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Beyond the Lyric: Expanding the Landscape of Early and High Tang Literature

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BEYOND THE LYRIC: EXPANDING THE LANDSCAPE OF
EARLY AND HIGH TANG LITERATURE

by

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Beyond the Lyric: Expanding the Landscape of Early and High Tang Literature

This dissertation investigates what Tang (618-907) literature was in its own time, as opposed to how it has been constructed at later times and for different critical purposes. The core of this dissertation is to diversify and complicate our understanding of Tang literature, including Tang poetry, from the perspective of self-(re)presentation, and by bringing out certain genres, works, and literati that have been overlooked. Prevailing narratives of Tang literature usually present it as a uniform phenomenon that went through four clear developmental stages, and are often restricted to shi-poetry, for the Tang is dubbed as the “golden age” of the shi. Such narratives may sound very neat, but they present one particular view of the Tang literary landscape, and conceal various other aspects and features that contributed to Tang literature. To remedy this situation, my dissertation offers a new historical narrative of Tang literature, one that is neither restricted to shi-poetry nor bounded by its traditional fourfold periodization, but presents Tang literary history as more multifaceted than has previously been portrayed. More specifically, I have considered in detail four literary forms that were both prevalent and important in the Tang period—the occasional preface, the self-recommendation letter, the fu, and autobiographical verse in various forms (including encomium, entombed epitaph, and shi). Through the discussion of these genres in four chapters, I show that the conventional fourfold periodization of Tang literature obscures the fact that High Tang literature is often similar to the work of the early Tang, that Tang literati did not view literature as “pure” literary composition but as an integral part of their socio-political life, and that a conscious, public self-(re)presentation grew to be a critically prominent feature of Tang literature.
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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER

I.  A DISPLAY OF ME, AND A FAREWARE GIFT TO YOU: THE OCCASIONAL PREFACE IN THE EARLY AND HIGH TANG LITERATURE ....................................................................................................................20

   The Occasional Preface Prior to the Tang .................................................................................................21
   Now You See Me ..............................................................................................................................................24
   Presenting Words as a Farewell Gift ............................................................................................................47

II. SEEKING POLITICAL PATRONAGE: THE ART OF THE SELF-RECOMMENDATION LETTER .................................................................................................................................61

   The Justification for Patronage Seeking .....................................................................................................62
   The Praise or Criticism of the Recipient .......................................................................................................73
   The Self-display of the Speaker ...................................................................................................................90
   The Plea for Patronage .............................................................................................................................101

III. A GENRE OF IMPORTANCE: REAPPRAISING TANG FU-POETRY .............................................115

   An Emperor’s Self-justification ...............................................................................................................116
   Presenting Fu to Win Imperial Favor .......................................................................................................123
   Fu-poetry to Express One’s Mind ...........................................................................................................132
   Shi or Fu? ..................................................................................................................................................140
   Self-fashion in the Fu ...............................................................................................................................145

IV. A PORTRAIT OF ME: SELF-REPRESENTATION IN TANG AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VERSE ........157

   The Contemporary Sage .........................................................................................................................164
   The Disillusioned Recluse .......................................................................................................................170
   The Virtuous Victim ................................................................................................................................185
   The Concerned Talent ............................................................................................................................192

FINAL REMARKS .......................................................................................................................................216

BIBLIOGRAPHY .........................................................................................................................................219

APPENDIX .................................................................................................................................................230

   “You Shanmiao xu” 遊山廟序 ...............................................................................................................230
   “Muchun Jiangxia song Zhang Zu jiancheng zhi Dongdu xu” 暮春江夏送張
祖監丞之東都序.............................................................232
“Shang Silie Taichangbo qi” 上司列太常伯啟.................................233
“Shang Zhongshu Yao linggong Yuanchong shu” 上中書姚令公元崇書...242
“Weifeng fu” 威鳳賦.................................................................247
“Chaoyuange fu” 朝元閣賦.........................................................250
“Sima fu” 死馬賦.................................................................255
“Jing luanihou tianen liu Yelang yi jiyou shuhuai zeng Jiangxia Wei Taishou Liangzai” 經亂離後天恩流夜郎憶舊遊書懷贈江夏韋太守良宰.......257
FIGURES

1. A map of the Huanqing Palace………………………………………………………………126

2. Dunhuang manuscript P. 3619 (partial)……………………………………………………145
Rewriting History

**Ernest:** Gilbert, you treat the world as if it were a crystal ball. You hold it in your hand, and reverse it to please a willful fancy. You do nothing but re-write history.

**Gilbert:** The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it. That is not the least of the tasks in store for the critical spirit.¹

In his essay “The Critic as Artist,” Oscar Wilde had the fictional Gilbert announce loud and clear the legitimacy of rewriting history, and claim it to be one of the tasks “in store for the critical spirit.” Wilde’s statement accords with the so-called “crisis of historicism,” which developed during the last third of the nineteenth century and undermined “the confidence in history’s claim to ‘objectivity,’ ‘scientifcity,’ and ‘realism.’”² This crisis carried on to the twentieth century and persists to this very day, as modern Western scholars—including Valéry, Heidegger, Sartre, Foucault—have stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions. This “fictive character” is most conspicuous when history is presented in narrative form. Yet on the other hand, Croce tells us that where there is no narrative, there is no history,³ and Hayden White illustrates with eloquence that the meaning of history derives from narrative.⁴ Therefore, with regard to David Perkins’s question “Is literary history possible?”⁵ my answer is, yes, if by “possible” we do not mean a literary history free

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³ See Hayden White’s discussion on Croce in *Metahistory*, 381-85.
⁵ For Perkins’s discussion on theories about literary history, see his *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
of imaginative reconstruction, but one with a consistent, coherent, and illuminative narrative. This is exactly what this dissertation intends to do: to write an alternative literary history of early and High Tang literature, of course not merely to “please a willful fancy.”

There is no lack of historical narratives of Tang literature. If we do not limit ourselves to Western-style literary history, which was not evident in China until the early twentieth century, but take into consideration the historical accounts of literary figures, activities, phenomena, and compositions found in various prefaces, letters, entombed epitaphs, and “notes on poetry” (shihua 詩話), then historical narratives of Tang literature already began in the Tang. The most famous examples include Yin Fan’s 殷璠 preface to his poetry anthology Heyue yinglingji 河岳英靈集, 6 Yuan Zhen’s 元稹 (779-831) entombed epitaph for the High Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), 7 and Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772-846) famous letter about literature to Yuan Zhen. 8 In these texts, preliminary narratives of Tang literature, especially Tang shī-poetry, are offered. Narratives in similar forms increased greatly in later dynasties, especially in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912). Among others, two narratives stand out: one is a fourfold periodization of Tang shī-poetry, and the other is an account that assigns shī to the Tang as its main, representative achievement in literature.

In the preface to his large anthology of Tang shī-poetry Tangshi pinhui 唐詩品彙, the Ming scholar Gao Bing 高棅 (1350-1423) proposed a periodization of Tang shī that has been widely accepted among scholars for the past six hundred years. According to Gao Bing’s periodization, Tang shī went through four developmental stages, namely, an “early” (shū 初) stage, a “high” (sheng

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time, a “middle” (zhong) era, and a “late” (wan) age. By dividing Tang shi into four periods, Gao Bing offers a single, neat narrative of its progression. The influence of this fourfold periodization is still significant: Stephen Owen’s influential narrative of Tang shi is a quartet consisting of histories of the shi of the “early Tang,” “High Tang,” “mid-Tang,” and “late Tang”; and the most widely used textbook of Chinese literary history in mainland China—the *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史 edited by Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈—divides Tang shi into the stages of “early,” “High,” “middle,” and “late,” just to name two examples.

The exclusive association between the Tang and shi-poetry also began in the Ming, when two prominent scholar-officials, Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1530) and He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521), made the claims that there was no sao 騪 in the Han (202 BCE-220 AD), no fu 赋 in the Tang, and no shi in the Song (960-1279). These statements surely should not be taken literally, for there were sao, fu, and shi in all three dynasties. Their intent was to assign, in what we might regard as an almost Darwinian evolutionary sequence, one particular form of literature to each dynastic period as its main, representative literary achievement. As for the Tang, it is dubbed the “golden age” of the

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12 “When the Mountain Dweller was engaged in trade in Liang and Song, he still imitated the shi poetry of the Song. By chance, Master Li was then travelling in Liang, and said to him, ‘The Song had no shi poetry.’ The Mountain Dweller thus abandoned the shi poetry of the Song and turned to imitate that of the Tang. Not long after, he asked what did the Tang lack. Master Li said, ‘The Tang had no fu.’ The Mountain Dweller asked about the Han. Master Li said, ‘No sao.’ 山人商宋梁時猶學宋人詩. 會李子客梁，謂之曰：‘宋無詩．’ 山人於是遂棄宋而學唐．已問唐所無，曰：‘唐無賦哉．’ 问漢，曰：‘無騷哉．’ Li Mengyang, “Qianqiu shanren ji” 潛虬山人記 (Account of Mountain Dweller Qianqiu), in *Kongtong xiansheng ji* 空同先生集, vol. 4 (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1976), 47.1371. “With the decline of the classics, sao was composed; with the decline of the sao, fu was composed; and with the decline of the fu, shi was composed. The Qin had no classics, the Han had no sao, the Tang had no fu, and the Song had no shi.” 經亡而騷作，騷亡而賦作，賦亡而詩作. 秦無經，漢無騷，唐無賦，宋無詩．He Jingming, “Zayan” 雜言 (Miscellaneous Words), in *He Dafu ji* 何大復集, ed. Li Shuyi 李叔毅 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989), 38.666.
Because of that, a large number of anthologies of Tang literature compiled during the Ming and Qing are anthologies of 诗-poetry only, among which the most influential anthology is the 唐詩三百首 Tangshi sanbaishou. It was compiled in 1763 by the Qing scholar Sun Zhu 孫洙 (1711-1778) and has been the starting point for most scholars in their study of Tang 诗-poetry for the past 250 years. Those Ming and Qing anthologies in turn reinforced the impression that 诗 was the main representative of Tang literature. As a result, many of the Tang literary histories appearing in the last hundred years are reduced to being histories of Tang 诗. In the Zhongguo wenxue 诗 edited by Yuan Xingpei, out of the two hundred and fifty-seven pages devoted to Tang literature, a hundred and eighty-eight pages are about 诗-poetry; and the narrative of early and High Tang literature centers exclusively on 诗-poetry.

These prevailing histories of Tang literature are important, as they offer us possible ways to view Tang literature, especially Tang 诗-poetry and Tang poets. However, if we restrict ourselves to Tang 诗 when trying to understand the Tang literary landscape, it is the same as to restrict ourselves to one particular painting of Vincent van Gogh. What we will miss by focusing on one painting, however brilliantly it is drawn, is the beauty of other remarkable paintings, as well as the opportunity to better appreciate the painting that has been the center of our focus, for it is taken out of its surroundings. As for the fourfold periodization, while it enables us to view Tang 诗/literature as a neat, linear progression, at the same time it makes us blind to various other aspects and attributes.

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13 For a discussion of Li Mengyang’s and He Jingming’s statements and other similar accounts, see Qian Zhongshu 钱锺书, Tangyi 談藝錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 27-31. The account of assigning one particular form of literature to each dynastic period as its main, representative literary achievement was famously reaffirmed by Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) in the Preface to his Song Yuan xiqu shi 宋元戲曲史: “In general, each generation had each generation’s own literature: the 詩 of the Chu, 詩 of the Han, parallel prose of the Six Dynasties, 诗 poetry of the Tang, 楚 lyric of the Song, and 曲 of the Yuan—all of these were so called “each generation’s own literature”, which could not be continued by later generations” 凡一代有一代之文學: 楚之騷, 漢之賦, 六代之駢語, 唐之詩, 宋之詞, 元之曲, 皆所謂一代之文學, 而後世莫能繼焉者也. Song Yuan xiqu shi (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 1. For a thorough discussion, see Jiang Yin 蒋寅, “Yidai you yidai zhi wenxue: Yi Tangshi fanrong yuyan de tantao wei zhongxin” 一代有一代之文學—以唐詩繁榮原因的探討為中心, in Gudian shixue de xiandai quanshi 古典詩學的現代詮釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 217-32.
14 Zhongguo wenxueshi, 236-492.
that also contributed to Tang literature. Moreover, with hundreds of years’ time gap in between, the literary tastes of the Ming and Qing critics were already quite different from those of Tang literati. Therefore, it is important, even necessary, to put aside Ming and Qing critics’ narratives and the prevailing narratives of Tang literature that are under their influence, if we are to investigate what Tang literature was in its own time, as opposed to how it has been constructed at later times and for different critical purposes. Accordingly, the goal of this dissertation is to present an alternative narrative of early and High Tang literature, one that is neither restricted to shi-poetry nor bound by its fourfold periodization, but presents Tang literary history as more multifaceted than it has been previously portrayed.

While the assertion that a similar effort is missing in the prevailing narratives of Tang literature is by and large true, some scholars have set out to complicate and expand our understanding of Tang literature. My work is inspired by the studies that break away from well-established understandings and conventions. In his “The Significance of the fu in the History of T’ang Poetry,” Paul W. Kroll reminds us that “to snub the medieval (Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch’ao and T’ang) fu is to consign ourselves not only to willful ignorance of what was during that period a prevalent and still vital genre of verse; it also guarantees a one-eyed view of the shih itself.” To overcome this “willful ignorance” and “one-eyed view,” my dissertation focuses on several literary forms—including the fu—that were both prevalent and important in the Tang period, but have been sadly neglected in later times. Stephen Owen, in his recent historical account of Tang literature, abandons the long-established dynastic periodization; instead, he refers to the 370-year span, beginning with the rise to power of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705) in the 650s and terminating at the time of the first significant literary figures of the Northern Song around 1020, as

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“the cultural Tang.”\textsuperscript{16} Although Owen’s eye is still most determinedly on \textit{shi}-poetry, his free-flowing account of “the cultural Tang” that follows its own, at times unexpected, course encourages one to break away from the traditional fourfold periodization of Tang literature.

Ding Xiang Warner, in her “‘A Splendid Patrimony’: Wang Bo and the Development of a New Poetic Decorum in Early Tang China,” questions the premises and effectiveness of the often seen evaluative criticism “in which, with the privilege and prejudice of hindsight, scholars hold up a chronology of literary productions against a yardstick of literary merit to help them tell one of two inevitable narratives: that what came before does not reach the heights of what came after, or alternatively, that in what came after we witness the regrettable decline of what came before.”\textsuperscript{17} She extracts Wang Bo 王勃 (649-676) from such narratives and from the retrospectively formulated context of the “The Four Elites of the Early Tang” (\textit{chu Tang sijie} 初唐四傑), a group including Wang Bo, Yang Jong 楊炯 (650-ca. 694), Lu Zhaolin 廬照鄰 (ca. 634-ca. 683), and Luo Binwang 駱賓王 (ca. 626-684). Following her example, I make the effort to keep my account of Tang literature from becoming one of the “two inevitable narratives,” and to appreciate each literatus as a distinct individual rather than associating them with any “school” or “group.” The new literary history I am writing also benefits from the series of new national literary histories published by Harvard University Press. The volumes that have been published—including the \textit{New Histories} of French literature, German literature, American literature, and Modern Chinese literature—all seek to revise the traditional formula of writing and reading literary history, one that places masters and canonical works and crucial events into a linear sequence informed by politics.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{18} They are: \textit{A New History of French Literature}, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press: 1989); \textit{A New History of German Literature}, ed. David E. Wellbery (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press: 2004); \textit{A
The Early and High Tang

I have just mentioned that the literary history I am writing is not bound by the traditional fourfold periodization of Tang literature; therefore, it seems self-contradictory to continue using the terms “early Tang” and “High Tang,” and limit my discussion to early and High Tang literature. To clarify, I use the terms “early Tang” and “High Tang” not to suggest a clear-cut distinction between the two “periods,” but to roughly indicate the time-span on which this dissertation focuses. The entire history of Tang literature, stretching over three hundred years, rather more than the whole span of American history from the founding of the United States to the present, is too broad to cover at once. My focus consequently is on the first, defining half of the dynasty—the so-called “early” (618-712) and “High” (712-766) Tang periods—although where possible I shall also venture remarks about related developments in the later half of the dynasty. My ending date for the High Tang period is ten years later than the traditional date, for it is difficult to imagine that the break-out of the An Shi Rebellion (An Shi zhiluan 安史之亂) on December 16th, 755 could have immediately changed the course of literature. Some of the important poets under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756), such as Gao Shi 高適 (706-765), Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), and Yuan Jie 元結 (719-772), were still very active during and after the Rebellion. It was in the Dali 大曆 (766-780) era that a new, prominent literary voice emerged in the works of the so-called “Ten Talents of the Dali Era” (Dali shi caizi 大曆十才子). Therefore, if we have to draw an arbitrary line between High Tang and mid-Tang literature, 766 would be my choice.

I limit my discussion to early and High Tang literature for one more reason: mid-Tang literature is in fact quite different from early and High Tang literature. This has been discussed most
clearly by Ge Xiaoyin,葛曉音, who points out, “High Tang literature is a summary of the literature of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties, whereas mid-Tang literature opens a new literary realm for the late Tang and Song 宋 (960-1279): the difference between the literary world of the mid-Tang and that of the early and High Tang bears epoch-making significance.” As mid-Tang literature already marked a different “epoch,” the scope of this dissertation does not go beyond the High Tang.

Four Genres

In his introduction to The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, Owen suggests that the danger for the literary historian “is [that] a set of increasingly atomized genre histories gives no sense of the variety of interests in a period or in a particular writer.” In this dissertation, however, I show the variety of interests in the Tang and among Tang literati exactly through the discussion of four different genres: the preface (序), letter,赋, and verse. For the first, second, and fourth genres, I focus on one particular subcategory of each genre: the occasional preface, the self-recommendation letter, and autobiographical verse in various forms (including 贊, 慕志銘, and 詩). In medieval China,序 (traditionally translated as “preface”) were written not just to introduce large literary works but also for works produced at various social occasions, such as excursions, banquets, and farewells, as well as for collected poems composed by a group on individual occasions. These are what I call the “occasional prefaces.” The self-recommendation letter, variably titled 书, 启, 表, or 简, is a form of writing that Tang literati

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20 Ge Xiaoyin, “Zhong Tang wenxue de bianqian (shang),” 44.
21 The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, xxvii.
22 In Chinese, the letter as a genre of writing has many different designations; for a discussion of epistolary terminology, see Antje Richter, Letter and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 34-37.
presented to those in power to seek political patronage. As for autobiographical verse, it refers to lyrics where the main point is the poet’s presentation of a self-account.

Admittedly, there are other important literary genres in the Tang, such as lun 论, song 颂, and bei 碑, which equally deserve our attention. Therefore, the literary history I present here is in no way a “complete” one. I choose to discuss the occasional preface, the self-recommendation letter, the fu, and autobiographical verse for three reasons. First, they are the genres that have fascinated me the most. As I am writing my version of Tang literary history, I believe the honest way to do so is by writing what I find most interesting. Second, the four genres all underwent important development in the early and High Tang: the occasional preface took on new functions; the self-recommendation letter embraced unconventional rhetorical strategies; a new type of fu was established; and the autobiographical verse was a newly developed form in the Tang. Accordingly, they reveal many important, variegated elements and features that contributed to Tang literature. Third, the first three genres discussed here are closely related to shi-poetry in their own ways: many occasional prefaces were written to introduce shi-poems or invite shi composition; some self-recommendation letters, when presented to individual recipients, were accompanied by shi-poems; and fu and shi displayed active interplay. Although I am writing here a Tang literary history “beyond the lyric,” complicating our understanding of shi is one of my goals, thus the focus on the genres that are connected with shi. As for the autobiographical verse, I include it because a discussion of Tang literature without verse, especially shi, would not be satisfactory.

Derrida once argued that the law of genre is “precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy.”23 However eloquent Derrida’s argument may be, it remains true that genre, as a classification, can be helpful, since most of the texts that have been categorized as one genre do share certain convention(s) of content (such as themes or settings) and/or form

(including structure and style). Hence I still adopt genre-concepts here. I use the four genres as four threads to connect different literati and literary works, as well as to show that at least with regard to these four genres, High Tang literature is often similar to the work of the early Tang.

Moreover, by organizing the four chapters on the basis of genres, I show in turn that many Tang literati tended to play with the conventions of a genre, which, according to Wellek and Warren, is an “institution” one may “reshape.” This is particularly true with regard to the occasional preface. Traditionally, as a xu, an occasional preface was expected to precede a collection of poems composed at a particular occasion. However, a new development of Tang occasional prefaces, as is shown in the first chapter, is that quite a few of them, though still called xu, would later be seen as independent, no longer attached to any other text. Moreover, among the occasional prefaces that were still attached to poetry collections, many, unlike the occasional prefaces of the Nanbeichao periods, were not written for poems already composed, but to invite poetry composition. Therefore, I feel quite uneasy about translating xu as “preface.” Nevertheless, for lack of a better term, I still translate the occasional xu as preface, although a noticeable amount of them are “preface” no more.

The four literary forms or subgenres with which I will be concerned, having been often neglected, have started to attract more scholarly attention in the last two decades. Recent relevant works include Michisaka Akihiro’s study on the early Tang occasional preface, Alexei Ditter’s discussion of mid-Tang self-recommendation letters (or what he calls “cover letter”), Liu Qinghai’s

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Showing Selves

I leave unmentioned the last but foremost reason for choosing the four genres. That is, they bring to light the showing of selves in Tang literature, which indicates a conscious effort of self-(re)presentation among early and High Tang literati. The manners in which one (re)presents oneself in literature, media, or everyday life and the motivations behind different (re)presentation has become a popular topic across different disciplines. The terms “self-presentation” and “self-representation” are most commonly used among literary critics. Some scholars prefer “self-representation,” as they believe “representation” reflects better the culturally constructed nature of one’s literary self-presentation. I use “self-presentation” in my dissertation for two reasons. On the one hand, “representation” carries a heavy implication that the self presented in the text is largely fictitious; on the other, “presentation” does not necessarily indicate a genuine manifestation, as is

30 Kōzō Kawai 川合康三, “Shisha no me de mita ware: Jisen boshime” 死者の目で見たわれ—自撰墓誌銘 in Chuugoku no jiden bungaku 中国の自伝文学 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1996), 157-205
used by Erving Goffman in his 1956 publication, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In the meantime, I also use the term “self-display” to refer to the presentation of self in a boastful manner.

Of course there are already selves presented in earlier literature. Prior to the Tang, the literary genres in which the poet spoke intensely of himself include *yonghuai* 詠懷詩 (poems on singing my heart), *zashi* 雜詩 (unclassified poems), and *shuqingfu* 抒情賦 (lyrical *fu*). In general, poets spoke with a generalized lyric “I,” an “I” that links the self with common human experience. For example, the first and the most famous piece of Ruan Ji’s 阮籍 (210-263) eighty-two poems on “Singing My Cares” (*Yonghuai* 詠懷) reads:

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夜中不能寐    I could not get to sleep at night,
起坐彈鳴琴    I sat up and plucked my zither.
薄帷鑒明月    The thin curtain gave the image of the bright moon,
清風吹我襟    a cool breeze blew on the folds of my robes.
孤鴻號外野    A lone swan cried out in the wilds,
翔鳥鳴北林    winging birds sang in the woods to the north.
徘徊將何見    I paced about, what might I see? —
憂思獨傷心    anxious thoughts wounded my heart alone.32
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Ruan Ji presents here an “I” who could not fall asleep at night, stayed up to play the zither, paced about, and felt distressed by anxious thoughts. Yet this self-image is so generalized that there is

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hardly any specific aspect that can link this “I” directly to Ruan Ji, except that Ruan Ji is the author of this “I.” The same can be said about the night setting: it has no reference to any specific site or occasion. Ruan Ji’s self-presentation is so generalized that the self thus presented can be applied to almost any dejected literatus in medieval China. So were most of the selves presented in pre-Tang literature.

The selves shown in Tang literature, on the other hand, are often more personalized. Lu Zhaolin, one of the “Four Elites of the Early Tang,” wrote a sao-style composition titled “Shiji wen” (Text to Resolve Illness), after he had been suffering bitterly from disease—probably progressive rheumatoid arthritis of the extremities—for over ten years. In this emotionally painful text, Lu Zhaolin presents an image of an intensely distressed self, from multiple perspectives. One of the self-portraits he offers is an ailing “I” who can barely move:

神翳翳兮似灰
My spirit is faint and feeble, similar to ashes;
命綿綿兮若縷
My life is far and finely threaded, same as a filament.
一伸一屈兮艱難乎尺蠖
To curl and stretch once is as difficult for me as is for an inchworm;\(^{33}\)
九生九死兮同變化乎盤古
Having survived nine near-death experiences, my body is as changeable as that of Pangu.\(^{34}\)
萬物繁茂兮此時
The myriad phenomena are proliferating and flourishing at this moment,
余獨何為兮腸邅迴而屢腐
Why am I the only one whose intestines, turning and twisting, are forever rotten.\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) According to \textit{Zhouyi}, the inchworm curls itself in order to stretch.

\(^{34}\) Allegedly, Pangu, the mythical Creator, transformed nine times within one day.
Ailing selves are not unique in Chinese literature, yet Lu Zhaolin successfully makes this “I” (yu 余) his unique self by graphically presenting the debilitating and demoralizing effects illness has forced on him, and by asserting that he alone is in such excruciating pain. Accordingly, Lu Zhaolin is not presenting a generalized “I” that links the self with common human experience; rather, he is presenting a personalized “I” that is based on his very own life experiences. “I”s presented in this manner are what I mean by “showing selves” in Tang literature.

Critics have long been defending or questioning the sincerity of self-presentation in literature. In his Fayan 法言, the Han scholar Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18AD) claims: “Speech is the heart’s sound, and writing, its image. When sound and image assume form, then the noble and petty appear in high relief” 言，心聲也；書，心畫也。聲畫形，君子小人見矣. This is indicative of Yang Xiong’s confidence in knowing the person through his speech and writing. Disagreeing with Yang Xiong, the Jin 金 poet Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190-1257) states that speech (heart’s sound) and writing (heart’s image), for most of the time, are only misrepresentations of the heart:

心畫心聲總失真 The sound and image of the heart always misrepresent it;

文章寧復見爲人 How can a literary composition reveal one’s conduct?

高情千古聞居賦 High-minded through the ages, the “Fu on Living in Idleness,”

爭信安仁拜路塵 But who would believe Anren used to bow in the dust on the road?38

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37 I take the translation from Michael Nylan’s Fayan, Exemplary Figures (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 77.
This is the sixth poem of his thirty-six quatrains “On Poetics” (Lunshi 论诗). Here Yuan Haowen questions the sincerity of literati’s self-presentation. He supports his argument with the example of the famous Western Jin literatus Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300), style-named Anren. After serving a series of positions, Pan Yue had a brief retirement from 295 to 297. Sometime during this retirement, Pan Yue composed the “Xianju fu,” where he presents himself as a high-minded figure, one who was disappointed about official service and delighted at his retirement to his country estate. However, according to the Jin shu, Pan Yue was ill tempered and obsessed with worldly fame and gains. In order to fawn over Jia Mi 賈謐 (?-300), the most influential official of the time, whenever Jia Mi went out, Pan Yue would wait outside and “bow toward the dust [stirred up by Jia’s entourage]” 望塵而拜. Pan Yue’s self-presentation in the “Xianju fu” seems to be at odds with his act as recorded in the Jin shu. Yuan Haowen, therefore, rhetorically asks the reader, that if we take Pan Yue’s self-presentation in the “Xianju fu” as reliable, how can we explain his behavior as recorded in the Jin shu?

Whether defending or questioning the sincerity of one’s self-presentation in literature, it means “we have not progressed past the assumption that the goal of literary analysis is to discover the poet’s true identity and real motives.” Instead of arguing over the sincerity of self-presentation, there is another way to look at it. Robert Ezra Park once remarked:

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40 Jin shu 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 55.1504.
It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role.\textsuperscript{42}

Assuming roles is the oldest game in the world, and donning masks is a crucial rhetorical strategy in literature long before and ever since the time of Pan Yue. Accordingly, trying to ascertain whether the role one plays in a literary composition is a reliable self-presentation or a misrepresentation is similar to beating a dead horse. I do not suggest that we should naively accept whatever a poet says in his writings. Rather, we need to break away from the habit of reading verse that takes the apparent form of direct expression of the poet’s private thoughts and feelings as a mirror of the inner man.\textsuperscript{43}

Often literati are in a role-playing game. To call role-playing a game is not to detract from its seriousness. Perhaps the most serious player of the game among Chinese literati prior to the Tang is Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (ca. 365-427, also called Tao Qian 陶潛), the famous Eastern Jin poet. In his writings, especially in his poems, Tao Yuanming consciously presents himself as an unsophisticated farmer-recluse. We should see his self-presentation, as Owen convincingly argues, “\textit{not} as complete definition of T’ao Ch’ien and \textit{not} as a false mask.”\textsuperscript{44} It is the Tao Qiao that he would wish to be, or to be seen as. According to Ashton Nichols, Wordsworth in his \textit{Prelude} “uses language to gain control over his experience and to present a self-image, or at least a self-representation: a textual version of the voice he wants to claim as his own.”\textsuperscript{45} The same can be said of Tao Qian’s and other Chinese literati’s self-presentation. Therefore, the roles literati play or the identities they forge on

\textsuperscript{43} Warner, \textit{A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes}, 1.
paper are textual creations out of emotional memory, not a literal remembering of a past self. This is not to argue that a textual self is entirely ficticious, rather, it suggests that we should move away from the question of the authenticity of one’s self-presentation in literature, and consider instead in what ways did the literati present themselves and why did they write about themselves in the ways they did? This is what this dissertation intends to do.

**Dissertation Outline**

The first chapter, “A Display of Me, and a Farewell Gift to You: The Occasional Preface in the Early and High Tang,” examines the development of the “occasional preface.” The occasional preface, known from earlier times, became more widespread and underwent important development in the Tang. This chapter explores its development in the early and High Tang periods, seeking to understand better what it was meant to do and what it in fact accomplished. I suggest that the occasional preface, whose earlier function was mainly to describe the setting and to provide background information for a proper reading of poems composed on a certain occasion, now grew to share two important functions with poetry: it became a means of self-display for the author and/or played the role of a farewell gift. Furthermore, it also came to be recognized often as a genre that could be appreciated as a self-standing form of literary craft.

The second chapter, “Seeking Political Patronage: The Art of the Tang Self-recommendation Letter,” explores the rhetoric of letters of self-recommendation. I show that Tang self-recommendation letters usually comprise four components: the justification of patronage seeking, the praise or criticism of the recipient, the self-display of the speaker, and the plea for patronage. In each component, Tang literati adopted various rhetorical strategies to make their letters persuasive. Moreover, in order to better attract the attention of individual recipients, who might have received plenty of similar letters, many Tang self-recommendation letters are well crafted, and some may be
called “masterpieces.” They show that the practical aim of seeking political patronage was one important element that contributed to the thriving of Tang literature.

The third chapter, “A Genre of Importance: Reappraising Tang Fu-poetry,” considers the significance and prevalence of the fu in the early and High Tang from four aspects: the fu could be used by the emperor for self-justification; Tang literati presented to the court their fu compositions to win favor and recognition of their scholarship, literary ability, and command of language; many Tang poets chose to compose fu when they desired to express fully their mind; and there was vital interplay between the fu and shi. With the discussion, I also reconsider fu as a genre. We see that the fu was not a static genre defined conventionally by its style and themes, but a literary form open to different possibilities, and a complementary as well as combative mode of poetic expression vis-à-vis the shi.

The fourth chapter, “A Portrait of Me: Tang Autobiographical Verse,” examines self-presentation in autobiographical lyrics. Self-presentation is a noticeable feature of the three genres discussed earlier, but it becomes most prominent in autobiographical writings. The appearance and gradual thriving of autobiographical verse in turn proves the role self-presentation played in Tang literature. In their autobiographical verse, whether in the form of entombed epitaph, encomium, or shi, early and High Tang literati used language to gain control over their experience and to present various self-images. More important are the different motivations behind their self-fashioning: to create a desired self-image for posthumous remembrance, to justify one’s action, to seek political patronage, among other goals. Even with the most self-expressive form of writing, literary texts were not always written for the sake of art or as a mere expression of one’s mind. Literature in the Tang was never “pure.”

By way of conclusion, I want to stress again that this dissertation is by no means a “complete” history in the conventional sense; rather, it is an initial step toward writing a complete, alternative
history of Tang literature, one that might reveal than heretofore the showing of selves in Tang literature.
Chapter I: A Display of Me, and a Farewell Gift to You:

The Occasional Preface in the Early and High Tang

In his 1972 publication *La Dissémination*, Jacques Derrida wrote a preface that at once describes and deconstructs the preface. He asked, “But what do prefaces actually do?” and “Can they be grouped according to the necessity of some common predicate, or are they otherwise and in themselves divided?”¹ Fifteen years later Gérard Genette offered his answer to Derrida’s first question in his *Paratexts*, that the functions of the preface are “to get the book read” and “to get the book read properly.”² Genette’s answer, however, is not fully applicable to the functions of the “preface” or *xu* 序 in traditional Chinese literature, as *xu* is a more complex and multivalent genre which by Tang times already had a history going back at least seven hundred years. Prefaces (*xu*) were written not just for large literary works (what I call a “book preface” in this chapter) but also for works produced on various social occasions, such as excursions, banquets, and farewells, as well as collected poems composed by a group on individual occasions. These are what I call the “occasional preface” in this chapter. The occasional preface, known from earlier times, became more widespread and underwent important development in the early and High Tang periods; this literary phenomenon has so far received little if any scholarly attention.³ Here we shall first briefly review the tradition of the occasional preface prior to the Tang, and then explore its development in the early and High Tang, seeking to understand better what it does and was meant to do. We shall also see that Tang occasional prefaces, while sharing some similar literary attributes with one

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³ The occasional preface as a type of writing has been discussed by Chu Binjie 褚斌杰 in his *Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun* 中國古代文體概論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), 382–87. In recent years, in addition to a dozen or so Chinese M.A. theses the Tang occasional preface, Michisaka Akihiro offers an inspiring discussion of the early Tang occasional preface, especially with regard to why this type of writing suddenly became popular in the early Tang; see Michisaka Akihiro, “Shotō no jo,” 79–117.
another, are “in themselves divided.” The discussion here may permit us to acquire a fuller, more comprehensive picture of what this aspect of Tang literature was in its own time.

The Occasional Preface Prior to the Tang

The earliest occasional preface preserved in its entirety is the “Preface to Collected Poems of the Golden Valley Gathering” (Jingu shi xu 金谷詩序) of Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300), followed by the “Preface to Collected Poems of the Lan-precinct Gathering Held on the Third Day of the Third Month” (Sanyue sanri Lanting shi xu 三月三日蘭亭詩序) of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), more commonly known as the “Preface to the Lan-precinct Gathering” (Lanting ji xu 蘭亭集序). An anecdote in the Shishuo xinyu 世說新語 tells us that Wang Xizhi was extremely pleased whenever he heard his Lanting preface was compared to Shi Chong’s Jingu preface, an indication that the Jingu preface was highly regarded in the Jin. However, due to Wang Xizhi’s renown as a great calligrapher and a gentleman of fengliu 風流 (urbane charm) character, as well as the ingenuity of his composition, the Lanting preface soon took pride of place as the prototype of the occasional preface.

The Lanting preface was composed in the ninth year of the Yonghe 永和 era (353), when a group of worthies, including Wang Xizhi, the eminent statesman Xie An 謝安 (320–385), and the famous poet Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371), “gathered at the Lan precinct-house in the Shanyin 山陰

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district of Guiji 會稽 commandery to carry out the spring purification ritual.\(^5\) Wang Xizhi’s preface consists of an elegant depiction of the pleasant gathering, including his personal sentiment inspired by the occasion, and an account of its poetry composition.\(^6\) It sets the model for the occasional prefaces of later generations. Accordingly, an occasional preface mainly serves to describe the setting and provide background information for a proper reading of the poems composed on a certain occasion.

The Lanting gathering was only one of the numerous literary gatherings held during the Southern and Northern dynasties; some of them were hosted by the royal family and many inspired brilliant poems. It is therefore natural to expect a large number of occasional prefaces were composed during this time. Nonetheless, judging by transmitted texts, the number of occasional prefaces written by the Four Elites of the Early Tang (sijie 四傑, namely Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰 [ca. 632–ca. 685], Luo Binwang 駱賓王 [ca. 619–687], Wang Bo 王勃 [649-676], and Yang Jiong 楊炯 [ca. 650-695?]) alone far surpasses that of the extant prefaces written in the Southern and Northern dynasties.\(^7\) Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that most of the occasional prefaces written in the Southern and Northern dynasties have been lost; however, that there are only a dozen or so extant occasional prefaces datable prior to the Tang is still notable. Moreover, there is some


\(^7\) For a discussion of the development of prefaces to poems, including occasional prefaces in the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties, see Zhong Tao 鍾濤, “Shilun Wei Jin Nanbeichao shixu de wenti yanjiu” 試論魏晉南北朝詩序的文體演進, Beijing daxue xuebao 北京大學學報 2008.1: 102–8.
evidence suggesting that the writing of occasional prefaces was not a common practice before the Tang:

In the beginning of the Taijian era (569–582), Inner Record Keeper Li Shuang, Record Keeper Zhang Zhengjian…Chief Clerk Liu Shan, and others became friends of the same literary circle; afterwards, Cai Ning, Liu Zhu, Chen Xuan, and Kong Fan also joined the circle—all of them were the gentlemen of the day. They went on excursions and held banquets where poems were composed; those poems were bound together in a scroll. [Xu] Boyang wrote a preface to this collection, which was widely circulated.

Information about this poetry collection, the *Wenhui shi* 文會詩 in three chapters, can be found in the “bibliographic monograph” (Jingji zhi 經籍志) of *Sui shu* 隋書, but the collection itself is no longer extant. Xu Boyang was likely also a member of this literary circle and a participant of those gatherings. It seems that there were no individual prefaces to their literary gatherings; rather, it was only after the poems composed on different occasions were collected together and made into a scroll that Xu Boyang was asked or volunteered to write a preface to the collection. Accordingly, this preface by Xu Boyang is not an occasional preface, but effectively a preface for a larger, collective literary work. It appears that the writing of the occasional preface may still have been a relatively rare literary phenomenon in the Southern and Northern dynasties.

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8 *Chen shu* 陳書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 34.468–69.
9 *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 35.1085.
Now You See Me

The flowering of the occasional preface took place in the early Tang, or to be more specific, in the hands of the Four Elites of Early Tang. Eighty-seven occasional prefaces by the four men are extant: thirteen by Luo Binwang, four by Lu Zhaolin, ten by Yang Jiong, and sixty by Wang Bo. This number, not considering pieces that are possibly lost (as so much of early Tang literature has been lost), strongly suggests that the occasional preface was a genre specially favored by the Four Elites. In general, each of these prefaces, following the model of the Lanting preface, depicts a social occasion and the personal sentiments inspired by the occasion, and characterizes its poetry composition. On the other hand, many of them, especially the prefaces by Wang Bo, began to exhibit the feature of self-display. Admittedly, personal sentiments had already played an important role in a few earlier occasional prefaces, including Wang Xizhi’s “Lanting preface,” Shi Chong’s “Jingu preface,” and Tao Qian’s 陶潛 (ca. 365–427) “Preface to an Outing to the Xie Stream” (You Xiechuan xu 遊斜川序). However, those personal sentiments were not presented as individual authors’ unique feelings, but primarily as feelings shared by the participants on the particular occasion. Wang Xizhi’s famous reflection on the transience of our ever-changing life in the “Lanting preface” is a case in point, whereas what I mean by “self-display” is the direct presentation or fashioning of one’s self-image, with the explicit use of first-person pronouns.

Wang Bo first turned self-display into a distinct feature of his occasional prefaces. See how he begins his “Preface for an Outing to Mount Sanctuary” (You Miaoshan xu 遊廟山序): ⁴⁰

This life of mine has lasted twenty years already! I am deeply tired of cities and palaces, but

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⁴⁰ In this paper, I use Jiang Qingyi’s 蔣清翊 annotated edition of Wang Bo’s collected works as the base text for Wang Bo’s prefaces, collated with the Shōsōin version of Wang Bo shixù 王勃詩序. The title here, for example, follows the Shōsōin version; see Zhengcangyuan cong Wang Bo shixù jiaokan 正倉院藏<<王勃詩序>>校勘, ed. Michisaka Akihiro (Hong Kong: Xianggang daxue Rao Zongyi xueshuguan, 2011), 90, 142.
dearly fond of rivers and seas. Constantly I peruse the transcendental scriptures and broadly wade through Daoist documents. I realize that official chariot and cap may be distanced by [cultivating] the Truth, simurgh and phoenix may be met with by [learning] the [esoteric] techniques. However, when serving my parents, I am mostly concerned with food and clothing; when advancing at court, I feel harassed by worldly fame and gain. My pure mind is imprisoned in this overcomplicated domain, and my transcendent bones are weakened within this worldly realm. Alas! Ruan Ji’s (210–263) loose attitude and Ji Kang’s (223–262) lax conduct were on just grounds! I constantly fear that the cycles of time and fate are more rapid than wind and fire, whereas the body of man is not as solid as metal or stone. Consequently, even groves and gorges will be ruined one after another, so will mist and aurora be shattered. This is why whenever I think of the path to the Yellow Springs (the netherworld), I am fretful, and whenever I face mountains and rivers, I heave a deep sigh.11

In the first year of the Zongzhang 總章 era (668), Wang Bo, at the egith of twenty-eight, was expelled from the establishment of the Prince of Pei 沛 (Li Xian 李賢 [651 or 653–684]) for having jokingly written an elaborate military call-to-arms (xi 檄) on behalf of the prince’s fighting cock

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11 Wang Zi'an ji zhu, 王子安集注, ed. Jiang Qingyi (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 7.206–7. For a complete translation of this preface, see appendix (1).
This parody enraged the emperor, who did not think it a proper composition for a prince’s companion. In the fifth month of the next year, Wang Bo set off for Shu 蜀 to “view its landscape and sites” 觀景物. In autumn, he arrived at Xuanwu 玄武 and visited Mount Sanctuary with two friends. Each of them composed a poem for this outing, none of them extant, and Wang Po composed this preface for the outing and the poems that they had composed. In the passage we have just read, what catches the reader’s eye is the author’s self-portrait, which reveals to us a Wang Bo who says he is devoted to Daoist pursuits but is trapped within the mundane world. He is also distressed about the transience of human life and the inconstancy of the world. We know of few instances previously of such a personal self-display at the beginning of an occasional preface.

Wang Bo might have partly gained his inspiration from the book preface, which, starting from Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145-90? BCE) “Taishigong zixu” 太史公自序 (Self-preface of the Grand Scribe), tends to be autobiographical. In this sense, self-display is not an entirely unfamiliar feature in the tradition of the preface, but it is a new attribute of the occasional preface. It might also relate to rhetorical developments of the time, as since the early Tang first-person pronouns were more and more widely used across various genres, including letters, shi, and fu. We may note incidentally that critics have long argued over the sincerity of authorial self-presentation in literature. In general, the image literati presented on paper are textual creations. This is not to argue that a textual self is is

12 Xi was a form of official proclamation used to denounce the transgressions of a ruler and announce a corresponding punitive military campaign, the most famous example of which is “Call-to-arms Denouncing Wu Zhao” (Tao Wu Zhao xi 討武曌檄), Luo Binwang’s denunciation of Empress Wu in 685.
13 “Preface to the Anthology of Travel Poems of My Journey to Shu” (Ru Shu jixingshi xu 入蜀紀行詩序), in Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 7.226.
entirely fictitious; but neither am I automatically taking the selves displayed in occasional prefaces as mirrors of individual authors.

The remaining half of Wang Bo’s “Preface for an Outing to Mount Sanctuary,” comprising a vivid depiction of this excursion and a brief account of its poetry compositions, fulfils the conventional functions of an occasional preface. As the practical functions are fully carried out in the second half, the first half seems to have been composed under a different motivation. The canonical idea that “poetry expresses one’s mind” (shi yan zhi 诗言志) had been firmly established prior to the Tang, but this does not make poetry the exclusive genre for personal display. What Wang Bo does here and elsewhere is to entrust to his occasional prefaces another and probably a more important function: to display himself, that is, to show readers a desired image of himself.

The same self-display is also found in other occasional prefaces by Wang Bo, as in the following passages from two different prefaces:

I, a lowly official, am solitary yet proud in the human realm, and have few matches within the seas. My mind does not yield to the nobles, nor does my person break with the mundane world. I chant alone among the Five Marchmounts, and whistle aloud in the Three Mountains. In the past I went to Wu in the east, sharing the mind of Liang Hong; at present I come to Shu in the west, not without the aspiration of Zhang Zai.

下官人間獨傲, 海內少徙, 志不屈於王侯, 身不絕於塵俗. 孤吟五嶽, 長嘯三山. 昔往東吳, 已有梁鴻之志; 今來西蜀, 非無張載之懷.

16 The “Five Marchmounts” symbolically mark the five directional points of the empire: Mt. Tai 泰 (east), Mt. Hua 華 (west), Mt. Heng 衡 (south), Mt. Heng 恒 (north), and Mt. Song 嵩 (center); the “Three Mountains” refers to the three legendary transcendent mountains on the sea: Mt. Fangzhang 方丈, Mt. Penglai 蓬萊, and Mt. Yingzhou 瀛洲.

17 “Preface for a Banquet Held at a Pavilion in the North of Mianzhou, Attended by a Host of Gentlemen” (Mianzhou beiting qungong yan xu 綿州北亭群公宴序), in Wang Zhan ji zhu, 7.218. Liang Hong, a virtuous man of the Eastern Han, used to lead a reclusive life in Wu; Zhang Zai, a famous Western Jin literatus, after experiencing the turbulence of the world, resigned from his official position and returned home to Shu.
Heaven and Earth are without benevolence, while the Fashioner of Change lacks capability. They endowed me with a disposition of profound worries and helpless dejections, as well as an unbending and uneasy temperament. Being completely indifferent to mountains and peaks, I stumble in the dynasty of King Yao [of the Tang era]; with eager craving for haze or mist, I am haggard and harried under the reign of a sagacious emperor. My situation can be thus recognized.\textsuperscript{18}

In these two passages, Wang Bo presents a self-image that is at the same time proud and frustrated, and his tone is quite self-assured. Paul W. Kroll points out that readers and critics are fond of remarking on a tone of brazen (one might almost say Byronic) impertinence in the poetry of Li Bai, sometimes citing his explicit use of the first-person pronoun, and seeing it as his daring individuality,\textsuperscript{19} yet the same forward self-display was already evident two generations earlier in Wang Bo’s compositions, as is shown in the prefaces translated above. And Li Bai knew Wang Bo’s writings well.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} “Preface for Collected Poems Composed When Several Gentlemen Visited Me on a Summer Day” (Xiari zhugong jian xunfang shixu 夏日諸公見尋訪詩序), in Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 7.225.


\textsuperscript{20} Just to give one example: Li Bai, at the end of his self-recommendation letter presented to Administrator Pei of Anzhou 安州, expresses his alternative if the hoped-for support is not forthcoming from the recipient: “If you formidable assume a great air of authority, flare up at me, refuse to admit me into your gate, and drive me away to the long road, then I, Bai, will come before you with both knees on the ground, bow to you twice, and leave immediately. I will go west to the Sea of Qin [namely, the capital] to observe the airs of the state, and part with your lordship forever. This yellow swan is now lifting up. Of the sundry princes, lords and important persons, at whose gate can’t I tap my long sword?” 若赫然作威，加以大怒，不許門下，逐之長途，白即膝行於前，再拜而去，西入秦海，一觀國風，永辭君侯，黃鵠舉矣。何王公大人之門不可以彈長㦈乎? “Letter Presented to Administrator Pei of Anzhou” (Shang Anzhou Pei Zhangshi shu 上安州裴長史書), Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping 李白全集校注彙釋集評, ed. Zhan Ying 詹锳 (Tianjing: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 26.4043. When Li Bai wrote these lines, he must have had in mind a similar remark in an identical rhetorical frame made by Wang Bo in Wang’s self-recommendation letter presented to Liu Xiangdao 劉祥道 (596–666), then the Right Prime Minister: “If not, then with lotus garments and cinnamon oars, I will
The self-display in Wang Bo's prefaces does not always appear at the beginning. Some of his occasional prefaces seem to be quite conventional from the very beginning, until at a later point the image of Wang Bo abruptly jumps out. The renowned “Preface for Ascending the Pavilion of the Prince of Teng to Bid Farewell on an Autumn Day” (Qiuri deng Hongfu Tengwangge jianbie xu 秋日登洪府滕王閣餞別序), commonly known as “Preface for the Pavilion of the Prince of Teng” (Tengwangge xu 滕王閣序), is a case in point. This preface was written in 675 when Wang Bo arrived at Hongzhou 洪州 during his journey to Jiaozhi (in northern Vietnam) to visit his father Wang Fuzhi 王福畤, who had been banished southward to serve as a district magistrate in Jiaozhi. Wang Bo was himself responsible for his father’s banishment, for one year earlier, while serving as an adjutant (canjun 參軍) in the prefectural office of Guozhou 虢州, Wang Bo reportedly killed a run-away government slave whom he had first taken under his protection. This was a crime punishable by death. Thanks to a national amnesty issued by Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–683) in celebration of the inauguration of the Shangyuan 上元 era (674–676), Wang Bo was not executed; but he was removed from office and his father was banished. This experience and all the complicated feelings that ensued may well have been in Wang Bo’s mind when he wrote this preface. He begins with an exquisite depiction of the grand gathering at Tengwangge, as is expected of an occasional preface, but then he turns unexpectedly to his self-display:

shake out my clothes east of the Eastern Sea; with a pavilion in the shape of mushroom and a pillar made of pine tree, I shall lay my head on the north of the Northern Mountain. How would I ever again be so trifling and trivial, and come to the gate of fame and profit?”不然，則荷裳桂楫，拂衣於東海之東；菌閣松楹，高枕於北山之北。焉復區區屑屑，踐名利之門哉？ “Letter Presented to Right Prime Minister Liu” (Shang Liu Youxiang shu 上劉右相書), Wang Zi'an ji zhn, 5.151.

21 Such as the “Preface for Seeing off District Constable Wei to Luoyang when I am Sojourning in Fenyn on a Winter Day” (Dongri jiyou Fenyn song Wei Shaofu ru Luo xu 冬日羈遊汾陰送韋少府入洛序) and “Preface for Bidding Xue Shenghua Farewell at a Banquet Attended by a Host of Mianzhou Officials on an Autumn Night” (Qiuye yu Mianzhou qunguanxi bie Xue Shenghua xu 秋夜於緜州羣官席別薛昇華序), Wang Zi'an ji zhn, 8.239–41, 9.263–64.
I, Bo, an abject person, am five-chi in height, and a lone paltry man of letters. Having no means to request a long cord from the emperor, I am at the same age of the callow and capped as Zhong Jun; with an intention to cast aside the writing-brush [to join the army], I yearn for Zong Que's far-ranging wind. I renounce the official hatpin and tablet for the entire hundred years of my life, to wait on [my father] from dawn to dusk in a place ten thousand miles away. I am not the treasure tree of the Xie clan, but have met the fragrant companies approved by Lady Meng. In the near future, I shall be hurrying across the courtyard, to humbly follow Kong Li's manner of response; at this very moment, I, holding up both sleeves, gratefully entrust myself to the Dragon Gate. Having not met a Yang

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22 “Three-chi” is conventionally understood as the length of the girdled sash that is correspondent to one’s official position, that is, the higher one’s position, the longer one’s sash, and accordingly, the three-chi sash is an indication of Wang Bo’s relatively low position. This explanation, however, sounds somewhat farfetched. In the 707 manuscript of Wang Bo’s anthology now preserved in Japan, this line is written as “I, Bo, an abject person, am five-chi in height” 勃五尺微命. “Five-chi in height,” whether it is close to the actual height of Wang Bo or not, is indicative of youth, as used in ancient texts such as Lunyu, Mengzi, and Xunzi. This reading, convincingly argued by Michisaka Akihiro, makes better sense, and is adopted here. See Michisaka Akihiro, “Bōtsu ‘Tōō kaku jo’ no ‘Bōtsu sanjaku no bimei, ikkai no shosei’ ku no kaishaku” 王勃「滕王閣序」中の「勃三尺微命一介書生」句の解釈, in <Bōtsu shū> to Bōtsu bungaku kenkyū, 194–209.

23 Zhong Jun (133–112 BCE), an official at the court of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE), volunteered to undertake the perilous mission when Emperor Wu wished to send an envoy to Nanyue 南越 in 113 BCE, a kingdom established by Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (ca. 240–137 BCE) in 204 BCE at the collapse of the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE) dynasty. Zhong Jun was later Murdered in the far south kingdom at the age of twenty-one, but his confidence and courage, particularly revealed in the words “would that I might be granted a long cord, I will surely truss up the King of Nanyue and bring him to Your Highness’s court” 願受長纓,必羈南越王而致之闕下, were remembered throughout history. Han shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 64.2821. Kongquan 弱冠, or “callow and capped,” is a term for a youth of approximately twenty years old.

24 When Zong Que (?–465) was still a young boy, his uncle asked him what his ambition was. He replied, “Would that I might mount a far-ranging wind to subdue ten thousand miles of waves” 願乘長風破萬里浪. His aspirations were realized when he became an eminent general of the Song 宋 (420–479). Song shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 76.1971.

25 The “treasure tree of the Xie clan,” referring to a worthy descendant able to glorify one’s family, alludes to a story in Shihuo xinyu “Hsieh An once asked his sons and nephews, ‘Young people, after all I have nothing to do with your affairs, yet why am I just now wanting you to become fine people?’ No one had anything to say except Hsieh Hsüan, who replied, ‘It’s just like wanting to have fragrant orchid or jade trees growing by the steps or courtyard, that’s all.’” 謝太傅問諸子姪: “子弟亦何預人事,而正欲使其佳?” 諸人莫有言者, 車騎答曰: “譬如芝蘭玉樹, 欲使其生於階庭耳.” Shihuo xinyu jiaojian, 1.82; Mather, Shih-huo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World, 75.

26 An allusion to the often heard and well remembered story of Mencius’ mother moving thrice in order to find the ideal neighbourhood for the sake of her son.

27 Alludes to Confucius’s education of his son Kong Li 孔鯉 when Kong Li “crossed the courtyard with quickened steps” 趨而過庭; see Lunyu 16.13.

28 Namely, to salute with joined hands and bowing.
Deyi of my own, I can but hold my cloud-grazing aspiration in self-pity; now that my Zhong Ziqi is found, what is the shame of playing the tune “Flowing Water?”

勃三尺微命，一介書生。無路請纓，等終軍之弱冠；有懷投筆，愛宗慤之長風。舍簪笏於百齡，奉晨昏於萬里。非謝家之寶樹，接孟氏之芳鄰。他日趨庭，叨陪鯉對；今茲捧袂，喜託龍門。楊意不逢，撫凌雲而自惜；鍾期相遇，奏流水以何慚？

The tone of these lines may sound superficially modest, but this doesn not veil Wang Bo’s self-assurance. After a seemingly humble introduction of himself in the first two lines, he immediately identifies himself as someone who is as talented and ambitious as Zhong Jun and Zong Que, only not as fortunate to realize his aspirations. A feeling of envy—albeit not understood in a negative way—can be detected. His envy of Zhong Jun, who died far too early, may be somewhat difficult to understand today. However, as far as Wang Bo was concerned, Zhong Jun was able to receive the emperor’s trust and be appointed as envoy on an important mission, whereas Wang Bo himself was first expelled from the establishment of the Prince of Pei and then stripped of his official position. That was all that mattered for him. His self-identification with Zhong Jun, unfortunately, turned out to be a prophecy, as Zhong Jun died at roughly the age of twenty-one and Wang Bo would die unexpectedly at twenty-seven. His following claim to renounce political pursuits is but a gesture, as

29 The Dragon Gate here refers to a man of prestige, or to be more specific, Lord Yan, Intendant-in-chief, who held the highest position among all the participants at the Tengwangge gathering.

30 Yang Deyi, director of the palace kennels at the court of Emperor Wu of Han, informed the emperor that the long poem “Fu on Sir Vacuous” (Zixu fu), which was highly admired by the emperor, was written not by a departed worthy but by Sima Xiangru, a native of his hometown in Sichuan and still quite alive. As a result, Sima Xiangru was summoned to the court and was favored by the emperor. The name Yang Deyi thus came to stand for an individual who could recommend men of talent to the court.

31 Wang Zilan ji zhu, 8.234–235. According to a much-repeated story, in the Spring and Autumn period there lived Boya, a virtuoso on the zither. One day his performance was overheard by Zhong Ziqi, a woodchopper. During his performance, when Boya had in mind high mountains, Ziqi commented, “How lofty is Mount Tai,” and when Boya had in mind flowing waters, Ziqi commented, “How vast are rives and oceans.” Whatever Boya played, Ziqi never failed to understand, and they naturally became close friends. Zhong Ziqi, as a result, became a symbol for one who “appreciates the tone,” or understands what is in his friend’s heart. “Lofty Mountain” and “Flowing Stream” are the two most famous zither pieces associated with Boya.
he quickly turns to seek patronage from his host, Lord Yan, hoping that the latter could be his Yang Deyi and Zhong Ziqi. This rather pedantic preface that calls for a footnote for almost each line or couplet may be seen as Wang Bo’s way to impress Lord Yan and the other guests then present. On the other hand, that remark “I am not the treasure tree of the Xie clan” is an accurate confession. Not only did Wang Bo fail to bring honor to his family, whose heritage he valued dearly, he also disgraced it, not once, but twice. The nearer he was to Jiaozhi and to seeing his father again, the more uneasy Wang Bo must have felt. That said, Wang Bo was still optimistic about his own future, for he ends this part of the preface with a comparison of himself to the great fu genius Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) and zither maestro Boya 伯牙.

These self-absorbed lines were taken by Timothy Wai Keung Chan as evidence that the seeing-off banquet at Tengwangge was held in Wang Bo’s and his father’s honor (Chan accepts the notion that Wang Bo was here accompanying his father on the latter’s journey to Jiaozhi): “Wang Bo personalizes this ‘Preface’ by skillfully weaving in his own feelings. This sentiment would not be appropriate in a ‘valedictory preface’ written for someone else but is acceptable as he is addressing it to himself.” Even if Wang Bo was traveling together with his father to Jiaozhi, Chan seems to have missed that such self-display is not a unique feature of this particular preface. Rather, it is a

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33 Chan, “Dedication and Identification in Wang Bo’s Compositions on the Gallery of Prince Teng,” *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002): 225. The claim that Wang Bo is addressing the preface to himself is startling and not convincingly supported.

34 The conventional understanding, following the narrative of Wang Bo’s biography in *Jiu Tangshu*, is that on his journey to visit his father in Jiaozhi, Wang Bo was traveling alone. However, some scholars, by examining “A Sacrificial Writing Composed Under Orders when We Stopped by Huaiyin and Paid Our Respects to the Temple of Emperor Gaozu of the Han” (Guo Huaiyin ye Gaozumiao jiwen fengming zuo 過淮陰謁高祖廟祭文奉命作) and “An Old Piece by the Oldster Chenglie of My Family” (Zuweng Chenglie jiu yishou 族翁承烈舊一首) that are preserved in the 707 manuscript of Wang Bo’s anthology in Japan, argue that Wang Bo was in fact traveling together with his father. The textual evidence seems suggestive, but I think that the internal evidence argues that this preface makes better sense if it was written without the companionship or supervision of a father. See Michisaka Akihiro, “Ō Botsu nangyō kô: fu shi dōgyō no kanosei nituyite 王勃南行考: 父子同行の可能性について, in *Ō Botsu shu* to Ō Botsu bungaku kenkyū, 281–313.
regular attribute of many of Wang Bo’s occasional prefaces, as well as his particular contribution to this genre of writing.

As in the “Tengwangge xu,” Wang Bo asks for political patronage in a few other occasional prefaces as well. A good example is his “Preface for Seeing off District Constable Wei to Luoyang when I am Sojourning in Fenyin on a Winter Day.” To better show the structure of this preface, I translate here the entire piece. It begins with a stylish description of the historical background and geography of the two places, Luoyang and Fenyin:

When the Han emperor sailed along the magnificent Fen River, his lyric was loud to the ear among double-decked boats;\(^{35}\) since the Duke of Zhou chose as residence the renowned metropolis Luoyang, his tracks can still be detected in the city.\(^{36}\) If one looks up at the patterns of heaven and observes the sun and moon, then those two places (i.e. Fenyin and Luoyang) surely share the same bright light; if one depends on the designs of earth and examines mountains and rivers, then they, one in the south and the other north, are different.\(^{37}\)

遊汾勝壤，樓船高漢帝之詞；卜洛名都，城邑辨周公之迹。仰天文而窺日月，雖共光華；憑地理而考山川，即殊南北。

That Fenyin and Luoyang are separated far apart suggests the melancholy of the impending parting between District Constable Wei and the author. Following this Wang Bo sings elaborate praises of Wei’s talent and achievement:

35 The “Han emperor” refers to Emperor Wu of Han, who, when sailing along the Fen River, composed the famous poem “Lyric to the Autumn Wind” (Qiufeng ci 秋風辭).

36 According to Shangshu, before building Luoyang as the Eastern Capital, the Duke of Zhou divined about the feasibility of this plan and received a positive answer.

37 Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 8.240.
District Constable Wei is a jade mountain radiating in all directions, and a glowing pearl of one pure color. His discourse astonishes the most acute and talented; his conversation accumulates the powers of rivers and lakes. His writing, comparable to that of Ziyun, embraces simurghs and phoenixes within the lines; his lyric, as good as one of Sun Chu, arranges in order the gong and shang notes for its tune. Girded with the silk ribbon of the lowest position, he broke open a way through the woods and wilds to accept his appointment; because of the assessment of his three years of official merit, he, now aiming at the Eupatorium Pavilion, is going to the capital to be examined for a better position. 

韋少府玉山四照，珠胎一色。縱橫振鋒穎之才，吐納積江湖之量。子雲筆札，擁鸞鳳於行間；孫楚文辭，列宮商於調下。牽絲一命，披林野而隨班；考績三年，指蘭台而赴選。

Wang Bo first praises District Constable Wei as remarkable as a jade mountain and a glowing pearl, then equates his literary talent to that of Yang Xiong and Sun Chu, two reputed literati of the past. He ends this compliment by applauding Wei’s political achievements at the local level, because of which Wei is now setting out for Luoyang to be examined on his official merit for a possible promotion. These laudatory words must have delighted Wei.

Then comes the farewell scene:

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38 *Shishuo xinyu* often uses “a jade mountain” to describe the elegant appearance of a gentleman, such as Ji Kang.

39 Ziyun, i.e., Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), the famous Han scholar. “Simurghs and phoenixes,” as the two noblest of feathered creatures and believed to have colorfully attractive feathers, is used as a metaphor for a desirable literary style.

40 Sun Chu (？–293) was a talented Western Jin literatus.

41 Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 8.240. Here the Eupatorium Pavilion is the alternate name from 662 to 670 for the palace library. The practice of assessing one’s official merit on a three-year basis is purported to have began in early times, as recorded in the *Shangshu*: “Assess one’s official merit on a three-year basis. Assess each official thrice, then the muddleheaded ones will be dismissed while the bright ones are promoted” 三載考績，三考，黜陟幽明. *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, ed. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 3.20. In the Tang, the Ministry of Personnel (liù 史部) was in charge of the final assessment of each official’s three years of official merit, and made decisions with regard to each one’s demotion or promotion. For a thorough discussion of the evaluation system of officials in the Tang, see Wang Xuncheng 王勛成, *Tangdai quanxuan yu wenxue* 唐代銓選與文學 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001).
Setting in motion the journeying carriage, he is about to depart from the farewell pavilion. The two places [Luoyang and Huaiyin] are separated by the wind-blowed haze; and we will, year after year, become estranged by time. In this bleak countryside, those of high status wholeheartedly share the merriment of osmanthus wine poured out; on the branching road, the wind-blow dust quickly cuts off thoughts of the flighty tumbleweed.\textsuperscript{42}

Here the depiction of the farewell occasion is rather brief and general, and it ends with Wang Bo’s self-identification with the flighty tumbleweed, which foreshadows the author’s self-display that comes next:

As a low-level servant, my learning is aimless and unstrained, and my feathers and wings have been clipped. At court, I have not even enough place to stick an awl into; in the countryside, I have space enough just to contain a bag. I [used to] take up occupations in mountains, briefly arriving at the places of fishermen and woodcutters; [now] I linger long in the world, tarrying at the city gatetowers [of Fenyin] for a short while. Suddenly we met, like patches of drifting duckweed, yet when facing clouds and rain alone, I have nothing to rely on; increasingly disheartened by the cul-de-sac I am in, I comfort my physical form, but where can I find refuge?\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[42] Wang Zi'an ji zhu, 8.240–41. The “flighty tumbleweed” is a metaphor for Wang Bo himself.
\item[43] Wang Zi'an ji zhu, 8.241.
\end{footnotes}
In this passage, Wang Bo presents himself as learned yet hapless, desperately in need of help. He closes this preface by turning back to the farewell occasion and summarizing its poetry composition:

At this time, icy frosts are tearing the earth apart, while sidereal phenomena turn the heavens around. When the boreal wind blows, frontier places are cold; when the bright moon sinks, tiered pavilions glow in the dawn. Let each of us write down some words according to the rhyme we each pick, to be passed between our two places, and that is all.\(^4^4\)

於時冰霜裂地，星象迴天。朔風動而關塞寒，明月下而樓臺曙。各題一字，傳之兩鄉云爾。

This preface, if we leave out the third and fifth parts, which describe the farewell occasion and its poetry composition, reads much like a literary piece meant for seeking political patronage. It consists of a lead-in (part one), a compliment of District Constable Wei (part two), and a self-display of Wang Bo (part four). Wei, for the time being, only holds a minor position, but he has earned the opportunity for a possible promotion. Wang Bo, therefore, in this preface written for Wei’s farewell party, asks for Wei’s future help. This intention is most clearly revealed in the two lines—“yet when facing clouds and rain alone, I have nothing to rely on” and “I comfort my physical form, but where can I find refuge”—that look to Wei as the one whom he can hopefully rely on and entrust himself to. Admittedly, seeking political patronage through literary writings had become a common practice since the early Tang, but genres most commonly used for seeking political favors were epistle, shi-poetry, and fu-poetry.\(^4^5\) Wang Bo seems to have been one of the first to use the occasional preface

\(^4^4\) _Wang Zilan ji zhu_, 8.241.

\(^4^5\) There are many discussions on the practice of seeking political patronage in the Tang period, among others: Cheng Qianfan 程千帆, _Tangdai jinshi xingjuan yu wenxue_ 唐代進士行卷與文學 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980); Luo Liantian 羅聯添, “Lun Tangren shangshu yu xingjuan” 論唐人上書與行卷, in _Tangdai wenxue luji_ 唐代文
also to fulfill the function of seeking political patronage. This is another of Wang Bo’s special contributions to the development of this genre.

Some of Wang Bo’s occasional prefaces were written in a quite conventional way; however, it is the unconventional ones that particularly stand out and draw our attention. In the hands of Wang Bo, the occasional preface was no longer restrained by conventional expectations, but became a “remolded” genre effective for self-display, and sometimes even for seeking political patronage. In his prefaces, what really matters is not the occasion, the guests, or the landscape, but the poetic self—the “me” that readers will now see more clearly.

This authorial self-forwarding in Wang Bo’s prefaces was first pronouncedly echoed a generation later in the occasional prefaces by Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂 (661–702). Chen Zi’ang has long been hailed as the most important fugu 復古 (back-to-the-ancient) poet of the early Tang and is traditionally regarded as a writer whose tendencies are rather opposite to those of the Four Elites. His poetry, especially the series of thirty-eight “Reflections on My Situation” (Ganyu 感遇) poems, is usually characterized as a powerful antidote to early Tang poetry that continued the supposedly decadent “Qi-Liang style,” and is instead the herald of the fresher style of High Tang poetry. The misconceptions inherited in this view have been clarified by a few scholars; for our purposes here,
it should suffice to point out that Chen Zi’ang, in the same way as Wang Bo, tended to integrate into the occasional preface his self-display:

Since youth, I, Zi’ang, have roamed among white-thatched dwellings but have not set foot near vermilion gates. I have heard of the excursions of princes, but only long in vain for the spring grasses; I get the high mood of lords, but am separated always from the blue empyrean.48

子昂少遊白屋，未歷朱門。聞王孫之遊，空懷春草；見公子之興，每隔青霄。

I, a lowly official, have travelled about the capital for very long, and have met many men of high rank. With bells and drums played at ponds and terraces, there were gatherings that lasted all day long; even when I was accompanied by wine and zithers, pipes and strings, I did not fully enjoy myself during that long night. Isn’t it because those things were different from what I have loved and inconsistent with what I have learned, so that I was deeply stirred when facing the hall, and sighed sadly when hearing the music?49

下官遊京國久矣，接軒裳眾矣。池臺鍾鼓，雖有會於終朝；琴酒管絃，未窮歡於永夕。豈非殊我親愛，異我風謠，而使臨堂有懷，聞樂增歎者也？

48 “Preface for a Banquet Held at the Pool Pavilion of the Prince of Liang” (Liangwang chiting yan xu 梁王池亭宴序), in Chen Zi'ang ji jiaozhu 陳子昂集校注, ed. Peng Qingsheng 彭慶生 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2015), 7.1155. The “white-thatched dwellings” are dwellings of common people, whereas the “vermilion gates” stand for mansions of the nobility or the powerful.

49 “Preface for a Banquet Held at the Linqiong Residence of Overseer Li on a Winter Night” (Dongye Linqiong Li Lushi zhai xu 冬夜宴臨邛李錄事宅序), in Chen Zi'ang ji jiaozhu, 7.1184.
As with Wang Bo’s self-display, Chen Zi’ang presents in these passages from two occasional prefaces a self who is quite dismayed, whether because of his unsuccessful political pursuit or the unsatisfying entertainment.

The most self-involved preface by Chen Zi’ang is his “Preface for Seeing off Several Perfected Men of the Central Marchmount” (Song Zhongyue ersan zhenren xu 送中嶽二三真人序), which, according to the colophon next to its title, was written in the first year of the Tiance wancui 天冊萬歲 era, or 695. This remarkable composition, full of Daoist references and stated longings for transcendence, deserves to be translated in its entirety:

There are many who cherish famous mountains and sing the praises of a sequestered life perennially away from society. If my person is set free at the skyscraping mountains and my shadow rests in the cloud-entwined forests, places that vulgar commoners have never heard of and worldly men never seen, then I would sneer at antiquity, as well as sniff at men of the past. There used to be two transcendent persons on Mt. Song; however, since Lord Fuqiu and Wangzi Qiao ascended to heaven to pay homage to the Jade Thearch, leaving their traces at the golden altar, the far-fading sound of Wangzi Qiao’s phoenix reed-organ has not been heard for thousands of years.\(^{50}\) Precisely because of this, I always feel deeply disappointed when looking out on rose-cloud mists, beating my breast and sighing deeply; I also constantly lament that the cloud carriages cannot be encountered, as the transcendent beings have been gone forever.

\(^{50}\) “Wangzi Qiao, named Jin, was the Crown Prince of King Ling of Zhou. He was fond of playing the reed-organ to produce music that was like the cry of the phoenix. When Wangzi Qiao roamed between the Yi and Luo Rivers, Lord Fuqiu, a Daoist adept, came into contact with him and led him to Mount Song.” 王子喬者，周靈王太子晉也。好吹笙作鳳凰鳴。遊伊、洛之間，道士浮邱公接以上嵩高山。《列仙傳校箋》, ed. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1.65.
Disengaging from this clamorous world, I hasten to the clouds in the blue; ascending to the Peak of the Jade Maiden, I cast my eyes toward the Temple of the Stone Woman. There I met Sima Ziwei and Feng Taihe, who, in rainbow garments, were dimly discernible, standing alone among the darkling mountains. This gathering of perfected Daoist comrades, supplied with gold liquors and jade fluid, was also joined by the transcendent oldster Yang, who practices mysterious stillness in the grotto-heaven, as well as the superior adept Jia, who dwells at a mystic valley in seclusion. A jade reed-organ called phoenixes, and bejeweled garments brought cranes to rest, as they were about to lose themselves in the entourage of Emperor Xuanyuan in anticipation of a free and endless roaming.

去囂世，走青雲，登玉女之峰，窺石人之廟，見司馬子微，馮太和，蜺裳眇然，冥壑獨立。真朋羽會，金漿玉液，則有楊仙翁玄默洞天，賈上士幽棲牝谷。玉笙吟鳯，瑤衣駐鶴，方且迷軒轅之駕，期汗漫之遊。

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51 Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735), style named Ziwei, was one of the most eminent Daoist masters of the late seventh and early eighth centuries.

52 Pingu 牝谷, or the mysterious valley, alludes to Laozi 6, “The valley spirit (epithet for the Way) never dies. This is called the mysterious female. The gateway of the mysterious female is called the root of the heaven and earth” 谷神不死，是謂玄牝。玄牝之門，是謂天地根。

53 “The Yellow Emperor [Xuanyuan] gathered copper from Mt. Shou, to have a large, three-legged bronze caldron made at the foot of Mount Jing. When the caldron was formed, a dragon, dangling his beard, descended to greet the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor mounted the dragon, followed by seventy ministers and concubines, and then the dragon ascended to heaven” 黃帝采首山銅，鑄鼎於荊山下。鼎既成，有龍垂胡䫇，下迎黃帝。黃帝上駕，羣臣後宮從上者七十餘人，龍乃上去。Shiji (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 28.1394.
Who am I, indeed, to have the honor of enjoying such delights in person? I sincerely wish that I could hold a blue tally, follow the white rainbow, attend the banquet held at the court of Mount Kunlun, and observe the Changes at the residence of the mysterious prime. Then, having realized my long-cherished aim, I would willingly let my bones be obscured. Surely I know that my destiny is too weak to visit the Gemmy Capital [of Heaven] and that my Way is too feeble to reach there? I endeavor to climb to where the stars shed light upward, yet I get lost; I would look back to the Central Marchmount, yet I cannot find my way. Worldly entanglements and mundane concerns repeatedly disturb my inner peace; transcendent beings and perfected companions are forever hidden from me, having their bond with the numinous world. Screened by blue mushrooms, [they] wait for me for long, but when might be our faraway rendezvous? Knotting up red-flowered osmanthus, [I] go round and about, with my distant longings broken in vain. The purple haze has left and the Yellow Court is far away. Looking up to the endless expanse, there is no light; looking down to the great domain, there is a lack of color. Fluttering in confusion, where should I go, since all around the world are men building relationships for fame and gain until their hair turns grey? Sighing in despair, what am I moaning about, if not for the waxing and waning of the mysterious cycles of fortune that give me deep melancholy? Finally, I have come to understand that the bewailing of Yang Zhu at a branching road, the sighing over white silk

54 “Blue tally” refers to a blue Daoist banner.
55 Mount Kunlun is the axis mundi traditionally said to be located in the far west and the home of the Daoist goddess Xi wangmu 雪王母 (Royal Mother of the West). The “mysterious prime” refers to the unfathomable beginnings of Heaven and Earth, associated with Laozi in his cosmic role.
56 The “Yellow court” usually refers to Huangting jing 黄庭经, an eminent Daoist scripture. In this preface, however, the term was clearly not used to designate the scripture. Instead, it was borrowed by Chen Zi'ang, probably to parallel the “purple haze,” to represent a celestial palace.
57 “Master Yang cried when he saw the crossroads, for it could lead to the south as well as to the north” 楊子見逵路而哭之, 為其可以南可以北. Huainanzi jishi 淮南子集釋, ed. He Ning 何寧 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 17.1203.
of Mo Di,\textsuperscript{58} Shang Ziping’s running away from home without return,\textsuperscript{59} and Bao Jiao’s withering to death while embracing a tree are surely able to make one feel deeply grieved and pained.\textsuperscript{60} Now I can understand the mind of those men of the past.\textsuperscript{61}

This preface is noteworthy in several ways. To begin with, rather than specifying the identities of the people whom the author is “seeing off,” as most titles of farewell prefaces conventionally do, the title here only concisely refers to them as “several perfected men.” It appears clear from the text that altogether four individuals—the renowned Sima Chengzhen and three other Daoist adepts, about whom we know no more than their names—were bidding Chen Zi’ang farewell and setting off for their “free and endless roaming”; yet even the number “four” is not identified in the title. One might argue that the title would have been too long had all four people been listed in it, but it is not that

\textsuperscript{58} “Master Mozi said, ‘Once I saw people dyeing silks and sighed, ‘if dyed with glaucous hue, they become glaucous; if dyed with yellow hue, they become yellow. As what seeps into them changes, their color also changes”’ Mozi xiangu 墨子閒詁, ed. Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 1.11.

\textsuperscript{59} Shang Ziping was an Eastern Han recluse who refused to serve at Wang Mang’s 王莽 (r. 8–23) court. After marrying off all his children, he escaped from society to live among the mountains, with no one knowing his whereabouts.

\textsuperscript{60} Bao Jiao was a recluse of the Spring and Autumn period. Discontent with his time, Bao Jiao chose to dwell in the mountains; later, he starved himself to death in the wilds.

\textsuperscript{61} Chen Zi’ang ji jiaozhu, 7.1164–65.
rare to have long titles in the Tang. Chen Zi’ang himself has a title of twenty-three characters,\(^{62}\) and Li Bai, when seeing off three officials, wrote a farewell preface with a title of twenty-seven characters, specifying each person’s identity.\(^{63}\) Chen Zi’ang could have easily done so with a title that would not go over twenty characters.

In addition to its peculiar title, this preface is one of the very few early Tang prefaces that deviate from the Lanting preface model. Indeed, it still offers a depiction of the farewell event, yet it does not present the occasion as a shared social event, but as Chen Zi’ang’s personal experience. To be more specific, in other early Tang occasional prefaces, even when a poetic self is conspicuously displayed, the social event itself is “objectively” presented, for the author of an occasional preface was responsible for giving a depiction, in a mostly non-personal tone, of the event as experienced by everyone present. For instance, hardly any reader would doubt that Wang Bo’s description of the banquet held at the Tengwangge is representative of the event as experienced by all the participants there. This preface by Chen Zi’ang, however, reads more like an apology for his failure to continue his Daoist pursuits than as a preface written for a farewell occasion. By the line “having realized my long-cherished aim, I would willingly let my bones be obscured,” which alludes to Confucius’s famous saying, “If a man in the morning hears the Way, he may die in the evening without regret” 朝聞道, 夕死可矣,\(^{64}\) Chen Zi’ang suggests that for him the Daoist pursuits were something worth dying for. However, his Daoist pursuits are suffering setbacks, as he is still trapped by “worldly entanglements and mundane concerns.” Chen Zi’ang then claims that he is disappointed with the capricious human realm as deeply as Yang Zhu and Mo Di, and that he yearns for a reclusive life as strongly as Shang Ziping and Bao Jiao. Nevertheless, he confesses he must stay behind to deal with

\(^{62}\) That is, “Hezhou jinkou bie shedi zhi Dongyangxia buchen buji juanran youhuai zuoyi shizhi” 合州津口別舍弟至東陽峽步趁不及眷然有懷作以示之.

\(^{63}\) That is, “Qiuri yu Taiyuan nanzha jian Yangqu Wang Zangong Jia Shaogong Shiai Yin Shaogong yingju fu shangdu xu” 秋日於太原南柵餞陽曲王贊公賈少公石艾尹少公應赴上都序.

\(^{64}\) *Lunyu*, 4.8.
worldly affairs instead of joining the “free and endless roaming” of the four “perfected ones.” Compared to the occasional prefaces by Wang Bo, each of which would still be a “complete” preface if its self-display part were taken away (though at the expense of losing some literary excellence), this preface by Chen Zi’ang does not have a “me” passage that can be easily set apart. What’s more, this preface has no mention of poetry composition, which seems to suggest that it was not attached to any poems. In other words, “Preface for Seeing off Several Perfected Men of the Central Marchmount” probably was not written to fulfil the traditional functions of an occasional preface, but largely for Chen Zi’ang to display himself.

In the High Tang period, Li Bai 李白 (701–762?) also conspicuously presents his self-image in the occasional prefaces. The first piece in the chapter devoted to prefaces in all the Li Bai collections available today is the “Preface for Seeing off Vice-Director Zhang Zu to the Eastern Capital in the Late Spring at Jiangxia” (Muchun Jiangxia song Zhang Zu Jiancheng zhi Dongdu xu 暮春江夏送張祖監丞之東都序), and it is an eye-catching self-display of Li Bai that begins this preface:

Alas! Alas! I, who am abject, have been sadly alone in my study for a very long time. Even though I long for a chance to ascend the far-off Penglai Mountain, to look afar to the limits of the four seas, to enjoy the bright sun at first hand, to lightly touch the blue sky with my head, and to unbridle my deep-seated frustration, none of these wishes can be realized. Furthermore, the [imperishable] gold bones [of an immortal] have yet to be cultivated, whereas my jade[-white] countenance has already lost its charm. How can I not grieve in heart when touching a pinetree or heave a deep sigh when patting a crane? I have mistakenly pursued scholarship and swordsmanship, as well as meaninglessly wandered in this worldly realm. The imperial palace is nine layered, while the green mountains are ten thousand miles away. Gifted but out of luck, I am ready to be left behind by the time. Liu Biao failed to
employ the talent of Mi Heng, who then went to Jiangxia for only a while;\textsuperscript{65} He Xun came upon Zhang Han in delight, and they made merry in a boat for the moment.\textsuperscript{66}

吁咄哉! 僕書室坐愁, 亦已久矣. 每思欲遐登蓬莱, 極目四海, 手弄白日, 頂摩青穹, 揮斥幽憤, 不可得也. 而金骨未變, 玉顏已緇, 何常不撫松傷心, 撫鶴歎息. 誤學書劍, 薄遊人間. 紫禁九重, 碧山萬里. 有才無命, 甘於後時. 劉表不用於禰衡, 暫來江夏; 賀循喜逢於張翰, 且樂船中.

Li Bai’s deep frustration as expressed in his self-display is better appreciated when complemented by some background information. This preface was written in 734, the twenty-second year of the Kaiyuan era. Earlier that year, Li Bai attempted to seek patronage from Han Chaozong 韓朝宗 (686–750), then the Administrator (zhangshi 長史) of Jingzhou. He visited Han in Xiangyang 襄陽 and presented to him a letter, the “Letter to Jingzhou Administrator Han” (Yu Han Jingzhou shu 與韓荊州書) where he asks for Han’s help. This attempt, like his other, earlier bids for patronage, failed, and Li Bai subsequently travelled to Jiangxia. This experience gives him enough ground to compare himself to Mi Heng: both talented, both underappreciated, and both came to Jiangxia from Jingzhou. In addition to political ambition, Li Bai also harbored Daoist pursuits, which, he tells us, have yet to be realized. Notwithstanding all the disappointments, he is going to “make merry in a

\textsuperscript{65} Mi Heng (173–198), a gifted literatus in the Eastern Han, was quite erratic and arrogant. In the mid–190s, he was sent by the warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), who was outraged by Mi Heng’s imperious behaviour, to join the staff of Liu Biao (142–208), Governor of Jingzhou 荊州. Liu Biao, while valuing his talent and reputation in the first place, also could not stand Mi Heng’s arrogance and sent him to the ill-tempered Huang Zu 黃祖 (?–208), governor of Jiangxia. Not long afterward, Huang Zu had Mi Heng killed. For the biography of Mi Heng, see \textit{Hou Han shu} (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 80.2652–54.

\textsuperscript{66} Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 27.4045–46. According to the biography of the Western Jin (265–316) literatus Zhang Han, when He Xun stopped at Wuchang 吳閶 Gate on his journey to Luoyang, Zhang Han heard him playing a zither on a boat. Therefore, Zhang Han, following the sound of the zither, went to visit He Xun, and the two, though they had not met before, became very fond of each other immediately and ended up going to Luoyang together. \textit{Jin shu} (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 92.2384. For a complete translation of this preface, see appendix (2).
boat for the moment.” This naturally leads to the next part of the preface, which includes praise of Zhang Zu (whom Li Bai has just compared to Zhang Han), a description of the farewell occasion, and an invitation to poetry composition. In other words, while the first half of the preface, translated above, fulfils the function of self-display, the second half, which by itself would be a complete preface, fulfils the traditional functions of an occasional preface.

In his many other occasional prefaces, Li Bai also catches the reader’s eye with his self-display:

I, admiring the manner of Master Guangcheng, drift in the world like ripples. Having received the precious instructions, I am an unattached servant of the thirty-six gods. He Zhizhang, the unconstrained elder of Siming, called me a “Banished Immortal,” a true reflection of my situation.

吾希風廣成, 蕩漾浮世, 素受寶訣, 為三十六帝之外臣. 即四明逸老賀知章, 呼余為謫仙人, 蓋實錄耳.

I do not get stuck in place, but advance and shift with the time. When going out for official career, I associate with lords and princes without lowering my head; when retreating from the world, I look down upon Chaofu and Xu You. Playing with the vermilion seal-cords, I still haven’t returned to the green twining vines. I regret that I am unable to settle in misty

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67 Master Guangcheng was a legendary immortal.
68 The Daoist heavens, in one Lingbao conception, was divided into thirty-six layers, each ruled by a god.
69 “Preface for Seeing off Quan the Eleventh in Jinling with Other Men of Worth” (Jinling yu zhuxian song Quan shiyi xu 金陵與諸賢送權十一序), in Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 27.4071.
70 Both Chaofu and Xu You were legendary recluses living under the reign of the sage-king Yao. 舊.
71 The “vermilion seal-cords” refers to official positions.
woods with your company, or sit with you face to face under pine trees that the moon throws light on.72

吾不滯於物，與時推移，出則以平交王侯，遁則以俯視巢許，朱緱狎我，綠蘿未歸，恨不得同棲煙林，對坐松月。

Whether it is to present himself as the “Banished Immortal” or a proud and virtuous figure, when Li Bai wrote down these self-assured lines, I wonder, if he ever thought of Wang Bo?

Presenting Words as a Farewell Gift

Presenting words as a farewell gift was another function newly assumed by the occasional preface, especially one subcategory of the occasional preface: the  

But zhengxu only officially assumed this function in the High Tang period. Prior to the High Tang, most farewell prefaces were also presented to the traveler, together with the shi-poems they were attached to; therefore, they might as well be perceived as “parting gifts.” Nonetheless, in many early Tang farewell prefaces, individual authors made it very clear that the parting gifts they gave were the shi not the prefaces. Wang Bo, for instance, ends his “Preface to Seeing Off Bai the Seventh” (Song Baiqi xu 送白七序)

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72 “Preface at Master Ziyang’s Cangxia Pavilion in Suizhou on a Winter Night, Seeing off Sir Yan, Yuan Yan, to Live in Seclusion in Mountain Xiancheng” ( Dongye yu Suizhou Ziyang xiansheng Cansialou song Yanzhi Yuan Yan yin Xianchengshan xu 冬夜於隨州紫陽先生飡霞樓送煙子元演隱仙城山序), in Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 27.4148.

73 “Laozi said: ‘A gentleman presents his words to others.’ When Yan Yuan and Zilu bade each other farewell, they presented words to each other. When King Liang drank with other feudal lords at Fantai, the Lord of Lu offered the king some words he preferred to convey the importance of respect and admiration, as well as to state the significance of sincere admonition. Starting from the early Tang, writings presented as gifts were called [farewell] prefaces, which were penned by many literati” 老子曰: “君子贈人以言。” 顏淵，子路之相違，則以言相贈處。梁王觴諸侯於范臺，魯君擇言而進，所以致敬愛。陳忠告之誼也。唐初贈人，始以序名，作者亦眾. Guwen ci leizuan 古文辭類纂, ed. Yao Nai (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1986), 11.
by saying: “Presenting you with words, I vainly wrote down forty rhyming couplets before our parting” 贈子以言，空有離前四韻,\textsuperscript{74} indicating that the presented farewell gift was the poem he wrote (which no longer exists), not this preface. Other examples include “All of us who are of the same mind, compose \textit{shi} as his parting gifts” 凡我同志，賦詩贈行;\textsuperscript{75} “The sundry lords admire him, composing \textit{shi} to present to him” 群公嘉之，賦詩以贈;\textsuperscript{76} and “All propose to compose \textit{shi}, to present him with quatrains” 僉曰賦詩，絕句以贈.\textsuperscript{77}

The two important figures who made great contribution to this new development of \textit{zengxu} in the High Tang are Li Hua 李華 (715–766) and Ren Hua 任華: the former was one of the preeminent writers of his age, best known for his grand “\textit{Fu} on Hnayuan Palace” (Hanyuan dian \textit{fu}) 含元殿賦, and the latter was a relatively minor literary figure mainly remembered as Li Bai’s friend. In the hands of Li Hua and Ren Hua, to “present words” (\textit{zengyan} 贈言) as a parting gift became an important function of farewell prefaces. A case in point is Li Hua’s “Preface for Seeing off My Thirteenth Uncle to Yue” (Song shisan jiu shi Yue xu) 送十三舅適越序. Li Hua begins the preface with a brief account of the farewell banquet, where he attended upon his uncle: “As my uncle was setting off for Yue, I, Hua, paid him my respects under the western stairs of the hall, and awaited his order at the end of the mat” 舅氏適越，華拜送西階之下，俟命席端.\textsuperscript{78} This is followed by his uncle’s request for farewell words:

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Wang Zhi'an ji zhu}, 8.251.
\textsuperscript{75} Song Zhiwen’s 宋之問 (ca. 656–712) “Preface to Seeing off Rectifier of Omissions Yin to the Capital” (Song Yin Buque ru Jing xu) 送尹補闕入京序, \textit{Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu} 沈佺期宋之問集校注, ed. Tao Min 陶敏, Yi Shuqiong 易淑瓊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 6.656.
\textsuperscript{76} Chen Zi'ang, “Preface for Seeing off District Vice-Magistrate Chen to Join the Army” (Jian Chen Shaofu congjun xu) 餞陳少府從軍序, in \textit{Chen Zhi'ang ji}, 7.182.
\textsuperscript{77} Chen Zi'ang, “Preface for Seeing off General Qu as An Envoy to Visit Qapaghan Qaghan” (Song Qu langjiang shi Mochu) 送麴郎將使默啜序, \textit{Chen Zhi'ang ji}, 7.187.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Wenyuan yinghua} 文苑英華, ed. Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 720.7b. “The western stairs of the hall” is a direction that indicates respect.
Uncle said, “My friend Censor Bao is a jade waiting to be polished. It is Sir Bao who truly appreciates me and has made me who I am today. Because of this, I am setting off for Yue, seeking to polish the jade that is Sir Bao. In the past, when Zilu was about to leave Lu, he asked Yan Hui, ‘What is your parting gift for me?’ Presenting words to others as parting gifts was the way of the ancients. Let alone that I am about to leave the Chu mountains and travel on the Zhi River, and to experience the perilousness of the Kuiji Mountains, paddle on the waves of Lake Jing, look into the tomb of Yu as dark as can be, and look up to the lofty Qinwang Mountain. How can you not offer me some advice?”

In this statement, Li Hua’s uncle first confessed that the reason for his journey to Yue is to help a Sir Bao who appreciates him. He then asked Li Hua to offer him some advice, by alluding to the parting between Zilu and Yan Hui, where the former asked for farewell words from the latter, as well as by depicting the route of his journey.

Li Hua, following his uncle’s request, presents his farewell words:

I, Hua, bowing from the waist with clasped hands, responded, “Being gentle yet also standing firm, this was how Jiu Yao achieved nine virtues; being broad and serene, this was
how Shiyi harmonized the five musical notes.\(^{82}\) Things as precious as the rhinoceros-horn with natural pattern and the luminous pearl should be laid entirely in one’s hands;\(^ {83}\) this is how a gentleman makes his commanding reputation widespread.” I bow once more and kowtow to my uncle.\(^ {84}\)

華拜手曰: “柔而立，咎繇所以成九德也; 寧而靜，師乙所以諧五聲也。文犀明珠之珍，伏於掌握之間，此君子所以恢令名也。”再拜稽首.

Li Hua respectfully suggests his uncle to “be gentle yet also stand firm,” “be broad and serene,” as well as hold on to virtues. With farewell words incorporated into the preface, this writing itself becomes a parting gift. Naturally, there would no longer be any need for writing additional poems as parting gifts, which in turn allows the preface to acquire an independent status, for it is now freed from being attached to collected poems composed by a group of people. Therefore, this composition—though still called a xu—, is not a “preface” understood in the conventional sense. On a side note, this occasional preface is also noteworthy in that it consists almost entirely of a conversation between Li Hua and his uncle.

Ren Hua also has some similar farewell prefaces that were written to “present words.” These prefaces all begin with a depiction of a farewell occasion, including a favorable portrait of the person that the author is seeing off, the reason for that person’s departure, and a scene of bidding farewell. Such depictions, in addition to recording each event for its own sake, also serve to enable a better understanding of the farewell words that come next. Those farewell words can be quite elaborate, as in the “Preface for Seeing off Li Yi to Serve as the District Magistrate of Xindu” (Song Li Yi zai

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\(^{82}\) Shiyi was an eminent musician of the Lu 魯 state.

\(^{83}\) Namely, to firmly hold valuable virtues.

\(^{84}\) Wenyuan yinghua, 720.7b.
Xindu xu 送李彝宰新都序), where Li Hua advises his nephew to exert himself when serving as magistrate:

When bidding farewell, the ancients valued the tradition of giving words as a parting gift. You used to serve as the District Magistrate of Shifang, and Shifang was well governed while you were playing a zither without leaving the government office; now you are put in charge of Xindu, and the situation will be different. As [in Xindu] cottages and wells have been reduced to ashes after being set on fire, and the common people wounded by the tips of swords and arrows, it is extremely demanding to re-build and re-establish the place, preserve and nurture its people. Let alone that hastening carriages arrive at Xindu day and night, through rain and wind, and the demand for its supplies is as large as mountains the whole time. With regard to conducting various affairs in person, you should leave home by starlight and not return till the stars rise again; with regard to receiving guests, you should bind your hair thrice during one bath and spit out food thrice during one meal: this is the wish of a friend. When the moonlight is shining on snow-capped mountain peaks, or when petals are drifting along the Jin River, you should compose new poems and occasionally send them to me. Bear this in mind, young Li!

古人别遠，貴於贈言。子昔為什邡令，蓋鳴琴不下堂而理；今領新都則異於彼焉。蓋以廬井灰於焚爇之後，甿庶瘡於刀箭之末，樹立存育，洪惟艱哉！况奔衝填凑，晝夜風雨，

85 Alludes to the story that when Fu Zijian 宓子貞, one of Confucius’s disciples, was governing Shanfu 単父, the district was well governed while Fu Zijian did little more than play a zither. Lüshi chunqiu jishi 呂氏春秋集釋, ed. Xu Weiyu 許維遹 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 21.586.

86 Although the exact incident being referred to here is unclear, these two lines indicate that Xindu, after experiencing a certain disorder, was now in a terrible situation.

87 Alludes to the Duke of Zhou’s thirst for men of talents: “The Duke of Zhou admonished [his eldest son] Boqin, ‘During one bath I bind my hair thrice, and during one meal I spit out food thrice, in order to rise to receive gentlemen, yet I still fear that I might suffer the loss of the world’s worthy men’” 周公戒伯禽曰: “然我一沐三捉髪, 一飯三吐哺,起以待士, 猶恐失天下之賢人.” Shiji, 33.1518.

88 “Preface for Seeing off Li Yi to Serve as the District Magistrate of Xindu,” in Wenyuan yinghua, 721.12b.
誅求供應，旬晦山岳，其親庶務，則宜星星而入，戴星而入焉。其接賓客，則宜沐三起，
一飯三吐焉。此朋友之望也。如月照雪峯，花飛錦江，當有新詩，時復寄來。念之哉，李
生。

At the same time, the farewell words can also be quite brief, as in the “Preface for Seeing off Luo Jiao, Commandant of Xinyu, at the Rear Cloister of Jianfu Temple” (Jianfusi houyuan song
Xinyuwei Luo Jiao xu 薦福寺後院送辛嶼尉洛郊序), where Ren Hua asks Luo Jiao to behave
himself so as not to dishonor his uncle’s name:

I present these words: “Your uncle, with an unsullied reputation, used to be of service to the
Tribunal of Imperial Supervisors and the Three Departments successively, and now he
holds a position with an emolument of two thousand bushels. You ought to be strict with
yourself and be the best you can, so as not to shame the good name of your uncle.”

贈言曰: “子之叔父以清白著稱，歷踐臺省，官至二千石。子其刻己自勵，無墜叔父之
風。”

These admonitory words, either brief or elaborate, are a major component of individual prefaces,
making them into presents given at farewells.

In some of Li Hua’s and Ren Hua’s farewell prefaces, the phrase “present[ed] words” is not
spelled out, yet the farewell words themselves are plainly stated. In his “Preface for Seeing off Xue

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89 The Three Departments are Chancellery, Secretariat, and Department of State Affairs.
90 Namely, a local commandery governor.
the Ninth to Travel afar” (Song Xue jiù yuānyōu xu 送薛九遠遊序), for instance, Li Hua begins his writing by praising Xue’s talents, comparing him to famous scholars in history. Then he says:

You kindly visited me, and informed me of your forthcoming long journey. You are going to paddle in the streams of Wu and Yue, and moisten your writing-brush to compose among rivers and mountains. The superb beauty of the southeast will fall into your heart. Moreover, you will be received as a guest of honor by the sundry vassal lords, and will befriend grand ministers from families who have held high official positions for generations. This is what the ancients have valued. Do your best about it! I, Li Xiashu, old and sick, present this preface to you.92

惠然訪余，告以行適。將棹溪吳越，濡札江嶠。東南勝事，落爾胷中。況為諸侯上賓，知大夫之官族，古所貴，勉之哉！病叟李遐叔贈。

In this passage, Li Hua draws a promising picture of Xue’s forthcoming journey, and encourages Xue to make the best of it. Although not marked explicitly as “presented words,” they are in essence none other than farewell words presented as a parting gift.

Whether with or without a clear mark, altogether eleven extant farewell prefaces by Li Hua and Ren Hua, none of which were attached to collected poems, were written to present farewell words: six (out of nine) by Li Hua,93 and five (out of seventeen) by Ren Hua.94 All these prefaces were given as parting presents.

92 Wényuàn yínghuā, 720.8a–b.
93 “Preface for Seeing off My Thirteenth Uncle to Yue,” “Preface for Seeing off Fang the Seventh to Travel to Liang and Song” (Song Fang qì you Liang Song xu 送房七西遊梁宋序), “Preface for Seeing off Xue the Ninth to Travel Afar,” “Preface for Seeing off Zhang the Fifteenth to Wuzhong” (Song Zhang shìwu wang Wuzhong xu 送張十五往吳中序), “Preface for Seeing off Guan to Wuzhong” (Song Guan wang Wuzhong xu 送觀往吳中序), and “Preface for Seeing off He Chang” (Song He Chang xu 送何萇序).
There is no direct evidence suggesting why the farewell preface began to assume this function in the High Tang period. I suspect it might relate to another new development of the occasional preface since the early Tang. Originally, prefaces were written for poems already composed, but starting from the early Tang, many occasional prefaces were composed to invite poetry composition. Expressions such as “Why should not each of us express what is in our mind, thus to compose a parting song?” 盂各言志，以敘離歌⁹⁵ and “Why should not each of us compose shi, and that is all?” 盂各賦詩云爾⁹⁶ are often found in the endings of occasional prefaces. Plenty of those prefaces were preserved without the poems to which they were originally attached. Of course, one likely reason for this situation is that the poems were lost; yet isn’t it also possible that some of those poems might have never been composed, despite the invitation issued by the preface? If this was the case, it indicates that the invitation of poetry composition in some occasional prefaces is just an empty gesture. From here, it was only a small step to drop the pretence and let the preface appropriate the function originally assumed by shi-poetry.

In addition to the farewell prefaces by Li Hua and Ren Hua, the “Preface for Seeing off Meng the Eldest to Shu” (Song Meng da ru Shu xu 送孟大入蜀序) by Tao Han 陶翰 (ji 730) was also given as a parting gift:

Meng Haoran of Xiangyang is particularly bright and pure, and has been highly regarded for his writings since he was very young. In the Tianbao era (742–756), he made his first trip to

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⁹⁴ “Preface for Seeing off Secretary Wang to Return to Shouchun to Wait upon His Parents” (Song Wang Sheren gui Shouchun shifeng xu 送王舍人歸壽春侍奉序), “Preface for Seeing off Case Reviewer Zu to Join the Military Headquarter of the Commissioned Lord, Vice Censor-in Chief Li, in Qian commandary,” (Song Zu pingshi fu Qianfu Li zhongchengshi mufu xu 送祖評事赴黔府李中丞使幕府序), “Preface for Seeing off Proofreader Du to Jiangling to Pay His Respect to His Uncle” (Song Du Zhengzi zanfu Jiangling baijin shufu xu 送杜正字暫赴江陵拜觐叔父序), “Preface for Seeing off Li Yi to Serve as the District Magistrate of Xindu,” and “Preface for Seeing off Luo Jiao, Commandant of Xinyu, at the Backyard of Jianfu Temple.”

⁹⁵ Chen Zi’ang, “Preface for Seeing off District Magistrate Chen to Join the Army,” in Chen Zi’ang ji, 7,182.

Qin in the west, and he was acclaimed as a peerless talent by all the poets in the capital. Considering his exceptional ingenuity and incomparable mastery of language, he is indeed the Sire of poetry. Otherwise, how would he become famous in the regions of the Yangtze River and Chu? Alas! Master Meng, blessed with such talent and ambition, is still wandering about destitute and unmet by fortune in the wind-blown dust. Isn’t it absurd to say that there is no adversity or prosperity, fortunate time or unfortunate time? I, Han, used to read the writings of the ancients, among which “Fu on the Tall Ploars Palace,” “Fu on Plume Hunt,” and “Fu of Sir Vacuous” are indeed magnificent. In the three thousand miles to the west of Guanghan, a pellucid river stretches out and paired mountains stand like swords, among which a hidden path leads west to Mt. Min and Mt. Emei where superb views are embraced: all these will move and inspire you. Do your best about it! Although this old friend of yours is inept, I have written this piece for you.

Most readers take the Meng Haoran of Xiangyang mentioned in this preface as the eminent High Tang poet Meng Haoran (689–740); however, there is no evidence indicating that the Meng Haoran we are familiar with ever went to Shu. More importantly, as he died in 740, it was impossible for him

97 All three fu were written by famous Shu poets: the first two to by Yang Xiong and the third Sima Xiangru.
98 Both Mt. Min and Mt. Emei are famous mountains of Shu.
99 Wenyuan yinghua, 720.4b–5a.
to have travelled to the capital in the Tianbao era. It is therefore safe to conclude that the Meng Haoran whom Tao Han was seeing off to Shu and to whom this preface was addressed was a different person, or that the text is corrupt and has here been wrongly “corrected” by a later editor. Tao Han’s commendation of Meng’s literary talent and lamentation for his hapless situation, which probably have misled readers into believing that this Meng Haoran was the famous poet, is not necessarily an accurate reflection of Meng’s situation. Rather, such a compliment may simply be a required feature of the farewell preface, as is seen in the examples discussed above. After praising Meng the Eldest, Tao Han presents his farewell words, which, similar to the words offered to Xue the Ninth by Li Hua, picture the charms of Shu and ask Meng to cherish this journey. Instead of writing a poem, Tao Han gave Meng this preface as a parting gift.

This preface by Tao Han may suggest that some other High Tang literati, besides Li Hua and Ren Hua, were also familiar with the practice of giving prefaces as farewell gifts. But this does not mean that since the High Tang all farewell prefaces somehow became independent or presents given at partings. For example, in most of the farewell prefaces by Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725–777), shi-poetry is still identified as the only appropriate farewell gift, as is stated in his preface for seeing off Commissioned Lord Li: “If not shi-poetry, what else is able to be presented as a gift?” 非歌詩莫足以贈.100

At first sight, there seems to be a kind of tension between these two new functions, as self-display focuses on showing the image of the author whereas presenting words as a farewell gift centers on offering words to the passenger. Nevertheless, some prefaces successfully fulfil these dual functions. One such example is Li Hua’s “Preface for Seeing off Censor Li while I Am Confined to

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100 “Preface for Seeing off Li, the Commissioned Lord of Zezhou and Concurrent Attendant Censor, to His Circuit to Take Office as the Vice Military Commissioner of Zelu and Chenzheng” (Song Zezhou Li Shijun jian Shiyushi chong Zelu Chen Zheng Jiedu fushi fu bendao xu 送澤州李使君兼侍御史充澤潞陳鄭節度副使赴本道序), in Wenyan yinghua, 722.8b.
Bed in Jiangzhou” (Jiangzhou woji song Li Shiyu xu 江州臥疾送李侍御序). This preface starts with a passage in praise of Censor Li’s virtue and political ambition, and then it reads:

When the Way prevails in the world, it is shameful to be poor and humble. Now a sage oversees the throne, with both Kui and Long wholeheartedly applying themselves to the state, whereas this oldster is content with being poor and humble. Isn’t it the case that one’s lot of success or failure is decided beforehand? At this very moment, I arrange a boat in Xunyang to follow the traces of the recluses, to untie the entangled, worldly snares, and to ascend to the great purity. Though I am suffering from persistent afflictions and my teeth are decaying, my spirit acts as king. Haggard and harried, I equate honor with dishonor, and bring together vision and hearing. As a result, neither right nor wrong, grief nor joy comes into my mind. Censor [Li] suddenly informed me of his departure; learning this news, I became glum and dolorous. It surely was not because those sundry entanglements have yet to be ended; might it be that being sad in this situation is also consistent with the Way? For the time being, using my hairpin to beat [a tune on] a tea bowl, I chanted a lyric to bid him farewell:

The Yangtze River is deep and profound, the rain cold and chilling;
Isles are engulfed in waves and darkling clouds droop low;

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101 This is an allusion to Lunyu 8.13: “Display yourself when the Way prevails in the world, but hide yourself when it does not. It is shameful to be poor and humble when the Way prevails in the state, whereas it is also shameful to be rich and powerful when the Way is abandoned in the state.”

102 Kui and Long were two virtuous ministers of the legendary sage-king Shun 舜.

103 Haochun 顥淳, rendered as “the great purity,” is an uncommon expression; the context suggests it means something similar to a transcendent, pure realm.

104 “Spirit acts as king,” indicating to live at one’s own will, alludes to Zhuangzi 莊子: “The pheasant of the woodlands walks ten paces for one peck, a hundred paces for one drink, but it has no urge to be reared in a cage. With its spirit acting as king, the pheasant finds [the cage life] unsuitable.”

My heart, grieving over this separation, hears the sound of war drums.105

天下有道，貧且賤焉，恥也。今聖人在上，夔龍宣力，而老夫甘心貧賤，得非人生窮達，固有分耶？方理舟潯陽，追跡幽人，解纓綱，陵顥淳，雖病痼齒衰而神王。憔顇之中，齊榮辱，一視聽，是非哀樂，無自入矣。侍御忽告余行，余知悒焉軫心，豈紛累未滌，將悲亦有道，且以箠擊茶瓯，歌而餞之曰：

江沉沉兮雨淒淒，
洲渚没兮玄雲低，
傷別心兮聞鼓鼙。

We do not have an exact date of this preface, but it must have been written sometime during Li Hua’s last few years. After the outbreak of the An Shi Rebellion (An Shi zhiluan 安史之亂) in December 755, Chang’an 長安 was taken by the rebel army in July 756, and Li Hua served, probably unwillingly, in the secretariat at the rebels’ court. One year later, in December 757, Chang’an was taken back by the Tang loyalist troops, with Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756–762) returned from his northwestern headquarters of Lingwu 靈武. Because of Li Hua’s collaboration (forced or not) with the rebels, he was demoted to Administrator of the Revenue Section (sihu canju 司戶參軍) of Hangzhou 杭州. Shortly afterwards, Li Hua resigned. In 764, he joined Li Xian’s 李峴 (709–766) staff when the latter was appointed as the Military Governor (jiédushi 節度使) of Jingnan 荊南 circuit and was in charge of selecting officials from the regions of the Yangtze and Huai Rivers; however, Li Hua resigned once again within a year, ostensibly for reasons of health, and lived in a reclusive style thereafter. This is very likely when this preface was written. Censor Li, whose identity

105 Wenyan yinghua, 720.7a.
can no longer be established, was, according to Li Hua, about to “tie up the mouths of greedy
wolves, cure the deep wounds that go down to the bones, stay his steps [in the human realm]
and come forward, and bring order out of chaos” 束贪狼之口，掩破骨之伤，濡足而前，化危为
安，that is, to serve the state worthily. Censor Li’s admirable act naturally leads Li Hua to
think about himself; therefore, he turns to his self-presentation, portraying himself as the personification
of the Zhuangzi ideas. Having done so, he turns back to Censor Li, referring to his departure and
ending this preface with a shi to present words as a farewell gift. We see thus that an occasional
preface is sometimes able to fulfil the two new functions simultaneously.

Ending the preface with a poem of three sao-style lines is in and of itself noteworthy. Since the
poem is already incorporated into the preface and thus part of it, it is clear that no other poems were
composed for this farewell occasion. Another similar preface is Ren Hua’s “Preface for Seeing off
Reverend Qian to Return to Guiji to Pay His Respects to His Parents and then Travel to Tiantai
Mountain” (Song Qian shangren gui Guiji jinxing bianyou Tiantaishan xu 送虔上人歸會稽覲省便
遊天台山序), which ends with a three-line lyric that appears comparable to a gexing 歌行 poem:
“This very day the flowers of Guilin are presented as parting gifts;/ White mists of Dongting Lake
shall moisten the monk’s cassock;/ Reverend Qian and you gentlemen will be at different edges of
the sky remotely apart” 今朝贈別桂林花，洞庭白煙濕袈裟，虔上人與君各在天一涯.110

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106 That is, to subdue the rebels.
107 To repair the terrible damages caused by the war.
108 Ruzu 濡足, same as ruji 濡跡, is a metaphor for taking official position. This usage of ruji is exemplified in Hou Han shu: “When the time was peaceful, gentlemen would uphold the Way to realize their ambition; when the time was declining, they would stay their steps [in the human realm] to return the world to order” 平運則弘道以求志, 陵夷則濡跡以匡時, Hou Han shu, 62.2058.
109 Wényuán yìnghuà, 720.7a.
110 Wényuán yìnghuà, 722.4a.
Notwithstanding the conventional belief that it was the mid-Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) who first “freed” this traditionally “dependent” genre of writing,\(^{111}\) the farewell preface in fact had already acquired its independent status in the hands of Li Hua and Ren Hua. And those independent occasional prefaces are “prefaces” no more.

Since the time of the Four Elites of Early Tang, the occasional preface, whose earlier function was mainly to describe the setting and provide background information for a proper reading of poems composed on a certain occasion, grew to share two important functions of poetry itself: it became a means of self-display for the author and/or played the role of a farewell gift. Indeed, quite a few farewell prefaces would later be seen as independent, no longer attached to the poems (which were often forgotten) they were originally meant to introduce. This attests to the recognition of the occasional preface as becoming a genre of writing that could now be appreciated on its own as a self-standing form of literary craft. It also reveals that Tang occasional prefaces, though all being called \(\text{xu}\), are “in themselves divided.” As for those that did remain attached to a set of poems, they often provide a far fuller and sometimes surprising context for understanding the meaning, intentions, and interplay of the poems that have been preserved. In both respects our view of the Tang literary landscape is significantly broadened.

\(^{111}\) Jiang Yin 蒋寅, on the other hand, argues that the independence of the farewell preface was first realized by Quan Deyu 權德與 (759–818). See Jiang Yin, “Quan Deyu yu Taingdai zengxu wenti zhi queli” 權德與與唐代贈序文體之確立. *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報 2012.2: 59–68.
Chapter II: Seeking Political Patronage: The Art of the Self-recommendation Letter

The desire, even necessity, of seeking political patronage in the High Tang period was satirized in this couplet by the poet Gao Shi 高適 (704-765), speaking of himself: “Talented but unwilling to learn how to seek patronage./ What point is there just to study in vain?” 有才不肯學干謁, 何必無事空讀書?¹ The goal of entering officialdom and becoming part of the government bureaucracy was the desire of every educated man of letters in medieval China; there was no independent status or wherewithal for a mere scholar or poet. In order to enter officialdom, Tang literati, especially those who were not from prominent families, had to win the favor of influential patrons, as poignantly pointed out by Wang Lingran 王泠然 (js 717): “Nowadays those who are able to be promoted rely on influence if not on kinship, and on connections if not on bribery” 今之得舉者,不以親, 則以勢; 不以賄, 則以交.² While there were different ways for Tang literati to build connections with prospective patrons and seek patronage from them, one common method was to present an influential person with one’s literary writings.³ And while there were different types of writing that could be so presented, the letter of self-recommendation, which had only rarely been seen prior to the Tang, became the favored form for many early and High Tang literati.⁴

³ There are quite a few studies on this phenomenon, among others, see Cheng Qianfan 程千帆, Tangdai jinshi xingjuan yu wenxue 唐代進士行卷與文學 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980); Ge Xiaoyin 葛曉音, “Lun chusheng Tang wenren de ganye fangshi” 論初盛唐文人的干謁方式 Tang yanjiu 1995.1: 119-38; Wang Quan 王佺, Tangdai ganye yu wenxue 唐代干謁與文學 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).
Self-recommendation letter, variably titled shu 书, qi 启, biao 表, or jian 简, is primarily a genre of rhetoric, whose main function is “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents,” that is, to persuade a prospective patron to offer his help. Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss how early and High Tang literati made their self-recommendation letters persuasive, what rhetorical strategies were applied, and what rhetorical effects were achieved. On the other hand, we are used to looking at prose for its context, barely taking any notice of its style. For the letters I want to discuss, however, style is crucial, since “rhetoric has from the beginning meant two things: ornamental speech and persuasive speech.” For this reason, I will also consider the ways in which early and High Tang literati make their self-recommendation letters stylish and stand out. By exploring these questions, I hope to further our understanding of self-recommendation letters and the role they played in building the Tang literary landscape, as well as to discuss how early and High Tang literati wrote to achieve a utilitarian goal. Moreover, we will see how Tang literati’s self-display in their self-recommendations resemble and differ from their self-display in the occasional prefaces.

The Justification for Patronage Seeking

Many Tang self-recommendation letters begin with a justification for patronage seeking. The need for justification derived partly from the criticism of patronage seeking since the late Han. The Eastern Han scholar Cui Yin 崔骃 (?-92) once remarked:


5 In Chinese, the letter as a genre of writing has many different designations; for a discussion of epistolary terminology, see Antje Richter, Letter and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2013), 34-7.


It is not that a gentleman does not long for a position in office, only that he is ashamed of fawning on others to get promoted at court; it is not that he does not long for a wife, only that he is loath to climb the wall to drag away an unwed daughter. To boast and show off, and hang a banner to announce oneself is not [the behavior with regard to] the treasures of the Marquis of Sui and Bian He; to reveal one's knowledge to dazzle the world, and thus to appeal for favor is not the Way of Zhongni.

夫君子非不欲仕也，恥夸毗以求舉；非不欲室也，惡登牆而攫處。叫呼衒鬻，縣旌自表，非隨和之寶也。暴智曜世，因以干祿，非仲尼之道也。

To avoid being criticized for “fawning on others to get promoted at court,” or being compared to the one who “climbed the wall to drag away an unwed daughter,” a justification of patronage seeking becomes necessary. One great master of giving such justification is Luo Binwang, who often compared his seeking of patronage to the quest for “the one who knows me” (zhiji 知己). A case in point is his apology in “Shang Silie Taichangbo qi” 上司列太常伯啟 (Letter Presented to the Grand Executive Attendant of the Bureau of Ranks). It is believed that in 664 Luo Binwang wrote this letter to Liu Xiangdao 劉祥道 (596-666), who was then serving as the Minister of Personnel, from 662 to 684, the Bureau of Ranks was the official variant of the Ministry of Personnel; during the same period a minister was called Grand Executive Attendant.

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8 Alludes to Mengzi, 6B.11: “If you climb over the wall of the neighbor to drag away the unwed daughter of the family, then you will have a wife; if you do not drag her away, you will not have a wife. [Under such circumstances,] are you going to drag her away or not?” 踕東家牆而攫其處子則得妻, 不攫則不得妻, 則將攫之乎?

9 The pearl possessed by the Marquis of Sui and the jade-disc possessed by Bian He 卞和 were said to be priceless. Hou Han shu 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 52.1715.


11 From 662 to 684, the Bureau of Ranks was the official variant of the Ministry of Personnel; during the same period a minister was called Grand Executive Attendant.
a high position (3a) in charge of personnel appraisement and appointment. To explain soundly why he seeks Liu Xiangdao’s patronage, Luo Binwang writes:

Respectfully I have heard this: the auspicious unicorn in the marshland of the Lu state expected to entrust himself to Xuanfu [namely, Confucius], the exceptional steed at Wu Slope surely was making long neighs for Sun Yang [namely, Bole]. This is because what they had valued was to be appreciated, and whatever injustice they had received would be redressed by the one who understand them. Therefore, [with Qin Zhi] carving their unworked wood, the half-dead paulownia trees of Mount Yi [were made into zithers], [with Cai Yong] valuing their timbre, no bamboos of Keting were left to decay forever.

側聞魯澤祥麟，希委質於宣父；吳坂逸驥，實長鳴於孫陽。是則所貴在乎見知，所屈伸乎知己。故雕其樸，嶧山有半死之桐；賞其音，柯亭無永枯之竹。

13 Qilin is a numinous animal that is traditionally rendered as “unicorn” though with few similar characteristics.
14 Xuanfu (Father of Brilliance) is the honorific title conferred to Confucius in the eleventh year of the Zhenguan era (637).
15 Sun Yang, more famously known as Bole 伯樂, is a legendary, superb judge of horses; later it became the synonym for a good judge of talent.
16 Qin Zhi 琴摯 was a famous zither master in ancient times; the paulownia trees of Mount Yi were suitable for making zithers. “Qifa” 七發 (Seven Stimulations): “The paulownia trees of Longmen are bare of branches to a height of one hundred feet. Their trunks are gnarled and twisted, their roots spread out and divide. Above is a peak of thousands of fathoms, below lies a flume of hundreds of staves. A rapid current, eddying waves, throb and pulsate there. Their roots are half dead, half live…Then, as the season turns its back on fall and edges into winter, the zither Master Chih, is ordered to cut one for a zither” 龍門之桐，高百尺而無枝。中鬱結之輪菌，根扶疏以分離。上有千仞之峯，下臨百丈之谿。湍流避波，又瀲澯之。其根半死半生…於是背秋涉冬，使琴摯斫斫以為琴。Wen xuan 文選, ed. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (505-531) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 34.1562. The translation is adapted from David Knechtges and Jerry Swanson’s rendering in “Seven Stimuli for the Prince: The Chi’fa of Mei Ch’eng” Monumenta Serica 29 (1970): 108-09.
17 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu 駱臨海集箋注, ed. Chen Xijin 陳煕晉 (1791-1851) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 7.225. For a complete translation of this letter, see appendix (3). Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192) was a famous musician and an influential scholar-official of the Eastern Han. According to Soushen ji 搜神記: “Cai Yong once arrived at Keting, where people made the local bamboos into rafters. Yong raised his head and looked askance at the rafters, saying, ‘Excellent woods!’ He then took those bamboos to make flutes, which produced sonorously echoing sounds” 蔡邕嘗至柯亭，以竹為椽。邕仰眄之，曰: “良竹也。”取以為笛，發聲避亮。Soushen ji ed. Gan Bao 干寶 (286-336) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 13.167.
The message Luo Binwang conveys is simple and clear—he is not merely seeking Liu Xiangdao to be his political patron, but “the one who knows me.” To make his letter catch the eye of Liu Xiangdao, he conveys the message in an ornate style, which is first revealed in its attention to parallel structure. This justification—as well as the entire letter—is written in the style of parallel prose. In addition, Luo Binwang skillfully weaves together four classical allusions to make his argument compelling. The “auspicious unicorn” alludes to a story recoded in the Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan 春秋左氏傳:

In the fourteenth year, in spring, there was hunting to the west, in the great wilds, and Zichu Shang, driver for the Shusun lineage, captured a lin. Considering it inauspicious, he bestowed it upon the game warden. Confucius examined it and said, “It is a lin.”

十四年春，西狩于大野，叔孫氏之車子鉏商獲麟，以為不祥，以賜虞人。仲尼觀之，曰：

“麟也。”

Although in the Zuo zhuan the story may be presented merely as an example of Confucius’ broad learning, great significance has been attached to this event in later times. Here Luo Binwang alters the narrative that the unicorn was captured, claiming that the unicorn willingly entrust itself to Confucius, thus to emphasize the unicorn’s desire to be appreciated by “the one who knows me.”

The story of the exceptional steed is another example of worthy beings looking for the appreciation of the one who understands their value. According to the Zhanguo ce 戰國策, an exceptional steed was treated as a regular horse and was made to pull the cart of salt at Yu Slope.

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When it saw Sun Yang, better known as Bole 伯樂, a legendary, superb judge of horses, it snuffled while lowering its head, neighed while lifting its head, for it understood that Bole could appreciate its true quality. With the two allusions, Luo Binwang comes to the conclusion that worthy beings, in order to have their virtue recognized and name vindicated, seek to be appreciated by “the one who knows them.” Having established this argument, Luo Binwang further supports it with the examples of the half dead paulownia trees of Mount Yi and the bamboos of Keting. Had it not been for the famous musicians Qin Zhi and Cai Yong, both the half dead paulownia tree and the Keting bamboos, which were perfect materials for making musical instruments, would have been forever neglected, instead of being made into precious zithers and lutes, and realizing their true values.

By equating his patronage seeking to the quest for “the one who knows me,” Luo Binwang successfully legitimizes and romanticizes his act. Moreover, with these four allusions, Luo Binwang subtly flatters Liu Xiangdao by comparing Liu to ancient worthies such as Confucius and Sun Yang, as well as advertises himself by suggesting that he is as talented as the auspicious unicorn and the exceptional steed (thus worthy of Liu’s help). Liu Xiangdao probably received many self-recommendation letters every day, but he would surely have been impressed by Luo Binwang’s stylish writing. Such an ornate style is typical of Luo Binwang’s self-recommendation letters.

Instead of resorting to the cultural authority of classical examples to justify one’s patronage seeking act, as Luo Binwang had done, many early and High Tang literati preferred to vindicate their act on more personal grounds. In 671, two years after Wang Bo was expelled from the Prince of Pei’s establishment, he wrote a self-recommendation letter to Pei Xingjian 貶行儉 (619-682), then the Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel. This letter, titled “Shang Libu Pei Shilang qi” 上吏部裴侍郎啟 (Letter Presented to Vice Director Pei of the Ministry of Personnel), was a response to

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19 Zhanguo ce, ed. Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 17.573.
Pei’s request for a writing sample (of *shi* or *fu*, presumably). Wang Bo begins the letter with a modest confession that his literary skill is not worthy of Pei Xingjian’s appreciation, and that he dares not randomly submit any of his writings to Pei in spite of the latter’s request. Such humble profession is expected, since Pei Xingjian, second in command of the Personnel office, was in a position that could directly influence Wang Bo’s career. On the other hand, Wang Bo also uses this humble profession to subtly remind Pei Xingjian, and other possible readers of the letter, that he presented his writing only because Pei had asked him to do so. This point is made more evident when Wang Bo says:

Confucius said, “Not to speak when spoken to by a gentleman is to be evasive.”\(^{20}\) Now that I have been received by your lordship thrice and been invited twice, I can probably speak indeed.\(^{21}\)

孔子曰: “言及之而不言謂之隱.” 今者接君侯者三矣, 承召延者再矣, 抑亦可以言乎.

Despite of the modest tone this letter, a sense of pride is revealed when Wang Bo claims that Pei Xingjian had received him thrice and invited him twice. He even refers to Confucius to support himself. With this statement, Wang Bo not only justifies his seeking of Pei’s help, but also separates himself from those who “serve as their own matchmaker” 自媒, for what he did was to “respect a command” 恭命.\(^{22}\)

Xiao Yingshi 蕭颖士 (707-758), a talented Tang literatus highly appraised by his contemporaries, adopted a similar rhetorical strategy when trying to seek patronage from Wei Shu 韋述 (?-757), who

\(^{20}\) *Lunyu*, 16.6.
\(^{21}\) *Wang Zi’an ji zhu*, 4.128-29.
\(^{22}\) *Wang Zi’an ji zhu*, 4.133.
then served as Director of Studies, second executive official of Directorate of Education (guozijian 國子監). In the first month of the twenty-ninth year of the Kaiyuan reign (741), Xiao Yingshi came to the capital to sit for a civil-exam, yet he failed the exam. In the intercalary fourth month of the same year,\(^{23}\) he wrote a self-recommendation letter to Wei Shu, hoping that Wei Shu may help him get a position in the Palace Library. In his “Zeng Wei Siye shu” 贈韋司業書 (Letter to Director of Studies Wei), Xiao Yingshi first brings up his previous contact with Wei Shu, whom he once paid a visit and who kindly received him:

Several years ago, you, sir, had just been appointed as Director of the Ministry of Personnel. Back then, I once took the liberty to importune you with a visit at the Department of State Affairs, and you condescended to inquire after and meet with me. Perhaps you have forgotten all about this now?\(^{24}\)

頃數歲前，足下新除吏部郎中，時曾於都省之間昧然一謁，足下亦頗垂顧接，而今得無忘耶？

This old connection, while able to offer him some grounds for trying to seek Wei Shu's help, might also make Wei Shu think that Xiao is someone who tends to frivolously impose himself on important people, so Xiao Yingshi immediately explains that he has never paid a visit to anyone except Wei Shu, whose help, he says, is desired by each and every literatus:

\(^{23}\) For discussions on the date of this letter, see Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民, “Xiao Yingshi xinian kaozheng” 蕭穎士系年考證, in Tangdai wenhu yanjiu congshu 唐代文史研究叢稿 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2013), 136-68; Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian 蕭穎士集校箋, ed. Huang Dahong 黃大宏 and Zhang Xiaozhi 張曉芝 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 3.84-5,192-93.

\(^{24}\) Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian, 3.71.
When you recall this, would you immediately think of me as someone who carelessly goes to pay a call on you? Even if the past act of this abject person was indeed careless and indiscreet, is there anyone who, after you have insistently invited him, would refuse to come to you? If you ask the sundry lords holding pivotal posts about me, you are surely going to find that no one will say that I have ever paid a visit to his gate.²⁵

豈或念此，便謂僕為輕於造詣者也？僕往時之舉，誠復輕率，然自足下，則有固求而不至者焉？足下誠問僕於衡軸諸公，必知未有一人言僕造其門矣。

He then recounts with gratitude the favor he has received from Wei Shu, that Wei Shu has invited him over several times. Added to that are two other personal connections: his younger brother used to be a guest of Wei Shu, and Xiao Yingshi himself is a close friend of Wei Shu’s son-in-law, as is stated in the following passage:

I arrived from the Eastern Capital on the twenty-fifth day of the first month. Since I paid my respects to you, I quickly received from you several invitations to visit you. Moreover, my virtuous younger brother once accompanied you at a banquet; and your precious son-in-law and I have been on friendly terms for long.²⁶

以正月二十五日至自東京，參後迨茲，遽承足下屢垂訪引。又賢弟曾一陪宴席，貴壻徐子，舊所交歡。

With such a close relationship, isn’t he justified, Xiao Yingshi rhetorically asks, in requesting Wei Shu to be his patron:

²⁵ Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian, 3.71.
²⁶ Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian, 3.71.
[Therefore,] how could I not depend on your gate and courtyard to spread my reputation, and reveal to you what has long accumulated in my deep heart?²⁷

豈不足假延譽於門庭，披舊積於心腑耶?

Whether to show gratitude for Wei Shu’s appreciation, or to claim to have a personal connection with him, both rhetorical statements have made Xiao Yingshi’s justification more understandable to Wei Shu, who then might not easily dismiss Xiao’s request for help. In fact, in the following year, Xiao Yingshi was appointed as a Proofreader in the Palace Library, although we have no evidence to tell whether it was due to Wei Shu’s recommendation.

Another rhetorical strategy—a more daring one—is to express one’s intention to evaluate and help the recipient. In his “Shang Yan Dafu jian” 上嚴大夫牋 (Letter Presented to Grand Master Yan), the date of which can no longer be established, Ren Hua claims that he gives up his reclusive life and comes to visit Grand Master Yan for no other reason than to evaluate Yan’s behavior and virtue; and whether Grand Master Yan is profound or shallow depends entirely on how he receives Ren Hua:

If you assume an arrogant countenance, change your previous beneficence, think that your authority qualifies you to violate other beings, and fail to receive me with a good manner, then whether you are profound or shallow is therefore revealed. But if you make an effort to summon and invite me, not separating yourself from the mean and low, holding in mind the

²⁷Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian, 3.71.
half-face encounter of the past, and turning your eyes on me for a brief while, then your great virtue is too much to be easily weighed.

公若帶驕貴之色, 移夙昔之眷, 自謂威足淩物, 不能禮接於人, 則公之淺深, 於是見矣。

公若務於招延, 不隔卑賤, 念半面之曩日, 迥親眼於片時, 則公之厚德, 未易量也。

With this statement, Ren Hua attempts to dignify his act by imaginarily changing his role from the appraisee into the appraiser, as well as to persuade Grand Master Yan to receive him respectfully. Ren Hua obviously is not serious about being the judge of Grand Master Yan’s character, but by making such a claim, Ren Hua tries to impress Grand Master Yan with his humor—that he was able to see the situation from such a different perspective. And his humor would hardly escape Yan’s notice. The same can be said of his ensuing assertion where he compares himself to the legendary physician Bian Que 扁鵲, and Grand Master Yan to the Marquis of Huan 桓, who was in need of Bian Que’s treatment. As Ren Hua conceives himself to be the one whose help Grand Master Yan must seek, he even asks Yan to “take the initiative with humble words, and show a delightful countenance” 先之以卑辭, 申之以喜色. Humor must have played a role in this bold statement.

Ren Hua uses the same rhetoric in his “Gaoci Jingyin Jia Dafu shu” 告辭京尹賈大夫書 (Letter to

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28 Alludes to the story of Ying Feng 應奉, an Eastern Han official. “When Feng was at the age of twenty, he went to pay a visit to Yuan He, Administrator of Pengcheng. At that time, He had been away for a journey, and the gate of his residence was closed. A carriage maker inside the gate opened the door leaf, revealing half of his face to look at Feng. Feng immediately left without looking back” 奉年二十時, 嘗詣彭城相袁賀, 賀時出行閉門, 造車匠於內開扇出半面視奉, 奉即委去. *Han Han shu*, 48.1607.

29 *Quan Tang wen*, 376.5a-b.

30 According to a story recorded in the *Shiji*, when Bian Que was in Qi, he paid a visit to the Marquis of Huan. After seeing the Marquis, Bian Que told him that he had a disease, which was only in the skin for the moment but would worsen if left uncured. The Marquis dismissed Bian Que’s advice, as he felt no symptom at the time. He also told his attendants that Bian Que was just trying to profit from those who were healthy. Bian Que visited the Marquis three more times thereafter. For each of the first two times, he told the Marquis how his disease had become worse and had to be treated immediately. The Marquis still dismissed Bian Que’s words. When Bian Que went to see the Marquis for the last time, he looked in from afar, and rushed out of the place. When an attendant of the Marquis asked him why he had done this, he replied that the Marquis’s disease was now in the reservoir of his vitality and was incurable. The Marquis died soon after. *Shiji*, 105.2793.

31 *Quan Tang wen*, 376.5b.
Bid Farewell to Grand Master Jia, Chief Administrator of the Capital). In this letter, instead of asking for Grand Master Jia’s permission to pay him a visit, Ren Hua suggests that it is to help Jia get rid of his arrogance that he invites Jia to pay him a visit.  

The most humorous justification, however, is probably made by Li Bai. Sometime during the 730s, when he dwelled with his family in Anlu 安陸, where the governmental office of Anzhou 安州 was, Li Bai wrote a self-recommendation letter to Administrator Pei of Anzhou. He begins his “Shang Anzhou Pei Zhangshi shu 上安州裴長史書 (Letter Presented to Administrator Pei of Anzhou) by contradicting Confucius:

I, Bai, hear that while Heaven never speaks, the four seasons keep going around, and while Earth never talks, the hundreds of beings all come into existence. I, Bai, am a human, not Heaven or Earth. How can I make myself known without speaking?

Confucius, in response to his disciple Zigong’s 子貢 question that if he gives up speech then what would there be for his disciples to transmit, used Heaven as his example and said, “What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and there are hundred thin into being. What does Heaven ever say?” 子曰: “天何言哉? 四時行焉, 百物生焉, 天何言哉?” Li Bai here wittily makes his point by refuting this remark made by Confucius. That is, the situation

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32 Quan Tang wen, 376.4a-b.
33 In the letter Li Bai claims that he has been writing creatively for “thirty springs” 三十春; because of that, most scholars give 730 as the date of this letter. Ōno Jitsunosuke 大野實之助 claims that the letter was not written when Li Bai was at the age of thirty, for “thirty springs” refers to the length of time Li Bai had been studying and not to his age, and “thirty” is simply a convenient, round number and not an exact designation of age. Ōno Jitsunosuke, Ri Taibaku kenkyū 李太白研究 (Tokyo: Ariake Shobō, 1971, rev. ed.), 73. I agree with Ōno Jitsunosuke that “thirty” is just a round number, and therefore suggest the date of the letter to be sometime during the 730s.
34 Li Bai quanjì jianzhú huishi jiping, 26.4026.
35 Lunyün 17.19; Lau, The Analects, 146.
of Heaven does not apply to him, for whom speaking—namely, writing this letter to Administrator Pei—is the only natural and right way to make himself known. In so doing, Li Bai justifies his act by pointing out its unquestionable rightness. Naturally, he would not think that to “importune all the feudal lords with a visit” 徹干諸侯 and “call on each and every high official and minister” 歷抵卿相 is something in need of justification.

The Praise or Criticism of the Recipient

In order to win the favor of a potential patron, another expected component of the self-recommendation letter is captatio benevolentiae, which in medieval China was called the “narration of virtue” (shude 述德). Of early and High Tang literati, Luo Binwang sings the most elaborate praises of his recipient. His praises usually consist of three components: first an expression of admiration of the recipient’s virtue and talent in general, then an acclamation of his official merits, and finally a commendation of his ability to promote talented men. The elaborateness of captatio benevolentiae in Luo Binwang’s letters can be directly perceived from its length. In his “Shang Silie Taichangbo qi,” for instance, three hundred and ninety three words are used to pay tribute to Liu Xiangdao, taking up more than half the space of the entire letter. More importantly, these words were organized and presented in an ornate manner. I will now focus on the first component of Luo Binwang’s praises of Liu Xiangdao to showcase his writing style.

Luo Binwang begins his compliment of Liu Xiangdao by comparing Liu to the magnificent Heaven and Earth:

I humbly hold in mind that your lordship, Grand Executive Attendant, matches Heaven that upthrusts its frame, spreading across the apex of the empyrean to expand its terrain, and

36 “Yu Han Jingzhou shu” (Letter to Jingzhou Administrator Han), Li Bai quanjji jiaozi huishi jiping, 26.4018.
enhances Earth that extends its spring, controlling the four strands to distribute its branches.³⁷

伏惟太常伯公，儀天聳構，橫九霄而拓基; 浸地開源，控四紀而疏派。

The line “matches Heaven that upthrusts its frame” alludes to Wang Yun’s 王筠 (481-549) “Zhaoming taizi aicewen” 昭明太子哀策文 (Composition in Mourning for the Crown Prince Zhaoming): “[The Crown Prince] Matches the Heaven in his loftiness” 儀天比峻.³⁸ That a similar expression had been used to praise Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531), the reputed prince who was believed to have compiled the Wen xuan, makes the compliment of Liu Xiangdao more laudatory. The line “controlling the four strands to distribute its branches,” on the other hand, would have immediately reminded its recipient of Zuo Si’s “Shudu fu” 蜀都賦 (Fu on the Capital of Shu), which is collected in the fourth chapter of Wen xuan, an anthology well-known by Tang literati: “Earth takes the four seas as its strands” 地以四海為紀.³⁹ This could have been viewed as an indication of the author’s knowledge of literary tradition. Luo Binwang then turns to admire Liu Xiangdao’s family heritage:

With red charts presenting blessings, the numinous son of the [Red] Thearch was revealed in Qufu,⁴⁰ with purple haze drifting with transcendent beings, the refined perfect man was born

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³⁷ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.226
³⁹ Wen xuan, 4.175.
⁴⁰ According to the “Furui” 符瑞 (Auspicious Signs) chapter of Song shu, in the fourteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu (481 BCE), Confucius dreamt of a red haze rising in the town of Pei 沛. Confucius, after some inquires, said, “This realm already has its master. He is the red Liu” 天下已有主也，為赤劉. Later, a young boy guided Confucius to see a unicorn that spat out three scrolls of charts, which predicated the rise of the red Liu, that is, Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202-195 BCE), the founding emperor of the Han, andlegendarily the son of the Red Thearch (chidizi 赤帝子). As the Han was believed to be of the virtue of fire, the color red was associated with the Liu royal family. Song shu, 27.766.
within the Hangu Pass. Since then, your family has produced lineal and collateral descendants of a hundred generations, and countless gentlemen of ten thousand years.\(^{41}\)

自赤文薦祉，曲阜分帝子之靈；紫氣浮仙，函谷誕真人之秀。本支百代，君子萬年。

According to the “Zaixiang shixi biao” 宰相世系表 (Genealogy of the Grand Councilors) of Xin Tang shu, Liu Xiangdao was a descendant of Liu Pengzu 劉彭祖 (?-92 BCE), seventh son of Emperor Jing 景 of Han (r. 157-141 BCE).\(^{42}\) Although an offshoot of Liu Bang 劉邦 (256-195 BCE), the “red Liu” who founded the Han, Liu Pengzu himself was not a prominent prince. To make Liu Xiangdao’s ancestry sounds more honorable, Luo Binwang replaces Liu Pengzu with Liu Chen 劉徹 (156-87 BCE), tenth son of Emperor Jing, later known as Emperor Wu of Han. As recorded by the Han Wudi neizhuan 漢武帝內傳, when Lady Wang 王 was pregnant with Emperor Wu, one day red clouds rose above her residence where a red dragon circled round and round, an auspicious omen indicating the extraordinary fate of the unborn child.\(^{43}\) Based on the story, the color of the clouds should be red; yet to avoid the repetition with chiwen (red charts), Luo Binwang changes their color into purple. Moreover, by the phrase “purple haze,” Luo Binwang evokes at the same time the Laozi story, that when Laozi was travelling to the west, the gatekeeper of Hangu Pass observed purple haze drifting above the Pass; several days later, Laozi, riding a blue ox, stopped by the Pass as expected.\(^{44}\) The phrase zhenren (refined perfected man), while referring to Emperor Wu in this context, also strengthens the line’s connection with Laozi. Such ingenuity must have caught Liu Xiangdao’s attention.

\(^{41}\) Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.226.

\(^{42}\) Xin Tang shu, 71.2256.

\(^{43}\) Taiping guangji 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 3.13.

\(^{44}\) Shiji, 63.2141.
Having praised Liu Xiangdao’s glorious ancestors, Luo Binwang goes back to compliment Liu Xiangdao himself, first equating him to Zhang Liang 張良 (ca. 250-186 BCE) and Xiao He 蕭何 (ca. 257-193), two distinguished Han ministers:

[As Zhang Liang] was in harmony with the Way and accorded with the numinous spirits, Master Yellow Stone instructed the emperor’s councilor in tactics; the unlimited virtue [of Xiao He] was bestowed by Heaven, for it was the White Star that brought down the essence of the king’s aide.  

道叶神交，黃石授帝師之略；德攸天縱，白星降王輔之精.

For the purpose of praising Liu Xiangdao, Zhang Liang and Xiao He are picked for two reasons. First, having assisted Liu Bang found the Han, they were the “emperor’s councilor” and ‘king’s aide.” Comparing Liu Xiangdao to them is both flattery and appropriate, for Liu concurrently serves as the Minister of the Ministry of Personnel and the Administrator at the Establishment of the Prince of Pei. This is a reaffirmation of Liu’s political talent. Second, it was believed that Zhang Liang’s and Xiao He’s talents were bestowed either by a transcendent figure or by Heaven. Zhang Liang, according to the Han shu, once came upon Master Yellow Stone on a bridge in Xiapi 下邳, who bestowed on him the Taigong bingfa 太公兵法; Xiao He, according to the Chunqiu zuozhu qi 春秋佐助期, was born from the essence of “Concluder” (mao 星), one of the twenty-eight lunar lodgings. As “Concluder” locates in the White Tiger (baihu 白虎) quadrant—namely, the western quadrant of the sky—it is here referred to as the “White Star” for a better parallelism with “Yellow Stone.”

45 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.226.
46 Han shu, 40.2014.
These fantastic stories make the two figures more legendary, thus a more laudatory praise of Liu Xiangdao.

Luo Binwang then continues his praises of Liu Xiangdao with commendations on Liu's cultivation, knowledge, eloquence, and literary skill:

Now, similar to the elegant peak that imitates the mountain, you set out the “three landmark texts” and look up to them; like the pellucid waves of the literary ocean, you entrust yourself to the nine schools to proceed to where you owe your allegiance. Ascending the cliff that makes the Lu state small, you discern the bright silks of the white draped horse; looking over the territory of great Wu, you appreciate the precious haze between the Dipper and Ox. You dangle autumn fruits in the conversational gathering, and embellish the spring blossoms in the literary garden. In the river of discourse, you shoot flying arrows that stir

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48 Sanfen, or the “three landmark texts,” refers to ancient texts attributed to the legendary Three August Ones (sanhuang 三皇, i.e., Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神農, and Huangdi 黃帝).

49 Mengzi, 7A.24: “When Confucius ascended the eastern hill, the Lu state appeared to him small; when he ascended Mount Tai, the entire world appeared to him small” 孔子登東山而小魯, 登泰山而小天下. According to Lunheng, when Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui ascended Mount Tai, Confucius looked afar at the Changhe 閶闔 Gate of Wu state and saw a white horse being tied to the gate. He then asked Yan Hui what did he see outside the Changhe Gate. Yan Hui replied, “There is something that appears to be in the shape of bound, white silks” 有如繫練之狀. Lunheng jiaoshi, 4.170.

50 Based on the astrological correlation between terrestrial regions and celestial counterparts, the Southern Dipper and Ox are matched with the Wu state. The biography of Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300) in Jin shu records that after the Wu was conquered by the Jin, Zhang Hua observed a purple haze between the Dipper and Ox become even brighter. A diviner informed him that it was “the essence of the precious swords rising up to and pervading heaven” 寶劍之精, 上徹於天耳. Later, Zhang Hua dug up two precious swords in Yuzhang 豫章, one being Longquan 龍泉 and one being Tai’e 太阿. The haze between the Dipper and Ox disappeared soon afterwards. Jin shu, 36.1075-76.

51 The “autumn’s fruit” is a metaphor for Liu Xiangdao’s eloquence, and the “spring’s blossom” his literary talent. Sanguo zhi: “Pluck the spring blossom of the sundry Cadets, yet neglect the autumn fruit of the Household Aide” 採庶子之春華, 忘家丞之秋實. Sanguo zhi, 12.383.

52 Alludes to Wang Yan’s 王衍 (256-311) comment on Guo Xiang 郭象 (?-312): “When Kuo Hsiang converses, it’s as if he were tilting the Yellow River to drain its waters; it pours and pours, but is never exhausted” 郭子玄語義如懸河寫水, 注而不竭. Shihuo xinyu jiaojian, 2.241; Mather, A New Account of Tales of the World, 236.
The beginning sentence applauds Liu Xiangdao’s cultivation, his devotion to the classical canon and the texts of the nine schools. The first half of it skillfully brings together two classical allusions within ten words (excluding the hypermetrical expression *zhiruo*): one from Yang Xiong’s *Fayan*: “The hill intends to imitate the mountain yet cannot reach the height of the mountain” 丘陵學山，不至於山, and the other from the *Shijing*, Mao 218 (“Chexia” 車箏): “Look up to the lofty mountain; / Walk on the grand walkway” 高山仰止, 景行行止. Luo Binwang then suggests the comparability between Liu Xiangdao and four other ancient figures: Confucius’s favorite disciple Zilu, the erudite official scholar Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300), the master of pure conversation Guo Xiang 郭象 (?-312), and the talented poets Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300). By drawing allusions from various sources and elegantly presenting them as an integral entity, Luo Binwang praises Liu Xiangdao’s learning and literary talent in a way that displays his own learning and literary talent.

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53 It was through the White Horse Ferry that Han troops entered into Chu, which was then under the control of Xiang Yu 项羽 (232-202 BCE).
54 Alludes to Zhong Rong’s *鐘嶸* (?-518) comment on Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300): “The literary talent of Lu Ji is as vast as the sea, and that of Pan Yue is as vast as the Yangtzu River” 陸才如海, 潘才如江. *Shipin jizhu* 詩品集注, ed. Cao Xu 曹旭 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 1.141.
55 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.227. *Zhuangzi*: “The pearl worth a thousand pieces of gold could only have come from under the chin of the black dragon who lives at the bottom of the ninefold deeps” 夫千金之珠, 必在九重之淵而驪龍頷下. *Zhuangzi jiishi*, 10.1061.
56 *Fayan jishu*, 2.31.
The four passages we have just discussed form only one of the three major components of Luo Binwang’s praises of Liu Xiangdao. In general, Luo Binwang here shows off his mastery of classical texts and writing skill by adopting the form of parallel prose, applying as many allusions as possible and employing the most polished language. The same can be said of his other self-recommendation letters, even when the recipients were not as prominent as Liu Xiangdao. By comparison, many other Tang literati’s elegantly phrased self-recommendation letters would suddenly appear “plain.” Such a display of literary talent allows Luo Binwang to amaze and prove his merit to his prospective patron, thus having getting a better chance to obtain the patronage he asks for.

Luo Binwang must have put a lot of effort into those expressions and been quite satisfied with them; because he uses them in different letters. Take for example some of the expressions Luo Binwang uses to praise Liu Xiangdao:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Shang Silie Taichangbo qi”</th>
<th>Luo Binwang’s other letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>道叶神交, 黃石授帝師之略; 德攸天縱, 白星降王輔之精.</td>
<td>德攸天縱, 白星降王輔之精; 道叶神交, 黃石授帝師之略.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>至若峰秀學山, 列三墳而仰止; 潟清筆海, 委九流以朝宗. 登小魯之岩, 辨練光於曳馬; 臨大吳之國, 識寶氣於連牛. 垂秋實於談叢, 綢春花於詞苑.</td>
<td>若乃峰秀學山, 列三墳而仰止; 潟清筆海, 委九流以朝宗. 登小魯之岩, 辨練光於曳馬; 臨大吳之國, 識寶氣於連牛. 垂秋實於翰林, 綹春花於文苑.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>道煥鶴池, 映桃花而曳綬.</td>
<td>道映鳳池, 綹桃花而曳綬.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>拂留皇鑒, 忠簡帝心. 列職春宮, 標離光於青殿;</td>
<td>拂留皇鑒, 忠簡帝心. 列職春宮, 標離光於青殿;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57 For renderings of these expressions, please see the translation of “Shang Silie Taichangbo qi” in appendix (3).
58 “Shang Li Shaochangbo qi” (Letter Presented to Junior Executive Attendant Li), *Luo Linhai ji jianzhu*, 7.234.
These expressions are not all the examples we have. For instance, almost each and every line of Luo Binwang’s “Shang Liang Mingfu qi” 上梁明府啟 (Letter Presented to District Magistrate Liang) shows up in various of his other self-recommendation letters. This phenomenon suggests that Luo Binwang must have had a repository of expressions specifically for use in self-recommendation letters. When required, some of those expressions—like “textual building blocks,”—were selected from the repository and placed into a new self-recommendation letter, with necessary alterations. This, at a practical level, probably saved Luo Binwang much time. To be sure, the “composite nature” is an important feature of early Chinese text, and literature has always been developed within established traditions, yet using the same expressions repeatedly in one’s own work is not a desirable quality. It is therefore worthwhile to notice that Luo Binwang, one of the most highly regarded poets of his day, often repeats himself in his self-recommendation letters. And he was the only Tang literatus, of whom I am aware, to have done so. On a practical level, this phenomenon might suggest that Luo Binwang’s self-recommendation letters were not widely

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61 “Shang Lianchaoshi qi” (Letter Presented to Investigation Commissioner), Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 8.263.
62 “Shang Yanzhou cishi qi” (Letter Presented to Prefect of Yanzhou), Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.237.
63 “Shang Li Shaochangbo qi,” Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.235.
64 “Shang Li Shaochangbo qi,” Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 7.235.
65 The Yongle dadian 永樂大典 version of this letter. Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 8.277-79.
circulated at that time, at least not by Luo Binwang himself. Had the fact that he used identical words to commend different recipients been broadly noticed, Luo Binwang would have risked offending his potential patrons and being ridiculed for lacking literary talent.

Wang Bo has a few letters, such as “Shang Ming Yuanwai qi” (Letter Presented to Supernumerary Esquire Ming), and “Shang Jiangzhou Shangguan Sima shu” (Letter Presented to Administrator Equestrian Shangguan of Jiangzhou), where his praises of individual addressees come close to those of Luo Binwang’s.67 These two letters, according to Zhang Zhilie, were written in 671, when Wang Bo came back from Sichuan to take an imperial examination in Chang’an.68 If this was the case, then the elaborate praises of the recipients are well expected, as Wang Bo was now in desperate need for recommendation. Nevertheless, it may be misguided to indiscriminately make such a connection. During the same period of time, in his letter to Pei Xingjian, who held a more important official than Supernumerary Esquire Ming and Administrator Equestrian Shangguan, Wang Bo directly criticizes Pei:

I humbly observe that when evaluating a candidate’s qualification for a post, your lordship typically places his competence in writing shi and fu first and foremost. I sincerely fear that for your lordship to simply base the appointment decisions on a person’s skills with ink and writing brush69 or the candidate selections merely on a person’s competence with bamboo strips and tablets70 is ultimately insufficient to reap the choicest pickings of the crop or to appraise the truly lofty and worthy. In the end, the bones of an extraordinary steed are forever left rotting away in vain and the true dragon will never descend. Those who show off

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69 Namely, compose literary writings such as shi and fu.
70 Namely, draft official memorandums and documents.
talents and parade intelligence hurry and scurry in the corrupted custom, whereas those who embrace genuineness and harbor purity are anxious and unsettled at their low positions.71

As Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel, Pei Xingjian was responsible for evaluating candidates’ qualification and placing the best of them in government posts. However, according to Wang Bo, Pei Xingjian fails to do so by overemphasizing the value of literary skill, especially the ability to compose shi and fu. This criticism, however, is not meant to discomfit Pei Xingjian, since it is very unlikely that Wang Bo would intend to offend the Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel. Its primary aim is rather to show Pei Xingjian his excellent qualities, that he has a perceptive understanding of political affairs and is not afraid of pointing out the mistakes of his superiors. Therefore, when indicating Pei Xingjian’s mistake, Wang Bo’s tone is quite soft, especially by using expressions like “I humbly observe” and “I sincerely fear.” In short, that Wang Bo criticizes Liu Xiangdao does not mean that he “does not consider sufficiently and what he writes and to whom,”72 to quote Cicero’s complain of the irritating tone adopted by M. Brutus in their epistolary exchanges; rather, the criticism of the recipient was a rhetorical strategy the author adopts.

The same can be said of his criticism of Liu Xiangdao. In the same year when Luo Binwang presented his “Shang Silie Taichangbo qi” to Liu Xiangdao, Wang Bo also presented his self-recommendation letter to Liu, who held the position of Right Prime Minister from the eighth month

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71 Wang Zi'an ji zhu, 4.131-32. Except for the last sentence, the translation largely follows Warner’s rendering in “A Splendid Patrimony,” 130.

to the twelfth month of that year. In his “Shang Liu Youxiang shu” 上劉右相書 (Letter Presented to Right Prime Minister Liu), Wang Bo politely points out four aspects that Liu Xiangdao “has not had a clear sight of” 未諭, and offers his opinions on the four aspects. He elaborates his viewpoints with more than thirteen hundred words, in the style of parallel prose. The aim of these elaborate statements clearly is not to offend, but to impress. According to the Xin Tang shu, after Wang Bo presented this letter to Liu Xiangdao, Liu recommended him to the court.

The criticism of the recipient adopted by Wang Bo subsequently became an often-seen feature of High Tang self-recommendation letters. A case in point is Li Bai’s “Dai Shoushan da Meng Shaofu yiwén shū” 代壽山答孟少府移文書 (Letter to Respond to the Dispatch of District Defender Meng, in Place of Mount Shou). Mount Shou was located about sixty miles to the north of Anlu, and this letter was probably written around 727, when Li Bai was dwelling in seclusion in Mount Shou after leaving Sichuan. In this letter, “Mount Shou”—the persona assumed by Li Bai— says that he has recently read District Defender Meng’s dispatch, where Meng dispraises him for his many wonders, vilipends him for his special qualities, and refers to him as just a little mountain without name and without potency enough to be esteemed thereby. “Mount Shou” laughs at Meng’s judgment, “Considering these words [of yours], how exceedingly preposterous they are!” 觀乎斯言，何太謬之甚也! He then uses a long passage—two hundred and ninety seven words in total—to eloquently refute Meng’s opinion:

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73 Wang Zi'an ji zhu, 4.151-62.
74 Xin Tang shu, 201.5739.
75 The first half (from the beginning to the refutation of Meng’s dispatch) of this letter has been translated by Paul W. Kroll, and the second half by Victor Mair; see Kroll, “Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in High T’ang,” T’ongPao 84 (1998), 91-4; Mair, “Li Po’s Letter in Pursuit of Political Patronage,” 141-42.
76 Dispatch, or proclamation, is a prose genre, usually of official nature, which was meant to be circulated and to effect a change of opinion or behavior. However, the dispatch written by District Defender Meng, if there was one, must have been a parody of the genre.
77 Li Bai quanjji jianzh huishi jiping, 26.3977.
How could you not know that “the nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth; the named was the mother of the myriad creatures”? Furthermore, the wise man Master Zhuang used to have some additional discourses, where he concludes that the meager quail does not envy the Peng bird, and the tip of an autumn hair is comparable to Mount Tai. When considering from this point of view, then how can there be any differences between the big and the small! Moreover, you blame this mountain for hiding away the treasure of the state, concealing the talented men of the world, and therefore making His Highness put up signs in roads, set fire to mountains, and break open a way [through woods], only to seek them in vain. This isn’t a perceptive remark…In the past, the Grand Duke was of profound worthiness, and Fu Yue brilliant virtue. One dwelled on the bank of Wei River, and the other hid in the Fu Cliff that marked the border of Yu and Guo states. Yet in the end one was revealed in a foretoken, and the other was perceived in a dream. Both cases indicate that

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78 Laozi 1: “The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth; the named was the mother of the myriad creatures” 無名天地之始, 有名萬物之母. Lau, Lao Tzu, 5.

79 In “Xiaoyao you” 逍遙遊 (Free and Easy Wondering), Zhuangzi tells the story of a meager quail laughing at the large Peng bird for flying high in the sky. In the story, Zhuangzi ridicules the ignorance of the meager quail; Li Bai here clearly has changed Zhuangzi’s idea. Zhuangzi jishi, 1.14.

80 In “Qiwu lun” 齊物論 (Discussion on Making all Things Equal), Zhuangzi sophistically argues that “there is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is little” 天下莫大於秋豪之末, 而大山為小. Zhuangzi jishi, 1.79.

81 In the early third century, Sun Hui 孫惠 sought to protect himself from court intrigues by hiding out in a mountain. The Prince of Gonghai 東海王 forced him out of retirement by posting “wanted” placards for him. Jìn shù, 71.1883. Ruan Yu 阮瑀, seeking to avoid a summons to court from Cao Cao, also hid in a mountain. Cao Cao had Ruan’s mountain burnt out, in order to acquire him. Sāngyuǎn zhì, 21.600. The prototype of burning out a mountain to force a recluse into official service is Duke Wen of Jin, who set fire to Mount Mian 绵 in order to find Jī Zìtuī 介子推. Xīnxu, 7.14b-15a.

82 One time, when the Marquis of the West (xībó hòu 西伯侯), Ji Chang 姬昌, later known as King Wen of Zhou, was about to go hunting, he conducted a divination, which told him that he was going to obtain a great councilor. During his hunt, the marquis met Lù Shāng as expected, who was then fishing on the bank of the Wei River. He recognized Lù Shāng’s talent and made Lù Shāng his councilor. Lù Shāng then assisted Ji Chang and his son Ji Fá 姬發 (known as King Wu of Zhou) to found the Zhou dynasty. Shìjì, 32.1477-81.

83 Fu Yue used to be a slave and was building walls in Fu Cliff. One day, King Wuding 武丁 of Yin dreamt of a sage, and tried to find the sage in real life. Afterwards, Fu Yue was recognized and appointed as the Prime Minister, who helped King Wuding build a great dynasty. Shìjì, 3.102.

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when a king’s virtue was inwardly consistent with the Way of Heaven, how would he undergo the trouble of seeking the worthy men?84

吾子豈不聞乎? 無名為天地之始，有名為萬物之母…且達人莊生常有餘論，以為斥鷃不羨於鵬鳥，秋毫可並於太山。由斯而談，何小大之殊也? 又怪於諸山藏國寶，隱國賢，使吾君傍道燒山，披訪不獲，非通談也…昔太公大賢，傅說明德，棣渭川之水，藏虞虢之巖，卒能形諸兆瞑，感乎夢想。此則天道闇合，豈勞乎搜訪哉?

Allusions to the Laozi, Zhuangzi, Sun Hui 孫惠, Ruan Yu 阮瑀, Lü Shang 吕尚, and Fu Yue 傅說 are deftly weaved together and elegantly presented in quasi-parallel prose. As with Wang Bo’s criticism of his recipient, “Mount Shou’s” refutation of the District Defender serves not to embarrass Meng, but to demonstrate the author’s literary skill and insightfulness.

In fact, whether District Defender Meng had written a dispatch of Mount Shou is arguable; Li Bai might have merely made up an imaginary dispatch so that he could, by refuting it, display his knowledge and literary talent. If this was the case, Li Bai probably got his inspiration from a literary genre labeled as duwen 對問 (responses to questions)85 or shelun 設論86 (hypothetical discourses).

Starting from the “Da ke nan” 答客難 (Repying to a Guest’s Objections) of the Western Han scholar Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 BCE), a typical duwen or shelun consists of an imaginary critic’s questioning of the author’s failed political career and an elaborate reply by the author.87 Clearly, the author had imagined the questions, and used them as a ruse so that he can make a

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84 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jipin, 26.3977-79. This fragmentray translation is my own; for a complete translation of the entire passage, see Kroll, “Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in High T’ang,” 93-4.
86 Wencuan, 27.
87 For a discussion of this type of wiring, see Dominik Declercq, Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China (Leiden: Brill, 1998).
statement about himself. District Defender Meng’s dispatch is comparable to an imaginary critic’s questions, so is Li Bai’s response in place of Mount Shou to the author’s reply.

Unlike Wang Bo and Li Bai, Wang Lingran appears to have intended to offend his recipient. When holding low positions of “Court Gentleman for Ceremonial Service and Editor of the Establishment of the Crown Prince” 將仕郎守太子校書郎, he wrote a self-recommendation letter addressed to Zhang Yue 張說 (667-731), the most prominent official of the time. According to Wang Lingran, by the time he writes this letter, Zhang Yue has been re-appointed as the Prime Minister, after Zhang had “taken offices among southern hills” 在官於巴邱 and “led the armies in the northern wild” 統軍於沙朔。88 These two lines refer to the years when Zhang Yue was serving a serious of provincial posts which took him successively to Xiangzhou 相州 (Henan), Yuezhou 岳州 (Hunan) and Jingzhou (Hubei), and overseeing military operation on the northeast frontier. Accordingly, Wang Lingran’s letter must have been written sometime between 723, when Zhang Yue was restored to his former position as Secretariat Director, to 727, when he was forced to resign.89 In his letter, which is titled “Lun jianshu” 論薦書 (Letter on Recommendation), Wang Lingran boldly blames Zhang Yue for causing the sufferings of the state, and asks Zhang Yue to give up his position:

I, who am abject, have heard that if the one in the position [of Prime Minister] is extolled for bringing about harmony and order, then the Way will be consistent with both yin and yang, and that if the four seasons are not in disorder, then the common people will have no resentment. How could there have not been any snow since the beginning of last winter or

88 Quan Tang wen, 294.12b.
any rain till the end of this spring? How could all the wheat sprouts, while they are still green, wither away day by day, and all the mulberry leaves, before autumn, turn yellow and fall? How could those who are bewildered and dull-witted be left to hue and cry, grieve and resent, whereas your lordship is warmly dressed in your mansion-house and sated with food at court? I am a human being between heaven and earth, and for my part, I resent your lordship just the same as all the other people...His Highness set up the Hanlin Academy to attract and take in talented men. Yet you, who are overbearing toward all beings and arrogant with other people for the wealth and rank you possess, have failed entirely to recommend even one virtuous person or worthy man since you took the position as Prime Minister. Emperor Gaozu of Han once said, “How can the worthy men today be any less remarkable than the ancients?” When there are worthy men yet you fail to recognize them, your lordship’s lack of awareness is manifested; when you have recognized worthy men yet fail to put them to use, your lordship’s weakness is manifested. Because of that, since the tenth month of last year till the fifth month of this year, there hasn’t been any rain: clouds that had just accumulated scattered immediately, and the rain that was about to fall quickly ceased. This apparently is the punishment on you for failing to avail yourself of virtue...Now that the common people are on the verge of starving to death, why don’t you recommend a worthy man to replace yourself, cede your position and ask for the emperor’s permission to return home?

僕聞位稱燮理者, 則道合陰陽; 四時不愆, 則百姓無怨。豈有冬初不雪, 春盡不雨, 麦苗繼日而青死, 桑葉未秋而黃落, 蠻蠻迷愚, 啼嗷愁怨, 而相公溫服甲第, 飽食廟堂? 僕則天地之一生人, 亦同人而怨相公也...主上開張翰林, 引納才子。公以傲物而富貴驕人，

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90 In a 197 BCE decree issued by Emperor Gaozu to seek talented men: “How can the intelligence and ability of the worthy men today be any less remarkable than that of the ancients?” 今天下賢者智能豈特古之人乎? Han shu, 1.71.
Zhang Yue, traditionally regarded as a virtuous minister, is, according to Wang Lingran, self-conceited and unable or unwilling to recommend worthy men to the court. Wang Lingran even specifically points out that Zhang Yue’s act is against the will of Emperor Xuanzong, who, after ascending the throne, set up Hanlin Academy to attract talented men. Zhang Yue is then held to be responsible for the abnormal weather since the tenth month of the previous year, which has resulted in crop failures and the suffering of the people, whereas Zhang Yue himself is said to still lead an extravagant life. Since Zhang Yue isn’t doing his job properly, Wang Lingran asks him to resign and cede his position to a worthy person. That worthy person Wang Lingran has in mind is Su Ting (670-727), the famous official scholar who, together with Zhang Yue, has been hailed as one of the two “grand virtuosos” (dashoubi 大手筆) of literary composition, and who, according to Wang Lingran, used to promote Zhang Yue and is now holding only a provincial position in Yizhou.

Wang Lingran’s criticism is as harsh as can be, which brings up the suspicion if Zhang Yue was in fact the targeted reader of this letter. In the letter, Wang Lingran does directly address Zhang Yue, as is shown in the salutation: “I, Wang Lingran, Court Gentleman for Ceremonial Service and Editor of the Establishment of the Crown Prince, respectfully bow twice and present this letter to Your Excellency, the Prime Minister and the Duke of Yan” 將仕郎守太子校書郎王泠然謹再拜上書

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91 Quan Tang wen, 294.13b-4a.
92 Xin Tang shu, 125.4402.
However, since the posts he held were extremely low positions, both ranked lower 9b, it was very unlikely that Wang Lingran could actually have written such a letter to Zhang Yue. Furthermore, different from all the other Tang self-recommendation letters, the title of this letter does not directly mention its recipient. If this title was decided by the author himself, then Wang Lingran probably intended to avoid the impression that his writing was meant for Zhang Yue; if the title was added by a later compiler, then the compiler must have realized the difficulty of labeling the text as a letter written specifically for and presented to Zhang Yue. In either case, it shows that, “Zhang Yue” probably is only a fictitious recipient of this letter.

Wang Lingran was very likely to have written this letter to vent his discontent with Zhang Yue, not only with regard to Zhang’s unwillingness to recommend worthy men, but also his appointment of certain people who don’t deserve the positions they have, or who haven’t followed the normal path. He criticizes Zhang Yue for having knowingly permitted the advancement of such persons instead of adhering to “customary practices” 舊貫. So he says, “In general, people in the positions of Editor and Proofreader should not, as a rule, be promoted to a position in a ‘metropolitan’ (i.e., specially ranked) district” 凡校書正字，一例不得入畿, for that’s “outside” the usual career path/sequence for someone in the position of Editor or Proofreader. He says that Zhang Yue ought to know this, since it has been this way ever since the Zhenguan era, and Zhang Yue himself used to hold the position of Editor of the Establishment of the Crown prince. But the current vice-director of the Ministry of Personnel, Yang Tao 楊滔, who can’t read and has no regards for talented men, sent out an order last winter (which corresponds with the time of the beginning of the draught Wang Lingran mentions) that henceforth there would no longer be any distinction between officials

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93 Quan Tang wen, 294.12b.
94 In the Tang, all together there were six different types of Editors, among which Editor of the Palace Library was the most prominent, ranked upper 9a. For more discussion on the Editor, see Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和, Táng dài jī cēng wén guān 唐代基層文官 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 13-69.
95 Quan Tang wen, 294.16b.
“within [the pure stream]” or “outside it.” So with regard to the idea of “not being promoted to a position in a ‘metropolitan’ district,” we can see that now an Editor or Proofreader doesn’t even compare in status with a local constable 十鄉縣尉, and a mingjing 明經 or jingshi 留名 graduate doesn’t compare with someone in the imperial guards 三衛. He then asks Zhang Yue “where is the [expected] differentiation, now that you accept this change or inflation [of tradition]?” 相公復此改張,甄別安在？

As an Editor and jinshi 留名 graduate himself, this change in the bureaucratic promotion system must have greatly frustrated Wang Lingran; he therefore wrote this composition in the form of self-recommendation letter to express his resentment towards Zhang Yue, who should have stopped this change. Wang Lingran might have circulated this letter among a small circle, to share his feelings with some intimate friends who were able to relate to his anger. This being the case, it shows that then by the time of High Tang the self-recommendation letter was likely to have become a literary genre that could be applied quite freely, no longer restricted to an epistle presented to its designated addressee. Breaking off genre conventions is a feature also seen in many occasional prefaces, as is discussed in the previous chapter.

The Self-display of the Speaker

For a self-recommendation letter to work, its author also has to prove in the letter that he is worth the patronage he is asking for, hence the need for self-display. Compared to their self-display in the occasional preface, Tang literati’s self-display in the self-recommendation letter is largely about “advertisements for myself” and they had advertised themselves in several different ways. Among them, Luo Binwang is genius at praising himself under the assumed veil of modesty. A snippet of his

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96 Quan Tang wen, 294.17a.
self-display in “Shang Yanzhou Cui Zhangshi qi” 上兖州崔長史啟 (Letter Presented to Administrator Cui of Yanzhou) will sufficiently prove his artistry:

I, Binwang, only have capacity as small as a jar or bucket, and talent as insignificant as a northern wren or mosquito. Slantingly surrounded by the paulownia trees of Mount Yi, I collect their profound virtue that is comparable to the bright sun; closely neighboring the dwarf bamboos of Fen River, I aspire to their pure uprightness that lasts throughout time. With a place merely enough to accommodate my knees, I am as exhausted as [Yan Hui] who lived on one ladleful of water in Qufu; using my elbow for a pillow in a small plot of land, I am as destitute as [Sima Xiangru] who had nothing but bare walls in Chengdu.

Luo Binwang begins his self-advertisement with a self-effacement, claiming to be as worthless as a trivial utensil and as insignificant as a petty insect. He then turns to imply his merit, not by directly comparing himself to the paulownia trees of Mount Yi and the dwarf bamboo of Wen River,

97 According to Kong Anguo’s 孔安國 commentary to Shangshu, the paulownia trees growing on the south side of Mount Yi were the perfect material for making zithers. Shangshu zhengyi, 6.172. See also note 172.
98 “Sheng fu” 帝賦 (Fu on the Reed-organ): “Of the treasures of Zou and Lu, / There is the unique dwarf bamboo on the north side of Wen River” 鄒魯之珍, 有汶陽之孤筱焉. Pan Huangmen ji jiaozhu 潘黃門集校注, ed. Wang Zengwen 王增文 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 2002), 110.
99 Lunyu 6.11: “The Master said, ‘How admirable Hui is! Living in a mean dwelling on a bowlful of rice and a ladleful of water is a hardship most men would find intolerable, but Hui does not allow this to affect his joy, How admirable Hui is!’” 子曰: “賢哉回也! 一簞食, 一瓢飲, 在陋巷. 人不堪其憂, 回也不改其樂. 賢哉回也!” Lau, The Analects, 82.
100 The Chinese expression for “a small plot of land” is wumu 五畝. The area of mu, or Chinese “acre,” varied at different times. In the Tang, approximately eight mu consisted one Western acre; five mu is barely half an acre, a tiny plot of land. This line refers to Lunyu 7.16: “In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found” 飯疏食飲水, 曲肱而枕之, 樂亦在其中矣. Lau, The Analects, 88.
101 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu 卢琳海集注, 7.246-47. Alludes to the well known story that when Sima Xiangru eloped with Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 to his home, “only four walls stood there” 徒四壁立. Shiji, 117.3000.
but by expressing his aspiration for the “profound virtue” and “pure uprightness” embodied by the
two exemplary plants. In so doing, Luo Binwang not only keeps his assumed modesty, but also
cleverly praises Administrator Cui by comparing him to the virtuous paulownia trees and the dwarf
bamboo. This sublet compliment must have delighted Administrator Cui. After that, Luo Binwang
proceeds to show his destitute situation, that he lives on one ladleful of water in a place merely
enough to accommodates his knees, and he uses his elbow for a pillow in a small plot of land
surrounded by bare walls. This, on the surface, appears to be a desperate cry for help; but when
taking into consideration that he is likening his situation to that of the virtuous Yan Hui and the
talented Sima Xiangru, the implied message—that he is comparable to the two ancient figures—is
not difficult to notice. Such assumed veil of modesty allows Luo Binwang to show his recipient his
virtue without leaving the undesirable impression of being presumptuous.

Like Luo Binwang, Chen Zi’ang was also very good at displaying his merit by assuming a
modest tone. When being requested for a writing sample by a Director Xue 薛, Chen Zi’ang wrote a
self-recommendation letter titled “Shang Xue Ling wenzhang qi” 上薛令文章啟 (Letter to Present
Literary Writings to Director Xue). Similar to Wang Bo, who in his letter to Pei Xingjian confesses
that his literary skill isn’t worthy of Pei’s appreciation, Chen Zi’ang apologizes for his lack of literary
genius, saying that “I, extremely incompetent, barely understand how to be a writer” 某實鄙能, 未窺作者, and “I surely lack the mind of Ruan Ji” 某無阮藉之思.102 Yet at the same time, he points
out the inferiority of literature:

Similarly, that the inferior skill of literary composition was entirely disregarded by the noble
worthies, and that the insignificant ability of wielding the knife and writing brush wasn’t

102 Chen Zi’ang ji jiaozhu, 10.1482.
approved by the wise men of the past—isn’t this because the great masters and gentlemen believed that literature was inferior to the Way and virtue?¹⁰³

然則文章薄技，固棄於高賢；刀筆小能，不容於先達。豈非大人君子，以為道德之薄哉?

By calling literary skill “inferior” and “insignificant,” and regarding literature as inferior to the Way, Chen Zi’ang subtly turns his confession into a self-praise, that is, he, being on the side of the Way, possesses more important virtues. This point is made particularly clear when he refers to Yang Xiong’s criticism of *fu* composition,¹⁰⁴ thus to expresses his regret for letting his talent be wasted in literary work.¹⁰⁵ He therefore suggests that instead of merely writing literary pieces, he aspires to and is capable of achieving true greatness, which means to take official position and contribute to the government of the state. In this self-display, Chen Zi’ang sounds apologetic and barely says one word to directly advertise himself, yet the message that he is virtuous and talented is unmistakably conveyed.

A different way of self-display is to proclaim one’s merit openly. Dongfang Shuo had already done so in his self-recommendation letter presented to Emperor Wu of Han.¹⁰⁶ Unlike Dongfang Shuo’s “artless” method,¹⁰⁷ most Tang literati’s self-display are quite ornate. Wang Bo, when advertising himself to Supernumerary Esquire Ming, first speaks highly of his family tradition in the style of parallel prose:

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¹⁰³ *Chen Zi’ang ji jiaozhu*, 10.1482.
¹⁰⁵ “In vain I regret that my effort has been wasted on licentious, extravagant [compositions], with my name being involved with entertainers, and that I have long been in the crowd of young boys, without any hope of joining the group of grown-ups” 徒恨迹荒淫麗，名陷俳優，長為童子之羣，無望壯夫之列. *Chen Zi’ang ji jiaozhu*, 10.1482.
¹⁰⁶ For a translation of this letter, see Declercq, *Writing Against the State*, 22.
¹⁰⁷ Declercq, *Writing Against the State*, 22.
This humble person [comes from a family] whose lineage began with a lofty sign, and whose profound virtue has been handed down from generation to generation. My family continues the transcendent clan of the Crown Prince, and is derived from the remote lineage of the [Qin] general. When vehicles of vermilion wheels were in the Han, my ancestors ranked among the lofty gentlemen of the Three Tribunals; when carriages of blue canopies drifted over the Yangtze River, my family, together with the seven clans, followed King Ping of Zhou. Thanks to the bequeathed manners and previous honors, the pure foundation of my family is still preserved; because of the ancestors’ virtues and the family’s reputation, each generation has descendants whose eyes gave free rein to [the Five Classics]. Since Jinling was vanquished in the east, and jade-horses ran to the west, the most remarkable men have prominently risen [from my family], and refined Ruists appeared successively. Singing like a phoenix on the eastern slope, [they made] the manifestation of haze and rain magnificent; cavorting like dragons through the Milky Way, [they rendered] a boundlessly wide momentum to rivers and mountains. Their distinguished name and refined

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108 The transcendent immortal Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 was said to have been the Crown Prince of King Ling 靈 (r. 571-545 BCE) of Zhou.

109 Probably refers to Wang Jian 王剪, a famous general of the Qin state.

110 According to the “Yufu zhi” 與服志 (Monograph on Carriages and Clothes) of Hou Han shu, the carriages for the emperor and princes had vermilion wheels and blue canopies. Hou Han shu, 29.3644, 3647. “When vehicles with vermilion wheels were in the Han,” an uncommon expression itself, indicates the rule of the Han royal family.

111 This line probably refers to Wang Yin 王殷 who served as the Governor of Zhongshan 中山 in the Han. “The Three Tribunals” is a collective reference to three agencies, the Imperial Secretariat, the Censorate, and the Tribunal of Receptions.

112 This line refers to the incident that the Jin court, after the uprising of the Five Barbarians, fled to the south of the Yangtze River. “King Ping of Zhou” is a metaphor for Sima Rui 司馬睿 (r. 318-323), Prince of Langya 琅琊, who was enthroned in 318. According to Du Yu, when King Ping of Zhou moved the capital to Luoyang, officials from seven clans followed him. Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie, 15.879 (Xiang 10).

113 Alludes to the Eastern Han official-scholar Zhou Ju 周舉 (105-149) who was reputed for his erudition; the expression that “Zhou Xuanguang gives free rein to the Five Classics” 五經縱橫周宣光 was widely circulated at his time. Hou Han shu, 61.2023.

114 The overthrow of the Chen 陳 dynasty (557-589).

115 “Jade horses” is a metaphor for worthy ministers.

116 Shishuo xinyu: “When Chang Hua had seen Ch’u T’ao, he said to Lu Chi, ‘With you and your younger brother, Yün, cavorting like dragons through the Milky Way, and with Ku Jung singing like a phoenix on the eastern slope, I began to think the treasure of the southeast had already been exhausted, but now unexpectedly I’ve seen it once more in
reputation gained prominence and fame in the northern wilds; their ornate caps and decorated couches, same as the southern airs, could not compete with [the former].

A noble family lineage was a source of pride for Tang literati. Wang Bo’s family belonged to the Wang clan of Longmen 龍門, which, according to Wang Bo, is bestowed with a “lofty sign” and “profound virtue.” It was allegedly descended from Prince Jin (better remembered as the immortal Wang Ziqiao), and had been blessed with many virtuous family members, some of whom used to hold important official positions. However, among all of his ancestors, the most important role model for Wang Bo was his grandfather, the “refined Ruist” Wang Tong 王通 (584-617), posthumously known as Wenzhongzi 文中子. An idiosyncratic Confucian master of the Sui, who devoted himself to expanding the classical canon and repeatedly declined the court’s invitations to

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118 Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 4.137-38. Zuozhuan: “The men of Jin heard about the Chu army attacking Zheng. The music master Kuang said, ‘No harm will be done. I have sung music to northern airs and also to southern airs several times. The northern airs cannot prevail, for they are filled with the sounds of death. Chu will certainly accomplish nothing.” 晉人聞有楚師, 師曠曰: “不害. 吾驟歌北風, 又歌南風. 南風不競, 多死聲. 楚必無功.” Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie, 16.947 (Xiang 18). Zuo Tradition, 1059. In ancient times, musical notes were tied to military movements, and one form of divination involved listening to the reverberation of musical notes to predict the fate of military endeavors.

119 For an official account of the history of the Wang clan of Taiyuan 太原, a branch of which was the Wang clan of Longmen, see “Zaixiang shixi biao” 宰相世系表 (Genealogy of the Grand Councilors) in Xin Tangshu 72.2602. For a discussion of Wang Bo’s ancestry and the history of the Wang clan of Longmen, see Ding Xiang Warner, A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), 14-5 and 131-35.
take office, Wang Tong had a profound influence on Wang Bo. Therefore, similar to his stance in the poem “Zhuo bi woxi” (Illustrious is My Lineage), Wang Bo here praises his exemplary ancestors “not so much on the basis of their rank or achievements in service but for their reputed unfaltering adherence to the dictates of conscience and the strict morality of their thought and conduct.” It is “the bequeathed manners and previous honors,” “the pure foundation of my family,” and “the ancestors’ virtue and the family’s reputation” that make Wang Bo most proud. For that reason, the official positions his ancestors used to hold are compared to the “southern airs,” which cannot compete with the “northern airs,” which signifies his virtuous family tradition already started “in the northern wilds.”

Being a descendant of a family with a well-preserved legacy has long been viewed as a valuable merit. Therefore, by proudly showing that he comes from a family where wealth and power have always been regarded as inferior to moral cultivation and classical teaching, Wang Bo has already demonstrated his own virtue. However, he does not stop here but continues to sing more direct praise of himself:

As Taiqiu [Magistrate] Chen [Shi] accumulated goodness, [the imperial gifts of] lambs and wild geese formed a group [in front of his family]; because of the lingering fragrance of Chariot and Horse General Xie [Xuan], [the Xie family, blessed with descendants as pure as]...
eupatorium and sweet-flag, never declined.\textsuperscript{124} Hurrying across the courtyard to conform to [my father’s] instruction,\textsuperscript{125} I sing respectfully the poem of the vermilion calyx,\textsuperscript{126} standing up from the mat to attend upon and please my parents, I still hold to the family undertaking of the blue chest.\textsuperscript{127}

陳太丘之積善，羔雁成羣；謝車騎之餘芳，蘭蓀不替。趨庭洽訓，共歌朱萼之篇；避席承歡，猶守青箱之業。

While comparing his ancestors to the virtuous Han minister Chen Shi 陳寔 (104-187) and the renowned Eastern Jin general Xie Xuan 謝玄 (343-388), Wang Bo simultaneously identifies himself as worthy as the offspring of the Chen and Xie families. He is likely to have had in his mind the upright official scholars Chen Ji 陳紀 (129-199) and Chen Chen 陳謙, and the talented poets Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433) and Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464-499). Wang Bo then further claims that he was well educated by his father and is devoted to attending upon his parents. More importantly, he “still holds to the family undertaking of the blue chest,” that is, taking as his responsibility to carry on the glorious family tradition. The term qingxiang, although clearly alluding to “the study of the blue chest of the Wang family” 王氏青箱學, could also refer to celosia, a tropical plant with feathery spikes of

\textsuperscript{124} Xie Xuan 謝玄 (343-388), the high-regarded general who led the Jin army to victory during the famous Feishui zhizhan 濱水之战 (The Battle of Fei River), was from the prominent Xie family of the Easter Jin. The Xie family continued to see many brilliant descendants, of whom were the two well know poets Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433) and Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464-499).

\textsuperscript{125} See note 27 in chapter one.

\textsuperscript{126} According to the “Mao Preface,” the poem “Baihua” 白華 (The White Flower), which is no longer extant, sings about the pureness of the filial son. In the second of his six “Buwang shi” 補亡詩 (Supplementary Poems to the Odes), Shu Xi 束皙 (264-306) writes: “The white flower and the vermilion calyx, they scatter among the dense underbrush” 白華朱萼，被於幽薄. Wenxuan, 19.906. The “vermilion calyx” later became a metonym for a filial son.

\textsuperscript{127} Wang Zi'an ji zhu 王子安集注, 4.138. According to the biography of Wang Huaizhi 王淮之 (378-433) in Song shu, Wang Biaozhi 王彪之 (305-377), Wang Huaizhi’s grandfather, was familiar with the events of the Eastern Jin that were not included in official histories through paternal teaching and influence. As he stored up his and his ancestors’ works in a blue chest, the people of the time called his learning “the study of the blue chest of the Wang family” 王氏青箱學. Song shu, 60.1623-24.
red or pink flowers. This meaning of the word adds another layer of flavor to the parallel between the “blue chest” and the “vermilion calyx.” Unlike the somewhat frustrated Wang Bo presented in his occasional prefaces (for which, see my preceding chapter), the Wang Bo who speaks here is more self-assured.

In addition to displaying oneself within a glorious family tradition, which was exclusive to a small number of people, Tang literati often praised themselves for their writing skill, the most desirable quality of a literatus. In his “Chenqing biao” 陳情表 (Memorial to State My Feelings) presented to Emperor Gaozong, Yun Banqian 員半千 (621-714) brazenly boasts of his literary talent. He compares himself to the talented poets Cao Zhi 128 and Mei Gao 枚皋 129 both of whom were famous for their ability to compose outstanding literary compositions swiftly. He then daringly bets his head on his literary talent:

I pray Your Highness to summon three or five thousand talented men in the world, and command them to take exams with me on the composition of poetry, question essay, 130 decision, 131 memorandum, 132 memorial, 133 and discourse, 134 with a prescribed number of words. If one man manages to complete his writing before me, Your Highness is free to

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129 Mei Gao, an Eastern Han fu expert, was reputed for his swiftness in composition. Xijing zaji 西京雜記 records a related comment attributed to Yang Xiong: “When, among armies and troops, and in the middle of battle steeds, letters and calls-to-arms have to be composed swiftly and speedily, use [men like] Mei Gao” 軍旅之際，戎馬之間，飛書馳檄，用枚皋. Xijing zaji, ed. Ge Hong (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 3.22.

130 A candidate’s answer to an exam question.

131 An official document that addresses administrative or legal matters.

132 An official memorandum or report that states an opinion, usually to members of imperial family.

133 An official manifesto, usually presented to the throne, which expresses one’s opinion regarding governmental matters.

134 A genre of prose writing that examines a subject according to its structure and qualities.
behead me, grind my bones to powder, and hang [my head up on the gate] of the capital, to apologize to the talented men of the world.¹³⁵

請陛下召天下才子三五千人, 與臣同試詩, 策, 判, 賈, 表, 論, 勒字數, 定一人在臣先者, 陛下斬臣頭, 粉臣骨, 懸於都市, 以謝天下才子。

Yun Banqian may have taken his inspiration from persuaders of the Warring States. Zhang Yi 張儀 (bef. 329-309 BCE), for instance, once bet King Zhao 昭 (r. 325-251 BCE) of Qin that if King Zhao did not become the overlord of the six states after taking his advice, then “Your Highness is free to behead me and sacrifice my life to the Qin” 大王斬臣以徇於國.¹³⁶ As with Zhang Yi’s words, what Yun Banqian claims here is merely a rhetorical statement to promote himself and gain the emperor’s attention; nevertheless, one wonders how Yun Banqian would defend himself, if Emperor Gaozong had offered him the opportunity he requested yet he failed to win the first place?

Another noteworthy self-display appears in Li Bai’s “Shang Anzhou Pei Zhangshi shu.” In this letter, Li Bai begins his self-promotion by offering a brief account of his family background, scholarly accomplishments, and great ambition, as well as the long journey he had taken before he settled in Anlu. Mair suggests that after Li Bai mentions “his scholarly accomplishments,” “there is really no need for him to say anything further.”¹³⁷ Li Bai clearly did not think so, as he continues to boast of his virtues by giving long narrative accounts of vivid personal experiences. He first informs his reader that once, while journeying east to Yangzhou 揚州, he dispersed three hundred thousand ounces of gold within one year to help each and every sad and bedraggled gentleman he encountered.

¹³⁵ Quan Tang wen, 165.4b.
¹³⁶ Zhanguo ce, 3.112. The same story is associated with the philosopher Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280-233 BCE) in the “Chujian qin” 初見秦 (Meeting the King of Qin for the First Time) chapter of Hanfeizi 韓非子. Hanfeizi jijie 韓非子集解, ed. Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1.12-3.
This, Li Bai says, shows that “I make light of wealth yet am eager to give money away” 輕財好施. He then tells a story about himself and his friend Wu Zhinan 吳指南. According to Li Bai, when Wu Zhinan died on Dongting 洞庭 Lake as they were roaming about Chu 楚, he, as if having lost a brother, dressed in mourning clothes and wept bitterly. After having temporarily buried Zhinan on the side of Dongting Lake, he went to Jinling. Several years later, he came back to see Zhinan and took Zhinan’s corpse with him. He begged for money to bury Zhinan east of Echeng so that Zhinan’s soul may look at his native place Shu. Li Bai concludes that this example shows that “I always keep friends in mind and give weight to dutifulness” 存交重義. The third narrative he gives is about his reclusive life. He tells us that when he lived with the famous recluse Zhao Rui 趙蕤 (659-742) on the south side of Mount Min, he “nested on a tree” for several years, and never set foot in any towns or cities. He raised thousands of rare birds, each of which, when being called on, would come to his palms to take their food without any surprise or suspicion. The governor of Guanghan, amazed by his ability, recommended both him and Zhao Rui for an imperial exam; yet neither of them answered to the court’s calling. This, Li Bai writes, shows that “I am loftily cultivated and ignorant of the contriving mind, and embody the quality of unyieldingness” 白養高忘機, 不屈之跡也.

Li Bai here enumerates his three meritorious qualities and proves each quality with an extraordinary life story of his own, in a language that is almost free of allusions. This makes his self-display more attractive and much easier to read. The autobiographical feature of this self-display has led many scholars to take it as a mining ground for biographical information; however, if we

138 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 26.4032.
139 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 26.4032.
140 The south side of Mount Min is Mount Kuang 匡.
141 “Nest on the tree” is a metaphor for living in a simple and crude cottage.
142 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 26.4034. For a translation of Li Bai’s self-display (except for the first story), see Mair, “Li Po’s Letter in Pursuit of Political Patronage,” 135-36.
understand it as a rhetorical strategy adopted by Li Bai to more effectively display himself to a prospective patron, then whether these statements can be taken seriously is open to discussion.

To make his self-display more convincing, Li Bai sometimes sings his own praise by quoting other people. In the same letter written to Administrator Pei, Li Bai, having promoted himself with narrative accounts of personal experiences, refers to Su Ting’s and Ma Zhenghui’s 马正会 laudatory remarks on his literary talent. It is clever of Li Bai to quote Su Ting—the reputed official scholar with a great reputation for his own literary talent,— and Ma Zhenghui—the former Commander-in-chief of the commandery where the letter recipient Pei is currently serving as Administrator,— for it would be difficult for Administrator Pei to easily dismiss these two figures’ judgments. The implied message is clear: to fail to recognize Li Bai’s talent is to be in disagreement with Su Ting and Ma Zhenghui.

Li Bai clearly sounds bold in his self-display, yet “the audacious self-confidence” that he shows is not “totally out of place in a letter requesting assistance,” nor “so out of keeping with the accepted practices of the times.” Rather, an assertive self-display is a rhetorical strategy shared by many early and High Tang literati. One cannot always expect a humble tone in a Tang self-recommendation letter.

The Plea for Patronage

The aforementioned components—the justification of patronage seeking, the praise or criticism of the recipient, and the self-display of the speaker—are all parts of the argument why the recipient should do the speaker a favor. Yet in none of these does the author directly state his case,

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143 For a translation, see Mair, “Li Po’s Letter in Pursuit of Political Patronage,” 136-37.
144 Victor Mair suggests that Li Bai here portrays himself as someone “of enormous ability who has been recognized by lesser lights but not by anyone with the stature of Chief Administrator Pei” Mair, “Li Po’s Letter in Pursuit of Political Patronage,” 137. However, Su Ting and Ma Zhenghui were clearly not “lesser lights,” and it was exactly because of their high status that Li Bai refers to the two’s remarks.
145 Mair, “Li Po’s Letter in Pursuit of Political Patronage,” 133-34.
that is, to openly plea for patronage and persuade the recipient to help him. To make their plea for patronage more compelling, early and High Tang literati generally adopted three different rhetorical strategies, the first of which is the promise of requiting favors, usually stated in extravagant fashion.

The most extravagant promise is made by Yuan Shen in his “Shang Zhongshu Yao linggong Yuanchong shu” 上中書姚令公元崇書 (Letter Presented to Secretariat Director Duke Yao Yuanchong). In this letter, Yuan Shen refers to Yao Chong 姚崇 (651-721) as “Secretariat Director” and “Duke of Liang.” It means that the letter must have been written sometime between the second year of the Xiantian 先天 reign (712), when Yao Chong was enfeoffed as the Duke of Liang, and the fourth year of the Kaiyuan 開元 reign (716), when Yao Chong resigned as Secretariat Director.

Yuan Shen begins his letter by directly pledging his allegiance to Yao Chong, and asking if Yao will employ him: “I intend to entrust myself and be of use to you forever, but will you have me? If I entrust myself to you, how can I benefit you?” 參將自託於君, 長為君欲用之乎? 參之託君, 何以利君也? That the patronage one tried to seek was offered on a quid pro quo basis was clear to every Tang literatus, yet few dared or were willing to speak about it in such unequivocal terms as Yuan Shen had done. Having thrown out the rhetorical question, Yuan Shen then enumerates five different circumstances under which he would be able to offer service to Yao Chong. Under the first circumstance, that if Yao Chong enjoyed the emperor’s favor forever and lived a long and healthy life, Yuan Shen promises to travel around the entire realm to spread Yao’s good reputation:

Supposing that you always held the seal of the Prime Minister and never lost the noble rank of “Marquis of Comprehensiveness,” that the long-lived guests always fill your hall and

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146 Quan Tang wen, 396.6b. For a complete translation of this letter, see appendix (4).
147 Tonghou (Marquis of Comprehensiveness) was the highest rank of the twenty noble ranks established in the Qin.
148 Shouke (long-lived guests) refers to chrysanthemum, a symbol of longevity because it flowers in the autumn.
the gold belt always spreads across your waist, then I ask your permission to go wherever
wheels go and horses reach to shield your weak points and extol your strong points, so that
people in the world are unable to judge against you.149

若使君常懷相印，不失通侯，壽客滿堂，黃金橫帶，則參請以車軌所至，馬首所及，而掩
君之短，稱君之長，使天下之人不能議君矣．

Under the second circumstance, that if due to some untoward incident, Yao Chong was interrogated
by clerks, and put into prison with his entire family, Yuan Shen promises to offer his own life to
clear Yao Chong’s name:

Supposing that you ran into an unforeseen situation and encountered an unforeseen
misfortune, with your person interrogated by clerks and your wife and children filling the
prison, then I ask your permission to let my undistinguished body and insignificant life fall
victim to a sword to clear the wrongful charges against you, so that the deadly, cruel
punishment is unable to trap you.150

若使君當不測之時，遭不測之禍，身從吏訊，妻子滿獄，則參請以翳翳之身，渺渺之命，
伏死一劍，以白君冤，使酷殺之刑不能陷君矣．

Under the third circumstance, that if Yao Chong lost the emperor’s trust because of some officials’
slanderes and was expelled from the capital, Yuan Shen promises to confront the emperor and use
his eloquence to clarify the truth:

149 Quan Tang wen, 396.6b.
150 Quan Tang wen, 396.6b.
Supposing that you, because of others’ slanderous letters, could not make yourself known to
the emperor, and were in the end deprived of your official position, expelled from the capital,
and laughed at by the entire world, then I ask your permission to use the integrity of my
square inch of heart and my three inches of silver tongue to hold aloft righteousness,
confront the emperor to his face, and clarify the truth to the imperial court, so that the name
of “expelled minister” is unable to dishonor you.\footnote{Quan Tang wen, 396.6b-7a.}

若使君因緣讒書，不得見察，卒至免逐，為天下笑，則參請以一寸之節，三寸之舌，抗義
犯顏，解於闕廷，使逐臣之名不能汙君矣.

Under the fourth circumstance, that if Yao Chong brought upon himself other officials’ enmity so
that they assault him at court, Yuan Shen promises to defend Yao with not only honest words but
also blood shedding from his eyes:

Supposing that you incurred the grudge of those who are furious with you and the
resentment of those who stare at you angrily, and all the officials at court deliberated on
attacking you, then I ask your permission to first shut their mouths up with honest words,
and if they are not stopped, I will further smear their garments one by one with the blood I
shed from my eyes, so that the shameful humiliation is unable to disgrace you.\footnote{Quan Tang wen, 396.7a.}

君有盛忿之隙，睚眦之怨，朝廷之士，議欲侵君，則參請以直辭，先挫其口，不爾，則更
以眥血，次汙其衣，見陵之羞不能醜君矣.
Under the fifth circumstance, that if after Yao Chong passed away, his descendants were unable to provide for themselves, Yuan Shen promises to take good care of them:

Supposing that there were things that you could not foreknow, and that after you passed away the few servicemen at your gate were in dread of cold and hunger, then I ask your permission to doff my fur garment, give away my food, and do all and everything I can without the slightest negligence to support your family for my whole life, so that the concerns for your descendants are unable to bother you.¹⁵³

若使君事至不可知，千秋萬歲後而君門閭卒有饑寒之虞，則參請解參之裘，推參之哺，勉勉不怠，終身奉之，使子孫之憂不能累君矣。

Having extensively elaborated on the five aspects, Yuan Shen summarizes: “Under these five circumstances, I am able to benefit you and therefore intend to entrust myself to you. Do you approve?” 此五者，參之所以利君而自托也，君其可乎?¹⁵⁴ To demonstrate how sincere he is about his promises, Yuan Shen even swears an oath that if he dares to disappoint Yao Chong, then “let the numinous ghosts and gods execute me” 鬼神之靈共誅之.¹⁵⁵ He does sound very genuine about his promises. Yet it seems very unlikely that either Yuan Shen or Yao Chong would take this oath and the aforementioned promises too seriously. Yuan Shen says these words mainly for their rhetorical effect, that is, to show Yao Chong that there is much to gain if he does Yuan Shen a favor now. And Yao Chong, when reading this letter, must certainly have been aware of its rhetorical nature.

¹⁵³ Quan Tang wen, 396.7a.
¹⁵⁴ Quan Tang wen, 396.7a.
¹⁵⁵ Quan Tang wen, 396.7b.
Contrary to the promise of requiting favors, another often used rhetorical strategy is to make threatening remarks. Of course the degree and seriousness of the “threat” is often an empty gesture that is made mainly for rhetorical purposes. Wang Bo, for instance, threatens to go off to lead a reclusive life if the high minister Liu Xiangdao fails to recognize his virtue:

> If you do not [appreciate me], then with lotus garments\(^{156}\) and cinnamon oars, I will shake out my clothes east of the Eastern Sea; with a pavilion in the shape of mushroom and a pillar made of pine tree, I shall lay my head on the north of the Northern Mountain.\(^{157}\) How would I ever again be so trifling and trivial, and come to the gate of fame and profit?\(^{158}\)

不然，則荷裳桂楫，拂衣於東海之東；菌閣松楹，高枕於北山之北。焉復區區屑屑，踐名利之門哉?

Li Bai and Xiao Yingshi also made similar remarks, even in a very similar rhetorical frame:

> If you formidably assume a great air of authority, flare up at me, refuse to admit me into your gate, and drive me away to the long road, then I, Bai, will come before you with both knees on the ground, bow to you twice, and leave immediately. I will go west to the Sea of Qin\(^{159}\) to observe the airs of the state, and part with your lordship forever. This yellow swan

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\(^{156}\) “Lisao” 邦騷 (Encountering Sorrow): “Tailor water lilies to make the upper garment; / Gather lotuses to make the lower garment” 製芰荷以為衣兮，雛芙蓉以為裳. *Chǔzì bùzhū*, 1.17.

\(^{157}\) Namely, Mount Beimang 北芒 of Luoyang.

\(^{158}\) “Shang Liu Youxiang shu,” *Wáng Zhì’ān jí zhu*, 5.151.

\(^{159}\) *Han shu*: “There were bamboo groves in Hu and Duling, rosewoods and silkworm-thorns in Mount Zhongnan; therefore, [Qin] was referred to as the “Continental Sea” and regarded as the fertile land of the nine isles” 有鄠杜竹林，南山檀柘，號稱陸海，為九州膏腴. *Han shu*, 28.1642.
is now lifting up.\textsuperscript{160} Of the sundry princes, lords and important persons, at whose gate can’t I tap my long sword?\textsuperscript{161}

若然作威，加以大怒，不许門下，遂之長途，白即膝行於前，再拜而去，西入秦海，一觀國風，永辭君侯，黃鵠舉矣。何王公大人之門不可以彈長劍乎?

I’m afraid that you sir will still think of me as a man of the wind-blown dust, whose name isn’t equal to the position sought-after, and that my word and behaviors will contradict you, making my voice and countenance be blocked from you. Then, even though an elaphurine deer is small, if you intend to harness it with shafts and yoke, how would it behave differently from a thoroughbred steed? If I have to make a reckless move, to the gate of what fine lord can’t I drag my long robe?\textsuperscript{162}

恐足下尚以為風塵一士，名位不侔，行言致迕，音容便阻。則麋鹿雖微，欲服之轅軛，且必異於騏驥矣。挺而走險，何公之門不可曳長裾乎?

By expressing their alternatives if the hoped-for support is not forthcoming from the recipient, Wang Bo, Li Bai and Xiao Yingshi remind their prospective patrons that if they are reluctant to offer help, they will lose the allegiance of a worthy man. This rhetorical strategy also allows each poet, while begging for favor, to keep a certain degree of pride by saying that he still has other, perhaps

\textsuperscript{160} Shangjun shu 商君書: “As for the flight of a yellow swan, with one lift it goes a thousand leagues” 黃鵠之飛，一舉千里，Shangjun shu, ed. Shi Lei 石磊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 157.

\textsuperscript{161} “Shang Anzhou Pei Zhangshi shu,” Li Bai quanjí jiaozhu huishi jiping, 26.4043. Alludes to the story of Feng Xuan 馮諼. According to Zhanguo ce, Feng Xuan, a man of Qi, was in a destitute situation when he became a retainer of Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君 (?–279 BCE). In the beginning, Feng Xuan wasn’t well received, so he leaned against a pillar, tapped on his unsheathed long sword, and complained about how he was treated. Zhanguo ce, 4.395-96.

\textsuperscript{162} “Zeng Wei Siye shu,” Xiao Yingshi ji jiaojian, 3.72. Alludes to Zigao, who, before becoming the prime minister of the Chu state, “dragging his long robe, shaking out his full sleeves, wearing square clogs and holding a crude fan, went to see Lord Pingyuan” 曳長裾，振褒袖，方屐麤 безоп，見平原君。Kongcongzi jiaoshi 孔叢子校釋, ed. Fu Yashu 傅亞庶 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 4.296.
even better choices. On the other hand, in order to not actually offend their prospective patrons, Wang Bo, Li Bai, and Xiao Yingshi adopt a relatively respectful tone. Li Bai even says that he will kneel before Administrator Pei to bid farewell “with both knees on the ground.”

There were, however, some literati who at first sight appeared to be unconcerned about the possibility of repelling their prospective patrons. Wang Lingran, in his letter to a censor named Gao Changyu 高昌宇, makes a brazen threat to the recipient:

If you, an eminent lord, are always forgetful, and if it is impossible to expect you to take me as a talented man of the state, supposing that one day I, beyond your expectation, manage to stand with you shoulder to shoulder at the imperial court, and glance over at you, only then your lordship will feel regret and apologize to me. How would I, at that time, have a pleasant countenance toward you?¹⁶³

儻也貴人多㤀, 國士難期, 使僕一朝出其不意, 與君並肩臺閣, 側眼相視, 公始悔而謝僕, 僕安能有色於君乎!

Wang Lingran’s remark—that if Gao Changyu fails to promote him, he will hold a grudge against Gao when he himself comes into power—is quite blunt. This “threat” must be understood as just a rhetorical gesture, almost a joke—unless this is another letter by Wang Lingran that was not actually sent to the addressee.

A threatening remark may even be made toward the emperor. Yun Banqian, in his self-recommendation letter mentioned earlier, informs Emperor Gaozong that if the emperor abandons him, then:

¹⁶³ Wang Lingran, “Yu yushi Gao Changyu shu” 與御使高昌宇書 (Letter to the Censor, Gao Changyu), in Quan Tang wen, 294.19a.
I will, without delay, set fire to all my classic texts, and burn my writing brush and inkstone. Then, sitting among the secluded cliffs alone, I shall [wait to] see which man Your Majesty is able to recruit and which literatus Your Majesty is able to promote, without burdening myself with any entangled melancholy.¹⁶⁴

即燒詩書，焚筆硯，獨坐幽巖，看陛下召得何人？舉得何士？無任鬱結之至。

Yun Banqian’s message is clear and audacious: no one in the world is as competent as him; therefore, if the emperor misses the opportunity to promote him, then the emperor will have to suffer the loss forever. His threat to set on fire all his books, give up writing, and be ready to be indifferent to whether the emperor suffers sounds so arrogant and willful that the reader might even find it quite amusing. But Emperor Gaozong was probably not amused by it, as according to the Xin Tang shu, this memorial was ignored by the emperor.

In addition to the threat of losing the allegiance of one particular person, other High Tang literati also threatened the recipient with the possibility of losing the good opinion of all the gentlemen in the world. Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–756), sometime between 723 to 724, before he passed the jinshi exam, wrote a self-recommendation letter to Li Yuanhong 李元紘 (?–733), then the Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel.¹⁶⁵ In his “Shang Li Shilang shu” 上李侍郎書 (Letter Presented to Vice Director Li), Wang Changlin warns Li Yuanhong that if Li fails to appreciate him, then “it will make all the gentlemen in the world give up hope for your brilliant lordship” 將使天下

¹⁶⁴ Quan Tang wen, 165.4b-5a.
This is a pertinent threatening remark considering that Li Yuanhong was in a critical position of evaluating and selecting the candidates, thus his failure in promoting talented men would naturally lead to his loss of the support of the literati.

Yuan Shen made a similar point in his letter presented to Yao Chong. Having made extravagant promises to Yao Chong, as discussed above, Yuan Shen moves to tell a story about the tears of the man of Kui. As the story goes: long ago, a man of Kui, engaged in trade, was selling ice at the market. A traveller who was suffering from the heat intended to buy his ice. The man of Kui, believing that now he had the opportunity, sought to multiply his profit from the traveller. Because of that, the traveller was infuriated and left. Shortly afterwards, all the ice melted. Therefore, the man of Kui couldn’t even keep his ice. Having lost both his ice and profit, he left the market, weeping.

Yuan Shen then turns to caution Yao Chong:

Now you are sitting in the clouds in the blue sky, weighing and measuring the entire world, and all the gentlemen in the world hope to entrust themselves to you. This is indeed the time when you are selling ice and the gentlemen hope to buy ice from you. When there is profit, people are brought together. Surely it will be inappropriate to miss the opportunity! Supposing that you stubbornly halt and hesitate till the ice is melting down, then even if you still want to open your month, how can the deal be made?

今君坐青雲之中，平衡天下，天下之士皆欲附矣，此亦君賣冰之秋，而士賣冰之際。有利則合，豈宜失時？苟使君強自遲迴至冰散，則君尚欲開口，其事焉得哉？

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166 Wang Changling ji biannian jiaozhu, 5.257.
167 Namely, the position of the Prime Minister.
168 Quan Tang wen, 396.8a-b.
Using the man of Kui as a counter-example, Yuan Shen warns Yao Chong to not miss the right opportunity to sell the “ice.” That is, if Yao Chong, now holding the position of Secretariat Director and being able to influence the fate of all the literati, does not raise up any gentlemen (especially Yuan Shen himself), then when Yao Chong loses the position of the Prime Minister, all the gentlemen in the world will also abandon him. Yuan Shen, first making an extravagant pledge and then following it with a well argued threatening remark, has made a very convincing case in his self-recommendation letter, yet unfortunately, we have no evidence to show whether Yao Chong was persuaded or not.

The third rhetorical strategy that Tang literati used to plead for patronage is to argue that it is the expected responsibility of a virtuous minister to promote worthy men. In his “Shang Liu Youxiang shu,” Wang Bo reminds Liu Xiangdao that “to requite the state, nothing is better than promoting the worthy men” 報國不如進賢.\footnote{Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 5.163.} He then rhetorically asks Liu Xiangdao, who was then responsible for “bringing forth and presenting opinions on imperial decrees, promoting and demoting [the literati on] the thoroughfares of the capital” 出納王命, 升降天衢, “for your part, does your lordship realize that there are men of extraordinary talent who have been neglected in the world?” 亦復知天下有遺俊乎?\footnote{Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 5.163.} In so doing, Wang Bo makes a valid point—as the Right Prime Minister, Liu Xiangdao is expected to recommend to the court those talented men who have yet to be valued, and in this case, Wang Bo himself.

Another noteworthy example is the “Yu Fengge sheren shu” 與鳳閣舍人書 (Letter to Secretary of Phoenix Hall) of Zhang Yue. Secretary of Phoenix Hall was the title of drafters in the Secretariat during Empress Wu’s reign, so this unknown secretary was not an influential person. In this letter, Zhang Yue tell an ingenious story about Numinous Wind and Flying Flower:

\footnote{Wang Zi’an ji zhu, 5.163.}
Long ago, Flying Flower dwelled deep in the woods, drifting along gutters and gullies. [One time] he happened to came upon Numinous Wind, who emerged from the “greatest ball-of-earth” and was about to tread on the cloudy empyrean. Flying Flower, also hoping to journey there, waved his sleeves and yelled loudly, “Please take me there with you!” Numinous Wind, not knowing who Flying Flower was, stared at him angrily, scolded him and told him to go back. Flying Flower said, “Whew! You are not a perfect lord. For the one who is perfectly fair, when someone asks for his help on the basis of righteousness, he gives the help on the basis of benevolence. Even more, he uses his spare resources to assist those who have no access to realize their dream, or grants his graciousness, which costs nothing, to raise the soul that is about to fall. You do not blow excessively, and I do not advance haphazardly: this is to plant virtue. Why do you refuse to do so?” Numinous Wind said, “Allow me to accept your instruction.” Thereupon, together they moved forward while wheeling and winging, rose up while bundling the wind, passed by the Exquisite Gallery, and rested at the Jade Terrace. They swung back and forth in fragrance ten thousand leagues, and mounted upward in sunlight a thousand fathoms. Not long afterwards Numinous Wind was without complacent countenance, and Flying Flower, for his part, was without any personal considerations.

昔有飛英子處於深林, 桴轉溝壑; 適遇靈風子出於大塊, 將獵雲霄。飛英子思欲遊焉, 揚袂大呼: “請俱載矣!” 靈風子不知其人也, 怒氣視, 叱而還之。飛英子曰: “吁! 子非至公也。夫至公也者, 以義而求之, 以仁而與之; 况乃假有餘之資, 濟無階之望, 施不費之惠, 振將墜之魂。子不濫吹, 我無苟進, 此種德也, 夫何拒焉?” 靈風子曰: “請受教。” 遂

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171 “Greatest ball-of-earth” is an expression from Zhuangzi, meaning the world, nature.
172 Alludes to Shangshu: “Gao Tao applied himself to planting virtue; as his virtue descended, common people cherished him in their hearts” Shangshu zhengyi, 4.108.
173 Zhang Yue ji jiaozhu 張說集校注, ed. Xiong Fei 熊飛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 30.1423.
The relationship between the wind and the flower, with the latter depending on the former for its flight, is a clever metaphor of the conventional relationship between the patron and the protégé. The story Zhang Yue tells, however, is about “Numinous” Wind and “Flying” Flower. By this story, Zhang Yue does something more than simply argue that it is the responsibility of the Secretariat drafter to promote him. A new relationship between the patron and the protégé is suggested. According to Zhang Yue, under the principle of being “perfectly fair,” Numinous Wind does not “blow excessively” (namely, does not abusively exercise his power), nor does Flying Flower “advance haphazardly” (namely, does not frivolously seek promotion). In other words, a requirement is placed on both parties—to seek or offer patronage on the basis of “righteousness” and “benevolence.” Under this requirement, the traditional, unequal relationship between the patron and the protégés is then turned into an equal one, since each party is now equally acting in conformity with the principle of being “perfectly fair.” Therefore, even though it was Numinous Wind who made Flying Flower’s journey possible, Numinous Wind was “without complacent countenance,” and Flying Flower “was without any personal considerations.” Zhang Yue wasn’t the only person who associated the principle of being “perfectly fair” with recommending virtuous men to the court,174 but he was unique in suggesting this unconventional patron-protégé relationship.

Having told the story, Zhang Yue then asks the Secretariat drafter to follow the example of Numinous Wind:

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174 For a discussion of the idea of being “perfectly fair” and its influence on the patronage seeking activity in the early and high Tang, see Ge Xiaoyin, “Lun chusheng Tang wenren de ganye fangshi.”
Now your brilliant lordship is in possession of the resources of the pure wind, if you allow worthy men to rely on you as Flying Flower relied on [Numinous Wind], then you can be said to be perfectly fair. Might it not be that you are averse to those who announce themselves to you by waving sleeves, and harbor doubts that come from great anger?\(^{175}\)

今明公據清風之資，令賢者獲飛英之托，此至公也，得無嫌揚袂之謁，懷怒氣之疑乎？

In this way, Zhang Yue proves that it is the need of being “perfectly fair” that requires the Secretariat drafter to recommend him.

Whatever rhetorical strategies Tang literati adopted in their self-recommendation letters, their ultimate goal remained the same: to win the longed-for patronage. Not all of their self-recommendation letters comprise the four components we have discussed: the justification of patronage seeking, the praise or criticism of the recipient, the self-display of the speaker, and the plea for patronage. Most of them consist of only two or three of the four components, and individual authors made their own choices, under the guiding principle of making their letters persuasive. The utilitarian aim of seeking political favor also motivated Tang literati to make their letters as stylish as possible, for the sake of catching the recipient’s attention, who might receive countless similar letters everyday. Many of these letters, therefore, are well crafted, and some may even be called “masterpieces.” These self-recommendation letters, clearly not written merely for the sake of art, or as the expression of one’s mind, form an indispensible part of Tang literature. They show that the practical aim of seeking political patronage was one important element that contributed to the thriving of Tang literature, and that there often was a utilitarian motivation to Tang literati’s self-presentation.

\(^{175}\) Zhang Yue ji jianzhu, 30.1423.
Chapter III: A Genre of Importance: Reappraising Tang Fu-poetry

Traditional Chinese literary history assigns one particular form of literature to each dynastic period as its main, representative achievement in literature: for the Tang it was verse in the shi genre, while for the earlier Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) it was verse in the fu genre. Critics such as Li Mengyang and He Jingming even made the claim that “there was no fu in the Tang” 唐無賦.\footnote{See Introduction, p3.} Therefore, it has become an unthinking cliché to assume that fu-poetry passed its peak with the fall of the Han. In fact, though, the fu continued to be widely used and to hold an important place in literary production into and beyond the Tang period. One sign of the fu’s importance in both the literary and political arenas is that from the 680s on, the fu was the form of poetic composition usually required in the most prestigious civil-service examinations, the jinshi 進士 and the boxue hongci 博學鴻詞 exams, sometimes supplemented by shi-poetry.\footnote{Pauline Yu suggests that the fu and shi were introduced into the imperial examination sometime in the 730s. Yu, “Chinese Poetry and Its Institutions,” Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry 2 (2002): 58. In fact, the fu was probably introduced into the jinshi exam earlier than the shi. The earliest jinshi exam that required the composition of a shi-poem, as far as I know, was the one in 724. See Dengke jikao 登科記考, ed. Xu Song 徐松 (1781-1848) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 7.239. Before that, fu composition had been required in at least seven jinshi exams; they are the ones that took place in 685, 713, 714, 716,717, 719, 723. See Dengke jikao, 3.80, 5.172, 5.184, 5.187, 6.201, and 7.238. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the fu was one form of literary writing that had been required in the jinshi exam since 685; it then became the main form of writing that was required in both the jinshi and the boxue hongci exams in the early eighth century.} Furthermore, there are altogether over 1,600 Tang fu available to us. This number, when compared with the fifty thousand Tang shi at our disposal, may appear to be negligible; however, if we compare the actual quantity of text instead of the number of titles, fu accounts for almost twenty percent of the surviving Tang verse, a percentage so high that we cannot afford to ignore it.

In an essay titled “The Significance of the fu in the History of Tang Poetry,” published eighteen years ago, Paul W. Kroll made a poignant observation on the dismal state of Tang fu studies: “Of the
1,600-plus T’ang fu currently available to us, very few have been seriously studied. One can count on just two hands and feet and—still have digits to spare—the number of T’ang fu that have been translated into English during the past century.” This situation has barely changed. To overcome the “wilful ignorance of what was during that period a prevalent and still vital genre of verse” and “a one-eyed view of the shih itself,” this chapter considers the significance and prevalence of the fu in the early and High Tang from four aspects: the fu was used by the emperor for self-justification; Tang literati presented to the court their fu compositions to win favor and recognition of their scholarship, literary ability, and command of language; many Tang poets chose to compose fu when they desired to express fully their mind; and there was vital interplay between the fu and shi. The discussion here also allows for a reconsideration of fu as a genre. It shows that the fu was not a static genre defined conventionally by its style and theme, but a literary form open to different possibilities, and a mode of poetic expression vis-à-vis the shi.

**An Emperor’s Self-justification**

Li Shimin 李世民, more commonly known as Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649) of the Tang dynasty, is regarded as one of the greatest emperors of imperial China. His way to the throne, however, was quite controversial. According to the Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書 and Xin Tang shu 新唐書, it was Li Shimin who played the most important role in founding the Tang. Nevertheless, when his

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6 See the annals of Emperor Taizong in both the Jiu Tang shu and Xin Tang shu. Jiu Tang shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 2.21–30; Xin Tang shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 2.23–7. By quoting the Jiu Tang shu and Xin Tang shu, I do not suggest taking their accounts of Taizong as historical facts; it is merely to show how Taizong was presented
father Li Yuan 李淵 [Emperor Gaozu 高祖(r. 618–629)] ascended the throne in 618, Li Shimin was appointed as the Prince of Qin 秦, whereas his elder brother Li Jiancheng 李建成 (589–626) became the Crown Prince. After years of conflicts with Li Jiancheng, Li Shimin and his supporters, including Zhasun Wuji 長孫無忌 (594–659), Yuchi Jingde 尉遲敬德 (585–658), and Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648)—all of whom would go on to serve in high positions at Taizong’s court—decided to launch a preemptive strike. On the fourth day of the sixth month of the ninth year of the Wude 武德 reign (July 2, 626), they ambushed Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji 李元吉 (603–626, the Prince of Qi 齊) at the Xuanwu 玄武 Gate. Li Shimin killed his two brothers. This is known as the Xuanwu Gate Incident. Before long, Emperor Gaozu appointed Li Shimin as the Crown Prince, and abdicated the throne to his son.

After ascending the throne, one of the emperor’s biggest concerns was the public opinion on the Xuanwu Gate Incident. To make certain that it was recorded in his favor, Taizong directly interfered with the compilation of the official history. Despite historians’ objection, he insisted on seeing the National History (guoshi 國史). Having seen the account of the Xuanwu Gate Incident, he ordered historians to change it, with high-sounding words:

[By means of the Xuanwu Gate Incident] We have satisfied the gods of the soil and of millet, and brought benefits to the myriads of people. Historians are expected to record in official history. David McMullen has raised the critical point that many Tang sources on the representation of Taizong are in and of themselves biased towards a positive evaluation of him, which is unsurprising considering Taizong’s role as the emperor. See McMullen, “The Big Cats Will Play: Tang Taizong and His Advisors,” Journal of Chinese Studies 57 (2013): 299–340.


8 As the gods of the soil and of millet supply the natural foundation of the state, they are often used as metaphor for the state.
everything with their writing brush; why bother covering it up? You should immediately edit and alter the account, and record the incident straightforwardly.⁹

朕之所以安社稷，利萬人耳。史官執筆，何煩過隱。宜即改削，直書其事。

Considering that the Jiu Tang shu and Xin Tang shu, which are based on the National History of the Tang, both record the Incident in Taizong’s favor, we can image that those historians at Taizong’s court understood quite well what the emperor meant by “straightforwardly.”

In addition to interfering with the compilation of the National History, Taizong also offered his own version of the Xuanwu Gate Incident and justified himself in a fu composition, the “Weifeng fu” 威凰賦 (Fu on the Awe-inspiring Phoenix). That Taizong chose to offer a self-justification in the form of fu was partly due to the expected seriousness of this genre. Since the Han, fu had been closely associated with court life and literature; because of that, Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) put fu as the first genre in his Wen xuan 文選,¹⁰ a sixth-century anthology that had a strong influence on the Tang.

According to the Xin Tang shu, Emperor Taizong, when thinking of the difficulties he had overcome and the significant support he received from one particular minister, composed the “Weifeng fu” and bestowed it to that minister, Zhangsun Wuji, who also was the emperor’s brother-in-law.¹¹ However, Taizong did not merely write the “Weifeng fu” to show his gratitude. He begins the fu by singing the praise of the “awe-inspiring phoenix,” which clearly is the personification of the emperor himself. Endowed with virtue and talent, the phoenix descended to the human realm to “calm the turbulent world” 弥亂世, and displayed itself to “embrace the glorious time” 膺明時

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¹¹ Xin Tang shu, 105.4018.
(lines 11–12), referring here to the emperor’s contribution to the overthrow of the Sui 隋 (581–618) and his great performance under the reign of Gaozu. However, the awe-inspiring phoenix was attacked by other birds.

同林之侶俱嫉  Companions of the same grove were all jealous of it;
共榦之儔並忤*  Fellows of the same branch defied it together.
無桓山之義情  They lacked the fraternal feeling of the [birds of] Heng Mountain,
有炎州之凶度*  But possessed the ferocious manner of the Flaming Isle.

Those birds, which shared the same grove and branch with the awe-inspiring phoenix, clearly stand for the emperor’s brothers. This is made more evident with the allusion to the birds of the Heng Mountain, which was symbolic of fraternal love. However, despite their close connection, those birds were determined to harm the phoenix: “No sooner had they clustered their beaks to strike it one after another, / Than they spread out the net to restrain it” (lines 27–28). As they were so malicious the awe-inspiring phoenix had to “Fold its exceptional wings that override the clouds, / Hide its brilliant demeanor that amazes the world” (lines 29–30). The phoenix even had been awaiting its death: “Expecting to lose its life once it was killed, / It originally had no intention to fly again” 期畢命於一死, 本無情於再飛

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12 Tang Taizong quanji jiaozhu 唐太宗全集校注, ed. Wu Yun 吳雲 and Ji Yu 聶宇 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004), 119. For a complete translation of this fu, see appendix (5).
13 For the translation of poetry, both fu and shi, each rhymed-word is followed by an asterisk. Lines put in italics are hypermetrical; they are not included in the line-count and do not figure in the prosody.
14 According to the Kongzi jiayu 孔子家語, a bird of the Heng Mountain gave birth to four young birds. When the four birds grew up and were about to separate from each other, they made saddening sounds. Kongzi jiayu shuzheng 孔子家語疏證, ed. Chen Shike 陳士珂 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1987), 5.125.
15 Tang Taizong quanji jiaozhu, 119.
16 Tang Taizong quanji jiaozhu, 119.
17 Tang Taizong quanji jiaozhu, 119.
This depiction of the relationship between the awe-inspiring phoenix and the other birds allows Taizong to present himself as a virtuous figure on the one hand, and as a victim of his brothers’ persecution on the other. Accordingly, it justifies his subsequent killing of Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji. Both in the *Jiu Tang shu* and *Xin Tang shu*, that Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji had attempted to murder Taizong is presented as the trigger of the Xuanwu Gate Incident.  

Taizong then turns to praise the “gentleman” who saved the phoenix from its predicament:

幸賴君子* Fortunately, thanks to a gentleman,

以依以恃* It had someone to rely and depend on.

引此風雲 He brought out the wind and clouds,

濯斯塵滓* To rinse away that dust and scum.

Taizong here seems to be giving all the credit to the gentleman, who got rid of the dust and scum for the awe-inspiring phoenix. This may be flattering praise of Zhangsun Wuji, but it may also be the emperor’s way of further exonerating himself, that he is not personally responsible for the disappearance of “that dust and scum,” or the death of his two brothers.

Although Taizong here mainly compliments the gentleman’s merit, he does not forget to praise himself. By using the expression “wind and clouds,” which, according to the *Zhouyi* 周易, follow the appearance of a sage, the emperor’s implication is clear. Thanks to the gentleman, the phoenix is able to regain its splendor, and preside over the entire world: “Looking at the eight ends of earth, it

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18 *Tang Taizong quanjí jiāozhù*, 120.
20 *Tang Taizong quanjí jiāozhù*, 120
21 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, ed. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 1.20.
soars afar; / Lowering its gaze at the nine heavens, it stands aloft” 盼八極以遐翥，臨九天而高峙 (lines 47-48). Moreover, whatever that awe-inspiring phoenix has done, Taizong says, it does for the sake of the entire realm: “It hopes to widely spread virtue to all the birds, / But has no intention to magnify its own profits” 庶廣德於眾禽，非崇利於一已 (lines 49-50). This lofty statement bears a striking resemblance to Taizong’s words quoted earlier, that “[By means of the Xuanwu Gate Incident] We have satisfied the gods of the soil and of millet, and brought benefits to the myriads of people.”

Having established the virtue and innocence of the awe-inspiring phoenix, Taizong ends the fu by expressing his gratitude:

Because of that, Loitering and lingering, it feels grateful to his favor;
As if looking back with longing, it holds dear its worth.
Thanks to the wise man, its adversity has been dispelled.
Depending on this brilliant person, its blessing is expanded.
Its desire to repay his kindness is more bound up within;
Its intent to reward his merit should be made public.
It is not that knowing is difficult and doing is easy;

22 Tang Taizong quan ji jiaozhu, 120
23 Tang Taizong quan ji jiaozhu, 120
24 The “Qin fu”琴賦 (The Zither) of Xi Kang 嵇康: “At times the sounds are hesitant, as if looking back with longing: / Held in and held back, restrained and repressed” 或徘徊顧慕，擁鬱抑按. Wen xuan 文選, ed. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 18.843. The translation follows David R. Knechtges’s rendering, see Knechtges, Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature, vol. 3: Rhapsodies on Natural Phenomena, Birds and Animals, Aspirations and Feelings, Sorrowful Laments, Literature, Music, and Passions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 293. In the “Weifeng fu,” both “loitering and lingering” and “as if looking back with lingering” refer to the sound the awe-inspiring phoenix made.
One wishes to make sure what comes at the end follows rightly that at the beginning.

So that his honorable virtue is circulated and celebrated,

And over myriads of generations his fragrant name is spread.

Expressing gratitude is one conventional trope of poems on the theme of the shot or captured bird. Taizong here stresses that his rewarding Zhangsun Wuji with this *fu* is not because it is an easy thing to do. Rather, by writing this *fu*, he wishes to bring a wonderful ending to the good deed Zhangsun Wujin has achieved in the beginning, that is, to hand down Zhangsun Wuji’s good reputation to future generations. And Zhangsun Wuji is indeed favorably depicted in both the *Jiu Tang shu* and *Xin Tang shu*.

Another *fu* Taizong composed to bestow on a minister is “Huaixi fu” (Fu on Reminiscing about the Past). According to the *Xin Tang shu*, Taizong bestowed this *fu* on Yang Cong, who used to live in the same alley with Taizong and served as an adjunct (*canjun*) at Taizong’s establishment when the latter was still the Prince of Qin. After the Xuanwu Gate Incident, Taizong “summoned royal princes and one prime minister for banquet, but Yang Cong showed up. Taizong bestowed the “Huaixi fu” on him to extend his graciousness” 戴親王，宰相一人入宴，而琮獨預，太宗賜懷昔賦，申以恩意. Although this *fu* is no longer extant, the political significance it used to bear is unmistakable. Taizong was the first and only emperor, of whom I am aware, to have conferred his own *fu* compositions to ministers.

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25 *Shijing*, Mao 255 (“Dang” 蕭): “All are [good] at first,/ But few manage to be so in the end” 靡不有初，鮮克有終.

26 *Tang Taizong quanji jiaozhu*, 120.

27 For a more detailed discussion, see Kroll, “Tamed Kite and Stranded Fish,” 41–77.

28 *Xin Tang shu*, 130.4495.
Presenting *Fu* to Win Imperial Favor

Compared to the relatively rare situation where an emperor composed a *fu* to bestow on his ministers, a much more common situation was that literati, either voluntarily or under an imperial command, presented their *fu* compositions to the emperor.\(^{29}\) As the *fu* is a very demanding type of writing, Tang literati presented their *fu* compositions to show their scholarship, literary ability, and command of language, in the hope to win imperial favor. To encourage literati’s enthusiasm, in the third month of the second year of the Chuigong 垂拱 era (686), Empress Wu 武 (r. 690-705) ordered the establishment of a Basket For Extending Graciousness (*yan’en gui* 延恩匭),\(^{30}\) through which Tang literati were able to present to the court their *fu* compositions conveniently.

Under some circumstances, a few literati were fairly rewarded: Cui Renshi 崔仁師 presented his “Qingshu fu” 清暑賦 (*Fu* on Being Cool in Summer’s Heat) for Taizong’s visit to the Halycon Haze Palace (*cuwei gong* 翠微宮), for which he was rewarded with fifty bolts of silks;\(^{31}\) Liu Yunji 劉允濟 presented the “Mingtang fu” 明堂賦 (*Fu* on the Hall of Light) to Empress Wu to commemorate the magnificent hall, which earned him the position of Editorial Director (*zhuzuolang* 著作郎);\(^{32}\) Xu Jingxian 許景先 (677–730) presented the “Daxiangge fu” 大像閣賦 (*Fu* on the Pavilion of the Great Statue) to celebrate the construction of the building, and he was appointed as Left Reclaimer of Omissions (*zuoshiyi* 左拾遺) as a result.\(^{33}\) The most famous example is that in the tenth year of the Tianbao 天寶 reign (751), Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), who is usually deemed as one of the greatest poets of the Tang because of his *shi*, presented to Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756)

\(^{29}\) For a study on this phenomenon, see Liu Qinghai 劉青海, “Lun chusheng Tang xianfu huodong de xingsheng jiqi yuanyin” 論初盛唐獻賦活動的興盛及其原因 *Wenshu yichan* 2013.5: 38–46.
\(^{30}\) Fengshi wenjian ji jiaozhu 封氏聞見記 校注 ed. Zhao Zhenxin 趙貞信 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 4.32.
\(^{31}\) Jiu Tang shu, 74.2622.
\(^{32}\) Jiu Tang shu, 190.5013.
\(^{33}\) Xin Tang shu, 128.4464.
three ceremonial *fu* through the Basket for Extending Graciousness in 751.\(^{34}\) Because of that, Du Fu, after years of failed attempts to obtain a government position, was appointed to await the imperial summons at the Academy of Gathered Worthies (*jixian yuan* 集賢院), but was still not appointed to an official position.

Admittedly, most of the *fu* compositions presented to the court were dismissed. Therefore, Qian Qi 錢起 (ca. 720–ca. 783), the mid-eighth-century poet, once lamented, “Having presented *fu* for ten years, I am still unmet by fortune” 獻賦十年猶未遇.\(^{35}\) Despite this disappointing result, Qian Qi kept presenting his *fu* compositions to the emperor. One such work is his “Chaoyuange *fu*” 朝元閣賦 (*Fu* on the Gallery of Paying Homage to the Mysterious Prime).

This *fu* deserves our attention for at least two reasons. First, it is a composition that uses a new *fu* form to present a traditional *fu* theme. The theme of the “Chaoyuange *fu*” falls under the category of the palace/hall *fu* (*gongdian fu* 宮殿賦), typically written within the tradition of Han epideictic *fu* (*dafu* 大賦). The most famous *fu* compositions on palaces and halls include “Lu Lingguangdian *fu*” 魯靈光殿賦 (*Fu* on the Hall of Numinous Light in Lu) of Wang Yanshou 王延壽 (ca. 140–ca. 165), “Jingfudian *fu*” 景福殿賦 (*Fu* on the Hall of Auspicious Blessing) of He Yan, and “Hanyuandian *fu*” 含元殿賦 (*Fu* on the Hall of Embodying the Mysterious Prime) of Li Hua. Qian Qi’s *fu*, however, is written in the form of regulated *fu* (*lüfu* 律賦). It was a new form of *fu* that appeared in the early eighth century, probably under the influence of the development of the tonal patterns of the regulated *shi* (*lüshi* 律詩), with its emphasis on syntactic parity between the lines of couplets and a


\(^{35}\) “Quexia zeng Pei Sheren” 贈闕下裴舍人 (Offered to Secretariat Drafter Pei at the Imperial Court), in *Qian Qi ji jiaozhu* 錢起集校注, ed. Wang Dingzhang 王定璋 (Hanzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2015), 8.271.
balanced arrangement of words according to the twofold division of level (ping 平) and deflected (zè 畝) tones. Therefore, the “Chaoyuange fu” is an exemplar of Tang fu compositions that bring together tradition and innovation.

The second reason is that the “Chaoyuange fu” is a fu on Chaoyuange (sometime also called Chaoyuandian 朝元殿), an important gallery located in the Huaqing 華清 Palace of Mount Huichang 會昌 (“Prosperity Gathering”), and a gallery with a magic story. A map of the Huaqing Palace (see below) shows that Chaoyuan ge was built near the center of the Palace.

36 For some discussions on the development of Tang regulated fu, see Kuang Jianxing 鄺健行, “Tangdai lüfu yu lü” 唐代律賦與律 Tangdai wenxue yanjiu 1988.00: 104–20; Yin Zhanhua 尹占華, Lüfu lungao 律賦論稿 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2001); Peng Weihong 彭衛紅, Tangdai lüfu kao 唐代律賦考 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009).

37 Namely Mount Li 驪, which was renamed as Mount Huichang (Prosperity Gathering) in the first year of the Tianbao reign (742). Jiu Tang shu, 9.216.
It is said that on the second day of the twelfth month of the seventh year of the Tianbao era (December 26, 748), emperor Xuanzong saw Lord Lao, the Illustrious Thearch of the Mysterious Prime 玄元皇帝，descending to Chaoyuange. Because of this auspicious phenomenon, the building was renamed as Jiangshengge 降聖閣 (Gallery of Sage Descending), and Mount Huichang was renamed as Mount Zhaoying 昭應 (Receiving Manifestation). In this fu, Qian Qi refers to the building as the “Gallery of Paying Homage to the Mysterious Prime” and the mountain as

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38 The title was bestowed on Laozi in 666.
“Prosperity Gathering” (lines 45–46). This may suggest that his fu was written before 749. However, it is not an uncommon practice to refer to a place with its previous name. In all the Tang shi-poems where this place is mentioned, it is always referred to as “Chaoyuange,” not once as “Jiangshengge.” This is indicative of the possibility that Qian Qi’s “Chaoyuange fu” might well have been written after it was renamed “Jiangshengge.”

In fact, there is further evidence that supports the second scenario. In his fu, Qian Qi uses the expression “sage’s trace” (shengji 聖跡) to designate Chaoyuange (line 9). This designation would make much more sense if it alludes to the legendary descending of Laozi. Moreover, in addition to this fu by Qian Qi, there are two other “Chaoyuange fu” that use the same rhyming scheme. One is by Sun Yiren 孫翊仁, a jinshi graduate of 751, and the other one is anonymous, possibly also by a jinshi graduate.⁴⁰ Like Qian Qi’s fu, these other two “Chaoyuange fu” also consist of a depiction of the magnificence of the gallery, and a celebration of the emperor’s virtue and his visit to Chaoyuange. Taking these into consideration, it seems likely that the three fu were composed concurrently, under the emperor’s command, to commemorate both the gallery and the imperial outing. Had Qian Qi not passed the jinshi exam yet, he probably would not have had the chance to be in the imperial entourage. Furthermore, Qian Qi has a poem titled “Fenghe shengzhi deng Chaoyuange” 奉和聖制登朝元閣 (Respectfully Composing a Matching Poem to His Majesty’s Composition on Ascending the Gallery of Paying Homage to the Mysterious Prime).⁴¹ The title suggests that this poem was composed when Qian Qi accompanied Xuanzong on one of his visits to Chaoyuange. This then would have to be sometime between the winters of 750 to 755,⁴² when the gallery was still called

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⁴⁰ Quan Tang wen 全唐文 (Taipei: Datong shuju, 1979), 407. 10a–b, 961.2a–3a.
⁴¹ Qian Qi ji jiaozhu 乾吉集注, 7.221.
⁴² In “Fenghe shengzhi deng Chaoyuange,” one line reads: “As the sun faintly brightens the sky, the auspicious snow appears pellucid” 晞陽瑞雪晴, which suggests that this imperial visit took place in winter. Qian Qi ji jiaozhu 乾吉集注, 7.221. According to Wang Dingzhang, this poem was composed when Qian Qi served as an official of the Ministry of Personnel, that is, sometime after 764. Qian Qi ji jiaozhu 乾吉集注, 7.222. However, as the Huaqing Palace had become entirely
“Chaoyuange.” All factors considered, it seems reasonable to suggest that Qian Qi wrote his “Chaoyuange fu” when he was accompanying Xuanzong to Chaoyuange. During his visit, Xuanzong must have commanded officials in attendance to compose *fu* to commemorate the occasion.

“Chaoyuange fu” uses as its rhyming scheme the eight-word phrase 高抗山頂 / 升覽清遠, that is, “Loftily stands on the mountain top;/ Ascend to inspect what is pure and profound,” which is itself a description of both the gallery and the emperor’s visit to the gallery. As a regulated *fu*, its tonal pattern, although not as rigorously arranged as a regulated *shi*, is quite well-balanced. Take for example the tonal pattern of the first stanza of the “Chaoyuange fu”:

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上將
恢帝宇 O X X

壯神皋 X O O

斷景山之松用而有節 X X O O O X O X X

感子來之眾役不告勞* X X O O X X X O

成仙閣之弘敞 O O X O O X

配紫極之崇高* X X X O O O
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In this stanza, tonal balance is achieved in two ways: first, in each couplet, the numbers of the words of level tones and of deflected tones are either the same or quite close; second, within one couplet, the tones of the words after which a caesura is required (namely, the underlined words) alternate between level and deflected (with the only exception of 閣 in the fifthe line and 極 in the sixth line).

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43 *Qian Qi ji jiaozhu*, 11.328.
The remaining seven stanzas also largely follow these two principles. In so doing, Qian Qi not only adds a dash of music to his *fu*, but also displays his mastery of the language’s resources of assonance.

Within eight stanzas and fifty-six lines, Qian Qi effectively impresses the reader with the grandness of the gallery. He opens this *fu* with a grandiose setting: the august firmament above and the divine land below:

上將  *His Highness intended to*
恢帝宇  Expand the august firmament,
壯神皋*  And magnify the divine land.\(^4^4\)

The statement that the construction of “Chaoyuange” is to “expand” the august firmament and “magnify” the divine land immediately conveys the magnificence of the gallery. Qian Qi then pains three engaging pictures that showcase the grandness of Chaoyuange. In the first picture, among far-reaching rivers and towering cliffs, Chaoyuange stands aloft, lifting the sun-dwelling crow and the jade hare of the moon beyond the sky:

當桂戶而八水悠遠  *Facing its cinnamon doors are the eight rivers, remote and far-reaching;*\(^4^5\)
植玉階而千巖相抗*  Standing next to its jade stairs are thousands of cliffs, towering aloft.
升陽烏於赤霄之表  *It raises the sun-dwelling crow beyond the red empyrean,*

\(^4^4\) *Qian Qi ji jianqun*, 11.328. For a complete translation of this *fu*, see appendix (6).

\(^4^5\) According to the *Xizheng ji* 西征記 by the Eastern Jin scholar Dai Yanzhi 戴延之: “Within the [Hangu] Pass, there are eight rivers: Rivers Jing, Wei, Ba, Chan, Lao, Jue, Feng, and Hao” 關內八水, 一涇, 二渭, 三灞, 四滻, 五澇, 六潏, 七灃, 八殤. *Chuxueji* 初學記, ed. Xu Jian 徐堅 (660–729) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 6.112.
棲玉兔於翠微之上* And rests the [moon’s] jade hare above the mountain’s halcyon haze.⁴⁶

That it “raises” the sun-dwelling crow and “rests” the jade hare of the moon is suggestive of the gallery’s loftiness, for even the two numinous animals need its help to reach their heavenly dwellings. In the second picture, the sky is approaching to Chaoyuange’s bow-arched beams and clouds are returning to its vermilion steps:

虹梁天近 To its bow-arched beams the sky draws near;

丹陛雲還* To its vermilion steps clouds return.⁴⁷

The nearing heaven and returning clouds, two images often associated with mountains, are here effectively used to present the magnificence of Chaoyuange. In the third picture, Chaoyuange, as its solemn color heavily saturates the tree branches and its floating light skims over the mountain peak, rises up alone:

正色深沉於木末 Its solemn color heavily saturates the tree branches;

浮光嶙亂於山頂* Its floating light disorderly skims over the mountain peak.

如翬斯飛 As if a pheasant soaring up,⁴⁸

獨出於穎* It alone comes out from searing light.⁴⁹

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⁴⁶ Qian Qi ji jiaozhu, 11.328. Allegedly, in the sun lives a three-footed crow and in the moon a jade hare.
⁴⁷ Qian Qi ji jiaozhu, 11.328.
⁴⁸ Shijing, Mao 189 (“Sigan” 斯干): “As if a bird on flying wings,/ As if a pheasant soaring up” 如鳥斯革, 如翬斯飛.
⁴⁹ Qian Qi ji jiaozhu, 11.328.
The image of tree branches being saturated by the gallery’s color is fresh and breathtaking, and the “searing light” from which Chaoyuangge emerges is indicative of the gallery’s sacredness.

Unlike the traditional palace/hall *fu*, “Chaoyuangge fu” does not contain a very elaborate depiction of the gallery, nor does it pay any attention to the gallery’s interior designs. What Qian Qi has done instead is to present three long shots of the gallery, and to present the magnificence of Chaoyuangge by placing it in some relation to its surroundings. This shows that a *fu*, even one on a traditional topic of the Han epideictic *fu*, does not always have to be fashioned in an extravagant manner.

The brilliance of the “Chaoyuangge fu” also reveals in its poetic ambiguity. Take for example lines 5–6:

成仙閣之弘敞 To construct the transcendent gallery, vast and broad;
配紫極之崇高* To match it with the Purple Supreme, venerable and lofty.\(^{50}\)

On the surface, the phrase “Purple Supreme” designates the heavenly dwelling of the Illustrious Thearch of the Mysterious Prime. Accordingly, this couplet suggests that Chaoyuangge was built to match the magnificent dwelling and thus the sublime status of Laozi. However, “Purple Supreme” can also refer to the imperial palace; then this couplet may as well suggest that Chaoyuangge was built to match the magnificent dwelling and sublime status of Xuanzong. Since, according to Qian Qi, Xuanzong had the “transcendent gallery” built to glorify the domain that was his, the second reading is clearly implied.

\(^{50}\) *Qian Qi ji jiaozhu*, 11.328.
Although there is no available evidence to suggest if emperor Xuanzong was impressed, it is fair to conclude that Qian Qi’s “Chaoyuange fu” is well crafted. The same can be said of many other *fu* compositions presented to the court, both in the regulated *fu* style and Han epideictic *fu* style. To brush them away in the study of Tang poetry is not justified.

**Fu-poetry to Express One’s Mind**

Our discussion so far focuses on the significance of the *fu* in the public sphere. The *fu* is also an important literary form for personal expression. The canonical idea that “poetry expresses one’s mind” (shi yan zhi 詩言志) is not restricted to shi-poetry. Many early and high Tang literati, when trying to fully express their mind, wrote *fu* compositions. This is partly because the formal structures of the *fu* allow for a more exhaustive expression of personal feelings. In medieval China, most shi-poems were written in five-character and/or seven-character lines. The rhythm of a five-character line is usually either 2/2/1, or 2/1/2, and the rhythm of a seven-character line is normally 2/2/3. “/” indicates a caesura, a strong pause in a line required by syntax and/or semantics. Moreover, there were hardly any shi poem that went over two hundred lines. The *fu*, on the other hand, embraces lines of more varied lengths—from two-character to eight-character lines, even nine-character and ten-character lines. The increased choice of different line lengths naturally means more possibility of rhythms. Furthermore, as with the tradition of the *sao* 騷 and Han epideictic *fu*, some *fu* compositions are expected to be lengthy. Accordingly, with regard to the rhetorical potential for exhaustive personal expression, the *fu* has its advantage over the shi. *Fu* compositions where Tang literati fully express their mind include the “You Beishan fu” (Fu on Roaming the

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Northern Mountains) of Wang Ji 王績 (590–644), “Sishen fu” 思慎賦 (Fu on Considering Being Cautious) of Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), and “Ganjiu fu” 感舊賦 (Fu on Thinking of the Past) of Cen Shen 岑參 (ca. 715–770). The most noteworthy piece probably is the “Shiji wen” 釋疾文 (Text to Resolve Illness) of Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰 (ca. 632–ca. 685). Written in the sao-style, the “Shiji wen” is among the most moving and emotionally painful of all medieval Chinese literature.

Lu Zhaolin, most famously known as one of the “The Four Elites of the Early Tang” (chu Tang sijie 初唐四傑, namely, Wang Bo 王勃 [649–676], Yang Jiong 楊炯 [650–ca. 694], Lu Zhaolin, and Luo Binwang 駱賓王 [ca. 626–684]), was born in the 630s, under the reign of Taizong. He claimed to be a descendant of the prestigious Lu clan of Fanyang 范陽, although he did not have any immediate ancestors who distinguished themselves at court. As a young boy, he was able to study with Cao Xian 曹憲 (ca. 541–645) and Wang Yifang 王儀方 (619–669), the former a master of Wen xuan studies, the later a savant of the “Five Classics.” Then, in his early teens, Lu Zhaolin was appointed as a secretary (dianqian 典籖) in the establishment of Li Yuanyu 李元裕, the seventeenth son of Gaozu and most commonly known as Prince of Deng 鄧. The prince reportedly developed a close relationship with the poet, and used to refer to him as “my own [Sima] Xiangru” 寡人相如也. Probably after the death of Li Yuanyu in 665, Lu Zhaolin was appointed as a constable (wei 尉) of Xindu 新都 in Shu 蜀 in charge of police and tax collection of the district. He later left Shu in 671, more than one year after the end of his term of office. Before long, Lu Zhaolin began to suffer bitterly from the disease—probably progressive rheumatoid arthritis of the extremities—which over the years would cripple both of his feet and gnarl one of his hands. He had also recently assumed for

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52 For a discussion and translation of this fu, see Ding Xiang Warner, A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 113–46.
53 Jiu Tang shu, 190.5000.
himself the sobriquet “Master of Intense Distress” (Youyouzi 幽憂子), which proclaims the condition that would dominate the rest of his life. Shortly afterward, Lu Zhaolin moved from Chang’an to Mount Taibai 太白, in the nearby Zhongnan 終南 range; near the end of the 670s, he moved to East Dragon-gate Mountain (Dong longmen shan 東龍門山), about eight miles south of Luoyang; and in 682, he relocated to Mount Juci 具茨, about fifty miles southwest of Luoyang, in the valley of the Ying 潁 River, where Lu Zhaolin would drown himself, and thus end his long suffering life.54

It was in Mount Juci where Lu Zhaolin wrote the “Shiji wen,” in an attempt to resolve his illness, which had nearly measly deprived him of the ability to move: “A pace of one inch is going a thousand leagues, and a step of one foot is crossing mountains and rivers” 寸步千里, 咫尺山河.55 The “Shiji wen” consists of three sections, “Yueruo” 粤若, “Beifu” 悲夫, and “Mingyue” 命曰, five hundred lines in total. Lu Zhaolin begins the “Shiji wen” with a self-display, which comprises a panegyric of his glorious family lineage (lines 1–22) and a praise of himself, including his virtue, talent, and cultivation (lines 23–46). Endowed with all the excellent qualities, Lu Zhaolin proudly claims:

自謂 I expected that

明主以令僕相待 The enlightened ruler would welcome me with positions of

Director and Vice-director,


朝廷以黃散為輕* And the imperial court would regard posts of Gentleman Attendant and Cavalier Attendant beneath me.⁵⁶

However, Lu Zhaolin tells the reader, he was unmet by fortune in the first place, as the emperor was devoted to military campaign (lines 57-66). Whereas when the emperor sent out a proclamation to invite talented literati, “I began to suffer from the illness of intense distress” 值余有幽憂之疾 (line 74).

The illness takes away from Lu Zhaolin any hope of a political career, even a normal life, leaving him in intense distress:

積怨兮累息 With piled-up resentment and bated breath,

茹恨兮吞悲* I swallow remorse and gulp down grievance.

怨復怨兮坎壈乎今之代 Repining and repining repeatedly, I am pitted with problems in the contemporary age;

愁莫愁兮侘傺乎斯之時* Lamenting and lamenting by all means, I am depressed with despair at this very time.⁵⁷

This deep feeling of melancholy makes Lu Zhaolin question the fairness of Heaven and Earth:

皇穹何親兮 How could the August Firmament play favorites?

誕而生之* It carries and gives birth to the myriad phenomena.

⁵⁶ Lu Zhaolin ji jiandezhu, 5.274.
⁵⁷ Lu Zhaolin ji jiandezhu, 5.275.
後土何私兮  How could the Sovereign Earth be partial?
鞠而育之*  It nurtures and brings up all the beings.
何故邀余以好學  Why did they appeal to me to be fond of learning?
何故假余以多辭*  Why did they bestow on me great eloquence?
何余慶之不終兮  Why did their favor for me not last?
當中路而廢之*  As it was brought to an end right in mid-path.58

The August Heaven and Sovereign Earth were supposed to be fair and benevolent, yet Lu Zhaolin accuses them of bestowing on him excellent qualities in the beginning but unreasonably abandoning him, and only him, in mid-path. The excellent qualities he owns only make his unexpected illness all the more unbearable. The three consecutive questions reveal vividly the poet’s anger with Heaven and Earth.

The intense distress is with Lu Zhaolin all the time; in the “Beifu” section, he presents a detailed description of his suffering in the four seasons individually. See how Lu Zhaolin feels in spring:

杳兮靄*  Broad and blurred,
川綿曠兮水如帶*  The stream stretches out and its current appears as a belt.
㟢兮籟*  Deep and echoed with pipings,
24 山嵲嵲兮雲似蓋*  Mountains are precipitously piled and clouds look like canopies.

58 Lu Zhaolin ji jianzhu, 5.275.
萋兮绿*  Lush and green,
春草生兮长河曲*  Spring grass grows along every twist of the long river.
试一望兮心断续*  Temporarily I look at the view from afar and my heart is broken.

28  晚兮畹*  As the night is approaching and the sun declining,
夕鸟没兮平郊远*  Evening birds disappear into the far distance of flat moors.
试一望兮魂不返*  Temporarily I look at the scene from afar and my soul never returns.

蘼芜叶兮紫兰香*  Hemlock-parsley is now leafy and purple eupatorium fragrant;

32  欲往从之川无梁*  I intend to go and follow them there yet there is no bridge across the stream.
日云暮兮涕沾裳*  As the day is getting late my tears have dampened my garment.

松有蘚兮桂有枝*  On the pine tree are lichens, on the cinnamon tree are branches,
有美一人兮君不知*  Yet there is a beauty of whom the lord is unaware.

36  气欲绝而何为*  My breath is about to cease but for what good cause?

In a letter to a Mr. Windham, Samuel Johnson writes: “But what can a sick man say, but that he is sick? ... Though I am now in the neighborhood of the Peak, you must expect no account of its

59 Lu Zhaolin ji jianzhu, 5.290.
wonders, of its hills, the waters, its caverns, or its mines. Unlike Johnson, Lu Zhaolin offers one of the most affecting literary depictions of spring in his “Shiji ven.” In his picture of spring, there are the broad river that is far-stretched and curved, the echoing mountains that are steeply high and encircled by clouds, the lush spring grass that grows along every twist of the long river, and the evening birds that disappear into the far distance of flat moors; there are also leafy hemlock-parsley, fragrant purple eupatorium, pine trees with lichens, and cinnamon trees with branches. This alluring picture shows that Lu Zhaolin, who has been suffering from a terrible illness and confined to his sickbed for over ten years, still sees the world with loving eyes. That is what makes this piece irresistibly touching. To be sure, how real, or how faithful, the verbal description here is as a representation of the spring Lu Zhaolin had actually seen in person is open to discussion. Nonetheless, the picture Lu Zhaolin presents here is the spring that captures his mind. These lovely views are supposed to offer Lu Zhaolin comfort, yet all they have done is to make his heart broken, his soul to never return, his tears to dampen his garment, and his breath to almost cease. The six stanzas, by skillfully bringing together landscape depiction and personal expression, shows that a fu’s descriptive and expressive possibilities can be very elastic.

Another noteworthy feature of Lu Zhaolin’s depiction of spring lies in its adventurous rhyming scheme that consists of one rhymed quatrains and four rhymed triplets. While the change of rhyme reminds the reader of a switch of viewpoint, the short stanzas, especially the triplets, aurally correspond to Lu Zhaolin’s claim that “my breath is about to cease,” for long stanzas would have required a strong breath. The breathless effect is further conveyed by the use of four three-character lines, all consisting of two hemistichs of one word each separated by the syllable xi. As xi functions

like a caesura, what we can hear is close to “x caesura x,” a vivid mimicry of being short of breath. These aural effects could not have escaped the ears of Tang readers.

Lu Zhaolin then goes on depicting in detail his intense distress in summer, autumn, and winter. Such an exhaustive presentation of personal feelings is rarely seen in medieval shi-poetry. To resolve his intense distress, Lu Zhaolin initiated an imaginary journey in the “Mingyue” section. In his imaginary journey, Lu Zhaolin sought divinations from Shamaness Yang 巫陽 and the Deity Taiyi 太一, yet refused to accept their unfavorable forecasts. Under the direction of Shamaness Yang, Lu Zhaolin met Taishang Laojun 太上老君 (Lord Lao, Most High), the deified Laozi, whose untainted abode is in the heavens. Lord Lao treated our poet as a long-lost companion, indeed a “banished transcendent” and convinced him, in over ninety lines, to leave behind the tainted human realm. Having heard Lord Lao’s words, Lu Zhaolin tells us, he was no longer in distress:

余於是乎 I, at this point, then
嗒然而喪其偶 In a trance, am bereft of my other self,
倏爾而失其知* In a flash, lost of all my knowledge.

Feeling at ease, he decided to journey to Watchet Whitecap, the Daoist paradise isle in the Eastern Sea:

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63 Some sixty years later, as this characterization came to be associated with Li Bai 李白 (701-762), its association with Lu Zhaolin has almost been forgotten.

64 In the opening of the “Qiwu lun” 齊物論 (Discourse on Equating Things), Ziqi 子綦 of Nanguo 南郭 was said to be sitting and leaning on his armrest, “Dejectedly, he seemed to have been bereft of his other self” 荷焉似喪其藕.

65 Lu Zhaolin ji jianzhu, 5.303.
倏爾而笑
In a flash, holding a smile

泛滄浪兮不歸*
I will drift out on Watchet Whitecap and never to return.  

Of course, due to his condition, it is absolutely impossible for Lu Zhaolin to physically drift to Watchet Whitecap, even if the place actually existed; but his mind, which has decided never to linger in the human realm any more, is free to do so. After all, this is expected of a “banished transcendent.” For this very moment, Lu Zhaolin has resolved his illness and is consoled. Unfortunately, this consolation did not last long. Shortly afterwards, Lu Zhaolin threw himself into the Ying River, and ended his long-suffering life.

Shi or Fu?

Above, I have mentioned some differences between the *fu* and *shi* in their formal structures. On the other hand, one of the most important literary phenomena in the early and High Tang is the active interplay between the *fu* and *shi*. The influence of the *fu* on the development of Tang *shi* has already been noticed by Wei Yiduo 魏一多. In his 1943 article “Sijie” 四杰, Wen Yiduo points out that the appeal of the *gexing* 歌行 poems by Lu Zhaolin and Luo Binwang lies in that the two poets “wrote *shi* poems in the *fu* style” 以賦為詩. This feature is most evident in their capital poems such as the “Dijing pian” 帝京篇 (Imperial Capital) by Luo Binwang. This is how Luo Binwang describes the imperial buildings and constructions in the capital Chang’an 長安:

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67 In *Tangshi zalun* 唐詩雜論 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 25.

The Angular Array\textsuperscript{69} looks stately with eupatorium pavements;
The jade-disc pool\textsuperscript{70} flows around the Locust Market.\textsuperscript{71}
The bronze bird, facing the wind, whirls about;\textsuperscript{72}
The metal pole, to receive the dew, stands upright.\textsuperscript{73}
Texts are collated at Tianlu Gallery.\textsuperscript{74}
Battles are practiced on Kunming Lake.\textsuperscript{75}
Vermillion villas\textsuperscript{76} stand opposite to Pingtai;\textsuperscript{77}
Yellow gates\textsuperscript{78} give passage to the residential compound of royal relatives.\textsuperscript{79}

Such an exhaustive depiction, especially the long list of various imperial sites, is typical of the aesthetic values that belong to the \textit{fu}. To be sure, what Luo Binwang presents here is a lexical landscape, one that is occupied by imperial buildings of the Han. Stephen Owen suggests that the strong \textit{fu} traditions behind this and other \textit{shi} poems on the capital “always threatened that the poem

\textsuperscript{69} The Angular Array, a group of six stars located within the Purple Palace, is the celestial counterpart to the imperial harem.

\textsuperscript{70} The imperial academy Biyong (Circular Moat) was a circular building surrounded by water, which was called “jade-disc pool.”

\textsuperscript{71} In the Han, literati in Chang’an gathered in Locust Market twice a month to trade their belongings. Later “Locust Market” was also used to designate the imperial academy.

\textsuperscript{72} It was said that on the Lingtai, which was located in the south of Chang’an, was a bronze bird. This bronze bird, made by the Eastern Han scholar-official Zhang Heng (78–139), moved its wings when the wind was blowing.

\textsuperscript{73} Seeking immortality, Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141 BCE–87 BCE) of the Han built a bronze tray, which was raised up by a bronze pole, to receive the dew from heaven.

\textsuperscript{74} Under the reign of Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 202 BCE–195 BCE) of the Han, Tianlu Gallery was built for keeping imperial texts.

\textsuperscript{75} In 120 BCE, Emperor Wu of the Han built Kunming Lake in the southwest of Chang’an for armies to practice water battle.

\textsuperscript{76} Metaphor for the mansions of nobility or the powerful, because the gateways of the nobility had been granted the privilege of being painted this color.

\textsuperscript{77} It was said that Liu Wu 劉武 (?–144 BCE), Prince of Liang 梁, built Pingtai in Henan 河南. He used to tour there with his literary entourage, including the famous \textit{fu} experts Mei Cheng 彭乘 (?–140 BCE) and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179 BCE–118 BCE).

\textsuperscript{78} Metaphor for palace gates, which are painted this color.

\textsuperscript{79} Luo Linhai ji jianzhu 駱臨海集箋注, ed. Chen Xijin 陳熙晉 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 1.8.
become no more than a poorly done *fu*.”\(^{80}\) However, it is by incorporating the *fu* traditions that this poem presents a grand atmosphere and shows off perfectly Luo Binwang’s scholarship. The “Dijing pian” was “regarded as the peak of poetic perfection in its time.” \(^{81}\)

“Writing *shi* poems in the *fu* style” is not limited to the *gexing* poems by Lu Zhaolin and Luo Binwang. Many other early and High Tang *shi*-poems embrace the *fu* style. The very famous ones include Wang Bo’s “Lin gaotai” (Looking down from the High Terrace), Liu Xiyi’s 劉希夷 (ca. 651–ca. 680) “Daibei baitou weng” (Grieving in Place of a Grey-haired Old Man), Zhang Ruoxu’s 張若虛 (ca. 647–ca. 730) “Chunjiang huayueye” (Flowers and Moonlight on the Spring River), and Li Bai’s 李白 (701–762) “Shudaonan” (The Way to Shu is Hard).\(^{82}\)

At the same time, quite a few early and High Tang *fu* compositions assimilate the formal features of the *shi*-poetry. For instance, Wang Bo’s “Chunsi fu”（*Fu* on Spring Emotions) consists of two hundred and three lines, out of which a hundred and sixty-one are five-character and seven-character lines of *shi*-poetry; Luo Binwang’s “Tangzi congjun fu” （*Fu* on An Unbrided Man Joining the Army) consists of fifty-six lines, out of which forty-two are five-character and seven-character lines of *shi*-poetry.

The most noteworthy piece is Liu Xiyi’s “Sima fu” （*Fu* on the Dead Horse), which, written entirely in the *shi* form, comprises six regulated quatrains and one regulated eight-line verse (stanza 4). It begins with a depiction of a thoroughbred suffering from cold on the frontier:

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\(^{81}\) *Jiu Tang shu*, 190.5006.

\(^{82}\) For discussion of Li Bai’s “Shudaonan,” see Paul W. Kroll, “The Road to Shu, from Zhang Zai to Li Bo” *Early Medieval China* 10-11.1 (2004): 227-54.
連山四望何高高* Connected mountains overlooking four directions, how lofty!
良馬本代君子勞* The thoroughbred, originally, labored in place of a gentleman.
燕地冰堅傷凍骨 In the land of Yan83 the firm ice injured its freezing bones;
胡天霜落縮寒毛* From the northern sky frosts falling, reduced its shivering hair.84

This is followed by a retrospect of the dead horse’s entire life, including its futile wish to get some rest (stanzas 2-3), its recollection of the former glorious days and its death and separation from the gentleman (stanzas 4-5).85 It ends with the dead horse’s grievance in stanzas 6-7:

千里相思浩如失* The longing of the “thousand-league horse” was unchecked, as if unbearable;
一代英雄從此畢* A hero of its generation, from now on, reached its end.
鹽車垂耳不知年 Driving salt cart with drooped ears,86 the fine steed lost track of time;
高門待封杳無期* To elevate the gate to await enfeoffment87 is far off and indefinite;

83 Yan was the name of one of the seven major states of the Warring States period, comprising areas in present-day northern Hebei 河北 and southern Liaoning 辽宁. Here it refers to the northern frontier.
84 The original text in the Dunhuang manuscript is corrupted; here I follow the emendation offered in the Quan Tang fu 全唐賦, ed. Jian Zongwu 簡宗梧 and Li Shiming 李時銘 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2011), 11.1009. For a complete translation of this fu, see appendix (7).
85 For a discussion of these stanzas, see Hu Youfeng 胡幼峯, “Dunhuang canjuan Liu Xiyi yishi ‘Sima fu’ de xiezuo tese” 敦煌殘卷劉希夷<<死馬賦>>的寫作特色, Furen guowen xuebao 1989.05: 187-204.
86 See p65-66.
87 According to the Han shu 漢書, before Yu Dingguo 于定國 was enfeoffed as the Marquis of Xiping 西平, his father had already elevated the gate of their family residence so that it would allow large chariots to pass through, and expected his son’s future enfeoffment. Han shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 71.3046.
The eight exceptional horses\textsuperscript{88} were well-known yet still dead in the end;

When would a thousand gold be used to buy horse bones again?\textsuperscript{89}

The final line is a rhetorical question, as the poet knows perfectly well that the time when a thousand gold would be used to buy a dead horse’s bones are forever gone. The only fate of the dead horse that is the subject of this \textit{fu} is to rot away and be forgotten.

In form, this saddening \textit{fu} lacks any properties of a conventional \textit{fu}. In addition, its language is relatively simple, whereas in general, \textit{fu}, compared to \textit{shi}, expects a higher register of language. Had it not been for the title, which specifies this piece to be a \textit{fu}, the reader could have easily taken it as a \textit{shi}. In fact, in the Dunhuang manuscript P. 3619, the “Sima \textit{fu}” is collected together with Liu Xiyi’s three other \textit{gexing} poems, “Daibei baitouweng,” “Beimang pian” 北邙篇 (Mount Beimang), and “Daoyi pian” 搗衣篇 (Beating Clothes with A Mallet). The same manuscript also includes over twenty \textit{shi}-poems written by other Tang literati (see the manuscript below). The “Sima \textit{fu}” is indeed a \textit{fu} written in the form of \textit{shi}.

\textsuperscript{88} Alludes to the story that when Sima Xiangru was leaving Sichuan for Chang’an, he inscribed on the pillar of the Shengxian Bridge of Chengdu 成都, claiming that he would not return without riding a chariot pulled by a four-horse team, a privilege enjoyed by ministers.

\textsuperscript{89} Refers to the eight exceptional horses of King Mu 穆 of the Zhou 周 (r. ca. 976 BCE–ca. 922 BCE). Allegedly, the eight horses took the king to the west to meet the immortal Xiwangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West).

\textsuperscript{90} According to the \textit{Zhanguo ce}, there was a ruler who, in order to obtain a thoroughbred, spent a thousand gold to buy the bones of a dead horse, thus to show his desire for exceptional horses. \textit{Zhanguo ce}, 29.1065.
The active interplay between the *shi* and *fu* shows that the distinction between the two genres was not as clear-cut in the Tang as it is imagined today. The generic categorization of the *Wen xuan* was very influential and widely used in the Tang. However, some Tang literati, unwilling to be confined or trapped by the conventional expectations of a genre, tried to push the limits of individual genres. Their experiment with the genre contributed to the thriving of Tang literature.

**Self-fashioning in the *Fu***

With these preliminary considerations in mind, we may now proceed to examine in its entirety one representative example of the *fu* from the first half of the Tang, one that should reveal *fu* as a genre effective for literary self-fashioning. The piece under discussion is Yang Jiong’s “Wodu shuji *fu*” 鬧讀書架賦 (*Fu* on the Bookshelf for Reading while Lying down).

Among the “Four Elites of the Early Tang,” Yang Jiong had a relatively successful political career. He came to court a prodigy, passing in 659 the Examination for Divine Lads (*Shengtong* 神童), in which candidates of nine years or under were tested in their knowledge of the *Lunyu, Xiaojing* 孝經, and one other classic text of their own choosing. Following his success in the exam, Yang Jiong
was given a position in the Hongwen Guan (弘文館, Institute for the Enhancement of Literature) at the imperial court, where he passed his adolescence and early manhood. The “Wodu shujia fu” was probably written when he was serving in the Hongwen Guan (弘文館). Judging from the title, this fu falls into the category of “fu on things” (yongwu fu 詠物賦). In general, a yongwu fu focuses on a single object—such as celestial phenomena, plants, animals, and human-made objects—and depicts the object in an elaborate manner. On many occasions, a poet presents the object described in his fu as an allegory of himself, thus revealing his own virtue, fate, or current situation. Such compositions include Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (200-168 BCE) “Funiao fu” (Fu on the Owl), Mi Heng’s 禰衡 (173-198) “Yingwu fu” (Fu on the Parrot), Zhang Hua’s 張華 (232-300) “Jiaoliao fu” (Fu on the Northern Wren), and Yu Xin’s 庾信 (513-581) “Kushu fu” (Fu on the Withered Tree).

Yang Jiong’s “Wodu shujia fu” deviates from the yongwu fu tradition in two aspects: first, it does not focus on the bookshelf, but Yang Jiong himself; second, Yang Jiong fashions his image not through allegory, but by directly talking about himself. He begins the fu by offering a very different view with regard to reading:

儒有

In the Confucian tradition:

傳經在乎致遠  
Transmitting classical texts lies in reaching to what is distant;

力學在乎請益*  
Committing to learning lies in requesting further instruction.

士安號於書淫  
Shi’an is called a “book addict”;

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92 Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282), style named Shi’an, was addicted to reading books, forgetting all about eating and sleeping; because of that, his contemporaries called him a “book addict.” Jin shu, 51.1410.
Yuankai is known for his “obsession with the Zuozhuan.”

Reposing on high [pillows] is extremely suitable: who could ridicule me as Sir Bian?

Comfortably lying down is pleasant: why would I be ashamed if I am criticized as Zai Yu?

That craftsman of the state, experimented with his skill;

He measured the mountain wood to make it into a shelf.

[So that] I can respectfully observe the Odes and Documents,

While not being away from the pillow and mat.

In the first four lines, Yang Jiong affirms the Confucian tradition of “transmitting classical texts” and “committing to learning”; he also introduces two reputed Confucian scholars who were both “book addicts”: Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282) and Du Yu 杜預 (222-285). With this statement, he seems to be presenting himself as a traditional scholar diligent in study. Nevertheless, he quickly dismisses this impression when he, in lines 5-6, comes to the defense of “lying down in daytime.” Line 5 alludes to Bian Shao 邊韶, style named Xiaoxian 孝先, a famous scholar in the Eastern Han. According to the Hou Han shu, once Bian Shao was lying in bed in the daytime, his disciples made fun of him: “Bian Xiaoxian, / His belly is round. / He is lazy with reading, / Merely interested in

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93 Yuankai was the style name of Du Yu 杜預 (222-285), a prominent scholar-official in the Western Jin. Immersed in the study of Zuozhuan, he composed a series of texts illustrating the Zuozhuan, including the Chunqiu Zuozhuan ji 章句左傳集解, Chunqiu Zuoshizhuan yin 春秋左氏音, Chunqiu Zuoshizhuan ping 春秋左氏評. When Emperor Wu (r. 265-290) asked him about his obsession, Du Yu replied, “I have an obsession with the Zuozhuan” 臣有左傳癖. Jin shu, 34.1032.

94 Yang Jiong ji jianzhu 楊炯集箋注, ed. Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 1.66.
sleeping” 邊孝先, 腹便便. 嫌讀書, 但欲眠. Hearing this, Bian Shao responded with a witty reply, saying he was not lying there sleeping, but considering the classics:

邊為姓  Bian is my family name,
孝為字* And Xiao my style name.
腹便便  My belly is round—

4 五經笥* It is the bamboo hamper for the five classics.
但欲眠  Merely interested in sleeping?—
思經事* I am considering matters of the classics. ⁹⁵

By referring to Bian Shao, Yang Jiong makes it clear that he is not defending daytime sleeping, but reading while lying in bed. He even boldly claims that if he can comfortably lie down as he is reading, he will not mind being criticized as Zai Yu (line 6). This alludes to *Lunyu* 5.10: “Tsai Yü was in bed in the daytime. The Master said, ‘A piece of rotten wood cannot be carved, nor can a wall of dried dung be trowelled. As far as Yü is concerned what is the use of condemning him?’” 宰予塗寢. 子曰: “朽木不可雕也, 糞土之牆不可杇也. 於予與何誅?”⁹⁶ Openly arguing against Kongzi, Yang Jiong shows that he is unrestrained by conventions. Moreover, the undesirable act of “lying in bed in the daytime” is turned into a positive one, displaying the poet’s fondness of reading.

Yang Jiong then explains that in order to “respectfully observe the *Odes* and *Documents*, while not being away from the pillow and mat,” he had a skillful craftsman make the bookshelf. The

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⁹⁵ *Hou Han shu*, 80.2623.
second stanza describes the bookshelf, including how it was made, as well as its appearance, merit, and function:

朴斲初成*  
12 因夫美名*  
兩足山立  
雙鉤月生*  
從繩運斤義且得於方正

With carving and sculpting, it was then completed,

Which is in accordance with its beautiful name.

Its two feet stand as mountains;

Its pair of hooks look like the rising moon.

Follow the making-line to move the axe: its principle is obtained from that of being fair and square;

Measure the tenon to make the mortise: its method is taken from that of being across and athwart.

Its merit lies in the promise that one will study as cultivating a plant;  

Its undertaking is to allow for the thorough explication of the classics.  

In Yang Jiong’s description, the bookshelf is more than a beautifully carved object. It embodies the principles of being “fair and square” and “across and athwart.” The two expressions are clever puns, referring both to the shape of the bookshelf, and the Confucian virtue (“fair and square”) and sophistical eloquence in political matters (“across and athwart”). Embodying these virtues, the bookshelf’s primary function is to allow the person who uses it to “study as cultivating a plant” and

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97 Zuozhuan (Zhao 18): “To study is to cultivate a plant. When one does not study, the plant loses its leaves” 夫學，殖也。不學，將落。Zuo Tradition, 1557.

98 Yang Jiong ji jianzhu, 1.68.
have a “thorough explication of the classics.” In these two lines, Yang Jiong is also conveying his
own aspiration, as he is the user of the bookshelf. Thus is presented his image as a diligent scholar.

Yang Jiong then moves to depict the advantages and joys derived from using the bookshelf in
the third stanza:

不勞於手          Without laboring the hand,
20 無費於目*        Or straining the eyes,
開卷則氣雜香芸    When unfolding the scroll, its air is mixed with rue’s scent;\(^99\)
掛編則色連翠竹*   When hanging up bundled strips, its color blends into the halcyon
                   bamboos.\(^{100}\)

With the bookshelf, reading becomes more relaxing and pleasant. These four lines still center on the
bookshelf, but within them the reader can already see the Yang Jiong persona enjoying reading in a
relaxed, unconventional way. Then the focus is shifted to the poet, who is portrayed as taking
delight in books from day to night:

風清夜淺每待蘧蘧之覺  When the breeze is fresh and the night is young, I always
                     await the sudden awakening;\(^{101}\)
24 日永春深常偶便便之腹* When the day is long and the spring is deep, I always lie alone
                     with my round belly.

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\(^{99}\) Rue was often used as insectifuge for books.
\(^{100}\) *Yang jiong ji jianzhu*, 1.68.
\(^{101}\) Alludes to the famous butterfly story from the *Zhuangzi* “Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed that he was a butterfly,
a glad and gay butterfly. Happy with himself and doing as he pleased, he did not know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly
he woke up, and all at once, he was Zhuang Zhou” 昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也. 自喻適志與，不知周也. 俄
然覺，則蘧蘧然周也. *Zhuangzi jiubi*, 1.112.
因为是而刺

Because of it, my thighs are longer being stabbed;\(^{102}\)

膺由是而伏

Thanks to it, I do not have to lean forward my chest anymore.

庶思覃於下卷

Hopefully I can reflect profoundly within a dropped curtain;\(^{103}\)

28 豈遽留而更讀

Is it possible that I will be tardy for reading more?

其利何如

What can compare with it in its benefits?

其樂只且

Let alone the joys it brings!

巾逐掛於屛幌

Thus the headkerchief is hung on the screen;

32 履誰曳於階除

Who would drag their shoes on stairs?

每偶草玄之字

I am always in the company of the words of *Taixuan*,\(^{104}\)

不親非聖之書

And never fond of books that are not sagely.

比角枕而嘆若

If it is compared to a horn pillow, I sigh of it in despair;

36 匹算琴而病諸

If it is equated to a jade zither, I deplore it.\(^{105}\)

Yang Jiong fashions his image from two aspects. On the one hand, he shows that he is a carefree and unconventional scholar, instead of a boring and stubborn Confucian. This is made especially clear in lines 23-24 and 31-32, where he depicts his “lazy” way of reading. On the other hand, he emphasizes his fondness of reading, as in shown in lines 25-28, when he displays his eagerness in learning. At the same time, he also proves his virtue by saying he never reads books that

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\(^{102}\) Alludes to the story of Su Qin, who was so painstaking in his study that in order keep himself from falling asleep, he used an awl to stab his thighs when he was reading.

\(^{103}\) Alludes to the reputed Han Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179-104 BCE), who taught disciples within a dropped curtain.

\(^{104}\) According to the *Han shu*, under the reign of Emperor Ai of the Han (r. 6-3 BCE), as the political world was extremely corrupted, Yang Xiong retreated from the world to “draft the *Taixuan*”, thus to preserve his own integrity. *Han shu*, 87.3565.

\(^{105}\) *Yang Jiong ji jianzhu*, 1.68.
are not sagely (lines 33-34). As in the first stanza, he presents himself to be an unconventional scholar diligent in study. Yang Jiong seems to be turning back to the bookshelf in the last two lines, where he declares the merit of the bookshelf. Nevertheless, it is him who “sighs of” and “deplores” the underappreciated value of the bookshelf, again showing his difference from other scholars.

In the fourth stanza, Yang Jiong continues his self-fashioning, displaying once more both his carefree personality and affection for studying:

爾其  
臨窗有風  
閉戶多雪*  
自得陶潛之性  
40  
仍秉袁安之節*  
既幽獨而多閑  
遂憑茲而徧閱*  
讀易則期於索隱  
44  
習禮則防於志悅*  
儻叔夜之神交  
固周公之夢絕*  

* As for

When the windows are facing the wind,
Or when the door is closed because of the heavy snow,
I naturally inherit the quality of Tao Qian,
And preserve the character of Yuan An.
Since I am alone and have much leisure time,
I depend on the bookshelf to read broadly.
Looking at the Changes, I expect to search for what is hidden;
Studying the Rites, I prevent myself from setting my mind on enjoyment.
Should it be that I form a spiritual friendship with Shuye,^{106}
Surely I will give up the wish to dream of the Duke of Zhou.^{107}

^{106} Namely, Ji Kang, the famous scholar of the Jin dynasty.
^{107} Yang jiong ji jianzhu, 1.71. Lanyu 7. 5: “The Master said, ‘How I have gone downhill! It has been such a longtime since I dreamt of the Duke of Chou’” 子曰: “甚矣吾衰也! 久矣吾不復夢見周公.” Lao, The Analects, 68.
In the previous stanza, Yang Jiong portrays himself taking delight in reading in fine weather; here he depicts himself enjoying books on windy and snowy days. He compares himself to the reputed Tao Qian and Yuan An (?-92). Tao Qian, in his “Yu zi Yan deng shu” 與子儼等疏 (Letter to My Sons: Yan and Others), presents a picture where he lies under the northern window in the fifth and sixth months, and when a cool breeze arrives, he thinks himself as a man of the time ruled by the Honorable Thearch Fuxi.108 Yuan An was known for his integrity. According to the Runan xianxian zhuan 汝南先賢傳, after a big snow in Luoyang, many people came out of their houses to sweep away the snow and beg for food. When the Magistrate of Luoyang passed by Yuan An’s door, he saw no footprints in the snow. Assuming Yuan An might have been dead, he went into the house, only to find Yuan An lying there corpse-like. He asked Yuan An why he did not go outside, Yuan An replied that due to the heavy snow, everyone is hungry; therefore, it is undesirable to bother other people.109 These two allusions appear to be somewhat imperfect, since neither Tao Qian nor Yuan An was said to be lying there reading. One possible reason for Yang Jiong’s use of these two imperfect allusions is that there were hardly any literati who associated themselves with the behavior of reading while lying down. The only person who had done so, that I know of, is Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508-555), Emperor Yuan of the Liang (r. 552-555). In his “Zixu” 自序 (Self-preface) to the Jinlouzi 金樓子, he portrays a picture where he enjoys reading while lying in bed, from the dusk to dawn:

When I was a kid, in the dusk of a summer’s day, I lowered the scarlet gauze and mosquito braids; inside was a silver cup, serving the sweet wine of Shanyin. I lay in bed and read, sometimes till dawn. Those who knew me all took this as normal.

109 As quoted by Li Xian, in his commentary to the Hou Han shu. Hou Han shu, 45.1518.
Yang Jiong might have been aware of Xiao Yi’s precedent; but he still adopted the allusions to Tao Qian and Yuan An, as the two figures were reputed for both their carefree personality and virtuous character, whereas Xiao Yi was known as the emperor of a conquered nation. In the next six lines, he again displays his eagerness in learning, especially his devotion to the classics, which is an echo of lines 17-18 and 33-34.

In the fifth stanza, Yang Jiong reveals his intention for writing this 

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其始也一木所為*
In the beginning, it is made of one piece of wood;
48 其用也萬卷可披*
As for the usage, it can display ten thousands scrolls.
墨沼之前謂江帆之乍至
Before the ink pond, it seems that a sea boat has suddenly arrived;
書林之下若雲翼之新垂*
Beneath the literary grove, it looks as if cloudy wings just hang down.
動靜隨於語默
Being active or still follows with whether some gentleman speaks up\textsuperscript{111} or keeps quite;
52 出處任於輓推*
Coming forth or staying secluded depends on if there is someone pulling and pushing.\textsuperscript{112}
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\textsuperscript{111} Namely, recommending.
\textsuperscript{112} Zuozhuan (Xiang 14): “The Wei ruler is sure to reenter Wei. With two such fine men, one pulling him and one pushing him, even if he did not wish to reenter Wei, how would it be possible not to do so?” 衛君必入，夫二子者，或
If one hopes that officials do what they are appointed to do,

Then surely they should be selected from those [who read
while lying down].

Whereas the first four lines describe the usage of the bookshelf, the following four lines turn to discuss the appointment of officials. The message Yang Jiong conveys is clear: those in power should “speak up” and “pull and push,” that is, recommend him to the emperor. Accordingly, Yang Jiong did not merely write the *fu* to praise the bookshelf; rather, he primarily used it for political self-promotion. The image he fashions here is consistent with this goal. For one thing, that he advocates and is committed to reading while lying down—a very unconventional behavior—reveals his difference from other traditional scholars. For another, that with the bookshelf he is always reading books, especially the classics, is indicative of his diligence and commitment to Confucian tradition. This image of an unconventional scholar fond of Confucian learning is likely to set him apart from other literati and attract high ministers’ attention.

Admittedly, starting from line 23, Yang Jiong deviates from the *yongwu fu* tradition by shifting the focus of the *fu* from the bookshelf to himself; but he does bring the reader’s attention back to the bookshelf from time to time, such as in lines 29-30, 35-36, and 47-50, showing he is not entirely ignoring the literary expectation of a *yongwu fu*. He is subtly adopting this prevalent literary form for self-fashioning.

Yang Jiong ends this *fu* with a picture, where he, by employing the bookshelf, wanders in the literary sea, freely and easily:

Zuo Tradition, 1023. Later the expression “pulling and pushing” became a metonym for recommendation.
Because of that, I say to it:

“You are flat and curled: your Way is able to gather emptiness;“

You are square and straight: your act is able to establish virtue.

When I cross the brush sea, you are my boat;

When I gallop in the literary garden, you are my wings.

Therefore I am ignorant of what is impossible;

Easy and effortless, I repose and rest for a moment.”

The Qing scholar Wang Qisun 王芑孫 (1755–1818) once notes in his Dufu zhiyan 讀賦卮言:

“The shi was never more thriving than in the Tang, so too the fu was never more thriving than in the Tang” 詩莫盛于唐, 賦亦莫盛于唐. Whether “the fu was never more thriving than in the Tang” may be open to discussion, but the fu was broadly used by both the emperor and literati, for various purposes. It is inarguably a prevalent and effective genre for authors to display their scholarship, literary ability, and command of language, as well as to represent their self-image.
Chapter IV: A Portrait of Me: Self-presentation in Tang Autobiographical Verse

In the beginning of The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography is a chronology of important Western autobiographies, starting from Xenophon’s Anabasis, which was composed around 370 BCE, to Andre Dubus’s Townie: A Memoir and Jeanette Winterson’s Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?, both published in 2011. In this long chronology, between St. Augustine’s Confessions (397-398) and Peter Abelard’s Historia Calamitatum (c. 1132), exists a vacuum that lasted more than seven hundred years. This time span roughly corresponds to medieval China, a period traditionally designating the eight hundred years lasting from 220 to the tenth century. Unlike its Western counterpart, medieval China was an important stage in the development of pre-modern autobiography, both in prose and poetry.¹

During the time, the most prominent prose form for autobiographical writing was the “self-preface,” typically entitled “zixu” 自序, “zixu” 自敘, or “xuzhuan” 敘傳. The prototype of this literary form is the “Taishigong zixu” 太史公自序 (Self-preface of the Grand Scribe), written by the Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-90? BCE). As a preface to the Shiji, although it is placed at the end of the book, “Taishigong zixu” begins with Sima Qian’s autobiography. It traces the legendary lineage of the Sima family, gives an account of his father Sima Tan’s 司馬談 (?-110 BCE) life and thought, and ends with Sima Qian’s own curriculum vitae.² Following Sima Qian’s example, most historians included in the histories they compiled a self-preface, where they offer individual

autobiographical accounts. This tradition came to an end in the Tang. In 629, the Tang court installed the historiographical office (shiguan 史館), as a result, “history was no longer the work of a single person or a single family; therefore, the term xuzhuan [and the tradition of writing self-prefaces] disappeared [in historical works]” 史非一人一家之書, 故無序傳之名矣.

In addition to historians, other scholars have also composed self-prefaces for their compositions. Self-prefaces written by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 CE), Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343), Jiang Yan 江淹 (404-505), and Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508-555) are representatives of autobiographical writings from the early medieval period. Admittedly, not all self-prefaces are autobiographical. In the “Xuzhi” 序志 (Statement of Intent) chapter, Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (b. ca. 470, d. after 519) self-preface to his discussion of literature titled Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍, the author barely mentions his own personal life. By the time of the Tang, literati’s interest in writing self-preface seemed to have dwindled, as only a very few of them composed prefaces for their own collections. The handful of self-prefaces—including Xu Hun’s 許渾 (ca. 791-ca. 858) “Wusilan shi zixu” 烏絲闌詩自序 (Self-preface to Poems Written on Fabric with Columns Marked by Black Silk) and Chen Kangshi’s 陳康士 (874-888) “Qindiao zixu” 琴調自敘 (Self-preface to the Tunes of Zither)—, are all quite short and

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3 In his Shitong 史通, the Tang historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721) has considered the tradition of historians’ self-prefaces; see Shitong tongshi 史通通釋, ed. Pu Qilong 濟起龍 (1679-1762) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 9.256-58.


5 Ershi’er shi kaoyi 二十二史考異, ed. Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804) (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 5.109.


serve primarily as introductions to individual anthologies. Similar to Liu Xie’s “Xuzhi,” they are not autobiographical.

The decline of the autobiographical self-preface in the Tang contrasts with the development of two other forms of prose autobiography at the time, especially in the mid and late Tang. The two literary forms are the fictional autobiography and the self-composed muzhiming 墓志铭 (entombed epitaph).

The Eastern Jin poet Tao Qian’s 陶潜 (c. 352-427) “Wuliu xiansheng zhuan” 五柳先生傳 (Biography of Master Five Willows) sets the model for the fictional autobiography. Rather than calling it his autobiography, Tao Qian presents the text as a biography of a fictional, idealized “Master Five Willows,” although he must have been aware that the reader would easily take it as his self-portrait. Tao Qian’s writing inspired Yuan Can’s 袁粲 (421-478) “Miaode xiansheng zhuan” 妙德先生傳 (Biography of the Master of Wonderful Virtue), another pre-Tang fictional autobiography.8 In the Tang, a few literati, including Wang Ji, Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), and Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (?-881), all composed their own fictional autobiographies.9 Moreover, with Lu Yu’s 陸羽 (733-804) “Lu Wenxue zizhuan” 陸文學自傳 (Autobiography of Scholar Lu) and Liu Yuxi’s 劉禹錫 (772-842) “Zi Liuzi zizhuan” 子劉子自傳 (Autobiography of Master Liu),10 the term zizhuan 自傳 (“autobiography”) was finally brought to the table. It shows that autobiography no longer required the assumed veil, however transparent, of being a biography.

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9 These pieces are: Wang Ji’s “Wudou xiansheng zhuan” 五斗先生傳 (Biography of Mr. Five Dippers); Bai Juyi’s “Zaiyin xiansheng zhuan” 趙吟先生傳 (Biography of Mr. Chanting-in-Drunkenness), and Lu Guimeng’s “Fuli xiansheng zhuan” 甫里先生傳 (Biography of Mr. Fuli). For studies on these fictional autobiographies, see Kōzō Kawai, *Chūgoku no jiden bungaku*, 67-156.

The self-composed muzhiming was a literary form newly developed in the Tang. Muzhiming, normally consisting of a biographical prose preface and a rhymed eulogistic poem, are biographical accounts that were carved onto rectangular blocks of limestone and placed within the tomb of their subject. In general, muzhiming were composed either by a friend or family member of the deceased, or by a commissioned literatus. In the Tang, a growing number of literati began to write their own muzhiming. We know of three self-composed muzhiming from the early and High Tang—individually by Wang Ji, Wang Xuanzong 王玄宗, and Yan Tingzhi 嚴挺之 (673-742)—, and over twenty self-composed muzhiming from the mid and late Tang.

Compared to autobiographical prose, autobiographical poetry appeared later. The earliest self-consciously autobiographical poem probably is Yan Zhitui’s 顏之推 (531-591) “Guan wosheng fu” 觀我生賦 (Fu on Considering My Life), a long autobiographical fu composition. Quite a few early and High Tang literati followed Yan Zhitui’s example by writing their autobiographies in the form of fu. Those compositions include Wang Ji’s “You Beishan fu,” Lu Zhaolin’s “Shijin wen,” Liu Zhiji’s

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15 For translation of the “Guan wosheng fu,” see Albert E. Dien, Pei Ch'i shu 45: Biography of Yen Chih-t'ai (Frankfurt: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 1976), 42-71, 125-83; for discussion on the fu, see Xiaofei Tian, Beacon Fire and Shooting Star (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 370-81.
“Sishen fu,” and Cen Shen’s “Ganjiu fu,” which we have mentioned in the last chapter. Unlike the fictional autobiography and the self-composed muzhiming, which became more prominent in the mid and late Tang, there were no autobiographical fu composed during the late eighth century to the ninth century that are known to us today.

In addition to autobiographical fu, autobiographical verse also became an important genre in the early and High Tang period. Some readers may argue that Tao Qian had already written many autobiographical shi-poems, where the poet presents one particular moment or specific period of his life. Nonetheless, when compared to other autobiographical writings, where individual authors reflect on their entire life, those shi-poems by Tao Qian may best be characterized as poems with features of self-writing. The same can be said of most of Du Fu’s poems, despite the conventional understanding that Du Fu wrote most of his poems as autobiographies, which contributed to his well-known reputation as the “poet historian” (shishi 詩史).

In the early and High Tang, three different forms of autobiographical verse appeared: the ming銘 (inscription) part of the self-composed muzhiming, the autobiographical zan贊 (encomium), and the autobiographical shi. A standard muzhiming is not purely autobiographical prose, as it also includes a ming, a rhymed eulogistic poem that comes at the end of it. One such example is Wang Ji’s self-composed muzhiming.

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17 For study on the concept of shishi, see Zhang Hui 張暉, Zhongguo “shishi” chuantong 中國 “詩史” 傳統 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2012).
Zan as a genre underwent important development from the Han to the Six Dynasties, partly under the influence of Buddhism.\textsuperscript{18} In general, there were three main forms of zan, one being the appraisal in historical texts (shizan 史贊), starting from Ban Gu's appraisals in his Han shu. The second form is the encomium to accompany portraits or paintings (xiangzan 像贊 or tuzan 圖贊), such as Zhidun’s 支遁 (314-366) “Shijiawenfo xiangzan” 釋迦文佛像贊 (Encomium for a Painting of Śākyamuni Buddha) and Xiahou Zhan’s 夏侯湛 (c. 243-c. 291) “Dongfang Shuo huazan” 東方朔畫贊 (Encomium for the Portrait of Dongfang Shuo). The third form is the encomium of various figures and objects, such as Li Bai’s “Li jushi zan” 李居士贊 (Encomium for Householder Li) and “Qin zan” 琴贊 (Encomium for Zither). With regard to the last two types of encomiums, most of them consist of four-character lines, whereas some are made up of five-character lines, even lines of varied lengths.

Zan already had a long history prior to the Tang, but there is no pre-Tang autobiographical encomium that I know of. According to the Sui shu, Liu Xuan 劉炫 (ca. 546-ca. 613), a scholar-official of the Sui, “composed encomium for himself” 自為贊.\textsuperscript{19} However, there is no evidence suggesting that Liu Xuan actually called his writing zan; moreover, judging from its form and content, Liu Xuan’s composition reads more like a self-preface, rather than an encomium.\textsuperscript{20} If Liu Xuan’s work is dubious maybe, then Yang Jiong’s “Sifa canjun Yang Jiong zizan” 司法參軍楊炯自贊 (Autobiographical Encomium for the Administrator of Law and Punishment Yang Jiong) is...
probably the earliest autobiographical encomium. This practice of writing one’s own encomium did not catch on until the Song 宋 (960-1279) dynasty.21

As for the autobiographical 诗, the third form of autobiographical verse, it includes two different groups. The first group consists of purly autobiographical 诗-poems where the poets reflect on significant moments of their entire lives, such as Luo Binwang’s “Chouxi pian” 稣昔篇 (Time of Yesteryear) and Du Fu’s “Zhuangyou” 壮遊 (Travels of My Prime). The second group consists of occasional shi-poems where a poet’s autobiographical account makes up a major component of a poem. In the early and High Tang periods, such shi-poems include Wang Ji’s “Wannian xuzhi shi Zhai chushi” 晚年敘志示翟處士 (In My Later Year I Express My Mind to Private Gentleman Zhai), Cui Shi’s 崔湜 (671-713) “Jinglong ernian yuzi Menxia pingzhangshi xuejie shou Jiangzhou Yuanwai sima xunbai Xiangzhou Cishi chunri fu Xiangyang tuzhong yanzhi” 景龍二年余自門下平章事削階授江州員外司馬尋拜襄州刺史春日赴襄陽途中言志 (In the Second Year of the Jinglong Reign, I Was Demoted from the Position of Manager of Affairs of the Chancellery, Appointed as Administrator Equestrian of Jiangzhou, and Designated as Prefect of Xiangzhou Soon After; In Spring, on the Journey to Xiangyang, I Express My Mind), Gao Shi’s 高適 (ca. 704-765) “Chou Pei Yuanwai yishi daishu” 酬裴員外以詩代書 (Responding to Vice Director Pei, I use the Shi as A Letter), and Li Bai’s “Jing luanlihou tianen liu Yelang yi jiyou shuhuai zeng Jiangxia Wei Taishou Liangzai” 經亂離後天恩流夜郎憶舊遊書懷贈江夏韋太守良宰 (After Experiencing the Disorder, Thanks to the Emperor’s Beneficence, I was Exiled to Yelang; I Recalled Old Travels and Wrote Down My Feelings to Present to Wei Liangzai, Governor

21 The other two extant “Zizan” from the Tang are Xue Feng’s 薛逢 (806-876) “Huaxiang zizan” 畫像自贊 (Autobiographical Encomium for My Portrait), and Wu Zilai’s 吳子來 “Xiezhen zizan” 寫真自贊 (Autobiographical Encomium for A Picture of Myself). For discussion on Song literati’s autobiographical encomiums, see Xie Peifen 謝佩芬, “Ziwo guankan de yingshang: Songdai zizanwen yanjiu” 自我觀看的影像—宋代自贊文研究 Xin guoxue 2012.0: 104-60.
of Jiangxia). These poems were composed under various circumstances and for different purposes, yet as they all display evident autobiographical features, they may as well be regarded as autobiographical poems.

That various forms of autobiographical poetry appeared in the early and High Tang is a noteworthy literary phenomenon that has been almost entirely ignored. This indifference to autobiographical poetry is partly related to the belief that autobiography has to be in the form of narrative whereas ancient Chinese poetry is unsuitable for narrative. Yet those early and High Tang autobiographical poems show that poetry can be an effective genre for autobiographical writing. Since autobiographical fu-poetry has already been discussed in the last chapter, this chapter focuses on the three different forms of autobiographical verse. I will consider the ways in which Tang literati presented themselves autobiographical verse, and the circumstances that motivated them to write about themselves in the ways they did. As I have explained in the Introduction of the thesis, the authenticity of one’s self-presentation will not be our concern here. I will show that on the one hand, there was a growing trend of self-fashioning among Tang literati, and on the other, many of them did not write autobiographical verse merely for the sake of presenting their lives, but for more practical concerns.

The Contemporary Sage

In Yang Jiong’s “Zizan” and Wang Ji’s “Zizhuan muzhiming,” two opposite self-images are presented: Yang Jiong idealized himself as the embodiment of Confucian ideas, whereas Wang Ji idealized himself as the embodiment of the philosophical concepts of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Despite this apparent difference, Yang Jiong and Wang Ji used the same technique in self-fashioning, that is, portraying themselves as the personification of ideas of the ancient sages. A self-image presented in this way is what I mean by “the contemporary sage.”
Yang Jiong, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, had a relatively successful political career among the “Four Elites of the Early Tang.” His life seems to have been a privileged and pleasant one until the year 685, when, as a punishment for his family relationship to a paternal uncle who had been involved in an abortive rebellion the year before, he was demoted to Zizhou梓州 (in Sichuan四川) to serve as local administrator of law and punishment (sifa canjun司法參軍). During his tenure in Zizhou, he wrote the encomium for himself, the “Sifa canjun Yang Jiong zizan.”

Yang Jiong’s “Zizan” is among a series of encomiums he composed for the officials of Zizhou. This series consists of twenty-nine encomiums, each comprising four or eight four-character lines. The first piece of the series is “Zizhou guanliao zan”梓州官僚贊 (Encomium for Zizhou Officialdom), an encomium for all the officials at Zizhou. Encomiums for individual officials begin with the one for Yang Yin杨諲, who, unlike all the other officials included in this series, was a former Administrator (zhangshi長史) of Zizhou and now serving as Governor of Yuezhou岳州. Yang Jiong might have included Yang Yin for some personal relationship he had with the latter, as the two not only shared the same family name, but also were both natives of Huayin華陰.

The last piece in this series is the encomium for Yang Jiong himself. The fact that he was a member of the Zizhou officialdom, and that he was in charge of writing this series gave Yang Jiong ground to write his own encomium, where he portrays a self that personifies Confucian ideas:

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吾少也賤  “I was low in status when young.”

信而好古*  “Truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity.”

遊宦邊城  Journeying to serve an office in this border city,

4 江山勞苦*  Rivers and mountains assuage the hardship.

歲聿云徂  As the year is indeed passing quickly,

小人懷土*  “The small man cherishes his native land.”

歸歟歸歟  “Let us go home! Let us go home!”

8 自衛反魯*  “I will return from Wei to Lu.”

Except for lines 3-4, which depict Yang Jiong’s experience as a local officer, this encomium consists entirely of verbatim quotations from the *Lunyu*. Lines 1-2 and 7-8 are exact expressions Kongzi used to describe himself. In this way, Yang Jiong presents himself as comparable to the Confucian sage, both in character and fate. In line 6, Yong Jiong surprisingly identifies himself as the “small man” who “cherishes his native land,” instead of the “gentleman” who “cherishes benign rule” 懷德. This

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23 *Lunyu* 9.6: “The t’ai tsai asked Tzu-kung, ‘Surely the Master is a sage, is he not? Otherwise why should he be skilled in so many things?’ Tzu-kung said, ‘It is true, Heaven set him on the path to sagehood. However, he is skilled in many things besides.’ The Master, on hearing of this, said, ‘How well the t’ai tsai knows me! I was of humble station when young. That is why I am skilled in many menial things. Should a gentleman be skilled in many things? No, not at all.’” 大宰問於子貢曰：‘夫子聖者與? 何其多能也? ’子貢曰：‘固天縱之將聖, 又多能也。’子聞之曰：‘大宰知我乎! 吾少也賤, 故多能鄙事。君子多乎哉? 不多也。’ Lau, *The Analects*, 96-7.


25 *Lunyu* 4.11: The Master said, ‘While the gentleman cherishes benign rule, the small man cherishes his native land. While the gentleman cherishes a respect for the law, the small man cherishes generous treatment’ 子曰：‘君子懷德，小人懷土；君子懷刑，小人懷惠。’ Lau, *The Analects*, 73.

26 *Lunyu* 5.22: “When he was in Ch’en, the Master said, ‘Let us go home. Let us go home. Our young men at home are wildly ambitious, and have great accomplishments for all to see, but they do not know how to prune themselves’” 子在陳曰：‘歸與! 彌哀! 吾黨之小子狂簡，斐然成章，不知所以裁之。’ Lau, *The Analects*, 79.

27 *Yang Jiong ji jianzhu*, 10.1525. *Lunyu* 9.15: “The Master said, ‘It was after my return from Wei to Lu that the music was put right, with the ya and the sung being assigned their proper places’” 子曰：‘吾自衛反魯，然後樂正，雅頌各得其所。’ Lau, *The Analects*, 73.
appears to be at odds with other parts of the encomium, as in the *Lunyu* Kongzi always criticized the “small man.” Yet it is due to the small man’s character of “cherishing his native land” that Yang Jiong decides to “go home.” Moreover, the “small man” image adds a nice twist to his self-portrait; otherwise, the reader may think that Yang Jiong is blandly and unimaginatively putting together words from the *Lunyu*.

Unlike Yang Jiong, Wang Ji presents himself as the embodiment of the philosophical concepts of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Wang Ji was the younger brother of Wang Tong, the famous Confucian scholar, and the granduncle of Wang Bo. Born some time around 590 into the family that claimed to be a branch of the illustrious Taiyuan Wang clan, Wang Ji was well trained in Confucian learning. Sometime after 610, he was assigned to a low-ranking position in the palace library. He reportedly found the daily routine of his duties boring and dull, so he asked to be released from the palace library on grounds of illness. Later Wang Ji was appointed as an assistant to the Liuhe 六合 district magistrate of Yangzhou prefecture. Because of his reckless drinking, he was frequently cited for negligence of duty and eventually he resigned, again pleading illness. With the founding of the Tang dynasty, Wang Ji was summoned to office. When he arrived in Chang’an, he was awarded the status of officer-waiting-for-appointment 待詔. After six years’ of waiting for an appointment that never came, Wang Ji withdrew his name for candidacy for office and retired to the country for the second time. Yet only after a few years, he sought office again, probably out of financial concerns. Upon his request, Wang Ji was appointed as an assistant in the Grand Music Bureau. After the death of the director of the Bureau, he resigned a third time, this time for good. Now in permanent retirement, Wang Ji lived off the family land near the juncture of the Yellow River and the Fen River, and he styled himself Donggaozi 東皋子 (Master of the Eastern Embankment), his famous sobriquet.²⁸

²⁸ The narrative of Wang Ji’s life here largely follows Ding Xiang Warner’s account; see Warner, *A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes*, 13-23.
“During the days when his form was about to perish, he wrote his own entombed inscription, which reads” 身死之日，自為墓志銘焉，曰：

有唐逸人 In the Tang was an unrestricted man—
太原王績* Wang Ji of Taiyuan.
若頑若愚 He appeared to be blunt and dull,
似矯似激* Yet also looked affected and sharp.
院止三逕 His yard had only three pathways;
堂唯四壁* His house comprised merely four walls.
不知節制 Ignorant of moderation and regulation,
焉有親戚* How could he be bothered with close relatives?29

Wang Ji here portrays himself as straightforward, eccentric, unbridled, and free of worldly bounds such as kinship, indeed an “unrestricted man.” By presenting this poetic persona, Wang Ji is not communicating his true identity; rather, he “is personifying in his literary self-image a self of philosophical concepts rooted in the Taoist texts Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子,”30 as Ding Xiang Warner has convincingly demonstrated. This feature becomes more clear when Wang Ji turns to quote directly from the Zhuangzi:

以生為附贅懸疣 “He regarded life as a swelling tumor and a protruding wen,

29 Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.200.
以死為決疣潰* And death as the draining of a sore or the bursting of a boil.\textsuperscript{31}

無思無慮 Never had he pondered nor contemplated,

何去何從* “Where would he go and which path would he follow?”\textsuperscript{32}

Life and death is the biggest concern for humankind. Zhuangzi successfully dismisses this concern by looking at “life as a swelling tumor and a protruding wen, and death as the draining of a sore or the bursting of a boil.” Moreover, Zhuangzi advocates a state of emptiness, where one does not pointlessly ponder or contemplate different choices and paths. Wang Ji’s self-image is the embodiment of these ideas.

As life is not more desirable than death, it is meaningless to mourn for the death or commemorate the dead; therefore, Wang Ji ends his writing with a mocking of such practice:

壟頭刻石 Carving the stone on the front of the grave,

馬鬣裁封* And making the horse-mané mound:\textsuperscript{33}

哀哀孝子 The sorrowful and mournful filial sons,

空對長松* Face the large pine trees in vain.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Zhuangzi: “He regarded life as a swelling tumor and a protruding wen, and death as the draining of a sore or the bursting of a boil” 彼以生為附贅縣疣, 以死為決疣潰. Zhuangzi jishi, 3.268.

\textsuperscript{32} Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.200. Zhuangzi: “Only when there is no pondering nor contemplation will you get to know the Way; only when you have no surroundings and follow no practices will you find rest in the Way; only when there is no path nor procedure will you obtain the Way” 无思无慮始知道, 无處无服始安道, 无從无道始得道. Zhuangzi jishi, 7.731.

\textsuperscript{33} According to the Liji, a mound in the axe-shape was called horse-mané mound. Liji zhengyi 禮記正義, ed. Kong Yingda (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanse, 1999), 8.280. Later, “horse-mané mound” became a synonym for grave-mound.

\textsuperscript{34} Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.200.
To Wang Ji, the filial sons’ act of carving gravestones and making horse-manef mounds is to no avail. Nevertheless, he still left behind his own entombed inscription, although we do not know if it was actually carved on a gravestone.

The Disillusioned Recluse

Unlike his self-presentation in the “Zizhuan muzhiming,” in the “Wannian xuzhi shi Zhai chushi” Wang Ji portrays himself as a disillusioned recluse, that is, a scholar who, after spending years pursuing a political career, came to realize its pointlessness and became a recluse.

In the beginning eight lines of the poem, Wang Ji presents himself as a multitalented youth with great political ambition: “Explicating the classics, I hoped for the emperor’s summons; / Studying swordsmanship, I sought ennoblement” 明經思待詔，學劍覓封侯 (lines 5-6). This attitude started to change in his middle age:

中年逢喪亂     In my middle age, I encountered turbulence and turmoil,
非復昔追求*    No longer pursuing the ambition of the past.
失路青門隱     Forfeiting my career path, I lived in seclusion outside the Blue Gate;36
12 藏名白社遊*    Hiding my name, I roamed about the White Alley.37
風雲私所愛     The wind and clouds38 were what I loved personally;
屠博暗為儔*    Butchers and gamblers became my companions in private.39

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35 Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.108. For translation and discussion of the eight lines, see Warner, A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes, 15-6.
36 Alludes to Shao Ping 召平, the Marquis of Dongling 東陵 in the Qin. After the Qin was overthrown, he became a commoner, growing melons outside the Blue Gate, which was the southeast gate of Chang’an.
37 Alludes to Dong Jing 董京, who, after the Jin replaced the Wei, pretended to be mad and lived in the White Alley.
38 Metaphor for the encountering of the emperor and his ministers.
Unraveling complications, [Zigong] once helped the Yue achieve hegemony. \(^{40}\)

Resolving difficulties, [Zhou Zui] surely had saved the Zhou. \(^{41}\)

The “turbulence and turmoil” refers to the collapse of the Sui and the endless battles among power contenders, which, Wang Ji claims, led him to give up his political pursuit. He compares himself to Shao Ping 召平 and Dong Jing 董京, two ancients who became recluses on account of the change of dynasties. On the other hand, despite his claim of “no longer pursuing the ambition of the past,” Wang Ji still held in his mind the exemplary encounter between the emperor and minister; he also imagined himself as figures such as Zigong 子貢 and Zhou Zui 周最 who were able to rescue endangered states. Therefore, this middle-aged Wang Ji had not fully given up his political ambition.

In his later years, Wang Ji’s attitude changed again:

In my later years, I thought deeply for a moment—

One’s limited life is indeed like a floating. \(^{42}\)

I returned to the fields in the south,

And sat by the side of the creek in the north.

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\(^{39}\) Alludes to Mao Sui 毛遂, the brilliant retainer of Lord Pingyuan 平原, who used to hide himself among butchers and gamblers. When the Zhao was invaded by Qin, he helped the Zhao form an alliance with the Chu.

\(^{40}\) According to the Shiji, when Qi planned to attack Lu, Kongzi ordered his disciple Zigong to unravel the complication. Zigong, by taking advantages of the conflicts among different states, caused wars between Wu and Qi, Wu and Jin, and Wu and Yue. In the end, Yue established its hegemony. Shiji, 67.2201.

\(^{41}\) Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.108. According to the Zhanguo ce, when Qin planned to attack Zhou, Zhou Zui 周最 persuaded King Zhao of Qin to give up his idea. Zhanguo ce, 2.68.

\(^{42}\) “Keyi” 刻意 (Constrained in Will): “His [the sage’s] life is like a floating, his death like a rest” 其生若浮, 其死若休. Zhuangzi jishi, 6.539.
Wang Ji become disillusioned about the political world, and he finally returned home. Now living a simple life, he compared himself to four virtuous, hermetic figures of the past:

庾袞逢處跪 Yu Gun, whenever he greeted people, always kneeled;\(^{43}\)

陶潛見吏羞* Tao Qian, when hearing his subordinate's [words], felt ashamed.\(^{44}\)

三晨寧舉火 How could [Zeng Shen] light the fire in three consecutive mornings?\(^{45}\)

五月鎮披裘* In the fifth month [a man], as always, was cloaked with a fur garment.\(^{46}\)

By way of conclusion, Wang Ji declares, as a detached and carefree hermit: “There naturally is joy in the simple way of living; / Who can tell that there will be worry after life?” 自有居常樂, 誰知身世憂 (lines 31-32).\(^{47}\)

As with Wang Ji’s self-presentation in “Wannian xuzhi shi Zhai chushi,” Luo Binwang portrays a similar self-image in his “Chouxi pian,” but in a much more elaborate manner. By the year of 678, Luo Binwang had been serving in a series of minor, provincial posts on and off for over twenty

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43 According to the Jin shu, when Yu Gun was building a fence with his disciples, he would kneel down whenever he passed branches to his disciples, thus to show his respect. Jin shu, 88.2281.

44 According the Song shu, when Tao Qian was on the post of the Magistrate of Pengze 彭澤 county, an inspector was sent down to the county by the commandery, and Tao Qian’s subordinate told him that he should tie his girdle and call on the inspector. Tao Qian gave a sigh, “I cannot bow before a country bumpkin for the sake of five pecks of rice” 我不能為五斗米折腰. On that same day he resigned. Song shu, 93.2287.

45 According to the Gaoshi zhuan 高士傳, Zeng Shen 曾參 refused to take office and roamed about Wei. He was so poor that he could not afford to light the fire to cook a meal in three consecutive days. Gaoshi zhuan, ed. Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282), in Gujin yishi 古今逸史, 1.16b.

46 According to the Lunheng, on his journey, Jizi 季子 saw some gold left on the road. It was the fifth month in the summer, and there was someone cloaked in a fur-garment gathering firewood. Jizi called the firewood gatherer, asking him to pick up the gold. The firewood gatherer got angry, and criticized Jizi for being so arrogant. He said, “When it is the fifth month in summer, I am cloaked with fur-garment to gather firewood. How could I be someone who would pick up the gold?” 吾當夏五月, 披裘而薪, 岂取金者哉? Lunheng, 4.167-68.

47 Wang Ji ji biannian jiaozhu, 2.108. There are three different versions of the final couplet. Here, I follow the three-juan edition, edited by Cao Quan 曹荃 (1661-1708) and Huang Ruheng 黃汝亨 (1558-1626). For a discussion of the three different versions, see Warner, A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes, 149.
Around that time, at the age of sixty, he was finally appointed as a censor (侍御使), the highest position he ever held. Not long afterwards, for some unclear offense or association, he was impeached and imprisoned. Thanks to an amnesty issued in celebration of the inauguration of the Tiaolu 調露 era (679-680) in 679, he was released from prison. After his release, Luo Binwang wrote the “Chouxi pian” of two hundred lines as a reflection of his entire life.

In the “Chouxi pian,” Luo Binwang presents his life as a process where he came to realize the meaninglessness of political pursuits. We see the Luo Binwang persona start out as an aspiring scholar-official, then gradually become disappointed and tired of officialdom, and finally pronounce his determination to lead a reclusive life.

In the first three stanzas of the poem, Luo Binwang lays out the setting of his autobiography by contrasting a promising past with a despairing present. He portrays a young self full of high spirits:

“I rambled by the corner of Baling, / And enjoyed the wind and moon by the edge of Luoyang”

遨遊灞陵曲，風月洛城端 (lines 5-6). This image is juxtaposed to his current situation, that is, after his imprisonment, he was left desolate: “Retainers of those days, where are they now? / Friends

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48 There are various opinions on Luo Binwang’s birth year, ranging from 619 to 640. Here I follow Luo Xiangfa’s 駱祥發 dating, that Luo Binwang was born in 619. Luo Xiangfa, “Luo Binwang shengnian kaobian” 賽賓王生年考辨, in Tangdai wenxue Luncong 唐代文學論叢, ed. Xibei daxue chubanshe (Beijing, 1987), 1-21; Zhang Zhilie, Chu Tang sijie nianpu; Luo Xiangfa, Chu Tang sijie yanjiu 初唐四傑研究 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1993), 1-42.

50 Baling was seventy li east of Chang’an.

51 Luo Linhai jì jiānzhù, 5.161.
from yesteryear have already become estranged” 當時門客今何在, 畠昔交朋已練索 (lines 21-22).\(^{52}\) In spite of this despondent reality, he decides to look forward to a bright future:

莫教憔悴損容儀 I shall not let being haggard and harried impair my appearance,

會得高秋雲霧廓 As there will be a bright autumn when clouds and mists are
dissipated!\(^{53}\)

This bright future, as we shall see by the end of the poem, refers to leaving behind the political world to lead a reclusive life.

With the setting laid out, Luo Binwang begins his autobiographical reflections. He first offers a *curriculum vitae* of his political career from the late 650s to 670, presenting himself as a committed official:

淹留坐帝鄉* I lingered and loitered to no purpose in the capital,\(^{54}\)

無事積炎涼* With nothing to do but gather the heat and cold,\(^{55}\)

一朝被短褐 One morning I still donned a short, coarse robe,\(^{56}\)

六載奉長廊* Then for six years I offered my services at the long corridor.\(^{57}\)

賦文慚昔馬 When composing a literary text, I felt ashamed before Sima Xiangru;

執戟慕前揚* When holding a halberd,\(^{58}\) I admired Yang Xiong from the past.

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\(^{52}\) *Luo Linhai ji jianzhu*, 5.162.

\(^{53}\) *Luo Linhai ji jianzhu*, 5.162.

\(^{54}\) Namely, Chang’an.

\(^{55}\) That is, witnessing the passage of time as the seasons changed.

\(^{56}\) That is, without official position.

\(^{57}\) “Long corridor” likely refers to the establishment of the Prince of Dao, and this line probably describes the poet’s first official position on the staff of the prince’s establishment.
Brandishing the spear, I came out of the Martial Tent;\(^{59}\)

Wielding my brush, I entered into the Civil Splendor Hall.\(^{60}\)

The Civil Splendor Hall was faintly visible inside the imperial city;

All along it was richly replete with talented men.

Sharp words of Pan [Yue] and Lu [Ji] flew about without stopping;

Literary pieces of Zhang [Heng] and Cao [Zhi] rose up from all sides.

High officials and ministers—I knew none of them;

Princes and lords—how could they accept my advice?

Letting fall a fishing-line, I was content to be a white-haired old man;

Bearing firewood, where could I meet the one who knows me?\(^{61}\)

Unlike the other three Elites, Luo Binwang’s political career began relatively late. It was in the late 650s, when he was already over thirty years old, that he entered into service at the establishment of Li Yuanqing 李元慶 (？-664), more famously known as Prince of Dao 道王, the sixteenth son of Emperor Gaozu. In lines 27-30, he describes this experience, and portrays himself as an aspiring official, looking forward to following in the steps of Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong. His hope

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\(^{58}\) At the Han court, an imperial attendant always held a halberd; Yang Xiong was often referred to as Yang Zhiji 揚執戟 (Yang who held a halberd).

\(^{59}\) According to Richard B, Mather, “the original Martial Tent’ may have been the temporary ‘Felt Hall’ (chan-tien氈殿) set up for the New Year celebration south of the capital in Lo-yang when the Wei Emperor Wen (Ts'ao P'i 曹丕, r. 220-226) was remodelling the Lo-yang palace.” Mather, The Age of Eternal Brilliance: Three Lyrical Poets of the Yung-ming Era (483-493), vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 194. Here it is used to designate the establishment of the Prince of Dao.

\(^{60}\) According to Mather, the original “Civil Splendor Hall” had been built during the late Han for formal ceremonial gatherings. Mather, The Age of Eternal Brilliance, 194. Here it is used to designate the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (Hongwen guan弘文館).

\(^{61}\) Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.162-63. See note 46.
seemed to have come true as he was later appointed to the “Civil Splendor Hall,” a metonym for the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (Hongwen Guan 弘文館), an establishment subordinated to the Chancellory. The line “Wielding my brush, I entered into the Civil Splendor Hall” is indicative of his excitement.

This appointment probably took place after the prince’s death in 664. With the prince dead, Luo Binwang first received a minor post as Secretary of Rites (fenglilang 奉禮郎), which he does not mention in the poem, and later as Textual Editor of the Chancellery (Tongtai62 xiangzheng xueshi 東臺詳正學士). Textual Editor was still a low position, but being an editor at Hongwen Guan means holding a position at the imperial court, and aiding in drafting and revising government documents; thus a desirable post. Luo Binwang’s excitement about this position is also revealed as he depicts Hongwen Guan as a galaxy of talents. The blissful tone suddenly comes to a halt when Luo Binwang turns to lament that no noble lords or high officials really appreciated him (lines 37-38). He visually marks this change of tone by making these two lines pentasyllabic, so as to contrast with the foregoing four heptasyllabic lines. He then, comparing himself to the virtuous Jiang Shang and firewood-gatherer, expresses his longing for “the one who knows me.”

This low-spirit carries on to the next stanza, where Luo Binwang recollects his days on the frontiers:

判將運命賦窮通*  Willingly I let fate decide my failure or success;
従來奇舛任西東*  As always, bad luck took me to the west and east.
不應永棄同芻狗  Surely I should not be abandoned forever as a straw dog,

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62 Tongtai was the alternative designation for Chancellery from 662-684.
Yet once more I drifted to and fro, like wandering tumbleweed.\footnote{Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.163-64.}

In 670, for some unknown reason, Luo Binwang was dismissed as Textual Editor. He subsequently joined the army on the northwestern frontier to fight against the Tibetan troops, and then travelled with the army to Yaozhou 姚州, the southwestern corner of the empire, to put down local rebels. Accordingly, rather than being taken to the “west and east” by bad luck, the more accurate direction should have been “north and south”; Luo Binwang chose “west and east” for the obvious reason that *dong* is a rhyme word. This wandering life made him feel like drifting tumbleweed, and his frustration is clearly conveyed. Notwithstanding the disappointment, he still held in his mind to dutifully serve the state and sacrifice himself for the emperor (lines 47-48): “To bring glory to my parents—I have not observed every detail of the rites [in serving the lord];\footnote{Lunyu 3.18: “Observing every detail of the rites in serving your lord” 事君盡禮. Lau, *The Analects*, 70.} / To sacrifice for the emperor—I wish to show my achievement” 榮親未盡禮,徇主欲申功.\footnote{Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.164.} Indeed a committed official.

This image begins to change in stanzas 7-14, when Luo Binwang moves to describe his life in Shu. Of the proceeding three stanzas we have just discussed, almost each and every line relates to Luo Binwang’s political career, thus reaffirming the impression that he was a devoted official. The eight stanzas here, on the contrary, rarely mention his official life, except for the first couplet of the seventh stanza, where Luo Binwang explains his reason for coming to Shu:

脂車秣馬辭鄉國*  Having greased the axles and fed the horses, I bid farewell to the capital city;
Whipping up the reins toward the southeast, I set out as an envoy to Qiong and Bo.  

Luo Binwang came to Sichuan as an envoy and held several minor positions over the years. His depiction of his days in Shu, however, focuses primarily on the local landscape and his personal life. He seems to have quite enjoyed his time there:

川平煙霧開* Above the tranquil stream mists and haze spread open;

遊戲錦城隈* I roamed and had fun by the corner of the Brocade City.  

墉高龜步轉 High is the wall that follows the movement of the turtle’s traces;  

水淨雁文迴 Pure is the water where the wildgeese carrying messages return.  

尋姝入酒肆 In search of the beauty, I went into a tavern;  

訪客上琴臺 To seek out the traveler, I ascended the Zither Tower.  

不識金貂重 I did not recognize the weight of the gold and sable cap,  

偏惜玉山頹 But was particularly attached to the “jade mountain about to collapse.”

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* Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.164. Name of the southwest Linqiong 臨邛 and Badao 樟道 of the Han; here it is used to refer to Shu area.  

* In the past, Chengdu was divided into Greater Chengdu 大成都 and Lesser Chengdu 小成都. As the governmental office for officials in charge of brocade located in Lesser Chengdu, it was also called “City of Brocade Officials,” which then became a synonym for Chengdu. Taiping huanyu ji 太平寰宇記, ed. Yue Shi 楊史 (930-1003) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 72.126.  

* It was said that when Zhang Yi 張儀 (?-309) was in charge of building the city wall of Chengdu, whenever the wall was put up it would fall down. One day, a giant turtle suddenly appeared and walked around the outer part of the city. A diviner told Zhang Yi that he should build the wall by following the tracks left by the turtle. Zhang Yi did so, and the wall stood firm. Soushen ji 搜神記, ed. Gan Bao 干寶 (?-351), comp. Wang Shaoying 汪紹楹 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 13.161.  

* It was believed that in ancient China wildgeese were used to deliver messages.  

* Alludes to Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, the beautiful and talented wife of Sima Xiangru. As Sima Xiangru was very poor, after the two eloped, they opened a wine shop in Linqiong, where Zhuo Wenjun sold the wine herself.  

* Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.166. Alludes to Sima Xiangru, who reportedly used to play zither on the Zither Tower.
Luo Binwang presents his life in Sichuan as full of sight-seeing and wine drinking. The allusion to Ruan Fu 阮孚 in line 79 is especially suggestive. According to the Jin shu, when Ruan Fu was serving as Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate (huangmen shilang 黃門侍郎), he pawned his official cap of gold ornaments and sable tail, which is a sign of high official position, for wine.⁷³ By identifying himself with Ruan Fu, Luo Binwang implies that he too was not keen on a political career any more.

No longer being keen on a political position does not mean he was entirely happy with his days in Sichuan, as Luo Binwang tells the reader, “In this alien land, steadily and gradually, I whiled away the years and months” 他鄉冉冉消年月 (line 81),⁷⁴ regarding his idle days in Sichuan as a waste of time. Moreover, he still longed for the capital, “The imperial capital, sunken in the far distance, was hindered by city walls” 帝里沈沈限城闕 (line 82).⁷⁵ Accordingly, we now see a Luo Binwang irresolute about his career/life path.

Around 675, after his official tenure in Sichuan ended, Luo Binwang came back to Chang’ an. His brief retirement at home, according to the poet, was quite pleasant:

回来望平陸* Having returned home, I gazed afar at the flat land;

春來酒應熟* With the arrival of spring, the wine should have been fully ripe.

相將菌閣臥青溪 Together with the mushroom[shaped] pavilion, I lay by the side of the blue creek;

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⁷² Alludes to Ji Kang. According to the Shihuo xinyu, Shan Tao once commented on Ji Kang, saying that when Ji Kang was drunk, “he leans crazily like a jade mountain about to collapse” 俄傀若玉山之將崩. Shihuo xinyu jiaojian, 3.335; Mather, Shih-shuo hsii-yü, 331.
⁷³ Jin shu, 49.1364.
⁷⁴ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.167.
⁷⁵ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.167.
且用藤盃泛黃菊* For the moment, I filled the rattan cup with [wine on which] yellow chrysanthemums floated.⁷⁶

Before he could enjoy this joyful life for long, he had to take office again (lines 103-104): “It is merely for the sake of obtaining a field by the city wall,⁷⁷ /I was made, once again, to seek provincial salary” 祇爲須求負郭田, 使我再干州縣祿.⁷⁸ Luo Binwang now announces loud and clear that he re-entered into officialdom for no other reason than to earn a salary. The two minor posts he held successively were Registrar (zhubu 主簿) of Wugong 武功 county and Registrar of Mingtang 明堂 county.

Having declared his unwillingness in taking official positions, Luo Binwang turns to describe his journey to the Wu and Yue areas in stanzas 14-16. As with the depiction of his time in Shu, Luo Binwang offers here an elaborate account of the extraordinary landscape in Wu and Yue (lines 107-120), as well as the pleasure he enjoyed there:

江南節序多* In the regions south of the Yangtze River, festival occasions are many;
文酒屢經過* Often have I participated in literary composition and wine drinking.
共踏春江曲 Together we stamped our feet to the “Tune of Spring River,”
俱唱采菱歌* And jointly we sang the “Song of Picking Caltrop.”
舟移疑入鏡 As the boat moved, we wondered if we had entered a mirror;
棹舉若乘波* When the oars lifted, it was as if riding a wave.

⁷⁶ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.167.
⁷⁷ After Sun Qin 蘇秦 (380-284 BCE) was appointed as the Prime Minister of six states, he sighed that if he had “two hectares of fields by the city wall of Luoyang” 雒陽負郭田二頃, then he would never have left his home and would never have become the Prime Minister of six states. Shiji, 69.2262.
⁷⁸ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.167.
風光無限極  The fine weather and scenery had no limits nor ends;

歸橈礙池荷* My returning paddles were blocked by the lotus.⁷⁹

This time, unlike when he was in Sichuan, Luo Binwang no longer thought of the capital city. Nonetheless, the “imperial business” 王事 unpleasantly interrupted his merrymaking, and made him come back to Chang’an:

眺聽煙霞正流眄  Looking and listening to the misty auroras, I was just roving my gaze over all;

即從王事歸艫轉* Merely to comply with the imperial business, the boat changed its course to return.⁸⁰

Although he had to follow the “imperial business” to go back, Luo Binwang implies his unwillingness by vividly depicting the detours he took: he swayed back and forth among flowers blooming in mushroom fields, indulged in leisure at the Golden Valley, ascended high to reflect on the past, and so on (lines 131-136).

Sometime after his return to Chang’an, Luo Binwang’s mother passed away. This struck a heavy blow against him, causing him great pain (lines 143-144): “Swallowing the bitterness, I sighed in vain; / Clasping tangerines to my bosom,⁸¹ I was alone and heartbroken” 茹荼空有歎，懷橘獨

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⁷⁹ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.169.
⁸⁰ Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.169.
⁸¹ Alludes to Lu Ji 陸績 (188-219), official of the Wu. According to the Sanguo zhi, when Lu Ji was six, he visited Yuan Shu 袁術 (?-199), who brought out tangerines to treat him. Lu Ji clasped to his bosom three tangerines, which fell on the ground when he bowed. Yuan Shu asked him why he did this, and Lu Ji replied that he wanted to take the tangerines home for his mother. Sanguo zhi, 57.1328. Later, “clasping tangerines to one’s bosom” became a metaphor for longing for one’s mother.
In ancient China, when one's parent died, an official was expected to resign from his position to observe a three-year mourning. Luo Binwang tells us that during this time, he made up his mind to leave behind worldly fame and gain, thus to lead a reclusive life:

年來歲去成銷鑠* The years and months, coming and going, have melted away;
懷抱心期漸寥落* My deepest ambition and heart-held wish gradually faded faraway.
掛冠裂冕已辭榮 Having hung my cap and torn my headpiece, I already gave up worldly honor;

148 南畝東皋事耕鑿* In the southern field and eastern embankment, I engaged in farm work.83

After observing mourning for his mother, Luo Binwang was called up as Registrar of Chang’an county around 678, and was quickly promoted as a censor. Not long afterwards, for some unclear offense or association, he was impeached and put into prison:

昨夜琴聲奏悲調* On the night before, the zither produced disheartening tunes;
旭旦含顰不成笑* At the crack of dawn, with knitted brows I could not produce a smile.
果乘駟馬發囂書 As expected, [they] rode dappled horses to send forth the slanderous document,

164 復道郎官稟綸誥* And said that the official gentleman should accept the imperial decree.84

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82 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.170.
83 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.171.
Censor was the highest position Luo Binwang ever received; yet surprisingly, he only subtly alludes to this appointment by referring to himself as an “official gentleman.” It almost seems that, in so doing, he had intended to guide the reader to take no notice of his self-contradictory act of reassuming an official post, right after his claim of having “already given up worldly honor.”

With regard to his imprisonment, Luo Binwang, as expected, claims to have been wrongfully accused:

丈夫坎壈多愁疾* This grown-up, pitted with problems, was often sadly sorrowful;

契闊邁遭盡今日* Woebegone and disconsolate, perilous and precarious, I was exhausted at this very moment.

慎罰寧憑兩造辭 A prudent punishment had better rely on the statements of the two sides, 85

嚴科直掛三章律* The rigorous judgment should depend straightly on the three legal rules. 86

邹衍衔悲繫燕獄 Zou Yan, swallowing sadness, was trussed up in the prison of Yan; 87

李斯抱怨拘秦桎 Li Si, wrapped in resentment, was bound with the shackles of Qin. 88

不應白髮頓成絲 My white hair should not have suddenly become so thin;

84 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.172.
85 Shangshu. “When both parties are present, let the judge listen to the fivefold statements that may be made” 兩造具備，師聽五辭. Shangshu zhengyi, 19.641.
86 According to the Shiji, when Liu Bang led his army into Xianyang, in order to appease the people in the city, he “made three legal rules” 法三章. Shiji, 8.362. Here, “three legal rules” stands for the national law in general.
87 Zou Yan (ca. 305-240 BC) was a loyal minister of Yan; however, he was slandered and thrown into prison. He raised his head to weep to Heaven, and in the middle of the summer it began to snow. Lunheng jiaoshi, 5.238.
88 Li Si was a prominent official under the reign of Emperor Shihuang. After the death of Shihuang, the eunuch Zhao Gao 趙高 (?-207 BCE) accused him of treason. He was imprisoned and later executed. Shiji, 87.2539-63.
While expressing his distress, Luo Binwang asserts that his imprisonment was neither a “prudent punishment” nor a “rigorous judgment,” and he was as wrongfully accused as Zou Yan and Li Si. Later, thanks to the national amnesty, he was exempted:

忽聞驛使發關東* All of a sudden, I heard the government messenger starting out from the Eastern Capital,  

傳道天波萬里通* Passing along the news that the Heavenly wave permeated ten thousand leagues.

涸鱗去轍還遊海 The thirsty fish now leaves the wheel-rut and is again swimming in the sea.

幽禽釋網便翔空* The caught bird, having gotten rid of the net, flies in the sky.

Luo Binwang compares himself to the thirsty fish and the caged bird that finally obtained their freedom. Regaining his freedom did not make him feel grateful. Rather, he eventually realized that the dangers of officialdom are infinite whereas imperial favor is limited. Accordingly, he made up his mind to follow the steps of the so-called “Four Grey-heads of Mount Shang” (Shangshan sihao), the four virtuous recluses of the Han:

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89 Yellow Sand was the name of a prison built in the Jin.
90 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.173-74.
91 Namely, Luoyang.
92 The “Heavenly wave” is a metaphor for the imperial favor, that is, the grand amnesty in 679.
93 Alludes to the Zhuangzi story that a golden carp was stuck in a wheel-rut and was in desperate need of water. Zhuangzi jishi, 9.924.
94 Luo Linhai ji jianzhu, 5.175.
The favor of Shun and the brilliance of Yao surely have their limits;

Malicious words of shrewd toadies are particularly endless;

Who could restrict their trace to stick with the Three Adjuncts? 95

I will go to Mount Shang to visit the four old men. 96

Earlier, Luo Binwang was still content with his reclusive life “outside the Green Gate” (line 153), that is, in nearby Chang’an. Now he decided to leave the capital area, an indication of his determination to abandon the political realm, and lead a complete reclusive life. We finally see the image of a disillusioned recluse.

This image allows Luo Binwang to justify his life, clear his name, and explain his choice. That was what Luo Binwang needed at the time. It, however, does not mean that the historical Luo Binwang is perfectly mirrored in this self-presentation, or that he would actually lead a reclusive life, as he declares in the poem. Therefore, some time after his release, Luo Binwang accepted the appointment as Magistrate of Linhai 臨海. Later on, he joined the rebellious army led by Li Jingye 李敬業 (636-684), and wrote the famous “Dai Li Jingye chuanxi tianxia wen” 代李敬業傳檄天下文 (The Composition to Spread the Military Call-to-arms to the Entire Realm, on Behalf of Li Jingye), where he eloquently denounces and details the transgressions of Empress Wu. Luo Binwang never actually retired from the world.

The Virtuous Victim

Luo Binwang was one of the many Tang literati who claimed to have been wrongfully accused. Unlike Luo Binwang’s self-presentation in the “Chouxi pian,” some Tang officials, when banished

95 “Three Adjuncts” refers to the three areas surrounding the capital Chang’an.
96 Luo Linhai ji jiange, 5.175.
or demoted, emphasized their virtue and innocence in their autobiographical accounts, portraying themselves as a “virtuous victim.”

On the twenty-second day of the first month of the first year of the Shenlong 神龍 reign (February 20, 705), a coup was initiated to dethrone Empress Wu. Two days later, Empress Wu abdicated her throne to her son Li Xian 李顯 (656-710), known as Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705-710). During the coup, Zhang Changzong 張昌宗 and Zhang Yizhi 張易之, two favorites of the Empress, were killed. After Zhongzong ascended the throne, many officials involved with the two Zhang brothers were either executed or banished. Among them was the reputed court poet Song Zhiwen. As his punishment, Song Zhiwen was banished to Longzhou 瀧州 (in nowadays Guangzhou 廣州) to serve as an adjunct (canjun 參軍).

On his journey to Longzhou, Song Zhiwen wrote the “Zi Hongfu zhouxing zhishu qishi.” In this poem, he first claims that someone had asked about his banishment:

問余何奇剝   [They] asked why am I so ill-fortuned and unlucky,\(^7\)

8   遷竄極炎鄙* Being transferred and banished to the extremely fiery border town.\(^8\)

Song Zhiwen very likely imagined this question himself, but presented it as a question asked by some unidentified “they.” This technique is a representative feature of the literary genre labeled asduiwei or shelun, as we have discussed in the second chapter.

In respond to this hypothetical request, Song Zhiwen offers an autobiographical account that portrays himself as a lofty, reclusive figure:

\(^{7}\) Bo 剝 was the name of the twenty-third hexagram of the Yijing, indicating the bad luck of a gentleman.

\(^{8}\) Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu 沈佺期宋之問集校注, ed. Tao Min 陶敏 and Yi Shuqiong 易淑瓊, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 2.423.
I gauged myself with the Way and Virtue that are more than sufficient; 99
Since I was young I have heard of the purport of emptiness and brightness. 100
I valued myself and disregarded external things,
Protecting my traces away from the worldly route.
At dawn, I roamed by the edge of Yi River;
At dusk, I lay on the foot of Mount Ji. 101

With this account, Song Zhiwen presents himself as virtuous as the legendary recluse Xu You 許由, who was said to have dwelled at the foot of Mount Ji. In his youth, Song Zhiwen used to live in Mount Song, where he studied with the famous Daoist master Pan Shizheng 潘師正 (586-684), and befriended Sima Chengzhen, the renowned disciple of Pan Shizheng, and Tian Youyan 田遊巖, another well-known recluse. The narrative here clearly is a recollection of this experience.

Despite his claimed disinterest in worldly fame and gain, he took and passed the jinshi exam in 675, when he was only about twenty years old. This, Song Zhiwen explains, was because of his ineptness at hiding his brilliance: “Few of years, I was inept at hiding myself; / Pure and honest, I played with literature and history” 妙年拙自晦, 皎潔弄文史 (lines 17-18). 102 In 690, he was appointed as literary scholar at the Institute for the Study of Arts (Xiyi guan 習藝館). Now holding a position in Luoyang, he had the opportunity to become acquainted with the two Zhang brothers.

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99 Laozi 54: “Cultivate it in your person, / And its virtue will be genuine; / Cultivate it in the family, / And its virtue will be more than sufficient” 修之於身, 其德乃真; 修之於家, 其德乃餘. Lao, Tao Te Ching, 61. “The Way and Virtue that are more that sufficient” refers to the ideas of the Laozi.
100 Zhuangzi: “In the empty chamber brightness is born” 虛室生白. Zhuangzi jishi, 2.150. Here the “purport of emptiness and brightness” stands for the teachings of the Zhuangzi.
101 Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu, vol. 2, 2.423.
102 Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu, vol. 2, 2.423.
And he did achieve prominence by currying favor with the two Zhang brothers. According to the *Xin Tang shu*, he “wholeheartedly fawned on and ingratiated himself with [the two Zhang brothers]” 傾心媚附, “even to the point of holding the urine bottle for Yizhi” 至為易之奉溺器. Song Zhiwen, however, describes this experience in a completely different light:

| 謡辱紫泥書 | Undeservedly [summoned by] the decree sealed with purple clay, |
| 20 揮翰青雲裏* | I wielded my quill-brush in the clouds in the blue [sky].¹⁰⁴ |
| 事往每增傷 | When things were gone, they always increased my sadness; |
| 寵來常誓止* | When favor arrived, I often vowed to give it up. |
| 銘骨懷林丘 | Engraving on my bones, I held dear the groves and hills; |
| 逆鱗讓金紫* | Brushing against the bristling scales,¹⁰⁵ I ceded the gold seal and purple ribbon. |
| 安謂讎潛構 | Who would expect that feuds were stealthily formed? |
| 退耕禍猶起* | Having retired to till fields, harm was still brought upon me. |
| 栖巖實吾策 | Dwelling among mountains was indeed my plan; |
| 28 觸蕃誠內恥* | Running into a hedge,¹⁰⁶ I sincerely felt ashamed inside.¹⁰⁷ |

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¹⁰³ *Xin Tang shu*, 202.5750. ¹⁰⁴ “The clouds in the blue [sky]” is a metonym for the imperial court. ¹⁰⁵ According to the *Hanfeizi*, on the underside of the dragon’s neck were “scales a foot in diameter that curl back from the body” 逆鱗徑尺, and anyone who tried to brush against them was sure to die. The ruler of men too has his bristling scales. *Hanfeizi jiaozhu* 韓非子校注, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 4.223-34. Later “brushing against the bristling scales” became an expression for affronting the emperor. ¹⁰⁶ Metaphor for encountering difficulties. ¹⁰⁷ Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu, vol. 2, 2.423.
Song Zhiwen here portrays himself as an honest official, who, while serving at court, did not seek favor, but still held in his mind a simple, reclusive life. According to the poem, Song Zhiwen seemed to have resigned before he was exiled, and tried to preserve himself with humbleness: “I, who am untutored, used humbleness to protect myself, / And sat empty-headedly to rid myself of sunken dregs” 暴以卑自衞，兀坐去沈滓 (lines 31-32). Nonetheless, he was still slandered and wrongfully punished: “As public opinion disregarded my long-cherished intent, / I incurred punishment at the beginning of brilliant splendor” 羣議負宿心，獲戾光華始 (lines 35-36). Song Zhiwen then expresses his despair at being undeservedly exiled (lines 39-44), and ends the poem with a self-consolation (lines 45-54).

Clearly, self-justification is one important motivation behind the composition of this poem. Instead of merely claiming his innocence, Song Zhiwen made a more convincing case by offering an autobiographical account, through which he creates the impression that he has always been honest and upright; accordingly, he must have been wrongfully accused, and is in fact a virtuous victim.

As with Song Zhiwen, Cui Shi fashions a similar self-image in his “Fu Xiangyang tuzhong yanzhi.” Cui Shi was born in the prominent Cui family, and passed the jinshi exam in his youth. Like Song Zhiwen, Cui Shi was also somewhat involved with the two Zhang brothers. From 700 to 701, he was one of forty-seven scholars who had participated in the compilation of a large encyclopedia called Sanjiao zhuying 三教珠英, under the direction of Zhang Changzong. After Zhongzong ascended the throne, Cui Shi was not punished for his involvement with the two Zhang brothers. As he ingratiated himself with influential figures such as Wu Sansi 武三思 (649-707), Shangguan Wan’er 上官婉兒 (664-710), and Princess Anle 安樂 (684-710), he received a series of promotions.

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109 “The beginning of the brilliant splendor” refers to the reign of Emperor Zhongzong.
In 709, Cui Shi was appointed as Vice Minister of the Secretariat (Zhongshu Shilang 中書侍郎), and received the designation of “Jointly Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery” (Tong Zhongshu Menxia Pingzhangshi 同中書門下平章事), making him one of the Grand Councilors (zaixiang 宰相). In the same year, when he was put in charge of official selection, he was accused of bribery, and was demoted to Administrator Equestrian of Jiangzhou (in current day Jiangxi). Because Princess Anle and Shangguan Wan’er came to Cui Shi’s defense, he was quickly transferred to be Prefect of Xiangzhou. On his journey to Xiangyang, he wrote the “Fu Xiangyang tuzhong yanzhi.”

Cui Shi begins the poems with a self-portrait, showing the kind of person he has always been:

余本燕趙人 I am originally a native of Yan and Zhao,

秉心愚且直* Possessing a heart that is ignorant and honest.

羣籍備所見 I have comprehensively read the sundry texts;

4 孤貞每自飭* Distinct and chaste, I always discipline myself.\footnote{Quan Tang shi, 54.661.}

Like Song Zhiwen, Cui Shi first presents a virtuous self-image, a scholar who is honest, learned, and chaste. Unlike Song Zhiwen, he does not claim to be indifferent to a political career, although he still downplays his interest in officialdom:

徇祿期代耕 Dedicating my self to official salary, I only hope to be free of farm work,

受任亦量力* When accepting an appointment, I always estimate my own strength.\footnote{Quan Tang shi, 54.661.}
He then tells the reader, that thanks to the great times he lived in, he was highly valued at court. Song Zhiwen sounds quite proud when recounting his court life, which lasted for a dozen years or so:

幸逢休明時* Fortuitously encountering a felicitous and bright time,
朝野兩薦推* I was recommended by those both in the court and countryside.
一朝趨金門 Since one morning I ran toward the Golden Gate,
十載奉瑤墀* For ten years have I been an attendant under the jade stairs.
入掌遷固筆 Going inside, I held in hand the writing brush of Qian and Gu;
出參枚馬詞* Coming out, I composed the words of Mei and Ma.
吏部既三踐 In the Personnel Ministry I have taken posts thrice;
中書亦五期* In the Secretariat I also completed five terms of office.

In presenting this impressive *curriculum vitae*, Cui Shi also foregrounds his talent and virtue, for otherwise, he would not have been so appreciated.

Having narrated his “fortuitousness,” he turns to express his concern: “I always feared that I may incur resentment and grudge, / And be unable to reduce personal associations” 常恐嬰悔吝, 不得少酬私 (lines 17-18). Careful as he was, he still met with slander, “Brawling and Bickering, those petty men by the roadside, / They profusely spread slander without end” 啍嗷路傍子, 納謗

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113 Namely, the great historians Sima Qian and Ban Gu.
114 Namely, the *ju* experts Mei Cheng and Sima Xiangru.
115 *Quan Tang shi*, 54.661.
116 *Quan Tang shi*, 54.661.
Admittedly, being appointed as the Prefect of Xiangzhou was not a severe punishment. But Cui Shi was demoted and had to leave the capital. This probably was his first political setback. By portraying himself as a virtuous victim, Cui Shi offers his self-justification.

Both Song Zhiwen’s and Cui Shi’s autobiographical accounts are quite concise, but they do comprise reflections on the important moments of an individual authors’ life. The two demoted officials did not write these two poems merely for the sake of autobiography; rather, they were defending themselves by fashioning an upright and innocent self.

The Concerned Talent

In contrast to Song Zhiwen and Cui Shi, who claimed to be indifferent to or not keen on the political realm in their self-fashioning, three High Tang poets—Gao Shi, Li Bai, and Du Fu—, painted a very different self-image in their autobiographical poems. They present themselves to be talented figures concerned about the state’s fate; they are what I call “concerned talents.”

Gao Shi, born to a lower family, spent much of his childhood in Songzhou 宋州 (in present-day Henan). In the mid-720s, when he was in his twenties, Gao Shi traveled to Chang’an to seek a political career, but lacking any connections, he soon returned to Songzhou in disappointment. In 737 he made a journey to the northeastern frontier, probably in search of a military appointment, and came back to Songzhou a year later. In 749, Gao Shi went to Chang’an to sit for an imperial decree exam, and he passed the youdai 有道 exam with success. In 750, he went again to the northeastern frontier, this time as an escort for a levy of local troops. Gao Shi’s political fortune began to change in 752, when he won the favor of Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (699-757), one of Xuanzong’s most important generals. At the age of fifty-one, he became Geshu Han’s secretary and

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117 Quan Tang shi, 54.661.
joined his military campaign in Central Asia in 754. When the An Shi Rebellion broke out, Geshu Han was commanded to hold Tong 潼 Pass, the major stronghold on the road to Chang’an. The imperial army was defeated decisively, but Gao Shi managed to escape to Chengdu to follow Xuanzong. He made a defense of Geshu Han’s defeat, and was appointed as a censor as a result. Later, he received a number of high posts under the reign of emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756-762). However, after the imperial army had retaken the capitals, Gao Shi lost his position. Being accused at court, he was first demoted as the Head of the Household Administration of the Heir Apparent (taizi zhanshi 太子詹事) in Luoyang, and then transferred to serve as the prefect of Pengzhou 彭州 in Sichuan in 759.118 It was in Pengzhou that Gao Shi wrote the “Chou Pei Yuanwai yishi daishu,” presented to a certain Vice Director Pei, who, according to Liu Kaiyang 劉開陽, was Pei Ba 裴霸, Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel.119

In the opening four lines of the poem, Gao Shi claims his indifference to worldly affairs:

少時方浩蕩 In my youth, I was totally unchecked and unrestrained,
遇物猶塵埃* Treating things as dust and dirt.
脫畧身外事 Nonchalant to external affairs,
交遊天下才* I befriended the talents of the world.120

This carefree and unrestrained image is quickly dismissed as Gao Shi turns to describe his journey to the northeast:

119 *Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu*, 310.
120 *Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu*, 308.
Driving a single carriage, I entered Yan and Zhao;

I stood alone, with my heart cast afar.

Who would know that among war-horses,

Suddenly I could express freely my deepest and long-held feelings?

In Tang poetry, a poet’s journey to the frontier usually is connected with a military position. The experience presented here probably refers to Gao Shi’s 737 journey to the northeastern frontier, where he unexpectedly encountered Pei Ba, with whom he was able to express freely his “deepest and long-held feelings.”

Gao Shi recounts the pleasure he and Pei Ba had together, as well as the historical places they visited (lines 9-14). Seeing those ancient sites, he lamented his lack of military strategy: “At the edge of the frontier, I lacked strategic schemes; / Observing the past, I went round and about in vain” 临边无策畧，览古空徘徊 (lines 15-16). With this statement, Gao Shi reveals his concern for the frontier, and his desire to make a real contribution. Correlating with this, he claims to be holding in mind two prominent figures of the Warring States, Yue Yi 楚毅 and Jing Ke 荆軻: the former seized seventy cities of the Qi, and the later sacrificed his own life in a failed attempt to assassinate The First Emperor of the Qin (lines 17-20).

Gao Shi then quickly skims over about twenty years of his life, taking his narrative to the An Shi Rebellion. During the rebellion, when “Thousands of officials had no one to rely on; / Myriads of commoners grieved and lamented in vain” 千官無倚着，万姓徒悲哀 (lines 33-34), Gao Shi, in his own description, was a concerned and loyal official:

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121 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 308.
122 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 308.
123 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.
Hurrying and scurrying, I ran amidst the wind-blown dust;

All of a sudden, I encountered “clouds and thunder.”

Upholding pennants, I came out from the area of the Huai River,

Entering the military tent, I summoned the talents of Chu.

I vowed to clip the giant whale,

And forever strive with all the might of this inferior horse.

The “giant whale” refers to Li Lin 李璘 (?-757), commonly known as Prince of Yong 永, the sixteenth son of Xuanzong. Earlier, during his flight to Shu, Xuanzong arrived at Pu’an 普安 on the twelfth day of the seventh month of the fifteenth year of the Tianbao reign (August 12, 756); three days later he issued a decree to distribute military commands to his sons, and Li Lin was allocated the strategically vital southeastern and southern sectors, with his headquarters set at Jiangling 江陵. As a censor, Gao Shi opposed the plan vigorously. What Xuanzong did not know was that on the same day he arrived at Pu’an, the Crown Prince Li Heng 李亨 (Emperor Suzong) had claimed the throne for himself in Lingwu 靈武. After learning the news almost one month later, he consented to Suzong’s status as the emperor and announced himself as the August Father (taishanghuang 太上皇), effectively the retired emperor. When Li Lin disobeyed Suzong’s order to return to Chengdu to accompany Xuanzong, Suzong appointed Gao Shi as the Regional
Commander (jiedushi 節度使) of Huainan 淮南. Gao Shi, together with other generals, successfully crushed Li Lin’s army in February 757.

In the six lines translated above, Gao Shi recounts his meritorious deeds during the rebellion and announces his desire to rid the state of evil, which reinforces the impression that he was a devoted and concerned official. Notwithstanding his loyalty, he was slandered: “Those small men, how unkind! / They slandered me till I became dead ashes” 小人胡不仁, 諛我成死灰 (lines 43-44), as a result, he was demoted to “stay behind to manage the palace in Luoyang” 留司洛陽宮 (line 47), that is, serve as the Head of the Household Administration of the Heir Apparent. While in Luoyang, Gao Shi tells the reader, he was deeply worried about the current political situation:

是時掃氛祲 At the time of cleaning the ill-omened aura,
尚未殲渠魁* The rebellious chieftain had yet to be annihilated.
背河列長圍 Against the river, a long siege was laid;
師老將亦乖* The troops were wearied, the generals, for their part, were discordant.
歸軍劇風火 Retreating armies fled as quickly as wind and fire;
散卒爭椎埋* Scattered soldiers competed to kill and bury.
一夕瀍洛空 One night, the areas of the Chan and Luo Rivers became empty,
生靈悲曝腮* And people were as wretched as the fish whose gills are exposed to the sun.
衣冠投草莽 As those robed and capped took refuge in the grass and bushes,
予欲馳江淮* I hoped to run toward the areas of the Jiang and Huai Rivers.

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128 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.
129 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.
130 Namely, An Qingxu 安慶緒 (?-759), son of An Lushan.
131 Namely, commoners.
With this narrative of the unpromising situation on the battlefield and the suffering of the people, Gao Shi shows his concern for the state and his wish to go to the war areas to make his contribution. Indeed a concerned talent.

Contrary to what he had expected, Gao Shi was “Subsequently appointed as the prefect of Pengcheng” 遂除彭門守 (lien 67). This further demotion put him in great distress: “My deep melancholy is too intense to be dispelled” 憂思鬱難排 (line 72). Gao Shi then ends this poem with a compliment of Pei Ba, and a self-consolation. It is difficult to ascertain if Gao Shi, with this poem, had intended to seek favor from Pei Ba; but if he did, portraying himself as a talented official who is always concerned about the state may have been meant to increase his chance of persuading the Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel.

A similar image appears in Li Bai’s “Yi jiyou shuhuai”; this time, we know for sure that he wrote this autobiographical poem in seek of political patronage. Li Bai wrote “Yi jiyou shuhuai” in 759, on his way back from his exile to the far southwest in Yelang 夜郎. He was exiled because of his involvement with Li Lin, whose defeat Gao Shi had just claimed credit. After the An Shi Rebellion broke out, Li Bai led a reclusive life at Mount Lu. When the Prince of Yong arrived in Jiangling, Li Bai joined his army. With the defeat of the Prince in 757, he was imprisoned. Thanks to the help of two officials, Song Ruosi 宋若思 and Cui Huan 崔涣 (707-769), Li Bai was released, and temporarily joined the military headquarters led by Song Ruosi. Not before long, he was exiled to Yelang. Due to a national amnesty in 759, he was exempted. On his way back, he stopped by

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132 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.
133 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.
134 Gao Shi shiji biannian jianzhu, 309.

197
Jiangxia, where he was well received by Wei Liangzai, the prefect of Jiangxia. Taking the opportunity, Li Bai composed a long poem for Wei Liangzai, asking for Wei’s help. Different from the conventional images we often associate with Li Bai—such as the carefree wine lover, the unrestrained poet, and the banished immortal—in this poem, Li Bai presents himself to be always concerned about the state and the people.

Admittedly, he opens the poem by assuming the identity of a heavenly immortal:

天上白玉京*  In the heavenly domain is the Pure Jade Capital,

十二樓五城* Along with twelve towers and five cities.136

仙人撫我頂  The transcendent being lightly touched my head;

4  結髮受長生* Knotting up my hair, he instructed me in the secret of immortality.137

In spite of his connection to the heavenly domain, he found himself attracted to the human realm, and claimed to be good at sorting out worldly affairs: “Mistakenly pursuing the joy of the human realm, / I have thoroughly considered the situation of order and disorder” 誤逐世間樂, 頗窮理亂情 (lines 5-6).138 And he had intended to achieve great political glory:

試涉霸王略  I tentatively studied the schemes of kings and overlords,

12  將期軒冕榮* Expecting to obtain the honor of lordly coach and coronet.139

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136 Pure Jade Capital is the residence of transcendent beings; in Mount Kunlun are twelve towers and five cities, where immortals dwell.
137 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1667. For a complete translation of this poem, see appendix (8).
138 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1667.
139 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1667.
However, Li Bai tells us, as he did not encounter a fortuitous time, he planned to give up his worldly ambition to lead a reclusive life on a transcendent island:

時命乃大謬 Since the fate of the time was greatly awry,
棄之海上行* I decided to abandon my goal to travel on the sea.\footnote{140}{Namely, to pursue transcendence.}
學劍翻自哂 Practicing swordsmanship merely made me laugh at myself;

16 爲文竟何成* What could literary composition achieve in the end?
剣非萬人敵 My swordsmanship did not prepare me to fight ten thousand rivals;
文竊四海聲* My composition stole me the reputation within the four seas.
兒戲不足道 This child’s play\footnote{141}{Alludes to Yang Xiong’s criticism of \textit{fu} composition as worm-carving and seal-character cutting in which only a child would indulge. \textit{Fayan yishu}, 3.45. Li Bai here uses “child’s play” to refer to his own literary composition.} is not worth mentioning;

五噫出西京* Having sighed five times, I departed from the Western Capital.
臨當欲去時 On the verge of departure,
慷慨淚沾纓* I was sorrowful but strong, with tears dampening my collar.\footnote{142}{Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1667.}

This lament over his fate relates primarily to his one and a half years of court life. Having spent years cultivating his reputation and seeking political patronage, Li Bai was summoned to court in the autumn of 742. As an Academician in Attendance (\textit{Hanlin gongfeng 翰林供奉}), his main job was to compose literary pieces to entertain the emperor, which is dismissed here as “the child’s play.” He clearly had a much higher expectation for himself, as he compares himself in lines 15-18 to the warlord Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BCE), who looked down on the study of writing and
swordsmanship, for the two skills did not prepare him to fight ten thousand rivals.\textsuperscript{143} Li Bai’s court life came to an end in the spring of 744, when Xuanzong “bestowed him gold and let him return home” 賜金放還.\textsuperscript{144} Therefore, he “departed from the Western Capital.” In saying he “sighed five times” before leaving Chang’an, Li Bai is thinking of himself as the virtuous recluse of the Eastern Han, Liang Hong 梁鴻 who, when passing by Chang’an, composed the poem “Wuyi” 五噫 (Five Sighs) expressing his concern for the state and the people. The message Li Bai conveys through this allusion is clear. He also claims that before his departure tears dampened his collar, which was indicative of his attachment to Chang’an, and the political world that Chang’an stands for.

After leaving Chang’an, Li Bai traveled east, first to Luoyang and then downriver to Bianzhou 汴州 and Songzhou 宋州. It was during this trip that he met Gao Shi and Du Fu, and the three roamed about the areas together. Over the next few years, Li Bai wandered from place to place. The two places he visited that were closely related to his claimed plan to “travel on the sea” were Qizhou 齊州, where he received an ordination register from the Daoist Master Gao Rugui 高如貴, and Anling 安陵, where the Daoist Master Gai Huan 蓋寰 wrote him a fancy copy of the register. Now he officially became an ordained Daoist. Yet Li Bai decided to mention neither experience in his poem. This clearly is a conscious choice, as he is not presenting himself as a devoted Daoist, but as someone concerned about the fate of the state.

Li Bai then takes his narrative directly to his journey to Youzhou in 752. The depictions of this journey and his earlier departure from Chang’an are connected by an account of a farewell banquet hosted by Wei Liangzai (lines 23-30), all using the same rhyme. It creates the impression that his

\textsuperscript{143} When Xiang Yu was young, he could not master either writing or swordsmanship, which enraged his uncle. Xiang Yu replied, “Writing only prepares one to record names, and swordsmanship only prepares one to fight against one man. They are not worth learning. I want to learn the skill that will prepare me to fight against ten thousand rivals” 書足以記姓名而已，劍一人敵，不足學，學萬人敵. His uncle then taught him military strategies. \textit{Shiji}, 7.295-96.

\textsuperscript{144} Xin Tang shu, 202.5763.
claim to “travel on the sea” was just an empty gesture as he immediately journeyed to the northern frontier instead:

十月到幽州  In the tenth month I arrived in Youzhou,
戈鋋若羅星*  Where glaives and spears were as many as stars spreading out.
君王棄北海  The emperor abandoned the farthest north,
掃地借長鯨*  Giving the entire land to the long whale.\(^{145}\)
呼吸走百川  By one breath it could surge hundreds of streams,
燕然可摧傾*  And Mount Yanran would be dashed to pieces.
心知不得語  Knowing in my heart that I could not relate it [to the emperor],
卻欲棲蓬瀛*  I returned with the plan to reside on the Isles of Penglai and Yingzhou.\(^{146}\)

Li Bai portrays a disturbing picture of Youzhou: the entire northern area was under the command of the “long whale” An Lushan, who was preparing a devastating rebellion. Knowing he had no means to convey his thoughts to the emperor, Li Bai says, for a second time, that he was going to reside in the transcendent Isles Penglai and Yingzhou. Yet again, he quickly dismisses this plan by showing his concerns for the state:

彎弧懼天狼*  Pulling a recurve, I was afraid of the Celestial Wolf;\(^{147}\)

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\(^{145}\) The long whale refers to An Lushan. According to the Xin Tang shu, by the third year of the Tianbao reign (744), all the land to the north of Youzhou was under An Lushan’s command. In the tenth year of the Tianbao reign (751), An Lushan, already the military commissioners of Pinglu 平盧 and Fanyang 范陽, was appointed concurrently as the military commissioner of Hedong 河東. By then, a large portion of north China had fallen under his control. Xin Tang shu, 225.6411-15.

\(^{146}\) Li Bai quanjji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1669-70. Penglai and Yingzhou are two fabled isles of the immortal in the Eastern Sea.
挾矢不敢張*  Holding the arrow between my fingers, I dared not to release it.

攬涕黃金臺  Shedding tears at the Golden Terrace,\textsuperscript{148}

呼天哭昭王*  I cried to Heaven and bemoaned King Zhao.

無人貴駿骨  Now, as no one valued the bones of the exceptional horse,\textsuperscript{149}

綠耳空騰驤*  The Green Ear galloped\textsuperscript{150} and pranced in vain.

樂毅儻再生  Were Yue Yi\textsuperscript{151} to be reborn,

于今亦奔亡*  In this day and age he too would have had to run away.\textsuperscript{152}

We see Li Bai weeping in grief for the current political situation. Yet as there was nothing he could do, he “Spurred a horse to stop by Guixiang District,”\textsuperscript{153} where Wei Liangzai was serving as the magistrate. Wei, once again, received Li Bai with delightful banquets, which were vividly presented in lines 47-60.

From the happy gathering, he then moves on to describe the An Shi Rebellion. As with Gao Shi, Li Bai displays his concern for the state and the people by depicting the disastrous effect of the rebellion (lines 65-70); he also directly bewails the suffering of the common people: “White bones

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Celestial Wolf, namely, Sirius, was believed in ancient China to signify the greedy, vicious invader. Here it refers to An Lushan.
\item It was believed that King Zhao 昭 (r. 312-279 BCE) of Yan 燕 built the Golden Terrace to invite talented men of the world.
\item After King Zhao of the Yan ascended the throne, he intended to recruit talented men of the world and asked his minister Guo Wei 郭隗 how to do it. Guo Wei told King Zhao a story that in the past a king intended to buy a thoroughbred with a thousand pieces of gold, yet he did not acquire any thoroughbred after three years. One of his attendants asked the king's permission to buy the thoroughbred for him. The attendant spent five hundred pieces of gold on buying the bones of a dead thoroughbred, and told the king that in so doing the entire world would know the king's eagerness of buying a thoroughbred. Within a year, three thoroughbreds arrived at the king's court. After telling this story, Guo Wei told the king to show the world his eagerness of recruiting talented men by first valuing Guo Wei himself. The king then built a palace for Guo Wei and treated Guo Wei as his teacher. Thereafter, talented men such as Yue Yi and Zou Yan 鄒衍 (ca.305-240 BCE) all came to the Yan to offer their service. \textit{Zhanguo ce}, 29.1065.
\item Name of an ancient thoroughbred.
\item After coming to the Yan to offer his service, Yue Yi was appointed as vice minister.
\item \textit{Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping}, 10.1670.
\item \textit{Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping}, 10.1670.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
formed hills and mountains; / What crime did the populace commit?” 白骨成丘山，蒼生竟何罪 (lines 71-72).  

Li Bai’s account of the Rebellion, one the other hand, is quite different from that of Gao Shi. First, he holds Geshu Han responsible for letting the rebel army into Chang’an.

函關壯帝居* Hangu Pass magnified the imperial dwelling;  
國命懸哥舒* The fate of the state hung on Geshu.  
長戟三十萬 With three hundred thousand long halberds;  
開門納凶渠* He opened the gate, letting in brutal rebellious leaders.  

Second, and more importantly, rather than referring to the Prince of Yong as the vicious “giant whale,” Li Bai comes to Li Lin’s defense. He points out that it was Xuanzong who ordered Li Lin to command the Southern areas, justifying the Prince’s legitimacy in leading the imperial army in Jiangling:

帝子許專征 The prince received permission to take sole charge of military expedition,  
秉旄控強楚* Holding in hand the ox-tail pennant to control the powerful Chu.  

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154 *Li Bai quanji jiaozi huishi jiping*, 10.1675.  
155 Here Hangu Pass is used to refer to Tong Pass.  
156 After the An Shi Rebellion broke out, Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (699-757) was ordered to fend off the rebellious armies at Tong Pass.  
157 “Long halberd” is a synonym for soldiers.  
158 *Li Bai quanji jiaozi huishi jiping*, 10.1675. According to the Xin Tang shu, after being defeated, Geshu Han tried to flee to Chang’an with several hundred cavalrymen, but he was captured and then surrendered to the rebellious armies. Xin Tang shu, 135. 4572-74.  
159 As a symbol of authority.  
160 *Li Bai quanji jiaozi huishi jiping*, 10.1675. The area of Jiangling prefecture roughly overlapped with that of the ancient Chu state.
Li Bai still mentions Li Lin’s fault, that he was unable to control his underling and soldiers:

節制非桓文  Since he failed to moderate and regulate as Huan and Wen,\textsuperscript{161}

84 軍師擁熊虎*  His military troops turned into crowds of bears and tigers.

人心失去就  People were confused about whom to support or oppose;

賊勢騰風雨  The force of traitors accumulated as the wind and rain.\textsuperscript{162}

But this fault clearly was not serious enough to make him a rebellious prince, or a “giant whale.” By defending the Prince of Yong, Li Bai also defends himself, that he did not offer his service to a subversive prince.

He then further justifies himself, saying that he was forced to join the army:

半夜水軍來  In the middle of the night the fleet arrived,

尋陽滿旌旃*  Filling Xunyang River with flags and banners.

空名適自誤  My empty name only did me harm,

96 迫脅上樓船*  For I was forced and threatened to board the double-decked boat.\textsuperscript{163}

Li Bai also asserts that he never accepted any gold or position from the prince:

徒賜五百金  The prince bestowed on me five hundred pieces of gold in vain;

棄之若浮煙*  I cast them aside as passing clouds.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{161} Namley, Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin.
\textsuperscript{162} Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1675.
\textsuperscript{163} Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1678.
\textsuperscript{164}
I declined his appointment and turned down all the rewards;  

Nevertheless I was exiled to the land of Yelang.  

In a nutshell, Li Bai is saying that he had been undeservedly exiled to Yelang. This self-justification fulfills a very practical aim: to show Wei Liangzai that it was all right to recommend him, for despite his exile, he was innocent.

Following his self-defense, Li Bai presents an elaborate depiction of the banquet held at Huanghelou 黃鶴樓 (lines 108-130). He also sings a flattering praise of Wei Liangzai (lines 131-146), which is expected, since he is asking for Wei’s recommendation (lines 155-156): “Your lordship now advances to the Phoenix Pool and will leave; / Please do not abandon Master Jia’s talent” 君登鳳池去，忽棄賈生才 (lines 155-156). This practical goal was the primary element that had motivated Li Bai to present himself as one who is concerned for the state and the people. Compared to the images of a wine lover, carefree poet, or banished immortal, this image of a concerned talent might give him a better chance to persuade Wei Liangzai to recommend him.

Li Bai ends this poem by reaffirming his image as a concerned talent:

The dog of Jie still barked at Yao;  
The Xiongnu barbarian laughed at Qianqiu.

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164 *Lunyu* 7.16: “Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds” 不義而富且貴，於我如浮雲.

165 *Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping*, 10.1678.

166 “Phoenix Pool” is a metonym for the Imperial Secretariat.

167 Namely, the Western Han scholar-official Jia Yi; here Li Bai compares himself to Jia Yi.

168 *Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping*, 10.1681.

169 By this time, An Lushan had been killed; the “dog of Jie” refers to Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761) and other rebellious generals.

170 Namely, Emperor Suzong.
中夜四五歎 In the middle of the night, I sigh again and again,

160 常為大國憂* Always being concerned for the great state.172

As the “dog of Jie,” that is, Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761) and other rebellious generals, has yet to be vanquished, Li Bai expresses his wish to contribute his talent: “Where to obtain Yi who was good at archery?173 / To shoot off the top of the rebel’s banner with just one arrow” 安得羿善射, 一箭落旄頭 (lines 167-168).174

This self-image of being concerned for the state and the people also appears in Du Fu’s “Zhuangyou.” In the second year of the Yongtai 永泰 era (766), Du Fu arrived in Kuizhou 巔州, and stayed there for about two years. By this time, most of Du Fu’s friends had passed away, and his own health was deteriorating. Du Fu developed a tendency to brood over his past in poems. As Mo Lifeng 莫礦鋒 summarizes, “the most noteworthy development in the topics of Du Fu’s Kuizhou poems is the appearance of a large amount of works where the poet reflects on his past and history.”175 It was in Kuizhou that Du Fu “composed [the ‘Zhuangyou’] as his autobiography” 是自為列傳也.176

He opens the poem by presenting the image of a young and talented Du Fu:

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171 Alludes to the story of Tian Qianqiu 田千秋 (?-77 BCE). According to the Han shu, Tian Qianqiu was without any talent or achievement, yet as his memorial impressed Emperor Wu, he was appointed as the Prime Minister. Later, when a Han envoy arrived at the Xiongnu court, the supreme leader of the Xiongnu asked him about the reason behind the appointment of the new Prime Minister. The envoy answered that it was because of a memorial Tian Qianqiu presented. The supreme leader replied, “If this was the case, then the Han does not set up the position of Prime Minister to appoint the worthy. A man, by haphazardly presenting a memorial, is able to get the position immediately” 苟如是,漢置丞相,非用賢也,妄一男子上書即得之矣. Han shu, 66.2884.

172 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1687.

173 Refers to the legendary Hou Yi 后羿, who was able to shoot off the sun with his arrow.

174 Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping, 10.1687.

175 Du Fu pingzhuan 杜甫評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993), 172.

In the past, when I was fourteen or fifteen,
I roamed about the realm of writing brushes and ink.
Those refined men, the likes of Cui and Wei,
Thought I was comparable to Ban and Yang.
At the age of seven, my thought was already mature;
Whenever I opened my mouth, I would chant about the phoenix.
At the age of nine, I wrote large characters,
And my writings filled up one whole bag.

Unlike Li Bai, who dismisses literature as “the child’s play” in his autobiographical poem, Du Fu here elaborates on his literary talent, which, according to the poet, had already been widely recognized since his youth. He also emphasizes that he matured at a very early age, chanting about the phoenix at the age of seven and writing larges characters at the age of nine.

In addition to his talent and maturity, the young Du Fu is also portrayed to be an unchecked wine lover who did not care for worldly affairs:

Born unreserved, my life’s work was the love for wine;
Hating evil, I harbored an unbending heart.
Indifferent to the young men of my generation,
I only made friends with those hoary elders.

Having drunk my fill, I looked at the eight ends of the world:

Mundane things to me were all afar and aloof.\textsuperscript{180}

Since the Song, Du Fu has always been perceived as a sagacious poet concerned for the state and the people. But here he presents himself to be unrestrained and carefree, an image that is conventionally associated with Li Bai.

Du Fu then reinforces his carefree image through the account of two journeys: one to the Wu and Yue areas in the south (lines 15-34) and one to the Qi and Zhao areas in the north (lines 41-49). In 731, Du Fu began his four-years journey around Wu and Yue, joyfully visiting various historical sites. This expedition was brought to an end due to an imperial exam:

\begin{itemize}
\item 《歸帆拂天姥》 The returning sail brushed by Mount Tianmu—
\item 《中歲貢舊鄉》 In my middle age, my native place sent me to sit for the imperial exam.
\item 《氣劘屈賈壘》 My force came near to the fort of Qu and Jia;
\item 《目短曹劉牆》 I regarded the wall of Cao and Liu as low.
\item 《忤下考功第》 Defiantly, I failed the merit-evaluation exam;
\item 《獨辭京尹堂》 Alone I took leave of the hall of the capital’s chief administrator.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{itemize}

In this narrative, Du Fu sounds very proud (almost impertinent). He believes that his literary talent is comparable to that of Qu Yuan and Jia Yi, and better than that of Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) and

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Dushi xiangzhu}, 16.1438.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Dushi xiangzhu}, 16.1441.
Liu Zhen 劉楨 (180-217), all of whom were reputed poets. He also claims that he only failed the exam due to his defiant attitude.

This setback did not stop Du Fu from being carefree, as he quickly started his cheerful journey to the north:

放蕩齊趙間 Wild and unbridled, I roamed about Qi and Zhao;
裘馬頗清狂* With furs and horses, I was quite carefree and reckless.
春歌叢臺上 In spring I sang songs on Cong Terrace;¹⁸²
冬獵青丘旁 In winter I hunted by the side of Green Mound.¹⁸³
呼鷹皂櫪林 I called to falcons in Black Oak Forest,
逐獸雲雪岡* And chased after beasts on Cloudy Snow Hill.¹⁸⁴
射飛曾縱韬 To shoot the flying birds, I let loose the reins;
引臂落鶴鶻* Drawing a bow, I brought down gray cranes.
蘇侯據鞍喜 Lord Su¹⁸⁵ clasped his saddle in delight,
忽如擕葛彊* Just as if he were holding the hand of Ge Qiang.¹⁸⁶

The carefree Du Fu was now unreservedly enjoying singing and hunting in the Qi and Zhao areas. In depicting his hunting experience, Du Fu also portrays himself as strong and good at hunting,
comparable to the skillful general Ge Qiang. This portrait contrasts greatly with the image of the old and weak Du Fu that readers usually have in mind.

In the fourth year of the Tianbao reign (745), after “Having indulged myself for eight or nine years” 快意八九年 (line 51), he “Returned west to Xianyang” 西歸到咸陽 (line 52),\(^{187}\) to pursue a political career. He spent the next ten years in Chang’an to build necessary connections to acquire a government post. In 747 a perfect opportunity seemed to present itself when Emperor Xuanzong ordered a special exam for those with distinct talents. However, the Prime Minister Li Linfu 李林甫 (683-753) failed all the candidates and assured the emperor that “no talented man has been left in the countryside” 野無留才.\(^{188}\) In 751, Du Fu presented three ceremonial fu to the emperor, which gained him the opportunity to await a position at the Academy for Assembled Worthies, which has been mentioned in the last chapter. He describes this experience, the highlight of his ten years time in Chang’an, with great pride:

許與必詞伯 The people I kept company with were all literary experts;

賞游實賢王* Those I appreciated and associated with were indeed virtuous princes.

曳裾置醴地 I dragged my long robe\(^{189}\) to where sweet wine was set out;\(^{190}\)

56 奏賦入明光* To present my fu, I entered the Palace of Bright Light.\(^{191}\)

天子廢食召 Heaven’s Son forgot his meal to summon me;

\(^{187}\) Du Shi xiangzhu, 16.1442.

\(^{188}\) Xin Tang shu, 223.6346.

\(^{189}\) Alludes to the story of Zigao; see note 162 in chapter two. “Dragging my long robe” later became an expression for seeking appreciation from the nobility.

\(^{190}\) According to the Han shu, Liu Jiao 劉交 (?-179 BCE), the Prince of Chuyuan 楚元, treated Sir Mu 穆, a reputed scholar of the time, with great respect. Knowing Sir Mu was not fond of wine, whenever there was a banquet, Liu Jiao would always specifically set out ale for Sir Mu. Han shu, 36.1923. “Setting out sweet wine” later became a gesture of treating talented men with special favor and respect.

\(^{191}\) The Palace of Bright Light was a Han palace, used here to refer to the Academy of Assembled Worthies.
The sundry lords greeted me with fine coaches and clothes.

Withdrawning myself, I attached to none;

Drinking my fill, I was indifferent to acting or retiring.  

Making friends with literary experts and virtuous princes, being well received by the emperor and sundry lords, and drinking his full: in Du Fu’s recollection, his life in Chang’an seemed quite all right. Wang Sishi 王嗣奭 (1566-1648), a Ming commentator of Du Fu’s poetry, remarked that in this poem, “Du Fu’s acts and conduct are quite similar to those of Li Bai” 其行徑大都與李白相似. Indeed, the carefree and unrestrained self-image Du Fu presented by now is very likely to remind readers of Tang poetry of Li Bai.

This image, nevertheless, begins to change henceforth: “How could my black sable fur not be worn out? / Hair flecked with white, I raised up the wine cup in frustration” 黑貂寧免敝; 斑鬢兀稱觴 (lines 51-52). Line 51 alludes to Su Qin 蘇秦 (?-284 BCE), the famous persuader of the Warring States. According to the Zhanguo ce, Su Qin presented ten memorials to King Huiwen 惠文 of Qin (r. 337-311 BCE), yet he was ignored by the king; haplessly, he wore out his black sable fur. With this allusion, Du Fu implies his own difficult situation. In the Tang, qualification for an appointment was not the same as actually receiving a post. Du Fu, probably for lack of connections, waited for a position in vain for years. In 754, his appointment finally came through. He was first appointed as the Constable of Hexi (Hexi wei 河西尉), which he declined, and then as an Adjunct...
of the Helmets Section of Left Defense Guard Command (Youwei shuaifu zhoucao canju 右衛率府胄曹參軍), which he accepted. Both positions were extremely low.

With the end of his carefree life, Du Fu begins to show his concern for the state and the people. This is first revealed through his descriptions of the disturbing political circumstance before the An Shi Rebellion (lines 67-72) and the dismaying situation after the rebellion (lines 73-86). He then portrays himself as a devoted official caring for the nation’s fate:

備員竊補袞 Serving at court, I audaciously supplied the emperor’s deficiencies;¹⁹⁶

88 憂憤心飛揚* Fretful and frustrated, my heart was agitated.

上感九廟焚 Above I was pained by the burning of the nine temples;¹⁹⁷

下憫萬民瘡* Below I pitied the suffering of the myriads of people.

斯時伏青蒲 At that time, I prostrated myself on the green rush mat;¹⁹⁸

92 廷諍守御牀* Admonishing fearlessly at court, I did my duty by His Majesty’s bench.

君辱敢愛死 When the emperor was humiliated, dare one begrudge dying?

赫怒幸無傷* He was enraged yet fortunately there was no harm.¹⁹⁹

During the Rebellion, Du Fu was first detained in Chang’an; later in the spring of 757, he managed to escape and arrived at Fengxiang 凤翔, the residential palace of the newly crowned emperor. There Du Fu was appointed as a Reminder, a respectable position with the responsibility

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¹⁹⁶ Shiying, Mao 260 (“Zhengmin” 蒸民): “When there are deficiencies in the king’s duty, / It is only Zhong Shanfu who can supply them” 衰職有關, 維仲山甫補之. Gan, ceremonial robe of the ruler, is a metonym for the king.

¹⁹⁷ Namely, the destroying of the Tang ancestral temples during the rebellion.

¹⁹⁸ Alludes to the Han minister Shi Dan 史丹, who, when hearing that Emperor Yuan 元 (r. 48-33 BCE) was going to replace the Crown Prince, entered into the inner chamber where the emperor was sleeping alone and prostrated himself on the green rush mat, remonstrating with tears. Han shu, 82.3377.

¹⁹⁹ Dushi xiangzhu, 16.1444.
to remonstrate with the emperor, or “supply the emperor’s deficiencies,” as described in the poem. When serving as a Reminder, Du Fu told the reader, he grieved for the burning of the Tang ancestral temples, which indicates the collapse of the Tang ruling family, as well as for the suffering of the people. He also depicts how he used to fearlessly remonstrate with Suzong to the point of offending the emperor, thus showing the image of a dutiful and loyal official. One particular incident might have been in Du Fu’s mind. In the fifth month of 757, Fang Guan (696-763), then the Prime Minister, was demoted, due to accusations made by some officials. Du Fu, out of his respect for Fang Guan, presented a memorial to defend Fang Guan, which enraged Emperor Suzong. Du Fu was then interrogated by clerks and was only exempted because of the help of Zhang Gao (?-764), the newly appointed Prime Minister.

In the ninth month of 757, Chang’an was taken back by the Tang imperial army, and in the tenth month, Luoyang was also taken back. This, according to Du Fu, was a result of Suzong’s virtue: “As the insightful sage embodies benevolence and kindness, / In districts under the heavens basic well-being was restored” 聖哲體仁恕, 宇縣復小康 (lines 95-96). Suzong returned to Chang’an in the tenth month. In the eleventh month, Du Fu also arrived at Chang’an. Despite the newly restored “basic well-being,” he still mourned for the fate of the nation:

哭廟灰燼中 I bewailed the dynastic temple in ashes and embers;
鼻酸朝未央* With sour nose, I attended court at the Palace of the Night-is-Young.202

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200 Namely, Emperor Suzong.
201 Dushi xiangzhu, 16.1444.
202 The Palace of the Night-is-Young was the name of a Han Palace, used here to refer to the imperial court at Chang’an.
In the sixth month of 758, Fang Guan was demoted as the Prefect of Youzhou, and those who were associated with Fang Guan were also relegated, including Du Fu, who was demoted as Adjunct Personnel Manager (sigong canjun 司功參軍) of Huazhou 華州. In the seventh month of 759, Du Fu abandoned this position, and fled to Qinzhou 秦州 with his family. This act is clearly inconsistent with the image Du Fu attempts to present here, and as expected, it is not mentioned in the poem. He then moved from Qinzhou to Chengdu, where he built his own residence “Caotang” 草堂 (Thatched Hall), and spent two and a half peaceful years there. In the following three and a half years, he wandered about Shu, before he moved to Kuizhou in 766. By the time Du Fu arrived in Kuizhou, he was already fifty-five, and was not in good health, as is described in the poem: “Old and sick, I am a guest in an alien place” 老病客殊方 (line 100).\(^{203}\)

In Kuizhou, Du Fu informs the reader, he was in great distress (lines 101-108). While feeling sorry for himself, he does not forget to reaffirm his image as a concerned talent, ending the poem with his longing for someone as talented as Fan Li 范蠡, the minister who helped Goujian 勾踐 (r. 496-464 BCE) achieve hegemony, to vanquish all the rebels:

吾觀鴟夷子 我 consider Master Owl-skin: \(^{204}\)
才格出尋常* His talent and character were extraordinary.
羣兇逆未定 As the rebellion of the sundry fiends has yet to be vanquished,
112 側伫英俊翔* Unworthily, I stood waiting for some hero to soar up.\(^{205}\)

\(^{203}\) *Dushi xiangzhu*, 16.1446.
\(^{204}\) “Master Owl-skin” was the sobriquet Fan Li assumed after he resigned and led a reclusive life.
\(^{205}\) *Dushi xiangzhu*, 16.1446.
In his autobiographical poem, Du Fu presents a self-image that develops from a carefree and unrestrained youth to an old man concerned for the state and the people. This development coincides with the decline of the Tang, which in turn reinforces the impression that Du Fu’s life was closely tied to the state’s fate. Unlike Gao Shi and Li Bai, who had in mind one particular reader when writing their autobiographical poems, Du Fu probably had aimed at a much broader readership, including audiences in later generations. His conscious self-presentation as a concerned talent in this and many other poems contributed to his posthumous reputation as the “Poet Sage” 詩聖.

In their autobiographical verse, whether in the forms of muzhiming, encomium, or shi, early and High Tang literati used language to gain control over their experience and to present a textual self-image. This is not to argue that a textual self is merely fictitious; more important are the motivations behind their self-fashioning: to create a desired self-image for posthumous remembrance, to justify their actions, to clear their name, or to seek political patronage. It suggests that autobiographical verse, though a very self-expressive form of writing, is not always written for the sake of art or as a mere expression of one’s mind. Literature in the Tang was rarely “pure,” and a literary self was often fashioned for some practical considerations.
Final Remarks

As the appearance of Mount Lu varies when it is observed from a different angle, so does the Tang literary landscape. Accordingly, there never is going to be the one and only correct narrative of Tang literature. The narrative presented in this dissertation is one that is observed from the perspective of self-presentation, with the focus on four literary forms that were prevalent and important in the Tang period—the occasional preface, the self-recommendation letter, the *fu*, and autobiographical verse in various forms.

That self-presentation grew to be a prominent feature of early and High Tang literature does not necessarily mean that Tang literati were more self-centered or eager to convey their personal feelings, though there are circumstances that seem to suggest so, such as some self-assertive occasional prefaces by Wang Bo and Li Bai and the autobiographical *fu* by Lu Zhaolin. On many other occasions, however, Tang literati fashioned their literary selves for practical goals, the most important one being political self-promotion. The practice of “importuning with a visit in hope of self-advancement” (*ganye* 千謁) was quite popular among Tang literati. A few scholars have

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considered the role it played in the thriving of Tang literature. However, most of them ignored that ganye also prompted Tang literati, at least partly, to talk more about themselves in their writings. Political self-promotion is the primary motivation behind Tang literati’s self-presentation in their self-recommendation letters; it at times also motivated them to fashion their images in the occasional preface, fu, and autobiographical verse. In the meanwhile, Tang literati also started to consciously fashion their images in writings that are not primarily meant for seeking political patronage, but for other considerations including self-justification and cultivating posthumous reputation.

As literary selves were often portrayed for practical reasons, literary works were also usually composed as responses to literati’s socio-political life. Early and High Tang literati wrote occasional prefaces to commemorate various social occasions, and, in many circumstances, also to display themselves, and/or give these prefaces as farewell gifts. They wrote self-recommendation letters to seek political patronage, and presented to the court their fu compositions to win favor and recognition of their scholarship, literary ability, and command of language. As for autobiographical verse, Tang literati did not write them merely for the sake of autobiography, but to create a desired self-image for posthumous remembrance, to justify their actions, to clear their name, or to seek political favor. Tang literati did not view literature as “pure” literary composition.

At the same time, they enjoyed playing with the conventional expectations of a literary genre. They wrote prefaces that would later be seen as independent, no longer attached to the poems they were originally meant to introduce (but which were often forgotten), composed letters that were not presented to their designated addressee, and wrote fu-poems that look like shi and shi-poems that look like fu. These phenomena show that, although the generic categorizations of the Wen xuan was very influential and widely used in the Tang, some Tang literati, unwilling to be confined or trapped by the conventional expectations of a genre, tried to push the limits of individual genres. Their
experiments with genre contributed to the thriving of Tang literature, and caution us to be more careful when applying modern genre concepts to Tang literature.

Through the discussion of the occasional preface, the self-recommendation letter, the *fu*, and autobiographical verse, it also becomes evident that Tang literature is not at all restricted to *shi*-poetry but embraces various other important literary forms. Moreover, with regard to these four literary forms, the works of the High Tang are often similar to that of early Tang. Accordingly, the widely accepted distinction between an “early” stage and a “High” era seems arbitrarily drawn.

This, in a nutshell, is the landscape of early and High Tang literature that I have drawn.
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Appendix

1. “You Shanmiao xu” 遊山廟序 (Preface to an Outing to the Mountain Temple)

This life of mine has lasted twenty years already! I am deeply tired of cities and palaces, but dearly fond of rivers and seas. Constantly I peruse the transcendental scriptures and broadly wade through Daoist documents. I realize that official chariot and cap may be distanced by [cultivating] the Truth, simurgh and phoenix may be met with by [learning] the [esoteric] techniques. However, when serving my parents, I am mostly concerned with food and clothing; when advancing at court, I feel harassed by worldly fame and gain. My pure mind is imprisoned in this overcomplicated domain, and my transcendent bones are weakened within this worldly realm. Alas! Ruan Ji’s (210–263) loose attitude and Ji Kang’s (223–262) lax conduct were on just grounds! I constantly fear that the cycles of time and fate are more rapid than wind and fire, whereas the body of man is not as solid as metal or stone. Consequently, even groves and gorges will be ruined one after another, so will mist and aurora be shattered. This is why whenever I think of the path to the Yellow Springs (the netherworld), I am fretful, and whenever I face mountains and rivers, I heave a deep sigh.

Accompanied by dear friends at a beautiful leisure day, together we visited the West Mountain Temple of Xuanwu, located at the Three Deities Peak of the Shu Commandary. To the east of the mountain is the Temple of the Sovereign of the Way, whose name was passed downed by the
ancients. With vermilion gorges clustering round and darkling cliffs drawing together, the West Mountain Temple overlooks the ground ten thousands fathoms below, as well as has the sky right at its eye level. We ascended onto this masked and mysterious place of wonder, just when fragrant blooms were at their waning season. Above the empyrean suspends the jade chamber; against clouds the gemstone terrace toweringly stands. There are also wild animals trifling with each other, as well as mountain songbirds thrilling together. Lofty pine trees and huge cypresses compete to shadow one another; gathered rapids and secluded currents sing the chorus jointly. How infinite! How uninhibited! Why the princes refused to return to the court? Why the feathered men [i.e. Daoist adepts] went away forever? Wasn’t it for the sake of the Lady of Purple Tenuity in the Mysterious Palace? Just now, we saluted with joined hands and bowed to the bell and tripod, reposed our shoulders on boulders, cut off eyesight and hearing within this domain, and casted the human form out of our mind. Weren’t they for the same reason [as the behaviors of the princes and feathered men]? Those who joined the tour of this day were Lu Hongyin of Jiyin and Shao Lingyuan of Anyang. As poems are to express one’s mind, we didn’t regulate our composition with any rhyme or line number.

粵以勝友良暇，相與遊於玄武西山廟，蓋蜀郡三靈峯也。山東有道君廟，古者相傳以名焉爾。其丹壑叢倚，玄崖糾合，俯臨萬仞，平視重玄。乘杳冥之絕境，屬芬華之暮節。玉房跨霄而懸居，瓊臺出雲而高峙。亦有野獸羣狎，山鶯互囀。崇松埒巨柏爭陰，積瀨與幽湍合響。眇眇焉，逸逸焉。王孫何以不歸，羽人何以長往，其玄都紫薇之事耶! 方斂手鍾鼎，息肩嚴石，絕視聽於寰中，置形骸於度外，不其然乎? 時預乎斯者，濟陰鹿弘胤，安陽邵令遠耳。蓋詩以言志，不以韻數裁焉。
2. “Muchun Jiangxia song Zhang Zu jiancheng zhi Dongdu xu” 暮春江夏送張祖監丞之東都序 (Preface to Seeing off Zhang Zu to the Easter Capital in the Late Spring of Jiangxia)

Alas! Alas! I, who am abject, have been sadly alone in my study for a very long time. Even though I long for a chance to ascend the far-off Penglai Mountain, to look afar to the limits of the four seas, to enjoy the bright sun at first hand, to lightly touch the blue sky with my head, and to unbridle my deep-seated frustration, none of these wishes can be realized. Furthermore, the [imperishable] gold bones [of an immortal] have yet to be cultivated, whereas my jade[-white] countenance has already lost its charm. How can I not grieve in heart when touching a pinetree or heave a deep sigh when patting a crane? I have mistakenly pursued scholarship and swordsmanship, as well as meaninglessly wandered in this worldly realm. The imperial palace is nine layered, while the green mountains are ten thousand miles away. Gifted but out of luck, I am ready to be left behind by the time. Liu Biao failed to employ the talent of Mi Heng, who then went to Jiangxia for only a while;¹ He Xun came upon Zhang Han in delight, and they made merry in a boat for the moment.²

吁咄哉！僕書室坐愁，亦已久矣。每思欲遐登蓬萊，極目四海，手弄白日，頂摩青穹，揮斥幽憤，不可得也。而金骨未變，玉顏已緇，何常不撫松傷心，撫鶴歎息。誤學書劍，薄遊人間。紫禁九重，碧山萬里。有才無命，甘於後時。劉表不用於禰衡，暫來江夏；賀循喜逢於張翰，且樂船中。

¹ Mi Heng (173–198), a gifted literatus in the Eastern Han, was also famously erratic and arrogant. In the mid–190s, he was sent by the famous warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), who was outraged by Mi Heng's imperious behaviour, to join the staff of Liu Biao (142–208), Governor of Jingzhou 荊州. Liu Biao, while valuing his talent and reputation in the first place, also could not stand Mi Heng's arrogance and sent him to the ill-tempered Huang Zu 黃祖 (?–208), governor of Jiangxia. Not long afterward, Huang Zu had Mi Heng killed. For the biography of Mi Heng, see Hou Han shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 80.2652–54.

² According to the biography of the famous Western Jin (265–316) literatus Zhang Han, when He Xun stopped at Wuchang 吳閶 Gate on his journey to Luoyang, Zhang Han heard him playing a zither on a boat. Therefore, Zhang Han, following the sound of the zither, went to visit He Xun, and the two, though they had not met before, became very fond of each other immediately and ended up going to Luoyang together. Jin shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 92.2384.
Lord Zhang, a gentleman of penetrative insight and great virtue, is in charge of the canal transportation on the bank of River Qing. Together we engaged in abstruse learning and poetry writing, making merriment uninterruptedly for several months. We also reveled in each and every flower and willow, as well as delighted in all the mountains and rivers. As the imperial mission has a set schedule, the far journey was urged on. At dusk, the lovely spring scene assumed a gloomy look with pain. The flying boats were tied to the sky, to drift on green waters to the sea faraway. On the verge of departure [lord Zhang] was unwilling to part; fragrant wine vessels were set out once again. Seeking pleasure at this human realm, our high spirits reached to the sky. Never had I drank wine as blissfully as at this banquet. With regard to pure conversation and singing loud, writing with force and elegance, drinking good wine joyfully, and playing a plain zither after getting drunk, I am not ashamed in the slightest in the face of the ancients. Waving farewell with my sleeve lifted up, when would you come back? When autumn’s wind rises in Luoyang, I will mince fish to wait for your return [alluding to Zhang Han who, when seeing the autumn’s wind in Luoyang, thought of the seabass and water-mallow of his hometown and returned Jiangdong]. As poems can be presented parting gifts, how can there be no such composition?

達人張侯，大雅君子。統泛舟之役，在清川之湄。談玄賦詩，連興數月，醉盡花柳，賞窮江山。王命有程，告以行邁，煙景晚色，慘為愁容。繫飛帆於半天，泛泝水於遙海。欲去不忍，更開芳樽，樂雖寰中，趣逸天半。平生酣暢，未若此筵。至於清談浩歌，雄筆麗藻，笑飲醁酒，醉揮素琴，余實不愧於古人也。揚袂遠別，何時歸來？想洛陽之秋風，將鱠魚以相待。詩可贈遠，無乃闕乎？

3. “Shang Silie Taichangbo qi” 上司列太常伯啟 (Letter Presented to the Grand Executive Attendant of the Bureau of Ranks)
Respectfully I have heard this: the auspicious unicorn in the marshland of the Lu state expected to entrust himself to Xuanfu [namely, Confucius]; the exceptional steed at Wu Slope surely was making long neighs for Sun Yang [namely, Bole]. This is because what they had valued was to be appreciated, and whatever injustice they had received would be redressed by the one who understand them. Therefore, [with Qin Zhi] carving their unworked wood, the half-dead paulownia trees of Mount Yi [were made into zithers]; [with Cai Yong] valuing their timbre, no bamboos of Keting were left to decay forever.

I humbly hold in mind that your lordship, Grand Executive Attendant, matches Heaven that upthrusts its frame, spreading across the apex of the empyrean to expand its terrain, and enhances Earth that extends its spring, controlling the four strands to distribute its branches. With red charts

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3 Qilin is a numinous animal that is traditionally rendered as “unicorn” though with few similar characteristics.
4 Xuanfu (Father of Brilliance) is the honorific title conferred to Confucius in the eleventh year of the Zhenguan 貞觀 era (637).
5 Sun Yang, more famously known as Bole 伯樂, is a legendary, superb judge of horses; later it became the synonym for a good judge of talent.
6 Qin Zhi 琴摯 was a famous zither master in ancient times; the paulownia trees of Mount Yi were suitable for making zithers. “Qifa” 七發 (Seven Stimulations): “The paulownia trees of Longmen are bare of branches to a height of one hundred feet. Their trunks are gnarled and twisted, their roots spread out and divide. Above is a peak of thousands of fathoms, below lies a flume of hundreds of staves. A rapid current, eddying waves, throb and pulsate there. Their roots are half dead, half live…Then, as the season turns its back on fall and edges into winter, the zither Master Chih, is ordered to cut one for a zither” 龍門之桐, 高百尺而無枝. 中鬱結之輪菌, 根扶疏以分離. 上有千仞之峯, 下臨百丈之谿. 湍流遡波, 又澹淡之. 其根半死半生…於是背秋涉冬, 使琴摯斫斬以為琴. Wen xuan 文選, ed. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (505-531) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 34.1562. The translation is adapted from David Knechtges and Jerry Swanson’s rendering in “Seven Stimuli for the Prince: The Chi’-fa of Mei Ch’eng” Monumenta Serica 29 (1970): 108-09.
7 Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192) was a famous musician and an influential scholar-official of the Eastern Han. According to Soushen ji 搜神記: “Cai Yong once arrived at Keting, where people made the local bamboos into rafters. Yong raised his head and looked askance at the rafters, saying, ‘Excellent woods!’ He then took those bamboos to make flutes, which produced sonorously echoing sounds” 蔡邕嘗至柯亭, 以竹為椽. 邕仰眄之, 曰: “良竹也.” 取以為笛, 發聲遙亮. Soushen ji ed. Gan Bao 千寶 (286-336) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 13.167.
presenting blessings, the numinous son of the [Red] Thearch was revealed in Qufu; with purple haze drifting with transcendent beings, the refined perfect man was born within the Hangu Pass. Since then, your family has produced lineal and collateral descendants of a hundred generations, and countless gentlemen of ten thousand years. [As Zhang Liang] was in harmony with the Way and accorded with the numinous spirits, Master Yellow Stone instructed the emperor’s councilor in tactics; the unlimited virtue [of Xiao He] was bestowed by Heaven, for it was the White Star that brought down the essence of the king’s aide. Now, similar to the elegant peak that imitates the mountain, you set out the “three landmark texts” and look up to them; like the pellucid waves of the literary ocean, you entrust yourself to the nine schools to proceed to where you owe your allegiance. Ascending the cliff that makes the Lu state small, you discern the bright silks of the white draped horse; looking over the territory of great Wu, you appreciate the precious haze between the Dipper and Ox. You dangle autumn fruits in the conversational gathering, and embellish the spring

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8 According to the “Furui” (Auspicious Signs) chapter of Song shu, in the fourteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu (481 BCE), Confucius dreamt of a red haze rising in Pei 沛 town of Feng 豐 district. Confucius, after some inquiries, said, “This realm already has its master. He is the red Liu 天下已有主也, 為赤劉. Later, a young boy guided Confucius to see a unicorn that spat out three scrolls of charts, which predicated the rise of the red Liu, that is, Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202-195 BCE), the founding emperor of the Han, and legendarily the son of Red Thearch (chidizi 赤帝子). As the Han was believed to be of the virtue of fire, the color red was associated with the Liu royal family. Song shu, 27.766.

9 Sanfen, or the “three landmark texts,” refers to ancient texts attributed to the legendary Three August Ones (sanhuang 三皇, i.e. Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神農, and Huangdi 黄帝).

10 Mengzi, 7A.24: “When Confucius ascended the eastern hill, the Lu state appeared to him small; when he ascended Mount Tai, the entire world appeared to him small” 孔子登東山而小魯, 登泰山而小天下. According to Lunheng, when Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui ascended Mount Tai, Confucius looked afar at the Changhe 防閶 Gate of Wu state and saw a white horse being tied to the gate. He then asked Yan Hui what did he see outside the Changhe Gate. Yan Hui replied, “There is something that appears to be in the shape of bound, white silks” 有如繫練之狀. Lunheng jiaoshi, 4.170.

11 Based on the astrological correlation between terrestrial regions and celestial counterparts, the Southern Dipper and Ox are matched with the Wu state. The biography of Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300) in Jin shu records that after the Wu was conquered by the Jin, Zhang Hua observed the purple haze between the Deeper and Ox become even brighter. A diviner informed him that it was “the essence of the precious swords rising up to and pervading the heaven” 寶劍之精, 上徹於天耳. Later, Zhang Hua dug up in Yuzhang 豫章 two precious swords, one being Longquan 龍泉 and one being Tai’e 太阿. The haze between the Dipper and Ox disappeared soon afterwards. Jin shu, 36.1075-76.
blossoms in the literary garden. In the river of discourse, you shoot flying arrows that stir the rapids by the White Horse Ferry; in the stream of literature, you disperse pearls that make round ripples in the cave of the black dragon. Because of that, the virtue of your lordship excels the toes of a unicorn, and the paulownia leaf has been trimmed to make a tablet; the Way of your lordship shines in the crane pool, and the pale blue silk glinting with peach blossoms has been made into a draped seal-ribbon. Not long afterwards your administrative skill is perceived by the august emperor, and your devotion approved by his majestic. As you deferentially take responsibilities at the Spring Palace, the distinct light [of the sun] shines brightly on the Green Mansion; [with you assisting the emperor who is] in place of heaven to govern the imperial court, the [Three] Eminences.

12 The “autumn’s fruit” is a metaphor for Liu Xiangdao’s eloquence, and the “spring’s blossom” his literary talent. *Sanguo zhi*: “Pluck the spring blossom of the sundry Cadets, yet neglect the autumn fruit of the Household Aide” 獵庶子之春華，忘家丞之秋實. *Sanguo zhi*, 12.383.

13 Alludes to Wang Yan’s 王衍 (256-311) comment on Guo Xiang 郭象 (261-303) and Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300): “The literary talent of Lu Ji is as vast as the sea, and that of Pan Yue is as vast as the Yangtzu River” 陸才如海，潘才如江. *Shipin jizhu* 詩品集注, ed. Cao Xu 曹旭 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 1.141.

14 It was through the White Horse Ferry that Han troops enters into the Chu under the control of Xiang Yu 项羽 (232-202 BCE). Alludes to Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (518-558) comment on Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300): “When Kuo Hsiang converses, it’s as if he were tilting the Yellow River to drain its waters; it pours and pours, but is never exhausted” 郭子玄語義如懸河寫水, 注而不竭. *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, 2.241; Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 236.

15 Alludes to Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (518-558) comment on Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300): “The pearl worth a thousand pieces of gold could only have come from under the chin of the black dragon who lives at the bottom of the ninefold deeps” 夫千金之珠，必在九重之淵而驪龍頷下. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 10.1061.

16 *Shijing*, Mao 11 (“Linzhizhi” 麟之趾): “The toes of unicorn, / The pure and sincere feudal princes” 麟之趾, 振振公子. As unicorn was believed to be a benevolence creature, its tones were used to symbolize the virtue of feudal princes.

17 *Shi jing* 鈞禁 (crane adyta) was an alternative name for the palace of the Crown Prince, and the pool within the palace was called crane pool. According to the *Han yi* 漢儀 (The Han Rites) of Ding Fu 丁孚, the seal-ribbon of an official who received an 2,000-bushel salary was made of pale blue silks embroidered with peach blossoms. *Hou Han shu*, 30.3675.

18 *Shi jing* 鈞禁 (crane adyta) was an alternative name for the palace of the Crown Prince, and the pool within the palace was called crane pool.

20 Both the Spring Palace and the Green Mansion are alternative names for the Eastern Palace.
and [Seven] Scintillances shed light on the purple adyta. You attend to affairs with a manner comporting with the mystery [of the Way], and your movement is consistent with the primal pneuma. The Mannered Office that holds brilliance, by the bright light of the loving sun, spreads its radiance; the Palace of Culture and Prosperity that cultivates gracefulness, by the reflection of the virtuous star, illuminates broadly. Your insight is extensive and discerning, and your demeanor loose and sympathetic. Exceedingly perceptive and genuine, you achieve great undertakings that are more prominent than that of Houtu; gracious and gentle, devoted and self-controlled, you make profound accomplishments that reach to heaven. With regard to these aspects, Yi Zhi will be shamed by your glorious virtue, and Wu Xian abashed by your protection [of the Tang]. You conform to people’s capacity to recommend talented men, and offer help to literati without any personal considerations. You are as pellucid and bright as a water mirror, with gold waves glistening in your numinous repository, and as clear and perceptive as an ice jar, with jade candles shining in your divine contrivance. With regard to these aspects, Deng You didn’t come close to your rolling wave-like [broadness], and Lu Yu had no hope of attaining your arts. As a result, the beautiful ones and the ugly ones are placed in their proper positions, and the heavy ones and light ones aren’t been wrongly weighed. The Five Teachings have been wildly spread, and the hundreds of affairs are put

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22 The “Three Eminences” refers to three groups of paired stars along the southwest border of the Ursa Major that make three of the bear’s paws; the “Seven Scintillances” refers to sun, moon and five naked-eye planets. That all these celestial bodies shine brightly is indicative of a good government.

23 Namely, the Department of State Affairs.

24 The “loving sun” is a metaphor for the emperor.

25 It was believed that the appearance of the virtue star indicates the existence of a virtuous man, which clearly refers to Grand Executive Attendant Liu in this letter.

26 Houtu, son of Gonggong, was said to be able to bring peace to the Nine Isles.

27 Both Yi Zhi and Wu Xian assisted King Taiwu 太戊 (r. 1535-1460 BCE) of Shang to rule the state. Shangshu: “Under the reign of King Taiwu, there were Yi Zhi and Chen Hu [whose virtue] reached to the Thearch of Heaven, and there was also Wu Xian who protected the royal House” in Shangshu zhengyi, 16.521.

28 Both the “numinous repository,” a word from Zhuangzi, and the “divine contrivance” refer to one’s mind.

29 Both Lu Yu (183-257) and Deng You (?-326) used to serve as Minister of the Ministry of Personal, one in the Wei and one in the Jin, and both were reputed for their ability to promote virtuous men.

30 Shangshu: “You, as Minister of Education, should reverently spread the Five Teachings” 汝作司徒, 敬敷五教, in Shangshu zhengyi, 3.89. The Five Teachings, according to Zuoziuan, refers to the instructions of “father being righteous,
in good order. Repelling the enemy’s chariots a hundred leagues, [You are] Lu Zhonglian who established meritorious exploits with his words and laugh, setting an example for the time, [You are] Guo Tai who possessed the principles of human relationships. Added that you pay deference to literati with the manner of standing on the opposite side of a courtyard, and reserve the seat of honor for the worthy. [When someone possesses] a sole virtue that moves your heart, [you bow to him as] Zhongxuan was bowed to at Cai Yong’s banquet; [when someone makes] a single remark that is consistent with the Way, [you receive him as] Ran Ming was received under the stairs of Zheng.

伏惟太常伯公，儀天聳構，橫九霄而拓基；浸地開源，控四紀而疏派。自赤文薦祉，曲阜分帝子之靈；紫氣浮仙，函谷誕真人之秀。本支百代，君子萬年。道葉神交，黃石授帝師之略；德攸天縱，白星降王輔之精。至若峰秀學山，列三墳而仰止；瀾清筆海，委九流以朝宗。登小魯之巖，辨練光於曳馬；臨大吳之國，識寶氣於連牛。垂秋實於談叢，絢春花於詞苑。辯河飛箭，激流翻白馬之津；文江散珠，圓波漱驪龍之穴。是用德茂麟趾，削桐葉以分珪；道煥鶴池，映桃花而曳

mother being tender-hearted, elder brother being fraternal, younger brother being respectful, and son being filial” 父義, 母慈, 兄友, 弟共, 子孝。Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie, 9.523 (Wen 18).

31 Shangshu zhengyi, 3.61.

32 Lu Zhonglian 魯仲連, also called Lu Lian, was a famous persuader of the Warring States. When the army of Qin laid siege on the capital of Zhao, Handan 邯顓, Lu Zhonglian successfully persuaded Lord Pingyuan 平原(?-251 BCE) out of the idea of supporting the King of Qin in his wish to proclaim himself emperor. Because of that, the army of Qin retreated fifty leagues. The biography of Lu Zhonglian is in Shiji, 83.2459-69.

33 Guo Tai (128-169), a gentleman of repute of the Eastern Han, persistently fought against the corrupted faction of eunuchs in his time, and was acclaimed by students of the Imperial University (taixue 太學) as their role model.

34 In the ancient, when a host met his guest, the host stood on the east side of the courtyard and the guest on the west side, and they saluted to each other face to face. This manner was meant to show that the host and guest were equal in their status.

35 Although Cai Yong’s residence was always full of guests, once during a banquet, when he heard that Wang Can (177-217) was outside the gate, he hurried to greet Wang Can with his shoes on back to front. Sanguo zhi, 21.597.

36 Zuozhuan: “Some time ago Shuxiang went to Zheng. Ran Ming of Zheng, an ugly man, wanted to observe Shuxiang, so he went in following the men who had been set to clear away ritual vessels. He stood at the lower end of the hall and displayed his excellence with a single remark. Shuxiang was about to drink when he heard Ran Ming speak. He said, ‘This must be Ran Ming!’ He descended, led him up by hand” 昔叔向適鄭，鬷蔑惡，欲觀叔向，從使之收器者，而往立於堂下。一言而善。叔向將飲酒，聞之，曰：“必鬷明也。”下，執其手以上。Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie, 26.1567 (Zhao 28); Zuo Tradition, 1691.
綬。既而揆留皇鑒，忠簡帝心。奉職春宮，爍離光於青殿；代工天府，明台曜於紫宸。綜理元風，變諧元氣。含暉禮閣，皎愛日以流光；毓彩文昌，映德星而開照。若乃識度宏遠，器宇疏通。明允篤誠，盛業隆於后土；惠和忠肅，玄功格於上天。則伊陟謝其緝熙，巫咸慙其保乂。舉才應器，與士無私。水鏡澄華，炫金波於靈府；冰壺徹鑒，朗玉燭於神機。則邓攸莫際其瀾，盧毓罕窺其術。故使妍蚩各安其分，輕重不失其權。五教克敷，百揆時敘。折衝千里，魯連談笑之功；師表一時，郭泰人倫之度。加以分庭讓士，虛席禮賢。片善經心，揖仲宣於蔡席；一言合道，接然明於鄭階。

I am a plain-garbed person living in a thatched cottage, with my door-hinge made of mulberry tree and my belt plain leather. At my tender age I have cultivated the aspiration to firmly renounce public respect and fame; at my middle age I have solemnly sworn that my heart has no intention for reputation or success. The best-case scenario is to act as a guard holding a whip, and long for the honor of receiving royal favor at the imperial court; the second best-case scenario is to hold the call-to-arms in both hands to take office, and realize the intention of giving up farm work [by earning official salary] in my private chamber. Nevertheless, my devotion isn’t known to any district of ten households, nor is my learning focused on one particular classic text. When drawing back, I am not good at hiding away; when going forward, I am different from the shrew official. To whirl with the “ram’s-horn” to soar up is [to cross] the flood without any fords; to depend on the tail of the thoroughbred steed to gallop forward is a remote [possibility] that cannot be relied on. What I really

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37 *Lunyu* 7.12: “If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard holding a whip outside the market place. If it is not, I shall follow my own preference” 富而可求也，雖執鞭之士，吾亦為之。如不可求，從吾所好. Lau, *The Analects*, 87.

38 Mao Yi 毛義 was a filial son of the Eastern Han. When he received the official call-to-arms that commanded him to take a local post, he, in order to support his mother, holding the call-to-arms in his hands, went to assume office happily. After his mother passed away, however, he immediately resigned. *Hou Han shu*, 39.1294.

39 Namely, whirlwind.
want is to cast a fishing-pole to hang down the bait, concealing my name and traces at the bank of Wei River,\textsuperscript{40} and hold an earthen jar to water the garden, renouncing the contriving mind at the shoreline of Han River.\textsuperscript{41} [However,] I am very fortunate to belong to a time when heaven and earth manifest chastity,\textsuperscript{42} and the [three-feet] bird and hare shine brightly together.\textsuperscript{43} Mount Song is excited by the sound of “ten thousand years old,”\textsuperscript{44} and the Virtuous Water corresponds [to the virtuous time] with its thousands of years of pellucidity.\textsuperscript{45} Having no use for the [realm that is] the vast residence [of King Yao], I’m delighted to be a part of the state where every household is worth enfeoffment;\textsuperscript{46} being poor and humble when the Way prevails in the world, I’m shamed of writing the \textit{fu} on returning the field.\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, I leave [my home that has] windows made of earthen jars, alludes to the story of Lü Shang, who, before appointed by King Wen of Zhou, was a fisherman at the riverbank of Wei River.\textsuperscript{40} According to \textit{Zhuangzi}, when Zigong, a disciple of Confucius, passed the south bank of Han River, he saw an old man had dug out a passage down into the well, from which the old man emerged with an earthen jar in his arms to water the soil. It cost the old man a lot of effort with very little result. Zigong suggested the old man to make a contrivance, which in one day would irrigate a hundred fields. The old man replied that “where there are contrivances, there are bound to be contriving affairs; where there are contriving affairs, there are bound to be contriving hearts” 有機者必有機事, 有機事者必有機心, and he was ashamed to make a contrivance. \textit{Zhuangzi jishi}, 5.433-434.\textsuperscript{42} Yi (\textit{Book of Changes}): “The Way of heaven and earth is the manifestation of chastity” 天地之道, 貞觀者也.\textsuperscript{43} Allegedly there dwelled a three-feet bird in the sun and a hare in the moon; therefore wutu is used to designate the sun and moon; therefore wutu is used to designate the sun and moon.\textsuperscript{44} Shiji: “In the third month of the first year of Yuanfeng era (110 BCE), Emperor Wu journeyed east to visit Mount Goushi. Afterwards, he paid reverence to and ascended Mount Taishi of the Center Marchmount (i.e. Mount Song). The attendants and officials at the foot of the mountain heard someone saying ‘the thousand years old.’ When asking those up on the mountain, no one admitted to have had said it; when asking those under the mountain, no one admitted to have said it either. Therefore, Emperor Wu enfeoffed three hundred households as the sacred shrine of Mount Taishi, naming it district of Honoring Highness” 三月, 遂東幸緱氏, 礼登中嶽太室. 從官在山下聞若有言“萬歲”云. 問上, 上不言; 問下, 下不言. 於是以三百戶封太室奉祠, 命曰崇高邑. Shiji, 28.1397. The sound of “ten thousand years old” at Mount Song was then regarded as a sign of a virtuous ruler.\textsuperscript{45} Shangshu (\textit{Book of Documents}): “In the past lived King Yao, who was perceptive, insightful, refined and thoughtful, and had the entire realm as his vast residence” 昔在帝堯, 聰明文思, 光宅天下. Kong Yingda, \textit{Shangshu zhengyi} (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 8.348. Therefore, zhenguan, which also was the reign title of emperor Taizong, indicates a time of peace and prosperity.\textsuperscript{46} “Guitian fu” 張衡 (78-139) to express his longing for a recluse life.
to take advantage [of the time] to meet the great man at the Gold [Horse] Gate. I take myself to the imperial city to admire the cloud, and hurry to Chang'an to tend toward the sun. With the intention to offer the tasty celery, I present myself to the Supreme One in vain; I have the features of a twisted tree, yet who will favorably describe me by the emperor's side?

Your brilliant lordship is able to understand the imperceptible and bring to a completion all undertakings in the world, weigh the merits of the Way and bring the state into proper alignment.

One glance from you is venerable enough to make a tired horse surpass a transcendent deer, and

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48 Yi: “When a winged dragon flies in the sky, it will be advantageous to meet with the great man” 飛龍在天，利見大人. Zhouyi zhengyi, 1.7. The great man in this letter refers to the emperor.
49 Both “admire the cloud” and “tend toward the sun” refer to paying respects to the emperor.
50 This refers to a Liezi story in which a man of Song so much enjoyed sunning his back in winter that he wanted to present the technique to the ruler of the domain. Another person told him of a man who loved celery and wanted a nobleman to taste it, but the nobleman found the celery almost inedible.
51 Alludes to “Yuzhong shangshu ziming” 獄中上書自明 (In Prison Presenting a Letter to Clarify myself) of Zou Yang 鄒陽 (ca. 206-129 BCE): “The root of a twisted tree is extremely winding and very singular, yet it can be made into the implement owned by the [ruler of a state of] ten thousand vehicles. Why is it? Because those to the left and right of the ruler have already favorably described the root to him” 蟠木根柢，輪囷離奇，而為萬乘器者，何則? 以左右先為之容也. Wen xuan 39.1771.
52 Yi: “Only [the understanding of] the imperceptible can bring to a completion all undertakings in the world” 唯幾也，故能成天下之務. Zhouyi zhengyi, 7.335.
53 Shangshu: “Weigh the merits of the Way and bring the state into proper alignment, harmonize and regulate yin and yang” 論道經邦，燮理陰陽. Shangshu zhengyi, 18.569.
54 It was said that one glance from Bole made the price of a horse increased tenfold. Zhanguo ce, 30.1092. According to Liexian zhuan, the Daoist immortal Su Dan 蘇耽 had a transcendent deer that could leap over any perilous peaks. Yixuan leiju, 95.1648.
one word from you is significant enough to make fish eyes outdo [the pearl offered by] the numinous snake.\(^{55}\) I simply hope that the “attentive hare”\(^{56}\) will depart from “Winnowing Basket,” stirring up a balmy wind on the sea of Shun,\(^{57}\) and that the “follower of dragon”\(^{58}\) will dampen the plinths, pouring a timely rainfall from the clouds of Yao. Then the fish transformed from the leftover of the minced meat is hopeful of exciting its scales to move in the rivers of Wu,\(^{59}\) and the pig that had been cooked is able to turn into a turtle of Lu Ford.\(^{60}\) Humbly prostrating myself before your stairways, I am more frightened than standing on the top of a tree or the edge of an abyss. I respectfully let you know.

I, Yuan Can, a plain-garbed person of Caozhou, knock my head on the ground, and respectfully present this letter to Your Excellency, the Duke of Liang: I intend to entrust myself and be of use to you forever, but will you have me? If I entrust myself to you, how can I benefit you? Supposing that you always held the seal of the Prime Minister and never lost the noble rank of “Marquis of

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\(^{55}\) It was said that after the Marquis of Sui saved the life of a numinous snake, the snake repaid him with a bright pearl several years later. *Sau Shenji*, 20.238.

\(^{56}\) Alternative name for the moon.

\(^{57}\) It was believed that when the moon departed from “Winnowing Basket,” one of the twenty-eight lunar lodgings, the wind would blow.


\(^{59}\) According to *Suoshen ji*, when King Helü 閣閭 (r. 514-496 BCE) of Wu was journeying on a river, he had the leftover of the minced meat thrown into the river, which then transformed into fish. *Suoshen ji*, 13.163.

\(^{60}\) According to *Fuzi* 符子, King Zhao 昭 (r. 312-279 BCE) of Yan 燕 had an extremely large pig killed and cooked, which later turned into a turtle and became the Sire of Lu Ford. *Taiping yulan*, 903.4139.
Comprehensiveness,”⁶¹ that the long-lived guests⁶² always filled your hall and the gold belt always spreaded across your waist, then I ask your permission to go wherever wheels go and horses reach to shield your weak points and extol your strong points, so that people in the world are unable to judge against you. Supposing that you ran into an unforeseen situation and encountered an unforeseen misfortune, with your person interrogated by clerks and your wife and children filling the prison, then I ask your permission to let my undistinguished body and insignificant life fall victim to a sword to clear the wrongful charges against you, so that the deadly, cruel punishment is unable to trap you. Supposing that you, because of others’ slanderous letters, could not make yourself known to the emperor, and were in the end deprived of your official position, expelled from the capital, and laughed at by the entire world, then I ask your permission to use the integrity of my square inch of heart and my three inches of silver tongue to hold aloft righteousness, confront the emperor to his face, and clarify the truth to the imperial court, so that the name of “expelled minister” is unable to dishonor you. Supposing that you incurred the grudge of those who are furious with you and the resentment of those who stare at you angrily, and all the officials at court deliberated on attacking you, then I ask your permission to first shut their mouths up with honest words, and if they are not stopped, I will further smear their garments one by one with the blood I shed from my eyes, so that the shameful humiliation is unable to disgrace you. Supposing that there were things that you cannot foreknow, and that after you passed away the few servicemen at your gate were in dread of cold and hunger, then I ask your permission to doff my fur garment, give away my food, and do all and everything I can without the slightest negligence to support your family for my whole life, so that the concerns for your descendants are unable to bother you. Under these five circumstances, I am able to benefit you and therefore intend to entrust myself to you. Do you approve?

⁶¹ Tonghou (Marquis of Comprehensiveness) was the highest rank of the twenty noble ranks established in the Qin.
⁶² Shouke (long-lived guests) refers to chrysanthemum, a symbol of longevity because it flowers in the autumn.
曹州布衣袁參頓首，謹上梁公閣下：參將自託於君，長為君欲用之乎？參之託君，何以利君也？若使君常懷相印，不失通侯，壽客滿堂，黃金橫帶，則參請以車軌所至，馬首所及，而掩君之短，稱君之長，使天下之人不能議君矣。若使君當不測之時，遭不測之禍，身從吏訊，妻子滿獄，則參請以顚覆之身，渺渺之命，伏死一劍，以白君冤，使酷殺之刑不能陷君矣。若使君因緣誹書，不得見察，卒至免逐，為天下笑，則參請以一寸之節，三寸之舌，抗義犯顏，解於闕廷，使逐臣之名不能汙君矣。君有盛忿之隙，睚眦之怨，朝廷之士，議欲侵君，則參請以直辭，先挫其口，不爾，則更以眥血，次汙其衣，見陵之羞不能醜君矣。若使君事至不可知，千秋萬歲後而君門闌卒有饑寒之虞，則參請解參之裘，推參之哺，勉勉不怠，終身奉之，使子孫之憂不能累君矣。此五者，參之所以利君而自托也，君其可乎？

A person’s character is difficult to judge; it is difficult to judge a person’s character. As far as you are concerned, I haven’t had any former connection with you as a retainer, or received any favor from you as a disciple. Now I suddenly hope to entrust myself to you and be of use to you forever, might it not be that you can’t decide my intention and suspect that I am reckless? Nevertheless, for my part, I do have a reckless desire. How is it so? Already in the second half of my life, I have been repeatedly travelling away from home for several years. My gold has been exhausted and my black fur coat worn out, my lips have become putrid and my teeth decayed, yet I still haven’t managed to make my name. My mother is alive, yet I have achieved absolutely none that could give her consolation; as the day is waning yet the road ahead is long, I don’t know what to do. Even so, I still hold in mind that except you no one is worth relying on. For that reason, now I venture to use the five benefits to buy favor from you, and hope you will take a look at me and grant me the chance to be examined, so that I will be able to console my mother for her fright and fear. I hear that speech is made for someone who is surly going to listen to you, and righteous conduct is carried out for
someone who truly understands you. How could I, a grown-up of great ambition, be incapable of gratitude? Let alone that now, because of my affection for my mother, I ask for your kindness. If you are delighted, and will not turn me down, then henceforth with what face can I simply remain silent and do nothing [for you]? Adhering to the promises I made earlier, I surely will not disappoint you kindness. In the netherworld there are ghosts, in the heaven there are gods, and between the ghosts and gods, I must be there. If I dare to disappoint you, then let the numinous ghosts and gods execute me. I solemnly swear this oath, only to hope that you will favor me with trust.

夫人不易知，知人不易。參於君，非有食客之舊，門生之恩，今便欲自託於君，長為君用，得無不知參意而疑參妄乎？然妄心實亦有之。何也？參行年已半春秋，客復數載，黃金盡，烏裘敝，脣腐齒落，不得成名。而親之在堂，終莫有慰。日暮途遠，不知所為。然獨念非君無足依者，故今敢以五利求市於君，冀君一顧見試，使得慰親恐懼。參聞言為必聽者出，義為知己者行。丈夫雄心，能無感激？況今以親親之故，而祈德於君。使君歡然，卒不見拒，爾後即參尚何面目，遂得默然而已哉？本向時之言，終不負德。夫幽則有鬼，天則有神，鬼神之閒，參所必有。如使參敢負於君者，則鬼神之靈共誅之。敬以自盟，惟君之惠信也。

Furthermore, because of your remarkable talent, you have been summoned to court to serve as the Prime Minister four times. You [have experienced] every kind of hardship and trouble, and know to the last detail people’s true state and deceits.⁶³ Now, you surely have recommended many men to the court, but are there anyone who could promise you the five benefits that I have offered? If I am one of those who are ignorant and half-witted, and I merely keep to and bring trouble to myself, then it shows how broadly you have appraised the literati. This utmost ignorant person only hopes to attain

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⁶³ Alludes to Zuoqian: “The Prince of Jin was abroad for nineteen years and finally obtained the domain of Jin. Hardship and trouble he has experienced in every kind; the people’s true state and deceits he knows to the last detail” 晉侯在外十九年矣，而果得晉國。險阻艱難，備嘗之矣；民之情偽，盡知之矣。Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie, 7.373 (Xi, 28); Zuo Tradition, 413.
your appraisal. Knocking my head on the ground, knocking my head on the ground. Now I dare not
to extravagantly sing my own praises to fool you; nevertheless, I have the audacity to speak for
myself—I am definitely not a mediocre person of the world. Now if you appraise me by righteous
conduct, then this is exactly what I have hoped for; if you appraise me by talent, then only you can
recognize that of mine. Since nothing but your power is going to bring me to success, how could
you, at this very moment, just sit back and disregard me?

且君以偉才，四入為相，艱難情偽，君盡知之。至於進人亦多矣，然亦能有以參之五利而許君
乎？參必愚儕鰲生，而自守取咎爾，則君之相士，何其備耶！至愚殆欲窺君之鑒矣。頓首頓首。
參今亦不敢盛稱譽上紿於君，然竊自言之，正參亦非天下庸人也。今君若見相以義，則參之本
圖；若見相以才，則惟君所識。今幸君之力能必致參，顧此時坐而相棄。

It is said, “A substantial profit is desirable, and the best opportunity cannot be repeated. If one loses
the profit and misses the opportunity, in the end one is surely going to regret.” Are you alone
unaware of the weeps of the man of Kui? Long ago, a man of Kui, engaged in trade, was selling ice
at the market. A traveller who was suffering from the heat intended to buy his ice. The man of Kui,
believing that now he had the opportunity, sought to multiple his profit from the traveller. Because
of that, the traveller was infuriated and left. Shortly afterwards, all the ice was melting down.
Therefore, the man of Kui couldn’t even keep his ice. Having lost both [his ice and profit], he left
the market while crying. Now you are sitting in the clouds in the blue sky,\textsuperscript{64} weighing and measuring
the entire world, and all the gentlemen in the world hope to entrust themselves to you. This is
indeed the time when you are selling ice and the gentlemen hope to buy ice from you. When there is
profit, people are brought together. Surely it will be inappropriate to miss the opportunity!

\textsuperscript{64} Namely, the position of the Prime Minister.
Supposing that you stubbornly halt and hesitate till the ice is melting down, then even if you still want to open your mouth, how can the deal be made? Hope you will consider this for a while, and do not repeat what the man of Kui had done. I, Can, knock my head on the ground.


5. “Weifeng fu” 威鳳賦 (Fu on the Awe-inspiring phoenix)

有一威鳳  There was an awe-inspiring phoenix;
憩翮朝陽*  When resting, its quills were as bright as the morning’s sun.
晨遊紫霧  At dawn, it roamed among purple mists;
夕飲玄霜*  At dusk, it imbibed mysterious frosts.
資長風以舉翰  Depending on the long wind, it flew high;
戾天衢而遠翔*  Hovering against the celestial avenue, it soared afar.
西翥則煙氛閟色  When it took flight to the west, haze and vapors lost their color;
東飛則日月騰光*  When it lifted away to the east, the sun and moon poured out their light.
化垂鵬於北裔  It transformed the Peng over the sky in the northern frontier,
訓群鳥於南荒*  And instructed the sundry birds in the southern wilderness.
弭亂世而方降  To calm the turbulent world, it then descended;
To embrace the glorious time, it displayed itself.

Lowering its wings from the cloudy road,
It returned with accomplishments to its home tree.
When looking up to tall branches, it caused suspicion;
When looking down upon tapering twigs, it was surrounded by insects.
Companions of the same grove were all jealous of it;
Fellows of the same branch defied it together.
They lacked the fraternal feeling of the [birds of] Heng Mountain,
But possessed the ferocious manner of the Flaming Isle.
Those [wrens] made nests with reeds and dwelled there unworriedly;
It alone was concerned about danger and acted with due caution.

Owls howling by the leaves to its side;
Small birds shrieking on the branches underneath.
Ashamed of their own extremely vulgar ignobility,
They harmed the worthy other that was uniquely remarkable.
No sooner had they clustered their beaks to strike it one after another,
Than they spread out the net to restrain it.
It folded its exceptional wings that overrode the clouds,
And hid its brilliant demeanor that amazed the world.

To embrace the glorious time, it displayed itself.
Therefore,

It brooded on its feelings in the shadows of night,

And had tangled thoughts in the rays of morning.

Frosts damaged its elegant wings;

Dews spotted its red plumage.

It sighed over easily formed adversities and calamities,

And lamented the difficulty in avoiding leashed arrows.

Expecting to lose its life once it was killed,

It originally had no intention to fly again.

Fortunately, thanks to a gentleman,

It had someone to rely and depend on.

He brought out the wind and clouds,

To rinse away that dust and scum.

So it broke through the overlying cover from beneath the leaves,

And shone brightly within the branches.

Its transcendent quills, once folded, now unfurled again,

And its ethereal voice, once curbed, arose anew.

Looking at the eight ends of earth, it takes flight afar;

Lowering its gaze at the nine heavens, it stands aloft.

It hopes to widely spread virtue to all the birds,
非崇利於一已* But has no intention to magnify its own profits.

是以 Because of that,
徘徊感德 Loitering and lingering, it feels grateful to his favor;
顧慕懷賢* As if looking back with longing, it holds dear his worth.
憑明哲而禍散 Thanks to the wise man, its adversity has been dispelled.
託英才而福延* Depending on this brilliant person, its blessing is expanded.
答惠之情彌結 Its desire to repay his kindness is more bound up within;
報功之誌方宣* Its intent to reward his merit should be made public.
非知難而行易 It is not that knowing is difficult and doing is easy;
思令後以終前 One wishes to make sure what comes at the end follows rightly that at the beginning.
俾賢德之流慶 So that his honorable virtue is circulated and celebrated,
畢萬葉而芳傳* And over myriads of generations his fragrant name is spread.

6 “Chaoyuange fu” 朝元閣賦 (Fu on the Gallery of Paying Homage to the Mysterious Prime)

上將 His Highness intended to
恢帝宇 Expand the august firmament,
壯神皋* And magnify the divine land.
Cutting down the pine trees of Mt. Jing, he used them with propriety;

Inspiring the crowd that came as if they were [his] children, he put them to work without toiling them.

He constructed the transcendent gallery, vast and broad;

Matched it with the Purple Supreme, venerable and lofty.

At first it was to,

Examine its size and scale,

And amplify its grand appearance.

He planned the beginning of [the gallery showing] the sage’s trace,

Then commanded woodworkers to complete it.

Facing its cinnamon doors are the eight rivers, remote and far-reaching;

Standing next to its jade stairs are thousands of cliffs, towering aloft.

It raises the sun-dwelling crow beyond the red empyrean,

And rests the [moon’s] jade hare above the mountain’s halcyon haze.

It can

Cap the sea-shell palace,
And overshadow “Wind-on the Fells” of Mount Kunlun.

How extremely marvelous!

It is indeed fashioned by divinely luminous essences,

And its appearance is impossible to be perfectly depicted.

Observe that

Its plain style is to manifest the [emperor’s] virtue,

And its height derives directly from the mountain.

To its bow-arched beams the sky draws near;

To its vermilion steps clouds return.

Seeking transcendent immortals, Emperor Wu of Han looked for Mount Penglai on the sea;

Being with the Way, our Majesty brings Daoist adepts to the human realm.

Since its structure is lofty,

Its serenity will surely be permanent.

Its solemn color heavily saturates the tree branches;

Its floating light disorderly skims over the mountain peak.

As if a pheasant soaring up,

It alone comes out from searing light.
農務暇
In the slack season for farming,

32 霜氣澄* When the frosty air is clear,

天門闢 The imperial gate has been opened,

龍輅升* And the Emperor’s carriage ascends [to the gallery].

俯人煙於萬井 Look down to the household smoke rising up from the ten thousand wells;

36 小雲樹於五陵* The towering trees of the Five Tomb-mounds appear small.

天臨宇宙 Heaven oversees the entire realm;

日照黎蒸* The sun shines on the multitudinous folk.

是時也， At this time,

靈仙響集 Numinous immortals loudly gather;

40 品物交感* Myriad sorts of beings are all moved.

因高載著於人風 Because of its height, it is evidently known in the prevailing atmosphere of common people;

有象寧遺於睿覽* With its image, how could it be neglected by the [emperor’s] percipient inspection?

聖人垂化 The sage condescended to show his teaching,

44 稽古上清* That of conforming to antiquity and the Highest Clarity.

彼會昌之構宇 This constructed edifice in Mount Prosperity Gathering,
得朝元之美名* Receives the honorific name of “Paying Homage to the Mysterious Prime.”

不奪穡地知庶心胥悦 Expropriating no farmland, it shows the utterly delighted heart of every commoner;

高標靈阜表聖壽長亨* Standing high on the numinous mountain, it signifies the long and prosperous life of our sage-ruler.

襟懷動植 He holds in his heart all the plants and animals;

指掌寰瀛* Has on his palm the entire land and sea.

將九圍載廣 [He is] as broad as the Nine Environs,

與三光克明* And as brilliant as the Three Lights.

斯乃棟宇之大也 Because of that, the grandness of [the gallery’s] ridgepole and roof,

雖前史莫之與京* Even cannot be matched by [anything recorded in] the past history.

夫如是 In this way

古之濬城隍飭宮苑* The ancient [emperors] who had city moats deepened and palace gardens organized,

孰比 How could they be compared to

我君居高而致遠* Our Majesty who, by dwelling high, attracts those who are far away to come.
7. “Sima fu” 死馬賦 (Fu on the Dead Horse)

連山四望何高高* Connected mountains overlooking four directions, how lofty!

良馬本代君子勞* The thoroughbred, originally, labored in place of a gentleman.

燕地冰堅傷凍骨 In the land of Yan the firm ice injured its freezing bones;

胡天霜落縮寒毛* From the northern sky frosts falling, reduced its shivering hair.

願君迴來郷山道 * “Prey, my lord, let me take you back home along the mountain road;

道傍青青饒美草* By the road, the tasty grass, green and lush, is abundant.

鞭策尋途末敢迷 Being whipped to search out the path, I dare not to loss direction;

希君少留養疲老* I merely hope my lord would stop for a while, to let me recover from fatigue.”

君其去去途未窮* The gentleman left it and departed for his unending journey;

悲鳴羸臥此山中* Neighing in grief, it lied feebly in this mountain.

桃花零落三春月 Peach blossoms were withered and wasted in the moonlight of the third month of spring;

桂枝摧折九秋風* Cinnamon branches were snapped by the wind of the ninth month of autumn.

昔日浮光疑曳練* In the past it, reflecting the floating light, appeared to be a bolt of draped silk,

常時躡景如流電* It also used to often chased the [sun’s] shadow, as fast as fleeting
lightning.

長揪塵聞形遙 [Stirring up] darkling dust admits the tall catalpa trees, its form and shadow were already afar;

16 上蘭日明跡盡* Among the superior eupatorium where the sun was bright, its tracks were everywhere.

漢女彈弦怨離別 The lady of the Han played a string instrument, resenting her separation.

楚王興歌苦征戰* The King of the Chu raised the song, mourning for the warfare.

赤血霑霑君不知 Its body was saturated with red blood, yet the gentleman did not know.

20 白骨辭君君不見* Its white bones bid farewell to the gentleman, yet the gentlemen did not see.

少年馳射出幽並* A young lad, galloping the horse to shoot, came out of Youzhou and Bingzhou;

高秋搖落重橫行* In the bright autumn when the trees shedding their leaves, he favored to run without check.

雲中想見遊龍影 Looking upon the clouds, it hoped to see the shadows of wandering dragons;

24 月下忍聞飛鵲聲* Under the moonlight, it put up with the sound of flying magpies.

千里相思浩如失* The longing of the “thousand-league horse” was unchecked, as if unbearable;

一代英雄從此畢* A hero of its generation, from now on, reached its end.
鹽車垂耳不知年
Driving salt cart with drooped ears, the fine steed lost track of time;

粧樓畫眉寧記日
* Drawing eyebrows in her boudoir, how could she remember the days?

高門待封杳無期* To elevate the gate to await enfeoffment is far off and indefinite;

僊橋題柱即長辭* Inscribing on the pillar of Shengxian Bridge means forever farewell.

八駿馳名終已矣 The eight exceptional horses were well-known yet still dead in the end;

千金買骨復何時* When would a thousand gold be used to buy horse bones again?

8. “Jing luanlihou tianen liu Yelang yi jiyou shuhuai zeng Jiangxia Wei Taishou Liangzai”
經亂離後天恩流夜郎憶舊遊書懷贈贈江夏韋太守良宰 (After Experiencing the Disorder, Thanks to the Emperor’s Beneficence, I was Exiled to Yelang; I Recalled Old Travels and Wrote Down My Feelings to Present to Wei Liangzai, Governor of Jiangxia)

天上白玉京* In the heavenly domain is the Pure Jade Capital,65

十二樓五城* Along with twelve towers and five cities.66

仙人撫我頂 The transcendent being lightly touched my head;

結髮受長生* Knotting up my hair, he instructed me in the secret of immortality.

誤逐世間樂 Mistakenly pursuing the joy of the human realm,

頗窮理亂情* I have thoroughly considered the situation of order and disorder.

九十六聖君 The ninety-six sagacious rulers,67

浮雲掛空名 Their empty names were hanging on floating clouds.

65 Pure Jade Capital is the residence of transcendent beings.
66 In Mount Kunlun are twelve towers and five cities, where immortals dwell.
67 All the rulers in the past.
天地賭一擲, Competing for heaven and earth as if throwing a dice,
未能忘戰爭, None were able to put aside warfare.
試涉霸王略, I tentatively studied the schemes of kings and overlords,
將期軒冕榮*, Expecting to obtain the honor of lordly coach and coronet.
時命乃大謬, Yet the fate of the time was too much awry,
棄之海上行*, I decided to abandon my goal to travel on the sea.
學劍翻自哂, Practicing swordsmanship merely made me laugh at myself;
為文竟何成*, What could my literary composition achieve in the end?
劍非萬人敵, My swordsmanship did not prepare me to fight ten thousand rivals;
文竊四海聲*, My composition stole me fair reputation within the four seas.
兒戲不足道, The child’s play was not worth mentioning;
五噫出西京*, Having sighed five times, I departed from the Western Capital.
臨當欲去時, On the verge of departure,
慷慨淚沾纓*, I was sad and sorrowful, with tears dampening my collar.
歎君倜儻才, Your exceptional talent took my breath away;
標舉冠羣英*, Eminent and lofty, you were the crown of all the worthies.
開筵引祖帳, The sitting-mat was unfolded and the tent for a farewell party stretched,
慰此遠徂征*, To console the person who was about to travel afar.
鞍馬若浮雲, Saddled horses, as many as floating clouds,

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68 To pursue transcendence.
69 Alludes to Yang Xiong’s criticism of fu composition as worm-carving and seal-character cutting in which only a child would indulge. *Fayan yishu*, 3.45. Li Bai here uses “the child’s play” to refer to his own literary composition.
Accompanied me to the Doughty Cavalry Pavilion.
Tuned bells had yet to give full expression to our mind,
The broad daylight already sank into Kunming Lake.
In the tenth month I arrived in Youzhou,
Where glaives and spears were as many as stars spreading out.
The emperor had abandoned the farthest north,
Giving the entire land to a long whale.\(^{70}\)
By one breath it surged hundreds of streams,
And Mount Yanran was dashed to pieces.
Knowing in my heart that I could not relate it [to the emperor],
I returned to reside on the Isles of Penglai and Yingzhou.
Pulling a recurve, I was afraid of the Celestial Wolf;\(^{71}\)
Holding the arrow between my fingers, I dared not to release it.
Shedding tears at the Golden Terrace,\(^{72}\)
I cried to Heaven and bemoaned King Zhao.
Now, since no one valued the bones of an exceptional steed,\(^{73}\)

\(^{70}\) The long whale refers to An Lushan. According to the Xin Tang shu, by the third year of the Tianbao reign (744), all the land to the north of Youzhou was under An Lushan’s command. In the tenth year of the Tianbao reign (751), An Lushan, already the military commissioners of Pinglu 平盧 and Fanyang 范陽, was appointed concurrently as the military commissioner of Hedong 河東. By then, a large portion of north China fell into his control. Xin Tang shu, 225.6411-15.

\(^{71}\) Celestial Wolf, namely, Sirius, was believed in ancient China to signify the greedy, vicious invader. Here it refers to An Lushan.

\(^{72}\) It was believed that King Zhao 昭 (r. 312-279 BCE) of Yan 燕 built the Golden Terrace to invite talented men of the world.
The Green Ear galloped and pranced in vain.

Were Yue Yi to be reborn,

In this day and age he too would have had to run away.

Unsteady and unsure, I was not self-possessed;

Spurring a horse I stopped by Guixiang District.

I came upon you as you were listening to tunes of stringed instruments,

Sitting gravely and solemnly in the splendid hall.

The hundred leagues distinctively embodied the quality of antiquity;

Contentedly lying down was a man from the time of the August Fuxi.

Seeking out music at the hostel of Changle,

We unfolded the sitting-mat and set out flagons and vessels.

Between worthy nobles were young, beautiful maids;

Facing candles, they resplendently formed a line.

After King Zhao of the Yan ascended the throne, he intended to recruit talented men of the world and asked his minister Guo Wei how to do it. Guo Wei told King Zhao a story that in the past a king intended to buy a thoroughbred with a thousand pieces of gold, yet he did not acquire any thoroughbred after three years. One of his attendants asked the king’s permission to buy the thoroughbred for him. The attendant spent five hundred pieces of gold on buying the bone of a dead thoroughbred, and told the king that in so doing the entire world would know the king’s eagerness of buying a thoroughbred. Within a year, three thoroughbreds arrived at the king’s court. After telling this story, Guo Wei told the king to show the world his eagerness of recruiting talented men by first valuing Guo Wei himself. The king then built a palace for Guo Wei and treated Guo Wei as his teacher. Thereafter, talented men such Yue Yi and Zou Yan all came to the Yan to offer their service. Zhanguo ce, 29.1065.

Name of an ancient thoroughbred.

After coming to the Yan to offer his service, Yue Yi was appointed as vice minister.

Alludes to Lunyu 17.4: “The Master went to Wu Ch’eng. There he heard the sound of stringed instruments and singing. The Master broke into a smile and said, ‘Surely you don’t need to use an ox-knife to kill a chicken.’” This is to say that Wei Liangzai had Guixiang district well governed.

In ancient the size of a district was about one hundred leagues, thus “hundred leagues” became a synonym for district.

Alludes to Tao Yuanming, who, according to his biography in the Jin shu, liked to lie down beneath the northern window, and when fresh breeze came, he would called himself “a man from the time before the August Fuxi” (Xihuang shangren 羲皇上人).
醉舞紛綺席  Intoxicated dance spread out on elegant mats;
清歌繞飛梁*  Clear singings whirled around the flying beams.
歎囀末終朝  While our merry making had not lasted the whole day,
60 秩滿歸咸陽*  Your term of office reached its end and you shall return to Xianyang.79
祖道擁萬人  The farewell party on the road gathered a crowd of ten thousand;
供帳遙相望*  Tents accommodating feasts gazed afar at one another.
一別隔千里  Once parted, we were divided by thousands of leagues;
64 榮枯異炎涼*  Flourishing and withering would be as different as hotness and coldness.

炎涼幾度改*  Hotness and coldness had changed many times;
九土中橫潰*  The nine lands suffered from the devastating collapse.80
漢甲連胡兵  Han soldiers81 came into fight with barbarian armies;82
68 沙塵暗雲海*  The dust of sand obscured the sea of clouds83.
草木搖殺氣  Grass and trees were agitated by the deadly atmosphere;
星辰無光彩*  The sun, moon, and stars all lost their splendor.
白骨成丘山  White bones formed hills and mountains:
72 蒼生竟何罪*  What crime did the common people commit?

函關壯帝居*  Hangu Pass84 magnified the imperial dwelling;

79 The capital Chang’an.
80 The collapse of Xuzong’s court after the An Shi Rebellion.
81 Tang troops.
82 The rebellious armies.
83 The sky.
The fate of the state hung on Geshu.\textsuperscript{85}

With three hundred thousand long halberds,\textsuperscript{86}

He opened the gate, letting in brutal rebellious leaders.\textsuperscript{87}

Dignitaries and high officials were slaved as dogs and sheep;

Loyal and forthright ministers became minced pricked meat.

As the two sagacious rulers went out for a tour,

The two capitals were turned into ruins and wastes.

The prince received permission to take sole charge of military expedition,

Holding in hand the ox-tail pennant\textsuperscript{88} to control the powerful Chu.\textsuperscript{89}

Since he failed to moderate and regulate as Huan and Wen,\textsuperscript{90}

His military troops turned into crowds of bears and tigers.\textsuperscript{91}

People were confused about whom to support or oppose;

The force of traitors accumulated as the wind and rain.

Only you sir was able to secure Fangling,

And your moral integrity was the crown through all the ages.

\textsuperscript{84} Here Hangu Pass is used to refer to Tong 潼 Pass.

\textsuperscript{85} After the An Shi Rebellion broke out, Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (699-757) was ordered to fend off the rebellious armies at Tong Pass.

\textsuperscript{86} “Long halberd” is a synonym for soldiers.

\textsuperscript{87} According to the Xin Tang shu, after being defeated, Geshu Han tried to flee to Chang’an with several hundred cavalrmen, but he was captured and then surrendered to the rebellious armies. Xin Tang shu, 135. 4572-74.

\textsuperscript{88} As a symbol of authority.

\textsuperscript{89} The area of Jiangling prefecture roughly overlapped with that of the Chu state.

\textsuperscript{90} Namley, Duke Huan of the Qi and Duke Wen of the Jin.

\textsuperscript{91} Metaphoric way of saying that, because of Prince of Yong’s incompetence, his soldiers became as unbridled and violent as bears and tigers.
僕臥香爐頂 I lounged on the top of Fragrant Furnace Peak,②

餐霞漱瑤泉* Feeding on auroras and sipping chalcedony spring.

門開九江轉 Unfolding before my door nine rivers ③ turned off course;

枕下五湖連* Under my pillow five lakes ④ connected.

半夜水軍來 In the middle of the night the fleet arrived,

尋陽滿旌旃* Filling Xunyang River with flags and banners.

空名適自誤 My empty name only did me harm,

迫脅上樓船* For I was forced and threatened to board the double-decked boat.

徒賜五百金 The prince bestowed on me five hundred pieces of gold in vain;

棄之若浮雲* I cast them aside as passing clouds.⑤

辭官不受賞 I declined his appointment and turned down all the rewards;

翻謫夜郎天* Nevertheless I was exiled to the land of Yelang.

夜郎萬里道* The road to Yelang was hundreds of thousands of leagues;

西上令人老* Going westward made one grow old.

掃蕩六合清 [Evils were] swept away and the six coordinates ⑥ were again peaceful;

仍為負霜草* Yet I still was the grass covered by frosts.⑦

② A famous peak to the north of Mount Lu.
③ It was believed the Long River, when it reached Xunyang 潟陽, divided into nine branches.
④ Namely, the many lakes beneath Mount Lu.
⑤ Lunyu 7.16: “Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds” 不義而富且貴,於我如浮雲. Lau, the Analects, 88.
⑥ Namely, cardinal directions plus above and blow. Synonym for the entire world.
The sun and moon did not throw light on everywhere;

Then how could I make my case to the great Heaven?

A virtuous governor, you were praised as divinely luminous;

Profundely kind, you cared for the ones you befriended with.

Ever since I unworthily became the guest of the cloud in the blue,

Thrice had I ascended the Yellow Crane Tower.

Being ashamed in front of the private gentleman Mi Heng,

I faced the Parrot Isle in vain.

The domineering air of Mount Fan already ended;

Echoless and empty were the heaven and earth in autumn.

The Long River carried along the snow of Mount Emei;

Its stream flowed across the Three Gorges.

Myriads of barges arriving on the middle,

Sails joined with sails, they stopped by Yangzhong.

I followed the River ten thousand leagues with my eyes;

Ranging far and free, it dispersed my sorrows.

97 Metaphor for suffering a wrong, that is, being implicated by the affair of Prince of Yong and being exiled to Yelang.
98 “Cloud in the blue” is a synonym for high official; here it refers to Wei Liangzai.
99 In the eastern Han, during the banquet of the son of Huang Zu, governor of Jiangxia, someone presented a parrot, and Mi Heng composed a brilliant fu on the parrot.
100 Sun Quan 孫權 (re. 229-252), the founder of the Wu state, used to hunt in Mount Fan. Here Mount Fan is metonymy for the Wu state.
紗窗倚天開 \ Silk-traced windows, leaning toward the sky, opened;
水樹綠如髮* \ Trees by the waterside were as green as glossy hair.
窺日畏銜山 \ Stealing a look at the sun, I was afraid that it would hide behind the hill;
促酒喜得月* \ Encouraging wine drinking, I was delighted to see the moon.

呉娃與越豔 \ The lasses of Wu and the beauties of Yue,
窈窕誇鈎紅* \ Coy and comely, bragged about the redness of their lead-based powder.
呼來上雲梯 \ Being called upon, they walked up the cloudy stairs;
含笑出籬椏* \ Wreathed in smiles, they came out from the curtains of latticed windows.
對客小垂手 \ Facing the guest, they performed “Small Dangling Hands,”
羅衣舞春風* \ Their silk garments dancing in the wind of spring.

賓跪請休息* \ The guest, with hams on heels, asked to take a break,
主人情未極* \ Yet the host had yet to enjoy himself to the full.
覽君荊山作 \ When reading your composition on Mountain Jing,
江鮑堪動色* \ Even Jiang and Bao would be emotional moved.
清水出芙蓉 \ Just as the lotus comes out from clear water,
天然去雕飾* \ Natural and unaffected, it is free of artificial embellishment.

逸興橫素襟* \ Uninhibited mood fills your pure bosom;

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* A type of dancing tune.
* The two reputed literati Jiang Yan 江淹 (444-505) and Bao Zhao 鲍照 (ca. 414-466).
無時不招尋* There is not a time when he you are not summoning friends.

朱門擁虎士 Your vermilion gate is surrounded by brave men;

列戟何森森* Halberds are lined up, how plentifully profuse!

剪鑿竹石開 With trimming and chiseling, baboons and stones are set out;

縈流漲清深* Twisting streams are replete with waters clear and deep.

登樓坐水閣 Ascending the tower to sit in the gallery facing the water;

吐論多英音* Your speech and discussions are always exceptional words.

片辭貴白璧 One single phrase of yours is more valuable than white Jade.

一諾輕黃金* A promise you commit makes gold worthless.

謂我不媿君 If it were said that I do not embarrass you,

青鳥明丹心* Then the blue bird will reveal my true heart.

五色雲間鵲 The five-colored magpie in the clouds,

飛鳴天上來* Flying while crying, came from the heaven.

傳聞赦書至 I heard that the pardoning letter had arrived;

卻放夜郎迴* Thus I was pardoned and set free, and returned from Yelang.

暖氣變寒谷 Warm air changed the cold valley;¹⁰³

炎煙生死灰* Flaming smoke arose from dead embers.¹⁰⁴

君登鳳池去 Your lordship now advances to the Phoenix Pool¹⁰⁵ and will leave;

¹⁰³ Alludes to the story that there was a valley in the Yan state where the land was fertile but the climate was very cold. Zou Yan then played the pitch-pipes, and warm air arrived. It was thereafter called “Millet Valley” (Shugu 穀谷).

¹⁰⁴ Alludes to the story of the Han minister Han An guo 韓安國 (?-127 BCE). When Han An guo was in prison, a prison clerk humiliated him. An Guo said, “How can the dead embers not flare up again?” The clerk said, “I will immediately use urine to drown it.” Later Anguo was appointed as a high minister, and that clerk fled away.
佰棄賈生才* Please do not abandon Master Jia’s
talent.

*Please do not abandon Master Jia’s talent.

The dog of Jie still barked at Yao;

The Xiongnu barbarian laughed at Qianqiu.

In the middle of the night, I sigh again and again,

Always being concerned for the great state.

Banners and flages occupied both sides of two mountains;

The Yellow River was blocked in the middle.

Same as cocks linked together, they were unable to advance;

Giving water to the horse, I held faltering qualms in vain.

Where to obtain the Yi who was good at archery?

To shoot off the top of the rebel’s banner with just one arrow!

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105 “Phoenix Pool” is a metonymy for the Imperial Secretariat.
106 Namely, the Western Han scholar-official Jia Yi; here Li Bai compares himself to Jia Yi.
107 By this time, An Lushan had been killed; the “dog of Jie” refers to Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761) and other rebellious generals.
108 Emperor Suzong.
109 Alludes to the story of Tian Qianqiu 田千秋 (?-77 BCE). According to the Han shu, Tian Qianqiu was without any talent or achievement, yet as his memorial impressed Emperor Wu, he was appointed as the Prime Minister. Later, when a Han envoy arrived in Xiongnu, the supreme leader of Xiongnu asked him about the reason behind the appointment of the new Prime Minister. The envoy answered that it was because of a memorial Tain Qianqiu presented. The supreme leader replied, “If this was the case, then the Han does not set up the position of Prime Minister to appoint the worthy. A man, by haphazardly presenting a memorial, is able to get the position immediately.”苟如是, 漢置丞相,非用賢也, 妄一男子上書即得之矣. Han shu, 66.2884.
110 Refers to the legendary Hou Yi 后羿, who was able to shoot off the sun with his arrow.