aided by a glass of red Graves, therein lies the real consolation to me, until the mind gives in, or up, or out, and we are ready to enter our graves.

Asian Studies, Harvard Univ., 2008). For Tao's influence on Wang Ji, see pp. 161–63.

26 The name is a nod toward Tao Qian, who was also known as Master Five Willows (Wuliu xiansheng 五柳先生).

27 Warner, *A Wild Deer among Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2003), 89.

On Some Verses of Li Bo

Paul W. Kroll

Horace, in his “Ars Poetica,” said poets *aut prodesse volunt aut delectare*, wish either to be of benefit or to delight. By “be of benefit” he meant “provide with something useful,” hence the common translation of *prodesse* in this context as “instruct” or “edify.” So, to edify or to delight. The choice offered has reverberated through centuries in discussions of Western poetry, but poets themselves have usually emphasized Horace’s latter term. For instance, Dryden in the seventeenth century: “Delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy; instruction can be admitted but in second place, for poetry only instructs as it delights.” Or Frost in the twentieth: “A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom.” On the present occasion, in honor of this volume’s dedicatee who loves literature in many languages, I wish to consider briefly some groups of textual shadows and echoes that provoke delight, from both China and the West. In doing so, I model my title after that of the most personal and in many places impetuously outright chapter of Montaigne’s *Essais*, viz. “Sur des vers de Virgile,” in which he meditates on passions once known but diminished by age. Although my specific focus will not recall his, the associational freedom and unrepentantly emotional bent of it have something in common. And it is similarities, of various kinds, that are at issue here.

Let us begin with one of the great Tang poet Li Bo’s 李白 (701–762) well-known—if minor—works, a heptametric quatrain, with an AABA rhyme-scheme, called “At Yellow Crane Tower, Seeing Off Meng Haoran to Guangling” (黃鶴樓送孟浩然之廣陵):

故人西辭黃鶴樓 煙花三月下揚州 孤帆遠影碧空盡 惟見長江天際流	My dear friend bids farewell to the west at Yellow Crane Tower, Amid misty blossoms in the third month, goes down to Yangzhou. His lone sail’s far shadow vanishes in the deep-blue void; Now I see only the Long River flowing to the sky’s edge.
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Scholars will identify the Yellow Crane Tower as a famous spot in Wuchang 武昌 district, southeastern Hubei, remark the interesting legend surrounding its name, and note that the poem was written in the spring of 738 when the older poet Meng Haoran (689–740), whom Li Bo had met a year earlier, was traveling downstream to Yangzhou (alternatively called Guangling) at the

mouth of the Yangzi River. Closer readers will comment on the skillful binary alternation of level and deflected tones in the Middle Chinese pronunciation of the important even-numbered words of each line. But all this is scarcely necessary to appreciate, even in translation, the beauty and delicacy of the poem, especially the imagery of the final couplet, as the shadowy speck of the departing friend's sail gradually disappears in the fused hues of water and sky at the distant horizon, leaving to the poet only the river before him, running ever to the unseen sea.¹ A variant version of the poem sees the vanishing sail as a far-off "glint" (*ying* 映) instead of "shadow" (*ying* 影); but whether it be a last-glimpsed shadow or a final sun-caught glimmer, either way the effect is supremely touching. The images in that couplet and their implied but unspoken emotions can haunt one, have done so to me since I first read them nearly a lifetime ago.

Does it change one's reaction to them to learn that Li Bo uses very similar wording in another farewell poem? This is one with the generic title of "Seeing Off and Parting" (送別), written for an unspecified friend on a now undatable occasion.² The poem is again heptametric (except for a pentametric opening line) but is in eight lines, consisting of two stanzas each of which uses an AABA rhyme-scheme.³ The first stanza indicates that the friend is departing from Xunyang 尋陽 in Jiangsu, going up the Yangzi toward Sichuan. The second stanza reads as follows:

送君別有八月秋	I see you off, sir, at a parting in the eighth month, autumn,
颯颯蘆花復益愁	As reed blossoms, blown free in the breeze, again deepen sadness.
雲帆望遠不相見	Your cloudy sail, gazed at afar, is now no longer seen;
日暮長江空自流	At the sun's setting the Long River flows vacantly on its own.

We recognize certain of these elements: the numerical designation of the month, though here it is in autumn instead of springtime; blossoms, though here the last, dying remnants; most of all, the distant sail fading afar and the remorseless river flowing away. The effect is similarly touching, more so if the imagery is encountered for the first time. What underlies the imagery in both cases, what gives that imagery emotional force, is the realization of

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- 1 An elegantly calligraphed scroll of this poem is reproduced as the cover illustration of *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture*, ed. P. W. Kroll (Leiden: Brill, 2013), one of the numerous books on Chinese literature that Albert Hoffstädt has shepherded for Brill.
 - 2 There are three different poems with this title in Li Bo's collected works. This probably indicates that a more informative title for each was lost somewhere in the transmission process and they were given the generic title by an editor or commentator.
 - 3 Structurally, a rhyme-change marks a new stanza.

unavoidable temporality, of the friend's departure, of the dimming light, of the running river.

Transience and loss is the human condition. As it is so of everything that is alive or that ever will live. Of all truths, that of impermanence is the most fundamental. As years lengthen and the western horizon draws nearer, this thought lies more steadily before one. One of the essential features of traditional Chinese (and Japanese) culture is the foregrounding of this truth, such that it is an inescapable fact and feeling of life, from earliest youth onward. While there is no lack of celebration of youthful exuberance and the beauty of springtime in Chinese literature, it is the mellowness of experience and the harder beauty of autumn that more often is written of. Half a world away and more than a millennium later, William Hazlitt, near the end of his 1827 essay "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," said: "As we grow old, our sense of the value of time becomes vivid. Nothing else, indeed, seems of any consequence. We can never cease wondering that that which has ever been should cease to be." One portion of East Asian literature could be subsumed in these words.

The Japanese phrase *mono no aware* 物の哀れ, "the pathos of things" or perhaps "sorrow for what exists," is an expression of this conscious heartache for what is (or has been) and of its inevitable passing away. The standard symbolic illustration of the phrase is of cherry-blossoms in their briefly glorious blooming, but the concept embraces the poignant acceptance of all impermanence. An almost exact Western counterpart linguistically of *mono no aware* is the Latin *sunt lacrimae rerum*, "there are tears for things," famously occurring in Vergil's description (*Aeneid*, Book 1) of Aeneas's reaction when he sees, on the walls of the temple to Juno that Dido is having built in her newly founded city of Carthage, pictures recounting the defeat of the Trojans. The full verse adds to the three words already quoted: *et mentem mortalia tangunt*, "and thoughts of mortality touch the heart." In the poem's context the word *rerum*, for which human tears and death-tinged thoughts arise, refers to the memory of the deeds done and sufferings undergone by the defeated Trojans, which Aeneas realizes are now known even by foreign peoples and even in a far-distant land, and somehow made even sadder for that.

Despite the happenstance of misfortune and the certainty that we all face of ultimate loss, one must continue. There are tasks to do, chosen or put upon one, and forward into the future is the only possible direction. The most acute expression of this in poetry is contained in Milton's concluding lines of *Paradise Lost*, where he says of Adam and Eve, banished from paradise:

The world was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:

They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.

There is a sense of the artistically inexorable about this: no other verses than these could have ended the work. The lines compass the end of eternal life and the beginning of human mortality, the desinence of permanent tranquility and the start of patient toil. They also mark the conclusion, finished in 1667, of what many have considered the greatest poem in the English language, which is also the first full-scale and resolute staging in the modern career of blank verse.

The rightness of the lines suggests that they are *sui generis*, unlike anything else—and perhaps they are unlike anything preceding them in English. But when recently I reread Book 11 of the *Aeneid* (mainly because Albert Hoffstädt mentioned that it was his favorite of the epic's twelve books), in which Aeneas recounts at length for Dido the events of the last, fateful day and night at Troy, I found something that intensely reminded me of Milton's lines; or speaking historically, that prefigured them. At the very end of Book 11, Aeneas tells how he lost his wife Creusa in the chaos and left behind his house now overrun by the Greeks. With his young son Iulus and his father Anchises who needed bearing on Aeneas's shoulders, he is joined by a small band of other survivors and determines on exile. The final verse of the book reads:

cessi et sublato montis genitore petivi

That is, "I gave up and, lifting my father, I sought the hills." I find here—in the original Latin, only weakly so in my inadequate English rendering—the same pronouncement as in Milton of resignation that the past is passed and of acceptance that one must now take a new, if unwished for, road. Did Milton model his lines on Vergil's (there are conscious borrowings elsewhere in his poem)? Or was the artist in him prompted to a similar but independent literary solution to the scene he had created? One cannot know for sure. However, as a reader I am sure the atmosphere surrounding both passages is kin and the phrasings have significantly similar weight, yielding altogether the same emotions—and I respond to both in the same full-hearted way.

Upon considering this, a third passage of like feeling and implication comes to mind, from a work that one does not think of in the same category as the work of Vergil or of Milton. It is Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Well, of course, suddenly one suspects: the novel's title is itself a negative acknowledgment of the *Aeneid's* opening phrase, *Arma virumque cano*, "Arms and the man I sing." But no, Hemingway had no Latin, his novel has no ostensible resemblance to

Vergil's epic, and in fact the title directly borrows that of a poem by George Peele, a contemporary of Shakespeare. Yet, remembering how the novel ends, with the death in childbirth of the common-law wife of the protagonist Frederic Henry (who is the story's first-person narrator) and destruction of all his careful though meager hopes, I look again at its concluding sentence, a description of bleak affirmation and acceptance: "After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain." Hemingway is known to have worried over the sentence and to have changed it several times. What he decided on is a baldly plain yet resonant statement, which has been critically celebrated for being shorn of emotion. But lack of explicit emotional statement does not mean the absence of emotion. Quite the contrary (recall, for instance, Li Bo's farewell poems quoted earlier). Frederic's world is now all before him, a different world, totally unlike that previously known and which has now been given up and is forever closed to him. His next steps are, like those of Milton's and Vergil's protagonists, onto an unprepared and unwanted path. The falling rain through which he walks is a lowbrow but aesthetically apt addition to the scene, befitting the intentional understatement of the words. In the end we can embrace only impermanence and frustration, whether it is at the gentlest side farewell to a traveling friend, or most severely the loss of home or exile from paradise, or as here the failure of personal safekeeping when one has already rejected social norms. In all three instances—Vergil, Milton, Hemingway—the concluding sentence emotionally resolves the narrative as though it were dropping down to a minor key, pregnant with a lingering sense of subdued restraint.

It is often said that misfortune and disappointment are necessary teachers and make not only for a better person but also for better writing. In China there is a classic statement about this from the great historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE). Citing the well-known works of a roster of earlier authors (or supposed authors), he averred:

To be sure, King Wen was made captive but set forth the *Book of Changes*; Confucius was in dire straits but composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; Qu Yuan was sent away in banishment and only then recited his poem "Encountering Sorrow"; Zuo Qiu lost his sight before there was his *Colloquies of the States*; Master Sun was punished with amputation of his lower legs and his *Methods of Warfare* was formulated and put in order; Lü Buwei was exiled to Shu and his *Perspectives of Lü* was transmitted to the world; Han Fei was incarcerated in Qin and there are his "Difficulties of Persuasion" and "Fervor of the Solitary One"; the three hundred poems of the *Odes* are, for the most part, compositions made out of the frustrations

expressed by sages and worthies. The intentions of all of these persons were pent-up and constrained, and they were not able to get through on their desired way, so they recounted happenings of the past, in thought of those to come. And in the end, like Zuo Qiu without his eyes and Master Sun with chopped feet, being useless they retreated and made assessments in their writings, in order to reveal their fervor, thinking to hand down their insubstantial texts as a means to make themselves known.

蓋文王拘而演周易；仲尼厄而作春秋；屈原放逐，乃賦離騷；左丘失明，厥有國語；孫子臙脚，兵法修列；不韋遷蜀，世傳呂覽；韓非囚秦，說難孤憤；詩三百篇，大底聖賢發憤之所爲作也。此人皆意有鬱結，不得通其道，故述往事，思來者。乃如左丘無目，孫子斷足，終不可用，退而論書策，以舒其憤，思垂空文以自見。

To feel greatly and write worthily in the face of misuse and affliction is both an effect and an inducement. It is not insignificant that Sima Qian could regard himself as a member of the exemplary but discomfited group he describes, having chosen, in order to see to completion his monumental work *Shi ji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*), to suffer the disgraceful punishment of castration for an offence committed at court instead of resigning himself to honorable suicide. This paragraph of Sima Qian was much quoted or alluded to by later Chinese writers who felt themselves mistreated or undervalued.

By way of distant association, this brings to mind Boethius's troublingly touching declaration in Book II of his *De consolazione philosophiae* (written, we remember, while he was imprisoned awaiting execution) that *Nam in omni adversitate fortunae infelicissimum est genus infortunii fuisse felicem*, "For in all adversity of fortune the most unhappy kind of misfortune is to have once been happy." These painful words of Boethius, written in 523, had a long and curious afterlife in Western literature. For instance, in Canto V of his *Inferno*, Dante has Francesca begin her telling of the forbidden love between Paolo and her which has consigned them to the restless winds of Hell's second circle with this Italian rendering of the statement: *Nessun maggior dolore/ che ricordasi del tempo felice/ ne la miseria*, "No sorrow is greater than to recall, in misery, the happy times." In English, less than a century later, Chaucer in his *Troilus and Criseyde* has Pandarus saying to Troilus (Book III), "For of fortunes sharp adversitee/ The worst kynde of infortune is this,/ A man to han ben in prosperitee,/ And it remembren, when it passed is." And in the nineteenth century we find Tennyson, in his "Locksley Hall," avowing: "... this is truth the poet sings,/ That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." It is not a zealous scholar's wish to quote or comment on Boethius that led to these various

rephrasings, but rather individual reactions to circumstance and to linguistic context; over the centuries the idea seems to have become almost proverbial.

Indeed there must be truth in something restated by so many different authors (more could be cited than those mentioned in the preceding paragraph) in different times and languages. And memory seems somehow central to it all, for as Bergson suggested, the past must be recalled and used, lest the past cease to exist. Following this thought to its practical destination in literature, Harold Bloom asserted that, "Memory is not only the principal mode of cognition in poetry; it is also pragmatically the major source of inspiration."⁴ Which for me calls up in turn certain favorite lines from Wallace Stevens:

But memory and passion, and with these,
The understanding of heaven would be bliss,
If anything would be bliss.⁵

However, the hard truth of impermanence and the unavoidable sadness produced by time is balanced for us by appreciation of the beauty that exists. It may be that what defines us among other beings in the world, the inherent distinction and even purpose of the *human*, what we are particularly made for, is to appreciate beauty. The green of summer leaves against a blue sky, fresh bird-calls before the dawn, the desirous nuzzle of dog or cat against a head-stroking hand, the face of your child in sleep, Thomas Tallis's unearthly forty-part motet "Spem in Alium" (the nearest we can get to the music of the angels); the list is endless and each of us can add to it as we wish. Stevens again, in one of his essays, said something quite startling and important about our relationship with poetry and the perceived beauty of the natural world:

Poetry is the imagination of life. A poem is a particular of life thought of for so long that one's thought has become an inseparable part of it or a particular of life so intensely felt that the feeling has entered into it.... It is easy to suppose that few people realize on that occasion, which comes to all of us, when we look at the blue sky for the first time, that is to say: not merely see it, but look at it and experience it and for the first time have a sense that we live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists

4 In his *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991).

5 From the poem "Lytton Strachey, Also, Enters into Heaven."

there—few people realize that they are looking at the world of their own thoughts and the world of their own feelings.⁶

Startling as the claim made in that long final sentence is, and it is the more accurate the more one thinks about it, Stevens's second sentence applies especially—perhaps only—to the kind of cerebral and intensely considered poetry he wrote. It could not be equally applied to traditional Chinese poetry, so much of which is social verse composed more or less on the spot, even if it be the outcome of profound textual learning. The first sentence, however (“Poetry is the imagination of life”), could not be more universally cogent and might even be taken as a gloss on one of Goethe's maxims, namely, *Einbildungskraft wird nur durch Kunst, besonders durch Poesie geregelt*, “Imagination can only be ordered through art, especially through poetry.”

Of course what poetry first and finally depends on is the chief beauty of humanity, that is, language. Language used with grace and love and mastery is what I have tried to foster for nearly fifty years in my scholarly, teaching, and editorial endeavors. Language not only impresses order on our world, as Goethe suggests or, even more basically, as advanced by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of how language conditions a particular culture's understanding of the world. It also impresses emotion on the world, allows—indeed encourages—more than brute response. The business, and the pleasure, of studying literature, that is, language's highest reification, begins or should begin with feeling, not with the scientist's desire to know and to analyze, which can itself, I admit, be undeniably satisfying but which for the humanist must occupy second place. How could it be otherwise, when we are dealing with the magic of literally intangible communication that can transmit thoughts not only orally to those here in front of us, but silently even to those separated from us by vast stretches of space and time? As George Steiner said in the opening sentence of his first book, “Literary criticism should arise out of a debt of love.”⁷

From medieval China there is no better statement of what literature is in this temporary world than Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) mid-fourth-century “Preface to the Collection [of Poems] from the Lan Precinct-House” (“Lanting ji xu” 蘭亭集序).⁸ One of the most famous prose writings in all of Chinese

6 From “The Figure of the Youth as a Virile Poet,” in his *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Press, 1965).

7 *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959).

8 “Lanting” is usually misrendered as the pleasant-sounding “Orchid Pavilion.” But the word *ting* 亭 did not yet have, in Wang Xizhi's time, its later sense of a free-standing, unwallled garden structure, here instead referring to the building and grounds of the local government office; and *lan* 蘭 is here simply a place-name, not a botanical identification.

literary history, the autograph manuscript of the work is also the single most famous calligraphy text in Chinese history, copies of which are found everywhere today, including in the offices or homes of most scholars of premodern Chinese literature. The occasion for the piece's composition was an open-air gathering of some forty-one men, young and old, of elite status and literary ability, to celebrate the annual springtime "Lustration Ceremony" (*xi* 禊). This was also an excuse for an outing to indulge in wine, good cheer, and literary games, during which they were asked to write impromptu poems to celebrate the event. Fifteen of the participants were unable to compose a poem, others composed one or two, and several composed more than that, including Wang Xizhi who composed six and was in fact the host of the event, being the local governor. The poems have been preserved, though they are rarely read now, having long been overshadowed by Wang's essay. This "preface"⁹ that Wang wrote afterward for the collected poems provides details of time and place, but then moves into a meditation on larger issues—from differences in personal relationships to questions of life and death, as well as the legacy and influence of literature itself. It touches, we shall see, on most of the themes and topics we have glanced at so far in this essay. In the translation that follows I break the piece into seven short paragraphs, to permit the addition of a running commentary to explain, amplify, or paraphrase certain matters and references.

In the ninth year of the Yonghe era, with the year-cycle at *guichou*, at the start of springtime's waning, we gathered at the Lan precinct-house in the Shanyin district of Guiji commandery, to carry out the lustration ceremony. A group of worthies all of us, elder and younger assembled together.

永和九年，歲在癸丑，暮春之初，會於會稽山陰之蘭亭，修禊事也。
羣賢畢至，少長咸集。

This was 353 CE. The lustration ceremony, meant to purify participants of the unhealthy effluvia accumulating during wintertime, was to be undertaken at riverside, early in the third lunar month. By Wang Xizhi's time it was regularized to take place on the third day of the third month. The Shanyin and Guiji area, in north Zhejiang, was famous for its scenic beauty.

9 The basic meaning of the word *xu* 序 is "sequence, orderly progression" and hence "to arrange in best order," by medieval times used for a paratext that describes the circumstances of a literary work or collection of works, thus setting it in its proper place.

In this place are upraised hills and crested ridges, with lush groves and tall bamboo, and what's more—a limpid current purling briskly, with sunlight glinting off it to either bank. This enticed us to engage in floating goblets along the curving river, arranged in our seats according to age and rank. Though there was no repletion of stringed instruments and bamboo pipes, one poem intoned for each goblet set adrift was enough to express with open-hearted joy our deeply held feelings.

此地有崇山峻嶺，茂林修竹，又有清流激湍，映帶左右。引以為流觴曲水，列坐其次。雖無絲竹管弦之盛，一觴一詠，亦足以暢敘幽情。

A frequent amusement at parties of the educated elite was the composing of poems while seated at near intervals along a gentle riverside or, more usually, an artificial waterway in a landscape garden, the poem (on a set theme and/or a set meter) to be produced impromptu in the time it took for a goblet of wine floated downstream by your nearest upstream neighbor to reach you. If you were unable to finish a poem in this time you were assessed as penalty a certain measure of wine to drink. Although music of zither and flute was common at festive gatherings, here the recitation of the poems themselves, in the lush local setting, is enough to take the place of music and express the joy of the participants.

This was a day when the sky shone bright and the air was clear and fresh, with a balmy breeze agreeably frisking. Looking up we took in the great breadth of heaven's firmament, looking down perceived the fullness of the world's sundry particulars. Because of this our thoughts ran away with us as we roved our gaze over all, enough to reach the utmost delight of sight and sound—truly something to take pleasure in.

是日也，天朗氣清，惠風和暢。仰觀宇宙之大，俯察品類之盛。所以遊目騁懷，足以極視聽之娛。信可樂也。

The sunlight, the air, the breeze delight the guests and provoke them to take in both the grand sweep and the precise aspects of, in Stevens's words quoted above, "the physical poetry" in which they find themselves. Their thoughts are unloosed by what they see and hear in this place, a contentment rarely known.

Now, we can say that in people's relations during this life which is no more than a glance up and down, some will take their closest-held thoughts and share them with another inside a single room, while some

project what is dearest to them in outward exuberance onto what is beyond human form. Though there be a myriad differences between what one chooses to do or not do, and though quietude and restiveness are not the same thing, when facing experiences that gladden the heart, appreciation of them is realized for a while in oneself and so sharp is the satisfaction that one then becomes heedless of time pressing onward.

夫人之相與，俯仰一世，或取諸懷抱，晤言一室之內；或因寄所託，放浪形骸之外。雖取舍萬殊，靜躁不同，當其欣於所遇，暫得於己，快然自足，曾不知老之將至。

This life is but “a glance up and down,” just the flicker of an eye. An interesting distinction is made between those who share their thoughts singly with another in a closed room and those who seem to merge themselves with the natural world outside, suggesting a more literal understanding of “introvert” and “extrovert” than the merely psychological. But however one chooses to act, satisfying experiences (like the gathering here on this very day) make time seem to stop, as you lose yourself in the happy moment. Notice that the focus of the preface is beginning to waver, shifting to more general and broader concerns.

But when it happens that such experience is fully spent, our feelings turn along with the occasion while a deep-felt melancholy hangs on. What had previously gladdened one's heart now becomes, in the glance of an eye, but a stale imprint that can do no more than raise a fond memory. Even more is this so when all the changes that go along with a long or short life, at the last, meet their final end. A man of old said, “Life and death are indeed the most important of all!” How can one not be pained by this thought?

及其所之既倦，情隨事遷，感慨係之矣。向之所欣，俯仰之間，已爲陳迹，猶不能不以之興懷。況修短隨化，終期於盡。古人云，死生亦大矣。豈不痛哉。

Such occasions of pure joy do not last, and leave behind a lingering sadness that eventually resolves into “fond memory.” This is so for life itself, no matter how long or short, and whatever changes we go through. Say what one will about everything else, it is, after all, the plain, large fact of life and death—as acknowledged long ago by the fictitious Confucius in the fifth chapter of *Zhuangzi* (though Wang Xizhi here changes the context of the quotation)—that looms over all and cannot but cut to the heart. Wang is now fully in

philosophic mode, though the final comment in this paragraph retains a personal purport.

Whenever I consider the reasons for men of former times being stirred by their emotions, it seems to fit together, all of a piece. And never can I look upon their writings than I sigh with sympathy, though I am helpless to explain it out of my inmost feelings. But I know definitely that saying life and death are just one and the same is groundless blather, and taking Pengzu's longevity and the years of someone who dies young as being equal is specious posing.

每覽昔人興感之由，若合一契。未嘗不臨文嗟悼，不能喻之於懷。固知一死生爲虛誕，齊彭殤爲妄作。

The focus now is on texts and how one reacts to the works of previous generations. Thinking of those who lived before him and who wrote about what they felt, Wang claims to understand them and to feel just as they did, though he cannot put words to why it is. Again, we see, it's a matter of *feeling*. But what he can say is that the sophisticated, linguistic paradoxes of the kind he and his contemporaries know and appreciate from *Zhuangzi* and spin out in their high-brow discussions in the fashionable jargon of *xuanxue* 玄學 (“mystical learning”)—for instance, that the longest and the shortest lives are equal in extent and that apparent opposites are really the same—are just fatuous games when placed against the world we actually live in and the decisions we must actually make. This rejection of literati pretentiousness is delivered unequivocally and in thundering fashion. It is the rhetorical high point of the piece, punctuated with the phrase “I know definitely”; there is now for Wang no doubt that the posing of language dilemmas, while entertaining up to a point, is ultimately valueless.

Those who come after will look at us now, just as we now look at those of times past. Most sad it all is! This is why here I note down my contemporaries in order and record what they have set forth today. For even if the world changes and events differ, the way one is moved at heart comes surely to the same thing. And those of aftertimes who consider us—let them be moved by these, *our* writings.

後之視今，亦猶今之視昔。悲夫。故列敘時人，錄其所述。雖世殊時異，所以興懷其致一也。後之覽者，亦將有感於斯文。

So, it is a continuous thread or, to change the metaphor, an endless cycle, as we are to those who'll live later and will read our writings just as our predecessors seem now to us. The present is the link that holds past and future together. We are here, in this moment, when seen in grand perspective, participants on the largest possible stage, specks in the ever-changing panorama of history. But although everything else may change from one age to the next, human feelings don't change; we can understand each other across time. The poems composed by those gathered here on this day, once preserved as texts (for they were originally composed orally), will carry our thoughts to those we'll never see, who will thereby know and be able to *feel* something of the persons we once were.

It is a powerful human statement, one that I have read (and taught) many times, and which often brings tears to my eyes. The way in which Wang Xizhi begins with the particulars of the day and gradually expands his view to consider all of time, and *these* writings in relation to those that have come before and those that will come after, reminds me strangely of the vast enlargement of perspective and knowledge that Cicero effects in his "Somnium Scipionis." There he has a young Scipio Aemilianus in dream visited by his grandfather, Scipio Africanus, who transports his young namesake beyond the confines of earth, from which he is shown the nine circles of the heavens, introduced to the cosmic music of the spheres, and is made to realize how infinitesimally small is our world and the Roman Empire even smaller. But although his fame could merely be known to a small portion of the world, Aemilianus is urged to carry through the noblest of endeavors, to work for the safety of his country, which historically he accomplished with the destruction of the enemy city of Carthage in 146 BCE. "Scipio's Dream" was provided in the fifth century CE with a Neoplatonic commentary by Macrobius, which became a widely circulated school text in the Middle Ages. Although Wang Xizhi's "Lanting xu" acquired no standard commentary, it has remained one of the best-known Chinese texts from the time of its writing up to the present day. The same diminishment of the self and one's world, or perhaps we should say the proper sizing of oneself, as though looking from the wrong end of a telescope, seems evident and salutary in both texts, though their specific backgrounds are as different as can be.

To return finally to Li Bo, I wish now to place beside Wang Xizhi's preface one of the twenty-one prefaces extant in Li Bo's collected works. This is his "Preface [to Poems] for a Banquet with Cousins on a Spring Night in the Garden of Peach Blossoms" (春夜宴從弟桃花園序).¹⁰ Scholars have dated the composition variously as from 733, 734, or 739. But its precise date, like the unknown names of those in attendance, hardly matters for our purposes. The

10 The title is given variously as "... Garden of Peaches and Plums" (桃李園).

poems composed by the young clansmen at the feast, which Li Bo refers to flatteringly, have also not been preserved. While the season here is springtime, as in Wang Xizhi's preface, the gathering takes place at night rather than during the day. This is one of several differences within similarity that we shall find in the piece. As we shall also see, the tone is lighter and the progression of thought is arranged in almost reverse order. The preface can be divided into three brief paragraphs, and here again I will insert comments after each paragraph.

Heaven and earth are, to be sure, the travelers' inn of the myriad creatures, and light and shadow are the passing visitors of a hundred ages. And as this floating life is like a dream, just how often can we find happiness? There is good reason that men of old would "take a candle and enjoy the night." Even more is this so, when burgeoning springtime beckons us with scenes of fine mist and the earth itself provides us with artful presentations.

夫天地者，萬物之逆旅也；光陰者，百代之過客也。而浮生若夢，爲歡幾何。古人秉燭夜遊，良有以也。況陽春召我以烟景，大塊假我以文章。

We note that Li Bo, unlike Wang Xizhi, begins immediately with the large view, defining space ("heaven and earth") and time ("light and shadow") themselves in parallel syntactic constructions, and explicitly recognizing the mutable nature of life. The phrase "take a candle and enjoy the night" comes from the fifteenth of the so-called "Nineteen Old Poems" from the end of the Han dynasty and refers to the desire of those attending a feast to extend the joyful occasion as long as possible, understandable and very fitting to recall on this present evening. The final sentence, again in balanced, parallel phrasing, suggests that time (spring) and space (the earth, literally "the great glebe" or "greatest mass of soil," an expression from *Zhuangzi*) induce our enjoyment by means of their natural effects. Most original is Li Bo's use of the term *wenzhang* as designating earth's inducement. This term, here rendered somewhat literally as "artful presentations" (it might also be "patterned adornment") is in other contexts the standard medieval Chinese term for "literature"; in the social and linguistic situation created by Li Bo it is as though the world itself is offering us its own natural qualities as its version of literature.

Our gathering in this sweet-scented garden of peach blossoms is a happy occasion to celebrate the natural order of relationships. The excellent

productions of you band of younger men are all like those of Huilian, but the songs I intone would simply embarrass Kangle.

會桃花之芳園，序天倫之樂事。群季俊秀，皆爲惠連；吾人詠歌，獨慙康樂。

This festive meeting of elder and younger relations exemplifies the proper order and affinity of senior and junior. An illustration from literary history of a correspondingly admirable relationship is that of the famous poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), nobly titled Duke of Kangle, and his younger cousin Xie Huilian 謝惠連 (397–433). Just as Lingyun encouraged and appreciated Huilian's compositions, so Li Bo here praises the poems made by his cousins on this evening, while (over-)modestly devaluing his own verses in comparison with those of Xie Lingyun.

Our deep enjoyments do not cease and our lofty talk grows ever more clear. We spread out jeweled mats to sit by the blossoms and send round the winged goblet to drink in the moonlight. If there were no fine compositions, how could we express the elegance we have in our hearts? So, should a poem not be completed in the allotted time, let the penalty in wine be like that assessed at Gold Valley!

幽賞未已，高談轉清。開瓊筵以坐花，飛羽觴而醉月。不有佳詠，何伸雅懷。如詩不成，罰依金谷酒數。

As the night wears on (and the wine continues to flow), conversation and expressed feelings seem to take on ever keener attributes. The mats on which they sit are unlikely to have been trimmed with jewels; this is hyperbole. The goblets are “winged” because they are stemless and have two flat handles to hold while drinking, like a Greek kylix; the adjective also suggests the ease with which they are handed round—or perhaps floated on an artificial waterway during poem composition, though that is not specified here. The composition of poems is, Li Bo affirms, an essential feature of such a gathering, and the penalty exacted for failure in this activity has been set equal to that stipulated at the famous banquets held centuries previously at the Gold Valley estate of the wealthy Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300), which was reputedly three *dou* 斗 of wine. As a measure of capacity, a *dou* was equivalent to about ten pints. The drinking of thirty pints (fifteen quarts) of wine is an obvious exaggeration for a penalty at a banquet (though most scholars stubbornly support this reading),

and I think that we must here take the word *dou* in another of its senses, simply as “a ladleful.”

We have noted that Li Bo begins his preface from afar, talking of space and time and of the impermanence they produce. He ends it on the nearest perspective, the wine drunk and poems composed on the present occasion, which we should make the most of just because such occasions are infrequent in the brevity of life; so *carpe diem*. The movement here, from far to near, is exactly opposite what it was in Wang Xizhi’s preface, although the concerns are much alike. Shadows and echoes again, but which can seem new.

Besides the various matters remarked in the running commentary above, something from a more technical side needs to be added about Li Bo’s preface. Balancing its light tone and the fairly straightforward diction adopted throughout, Li Bo has structured it in the formal style of parallel prose (*piantiwen* 駢體文), primarily made up of syntactically identical, paired clauses in units of four or six words, as typical in that genre. This is evident only slightly in translation, but it is unmistakable in the original Chinese. Another formal grace of the original, which can be recognized only if one reads the text with an awareness of the reconstructed phonic values of Middle Chinese, is that Li Bo alternates nearly every successive pair of phrase-ending words between the binary division of phonetically “level” and “deflected” tones into which words were largely categorized in Middle Chinese and which was employed as a feature of aural artistry in some styles of poetry and in the more formal types of parallel prose. However, that is a particular “delight,” to recall Horace, that is demanding of more pointed analysis and requiring a different orientation than we have been pursuing here.

Vita brevis, ars longa. Whether centuries apart or separated by physical distance, the artful manipulation of language bridges gaps and inspires delight. Thinking of my friend Albert Hoffstädt, who delights in literature, I quote once more from Li Bo, these lines which are the penultimate couplet from a long poem remembering an absent friend:¹¹

言亦不可盡	As to words, they cannot say it all,
情亦不可極	Nor can feelings be told to their end.

But the friends we find in and through literature are companions to treasure, beyond words and in the fullness of feelings.

¹¹ The poem, in sixty-three lines, is called “Remembering Our Former Travels, Sent to Aide-de-Camp Yuan of Qiaojun” (憶舊遊寄元譙郡參軍).

An Early Medieval Chinese Poem on Leaving Office and Retiring to the Countryside

David R. Knechtges

In this article I shall present an early medieval Chinese poem in which the author writes about leaving office to take up residence in the countryside. This poem is “Let Me Return” by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427), also known as Tao Qian 陶潛, who is often considered the foremost Chinese poet before the Tang dynasty. This is a poet that Albert Hoffstädt may remember. In 2008, when I submitted a proposal to him about publishing a reference guide on early medieval Chinese literature, I presented about a dozen sample entries written by me and my wife Chang Taiping. I also included a translation of a long entry about Tao Yuanming by Professor Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈 of Peking University.¹ In my view Professor Yuan is the foremost authority on Tao Yuanming of his generation. His critical edition of Tao Yuanming’s works is unsurpassed in its critical acumen and literary insights.² He also has written a long monograph on Tao’s life, thought, and writings.³ The one entry Albert singled out for special praise was Yuan Xingpei’s entry on Tao Yuanming. Albert initially thought the entry had been written by a European or American scholar. He was quite surprised when I informed him that this entry was written by a distinguished Chinese scholar, and I had translated it from the Chinese. Several years later, Albert was visiting Beijing. My wife and I hosted a dinner for Albert where he was able to meet Professor Yuan in person. In this article, I shall make a number of references to Professor Yuan’s works.

The details of Tao’s life are too numerous to recount here. To make things simple, I shall mention the following pieces of essential information about him: Tao Yuanming came to maturity during the final years of the Eastern Jin (late fourth century). Although he usually is celebrated as a great hermit poet (his biography in the standard histories is actually in the chapter on recluses), for the first forty years of his life he held various official positions, mostly in his

1 For the published version, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide, Part Two* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1090–1112.

2 *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注, ed. Yuan Xingpei (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003).

3 Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming yanjiu* 陶淵明研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997).

home commandery of Xunyang 潯陽 (modern Jiujiang 九江, Jiangxi). His natal place is Chaisang 柴桑 (southwest of modern Jiujiang city, Jiangxi). Although he speaks repeatedly of his distaste for official service, Tao accepted positions with several of the warlord generals who held sway in the Xunyang area during this time. Tao's final post was magistrate of Pengze 彭澤, a small county located in what is now modern northern Jiangxi on the south bank of the Yangtze River not far from modern Anhui. It was only about thirty miles from his home in Chaisang. This was in the autumn of 405. After eighty days in office, he decided to resign and retire for good. He returned to his home in the country, where he supported himself by farming and probably also by donations from friends.

While in retirement, Tao wrote a goodly amount of poetry that is usually characterized as *tian yuan* 田園 or “field and garden” verse. Among his best-known poems are the five-poem set “Gui yuan tian ju” 歸園田居 (Returning to garden and fields to dwell) and the “Guiqu lai ci” 歸去來辭 (Let me return!), both of which celebrate the delights of living in a rural area.⁴ The latter piece, which is the subject of this article, is one of the most frequently translated pieces of pre-Tang poetry. I translate the title as “Let Me Return!” As Professor Yang Lien-sheng pointed out in the 1950s, the second word in the title *lai* 來 has a hortatory force.⁵ Most translators render the title simply “The Return.” More precisely, the title means “Let Me Return!”

Tao Yuanming provides a short preface to “Let Me Return!” in which he explains the circumstances of his decision to quit office.

Let Me Return!

My family was poor, and ploughing and planting were not sufficient to supply my needs. Young children filled the house, but in the jar, there was no store of grain. To obtain what I needed to sustain them, the means were not apparent to me. My kinsmen and friends often urged me to become a senior subaltern. Feeling a sense of relief, I thought of doing so, but I did not have the means to seek one. It happened that there were various incidents throughout the realm,⁶ and the regional officials considered the benevolent care for the people a virtue. A paternal uncle,

4 I have mainly relied on the text in *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 460–77. I have occasionally referred to the text in the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of refined literature). See *Wen xuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 45.2026–28.

5 See James Robert Hightower, “The *Fu* of T’ao Ch’ien,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17 (1954): 220, n. 299a.

6 Tao Qian refers here to the numerous uprisings and civil wars that erupted at the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty.

because of my impoverished state subsequently informed [someone], and I became employed in a minor county. At that time the storm had not abated,⁷ and I was wary of serving in a distant post. Pengze was one hundred leagues from my home, but the yield from the government fields was sufficient to make wine.⁸ Thus, I then requested the post. By the time I had been in the position a few days, with deep longing I had the desire to return home. Why was this? My basic nature is that of spontaneity, and it is nothing that can be forced or tempered. Although hunger and cold are acute, going against my principles causes me distress. In the past when I engaged in human affairs, it was always because I put myself at the service of my mouth and stomach. Thus, I was chagrined and indignant, deeply ashamed that I had violated my long-held ideals. I still expected to remain another year, and then straighten my clothes and slip away in the night. But soon thereafter, my younger sister Madame Cheng passed away in Wuchang. My feeling at the time was to go there as quickly as possible, and thus of my own volition I resigned office and left. From mid-autumn to winter, I had been in office eighty-odd days. Given that this circumstance suited my wishes,⁹ I have written a piece titled “Let Me Return!” The eleventh month of the year *yisi* [December 405].

余家貧，耕植不足以自給，幼稚盈室，餼無儲粟。生生所資，未見其術。親故多勸余爲長吏，脫然有懷，求之靡途。會有四方之事，諸侯以惠愛爲德，家叔以余貧苦，遂見用爲小邑。于時風波未靜，心憚遠役，彭澤去家百里，公田之利，足以爲酒，故便求之。及少日，眷然有歸歎之情。何則？質性自然，非矯勵所得。飢凍雖切，違己交病。嘗從人事，皆口腹自役。於是悵然慷慨，深愧平生之志。猶望一稔，當歛裳宵逝。尋程氏妹喪于武昌，情在駿奔，自免去職。仲秋至冬，在官八十餘日。因事順心，命篇曰歸去來兮。乙巳歲十一月也。

In the preface, Tao first mentions that he was poor and unable to support his growing family by farming the land. He had some influential relatives who

7 According to Yuan Xingpei (*Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 5.468, n. 8), the “storm” (literally “wind and waves”) refers to the usurpation of the Jin throne by Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404) in 403 and the military expedition led by Liu Yu 劉裕 against him.

8 Yuan Xingpei (*Tao Yuanming jianzhu*, 5.469, n. 11) notes a variant reading for this line, which he prefers: “The grain from the public fields was more than ample and was an enrichment [over my previous impoverished condition]” 公田之稅過足爲潤。 He explains that Tao would have been entitled to receive grain from the public lands as well as his salary.

9 The “circumstance” is the death of his younger sister.

urged him to take up an official position. Through the good offices of a paternal uncle, he was able to get a job as magistrate of Pengze. However, Tao confesses that almost as soon as he arrived at his post, he was eager to resign and return home. His rationale? To serve in this office or any office was contrary to his basic nature, which is that of *ziran*. This word has various meanings, notably in this context “spontaneity” and “naturalness.” In “Returning to the Farm to Dwell” #1, the last four lines read:

戶庭無塵雜，	Within my doors and courtyard there is no dusty confusion;
虛室有餘閑。	In the empty rooms I have excess leisure.
久在樊籠裏，	Long was I in a confining cage,
復得反自然。	But once again I am able to return to naturalness. ¹⁰

As Richard Mather aptly put it, those in the early medieval period such as Tao Yuanming who upheld “spontaneity” and “naturalness” were “quietists, who preferred compliance with one’s own nature rather than with any artificial code.” In practical terms this usually meant non-conformity with the rites and retirement from public life.

It should be noted that Tao’s account in the preface differs from the official biographies of Tao Yuanming that were written later. The earliest one is from the *Song shu* 宋書 (History of the Song), written about sixty years after Tao’s death:

His mother being old and his family poor, he was invited to serve as regional administrative aide, but being unable to bear the tedium of administration, within a few days, he resigned and returned home. The regional authorities summoned him to serve as recorder, but he did not take up the post. He supported himself by plowing the fields, and subsequently contracted a debilitating illness. He then became a military aide to the Zhenjun General and Jianwei General. He said to his relatives and friends, “For now I wish with zither and song to provide resources for my ‘three paths.’¹¹ Would this be possible?” When the authorities heard of

¹⁰ Tao Yuanming *ji jianzhu*, 2.76.

¹¹ The phrase “zither and song” refers to Tao’s appointment as magistrate of Pengze. It is an allusion to *Analects* 17/4: “When the Master went to Wucheng [where Ziyou was serving as a local official], he heard the sounds of a zither and singing.” The “three paths” is a phrase used to designate the abode of a retired official. It alludes to Jiang Xu 蔣詡, who at the end of the Former Han refused to serve under the “usurper” Wang Mang (r. 9–25 CE). He resigned from office and retired to his country residence the grounds of which were overgrown with briars and thorns. Jiang had three paths cleared that admitted entry to

this, they appointed him magistrate of Pengze. In the government fields he ordered all his functionaries to plant glutinous millet [which was suitable for making wine].¹² His wife and children adamantly begged him to plant non-glutinous rice [which was not suitable for making wine]. Tao then had two *qing* and ten *mu* [30.25 acres] planted with glutinous millet, and fifty *mu* [6.05 acres] planted with non-glutinous rice. The commandery dispatched a local inspector [to Pengze]. Tao's functionaries informed him he should tie up his belt and receive him. Heaving a sigh, Tao said, "I cannot bend my waist to a petty fellow from a country hamlet for five pecks of grain." That very day he untied his seal ribbons and left his post.¹³ He composed "Let Me Return!"

親老家貧，起爲州祭酒，不堪吏職，少日，自解歸。州召主簿，不就。躬耕自資，遂抱羸疾，復爲鎮軍、建威參軍，謂親朋曰：「聊欲弦歌，以爲三逕之資，可乎？」執事者聞之，以爲彭澤令。公田悉令吏種秬稻，妻子固請種秠，乃使二頃五十畝種秬，五十畝種秠。郡遣督郵至，縣吏白應東帶見之，潛嘆曰：「我不能爲五斗米折腰向鄉里小人。」即日解印綬去職。賦《歸去來》。

The most significant difference between the preface and the *History of Song* version is the story of why Tao Yuanming resigned from office. In the preface Tao simply says after serving for only a few days, he was eager to return home mainly because it was against his basic nature to serve in this, or any position. The story of his refusing to meet the local Pengze official is much more famous. The phrase "I cannot bend my waist to a petty fellow from a country hamlet for five pecks of grain" has become proverbial. However, as Tian Xiaofei has put it, "this is the least credible part in the biographical account."¹⁴ I should also mention that the preface itself is problematic. In the earliest extant source to preserve "Let Me Return!," the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan* (Selections

himself and two of his retired friends. The phrase "resources for my 'three paths'" means Tao wished to obtain a small salary to support himself in a minor post in the countryside.

12 Most scholars translate the grain mentioned here as glutinous rice. However, although the word *shu* 秬 is a general term for glutinous cereal, it technically designates a glutinous variety of *Seteria italica*. See Francesa Bray, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 6: *Biology and Biological Technology*, part 11: Agriculture (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 440. On *Seteria* millet as a substrate for wine, see H. T. Huang, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 6: *Biology and Biological Technology*, part V: *Fermentation and Food Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 174, 178.

13 See *Song shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 53.2287.

14 *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005), 77.

of refined literature), the preface is much shorter than the versions preserved in Tao's collected works, the earliest extant edition of which dates from the twelfth century. All it says is the following: "My family was poor, but I was also wary of serving in a distant post. Pengze was one hundred leagues from my home, and thus I then requested the post. By the time I had been in the position a few days, with deep longing I had the desire to return home. Given that this circumstance suited my wishes, I have written a piece titled 'Let Me Return!'"

I should also note that the line in the preface that mentions Tao was interested in the Pengze position because he could make wine from the grain in the government fields has a significant variant that Professor Yuan Xingpei prefers. "The grain from the government fields was more than ample and was an enrichment [over his previous impoverished condition]." It says nothing about planting glutinous millet to make wine.

The poem itself can be divided into four sections based on changes in the rhyming. In the first section, LL. 1–12, Tao recounts how he decides to leave Pengze and return home.

Let me return!
 My fields and gardens are about to be overgrown with weeds—
 2 why not return?
 Since I have made my heart the thrall of my body,
 4 Why be so downcast and dejected in solitary sorrow?
 I realize that what has passed cannot be corrected;
 6 But what is to come can be remedied.
 Truly I have not traveled far on the wrong path;
 8 I am aware today I am right and yesterday I was wrong.
 My boat rocks and sways as it lightly drifts;
 10 The wind, whirling and swirling, blows my gown.
 I inquire of a traveler about the road ahead;
 12 I begrudge the fading starlight at dawn.

歸去來兮，田園將蕪胡不歸！既自以心爲形役，奚惆悵而獨悲。悟已往之不諫，知來者之可追。實迷途其未遠，覺今是而昨非。舟遙遙以輕颺，風飄飄而吹衣。問征夫以前路，恨晨光之熹微。

Although Tao mentions that he is worried his fields and gardens may be overgrown with weeds, his main concern is that his decision to take up the position of magistrate simply to feed himself and his family may have been the wrong one. Lines 5–6 allude to *Analects* 18/5: "The madman of Chu, Jiyeu, sang the

following song: ‘Phoenix, phoenix, / How your virtue has declined! / What has passed cannot be corrected; / What is to come can be remedied.’” However, Tao is optimistic that it is not too late to rectify matters. He ends this section by recounting his journey home.

In the second section, lines 13–32, Tao expresses delight at arriving home:

- I finally catch sight of “crossbeam and roof”:
 14 I am so joyful I break into a run.
 A servant welcomes me;
 16 My young son awaits me at the door.
 The three paths are almost covered with weeds;
 18 But pines and chrysanthemums still remain.
 Leading the children by the hand I enter the house,
 20 Where there is a goblet filled with wine.
 I lift up a jug and cup and pour for myself;
 22 A glance at the courtyard trees brings joy to my face.
 I lean on the southern window to convey my contempt for the world;
 24 For I know how a knee’s width space provides easy comfort.
 My daily passage through the garden creates a well-worn path;
 26 Although there is a gate, it is always closed.
 Propped up on a staff I stroll and rest;
 28 At times I raise my head and look into the distance.
 Clouds aimlessly emerge from the peaks;
 30 Birds, weary of flying, know to return home;
 The sun grows dim and is about to set;
 32 I stroke a solitary pine and pace around it.

乃瞻衡宇，載欣載奔。僮僕歡迎，稚子候門。三徑就荒，松菊猶存。攜幼入室，有酒盈樽。引壺觴以自酌，眄庭柯以怡顏。倚南窗以寄傲，審容膝之易安。園日涉以成趣，門雖設而常關。策扶老以流憩，時矯首而遐觀。

In line 13, “crossbeam and roof” is a conventional term for a humble abode. It is derived from a phrase in *Mao shi* 138/1: “Beneath a crossbeam door,/ One can linger long.” The *Mao* commentary explains that the door consists of a single crossbeam, thus indicating that the abode is simple and humble. In L. 15, Tao mentions he is greeted by a servant, or perhaps servants. I should mention that the word *tong* 童, which I have provisionally translated as “servant,” here can also mean bondservant or slave. In a long two-page note in his *Han Social Structure*, Ch’ü T’ung-tsu explains *tong* “was a synonym for slave.” He also notes

that *tong* “does not always refer to male slaves,” but can also include female slaves. Ch’ü further explains that although *tong* “may mean ‘youth,’ it is important to note that when it is used to mean ‘slave’ the age connotation is absent...”¹⁵ Not many poor farmers had *tong* in this period. If Tao Yuanming owned *tong*, even though he did not have to pay them in wages, he would have had to have the resources to supply them with food, housing, clothing, and of course the tools that they used. According to Hsu Cho-yun, this “could amount to a sizable outlay of money.”¹⁶ Tao would also have had to pay a considerable sum to purchase a slave. In the Han period, the price of a slave “varied from 5,000 to 20,000 cash.”¹⁷ Thus, Tao may not have been as poor as he claims.

Tao Qian’s farm was not exactly small—it was about a dozen *mu* (about 1.5 acres). He had a house of eight or nine bays that was shaded by trees. There is evidence that Tao may have had more than one farm. He refers to several different fields including a western field that may have been tended by an overseer in his employ.¹⁸ In order to reach one of his fields located in a rugged mountain area he had to undertake a trip that required him to cross a lake and then follow a winding stream.¹⁹

This section contains images that are indelibly associated with Tao Yuanming. The pine and chrysanthemums are symbols of durability and longevity. A Tao Yuanming poem would be incomplete without a reference to his imbibing of wine. He wrote a set of twenty poems titled “Drinking Wine” which are classics in Chinese poetry on the theme of wine drinking. Other notable features in this section is the mention of the three paths overgrown with weeds and the closed gate. These are statements of how he has closed himself off from conventional society, especially the court. The last line in this section in which he strokes the pine tree as he paces around it is another example of his fondness for this arboreal image.

In section III, lines 33–48, Tao recounts how he wishes to spend his time in retirement:

Let me return!

- 34 May I end all contacts and sever all associations.
The world and I are at odds with one another;

15 Ch’ü T’ung-tsu, *Han Social Structure*, ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1972), 336–37, n. 51.

16 Hsu Cho-yun, *Han Agriculture*, ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1980), 64.

17 *Ibid.*, 63, n. 13.

18 See *Tao Yuanming jijianzhu*, 3.229, 3.233, n. 4.

19 See *ibid.*, 3.231, “Bingchen sui bayue zhong yu Xiasun tianshen hu” 丙辰歲八月中於下澗田舍穫 (Eighth Month of the *Bingchen* Year, Harvest at the Farmhouse of Xiasun).

- 36 If I again were to harness my carriage, what would I seek?
I enjoy convivial conversation with my family;
- 38 I delight in zither and literature to dispel my cares.
Farmers tell me that it is now spring;
- 40 There will be work to done in the western fields.
At times I send for a covered cart;
- 42 At times I row a solitary boat.
In dim and dark recesses, I explore ravines;
- 44 Over rough and rugged paths, I cross the hills.
The trees are flourishing and are about to bloom;
- 46 The springs are trickling and just beginning to flow.
I like that all things have attained their season;
- 48 I am moved that my life is approaching its end!

歸去來兮，請息交以絕游。世與我而相遺，復駕言兮焉求？悅親戚之情話，樂琴書以消憂。農人告余以春及，將有事於西疇。或命巾車，或棹孤舟。既窈窕以尋壑，亦崎嶇而經丘。木欣欣以向榮，泉涓涓而始流。善萬物之得時，感吾生之行休！

Tao begins by declaring his intention to “end all contacts and sever all associations.” By this he does not mean he will avoid contact with all persons, only those who are still serving in office and the court. Thus, in the following lines he mentions engaging in conversation with family members and local farmers. He also derives pleasure from zither music and literature.

Tao also tells of his going out to inspect his fields. Line 41 in which he mentions calling for a covered cart is intriguing: “At times I send for a covered cart.” The phrase translated as “covered cart” originally was the name of an official position, the intendant of public carriages that had charge of royal conveyances. Tao must have known this earlier usage. I suspect that by using this phrase he may be casting himself in the role of the “lord” of his country domain who orders a carriage to convey him on his travels through his estate. Thus, again he may not have been as poor as he often portrays himself to be.

In the final section, lines 49–60, Tao observes that given the brevity of human life, one simply should follow one’s heart and basic inclinations. This is another statement of his upholding naturalness and spontaneity. He also tells us that he has no interest in obtaining wealth and honor, nor does he wish to become an immortal (line 54). He rather prefers “traveling alone.” The words he uses here—*gū wǎng* 孤往—may be the first occurrence of this phrase in Chinese poetry.

In the concluding lines of this section we see several motifs of Chinese eremitic poetry. In line 57, Tao mentions climbing the eastern embankment and

whistling: "I climb the eastern embankment and slowly release a whistle." This is a reference to an earlier non-conformist, Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263, who claimed to have plowed the fields south of what he calls the "eastern embankment." Ruan Ji was also a renowned whistler. Su Jui-lung has shown that whistling, which is sometimes compared to Western yodeling, was employed during this period by recluses as a means to indicate their "disdain and contempt for worldly affairs or to show an attitude of absolute freedom and unrestraint."²⁰ The Tang *Wen xuan* commentator Li Shan 李善 (*Wen xuan* 21.1008) cites the following anecdote about Ruan Ji from the *Weishi chunqiu* 魏氏春秋 (Annals of the house of Wei) of Sun Sheng 孫盛 (302–373): "When Ruan Ji was young he often traveled to Sumen Mountain. There was a recluse there whose name no one knew. Ji chatted with him about the Way of Inaction of high antiquity, and also discussed the principles of the Five Emperors and Three Kings. The Master of Sumen remained impassive and did not indicate he even noticed him. Ji then made a long whistle to him, its shrill tones loudly resonating. The Master of Sumen pleasantly smiled. When Ji had gone down the mountain, the Master of Sumen also whistled, its sounds like that of simurgh and phoenix." Tao Qian here portrays himself as an emulator of Ruan Ji, both as a farmer and a whistler.

In the final couplet, Tao reflects on the prospect of death, which does not perturb him, for he knows that death is part of the natural process of things: "For now, I shall follow changes of nature until my return is complete; I rejoice in Heaven's decree—what is there to doubt?" In line 59 "return" refers to death, which Zhuangzi claimed was a return to the natural state of things: "Life has that from which it sprouts, and death has that to which it returns."²¹ In line 60, the phrase "rejoice in Heaven's decree" alludes to the *Classic of Changes*, "Commentary on the Appended Phrases," A/4: "[The sage] rejoices in heaven and understands its decrees, and thus is not burdened by care." In other poems, Tao characterizes death as a final return. Thus, in this poem Tao sees return in two senses: his return to his country home and his return to what he refers to in an elegy that he wrote for himself as "the eternal return to my original abode" 永歸於本宅. According to Yuan Xingpei, the "original abode" is the earth, out of which one is both born and where one returns when one dies.²²

As I mentioned above, Tao Yuanming is considered one of the premier writers of "field and garden verse." A famous example is "Returning to the Fields and Garden to Dwell" #3:

20 See "Whistling and Its Magico-religious Tradition: A Comparative Perspective," *Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies* 3 (1999): 31.

21 *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶蕃 (1844–1896) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 7B.712.

22 See "Elegy for Myself," in *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 7.558, n. 4.

- 種豆南山下, I plant beans below the southern mountain;
 草盛豆苗稀。 Wild grass flourishes, but bean sprouts are few.
 晨興理荒穢, I rise at dawn to attend to the rank weeds;
 4 帶月荷鋤歸。 Bringing along the moon with me, I return carrying my hoe.
 道狹草木長, The path is narrow, plants are tall;
 夕露沾我衣。 Evening dew soaks my clothes.
 衣沾不足惜, That my clothes are soaked is of no concern;
 8 但使願無違。 Just let there be no violation of my hopes.²³

“Pastoral” has often been used to characterize poems like this one. Pastoral even as applied to Western literature is a problematic term. As one of my former teachers, Thomas G. Rosenmeyer (1920–2007), explains, “the terms bucolic, pastoral, eclogue, and others shift about so much that their usefulness as distinguishing labels has become questionable.”²⁴ Pastoral poetry proper of course has its origins in the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, a poetic tradition well known to Albert Hoffstädt. However, Albert perhaps would find missing from Tao Yuanming’s rustic “countryside” pieces herdsmen exchanging songs with each other, or even goats, sheep, and cows rambling across a field, let alone wolves, jackals, and bears. Tao Yuanming never wrote lines like the following excerpt from Theocritus, *Idyll* I:

“Farewell, you wolves, jackals and bears in your mountain caves. I, Daphnis the oxherd, shall no longer be found in your forests, no longer found in your groves and woods.”

“I am the famous Daphnis who herded his cows here, Daphnis who watered here his bulls and calves.”²⁵

The following lines from Horace’s *Epodes* 11, “Beatus ille,” that praise the delights of country living are closer to sentiments expressed by Tao Yuanming in the poems cited above:

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
 ut prisca gens mortalium,

23 Ibid., 2.85.

24 *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European and Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), 8. I studied with Professor Rosenmeyer at the University of Washington in the 1960s before he left for U.C. Berkeley. What little I know about Greek and Roman literature I learned from him.

25 Neil Hopkinson, ed. and trans., *Theocritus Moschus Bion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015), 31.

paterna rura bobus exercet suis,
 solutus omni faenore,
 neque excitatur classico miles truci,
 neque horret iratum mare,
 forumque vitat et superba civium
 potentiorum limina.

Fortunate the man who, free from cares,
 Like men of old still works
 his father's fields with his own oxen,
 encumbered by no debt.
 No solider he, aroused by bugle's blare,
 nor does he fear the angry sea.
 The Forum he avoids and lofty doors
 of powerful citizens.²⁶

However, as Professor Rosenmeyer astutely observes, the speaker of these words is “the usurer Alfius, about to choke off his debtors and invest in his capital anew.”²⁷ Rosenmeyer also argues that Horace is disqualified as a pastoral poet because “his *Stimmungslandschaft* usually has a villa at the center of it. His farm is part of the world of business and culture because it is part of a larger harmony. Country and city are separated and contrasted because they are known to be one.”²⁸ As I have noted above, Tao Yuanming intently distances himself from the culture of the court and officialdom.

A value that Greek and Roman pastoral shares with Tao Yuanming is the idea of *otium*, which Rosenmeyer explains as “vacation, freedom, escape from pressing business.”²⁹ Obtaining *otium* in the countryside is similar to what Tao Yuanming says in the line from “Returning to the Farm to Dwell” cited above: “In the empty rooms I have excess leisure.” The word translated as “leisure” is *xian* 閑, also written *xian* 閒, which has a variety of meanings: ‘relaxed’, ‘at ease’, ‘idle’, ‘quiet’, and ‘rest’. The phrase *xian ju* 閑居, literally ‘dwelling at ease,’ is a phrase Tao uses to refer to his retirement to the countryside. In “Matching a Poem by Assistant Magistrate Guo” 和郭主簿二首, Tao directly identifies his farm in the country as a place where he can pursue “leisure activities”:

26 David West, trans., *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 4.

27 *The Green Cabinet*, 212.

28 *Ibid.*, 182.

29 *Ibid.*, 67–68.

息交遊閑業， Having ceased social intercourse, I indulge in leisure activities;
 臥起弄書琴。 During my waking hours I amuse myself with writing and
 zither.³⁰

In another line of “Returning to Garden and Fields to Dwell” Tao characterizes his retreat to the countryside as an escape from the “dusty net” of the vulgar world:

少無適俗韻， From youth I lacked the temperament to fit in with the vulgar
 world;
 性本愛丘山。 By nature, I was basically fond of hills and mountains.
 誤落塵網中， By mistake I fell into the dusty net,
 一去三十年。 And once gone, thirty years have passed.

In his “Xinchou sui qi yue fu jia huan Jiangling ye xing Tukou” 辛丑歲七月赴假江陵夜行塗口 (In the Seventh Month of the *Xinchou* Year, Passing through Tukou at Night, Returning to Jiangling from Leave of Absence) Tao writes: “For thirty years I dwelled at ease, / And I was oblivious of dusty affairs” 閒居三十年，遂與塵事冥。³¹ According to Yuan Xingpei, the terms “dusty net” and “dusty affairs” do not refer solely to official service, but to the “marketplace,” that is the time in which Tao lived in towns and cities and engaged in mundane activities.³² This sounds very much like the “escape from pressing business” that Rosenmeyer claims was part of the ancient Western concept of *otium*.

Albert Hoffstädt is about to embark on his “escape from pressing business,” at least on a part-time basis. Although his academic training was in Western classical literature, he has shown a remarkable understanding of the classical Chinese literary tradition, and in his capacity as Asian Studies editor at Brill he has been a highly effective advocate on behalf of solid scholarly works on subjects that many presses would not even consider publishing. I wish Albert a most enjoyable semi-retirement. May he “dwell at ease” and enjoy “otium cum dignitate.”

30 *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 2.144.

31 *Ibid.*, 3.193

32 *Tao Yuanming yanjiu*, 326.

Lu Ji's Theory of Reading and Writing: Medieval Chinese Anxieties about Literary Creation

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There is no more fruitful period than the early medieval era to focus an inquiry on the development and blossoming of Chinese literary thought. This period witnessed massive gains in cultural wealth as new literary genres and discursive forms were introduced, and the proliferation of examples ensued. The affordability and availability of paper enabled the expanding circulation of manuscripts and their duplication, hence increasing the likelihood of the transmission of texts to a more informed public. The widespread dissemination of texts in turn fostered nascent or new forms of literary and textual studies, such as bibliography, genre study, anthology making, and literary criticism, that undertook an accounting of this rapidly accumulating cultural capital. Early medieval literary critics and historians sought to manage the multiplication and spread of literary texts by composing cohesive or systematic accounts using the tools of definition, selection, and/or ranking. These critical readers seemed to have perceived and certainly attempted to address the need to arbitrate not only what was good literature but what literariness even was. The aspects that distinguished literature from other types of writing and branches of learning, such as the classics and histories, became the concern of critics and theorists who assumed the mandate to shape literary culture in the tradition that developed after the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) and *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭).

One such theorist was Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303), who, according to one influential though probably spurious account, set out to probe the art of writing and explain the process of literary creation at the tender age of twenty.¹ Most modern scholars dispute that account and instead date the composition of Lu Ji's masterwork to around the age of forty.² The contention is not merely a

1 In "Zui ge xing" 醉歌行 (Drunken song: a ballad), Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) writes that "At twenty, Lu Ji composed 'Rhapsody on Literature.'" The basis for Du's claim is uncertain.

2 See, for example, Lu Qinli 遼欽立, "Wen fu' zhuan chu niandai kao," 文賦撰出年代考, in *Han Wei Liuchao wenxue lunji* 漢魏六朝文學論集 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1984), 421–34; and Zhou Xunchu 周勛初, "Wen fu' xiezuo niandai xintan" 文賦寫作年代新探, in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue luncong* 魏晉南北朝文學論叢 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe,

literary-historical matter of chronology in the life of Lu Ji, but implies a debate on the theoretical question of “what is a credible age for any writer to comment authoritatively on the art of writing and the workings of literary creativity?” Whether “Rhapsody on Literature” (“Wen fu” 文賦) was written by a precocious genius or an experienced master, Lu Ji’s work has been justifiably celebrated for over seventeen hundred years as one of the most inspired theoretical pieces in Chinese literary history. This work of meta-literature not only details the preparations of a writer, but also candidly discusses the various fearsome and obsessive challenges that concern the writer. These challenges range from the difficulty in finding at times apt expressions, the occasional disconnection between idea formation and articulation, to the dread of unintentionally imitating or duplicating a prior work. This essay will explore the ways in which Lu Ji represents the process of the creative act and the questions his work raises about reading and writing, tradition and invention, and conception and representation.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Reading for Writing

It is a basic truth widely acknowledged that every writer must first be a reader. Lu Ji’s “Rhapsody” probes into just how connected the practices of reading and writing were for the early medieval Chinese writer.

佇中區以玄覽 He stands at the center, observing in darkness,³
 頤情志於典墳 And nourishes feeling and intent in ancient writings.
 遵四時以歎逝 He follows along the four seasons, sighing at their passing,

1999), 28–35. Among the reasons these modern scholars set forth as persuasion for a later date of composition include: Lu Ji was around forty when he composed the other works mentioned along with “Rhapsody on Literature” in his famous letter to his younger brother Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303); “Rhapsody on Literature” shows the influence of the then-current metaphysical discourse, “learning of the mysterious [Dao]” (*xuanxue* 玄學), which was not present in works that predate his move to Luoyang in his mature years; and the piece evinces a maturity that comes with many years of experience.

3 “Observing in darkness” (*xuan lan* 玄覽) appears in the tenth chapter of the *Laozi*, signifying where the mind resides and how it encounters the world, according to the Heshang Gong 河上公 (2nd century CE?) commentary, a reading Lu Ji would have known: “the mind resides in a dark and obscure place, from which it observes and knows the myriad things. Hence this is called ‘observing in darkness.’” This observing is a type of reflection that can lead to a clarity of vision. D.C. Lau, following the Western Han Mawangdui version of the *Laozi* which reads *jian* 監 (“mirror”) in place of *lan* (“observing”), renders *xuan jian* as “mysterious mirror,” a metaphor for the mind. With the mind’s eye, as it were, the writer observes things in the world. See Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 14.

瞻萬物而思紛 Looks at the myriad things of the world, reflecting on their profusion.
 悲落葉於勁秋 He grieves over falling leaves in forceful autumn,
 喜柔條於芳春 And delights in tender branches in fragrant spring.⁴
 (LL. 1–6)

As the reader prepares to write, he must first journey through past works, which nourish the two faculties essential to writing, feeling (*qing* 情) and intent (*zhi* 志). For Lu Ji, literary creativity may be stirred by things in the natural world, but it germinates directly from the nourishment of past models, a synesthetic process aptly expressed through mixed metaphors, such as intoning the fragrance of predecessors and wandering through the forest of letters. Lu Ji elaborates on this last point:

詠世德之駿烈 He sings of the great enterprise of the virtuous forebears,
 誦先人之清芬 And intones the pure fragrance of his predecessors,
 遊文章之林府 He roams the grove and trove of literary works,
 嘉麗藻之彬彬 And admires the perfect balance in these beautiful pieces.
 慨投篇而援筆 Feeling moved, he puts aside books and picks up a writing brush,
 聊宣之乎斯文 And gives it manifestation through literature.
 (LL. 9–14)

Stirred by writings from the past, the reader is inspired to express his sentiments, thus becoming a writer. In this way, literary creation becomes the direct, immediate, and necessary result of reading.

For practical purposes, reading provides a primary means for writers to access the reserve of verbal possibilities. The “assemblage of words” (*qun yan* 群言, translated below as “pool of words”) refers to the entire linguistic reservoir that is constituted by all literature, including the Classics.

傾群言之瀝液 He imbibes the drip drop from the pool of words,
 漱六藝之芳潤 Rinsing in his mouth the aromal moisture of the Classics.
 浮天淵以安流 Drifting between heaven and watery depths, he is at rest in
 the flow,
 濯下泉而潛浸 Bathing in the cascading stream, immersed in its recesses.
 於是沈辭拂悅 Then, submerged phrases struggle to surface,
 若遊魚銜鉤而出重淵之深 Like swimming fish, with hook in their mouths, emerging
 from the depths of a layered pool.

4 All citations of Lu Ji's “Wen fu” are from *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 17.761–782.

浮藻聯翩

若翰鳥纓繳而墜曾雲之峻

Peacocky displays of artistry drift down,

Like winging birds, taken by tasseled arrows, falling from the heights of storied clouds.

(LL. 21–28)

Lu Ji employs impressionistic metaphors to evoke the experiential acts of reading and writing: reading is cast as the consumption of liquids (swallowing and gargling existing literature) and writing the selection of materials (fishing and fowling signifying the process of literary composition). This consumption and selection are not only constructive but also destructive. Neither the clumsiness of the fish's ascent nor the elegance of the birds' descent palliates the ultimate violence done to the animals. The idea that the act of reading in particular constitutes culturally-sanctioned violence would find sensationally grim articulation in the ruminations of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). On reading, he said, "It is necessary with one blow of a cudgel to leave a scar; with one slap on the face to draw a handful of blood. When you read the writings of others, it should be just like this. Do not be lax!" 須是一棒一條痕；一擱一掌血。看人文字，要當如此，豈可忽略。⁵ In this view, reading means aggressively interrogating and deconstructing those writers, causing in the process damage to the writings. Similarly, in Lu Ji's vision, reading is the destruction of another's writing, an act of breaking down existing matter to assemble materials for one's own thought or writing. And writing is made possible by the disassembled remains of others.

The element of assimilation in reading has lent the act to alimentary metaphors (e.g. ingestion, absorption, incorporation, rumination) across cultures. Textual consumption—figural, even literal—served also in the West as a rhetorical marker for reading and understanding. Eating a book (or scroll) figured in lessons from Hebrew and Christian scriptures to medieval European devotional texts on the rewards of opening oneself up to the nourishment of divine words. In the Old Testament, Ezekiel receives the command to eat a scroll so that he may then convey the divine words in his native language to his people (Ezekiel 3). The fifteenth-century English friar John Capgrave recounts a comedic scene where a fourteenth-century English priest and translator of the *vita* and *passio* of Saint Katherine protested the command of an angel to eat the book containing the *vita* for which he was searching by reasoning that its covers are rotten, its pages dark and moldy, and its size too large to fit down his throat. The poor priest missed the point of the command and its scriptural basis, but in his *Life of Saint Katherine* John Capgrave seizes upon the viscerally

5 Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 10.164.

suggestive power of eating and digesting to conjure up the act of ruminative reading.⁶

The reader in Lu Ji's work has no such trouble swallowing texts, which are consumed so smoothly and fluidly that he could even rinse his mouth with them. These materials may go down easily, but the fishing metaphor that follows in the same passage suggests that they do not simply remain down there. Fish being drawn from the bowels of the pool evokes the act of purging that must follow any consumption. Writing is cast as the necessary, even organic outcome of reading. In a seminal study of memory in European medieval culture, Mary Carruthers cogently links together memory, reading, and writing: "merely to store memory by reading is an incomplete process without composition, for composing is the ruminative, 'digesting' process, the means by which reading is domesticated to ourselves."⁷ But this process of composition using familiar, incorporated materials is by no means an easy passage, according to Lu Ji. Phrases are not only "submerged," but they also "struggle to surface," like swimming fish resisting the hook and line. This prompts the question "why is there such difficulty in this (re)composition?"

Throughout Lu Ji's exposition on the writing process, there is persistent indication of an uneasy relationship with predecessor works. The tension is especially perceptible in the following passage:

必所擬之不殊 乃闇合乎曩篇 雖杼軸于予懷 怵侘人之我先	If what your work aspires to be lacks distinctiveness— It unintentionally matches a piece from long ago. Though what comes out of the shuttle and loom are my own feelings, I fear that others may have come before me.
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(LL. 139–142)

During the process of literary production, the writer may know that his feelings will be woven into a texture that bears his own mark, but still fear that the textual product has already been made, a text that the writer already read or will one day read. The fear of unwittingly duplicating or repeating a prior work is revelatory of the angst-generating literary contradictions of early medieval Chinese society. While originality was not openly demanded in a labor that assumes extensive reading as a prerequisite for writing, it was nevertheless

6 For a detailed discussion of John Capgrave's use of alimentary metaphors and their implications, see Shannon Gayk, "Ete this Book: Literary Consumption and Poetic Invention in John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine*," in *Form and Reform: Reading across the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2011), 88–109.

7 Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 238.

somehow expected to emerge as the author goes along conforming to past models and citing predecessors as prescribed by the cultural norm. One may reasonably view Lu Ji's fear as an early medieval Chinese expression of "the anxiety of influence," a descriptive term popularized by Harold Bloom for a latter-born writer's struggle against the influence of one's forefathers. In his elaboration of the notion, Bloom sees fit to draw upon impressionistic metaphors of inundation: "The anxiety of influence is an anxiety in expectation of being flooded ... every good reader properly *desires* to drown, but if the poet drowns, he will become *only a reader*."⁸ A writer must first be a good reader, "bathing in the cascading stream, immersed in its recesses" (l. 24), as in Lu Ji's description, and then somehow emerge distinctly as a writer rather than drown merely as a reader. Bloom astutely articulates both the peril and necessity of immersive study for artistic innovation: "The precursors flood us, and our imaginations can die by drowning in them, but no imaginative life is possible if such inundation is wholly evaded."⁹ Lu Ji would have agreed with Bloom on the double-edged condition underlying reading for writing.

At the outset of his exposition, Lu Ji claims dependence on prior works for creativity and expression, yet he also disavows that knowledge in the immediate process of composition. A journey of the mind, in which the writer relies solely on his imagination to discover the world, precedes the act of writing in the following account.

其始也，皆收視反聽	At the beginning, vision is retracted, hearing suspended; ¹⁰
耽思傍訊	Immersed in thought, he examines all around.
精驚八極	His essence swiftly gallops to the eight ends of the world;
心遊萬仞	His heart roams ten thousand fathoms.
其致也，情曛曠而彌鮮	At the end, feelings first dimly glimmer then become brighter;
物昭晰而互進	Things become radiant and clear, revealing one another.

(LL. 15–20)

The beginning of this description outlining the preparation of the writer echoes a passage in *Zhuangzi* 11, "Let it Be, Keep it Within Bounds" 在宥, in which Master Guangcheng teaches the Yellow Emperor how to lengthen his life. Since the essence of the Perfect Way is enshrouded, he advises that first there be "no seeing nor hearing" 無視無聽, then "enwrap the spirit in stillness"

8 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57.

9 Ibid., 154.

10 *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 11.381.

抱神以靜。"If the eyes do not see, the ears do not hear, and the mind does not know, then the spirit will safeguard the body and the body will live long" 目無所見，耳無所聞，心無所知，女神將守形，形乃長生。The *Zhuangzi* passage ostensibly describes a self-cultivation practice of the Daoist sage: to close off bodily senses, which would then lead the mind to the highest form of clarity, what Master Guangcheng calls "Great Illumination" 大明, a gateway to unlimited cognition. The continuation of the *Zhuangzi* passage tells the critical reason for shutting out external stimuli: "Be careful of what is within you; close off what is outside you, since too much knowledge causes harm" 慎女內，閉女外，多知爲敗。Lu Ji seems to find in this prescription for Daoist spiritual cultivation an application for the writer grappling with the influence of past works. Knowledge of literary history needs to be cautiously managed, for the writer must be ever aware of what he has already read but be prepared to block off that knowledge in order to allow one's own feelings to form distinctly and one's own conceptions to emerge clearly.

At the heart of Lu Ji's inquiry into the creative process are tangled questions of conception, or thought-formation. How do literary history, mnemonic recall, envisioning or imagination figure in the process? One of the most elliptical and cryptic passages in the "Rhapsody" concerns the workings of the mind prior to setting down words on a sheet:

觀古今於須臾 撫四海於一瞬 然後選義按部 考辭就班	He observes past and present in an instant, And sweeps over the four seas in the blink of an eye. Then, he selects ideas, arranged in categories, Examines phrases, putting them in order.
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(LL. 33–36)

The ability to survey all of history in a single moment logically develops from extensive reading and intimate knowledge of that history. The power to skim the whole world in the blink of an eye suggests a capacity for envisioning or imagining that is substantiated, though not limited, by book knowledge. It seems apropos, then, that Lu Ji's account of the thought process draws from his book knowledge. In the same chapter 11 of *Zhuangzi*, Lao Dan thus describes the marvelous workings of the human mind: it is so swift that it can again "sweep over the four seas" and beyond in the time it takes to raise and lower one's head.¹¹ Extensive reading and book knowledge may underwrite the capacity to see far and wide, but history compressed into a single instant and the world captured in the blink of an eye unequivocally underscore the mysterious

11 *Zhuangzi jishi*, 11.371. The original reads: 其疾俛仰之間而再撫四海之外。

workings of recall and imagination which no quantity or quality of words can elaborate. Indeed, Lu Ji does no more than repeat the metaphor of celerity from the *Zhuangzi* in his attempt to track and represent the workings of the mind. Elsewhere in the “Rhapsody,” Lu Ji openly acknowledges the inherent difficulty, even impossibility, to explain creative inspiration.

The Fickleness of Inspiration

Throughout the “Rhapsody,” Lu Ji concedes the unpredictability of the writing process. Composition can be casually smooth or stubbornly difficult:

或操觚以率爾 Sometimes he grasps the tablet and composes with casual ease,
或含毫而邈然 Other times he holds the brush in mouth, his mind distant.

(LL. 59–60)

Or it can be easy to execute or hard to manage:

或妥帖而易施 Other times it is steady and stable, easily carried out,
或岨嶇而不安 Or it is rough and unruly, hard to settle.

(LL. 45–46)

The rhapsody writer unsurprisingly does not miss the opportunity to impress his point upon his readers with exquisite metaphors. Instant, spontaneous composition is compared to winds of thought that arise in the breast and a flow of words spilling from one's mouth, while the writing brush rushes to try to capture it on silk:

思風發於胸臆 A gust of thought emerges from the breast;
言泉流於脣齒 A spring of words flows from lips and teeth.
紛威蕤以馭選 Such flourishing with teeming continuity
唯毫素之所擬 Can only be copied by brush and silk.

(LL. 231–234)

Slow, reflective composition is pictured as words struggling to surface like fish with a hook in its mouth, being reeled up from the bottom of the deepest pool, as we have seen earlier: “Then, submerged phrases struggle to surface,/ Like swimming fish, with hook in their mouths, emerging from the depths of a layered pool.”

For the uncertainty that inheres in each experience of writing, Lu Ji seems to cast blame upon the caprices of inspiration. Some of the most ingenious passages in the exposition describe in impressionistic detail either inspired creation or depressive sterility. Inspiration is cast as a force of nature in these tropes from the passage above about spontaneous composition: “gust of thought,” “spring of words,” and “flourishing [vegetation].” The lack of inspiration is similarly illustrated by the natural metaphors of “withered tree” and “dried-up creek” in the following passage:

及其六情底滯	Then when the six affects are stifled and stalled, ¹²
志往神留	When the intent moves toward something, but the spirit stays:
兀若枯木	One is stuck motionless like a withered tree,
豁若涸流	Empty like a dried-up creek.
攬營魂以探蹟	He clasps the soul to probe its profound reaches,
頓精爽於自求	Holds still the spiritual essence to search within himself.
理翳翳而愈伏	Yet the inherent principle, dim and dark, is ever more hidden,
思乙乙其若抽	Thought, finding it hard to come out, as if needing to be pulled.

(LL. 237–244)

Inspiration may be natural, even familiar, but its workings are mysterious through and through: in terms of human effort, the poet deems it appropriate to answer these unfathomable workings with equally esoteric notions as “searching the soul” and “grasping the spiritual essence.”

A remarkable moment arrives in an exposition that lays out the process of writing, from conception to execution, when Lu Ji concedes his inability altogether to convey creativity. This he smartly does by invoking a classical example of ineffability and intransmissability, the story of Wheelwright Bian from the *Zhuangzi*.

譬猶舞者赴節以投袂	It is like a dancer flinging her sleeves to the rhythm of the beat,
歌者應絃而遣聲	Or the singer delivering his sounds in response to the strings.
是蓋輪扁所不得言	This is undoubtedly what Wheelwright Bian could not speak about,
故亦非華說之所能精	Hence nor is the most flowery discourse able to capture its essence.

(LL. 199–202)

12 According to Zhongchang Tong's 仲長統 *Chang yan* 昌言, the six affects are pleasure, anger, sorrow, happiness, fondness, and hatred.

Recall that in *Zhuangzi* 13, "Way of Heaven" 天道, Wheelwright Bian tells Duke Huan that the book he is reading is but the dregs and draff of the ancients. Based on his experience of attempting to teach his son his own craft, Wheelwright Bian argues that there are certain principles and ideas that cannot be put into words, and are therefore not transmissible.¹³ That which cannot be transmitted in his craft, as with the sages' teaching, must then end with the source. What is transmitted is, therefore, not the essence of the ancients' teachings, but merely the dross sapped of its original strength. According to Lu Ji, the workings of creativity, natural as a dancer flinging her sleeves to musical beats and undeliberate as a singer sounding his response to musical notes, can no more be revealed in language than Wheelwright Bian's craft. The unmanageability, even unpredictability, of the creative force is already foreshadowed in the preface of the "Rhapsody," where Lu Ji writes: "As for grasping an axe to hew an axe-handle, even though the model is not far, yet the permutations that follow the movements of hand are truly difficult to convey in language" 至於操斧伐柯，雖取則不遠，若夫隨手之變，良難以辭逮. No matter how closely one follows the model, such as examples by past worthies, in the execution of writing there can arise unplanned developments that run their own course. It is as if the hand assumes a life of its own, and the work writes itself in a moment of inspired creation. From this vantage point, inspiration becomes the wild card that can make the winning hand in the competition against one's predecessors as one adheres to models yet can somehow diverge from duplicating them.

As much as "Rhapsody on Literature" grants that certain key aspects of the writing process exceed knowledge and therefore control, hence the appeal of guiding rules, it nonetheless boldly asserts supernal command for the writer.

籠天地於形內 He encages Heaven and Earth within forms,
挫萬物於筆端 And subdues the myriad things with the tip of his brush.

(LL. 49–50)

Nowhere in the "Rhapsody" does Lu Ji make a more confident claim about a writer's prowess and ability: through conception and language, the writer wields the power to bound and dominate even the greatest of things. He manages and contains that which are beyond measurement, such as Heaven and Earth, and beyond calculation, such as the myriad things of the world. The brashness of this claim is approximated in another passage in the "Rhapsody":

13 See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 13.490–91.

函綿邈於尺素 He contains vast distances in a foot of silk,
吐滂沛乎寸心 Spews out a surging torrent from a square inch of heart.
(LL. 65–66)

These lines suggest a view of language at radical variance with Lao-Zhuang thought, which shaped to a great extent the intellectual discourse of early medieval China. One of the principal charges brought against language by the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* is that words are delimiting, and they therefore undermine any attempt to represent the boundless Way. Lu Ji makes instead a positive claim about language: conception and writing are forms of containment and tools of domination that return to the writer a good measure of agency in the creative process. From this vantage point, the use of language (from conceptual organization to linguistic expression) is a form of constructive containment that could also serve as a steadying counterpoint to the unbridled force of creative inspiration.

Conclusion

Lu Ji appears to track the creative movement from origin to end (or dead-end) in this key passage from the “Rhapsody” and thus reveals another facet of his anxiety concerning literary creation:

若夫應感之會 As for the meeting of stirring and response,
通塞之紀 The juncture of passage and obstruction,
來不可遏 What comes cannot be halted,
去不可止 What goes cannot be stayed.
(LL. 223–226)

From this vantage point, cogitation arises when a stirring—be it from nature, predecessor works, or imagination—elicits a response, and inchoate thoughts or phrases may come fully into being or not in the ever mystifying workings of creativity. The creative impulse seems to hold the writer in suspense, as emergent ideas and words hang between expression and dissipation. The writer’s inability to control, even predict, the flow of creativity can lead to bitter frustration.

雖茲物之在我	Although this thing is within myself,
非余力之所勦	It is not something I can draw forth with my concentrated efforts.
故時撫空懷而自惋	Hence at times I stroke my empty bosom and resent myself,
吾未識夫開塞之所由	As I do not know the reasons behind blockage or pouring forth.

(LL. 247–250)

“This thing” (*zi wu* 茲物) refers to none other than the subject of the rhapsody, *wen*, which here encompasses the meanings of writing, a literary work, and literary creativity. The writer keenly feels the pang of resentment over bearing within oneself a living creature, as it were, whose movements so often operate wholly outside of one’s control. The torrent of stimuli within the writer in the form of mental cogitations and the rapid appraisal of expressive possibilities, at a certain point, compels the externalization of the creative work. The desire to discharge from one’s body “this thing” seems not to be a simple matter of alleviation. Rather, it would present the ultimate opportunity for the creator to imprint definitively his own mark in the birth of his work.

Terms of Friendship: Bylaws for Associations of Buddhist Laywomen in Medieval China

Stephen F. Teiser

What do we owe our friends? How are close relationships outside the family formed, and by what principles? Where are the bonds of friendship situated among other social ties like neighborhood, profession, nation, or religious community? What are the historiographical challenges to understanding values, conventions, and intimacies in the past? Such questions are a natural starting point for an essay inspired by my amazing friend, Albert Hoffstädt. He is one subject—the sub-text, really—of this piece. The other, ostensive subject is a signed, handwritten Chinese document containing articles of incorporation for a congregation of Buddhist women in the tenth century. Contemplating the one helps me appreciate the other.

The manuscript (British Library shelfmark Or. 8210/Stein 527, hereafter S 527; see Figure 13.1) is one of the more than sixty thousand documents that, after serving a useful purpose, were holed up in a shrine room in the Mogao Caves in the northwestern town of Dunhuang (Gansu province) in the early eleventh century. The manuscript is nearly unique in combining in one polished document a constitution for a women's lay Buddhist association with the names and actual signatures of the members. Like other bylaws, the charter celebrates general principles. It references the philosophical underpinnings of the group and explains its main purpose, which was to provide mutual aid during funerals and annual religious festivals. The document stipulates the women's duties, stating how much vegetable oil, grain, prepared food and liquor, and what religious objects they were required to contribute. The rules for the society also define penalties for disrupting the peace: those who contravene the regulations must provide a banquet for all, and those desiring to leave the community must not only fête the group but also submit to corporal punishment.

In its original setting the document did more than simply talk about the incorporation of a new social group. Through its performative or juridical features, it also brought a new community into being. The list of members' names near the end of the document asserts a hierarchy. It is ranked from most important (senior nun and organizer, officer, secretary, and elder) to least important

(women marked only by their names—some legally entitled to bear surnames, others not). Beneath fourteen of the fifteen names, each woman has written her own personal sign indicating assent to the charter. The signatures, probably made with a fingernail dipped in ink, vary in design and complexity. Some consist of a single, short line. Others are crossed lines, circles, a circle with a cross inside, or other representational markings. I intentionally refer to them as signatures despite the fact that the women were likely illiterate—otherwise, they would have written their names as words, rather than signs bearing no conventional relationship to their names. But, like writing one's name by hand, the signatures show that each member attempted to distinguish herself from her sisters by drawing a different design. By affixing a personalized token on the constitution, each woman was endorsing the sorority, its rules, and her membership in it.

Background

Two areas of inquiry need to be introduced to help make sense of the material at the heart of this essay. Beyond its intrinsic interest, the formation of religious congregations composed of Buddhist laywomen sheds light on broader trends in the history of Buddhism and Chinese society during the middle ages. A related field of research is Dunhuang studies, which combines the study of the words of the text with consideration of the material features of manuscripts.

Why are lay Buddhist societies important? They are significant in the first place because their form of sociological organization—a voluntary sodality that meets occasionally and whose members understand themselves to be obligated to the association—is relatively uncommon in premodern China. Over the *longue durée*, as many grand treatments have remarked, the two dominant social groupings in China have been the family and the state, and their guiding values (filial piety and loyalty, respectively) have been amply theorized. In this context, clubs of highly-committed members and forms of religiosity based on conscious choice are somewhat rare.

The type of religious identity easily recognizable to moderns, whether the pious believer or the scholar who is suspicious by profession, was not very common in ancient and medieval China. Instead, most activities for worshipping spirits, calming the dead, healing the sick, or securing good fortune were carried out in the home or marketplace, at state-sanctioned altars, or in temples commemorating local cults. This is not to say that exclusive devotion or

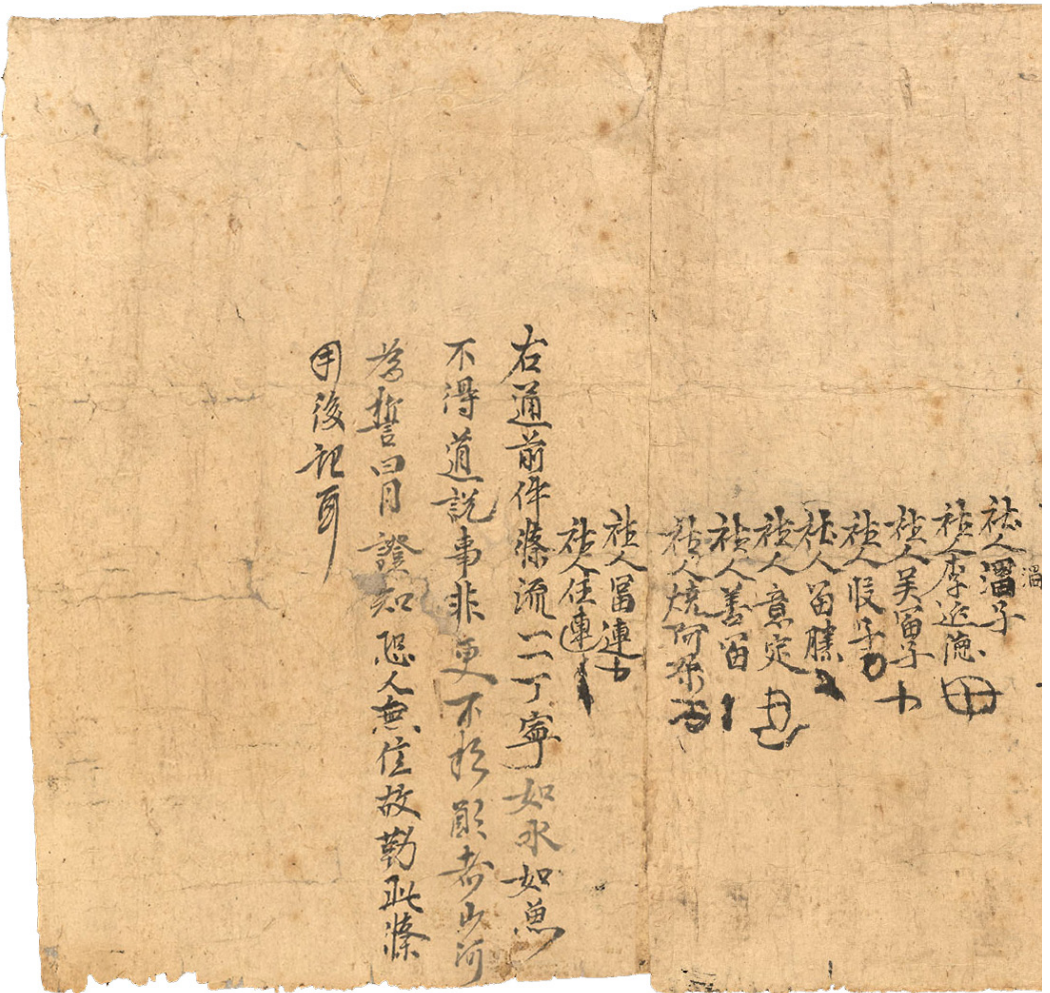


FIGURE 13.1 959 *Bylaws*, S 527, © The British Library Board, Or. 8210/S. 527

full-time religious life was impossible—simply that these more strenuous modalities of being religious were more marginal.¹

Considered from this sweeping perspective, Buddhist lay congregations are significant because they are one of the earliest forms of self-selecting, mildly

1 Ritual specialists and shamans were, on and off, employed by the state. The ideal regimens of hermits and transcendents were vaunted in popular mythology and elite poetry. Dioceses of Daoist followers cultivated deliverance. And Buddhist monastics took vows of celibacy and were supposed to live together scrupulously in monasteries segregated by gender.

顯德六年正月三日女人社日茲新歲初來各發好意再
 立條件 蓋聞至誠之社有條有格夫邑儀者父母生其身
 用友長其值遇則相狀難則相救與用友交言如信結交用
 友世語相續大者若好小者若妹讓語先登立條件與後出
 河為並言中不相違 一社內榮幸遂去親痛之必便於社格人各
 油去合白麩未斤不志糾便須馳濟造食餘及酒者若本身死
 亡者仰眾社蓋自就拽便送贖例同前一般其主人看侍不諫其
 薄輕重亦無罰責 一社內正月建福日各稅不志燈油去蓋
 脫塔吊砂煎報 君王恩泰乃以父母作福或有社內不諫大小
 無格在席上臆拳不聽工人言教者便仰眾社就門罰醴醴一選
 眾社被用若要出社之者各人杖杖卷棒後罰醴方席一選或出
 送者社人名目誦實如後

社官眉切德廷
 社長侯留子也
 歸事印定慶學家姐十

社老女子十
 社人張家富子



obligated groups engaging in shared religious activities. In this respect, they presage later developments in China such as Buddhist sectarian groups, Protestant and Catholic communities, and secret societies.

Thanks to the close study of stone and paper artifacts by historians over the past century, we now have a more detailed and colorful picture of how Buddhist congregations worked. Most were headed by or organized around a senior monastic figure, a nun for women's groups or a monk for men's. Their organizational structure included several officers, selected by the membership, who administered the group's decisions and rules and kept a ledger of

donations. The societies varied in size from a maximum of sixty to one or two handfuls of members. Larger associations seem to have been common in the late-fifth through mid-seventh centuries, judging by stelae inscriptions and statuary dedications for pious societies (“districts of righteousness,” *yiyi* 義邑) from north China.² In the northwest (Dunhang in Gansu and Turfan in Xinjiang), by contrast, Buddhist fellowships (*she* 社 or *sheyi* 社邑) were usually smaller, especially during the period of independent rule at Dunhuang, 848–1036, when the area was administered by the Zhang 張 and Cao 曹 families, who nominally reported to the central Chinese state but who exercised considerable autonomy and engaged in diplomatic relations with a variety of states.³

Judging by the Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts, members of Buddhist associations paid dues or were required to make regular donations. They mobilized resources to undertake a wide range of good works. Perhaps their heaviest responsibility involved mortuary ritual: providing food for banquets and wailing or performing other acts of mourning at the funeral of society members or their families. They also pooled donations for other merit-making ventures, including commissioning the copying of sutras, fabricating statues, and

2 Important studies of lay societies in the North through the mid-seventh century include: Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Zhongguo shiqi sheyi yanjiu* 中古時期社邑研究 (2006; rev. ed. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2019), esp. 7–151; Hou Xudong 侯旭東, *Wu-liu shiji beifang minzhong fojiao xinyang: yi zaoxiang ji wei zhongxin de kaocha* 五六世紀北方民眾佛教信仰：以造像記為中心的考察 (1998; rev. ed. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015), esp. 102–284.

3 Important studies of lay societies between 400 and 1000 at Dunhuang include: Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), 290–95; idem, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 281–94; Chikusa Masaaki 竺沙雅章, “Tonkō shutsudo sha monjo no kenkyū” 敦煌出土社文書の研究, 1964, reprinted in Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中國佛教社會史研究, rev. ed. (Kyoto: Dōhōsha shuppan, 2002), 477–560; Imre Galambos, “She Association Circulars from Dunhuang,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 853–77; Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), 259–77; Hao, *Zhongguo shiqi sheyi yanjiu*, 155–385; Meng Xianshi 孟憲實, *Dunhuang minjian jieshe yanjiu* 敦煌民間結社研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009); Naba Toshisada 那波利貞, “Tōdai no shayū ni tsukite” 唐代の社邑に就きて, 1938; and “Bukkyō shinkō ni motozokite soshiki seraretaru chūban-Tō Godai jidai no shayū ni tsukite” 佛教信仰に基ずきて組織せられたる中晚唐五代時代の社邑に就きて, 1939; both reprinted in Naba, *Tōdai shakai bunkashi kenkyū* 唐代社會文化史研究 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 459–673; Yu Xin 余欣, “Cong wenxianxue dao lishixue: you shetiao wenshu toushi Tang-Song funū jieshe” 從文獻學到歷史學：由社條文書透視唐宋婦女結社, in *Bowang Mingsha: Zhongguo xieben yanjiu yu xiandai Zhongguo xueshushi zhi huitong* 博望鳴沙：中古寫本研究與現代中國學術史之會通 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 288–306.

building temples. Some joint projects were seasonal in nature: celebration of the monthly vegetarian feast days (numbering two, eight, or ten), provisions for the spring and autumn sacrifices, underwriting the Lantern Festival at the beginning of the year (fifteenth day of the first month), and making offerings on the Ghost Festival six months after that. Other *mitzvot* included distributing a “righteous collection” (*yiju* 義聚) for members in need.

Having summarized the historical, sociological, and religious significance of lay Buddhist associations, it is also worthwhile introducing recent scholarship on the textual and material evidence. The essential data comprise 422 manuscripts from Dunhuang and Turfan, mostly produced in the ninth and tenth centuries, that contain documents related to the workings of lay societies.⁴

There are, roughly speaking, five basic types of composition. The first genre is the one I focus on in this study, *Articles of Incorporation* or *Bylaws* (usually: *shetiao* 社條). These founding documents exist in two forms. One is a generic version listing only general principles and organizational structure, which modern scholarship refers to as literary models or formularies (Ch.: *wenyang* 文樣, Ja.: *bunpan* 文範), which I will call *Draft Bylaws*. The second form is a more formal document drawn up for a specific occasion, listing members’ names and often including their signatures, which I will call *Bylaws* (from a specific year).

The second genre of writing used by associations is the most numerous among surviving manuscripts, the *Association Circular* (*shesi zhuantie* 社司轉帖). These are relatively short announcements of the group’s meetings, usually written on leftover pieces of paper. They state the purpose, date, and time of the gathering, stipulate if any dues need to be paid, and specify penalties for tardiness or absence. As their title implies, these notifications were circulated among all the members, and many examples contain members’ names as well as a check-mark or the word “notified” (*zhi* 知) scribbled by each member, indicating s/he received the memo and passed it on. A third genre consists of ritual documents, *Association Liturgies* (*shewen* 社文), to be read aloud or followed during events sponsored by the fellowship, including monthly feasts, memorial services, and other merit-making events. The fourth genre is usually titled *Association Account* (*sheli* 社歷), a ledger of the goods donated by each member. Sometimes these tallies record the items that were loaned out and

4 The authoritative compilation by Ning Ke 寧可 and Hao Chunwen 郝春文, eds., *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao* 敦煌社邑文書輯校 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), includes 345 documents; Hao’s authoritative updating (Hao, *Zhonggu shiqi sheyi yanjiu*, 2019) adds another seventy-seven; Takata Tokio 高田時雄, “Zangwen sheyi wenshu ersanzhong” 藏文社邑文書二三種, *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 3 (1998), 183–90, includes three Tibetan language documents, two of which are bylaws.

later returned to the society's coffers. The fifth genre, *Association Report* (*she-zhuang* 社狀 or *shedie* 社牒), also drawn up by the group's officers, documented petitions from applicants as well as resignations. Still more evidence about Buddhist lay congregations can be gleaned from votive inscriptions recording sponsorship of sūtras, statues, or temples by the group.

Four bylaws for women's congregations survive among medieval manuscripts. The earliest is a Turfan document dating from 658 or before, which I will refer to as *658 Bylaws*.⁵ It includes names and signatures of twenty-six "grandmas" (*apo* 阿婆), and hence was likely used as a formal founding document. The next is a draft of bylaws from Dunhuang dated 876 or 936, containing articles (but no names) for a group of thirteen women from Bowang 博望 district of Dunhuang who joined together to celebrate the Lantern Festival at the Mogao Caves (*936 Draft Bylaws*; see Figure 13.2).⁶ The third of the bylaws is studied in this article. It is dated 959 and, judging from the listing of names and affixing of signatures, as well as its larger, more formal handwriting, it was also a ceremonial instrument (*959 Bylaws*).⁷ The fourth probably dates from 968. It contains articles of incorporation as well as a list of the twelve members from the Jing 旌 district⁸ of Dunhuang, but no signatures (*968 Bylaws*).⁹

These four documents bear obvious affinities in physical form. They are all handwritten documents taking up one or two sheets of paper. The three that are for actual events (not the draft), containing the names of members, have writing that is relatively large (characters greater than 1 cm square), formal, and stylized consistently within each document.¹⁰ The writing style, plus the

5 *658 Bylaws*, 67 TAM 74; critical edition in Guojia wenwuju guwenxian yanjiushi 國家文物局古文獻研究室, Xinjiang Weiwu'er zizhiqu bowuguan 新疆維吾爾自治區博物館, Wuhan daxue lishixi 武漢大學歷史系, eds., *Tulufan chutu wenshu* 吐魯番出土文書 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), 6:160–63; and Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 60–63.

6 *936 Draft Bylaws*, BD 14682; critical edition in Fang Guangchang 方廣錫, ed., *Guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang yishu* 國家圖書館藏敦煌遺書, 146 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005–2012), s.v. BD 14682; and Hao, *Zhongguo shiqi sheyi yanjiu*, 315–16. The sexagenary dating is ambiguous, and Fang dates it to the ninth-tenth century, so my English title (*936 Draft Bylaws*) is a guess.

7 *959 Bylaws*, S 527; critical edition in Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 23–27.

8 Following Wang Zhongmin 王重民, *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suo yin* 敦煌遺書總目索引 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983) in reading Jing 旌; Naba, *Tōdai shakai bunkashi kenkyū*, 504, reads Gu 雇.

9 *968 Bylaws*, P 3489; critical edition in Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 27–29.

10 A complete study of paleography and alternate character forms is beyond the scope of this paper. A preliminary listing of the non-standard, stylized characters in the *959 Bylaws* (S 527) would include: 條, 蓋, 朋, 社, 危, 扶, 與, 相, 濟, 凶, 麵, 一, 粟, 用, 揔, 膩, 後, 錄, 印, 延, 吳, 段, 流.

affixing of individual signatures on two of the documents, suggest that these three manuscripts were likely used and signed during a public ceremony marking the founding of the sisterhood. By contrast, the 936 *Draft Bylaws* are written out on a smaller sheet of paper twice as tall (26.5 cm) as it is wide (13.5 cm). Its handwriting is messy and fast. Its function as a rough draft is buttressed by the fact that more than twenty percent of its characters (38 out of 174) have been blotted out or corrected.

There are also similarities in organization, terminology, and phrasing among these four sorority articles of incorporation as well as among other association bylaws written at Dunhuang. One of the other bylaws (*Undated Draft Bylaws*)¹¹—one of three drafts of bylaws that are part of a miscellany of ritual texts, contracts, phrasebooks, hymns, and lyrics—contains wording particularly close to that of our main text (959 *Bylaws*). Written in what is likely two or more hands, the miscellany was probably used as a model or guide by local monks or lay students in composing formal documents.

Text, Translation, Commentary of the 959 *Bylaws*

My edition and translation of the text are based on my inspection of the original at the British Library in March 2019 and comparison with several scholarly editions of the text.¹² I also base some of my editorial choices on the similar text, *Undated Draft Bylaws*.

The text begins:

In the sixth year of the Xiande era, on the third day of the first month of the *jiwei* year [February 13, 959], for this dawning of the new year, each member of the women's association expresses good intentions and reestablishes the bylaws.

11 *Undated Draft Bylaws*, S 6537v, 6; critical edition in Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 55–58.

12 The most important editions of the text are: Chikusa, “Tonkō shutsudo sha monjo no kenkyū,” 503–4, who collates S 529 in relation to S 5637v, 6; Yamamoto Tatsuro, Dohi Yoshikazu, and Ishida Yusaku, eds., *Tun-huang and Turfan Documents Concerning Social and Economic History*, vol. 4: *She Associations and Related Documents*, part A: *Introduction and Texts* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunkō, 1989), 9–10; and Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 23–27. My earlier translation of the text in Hao Chunwen, *Dunhuang Manuscripts: An Introduction to Texts from the Silk Road*, trans. Stephen F. Teiser (Los Angeles: Portico Press, 2020), 138–40, needs significant correction, offered here; it was completed before I inspected the original document in person and studied the subject further.



FIGURE 13.2 936 Draft Bylaws, BD 14682, courtesy of Beijing tushuguan chubanshe

顯德六年己未歲正月三日，女人社因滋[茲]¹³新歲初來，各發好意，再立條件。

The first section of the 959 *Bylaws* does more than simply date the organization's founding and introduce the material. In addition, the opening words are metapragmatic in the sense that the members talk about what they are doing: coming together and reaffirming the terms of their bond. This illocutionary section is entirely lacking in the *Undated Draft Bylaws*, in keeping with the use of the draft text in composing a document rather than enacting the rules. The

13 Emending 滋 to 茲, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

opening of the 959 *Bylaws* also makes the quasi-judicial announcement that the women have gathered out of good will and not through coercion. This democratic strain is even more explicit in the corresponding passage of the 968 *Bylaws*, which states that the women “sit in a circle and discuss the establishment of the bylaws, fixing them through deliberation of the association.”¹⁴

Next, the 959 *Bylaws* shift into a higher literary register, utilizing introductory expressions and loose parallel prose, to explain the fellowship’s philosophy. The text states:

Now, we know:

With utmost sincerity we establish an association, with bylaws and protocols.

As for our community’s principles:

Parents give us life, and friends sustain our resolve.

When we encounter danger, we support each other; when we have problems, we help each other.

In dealing with friends, our word is our bond; once we form relations with friends, our plain words follow each other.

We treat our elders as older sisters; we treat our juniors as younger sisters; we use deferential words and let elders rise first.

After establishing the bylaws, we swear to mountains and rivers, we will never go against them.

盖聞：至城[誠]¹⁵立社，有條有格。夫邑儀[義]¹⁶者：父母生其身，朋友長其值[志]¹⁷。遇危則相扶，難則相救。與朋友交，言如信；結交朋友，世語相續。大者若姊，小者若妹；讓語先登。立條件與[以]¹⁸後，山河爲誓，中[終]¹⁹不相違。

This second section lays out the principles of communal life. It considers relations among club members to be nearly as important as the bond between parent and child: parents bestow life, and friends are necessary in order to

14 968 *Bylaws*, P 3489: 圍座[坐]商億[議]立條，合社商量爲定。Similarly, the 936 *Bylaws*, BD 14682, say that “the group sits and discusses” 眾坐商儀[議].

15 Emending 城 to 誠, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

16 Emending 儀 to 義, following *Undated Draft Bylaws* (S 6537v, 6), and Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

17 Emending 值 to 志, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

18 Emending 與後 to 以後, following 936 *Draft Bylaws* (BD 14682), and Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

19 Emending 中 to 終, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 22.

nurture it. Drawing on the conceptual vocabulary of Chinese moral reflection, the 959 *Bylaws* model the relation between friends on the relation between siblings. In all dyadic relationships, there is a senior and a junior partner, while at the same time, values such as trust apply equally to both parties. The *Undated Draft Bylaws* assume a male norm, referring to elder and younger brothers.²⁰ The wording of the 959 *Bylaws* (for a women's association) alters the passage to account for gender (elder and younger sisters), but otherwise abbreviates and follows the *Undated Draft Bylaws*. The end of the section cloaks the principles with supernatural force, alluding to the members taking an oath to terrestrial gods.

The third section in the 959 *Bylaws* contains the articles outlining members' responsibilities for different events. The first major provision concerns sickness or death of a member. The document reads:

Article: Within the association, we honor inauspiciousness and pursue auspiciousness. On the announcement that one of our associates has suffered harm, then it is dealt with through the provisions of the association. Each person is to provide one vat of oil, one catty of white flour, and one peck of millet. Then they should make haste, bringing help by preparing food and wine. If the member herself has died, she can look to the entire association, cloaked in white and dragging along, bringing offerings according to the same precedent as before. If they encounter the deceased member's master and do not observe proper intimacy and propriety, this will not be deemed an offense.

一，社內榮兇逐吉。親痛之名，便於社格，人各油壹合，白麩壹斤，粟壹斗，便須驅驅濟造食飯及酒者。若本身死亡者，仰眾社蓋白耽拽，便送贈例，同前一般。其主人看待，不諫厚薄輕重，亦無罰責。

Providing mutual assistance for funerals and memorial rites was likely the most important function of Buddhist lay associations. The provisioning of the living on occasions of death appears to have been undertaken within the home, involving kin and members of the lay society. The phases of mortuary ritual carried out elsewhere—whether deathbed rituals, graveside ceremonies, or memorial rites enlisting the intercession of the Saṅgha—entailed other costs, drew on different personnel, and were conducted in other locations.²¹

20 *Undated Draft Bylaws* (S 6537v, 6): 大者如兄，少者若弟[弟].

21 See Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Tanghouqi Wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* 唐后期五代宋初敦煌僧尼的社会生活 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue

Judging from the contributions stipulated in the lay society's bylaws, perhaps the heaviest burden was to provide a feast, including food and liquor, for the mourners. No respectable family could avoid this expense. Prudent management of finances and emotions also required that members be prepared to help out at each other's funerals. This article of the document details the duties owed when one's sisters passed away, including ritualized weeping and the donning of mourning clothes. This suggests that in this situation, the members would be acting like affinal kin, so the rules also enjoin the male head of the household (in theory, the deceased woman's husband) to excuse any breach of family mourning custom.

The third section of the manuscript continues with another article outlining the duties of the congregation during Buddhist celebrations of the new year. The text says:

Article: Within the association, on the first day of building merit of the first month, each person is taxed one peck of millet, a small cup of lamp oil, castings of stūpas, and stamped images. First, this repays the kindness and munificence bestowed by rulers. Second, it is to make merit for our parents.

一，社內正月建福一日，人各稅粟壹斛，燈油壹盞，脫塔印砂。一則報 君王恩泰，二乃以[與]²²父母作福。

These and similar regulations provide rich details about the celebration of seasonal festivals at Dunhuang. This women's lay society was particularly energetic at the beginning of the year, during the first few days of the first month. The rules direct members to provide grain, oil, and small devotional objects, all serving as material support for the group's public activities. Grain was presumably used to prepare food for banquets. The lamp oil kept lanterns burning. Such illumination celebrations were held particularly at the end of winter, including the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, as well as at the beginning of spring, around the full moon of the first month, on the fourteenth, fifteenth,

chubanshe, 1998), 240–368; Hao, *Zhonggu shiqi sheyi yanjiu*, 220–37; Koichi Shinohara, “The Moment of Death in Daoxuan's Vinaya Commentary,” in *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, ed. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2007), 105–33; Stephen F. Teiser, “*The Scripture on the Ten Kings*” and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval China (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1994), 20–30; Zhanru 湛如, *Dunhuang fojiao lüyi zhidu yanjiu* 敦煌佛教律儀制度研究, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 266–347.

22 Emending 以 同 與, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 24.

and sixteenth days. Often, such celebrations were conducted not in the homes and temples in Dunhuang but out of town, up at the Mogao Caves.²³ The other items mentioned are small clay figurines, produced in molds of stūpas or by impressing stamps onto clay to form Buddha-images (*yinsha fo* 印沙佛).²⁴ Other association documents, including the *Undated Draft Bylaws*, require tithes of oil and flour for celebrating the Ghost Festival on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and the semi-annual fertility sacrifices during spring and autumn.²⁵

Following these events and duties, the *Bylaws'* fourth section lists different forms of bad behavior and the corresponding punishments. The document stipulates:

If within the association someone takes no heed of remonstrance large or small, or breaks protocol and rolls up their sleeves in the position of honor, or does not obey the directives of superiors, then the penalty is to welcome the entire association at her door and provide a banquet of ale and rich food for their consumption. If someone wants to leave the association, each member metes out three whacks of the stick, and afterwards she's penalized by holding a banquet with ale. Absolutely no exceptions.

或有社內不諫大小，無格在席上脰[搯]舉，不聽上人言教者，便仰眾社就門罰醴{酉+貳}[膩]²⁷一筵，眾社破用。若要出社之者各人決杖參棒，後罰醴局席一筵。的無免者。

The type of offenses and the calibration of penalties are consistent with other bylaws from Dunhuang. How does the text imagine friendship? First, the

23 Ning Ke 寧可, "Randeng she" 燃燈社, in *Dunhuangxue dacidian* 敦煌學大辭典, ed. Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1997), 428a-b; Tan Chanxue 譚蟬雪, *Dunhuang suishi wenhua daolun* 敦煌歲時文化導論 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1998), 21–25; and idem, *Dunhuang minsu: Silu mingzhu chuan fengqing* 敦煌民俗：絲路明珠傳風情 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 40–60. The 936 *Draft Bylaws* (BD 14682) refer to the festival as "Lighting Lanterns up at the Caves" 上窟燃燈.

24 See Tan, *Dunhuang suishi wenhua daolun*, 26–37; and idem, *Dunhuang minsu*, 47–52.

25 *Undated Draft Bylaws*, S 6537v, 6: 凡有七月十五日造于蘭盤兼及春秋二局. . .

26 Emending 脰 to 搯, following Huang Zheng 黃徵, *Dunhuang suzidian* 敦煌俗字典 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 465, s.v. *xuan* 搯, who claims that the flesh radical (肉/月) is used by the writer to emphasize that what is exposed is the arm. Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 24, emend to 脰, presumably following *Undated Draft Bylaws*, S 6537v, 6.

27 Emending {酉+貳} to 膩, following Huang, *Dunhuang suzidian*, 289–90, s.v. *ni* 膩, who points out that the two expressions, *lini* 醴膩 and *nongni* 醴膩, are used frequently in documents from Dunhuang lay associations and are close in meaning.

relationship is defined by rules of etiquette. Breaches include rebuffing admonishment from others, acting in a brutish or proud manner, and ignoring one's lack of seniority within the association. More serious is the attempt to rend the group by trying to withdraw from it. The minimum punishment is providing members with their fill of liquor and food. The specific beverage, *li* 醴, appears to be a dark-colored brew, perhaps best translated as "ale,"²⁸ while the required food is referred to loosely as *ni* 膩, the quality Lin Yutang describes as "oily: (of food) rich and greasy."²⁹ Abandoning the congregation triggers the further pain of undergoing corporal punishment, detailed as three strokes of the stick. Given that other bylaws mandate thirty strokes for lesser infractions, it may be best to regard the specific punishments as aspirational rather than descriptive.³⁰

The fifth section of the *959 Bylaws* lists the names of all the members, notes the position any of them hold within the administration, and, for all but one of the fifteen members, includes their signatures (which I describe below in brackets). The manuscript reads:

List of Association Members, tallied as follows:

Association Officer, Nun Gongde Jin 功德進 [mark: thick, blotchy stroke tilted left, covering part of the name]

Association Chief, Hou Fuzi 侯富子 [mark: stroke tilted right]

Recording Secretary, Yin Dingmo 印定磨, Woman of the Chai 柴 family [mark: horizontal stroke, faint vertical stroke]

Elder of the Association, Nüzi 女子 [mark: horizontal stroke, vertical stroke]

Association Member, Zhang 張 family Fuzi 富子 [mark: thick strokes resembling capital letter E]

Association Member, Guozi 渦子 [no mark]

Association Member, Li Yande 李延德 [mark: circle with cross in middle]

Association Member, Wu Fuzi 吳富子 [mark: horizontal hooked stroke, vertical stroke]

Association Member, Duanzi 段子 [mark: thick circle]

28 See Paul W. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 262, s.v. *li* 醴, "sweet liquor, made with malt and glutinous millet."

29 Lin Yutang, *Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Chinese Usage|Dangdai Hanyu cidian 當代漢語辭典 (Online Version)* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1999), last accessed January 20, 2020, s.v. *ni* 膩.

30 *Undated Draft Bylaws* (S 6537v, 6) decree thirty strokes for not responding to others' reprimands and failing to observe social ranking.

Association Member, Fusheng 富勝 [mark: thick strokes resembling Arabic numeral 2]

Association Member, Yiding 意定 [mark: oval with horizontal stroke inside and open seat underneath]

Association Member, Shanfu 善富 [mark: thick vertical stroke]

Association Member, Shao Aduo 燒阿朵 [mark: horizontal top, short vertical stroke underneath, open circle beneath that]

Association Member, Fulian 富連 [mark: vertical stroke, hooked horizontal stroke]

Association Member, Zhulian 住連 [mark: thick vertical stroke]

社人名目詣實如後：社官尼功德進X，社長侯富子X，錄事印定磨紫家娘X，社老女子X，社人張家富子X，社人渦子，社人李延德X，社人吳富子X，社人段子X，社人富勝X，社人意定X，社人善富X，社人燒阿朵X，社人富連X，社人住連X。

The ordering of the membership list is significant in that it betrays three different hierarchies. It elevates monastics (nuns who have left the family) over lay Buddhists, placing the nun whose Dharma name is Gongde Jin (literally: Advancing Merit) first and affording her the generic title of Association Officer. Another social division separates officers from members, with officers listed first. A third distinction involves age, since a non-office holding woman named Nüzi (literally: girl), presumably the oldest member of the group, is placed at the head of the other non-office-holding laywomen.

This section of the *959 Bylaws* also offers interesting information about naming practices for women in medieval China. Some women are listed according to surname (Hou, Yin, Li, Wu, Shao), some not. Some women are listed according to their family's (that is, in a patrilineal society, their husband's) surname (Chai, Zhang). Others are merely listed by personal name.

As noted in the introduction, I consider the ink markings done by hand (probably with a fingernail) placed after the names to constitute signatures, in *Webster's* sense of "the name of a person written with [her] own hand to signify that the writing which precedes accords with her wishes or intentions."³¹ Placing the signs after their names demonstrates their assent to the articles and their membership in the group. This fully-executed version of association bylaws thus differs from manuscript charters lacking signatures, including

³¹ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, ed. Philip Babcock Gove, et al. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Inc., 2002), 2116, s.v. signature, def. 2a, modified for gender.

draft versions skipping this section entirely, as well as from formal manuscript copies containing a list of names but no signatures (the 968 *Bylaws*).

In addition to highlighting the women's physical involvement with the group's founding document and their commitment to the association, the markings are also a medium for the women to represent themselves as individuals within the collectivity. Close attention to the signatures shows that they are clearly different from each other (see 959 *Bylaws*, S 527; Figure 13.1). (My rough description of the visual features of the signatures is contained in my translation of the document above.) Judging from the women's written traces, it seems that none of them received an education in writing. Lionel Giles, who played up the charm of this document in his general lecture on Dunhuang materials delivered at the China Society (London) in 1941, could only interpret this as a deficiency: "These are executed in so clumsy a fashion as to leave little doubt that none of them could write."³² To lapse into the vernacular, I can imagine the women responding: "It may be a blob, but it's my blob." That is, with a more instrumental notion of literacy, we can understand that the women in the group took pains to personalize their signatures. They asserted some measure of authority and expressed their individuality through the medium of a fingernail dipped in ink.

Finally, the complex nature of the signing practices in the 959 *Bylaws* is made clearer still by comparison to other association documents bearing signatures. The signatures beside members' names in the 894 *Bylaws*, another working document, demonstrate a greater range of literacies among members. The 894 group consisted of men, some of whom stood higher on the scale of functional literacy. About half the signatories wrote their names, in styles ranging from relatively clear and accurate (the Yanzong 彦宗 of the Recording Secretary, Fan Yanzong 范彦宗) to relatively confused or erroneous (the Shide 仕德 of Gao Shide 高仕德, the Zhang 張 of Zhang Shanyuan 張善緣) (894 *Bylaws*, P 3989; see Figure 13.3). That is, these men consciously represented their names by drawing on their knowledge of the Chinese writing system. The other members merely made a mark, such as Chen Jiangqing 陳江慶, who used a symbol resembling the Arabic numeral 7, and Hun Yingzi 渾盈子, whose mark was in the shape of a cross. These latter signatures are relatively different from each other, but all similar in that they are individualized marks rather than the standard character for their name.

32 Lionel Giles, *Six Centuries at Dunhuang: A Short Account of the Stein Collection of Chinese Mss. in the British Museum* (London: The China Society, 1944), 38.

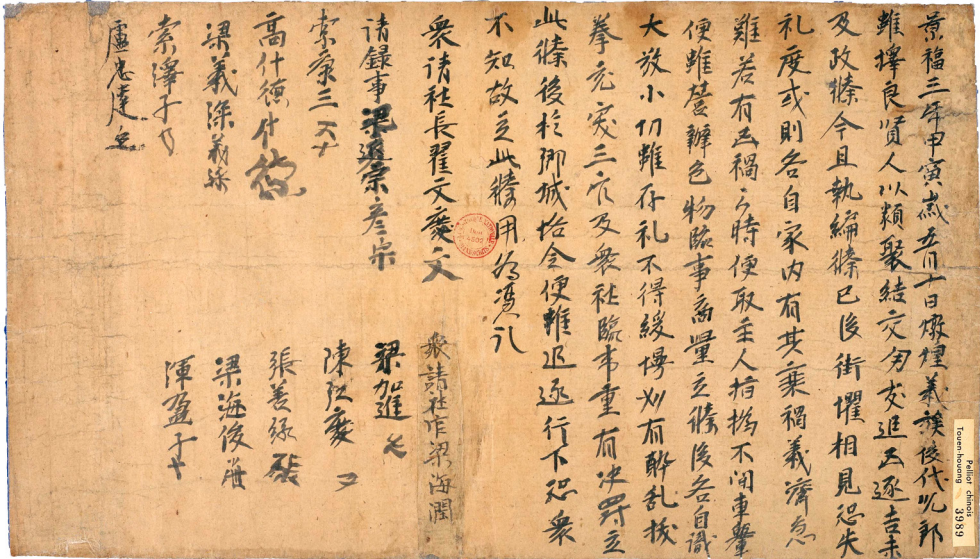


FIGURE 13.3 894 Bylaws, P 3989, La Bibliothèque nationale de France

The manuscript concludes with a sixth section stressing the finality of the rules, considered not only as normative content but also as a material, written document. The text states:

All the preceding items of bylaws have been laid out, one by one with care and precision. They are like water and fish [flowing by]: no one could have cause to dispute them, nor can anyone renounce their vows. Mountains and streams are our witness, and sun and moon certify their guarantee. To guard against dishonesty, we transcribe these bylaws to serve later as a record.

右通前件條流，一一丁寧。如水如魚，不得道說事[是]³³非，更不捨³⁴願者。山河爲誓，日月證知。恐人無信，故勒此條，用後記耳。

Like some modern constitutions, the 957 *Bylaws* include a section concerning revision. In this case, however, amendments are prohibited: once laid down,

33 Emending 事 to 是, following Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 25.

34 Reading 捨 in original, close to attested variant in P 2305 cited in Huang, *Dunhuang suzidian*, 356, s.v. 捨; Yamamoto, et al., *Tun-huang and Turfan Documents*, vol. 4, part A, p. 10, and Ning and Hao, *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao*, 25, read 於, the latter emending to 如; Chikusa, “Tonkō shutsudo sha monjo no kenkyū,” 504, reads 改.

the principles can neither be revised nor revoked. The corresponding section in the *936 Draft Bylaws* phrases the sentiment in a simple rhyming couplet: “The sun may set and the moon may rise, / but these words we’ll never revise.”³⁵ The bylaws further invoke the forces of nature to authenticate the verbal commitment and to guarantee punishment.³⁶ The text ends by reinforcing that the act of writing down the regulations—putting them into material form—is essential to the governance of the group. The *Undated Draft Bylaws* make the analogy to political procedure even more explicit: “Our association has strict regulations; officials have governmental statutes.”³⁷

Conclusion

The themes of friendship, family, and government, as well as the bonds of sentiment and morality appear throughout these documents from medieval Dunhuang. How unique are these concerns, and to what might they be compared? Some continuities are clear. I hope to have shown, in the first place, that the bifurcating language of modern analysis cannot be indiscriminately applied to the materials. That is, the medieval sources do not distinguish between the values of Confucianism, Buddhism, and folk religion, nor do they separate the secular and the sacred. As Jacques Gernet has argued, “Every association had a dual objective: to ensure, on the one hand, the performance of religious acts that were expected to benefit the association as a whole, or even a village community, and, on the other, to maintain the continuity of family cults.”³⁸ Beyond this caution, the historical situation is hard to assess because of the nature of the evidence. Looking to the period’s social and political situation, judgments based on diachronic variation are difficult because the uneven distribution and chance survival of documents from Dunhuang and Turfan do not permit fine-grained differentiation.³⁹ Unlike our knowledge of ancient and medieval European discourse on relations between equals, the affective depths of medieval

35 *936 Draft Bylaws*, BD 14682: 日往月來 / 此言不改。

36 The *Undated Draft Bylaws* go even further, promising that anyone who does not preserve their commitment will be punished by “passing through three lifetimes without glimpsing the face of the Buddha” (6357v, 6): 三世莫見佛面。

37 The *Undated Draft Bylaws*, S 6357v, 6: 社有嚴條，官有政格。

38 Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), 269.

39 See Anna M. Shields, *One Who Knows Me: Friendship and Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2015), 48–60, who notes (p. 50), “friendship in China remained under-theorized as a social relation and little discussed throughout the medieval era.”

Chinese associations remain largely unfathomable.⁴⁰ In the end, it may be impossible to ferret out distinct valences related to gender, although these were surely important forces at the time. As Deng Xiaonan concluded about one of the medieval bylaws for Buddhist women's associations from Turfan:

Such religious and mutual-aid organizations among the people undoubtedly provided a legitimate opportunity for “grandmas” [*apo* 阿婆] and “moms” [*zhumu* 諸母] [Tang-dynasty terms used in Turfan documents for adult women's groups] to leave the confines of home and join in organized activities. The motives for such congregations are undoubtedly multiple: religious belief certainly played a role, as did female solidarity and shared class interests.⁴¹

Other facets of amity and obligation remain beyond our grasp. Despite the limitations of the evidence and the fallibility of our knowledge, the documents of women's lay associations from Dunhuang, much like Albert Hoffstädt's enlivening and unwavering support for his colleagues, inspire us to think about the joys and duties of friendship.

40 Cf. David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

41 Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, “Liu zhi ba shiji de Tulufan funü: tebie shi tamen zai jiating yiwai de huodong” 六至八世紀的吐魯番婦女：特別是她們在家庭以外的活動, *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 4 (1999): 232.

Women in the Religious and Publishing Worlds of Buddhist Master Miaokong (1826–1880)

Beata Grant

Introduction

Apart from images of (mostly elderly) women flocking to temples to light incense and mumble prayers, or loveless (and often lovely) young women consigned to the loneliness of the convent, the lives of religious women in pre-modern China remain largely clothed in scholarly obscurity.¹ A big part of the problem is the nature of the primary sources dealing with religious women, which are either non-existent or so fragmentary and formulaically composed that they provide only glimpses into what the actual lives and experiences of these women may have been like. I believe, however, that such glimpses should not be dismissed out of hand, given that, when considered in context, they suggest a much greater engagement with larger religious trends than is often acknowledged. As an example of this, in this short essay I offer a preliminary exploration of the role of women in the energetic Buddhist revival that followed on the heels of the social turmoil and destructive violence of the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864).²

Recent years have seen many excellent studies of what Raoul Birnbaum calls “one of the most remarkable periods of Chinese Buddhist history,” during which a cohort of exceptionally dedicated figures devoted their lives to rebuilding monasteries and temples, as well as recovering and reprinting Buddhist texts that had been lost in the madness and mayhem of the rebellion.³ Not surprisingly, these studies focus primarily on well-known monks and laymen, such as Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), who in 1868 established the

1 This modest essay is dedicated to Albert Hoffstädt, who over the years has been unstinting and ever-generous in his friendship and support of my scholarly (and poetic) endeavors.

2 “The destruction wrought by the rebellion is almost unfathomable. Population estimates for the Lower Yangzi macroregion alone suggest that the population in 1843 had reached sixty-seven million, but that fifty years later in 1893 it had fallen to forty-five million.” R. Keith Schoppa, *The Columbia Guide to Modern Chinese History* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 26.

3 Birnbaum, “Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn,” *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 431.

influential Jinling Scriptural Press (Jinling kejing chu 金陵刻經處) in Nanjing, and is often referred to as the “father” of this Buddhist revival.⁴ Less well-known but equally dedicated to publishing was Yang Wenhui’s slightly older contemporary, the monk Miaokong 妙空 (1826–1880), also known as the Scripture-Printing Monk (Kejing seng 刻經僧). The five women highlighted in this essay were all lay followers and patrons of Miaokong. Their stories are found in a collection of informal anecdotes and accounts entitled *Records of Things Heard and Seen Regarding the Cultivation of Rebirth in the Western Pure Land* (*Xiuxi wenjian lu* 修西聞見錄), hereafter *Records*.⁵ This collection, which was started in 1864 and first printed in 1877, was compiled by Miaokong’s father, Zheng Yingfang 鄭應房, who became a lay Buddhist later in life and adopted the religious name of Zhiguan 咫觀. Most of the accounts in this collection were written or recorded by Buddhist laymen in Miaokong’s circle. Zheng Yingfang, however, was responsible for dividing them into seven general categories: monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, virgins, miscellaneous anecdotes, and marvelous events. Three of the seven, in other words, are devoted to accounts of pious women, including the five women introduced in this essay, who were associated, directly or indirectly with Miaokong. Their stories, while inevitably constrained by the nature of the sources, suggest the ways in which laywomen both quietly sustained and actively contributed to the work of revival, both as models of lay practice and as patrons and donors.

Miaokong: A Brief Biography

Miaokong, whose secular name was Zheng Xuechuan 鄭學川, was born in Jiangdu 江都, Jiangsu province, to an upstanding scholarly family.⁶ His mother,

4 Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), 3. For more on Yang Wenhui, see Gabriele Goldfuss, “Binding Sutras to Modernity: The Life and Times of Chinese Layman Yang Wenhui 1837–1911,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 9 (1996): 54–74. See also Gregory Adam Scott, “Conversion by the Book: Buddhist Print Culture in Early Republican China” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 2013).

5 CBETA X78, no. 1552.

6 Most available scholarship on Miaokong is found in Chinese sources. See, for example, Xiong Runsheng 熊潤生, comp., *Kejing seng Miaokong dashi zhuan* 刻經僧妙空大師傳 (1910), reprinted in *Guojia tushuguan fenguan* 國家圖書館分館, *Zhonghua Fojiao renwu zhuanji wenxian quanshu* 中華佛教人物傳記文獻全書 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2008), 48:24308–24315. An online article I have also found useful is Wu Yuankai 武元康 “Manmu qingshan: Miaokong fashi he Jiangbei kejing chu” 滿目青山 9 妙空法師和江北刻經處 *The Culture of Buddhism* 1 (1999). <<http://www.buddhism.com.cn/fjwh/199901/mmqs19990102.htm>>, last accessed December 10, 2019.

Madame Tang 唐, was a devout Buddhist who appears to have exerted a considerable religious influence on her son. According to an anecdotal account in the *Records*, the young boy once asked her whether it was really true that not only must everyone die but that even Heaven and Earth would one day be destroyed. When she replied in the affirmative, he declared that he would devote his life to finding both a body and a place that would not perish.⁷ The same account also relates a more humorous side of the young Miaokong: once when he had done something wrong and his mother punished him, he asked her: “Are not you and I of the same essence? Why then are you punishing yourself?”⁸ She smiled and refrained from imposing any further punishment.

Miaokong’s father, Zheng Yingfang, who as mentioned earlier, did not embrace Buddhism until later in life and largely due to his son’s persuasive influence, was known for his scholarship as well as for his excellent cursive calligraphy and regulated verse.⁹ Toward the end of his life, he took up residence in an old Daoist hermitage in Yangzhou that his son had converted into a Buddhist retreat center called Jiyuan 雞園,¹⁰ which served as a place for devotees to gather for various rituals and Pure Land recitations, as well as a base for Miaokong when he was in the area. Zhang Yingfang would become one of his son’s most active supporters. He would also make use of his scholarly acumen not only to compile the *Records*, but also two major ritual treatises and manuals on the Water and Land Great Feast (*shuilu dazhai* 水陸大齋).¹¹

As a young man, Miaokong appeared to be destined for a distinguished official career, having passed the first-level (*xiucaì*) civil-service degree with flying colors. However, after the sudden death of his mother—he was hiding from the Taiping rebels at the time and supposedly learned about her death from a dream in which she appeared to him—he began to delve more deeply into Buddhist texts such as the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* (*Dizangjing* 地藏經). Then, as his personal grief became somewhat assuaged, he began to make friends with monastics and to devote himself almost entirely to the study of Buddhist

7 Zhu Zhuxian 朱竹咸, “Tang Ruren muzi yuanshu” 唐孺人母子緣述, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 406a3–7.

8 Ibid., p. 406a5–6.

9 See Hu Jingzhi 胡鏡之 “Zheng laoren biezhuàn” 鄭老人別傳, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 401b4–9.

10 Jiyuan or Cock’s Park (Skt. Kukkuṭārāma) was also the name of a major Indian Buddhist monastery built by King Aśoka.

11 Although he (I believe mistakenly) attributes them to Miaokong rather than Miaokong’s father, both of these texts are listed and described (as massive and monumental) in Henrik H. Sorenson, “Textual Material Relating to Esoteric Buddhism outside the Taishō, Vols. 18–2,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 51.

scriptures. He also wrote prolifically on Buddhist topics, even before, in 1866 when he was forty-one years old, he actually took the tonsure. In 1859, a major collection of these works entitled the *Pavilion Collection* (*Louge congshu* 樓閣叢書) was prepared for printing by the Zongjing tang 宗鏡堂 in Hangzhou. It would be reprinted again in 1914, this time including texts written after he became a monk, as well as texts by some of his close associates, including his father. Many of these texts, especially those of a more didactic nature, appear to have acquired a fairly wide readership, among both men and women, in south-eastern China.

At the time he decided to become ordained, Miaokong was engaged to a certain Ms. Hu 胡 (? -1895), his first wife having perished in the chaos of the Taiping rebellion. Ms. Hu, who took the religious name Shenkong 身空, never married, but instead took up residence in a small hermitage called the Haitian jingshe 海天精舍 in Jiangdu built by Miaokong for his stepmother, Mme. Wang 王. Like the Jiyuan, the Haitian jingshe would also become a refuge, in this case for Buddhist laywomen and nuns.

Even before taking ordination, Miaokong had dedicated himself to searching out and reprinting lost Buddhist texts. Once ordained, he established the Jiangbei Scripture-Printing Press in his hometown of Yangzhou, and then later other presses in cities such as Suzhou, 蘇州, Changshu 常熟, and Rugao 如皋. Through his writings, teachings, and publishing activities, Miaokong attracted a devoted following of supporters and sponsors among Buddhist laymen, many of purely regional reputation, and some more widely-known, such as the famous anti-Taiping general Wu Kunxiu 吳坤修 (1816–1872) who became a Buddhist devotee and dharma patron in his later years.¹² However, as we shall soon see, there were also a number of laywomen who contributed significantly to Miaokong's efforts, although they have rarely received the attention that they deserve.

Before turning to these women, a few words regarding Miaokong's primary religious orientation might be useful. Like Yang Wenhui and many other Buddhists of his time, Miaokong's writings largely reflect a synthesis of Huayan thought and Pure Land practice. As Yang Wenhui put it, "In terms of teaching, I honor Xianshou (i.e., Fazang [643–712], the third patriarch and primary systematizer of the Huayan school); for practice I rely on Amitābha" (教宗賢首，行在彌陀).¹³ Mention of the Amitābha Buddha and his Pure Land, and in

12 See Xu Zhi 余治 "Shu Wu ke Huayan helun hou" 書吳刻花嚴合論後, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 400a7–11.

13 Liu Guijie (Liu Kuei-chieh) 劉貴傑, "Qingchu Huayan nianfo sixiang shixi: yi Shufa yu Peng Shaosheng wei lie" 清初華嚴念佛思想試析：以續法與彭紹升為例 (On the Synthesis of Huayan Thought and Pure Land Practice by Early Qing Dynasty Buddhist

particular, the practice and realization of *nianfo samādhi* 念佛三昧 can be found in all of the three versions of the *Huayan Sūtra*: for example, in the famous “Entering the Dharmadhātu” chapter (入法界品) which relates the journey of the youth Sudhana (Shancai 善才) to fifty-three different teachers, we find several of these teachers offering the practice of *nianfo* as a useful method of achieving enlightenment. The Huayan monk Xufa 續法 (1641–1728) and later the famous Buddhist layman Peng Shaosheng 彭紹升 (religious name Jiqing 際清, 1740–1790) further argued that the practice of *nianfo* encompassed all of the other methods, and that all Buddhist teachings and practices eventually converged in the Pure Land. In advocating the practice of *nianfo*, however, both Xufa and Peng placed considerable emphasis on its “mind-only” aspect—that is, while they did not discount the notion of rebirth in the Pure Land after death, they believed that the Pure Land also existed within the mind and could be accessed in the here and now, for ultimately, to invoke the Amitābha Buddha was essentially to invoke the truth of own’s own innately pure Buddhature. Thus, we find Miaokong extensively commenting and teaching on the *Huayan* as well as the *Amitābha Sūtra*. Interested in reaching as wide an audience as possible, works such as his *Forty-Eight Essential Points Regarding Buddha-Recitation* (*Nianfo sishi ba fa jieyao* 念佛四十八法節要) laid out, with simplicity and concision, the method and benefits of *nianfo* practice. The following lines from this text, for example, explain the benefits of *nianfo* practice during periods of violence and social disruption such as the one caused by the Taiping.

I urge those plagued by anxieties to first settle their bodies and then straighten out their minds through the practice of *nianfo*. A religious offering may provide relief from momentary suffering, but to relieve the suffering of the successive kalpas, the practice of *nianfo* is essential. Whenever one sees man or beast in difficulty, but cannot save them by one’s own strength, then one should hasten to practice *nianfo* on their behalf in order to bring peace to their souls. Or in the hours before dawn if one resolutely recites the name of the Buddha on behalf of the ghosts and spirits [of those who have died] in the widespread warfare and great suffering, one will be able melt away their resentments.

凡見苦惱者，先安其身，然後開導其心，勸之念佛，所謂救一時之苦，布施爲急，救歷劫之苦，念佛爲要。或見人物有難，力不能救，

Scholars: With Xufa and Peng Shaosheng as Examples), *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 20 (2007): 242.

當急爲彼念佛，安其魂識。或清夜朗誦，以施鬼神。凡大兵大疫之年，五更持誦佛名，能消冤厲。¹⁴

The ritual manuals for the Water and Land Great Feasts compiled by Miaokong's father also reflect this profound concern with placating the souls of the countless men and women who suffered violent deaths during the Taiping uprising.

Miaokong's Female Dharma Patrons and Followers

Lady Xu

According to Tang Chiping 唐持平, it was thanks to Miaokong's close friend and Dharma patron, the Buddhist layman Xu Lingxu 許靈虛, that the text mentioned above, *Forty-Eight Essential Points Regarding Buddha*, gained a wide circulation and contributed significantly to the revival of Pure Land practice in China's coastal area.¹⁵ However, Tang adds, the major force behind this surge of domestic devotion was actually Xu Lingxu's mother. Born into one wealthy and high-ranking family of scholar-officials and married into another,¹⁶ Lady Xu (徐太夫人) is described as being an ideal Confucian wife whose kindness extended not only to servants but also to the ill and the needy; Tang notes her readiness to come to the aid of anyone regardless of wealth or status. Tang Chiping also makes note of Lady Xu's great piety and remarks on the ripple effect her practice had on the other women in her extended family:

Her granddaughter Wuyuan was the first of these; she was followed by other young women, such as Yutong, Huaixi, Huanzhen, Yuanzhue, Yuxu, Yazou, Zhengjue (Xu Lingxu's concubine), and Wuzhen, each of them different in their accomplishments but all of them of shining spirit.

孫女悟源其一也。若與同。若還西。若環真。若緣覺。若玉虛。若雅奏。若正覺。若悟真。雖其中所造各殊。而精神炯炯。¹⁷

14 <<http://www.ucchusma.idv.tw/buddha/buddha10.htm#a16>>. Accessed December 15, 2019.

15 Tang Chiping, "Xumu Xutaiuren biezhuàn" 許母徐太夫人別傳, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 406c19-407a1.

16 Her father Xu Gongbao 徐宮保, held the position of tutor to the Crown Prince (taizi shaobao 太子少保); her husband Xu Yunian 許玉年 was also an official, but was especially known as a painter and philanthropist.

17 Tang Chiping, "Xu mu Xu taifuren bieshi," CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 407a1-4.

The description of a wealthy elite laywoman's exemplary charity and devotion to *nianfo* practice is not unusual. In another *Records* account, this one by Xu Guozhen 徐國楨 (1870–1938), it was after reading Miaokong's *Forty-Eight Essential Points Regarding Buddha* that she took the religious name of Yinshen 印深 and began to devote herself primarily to the practice of *nianfo*. He also notes that her influence extended beyond her family members. In fact, he claims that it was largely due to her example of dedicated practice during a time of crisis and turmoil that “the Pure Land dharma-gate was able to once again flourish in the Three Rivers and Huai-Hai regions” 故淨土法門，復能盛行於三江淮海間.¹⁸

Madame Chen

It was also after reading some of Miaokong's writings that Madame Chen 陳氏 from Rugao 如皋 became one of Miaokong's first disciples as well as one of his first patrons. Said to have been precociously intelligent as a girl, she married Lu Changling 盧長齡, with whom she had a companionate marriage and to whom she bore two sons. A highly educated woman, Madame Chen read widely in different literary genres, both poetry and prose, secular and religious. It appears to have been admiration for Miaokong's writing that led Madame Chen to seek spiritual guidance from Miaokong; she took formal refuge with him, and was given the religious name Benyi 本一. She was joined in her devotions by her husband, who was given the name Benyin 本音. Later, Madame Chen and her husband assisted Miaokong in setting up a branch of the original Ji-angbei scriptural press in Rugao, about eighty-four miles away. For nearly a decade, she served as one of Miaokong's most active and generous lay supporters:

For ten years, she supported the printing of the scriptures as well as a wide range of meritorious rituals of releasing life and [the Grand Rites of] Water and Land. She also contributed 20,000 cash to the printing of a revised version of the *Xiuxi wenjian lu*. During the period of her illness, she would often say, “If I have [achieved any] spiritual realization, then may I never be separated from the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*.”

護刻經及水陸放生諸善事以十年。助刻續補修西聞見錄者錢二萬中云。我若有靈。終不離大般若經也。¹⁹

Madame Chen and her husband were generous supporters of Miaokong's final and most ambitious project: a reprinting of the massive 600-fascicle *Larger*

18 Xu Guozhen, “Xu taifuren zhuan” 徐太夫人傳, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 406b21–22.

19 Mao Tongqing 冒同慶, “Shu Benyi shi” 書本一事, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 410b21–23.

Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* 大般若波羅蜜經).²⁰ Madame Chen, who had long suffered from ill health, passed away prematurely in her early forties. Before her death she wrote a letter to be delivered to Miaokong, in which she wrote:

Although I have long enjoyed [your] enlightening influence, I have yet to penetrate directly into the First Principle; I am ashamed [that by not doing so I have failed to show my gratitude] for the Master's great compassion. Nevertheless, I have yearned for the Great Vehicle, supported Buddhist activities, and tirelessly guided the younger generation [to the Pure Land practice]. Today, although I know that death awaits me, yet I am confident that my spirit will go to Jiyuan, where it will assist in the great work of printing and see the completion of the printing of the entire Buddhist canon.

受玉尺教澤甚久。於第一義未能直入。有愧師恩。然嚮往大乘。護持佛事。接引後進。始終如一。今雖知死。然魂魄必赴雞園。佐佑刊刻機緣。俟書全藏之成也。²¹

Madame Chen, however, was not Miaokong's first female supporter. That distinction goes to a woman by the name of Madame Jueluo 覺羅 (Gioro) who, with her husband, official, painter, and calligrapher Rushan Kuangjiu 如山冠九 (*jinsi* 1838) became Miaokong's follower not long after his ordination in 1866.²² Madame Jueluo belonged to the Manchu ruling clan, and originally hailed from Changbai 長白 (today located on the border of Korea and China and now a Korean Autonomous County located in southern Jilin province). As in the case of Madame Chen, Madame Jueluo (whose religious name was Shanyi 善一) and her husband, who belonged to a Manchu bannerman clan, were both devout Buddhists. Once when the latter was in Hubei on business, he happened to get hold of Miaokong's *Commentary on the Amitābha Sūtra* (*Amituo jing zhujie* 阿彌陀經注解). He was so taken with this text that he had it printed, after which he donated the printing blocks to the Guiyuan Monastery 歸元寺, a Caodong Chan monastery in Wuhan known for its collection of Buddhist texts and artifacts. He also brought a copy home, and it was through this text that Shanyi appears to have first become acquainted with Miaokong's writings. Shanyi's husband later met Miaokong while on an official business

20 Miaokong himself died three years before the entire work was printed in 1883.

21 "Shu Benyi shi," CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 410b3-6.

22 Zhao Dali 趙大禮, "Shu Shanyi shi" 書善一事, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 407b2-7.

trip, and the monk subsequently made several visits to Shanyi and her husband at their home in Yangzhou. Each time he visited, Shanyi would ask him to give a dharma talk, and between visits he appears to have written her letters (unfortunately lost) with her questions. She would share Miaokong's replies to her letters not only with her husband, but also with other female friends and relatives, including her unmarried younger sister Jueluo Shengquan 覺羅聖全 who was still living in Changbai and who herself took up *nianfo* practice and considered Miaokong as her teacher, although she never met him in person.²³

According to Jiang Yuanliang's account, in 1868, only two years after his ordination, Miaokong visited the couple in Quxian 衢縣, Zhejiang province, where Rushan Kuangjiu was serving as Salt Distribution Commissioner (*du-zhuan* 都轉). His visit coincided with the anniversary of the premature death of Madame Jueluo's younger sister back in Changbai, and she asked him to conduct a special ritual for her. She also asked him to give a dharma talk on the "Ten Mysterious Gates" (十玄門 *shi xuanmen*) of the *Huayan Sūtra*. The talk was attended by many residents of Quxian, monastic and lay alike, and we are told that they all left both impressed and inspired by this monk who, while not young, had been ordained only very recently. Not long after this, Madame Jueluo also made a generous donation to help Miaokong in his printing ventures; in fact, she can be regarded as the first of his lay donors. Her reputation for dedicated devotion spread widely and served as motivation to many other women (and probably men as well) who were inspired by her example to take up the practice of *nianfo*.

Ms. Peng Dingshen and Ms. Zhang Yunying

The piety of these educated women represented a continuation of the religious lives of women a few decades earlier, such as those of the family of the eighteenth-century layman Peng Shaosheng. The most well-known of these women was Peng's daughter-in-law Tao Shan 陶善 (*zi* Qionglou 瓊樓), who was known for her deep devotion and who died in her early twenties shortly after having given birth to her first child. Highly educated, Tao Shan left a collection of poetry, much of it religious in nature, that was highly regarded by many and eventually included in later editions of the supplemental Buddhist canon.²⁴ Sun Lingbo 孫靈波, the author of a short account included in the *Records*, notes that the female members of Peng Shaosheng's family, including not only

23 Jiang Yuanliang 蔣元亮, "Ji Shengquan shiji" 記聖全事蹟, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 414c4-10.

24 See Beata Grant, "Who is this I? Who is that Other? The Poetry of an Eighteenth-Century Buddhist Laywoman," *Late Imperial China* 15.11(1994): 1-40.

Tao Shan but also his wife and two daughters, together constituted “a lineage of fragrant radiance” (*yimai zhi xiangguang* 一脈之香光).²⁵ Sun goes on to remark that although the years of turmoil and warfare resulted in so many books and collections being scattered and lost, it was largely the succeeding generations of women of the family, including his great-granddaughter Peng Dingsheng 彭定生, who had managed to keep Peng Shaosheng’s spirit alive. Miaokong, in his search for books to reprint, visited the family and was both moved and impressed by the women’s dedication to the preservation and circulation of Peng Shaosheng’s work, as well as the practice of the Pure Land devotion he so strongly advocated.²⁶

The Zhang 張 family of Changshu 常熟 were also credited with having maintained the “spirit of the Pengs of Changzhou” (有長洲彭氏風), and again it appears to be the women of this family who were the ones primarily responsible for doing so.²⁷ Of particular note was one of this family’s daughters, Zhang Yunying 張曇影, who appears to have first met the elderly Miaokong when she was only thirteen *sui*, at which time she immediately asked him if she could take refuge with him. Miaokong, impressed with both her intelligence and her devotion, agreed and gave her the religious name Baofang 寶芳, urging her to study the Buddhist scriptures. At the age of sixteen *sui*, Wu tells us, Yunying gave up eating meat, and recited the name of the Buddha 10,000 times daily. However, she suffered from ill health (which may have been one of the precipitating reasons for her early piety), and just a few years later found herself at death’s door. She passed away in the winter of 1883, three years after Miaokong himself, with the name of Amitābha on her lips. Wu’s account does not, however, stop here. It goes on to describe the manner in which Yunying, following Miaokong’s instructions, applied herself to the study of the Buddhist scriptures:

The Woman of the Way [Yunying] was by nature quiet and gentle and spoke only rarely. Unless she was doing embroidery or her meditations, she was never without a book in her hand. Together with her two elder brothers she would discuss all of the esoteric scriptures, often deep into the night. She would study such scriptures as the *Huayan Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*, and was able to comprehend their meaning. She also carefully studied the *Ten Essentials of the*

25 Sun Lingbo, “Peng Dingsheng liming shuo” 彭定生立名說, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 407b18.

26 Ibid., p. 407b20–c2.

27 Wu Baocong 吳寶叢, “Yunying daoren zhuan” 曇影道人傳, CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 417c21–24.

Pure Land;²⁸ moreover, she had an understanding of the teachings of the Tiantai and Xianshou [Huayan] schools of Buddhist teaching.

道人性溫靜。寡語言。不事女工。禪課之餘。手不釋卷。從兩兄討論內典。輒至夜分。讀華嚴法華圓覺諸經能解其義。又精研淨土十要。於台賢圓旨頗有會心。²⁹

Finally, we are told—in typical rebirth account fashion—that toward the end, she was rewarded with a dream vision of the Bodhisattva Guanyin and was able to assure her family that she would be reborn in the Pure Land. However, we are also told that before her death, she left instructions that all of her money was to be used, presumably by Miaokong's press, to print five fascicles of *The Great Commentary to the Huayan Sūtra* (*Huayan dachao* 華嚴大鈔) for the edification of others.³⁰

What we see here, then, is yet another example of a woman who combined Pure Land piety and a deep intellectual engagement with Buddhist texts. Interestingly, a one-fascicle collection of Yunying's own religious verse was later appended to the edition of the Huayan commentary that was printed owing to her donation. Although I have been unable to locate this collection, if indeed it is still extant, fortunately Wu thought to append to his account a series of her four verses under the title of “Cherishing the Pure Land (*Huai Jingtu* 懷淨土).³¹ The first of these verses reads as follows:

Carefully contemplating the Pure Land, a realm that is transparently clear;
Where the Buddha sun is eternally alight, a city that knows no darkness.
The birds' chatter, the flowers' fragrance: together they preach the Dharma;
Having cleansed our minds, we quietly listen and awaken to the Deathless.

諦觀安養境澄清，佛日常開不夜城。鳥語花香齊說法，洗心寂聽悟無生。³²

28 By Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), an eminent late-Ming monk who, although trained in Chan, was also a strong advocate of Pure Land practice. His *Ten Essentials of the Pure Land* (*Jingtu shiyao* 淨土十要) was a standard text of Pure Land practitioners.

29 CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 418a4–7.

30 I am not sure which of the several major commentaries on this sūtra is referred to here.

31 This was a popular type of religious verse—many late imperial monks and laymen also wrote series of poems under the same title, sometimes comprising as many as a hundred verses.

32 CBETA X78, no. 1552, p. 418a16–17.

Concluding Remarks

The cases discussed briefly in this essay represent only a handful of the many (mostly) laywomen described in the accounts written by Miaokong's friends and associates and compiled by Miaokong's father. What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that while in many cases it was their pious devotional practice that garnered the highest praise, in many others acknowledgment was made of their dedicated study and mastery of Buddhist texts and, of course, their generous financial support of the work of recovering and reprinting texts that had been lost in the turmoil of the Taiping Rebellion. While the contributions of these women may not appear to compare with the achievements of the more well-known and charismatic male leaders of the Buddhist revival, including Miaokong himself, I would suggest that there may have been many more that have gone unrecorded or have been lost. In any case, the scattered cases that we do have can still, like pointillistic brushstrokes on a canvas when regarded as a whole, offer us a far more nuanced landscape of Chinese religious history during this tumultuous time.

Chinese Dualism Revisited

John Lagerwey

In an earlier essay on Chinese dualism,¹ I suggested that: 1) dualism is a universal phenomenon; 2) Platonic dualism, inherited by Latin Christian theology via Augustine, is a particularly radical form thereof; 3) Chinese dualism is more readily approached by means of Hebraic as opposed to Greek dualism; but 4) similarities notwithstanding, the contrast between God-the-Father and Dao-the-Mother embodies and entails fundamental differences between Hebraic and Chinese dualisms. I also sought to explain certain differences in Derridean manner, by referring to alphabetic as opposed to iconographic forms of writing and the related contrast between an auditive and a visual epistemology. Finally, in a third section entitled “Chinese dualism in history”, I took up briefly what will be the heart of the present essay—an undertaking made possible by the Brill publication of eight massive volumes on Chinese religious history. Without the unstinting support of Albert Hoffstädt these volumes would never have seen the light of day.

1 Pre-Buddhist China²

We could also refer to the first, royal phase of Chinese history as pre-Dao China, for the introduction of the concept Dao in the fourth century BCE constitutes a major turning point in Chinese intellectual and religious history. Before the Dao, Heaven was the supreme source of authority, as may be seen in two parallel concepts, the Mandate of Heaven 天命 and the Son of Heaven 天子, that appear in the early Western Zhou. The first reference to the former occurs in a bronze inscription dated ca. 998:

1 “Dieu-Père/Dao-Mère: Dualismes occidentaux et chinois,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*, special issue «The Father in Question» (2012): 137–57.

2 There is now an excellent introduction to this subject in Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018). Using both close reading of selected early texts and “distant”, digital reading statistics for a much wider range of texts, Slingerland definitively lays to rest the myth of Chinese monism, at least as regards the human person.

Brilliant King Wen received the great Mandate from Tian. When King Wu succeeded King Wen, he created a state, opening hidden lands, possessing all the four quarters, and setting right their peoples. In ceremonial affairs involving wine, oh! he permitted no excess; at sacrificial rites, he permitted no drunkenness. Hence Heaven in its greatness watched closely over its sons and protected the former Kings in their possession of the four quarters. I have heard that the Yin (Shang) lost the Mandate because the greater and lesser lords and the many officials assisting the Yin sank into drunkenness and so were bereft of their capital.³

Thus even if, in Martin Kern's words, "the memory of the founding rulers, the claim that they had received their right to rule directly from Heaven, and the very notion of the ruler being the 'Son of Heaven' take on particular urgency only toward the end of the Western Zhou,"⁴ Robert Eno is clearly right in commenting as follows on the above citation:

Tian has taken on the role of ethical guardian, rewarding and punishing rulers according to the quality of their stewardship of the state. The relationship of the ruler to the High Power has now added to worship the fulfillment of an imperative to govern according to moral standards.⁵

Although the later complementary pair of Heaven/Earth is not yet visible in the transcendence of Heaven, it is clear that to refer to the sovereign as "Son of Heaven" refers to the fact that his exercise of authority in human society here on earth derives from a "divine" heavenly sanction.

As Jean Levi has shown,⁶ nowhere is heavenly transcendence clearer than in the Zhou sacrifice to Heaven. For this sacrifice, two bullocks were raised, one for Heaven itself, the other for Houji, Lord of Cereals, the legendary ancestor of the Zhou. When it came time to sacrifice, the king himself killed the bullock for Heaven with bow and arrow. The bullock was then placed on a pyre and burned totally. The second bullock, by contrast, was divided into raw and cooked parts, with the former being burned as an offering, the second being distributed by what Levi calls a "cascade of leftovers" from the top to the bottom of the governing aristocracy: those lower in rank ate what those higher

3 Robert Eno, "Shang State Religion and the Pantheon of the Oracle Texts," in *Early Chinese Religion 1: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 101.

4 Martin Kern, "Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shijing*, and the *Shangshu*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou," in *Early Chinese Religion 1*, 149.

5 Eno, "Shang State Religion," 101.

6 Levi, "The Rite, the Norm and the Dao: Philosophy of Sacrifice and Transcendence of Power in Ancient China," in *Early Chinese Religion 1*, 645-92.

had left and owed them, in return, a debt (*bao* 報) of loyalty. Together, these two bullocks thus illustrate the absolute transcendence of Heaven, the relative transcendence of the “divine” ancestor (and his descendants, sons of Heaven), and the political hierarchy formed by the “meat-eaters” who participated in the sacrifice. The people, of course, had no part in these rites of the powerful.

In the same essay, Levi shows how the Dao comes to replace Heaven as the source of transcendence. The Dao is, in the first place, “absolute extensiveness.” But while it thus englobes all, its unity encompassing multiplicity, it is itself empty of any specificity and, as such, most obviously linked to the fictitious fifth season and direction, the Center. Put in other terms, this Dao is a spatio-temporal entity in which space takes precedence over time and bureaucratically administered territory over temporally defined ancestry. In both royal dynasties, the Shang and then the Zhou, the kings traced their descent back, via close to distant ancestors and, finally, to mythical ancestors who were closest to celestial transcendence. In the new bureaucratic empire that was forming at the same time as its ideological foundations, the ultimate ancestor was Huangdi 黃帝, the Yellow Lord, one of the Five Lords 五帝 who represented the five directions and phases 五行.

Di 帝 originally referred to a high god, probably the High God, who alone in the Shang pantheon could give orders (*ling* 令) and who controlled weather, harvest, and warfare. This clearly anthropomorphic imagination of divine power gave way first to the Zhou Heaven, at once anthropomorphic (ethical) and cosmic, and now to the Dao, purely cosmic. The Son of Heaven does not pray or sacrifice to the Dao but models himself on it, notably in the Mingtang 明堂 or Hall of Light.⁷ Central institution of the bureaucratic empire, this Hall of the Gods reveals clearly that the gods now simply embody the cosmic order manifest in the spatially ventilated cycle of seasons: its four sides represent the four seasons, its center the fifth season, sandwiched between summer and fall, the Yang and Yin halves of the year. The Son of Heaven now illustrates his transcendence by performing rites in each month that correspond to the celestial events determining the seasons, that is, by modeling himself on the cosmic order. His divine authority has become inseparable from the Dao, that is, from the cosmic order—an order he must not only illustrate in the Hall of Light but incorporate by engaging in self-cultivation so that he himself embodies the Dao. It is by means of this Daoist “monism” that political and religious power were “collapsed” into one in a way that continues to over-determine the exercise of power in China today.

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⁷ Luminosity being inseparable from the “gods,” referred to as both *mingshen* 明神 and *shenming* 神明, Mingtang might also be translated as Hall of the Gods.

One of the most useful passages for understanding Daoist monism is the famous first chapter of the *Daodejing*:

A dao that may be spoken is not the enduring Dao. A name that may be named is not an enduring name. No names—this is the beginning of heaven and earth. Having names—this is the mother of the things of the world. Make freedom from desire your constant norm; thereby you will see what is subtle. Make having desires your constant norm; thereby you will see what is manifest. These two arise from the same source but have different names. Together they may be termed “the mysterious.” Mystery and more mystery: the gate of all that is subtle.⁸

It will be noticed, to begin with, that this Dao is silent, i.e., defined in terms of speech—one of the two reasons I gave in my earlier essay for the universality of dualism, namely, the gap between words and things. It is precisely that duality that this initial paragraph addresses, in a way that would make Lacan proud, since in it naming = desiring:

enduring	常	not enduring	非常
no-name	無名	have-name	有名
no-desire	無欲	have-desire	有欲
subtle	妙	manifest	徼

In suggesting a strategy of alternating between “no-desire” and “have-desire,” Laozi prepares for his concluding affirmations that they “arise from the same source” and “together may be termed ‘the mysterious.’” We will see below how this idea of alternation, modelled on that of the seasons and ideologically compatible with the Hall of Light was re-used by Zhu Xi centuries later.

2 The Buddhist “Conquest”

It is a well-known fact that Buddhism represented until modern times the most powerful challenge to Chinese political/religious monism. This took the form of debates over whether monks should bow down before the Son of Heaven, clearly a question that made no sense whatsoever in pre-Buddhist China. In South China—the China of the “Chinese,” where the debate was carried on

⁸ For this translation by Robert Eno see <<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/23426>>. Last checked 26 April 2020.

by elite intellectuals—the consensus was that monks, as representatives of a higher order, should not bow down before emperors: religious power was superior to political power, and the role of the latter was to protect the former (*hufa* 護法, literally, protect the Dharma). But in North China, occupied by dynasties of non-Chinese origin, the debate took a much more traditional turn when the monk Faguo 法果 (fl. 396–409) announced that the reigning emperor Daowu 道武 was “the living Tathāgata [Thus-come-one].”⁹ This was confirmed not long after by the great Yungang cave projected initiated in the year 460 by the monk Tanyao 曇曜: “By modeling the images of the buddhas on the Northern Wei emperor, he announced that the emperor was the buddha of that age.”¹⁰ Thus with regard to the key question of the nature of power, Buddhism was more “conquered” than “conquering.”

In the larger picture of religion, society, and psychology, however, Buddhism very much comes across as the conqueror, with profound implications for Chinese dualism. We may begin with the basic institution of the *sangha*: hitherto, China had known only eremitism, not monasticism. The fact that monasticism was in contradiction with truly fundamental social tenets is obvious from the name given monastics: *chujia* 出家, people who leave the family. Centuries later, when China will have come to be dominated by the Confucian ideology and practice of the lineage, sons who thus “left the family” were often erased from the family “genealogy” (*zupu* 族譜): excommunicated. Even more in contradiction with Confucian tenets was the creation of communities of “family-leaving” women and, even though women were clearly discriminated against in Buddhism too, the opening up of a space where they were no longer just an instrument of physical reproduction for a male-dominated society but could also apply themselves to “spiritual” goals is reflected in the creation of a literary genre of “Lives of nuns” (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳). Here, in François Martin’s translation, is an example of a woman “saint” from the late-fifth, early-sixth century:

Miaowei 妙禪, whose original surname was Liu 劉, was from Jiankang 建康. From the tenderest age, she showed a keen intelligence. She left her family young to live in the Xiqingyuan nunnery 西青苑寺. Her practice of the rules was impeccable and she was spiritually highly awakened. Everybody loved her for her earnestness and kindness. She was a superb

9 Li Gang, “State Religious Policy,” *Early Chinese Religion 11: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 274.

10 Li Yuqun, “Classification, Layout, and Iconography of Buddhist Cave Temples and Monasteries,” *Early Chinese Religion 11*, 585.

conversationalist and excelled at talking and joking. She lectured more than 30 times on the *Da niepan jing* 大涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*), the *Lotus sūtra*, and the *Shidi (jing)* 十地經 (*Sūtra of the ten stages*), and she taught about each of the texts of discipline for nuns in the *Shisong* 十誦 [Sarvāstivāda Vinaya tradition]. She was often a great help to others by leading them in every way. She died in the 12th year of Tianjian (513), aged 69.¹¹

Buddhism is without any question the religion that, before the arrival of Christianity, did the most for paving the way to a gender equality that still remains far out of reach, in China as elsewhere.

Meditation and ritual are two other areas in which the impact of Buddhism was deeply felt. Concerning the first, Martin, inspired by studies of Tian Xiaofei concerning the influence of meditation on poetic practice, translates Wang Wei's poem "The Deer barrier" and suggests:

Tonal harmony, brevity of form, absence of the self, the seizure of the fugitive instant through echoes and the play of light and shadow, all the ingredients which collaborate to make of these four lines a chef d'oeuvre, can be traced back to the Six Dynasties and assigned in one way or another to the influence of Buddhism. In other words, without Buddhism, they would likely never have been written.¹²

As to ritual, it is on Daoism that Buddhism's mark is deepest. Before Buddhism, Daoism was a salvation religion, but only for the "seed people" 種民. Above all, perhaps, it was a religion of the written, taking over from the imperial bureaucracy both its petitions and talismans. Under the conjoined influence of *chenwei* 讖緯 speculations on the cosmic nature and power of *wen* 文 (writing, pattern) and of Buddhist scriptures "spoken" by the Buddha 佛說, the new Lingbao rituals of the early fifth century represent a massive shift toward orality—and thereby universality.¹³

"Talismans" are particularly important for understanding this shift. First, the corresponding Chinese word, *fu* 符, has the same origins as the Greek *sumbolon*: a sign which, divided in two, serves as a "passport" when the two halves are reunited. Early talismans are simply exaggerated forms of identifiable Chinese characters. But by the time of the *Taishang lingbao wufuxu* 太上靈寶五符

11 François Martin, "Buddhism and Literature," in *Early Chinese Religion II*, 922.

12 *Ibid.*, 951.

13 Cf. my *Paradigm Shifts in Early and Modern Chinese Religion: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 87–88.

序 in the late third century CE, five complex “configurations of energy” representing the divine lords of the five directions/phases have become the basis of Daoist self-cultivation. The third chapter of this text describes a pitiable Yellow Lord begging the Sovereign, “a man of unknown epoch, whose body is nine feet long and covered with black fur” (3.18a4–5), to explain to him the five true writs. At long last, this is what the Sovereign tells him:

The true writ of which you have spoken, whose words you do not understand, are the energies of higher Heaven in your body. It suffices to know your own body well in order to live forever. Humans are the most spiritual of all living creatures, but people do not understand themselves and do not know how to keep their spirits so as to master all ills. Those who have understood do not seek the help of gods in Heaven: for them, focusing on the body is sufficient. That is why it is said, “The human body is like a country. The trunk is comparable to the buildings of the Court, while the four members constitute the suburbs. The articulations are like the hundred functionaries. The spirit is like the sovereign, the blood like the ministers, and the energies like the people. That is why the person who knows how to regulate his body also knows how to govern a country. (3.20a6-b3)

Chapter 1 of the same text provides the oral formulae that describe the energies of each of the five writs, identifying them by name with the Five Lords 五帝. By ingesting these energies in accord with a cosmo-liturgical calendar, the adept achieves immortality. The core Daoist ritual of the Offering (*jiao* 醮) is made on a regular basis to these Five Lords as represented by their talismans.¹⁴

To summarize: these five “true writs” 真文 represent the creative energies of the Five Lords and, as such, are the source of space-time in every way comparable to the uttered word of the Creator in the Book of Genesis.

This “theology of the celestial writs of Lingbao”¹⁵ is considerably developed in the Lingbao scriptures revealed in the early fifth century:

Born prior to primordial commencement within the vacuous cave, when heaven and earth had not yet taken root nor the sun and moon lit up, all was abysmal darkness: they are without ancestor and without progenitor.

14 For a complete account, see my “Deux écrits taoïstes anciens,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004): 139–71.

15 Wang Chengwen, “The Revelation and Classification of Daoist Scriptures,” in *Early Chinese Religion II*, 775–890, and my summary in *Paradigm Shifts*, 84–88.

The numinous script was obscure, flickering between visibility and invisibility. The two principles [the Yin and the Yang] relied on them for their separation, the great *yang* [the sun] relied on them in order to illuminate.... The *Jade chapters in red script of the five elders of primordial commencement* emerged spontaneously in the vacuous cavern, produced heaven, established earth, and produced through transformation the radiant spirits.¹⁶

The Tang commentator Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–55) states that “the body of the perfect writs ... transformed with the dharma-body of the great Dao.”¹⁷ That is, whereas the Buddhist dharma body was composed of the sermons of the Buddha, the Lingbao dharma body was composed of perfect writs.

These writs were the origin of all the “radiant spirits”, even the highest, the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement 元始天尊, who “replace[d] the Great Thearch and celestial sovereign that symbolized heaven in the Confucian tradition.”¹⁸ But, on the model of the Buddha, he was temporalized by giving him “his own previous lives and innumerable rebirths, thus forming in actuality the model of a sincere practitioner who finally accomplishes the Dao.”¹⁹ This “temporalization” occurs together with the oralization of the process of transmission: like the Buddhist scriptures that begin “Thus did I hear” 如是我聞, during heavenly audiences with myriad disciples gathered round, the new Lingbao scriptures are “revealed through recitation by the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement.”²⁰

This oralization is even clearer in another early fifth century revelation, the *Shenzhou jing* 神咒經 (*Scripture of divine incantations*), where paragraph after paragraph is said simply to be “uttered by the Dao” 道言. Thus did the religion of the privately transmitted writ become a universal salvation religion of public rituals based on scripture recitation by priests on Buddhism-derived “high seats” 高座. At the same time, the talisman, now invariably accompanied by an oral formula, remained one of Daoism’s central instruments of healing and salvation.

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But what has this to do with dualism? This: the cosmological monism of the Dao had become, over the course of the Han, inseparable from the “theology of

16 Wang, 791.

17 Ibid., 792.

18 Ibid., 796.

19 Ibid., 795.

20 Ibid., 873.

celestial writs," its worship an individual form of the imperial Hall of Light rituals. We might even speculate that the *Lingbao wufuxu* mode of self-cultivation was precisely what the emperor had to practice in order to "incorporate the Dao," and that this is being hinted at in the story of the Yellow Lord begging the Sovereign for access to the five true writs and immortality. But in thus becoming the ritual expression of the cosmological monism on which the imperial bureaucracy was built, it became as well the expression of the sociological and gender dualism embedded in a system of writing to which only a very small portion of the male elite belonged: the meat-eaters had become writ-eaters. This explains why Daoism, from the beginning, is one of the most ferocious combatants of the anthropomorphic spirit-medium cults of the illiterate people. It is the religion of self-sovereignty, of self-possession, as opposed to possession by the gods. Its true writs stand over against the "inspired" speech of the spirit mediums.

Buddhism, by legitimizing orality in a written canon, created the new social model of a *samgha* supported by and working for lay society and, in so doing, turned Daoism into a religion of universal salvation. This is perhaps the most important consequence of the Buddhist "conquest."

3 Song Dualism

In the Song, Buddhist dualism continues to worm its way ever deeper into elite Chinese thought and practice. In Daoism, this is visible in the Quanzhen 全真 founder's call for radical asceticism: "Recalling the vanity of mundane affairs, he promoted humility and the contemplation of skulls," a "fight against the vices," and "mortification".²¹ Assiduous practice of inner or symbolic alchemy was the way to escape "the carcass of the body 軀殼, which is just a 'hut of bones' 骸屋."²² As in many religious traditions, harsh treatment of the body was the path to inner, spiritual authenticity: "This life that everyone can give rise to through ascesis is not an 'energy.' It is a presence, an inner master everyone can find."²³

In ritual Daoism, too, the ever more radical focus on the inner person was in evidence:

21 Pierre Marsonne, "Daoism under the Jurchen Jin Dynasty," in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan*, ed. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsonne (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1136–38.

22 *Ibid.*, 1135.

23 *Ibid.*, 1158.

The clearest sign of interiorization is the universal penetration of esoteric Buddhism, in water-land and yellow register rituals not only but also in literature and iconography. Daoist murals of going in audience before the Origin—which echo an identical practice in symbolic alchemy—are a striking example of Tantric-inspired interiorized and synthetic rationality, as are of course the mandala and its impact on Buddhist architecture and self-cultivation. It is perhaps in the *Inner method of the great ultimate for oblatory refinement* 太極祭煉內法 by Zheng Sixiao that Tantric-influenced interiorization reaches its fullest expression in Daoist ritual.²⁴

In the *Inner method* of Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241–1318), the entire ritual process of saving the souls of the dead takes place inside the body of the priest:

When I silently go in audience in the muddy pellet (the upper cinnabar field), then all the myriad souls follow me and rise to Heaven. When I thoroughly awaken to the great Dao, then all the myriad souls through me attain the realized state 證果. My own mind is the ruler of the ten thousand transformations in heaven and on earth. My own body is the ruler of the oblatory refinement of the souls in the netherworld.²⁵

A purer idealism would be hard to formulate.

As for the “new” Confucians, Curie Virág begins her account with a survey of the anti-emotion dualism characteristic of Confucianism from the late royal period through the Tang. A stark version of this dualism may be seen in Li Ao 李翱 (772–841):

That by which a person becomes a sage is his [moral] nature. That by which one’s nature becomes deluded is the feelings. Joy, anger, fear, sadness, love, hate, and desire are all brought about by the feelings. When the feelings obscure it, the nature becomes hidden.... Feelings are the corruption of the nature. If one understands how this corruption comes about, this corruption would have no basis. If the mind is still and unmoving, corrupt thoughts would cease by themselves.²⁶

24 Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 66.

25 *Ibid.*, 42–43.

26 Curie Virág, “Self-Cultivation as Praxis in Song Neo-Confucianism,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 1207–8.

Like Li Ao, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) begins with the distinction first found in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 between the mind “before” 未動 and “after movement” 已動, but he believes the latter need not be the corruption of the former: “The nature is the state before movement, and the feelings are the state after movement. The mind encompasses both the states before and after movement.”²⁷ It is only if feelings derive from the “human mind” 人心 that they will be bad, expressions of “the selfishness of the physical body” 形氣之私; if they derive from the “Dao mind” 道心, they will be good, expressions of the “correctness of the innate nature and destiny” 性命之正.²⁸ The agonistic duality of the human mind is thus replaced by a Yin-Yang alternation reminiscent of the monad-like Dao.

But if Zhu Xi thus overcomes the ontological dualism of the human person, he perpetuates Confucian sociological and gender dualism: it is only a male elite that studies the Classics and engages in the serious self-cultivation that alone can preserve “correctness”.

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More important, however, than these dualisms is a distinction between moral (*daotong* 道統) and political legitimacy (*zhengtong* 政統) that recalls the early Buddhist challenge to the state. Chang Ouei Ong notes that the use of the term *daotong* by the Song-dynasty prime minister Qin Gui is what “prompted Zhu Xi to rework the concept to stress the authority of the literati over the interpretation of morality and culture at the expense of the rulers.”²⁹ Versus Qin Gui, who promoted peace negotiations with the Jurchen Jin, the Daoxue 道學 people were a “war party”, rejecting the unequal treaties concluded first with the Liao and then with the Jin. According to Hoyt Tillman, Zhu Xi first began to use the term *daotong* in the year 1189, when working on his commentaries on the *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue* 大學.³⁰ But once Daoxue (neo-Confucianism) had become state orthodoxy, in 1241, it left the opposition and supported emperors like the Ming founder, who “claimed for himself the status of sage-king, combining both political and moral authority.”³¹ To justify this, the founding Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang invoked the same vision of the self as Zheng Sixiao: “This is because the body of the ruler is the empire, the dynasty, and the myri-

27 Ibid., 1211.

28 Ibid., 1205–6.

29 Chang Woei Ong, “Confucian Thoughts,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 1407.

30 Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1992), 138.

31 Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I*, 70.

ad creatures, and because the spirit and the breath of the ruler are the prince of the realm.”³² That is, the ontological monism of the Dao once again aborted any challenge to the divine status of the Son of Heaven and the church-state over which he presided.

4 Contemporary Monism

In the final set of the Brill volumes, covering the period 1850–2015, we suggest that, “while secularization’ was traditionally defined as the elimination of religion from the public sphere, its use here is more about the diffusion of comparable values into various autonomous realms (religion, politics, the economy, science).”³³ In other words, if in previous periods of paradigm shift what are clearly new religions attack the religions of the past and, in appearance at least, replace them, contemporary secularization takes a very different form. In the first period of radical change, during the Warring States, the intellectuals promoting a new religion of the Dao systematically attacked and ridiculed the spirit medium religion that had prevailed throughout the royal Shang and Zhou periods. After the collapse of the Han, transformations led by the Buddhists produced a united front of the Three Teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, each with its own imperially approved scriptural canon—against spirit mediumism. In the Song, processes of radical rationalization and interiorization transformed each of the Three Teachings, leading not only to “unification of the Three Teachings” but even to a degree of unification with spirit medium religion and, above all, to ever more important lay versions of the Three Teachings.

It is this unified “Chinese religion” that was driven out of the public space in the contemporary paradigm shift, to be replaced by the religions of scientism, nationalism, and the market economy. Having defined religion itself as “the practice of structuring values”, we suggest that, in the “reform and opening period,”

the new structuring value system is nationalism, practiced in the form of state-owned enterprises and the banking system of state capitalism.³⁴

32 John D. Langlois, Jr., and Sun K'o-k'uan, “Three Teachings Syncretism and the Thought of Ming T'ai-tsu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43 (1983): 133.

33 Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, John Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-Present*, ed. Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerwey (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1, n.2.

34 *Ibid.*, 20.

It is clear in retrospect that it was the potent mix of scientism and nationalism that fuelled the Qigong fever and enabled Falungong's deep penetration into both the party and the army.³⁵

As I write these words in early 2020, a resurgent nationalism seems to be the religion of the entire world, of Trump's America as much as of Xi Jinping's China or Narendra Modi's India, replacing—or at least challenging—the neo-liberalism that, while it lingers on in fragmented form here and there, is no longer “believed in” by anyone serious. Scientism, too, is alive and well, both in the inverse mode of science rejectionism in America and in the renewed attention to Marxism and its “scientific theory of history” in China. The implosion and near collapse of neo-liberal capitalism in 2008, combined with the CCP's survival of both the Soviet and the neo-liberal collapse, feeds the conviction that tomorrow it will be their turn to play hegemon.

It is precisely this conjuncture that makes it imperative to understand the continuities of both the current Western and Chinese systems of government, with regard, notably, to the question of monism and dualism. To do this, one of the most telling issues is precisely that of the relationship between the market economy and national governments. As I have written elsewhere, “Consistently, over the last 150 years, it has proven hard in China to accept market autonomy and relinquish administrative control of the economy.”³⁶ From “Yan Fu's translation of Adam Smith [that] was skewed toward greater government involvement in the market than the original text would warrant,”³⁷ to the current campaign in China to reinforce the role of state-owned enterprises there is a common theme: the state must control the economy. But the word “state” in China refers—and with increasing insistence—to the party-state, that is, the “secularized” version of the church-state. In other words, it is the contemporary expression of the Dao-monism of the “sage-king”—made concrete in the promotion of “Xi Jinping thought”—that cannot countenance a separation of powers that enters history in the form of two dualistic religions of universal salvation:

In both cases [Rome and China] conquerors increasingly merged with local elites, and transcendent religions that claimed autonomy from the state—Christianity and Buddhism—made considerable progress.³⁸

35 Ibid., 41.

36 *Paradigm Shifts*, 212.

37 Ibid., 213, citing David Faure, “The Introduction of Economics in China, 1850–2010,” in *Modern Chinese Religion 11*, 79.

38 Walter Scheidel, “From the ‘Great Convergence’ to the ‘First Great Divergence’: Roman and Qin-Han State Formation and its Aftermath,” in *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 14.

In China, as we saw, Buddhism was “subjugated” by the Chinese church-state; in the West, the Augustinian dualism of the City of God and the City of Man predominated:

As Sturzo reminds us, a fundamental dualism of political and religious powers was the novelty introduced with Christianity, and this diarchy—Sturzo’s term—has characterized every Christian civilization for two thousand years. Indeed, one could argue it was precisely this dualism that allowed political power to dissociate itself from religious authority over the course of the centuries and claim for itself not only autonomy, but also *absolute* autonomy over its subjects through the appropriation of its own personality. In any event, Sturzo concedes the modern State remained the central arbiter of power in the International Community up to his day.³⁹

It is thus Christian Platonism that eventually paved the way for Western modernity, with its constitution-based rule of law and its recognition of the autonomy of not just the market and the state, but of the ultimate institution of modernity, the university with its disciplinary specialization. Chinese Dao-based monism admits only of a “mitigated dualism,” alternating between the “enduring” and the “non-enduring,” between “before” and “after movement,” that is, a world of sovereign, self-possessed subjects with no place for the Wholly Other.

39 Matthew Bagot, “The Development of the International Community, Human Personality, and the Question of Universal History in the Thought of Luigi Sturzo,” *Telos* (February 26, 2016). Accessed online at <<http://www.telospress.com/the-development-of-the-international-community-human-personality-and-the-question-of-universal-history-in-the-thought-of-luigi-sturzo/>>. This quote obviously implies a reading very different from mine of the contemporary dominance of the political as opposed to the religious—a subject for another essay.

An Ant and a Man, a Rock and a Woman: Preliminary Notes toward an Alternate History of Chinese Worldviews

Robert Ford Company

An Ant and a Man

Consider the following fifth-century anecdote.¹ A man named Dong Zhaozhi was traveling by boat when he noticed a floating twig. On it, an ant scurried back and forth, seemingly afraid. So Dong brought the ant on board. That night he dreamed a black-robed man thanked him. “I am king among ants,” the man said. “Should you ever find yourself in trouble, please let me know.” Years later, Dong was falsely arrested. Recalling his dream, he gathered several ants and told them of his plight. He then dreamed again of the black-robed personage, who advised him to flee into the hills and await the official pardon coming by courier. Waking, he found that ants had chewed through his restraints, allowing him to escape. The pardon soon arrived.

Hundreds—or probably thousands—of stories like this one, about animal-human (and insect-human) interactions, were exchanged and compiled in early medieval China. Many of them did not survive into the modern era, but enough did to constitute a formidable body of evidence. But: evidence of what? How should we understand such stories? Who are their subjects? Why were they recorded, collected, and disseminated? In this brief paper I will sketch a project that I intend to develop at much greater length elsewhere, a project in which these stories will furnish invaluable evidence.

Much of the history of animal-human relationships has been anthropocentric, focused on “the human cultural ... contexts for such relationships rather than on the emergent ... relationship itself.”² I want to rethink stories like this

1 The work in question is *Qi Xie's Records* (*Qi Xie ji* 齊諧記), compiled by Dongyang Wuyi 東陽無疑 (fl. ca. 435). This story is translated in Robert Ford Company, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder from Early China* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2015), 24–25. For a listing of its multiple textual witnesses see p. 136. On *Qi Xie ji* see Company, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1996), 80–81.

2 Eduardo Kohn, “How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement,” *American Ethnologist* 34.1 (Feb. 2007): 18n2.

one less anthropocentrically and more zoo-semiotically. My rethinking is informed by recent work in “anthropology of life” (Eduardo Kohn), revisionist rejections of the nature/culture binary (Philippe Descola), new animisms and the “ontological turn” (Irving Hallowell, Nurit Bird-David, Graham Harvey), “posthumanities” (Donna Haraway), biosemiotics (Jesper Hoffmeyer, Lynn Margulis), and theories of how selves and aims first emerged in an otherwise aimless universe (Terrence Deacon, Jeremy Sherman). Much of this in turn builds on the semiotics of Charles Peirce and others. For these researchers, life is defined by a single key characteristic: that all living things, from the simplest to the most complex, are selves with aims, selves that represent the world—often differently than humans do. Any dynamic in which “something ... stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (to quote Peirce’s definition of a sign³) is alive, and the “somebody” in this equation is some sort of self—but not necessarily a human one. Processes of sign interpretation, meaning, and intention do not distinguish culture from nature. Life is semiosis.

With these all too briefly sketched ideas in mind, let us return to the ant story, serving here as exemplar of a much larger set. We can see it as a story about a relationship. The relationship is built on the exchange of help in dire circumstances. It begins in an intersubjective encounter in which the human protagonist recognizes another self, a self that recognizes itself to be in trouble on the water. Significantly, some of the textual variants that have come down to us say that as it scurried to and fro the ant “feared for its life” 惶遽畏死; the ant thus becomes a narrative subject, a co-protagonist. Other variants put this as an inference in the mind and speech of Dong: “Zhaozhi said [to himself], ‘This means it is in fear for its life’” 昭之曰此畏死也; the ant is thus apprehended by the man, via what philosophers are wont to call a “theory of other minds,” as a subject like himself, whose behavior evinces the aim to stay alive. Accustomed as we are to the fixity of texts that is a byproduct of printing technology, we might naturally assume that only one of these versions is the “original” and thus “correct” one. But in a manuscript culture such as that of early medieval China, where much more fluid views and treatments of texts were the norm, we should instead see each version that has come down to us as an artefact of social memory. Each bears witness to what some people claimed to have happened, or to the sort of thing people thought could happen. It’s not a

3 As quoted and discussed in *ibid.*, 6; *idem*, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013), 29; and Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs*, tr. Jesper Hoffmeyer and Donald Favareau (Scranton, Penn.: Univ. of Scranton Press, 2008), 20.

question, then, of trying to ascertain which version was “original” or “correct,” but of pondering the distinct implications of each.⁴

Let us think of this story, then, as bearing witness to the idea of a trans-species ecology of selves.⁵ (Whether the incident really occurred as reported is much less significant than the facts that many people thought it was the sort of thing that might possibly occur and that many parties joined in the laborious processes needed to secure its transmission into modern times.) Each party to the ecology recognizes the other as a member of a society with certain conventions. Although the man is initially unaware of the ant’s status in its social world, he later, having learned of it, depends on it to make his own request for aid. And for his part the ant king is kept informed of human events by his far-flung network of formic subjects. This mutual recognition is what enables their exchange of help.

The two selves fall into a pattern of gifting that transcends species.⁶ This gifting is not a conceptual or merely cultural structure imposed by the human on the blank canvas of “nature” so much as an emergent feature of the interaction itself. The story invites us to consider whether, rather than the familiar binary in which cultures are plural but nature is singular, there is in fact *one culture*—in which forms like gift-giving link selves of diverse species—but *many natures*, in the sense of many *Umwelten*, many worlds-as-experienced depending on each species’ distinctive capacities.⁷ We are, of course, accus-

4 For more on this point, see Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2012), 17–30, and works cited there.

5 In the sense developed in Kohn, “How Dogs Dream,” and idem, *How Forests Think*.

6 Following Philippe Descola (*Beyond Nature and Culture*, tr. Janet Lloyd [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013], 307–35), I see the relationship here as one involving gifting, not exchange. “Unlike exchange, the gift is above all a one-way gesture that consists in abandoning something to someone without expecting any compensation other than that, possibly, of gratitude on the part of the receiver.... Reciprocal benefaction is never guaranteed where a gift is concerned” (p. 313). But I would add that in China the expectation of a commensurate return has often been stronger than Descola suggests. On the one hand, then, Dong’s initial gesture was not done in the expectation of a return; but on the other hand, the ant king’s response to it was, in Chinese context, hardly unexpected, either (except in the obvious way that he was an ant with extraordinary power to be of assistance).

7 On this concept, see the classic discussion in Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the World of Animals and Humans, with A Theory of Meaning*, tr. Joseph D. O’Neil (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010), and the use made of it, for example, in Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 84, and Kohn, “How Dogs Dream,” 4–5, 7, 9. “Because an organism is the locus of the work that is responsible for generating the constraints that constitute information about its world, what this information can be about is highly limited, specific, and self-centered. Like the treasure hunter with his metal detector, an organism can only obtain information about its environment that its internally generated dynamic processes are sensitive

tomed to other readings. One might read the story as a charming *projection* of a uniquely human, perhaps “Confucian” value (that of *bao* 報 or moral reciprocity) onto the sign-less, value-less, self-less, aim-less nonhuman world of nature. In such a reading, the story would have only human beings and human culture to be about. Or one might simply read it as a precursor of “fiction,” in which case it has only the prehistory of a literary genre and the supply of entertainment to be about.⁸ I am pursuing a different reading, one in which the narrative’s two dream events are crucial.

For dreaming is a privileged mode of cross-kind communication, allowing the ant—normally presumably a user of indexical signs⁹—to communicate in symbolic signs, that is, human language.¹⁰ That, we could say, is one *affordance* of dreaming.¹¹ Another is the opportunity for the ant to appear in human form and garb. Selves come clothed in bodies, and in dreams (as well as in

to—von Uexküll’s *Umwelt*, the constellation of self-centered species-relevant features of the world” (Terrence W. Deacon, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* [New York: Norton, 2013], 410). See also Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics*, 171–211; Wendy Wheeler, *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), 120–22; and Alexandra Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 20–32.

- 8 Altogether too many studies of works of the *zhiguai* genre have been of this sort, due in part to the frequent isolation of the study of China’s literary history from the study of its cultural and religious history.
- 9 Again, a sign, for Peirce, is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.” Understood thus, “not all signs have languagelike properties, and ... not all the beings who use them are human” (Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 29). Peirce distinguished three general classes of signs. *Icons* are usually likenesses of their objects (e.g., photographs). *Indexes*, rather than being likenesses of the objects they represent, point to them (e.g., weathervanes as indices of wind direction). *Symbols* refer to their objects indirectly as a function of their systematic and conventional relationship to other symbols (e.g., words in a human language). “Unlike iconic and indexical modes of reference, which form the bases for all representation in the living world, symbolic reference is, on this planet at least, a form of representation that is unique to humans” (Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 31–32). See also Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893–1913)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 13–17, and James Jakób Liszka, *A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 18–52.
- 10 Compare: “Dreaming is understood to be a privileged mode of communication through which, via souls, contact among beings inhabiting different ontological realms [that is, different *Umwelten*] becomes possible” (Kohn, “How Dogs Dream,” 12).
- 11 On the notion of *affordances* as intended here, first developed by J. J. Gibson, see Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015), 6–11, and Nurit Bird-David, “‘Animism’ Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology,” *Current Anthropology* 40, special issue 1 (February 1999): S67–91.

transformations, another ubiquitous motif of early medieval anecdotes) the clothing may be changed.¹² Dong presumably would not have understood ant signs, but thanks to dreaming the ant king is able to meet him more than half-way, addressing him face to face in human form and speech.

It's crucial to note that it's not as if the ant was instantly recognized by the human protagonist as a self with aims because that's how Chinese people viewed its *class* of beings. In many situations an ant might have gone unnoticed. In others it might have been seen as an object, an instrument, or a nuisance. (In fact, yet another version of the story depicts other passengers on Dong's boat complaining about his bringing the ant aboard.¹³) But here, the ant's being seen as a self with aims *emerges* from the *interaction* of these two beings in their specific situation on the river. The ant scurries on the floating stick; the human being notices this behavior and situation, draws an inference about the ant's aims, and intervenes. It's not the intrinsic properties of either the ant or the human but rather, precisely, this *pairing* of human attention *with* the purposive behavior of the distressed ant that opens into a relationship that, facilitated by the communicative portal of dreaming, stretches over years.¹⁴

A Rock and a Woman

In his classic essay, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," A. Irving Hallowell had this to say:

Since stones are grammatically animate, I once asked an old man: Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, "No! But *some* are." This qualified answer made a lasting impression on me. And it is thoroughly consistent with other data that indicate that the Ojibwa are not animists in the sense that they dogmatically attribute living souls to inanimate objects such as stones. The hypothesis which suggests itself ... is that the allocation of stones to an animate grammatical category ... does not involve a consciously formulated

12 On the variability of the forms under which beings appear to people in dreams, see for example Robert Schweitzer, "A Phenomenological Study of Dream Interpretation among the Xhosa-Speaking People in Rural South Africa," *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 27.1 (1996): 72–96.

13 These lines appear in the version preserved in the twentieth chapter of the received *Soushenji* 搜神記; in one medieval anthology they are attributed to *Qi Xieji*.

14 Cf. Bird-David, "Animism' Revisited," 75.

theory about the nature of stones. It *leaves a door open* that our orientation on dogmatic grounds keeps shut tight. Whereas we should never expect a stone to manifest animate properties of any kind under any circumstances, the Ojibwa recognize, *a priori*, potentialities for animation in certain classes of objects under certain circumstances. The Ojibwa do not perceive stones, in general, as animate, any more than we do. The crucial test is experience. Is there any personal testimony available?¹⁵

Hallowell goes on to recount several anecdotes in which Anishinaabe people¹⁶ saw stones move, or encountered stones with features suggesting eyes and a mouth, or saw stones opening their mouths as if to speak or disgorge objects. It is not, then, that the Anishinaabe “personify” non-human creatures or natural objects in general. For this would imply two things that are not the case: that at some point Anishinaabe people first saw them as inanimate, material things, and only later began “personifying” them, and that how they see them is entirely a function of their membership in general classes. It is, instead, a matter of encounters in particular situations, and of subsequent socially circulated testimony—stories—about such experiences. Similarly, concerning the hunter-gatherer Nayaka people of South India the anthropologist Nurit Bird-David writes:

My argument is that Nayaka focus on events. Their attention is educated to dwell on events. They are attentive to the changes of things in the world in relation to changes in themselves. As they move and act in the forest, they pick up information about the relative variances in the flux of the interrelatedness between themselves and other things against relative invariances. When they pick up a relatively changing thing with their relatively changing selves—and, all the more, when it happens in a relatively unusual manner—they regard as *devaru* [that is, as a “superperson”¹⁷]

15 Hallowell, “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” in *Primitive Views of the World*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), 54–55, emphasis added. For an astute unpacking and appreciation of Hallowell’s essay and its aims, see Pauline Turner Strong, “A. Irving Hallowell and the Ontological Turn,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7.1 (2017), 468–72.

16 Switching to the autonym used by these indigenous people of what’s now Canada and the northern United States.

17 *Not*, however, *supernatural* person. See Bird-David, “‘Animism’ Revisited,” 71, and Miguel Astor-Aguilera, “Maya-Mesoamerican Polyontologies: Breath and Indigenous American Vital Essences,” in *Rethinking Relations and Animism: Personhood and Materiality*, ed. Miguel Astor-Aguilera and Graham Harvey (London: Routledge, 2018), 143, as over against Roger Ivar Lohmann, “The Supernatural is Everywhere: Defining Qualities of Religion in

this particular thing within *this* particular situation. This ... arises from the stories which Nayaka tell.¹⁸

With these points in mind, consider now a Chinese anecdote about a human being and a stone. Among the tales collected in *Arrayed Accounts of Marvels* (*Lieyi zhuan* 列異傳), attributed to Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), we find:

A woman of the Dai clan in Yuning who had long been ill once went outdoors and, noticing a small stone, said to it, “If you have divinity and can cure my illness, I will worship you.” That night she dreamed of a personage who said, “I am about to bestow blessings on you.” Afterwards she gradually recovered. So she established a shrine for the deity, calling it the Shrine of the Stone Marquis.¹⁹

We are not told *why* the woman “notices” 見 the particular stone in question, only *that* she does. We sense a bit of weight hanging on “went outdoors” 出, perhaps implying that Ms. Dai had been shut in for a long time and that it was on this rare excursion that the stone caught her attention. In any case, here again it’s not as if this lady is depicted as acting on a general cultural belief that stones are living beings who can cure ailments. Nor (I think) does the story wish to argue that just any object at all, if approached in this manner, would respond as this stone does. Rather, this particular stone catches her gaze and she responds by focusing her attention and intention on it, promising to serve it ritually if it possesses divine power and can cure her. This recognition and promise open the portal of a relationship, each party responding in turn to the other. She talks with the stone, and this

“talking with” stands for attentiveness to variances and invariances in behavior and response of things in states of relatedness and for getting to know such things as they change through the vicissitudes over time of the engagement with them. To “talk with a [stone]” ... is to perceive what *it* does as one acts towards it, being aware concurrently of changes in oneself and the [stone]. It is expecting response and responding, growing into mutual responsiveness and ... possibly into mutual responsibility.²⁰

Melanesia and Beyond,” *Anthropological Forum* 13 (2003), 175–85. One of the arguments of the project I’m sketching here will be that the ways in which scholars routinely use “supernatural” to characterize beings or aspects of Chinese religions is a category mistake.

18 Bird-David, “Animism’ Revisited,” 74.

19 The textual sources for the story are listed in Company, *A Garden of Marvels*, 136.

20 Bird-David, “Animism’ Revisited,” 77, substituting “stone” where she writes “trees.”

In her dream the stone appears as a personage 人 declaring the intention to play its role in this emergent relationship. Again, dreaming is a key portal of communication, affording non-human selves the capacity to appear in human form and speak human language. The woman's recovery is taken as evidence that this intention was fulfilled, and she follows through by establishing the shrine. That the site acquired a name suggests that it came to be frequented by other people, gaining a local reputation. It is telling that the stone never confirms (or denies) its possession of divine power. We are left to wonder whether it was the interaction between the two parties that *performed* the stone's divinity into being. In other words, rather than see its divine power *either* already existing independently of the woman's response to it *or* as resulting from her sheer projection of power onto a "dumb object,"²¹ we are invited to think of "divinity" here as a *type or aspect of the relationship* between the two parties, co-activated and sustained precisely by their interactions and in no other way.²²

Another version of this little anecdote has come down to us, attributed to Gan Bao's 干寶 early fourth-century *Inquest into the Spirit Realm* (*Soushen ji* 搜神記). I italicize details that differ importantly from the *Lieyi zhuan* version:

A woman of the Dai clan in Yuzhang had long suffered from an incurable illness. She [once] noticed a small stone *with the form of a human being* 形像偶人. She told it: "You have human form 爾有人形. Are you divine? If you are able to cure my affliction, I will treat you very generously." That night she dreamed of a personage who said, "I am about to bestow blessings on you." Afterwards she gradually recovered from her illness. So she built a shrine at the foot of a mountain. *Members of the Dai clan served as the mediums there* 戴氏爲巫, so it came to be known as the Shrine to Marquis Dai.²³

This version supplies a reason why the woman noticed this particular stone: it jumped out at her because of its unusual human-like form, a form that *she took as* hinting at its potential. (This *motif of the striking object* is a staple in Western thought experiments on how the phenomenon known as "religion" might first

21 Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 153.

22 There were stories circulating in this period, a few of which have survived, which can be read as suggesting precisely this. See Robert Ford Company, "'Religious' as a Category: A Comparative Case Study," *Numen* 65 (2018): 363–66.

23 The story appears in the fourth chapter of the received twenty-chapter arrangement of *Soushen ji*.

have emerged.²⁴) The human form that the stone assumes in the woman's dream is here simply an extension of how it appeared to her in waking experience. Here, members of the woman's family go on to serve as the mediums attached to the shrine—that is, as the literal mouthpieces through whom the god (or, to be more precise, the being who was being treated by the Dai clan and other locals as what in English is termed a “god”) spoke to human audiences. Whether through the portal of dreams or the bodies of mediums, this stone had words to speak in response (and only in response) to human devotional vows and action.

The tenth-century geographic compendium *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 in turn attributes a slightly different version of this anecdote to *Soushen ji*. There, the chronically ill woman of the Dai clan had ventured out in search of medicines 覓藥 (presumably herbs in the wild) when she “noticed a stone standing erect and resembling human form” 見一石立似人形. She “paid courtesies to it” 禮之 and then spoke to it in terms similar to the above versions. So here the stone grabs the woman's attention both for its anomalous, human-like bodily form and for its erect stance. And she responds, as above, by engaging it as a fellow self, but here with the added mention of courtesies—a culturally patterned response, to which the stone responds in accordance with the pattern, both of them falling into a form.²⁵

Finally, one other version of the tale is close to the *Lieyi zhuan* version—but adds a postscript. After the Shrine of the Stone Marquis is established, this early seventh-century text continues:

Later, someone took the stone and threw it into a fire. Everyone said, “This is a divine stone 此神石. You ought not commit such an offense against it.” The man said, “What ‘divinity’ is this stone? 此石何神”. With that, he threw it into a well, [saying] “If it's really divine, then it should emerge from the well” 神當出井中. Next morning when everyone went to look, the stone had indeed emerged. The man who had seized it fell ill and died.²⁶

This version's sponsors were unwilling to simply “leave the door open,” as Halliwell's Anishinaabe interlocutors had been content to do. By setting a test and having the stone-person pass it, they added narrative confirmation of the

24 See Campamy, “Religious’ as a Category,” 346–49.

25 *Taiping huanyu ji* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1963), 106.8b.

26 *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (1888 ed.; rpt. Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), 160.17a-b, attributing the text to *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, obviously an error for *Lieyi zhuan* 列異傳.

stone's divinity. This version also affords us an unmistakable glimpse of the *community of estimation* involved in bringing the shrine cult to life. The shrine has become a site where multiple individuals engage in relationships with the stone and each other—mutual responsiveness and mutual responsibility.

Conclusion

Taking these sorts of stories seriously as products of collective worldviews and widespread patterns of narration and action would require considerable revision to our standard picture of early and medieval Chinese worldviews. We are accustomed to prioritizing such passages as this famous *Xunzi* 荀子 (3rd-century BCE²⁷) one depicting a human-crowned hierarchy of life:

Water and fire have *qi* but are not alive 無生. Grasses and trees are alive but are without awareness 無知. Birds and beasts have awareness but are without a sense of rightness 無義. Human beings have *qi*, are alive, and have awareness, and moreover they have a sense of rightness. This is why they are valued over all else in the world.²⁸

Such “What a piece of work is man!” declarations are the staple of histories of Chinese “thought.” On them, Ted Slingerland comments: “The picture that emerges ... of pre-Qin Chinese texts is that consciousness and the ability to think and choose, centered in the *xin* 心 [the mind or heart], is what makes a person a *person*, rather than an animal or inert object.”²⁹ But notice that, by these lights, stories showing animals possessing consciousness, memory, the ability to think and choose, and a sense of fairness, *are portraying animals as persons, too*—just not *human* persons. The anecdotes may be read as evidence of a more expansive ecology of selves, and a more relational way of knowing within such an ecology, than that envisioned in *Xunzi* and similar texts.

If we were to take up a broad enough archive of texts, expanding our engagement beyond the small circle of works conventionally deemed “philosophical,”

27 The text was assembled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE) from earlier bits; how much earlier is hard to say.

28 *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, ed. Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 5 (sect. 9).164. Adapting the translations in Eric L. Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), 76, and Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), 112.

29 Slingerland, *Mind and Body*, 111.

I think we'd see that this more variegated ecology of selves was at least as prevalent as the utterly human-centered view reflected in the *Xunzi* passage and privileged in much discourse both in and about China. This is not the place to develop that big-picture argument. But I want to emphasize that this ecology and epistemology were not just convenient narrative devices imposed on an extra-textual life-world to which they were alien. How do I know this? I know it because each of these stories emerged from lived experience. Each was circulated, retold, written, rewritten, compiled by countless individuals with some *interest* in it. Each telling, writing, or reading of the story performed an ecology of relationship that was at least entertained as *possible*—as *imaginable*—by many persons. My claim is not that any given anecdote accurately reports what happened but that it preserves for us what some thought had happened, thought it possible to have happened, and wished others to believe had happened. In a manuscript culture, each recorded and transmitted anecdote is an artefact of collective memory in the most literal sense, representing an investment of time and resources on the part of many persons. Each of these anecdotes was preserved in the archive for the same reason: *each won sponsors*.

In 1878, Friedrich Nietzsche published a famous aphorism reminiscent of Edward Burnett Tylor's equally famous thought-experiment (published in 1871) on the origins of what Tylor had termed "animism":

Misunderstanding of the dream (*Mißverständnis des Traumes*).—The man of the ages of barbarous primordial culture (*der Mensch in den Zeitaltern roher uranfänglichen Kultur*) believed that in the dream he was getting to know a second real world (*eine zweite reale Welt*): here is the origin of all metaphysics (*der Ursprung aller Metaphysik*). Without the dream one would have had no occasion to divide the world into two (... *zu einer Scheidung der Welt gefunden*)....

Nietzsche and Tylor, setting themselves against this imagined primordial humanity, were certain that there is only one *Welt*. For many Chinese people, I would argue, it was not that there were two worlds, the non-waking one a *metaphysical deduction* from dream experience—a faulty deduction, by Nietzsche's and Tylor's reckonings. Rather, there were many *Umwelten*, many worlds-as-experienced by extra-human persons who were, like us, selves with aims. But the many *Umwelten* were linked by portals allowing for the transformation of beings, for communication in speech, for giving gifts and requesting help and many other interactions. Dreaming was perhaps the most important such portal. Dreaming was, among other things, a key component in a

relational epistemology in which knowledge was a function of interactions and relations with other beings. In the common space of dreaming, women and men found themselves connected in relationships with a rich array of fellow sign-making, sign-interpreting selves—even, sometimes, an ant or a stone.

Self-Portrait of a Narcissist

Pierre-Étienne Will

This essay deals with an autobiography written sometime around 1680 and of a quite unique nature. Autobiography is an old genre in Chinese literature, going back to the postface and “letter to Ren An” in Sima Qian’s *Shiji*. These two texts are quite candid and emotional statements, just as would be, much later, the most interesting among first-person accounts written during the transition from Ming to Qing. But in between, writing about oneself was largely dominated by the conventions of the biographical genre, also a creation of Sima Qian, pursued in the entire series of standard histories and in their innumerable avatars and byproducts. Without entering into details, it should be enough to recall that in the Chinese tradition the biography of an individual aimed to situate him (or very occasionally, her) within an ideal-typical “role”: a model official, say, or a *littérateur*, an artist, a scholar, a paragon of filial piety or female chastity, etc.; or more rarely, a negative type, such as cruel official, sycophant, rebel, and a few others. As a result of this classificatory bent, the subject of a conventional Chinese biography is always a one-dimensional being deprived of depth and complexity: a character rather than a person with his or her individual voice.

It is largely the same with autobiographies, except that, almost by definition, the author/subject of an autobiography never presents himself as a negative type. This is only natural if we remember that the main rationale for writing one’s life history was to honor one’s parents and ancestors, as Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) forcefully insisted in the essay on autobiography found in his *Shitong* 史通—apparently the only theoretical statement in Chinese literature on autobiographical writing: “When one writes about one’s own life and discusses one’s family’s successive generations, assuredly the important thing is to project one’s reputation and bring fame to one’s parents!”¹ At the same time, Liu Zhiji claims that when writing one’s autobiography one must be “truthful,”

1 *Shitong*, *Neipian* 內篇, j. 32, “Xuzhuan” 序傳. In his seminal book, *The Confucian’s Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 50–60, Pei-yi Wu discusses Liu’s pronouncements on autobiography and stresses their influence, to the extent that they may have discouraged many people from writing about their own lives.

or “sincere” (*shi* 實). In fact, Liu Zhiji’s recommendation to reconcile the requirements of ancestral glory and truthfulness is to simply omit whatever may stain one’s ancestors’ or one’s own reputation: “An autobiography that meets the requirements of propriety (or ‘duty,’ *yi* 義) is when one is able to conceal one’s shortcomings, bring out one’s qualities, without telling falsehoods—then one gets a truthful (or ‘sincere’) account.” In short, only retain the good, don’t mention the bad.

I call this the “respectability requirement,” and it has massively dominated both biographical and autobiographical writing in China at all times. But there were exceptions, and it is these that concern us here. We do find first-person writings whose authors tried seriously to look at themselves as autonomous human beings, not just members of a group or class defined by tradition or mere units in the long line formed by their ancestors and their future descendants, to analyze their own behavior, to describe their own emotions and discuss their own uncertainties, and were not afraid of mentioning facts that showed them or their family in a less than ideal light. And as is well known, in China the seventeenth century—the late Ming and, to an certain extent, the first post-conquest decades—was a golden age for such writings, regarded by some as the only authentic sort of autobiography.

One significant factor at work must have been the uneasy conscience of a growing number of people in the face of the enchanted life-style cultivated by the elite, with its combination of extravagance, refinement, and social irresponsibility, and of the contrast it made with the mounting problems that confronted the empire. The late Ming was a time with much selfishness, greediness, and pleasure-seeking among the literate elite, but the concern with the self so typical of the period could also turn into serious consideration of the social and political crises the government seemed increasingly unable to handle, into social activism, and into sometimes agonizing ruminations on the role and attitude of the individual and questions about the family and state institutions that structured everyday life. This is particularly true of the very last years before the 1644 catastrophe and of its aftermath, when more and more people came to feel they were heading straight for total disaster, that they were living the last days not only of the Ming dynasty, but also of a way of life, or indeed of a civilization, to which they were passionately attached. In such circumstances, the usual constraints on writing—the respect of hierarchies, the concern for honorability, even the care for “elegance”—were considerably weakened.

Wang Jie and His Text

Wang Jie 汪价, the author to whom this essay is devoted, did experience the violence of the Qing conquest: a native of Jiading 嘉定, one of several Jiangnan cities whose inhabitants were methodically slaughtered in 1645 for having refused to submit to the Manchus, he recounts in his autobiography how when soldiers burst into his residence he barely escaped by jumping over the wall and that the place was looted to the last item.² The text, which Wang wrote in his twilight years sometime in the late 1670s, is entitled *Enlarged Account by Himself of the Life of Sannong The Useless* (*Sannong zhui ren guang zixu* 三儂贅人廣自序). Because of its loose, even disorderly organization and of its disdain for chronology, it is better described as a self-portrait, rather than a formal autobiography. There is a beginning and an ending, though: at the start, Wang's literary education as a child, and at the end, a final listing of his oeuvre, concluding with a few ironic words on the destiny of his future writings (he essentially claims he doesn't care); but in between the few dated life events must be retrieved from a maze of anecdotes and considerations on every kind of subject—though always related to him—the arrangement being essentially by loose association of topics or ideas.

The *Sannong zhui ren guang zixu*, a rather long text, does not seem to have ever been published separately. It features in *juan* 20 (and last) of a collection of “trivial sayings” (*xiaoshuo* 小說) entitled *Yuchu xinzhì* 虞初新志, first printed in 1700 but with a 1683 preface by its compiler, Zhang Chao 張潮.³ The interesting fact, of course, is that Wang's piece should have been published as part not of some collection of “serious” historical/biographical materials, but in a work devoted to “small talk,” or “stories”—in other words, of more or less dependable narratives devoid of historical authority and devoted to personalities or events whose defining characteristic is that they are out of the ordinary. Zhang Chao's *Yuchu xinzhì* contains about 150 entries, mostly biographical sketches of a wide variety of colorful individuals, including a number of women, all of them “extraordinary” (*yi* 異) in one way or another. One feature that distinguishes Zhang's work from other similar collections is that, instead of assembling anecdotes from the past culled from previous compilations, it

2 Wang Jie, *Sannong zhui ren guang zixu*, 4a. On the Jiading massacre and the events that led to it, see the classic study by Jerry Dennerline, *The Chia-ting Loyalists: Confucian Leadership and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century China* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), in particular chapter 10.

3 There are several other editions of the collection, down to the twentieth century. The page-numbers in the present essay refer to the original 1700 edition, photo-reproduced in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, vol. 1783, and in *Siku jinhui shu congkan*, 子, vol. 38.

collects “modern” (*jindai* 近代) texts, that is, from authors writing in the early Qing. The one by Wang Jie is by far the longest, and it is the only one written in the first person.

Wang Jie’s autobiography is assuredly something out of the ordinary, and as we shall see its author takes pains to show us how “extraordinary” he indeed is. As already stressed by Pei-yi Wu in what to my knowledge is the only existing discussion of Wang’s text,⁴ the latter is an extreme, almost outrageous example of the preoccupation with the self that singularizes Ming-Qing transition first-person writings. At the same time, it hardly displays the sort of philosophical doubts, social worries, and political anxieties so common with pre-conquest authors. How far is this a result of Wang’s idiosyncrasies, and how far does it reflect the post-conquest times during which the larger part of his adult life unfolded?

Wang Jie: An Outer Biography

Before attempting to answer these questions, it will be useful to look at what solid information can be found concerning Wang’s life and background beyond the curious anecdotes and high-flown claims he himself generously dispenses in his autobiography. In effect, we get no more than in the case of any Chinese literatus without a political, scholarly, or literary career distinguished enough to leave more than a few scattered traces in the written record. The biography of Wang Jie in the 1881 Jiading gazetteer is a four-line entry, saying that Wang, who went by the styles Jieren 介人 and Sannong 三農,⁵ mastered all sorts of literary styles at an early age, became a government student (*zhusheng* 諸生), travelled widely as a private secretary (*muyou* 幕友), was invited in 1659 by the governor of Henan to work on the Henan provincial gazetteer, and during the Kangxi period participated in the compilation of the gazetteer of his native Jiading. It also adds, somewhat allusively, that in 1689 one of his sons, Wang Suishi 穉實, was slandered over some fiscal issues and died in prison.⁶

4 See Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 163–72.

5 The meaning of Sannong is unclear. Though *nong* 農 is current for the first-person pronoun in the Wu dialect, I am not sure that even the ego-obsessed Wang Jie would call himself “Triple-Me.”

6 See *Jiading xianzhi* 嘉定縣志 (1881), 19.20a. The events that led to Wang Suishi’s death can be reconstructed based on a few entries in the same gazetteer, in particular 32.21b–22a on the so-called “ministry fees trial” (*bufei yu* 部費獄) that happened in 1689—a case of embezzlement that ended with six officials sentenced to death and three hundred Jiading notables, including Wang, stripped of their ranks. Several were later pardoned, but in between Wang had died from ill treatment in prison.

Evidence scattered in Wang's autobiography and in a few other sources allows us to complement the picture somewhat. Though we do not know Wang's exact dates of birth and death, Wu Pei-yi proposes 1603–1682 with interrogation marks. This would mean that he was in his early thirties—not a very young age—when he became a government student in 1635 (13b). A close examination of the text suggests that his date of birth might be in 1609 or later, however.⁷

A casualty of the fall of Jiading in 1645 that deserves mention here because it is an indicator, however vague, of the family's economic and scholarly standing, was Wang's family library. As Wang Jie recounts it (3b-4a), in 1632 already a fire in their house had destroyed the totality of the Wangs' book collection, which was "several tens of thousands *juan*" strong. However the Wangs were able to mobilize the wherewithal to reassemble a collection of "several thousand *juan*": these are the books that were pilfered in 1645 by "mutinied soldiers" who left only a few odd volumes behind them. But more was to come: while Wang Jie had managed to again rebuild a collection of a few hundred *juan* by doing the rounds of bookstores, in 1651 almost all of them were robbed in circumstances that he does not make altogether clear. And finally, when in 1657 he was arrested for reasons I will discuss later, the few tens of *juan* he had been able to retrieve were snatched away from his study by the yamen runners who had come to seize him.

Whatever we think of the well-calibrated narrative—after each incident the library is diminished by an order of magnitude—the size of the original collection suggests a comparatively well-to-do literati family with serious scholarly pretensions. Still, if as Wang claims (9a) his father inhabited a modest house with only a few rooms, and with only three bondservants (*jiaren* 家人), the family must have fallen into harder times at some point. Thus, they had to pawn clothes and rent out part of their residence to be able to rebuild their library in 1632. Wang tells us that in his youth he lived and worked in the cramped cabin of a "half-boat" (*banfang* 半舫, one of two boats lashed together), and that when he went to visit rich families in their grand dwellings he did not feel like he belonged to the same world; and he describes his later circumstances as extremely modest.

In 1632, at the time of the fire that destroyed his library, Wang's father, Wang Yunzhen 允貞, was an official: he had just been appointed magistrate of Yuan'an 遠安, in Jingzhou 荊州 prefecture, Hubei, and he had taken his son

7 The latest date in the text is 1678, and Wang says at one point (15b) that he is now seventy years old. Regarding his year of death, there is an indication somewhere that he was still alive around 1684; see *Jiading xian xuzhi* (1684), 2.30a.

along. They started rebuilding the collection after their return, which seems to have taken place the very same year: after only three months in the post Wang Yunzhen had been denounced by his superiors for “causing incidents due to his short-temperedness,” and had preferred to resign.⁸ This was his first (and apparently last) appointment, which he had eventually received fourteen years after becoming a “tribute student” in 1618, and following a long series of failures at the higher examinations.⁹

In sum, the foregoing suggests that Wang Jie was the scion of a literati family, possibly distinguished in terms of scholarly achievements, apparently of moderate means—though at one point well-to-do enough to build a large library—but without a strong background of examination success and official service. Wang himself never rose above this condition: while apparently enjoying some reputation as a scholar and *littérateur*, he too failed the provincial examination repeatedly and never became an official. And indeed, Pei-yi Wu’s argument in his short essay on Wang’s autobiography is that Wang was never able to get over these failures, and that the flamboyant account he gives of his many talents and various adventures must be understood as a compensation for the deep frustration caused by his inability to make it into officialdom.

My own reading is somewhat different; but before discussing this, let me stay for a while with Wang’s attempts at passing the provincial examination. Wang says nothing of the attempts at the *juren* triennial examination he probably made before the fall of the Ming. He speaks of his spectacular despair when the news of the fall of Beijing was received in 1644—crying and stamping his feet, almost wanting to die; but at what must have been the first opportunity offered to him, in 1648, he did attend the provincial examination set up by the new regime (24b). Wang’s next dated attempts are in 1651 (19a) and 1654 (22a), and he appears to have pursued the effort, rather incredibly, through 1675, when he must have been close to seventy years old (13b). In one occurrence where he speaks of his examination-taking without providing a date, he says that he went several times to the capital to pass what was called the Shuntian examination, which candidates hailing from the provinces were allowed to do under certain conditions (2a). (The Shuntian examination was said to be easier than the one in Jiangnan, the most competitive of all; why Wang was able to compete in Beijing is unclear.)

8 See *Jiading xianzhi* (1673), 11.37b, 16.21a-b. Reportedly, shortly after his arrival in his post Wang arrested and summarily executed a local despot who defied the government, but after they had received his report his superiors were bribed into denouncing him instead.

9 We do not know when Wang Yunzhen died, but there are indications in the autobiography that it happened before the fall of the Ming.

At this point a word must be said of what Wang calls the “catastrophe” (*huo* 禍, or *nan* 難) that befell him in 1657, which he mentions repeatedly. Referring to the unfortunate series of events that ended with the disappearance of Wang’s library, Pei-yi Wu claims that in that year Wang “was implicated in a major criminal case involving hundreds of civil candidates; many of the codefendants were executed. He was acquitted. . . .” Examination scandals did break out in several provinces in 1657. The two major cases occurred in Shuntian (Zhili) and Nanjing (Jiangnan). Both involved gross corruption and favoritism and provoked violent demonstrations when the results were posted. In both cases the successful candidates were re-examined under heavy military surveillance early the following year. The trials that followed ended with the execution or demotion of a number of examiners and other officials involved; a few Shuntian candidates also lost their lives, though the majority of those accused in both cities got off with beatings and exile, or were pardoned.¹⁰

It is unclear which of the two scandals Pei-yi Wu is alluding to. But what is made clear by a careful examination of the allusions to his ordeal scattered in Wang’s text is that in reality it had nothing to do with examinations. Wang was arrested at his home in Jiading, thrown in jail, and apparently threatened with execution. What was the cause? He tells us at one point that he had been imprudent enough to arouse the wrath of people belonging to a political faction, who in turn had started attacking him, all of this ending in what he himself calls a “literary inquisition” (*wenzi yu* 文字獄) (17b-18a). What the contents of the writings that spurred his arrest may have been Wang does not say. He only deplores his own carelessness: “When I write on current affairs, it is as if I did not know about prisons!”; and when a visitor during his captivity reproaches him for bringing such trouble upon himself by having no idea of what he is writing, he nobly retorts by citing several historical figures (the first is Sima Qian) who were unfairly condemned and yet accomplished great works at great cost to themselves, or were sorry to leave them unfinished when having to submit to execution.

In short, Wang Jie appears to have dabbled in politics during this period of his life, and to have been a victim of his own rashness and propensity to speak too much. And these were dangerous times indeed. Factionalism was rife, and literati—especially southern literati—were prone to take sides or criticize the powers that be, as had been so common in the late Ming. Indeed, the Ming was a close memory and the new regime was still threatened by loyalist forces. In such surroundings it was tempting to crush an enemy by accusing him of

10 For details, see Shang Yanliu 商衍鑿, *Qingdai keju kaoshi shulu* 清代科舉考試述錄 (Beijing: Sanlian, 1958), 299–304.

contacts with the loyalists. Whether Wang was victim of such allegations we have no idea, and in fact, apart from mentioning his despair when hearing of the fall of Beijing in 1644, he is totally (and understandably) discreet on his feelings toward the defunct dynasty.

Whatever the case may have been, in the end Wang Jie escaped punishment. In the rather extended development that follows the account of his imprisonment, he gives a list of ten personalities, many of them officials or scholars involved in his life as a student and writer, but also including a courtesan passionately in love with his writings, who “understood him intimately” (*zhiji* 知己) and from whose benevolence (*en* 恩) he benefited (18b-20a). The fifth in the list is a certain Li Linzhi 李琳枝, who extracted him from prison: Li, who was examining the students everywhere in the province, including, apparently, Wang in his prison, was deeply impressed by the emotional powers of Wang’s paper and concluded his evaluation—if we are to take Wang’s words at face value—by emphatically proclaiming that the simple notion of such a genius being threatened with death by a bunch of vulgar people was unbearable.

This was Li Senxian 李森先 (?-1660), who features frequently in the text as “censor Li,” and whose position at the time did endow him with the ability to rescue Wang from execution. A Shandong native who had passed the *jinshi* exam in 1640, he had been recruited by the Qing after they entered Beijing, became a censor in 1645, and served the Qing in this capacity for the next fifteen years, though with periods of disgrace due to enmities caused by his vaunted courage and integrity and by his membership in the so-called southern faction among Chinese officials.¹¹ In 1656 Li was dispatched to the Suzhou-Songjiang area as a regional inspector (*xun’an yushi* 巡按御史), a position that gave him considerable powers to fix whatever problems he chose. There he is said to have earned much popularity by punishing the abuses of the powerful and corrupt, but in the early months of 1657 he was cashiered and called back to the capital for being too lenient with a certain official who had embezzled some tax monies, but had returned them. The date of this incident confirms that his examination of local students, which was part of his duties, and in particular his rescuing of Wang Jie, can only have taken place months before the 1657 provincial examinations were held. Li Senxian was tried and punished in Beijing, but in early 1658 the accusations were rescinded, he was restored to his position, and after some further brushes with the Shunzhi

¹¹ See his detailed biography by Wang Zhengyao 王政堯 in *Qingdai renwu zhuangao* 清代人物傳稿, 1st series, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 132–36. The southern vs. northern faction rivalry in the early Qing was in part a continuation of the one between the Donglin party and the eunuch/northern faction in the late Ming.

emperor, at the end of the same year he was dispatched to Henan to survey famine conditions. And as it happened, this marked the start of Wang Jie's career as a private secretary.

There are many references in the text to Wang's peripatetic life as a *muyou* or, more generally, in search of any sort of employment, or just hospitality; but at one point he provides a sort of recapitulation (12a). Though he claims to have travelled half the empire, his activities far from home seem to have mainly taken place in Henan, where he says he spent a total of ten and some years. Sometime in 1658 he entered Li Senxian's cabinet, though it is unclear whether he participated in Li's famine relief work or was, rather, a sort of literary guest. Then he was invited by a certain minister of Rites Xue 薛宗伯, that is, Xue Suoyun 所蘊 (1600–1667), who hailed from Henan, to study in his home at Mengxian 孟縣 together with his elder brothers Wang Zhong 仲 and Wang Qian 蒨. Not long after he was hired by governor Jia Hanfu 賈漢復 to participate in the compilation of the Henan provincial gazetteer, completed in 1660.¹² Three years later, while he attended the funeral of Xue Suoyun,¹³ Wang was invited by Xue's son Fensheng 奮生 to stay at his home to “discuss things past and present.”¹⁴ Wang says that Xue and his son remained his main benefactors in Henan, and we will see that still in 1678 Xue Fensheng was anxious to promote Wang's career. Following this visit Wang was hired by the prefect of Luoyang, Zhu Canhuang 朱燦煌, to help read examination essays.¹⁵ The last patron Wang cites by name is Shen Yitang 沈繹堂, that is, Shen Quan 荃 (1624–1684), who was Henan vice surveillance commissioner between 1656 and 1662, though he is not specific about the kind of work he may have accomplished in his service.

In any event, in the eyes of his local friends and patrons his years in Henan seem to have made Wang Jie a sort of honorary citizen of the province.¹⁶ And

12 It can be seen at the beginning of this 1660 *Henan tongzhi* 河南通志, a fairly rare edition, that Wang's participation was modest: he was part of a small group of six proofreaders (*dìngzhèng* 訂正), all but one being government students, as opposed to the Henan prefects listed as “compilers” (*fēnji* 分輯).

13 Xue died in 1667, but three years after the compilation of the Henan gazetteer would mean 1663 or thereabout—one example of Wang's casualness with chronology.

14 Wang calls Xue *filis* by his style Weigong 衛公, which is not mentioned in any of the documents I have seen on him, and describes him as a “supervising secretary” (*huangmen* 黃門, equivalent to *jishizhong* 給事中), a post that Xue, a 1655 *jìnshì*, held until he retired after getting embroiled in factional politics in Beijing.

15 This is Zhu Mingkui 明魁, who became prefect of Henan *fu* (Luoyang) in 1661 and seems to have stayed in the post for a decade.

16 For an enumeration of contemporary Henan officials and luminaries to whom Wang Jie is said to have been close, see Zhang Fengtai's 張鳳臺 preface and postface to his 1921 edi-

it is to Henan that he devoted what appears to be (with his autobiography) his only surviving work, the *Zhongzhou zazu* 中州雜俎. This is a vast compilation of information and anecdotes culled from other books and arranged under the four headings “Heaven,” “Earth,” “Man,” and “Various Things.” It is said to have been compiled in the wake of Wang’s work for the Henan provincial gazetteer. In the Qianlong period the *Zhongzhou zazu* was deemed significant enough to be sent by the Henan governor for inspection by the *Siku quanshu* commission in Beijing. Though the *Siku* editors declared it unfit for copying into the “Four Treasuries,” they nevertheless inserted an entry in the catalogue of “preserved titles” (*cunmu* 存目). Their evaluation is not very positive, to say the least: they deplore its confusing organization, unsourced entries, undated anecdotes, and unreliable (that is, unofficial) sources, making the work belong to the *xiaoshuo* genre; and they conclude with the words “much effort and few results” (*ke wei lao er xian gong* 可謂勞而鮮功). Still, by being included in the *Siku* catalogue the *Zhongzhou zazu* became part of the official bibliography of the empire, and for this reason it is mentioned in various official or semi-official compilations.¹⁷

If the *Zhongzhou zazu* and the *Sannong zhui ren guang zixu* seem to be Wang Jie’s only works preserved today, he wrote many more. He himself enumerates at the end of the autobiography the titles that made up his oeuvre, ten in all, including his *Oeuvres complètes*, which he says is still in progress; and roughly the same titles (as well as a few others) feature in the bibliographic section of the Jiading gazetteer.¹⁸ Wang clearly enjoyed some reputation as a man of letters, both in his native Jiading and among his elite friends in Henan. Among the latter was his old acquaintance Xue Fensheng, who according to Wang was eager to help him in his career and in 1678 offered to nominate him for the “Broad Learning and Superior Writing” (*boxue hongci* 博學宏詞) special examination that was to take place the next year under the personal watch of the Kangxi emperor (22b). As is well known, an unstated aim of the project was to lure scholars of repute who were suspected of loyalty to the former Ming regime into working for the government by participating in the compilation of

tion of Wang’s *Zhongzhou zazu* (on which see below).

- 17 The 35-juan work described in the *Siku* notice seems to have been lost. The only text available today is in 21 juan and lacks the part on “Heaven.” It was edited and published by Zhang Fengtai in 1921, based on a manuscript found in a Liulichang bookstore in Beijing.
- 18 See *Jiading xianzhi* (1673), 24.34a; *Jiading xianzhi* (1881), 24.14b-15a, 25.12a, 15a, 15b, 26.15a, 22b, 27.15b, 28.9a, 11a, 12a. Wang’s writings are often quoted in the Jiading gazetteers. He also seems to have had an interest in administrative matters, a subject completely absent from the autobiography: the statecraft anthology *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 of 1826 features two texts by him (in juan 73 and 90), one on the postal system and one on judicial amnesties.

the Ming dynastic history. Several famous scholars who had been nominated managed to excuse themselves from attending. Wang Jie, for his part, did not even want to be nominated. Quoting the letter he wrote Xue to decline, he gives as excuses his arrest in 1657, his “addiction to books,” the fact that he only “deals with trifles,” and his lack of talent as an historian: he cannot be regarded as a “famous author,” and to speak of “broad learning” about him would be groundless. Such modesty is a far cry from all the bragging in the rest of the autobiography and may imply some loyalist sensibilities on the part of Wang, even if he had tried to pass the Qing examinations. In any case, and assuming the anecdote is authentic, being thought of as eligible to attend the *boxue hongci* examination suggests that Wang’s scholarly stature in the eyes of his friends was quite real.

Wang Jie’s Self-Portrait

The foregoing was an attempt to assemble a factual record of what can be known about Wang Jie’s life and works. Surely further details could be discovered here and there, but I doubt they would change much for a profile that does not appear particularly original: after all, in any period there were thousands of impecunious literati, some with talent, learning, and a reputation, who roamed the country in search of employment and protection and every three years tried their luck at the higher examinations. But what makes the autobiography a fascinating document is not this: it is the way Wang describes himself as a unique, indeed an extraordinary personality.

We have seen that for Pei-yi Wu this self-image was a compensation for Wang’s deep frustration with his incapacity to succeed at the provincial examination and become eligible for an official career, and as a result for thinking of himself as a nobody, a pathetic failure. Does the text contain any signs that Wang may have experienced such feelings? He does mention his failures, but only after the last one in 1675 does he admit that he felt “distraught” (*caolao* 惴惴), and tried to “relieve his depression” (*shimen* 釋悶) by throwing a wild theatrical show with his young servants that was attended by a raucous audience for a full month (13b). In a passage where he derides the practitioners of physiognomy who predicted he would become a high minister before age thirty or forty, he adds that now, at age seventy, “the millet is cooked and the time for wild dreams is over”—an allusion to a famous anecdote about the immortal Lü Dongbin. He certainly experienced frustration at some points, but elsewhere he consistently claims that he has no regret. Referring to the several examinations he attended at the capital, he says rather grandly that he had “his

feet cut by the officials in charge” but that, contrary to his friends who had also been ousted and who were devastated and cried their heart out, *he* would banquet and have fun, and “be like his old self” (*you guwu ye* 猶故吾也) (2a). A little later (3a) he enumerates all the misfortunes that befell his friends and classmates who had become officials after the dynastic transition: several perished in Guangdong because of civil war, another died of exhaustion in Guangxi, tribute students were victims of ghosts or bandits on their way to the capital, several had their careers stalled or compromised because they were honest and simple, and many who had passed the *jinshi* waited “several tens of years” without being called to office. In sum, says Wang, becoming an official confers prestige and nobility on you, but it is at the price of one humiliation after another, of ending up in grave difficulties, or even of losing one’s life. He himself did not have the good fortune to succeed, but at least he was able to “happily roam the forests, serenely wearing hide and canvas” to a ripe old age, while “the kingdom of wine and the city of poetry were his long-time apanage.” Finally, Wang recounts two dreams in which he was visited by a man dressed in red who cautioned him against writing provocative essays: the first right after his 1657 “catastrophe,” where he pledged to limit himself to innocuous writings, and the other following a period during which he had reneged on his promise and been unable to control his ingenuity (*jiangxin* 匠心) and refrain from his inclination to “hit and stun” (*pengqi* 碰奇): the man in red tells him that in such conditions he has no hope of passing the examinations; and Wang explains that from then on he “forgot about the imperial court,” wine was his constant friend, and he would “look for poets and singers to play in accompaniment” (21b-22a).

Indeed, being a prodigious drinker and an inexhaustible poet is the dominant, one might almost say the structural, motif in Wang’s autobiography. While the combination of intoxication and poetry-writing is commonplace in the Chinese literary canon, in the *Sannong zhuren guang zixu* it acquires a Rabelaisian quality that may not have many equals. Wang tells us he acquired his fondness for liquor at the early age of five, when he sneaked into the family wine cellar and started sipping from a jar, until the servants found him there, dead drunk. Later, having grown up and “pretending to be from a great family,” and as a consequence being invited to multiple banquets, he and a certain Zhu were the only ones able to hold out until dawn, earning the nicknames “At-Cockcrow-Zhu” and “At-Dawn-Wang.” He also recounts in some detail the only two occurrences in his life when he got drunk after a prolonged binge to the point of losing consciousness (7a-b).

Banquets were of course the occasion par excellence to drink and write verse at the same time, the two activities nourishing each other by way of

drinking games and other challenges. Several such parties recounted in the text are raucous events described without caring in the least for taste or elegance: the guests drink their fill and beyond, there are shouts of applause and laughter, some get sick or fall asleep, and there are women. One of my favorite among Wang's accounts took place at Mengxian, where Wang was a frequent guest of the Xue family:

The courtesan Little-Red (Xiaohong'er) of Heyang, who was simple-minded but a good drinker, liked to take advantage of that aptitude to overcome people. One day I presented her with a pitcher containing several *sheng* of wine. Little-Red did not turn it down. She said: "I am good at liquor, you are good at poetry, each time you complete a poem I will drink a cup. Today we will test each other with poetry and wine and decide who is Chu and who is Han!" I hummed verses while Little-Red drank; after we had faced each other drinking several rounds, Little-Red started to look tipsy. Thereupon I chanted a series of poems in a row, and she was not able to stand up to it: she knelt and begged surrender. I let her go to bed, and continued to hum and drink by myself while the guests raised their cups and congratulated me! (23b-24a).

There are other examples of Wang's incredible, almost superhuman, proficiency and ease in versifying. Thus, when he goes to visit censor Li in Henan, Li offers him a booklet containing over a hundred of his poems composed during the year 1656, entitled *Bingshen shike* 丙申詩刻. Back home Wang orders his servant to warm up some wine for him and gets down to work: at the end of the night he has composed the same number of poems, all set to Li's rhymes, and rushes to the censor's residence to present them. Li is overwhelmed: it had taken him a year to craft his poems, but now here is someone a hundred times more talented than him! He takes on Wang right away in his cabinet (23b).

But it is not just a question of ease and rapidity. Wang prides himself more than once on the efficacy of his writings—on their ability to convince, to move and captivate an audience. In the most far-fetched instance, it is a tiger that is subdued by Wang's poetry—or in this case, his offer of a poem. In 1664, while traveling in the mountains of northwest Zhejiang, Wang and his party encounter a tiger that looks extremely aggressive. Whereas his companions are crouching in panic, Wang approaches the tiger and makes a respectful speech, calling him "Lord of the Mountains" (*shanjun* 山君) and promising to write a poem for him. The tiger nods three times and goes away. During the night Wang pens a poem in five-syllable verse with sixty rhymes (i.e., 120 lines), which he brings back to the spot where the encounter had taken place and burns, pronouncing

the wish that the tiger acknowledge it. During that night he dreams of a tiger with a human head that comes to feast him with meat and drink.¹⁹

In another, less fantastic, instance—one of those ubiquitous banquets, this one at the home of Song Luo 宋犖 (1634–1713) and in the presence of Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612–1672), both important personages and Henan natives—Wang captivates the audience by reading his *Blaming the Volcano Guest* (*Huoshan keqiao* 火山客譙), a work written at the time of his 1657 troubles, to such an extent that the guests urge him to go on with his reading until dawn and that the rituals of banqueting are overlooked (25b). Other similar examples could be cited, several of which feature in an enumeration of seven occurrences in his life that Wang defines as “occasions for great joy” (*kewei dakuaizhe* 可爲大快者), each time caused by the recognition of his superior literary abilities by a crowd of distinguished people (24b–26b).

Now, banqueting with one’s peers and composing literary works are not highly original subjects in the autobiography (or diary) of a Chinese literatus, even though Wang more often than not endows them with a picaresque or even epic dimension that is rarely found in Chinese first-person writings. Less common is his catholic interest in all sorts of knowledge. And much rarer, perhaps unique, are the freewheeling descriptions he offers of his everyday habits and tastes, the way he speaks of his body and physical experiences, his kindly attitude toward women, his care for the details of material life, and his offhand attitude with money.

The range of specialized disciplines in which Wang claims to have superior knowledge is vast. He says that he has thoroughly studied the doctrines of Buddhism and Taoism, more for their social usefulness—they keep the small folk satisfied with their fate—than for their intrinsic value (15a–b): he does not believe in them and, more generally, several anecdotes stage him as a rational man not to be deluded by sorcerers, soothsayers, or ghosts, and denying the divine retribution of deeds. In a more scholarly vein, he is highly competent in phonetics (14b–15a).²⁰ He has also studied local dialects and composed an important treatise on the subject, the *Nongya* 農雅, in 4 *juan*.²¹ Another area of expertise is music (12b), of which he has a comprehensive knowledge, past and

19 This is one in a set of three encounters with tigers recounted by Wang (4a–b). See Pei-yi Wu, 171, for a translation of the story. For Wu, it illustrates Wang’s intense desire to be recognized as equal to famous officials who drove wild beasts away by the sheer strength of their writing.

20 This is an episode where Wang reveals the secrets of the science of characters and rhymes to the students of a school whose master is so elated that he offers the penniless Wang the money he needs to carry on with his traveling.

21 The work is occasionally quoted in gazetteers when they discuss local speech.

present. He reports that he rectified pitches with the help of a stringed-instrument maker from Jiading, arriving at a tuning of such perfection that “the breaths of the eight winds and twenty-four solar terms all respond to each other”; and he claims that, “extraordinarily,” all the high ministers and erudite scholars in the land have adopted it, that its renown has even reached the imperial apartments, and that it is now used to teach the zither.

But where Wang Jie’s text is truly out of the ordinary as a self-description, it seems to me, is when it comes to his intimate habits and tastes. The physicality of it is remarkable. Wang discusses, occasionally in great detail, his eyesight (he is short-sighted but his ability to write and read has not been diminished with old age), his hearing (incredibly sharp), his teeth (he lost only two), his hair (in 1660 he was dismayed by having to pull out some white hair), his ability to walk long distances and climb mountains (despite “feet lacking strength”), his competence in riding (which as a man of the south, more used to move by boat, he had to learn from scratch when he traveled with censor Li in Henan), and more. He also was trained by an “extraordinary man” (*yiren* 異人)—clearly a martial arts master—to make his arms as hard as iron, though this was only for the fun, not to make a living as a “brave” (5a-6b for all of the above).

Wang also comments with great precision on his tastes in matter of food and drink, as well as clothes, houses, and more. He mentions tobacco smoking (*shiyān* 食烟), a recent craze in the region, but criticizes the habit. Though he is short on money most of the time, he makes sure that his hat and outer garment are in perfect condition so as to make him look well-to-do; but otherwise he needs to be sparing with clothes and make them last as long as possible.²² As for houses, he hates dampness and darkness and his preference goes to clear and neat rooms in the upper floor, with four windows where he can expose his bare chest to the wind and sun when getting up in the morning—probably not a very common habit of Chinese scholars. Still, his body hygiene must have been limited since he used to dislike taking baths, only discovering the pleasure of it in old age. And in general he says he is strong and in good health, never suffered from a serious illness, never takes any medicine, and whenever he does not feel well treats his discomfort with light wine and a good book—and he gives examples of friends or historical figures who suffered badly or even died for having followed the prescriptions of the ancient medical treatises (7a-10a for the above).

22 He also mentions a robe made of “western cloth” (*xīyāng búpào* 西洋布袍, presumably from Southeast Asia) that his father had made for him when he entered the prefectural school, and which he continued to wear on ceremonial occasions for some thirty years but always refused to wash or re-use as an undergarment.

Wang discusses sex at some length (10a-11a). He did enjoy it when he was young and strong.²³ He even appears to have been a ladies' man, at least if we are to believe his claim that when he visited brothels during his rakish years, the most famous courtesans would offer themselves to him for free, or even give him money, which together with his winnings in gambling dens helped pay for his studies. But at some point he realized that the "lofty talents" (*daya* 大雅) might not like to hear of this, and stopped once and for all (1a).²⁴ And later, at age fifty, he took the more radical decision to definitively abstain from sex, notwithstanding his friends' reproaches and the jokes he faced during banquets.

As a matter of fact, there were no banquets without courtesans, prostitutes, or singing girls whose task it was to take care of the guests, pour them liquor, sing when asked, and more if requested. Wang mentions them often, sometimes by name, and with sympathy. For example, he recounts that, though in the north the attending women are required to show the utmost submission to guests and are treated harshly by the host, he used to make them sit down and ordered the menials to take care of the service, incurring criticism from the northerners because it ruined local customs and the consideration due from the women. The section on sex in the autobiography ends with Taoist-style considerations on the urgent necessity to preserve one's essence (*jing* 精) and spirit (*shen* 神), and with a virulent and detailed denunciation of people who attempt to increase their potency with concoctions extracted from wild animals.

And finally, there is Wang's casualness with money: he does not know how to count currency, he is ignorant of the price of local products, he has not been apprised of how to make a profit, and he has no account-book. Money comes and goes and he never has ten taels in store. When he acquires one of these old music instruments (*guqi* 古器) he loves so passionately, he can be sure he will have to sell it at some point and be depressed by this; and when one day he brings back from Henan some precious antiques he has been offered as a farewell gift, his bondservants laugh at him because they know his treasures will soon have to go. But Wang the spendthrift manages to put his financial irresponsibility under a nobler light when he recounts a family conflict that took place when he was seven years old, during which he haughtily refused the right the local magistrate was awarding him to inherit the property of a deceased

23 He tells us he had two wives, who lived in perfect harmony and gave him two sons each (2a-b).

24 Pei-yi Wu, 167, speaks of the relevant passage as "one of the very few confessions in Chinese autobiography," which I think is an overstatement, but considers that it was not a "genuine" confession because of the lack of "any expression of remorse or sense of guilt."

uncle to whom he had been appointed heir: he has been like this since childhood, he tells us, “with lofty aspirations but indifferent to riches” (17a-b).

Conclusion

Is Wang’s autobiography a desperate attempt to redeem his many examination failures by singularizing himself from his social peers and making himself admirable as a multi-talented genius and a sort of literary knight-errant? To be sure, he continued for decades trying his luck in the examination hall. But he clearly says that at the time of writing he has become completely comfortable with not being a provincial graduate and not having made an official career. Instead he had a life full of fun, he made friends with a lot of important scholar-officials who admired him, and he enjoyed a reputation as a scholar and, especially, a writer. Reading through the text one senses everywhere his “sunny temperament” (in Pei-yi Wu’s apt characterization) and optimism. I tend to think that Wang wrote his self-portrait not as a compensation for some ontological frustration as a failed literatus, but for the sheer pleasure of it—indeed, as a piece that is perfectly appropriate for inclusion in a *xiaoshuo* collection devoted to “extraordinary” individuals.²⁵ No doubt Wang was convinced he was a character out of the ordinary: not just because of his considerable capacity for drinking and fluency in writing verse and prose, which one assumes were shared by many colleagues, but above all for his gargantuan curiosity for every kind of knowledge and experience and his taste for adventure. The impression is that he not only admired himself very much for his abilities, but also found himself and his life *interesting*, special. Hence his obsession with telling everything and writing it down with a total lack of inhibition. Hence, too, his use of enumerations—of the misfortunes he encountered, of the things he was afraid of, of the people who “understood him intimately,” of the “occasions for great joy,” and of the things he likes (*xi* 喜) or dislikes (*wu* 惡). The latter form a list almost poetic in its randomness (16a-b):

I like the sound of a spring, I like the sound of stringed and wind instruments, I like the sound of little boys reciting books in a clear voice, I like the sound of the boatman’s oar in the middle of night; I hate the cawing of a flight of crows, I hate the shouting of guards clearing the way, I hate the sound of merchants working on the abacus, I hate the voice of

25 Whether Wang had anything to do with the inclusion of his self-portrait in the *Yuchu xinzhi* cannot be known.

women cursing, I hate the voice of men breathing “ah?,” I hate the sound of blind women singing ballads and strumming the lute, I hate the sound of scratching the bottom of a pot; I like the sight of the moon at the end of night, I like the sight of snow at dawn, I like the sight of flowers at noon, I like the genuine beauty of women with light make-up, I like the sight of “triple brandy”; I hate the sight of survivor courtesans, I hate the sight of flatterers getting intimate, I hate the sight of grandees who wear masks and disguise themselves.²⁶

Here the notion of “truthfulness,” or “sincerity” (*shi* 實), I adduced at the beginning might be invoked. In many late-Ming texts sincerity involves a propensity to analyze oneself, meaning not just moral self-examination but an effort to understand one’s own psychology and to *interpret* one’s thoughts and acts. In contrast, Wang Jie’s autobiography is more description than introspection, except perhaps for his considerations on old age and the necessity of quieting down and enjoying the settled life of someone who has abandoned all ambitions and no longer possesses the wild energy of his younger years.

The fact is, *change* is not absent from Wang’s account of himself: from the teenager fond of performing magic tricks (12a-13b) and the young student immersed in gambling and whoring, to the sedate but still sprightly old man who has renounced traveling at the urging of his sons and cultivates his garden, drinks, versifies, and plays chess with his elderly friends, has fun with his servants, and plays with his grandchildren (11a-b); not to mention his renunciation of sex and all the physical manifestations of aging. In this respect at least his self-portrait qualifies as an “autobiography,” as an account of life as a process—or a progress, to borrow Pei-yi Wu’s term. What most of the authors dealt with in *The Confucian’s Progress* are ruminating over is the changes they went through during their lives, their psychological and spiritual progress, the difficulties and reversals they encountered, and how in the end some of them at least were able to reach a form of enlightenment.

To speak of enlightenment about Wang Jie’s progress from riotous young scholar to settled retiree reconciled with his fate would be a gross exaggeration. As I said, his text is description more than reflection; and even though there is some of the latter, it is devoid of profundity. But Wang’s descriptions display a form of utmost sincerity, occasionally bordering on self-absorption, both in the material details of his life and activities and in reports of not

²⁶ See Pei-yi Wu, 170, for a somewhat different translation. Wu claims that such likes and dislikes are not very different from those of other seventeenth-century literati and that the list is not a great innovation.

particularly admirable behavior. The resulting text is a mixture of realism and hyperbole, with much embellishment and, again, a healthy sense of fun.

Finally, and to come back to the question raised at the beginning, Wang's idiosyncrasies and cheerful approach to life are clearly the main reason why his self-portrait is so startlingly different from even the most freewheeling among first-person accounts written during the Ming-Qing transition. Still, does the text reflect the specificities of the early Qing decades that it essentially covers? If it does, it is in a rather limited way. As we saw, what Wang tells of his arrest in 1657 allows a glimpse of the perilous political environment in Jiangnan a little more than a decade after the conquest. At one point in the text there is a brief allusion to the case of a private Ming history that came under censure and in which Wang's friend Zha Jizuo 查繼佐 (1601–1676)—a scholar of some renown who had fought alongside the Southern Ming and who after returning home in 1647 remained suspected of loyalist sentiments by the authorities—was implicated at the beginning of the 1660s (6a).²⁷ And finally, we can at least suppose that Wang's refusal to be considered for the 1679 *boxue hongci* examination was partly due to a feeling of guilt toward the ancient regime. Only later would the Qing monarchs systematically and ruthlessly repress the factionalism and overt political criticism that they regarded as a major cause of the fall of the Ming; but even so, Wang Jie is obviously very cautious regarding this kind of thing. In a similar way, it took some time for the Qing to take aim at and discourage the individualistic bent (often inspired by Wang Yangming's brand of neo-Confucianism) and propensity to talk about oneself other than as a public persona that were so characteristic of the late Ming. Indeed, we do find in the second half of the seventeenth century examples of first-person writings revealing the concerns with the self and the tendency to distance oneself from social conventions and conformities often found with authors from the previous generations.²⁸ Wang Jie undoubtedly displays no little disregard for the conventional. But where he probably is exceptional is in his deep and completely unrestrained involvement with the minutiae of his physical and material life: a jubilant realism, one might say, that is never found in the writings of his literati peers and that together with his gleeful flights of exaggeration makes his autobiography a most enjoyable exercise in narcissism.

27 On this affair, which cost scores of individuals their lives, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 206

28 Several examples are analyzed in Wu's *Confucian's Progress*.

The Mask of Comedy in *A Couple of Soles*

Robert E. Hegel

Offstage

By the seventeenth century, plays of the *chuanqi* tradition had become a favorite theatrical form for China's cultured elite. Highly educated writers composed these operatic texts to avail themselves of the opportunity to write great amounts of verse for the arias as much as to craft a meaningful and entertaining story. These plays were too long to present in a single session; either they were performed over several days or, more likely, only selected scenes were ever staged. To get the whole story or to mull over the emotional power of the arias, readers could refer to the printed versions of these plays published, most often in series, by major printing houses in lower Yangzi region cities. Although at this distance in time we cannot know just how, when, and where a particular play was staged, we can be sure that reading their scripts was a widespread practice among the elite. Scholars of a later age must consider how the realities of their life experiences shaped their reception of the plays.

Peace and social stability were relatively new when Li Yu's 李漁 (1610–1680) comic opera *Bimu yu* 比目魚 (*A Couple of Soles*, 1661) first appeared.¹ The Ming empire having collapsed in the 1640s, the country was still being pacified as the Manchus consolidated their Qing state. Devastation in the major Jiangnan cities, widespread loss of life, and conflicting loyalties had scattered China's cultured class and thrown into question the values of the late Ming literati. In particular, this meant challenging the sensuous courtesan culture and the leisure and indulgence that many had pursued during the 1620s and 1630s. That world had fallen apart just at its glittering height: widespread natural and man-made disasters produced roving bands of brigands, robbers, and rebels, one of whom took Beijing in 1644, causing the last Ming emperor to kill his empress and daughters before hanging himself north of the imperial palace.

1 The text appears in *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1992), vol. 5, and in *Liweng chuanqi shizhong jiaozhu* 笠翁傳奇十種校注, ed. Wang Xueqi 王學奇, Huo Xianjun 霍現俊, and Wu Xiuhua 吳秀華 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji, 2009). An English translation is Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles* 比目魚, trans. Shen Jing and Robert E. Hegel (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2019).

To write a comedy when such events were fresh memories in people's minds was not a common activity among China's scholarly playwrights. But then Li Yu was an exceptional person.² His writing activities were many-faceted: he was famous (or infamous) for writing guidebooks for gardening and on how to select the best concubines, and for his short stories, poems, and essays, in addition to his writing for the theater. He also compiled two massive collections of administrative texts in the 1660s, including his own observations on judicial punishments, imprisonment, and even categories of crime. Beyond his serious interests in governing and despite all recent events, Li Yu could still boast: "Broadly speaking, everything I have ever written was intended to make people laugh." 大約弟之詩文雜著，皆屬笑資。³ Most of his plays were light-hearted romantic comedies, very much in line with the scholar-beauty (*caizi-jiaren* 才子佳人) fashion in escapist fiction that circulated during the first decades of Qing rule. He almost certainly wrote the bawdy parody of that genre, *Rou putuan* 肉蒲團 (The Carnal Prayer Mat), although he did not acknowledge doing so.⁴

Li Yu's avowed purpose in writing *A Couple of Soles* was to promote traditional virtues—to echo the new Qing emphasis on behavioral standards and their opposition to the hedonistic lifestyle. And sure enough, loyalty to the state and fidelity in marriage are the two major themes interwoven through the play. Neither is caricatured, at least not directly. But as we will see, there was a dark side to Li Yu's humor in this play as backdrop to its superficial amusements.

Love Conquers All (Sort of)

The play begins with the first of its major narrative strands, a love story: a nicely conventional young, hard-working, and gifted Confucian scholar—an orphan, just to avoid any family objections—sees and falls in love with the teen-aged daughter of a beautiful actress. Just at that time the girl's father is forming a "youth troupe" in which this girl, Liu Miaogu 劉藐姑 or Fairy Liu, will play all the central female *dan* roles. In order to get to be near her, the young

2 The most thorough, and most lively, biography of Li Yu is by Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988). See also Huang Lizhen 黃麗貞, *Li Yu yanjiu* 李漁研究 (Taipei: Chun wenxue, 1974), and Jing Shen, "The Playwright and His Art," in Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 239–70, esp. 241–44.

3 Li Yu, *Yijia yan quanji* 一家言全集, in *Li Yu quanji*, 1.219; trans. Hanan, *Invention*, 75.

4 Li Yu, *The Carnal Prayer Mat (Rou putuan)*, trans. Patrick Hanan (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990).

scholar Tan Chuyu 譚楚玉 abandons his higher social status and joins the troupe by answering an advertisement for an actor to perform the painted-face or *jing* roles. But his superior skill in memorization and his assertive manner soon win him the privilege to play *sheng* or leading male roles—opposite Fairy Liu—just as he has been longing to do.

Tan's initial naughty plans for a quick seduction, glossed by professions of deep attraction, are quickly crushed by the troupe's internal rule: no fraternization between the sexes, a rule strictly enforced by their patron deity Erlang 二郎神—who makes no appearance in the play, by the way. But while the young couple grow in devotion to each other, they must reserve their steamy glances for onstage performances in costume. Any greater intimacy is totally out of the question. However, Fairy Liu's mother, aptly named Liu Jiangxian 劉降仙 or Fallen Angel,⁵ has other plans for the girl. That is, she wants her daughter to follow in her own footsteps by taking on selected wealthy lovers as a means to build up the family nest-egg. Despite Fairy's adamant refusal to compromise her chastity, Fallen Angel arranges a match for her with an odious rich man, Qian Wanguan 錢萬貫 (Moneybags Qian)—and receives a thousand ounces of silver in exchange.

On the day that Fairy is supposed to go to Moneybags's house, she changes the program for the day's performance to include a scene from a famous older play, *Jingchai ji* 荆釵記 (The Thorn Hairpin). Its heroine feels that she has been abandoned by her husband, and she jumps into a river to drown herself. As it happens, this performance takes place on a stage overhanging a river, too—and after denouncing her besotted suitor quite directly, Fairly Liu leaps to her watery death. Tan Chuyu, onstage as her husband, quickly realizes that Fairy has taken this drastic action to preserve her commitment to him. And without a second thought, he too leaps in and disappears in the current.

Implications behind the Love Story

At that point of suspense, about half-way through the play, the first day's performance may well have concluded. So I'll stop here and make some observations about this part of the plot. First, the commercial nature of society is manifested repeatedly in this play. Everyone and everything would seem to be for sale: performances onstage and off (pretending to be in love with suitors, in particular), positions in local government, useful connections, and of course,

5 Jiangxian is more literally, "fallen immortal," but "angel" has been used for prostitutes in the U.S. No connection with Biblical stories of Lucifer is intended by this rendition of her name.

flirtation and sex. Not only is the mother willing to sell herself—although only for the right price—she and Moneybags talk about her daughter as if Fairy were simply property to be disposed of as needed for economic gain and personal gratification. Moneybags has other concubines, of course; more is what he wants, his lust—like her greed—being seemingly insatiable.

So much for maternal concern and affection for her offspring! By marked contrast, Fairy despises her mother, not surprisingly, but shows her all courtesy and appropriate respect as befits a filial daughter. Is there social relevance in this portrayal of relationships? Interestingly, “a thousand ounces of silver” (*qianjin* 千金) is a polite way to refer to one’s daughter: Fairy, in this sense, has been symbolized as a trunk filled with precisely that amount of precious metal. This is what Moneybags has had delivered to Fallen Angel’s door in anticipation of her handing over her daughter. The mother is a tactical sex worker; the virginal Fairy is a fungible commodity. Similarly, bribes and extortion are the accepted way that officials make personal fortunes at the obvious expense of the poor—who clearly resent this mistreatment. And yet the officials refer to themselves as *fumu guan* 父母官, “parent officials,” to emphasize their Confucian concern for their subjects. Where money is involved, one-upmanship and the double-cross are ubiquitous in both private and official transactions. In scene 17—after the suicides—Moneybags even refers to himself as a *haohan* 好漢, a “brave fellow,” a term usually applied to heroic figures in such popular narratives as *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Outlaws of the Marsh), perhaps because he is so adept at wielding financial, if not physical, violence on the defenseless. What a comment on Li Yu’s society! The playwright was known for his frequent social commentary, but his over-the-top characterizations and farcical dialogue here make the satire all the more biting. This ostensibly comical social critique is structurally juxtaposed to the markedly different play-within-the-play: *The Thorn Hairpin* is a tale of betrayal and loss; as such this older play is anything but amusing. Allusions to it seem to reflect the darker political and social context in which the comedy appeared. Or, more specifically, the play suggests the betrayal and loss of cultural values felt by many literati that they attributed to inept late Ming rulers.

Administrative Service vs. Eremitism

The second narrative strand, a counterpoint to the love story in the acting troupe, follows a hard-working and dedicated older local administrator named Murong Jie 慕容介 who just cannot wait to retire in order to avoid being drawn into yet more official functions. Using superior military strategy (and fire as a

defensive weapon) he commands government forces to defeat a band of local marauders and their wild animal allies. With that threat to the local civilian population out of the way, Murong makes a hasty retreat into the mountains to hide there as a hermit and fisherman with his like-minded wife. They even take on new names to hide their identity; he becomes Old Fisherman Mo 莫漁翁. Murong's intention had been to wipe out the bandits completely, but his wife had insisted that he treat the enemy kindly and spare lives when he can. As a consequence the bandit leader and some of his henchmen take refuge in their mountain lair, to constitute a threat later in the play when they have rebuilt their strength.

There are several ambiguities worthy of note here. First, although Murong has rendered meritorious service and the people in his jurisdiction all love him, to retire—to reject “fame and gain”—can signal a disapproval of the state and the prioritization of personal integrity.⁶ To retire when the Way does not prevail is a tried and true Confucian dictum (*Lunyu* 8.13) after all,⁷ and at the fall of the Ming, many Confucian scholars and administrators did just that. A number shaved their heads to avoid the hairstyle that the Manchus had imposed on all Han men and had turned to Buddhism, some seriously and others as subterfuge to save their necks; Li Yu was in regular contact with some of these *yimin* 遺民 or “left-behind subjects” of the Ming.⁸

Secondly, the leader of the mountain marauders here is quite the extraordinary figure. He seems to be the offspring of a primitive “strange man” who copulated with the wild beasts of the wilderness, tigers and panthers. So in appearance this fellow is visibly “Other,” even subhuman, a “half-breed,” although his thirst for raiding seems to have strong parallels with late Ming bandit gangs. Moreover, his vanguard is originally comprised of other wild creatures: the illustration for his attack in the play's first edition includes wolves and even snakes in the charge. Is this a caricature of the infamous Chinese bandit who sacked Beijing, Li Zicheng 李自成 (1605–1645)? Or, because he came from the uncultivated northern wilds, is his bestial appearance meant to suggest the culturally alien—hence assumed to be culturally

6 Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 237.

7 Confucius, *The Analects* (*Lun yü*), trans. D.C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1983), 73: “The Master said, ‘... Show yourself when the Way prevails in the Empire, but hide yourself when it does not. It is a shameful matter to be poor and humble when the Way prevails in the state. Equally, it is a shameful matter to be rich and noble when the Way falls into disuse in the state.’”

8 See Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), esp. 1: 646–50, 674–80.

inferior—Tungusic peoples and converted frontier Hans who constituted the Manchu invasion force?⁹ The play gives no direct clues to support these inferences; overt lampooning of the Manchus was too dangerous to attempt during Li Yu's lifetime. Even so, surely contemporary readers would have been prompted to speculate on what this bizarre character symbolized. Also curiously, later in the play the bandit chief engages an imposter to enact a ruse that will allow him to overcome local resistance; this stratagem is reminiscent of clever deceptions employed by the heroic protagonists in the great Ming novel *Sanguo zhi yanyi* 三國志演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms, earliest ed. 1522). This may suggest empire-building aspirations, again pointing toward the Manchus. But we have not yet viewed these scenes.

And the Lovers Are Saved!

We left the play at its midpoint, the overnight break for the audience who would return the following day for the second installment. The heroine leapt into a river and presumably drowned, with her intended husband joining her in her fate. But nothing is quite as it appears in this play; such is the nature of its comedy. The god Erlang had not shown up as predicted to prevent any premature intimacy when the young couple were merely mortal actors, nor does he now. Instead, a second deity intervenes in the drama.

This river god, the "Pacifier-of-the-Waves" Lord Yan 平浪侯晏公, ushers in the second half of the play. It is his birthday, and with his divine minions he has been visiting various shrines across the region to check up on the sincerity of offerings and ceremonies in his honor. The play that takes the lives of the young scholar Tan Chuyu and his beloved was staged in a local celebration of this same god's birthday. He shows up just as the young couple disappear beneath the waves, and, like any good *deus ex machina*, Lord Yan saves the day. However, this being a play by Li Yu, he cannot simply have some kindly older person scoop them out of the water, revive them, and hide them away

9 Hanan, *Invention of Li Yu*, 184, notes the play's artful use of correspondences: the river god parallels the half-human bandit chief; the god is a water deity, while the bandit is a mountain king. As we will see, Murong impersonates the god to offer advice, and the bandit chief employs an imposter to discredit Murong. Perhaps more appropriately, the willing prostitution of the mother, Fallen Angel, contrasts absolutely with the impassioned chastity of the daughter, our heroine Fairy Liu.

somewhere as happened in earlier short stories.¹⁰ Li Yu's cleverness takes the episode much farther.

In his great perspicacity, this deity sees what the couple have done and quickly grasps the sincerity of their devotion to each other. Consequently he is moved to rescue them. He does so by accommodating them to their new surroundings: he changes them into fish, in particular flatfish or soles. Nor does he prevent them from sticking their flat sides together, so throughout their watery adventures the fish are, in effect, copulating the entire time. This is demonstrated on stage by some sort of painted paired-fish costume worn by a single actor—while confirmed in dialogue by the people who soon catch this strange couple of fish in their net.

To tie the two strands of the narrative together, the coupled fish are pulled from the water by servants of the good official who retired to the mountains, Murong Jie, now known as Old Fisherman Mo. Just to carry on with the naughtiness, seeing the fish so joined arouses the female servant's own desires which, we learn, surpass those of her husband in intensity (although she chides him, he is not made into a fool for his shortcomings—she is performed by a *chou* or clown actor, while he is played by a *mo* actor, a formal male character-type).¹¹

Once the fish have been hauled up in the net, the benevolent spirit changes them back into their human forms, to everyone's amazement. "Fisherman Mo" and his wife welcome them and in days to come they arrange a raucous rustic wedding, complete with off-color jokes and various tricks to get the couple hopelessly drunk. Back at the town where the play was being performed, Fairy's mother and Moneybags carry on an outrageous parody of lawsuits: they file countercharges against each other over ownership of the silver paid as Fairy's

10 This is what happens in the Li Yu short story on which this play is based, however; see "An Actress Scorns Wealth and Honour to Preserve Her Chastity" 輕富貴女旦全貞, in Li Yu, *Silent Operas*, trans. Patrick Hanan (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1990), 161–201. The broader theme of travelers on a boat attacked by bandits or a rogue boatman usually has the girl leaping into the water to preserve her chastity, where downstream she is rescued by a harmless older man before she can drown. This is the narrative core of *The Thorn Hairpin*; a comparable element appears in *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (1621) Story 27: "Jin Yunu Beats the Heartless Man" 金玉女棒打薄情郎; a young man is similarly rescued in *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (1627) Story 20: "Zhang Tingxiu Escapes from Death and Saves His Father" 張廷秀逃生救父.

11 For Li Yu's use of role-types in making gags, see Shen, "Playwright," 262–63. That the flatfish are copulating is made quite explicit by the servant's comments: 嘻！兩個並在一處，正好干那把戲，你看頭兒同搖尾兒同擺，在人面前賣弄風流。"Hee, hee! The two are stuck tight together and playing 'that game.' You see, they are shaking their heads and wagging their tails together, carrying on their 'romantic business' right in front of us!" Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 142 (modified).

bride price, but the highest official manages to appropriate all the silver offered in the original agreement—and more as well.

Political vs. Personal Loyalties

Once fully recuperated, young Tan Chuyu leaves the mountains to take the civil service examinations and, fulfilling the most hackneyed storytelling convention of the day, earns high marks and is immediately appointed to an important local position. Unsurprisingly, he is posted to the area near where Murong had recently served. However, because Murong had hidden his true identity, Tan does not realize that the older man is both an experienced civilian administrator and competent commander of military forces.

The local bandits Murong Jie had mercifully spared have regrouped, have found a military advisor, and are preparing to invade the area. Upon learning of the imminent attack, fearful local officials send scouts into the mountains to find Murong in order to bring him back to lead their resistance. Hearing this, the raiders find another man who looks very much like Murong Jie; this imposter allows himself to be “found” and “resumes his earlier post.” At his first encounter with the bandits, this “commander” declares the beastly bandits too powerful to resist. As planned, he quickly surrenders and urges all local leaders to do the same. The bandits overrun the region in short order, draining it of all objects of value and imposing their own harsh rule. For his part, the imposter quietly absconds with a great portion of their pillaged treasures.

Before Tan Chuyu took up his post, Murong had secreted in Tan's luggage a booklet with detailed instructions on how to defeat the marauders. Thinking this, too, is a gift from the god, Tan follows instructions and handily destroys the mountain bandits, decisively this time. He also orders the arrest of Murong Jie, thinking that the old official had turned traitor to the state. Former underlings recognize hermit Mo in the mountains as the real Murong; they bring him in chains to Tan's court. A fiery exchange between him and Tan results: each accuses the other of treachery and immoral behavior, of betraying the state or showing deep ingratitude for friendship and disrespect for seniors. Finally the bandit chief himself, now humanly contrite and moved to honesty in the face of execution, explains his use of the imposter and identifies this man as the real Murong. Only his confession can save the old administrator from being beheaded along with him. Greatly relieved, Tan Chuyu and Fairy renew their friendship with the old couple, now recognized for who they truly are; Tan concludes the play by vowing to join the Murongs in the mountains when his term

of office is completed. The value of Confucian service is thus confirmed, as are the obligations of friendship and of respect for elders.

Disguising Li Yu's Times

The final scenes have been largely devoted to suspenseful waiting for mistaken identities to be revealed. This being a comic play, the audience can be confident that everything will turn out right, and when it does, no spectator or reader, then or now, would be surprised. Both will have been treated to the play's series of extravagant exaggerations that follow caricatures and incongruities piled upon absurdities, with not a few dirty jokes added along the way. Neither realism nor historical accuracy was ever a concern in romantic *chuanqi* plays; *A Couple of Soles* is no exception. But the play seems overly light-hearted: it is rife with signs that beg to be interpreted in ways reflective of its time. Especially for readers who could take their time reading and rereading while reflecting on what they were seeing on the page,¹² all of this ostensible silliness could have seemed somewhat forced. The roughly sketched violence and selfishness in the background of the play's comic action might well have evoked painful memories of recent events in their own lives: the play's escapist aspects could hardly divert all traumas of the recent past.¹³ As Patrick Hanan noted, Li Yu regularly relied on "the illusory medium of drama to express a truth that cannot otherwise be revealed."¹⁴

Relevant truths here circle around the catastrophic change of dynasties mid-century. Less than twenty years before this play appeared in 1661, Li Zicheng's bandits had taken and sacked Beijing; the Manchus had used this event as their excuse to restore order by asserting military control over the whole empire—since the Ming state had clearly lost all strength and determination to do so. Yangzhou, a city not far from Li Yu's beloved Hangzhou and closer still to Nanjing where he lived later in life, refused to surrender to the

12 There is no record of the play having been performed in its entirety; perhaps it never was. But Li Yu's, like other *chuanqi* plays written by members of the educated elite, were printed and circulated broadly among that class as texts for reading. Reading allows rereading and stopping to ponder, in marked contrast to a non-stop performance onstage, even though Li Yu asserted that his plays were meant to be seen; see Shen, "Playwright," 264–66.

13 See various first-person accounts in Lynn Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993); for more on traumatic memories, see her *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2019), esp. Chapters 3 and 4.

14 Hanan, *Invention of Li Yu*, 89.

Manchu invaders; when the city finally was taken, the Northern armies slaughtered seventy percent of the population, men, women, and children. Other Jiangnan cities were similarly devastated. During those decades, plays and fiction dramatizing contemporary events (*shishi xiju* 時事戲劇 and *shishi xiaoshuo* 時事小說) were being performed and circulated in print, fulfilling something of the function of newspapers two centuries hence by bringing distant events into the lives of viewers and readers. One did not have to see it with his own eyes to understand what misery had been inflicted all across the land. If Li Yu had parallels with reality in mind, he left only suggestions of his meaning, preferring to “gain relief” from the world’s problems through his writing.¹⁵

Even so, many of the play’s events and situations could have provoked powerful emotional associations for its initial audiences. The gangs of roving bandits (*liukou* 流寇) during the late Ming seem reflected in the barbaric mountain forces beaten back only by the ethical and intelligent leadership of Murong Jie and his protégé Tan Chuyu. And the sensualist greed of Moneybags Qian and even of Fallen Angel as they fight with unscrupulous local officials over possession of Fairy’s bride price suggest the venality of the rump Ming court formed in Nanjing, 1644–1645. Retirement, as mentioned above, brings the Confucian maxim to mind. Moreover, in the play Murong Jie seeks out the rock where an ancient worthy stood to fish—a man who had adamantly refused to serve in an official position even when invited by his childhood friend, newly enthroned as emperor Guangwu of Han.¹⁶ In this the official-in-exile seemingly alludes to motivations of the *yimin*, the “left-behind” subjects of the Ming, members of the elite who likewise refused to serve the new government, preferring exile, becoming Buddhist monks, or even committing suicide to compromising their personal integrity and loyalty to the fallen state—despite the flaws of its rulers. At the least, this historical allusion supports resisting the political expediency of taking office under China’s new Manchu rulers.

As the river god Lord Yan celebrates his birthday, he sees and evaluates performances by many amateur ritual specialists and their followers at the various temples scattered across the countryside. The performers play local musical instruments and sing repetitious songs with nonsense syllable choruses. The

15 Ibid., 36: “When writing plays, however, I not only gain relief from my depression and resentment, I lay claim to the title of happiest man between Heaven and Earth. ... If one cannot fulfill one’s desires in real life, one can produce an imaginary realm in which to do exactly as one wishes. ...” *Li Yu quanji* 11.47: ... 惟於制曲填詞之頃，非但郁藉以舒，愠爲之解，且嘗偕作兩間最樂之人。... 未有真境之爲所欲爲，能出幻境縱橫之上者。....

16 This was Yan Guang 嚴光 or Yan Ziling 嚴子陵 (39 BCE–41 CE); see Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 291–92n168. On Murong’s determination to follow Yan’s model, see p. 250.

play generally represents these people as primitive in custom and habit, even to the point of infantilizing them. As the God sings, “I enjoy these local customs / So similar to the most ancient times; / So simple and sincere, / And free from any cunning.”¹⁷ But not all villagers are equally grateful for his protection and sincere in their offerings, with the consequence that Lord Yan does not accept them, granting no favors to the region for the coming year.

The deity serves as a critical observer in this regard. To support his evaluations, Li Yu has created distinctions between the several communities the god inspects. For the sincere supplicants, the role-types assigned are *chou* and *mo*; the clownish and often vulgar aspect of *chou* performances are balanced out by the performers of more upright *mo* roles.¹⁸ A similar use of these two character-types can be seen in Murong’s servants as mentioned above: the wife, performed as a *chou*, is outspoken in her sexual interests, whereas her husband (performed as a *mo*) avoids any such inuendo. The Deity’s negative judgment falls on villagers performed by *chou* and *jing*, or painted-face characters, who tend to be violent and can also play the fool.

These role-type distinctions seem to reflect crude social stereotypes of the day. Despite having suffered poverty and want himself, Li Yu clearly aspired to identify with the social and cultural elite, a class that saw themselves as substantially superior in cultural terms to the unlettered masses of the empire. Tan Chuyu and Murong Jie are performed as upright and learned *sheng* and *xiaosheng* respectively. Among the *chou* characters in the play are the wicked imposter who pretends to be Murong Jie in order to help the King of the Mountain overrun the territory previously under Murong’s administration. Appropriately, this man is treated to a hilarious rough and painful ride to the military headquarters once he’s discovered in the mountains (scene 23). Another is the illiterate shepherd boy who provides most of the off-color entertainment at the rustic wedding for Fairy and Tan in scene 19. Although a contemporary reader might not perceive the relevance of these distinctions if they corresponded to his prejudices, they stand out in our more class-conscious age.

Yet Li Yu may well have shared this critical perspective.¹⁹ Printed around the same time, apparently by a friend or acquaintance of Li Yu who used the penname Aina the Layman 艾納居士, the story collection *Doupeng xianhua*

17 Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 119; see 118–22.

18 Referring to another Li Yu play, Hanan, *Invention*, 154, notes, “a common function of the *chou* characters in Li Yu: to play out in gross counterpoint the actions of the high characters.”

19 To judge from his extensive collections of materials meant to serve as advice to administrators, *Zizhi xinshu* 資治新書 (A New Collection for Aid in Governing), Li Yu considered political questions very seriously, and clearly he was well read in this realm of activity.

豆棚閒話 (Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor, ca. 1660) presents provocative parallels. Arranged as a series of oral storytelling sessions on hot afternoons in the shade of a makeshift arbor overgrown by runner bean vines, its tales challenge conventional judgments of historical and fictional figures. Exaggeration and caricature dominate these characterizations, as if their author's intention were to provoke questioning of all received wisdom. Aina's focus seems to have been to seek out exemplars of genuine virtue from among the self-congratulatory charades he projects onto most of his subjects. Stories skewer self-styled moralists, do-gooders, and philosophers alike. Nor are common people spared from these barbs; fools and the gullible appear in every story. True goodness seems to be represented only by some of society's most humble. But one of its last stories is told by an older man when asked by the young men in the group to recount events that occurred before they were born. What they get is a chilling account of the brutal and widespread violence, ghastly tales of death and the undead occasioned by rampaging Han bandits and the Manchu armies as they rode roughshod over the hapless common people.²⁰

Could events that traumatic have been unfamiliar to the second generation of survivors? Would their parents not have told them about their experiences? Perhaps not. One might consider possible parallels in more recent times: many Cultural Revolution survivors have declined to detail their experiences with their children, preferring to look forward to better times to come. Following conventional structural patterns for *chuanqi* plays, Li Yu interweaves two plot lines and their separate themes, especially in the play's first half: the love story and the retirement of Murong Jie, chastity and loyalty. The first might appeal more to younger audiences, but surely the second would resonate particularly strongly with those who had served in office, older male readers and playgoers. Both virtues are asserted and then questioned or rejected as their stories unfold: Fairy Liu turns her back on all family obligations and in their piscine forms the yet unmarried couple copulate furiously; the elder administrator values maintaining his individual integrity and peace of mind over continuing

20 Aina jushi, *Doupeng xianhua*, ed. Chen Dakang 陳大康 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1998); see Aina the Layman, *Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor*, ed. Robert E. Hegel (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2017), 171–85. *A Couple of Soles*, scene 31, ends with a reference to the historical Jie Zhitui 介之推 (c. 650 BCE) who burned to death in a well-intentioned but stupid attempt to get him to leave his mountain retreat; perhaps not coincidentally, the first story in *Idle Talk* rewrites this story to focus on the exaggerated jealousy of Jie Zhitui's wife, subverting the traditional political concern for loyalty by focusing on her resentment over being ignored during the many years Jie had faithfully served his lord. Here, too, the personal outweighs traditional loyalty to one's ruler.

service to state and society—for which he had been amply lauded: he cannot claim to have been slighted by his emperor.

The love story survives apparent tragedy to reach a happy marriage and then, after a period of tense separation while Tan goes off to battle, concludes with a “happily ever after” reunion. But Murong’s paternalistic application of leniency to the subhuman raiders and his subsequent flight into the mountains have a very troubling outcome: the scourging of the region by the resurgent bandits. Could this *not* resonate with readers and viewers old enough to be counted as survivors? For a clearer understanding of the symbolic importance of historical tragedy as subtext here, one might compare the lengthy dispute between Tan Chuyu and Murong Jie to the very brief *da tuanyuan* 大團圓 (grand reunion) scene when both couples come together in the play’s final scene.²¹ A happy ending (or at least a successful conclusion) was conventional for these plays; the final scene Li Yu gives *A Couple of Soles* nominally fills the bill. Even so, the vehemence of the defense of apparently competing values—service to the state versus individual self-protection—provides no unambiguous answers to the question of whether the political and ethical questions involved in voluntary retirement could be easily resolved—or whether the recent past might be so easily forgotten and rendered irrelevant.

Reflections of a Reader

In deciphering what meaning a text might have conveyed, whether intentionally on the part of the author or quite unconsciously embedded there, the historical context is always a reliable source of inspiration. While one can never know what a writer was thinking as he (or she) wrote, we can be assured that whether or not self-consciously responding to outside influences, major events of each writer’s life present their own special pressures. Certainly the writings of 1930s China, before the Japanese invasion, were far different from dominant writing of the 1950s, after the founding of the People’s Republic, the political atmosphere having changed radically in the meantime. The years spent in graduate school during the American war in Vietnam undoubtedly shaped my outlook on study and a career. Writing is always done in a context; so, too, is reading. Have the Vietnam War in my student days and the nearly two decades of U.S. military action in the Middle East jaundiced my interpretation of this

21 Li Yu, *A Couple of Soles*, 214–32 (scenes 20–32), compared to the resolution in 233–38 (the end of scene 32). Another term for this climactic scene is simply *da shousha* 大收煞, the “big ending”; see Shen, “Playwright,” 261.

play? Quite likely, but that constant awareness of distant violence and the human suffering involved may have sharpened my vision in some respects rather than dulling it altogether. Li Yu regularly referred to his poverty and frustration in his informal writings; light-hearted but superficial humor might well have been his expedient to avoid directly addressing the warfare and its outcomes that undoubtedly contributed to his plight. Even if unbidden, events of his times make a shadow appearance from behind his comic mask.

Making Up for a Loss: The Tragedy of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai in Modern Zaju

Wilt L. Idema

In 2008 Stephen Greenblatt, a well-known authority on Shakespeare, drew attention by publishing *Cardenio*, his own version of a lost play by Shakespeare. In an age when we study literature not in order to write it but to write about it, such an action may be more unusual than it was in earlier times when one studied literature in order to become an author oneself by imitation and emulation of the works of the masters. When literature became established as an academic discipline in China in the beginning of the twentieth century, the earliest generations of university teachers as well as college students as a rule still had been initiated to the study of literature in the traditional way: many of them were not only critics and historians of the genres they taught and read but also practitioners, showing their mastery of the subjects they taught by the works they produced on the side.

In the 1920s and 1930s this applied not only to essays, poems, and lyrics, but also in the field of traditional drama.¹ If the pioneer scholar of drama history Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) never realized his ambition to write his own *zaju* 雜劇, other scholars did. In Nanjing the veteran playwright and drama scholar Wu Mei 吳梅 (1884–1939) stimulated his students such as Lu Qian 盧前 (1905–1951), Wang Jisi 王季思 (1906–1996), and Chang Renxia 常任俠 (1904–1996) to write their own *sanqu* 散曲 and *zaju*,² but their works were eventually surpassed, both in quantity and quality, by the Beijing-based scholar Gu Sui 顧隨 (1897–1960). In the second part of the twentieth century the creative works of these scholars have been largely ignored, but in recent decades Zuo Pengjun 左鵬軍 in his many publications has not only provided a general

1 For a brief survey of the authors of *zaju* and *chuanqi* active in the period 1920–1949, see for instance Zuo Pengjun 左鵬軍, *Jindai chuanqi zaju yanjiu* 近代傳奇雜劇研究 (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 78–89. Yao Dahuai 姚大懷, “Minguo xuezhe zuojia de chuanqi zaju chuanguo jiqi xiqushi yiyi” 民國學者作家的傳奇雜劇創作及其戲曲史意義, *Wenyi lilun yanjiu* 2016.4: 142–51 highlights the growing prominence of academics among authors of *zaju* and *chuanqi* during the Republican era.

2 Zuo Pengjun, “Wu Mei dizi de chuanqi zaju ji qi xiqushi yiyi” 吳梅弟子的傳奇雜劇及其戲曲史的意義, *Xueshu yanjiu* 2007.7: 137–42.

picture, but also discussed the works of many individual authors. The works of Gu Sui had already earlier started to attract attention.³

In the wake of the Folklore Movement of the 1920s many Chinese scholars had also developed an interest in the development and meaning of folktales. Following the example of Gu Jiegang's 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) studies on the tale of Meng Jiangnü 孟姜女, Qian Nanyang 錢南楊 (1899–1987) focused on the tale of Liang Shanbo 梁山伯 and Zhu Yingtai 祝英台, on which he first published in 1926. This tale of a girl who passes as a boy in order to pursue an advanced education away from home, and whose love for her roommate is thwarted when on her return home her parents marry her off to another young man, perfectly fitted the agenda of the May Fourth Movement with its emphasis on gender equality and free marriage choice. The tale was discussed more widely in a variety of media in the 1930s, following a triple special issue of the Canton-based periodical *Minsu zhoukan* 民俗周刊 in February 1930.⁴ One aspect of this “Liang-Zhu fever” of the 1930s that is hardly if ever discussed in surveys of early scholarship on the legend, is that the legend was twice adapted as a *zaju* to make up for the loss of the play on this topic by the famous Yuan-dynasty playwright Bai Pu 白樸. This lost play was often mentioned by scholars on the legend to prove its early popularity on and off stage.⁵ The first modern *zaju* adaptation was authored in 1931 by Chang Renxia while he was still a student at the Central University in Nanjing; the second adaptation was written by Gu Sui in 1936, then teaching at Yanjing University. A comparison of these

3 Gu Sui and his works have been eagerly studied since the 1990s. See Min Jun 閔軍, “Gu Sui yanjiu shuping” 顧隨研究述評, *Xuzhou shifan daxue xuebao* 2006.3: 12–20; Zhao Lintao 趙林濤, “Guxue yanjiu fanchou” 顧學研究範疇, *Hebeixuekan* 32.1 (2012): 90–93; Zhao Lintao and Gu Zhijing 顧之京, “Gu Sui xueshu nianbiao” 顧隨學術年表, *Hebei daxue xuebao* 40.3 (2015): 32–37.

4 Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918–1937* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985) discusses the studies of these two folktales on pp. 93–103. For a more detailed analysis of Gu Jiegang's study and reinterpretation of the legend of Meng Jiangnü, see Haiyan Lee, “Tears That Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 64.1 (2005): 35–65.

5 Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Yuandai zaju quanmu* 元代雜劇全目 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1957), 7. The full title of Bai's play is listed as *Ma Hao'er buyu Lü Dongbin; Zhu Yingtai sihun Liang Shanbo* 馬好兒不遇呂洞賓; 祝英台死婚梁山伯 (Goodfellow Ma does not meet Lü Dongbin; Zhu Yingtai marries Liang Shanbo in death). The reference to Lü Dongbin in this title is puzzling. This immortal makes an appearance as a teacher of Liang Shanbo in some of the versions of the legend that include an account of the resurrection of the lovers and their further career, but his name is not found in any of the preserved early versions. Its occurrence here, however, might suggest that Bai Pu's adaptation already included the resurrection of the lovers alongside the death of Student Ma. The name of Student Ma is not mentioned in any of the earlier records of the legend.

two plays may be helpful to bring out the characteristics of these two authors, and so perhaps be a small contribution to the study of modern *zaju*. A closer look at these two plays may also be of interest for the study of the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, because both authors did not base their adaptations on the best-known versions of the legend from the Jiangnan area, but on the local traditions of their hometowns in respectively northern Anhui and southern Hebei.

1 Chang Renxia and His *Zhu Liang yuan*

After 1949 Chang Renxia established himself as a major authority on ancient Chinese art. Students of early Chinese drama are of course acquainted with his monographs on ancient Chinese dance. But little in his early youth predicted such a scholarly career. Chang was born in a small village in Yingshang district in northern Anhui, north of the Huai River. Only at the age of ten *sui* did he start attending a traditional school (*sishu* 私塾). He was forced to leave his hometown in 1922 because of floods, but a generous gift from a brother-in-law allowed him to travel to Nanjing, where he was admitted to the Special School for the Arts. Upon graduation from that school he was later admitted to the Central University, where he studied with Wu Mei. Upon graduation he was retained at his alma mater. The academic year 1935–36 he spent in Japan, where he pursued an M.A. degree at Tokyo University.

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s Chang Renxia was active in *huaju* 話劇 (modern spoken drama) activities in Nanjing as a critic, organizer, and actor. He played, for instance, a small part in Tian Han's 田漢 (1898–1968) *Fuhuo* 復活 (Resurrection; an adaptation of Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*), when it was performed to great success in Nanjing in the spring of 1936. Throughout the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45) Chang Renxia would continue to produce dramatic scripts. His first exposure to drama was, however, as a young boy to the various forms of local theater in his home village. Late in life he left a vivid description not only of his *huaju* activities but also of his childhood exposure to traditional theater:

As a child I grew up in Yingshang district in northern Anhui and I only went to school at ten. The dramatic arts that I encountered all were as local as local could be. Each year on the eighth day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar there would be a large local market fair where the farmers could buy and sell livestock and implements, and there you could find all kinds of locally-produced woodblock-printed small songbooks,

some of which were local plays, and I collected not a few of them. At the time of the new year according to the lunar calendar people everywhere were selling woodblock-printed, brightly colored New Year prints, many of which showed dramatic scenes, and I also collected not a few of those. The local little plays you could see under normal circumstances were only the *duangongxi* 端宮戲 (*danwuxi* 擔巫戲) that were performed by only a handful of people: they would construct a coarse stage, high above the heads of the audience.... There they performed *Mulian Saves His Mother*, *The Large Parting at the Inn*, *The Small Parting at the Inn*, and *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*.⁶

For more elaborate performances the young Chang Renxia had to wait for the annual festival in the district capital on the first of the tenth month. As a teenager he learned from a blind singer the tunes he performed, and he also learned to play the flute and the two-stringed fiddle.⁷

Despite Chang Renxia's active involvement in *huaju* activities in Nanjing, Wu Mei succeeded to also instill a passion for Yuan drama in his student:

In my studies at that time I emphasized China's classical literature. I was most interested in Yuan drama and the famous plays of Guan Hanqing 觀漢卿, Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠, Zheng Guangzu 鄭光祖, and Bai Pu were always at my side. My teacher Wu Mei also provided me with additional instruction. At times he would in the classroom play the flute and correct the tune when lecturing on prosody. I have written a few short and long *sanqu*, and I also wrote the one-act plays *Gupen'ge* 鼓盆歌 (Singing while Drumming on a Pot) and *Tian Heng dao* 田橫島 (Tian Heng's Island), as well as the four-act script *Zhu Liang yuan* 祝梁怨 (Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo's Grief). These were all published after they had been corrected by Wu Mei himself.⁸

The text of *Gupen'ge* so far has not been recovered but must have been an adaptation of the well-known tale in which Zhuangzi's 莊子 friends upon the death of his wife find the philosopher drumming a pot and singing a song on ephemerality. *Tian Heng dao* was printed in the January 16, 1930 issue of the *Guoli Zhongyang daxue banyuekan* (*Wenyi zhuan hao*) 國立中央大學半月刊文

6 Chang Renxia, "Wo yu xiju yishu" 我與戲劇藝術, *Xinwenxue shiliao* 1993.2: 46. This article is also reprinted by Shen Ning 審寧 and Guo Shufen 郭淑芬 in *Yaxiya zhi liming: Cheng Renxia xiju ji* 亞細亞之黎明: 常任俠戲劇集 (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji, 2012), 5–11.

7 Ibid. 46.

8 Ibid., 48.

藝專號。This little play is set in the present: on the occasion of a visit to the last hold-out of the ancient hero Tian Heng who chose suicide over defeat, the author's alter ego gives expression to his anti-Japanese patriotism.⁹ If the young author had voiced his noblest sentiments in these two little plays, he would appear to have written *Zhu Liang yuan* as a prank during a local flood in 1931, as we learn from the preface he wrote in December 1933:

When in earlier years I was a student at the Central University, I studied the methods of arranging suites and devising scenes with my teacher Wu Mei, and I also read northern plays with great joy, but even though I might understand their import in my heart I had not yet mastered their skill. As an experiment I wrote a few plays such as *Gupen'ge*, *Tian Heng dao*, and *Jieyu hui* 劫餘灰 (Ashes Remaining from a Kalpa) and the university had them printed,¹⁰ but I myself consider them failures and have now rejected them. In the summer of the year *xinwei* the capital (Nanjing) suffered from a great flood, and in the Chengxian 成賢 Dormitory where I was staying the water reached to one's knees in the first-floor rooms. I spent my days leaning on the window and watching the fishes, despondent because I could not go out. Thereupon I selected four stories, planning to compose four *zaju* to while away my time. In one or two days I had finished the first act. But when I had barely finished *Zhu Liang yuan*, I left for Lushan and I could not complete the project. During these last few years I have been quite busy and have not practiced this craft anymore. By chance rifling through my trunks, I found my old manuscript still there. When I promptly took it to my teacher, and after he had corrected it, I handed it to the printer. How could I dare call this a "publication"? It only serves as a memory.¹¹

Despite these words of modesty, Chang Renxia must have thought quite highly of *Zhu Liang yuan*, as this preface was included when Chang had it printed in a limited edition of two hundred copies on the eve of his departure for Japan in 1935.¹² He took these copies with him when he went to Tokyo, where he

9 For a discussion of this play, see Zuo Pengjun, *Wan-Qing Minguo chuanqi zaju wenxian yu shishi yanjiu* 晚清民國傳奇雜劇文獻與史實研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2011), 115–17.

10 *Jieyuhui* would appear to be lost.

11 Chang Renxia, *Zhu Liang yuan zaju* (Nanjing: 1935), 2a-b.

12 Wu Mei provided the title page calligraphy for this edition, which is now very hard to find in China. See Zuo Pengjun, *Wan-Qing Minguo chuanqi zaju wenxian yu shishi yanjiu*, 117–19. I have consulted the online version of the copy kept in the Sōkōdō 雙紅堂 Collection

presented his work to Japanese scholars of Chinese vernacular literature, who showed themselves duly impressed. Shionoya On 鹽谷溫 (1878–1962) is said to have exclaimed that Chang’s play merited comparison with the works of Guan Hanqing!

Chang’s *Zhu Liang yuan* is a regular four-act *zaju*. In the first act Zhu Yingtai enters on stage in male attire. She relates that her parents, lacking a son, had raised her as a boy and told her, when she reached the age of sixteen, to accompany Liang Shanbo and study at an academy. In the three years at the academy he never has found out that she is a girl but happily shoulders tasks that are too heavy for her, such as hauling water. But now that the teacher’s wife has discovered she is a girl, by plying her with alcohol and discovering her bound feet, she decides that Zhu Yingtai cannot stay any longer and will have to return home. Though Zhu Yingtai is very much in love with Liang Shanbo, she cannot but chide him for his foolishness, for instance in the following aria to the tune of *Chenzui dong feng* 沉醉東風

That silly student strictly abides by the rites and yielding,
 So I on my part don’t have to take any special precautions.
 What a joke: you are so smart and intelligent but still such a muddled
 mess!
 For several years we’ve shared one couch and one window,
 But you only appreciated ‘The Master said,’ ‘The Odes proclaim’:
 Yours may be called ‘a mind free of evil’ truly transcending all physical
 charms!

The second act is devoted to the parting of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo. Zhu Yingtai claims she is leaving because of her concern for her aged parents. Singing *shan’ge* 山歌 (“mountain songs,” four-line folk songs) she hints to Liang Shanbo that she is a girl and that she is in love with him, but all to no avail. In the third act Liang Shanbo, accompanied by his book-boy, arrives at the Zhu mansion for a visit to his roommate. Only now he learns that Zhu Yingtai is a girl, and that she has been engaged to a young man of the Ma 馬 family. When Liang declares that this will be his death, she promises him that she will follow

in the library of the Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo 東洋文化研究所 of Tokyo University which was presented by the author in December 1935 to Nagasawa Kikuya 長澤規矩也 (1902–1980). The play was reprinted (with many typos, and without the original prefaces by Lu Qian and Chang Renxia) in Zhou Jingshu 周靜書, ed., *Liang Zhu wenhua daquan: xiju yingshi juan* 梁祝文化大觀戲劇影視卷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 18–28. The edition included in Shen Ning and Guo Shufen, eds. *Yaxiya zhi liming: Chang Renxia xiju ji*, 16–25, includes the prefaces.

him in death. The final act opens with the entrance on stage of Zhu Yingtai's wedding procession. When it passes by Liang Shanbo's grave, Zhu Yingtai steps down from her sedan chair and sings:

[Wuye'er 梧葉兒]

Brother Liang,

If your spirit still is present,

Let my soul make here her home!

I truly can't believe the road to the springs indeed is blocked.

Like hovering clouds your ghost descends:

Your image wavering—it must be you?

My mind so confident—or am I wrong?

Please welcome me like a fierce gust of wind!

(Speaks:) Brother Liang, if your soul has awareness, may this grave open up so I can join you below the earth! (Sings:)

(Langlilaisha 浪裡來煞)

Let us be passionate cocoons,¹³

Together turn into butterflies

That together to the western winds will sing a gatha of transcendence.

Down in the tomb we'll tie the knot of mutual longing,

And without day and without night

Entrust the myriad strands of foolish passion to eternity!

When Liang Shanbo's grave opens up at her prayer, she rushes into it, leaving a stupefied crowd which comments, "This happy event has suddenly been turned into a tragedy!"

Chang's *Zhu Liang yuan* is by all accounts a short and simple play. The cast is kept as limited as possible, the prose dialogues are short, and each act includes a very minimal number of songs. The language of the arias is quite clear and almost free of allusions, but quite lively. In a small compass it provides a relatively complete version of the legend. For the details of the plot, it borrows from the version of the legend as this circulated in southeastern Henan and the neighboring areas of northern Anhui.¹⁴ In the Henan version, one also finds, for instance, descriptions of Liang Shanbo helping out Zhu Yingtai when it is her turn to bring water from the well to the academy, and of the teacher's wife

13 This conceit is based on the homophony of "thread" (*si* 絲) and "thought/longing" (*si* 思). The pupa in its cocoon is believed to continue to "spit out" thread/longing until it dies.

14 Lu Xiaonong 路曉農, *Lun Liang Zhu de qi yuan yu liubian* 論梁祝的起源與流變 (Nanjing: Dongnan daxue chubanshe, 2014), 344–45.

plying Zhu Yingtai with alcohol so she can take off Yingtai's boots when she has fallen asleep and find out that she has bound feet.¹⁵ It should also be highlighted that Chang's adaptation is apparently based on a version that tried to downplay Zhu Yingtai's scandalous behavior of dressing as a boy and aspiring to a man's education: in Chang's version Zhu Yingtai does not cross-dress on her own initiative, but it is her parents who have her dress as a boy and tell her to study at an academy! Chang Renxia tried to stress the local nature of his adaptation by including in the second act some Henanese *shan'ge* that Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君 (1900–1974) had published in the special issue of *Minsu zhoukan* on Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai of 1930,¹⁶ so I take it that for these plot elements he relied on local traditions from his hometown and deliberately kept his distance from the Jiangnan versions. By calling the events depicted in his play in its final line “a tragedy” (*beiju* 悲劇), he claimed for his own play of course the highest status of dramatic art, on a par with *Dou E yuan* 竇娥冤 (The Injustice to Dou E) and *Zhaoshi gu'er* 趙氏孤兒 (The Orphan of Zhao), that had been accorded this superior accolade by Wang Guowei.¹⁷

2 Gu Sui and His *Zhu Yingtai*

We do not know whether Gu Sui had seen Chang Renxia's *Zhu Liang yuan* before he wrote his own adaptation of the legend in 1936, but I think it very likely

15 *Zhongguo quyi zhi: Henan juan* 中國曲藝志河南卷 (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1995), 191. Also see Zhou Jingshu ed. *Liang Zhu wenhua daquan Gushi geyao juan* 梁祝文化大觀故事歌謠卷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 433–52, “Yingtai hen” 英台恨. For an English translation of this ballad from Henan as “Yingtai's Grief” see Wilt L. Idema, *The Butterfly Lovers: The Legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, Four versions, with Related Texts* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), 111–37. It should be noted that this version of the legend also circulated in areas of Hebei such as Dingxian. See “The Golden Brick” in Sidney D. Gamble, *Chinese Village Plays from the Ting Hsien Region (Yang Ke Hsüan): A Collection of Forty-Eight Chinese Rural Plays as Staged by Villagers in Ting Hsien in Northern China* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1970), 131–39.

16 Feng Yuanjun, “Zhu Yingtai de ge” 祝英台的歌, *Minsu zhoukan* 93–95 (*Zhu Yingtai gushi ji* 祝英台故事集, February 1930): 61–62. The songs recorded by Feng Yuanjun had earlier been printed with her notes in *Beijing daxue yanjiu nian Guoxue yuekan* 3 (1925): 15–17.

17 For a discussion of the importance of the notion of “tragedy” in the literary thought of Wang Guowei, see, for instance, He Yuming, “Wang Guowei and the Beginnings of Modern Chinese Drama Studies,” *Late Imperial China* 28.2 (2007): 129–56. In view of the high status of tragedy in Western literary thought, and the (Japanese) claim that the Chinese dramatic tradition lacked tragedies, it became a matter of national pride to assert that China had a long tradition of tragedies. This line of scholarship eventually resulted in *Zhongguo shi da gudian beiju ji* 中國十大古典悲劇集, ed. Wang Jisi (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe), 1982.

that he had. The academic community in China in the 1930s was still very small and experts in traditional drama were few and far between. In these circles Chang Renxia's decision to have two hundred copies of his work printed must have created quite a stir, and the high praise for his *zaju* by Japanese scholars must have earned him both the admiration and the envy of his Chinese colleagues back home. Gu Sui may well have felt that Shionoya's praise for Chang's *Zhu Liang yuan* was wide of the mark and only betrayed his ignorance. Could his own play on the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai have been inspired by a desire to show both his junior colleagues down in Nanjing and those self-proclaimed Japanese experts on things Chinese how it should be really done? But even if these motivations might have played a role, Gu Sui was of course too much of a gentleman to confess to such considerations.

In 1936 Gu Sui was teaching at Yanjing University outside Beijing, which had hired him in 1929 and where he would continue to teach until the end of 1941 when it was closed down by the Japanese. Gu Sui was born in Qinghe district in southern Hebei into a family of literati. He was something of a child prodigy and at the age of ten had finished reading all the books the family school had to offer. When in 1915 he had passed the admission examination for the Department of Chinese at Beijing University, he was told to go and study English because there was nothing the university could teach him in the field of Chinese literature. Following two years of initial study of English in Tianjin, he graduated from the English department of Beijing University in 1920. In the early 1920s he worked as a middle-school teacher of English, while also publishing stories and essays in the new style of *baihua* 白話 literature.¹⁸ When Gu Sui moved to Yanjing University, one of his colleagues there was Zheng Qian 鄭騫 (1906–1991), one of the finest scholars of Yuan drama of the last century.¹⁹

In a letter of October 2, 1933 to Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), Gu Sui declared that he had decided on a five-year program to master the writing of *qu*:

18 In the 1920s Gu Sui wrote altogether eight short stories, one of which (*Shizong* 失蹤) was selected by Lu Xun in the second volume of fiction in the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系 of 1935–1936.

19 Zhao Lintao, "Gu Sui yu Zheng Qian" 顧隨與鄭騫, *Baoding xueyuan yuebao* 28.2 (2015): 78–80. In his years in Taiwan Zheng Qian published a one-act *zaju* titled *Li Shishi liuluo Huxiangdao zaju* 李師師流落湖湘道雜劇 (*Li Shishi wanders through Hunan*), in which the once famous Kaifeng courtesan, now a wandering performer, narrates the former splendor of the Song and the loss of the north following the Jürched invasion to a southern audience. See Zheng Qian, *Jingwu congbian* 景午叢編 1 (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua shuju, 1972), 446–89.

I have decided on a five-year program: for the time being I will put aside poems, lyrics, and essays, and devote myself exclusively to northern and southern songs. From *sanqu* I will proceed to *zaju* and hence to *chuanqi* 傳奇. Even though I cannot predict the outcome, it will at least serve to rein in my mind and energy so they will not overflow. Let's consider it my Chan training.²⁰

Gu Sui's earliest attempt at writing a *zaju*, the two-act *Chan xiucai* 饒秀才 (The Glutinous Student) dates indeed from 1933, but he would continue his self-imposed task only in 1936. In *Chan xiucai* Gu Sui portrayed in the character of its protagonist Zhao Boxing 趙伯興 the fiercely independent nature of a true literatus.²¹ Like Chang Renxia, Gu Sui started out with an only slightly dramatized piece of lyrical self-expression.²² For fully developed plot-based four-act plays he turned to pre-existing stories like the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.²³ Gu Sui's *Zhu Yingtai shenhuadie* 祝英台化身化蝶 (Zhu Yingtai bodily turns into a butterfly; short title *Zhu Yingtai*) was published in 1937 as one of the three plays included in *Kushui zuoju sanzong* 苦水作劇三種 (Three Plays by Kushui).²⁴

Gu Sui's *Zhu Yingtai* comes with an interesting postface:

The distribution of dramatic adaptations of the love story of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo must have been quite widespread in Yuan-dynasty times. Both the *Lu gui bu* 錄鬼簿 (Record of ghosts) and the *Taihe*

20 Quoted in Zhao Lintao and Gu Zhijing, "Gu Sui xueshu nianbiao," 34.

21 For discussions of this play which was first published in 1941, see Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, "Kushui zuoju zai Zhongguo xiqushi shang kongqian juehou de chengjiu" 苦水作劇在中國戲曲史上空前絕後的成就, *Taishan xueyuan xuebao* 32.1 (2010): 8; Zuo Pengjun, "Gu Sui zaju de tizhi tongbian yu qinggan jituo" 顧隨雜劇的體制通變與情感寄托, *Jilin shifan daxue xuebao* (July 2014): 25–26.

22 *Chan xiucai* originally only consisted of arias. Gu added dialogues and stage directions in 1942.

23 Gao Xianhong 高獻紅, "Gu Sui zaju chuanguo zhi shimo ji xinbian" 顧隨雜劇創作之始末及新變, *Hebei daxue xuebao* 42.1 (2017): 16–20.

24 Zuo Pengjun, *Wan-Qing Minguo chuanqi zaju wenxian yu shishi yanjiu*, 263–66. For this article I have based myself on the edition in Gu Sui, *Gu Sui wenji* 顧隨文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 596–610. The first complete edition of Gu Sui's six *zaju* was compiled by Ye Jiaying, as *Ku Sui zuoju* 苦水作劇 (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gongsi, 1992). Gu Sui's plays are also reprinted in the first volume of the four-volume *Gu Sui quanji* 顧隨全集 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 191–312, and in the first volume of the ten-volume *Gu Sui quanji* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 239–347.

zhengyin pu 太和正音譜 (A formulary of the correct sounds for an era of Great Harmony) list a play by Bai Pu titled “Zhu Yingtai Marries Liang Shanbo in Death,” but it has not been transmitted. But the story still widely circulates among the people....When I was a kid back home in the village, I saw performances of this play in the local theatrical genre of *Yanggeqiang* 秧歌腔. They had Liang Shanbo performed by a *chou* 丑, which is extremely stupid.²⁵ Our countrymen have many taboos and that’s why they don’t like tragedies. Even *Dou E yuan* and *Haishen miao* 海神廟 (The Sea God’s Temple)²⁶ in Ming times were changed into *chuanqi* plays with a happy end, so the stories could be transmitted till today. Now when I write this today, it may be a tragedy, but my plot does not fully follow the traditional tale. Especially in the third act I have allowed myself to follow my whim, because I wanted to write my own play. Whether this story will be collected and transmitted will depend on the contemporary Grimms.²⁷

Like Chang Renxia, Gu Sui claims that his play is a tragedy, and he even suggests that Bai Pu’s lost play was not transmitted because it was a tragedy. Like Chang, Gu claims to have seen performances of plays on the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai while a child, and one would therefore expect him to base his plot on the local version of the legend. The closest parallel to the plot of Gu Sui’s play I have been able to locate so far, however, is the plot of the legend as narrated by Feng Yuanjun who hailed from Tanghe in southwestern Henan. According to this version, the future parents of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai are good friends, and when both couples are expecting they agree that if the two children turn out to be a boy and a girl, they should be married. But by the time the babies are born, the Liang family has fallen on hard times and

25 The *chou* is the role-type that portrays simpleminded folks. As a young student Liang Shanbo is usually performed by a *sheng* 生, the role-type that portrays handsome young lovers. The local Yanggeqiang opera in Qinghe, however, was not the only genre to have Liang Shanbo performed by a *chou*, as that was also the role-type for Liang Shanbo in Hongdong opera from Shanxi in the nineteenth century. See Zhou Jingshu ed., *Liang Zhu wenhua daquan: Xiju yingshi juan*, 392–401. On pp. 397–98 the editor suggests that Liang Shanbo’s role-type in this text may reflect the situation in many local genres of skits where the role types are limited to *chou* and *dan*.

26 *Haishen miao* is an early southern play. In this play a courtesan is betrayed by her former lover after he has passed the examinations. The courtesan then commits suicide and her ghost takes revenge by driving her unfaithful lover mad. The play is named after the temple where the couple swears eternal loyalty to each other before the student leaves for the capital to take the examinations.

27 Gu Sui, *Gu Sui wenji*, 610.

Mr. Zhu has died, whereupon his widow reneges on the engagement pledge by claiming that she gave birth to a boy. When later Liang Shanbo has reached the age to go to school, the Liang family invites the “boy” of the Zhu family to accompany him, so her mother dresses Zhu Yingtai as a boy until she becomes too old for this charade. Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai love each other very much, but they don’t know they have been promised to each other, and Liang Shanbo does not understand her hints when she leaves the school. When later Liang Shanbo visits the Zhu mansion, he finds out Zhu Yingtai is a girl and is engaged to someone else, because of which he falls ill and dies, and Zhu Yingtai joins him in the grave on the day of her marriage.²⁸

Like *Zhu Liang yuan*, Gu Sui’s play is a regular four-act *zaju*, in this case including a wedge in front of the third act. Once again, the four main sets of songs are assigned to the *dan* 旦 who plays Zhu Yingtai. In the first act, Zhu Yingtai enters the stage dressed in male attire. She informs the audience that she is her parents’ only child and has been dressed as a boy since her earliest youth. Her parents had engaged her “in the womb” to Liang Shanbo, who has lost both his parents and does not know about the arrangement. Following the death of her mother, her father has turned his back on the engagement, but still allows Liang Shanbo to study with her in the family school. When Liang Shanbo joins her in the classroom, Zhu Yingtai praises him highly, but when the teacher enters and asks them to come up with a parallel line to a phrase set by him, Zhu Yingtai easily outperforms him. When the teacher leaves, she invites Liang Shanbo to accompany her to the spring garden:

(Female and male act out walking together and entering the garden.
Female speaks:) Brother, just look!

[Daodaoling 叨叨令]

Flaming red: the whole garden seems on fire as spring buds have opened;
Drifting afar: all of the sky seems a haze now willow floss stirs;
Rippling and blue: below the red-lacquered bridge the clear waves wax.
I feel languorously lazy, too ashamed, weak as I am, to ascend the swing.
Let me ask you: do you perhaps understand?

28 Feng Yuanjun, “Zhu Yingtai de ge,” 63–64. I take it for granted that Gu Sui was acquainted with the special issue of *Minsu zhoukan* in which this little article appeared, or with the earlier publication in *Guoxue yuekan*. Zhu Yingtai’s cross-dressing as a result of a broken marriage promise would appear to be a plot element that was quite widespread in Henan and adjoining areas. In southern versions in which Zhu Yingtai is dressed as a boy from birth the parents are confronted with clan rules that only allow sons to inherit. For the regional distribution of these plot elements see Xu Duanrong 許端容, *Liang Zhu gushi yanjiu* 梁祝故事研究 4 (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji, 2007), 1385, 1493, 1502–3.

Let me ask you: do you perhaps understand?

Because of this I'm overcome by longing:

Plucking a sprig, not saying a word, my heart so pensive and wistful!

(Female speaks:) Brother, do you fathom my spring sorrow? (Male speaks:) The spring is a time for having fun. What sorrow could there be? (Female acts out heaving a sigh, and speaks:) So you cannot fathom it! (Sings:)

[Sansha 三煞]

You cannot hear at all the oriole that's singing hidden among the peach blossoms,

You cannot feel at all the green that fills the banks as fragrant herbs first grow.

You too must see the drifting threads that in the air float upwards without wind,

The busy bees below the flowers that seek fragrance everywhere!

Brother, you may understand the ritual system of the Duke of Zhou,

The Odes as edited by Master Kong, and the fine writings of Sir Zuo,

But you don't understand the intertwining branches of the trees,

The coupling of all creatures!

(Male speaks:) I don't understand a word of what you are saying. I'm hungry. Goodbye brother. I'm going home to have a meal.

And as Liang Shanbo departs to have a bite, he leaves a frustrated Zhu Yingtai behind. By the second act, we have moved one year forward. Zhu Yingtai still enters in male dress, but tells us that she is not allowed to see Liang Shanbo anymore because she has grown up. Even as Liang Shanbo is leaving for the examinations, her father does not allow her to receive him, so behind her father's back she decides to see Liang Shanbo off at a pavilion by the river. At the pavilion she wishes Liang Shanbo all the best and deplores her own fate, but Liang Shanbo does not understand her feelings, leaving her in tears.

The wedge in Gu Sui's *Zhu Yingtai* is given over to Liang Shanbo. He has not only failed to pass the examination, but he also has been informed by an uncle that the Zhu Yingtai he always believed to be a boy is not only a girl, but also the girl that had been promised to him in marriage. He now understands what she wanted to say to him, but also has learned that her father has now promised her in marriage to student Ma. Overcome by emotions, he falls ill and dies. In the following third act, Zhu Yingtai enters dressed as a girl. She has learned of the death of Liang Shanbo and is wondering whether he knew before his death that she was a girl. When she hears migrating geese passing outside, she blames them for calling out even though they are flying together. When she

falls asleep, she dreams that she is visited by Liang Shanbo who urges her to pluck the red flower, rooted in his heart, that has grown on his grave, when she will be taken to the Ma family on her wedding day, which leaves her puzzled when she awakes. The fourth act opens with the entrance of student Ma (played by a *jing* 淨), who knows she loves Liang Shanbo but nevertheless looks forward to a happy marriage (“Once the fat duck has been cooked, it won’t fly off to heaven.”) Whereas many versions of the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai make a point of stressing that the bride Yingtai is dressed in mourning, in this play she enters the stage in all her finery. When the wedding procession headed by Student Ma passes by the grave of Liang Shanbo, she first asks student Ma to pluck the red flower for her, but when he is unable to do so, she insists on plucking it herself and sticks it in her hair. At her prayer, the grave then opens up, but in the good fashion of Italian opera, she only steps into it after a final dazzling aria.

([Female] speaks:) Brother, the dream has been proven true. Now display some more of your divine power to that nincompoop. (The grave opens up with an explosive sound. The clown collapses in fright, and speaks:) How terrifying! (Female sings:)

[Litingyan 離亭宴 followed by Xiezhisha 歇指煞]

I suddenly see the hullabaloo of one gust of mad wind scatter the wilted leaves,

The swirling waves of yellow dust on all sides raise the remnant snow:

It fully seemed as if in a roaring rumble the hills fell down, the earth was wracked!

No talk anymore of the cold and forlorn shadows drifting in the evening glow,

Of the endless expanse of darkening clouds at the distant horizon,

Of the transparent gleam on murmuring streams of mountain brooks.

You over there: bitterly tragic, your century of grief an eternal sorrow;

I over here, shivering with cold: the piercing frost of the heart of winter!

I cannot stop the tears trickling down on my cheeks from flowing on.

I only thought that with a sizzling sound the clear star had fallen from the blue welkin,

That deeply so deeply the white jade had been buried in the yellow earth,

That nowhere to be found the bright moon had sunk into the gray ocean,

That from now on the distant view of a thousand years would offer no fine spring,

The endless procession of millions of autumns would resemble one eternal night,

But then in fact most majestically your divine power still exists!
 Student Ma, go home by yourself all alone to the wedding awning!
 Liang Shanbo, let's go off, united together, to the Yellow Springs!

(Female acts out stepping into the tomb, and exits. Clown acts out immediately jumping into the tomb that has closed and does not admit him, and speaks:) This tomb is way too exclusive! (Recites a poem:)
 From the day Pangu opened heaven and earth down to the present,
 One's never seen a living person jumping into the grave of a stiff.
 Now watch me: whether I'll have to die or to turn into a monster,
 I'll not allow that couple to turn into rain and to turn into clouds!²⁹
 (Acts out dying by butting his head [against the tomb], and exits.)

After Yingtai's maid in a final poem has blamed Yingtai's father for causing this tragedy, two yellow butterflies flutter across the empty stage, followed closely by a white butterfly as Student Ma is turned into a butterfly too.

Moving the action in the first act from the academy to the family school, Gu Sui's version goes beyond Chang's adaptation in exculpating Zhu Yingtai, whose love for Liang Shanbo is now a passion that has been pre-ordained by her parents when they promised her to him even before her birth.³⁰ Switching the deceased parent from the father to the mother may have been inspired by the thought that a father makes for a more fitting representative of parental power than the mother. If the common study of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai took place during their primary school days, Gu Sui may have drawn the logical conclusion that the action must have taken place in their home village and not in some faraway academy. If that is the case, the parting scene also must be redesigned, and it would be an obvious choice to have Liang Shanbo depart for the capital in order to sit for the exams. In his postface Gu Sui claimed that he was most original in the third act of his play. A Zhu Yingtai lamenting her fate, once she learns of Liang Shanbo's death, is of course a fixture of practically all versions of the legend. More original may be the objective correlative of her grief. No end of poets have been moved to grief by the lonely call of a goose

29 "Clouds and rain" is the classic Chinese euphemism for having sex.

30 In his "Guanyu Liang Shanbo Zhu Yingtai gushi" 關於梁山伯祝英台故事, an article originally published in the *Renmin ribao* of March 18, 1951, He Qifang 何奇芳 (1912–1977) lambasted a critic who had complained about a lack of fighting spirit in Zhu Yingtai in a play on Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai that had been published in 1950 in Hebei and was based on earlier plays on the legend in Pingju and Yanggexi. If that play and Gu Sui's *zaju* reflected the same local tradition, the complaint about the lack of fighting spirit becomes quite understandable. He Qifang's article has been repeatedly been reprinted. I have consulted the edition in Zhou Jingshu ed., *Liang Zhu wenhua daguan: xueshu lunwen juan* 梁祝文化大觀學術論文卷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 39–51, esp. 45.

that has lost its companions, but here Zhu Yingtai is moved to sadness by flocks of geese.

The red flower that blooms on Liang Shanbo's grave in the middle of the winter may well be Gu Sui's own addition to the story. Rooted in Liang Shanbo's heart, it can only be plucked by Zhu Yingtai. A red flower in the shape of a peony is also encountered in many other versions of the legend (some of which are called "tale of the peony"), but in those cases it is a symbol of Zhu Yingtai's virginity: on leaving home to study at an academy she vows she will guard her virginity and that the blooming peony will only wilt when she breaks that vow. Gu Sui's flower may well derive from the fairy-tale literature of romantic nineteenth-century Europe, as he seems to betray in his reference to the Grimm brothers in the final line of his postface. When discussing her teacher's plays, Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩 has repeatedly stated that Gu Sui's most original and important contribution to the history of Chinese dramatic literature was that he imbued his plays with a symbolic meaning, but adds that he did so least of all in his *Zhu Yingtai*.³¹ But in her introduction to his collected plays of 1992 she very much stresses the importance of the red flower as a symbol of a sincere passion that is so strong it transcends life and death.³² The importance of the addition of the red flower is also much stressed by Gu Sui's daughter Gu Zhijing 顧之京.³³ As an expression of Liang Shanbo's undying burning passion, the flower also goes a long way to redeem his character. Gu Sui may have changed the role-type of Liang Shanbo from a *chou* to a *mo* 末, but his Liang Shanbo in the first two acts of his play is still very much a simpleton. It is only upon his death that Liang Shanbo gains the strength to claim Zhu Yingtai.

3 Conclusion

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai remained a popular item in basically every genre of regional opera, and the plays were continuously adapted to take advantage of new stage

31 Ye Jiaying, "Kushui zuoju zai Zhongguo xiqu shi shang kongqian juehou de chengjiu" 苦水作劇在中國戲曲史上空前絕後的成就, *Taishan xueyuan xuebao* 32.1 (2010): 9. In the same article she quotes her teacher's offhand dismissal of earlier playwrights as "vulgar, superficial, absurd, and nonsensical" (p. 4).

32 Ye Jiaying, "Gu Xianji xiansheng juzuo zhongzhi xiangyu yiwei, daixu" 顧羨季先生劇作中之象喻意味, in *Kushui zuoju*, 6–7.

33 Gu Zhijing, *Nü'er yanzhong de fuqin: dashi Gu Sui* 女兒眼中的父親：大師顧隨 (Beijing: Zhongguo Gongren chubanshe, 2007), 160–63.

design and changing theatrical technology.³⁴ This popularity remained undiminished in the first seventeen years of the People's Republic,³⁵ when it was further strengthened by the new medium of film.³⁶ A silent movie based on the legend had been shot as early as 1926, and in 1954 China's first full-color feature movie was an adaptation of the Yueju 越劇 version of the love story, which was re-released to great popular acclaim in 1978. Outside the PRC, the 1967 Shaw Brothers' *Huangmeidiao* 黃梅調 adaptation as *Love Eterne* was a runaway success. In recent decades spoofs and parodies continue to testify to the popularity of the legend.³⁷

Chang Renxia's *Zhu Liang yuan* and Gu Sui's *Zhu Yingtai* had no connection to the vibrant world of the contemporary commercial theater. While it is likely that the conception of their two plays was at least partly inspired by local versions that the authors had watched in their youth, these plays were not written to replace these. There is also no indication that either author made any serious attempts to have his play performed. It is of course also difficult to imagine how these two plays could have been performed. The true music of Yuan drama is lost, and inasmuch as Chang Renxia and Gu Sui were more successful in adhering to the prosodic rules of early *zaju*, it would be more difficult to perform these plays in Kunqu. A performable Kunqu adaptation of the legend only arrived in the early twenty-first century, when Zeng Yongyi 曾永義 produced his *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* 梁山伯與祝英台.³⁸

Zhu Liang yuan and *Zhu Yingtai* were both born as closet drama. Recent scholarship has evinced a growing appreciation of the premodern genres of Chinese literature, such as poetry, as they were still practiced in Republican times. If this ever leads to an overhaul of the history of Chinese literature in the first half of the twentieth century and a redesigned curriculum for Chinese

34 Zhou Jingshu and Shi Xiaofeng 施孝峰, *Liang Zhu wenhua lun* 梁祝文化論 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), 165–75. Jin Jiang, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 102–5 discusses the continuous revision of the Yueju opera on Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai in the 1940s.

35 Hsiao-mei Hsieh, "Where Have All the Different *Butterfly Lovers* Gone? The Homogenization of Local Theater as a Result of the Theater Reform in China as seen in *Gezai xi/Xiangju*," *Chinoperl Papers* 30 (2011): 103–22.

36 Xu Lanjun, "The Lure of Sadness: The Fever of Liang-Zhu and the Yue Opera in the 1950s China," *Asian Theater Journal* 33 (2016): 104–127.

37 Shi Lijuan 師麗娟, "Huwening shiyu zhongde Liang Zhu gushi zhi dangdai gaibian" 互文性視域中的梁祝故事之當代改編, *Taiyuan ligong daxue xuebao* 35.1 (2015): 71–75.

38 Zeng Yongyi and Zhou Qin 周秦, *Pengying wunong* 蓬瀛舞弄 (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2016), 3–145.

literary history, perhaps some space can be reserved too for a consideration of these plays as the last masterworks of a fading tradition, testifying to the complexity and variety of Chinese literature and art in the Interbellum.

Transgression as Rule: Freebooters in Chinese Poetry

Maghiel van Crevel

China's unofficial poetry journals just won't leave me alone.¹ This pedantic claim sums up my long, evolving relationship with a decidedly niche but significant body of material. I hasten to add that I would not want the journals to leave me alone—and of course it is really the case that I am not leaving *them* alone. In this spirit, the present essay looks at a recent, remarkable specimen of this extraordinary genre.

But first a brief history. China's unofficial (民間) poetry journals are loosely comparable to Soviet-Russian samizdat publications but also to the "little magazines" associated with early modernism in the West. They emerged after the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1970s. Privately published and circulated through personal networks, they marked the end of the Mao era, when cultural production in China was fully state-controlled. In the 1980s they offered a much-needed alternative to official (官方) publication, in terms of aesthetics, ideological orientation, and the social dynamics of literature and art. At this time, opportunities for official publication remained rare in spite of the "high culture fever" that marked intellectual life, which the journals helped whip up. In the 1990s they were instrumental in reviving the poetry scene after the trauma of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre (aka June Fourth) and became a

While I am one of the editors of the *Sinica Leidensia* series, I was not involved in the series-editorial process for the present volume.

- 1 In addition to notes taken during regular field trips since 1991, this essay draws on my previous work on the journals at large and on *Freebooters*. For more detail and references, see Maghiel van Crevel, "From China with Love: Unofficial Poetry Journals in the Leiden University Library," in *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis* [Yearbook of Book History in the Netherlands], ed. Saskia van Bergen et al. (Nijmegen: Vantilt & Nederlandse Boekhistorische Vereniging, 2017), 233–49; and "Walk on the Wild Side: Snapshots of the Chinese Poetry Scene," MCLC Resource Center, 2017 (bit.ly/35qjBzh). Key Chinese-language publications on the journals are Liao Yiwu 廖亦武, ed., *Chenlun de shengdian: Zhongguo 20 shiji 70 niandai dixia shige yizhao* 沈淪的聖殿：中國 20 世紀 70 年代地下詩歌遺照 [Sunken Temple: Chinese Underground Poetry in the 70s of the 20th Century—A Portrait of the Deceased] (Urumqi: Xinjiang qingshaonian chubanshe, 1999); Zhang Qinghua 張清華, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai minjian shige dili* 中國當代民間詩歌地理, 2 vols. [The Geography of China's Contemporary Unofficial Poetry] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2014).

site of resistance to the commercialization that swept through Chinese life. And in the 2000s, when the internet had truly arrived in China, they were obviously going to disappear.

Except they didn't. Unofficial print journals continue to be made to this day. And while the poetry scene has changed immeasurably over the forty-plus years we are now into the Reform era, the unofficial journals remain influential, even if officially they don't exist and individual issues normally appear in editions of no more than a couple hundred copies (upward exceptions might have one or two thousand). This is because they are a testing ground for new voices and texts that probe the boundaries of social and political expectations of poetry, an inner-circle enterprise in which the poets themselves take a keen interest.

When I say the journals won't leave me alone (or I them), I mean two things. First, from about 2000 to 2005, after Chinese poetry had enthusiastically gone online, print-journal-making slowed down and it seemed possible that it might disappear. After all, the Web was a convenient, powerful medium and less tightly censored than print. So I figured the collecting efforts I had undertaken during research trips since the early 1990s had come to a natural end. To mark this I wrote a web essay on the subject with an annotated bibliography of the special collection that was established for the journals when I donated my material to the Leiden University library in 2006.² There were then about a hundred titles in the collection, involving several hundred poets, and this was a labor-intensive paper. Perhaps it was motivated by the feeling that the journals embodied a unique, transitional moment between the stifling political control of the past and the infinite online space of the future, which would make it a good moment for bringing them to the attention of readers outside China.

But as noted above, it turned out that the journals were anything but finished. The Web has added a new dimension to Chinese poetry³ but it has not killed print. In fact, according to journal collector Shizhongren 世中人 (b. 1972), the foremost authority on the subject, the late 2000s saw a print-journal comeback. This was spurred by two things. One was people's realization of the vulnerability of online publications to political as well as commercial

2 Maghiel van Crevel, "Unofficial Poetry Journals from the People's Republic of China: A Research Note and an Annotated Bibliography," MCLC Resource Center, 2007 (bit.ly/2sv4ueg), later abridged and updated as "From China with Love."

3 See Michael Day, "Online Avant-Garde Poetry in China Today," in *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, ed. Christopher Lupke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 201–18; Heather Inwood, *Verse Going Viral: Chinese New Media Scenes* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2014); and Michel Hockx, *Internet Literature in China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015), chapter 4.

forces when several literature websites were shut down and all the data was lost, not to mention day-to-day censorship. Another was re-engagement with print literature once the newness of publishing online had worn off.⁴ In historical perspective, print-journal-making has become a *culture* in the Reform era, one of many manifestations of the power of poetry as a meme in Chinese cultural tradition. Witness, for instance, the fact that beyond the “avant-garde” (先鋒) poetry with which journal culture is generally associated, it also extends to “subaltern” (底層) writing by members of the precariat of rural-to-urban migrant workers.⁵ The essay and bibliography that were meant to wrap things up are long behind me as I continue to find exciting new material, not just during fieldwork but also through snail mail that lands on my desk in Leiden. So no breaks.

Second, being the “informal publications” (非正式出版物) they are, the journals have hardly been professionally archived in China, but the last few years have seen a surge in interest by major libraries such as those at Nanjing University, Sichuan University, and Fudan University. These institutions are reaching out to private individuals in China who started collecting long ago and they are interested in working with foreign partners such as Leiden University. Hence, over and above the use of the journals in research on other topics, I have found myself returning to them as a project in their own right, together with fellow researchers in China. The Leiden collection now holds over 150 titles and we have begun to digitize the material and make it available online.⁶

The journals are made all across China. They showcase poetics that range from masculine romantic agony to feminist activism and from elitist language games to streetwise indictments of social injustice, in crudely stapled black-and-white photocopies as well as lavishly illustrated bibliophilic productions and everything in between. The present essay looks at a remarkable, recent addition to this heterogeneous body of material: *Freebooters* (*Jianghu* 江湖), run by Feng 風 (b. 1968) since 2014, first out of Changzhou and more recently out of Wuxi. No fewer than twenty-one issues have appeared to date, typically of three hundred to five hundred pages in length, sometimes including color plates and always with carefully designed covers that are part artsy, part sci-fi,

4 Personal communication (fieldwork interview), February 16, 2017.

5 See van Crevel, “Walk” for more on the power of poetry as a meme in Chinese cultural tradition (*passim*) and the notions of “avant-garde” poetry and “subaltern” writing in China (pars. 82–85 and 98–108). Unofficial publications featuring “subaltern” writing include *Dagong shiren* 打工詩人 [The Battler Poet], since 2002, recently renamed *Dagong shige* 打工詩歌 [Battlers Poetry]; and *Picun wenxue* 皮村文學 [Picun Literature], since 2014.

6 For the digital collection, see bit.ly/2KXDF13.

and a little surrealist. Further to a brief introduction to *Freebooters* presented elsewhere,⁷ I focus on this journal because it foregrounds the politics of journal culture. Also, it takes what I have called transgressive discourse on the contemporary Chinese poetry scene to a new level. And finally, there is something ... disorienting? about *Freebooters* that I would like to tease out.

But first, let's read Feng's best-known poem, "Cold Lyricism" (冷抒情):⁸

On the horizon / grows the sky / In the sky / grow the birds / Under their wings / grow the houses / By the houses / grow the shores / Between the shores / grow the rivers / On the rivers / grow the waves / On the waves / grow the ships / Ships afloat in torrents of time / Ships headed for the horizon / On the horizon / grows the sky / Under the sky / grows the soil / In the soil / grow shadow and light

I give "Cold Lyricism" pride of place as Feng's signature text even though this essay has next to no room for actual poetry citation (hence the sacrilege of using virgules instead of line breaks) and even though "Cold Lyricism" is starkly different from most of Feng's other work—or precisely because it is, thus contributing to the disorienting effect mentioned above. His oeuvre, meaning not just his own poetry but especially his editor's footprint in *Freebooters*, occasionally feels like it is all over the place and yet it triggers the intuition that it captures something essential about the Chinese poetry scene. Rather than the meditative depiction of the natural world in "Cold Lyricism," much of Feng's other poetry is angry and cynical and rants against repression and corruption in Chinese society—and against those he sees as wannabe poets who sell out to the system (體制), meaning state-sponsored literature. It is with this latter strand in his own writing that his editorial vision for *Freebooters* resonates most clearly.

The expression from which the journal takes its name, 江湖, romanized as *jianghu*, is notoriously hard to translate and can be rendered in many different ways depending on the context—which, incidentally, could lead one to speak of hypertranslatability as well as untranslatability.⁹ *Jianghu* literally means "rivers and lakes" and is an age-old, sentimental term for a world of wanderers and drifters living by their wits and prowess, outside the realm of law and order. Among other things, it signifies rebellion-with-a-grin from the margins of

7 van Crevel, "Walk," pars. 64–68.

8 Feng, 2018. *Lingdu yishang de Hanyu* 零度以上的漢語 [Chinese above Zero], 9. Unofficial publication. All translations are mine.

9 This passage draws on van Crevel, "Walk," par. 122.

society against state institutions and elite traditions. In English, for the name of Feng's journal I use the anthropomorphist "freebooters" because journals have agency and personalities, and freebooters bring to mind not just rebellion but also maritime imagery that aligns well with rivers and lakes. But *jianghu* is also a popular epithet for the (unofficial) poetry scene at large¹⁰ and as such it could be rendered as "the wild side"—which, incidentally, would work for the name of the journal too. At any rate, by calling his journal *Jianghu* Feng signals that rather than "simply" disseminating texts, he wants to add to the unending tumult on the Chinese contemporary poetry *scene*: partisan events, polemics, and publishing as a means of staking out territory in the literary field.

1 Literature and Politics

The unofficial journal tradition includes a small number of short-lived, truly underground (地下) publications from the late 1950s, the 1960s, and the early 1970s that were circulated among hand-picked audiences of trusted friends and read in secret. This was underground writing in a fairly literal sense, as distinct from the underground as a metaphor for anti-establishment cultural production, still commonly used today in China as elsewhere. The earliest journals to shed this secrecy and seek outside readers appeared in late 1978, at the turning point between the Mao era and the Reform era.¹¹ They include political publications such as *Exploration* (*Tansuo* 探索, 1978–1979), a key text of the Beijing Spring movement embodied by the Democracy Wall, but these were quickly and decisively repressed.

The first two journals that put poetry center stage, *Enlightenment* 啓蒙 (1978–1979) and *Today* 今天 (1978–1980), were also politically motivated inasmuch as they addressed the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. *Enlightenment* did so more explosively and less subtly than *Today*, and *Today* has had a more enduring legacy in literary history. Beyond addressing specific moments in political history, the act of unofficial publishing retains its generic political potential today in its contestation of cultural production as the prerogative of the state, and later of the state and the market. That said, it is important to note that the journals rarely if ever contain overt political dissent, in contrast to

10 See Tang Qiaoqiao 湯巧巧, *Jin ershi nian Zhongguo shige de "shi jianghu" tezheng yanjiu* 近二十年中國詩歌的“詩江湖”特徵研究 [A Study of the "Poetry Arena" as a Distinguishing Feature of Chinese Poetry of the Last Twenty Years] (Xinbei: Huamulan chubanshe, 2014).

11 See David S. G. Goodman, *Beijing Street Voices: The Poetry and Politics of China's Democracy Movement* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981).

persistent foreign caricatures that make every poet in the People's Republic a freedom fighter. Political dissent is not tolerated by the authorities; and more relevant to this essay, most poets' and editors' primary interest is not in politics but poetry, even if this binary is a simplification.

Freebooters stands out because it suggests allegiance with authors who operate on the borderline between literature and politics—and some of whom count as dissidents who write poetry rather than poets who address politically “sensitive” subject matter, to stay with said binary a little longer. Two such authors died in prison: Lin Zhao 林昭 (1932–1968) and Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波 (1955–2017). Lin was sentenced to twenty years in prison in 1965, for “counter-revolutionary” activities. She had contributed a long poem that mocked Mao to *Spark* (星火), an underground journal of political resistance whose two issues appeared in Lanzhou in 1960. “Thought reform” left her unrepentant and in 1968 her sentence was converted to the death penalty and she was shot. She was rehabilitated in 1981 and her prison writings were returned to her family, though not in full. In recent years, as her writing has begun to circulate and her story has become more widely known in China and elsewhere, her grave outside Suzhou has been visited by growing numbers of democracy activists and the police now block access around the anniversary of her execution.¹² Feng has repeatedly hailed Lin as a pioneer of the underground/unofficial scene. On the 2017 anniversary of her death, he posted in the *Freebooters* WeChat group to say he was stopped from doing a poetry performance at her grave “some years ago” (the photo companion to *Freebooters* no. 18 has pictures of a crowd that formed on the occasion) and vowed to try again in future.

Liu Xiaobo needs little exposition. An iconoclastic scholar of literature and philosophy and China's best-known political activist, he spent most of the latter half of his life in jail—and hence, when he was given the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, he was unable to attend the award ceremony, a moment that was captured in the famous empty chair in Oslo. He died of cancer in 2017, still incarcerated. Liu Xiaobo's wife Liu Xia 劉霞 (b. 1961), a poet, painter, and photographer and a dissident by association with her husband, was kept under house arrest for a decade and forced into exile in Germany in 2018. She, too, appears in *Freebooters*.

12 On Lin Zhao, see Lian Xi, *Blood Letters: The Untold Story of Lin Zhao, a Martyr in Mao's China* (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Hu Jie 胡傑 (dir.), “Xunzhao Lin Zhao de linghun” 尋找林昭的靈魂 [In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul] (2004, available on YouTube at bit.ly/39WAYEQ or, with English subtitles, in two parts at bit.ly/36E4Kmo and bit.ly/37W1MLR); and Sebastian Veg, *Minjian: The Rise of China's Grassroots Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2019), 91–96.

Other dissident-poets or poet-dissidents who feature in the journal include Huang Xiang 黃翔 (b. 1941), Liao Yiwu 廖亦武 (b. 1958), Bei Ling 貝嶺 (b. 1959), Meng Lang 孟浪 (1961–2018), Tsering Woesser ཚེ་རིང་འོད་རླེང་, aka Weise 唯色 (b. 1966), Shi Tao 師濤 (b. 1968), and Wang Zang 王藏 (b. 1985). Huang was among the earliest voices that protested against the totalitarianism of the Mao years and became the driving force behind *Enlightenment* and the “Guizhou [Province] undercurrent” in poetry.¹³ Liao, a poet from Sichuan province who rose to prominence in the 1980s, is the author of “Slaughter” (屠殺), later renamed “Massacre” (大屠殺), a long poem associated with June Fourth, and of many other politically engaged texts.¹⁴ Bei Ling and Meng Lang, from Beijing and Shanghai respectively, were among the most visible poetry activists of the 1980s and 1990s, often working together and steadily politicizing over the years. All four contributed to various unofficial journals, as poets and as editors; all were detained or imprisoned once or several times for activities on the borderline between literature and politics; and all were eventually forced into exile (Huang in the U.S., Liao in Germany, Bei Ling in the U.S., and Meng first in the U.S. and later in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where he died of cancer). Woesser is a Tibetan poet, journalist, blogger, and activist. Her work has been banned and censored and she has otherwise suffered for her activism, losing her job as a journalist, exiled from Tibet to Beijing, denied a passport, and so on. Shi Tao is a journalist, writer, and poet who was jailed from 2005 to 2013 for his involvement with an overseas Chinese democracy website. Wang Zang’s poetry has been politically very outspoken for close to two decades. He has had recurrent brushes with the authorities, leading to a nine-month stint in prison in 2014.

Most if not all of these authors count as sufficiently “sensitive” to make mentioning their name or carrying their work acts of defiance, even if their writing is included among that of less “sensitive” authors and comes without commentary. But they make regular appearances in *Freebooters*. Some examples: issue no. 2 is dedicated to Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia; no. 3, to Lin Zhao and Huang Xiang (and Shizhi 食指 [b. 1948], commonly held to have been driven mad by the Cultural Revolution); no. 4, to Liao Yiwu, Bei Ling, and Meng Lang (and Lao Mu 老木 [b. 1963], editor of a trailblazing unofficial poetry anthology in 1985 and exiled to France after June Fourth). As for actual writing by and on these authors, no. 1 lists Liao as one of the recipients of a 2014 “underground” poetry prize—presumably awarded by *Freebooters* in this simple, performative

13 For scholarship on *Enlightenment* and the “Guizhou undercurrent,” see the references provided in the annotations on this journal in van Crevel, “Unofficial Poetry Journals.”

14 See Michael Day, *China’s Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982–1992* (Leiden: DACHS, 2005), 349–56 (bit.ly/39Kcx3U). Day’s book is a key work on unofficial poetry.

speech act—for a poem called “The Old Monk in Prison Ponders Peace” (老和尚在監獄冥想和平) that clearly refers to the realities of political repression in China (1/237–44).¹⁵ No. 2 contains a letter from Liao to Bei Ling and Meng Lang on the sorry state of Chinese establishment poetry (2/379–82), and a poem by Wang Zang called “Declaration of War to the China Writers Association” (向中國作協宣戰) in which the speaker’s anger turns to contempt in wicked invective (2/299–300). The table of contents in no. 3 has an item called “Historical Material on Chinese Poetry” (中國詩歌史料); once the reader arrives at the actual text, this turns out to be about the arrest of six Sichuanese poets soon after June Fourth, including Liao (3/325–28). No. 4 has a section called “Frontiers of the Mother Tongue” (母語前沿, a heading that recurs in other issues) containing contributions on and by Liao, with much room for his clash with Chinese establishment authors at the 2015 Berlin Poetry Festival (4/275–90). No. 5 carries work by Woese (5/147–56); no. 6, an essay by Liao called “For Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia” (爲劉曉波和劉霞而做) (6/225–29); no. 7, work by Shi Tao (7/348–59), in a category called “Salute” (致敬) that is regularly used in other issues as well. And there is more. For example, the cover of no. 6 visually aligns the numerals 6 and 4 in one of many overt or thinly veiled references to June Fourth; photographs of most of the authors discussed above appear in one or several issues; and they feature in a set of playing cards adorned with poet portraits that is a side product to the journal, with Lin Zhao and Liu Xiaobo as Jokers.

2 The Real Deal

In another sense than that highlighted in the previous section, the politics of journal culture plays out in the relation between the unofficial poetry scene and its official, government-sanctioned and -sponsored counterpart. Starting from the 1990s, the boundaries have been blurred and poets cross over all the time.¹⁶ And while the journals are outside the system, their editors and authors generally do value recognition by the system. Such recognition is manifest in the above-mentioned, recent collecting efforts by university libraries, in official literary histories—Hong Zicheng 洪子誠 and Liu Denghan’s 劉登韓 history of contemporary Chinese poetry, for instance, has several chapters on the

15 This is how I will cite issue and page numbers in *Freebooters*, to limit the number of notes.

16 See, for instance, Jacob Edmond, “Dissidence and Accommodation: The Publishing History of Yang Lian from *Today to Today*,” *The China Quarterly* 185 (2006): 111–27.

1980s and 1990s that are built around the journals¹⁷—and so on. In all, the unofficial journals and the groups and alliances behind them provide yet more evidence for “the high level of organization” of modern Chinese literary practice,¹⁸ working not so much against official discourse and infrastructure as alongside them and sometimes intertwined with them. On a related point, whereas the journals count as marginal players in the literary field, many are produced by members of a highly educated urban elite who are in a position to wear their “marginality” with pride, and some of whom have close connections to academia.

However, if official and unofficial poetry are not separate worlds, this does not render their distinction obsolete and *Freebooters* stands out in how it reflects this distinction. Every unofficial-journal-maker is aware that their actions imply relative distance from or proximity to the unofficial and official ends of the spectrum, but Feng is among the most radical voices I have encountered on paper or in person.¹⁹ His perspective is roughly as follows. In China there are political limits to what one can publish. As such, writing what *is* politically permissible is a way to get published and to make money. Aside from politically orthodox authors whose work amounts to propaganda with line breaks, most of the poets whose work might be worthwhile have sold out by joining the China Writers Association and/or by participating in activities (co)sponsored by it. Any involvement with the Association makes the poet in question “pseudo-” or “phoney-unofficial” (偽民間); as does the acceptance of sponsorship from other government institutions; as does respect for social, ideological, or political taboos. Among countless poets thus disqualified, a few mostly Beijing-based, well-connected authors who produce worthless, “academic” (學院) poetry somehow still manage to control the discourse, thus also keeping foreign researchers and translators in the dark about the real deal, meaning a “pure” (純粹) unofficial poetry that is worthy of the name. This shows “academic” poetry’s complicity with official culture. By contrast, Feng has called *Freebooters* “a key battlefield for marginal poets, dissenting poets, niche poets, newborn poets, under-the-radar poets, vanguard poets, independent poets

17 Hong Zicheng 洪子誠 and Liu Denghan 劉登韓, *Zhongguo dangdai xinshi shi* 中國當代新詩史 [A History of Contemporary Chinese New Poetry] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005).

18 Michel Hockx, “Literary Communities and the Production of Literature,” in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2016), 47.

19 I interviewed Feng in Changzhou on February 21–22, 2017, and we have stayed in touch.

and other pure poets who operate outside the poetry scene [that is controlled by] the Writers Association.”²⁰

Crucially, Feng’s perspective highlights an authenticity claim made vis-à-vis not just official poetry but also other persuasions within unofficial poetry.²¹ And his perspective is rather absolute, certainly if one considers its feasibility in practice. (Sometimes it is a bit obsessive: during our first interview I felt he might blame the bad weather on the Writers Association as well.) Censorship and self-censorship are an integral part of literary practice in China and internalized as such by all parties involved, and they definitely extend to the unofficial poetry scene. Also, officialdom is everywhere when it comes to event organization, even when this means little more than the seal of approval for activities that are funded and organized by other, unofficial parties. So the dismissal of any and all unofficial–official collaboration would reduce one’s impact in terms of event culture, which is a key part of poetic practice in China. Strict adherence to his own rules would, for instance, have kept Feng from co-organizing the 2017 Conference on Schools in Chinese Avant-Garde Poetry, whose list of sponsors was headed by the Zhengzhou branch of the China Literary and Art Federation, followed by poet-businessman (and main sponsor) Lang Mao’s 郎毛 cultural communications company, the Tongji University Poetics Research Center, collector Shizhongren’s Chinese Poetry Archive ... and something called the Freebooters Art Journal Association.

Needless to say, this is not about checking Feng’s or anyone else’s practice against their theory, assessing their literary-activist credentials, etc. If Feng breaks his own rules in situations such as the above, this need not diminish the significance of his editorial vision. And of course he knows there are limits to what he can do if he wants to continue making *Freebooters*, a point he readily concedes in conversation. At the same time, the journal does in fact strike me as compatible with this vision in important ways. Superficially, this is visible in provocations such as Feng’s introduction of the *Freebooters* “underground” poetry prize as a sarcastic send-up of official and “academic-unofficial” (學院民間) literary prizes (1/245), and Wang Zang’s “Declaration of War to the China Writers Association.” But *Freebooters*’ realization of Feng’s vision also happens at a deeper, structural level.

20 Feng shiren yishujia 風詩人藝術家 public WeChat account, “Jianghu zhong shiren liao Jianghu” 江湖眾詩人聊《江湖》 [Freebooting Poets on *Freebooters*], June 8, 2019 (bit.ly/3aiL6oL).

21 This mechanism has been operational ever since the emergence of the unofficial scene. See Maghiel van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), chapter 12.

First, *Freebooters* is privately funded (as are most unofficial journals, but it bears reiteration here). Feng was active on the unofficial scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like many other erstwhile poets he then struck out on a business career, and like some other erstwhile poets he came back to poetry in the 2000s, with private money to spend. He has been the journal's main sponsor. When others chip in, this is recognized in their designation as honorary editors of the issue in question. Second, what I know of the better-known authors in the journal is in line with its positioning as against, or emphatically dissociated from, the official poetry scene rather than alongside it or intertwined with it; and I am inclined to think this holds for the lesser-known authors as well, from what I have seen of their poetry and other texts (essays, interviews, memoirs), although I have by no means read the approximately eight thousand pages of *Freebooters* to date.

Third, when Feng suggests that poetry written by an internationally connected avant-garde posse supported by academic gatekeepers is indistinguishable from propaganda literature, this is a clever rhetorical move—but it is indefensible as soon as we start reading the poetry. As regards the gatekeepers, he seems much less familiar with who is who in Chinese (and foreign) academia than many of my other interlocutors during fieldwork, even if his assertions on the conspiracy of academia and officialdom flow from strategy as much as ignorance. Also, while he is prone to exaggeration, there is certainly *some* correlation between establishment connections, scholarly attention, and domestic and international fame, and this leads me to a fourth point. It is hard to get a reliable overview of the thousands of people in today's China who count as serious poets at the local, regional, and national levels, not to mention their relative popularity with various audiences (e.g. mainstream, avant-garde, migrant workers, ethnic groups; domestic and foreign); but *Freebooters* definitely comes across as privileging lesser-known voices.

3 The Scope of Poethood

The earnestness of *Freebooters'* allegiance with dissident poets does not keep it from celebrating a wide variety of other authors. This shows the tenacity of the "cult of poetry" in contemporary China,²² which is reflected in the versatility of the notion of poethood among other things. Thus, while Feng's editorial choices include moments of downright clownery, they also point to an

22 See Michelle Yeh, "The 'Cult of Poetry' in Contemporary China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (1996): 51–80.

overarching, romantic fascination with the poet per se as someone whose unique talent and individuality place them outside the social order, at once tragic and glamorous. This fascination is widespread on the poetry scene and it can border on collective narcissism. The “regular” poet’s quality of being tragic yet glamorous is different from that of the intellectual who speaks out on political issues and happens to write poetry; but it is also alignable with it. Poethood pulls things together.

As such, *Freebooters* can accommodate its gestures of respect toward political dissidents side by side with sections on “fallen women” poets (= female sex worker poets), “comrade” poets (= homosexual poets),²³ Christian poets, singer-poets, rock-n-roll poets, “punk-folksong” poets, dancer-poets, female painter-poets, male painter-poets, photographer-poets, poets who are in wedlock with one another (dissidents Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia tick this box as well), poets who passed away before their time (often by suicide, a huge topos on the Chinese poetry scene that illustrates the quality of being tragic yet glamorous in macabre fashion), poets with monosyllabic names, and so on.

The monosyllabic names include Bridge (橋), Knife (刀), Gone (離), Meat (肉), Up (豎), Don’t (*sic*, 勿), Flat (橫), and Wind (風 = Feng himself, who claims he was the first poet to pick a single-character pseudonym) (3/1–30). They present a typical example of how playfulness and provocation can combine seamlessly with the Serious Business that poetry ultimately is for these authors. On the one hand, they are as obviously pseudonymous and, in some cases, playful or provocative in Chinese as in English (I have taken only minor translational liberties). But on the other hand, much of these poets’ work is in fact quite ... *grim*, which is what I might settle on if I had but a single English syllable to characterize the poetry in *Freebooters* across the board. “Fisherman” (漁夫, 3/23), for instance, by the poet called Don’t (b. 1969), is a somber, modestly philosophical text:

Every night at sea I catch a few fish / and early in the morning I take them
to market / Selling them is my ultimate goal // I have a foul smell about
me, I am not liked by others / The sea wind makes me rough and bad-
tempered, I often have evil intent / When my fish are sold out, I feel no
gratitude toward the buyers // When I cast my net, the ocean is also a net

23 A spectacular discursive appropriation, “comrade” (同志) has not been stable over time in its connotations. It can encompass broader notions of LGBT+ or queerness, but in mainland China it now mostly refers to gay men and lesbian women (女同志 “female comrade”).

/ When I've sold all the fish, I am also a fish / Every day, morning and evening, with life selling me this way and that

To be sure, for organizing his tables of contents Feng also avails himself of conventional literary-historical and critical categories such as the poet's birth decade (a favorite category in Chinese literary discourse, with those [born] "after 1970" and "after 1980" currently getting a lot of air time), their geographical provenance, the schools and trends with which they are affiliated, and their gender. And sometimes he lists them in the order of their names in alphabetic transcription, under an overarching theme such as "after 1970," with the names themselves not actually alphabetized but the list of names punctuated by uppercase roman letters. He also invokes names and titles from imperial China—historical periods, dynasties, literary texts, imperial examination rankings—as section headings, with (to this reader) little semantic value beyond amorphous anchorage in a native tradition. But the more particular and somewhat theatrical categories listed above and their conceptual range add to the sense that *Freebooters* is special.

4 Transgression as Rule

The title of this essay and the present section refers to transgression as an organizing principle of *Freebooters* that is visible from several angles. Its allegiance with political dissidents is but one of these, and not necessarily the most important if what we are after is what this journal means and does in the broader context of unofficial journal culture.

First of all, *Freebooters* epitomizes what I have called a transgressive discourse in and on contemporary Chinese poetry that is marked by strategic, sometimes theatrical rudeness and other discursive "misbehavior," often with gender-stereotyping overtones and sometimes with machismo and misogyny on full display. This originated in mid-1980s Sichuan, rapidly expanded in the 1990s, and has been taken further in the new century by journals such as *The Lower Body* (下半身), *The Low Poetry Movement* (低詩歌運動), *The Trash Movement* (垃圾運動), *Rubber* (橡皮), *Loose* (頹蕩), and *Freebooters*.²⁴ It involves the flaunting of what conventionally counts as offensive subject matter (defecation, indecorous sexuality, cruelty, cynicism, etc.) and vicious attacks on

24 The locus classicus is the journal *Manghan* 莽漢 (Macho Men, 1984); see Day, *China's Second World*, chapter 4. This passage further draws on van Crevel, "Walk," pars. 122–26.

poets of other persuasion—but also self-mockery. Notably, especially in the last two decades it has also operated as a vehicle for social concern.

Also, *Freebooters* takes transgression to another level in its regular efforts to survey and inventory the poetry scene. This is a popular pastime among poetry buffs, and *Freebooters* partakes in a tradition of the journals producing their own, unofficial literary history. This can take the form of annual poetry news round-ups as well as historical, annotated inventories of the journals, reminiscences by key players, and so on. *Independence* (獨立, since 1998), run by Faxing 發星 (b. 1966) out of Puge in the mountains of southern Sichuan and one of few journals that are not city-based, is a shining example. But while partisanship is not something that is held against journal editors—Faxing gives a lot of space to Sichuan, and why make a journal if you cannot be partisan?—Feng is extreme in his transgressions against what we might call the unofficial canon or a shared vision of its history. See, for instance, his contemptuous disparagement of *Today* (18/24; 21/13–17), widely considered the fountainhead of the unofficial poetry tradition, even by younger generations who rebelled against it. Or his deeply unbalanced literary-historical overviews of unofficial poetry, in a brief “memorandum” in an early issue (4/451–60) and more extensively in no. 18, a special issue on the subject, in a manner that is not just selective but positively distorting.

Furthermore, while *Freebooters* shares with other journals the mobilization of transgressive discourse not just to shock but also to voice social concern, in this journal such concern also takes shape in the many literary-historical and critical categories in which Feng presents his authors and texts of choice; he is right up there with the most fanatical among Chinese poetry’s many avid labelers of associations, societies, schools, trends, and so on. Mu Cao’s 墓草 (b. 1974) poetry may serve as an example. While sex and sexuality at large and LGBTQ+ subject matter are “sensitive” areas for literature and art in China, Feng is one of few people who have published poetry by Mu Cao that contains graphic depictions of gay sex, often embedded in social critique. And he *categorizes* this poetry as “China’s Comrade Poets,” which is the label under which it appears in the table of contents, published online and hence subject to surveillance (5/121–38); never mind that the category only holds a single author. In the same way, Woesser’s poetry appears in the category of “Tibetan Poets” (5/147–156); Su Xiaohe’s 蘇小和 (b. 1968) poetry, in the category of “China’s Christian Poets” (6/107–122); Duoduola’s 朵朵拉 poetry, with clear references to sex work, in the category of “China’s Fallen Women Poets” (6/55–68); and so on.

Duoduola is something of a mystery and I have been unable to establish when she was born (or, for that matter, whether she is still alive). Poet and

unofficial publisher Fang Xianhai 方閒海 (b. 1971) recalls that in the late 2000s, Duoduola's poetry was around on the Web, she was considered very talented, she was associated with the style of *The Lower Body*, and one of various stories circulating about her said she was a sex worker from the countryside; but nobody had ever met her. Based on his correspondence with Duoduola, Fang concludes (without elaborating) that the only thing he knows for sure is that she is in fact a woman. He adds that at the time of writing (2017), she had long "disappeared."²⁵ Duoduola's "Sex and a Record of Events" (性與紀實, 6/64) brings honesty, irony, and sadness together:

This is me, lower than city life / very very tall / standing at the turnoff to
the village / making all kinds of seductive movements / trying to lure
some pedestrian / to temporarily / abandon wife and child and parents /
and linger on my highly expensive bed // What I need at that moment / is
just the night / In the morning / I'll be standing there again / watching
those who live forever under the horizon / on my lower body / exhausted,
smiling, falling asleep

Transgression against social and political norms is also what ties together various social groups for which *Freebooters* can be seen to advocate, whether or not it does so by explicitly labeling them in the table of contents—and whether or not the poets thus invited to speak do so from personal experience or by assuming a persona.²⁶ Several of these groups are vulnerable and suffer discrimination and exclusion, and there is a connection here with my general observation that the journal privileges lesser-known voices. In addition to dissidents, sex workers, homosexuals, and Christians, two other such groups are prisoners and the aforesaid "subaltern" poets. "Subaltern" writing features in one of Feng's "Salute" sections, this one dedicated to the "Beijing Drifter Poets" (北漂詩人, 5/157–62), again featuring a single author, named He Sanpo 何三坡 (b. 1964); "Beijing drifters" is a colloquial expression for rural-to-urban migrant workers in the capital. Incidentally, the famous poet-tramp (流浪詩人) Zeng Dekuang 曾德曠 (b. 1968) is described as a proto-subaltern poet in

25 Fang's recollections appear on poet Yuan Wei's 袁瑋 (b. 1985) Sohu blog (Fang and Yuan are life partners), bit.ly/35D00RC.

26 Depending on what one wants to know, the latter point is of course of interest in other contexts and will generate discussion on issues of ownership, authenticity, identification, appropriation etc.: Who has the right to speak, to whom, about whom, on whose behalf, to whose exclusion? But it lies outside the scope of the present discussion. I have not tried to establish if Duoduola was or is a sex worker, if Li Bujia spent time in prison (see below), and so on.

the pages of *Freebooters* (1/325)—though one could argue that unlike your average migrant worker, Zeng and his fellow poet-tramps relish their exclusion and are outsiders by choice, by *épater le bourgeois* and turning transgression into an art and a way of life. Be that as it may, Zeng is among those honored by Feng with the label “Champion’s Poetry” (冠軍詩, 4/413–29), as is Mu Cao (2/417–35).

As for prisoners, in addition to Liao Yiwu, *Freebooters* gives the floor to Li Bujia 李不嫁 (b. 1966) (10/301–21). Inmates appear in several of Li’s poems. One of these is “On Entering Prison” (入獄記), a text at whose core lies a sense of dignity:

He pulls out my belt so my pants are loose / I quickly reach to hold them up / I can’t let a prison guard going through the formalities / lay eyes on my shame / He has fished out my keys / but once I’m in I won’t exactly be going out and locking up behind myself, right? // He kneels to take out my shoelaces / I tell him you can’t kill a man with these and I won’t kill myself / He lets on a gloomy smile / and proceeds to take off my glasses: / my eyes transform and the piercing cold that shoots out makes him shiver

5 Disorientation

I have said that there is something disorienting about *Freebooters*, and specifically that Feng’s editorial footprint occasionally feels like it is all over the place but also triggers the intuition that it captures something essential about the Chinese poetry scene. By “all over the place” I mean that when browsing through *Freebooters*, I find myself bouncing back and forth between awe-struck and baffled-and-exasperated. Awe-struck: by its energy, its inventiveness, its humor, its radicalism, its credible anti-elitism, its support of lesser-known voices and advocacy for vulnerable groups, its compelling conveyance of the poetry experience in today’s China. Baffled and exasperated: by its extreme partisanship, its wildly fluctuating level of coherence within individual issues, the random element that appears to be part of its inventiveness, its looseness and incompleteness in regard to “normal” editorial technique. To both lists might be added the overwhelming size of the enterprise, meaning the sheer amount of text *Freebooters* has produced.

What I call looseness and incompleteness in regard to “normal” editorial technique refers, for instance, to the fact that Feng uses various terms associated with unofficial poetry as if they are interchangeable—民間 “unofficial,” 地下 “underground,” 體制外 “outside the system,” 獨立 “independent,” 先鋒

“avant-garde,” 自由 “free”²⁷—just like he moves around names and titles from imperial China as section headings without any perceptible logic (again: to this reader, because maybe I just don’t get it; and yes, the terms listed just now *do* overlap; and no, my observations are not intended as value judgments). It also refers to the frequent absence of composition dates for individual texts, of background information on individual authors, and of photo captions, all three types of information that are commonly included in publications such as this. Then again, this could point to editorial interventions (rather than negligence), motivated by the journal’s radicalism and a concomitant desire to minimize the traceability of its contributors in the real world But that is too cloak-and-daggery and it hardly squares with their exuberant online presence in the Freebooters WeChat group and other places, or with the journal’s attempts to reach outside readers through online announcements. Nor is the absence of composition dates, author bios, and photo captions consistent throughout the journal (I realize that as above, this observation may come across as the sorry grumblings of a hidebound academic).

In all, I feel that various *tensions* I perceive in Feng’s project help explain the disorienting effect the journal has on me. Tension, for example, between Feng’s drive as a system-builder—visible in his habit of “surveying” unofficial poetry from various angles, often including a historical perspective—and a style of operations that may be summed up as going it alone. When he re-entered the poetry scene in 2008 this was as one of several editors of a new journal called *Underground* (地下), but after the first few issues he struck out on his own to start *Freebooters*. (His affiliation with *Underground* has recently been revived and he is involved in other projects, but *Freebooters* very much appears to be his top priority.) Tension between narcissistic, playful, fun-loving aspects of the cult of poetry and *Freebooters*’ dead-serious cultural-political positioning and emancipatory work, even if I know to invoke the scope of poethood to explain this. The promotion of Mu Cao’s poetry and thereby of the notion of “comrade” poetry serves as an example: Feng has given Mu Cao much exposure, in *Freebooters* but also in an unofficially published, extensive collection of his poetry called *Blue Sex* (藍色的性) to mark his receipt of the aforesaid “underground” poetry prize in 2015.²⁸ Tension between *Freebooters*’ emancipato-

27 For example, *Freebooters* no. 18 is called *China’s Independent Poetry Journals and Underground Avant-Garde Poetry Movements* (中國獨立詩刊暨地下先鋒詩歌運動卷), lumping together three of these six terms; and on the cover of the above-mentioned photograph companion, *Historical Photo Companion to China’s Independent Poetry Journals and Avant-Garde Poetry Movements* (中國獨立詩刊暨先鋒詩歌運動歷史影像側), *Underground* has gone missing.

28 Mu Cao 墓草, *Lanse de xing* 藍色的性 (*Blue Sex*), unofficial, 2015.

ry impulse, including regular attention to women's poetry (女性詩歌), and its simultaneous exudation of the rude-boy machismo and misogyny that are part of the transgressive discourse. Tension between easy, clichéd visions of unofficial poetry as projects run on a shoestring (to which I am not immune) and Feng's status as an editor of independent means who can afford to indulge his interest in professional print material for thousands of pages on end.

6 Between a Religion and an Industry

This brings me to two final points. One: we might ask with some justification if *Freebooters* is (A) truly an interesting journal or (B) merely the product of an idiosyncratic mind that happens to have a lot of time and money at its disposal. After noting that this is a false dichotomy, my vote goes to A, with a caveat: especially in light of the journal's ambition to shape and frame the discourse on contemporary Chinese poetry, it is crucial that it be read and interpreted in abundant context. Phrased in more positive terms, *Freebooters* is an outlier, but one that adds to our insight into journal culture and the bigger picture of which it is a part. Two: if I had to pinpoint what it is that *Freebooters* captures about the Chinese poetry scene, this might be the phenomenon of poetry as a social practice that sits between a religion and an industry. Comfortably so.

Horatius Sinensis

Michael Lackner

In terms of sheer quantity, there is still an enormous disproportion between translations from Chinese antiquity into European languages on the one hand and Chinese renderings of European classical antiquity on the other. With dozens of eminent Western specialists in Egyptology, Assyriology, and European classics, the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations at Changchun University, established in 1984, has made great efforts to remedy this situation; and Liu Xiaofeng 劉小楓 (born 1956) constantly encourages the teaching of Greek and Latin at the People's University in Peking, where the indefatigable Leopold Leeb is basing his teaching of these languages on his own textbooks that are saturated with Christian literature. However, despite these and other meritorious efforts, this discipline is still rather marginal in China, and the readership is rather small in number. After 1949, the Catholic Fu-jen University moved to Taiwan, and the European classical languages were buried for almost forty years in the mainland.

However, there is a revitalized interest in European antiquity. One of the most prominent scholars for Latin in China is Li Yongyi 李永毅 (born 1975), professor of English (!) at Chongqing University: Chinese owes him the first translation of Catullus' *Carmina* as well as many other renderings of Latin poetry into Chinese. In an account of his scholarly itinerary, Li also reveals the underlying motivation of his studies:

... this outburst of passion for the Western classics has been parallel to, and following a similar historical logic as, our belated reconciliation with our own ancient tradition. After a century's sterile radical nihilism regarding our heritage, many of us have begun to treat our classics with the respect and care they deserve, refraining from simplified assumptions and searching through painstaking negotiations with the texts for intelligent readings that are relevant both to the original contexts and to our contemporary concerns. Likewise, we believe that it is high time we discarded stereotyped generalizations of Western values, ceasing to take modern Euro-American civilizations as the "medicine" for the "diseases" of an "inherently" defective Chinese culture, a conviction shared by most advocates of the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and carried to

catastrophic extremes by the Red Guards half a century later. Studies of Western classics help us understand the roots and ramifications of this drastically different tradition, and reveal ways in which any tradition can be questioned, revised, and transformed in an ongoing dialogue that steers clear of both servile dogmatism and arrogant dismissal.¹

In his recently published translation *Selected Poems of Horace*, Li presents us with a bilingual edition of *Carminum liber primus* (1–9; 11; 14; 17; 20; 22–23; 28; 34; 37), *liber secundus* (2; 20), *liber tertius* (4; 30), *liber quartus* (5; 8; 12), *Carmen saeculare*, *Epodon liber* (2; 13; 60), *Sermonum (Satires) liber primus* (1–9), *liber secundus* (1; 3; 8), *Epistularum liber primus* (2; 7; 19–20), and *secundus* (1–3, including the *ars poetica*). While the translations cover pp. 10–217, the commentaries take up pp. 218–507. With its introduction (life of Horace, an overview of metrics, index, editions, and bibliography), but foremost because of the extensive comments, the volume is also meant as a textbook for advanced students in Latin. The author's secondary sources are limited to English works, but, given the fact that Horace has always been a subject of predilection and sound study in the Anglo-Saxon world, this does not constitute a major shortcoming. It is, however, deplorable, that this laudable translation had to appear in an author's edition, self-published in Middletown, Delaware (June 7, 2019).

Let us first take a look at parts of a translation of a poem by Horace where we can identify some of Li Yongyi's strategies in rendering Horace's verse. We will not retranslate ("re-spell") the entire Chinese translation into English, because there is no need to boast of the faultfinder attitude that is unfortunately so common in translation studies. Here is *Carminum liber primus*, I, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 10f:

- 1 Maecenas atavis edite regibus 麥凱納斯啊，你，王族的貴胄 (zhòu)
- 2 o et praesidium et dulce decus meum：我的堅盾，甜美榮譽的源頭 (tóu)
- 3 Sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum 有人癡迷於奧林匹亞的塵霧 (wù)
- 4 collegisse iuvat metaque fervidis 隨賽車翻卷，閃電船的輪軸 (zhóu)
- 5 evitata rotis palmaque nobilis 掠過標錐，手握光榮的棕櫚 (lǚ)
- 6 terrarum dominos evehit ad deos；恍惚間與主宰世界的神交遊 (yóu)
- 7 hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium 有人寧可讓無常的羅馬庸眾 (zhòng)
- 8 certat tergemini tollere honoribus；簇擁著沿權力之階步步高升；(shēng)
- 9 illum, si proprio condidit horreo 有人只關心家穀倉的充盈，(yíng)

1 (<<https://classicalstudies.org/amphora/new-incarnation-latin-china-yongyi-li>>; December 23, 2019).

- 10 quicquid de Libycis verritur areis. 不許利比亞的一粒糧食逃遁。(dùn)
 11 Gaudentem patrios findere sarculo 手把鋤頭，農夫怡然耕作(zuò)
 12 agros Attalicis condicionibus 祖先的土地，阿塔盧斯的財富(fù)
 13 numquam demoveas, ut trabe Cypria 都無法勸他忍受木船的顛簸(bō)
 14 Myrtoum pavidus nauta secet mare; 穿越米爾托翁海，滿面恐懼。(jù)
 15 luctantem Icaris fluctibus Africum 西南風起，伊卡利亞的波濤(tāo)
 16 mercator metuens otium et oppidi 驚嚇了行商，閒適靜謐的故土(tǔ)
 17 laudat rura sui; mox reficit rates 讓他懷念，但轉眼已修好，(hǎo)
 18 quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati. 窘迫的生活才是不堪的重負。(fù)
 19 Est qui nec veteris pocula Massici 有人不會拒絕老窖的誘惑(hùo)
 20 Nec partem solido demere de die 不會因為虛擲光陰而羞愧，(kùì)
 21 spernit, nunc viridi membra sub arbuto 時而在蔥綠的野草樹下安
 臥，(wò)
 22 stratus, nunc ad aquae lene caput sacrae . 時而傾聽呢喃的神聖泉
 水。(shǔi)
 23 Multos castra iuvant et lituo tubae 許多人喜歡軍營，喜歡喇叭(bā)
 24 permixtus sonitus bellaque matribus 與號角齊鳴，喜歡戰爭，儘管
 (guǎn)
 25 detestata. Manet sub Iove frigido 母親詛咒它(ta)。寒冷的天空底
 下，(xià)
 26 venator tenerae coniugis immemor 獵人守候中夜，嬌妻拋一邊，(biān)
 27 seu visa est catulis cerva fidelibus, 或者鹿被忠臣的狗發現(xiàn)，或者
 28 seu rupit teretes Marsus aper plagas 野豬掙破了網，在馬爾西山
 間。(jiàn)
 29 Me doctarum hederæ præmia frontium 我因為獎賞詩人的春藤束(shù)
 30 dis miscent superis; me gelidum nemus 而置身的上界；冰涼的樹
 林，(lín)
 31 Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori 水澤仙女和山神的輕盈歌舞
 (wǔ)
 32 secernunt populo, si neque tibus 分開了我和眾人，既然笛音(yīn)
 33 Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia 歐忒耳佩不禁止，聖歌之主(zhǔ)
 34 Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton. 也願意彈奏萊斯博斯的里拉琴。(qín)
 35 Quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres, 但你若給我抒情詩人的冠冕，(miǎn)
 36 Sublimi feriam sidera vertice. 我高昂的頭將立於群星之巔。(diān)

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned caveat, some remarks about the general strategy of the translator still seem to be appropriate. There is no need to explain “Lybia” (line 10), but the “Quirites” (line 7) have been rendered as “the ordinary people of Rome,” and the “pocula Massici” (line 19) are transformed into “wine of old cellars”; the same device is used for “Polyhymnia” (line 33),

which appears as “the mistress of sacred songs.” Again, in lines 7 and 8, we find an allusion to the three highest offices of Rome—*tergeminis honoribus*—(aedile, praetor, consul), which, in Chinese, find its metamorphosis as “they ascend the ladder of power step by step.”

What seems to be more important is a structural transformation of the poem for the sake of its euphony in Chinese. There is no doubt that in this poem dedicated to Maecenas, Horace maps out different life designs, which, at the end, are juxtaposed in opposition to his own choice to be a poet. And there is also no doubt that each of these life designs constitutes a separate unit of meaning. Chinese poetry is unable to emulate metrics (and this is how the “regulated verse poem,” *lüshi* 律詩, evolved), but it does have rhymes. Li Yongyi’s ingenious method in translating the first poem of *Carminum liber primus* consists in denoting each of the units of meaning by a sequence of rhymes, predominantly end-rhymes, with some few internal rhymes. Just let a Chinese native speaker read this text aloud, and you will immediately become aware of the translation’s beauty and the intrinsic logic that delineates the units of meaning.

However, the translation’s rhyme scheme follows Li’s own understanding of coherent units of meaning: Lines 1–6 constitute a unit, and again 7–10; such is the case for lines 11–18, 19–22, 23–25 (with an internal rhyme 叭/它 *bā/ta* as well as an end rhyme 叭/下 *xià*), and 26–28. Lines 29–34 introduce the poet’s position and lines 35–36 return, yet with another rhyme scheme, to Maecenas’ benevolence. One could arguably object to this arrangement, which is also emphasized by the frequent repetition of *you ren* 有人, “there are those who...” (which occurs only once in the Latin text: “sunt quos...”) to mark the different life designs. But notwithstanding possible criticism, Li Yongyi has magnificently succeeded in making the poem sound alive for a native speaker of Chinese.

There are, however, obstacles in translating poetry of European antiquity into Chinese. In an article published in 2001, Christoph Harbsmeier has pointed to the fact that classical (“pre-buddhist”) Chinese lacked a “parenthetic mode.”² Harbsmeier provides us with examples like “*horresco referens* (‘I am horrified to report’), *vel potius dicam* (‘or rather should I say,’ as a form of self-correction inserted in the text), ... *ut ita dicam* (‘so to speak,’ creating a distance between themselves and their present manner of expression”) and many other rhetorical forms (“metalinguistic modes”) that were not part of what he calls the “cultural style” of classical Chinese. According to Harbsmeier, the syntactic

2 Harbsmeier, “May Fourth Linguistic Orthodoxy and Rhetoric: Some Informal Comparative Notes,” in *New Terms for New Ideas: Western Knowledge and Lexical Change in Late Imperial China*, ed. Michael Lackner, Iwo Amelung, and Joachim Kurtz (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 373–410.

repertoire of classical Chinese *could* have expressed such modes of subjectivity, but it was rather “culture” than “language” that prevented their emergence.

However, even modern Chinese has difficulties in rendering this kind of rhetoric. A close look at some of the translations will enable us to see how Li Yongyi tries to circumvent the pitfalls of the subjective character of the “parenthetic mode” in his native tongue. And in the examples quoted below, we will have to recur to re-translations from the Chinese to elucidate the translator’s skill and awareness, because his commentaries reveal that he is completely cognizant of the original version’s rhetorical structure and intention.³

How, for instance, to translate *vellem* in *Satires 3, Selected Poems of Horace, 96?*:

Vellem in amicitia sic erraremus, et isti
Errori nomen virtus posuisset honestum.⁴

(I wished we erred in the same way with regard to friendship, and that virtue had affixed a reputable appellation to such an error).

We know that *vellem* refers to an unrealizable wish and therefore the subjunctive past tense is used. The Chinese translation reads:

我真心盼望，我們對朋友也能這樣
犯錯，美德能給它一個光榮的名字。

(I truly hope we could err the same way with regard to our friendship, and that virtue could give it a glorious name).

The translator is fully aware of the problem of rendering the expression of an unrealizable wish into Chinese: on p. 329, he comments on line 41: “*vellem* (我希望) 的未完成過去時虛擬式表明這個希望無法實現, *vellem* (I hope) is

3 If not indicated otherwise, I have concocted all English translations from Horace by using more than a dozen existing translations, which do not need to be enumerated here. My translations merely serve to provide the reader with a first impression of the meaning, and they are adapted, as far as possible, to Li Yongyi’s renderings. However, to provide the reader with an orientation aid, the Loeb Classical Library translation will be quoted for each passage. There are some astonishing observations to be made!

4 *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica; With an English Translation by H. Rushton Fairclough.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1942 [1st ed. 1926], Loeb Classical Library; henceforth *Loeb*). *Loeb*, 35: “I could wish that we made the like mistake in friendship and that to such an error our ethics had given an honourable name.”

imperfect subjunctive and indicates that this wish cannot be realized”). The comment thus clarifies what the translation had to leave out.

Let us now take a look at an authentic parenthesis, as it occurs in *Satires* 2:1, lines 44f., *Selected Poems of Horace*, 130f.):

At ille qui me commorit - melius non tangere! clamo—flebit, et insignis tota cantabitur urbe.⁵

(But he who provokes me (better not touch, I cry!) will suffer, and his blemishes will be sung throughout the City).

The Chinese translation has:

可是如果我喊著‘別碰我’，還有人膽敢挑釁，他會痛苦的，全城都將歌唱

(But if I shout “don’t touch me,” there is still someone who will courageously provoke, but he will cry bitterly, and the whole city will praise his reputation).

No doubt the parenthetical interjection is missing in the Chinese version. But, again, the commentary (p.379) clarifies: “melius non tangere 最好別碰（我）(best is not to touch—me—, melius 更好，意為不碰是“更好”的選擇 melius, ‘better,’ means that not touching is the ‘better’ choice. Clamo, 我喊，賀拉斯已經提前發出警告。Horace has already issued this warning in advance.”

In this case, the parenthesis points to a “warning in advance,” how nicely articulated!

Satires 1:1, lines 15–17, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 80 has:

Si quis deus, ‘En ego’ dicat,
iam faciam quod voltis: eris tu, qui modo miles,
mercator; tu, consultus modo, rusticus.⁶

5 *Loeb*, 13: “But if one stir me up (‘Better not touch me!’ I shout), he shall smart for it and have his name sung up and down the town.”

6 *Loeb*, 5, 7: “If some god were to say: ‘Here I am! I will grant your prayers forthwith. You, who were but now a soldier, shall be a trader; you, but now a lawyer, shall be a farmer.’”

(If any god should say, “Behold! I will effect what you desire: you, that were just now a soldier, shall be a merchant; you, lately a lawyer [shall be] a farmer).

In Li Yongyi’s Chinese we have:

倘若某位神在空中宣布，
瞧！我成全你們的願望。士兵，你
變成行商；律師，你變成農夫。

If any god in the sky declared:
Look! I fulfill your wishes. Soldier, you
Become merchant; lawyer, you become peasant.

The subjunctive of ‘dicat’ may be satisfactorily rendered by “if” (although the commentary on p. 308 remarks that ‘dicat’ [說] by its subjunctive form indicates a hypothetical mode [假想]), but the modo ... modo, which the translation ignores is explained as 剛才, “a moment ago,” 後面省略了”and the ‘eris’ is omitted”).

Similarly, *Satires* 1:3, line 19, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 94:

Nunc aliquis dicat mihi: Quid tu?⁷
(Now someone might say to me: what about you?)

In Li Yongyi’s Chinese:

有人對我說：你呢？
(someone says to me: and you?)

Commentary, p. 327: “Nunc aliquis dicat mihi 在這個節骨眼上，某人（可能會）對我說，dicat 的虛擬式表示潛在可能。(At this juncture, someone [possibly could] say to me; the subjunctive of ‘dicat’ indicates the latent possibility).”

No “latent possibility” (someone who possibly could) is to be found in the translation, so we may conclude that the translator had to avoid this phrasing—simply because it sounds too clumsy in the Chinese.

⁷ *Loeb*, 35: “Now someone may say to me: ‘What about yourself?’”

In *Satires*, 1:1, line 23ff., *Selected Poems of Horace*, 80, we find:

Preaterea, ne sic, ut qui iocularia, ridens
 Percurram, (quamquam ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?)⁸
 (But further, that I may not run over this in a laughing manner, like those
 [who treat] on ludicrous subjects [though what hinders one being merry,
 while telling the truth?])

In the Chinese:

可是，我不打算像逗樂的人那樣
 一直戲謔下去-不過笑著說真相
 又犯了什麼戒？

(But I do not intend to ridicule this like people who clown around—how-
 ever, telling the truth while laughing, where is the transgression?)

Commentary, p. 308: “quamquam, 雖然，引導讓步狀語從句。Quamquam introduces a concessive adverbial clause. 現在分詞賓格ridentem (笑著)修飾dicere 說出隱含的主語。Now the participle ‘ridentem’ in the accusative case modifies the hidden nominative of dicere. Verum 真相，真理作‘dicere’的賓語，Verum ‘truth’ is the object of ‘dicere’ 整個不定式短語作下一行‘vetat’禁止阻礙的賓語。And the entire infinitive phrase is the object of ‘vetat’ in the following line.”

Even the slightest details of Horace’s rhetorical devices are acknowledged—in the commentary; but, in the translation, the translator has to shy away from rendering justice to the idea of an intersection.

And in *Ars poetica*, lines 42–44, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 196, we find:

Ordinis haec virtus erit et venus, aut ego fallor,
 ut iam nunc dicat iam nunc debentia dici.⁹

(This, or I am mistaken, will constitute the merit and beauty of arrange-
 ment, that the poet just now says what just now ought to be said).

8 *Loeb*, 7: “Furthermore, not to skim over the subject with a laugh like a writer of witticisms—and yet what is to prevent one from telling truth as he laughs...”

9 *Loeb*, 453: “Of order, this, if I mistake not, will be the excellence and charm that the author of the long-promised poem shall say at the moment what at that moment should be said.”

In Chinese we have:

如果我理解正確，佈局的優點和妙處
就在於：創作承諾的作品時

(If I understand this correctly, the virtue and the subtlety of a composition just lie in the moment of creative commitment of the literary work.)

The commentary (p. 474) explains: “aut ego fallor,” 或者我被欺騙了，意為‘如果我沒有說錯的話’ If I am not deceived, meaning, ‘If I haven’t said something wrong.’”

Most probably, expressions like “aut ego fallor” or “nisi fallor” (If I am not mistaken) can be found nowhere in texts of ancient China. But even in modern Chinese they seem to constitute an almost insurmountable hurdle. “If I understand this correctly” is a far cry from the extremely self-relativizing “aut ego fallor.”

Consider then *Epistularum liber secundus*, 1, line 210, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 179:

Ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur
Ire poeta, meum qui pectus inaniter agit.¹⁰

(That poet seems to me the one who goes through great difficulties and by his fictions provokes my heart).

In Li Yongyi’s Chinese this is:

告訴你，我心目中高超的詩人是什麼樣子：
他讓我的心為虛構的世界感覺痛苦

(I tell you: the excellent poet in my mind’s eye allows my heart the fictional sentiment of this world’s grief).

Commentary, p. 449: “ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur ire poeta, 那位詩人（那樣的詩人，具體見下文）在我看來能夠在繃緊的繩子上行走’，意為我認為他技巧高超，就像雜技演員。不定式 posse...ire 與 videtur (他看起來) 連用。That poet—see below—is in my view able to walk on a rope,

¹⁰ Loeb, 415: “... methinks that poet is able to walk a tight rope, who with airy nothings wrings my heart.”

meaning I think his skill is excellent, like a circus performer. The infinite posse...ire are connected with videtur (he seems to)."

With some clemency, one could accept that in this case, "my mind's eye" stands for "videtur." However, the commentary makes clear that "videtur" poses a problem, otherwise one would not need the literal Chinese translation as 看起來, "he seems to."

Next, *Epistularum liber secundus*, 2, line 52–54, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 186:

Sed quod non desit habentem
Quae poterunt umquam saīs expurgare cicutae, ni melius dormire putem
quam scribere versus?¹¹

(Could it ever be sufficient to purify my mind, if I didn't think dozing were better than writing poetry?)

In Chinese we have:

...如果我寧可寫詩，也不選擇睡眠？

(If I can better write poetry, and have not chosen to sleep?)

Commentary, p. 458, says: 如果我不認為睡眠比寫詩好 (If I didn't think sleeping were better than writing poetry).

Let us note the occurrence of 認為 (think, consider) throughout the commentary. Once again, we may observe that, for a Chinese reader, the repetitive occurrence of 我認為 (I think, I consider, I assume) may sound clumsy.

Finally, *Epistularum liber secundus*, 2, line 17, *Selected Poems of Horace*, 184:

Ille ferat pretium, poenae securus, opinor.¹²

(he will get his price without fear of penalty, I think).

The Chinese says:

我認為他會得到報的價，而不受懲罰。

¹¹ *Loeb*, 429: "But now that I have sufficient store, what doses of hemlock could ever suffice to cleanse my blood, if I were not to think it better to slumber than to scribble verses?"

¹² *Loeb*, 425: "... the seller, I take it, would get his price without fear of penalty."

(I think he will obtain the price and will not receive a punishment).

Commentary, p. 455: “opinor, 我認爲, 插入語 ‘opinor,’ I consider, parenthesis.”

In this case, the commentary simply admits the impossibility of rendering the “parenthesis” into proper Chinese.

Conclusion

Through an intrinsically Chinese poetic device, the rhyme, Li Yongyi tries to do justice to the beauty of Horace’s verses. The careful choice of words (which in this contribution has not been addressed) and the entire rhythm of his translation make the *Selected Poems of Horace* a masterpiece of transcultural conveyance. The parenthetical, subjective style of the Latin original is acknowledged throughout the commentary, but the translation meticulously avoids its literal rendering because of the fear of sounding too clumsy. And, in fact, if the translation would follow the conscientious remarks of the commentary, readers would certainly not be able to fully enjoy the charm of the original. There remains, of course, the intriguing question of whether modern Chinese is a genuinely apt medium for (translating) poetry, but this is a different matter and is not the subject of the present contribution.

Epilogue

However, there is more to overcome than mere linguistic barriers. Let us take a brief look at cultural (non-linguistic) barriers:

Satires, 1, 2, Selected Poems of Horace, 127:
 ... ne, dum futuo, vir rure recurrat.¹³

Although the author does not shy away from translating the somewhat less puritan satire 1, 2, , «futuo» (no translation needed, sapienti sat) is translated by «intercourse» 交 and explained (in the commentary, p. 325) as «describing the sexual action of a man towards a woman» 描述男人對女人的性動作. No doubt there are definitely more literal words in Chinese for this verb. In this

¹³ *Loeb*, 29: “No fears have I in her company, that a husband may rush back from the country.” This translation is far more puritan than Li Yongyi’s!

case, the translator did not expect the readers to put up with the lewd wording of the original.¹⁴

However, there you go: *Satires* I, 2, lines 116f., *Selected Poems of Horace*, 90:

Tument tibi cum ingenua, num, si
Ancilla aut verna est praesto puer, impetus in quem
Continuo fiat, malis tentigine rumpi?¹⁵

(When your prick swells, then, and a young slave girl or boy's nearby you could take. At that instant, would you rather burst with desire?)¹⁶

In Chinese we have:

性器鼓脹時 (when the genital organ swells) , 如果身邊就有妓女 ,
或年少的奴隸 , 可以發洩你的欲火 (give vent to your burning desire)

In this case, the literal translation leaves nothing to be desired.

14 <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceSatiresBkISatII.php#anchor_Toc98155411>; December 23, 2019)

15 *Loeb*, 29: "When your passions prove unruly, would you rather be torn with desire?" See n. 13.

16 <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceSatiresBkISatII.php#anchor_Toc98155411> (December 23, 2019).

The Hazards of the Use of English as a Default Language in Analytic Philosophy: An Essay on Conceptual Biodiversity

Christoph Harbsmeier

Epistemology recapitulates philology.¹

QUINE, *Word and Object*, p. vi.



The hazards of the use of English as a default language in analytic philosophy are obvious to everyone except mainstream analytical philosophers.² The uncanny conceptual resemblance between what one is told about Jerry Fodor's universal Language of Thought and current globalese basic academic English calls for reflection.³

One might suggest, by way of an historical explanation, that after all Latin was used as the unquestioned default language in medieval analytic philosophy just as globalese *koinē* American English is used today. But as we shall see presently below, such an explanation would commit a grave injustice against Danish medieval philosophical thoughtfulness and methodological stringency.

1 I offer these freewheeling reflections in homage to my dear friend Albert Hoffstädt. As we might have said: *Dulce est desipere in loco*. And: *Desipere est semper sapere*. *Kai summanēnai denia dei*. Albert's cosmopolitan Latinate friendship and his inimitable Greek *parrēsia*, over many decades, continues to enrich the lives of many of us.

2 For example: would philosophy be quite the same with Chinese as the default language, where Americans would have to make do as best they can with a foreign language just as the Chinese and the French philosophers have to do today if they would like to be taken seriously in the profession? There is much to worry about here, even from a purely philosophical point of view. Some of the purely practical general problems raised by the hegemony of basic *koinē* English in academia are memorably summarized by Eve Seguin under the title: *Les effets délétères de l'hégémonie de l'anglais sur la recherche*. (url: <<https://www.acfas.ca/publications/decouvrir/2015/04/quand-english-rime-avec-rubbish>>)

3 For a survey of the history of the idea of Mentalese or *oratio mentalis* (confidently disregarded by Jerry Fodor), see Claude Panaccio, *Le discours intérieur: De Platon à Guillaume d'Ockham* (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1998).

Professionals in the Philosophy of Mind have learned to be utterly unperturbed by the fact that Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* sells in Germany as *Die Philosophie des Geistes*, in France even as *La philosophie de l'esprit*, and in Russian still more ominously as what I suppose might naturally translate into English as *The Concept of Consciousness*.⁴ Such is also the current state of the art in analytical philosophy more generally.⁵

"Philosophy," at least, one might be tempted to say, is found in a very large number of "major" languages of the world. But in fact the word "philosophy" recurs in so many languages of the world exactly because the concept of philosophy was sufficiently alien to all those cultures which have borrowed that alien word "philosophy" from the Greeks. Like the Romans, and for that matter the Arabs as well as the English. Sound philosophy should involve a thorough analysis of the reasons when and why so many rich languages have even needed to literally borrow a Greek word and were unable to coin a less obviously arcane and outlandish loan translation. The historical cultural anthropology of philosophy should be a matter of basic philosophical concern.

A concept like that of "knowledge" raises less obvious but no less fundamental problems. Since we have a word like "knowledge" in English, it is assumed by professional epistemologists like Ernest Sosa that there is an issue out there in philosophy and not in mere English philology. But "knowledge" might indeed also very much be a matter of the cognitive ethnography of speakers of English.⁶

4 *Ponyatie soznaniya* (Moscow: Ideya-Press, 2000). The best bilingual dictionary of Russian that I know of is the *Large Russian-Chinese Dictionary of the New Epoch* (Большой русско-каитайский толковый словарь новой эпохи [Peking: Commercial Press 2014], 7576 pages), and it supplies the following modern Chinese glosses for *soznanie*: 知覺, 意識, 感覺, 神志, 覺悟 (p. 6052). This is not the place to discuss the detailed meanings of these semantically complex Chinese terms. Suffice to say that none of them would be glossed by "mind" in any Chinese-English dictionary. And Professor Laier's book—and Laier is Ryle's Chinese name—sells under the name *Xin de gainian* 心的概念 (published Peking, 2011 and Shanghai, 1988), which any unsuspecting Chinese reader would tend to understand as "The Concept of the Heart"—until perchance instructed to do otherwise by bilingual speakers of Chinese.

5 Linguists have essentially the same problem as philosophers. However, linguists are at least trying to face up to the obvious problem. See, for example, Martin Haspelmath, "Comparative Concepts and Descriptive Categories in Cross-linguistic Studies" *Language* 86 (2010): 663–87, who makes a valiant effort in this direction. French having no notion quite like the English "language," only *langue*, *langage*, and *parole*, each of which has its specific excruciating conceptual quirks, any general linguist worth his salt is fortunately expected to be ready to discuss in detail the problems raised by the case of French.

6 Sosa writes: "Given a system of reasoning in competition with ours, how do we defend our preference for our own? The analytic epistemologist proposes that we engage in conceptual analysis, aiming to elaborate a criterion of rightness for systems of reasoning. With this criterion, we can then assess our system and compare it with competitors." (Ernest Sosa, "A Defence

I have no doubt that many languages share with English the complex language game of using some word relevantly like “knowledge” to refer to a BELIEF that a PROPOSITION is TRUE and that BELIEF being (perhaps even: SCIENTIFICALLY OR STRICTLY) JUSTIFIED and that BELIEF being PRESUPPOSED by a PUBLIC.

For players of this complex cognitive game it is required that they share the following concepts:

PROPOSITION, TRUTH, BELIEF, JUSTIFICATION, PRESUPPOSITION, GENERAL PUBLIC.

The game is most enjoyable to play when among the players

1, the contested and problematic nature of all these six concepts is not focused (even better when not understood at all), and when

2, it is assumed that the game is universal, in the sense that it is played with an intended GENERAL PUBLIC that consists of the world’s cognitively non-deficient humans capable of clear logical thinking.⁷

Now one might think that such matters as propositions (p, q, r) and matters of true and false (T, F) are adequately dealt with in what is known as the “first-order propositional calculus” in logic. But of course the abstract algebra of that calculus has no relation to what we call propositional logic until its symbols p, q, etc., as well as the symbols T and F, are satisfactorily interpreted in a way that ensures what is known as the “material adequacy” of the theory. And here, of course, English *truth* will be no more decisive than Russian *pravda* “truth” versus *istina* “Truth,”⁸ or the less substantive distinction Latin makes of *veritas*

of the Use of Intuitions in Philosophy,” in *Stich and His Critics*, ed. Dominic Murphy and Michael Bishop [Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2009], 101). Naturally enough, this conceptual analysis is to be conducted in American English for Ernest Sosa. And that *exactly* is the problem with his approach that is never sufficiently focused.

7 David Papineau refuses to join the game and he thinks it is a waste of time: “Far from being a touchstone of the truth, knowledge is a stone-age concept that harms our dealings with the modern world” (<<https://aeon.co/essays/knowledge-is-a-stone-age-concept-were-better-off-without-it>>). I am in enthusiastic agreement with this, but the reference to the stone age is deeply misleading from the point of view of conceptual history. We know nothing of stone age epistemic notions. The impact of Plato’s *Theaitetus* on epistemic cognitive history has long been recognized and described.

8 Anna Wierzbicka, “Russian Cultural Scripts: The Theory of Cultural Scripts and Its Applications,” *Ethos* 30.4 (2002): 401–32, esp. 407ff. The literature on *istina* versus *pravda* is vast, and occasionally it is indeed of profound philosophical interest. Cognitive and conceptual anthropology is essential to philosophy.

“truth, the feature of being true” as opposed to *verum* “what is true,” and the like.

Such a satisfactory interpretation will have to be done in a way that is not in itself a part of the abstract algebra in the first-order propositional calculus on the one hand, and not any idiosyncratic part of English or Russian only. The analysis has to aim to be overexplicit and metalinguistic, at least in aspiration.

In short: the abstract algebra in first-order predicate calculus is abstract in a sense that first-order predicate logic is not.

The “material adequacy” of first-order predicate logic thus resides in the contingent fact that words like “if,” “or,” and “and” are found to have certain standard uses that are adequately analyzed/modelled by certain symbols that may be formally defined in that calculus.

In much the same way, the “material adequacy” of the abstract algebra in natural number theory depends on the fact that some common uses of common words like “one,” “two,” “three,” etc. seem adequately analyzed/modelled by that calculus. And, of course, until such a satisfactory interpretation is given and justified, the abstract algebra in natural number theory cannot be taken to be about numbers at all.

In short: The abstract algebra of natural number theory itself is not about numbers. It has been satisfactorily applied to natural numbers, but the algebra itself is more abstract than arithmetics.

For a satisfactory clarification of what a proposition is, or what it is to be true for a proposition, we cannot turn to the propositional calculus. One might feel the need to turn to Alfred Tarski and Donald Davidson and the Convention T.

Alfred Tarski and Donald Davidson on the Convention T

Using the symbol ‘Tr’ to denote the class of all true sentences, the above postulate can be expressed in the following convention:

CONVENTION T.

A formally correct definition of the symbol ‘Tr’, formulated in the meta-language, will be called an adequate definition of truth if it has the following consequences:

(α) all sentences which are obtained from the expression ‘ $x \in \text{Tr}$ if and only if p ’ by substituting for the symbol ‘ x ’ a structural-descriptive name of any sentence of the language in question and for the symbol ‘ p ’ the

expression which forms the translation of this sentence into the metalanguage; ... (Tarski, CTF p. 188)⁹

Tarski studiously avoided declaring his metalanguage to be Polish or later German anywhere in his work as far as I know.

Let us try to approach the problem from a quite different angle, by returning to the idea of a semantical definition as in §1. As we know from §2, to every sentence of the calculus of classes there corresponds in the metalanguage not only a name of this sentence of the structural descriptive kind, but also a sentence having the same meaning.... In order to make clear the content of the concept of truth in connexion with some one concrete sentence of the language with which we are dealing we ... take the scheme [*x* is a true sentence if and only if *p*] and replace the symbol '*x*' in it by the name of the given sentence, and '*p*' by its translation into the metalanguage. All sentences obtained in this way ... naturally belong to the metalanguage and explain in a precise way, in accordance with linguistic usage, the meaning of phrases of the form '*x* is a true sentence' which occur in them. Not much more in principle is to be demanded of a general definition of true sentence than that it should satisfy the usual conditions of methodological correctness and include all partial definitions of this type as special cases; that it should be, so to speak, their logical product. At most we can also require that only sentences are to belong to the extension of the defined concept.... (CTF, p. 187)

In the Postscript, the central theorem of §5 is withdrawn and replaced by the theorem now familiar to logicians as Tarski's Theorem, saying roughly that truth is definable for an object-language if, but only if, the metalanguage in which truth is to be defined is "essentially richer" than the object-language; cf. CTF, p. 273.

Donald Davidson summarizes:

According to Tarski's Convention T, a satisfactory theory of truth for a language *L* must entail, for every sentence *s* of *L*, a theorem of the form "*s* is true if and only if *p*" where '*s*' is replaced by a description of *s* and '*p*' by

⁹ Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956; henceforth CFT), 187–88. See also Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944): 341–75, esp. 351.

s itself, if L is English, and by a translation of s into English if L is not English.¹⁰

Translatability into English is declared to be the standard by which candidature for being true or false is to be judged.

Davidson states elsewhere that “the notion of translation ... has no precise or even clear application to natural languages.”¹¹ I conclude that according to Davidson himself, at the philosophically substantial point of its definition the Convention T is “neither precise nor even clear.” The Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, who knew Alfred Tarski well, has pointed this out a long time ago,¹² and I am told that Tarski acknowledged the problem in two postcards. I do wish I had asked Arne Næss about this when we were friends and colleagues in Oslo.¹³

Davidson basically agrees with Tarski: “Tarski was right, I think, in proposing that we should think of natural languages as essentially intertranslatable (though I don’t see why this should require word-by-word translation). The proposal idealizes the flexibility and expandability of natural languages but can be justified by a transcendental argument.”¹⁴

The anthropologist Mary Douglas comments on this kind of thinking in Donald Davidson and Quine with a reference to their “provincial logic”: “The better the translation, the more successfully has our provincial logic been imposed on the native thought.”¹⁵ Mary Douglas does not, I think, rely on the

10 Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–1974): 17. (Bolding is mine!)

11 D. Davidson, “The Method of Truth in Metaphysics,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 204.

12 Arne Næss, “Truth” as Conceived by Those Who are not Professional Philosophers (Oslo: I kommission hos Jacob Dybvad, 1938), and “Empirical Semantics,” in *Philosophy and Grammar*, ed. G. H. von Wright, Stig Kanger, and Sven Öhman (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), 135–55. See also *The Selected Works of Arne Næss*, ed. Alan Drengson in cooperation with the author, 10 vols. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

13 For detailed discussion of Arne Næss’s contributions, see Joseph Ulatowski, “Ordinary Truth in Tarski and Næss,” in *Uncovering Facts and Values*, ed. Adrian Kuzniar and Joanna Odrowaź-Sypniewska (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 67–90, and Robert Barnard and Joseph Ulatowski, “Tarski’s 1944 Polemical Remarks and Næss’ “Experimental Philosophy,”” *Erkenntnis* 81 (2016): 457–77, and now more generally Ulatowski, *Commonsense Pluralism about Truth: An Empirical Defence* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

14 Davidson, “In Defence of Convention T,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 72.

15 Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 252–53. The quotation continues memorably: “So the consequence of good translation is to prevent any confrontation between alien thought systems. We are left as we were at the

any confused relativistic notion of “provincial logic” according to which every culture might come with its own self-contained incommensurate peculiar logic. The case of bilingualism is quite enough to show that confrontation between alien thought systems is real as long as it does not involve internalised notion that one idiom is the measure the conceptual or semantic well-formedness of all others.

However this may be, Davidson’s summary of Tarski seems in other ways curiously inadequate. Tarski never redefined his (Polish) *metajęzyk* as being English after the American victory in the Second World War. He wrote before the effects of the Second World War on the monopolistic predominance of English in academia.

On the other hand, Tarski maintained specific views on lexical equipollence or intertranslatability between colloquial languages: “A characteristic feature of ordinary language (in contrast to various scientific languages) is its universality. It would not be in harmony with the spirit of this language if in some other language a word occurred which could not be translated into it: it could be claimed that if we can speak meaningfully about anything at all, we can also speak about it in colloquial language.” (CTF, 164)

Fortunately, Tarski’s position on lexical equipollence and Donald Davidson’s claim on translatability into English are open to empirical investigation. For example, it might appear that the Greek word *philosophia* was untranslatable into Latin, as we have noted above. The Roman solution was to invent a new Latin word *philosophia* which the speakers of Latin meant to understand exactly as the Greeks understood their word *philosophia*. If the possibility of extensive lexical, morphological, syntactic, and all manner of idiomatic borrowing were to be considered as an acceptable way of assuring equipollence between languages, then many problems would appear to disappear.

Consider now the following German sentences:

A. *So etwas wird man doch wohl mal sagen müssen können dürfen wollen sollen!*

SUCH SOMETHING ONE SURELY PRESUMABLY ONCE SAY MUST CAN MAY WANT-TO SHOULD

B. *Das ist nun ja aber doch eben leider auch fast schon ueberhaupt kaum weiterhin noch recht eigentlich sozusagen wirklich vorbehaltlos zu glauben.*

outset, with our own familiar world divided by its established categories and activated by the principles we know. This world remains our stable point of reference for judging all other worlds as peculiar and other knowledge as faulty.”

As for the second German sentence B, I am unable to attempt even any approximative *mot-à-mot* translation at this point: I must leave this huge task to a separate occasion.¹⁶ By the standards of Davidson's reformulation of "Convention T," I fear, the above sentences A and B would seem not to be semantically well-formed. And I suggest that this should worry analytical philosophers working in the tradition of Davidson.

When I presented Donald Davidson with such examples while we were colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at Berkeley, he pointed out with relish that to the extent I could show that these examples were convincing, I would have refuted my contention that these were relevant cases of untranslatability. He did add that in his view paraphrase must count as translation. A convincing paraphrase of the examples I then provided, to illustrate this ubiquitous possibility of paraphrase would have helped considerably, I thought.

I shall not pursue this matter in detail on this occasion. Suffice to say that anthropologically relevant paraphrasability *in principle* is best demonstrated by paraphrase of problematic examples in practice. The theoretical observation that as long as a people have Scheffer's stroke they are able, in principle, to express all of the propositional calculus is of strictly limited relevance. As Hans Reichenbach observes with his admirable bland directness: "The reducibility of all other operations to the stroke operation has, of course, only a theoretical interest. The resulting formulas (sic!) are so complicated that the use of other signs is preferable."¹⁷ The theoretical possibility of a paraphrase of B would have to be discussed on the basis of the critical discussion of a philosophically satisfactory and philologically successful explicit attempt to provide one. The

16 Here I shall also need to discuss the translatability of Jerry Fodor's splendid example "anti-anti-anti-missile-shield-shield-shield" into classical and also modern Chinese. See Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore, *The Compositionality Papers* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 1–2.

17 Reichenbach, *Elements of Symbolic Logic* (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 44. On perceived limits of translatability, see, e.g., Bronisław Malinowski, *Coral Garden: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands* (Vol 11: The Language of Magic and Gardening) (London: Unwin Brothers, 1935), Div.2: "The Translation of Untranslatable Words." See also Anna Wierzbicka, *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014) and Howard Rheingold, *They Have a Word for It: A Lighthearted Lexicon of Untranslatable Words and Phrases* (Louisville, Ky.: Sarabande Books, 2000), bibliography, 267–79, with its instructive word index on pp. 281–84. For untranslatability in philosophy there is the much more ambitious and more radically chaotic *Vocabulaire Européen de philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: Robert, 2004), which has been delightfully mistranslated into English and published by Princeton Univ. Press.

philosophical issue will then have to be discussed on the basis of advanced logically explicit *philology*. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

Jerold Katz's insistence on effability in principle is philologically and empirically—and therefore also *philosophically*—*anemic*, as it were, until it includes a discussion in full detail of the apparent difficulties of translation or paraphrase into English.¹⁸ Since I am personally incapable of providing so much as a *mot-à-mot* literal rendering of any sort I cannot be of much full-blooded help here. I can only lamely submit that B does make good sense to me, and that as a non-native speaker of English I have great trouble providing an English paraphrase to help in the discussion of B.

Ernest Sosa on Knowing

As I understand Sosa in discussion, he assumes that the problem of knowledge is not parochial to English or to languages like English, but somehow language-independently given.¹⁹ I find it impossible to rise to the level of focusing on any such language-independently given object of thought, in propositional logic as in epistemology.

Any **philosophically precise** definition of knowledge is in my view stipulative: it creates an object of thought *per definitionem*. Such exact philosophical definitions are not the definitions of any well-defined given conceptual object of thought *préalablement donné au delà du langage*.

The stipulative definition of knowledge as based on the notion that belief qualifies as knowledge (justified, warranted) in virtue of its deriving from a **reliable process** designed to lead to the discovery of truth is unobjectionable, and is certainly not in any conflict with another stipulative definition of knowledge as a belief that fundamentally coheres with all other confident beliefs of some sort.

The question, of course, of which of these stipulative definitions—if any!—best cover basic core meanings of the English word *know/knowledge*, the

18 Jerold Katz, *The Metaphysics of Meaning* (New York: Bradford Books, 1992), and idem “Effability and Translation,” in F. Guenther and M. Guenther-Reutter, *Meaning and Translation, Philosophical and Linguistic Approaches* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978), 191–235.

19 On empirical aspects of epistemology, see Sosa, “Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuition,” *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 99–107; idem, “A Defense of the Use of Intuitions in Philosophy,” in *Stich and His Critics*, 101–12; and idem, “Intuitions and Meaning Divergence,” *Philosophical Psychology* 23 (2010): 419–26.

German *Wissen* versus *Erkenntnis*,²⁰ the Russian words *znat'* versus *vedat'*, the modern Chinese *zhidao* versus *xiaode*, the classical Chinese *zhi*, the classical Latin *scire*, and so forth, is philological as well as philosophical and does deserve close attention, especially with regard to the further question of how generally anthropologically representative these particular words are within the wide field of historical and comparative cognitive ethnography. But to hypostatize and conceptually reify a concept like knowledge is quite as arbitrary as it would be to assume that there somehow “is” somewhere out there some Justice waiting to be studied and adequately discussed and defined by Plato or John Rawls. For a comparatist student of conceptual history, it stands to reason that Archelaus (fl. 450 BC) made an important basic point when he claimed that “what is just and what is base depends not upon nature (*phusei*) but upon convention (*nomōi*).”²¹ And the fundamental cognitive contrasts between such conventions merit philosophical attention.

Philosophical Fieldwork in the Cognitive Ethnography of Classical Chinese

It might seem that epistemology is about something very important, namely knowledge—which I would want to try to distinguish carefully from the knowing of it.

20 It seems significant that even the truly brilliant book by Myles Burnyeat, *The Theaitetus of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), never stops to consider that fact that the theologian and hermeneutic philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher in his time came to prefer *Erkenntnis* as a translation for the issue of *epistēmē* in his famously literal translation of the *Theaitetus*. To cut a long story short: Plato's ultimate issue is not the kind of *Wissen* that snow is white (for this Plato has the very current *oida* “I know” and the much rarer abstract *eidēsis* “knowledge”). Plato's ultimate concern is taken to be the *Erkenntnis* of what exactly it is, in a deep scientific sense, for snow to be white. *Epistēmē*, then, would not be anything like just knowing something is the case. *Epistēmē*, in the sense that Plato obsesses with is more like the *getting to the bottom of* how exactly something is really to be understood. In any case, one understands the word *epistēmē* to the extent that one has learned to distinguish it from its many near-synonyms in ancient Greek generally or in a given text.

21 See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, tr. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1980), 1: 147. For ancient detail on this point, see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, tr. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 194. One does not have to be an ethical skeptic or a relativist of any ilk in order to respect the philosophical importance of cognitive and conceptual diversity.

In “Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China,”²² I myself have made a first tentative effort to put Chinese epistemological reflection in a philological and and historical as well as philosophical context.

When *Zhuangzi* ch. 1 says 小知不及大知 “Little *zhi* (knowledge) does not reach great *zhi* (knowledge),” the question that needs to be addressed is which (if any!) of the following that each of these two tokens of *zhi* should be taken to be referring to:

- A. what one knows to be true
- B. the knowing of what one knows to be true
- C. the capacity for knowing things to be true or false
- D. the proper understanding of the inner workings and dynamics of things
- E. the *wisdom* as a general capacity for such understanding of the inner workings and dynamics of things as formative of one’s “philosophy of life”

In interpreting this gnomic statement, one is in the middle of complex issues of classical Chinese philosophical philology, before one even begins to have any well-defined abstract object of thought to philosophize and theorize about with any theoretical precision at all. One is faced with a pretty radical philosophical indeterminacy of discourse which leads to a danger of radical indeterminacy of translation. And as Quine has famously demonstrated, such philosophical indeterminacy and such indeterminacy of exact philosophical interpretation is very much present in English, just as we here find it even manifest in classical Chinese.

Consider the opening paragraph of *Zhuangzi* ch. 7 with Burton Watson’s translation:

一以己爲馬，一以己爲牛。其知情信，其德甚真。

once take self consider.as horse. once take self consider.as ox. his KNOW truly reliable, his virtue intensely genuine.

“(The Clansman T’ai, now—he lay down peaceful and easy; he woke up wide-eyed and blank.) Sometimes he thought he was a horse, sometimes he thought he was a cow. His understanding was truly trustworthy, his virtue was perfectly true.”²³

22 Harbsmeier, “Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China,” in *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Hans Lenk and Gregor Paul (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993), 11–31.

23 Watson, *Chuang-tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), 89. A quick glance across other translations shows up the philosophical uncertainties regarding the interpretation of this passage. Herbert Giles (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), 86: “his wisdom was above suspicion.” The Polish translators (*Czuang-ty* [Warsaw: Panstwo Wydanictwo Naukowe, 1953], 109) translate *xin* 信 as *wiarogodny* “plausible.” A. C. Graham,

Mr Tai's **opinions** or beliefs (what he *yi wei* 以爲's) are here referred back to as *qi zhi* 其知 "his *zhi* UNDERSTAND>KNOW ??his understanding??"

When *zhi* 知 is used in contrastive parallelism with the body, the English translation that recommends itself is not in any sense "knowledge" but rather something like the capacity of "understanding," German *Verstand*. As in the famous phrase from Zhuangzi 1:

豈唯形骸有聾盲哉？夫知亦有之。"Why should there only be deafness and blindness of our physical frame. As for one's understanding, such conditions also exist."

In nominal use, the wisdom or knowledge referred to by *zhi* 知 is typically (but not always) practical, even in *Zhuangzi* 10:

出後，義也；知可否，知也；分均，仁也。"(As a robber) getting out last is dutifulness; understanding the possibilities/acceptabilities is wisdom (*zhi*); dividing the loot evenly is benevolence."

The counter-examples to this in *Zhuangzi* and elsewhere, where the issue is indeed theoretical and about the adequacy of human knowledge, will be discussed by others. My purpose here is to provide some impression of the philological and lexicographic context of such uses of *zhi* 知.

I note in passing that the question of exactly which of these uses of *zhi* "knowledge" would naturally translate into ancient Greek *epistēmē* and which into ancient Greek *gnōmē* is of some interest for the historically well-orientated epistemology.

General Considerations on Philosophical Cognitive Ethnography

From the point of view of cognitive science I find, to begin with, it is entirely plausible that there are richly expressive languages in which one can only be "quite sure," "quite certain," "perfectly convinced," and so on, but where one never engages in the kind of "knowing" that imputes presuppositions about truth to any audience.

Chuang-tzū: Inner Chapters (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 94 has "His knowledge was essential and trustworthy." Wang Rongpei (*Zhuangzi* [Changsha and Beijing: Hunan People's Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, 1999], 114) translates freely thus: "With true virtue, he had never troubled himself with the human world," and into modern Chinese as "他的智慧和感情實在而不虛偽." Victor Mair (*Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* [Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1994], 66) disregards the reflexive pronoun *ji* 己 and translates: "Clansman T'ai's dozing was so contented and waking so peaceable that at one point you might think he was a horse and at the next moment a cow. His knowledge was trustworthy, his integrity very true."

I hope I can be forgiven if I begin with some very unprofessional reflections from an outsider, before I go on to the main philological part of my contribution.

I ask myself this: exactly how widespread is some kind of lexicalized practice (or as Wittgenstein would have it, the language game) of concurrently **believing propositions** to be **true**, believing that belief to be **justified** (in whatever way), and *presupposing* that belief **should** be universally **shared** by an **intended general public** (however circumscribed)?

Now *believing, justifying, presupposing, shoulding*, as well as *being shared*, are matters of different kinds, levels, and degrees, in important ways. Different languages may elaborate and lexicalize such matters to widely differing degrees and in widely different manners.

And here, then, is my hunch within the wide field of cognitive ethnography:

There **might very well be** linguistic NON-EPISTEMESE communities who do use non-factive verbs, like FEEL SURE THAT, without engaging in the problematic and complex game of committing themselves to any presumed universal or general consent. And would not lexicographers, in any such language, cite the verb BE SURE THAT as the local word for KNOW, *faute de mieux*? Would not the inevitable *New Comprehensive English—Non-Epistemese Dictionary* reasonably cite the Non-Epistemese expression for “be sure that, etc.,” as the local word for the English “to know”? Remember: the lexicographic *horror vacui* is endemic in lexicography: dictionaries feel obliged to list up translations of untranslatables in order to avoid a lexical void, or a lexical gap. Lexicographers do not like to acknowledge professional failure to deliver. Philosophers would trust them at their peril.

The scope of what is discussed by philosophy as theory of knowledge is very likely less than universal. The thought that English exhibits the essentially important features of human language sufficiently for the philosophy of language to be able to limit its attention to English is in my view a recent instance of wishful thinking with an old history.

One might also want to say that it was intellectual wishful thinking in the doctrine of the Danish logicians of the thirteenth century that everything important about language was in fact exhibited in the features of Latin (the Greek article, for example, they declared to be only a marginal feature of the basic system of human language). But neither Boethius of Dacia nor Johannes of Dacia²⁴ (nor indeed Thomas of Erfurt) were aiming at intellectual comfort

24 See Jan Pinborg, *Die Entwicklung der Sprachtheorie im Mittelalter* (Copenhagen: Verlag Arne Frost-Hansen, 1967), 26–30. There is a medieval Danish tradition along these lines, published as the *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi*, 6 vols. (Hauniae: apud

over and above logical truth. They did indulge in wishful thinking. But at least they did their best to argue their case. The comparison with modern analytical philosophers is instructive on this point.

In my extensive *tête-à-tête* discussion with Professor Quine on these matters in the Faculty Club at Harvard some time in the early eighties,²⁵ I opened the conversation with a fearless question: “Why,” I asked, “are you not describing yourself as a ‘philosopher of English’ since that is what in effect you really are?” Quine seemed delighted by the challenge: “Point taken!” he said, apparently looking forward to a lively lunch. And I came away from that lunch happily convinced that Quine did *not* succumb to any wishful thinking concerning the representative status of the English language for philosophical concerns. On the other hand, he congenially insisted that the ball was in my court to demonstrate with logical clarity what the philosophical essentials were that needed to be learned from, for example, classical Chinese. He had been profoundly unimpressed by what he had been told so far. And I hate to admit that now, some thirty years later, the ball still remains where it was then.

Now Ernest Sosa identifies wishful thinking as follows: “There is such a thing as wishful thinking of a sort that aims at the intellectual comfort of the believer.”²⁶ Sosa continues to give an example: “For example, we are said to systematically overestimate our own merits. Such beliefs can aim at our comfort regardless of truth, which in some cases might not even be an aim, much less the aim.”²⁷ For my part, I take wishful thinking to consist in the wishful thinker being intellectually *misled* by a subconscious motivation which causes him to take what is merely desirable to be real. The wishful thinker clearly wishes he was not in this way being misled. And I believe as philosophers we should ensure that we are indeed not in this way intellectually misled into treating deep linguistic variation as irrelevant to the philosophy of language.

There is an interesting idiomatic feature in “knowing full well.” For, knowing full well strongly invites a negative continuation. As in: Knowing full well that

G.E.C. Gad, 1955), where especially 1: 53–75 is relevant: *utrum grammatica una apud omnes* “Whether grammar is one in everyone.” Sten Ebbesen, *Dansk Middelalder-filosofi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Forlag, 2002) provides a truly magisterial and eminently readable survey of the medieval Danish tradition of philosophy, for those who read Danish.

25 It was by the grace of my host in Cambridge, Betty Burch, that I met Quine for a two-and-a-half-hour lunch *à deux* at the Faculty Club. I owe Betty Burch an eternal debt of gratitude for finding it in her heart to take the initiative to arrange this unforgettable meeting. (Betty Burch was married to the philosopher George Boswell Burch who wrote his Harvard Ph.D. thesis on the entirely pertinent subject, “The Epistemology of St. Bernard of Clairvaux”).

26 Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 15.

27 Ibid.

linguistic variation is relevant to the philosophy of language *and doing nothing about it is*, in my view, a dereliction of philosophical duty.

The philosophical duty I am thinking of here is the duty to cultivate philosophical fieldwork nourished by a spirit of logical analysis, coupled with patient literate philology, modern and ancient.²⁸ Ultimately it involves the cultural anthropology of analytic philosophy, much in the spirit of Bronislaw Malinowski. This would involve a type of critique of language that goes beyond Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923)²⁹ and the late Ludwig Wittgenstein, by taking philosophically seriously what Wilhelm von Humboldt investigated as *die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaus*, “the structural variability of human language.”³⁰

What we need in the philosophical sphere is the fearless curiosity that Alexander von Humboldt displayed in the naturalist wealth of the Americas and of the vast lands of Russia. In these distant lands he found the following:

Spheniscus humboldti—known as the Humboldt penguin
 Dosidicus gigas—known as the Humboldt squid
 Lilium humboldtii—known as the Humboldt lily
 Phragmipedium humboldtii—known as the Humboldt orchid
 Quercus humboldtii—known as the Humboldt (Andean) oak
 Conepatus humboldtii—known as the Humboldt hog-nosed skunk
 Annona humboldtii—known as a Humboldt neotropical fruit shrub
 Utricularia humboldtii—known as the Humboldt bladderwort
 Geranium humboldtii—known as the Humboldt cranesbill
 Salix humboldtiana—known as the Humboldt South-American willow
 Inia geoffrensis humboldtiana—known as the Amazon river Humboldt dolphin.

28 My mentor Professor Günter Patzig provided a shining example of all of this in relation to Greek philosophy, at the Georgia Augusta University of Göttingen in the 1960s.

29 For a brilliant essay on Fritz Mauthner, the disciple of the Vienna physicist Ernst Mach, as a major inspiration for Ludwig Wittgenstein, see Hans Sluga, “Wittgenstein and Pyrrhonism,” ch. 5, in, ed., *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Walter Sinnott Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 99–117. Fritz Mauthner’s relevant works include *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1901–02), and his *Wörterbuch der Philosophie: Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1910). Many of Mauthner’s other writings provide philosophical comic relief.

30 See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language: The Diversity of Language Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, tr. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), and Christoph Harbsmeier, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Brief an Abel-Rémusat und die philosophische Grammatik des Altchinesischen* (Stuttgart: Fromann Verlag, 1979).

Might there not be, in philosophy *at least as much as* in physical nature, unfamiliar things out there in distant parts that need—however!—to be approached *in their own terms and by their own names*, without superimposing Latinate or English nomenclature or assimilation on them? This is not a matter of mere intellectual politeness to the Other. What we really would need, after the Linguistic Turn, is a Copernican analytic revolution in analytical philosophy. But such grandiloquent talk sounds depressingly like modern academic self-advertising commodification of what is just a little worrying reflection on the current use of language in analytical philosophy.

What I am pleading for is *not* just a matter of paying great attention to other philosophical traditions.³¹ It is a matter of understanding how English cannot serve as any centre or *point de départ* for the description of all cognitive systems. We need to try to define the topology of the human cognitive space where English must show up as the very untypical case of a natural language that it manifestly is.

Pace Donald Davidson, English is **not** *the measure of all things*.³² And historical cognitive ethnography is relevant to philosophical epistemology.

The indispensable basis for any philosophy with global ambitions is a conceptual “experimental method” applied to the problems of conceptual diversity among human languages regarding not least of all the conceptual schemes of which *one’s own* philosophical keywords are an integral part.³³

31 Pleas for such a non-Eurocentric global perspective abound everywhere, East and West. But neither subsumption of other traditions under Western philosophical categories nor the exoticization of foreign concepts by the introduction of inscrutable neologisms are helpful. Current work is torn between the Scylla of subsumption and the Charybdis of exoticization. An escape from these two overfamiliar dangers might be found in Anna Wierzbicka’s project of Natural Semantic Metalanguage, which aims to use configurations of “universal” primitive concepts to define all concepts, including the English ones. See Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996). But this would involve, for example, the postulation of KNOW as a semantically non-complex prime, which I have found philosophically problematic if THINK is also taken as a primitive, since KNOWING under any analysis would have to be a hyponym of (some kind of) THINKING or BELIEVEING, and thus not a prime. For my own imperfect efforts to solve the problem, see Thesaurus Linguae Sericae (tls.uni-hd.de) and my chapter in the forthcoming *Keywords in Chinese Culture*, ed. Li Wai-ye and Yuri Pines (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press).

32 On the difficult notion of “measure” as used here, see *Protagoras of Abdera: The Man, His Measure*, ed. Johannes M. van Ophuijsen, Marlein van Raalte, and Peter Stork (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

33 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976), deserves a successor that might attempt to take better account of conceptual diversity across cultures and also across history.

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