

# Memory in Medieval China: Text, Ritual, and Community

*Edited by*

Wendy Swartz  
Robert Ford Campany



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## Intertextuality and Cultural Memory in Early Medieval China: Jiang Yan's Imitations of Nearly Lost and Lost Writers

Wendy Swartz

Early medieval poets bore witness to and participated in one of the most remarkable expansions of cultural wealth in Chinese history. This boom included the addition of new literary genres and discursive forms, as well as the production and preservation of numerous examples of these various genres and forms. New areas of learning were also developed in the forms of an imported philosophy and religion (e.g. Buddhism) and of the indigenous, metaphysical *xuan* 玄 learning that probed into the mystery of the Dao through a syncretic use of various scholastic traditions and intellectual currents. Furthermore, the period from the third to the sixth century was marked by the rapid accumulation of commentaries on classical texts and translations of foreign works. The impact of contemporary intellectual trends on poetry in this formative period was profound. Key material conditions supported this cultural and intellectual growth. The increasing availability and affordability of paper during this period substantially facilitated the preservation, duplication, and circulation of texts. Scholars could write out texts, either word for word or for their essential points, during their course of study, so as not to forget the information. This learning and mnemonic practice yielded additional copies of texts. Book owners could hire scribes to make copies of their books and readers could travel to private libraries or otherwise borrow from individuals to transcribe duplicate copies of books. Even poorer households could boast some sort of library collection.<sup>1</sup> The avenues and means for readers and writers to access books increased exponentially during this period.

For their creative acts, early medieval writers had at their disposal a diverse range of textual sources and cultural signs that extended beyond the canonical literary heritage. Many capitalized on the growing web of literary and cultural materials, whose textual strands could be woven into new patterns and

1 For more on book circulation in the early medieval period, see Li Duanliang, *Zhongguo gudai tushu liutong shi* 中國古代圖書流通史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2000), 118-70.

configurations. To read and write well demanded fluency in the growing, shared textual tradition. In early medieval China, cultural literacy was very much determined by competence in *xuan* discourse and the ability to mobilize its continually expanding set of allusions, arguments, notions, and values for diverse purposes and audiences. This cultural currency underwrote a fluidity in composing poetic texts that freely wove together materials from different sets of sources (*rujia* 儒家 texts and *daoja* 道家 texts), different brands of thought (Lao-Zhuang, Classicist, and Buddhist), and different branches of learning (poetry, classics, philosophy, and religion). Writers' use of a heterogeneous assemblage of resources illustrates the fluid, intertextual configuration of early medieval poetry and thought.

How early medieval writers understood and manipulated the textual and cultural signs of a common lexicon to produce meaning is the concern of intertextual study. Intertextuality is "the general discursive space that makes a text intelligible," as Jonathan Culler writes.<sup>2</sup> A pioneer in the theory of intertextuality, Julia Kristeva argued for the "literary word" to be approached as "an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee... and the contemporary or earlier cultural contexts."<sup>3</sup> This argument is adapted from the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In this view, meaning is produced by an intertextual constellation of signs and is layered or multifaceted rather than fixed or singular. Each instance of quotation, allusion, adaptation, or rewriting creates a semantic saturation that potentially enriches both the manifest and source texts.

Mastery of texts—as demonstrated by recognition, quotation, allusion, continuation or revision—enabled a writer to participate in the preservation, transmission, and revitalization of that very culture. On the framework for communication within a culture across time, Aleida Assmann writes with particular insight:

Through culture, humans create a temporal framework that transcends the individual life span relating past, present, and future. Cultures create a contract between the living, the dead, and the not yet living. In recalling, iterating, reading, commenting, criticizing, discussing what was

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2 Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 106.

3 Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 65.

deposited in the remote or recent past, humans participate in extended horizons of meaning-production.<sup>4</sup>

From this vantage point, the past, especially for strong written cultures, becomes an inherited and continually replenished store of textual and cultural signs and patterns with which writers maintain an organic, constantly evolving relationship of give and take. Cultures are continually coming into being, their capital continually being used, expanded, even squandered or lost. Literature stores and manifests the memory of this continuous process. In her powerful analysis of the relation between intertextuality and cultural memory in Russian Formalist literature, Renate Lachmann argued that “the memory of a text is its intertextuality. Literature supplies the memory for a culture and records such a memory. Intertextuality demonstrates the process by which a culture continually rewrites and retranscribes itself.”<sup>5</sup> Intertextuality is a form of participation in a textual tradition. And literature is the compendium of a society’s cultural memory, which is stored, encoded, objectified, and embodied in symbolic forms such as texts. As a store of shared knowledge, experiences, and signs, cultural memory as manifested in literature can be accessed, interpreted, and reshaped in new commemorative acts by any one of its participating members. Each resultant text becomes a confluence of interpretation and invention, remembrance and revision.

### Questions for Cultural Memory: Jiang Yan’s Imitations Project

One of the most complex forms of textual recall is imitation.<sup>6</sup> Like quotation and allusion, *imitatio*, the imitation of models, constitutes an act of homage to past works and writers. On a more functional level, these forms of remembrance can help preserve the past. Ralph Waldo Emerson once mused about how through quotation and imitation, Dante “absorbed” and “survives for us” the works of Albert, St. Buonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>7</sup> Yet through this very absorption, which always transforms the foreign matter, these acts of commemoration reshape the past as they summon it to the present. Imitation

4 Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 97.

5 Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Literature*, trans. Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 15.

6 On literary imitation, see also pp. 101ff. in this volume.

7 Emerson, “Quotation and Originality,” in *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), 179.

not only serves to preserve, but can also revitalize, the past. On this point, Lachmann writes:

*Imitatio* becomes an act of memory: it draws up cultural summae, establishes new paths toward continuity, and stores up cultural information. Indeed, *imitatio* emerges as the very textual practice that reveals that the work of forging new signs is a process of resuscitation. This is the reanimation of dead meaning and dead form that offsets any cultural loss, that builds up semantic tension, and that places the older text inside a new one and thereby recharges it.<sup>8</sup>

From this vantage point, imitation performs a monumental service for a culture's memory: it saves information for a culture, it counterbalances cultural loss in its revitalization of past works and forms, and it links together the past, present, and future. However, the act of resuscitating the dead is neither a simple nor innocuous procedure, as Lachmann's choice of metaphor already implies. The "dead" that is brought back to life is never the same as its previous incarnation. The reanimated dead writer is reshaped or disfigured, depending on the perspective, and always managed by the new text. While an imitation may offset the cultural loss of a forgotten or obscure writer, or even simply of a well-known past writer in cases where aspects of that writer's output have gotten lost in the temporal distance, and may thus represent a gain in the overall assessment of a culture's heritage, how is the restoration made, and at what cost? How has the new text recast the old one in an effort to sustain and save it? The stakes are even higher for a culture's memory when old texts that were the objects of imitation have become limited, fragmentary, or lost.

Examples from Jiang Yan's 江淹 (444-505) magisterial series of imitations, "Thirty Poems in Various Forms" 雜體詩三十首, make a strong case in point. The ambition and scope of Jiang Yan's imitations project are unparalleled in early medieval China. Jiang wrote imitations of thirty well-known poets spanning from the Han period to the author's own time, with each poem characterizing the earlier or contemporaneous poet with a perceived main theme or subgenre (e.g. "singing my cares" for Ruan Ji, "telling my grief" for Pan Yue, "farmstead dwelling" for Tao Yuanming). As suggested by the pastiche quality of his imitations, Jiang Yan seems to have drawn from each subject's larger corpus of texts when possible, rather than merely a single piece. Through quotation, adaptation, reminiscence, amplification, and/or trimming, these imitations are represented as essential summaries of the imitated poets. The models selected by Jiang Yan would soon find their place in the first or second rank of Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (ca. 469-518) *Shipin* 詩品 (Grades of the poets) and the

<sup>8</sup> Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*, 198-99.

imitations they inspired in Jiang Yan would later be canonized in the *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of refined literature). His imitations project can be said to be successful in at least the following respects: it not only elevated Jiang Yan to be the most represented Qi-Liang poet in the *Wen xuan*, but also many of his imitations were praised by later critics as faithfully resembling his models, with one imitation even fooling some Song editors who included the piece as the sixth poem in Tao Yuanming's "Returning to the Farm to Dwell" (Five poems) series as well as the usually astute reader, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), who wrote a poem to match what he believed to have been Tao's work.

Furthermore, after the completion of this imitations project, Jiang Yan's poetic output dramatically declined according to available evidence, as if there was little left to write after his summary of the various achievements in the development of pentasyllabic verse. Jiang Yan's alleged lack of productivity late in life not surprisingly invited sneering speculation and critical judgment from other writers. His official biography in the *Nan shi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties) records a story about how Zhang Xie 張協 (ca. 255-ca. 310) once appeared in Jiang Yan's dream to demand the return of a bolt of brocade he had lent to Jiang and how Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324) appeared in another dream to take back the multicolored brush he had loaned Jiang.<sup>9</sup> Mockery and bemusement color the speculation that without the writing instruments borrowed from other poets, Jiang could no longer produce beautiful works on his own. The condemnation is clear: his talent was exhausted only because it was merely on loan. This anecdote surely implies an indictment of the perils of making the imitation of others the whole basis of one's creative talent. But does it not also suggest the notion that composition is the utilization of available sources, and when those sources have been exhausted, there remains nothing with which to write? And if writing is a form of remembrance, then the completion of a summary of the whole range of voices in pentasyllabic verse, past and present, could signify in a figural reading that the writer has remembered all that he cares to remember through his writing.

Several arguments in Jiang Yan's preface to this imitations series suggest that the author viewed this project as an effort to draw up a summa of pentasyllabic poetry. At the outset, he maintains that examples of poetry from different eras and various writers each can be distinct from one another yet all can be admirable. He then goes on to denounce other readers for embracing a single bias toward the one and only model each fancies:

The songs of Chu and the airs of Han are not of a single structure; the compositions of Wei and the creations of Jin are also of two distinct

<sup>9</sup> See *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 59.1451; the *Shipin* includes only Jiang Yan's dream of Guo Pu in a nearly identical anecdote.



forms. Just as when indigo and crimson form a multicolor pattern, their mixed and motley transformations are inexhaustible; or when the *gong* and *shang* modes produce sounds, their pliant, delicate manner is without end. Therefore, moth-like eyebrows might not have the same appearance, though they all move the soul; and fragrant plants might not share the same scent, but they all gladden the spirit. Is it not so? As for the various worthies in our world, each is stuck in his own infatuations. All who discuss the sweet must despise the bitter; and all who like vermilion must reject the plain. How can this be called a thorough understanding or tolerant view, or fondness for the distant and universal love?<sup>10</sup>

夫楚謠漢風，既非一骨。魏制晉造，固亦二體。譬猶藍朱成彩，雜錯之變無窮。宮商為音，靡曼之態不極。故娥眉詎同貌而俱動於魄，芳草寧共氣而皆悅於魂。不其然歟？至於世之諸賢，各滯所迷，莫不論甘而忘辛，好丹而非素。豈所謂通方廣恕，好遠兼愛者哉？

Jiang moreover notes that the development of pentasyllabic verse from the Han through the Jin produced such diverse styles that evaluating the superiority of one over another would be as meaningless as trying to “discriminate between black and brown or warp and weft, or differentiate between gold and jade or falling and rising.” Rather than to make judgmental discriminations between things that are simply different, he advocates a universal appreciation of the various writers and styles: “This lowly writer humbly submits that all can share in the beautiful and the good” 僕以為亦合其美並善而已。The selection of thirty particular styles to imitate so as to exemplify “the beautiful and the good” implies a summa of pentasyllabic verse at its best. In this essay I am not interested in reading Jiang Yan’s imitations against the bodies of original works for the sake of evaluating which is superior or what is new. Rather, I will explore the implications of how a writer who has positioned himself as the guardian and transmitter of the whole of a literary past remembers that past, and in cases where he preserved for us what would turn out to be lost or nearly lost writers, what questions his imitations pose for cultural memory.<sup>11</sup> His imitations of Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314-371), Xie Hun 謝混 (381?-412), and Xu Xun 許詢 (ca. 326-after 347) furnish the examples used in this study.

10 Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (hereafter cited as *xs*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 2:1569. I thank Zeb Raft for his comments on my reading of Jiang Yan’s preface and poems.

11 For a book-length study that examines Jiang Yan’s imitations vis-à-vis their models and the early medieval culture surrounding imitation writing, see Nicholas Morrow Williams, *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015).

## Heterogeneity and Containment: The Case of Sun Chuo

Sun Chuo is relatively little known today when measured against his stature in his own time. The early medieval historian Tan Daoluan 檀道鸞 (fl. 459) described the poet as being, along with Xu Xun, “the literary patriarch of his time” (*yi shi wen zong* 一時文宗).<sup>12</sup> Sun also distinguished himself as one of the most colorful and flamboyant figures in the impressive cast of characters that starred in stories recorded in the early medieval cultural compendium *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (Talk of the ages and new anecdotes). These anecdotes feature not only his talent as a poet but also his brazen penchant for self-promotion, which can be seen in several comical episodes in which the poet attempted to elevate his stature by claiming intimacy with deceased personages in elegies he was tasked to write. Most of Sun Chuo’s works have not survived, a fate shared by many other examples of *xuanyan* 玄言 poetry, which used concepts, symbols, and lexica from the *Laozi* 老子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and *Classic of Changes* 易經, to discourse on the Dao (whose marker is *xuan*, translated variously as “mysterious,” “abstruse” or “dark”). For much of its reception, this type of poetry was maligned and disregarded, and it is now mostly lost. The scathing reviews by late Six Dynasties critics surely had something to do with its later neglect. Tan Daoluan decried the damage that Sun Chuo and Xu Xun allegedly inflicted upon the classical tradition by incorporating materials from the alternative repertoires of Daoist and Buddhist texts.<sup>13</sup> Zhong Rong added the charge of the supposed ruination of the “affective force of Jian’an 建安 poetry” with bland, insipid discourse on philosophical principles.<sup>14</sup> Were it not, then, for the fortuitous discovery of fragments of the seventh-century anthology *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林 (Lodge of literature and forest of lyrics) during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Japan, the work and legacy of Sun Chuo would have been mostly a matter of anecdote, for only a mere handful of poems and Jiang Yan’s imitation piece had been transmitted. The recovery of three long exchange poems by Sun Chuo in these fragments has yielded a fuller picture of the range and complexity of his poetry.<sup>15</sup>

12 Excerpt from Tan’s *Xu Jin yangqiu* 續晉陽秋, cited in *Shishuo xinyu* (hereafter cited as *SSXY*), 4/85.

13 See *SSXY*, 4/85.

14 *Shipin jizhu* 詩品集注, ed. Cao Xu 曹旭 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 24.

15 A fourth exchange poem has been attributed to Sun Chuo, one written to Wen Jiao 溫嶠, who became a national hero after aiding the suppression of both Wang Dun 王敦 (266–324) and Su Jun 蘇峻 (d. 328) in the early years of the Eastern Jin. However, Cao Daoheng 曹道衡 has convincingly cast doubt on the attribution of this work to Sun Chuo. Given

For most of Chinese literary history, Jiang Yan's imitation of Sun Chuo's style could boast an outsized influence on the readers' imagination. It, along with a few of Sun's own works that circulated independently in anthologies, purported to represent the poet at his finest or most defining.<sup>16</sup>

孫廷尉綽雜述 “Chamberlain Sun Chuo: Miscellaneous Accounts”

- 太素既已分      The Primordial Purity, once divided,<sup>17</sup>  
 吹萬著形兆      Blew on the myriad things, manifesting all phenomena.  
 寂動苟有源      Should stillness and action each have a source,  
 4 因謂殤子夭      Then it would be calling premature a child's death.<sup>18</sup>

that Wen Jiao died in 329, Sun Chuo would have been merely 15 or so (calculating from a birth year of 314) when he supposedly presented this poem to the great general, an unlikely event. See Cao, *Zhonggu wenxueshi lunwen ji* 中古文學史論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 311. David Zebulun Raft, while acknowledging that the poem's attribution is uncertain, nonetheless makes an argument for reading this work as a patronage poem plausibly written by the precociously talented Sun Chuo to the famous general. See Raft, “Four-syllable Verse in Medieval China” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007), 334-36.

- 16 For example, Sun Chuo's “Rhapsody on Roaming the Celestial Terrace Mountains” 遊天台山賦 was included in the *Wen xuan* and his two Lanting 蘭亭 poems circulated independently of his other works.
- 17 In the opening of *Zhuangzi* 2, “Qi wu lun,” Nanguo Ziqi “leaned against an armrest” with a look of profound detachment and tranquility. He then describes contemplating the piping of Heaven, which blows on the myriad things in different ways so that each may be self-so, and compared it against the lesser kinds of piping of earth and men. See *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (hereafter cited as *zzjs*), ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 1:43-50.
- 18 A reference to one of the famous paradoxes from “Qi wu lun,” where Zhuangzi levels the extreme old age of Ancestor Peng and the premature death of a child: “no one has lived longer than a dead child, and Ancestor Peng died young.” The commentary by Guo Xiang 郭象 on the correlative Mount Tai and Ancestor Peng paradoxes is relevant to this discussion and instructive of how early medieval readers might have construed this passage: “If each one is in accord with its own nature and function, and is in tacit harmony with its ultimate capacity, then a form that is large is not excessive, nor a small one insufficient... As there is nothing small or large, and there is neither longevity nor brevity, the chrysalis does not envy the old tree trunk.” *zzjs*, 1:81. My translation is based on Wing-Tsit Chan's in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 329-30. In other words, if one's life is measured not in terms of countable time but fulfillment of one's natural course and ultimate capacity, then there is no brevity (or longevity) with which to be concerned. Following Zhuangzian logic, then, there is no discrimination between stillness and action, hence neither has a source. If one were to suppose that they



- 20   𦉳𦉳玄思清      With steady effort, thoughts on the mystery become clear,  
       胸中去機巧      I remove from my breast all contrivance and craft.<sup>25</sup>  
       物我俱忘懷      When one has forgotten all things and oneself,<sup>26</sup>  
       可以狎鷗鳥      Then he can cozy up to the seagulls.<sup>27</sup>

Although the poem's title promises a theme of diversity or heterogeneity, the text itself is contrarily singular in orientation and composition. Nearly all of the lines in this story of Sun Chuo's quest for understanding the mysterious Dao and for transcendence allude to the *Zhuangzi*. The arc of the narrative is charted by major themes drawn from that text: the disintegration of the primordial state of purity into myriad phenomena and the unity of all comprehension into a single whole (ll. 1-2, 15); the leveling and, ultimately, transcendence of arbitrary distinctions between apparent opposites such as stillness and action, longevity and brevity, beauty and ugliness (ll. 3-4, 13); accepting transformation as an uncontrollable force and its ultimate phase, death, as simply part of the natural cycle of things (ll. 17-18); and, finally, embracing the virtue of

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to which Qin Shi replied, "Your master came since it was his time to come, and left since he followed the way it is. If one is at peace with time and accepts following along with things, then neither sorrow or happiness can enter. This is what the ancients called being freed from the binds of God. This refers to when the fire burns out, one adds more tinder; then the fire passes on, and no one knows where it would end." Both quotations from the *Zhuangzi* speak to the idea that death is as natural as life and underscore the insignificance of death, which is merely that of the body. See *Zhuangzi* 3, "Yangsheng zhu," in *ZZJS*, 1:128-29.

- 25 In *Zhuangzi* 12, "Tian di," the man of complete virtue is described as having "forgotten all about achievement, profit, contrivance, and craft." *ZZJS*, 2:436.
- 26 Guo Xiang's commentary on the passage in which Nanguo Ziqi in "Qi wu lun" said that he lost himself is relevant: "I lost myself means I forgot myself. Since have I forgotten myself, then how could anything in this world be worth recognizing?" *ZZJS*, 1:45. In other words, forgetting self and other, as well as any distinction between the two, leads to a transcendent, all-encompassing understanding.
- 27 The *Wen xuan* commentator Li Shan 李善 cites a story in the *Zhuangzi* about how a man played with seagulls at the shore every day and how the seagulls came to him a hundred times. However, one day when his father asked him to catch one so he can also play with it, the seagulls did not descend to the shore that day. This anecdote does not appear in the extant *Zhuangzi*, though it is preserved in the *Liezi*. See *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2.67-68. For the Chinese text of Jiang Yan's poem, see Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wen xuan* (hereafter *wx*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 31.1467-69. I have emended the surname given in the *Wen xuan* from Zhang 張 to Sun 孫.

forgetting artificial constructs (contrivance and craft) and boundaries (between self and other) to return to an originary simplicity and wholeness (ll. 19-22).

This imitation poem is fabricated of mostly quotations and allusions to the *Zhuangzi*, thereby indicating Jiang Yan's recognition of the intertextual nature of Sun Chuo's works. Although we cannot ascertain exactly how much and which lines are taken from Sun Chuo's mostly lost corpus, for a number of other imitations in the series there is evidence that Jiang Yan liberally borrows or adapts phrases and elements from the original body of works.<sup>28</sup> The act of composing a piece from existing textual strands that are themselves composed of foreign textual strands would add yet another layer of interpretation and signification to the text at hand. Whether Jiang Yan quoted Sun Chuo quoting the *Zhuangzi* or whether he quoted the *Zhuangzi* while writing on behalf of Sun Chuo may be beyond the reach of research, but the saturation of this imitation poem with *Zhuangzi* allusions reveals two significant points: first, the fluid, composite, and intertextual constitution of early medieval poetry and thought; and second, an apparent effort on Jiang's part to circumscribe and contain Sun Chuo's heterogeneous assemblage of literary and cultural resources that is attested by his extant works and descriptions of his corpus by Six Dynasties historians and critics.

Sun Chuo's "Poem to Yu Bing" 與庾冰詩 in one hundred and four lines, for example, demonstrates a pragmatic use of diverse, sometimes incongruous repertoires of literary and cultural meanings. Although the poem is too long to cite in full here, the range of its appropriation of available sources can nonetheless be appreciated in the following outline.<sup>29</sup> This poem casts a portrait of the great statesman Yu Bing (296-344), the younger brother of Yu Liang 庾亮 (289-340), within a larger picture of the decline of Western Jin and the founding of Eastern Jin. It draws mostly from the *Yijing* and *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of poetry) to explain matters of cosmology and politics but relies substantially on Lao-Zhuang ideas in recasting old cosmological paradigms. The cataclysmic disaster story of a dynastic collapse that led to the abandonment of the old

28 For example, in Jiang Yan's imitation of Tao Yuanming, he mixes and matches phrases from the earlier poet's farmstead works, especially "Returning to the Farm to Dwell" 歸園田居 and "The Return" 歸去來兮辭. Jiang creates a dense collage of imagistic phrases taken from Tao's works, such as "planting sprouts," "eastern hill," "carrying a hoe," "unstrained wine," "a young son waiting," "growth of mulberry and hemp," and "a pure heart."

29 For a detailed discussion of this poem and others by Sun Chuo, see Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry: Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018).



heartland of Chinese civilization in the north to foreign invaders and the subsequent mass migration to the south seems best told in *Yijing* language. An allusion to Adversity 否 (hexagram 12) and Peace 泰 (hexagram 11) in the first stanza signifies how any rise eventually leads to decline, just as any concentration in a situation leads first to excess then depletion, according to the pattern laid out in the *Yijing*. Sun Chuo thus depicts the fall of the dynasty as a matter of course, part of a naturalized cycle of events. The *Shijing* serves as another rich repertoire of cultural and literary signs for discussing matters of state and governance. In one passage, the poet links the decline of Western Jin to the momentous fall of Western Zhou through an allusion to *Shijing* 65, “Drooping Millet” 黍離, which traditionally has been read as the lament of an official traveling through the former capital of Western Zhou now laid to waste. Or Sun describes the founding of Eastern Jin with a line adapted from *Shijing* 241, “August” 皇矣, which asserts Heaven’s bestowal of the mandate. Replacing “west” (where the Zhou settlement was located) in the original line with “east” (i.e., south of the Yangzi, where the Eastern Jin was founded), Sun Chuo writes, “[Heaven] looked and turned its gaze to the east” 乃眷東顧 (l. 18), to claim that the rise of Eastern Jin was sanctioned by Heaven’s will.

To address the issues of the causes behind the decline of Western Jin and the founding of Eastern Jin as well as the role of Heaven in those events, Sun Chuo borrows from the *Laozi* to articulate a view of the universe that is consonant with early medieval intellectual values. The first four stanzas of the poem grapple with locating the historical causes of turmoil: did the Western Jin collapse because “the virtue [of Emperors Hui and Huai] was not sufficient” (l. 9)? What were the greater challenges in the founding of Eastern Jin: the external threats in the form of Jie 羯 troops led by Shi Le 石勒 (d. 333) or internal ones in the form of rebel troops led by Su Jun 蘇峻 (d. 328) (ll. 27-32)? How does Heaven’s will fit into this narrative? These questions are addressed in the fifth stanza of the poem:

遠惟自天  
抑亦由人  
道苟無虧  
變故曷因  
遑遑遺黎  
死痛生勤  
撫運懷□  
天地不仁

From afar it was something that came from Heaven,  
But it was also something caused by men.  
If the Way was not deficient,  
Then what caused the disaster?  
Frantic were the displaced folk—  
The dying were in agony, the living in misery.  
Abiding by destiny’s course [one-character lacuna],  
“Heaven and Earth are not humane.”<sup>30</sup>

30 XS, 2:898.

Is it Heaven at work or humans at fault? Did the fall of Western Jin and rise of Eastern Jin, or the formation of a new state and its obstructions, enact a naturalized, preordained cycle of events? Or is Heaven humane insofar as it wants what is good for humankind and punishes or rewards those who rule or not according to its Way (or Will), a venerable strain of thought that dates to ancient Zhou texts (e.g. *Shijing*) and powerfully re-articulated by the Han classicist official Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179-ca. 104)?<sup>31</sup> These implicit questions are answered by a single line at the end of the stanza, quoted verbatim from *Laozi* 5: “Heaven and Earth are not humane.”<sup>32</sup> Sun Chuo’s reading of this line is surely informed by the commentary of Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249 CE), with which *xuanxue* 玄學 adepts were certainly familiar. According to Wang Bi, this line means that “Heaven and Earth follow naturalness, without acting consciously or starting anything, letting the myriad things govern themselves. Thus, they ‘are not humane.’”<sup>33</sup> Questions of divine intervention or human agency are ultimately decided by a view of the human course vis-à-vis cosmic order that is championed in *xuan* learning. Heaven and Earth are neither partial nor activist: as such, they allow all things (including dynastic rule) to fulfill their natural course rather than impose upon them some contrived, artificial scheme. The *Laozi*, as interpreted by Wang Bi, is judiciously appropriated by Sun Chuo to reconcile the historically various views of divine and human agency and to re-cast the issue as each thing simply following its own natural course.

In one of Sun Chuo’s best-known works, “Rhapsody on Roaming the Celestial Terrace Mountains” 遊天台山賦, the poet in similar fashion draws from various materials, ranging from Lao-Zhuang concepts to Buddhist ideas, to express his spiritual ascent toward enlightenment. Sun Chuo references key terms from both teachings before merging all into one in the end: for example, Existence (or Being) 有 and Non-existence (or Non-being) 無, which appear in the first chapter of the *Laozi* as references to *xuan*, or the Dao, and whose relationship figured centrally in Wei-Jin *xuan* thought; or Form (*se* 色) and Emptiness (*kong* 空), whose distinction some Mahāyāna texts erase by, for example, positing Form as Emptiness. The last section of the rhapsody, which

31 For Dong Zhongshu’s development of a heaven-man correlative cosmology, see his major work *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Strings of pearls from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), now available in a translation by Sarah A. Queen and John S. Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

32 The entire passage from *Laozi* 5 reads: “Heaven and Earth are not humane and treat the myriad things as straw dogs.”

33 *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 (hereafter cited as *WBJS*), ed. Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 1:13.



describes the end of the poet's spiritual journey that culminates at the summit of this sacred mountain, offers a dazzling *mélange* of Lao-Zhuang and Buddhist thought.<sup>34</sup>

散以象外之說	Inspired by the doctrine of “beyond images,” <sup>35</sup>
暢以無生之篇	Illumined by the texts on “non-origination,” <sup>36</sup>
悟遣有之不盡	I become aware that I have not completely dismissed Existence,
覺涉無之有間	And realize that there are interruptions in the passage to Non-existence.
泯色空以合跡	I destroy Form and Emptiness, blending them into one;
忽即有而得玄	Suddenly I proceed to Existence where I attain the Mystery.
釋二名之同出	I release the two names that come from a common source,
消一無於三幡	Dissolve a single Non-existence into the Three Banners. <sup>37</sup>
恣語樂以終日	All day long giving oneself to conversation's delights,
等寂默於不言	Is the same as the still silence of not speaking.
渾萬象以冥觀	I merge the myriad phenomena in mystic contemplation,
兀同體於自然	Unconsciously join my body with the Naturally-so.

The cross-pollination between Mahayana Buddhist and Lao-Zhuang thought through translation, interpretation, and intertextual work during the Wei-Jin period fostered this type of hybridization of Eastern Jin *xuan* discourse and lent support to the idea that the Ultimate could be discussed in various, interchangeable terms. In his “Rhapsody,” Sun Chuo uses the various terms available to him from *xuan* discourse and Buddhist learning to convey the Ultimate

34 Sun Chuo, “You Tiantai shan fu,” in *WX*, 11.493-501. I have followed with slight modification David Knechtges' translation of the rhapsody in *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume Two: Rhapsodies on Sacrifices, Hunting, Travel, Sightseeing, Palaces and Halls, Rivers and Seas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 243-53.

35 A reference to Daoist teachings which paradoxically state that the Dao cannot be represented in words or images.

36 A designation for Buddhist sutras which teach that dharmas have neither birth nor extinction.

37 Here I depart from Knechtges' rendering (“Dissolve the Three Banners into a single Non-existence”) and follow the original grammar of the line. It seems to me that Sun Chuo's point is the connectedness or lack of distinction between apparent opposites: the shared source between existence (*you*) and non-existence (*wu*); and the indistinction among the Three Banners, which according to Li Shan, refer to form (*se*), emptiness (*kong*), and contemplation (*guan* 觀). Hence, the distinction between part and whole is rejected: two names come from a single source, and a single non-existence dissolves into three banners.

Way or Truth, such as *wu* (non-existence), *xuan* (mystery), and the non-duality between *kong* (emptiness) and *se* (form).

The two examples above, among others in Sun Chuo's corpus, provide a window into the ways in which the poet used quotation and allusion to appropriate from a heterogeneous repertoire of cultural and literary meanings, contributing to the growing web of emergent textual relationships in this formative period for literary, cultural, and intellectual history. While writers from this period bore witness to a rapidly expanding repertoire of literary and cultural resources, the cultural workings at play in this period of growth were protean and not easy to contain. Sun Chuo is credited with (or castigated for, depending on the perspective) substantially incorporating Lao-Zhuang terms as well as introducing Buddhist language into poetry. At stake for writers like Sun Chuo was not merely the expansion of an existing container (i.e. received tradition) but also engaging and negotiating with new kinds of organisms (new sources or languages). Jiang Yan's imitation, which is almost entirely composed of quotations from one source—the *Zhuangzi*—gives little indication of the heterogeneity and complexity of Sun Chuo's poetics. It too neatly encapsulates Sun Chuo's intertextual relations with various texts and continually morphing materials into a singular focus on one such text. Jiang Yan, like his contemporary Tan Daoluan, may have deemed that Buddhist terms did not properly belong in classical poetry and chose to excise that element in his rewriting of Sun Chuo. And, as with both Tan and Zhong Rong who ignored Sun Chuo's extensive use of *Shijing* in their denunciation of his departure from tradition, Jiang excluded that source in his representation of Sun Chuo's style to showcase the one source which Jiang apparently decided best epitomized the poet's style.

### The Resilience of Convention: The Case of Xie Hun

Composing an imitation piece involves as much definition as selection, representation as fabrication. Jiang Yan's imitation of Sun Chuo distorts the fuller picture of his predecessor's intertextual poetics but distinctly reflects the single aspect by which he would have future readers remember his predecessor. Whereas an aim to contain and fit Sun Chuo into a particular place in literary history may well have steered Jiang Yan's trimmed version of that poet, it would seem that poetic conventions and habits governed Jiang Yan's rewriting of another nearly lost poet, Xie Hun.

## 謝僕射混遊覽 “Supervisor Xie Hun: Excursion and Sightseeing”

信矣勞物化	Truly I fret over the transformation of things:
憂襟未能整	With this worry in my breast, I cannot set my collar straight.
薄言遵郊衢	So I'll follow along the outskirts thoroughfare,
4 摠轡出臺省	Gather the reins and leave the Palace Pavilion.
淒淒節序高	Chill, chill—the season has progressed to its peak;
寥寥心悟永	Vast, vast—my heart understands the eternal.
時菊耀巖阿	Season's chrysanthemums cast their glow on grottoed hills,
8 雲霞冠秋嶺	While rosy clouds cap autumnal summits.
眷然惜良辰	Fondly I cherish this fine day,
徘徊踐落景	Treading back and forth upon the falling sunrays,
卷舒雖萬緒	Furling and unfurling—the threads are myriad;
12 動復歸有靜	Action always returns to stillness.
曾是迫桑榆	So as I press toward the mulberry and elm,
歲暮從所乘	In the twilight of my years, I shall follow what my heart holds true.
舟壑不可攀	Since a boat in the ravine cannot be held in place, <sup>38</sup>
16 忘懷寄匠郢	I shall forget my cares, entrusting them to the carpenter and man from Ying. <sup>39</sup>

This poem begins with a reference to a major theme in the *Zhuangzi*—the transformation of things—in which it is cast as the determinative force of all life. “The human body has ten thousand transformations that never come to an end,” while death merely constitutes one such transformation, according to Zhuangzian philosophy.<sup>40</sup> Contemplation of transformation and, by extension,

38 An allusion to a story in *Zhuangzi* 6, “Da zong shi”: when someone hides his boat in the ravine, he believes that it will be secure. However, in the middle of the night, a strongman comes to shoulder it and takes it away. In ignorance, he does not know how it happened. See *ZZJS*, 1:243. The strongman is likened to transformation (and, its ultimate iteration, death). Guo Xiang’s commentary to this passage states: “The transformations of life and death cannot be escaped... Of the forces that have no force, there is none that is greater than transformation... Therefore, without stopping even momentarily, it suddenly already has brought on something new. For this reason, there is no moment in which the myriad things between heaven and earth are not changing.”

39 A reference to a story in *Zhuangzi* 24, “Xu Wugui,” about sympathetic understanding between friends. There once was a plasterer from Ying 郢, who so trusted his friend Carpenter Shi 石 that he would ask the carpenter to slice off specks of mud that got on his nose. The carpenter would wield and move his axe like the wind, while his friend stood without losing his calm countenance the whole time. See *ZZJS*, 3:843. For the Chinese text of Jiang Yan’s poem, see *WX*, 31.1471-72. On Carpenter Shi, see also pp. 77-78 in this volume.

40 See *Zhuangzi* 6 and *Zhuangzi* 15, in *ZZJS*, 1:244 and 2:539, respectively.

its ultimate iteration, death, seems to lead the poetic subject to an outing in nature where further meditations arise. The poetic subject's investigation of this philosophical theme then leads to an appreciation of the workings of both continual change and a return to the beginning, articulated through two other textual references. The "furling" and "unfurling" of the myriad things allude to *Huainanzi* 2: "The ultimate way does not act. Now a dragon, now a snake: expanding and contracting, furling and unfurling, they change and transform along with the times."<sup>41</sup> The statement "Action always returns to stillness" summarizes the lesson in *Laozi* 16: "As such, I observe their return. Things proliferate, yet each returns to its root. Returning to one's root is called stillness, which means returning to one's destiny." Wang Bi's commentary, which both Jiang Yan and Xie Hun would have known, further explains, "All that exists arises from emptiness (虛 *xu*), and action arises from stillness (靜 *jing*). Therefore, although the myriad things act together, in the end they return to empty stillness. This is the ultimate truth of things. Each returns to its beginning, and when it has returned to its root, it becomes still."<sup>42</sup> The natural course for all things is constant transformation, the ultimate manifestation of which is death. Just as each thing returns to its beginning, all action returns to stillness or, correlatively, all living beings return to death, as Zhuangzi suggests in "Qi wu lun" 齊物論 (Discussion on leveling things). These reflections on death expressed through choice allusions to the *Huainanzi* and *Laozi* adumbrate the philosophical acceptance of it in the final passage of the poem, which is, in turn, conveyed by two allusions to the *Zhuangzi*. The parable of the boat hidden in the ravine teaches about the precariousness of the boat (life) and how a strongman (death) comes unexpectedly to take it away.<sup>43</sup> Following this implicit acknowledgment of the inevitability of death, the poetic subject impassively declares that he shall "forget cares" and entrust his feelings to the likes of the plasterer from Ying who stood calmly while his friend Carpenter Shi sliced off specks of mud from his nose in the "Xu Wugui" 徐无鬼 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>44</sup> The mood of equanimity at the poem's end not only represents a complete reversal of the one of apprehension at the beginning, but also underscores the philosophical tenor sustaining the entire poem.

For a poem purportedly about sightseeing, there is very little description of sights. Instead of natural imagery, philosophical allusions and reflections dominate this poem. Even the rare instance of a scenic description of season's

41 *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋, ed. He Ning 何寧 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1:113.

42 *WBJJS*, 1:36.

43 See *Zhuangzi* 6, in *ZZJS*, 1:243.

44 See *Zhuangzi* 24, in *ZZJS*, 3:843.

chrysanthemums and autumnal peaks serves to set into relief the philosophical theme of transformation. This imitation poem, composed significantly by allusions to the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*, no more squares with the descriptions of Xie Hun's poetry by Six Dynasties historians and critics than it does with its title. In his denunciation of Sun Chuo and Xu Xun's use of Daoist and Buddhist language in their poetry, Tan Daoluan hailed Xie Hun as the turning point in what seemed to him a disastrous trend instigated by Sun and Xu.

Henceforth Guo Pu's pentasyllabic verse was the first to combine Daoist phrases and set them into rhyme. Xu Xun and Sun Chuo of Taiyuan each emulated them and moreover added the [Buddhist] language of the three worlds [past, present and future], and the normative style of the Odes and Elegies came to an end. Xun and Chuo together were literary patriarchs of their era; from then on, writers all imitated them. During the Yixi reign (405-419), Xie Hun was the first to change [the prevailing style].<sup>45</sup>

故郭璞五言始會合道家之言而韻之。詢及太原孫綽轉相祖尚，又加以三世之辭，而《詩》、《騷》之體盡矣。詢、綽並為一時文宗，自此作者悉體之。至義熙中，謝混始改。

Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) similarly credited Xie Hun with “completely reforming” the sweeping trend of the time.<sup>46</sup> Zhong Rong chimed in as well to cast Xie Hun as one of the saviors of the classical poetic tradition who managed to alter its declining course set into motion by Sun and Xu's “bland” (*dan* 淡) and “flat” (*ping* 平) philosophical verse. In the *Shipin*, Zhong Rong praised Xie Hun for “gloriously continuing the work” of a few Western Jin predecessors who first sought to change the rampant practice by introducing a new style.<sup>47</sup> This assessment by Six Dynasties historians and critics of Xie Hun as a revitalizing new voice diametrically opposes Jiang Yan's imitation piece, which continues the dominant mode of using Lao-Zhuang language and themes.

Even more curiously, Jiang's imitation bears only superficial resemblance to the sightseeing poem that apparently served as a model. Xie Hun's “Touring West Pond” 遊西池詩, later included in the *Wen xuan*, is one of the few remaining pieces from his corpus. Its survival challenges Jiang Yan's representation of the poet and grants Xie Hun participation in how history remembers him.

45 Cited in *SSXY*, 4/85.

46 See *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.1778.

47 *Shipin jizhu*, 24-28.

- 悟彼蟋蟀唱 I understand the singing of those crickets:<sup>48</sup>  
 信此勞者歌 Truly this is the song of ones who have toiled.<sup>49</sup>  
 有來豈不疾 Time comes and goes—is it not in a rush?  
 4 良遊常蹉跎 Fine outings have too often been missed.  
 逍遙越城肆 Carefree we could be striding through the city marketplace,  
 願言屢經過 How I wish we might frequent there.  
 迴阡被陵闕 A curving path extends past mounds and towers,  
 8 高臺眺飛霞 From the tall terrace, we could see rosy clouds in flight.  
 惠風蕩繁囿 A gentle breeze sweeps over the blooming park,  
 白雲屯曾阿 While white clouds gather on layered peaks.  
 景昃鳴禽集 As the sun descends, singing birds flock to their perch;  
 12 水木湛清華 Trees stand clear and glorious in the water, pellucid.  
 褰裳順蘭沚 I lift my robe to follow along the thoroughwort islet,  
 徙倚引芳柯 And linger, drawing close the fragrant boughs.  
 美人愆歲月 The time has passed for the fair one;  
 16 遲暮獨如何 In the year's twilight, what shall I do?  
 無為牽所思 Do not let these thoughts fetter you,  
 南榮戒其多 Nanrong was warned against their excess.<sup>50</sup>

Like the imitation poem, this one begins with a reference to the swift passage of time, continues to an account of an excursion, and concludes with an allusion to the *Zhuangzi* about transcending cares. The similarities end there. The main theme of this poem, given the premise of a year drawing to its end as signaled by the “singing of the crickets” borrowed from *Shijing* 114, is not fretting over imminent death, but rather missing opportunities to enjoy excursions with friends. With only one allusion to the *Zhuangzi*, the poem represents a marked departure from *xuanyan* poetry, which borrowed significantly from the Lao-Zhuang corpus. Instead, the focal point of this poem is an extended description of scenes in nature that the poet would have liked to experience together with a friend. Nature's activity manifests in the rosy clouds in flight, a gentle breeze sweeping over a blooming park, as well as the setting sun and

48 This alludes to the opening lines of *Shijing* 114, “Crickets” 蟋蟀: “Crickets in the hall, the year is near its end. If I do not make merry today, months and years will pass me by.”

49 This alludes to *Shijing* 165, “Hewing the Trees” 伐木, a poem about the natural need for companionship. Those who hew trees sound to one another, just as birds cry out in search of mates.

50 *WX*, 22.1034-35. In *Zhuangzi* 23, “Gengsang Chu,” the title character advises Nanrong Chu to “keep the body whole, cling to life, and not busy oneself with thoughts and deliberations.” *ZZJS*, 3:777.

homing birds. Nature's stillness can be observed in the luminously clear image of trees in the placid water. Such imagistic descriptions of nature's workings are transfigured into an abstract statement about activity and stillness in Jiang Yan's hands.

If Xie Hun was widely considered to have reformed the established mode represented by *xuanyan* poetry, a point his sole surviving excursion poem would support, why did Jiang Yan represent Xie Hun in such a way that renders the imitation work hardly distinguishable from *xuanyan* poems? The simplest answer would be that, for Jiang Yan, change is relative: Xie Hun borrowed less from Lao-Zhuang than did Sun Chuo or Xu Xun, an assessment quantifiably demonstrable by Jiang's imitation pieces, and he therefore may still be considered to have been a reformer of the prevailing trend. A more nuanced answer concerns the influence of convention and existing language upon all writing, including self-consciously reflective forms such as imitation and revision. Even if Jiang Yan meant to cast Xie Hun as the new voice his contemporaries heard and hailed, we must consider the likelihood that the poetic language (broadly defined as rhetorical tools, semantic associations and established patterns) to which *xuanyan* poets contributed for two centuries was as much in command of the writer as the writer was in command of the language he used. In re-writing the poetry of Xie Hun, however new that style may have been, Jiang Yan still worked within the sphere of established—albeit changing—poetic conventions.

### Semblance of a Lost Poet Preserved: The Case of Xu Xun

Not a single poem has survived intact from the corpus of the other “literary patriarch of his time” named along with Sun Chuo in Tan Daoluan's account—Xu Xun. Fragments from three poems totaling eight lines reveal very little about this alleged master poet.<sup>51</sup> In addition to his reputed literary talent, Xu Xun was also famed for his resolute eschewal of office and lofty air of detachment, according to anecdotes in the *Shishuo xinyu*.<sup>52</sup> The style and content of

51 For these fragments, see *xs*, 2:894.

52 When asked by the famous monk Zhi Dun 支遁 to compare himself to Xu Xun, Sun replied that “as far as exalted feelings and remoteness are concerned, your disciple has long since inwardly conceded Xu's superiority. But in the matter of a single humming or a single intoning of poetry, Xu will need to sit facing north [as a student before a teacher].” *SSXY*, 9/54; trans. Richard Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of the Tales of the World*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), 283.



his poetry must, then, mostly be surmised from secondary sources. A response poem from Sun Chuo to Xu Xun is an especially crucial source, for its eighth stanza purports to summarize his friend's original poem to him:

貽我新詩 韻靈旨清 粲如揮錦 琅若叩瓊 既欣夢解 獨愧未冥 慍在有身 樂在忘生 余則異矣 無往不平 理苟皆是 何累於情	You presented me with a new poem, Spiritual in resonance, pure in meaning. Brilliant as a fluttering brocade, Sonorous as carnelian when struck. You are glad since you have understood the dream, <sup>53</sup> But still ashamed for not yet reaching the depths. Resentment lies in “having a body,” <sup>54</sup> Joy lies in “forgetting life.” <sup>55</sup> I am different from this: There is no going that is not leveled for me. If Truth were like this in every case, Why should we become entangled by feelings? <sup>56</sup>
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Sun Chuo affirms that he has appreciated both the sound and sense of his friend's communication, before proceeding to summarize a key point of Xu's address: Xu had expressed joy in having understood the meaning of “the dream”

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- 53 *Zhuangzi* 18, “Zhi le,” tells a story about the dream of the skull; see my discussion in this section. I thank Liu Yuanju of Academia Sinica for her insight on this allusion.
- 54 An allusion to *Laozi* 13: “What is meant by self-importance being ‘a great calamity that can cost one his person?’ The reason I suffer such a great calamity is that I am bound by my own person [*you shen* 有身, i.e. bodily existence]. When I am no longer bound by my own person, what calamity could befall me?” *WBJJS*, 1:29; trans. Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 71.
- 55 This phrase conjures up two passages in the *Zhuangzi* about forgetting one's person (*wang qi shen* 忘其身): seeing life and death as equal in value (“the reason I find it good to live is the same as why I find it good to die”); accepting the state of things (*shi zhi qing* 事之情 or *wu zhi qing* 物之情) and the fact that man cannot intervene with it. See *Zhuangzi* 4, “Ren jian shi,” and *Zhuangzi* 6, “Da zong shi,” in *ZZJS*, 1:155, 241-44.
- 56 This refers to the famous debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether sages possessed emotions. He Yan opined that the sages were free from feelings of pleasure, anger, sadness or joy, whereas Wang Bi argued that sages, like others, have common emotions. However, unlike others, the sages possess an uncommon, numinous intelligence that enables them to identify with nothingness. Thus, according to Wang Bi, their emotions are such that “they respond to things, but without becoming attached to things” 應物而無累於物. See Wang Bi's biography by He Shao 何劭, as appended to Zhong Hui's biography in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 28.795. For the Chinese text of Sun Chuo's poem, see *XS*, 2:900.



but is ashamed for not having attained a more profound level of understanding, that is to say, complete enlightenment; he still views his bodily existence as a source of resentment and being able to forget life as cause for joy. The dream refers not to the famous Zhuangzi-butterfly episode about accessing reality and epistemology in Chapter 2, “Discussion on Leveling Things,” but likely alludes to the dream of the skull in Chapter 18, “Ultimate Happiness” 至樂, whose theme of death’s value vis-à-vis life seems more consonant with the rest of the stanza. In that story Zhuangzi went to Chu and found an old, dried up skull, which he asked, “Were you greedy for life and lost your reason” and thus came to this? That night the skull appeared in Zhuangzi’s dream and revealed to him the perfect happiness to be found in death, cast as a realm of absolute freedom that transcends all constraints of time and duty. The skull concluded that he would not trade death for life, which is characterized as “troubles” (*lao* 勞).<sup>57</sup> Although Xu may have grasped the signification of this dream, he still feels the demands placed on one’s existence (e.g. honor, favor, station) and the burden of valuing life over death, according to Sun’s summary of Xu’s poem.

Although we cannot know whether Sun Chuo made a fair reading of Xu Xun’s poem, at play here seems less an implicit critique of Xu’s alleged spiritual deficiency than an unabashed exhibit of Sun’s supposed superior understanding. He tells Xu that he is different from his friend (“I am different from this”), since he suffers neither the resentment nor joy of life or death (“There is no going that is not leveled for me”). Given the way things are in the world, Sun knows better than to become entangled by his emotions (“Why should we become entangled by feelings?”). Moreover, to distinguish himself from Xu Xun, Sun Chuo draws from Wang Bi’s famous response to He Yan 何晏 (189?-249) about whether the sages had feelings: “the feelings of sages are such that the sages respond to things, but without becoming entangled by them.” Sun has cast himself in the role of the sage and, by extension, his younger friend and rival, to whom others have often compared him, as the student. Why should engagement with worldly affairs matter so long as one is free of the emotional weight of it? The message of Sun Chuo, a known careerist, to his friend, a renowned recluse, is clear: true enlightenment for him hinges upon the mind, not matter.

If one were to judge by Sun Chuo’s digest and revision of Xu Xun’s poem alone, Xu’s reputation for lofty transcendence would hardly seem justified. Although it is said that Sun Chuo himself once acknowledged his friendly rival’s superiority in terms of “exalted feelings” and “remoteness,” at least in this

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57 ZZJS, 2:617-19.

poetic account Xu appears to be mired in the mundane.<sup>58</sup> Jiang Yan's imitation of Xu Xun presents an alternative picture, one that is congruous with available historical and anecdotal accounts which portray an untrammelled and enlightened recluse.

許徵君詢自序 Summoned Gentleman Xu Xun: Self-Account

張子闇內機	Master Zhang was oblivious to inner workings,
單生蔽外象	Whereas Sir Shan was unaware of outer phenomena. <sup>59</sup>
一時排冥筮	If for a time you cast away the dimming fish trap, <sup>60</sup>
4 冷然空中賞	Then you'll have the pleasure of soaring lightly through the void. <sup>61</sup>
遣此弱喪情	Leave behind this feeling of losing your childhood home; <sup>62</sup>
資神任獨往	Rely instead on your spirit, entrusting yourself to journey alone. <sup>63</sup>
採藥白雲隈	I pluck herbs by the bend of white clouds,
8 聊以肆所養	And shall abandon myself to self-cultivation.
丹葩曜芳蕤	Crimson flowers shine in their fragrant bloom;
綠竹陰閒敞	Green bamboos shade a placid expanse.
苔苔寄意勝	Far, far away, I lodge my feelings beyond,
12 不覺陵虛上	Unaware I ascend into the void above.
曲櫺激鮮飈	The window's curved lattices are stirred by fresh gales—

58 See note 52.

59 Following the Wuchen 五臣 edition of the *Wen xuan*, which reads 象 for 像. The story of Zhang Yi and Shan Bao appears in *Zhuangzi* 19, "Da sheng": Zhang Yi worked tirelessly to advance his material situation by currying favor with the rich and powerful. When he was merely forty, he fell ill to an internal fever and died as a result. By contrast, Shan Bao shunned an activist, profit-seeking life and secluded himself among the cliffs, drinking only water. When he was seventy, he still looked as a child. He met his death by a hungry tiger, who devoured him. See *ZZJS*, 2:646.

60 In a parable about language and meaning from Chapter 26, "Wai wu," *Zhuangzi* argues that "the reason the fish trap exists is for the fish; once you've gotten the fish, then you can forget the trap. The reason the rabbit snare exists is for the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, then you can forget the snare. The reason why words exist is for their meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, then you can forget the words." *ZZJS*, 3:944.

61 In "Qi wu lun," Liezi is described as "riding the wind and soaring lightly with skill."

62 A reference to an argument in "Qi wu lun" that challenges the conventional hatred of death: "How do I know that in hating death that I am not like a man, who having lost his childhood home, has forgotten the way back?" *ZZJS*, 1:103.

63 The phrase *du wang* (journeying alone) does not appear in the text of the *Zhuangzi*, but in Guo Xiang's commentary. For example, Guo associates "embracing the uncarved block and journeying alone" with following the Way. *ZZJS*, 2:322. The concept of *du* (solitariness, independence), however, is well developed in the *Zhuangzi*.

- 石室有幽響    In the stone chamber are sounds of seclusion.  
 去矣從所欲    Away I have gone to follow my wish,  
 16 得失非外獎    Loss and gain are not to be determined by external forces.  
   至哉操斤客    How perfect, the sojourner wielding his axe!<sup>64</sup>  
   重明固已朗    His clear discernment was due to mutual understanding.  
   五難既灑落    Now that the “Five Obstacles” have been shed,<sup>65</sup>  
 20 超迹絕塵網    I transcend these tracks and cut through the dusty net.<sup>66</sup>

This poem presents a radically different figure than the insecure apprentice from Sun Chuo's representation. In Jiang Yan's imitation of Xu Xun, the adept masterfully delineates the path to transcendence. Neither Zhang Yi, a successful careerist who succumbed to an internal issue in the form of a deadly fever, nor Shan Bao, an exemplary recluse who perished with an external threat in the form of a hungry tiger, illustrates in the *Zhuangzi* story the perfect way since one only minded the outer, whereas the other only minded the inner. Instead, true transcendence requires casting away conceptual containers such as language, symbolized by the Zhuangzian parable of the fish trap, and forgetting conventional fears and biases such as the abhorrence of death. In the *Zhuangzi*, death is compared to one's childhood home, and so dying is merely a returning that should be accepted as part of the natural process. The highest level of attainment also entails the cultivation of one's body through the ingestion of medicinal herbs. In following the Way, the adept sheds remaining obstacles, such as joy and anger or concern for reputation and profit, and ultimately achieves transcendence of the world.

The facts that Jiang Yan titled his imitation of Xu Xun as “Self-Narration” and that this account consists of lessons for transcendence amalgamated from the *Zhuangzi* and the writings of an earlier adept, Xi Kang 嵇康 (ca. 223-ca. 262), suggest that an account of *his transcendence* constituted a major aspect of Xu's poetry. Jiang Yan's imitation of Xu Xun is thus invaluable in giving the lost poet a voice, however mediated. It is a voice which fruitfully complicates, even challenges, the version by Sun Chuo.

64 See note 39.

65 According to Xi Kang's “Answer to [Xiang Xiu's] Refutation of My ‘Essay on Nurturing Life’” 答難養生論, the “Five Obstacles” to nurturing life are: 1) that reputation and profit are not exterminated; 2) that joy and anger are not eliminated; 3) that sound and form are not cast away; 4) that taste and flavor are not renounced; and 5) that spiritual meditations are dispersed and scattered. See *Xi Kang ji jiaozhu* 嵇康集校注, ed. Dai Mingyang 戴明揚 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962), 4.191-92.

66 WX, 31.1469-70.

## Conclusion

Jiang Yan's imitations of nearly and completely lost writers poses thorny questions for cultural memory. These texts represent bodies of works that have mostly disappeared and their value lies precisely in offering a memory of what is no longer present. Unless Xu Xun's works are somehow recovered in the future, Jiang Yan's imitation of Xu Xun uniquely offers readers one intact picture and compact summary of the lost poet's works. The costs to a culture's memory, however, are equally considerable. His imitations of Sun Chuo and Xie Hun yield partial, even distorted, pictures when seen alongside those poets' extant corpus and considered in light of the assessments by other contemporary readers.

Representation and selection in the work of imitation writing are to a great extent memory construction—both willfully remembering and forgetting and willing others to forget as well. One might point out that in order for memory to function, one needs to forget. Indeed, the tragic consequence of remembering everything and forgetting nothing is memorably impressed upon the readers of Jorge Luis Borges' "Funes, the Memorious," a short story about a boy cursed with this strange ability after he was thrown from a horse and became crippled. Unsurprisingly, he dies in the end. "The truth is that we all live by leaving behind," explains the narrator.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, literary history can only be written by excluding some aspects. Yet that which the self-appointed guardian of a literature's past chooses to preserve or to discard, to add or modify, reveals as much about his view of the past as about the cultural forces at play as outlined below.

In a period that bore witness to massive gains in cultural wealth in the forms of new literary genres and a proliferation of examples, early medieval literary critics and historians sought to manage the multiplication and spread of literary texts by composing cohesive or systematic accounts using the tools of definition, selection, and/or ranking. Critical readers attempted to address the need to arbitrate not only what was good literature but what literariness even was. Jiang Yan's imitations project may lay claim to such an ambition: in drawing up a summa of pentasyllabic poetry, it establishes a canon of poets ordered by a specific theme identified with each, and judges what should be considered their "fine" and "excellent" aspects. The choices Jiang Yan made in the case of Sun Chuo—what to include and what to exclude in representing the poet's intertextual mode of writing—suggest an effort to simplify a heterogeneous

67 Borges, "Funes, The Memorious," trans. Anthony Kerrigan, in *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 113.

and amalgamate poetry that blurred the very boundaries by which literary historians and critics at the time sought to demarcate it.

Cultural workings in the form of poetic language and conventions can be discerned in Jiang Yan's imitation of Xie Hun. This work "absorbed" and "survived for us" less the new style of the reformer than deep-rooted and pervasive poetic habits that held sway over writers for several centuries. As surely as his chosen model, conventional thematic associations (the passage of time—transformation—death—transcendence), common repertoire of sources (e.g., the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*), and established modes of writing (allusive and intertextual) guided the imitator's hand.

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