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Thomas J. Mazanec

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# OF ADMONITION AND ADDRESS: RIGHT-HAND INSCRIPTIONS (ZUOYOUING) FROM CUI YUAN TO GUANXIU\*

THOMAS J. MAZANEC  
UC Santa Barbara, USA

*This essay traces the development of the right-hand inscription (zuoyouing 座右銘) from its birth in the second century CE through its culmination as a complex literary subgenre in the tenth. Over the course of these eight centuries, right-hand inscriptions were used by some of the most prominent poets of their respective eras, including Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (77–142 CE), Bian Lan 卞蘭 (ca. 230), Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–366), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), and Guanxiu 貫休 (832–913). These writers used the subgenre to advocate for many different kinds of wisdom, often reflecting intellectual trends of their times. The inscriptions underwent a process of literarization, meaning they became more deeply embedded in a self-consciously literary tradition. By the end of this process, with the poet-monk Guanxiu, the temporal spectrum of address (past-present-future) comes to dominate the others. Poetic address, in this subgenre of verse as in shi-poetry 詩, comes to focus more on the literary tradition itself than the poem’s immediate readership.*

KEYWORDS: address, audience, lyric, literary, zuoyouing

## INTRODUCTION

Address has long been a central concern in the study of poetry. Lyric poetry has often been defined precisely in this manner: that it consists of personal thoughts or feelings addressed primarily to oneself. Unlike drama and epic, which assume certain kinds of audiences, lyrics often stage themselves as being something “overheard,” as John Stuart Mill put it.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it is a well-attested fact that much poetry—including lyric poetry—was written for specific people, often on important events. At the very least, the posture of turning away from society is

\* I would like to thank *Tang Studies*’s anonymous reviewers for offering many helpful suggestions on this paper. Some of the source material for this article was first presented, via proxy, as part of the conference “Philology and the Study of Classical Chinese Literature: An International Symposium on the Future of Sinology in the 21st Century,” at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in April 2018. It is dedicated to Paul Kroll, whose birthday was celebrated that weekend, and my daughter Rae 余曦 Mazanec, who was born that weekend.

<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,” *The Crayon* 7.4 (1860): 95, drawing on William Wordsworth’s canonical statement that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility,” for which see “Preface,” in *Lyrical Ballads, with Other*

itself a reaction to society. More mundanely, the very act of writing a poem down on paper (and later circulating it) implies an imagined readership.

In medieval China, the subgenre of verse known as “right-hand inscriptions” (*zuoyouming* 座右銘) highlights the dynamics of poetic address in an especially clear manner. Though framed as self-admonitions, they offer guidance for others. Though filled with commands, some paint pictures of the world and the people who live in it. Though addressed to the writer’s present, they are written with an eye to previous poets and future readers. Thus, we can imagine the dynamics of address in these poems as occurring along three spectrums: self-other, direct-indirect, and past-present-future. These spectrums may be used to understand the issue of address in any work of literature, but they are particularly apparent in admonitory inscriptions.

This essay traces the development of the right-hand inscription from its birth in the second century CE through its culmination as a complex literary subgenre in the tenth. Over the course of these eight centuries, right-hand inscriptions were used by some of the most prominent poets of their respective eras, including Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (77–142 CE), Bian Lan 卞蘭, (ca. 230), Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–366), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), and Guanxiu 貫休 (832–913). These writers used the subgenre to advocate for many different kinds of wisdom, often reflecting intellectual trends of their times. The inscriptions underwent a process of literarization, by which I mean more deeply embedded in a self-consciously literary tradition. By the end of this process, with the poet-monk Guanxiu, the temporal spectrum of address (past-present-future) comes to dominate the others. Poetic address, in this subgenre of verse as in *shi*-poetry 詩, comes to focus more on the literary tradition itself than the poem’s immediate readership.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SUBGENRE

The subgenre of admonitory epigrams begins near the turn of the second century CE with the work of Cui Yuan. Cui’s verse was immortalized in the foundational sixth-century anthology *Wenxuan* 文選, and was read, imitated, and elaborated on many times in the medieval period.<sup>2</sup> Cui Yuan was a member of the Cui clan of Boling 博陵崔氏, who were an especially prominent aristocratic family during the Eastern Han dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Yuan’s father, Cui Yin 崔駟 (30?–92), died when Yuan was only eleven, leaving Yuan and his brothers as orphans in relative poverty.

*Poems, in Two Volumes*, 2nd ed. (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), 1:xxxiii. Northrop Frye restates an elaborated version of Mill’s dictum in his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 249–50.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the examples given below, we can see the high regard for Cui Yuan’s “Inscription” in a story from the biography of Wang Jian 王儉 (ca. 452–489), in which the precocious child is given the text as part of his moral training (Li Yanshou 李延壽 [fl. 627–649], *Nanshi* 南史 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975], 22.590–91).

<sup>3</sup> On Cui Yuan, see Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 104; and David Knechtges and Taiping Chang, ed., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2010–2014), 1:175–78. On Cui Yuan, his father Cui Yin 崔駟 (30?–92), and his son Cui Shi 崔寔 (ca. 120–170), see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts’ui Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 34–49.

Cui Yuan's "Right-hand Inscription" was said to be written a decade or so later, after he avenged the murder of his elder brother.

瑗兄璋為人所殺，瑗遂手刃其仇。亡命，蒙赦而出，作此銘以自戒，嘗置座右，故曰座右銘也。

When Cui Yuan's elder brother Zhang was killed by someone, Yuan stabbed his foe to death with his own hands. He went on the lam, then came back during the general amnesty, and wrote this inscription in order to admonish himself. Because he had installed it to the right of his seat, it was called his "Right-hand Inscription."<sup>4</sup>

The general amnesty referred to here took place in 105 CE, when Cui Yuan was twenty-seven years old. Following this episode, he remained at home with his family for over a dozen years and did not seek office until he was over forty. This biographical preface frames the inscription as an act of self-admonition. As such, his verses gain gravity from their context. An admonition toward moderation means more coming from a reformed killer.

Before we examine Cui Yuan's inscription itself, it is worth noting how the preface already highlights the issue of poetic address. The stated audience for the verse is Cui Yuan himself. It is a private piece of writing, placed next to his own seat as a personal admonition. The preface does not tell us on what material the inscription was written—a nearby wall, a stone slab, a drinking vessel, or any number of possibilities.<sup>5</sup> The verb used (*zhi* 置, meaning "install" or "place") applied to both portable and non-portable things. However, the very fact that it was carved into a physical object means that it would have been visible to anyone who came near Cui Yuan's seat. The inscription was not enclosed in a scroll or rolled up in a series of bamboo slats, but out in the open. We do not know whether the seat here is located in Cui Yuan's personal chambers or in some kind of receiving hall in the Cui family compound. Either way, its material reality meant that a visitor could have potentially seen it and associated it with Cui Yuan. It would have signaled something about how Cui wanted to be seen

<sup>4</sup> *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 六臣註文選, 55.6b (*Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 ed.). Cui Yuan's vengeance is also attested in his biography in Fan Hua 范曄, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 52.1722, though it is not there related to Cui's composition of his inscription. The earliest references to Cui Yuan's inscription can be found in the *Wenxuan* and *Jinlouzi* 金樓子 in the sixth century, and it one of the earliest examples of pentametric verse attributed to a known author. We have no reason to doubt its authenticity any more than other works from this period, and it follows the broader trend of pentameter becoming more widespread in this period. See Donald Holzman, "Les premiers Vers pentasyllabiques datés dans la poésie chinoise," in *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à Monsieur Paul Demiéville, II* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1974), 77-115; Lu Qinli 逯欽立, "Hanshi bielu" 漢詩別錄, in *Han Wei Liuchao wenxue lunji* 漢魏六朝文學論集 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1984), 54-69; Muzhai 木齋, *Gushi shijiushou yu Jian'an shige yanjiu* 古詩十九首與建安詩歌研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), 2, 17-39.

<sup>5</sup> It is unlikely that the inscription was carved into the seat itself, since Cui's seat would have been a mat or bench he knelt on and therefore would not have had a right-hand armrest. Chairs did not become widely used in China until the Tang. See John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 222-49.

by others. Therefore, there is an external, public audience for the inscription as well. Just by reading the preface, we find ourselves implicated in the *self-other* polarity of poetic address.

The name of Cui's piece, "right-hand inscription" (*zuoyouming*), evokes two precedents. First, the genre known as *ming* 銘 ("inscription") partakes of the long history of inscribed admonitory writing in premodern China. According to Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 521), this mode can be traced back to the sage-emperors of high antiquity, who "carved into their chassis and tables to guard against transgression" (*ke yuji yi biwei* 刻輿几以弼違) and "engraved their horizontal and vertical bell racks to invite remonstrators" (*le sunju er zhaojian* 勒筮虞而招諫). Others inscribed these sayings on bronze basins, doors, seats, statues, and drinking vessels. These, it is said, gave rise to the later genre of inscription, which Liu Xie pairs with "admonitions" (*zhen* 箴) in his discussion. The main differences between these two genres are their medium and tone. Admonitions are oral and critical, while inscriptions are written and encouraging. Nevertheless, both share the same goals of "warning and instructing" (*jingjie* 警戒) those who pay attention to them, and both use "simple and deep" (*jian er shen* 簡而深) language to achieve these goals.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the modifier in Cui Yuan's title, "to the right of one's seat" (*zuoyou* 座右), alludes to a well-known story about a "vessel to the right of one's seat" (*youzuo zhi qi* 宥坐之器), also known as the "tipping vessel" (*qiqi* 欹器).<sup>7</sup> This story, mentioned in *Xunzi* 荀子, *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and elsewhere, has Confucius encountering the vessel in either the Zhou ancestral shrine or that of Duke Huan of Lu 魯桓公. The vessel is a small goblet that turns over when full, stands upright when partially filled, and leans to the side when empty. Confucius, intrigued upon learning how it works, uses it as an illustration of how a gentleman should maintain virtue and balance.<sup>8</sup> Though these vessels could illustrate moral lessons, there is no evidence that they were inscribed with moral maxims.

<sup>6</sup> *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu* 增訂文心雕龍校注, annot. Huang Shulin 黃叔琳 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), "Chapter 11: Inscriptions and Admonitions" (Mingzhen di shiyi 銘箴第十一), 3:139–54.

<sup>7</sup> There is some debate among scholars whether, in the original story, *you* 宥 refers to the location of the inscription (*you* 宥 as a loan *you* 右, "right") or to its function (*you* 宥 as a loan for *you* 侑, "urge"). See *Hanshi waizhuan jishi* 韓詩外傳集釋, comp. Xu Weiyu 許維通 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 3:114–15. It is clear from his preface that Cui Yuan understood it, at least on one level, to refer to the location. It is possible that he understood it to refer to the function, too, in which case placing the inscription to the right of his seat would be a kind of visual pun.

<sup>8</sup> The *Xunzi* version is the first anecdote found in chapter 28, for which see *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, comp. Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988); English translations in John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 3:244; and Daniel Fried, "A Never-Stable Word: Zhuangzi's *Zhiyan* 卮言 and the 'Tipping-vessel' Irrigation," *Early China* 31 (2007): 157. The *Hanshi waizhuan* version is the thirtieth anecdote found in chapter 3, for which see *Hanshi waizhuan jishi*, 3:146–47; English translations in James Robert Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustration of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs, An Annotated Translation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 111–13; and Paul Van Els, "Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls: On the Rhetorical Function of Anecdotes in Early Chinese Texts," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012): 155. On the *Huainanzi* version, see He Ning 何寧, annot., *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 12:904–7; English translations in John Major et al., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han*

So the title of Cui Yuan's verse doubly implies its admonitory function. But who is being admonished? While the preface states that Cui's inscription is directed simply to himself, some of the verse's details imply other dynamics of address.

### Right-hand Inscription 座右銘<sup>9</sup>

Cui Yuan

	無道人之短	Talk not of others' shortcomings,
	無說己之長	Speak not of your own greatness.
	施人慎勿念	In doing favors for others, be careful not to remember,
4	受施慎勿忘	In receiving favors, be careful not to forget. <sup>10</sup>
	世譽不足慕	Worldly praise is not worth coveting,
	唯仁為紀綱	Let humaneness alone be your guide.
	隱心而後動	Move only after retreating your mind: <sup>11</sup>
8	謗議寧何傷	What harm could come from slander?
	無使名過實	Do not let your fame exceed reality,
	守愚聖所臧	Preserve your naïveté: this is what the sages commended. <sup>12</sup>
	在涅貴不淄	In the muck, to go unstained is precious, <sup>13</sup>
12	曖曖內含光	To secretly harbor a light within.
	柔弱生之徒	"The soft and weak are the disciples of life,"
	老氏誠剛強	Laozi warned against being rigid and firm. <sup>14</sup>

*China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 480–81; and Van Els, "Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls," 157–58. A description of how the tilting vessel exploited centers of gravity to perform its trick can be found in Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China, Volume 4: Physics and Physical Technology, Part I: Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 34–35.

<sup>9</sup> For a French translation and brief discussion of this work, see Holzman, "Les premiers Vers pentasyllabiques datés dans la poésie chinoise," 93–95.

<sup>10</sup> The *Annals of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) records a minister of the Kingdom of Wei 魏, Tang Ju 唐雎, as saying, "When others do something good for me, I cannot forget; when I do something good others, I cannot but forget" 人之有德於我，不可忘也；吾之有德於人，不可不忘也。See *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 25.912; cf. J. I. Crump, Jr., *Chan-kuo ts' e* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 447.

<sup>11</sup> *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), "Appended Phrases" 繫辭: "The gentleman moves only after settling his body and speaks only after setting his mind at ease" 君子安其身而後動，易其心而後語 (Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009], 8.184).

<sup>12</sup> A saying attributed to Confucius in multiple sources, including the "tipping vessel" story as found in *Xunzi* and *Hanshi waizhuan*, reads: "Perspicacious intelligence and sagacious wisdom should be preserved by means of naïveté" 聰明聖知，守之以愚。Xunzi jijie, 28.520; and *Hanshi waizhuan jishi*, 3.115, 3.117, 8.302; cf. Hightower, *Han Shi Wai Chuan*, 112–13, 114, and 286.

<sup>13</sup> *Analects* XVII.7: "Is it not said that if something is pristine, it can enter the muck and not be stained?" 不曰白乎，涅而不淄。Cf. Simon Leys, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Norton, 1997), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Laozi 老子, chapter 76: "Humans are soft and weak when they are born, and hard and firm when they die. The ten thousand creatures and all vegetation are soft and delicate when born, and

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
|    | 行行鄙夫志 | Unyielding is the will of the lowly: <sup>15</sup>           |
| 16 | 悠悠故難量 | Remain distant and therefore hard to measure.                |
|    | 慎言節飲食 | Be careful in your words, sparing in what you eat and drink, |
|    | 知足勝不祥 | Know what is enough and overcome the inauspicious.           |
|    | 行之苟有恆 | If you practice it with constancy,                           |
| 20 | 久久自芬芳 | Long, long will your scent be sweet.                         |

The most conspicuous feature of Cui's inscription is its frequent use of the imperative mood. This is particularly visible in the negative prohibitions of the first four lines, indicated by the particles *wu* 無 and *wu* 勿. Though I have rendered these into the second person for the sake of idiomatic English, the Chinese gives no indication of person. They could just as easily be read as applying to the speaker himself ("May I not talk of others' shortcomings ...") or an inclusive audience ("Let us not ..."). In any case, the use of imperative is a form of *direct* address, in which the speaker tells the subject precisely what they ought to do.

Cui Yuan's verse also makes frequent reference to early authoritative texts, thus raising the issue of temporality. In just twenty lines, there are five clear allusions to the classics. Invoking the authority of Confucius and Laozi, he emphasizes that it is best to be flexible and to keep a low profile.<sup>16</sup> The wise man relies on his own inner light for his sense of worth, and is not given up to vain boasting or carnal desires. Intertextuality lends authority to his lines: they are valuable not for originality, but for their ability to distill the wisdom of sages in short, memorable lines. The poem's conclusion (lines 19–20) rushes forward to the future, the other end of the temporal spectrum. Instead of looking back to the classics, it envisions a possible world in which the reader puts the text into practice. By using the conditional mood, the speaker places the fulfillment of the poem in an unrealized yet-to-come. Despite its use of allusion, Cui Yuan's verse does not engage with past precedents as conversation partners. While this is typical of poetic writings in this period, we will see that it contrasts sharply with later inscriptions written in the Tang. Therefore, if we think along the past-present-future spectrum of address, Cui Yuan's verse is aimed explicitly at the present and implicitly at the future.

In terms of its modes of address, Cui Yuan's inscription is relatively simple. It is an admonition aimed at himself, drawing wisdom from classic texts to guide his current behavior. That is to say, along our three spectrums, it leans mostly toward direct, self, and present. The latter two are complicated somewhat by features inherent to the nature of inscribed admonition. Any inscription necessarily has a potential audience of more than one, and any warning (especially when stated in the conditional mood) implies a future. But these are not Cui Yuan's self-conscious attempts to add complexity to his work. What makes his inscription

dry and withered when they die. Consequently, the hard and firm are the disciples of death, and the soft and weak are the disciples of life" 人生也柔弱，其死也堅強；萬物草木生也柔脆，其死也枯槁；故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒也。

<sup>15</sup> I follow the commentary of Li Shan 李善 (d. 689), who notes Zheng Xuan's gloss of *xingxing* 行行 in *Analecets* XI.13 as "rigid and firm" (*gangqiang* 剛強).

<sup>16</sup> On this point, see Li Nailong 李乃龍, "Cui Yuan 'Zuoyouming' renshengguan de lilun disai: jianxi zuoyouming wenti yiyi" 崔瑗《座右銘》人生觀的理論底色——兼析座右銘文體意義, *Henan daxue xuebao (shehuikexue ban)* 46.2 (2006): 79.

powerful is its simplicity, its direct tone, and its applicability to one's immediate circumstances.

## POETIC ADDRESS

The three spectrums of address found in Cui Yuan's inscription are useful for thinking about poetry more generally.<sup>17</sup> The self-other spectrum helps us understand the contradictions of poetry when it is presented as being private. As mentioned above, this claim of privacy is central to modern lyric theory, even though the very act of publication means that it is not *only* directed to oneself.<sup>18</sup> Some genres, such as occasional and commemorative verse, make this explicit,<sup>19</sup> while others, like the Romantic lyric, are shaped by society in their very attempt to turn away from it.<sup>20</sup>

Inscribed verse highlights the contradictions along the self-other spectrum in unique ways. As poetry written on long-lasting objects (gravestones, temple walls, ritual vessels, etc.), it is written to imagined readers not immediately present to the poet, readers that may be far removed in time. Inscriptions speak to generic, fictive readers—a general “you” who will happen upon the inscribed object, not a specific individual.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, inscribed verse is defined by its setting. The poet knows that its readers will share the bodily experience of encountering a specific object.<sup>22</sup> But inscribed poems could circulate as well as

<sup>17</sup> Reading William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), has been invaluable in helping me tease out some of the complexities of address I had begun to notice in the right-hand inscriptions of medieval China, though my categories do not map directly onto his.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to Mill, Wordsworth, and Frye mentioned above, this connection between privacy and lyricism is well-attested (and contested) throughout *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), such as in Jonathan Culler's “Lyric, History, and Genre” (63–77), Helen Vendler's “Introduction to *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*” (128–40); M. H. Abrams's “The Lyric as Poetic Norm” (140–43); Jacques Derrida's “Che cos'è la poesia?” (287–91). Studies of Chinese lyricism tend to emphasize privacy in the way it interacts with sociality or politics, as in Hu Dalei 胡大雷, *Zhongguo shiren shuqing fangshi de yanjin* 中古詩人抒情方式的演進 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 340–42; Kao Yu-kung 高友工, *Zhongguo meidian yu wenxue yanjiu* 中國美典與文學研究 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2004); and David Der-Wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> For overviews of occasional verse at different points in the West, see Bret Mulligan, “Epigrams, Occasional Poetry, and Poetic Games,” in *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*, ed. Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 241–58; David Money, “Epigram and Occasional Poetry,” in *Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin*, ed. Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 73–86; and Joseph Leighton, “Occasional Poetry in the Eighteenth Century in Germany,” *The Modern Language Review* 78.2 (1983): 340–58.

<sup>20</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 37–54.

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas Schmitz, “Speaker and Addressee in Early Greek Epigram and Lyric,” in *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*, ed. Manuel Baumbach et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>22</sup> See Joseph W. Day, “Poems on Stone: The Inscribed Antecedents of Hellenistic Epigram,” in *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram*, ed. Peter Bing and Jon Steffen Bruss (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 29–47; and Gjert Vestrheim, “Voice in Sepulchral Epigrams: Some Remarks on the Use of First and Second Person in Sepulchral Epigrams, and a Comparison with Lyric Poetry,” in



situate. As readers copied them down to paper, they became a well-established genre, and poets could write their own directly in books in a kind of literary imitation. Such literary imitations would be written with an eye to their predecessors, often aware of the ways they expanded or challenged them. This is what happened with ancient Greek epigrams, and a similar phenomenon may be one factor in the evolution of medieval Chinese right-hand inscriptions.<sup>23</sup>

This brings us to the past-present-future spectrum. Readers encounter poetry in their present. But as genres become more well-established as forms of literature, they are often increasingly *addressed* to the past. On the other hand, they are also addressed to the future. Admonitory writing, such as the right-hand inscriptions, make this especially clear. They hope that future readers will not only understand or sympathize with their texts, but put them into practice. Much like didactic and ritual songs, they demand future action.

Admonitory inscriptions may make their demands directly by means of commands and prohibitions, or indirectly by means of general statements about the world and descriptions of exemplary figures.<sup>24</sup> This brings us to our third spectrum of poetic address, direct-indirect. Direct address makes for stronger admonitions, and the reader is forced to accept, reject, or ignore the command. Indirect address, by contrast, is weaker but potentially more broadly applicable. The reader must interpret the descriptions to establish principles for how to conduct oneself in the world. When direct address appears, it is often quite conspicuous, an intensifier that would defy temporality.<sup>25</sup>

In the remainder of this essay, I will look at a few examples of right-hand inscriptions through the end of the Tang. The three spectrums of address found in Cui Yuan's verse (self-other, past-present-future, and direct-indirect) help highlight how the subgenre underwent a process of literarization. That is, as right-hand inscriptions became an established subgenre of verse, they were more consciously situated in the literary tradition, primarily addressing past precedents and future writers rather than their immediate audiences.

## BIAN LAN AND ZHI DUN

The earliest surviving right-hand inscription written after Cui Yuan comes from the hand of Bian Lan in the first half of the third century. Bian Lan was the nephew of Lady Bian (160–230), a concubine of the warlord-emperor Cao Cao 曹操 (155–

*Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*, 61–78. Some inscribed poems in ancient Greece played with their setting in a self-referential way to build irony or emotional complexity. On these, see Mario Burzachechi, "Oggetti parlanti nelle epigrafi greche," *Epigraphica* 24 (1962): 3–54; and Rudolf Wachter, "The Origin of Epigrams on 'Speaking Objects,'" in *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*, 250–60.

<sup>23</sup> On the literarization of ancient Greek epigrams, see Regina Höschele, "Epigram and Minor Genres," in *A Companion to Greek Literature*, ed. Martin Hose and Dave Schenker (West Sussex: Wiley, 2016), 190–204.

<sup>24</sup> In this, their strategies are similar to biblical wisdom literature. Roland E. Murphy calls these "the admonition" and "the saying," for which see his *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 7–10; and his *Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981), 4–6.

<sup>25</sup> On this, see Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, augmented ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 135–54.

220). Bian Lan gained imperial favor upon composing a *fu* 賦 for Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) and advised both Pi and his son Rui 叡 (c. 206–239) when they held the reins of the Wei dynasty 魏. It is said that Bian Lan died after suffering diabetes due to excess drinking.<sup>26</sup> His inscription survives in the early-Tang compendium *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 without biographical contextualization. Like Cui Yuan’s inscription, Bian’s is written in the imperative mood and offers generally applicable life lessons adapted mostly from classics attributed to Confucius and Daoist sages.

### Right-hand Inscription 座右銘<sup>27</sup>

#### Bian Lan

	重階連棟	Layered staircases and connecting purlins
	必濁汝真	Always muddy your authenticity.
	金寶滿堂	Gold and gems filling your hall
4	將亂汝神	Will ruin your spirit.
	厚味來殃	Rich flavor brings disaster,
	艷色危身	And lavish sensuality harms your self.
	來高反墜	If you come to the heights, you’ll fall back down,
8	務厚更貧	And if you serve wealth, you’ll just become poorer.
	閉情塞欲	Shut out passion, block desire—
	老氏所珍	This was cherished by Laozi. <sup>28</sup>
	周廟之銘	The inscriptions on the temple of Zhou
12	仲尼是遵	Were what Confucius observed. <sup>29</sup>
	審慎汝口	Be prudent with your mouth
	戒無失人	And be warned not to waste people. <sup>30</sup>
	從容順時	Be at ease, follow the seasons,
16	和光同塵	Soften your light, and conform your dust. <sup>31</sup>
	無謂冥漠	Don’t think that in darkness and desolation
	人不汝聞	People won’t hear you.

<sup>26</sup> See Knechtges and Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 44–45; and de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quan Sanguo wen* 全三國文, 30.2446–47, in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958) [further references to “Yan Kejun” refer to this edition]; Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 ed.), 23.17b.

<sup>28</sup> *Laozi* 52: “Block out your joy and close your gates, and you will never toil your whole life” 塞其兌，閉其門，終身不動。

<sup>29</sup> Possibly an allusion to the tipping vessel story mentioned above. If so, the vessel (an illustrative object) has been replaced with an inscription (admonitory writing).

<sup>30</sup> *Analects* XV.8: “The Master said: ‘If a person may be spoken with, but you do not speak with them, that is wasting the person. If a person may not be spoken with, but you do speak with them, that is wasting speech. A wise person wastes neither people nor speech.’” 子曰：「可與言而不與之言，失人；不可與言而與之言，失言。知者不失人，亦不失言。」 Cf. Leys, *Analects*, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Dust: the dust that is stirred up by your footsteps. *Laozi* 4: “Blunt your sharpness, unravel your tangles, soften your light, and conform your dust” 挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵。

	無謂幽冥	Don't think that you're hidden and dark, <sup>32</sup>
20	處獨若羣	But abide in isolation as if in a crowd.
	不為福先	Not acting first for the sake of fortune,
	不與禍鄰	Nor being a neighbor to misfortune, <sup>33</sup>
	守玄執素	Protect mystery and uphold purity,
24	無亂大倫	But don't ruin the Great Relationship. <sup>34</sup>
	常若臨深	And always, as if looking into an abyss, <sup>35</sup>
26	終始惟純	Ponder perfection from the first to the last.

Despite its similar appearance in translation, Bian Lan's verse is formally distinct from Cui Yuan's in the original. It is, first, written in the more archaic tetrameter, whereas Cui's was in pentameter. Second, and more relevant to the problem of address, it is written in the second person, using the pronoun *ru* 汝 four times (lines 2, 4, 13, and 18). On the self-other spectrum, Bian Lan's inscription is explicitly oriented toward the other.

Along the temporal spectrum, Bian Lan's verse is similarly addressed to the present, but with a stronger orientation to the past. We see this most clearly in the poems' conclusions. Rather than ending with a conditional statement, as Cui Yuan does, Bian Lan negotiates between a contradiction in the classical texts he is drawing from. The problem is how to maintain personal purity while fulfilling one's duty to the public. According to the *Zhuangzi* (alluded to in lines 21–22), the sage should not interfere until absolutely necessary: he does not impose a preharbored will, but responds naturally to events. At the same time, those who are pure in intent have a duty to serve the state by putting their talents to use. In the *Analects*, Zilu makes it clear that reclusion for the sake of maintaining personal purity is a selfish act (alluded to in lines 23–24). Bian Lan's solution is a kind of propriety. He advises to act not out of concern for fortune or misfortune (lines 21–22), but for the sake of public good, the “Great Relationship” (*dalun* 大倫) between the government and the governed. In order to maintain personal integrity while entering this rough world, one must continually “ponder perfection” (lines 25–26). This lofty goal is the guiding principle for taking practical action while

<sup>32</sup> *Wenzi* 文子: “Laozi says: ‘The Way takes non-existence to be its form. I observe it without seeing its shape and listen to it without hearing its sound. I refer to it as the hidden and dark. The hidden and dark is a means of discussing the Way, but it is not the Way.’” 老子曰: 「道以無有為體, 視之不見其形, 聽之不聞其聲, 謂之幽冥者。幽冥者, 所以論道, 而非道也。」 (*Wenzi shuyi* 文子疏義, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009], 6.260). A similar passage can be found in *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (*Huainanzi jishi*, 16.1101–2).

<sup>33</sup> *Zhuangzi*: “[The sage] does not act to prioritize good fortune, nor to initiate disaster. He responds when affected, moves when pressed, and arises only when he has no other choice” 不為福先, 不為禍始; 感而後應, 迫而後動, 不得已而後起. *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, coll. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 15.539; cf. Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 145.

<sup>34</sup> In *Analects* XVIII.7, Confucius' disciple Zilu 子路 criticizes an old man who went into reclusion instead of serving the state: “Wishing to purify his person, he ruined the Great Relationship [of the government to the governed]” 欲潔其身, 而亂大倫 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 92).

<sup>35</sup> *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), #195, “Foreboding” (“Xiao min” 小旻): “Be careful, be cautious / As if you were looking over an abyss, / As if you were treading on thin ice” 戰戰兢兢、如臨深淵、如履薄冰 (translation adapted from Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, ed. Joseph Allen [New York: Grove Press, 1996], 175).

also remaining pure of heart. Only then will the reader be able to guard against the lures of money, sensuality, and vain speech detailed in the first half of the poem. The contemplation of perfection is what bridges past example, present mindset, and future action. The address to the present stretches throughout one's whole life, from first to last.

Writing roughly a century after Bian Lan, Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–366) departs significantly from his predecessors. One of the first Buddhist monks to be highly regarded as a poet, Zhi Dun was closely connected to elite literary circles in the southeast. The anecdote collection *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 frequently depicts him engaged in the stylized repartee known as “pure conversation” (*qingtan* 清談). He was one of the most eminent expositors of the *Zhuangzi* in his day and came to be known for proposing that the Buddhist concept of emptiness is to be identified with matter as such (*ji se* 即色). He is best understood in the context of *xuanxue* 玄學 (“arcane studies”), a kind of mysticism popular in the third and fourth centuries that was based on idiosyncratic readings of *Zhuangzi*, *Laozi*, and other classical texts.<sup>36</sup>

Zhi Dun's right-hand inscription is preserved in his hagiography found in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, where the narrative tells us he wrote his verses to encourage the lazy students he sometimes noticed at his temple in Wozhou 沃洲, located near modern Ningbo. Zhi Dun is the first we know of to adapt the generic possibilities of this subgenre to a didactic Buddhist context.<sup>37</sup> In terms of the temporal spectrum of address, Zhi Dun's verses are firmly grounded in the present (to his disciples) with abundant roots shooting into the past. Unlike Cui Yuan and Bian Lan, Zhi Dun's allusions are mainly to the *Zhuangzi* and to Buddhist technical jargon, both seen through the filter of *xuanxue*.

#### Right-hand Inscription 座右銘<sup>38</sup>

Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–366)

勤之勤之      Strive on, strive on!  
至道非彌      The ultimate Way is not far off.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> On Zhi Dun, his teachings, and their relationship to *xuanxue*, see Eric Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, third ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 116–30. For an example of Zhi Dun's *xuanxue*-inflected poetry, see Nicholas Morrow Williams, “The Metaphysical Lyric of the Six Dynasties,” *T'oung Pao* 98 (2012): 90–91. For more on Zhi Dun's poetry and *xuanxue*, see Wang Shu 王澍, *Wei-Jin xuanxue yu xuanyanshi yanjiu* 魏晉玄學與玄言詩研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007), 224–35.

<sup>37</sup> Centuries later, Jiaoran 皎然 (720?–798?) would write his own didactic Buddhist wisdom verses, which he called his “Right-hand *Gāthā*” (Zuoyou ji 座右偈, in *QTW* 917.9557; *Zhou shangren ji* 畫上人集 [Sibu congkan 四部叢刊 ed.], 9.14b).

<sup>38</sup> Zhang Fuchun 張富春, *Zhi Dun ji jiaozhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 2.299–315; Yan Kejun, *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, 157.4741; *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, fascicle 4, in *T* 2059: 50.348c; *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, fascicle 48, in *T* 2122: 53.653a. My thanks to Graham Chamness and Nicholas Morrow Williams for offering many valuable suggestions on the translation of this difficult poem.

<sup>39</sup> *Mi* 彌 appears to be used in the sense of *miyuan* 彌遠 or *jiuyuan* 久遠 (remote) here. This, at least, is how the early Tang monk Daoshi 道世 understood it when he adapted Zhi Dun's lines to conclude a verse summarizing section 16.9 of his encyclopedia *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, on the worldly benefits of hearing and spreading the dharma: “released by non-release, the ultimate

	奚爲淹滯	Why linger on in stagnation,
4	弱喪神奇 茫茫三界	You who have lost your home in divine wonder? <sup>40</sup> Vast, vast are the three realms, <sup>41</sup>
	眇眇長羈	In the nebulous nothingness you roam forever.
	煩勞外湊	Though afflictions gather from without,
8	冥心內馳	A silenced mind races within.
	徇赴欽渴	If you rush to sacrifice yourself in eagerness,
	緬邈忘疲	You'll forget your weariness in the remote vastness [of the Way]. <sup>42</sup>
	人生一世	The whole of a human life
12	涓若露垂	Trickles away like dew hanging.
	我身非我	My person is non-self. <sup>43</sup>
	云云誰施	The teeming mass of things: who arranged them? <sup>44</sup>

way is not far off” 遺于無遺，至道非彌 (*T* 2122: 53.466b). On *Fayuan zhulin*, see Stephen F. Teiser, “T’ang Buddhist Encyclopedias: An Introduction to *Fa-yüan chu-lin* and *Chu-ching yao-chi*,” *T’ang Studies* 3 (1985): 109–28; and Alexander Hsu, “Practices of Scriptural Economy: Compiling and Copying a Seventh-Century Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> A homeless youth (*Zhuangzi jishi* 2.103; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 22, modified):

予惡乎知說生之非惑邪，予惡乎知惡死之非弱喪而不知歸者邪。

How do I know that love of life is not a delusion? And how do I know that fear of death is not like being a homeless waif who does not know the way home?

Divine wonder: life. See (*Zhuangzi jishi* 22.733; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 212, modified):

人之生，氣之聚也。聚則爲生，散則爲死。若死生爲徒，吾又何患！故萬物一也，是其所美者爲神奇，其所惡者爲臭腐；臭腐復化爲神奇，神奇復化爲臭腐。

Human life is the coalescence of vital breath. When it coalesces there is life; when it dissipates there is death. Since life and death are disciples of each other, how should I be troubled by them? Thus, the ten thousand things are a unity. What makes the one beautiful is its divine wonder, and what makes the other loathsome is its stench and putrefaction. The stench and putrefaction evolve into divine wonder, and divine wonder evolves once again into stench and putrefaction.

<sup>41</sup> Three realms: The three realms of *samsāra*, namely the realms of desire (*yujie* 欲界), of form (*sejie* 色界), and of the formless (*wusejie* 無色界).

<sup>42</sup> Reading *xun* 殉 (to sacrifice oneself, to die for a cause) for *xun* 徇 (swift), as attested in the text as found in *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Fayuan zhulin*.

<sup>43</sup> Simultaneous allusion to the Buddhist doctrine of “no-self” (Sanskrit *anātman*, Chinese *wuwo* 無我 or *feiwo* 非我) and *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 2, “Discourse on Seeing Things as Equal”: “Just now, I have lost myself: can you understand this?” 今者吾喪我，汝知之乎 (*Zhuangzi jishi* 2.45; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 10). In third- and fourth-century translations of Buddhist scriptures, *feiwo* is frequently used to indicate the idea of no-self, both as a noun phrase directly translating *anātman* (see, e.g., *Arthavargīya sūtra* 義足經, trans. Zhi Qian 支謙 [223–253 CE], *T* 198: 4.185c; and *Pañcaviṃśati sāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra* 放光般若波羅蜜經, trans. Mokṣala [292 CE], *T* no. 221, 8:13a), and as a verb phrase stating that a person cannot be identical to any phenomenon (see, e.g., *Bhadrapāla bodhisattva sūtra* 拔陂菩薩經 [c. 220], *T* 419: 13.920c: “all dharmas are not myself”—一切法非我).

<sup>44</sup> See *Zhuangzi jishi* 11.390; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 99: “The ten thousand things teem, yet each returns to its roots” 萬物云云，各復其根。

	達人懷德	The accomplished person harbors virtue; <sup>45</sup>
16	知安必危	He knows that safety necessitates danger, <sup>46</sup>
	寂寥清舉	Is still and quiet in pure transcendence,
	濯累禪池	Washes away troubles in the pool of meditation, <sup>47</sup>
	謹守明禁	Adheres closely to wise restrictions,
20	雅翫玄規	And elegantly practices the arcane guidelines.
	緩心神道	He settles his mind on the spirit path,
	抗志無爲	And elevates his will towards non-action.
	寥朗三蔽	He clears up the three occlusions, <sup>48</sup>
24	融洽六疵	Melts away the six illnesses, <sup>49</sup>
	空同五陰	Regards the five <i>skandhas</i> as ignorance, <sup>50</sup>
	虛豁四肢	And the four limbs as an empty void.
	非指喻指	A non-finger explains a finger— <sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Accomplished person: in *Zhuangzi*, “Discourse on Seeing Things as Equal,” this refers to one capable of understanding the unities behind seemingly contradictory things: “To split some thing up is to create something else; to create something is to destroy something else. But for things in general, there is neither creation nor destruction, for they all revert to being a unity. Only the accomplished one understands them as being a unity” 其分也，成也；其成也，毀也。凡物无成與毀，復通爲一；唯達者知通爲一。 *Zhuangzi jishi* 2.70; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 16 (modified).

<sup>46</sup> *Zhuangzi*: “Safety and danger alternate with each other, misfortune and fortune give birth to each other, indolence and urgency rub against each other, so that gathering and dispersal were thereby completed” 安危相易，禍福相生，緩急相摩，聚散以成。 *Zhuangzi jishi* 25.914; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 264–65 (modified).

<sup>47</sup> Pool of meditation: Buddhist metaphor for the mind’s store of mental concentration. The later *Sūtra of the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Present Bhadrakalpa* 現在賢劫千佛名經 (translated during the Liang 梁 dynasty, 502–557) notes that, if one “proceeds to let the pool of meditation dry up, one will not be able to draw forth the lotus of wisdom” 遂使禪池枯竭。摩引智慧之蓮 (T 447: 14.383a).

<sup>48</sup> Three occlusions: following Zhang Fuchun, I take these to mean types of unclarity that arise from the three poisons (Skt. *tridoṣa*; Ch. *sandu* 三毒) of desire (*tan* 貪), anger (*chen* 瞋), and folly (*chi* 癡). Zhi Dun may be using the term “occlusion” here to mark a continuity with the classicist tradition, as Confucius outlines six occlusions of a different variety in *Analects* XVII.8.

<sup>49</sup> Six illnesses: following Zhang Fuchun, I take these to mean illnesses resulting from the six defilements: falsehood (*kuang* 誑), flattery (*chan* 諂), arrogance (*jiao* 驕), vexation (*fan* 惱), hatred (*ben* 恨), and malice (*bai* 害).

<sup>50</sup> I understand *kongtong* 空同 to be an alternate writing of *kongtong* 空洞 (“ignorant, stupid”), which is used here as a putative verb. Five *skandhas*: The five “aggregations” which arrange to constitute objects in the world of experience, also written as *wuyun* 五蘊: form (*se* 色), feeling (*shou* 受), perception (*xiang* 想), volition (*xing* 行), and consciousness (*shi* 識).

<sup>51</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 2.66; cf. Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 16:

以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也；以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。天地一指也，萬物一馬也。

Using a finger to explain that a finger is not a finger is not as good as using a non-finger to explain that a finger is not a finger, and using a horse to explain that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to explain that a horse is not a horse. Heaven and earth are a finger, and the ten thousand things are a horse.

- 28 絕而莫離 This is surpassing but not fully separate [from his message].<sup>52</sup>  
 妙覺既陳 Once marvelous awakening has been expounded,<sup>53</sup>  
 又玄其知 He makes his knowledge more wondrous.  
 宛轉乎任 He twists and turns within his lot  
 32 與物推移 And moves with phenomena.  
 過此以往 Beyond this,  
 勿議勿思 Do not opine and do not think.  
 敦之覺父 Approach the father of awakening with sincerity<sup>54</sup>  
 36 志在嬰兒 With your will set upon the child.<sup>55</sup>

Zhi Dun opens with a direct admonition which, combined with the inscription's didactic context, places the text firmly on the "other" end of the self-other spectrum of poetic address. This injunction grabs the reader's attention and directs it to the poem's main theme, stated in line 2: "The ultimate Way is not far off." The Buddhist practitioner should take heart because *nirvāṇa* is immanent: true reality is not to be found in some distant heaven, but at hand in this world. The remainder of the poem strings together *Zhuangzi* allusions and Buddhist terminology to elaborate on this point. The first part of the poem (lines 3–12) describes the piteous state of humans stuck in the mire of *samsāra*: stagnant, estranged, afflicted, wearied, and short. By contrast, the vast Way—reality in its fullness, in which emptiness is identical with form—is full of divine wonder.

In the second part of the poem, Zhi Dun dissolves the "self" end of the self-other spectrum. He does this by considering *Zhuangzi's* remark that "I have lost myself" 吾喪我, rephrased to question the very idea of its coherence: "My person is non-self" (line 13). In this way, it develops a *Zhuangzian* notion into Buddhist one, namely the doctrine of "no-self" (*anātman*, translated into Chinese as both *wuwo* 無我 and *feiwo* 非我). The self that suffers in this world is ultimately empty. Like the teeming mass of all things, it is a temporary configuration of thoughts and sensations that changes moment by moment. There is no self (and, for that matter, no other) to address.

This leads him to shift to a new mode of address, from direct to indirect. Instead of telling the reader what to do, he provides an exemplary figure worthy of imitation, the "accomplished person" (*daren* 達人) who is capable of seeing the fundamental unity behind disparate things. The second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* describes in detail how seemingly contradictory things are in fact interrelated, and "only the accomplished one understands them to be a unity,"<sup>56</sup> a unity of

<sup>52</sup> That is, *Zhuangzi's* doctrine is a surpassing one compared to everyday, rational discourse, but it is not superior to (nor fully disconnected from) the Buddhist dharma.

<sup>53</sup> Marvelous awakening: The final stage of enlightenment, the level attained by the Buddha himself. I take this to mean the process of achieving *nirvāṇa*, but it could also refer to the Marvelously Awakened One himself, the Buddha, in which case we would have an abrupt change of subject: "Once the Marvelously Awakened One has expounded this ..."

<sup>54</sup> The father of awakening: the Buddha.

<sup>55</sup> The child: in the *Laozi* 老子 and self-cultivation traditions inspired by it, "the child" is used as a metaphor for the state of perfect innocence to which one attempts to return.

<sup>56</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 2.70.

conditions that respects the ontological individuality of each thing.<sup>57</sup> Zhi Dun uses descriptions of this accomplished person to articulate his ideals (lines 15–32), using an indirect rather than direct mode of address.

Zhi Dun's accomplished person has a calm mind, meditates, obeys wise rules, and acts without acting. He sees the underlying unity of ultimate and mundane realities while still understanding the uniqueness of any given phenomenon. In a rapid series of technical terms (lines 23–26), Zhi Dun shows how the accomplished person understands and transcends the fundamental reality of various numbered lists of the conditions of worldly existence—the “three occlusions,” “six illnesses,” “five *skandhas*,” and “four limbs.” It would be easy to see these mires as things to be left behind, but the truth is more complicated than that. Zhi Dun explains with another allusion to the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, of a “non-finger explaining a finger” (line 27). In that passage, as understood by the leading *xuanxue* philosopher Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), this refers to the erroneous use of one thing to understand another. Instead of taking some permanent standard, one must understand things in their dynamic relations to each other, and only then one can discover their ultimate unity:

今是非無主，紛然淆亂，明此區區者各信其偏見而同於一致耳。仰觀俯察，莫不皆然。是以至人知天地一指也，萬物一馬也，故浩然大寧，而天地萬物各當其分，同於自得，而無是無非也。

In reality there is no standard of right and wrong; they are mixed together. When you understand this, even though each one believes only in his own narrow viewpoint, you see the consistency between them, their sameness. For it is the same wherever one looks, above and below. Thus, the Consummate Person knows that heaven and earth are one finger, and all things one horse. He finds everywhere only a vast overflowing tranquility, where every creature exactly occupies its own allotment, all the same in their self-attainment, free of right and wrong.<sup>58</sup>

The Consummate Person (*zhiren* 至人), a term synonymous with Zhi Dun's “accomplished person” (*daren*), is the one who grasps the underlying, chaotic sameness that unites all beings, different as they are in their particular allotments (*fen* 分). An “overflowing tranquility” grounds all alike. To Zhi Dun, this would have mapped neatly on to the fundamental unity of ultimate and mundane reality as expounded in Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine as understood in the fourth century.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> As Wang Bi notes in his commentary to chapter 39 of *Laozi*, “One is the first of numbers and the ultimate of things ... One is what enables things to attain completion” 數之始而物之極也 ... 物各得此一以成. Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, ed., *Wang Bi ji jiaozhu* 王弼集校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980); translation adapted from Jana S. Rošker, “The Metaphysical Style and Structural Coherence of Names in *Xuanxue*,” in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue (Neo-Daoism)*, ed. David Chai (Cham: Springer, 2020), 47.

<sup>58</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 2.69; translation adapted from Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 147.

<sup>59</sup> On Zhi Dun's identification of matter and emptiness, and how these relate to the key *xuanxue* concepts of the self-so (*ziran* 自然), mystery (*xuan* 玄), and more, see Ellen Y. Zhang, “Zhi Dun on Freedom: Synthesizing Daoism and Buddhism,” in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue*, 506–10.



The accomplished person does not conclude here, with this explanation of Buddhist doctrine. Once his reader has grasped this truth, he goes even deeper, “makes his knowledge more obscure” (line 30), shifting with external circumstances, changing his message to meet his audience. With this, we reach the outer limit of what Zhi Dun’s audience is capable of comprehending, and he switches back to direct, future-oriented address, advising us to think no further (lines 33–34). It is best, instead, to reverently approach the Buddha, the father of awakening, and set one’s mind on becoming as pure and genuine as a child (lines 35–36).

Zhi Dun’s shifts between different modes of poetic address mark important shifts in his message. Through framed by direct, future-oriented admonitions, it is Zhi Dun’s indirect instructions via the Zhuangzian figure of the accomplished person that drive home his main points. One reason for Zhi Dun’s innovative use of the indirect mode is likely his relationship to his source texts. Cui Yuan and Bian Lan were literati officials, with what we must assume to be standard knowledge of the classical literary tradition. They combine sayings by authoritative figures, especially Confucius and Laozi, to create a coherent set of principles for readers to follow. Zhi Dun, by contrast, draws mainly from a single chapter in the *Zhuangzi*, namely, “Discourse on Seeing Things as Equal” (Qiwu lun 齊物論). Zhi Dun combines the *xuanxue*-inflected Zhuangzian ideal presented there with the doctrines and terminology of Mahāyāna Buddhism in a virtuosic synthesis. This attests to Zhi Dun’s skill as a Buddhist preacher, which reportedly drew in crowds of hundreds of people.<sup>60</sup> Zhi Dun is expounding on a text (*Zhuangzi*, chapter 2) to convey the Buddhist dharma that is hidden in it. He is doing hermeneutics. We can understand Zhi Dun’s right-hand inscription, then, as a religious admonition adapted to an existing literary subgenre.

## BAI JUYI

Right-hand inscriptions continued to be produced into the Tang dynasty. Some were written in response to imperial compositions, others carry on the sorts of things achieved in the early medieval period, and at least one merges with yet another literary genre (the Buddhist *gāthā*) to create a new hybrid.<sup>61</sup> For the sake of understanding the dynamics of poetic address, however, the most interesting examples come from the latter half of the dynasty, written by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and Guanxiu 貫休 (832–913). Both of these poets show stark awareness of their place in the ongoing development of the right-hand inscription subgenre, as both state in their titles that they are “continuing” (*xu* 續) the works of predecessors and situate their work along the past-present-future spectrum in explanatory prefaces.

<sup>60</sup> This is described in his hagiography found in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, in T 2059: 50.348c).

<sup>61</sup> On these other right-hand inscriptions, see Zhang Yue, “Respectfully Matching Compositions Made at Imperial Decree Bestowed upon the Various Commanderies’ Inciting Notaries, I Write a ‘Right-hand [Inscription]’” 奉和聖制賜諸州刺史應制以題座右 (QTS 86.924); Chen Zi’ang, “Right-Hand Inscription” 座右銘 (*Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, comp. Dong Hao 董誥 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983], 214.2167–68; *Quan Tangshi bubian* 全唐詩補編, comp. Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992], 332); and Jiaoran, “Right-hand *Gāthā*” 座右偈 (QTW 917.9557).

Bai Juyi, perhaps the most prolific and self-conscious poet of the Tang, uses his preface to claim direct continuity with Cui Yuan, leaping over the entire subtradition in the process. He imitates many aspects of Cui's piece as found in the *Wenxuan*: he presents his text as being physically inscribed, he declares that the admonitions are directed primarily at himself, and he uses the same metrical form (pentameter) as Cui. Bai Juyi's inscription is an ironic mix of humility and audacity. He is unable to act according to Cui's sage advice; nevertheless, he recognizes that Cui's work is not exhaustive, and then claims to have just the words to add to it. Cui tried to practice what he preached; Bai preaches what he cannot practice. While Bai Juyi avoids the indirect mode of address that Zhi Dun used, he complicates the temporal and self-other spectrums in new ways.

Continuing a Right-hand Inscription 續座右銘<sup>62</sup>

Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846)

序：崔子玉《座右銘》，余竊慕之，雖未能盡行，常書屋壁。然其間似有未盡者，因續為座右銘云。

Preface:

Cui Yuan's "Right-hand Inscription"—how I admire it! While I haven't yet been able to fully put it into practice, I once wrote it on my wall. However, there are parts in it that seem not to be exhaustive, and so I wrote a continuation to the "Right-hand Inscription."

勿慕貴與富	Admire not honor and wealth,
勿憂賤與貧	Worry not over baseness and poverty. <sup>63</sup>
自問道何如	Ask yourself what the Way is like,
4 貴賤安足云	Are honor and wealth even worth mentioning?
聞毀勿戚戚	Don't fret in hearing calumny.

<sup>62</sup> Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 39.2625–26; QTW 677.6919.

<sup>63</sup> There are many classical precedents for this statement. See, for example, *Analects* IV.5: "Honor and wealth are what people want, but if this can't be done in proper way, one should not hold on to them. Baseness and poverty are what people despise, but if this can't be done in a proper way, one should not avoid them" 富與貴是人之所欲也，不以其道得之，不處也；貧與賤是人之所惡也，不以其道得之，不去也 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 15); the *Annals of Mr. Lü* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋): "If one is honored and wealthy but does not know the Way, this is tantamount to creating calamity. It would be better to be poor and base, for it is difficult to acquire material things when one is poor and base" 貴富而不知道，適足以為患，不如貧賤。貧賤之致物也難 (Lü Buwei, *Lüshi chunqiu xinjiaoshi*, 1.22; trans. adapted from Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 66); and *Zhuangzi*: "A person who is able to respect life, though he be honored and wealthy, would not injure his person on account of what nourishes him, and though he be poor and lowly, would not burden his physical being on account of what profits him" 能尊生者，雖貴富不以養傷身，雖貧賤不以利累形 (*Zhuangzi jishi* 28.967; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 286).

- 聞譽勿欣欣 And don't delight in hearing praise.<sup>64</sup>  
 自顧行何如 Look to yourself to see how you've acted,  
 8 毀譽安足論 How much talk of calumny and praise is enough.  
 無以意傲物 Never purposefully be proud of things,  
 以遠辱於人 That you may be far from the slander of others.  
 無以色求事 Never seek things in their outward forms,<sup>65</sup>  
 12 以自重其身 That you may respect your person.  
 遊與邪分歧 Travel a path removed from wickedness,  
 居與正為鄰 And dwell in the region of the proper:  
 於中有取舍 At its center, there is the taking and leaving of things,<sup>66</sup>  
 16 此外無疏親 Outside of it, there is no estrangement or intimacy.  
 修外以及內 Shape the outside to reach the inside,  
 靜養和與真 And silently cultivate harmony and truth.  
 養內不遺外 Cultivate the inside, and don't neglect the outside:  
 20 動率義與仁 In action, follow duty and humaneness.  
 千里始足下 A thousand-mile journey starts beneath your foot,  
 高山起微塵 A tall mountain begins as a mote of dust.<sup>67</sup>  
 吾道亦如此 My Way is like this:  
 24 行之貴日新 Practice it, honor and renew it daily.  
 不敢規他人 I dare not make it a rule for others,  
 聊自書諸紳 It's only for myself I write these restrictions—  
 終身且自勸 A self-exhortation for my whole life,  
 28 身歿貽後昆 And when I die, it is to be given to my descendants.  
 後昆苟反是 Should my descendants oppose these,  
 30 非我之子孫 They aren't any offspring of mine.

Bai Juyi repeats many of the ideas from Cui Yuan's poem—the importance of humility (lines 4, 9), the lack of concern for others' wagging tongues (lines 5–6), the maintenance for personal purity (lines 12–14, 17), and the quotations from the *Laozi* (lines 21–22). At the same time, he follows Bian Lan in recognizing the danger of the material world (lines 1, 9) and the importance of appearances (lines 10, 15). Bai Juyi stresses the interdependence of inner virtue and outer

<sup>64</sup> See *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要 (comp. 631), summarizing a section of *Yinwenzi* 尹文子: “Worldly people delight when hearing praise and fret when hearing calumny. This is the normal situation of the mass of men” 世俗之人，聞譽則悅，聞毀則戚，此眾人之大情 (*Yinwenzi* 9; *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要 [Sibu congkan ed.], 37.19a).

<sup>65</sup> *Diamond Sūtra*: “If one seeks me in outward form, or seeks me in sound, such a person practices the wrong way, and will not be able to see the Tathāgata” 若以色見我，以音聲求我，是人行邪道，不能見如來 (*Jin'gang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, trans. Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 in 403 CE, T 235: 8.752a).

<sup>66</sup> “The taking and leaving of things” (*shequ* 取舍) was a common term for “good conduct.” I translate it literally to highlight the parallelism with the next line.

<sup>67</sup> *Laozi* 64: “A nine-story terrace begins with layers of dust, and a journey of a thousand miles starts beneath your foot” 九層之臺，起於累土；千里之行，始於足下。

conduct. One must “shape the outside to reach the inside” (line 17). It is important to do good because action shapes thought, which will in turn shape action. In this way, he supplements Cui Yuan’s original advice, which stressed personal purity in a dirty world. This is not enough, says Bai: inner virtue is impossible without proper external conduct. In doing so, Bai makes good on his preface’s claim that he goes beyond Cui’s non-exhaustive poem. The orientation to the past in Bai Juyi’s inscription is different from Cui Yuan’s, Bian Lan’s, and Zhi Dun’s. The past is not just a source of wisdom, but a conversation partner, a literary model that may be superseded. Bai’s inscription is the first that is truly *addressed* to the past.

This comes to the fore in the conclusion of Bai Juyi’s poem (lines 23–30). Bai emphasizes that what he offers is “My Way” (*wudao* 吾道), written for himself personally (lines 23–26), not binding to others, echoing the language of the preface. But he immediately undermines this with his concluding admonition. His descendants must follow these verses, or they are not to be considered his true descendants (lines 27–30). He binds his offspring just a few lines after humbly proclaiming that he would never dare bind others with his own wisdom. This also throws the temporal spectrum of address into confusion, as he shifts the audience of his verses from the past and present to the future by invoking descendants and using the conditional mood.

If we turn back to Bai Juyi’s preface at this point, the irony compounds. He has already stated that he finds himself incapable of following Cui Yuan’s advice, and yet he claims to inherit Cui’s mantle of moral authority in writing a continuation of his poem. But if those who cannot practice the wisdom of a right-hand inscription should not be considered the true descendants of its author, Bai should not be a literary descendant of Cui, and therefore he has no authority to write a continuation of his predecessor’s poem. Bai Juyi’s own restrictions (which he claims are not restrictions) reflect back on him and restrict himself. His own inscription is both a fulfillment of and a spurious sequel to Cui Yuan’s.

## GUANXIU

Guanxiu, a Buddhist poet-monk who lived through the collapse of the Tang dynasty, wrote an extraordinary right-hand inscription that takes the ironic dynamics of address in Bai Juyi’s version and complicates them further. As I have introduced Guanxiu in a previous issue of *Tang Studies*, I will not do so again here.<sup>68</sup> Suffice it to say that he was a man of contradictions who, like Bai Juyi, often presented himself as one keenly aware of his place in the long arc of literary history. Guanxiu’s inscription is preceded by a preface that posits even more layers of continuation.

Continuing Yao, Duke of Liang’s “Right-hand Inscription” 續姚梁公座右銘  
Guanxiu

序：愚嘗覽白太保所作《續崔子玉座右銘》一首，其詞旨迺典迺文，再懇再切，實可警策未悟，貽厥將來。次又見姚崇、卞蘭、張說、李邕，皆有

<sup>68</sup> See my “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems’: A Translation,” *Tang Studies* 34.1 (2016): 99–109.

斯文，尤為奧妙，其於東勗婉婉，乃千古之鑒，戒資映矣。愚竊愛其文，惟恨世人不能行之，十得其一二。一日因抽毫，遂作續白氏之《續》，命曰《續姚梁公座右銘》一首，雖文經理緯非逮於群公，而亦可書於屋壁。

Preface:

I once looked over Grand Guardian Bai Juyi's (772–846) "Continuing Cui Yuan's (77–142 CE) 'Right-hand Inscription'." The meaning of its phrases was both classic and refined, sincere and touching: indeed, it could whip awake the unenlightened and should be passed down to those who are to come. Then, I also saw that Yao Chong, Bian Lan (ca. 230), Zhang Yue (667–731), and Li Yong (ca. 687–747) had all produced such writings. They are particularly profound and marvelous: they are delicate and tactful in their message of self-restraint and exhortation, mirrors of a thousand generations that are rich in material. I love these works, and only regret that the people of this era aren't capable of putting them into practice, achieving only one or two things in ten. One day, I took out my writing brush and wrote a continuation of Bai Juyi's "Continuation," calling it "Continuing Yao, Duke of Liang's 'Right-hand Inscription'." While the warp of its writing and the weft of its structure don't quite reach that of these men, it could be written on the wall of someone's room.<sup>69</sup>

Like Bai Juyi, Guanxiu addresses his inscription to the past. But Guanxiu's preface and title claim different lines of continuity. The preface makes it very clear that his source of inspiration was Bai Juyi's continuation of Cui Yuan's classic piece. The title, on the other hand, invokes Yao Chong, a man better known for his exemplary governance than his literary ability.<sup>70</sup> As an ethical and political authority, Yao Chong was an excellent figure to associate with a series of moral maxims. Unfortunately, Yao Chong's own *zuoyouming* is nowhere to be found in the textual record, so we have no way of knowing to what extent Guanxiu's adhered to or departed from it.

Also like Bai Juyi, Guanxiu praises his predecessors while adopting a posture of humility. He lists off six previous right-hand inscriptions, singling out Bai Juyi's as most exemplary, then tells the reader that his own version does not measure up. But in fact, Guanxiu is trying to outdo Bai Juyi in each of these aspects. Whereas Bai praises Cui Yuan's "Inscription" with only one clause ("How I admire it!"), Guanxiu goes on for four clauses of high diction in parallel four-character phrases to praise Bai Juyi. The other inscriptions are lauded in similarly refined language. Guanxiu values his predecessors' works for their ability to instill in their readers the values of civilization, the accumulated wisdom of the past. The only problem is that the present age is not up to the task of putting these ideals into practice.

Guanxiu then ratchets up the humility: Bai Juyi claimed that he could not put his own maxims into practice, but that he did write them on his wall as a daily

<sup>69</sup> Hu Dajun 4.228.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Guanxiu mentions him in a list of exemplary ministers in his "Song of Bright Spring" (Yangchun qu 陽春曲), which laments the destruction of the empire at the hands of Huang Chao's band of rebels (Hu Dajun 1.9).

remainder to himself. Guanxiu does not even claim to have written his “Inscription” on his own wall, only that “it *could* (*ke* 可) be written on the wall of someone’s room.” Thinking along the self-other spectrum of address, we should note that Guanxiu completely removes the “self” end of the spectrum. The inscription is entirely geared toward others, the “people of this age” or “worldly people” (*shiren* 世人) who cannot put Bai Juyi’s verses into practice. Though he adopts a tone of humility in his preface, Guanxiu does not include himself in his admonitions’ intended audience.

Moreover, whereas Bai Juyi explicitly tells us that he feels that earlier versions of the “Inscription” are “not exhaustive” (*weijin* 未盡), Guanxiu makes no such boldly direct claim, and in fact bends over backwards to tell us that his version is inferior. Specifically, he tells us that “the warp of its writing (*wen*) and the weft of its structure (*li*) doesn’t quite reach” that of his predecessors. This leads us to ask: if we take Guanxiu’s claims at face value, why would he write a shoddy version of maxims that no one can put into practice? Would this not be an exercise in futility?

The answer, of course, is to not take his claims at face value. Guanxiu intends to surpass Bai Juyi, to beat him at his own game. Or, to put it less agonistically, Guanxiu is staging himself as the inheritor of Bai Juyi and the entire subgenre of right-hand inscriptions, building on what has come before. Although the poet-monk does not say it outright, the very act of writing a continuation implies that previous versions are not exhaustive. Moreover, Guanxiu uses a variety of literary and rhetorical techniques to show that his wisdom is more comprehensive than Bai Juyi’s, Cui Yuan’s, or anyone else’s. The first section of the poem lays out the stakes.<sup>71</sup>

	善為爾諸身	Goodness is your very body,	<i>syin</i>	-
	行為爾性命	And conduct your whole life.	<i>maengH</i>	A
	禍福必可轉	Fortune and misfortune can be exchanged,	<i>trwjenX</i>	-
4	莫愆言前定	Don’t solemnly speak of them as predetermined.	<i>dengH</i>	A
	見人之得	If you look upon others’ gains	<i>tok</i>	B
	如己之得	As your own gains.	<i>tok</i>	B
	則	Then	<i>-tsok-</i>	-B-
	美無不克	None can top your praiseworthiness.	<i>kbok</i>	B
8	見人之失	Look upon others’ losses	<i>syit</i>	C
	如己之失	As your own losses,	<i>syit</i>	C
	是亨貞吉	And you’ll be stable, loyal, and fortunate.	<i>kjit</i>	C
	反此之徒	Those who oppose this	<i>du</i>	D
12	天鬼必誅	Heaven and ghosts shall put to death.	<i>trju</i>	D
	福先禍始	To prioritize good fortune, to initiate disaster, <sup>72</sup>	<i>syiX</i>	E

<sup>71</sup> I have listed the rhymes in reconstructed Middle Chinese to highlight some of the formal aspects of Guanxiu’s poem, noted below. Middle Chinese reconstructions come from Paul Kroll et al., *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 15: “[The sage] does not act to prioritize good fortune, nor to initiate disaster. He responds when affected, moves when pressed, and arises only when he has no other

	好殺滅紀	To delight in killing, to extinguish proper order—	<i>kiX</i>	E
	不得不止	It is imperative to cease these.	<i>tsyiX</i>	E
16	守謙寡欲	Preserve humility, make desires few,	<i>yowk</i>	F
	善善惡惡	Take good to be good and evil, evil: <sup>73</sup>	<i>?ak</i>	F
	不得不作	It is imperative to do this.	<i>tsak</i>	F

Guanxiu's much longer right-hand inscription marks a significant departure from his predecessors' in several ways. First, there is its sheer length: Bai Juyi's version was 30 lines long, Zhi Dun's 36, Bian Lan's 26, and Cui Yuan's 20. Guanxiu's poem, at 68 lines, nearly doubles his most lengthy predecessor. This is a statement in itself. He implies that his version is more comprehensive than the others. Secondly, Guanxiu does not stick to one rhyme or meter throughout. Instead, he opts to switch rhymes and meters every 2–4 lines, rhyming immediately (AABB rather than -A-A), then just as quickly casting aside that rhyme and meter. This gestures toward the goal of capaciousness. Guanxiu's allusions imply that the sources of wisdom are varied: he refers not just to classics like the *Analects*, *Xunzi*, *Hanshi waizhuan*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Liezi*, but statements found in poems, letters, biographies, and other genres. The proliferation of rhymes underscores this variation in where good advice for how to live may be found. Guanxiu's verse, like his predecessors', is rooted in the past, but these roots appear to have spread more widely than others'.

Just as in the preface, the main text of Guanxiu's inscription is addressed to others. The first couplet uses the second-person pronoun *er* 爾 twice, making it clear that the imperatives are directed outward. The “you” here is a general human rather than one who specifically has encountered Guanxiu's text. For all humans, how they act constitutes their very body, so virtue is of singular importance. This statement is particularly powerful because it is rooted in the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* (the “no-self” that Zhi Dun also emphasized): if there is no fixed, permanent self in which one's being is grounded, then one's actions truly are the only thing that lend coherence to “you” as an entity. Therefore, conduct is

choice” 不為福先，不為禍始；感而後應，迫而後動，不得已而後起 (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 15.539; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 145). Note that this same *Zhuangzi* quotation was alluded to in Bian Lan's poem.

<sup>73</sup> *Xunzi*:

To honor the worthy and employ the able, to reward achievements and punish faults are not the views of a single individual. Such was the Way of the Ancient Kings, and such is the foundation of the unity of humanity. It is the natural response to taking good to be good and evil, evil.

夫尚賢使能，賞有功，罰有罪，非獨一人為之也，彼先王之道也，一人之本也，善善惡惡之應也。

See *Xunzi jijie*, 16.295; trans. adapted from Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2:241. This wisdom was not universally accepted. A story in the *Xinxu* 新序 (Western Han) tells how the Guo 郭 family came to ruin precisely because they followed this advice. As an unnamed local man explained, “If you take good to be good, it is impossible to practice [goodness]. If you take evil to be evil, it is impossible to get rid of [evil]. This is why [their home] turned into ruins” 善善而不能行，惡惡而不能去，是以為墟也 (Liu Xiang 劉向, *Xinxu jiaoshi* 新序校釋, annot. Shi Guangying 石光瑛 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001], 4.591–94).

about more than reputation. It is about one's very being (itself an admittedly illusory phenomenon).

The main message of the inscription is to demonstrate compassion, treating others' gains and losses as your own (lines 5–10). While this “golden rule” style of empathy can be found in many corners of the classical Chinese tradition, Guanxiu couches it in future-oriented addresses. He denies that the future is predetermined (lines 3–4). One's actions have consequences that will lead one away from fortune or misfortune. Therefore, heeding his advice is a matter of life and death. For this reason, Guanxiu puts his stern warnings at the beginning of the poem, following specific verses. Twice we are told that his commands “cannot not” be done (*bukebu* 不可不, translated idiomatically as “imperative” in lines 15 and 18). Elsewhere, the warning is more shocking: punishment from supramundane forces await those who ignore the wisdom laid out in his poem (lines 11–12). Underlying this warning is the Buddhist idea of karmic consequence, that evil will be repaid with evil in this life or the next. Thus, despite the modesty of Guanxiu's preface, his warning to the reader presumes to take on the authority of the Buddhist tradition. He is not just writing down his own personal views, but describing some of the moral laws that govern the universe.

Guanxiu continues by describing how these laws apply to one's own life in specific situations, and then takes a step back to consider the larger picture.

	無見貴熱	Don't look upon the rich and powerful,	<i>nyet</i>	G
20	諂走蹙蹙	Obsequiously rushing about on your tiptoes. <sup>74</sup>	<i>sat</i>	G
	無輕賤微	Don't belittle the base and lowly:	<i>mj+j</i>	H
	上下相依	Those above and below depend on each other.	<i>?j+j</i>	H
	古聖著書	In their writings, the ancients	<i>syo</i>	-
24	矻矻孳孳	Were pertinacious and persistent:	<i>tsyi</i>	H
	忠孝信行	The faithful practice of loyalty and filial piety	<i>haengH</i>	-
	越食逾衣	Surpasses food, exceeds clothing.	<i>?j+j</i>	H
	生天地間	In our life between heaven and earth,	<i>kean</i>	-
28	未或非假	There is nothing that isn't contingency. <sup>75</sup>	<i>kaeX</i>	I
	身危彩虹	The body's more perilous than a rainbow,	<i>kaewngH</i>	-
	景速奔馬	A shadow quicker than a galloping horse. <sup>76</sup>	<i>maeX</i>	I

<sup>74</sup> *Zhuangzi*: “And when the sages came, fawning about in practicing humaneness, and tiptoeing in practicing righteousness, the whole world first became suspicious” 及至聖人，蹙蹙為仁，跼跼為義，而天下始疑矣 (*Zhuangzi jishi* 9.336; cf. Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 81–82).

<sup>75</sup> That is, one must recognize that the permanence of life is an illusion. See *Zhuangzi*: “What is not yet born cannot be forbidden, what is already dead cannot be prevented. Death and birth are not distant. Its their principle that cannot be seen. That someone caused them, or that no one enacted them, is a contingency of speculation” 未生不可忌，已死不可阻。死生非遠也，理不可睹。或之使，莫之為，疑之所假。 (*Zhuangzi jishi* 25.921; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 266 (modified)).

<sup>76</sup> The rainbow, the shadow, and the galloping horse are all metaphors for the brevity of life. The metaphor of the galloping horse, usually a white colt seen through a gap in a wall, was particularly well known. The *Zhuangzi*, for example, tell us:



胡不自強	Why wouldn't you steel yourself	<i>gjang</i>	J
32 將昇玉堂	To prepare to ascend to the Jade Hall? <sup>77</sup>	<i>dang</i>	J

Guanxiu's theme of compassion is now extended across class boundaries: the powerful should not be pandered to, and the lowly should not be looked down on, for each depends on the other (lines 19–22). Buddhist interdependence applies to all phenomena, including social classes. The same respect should be extended to the past: the ancients' writings about loyalty and filial piety are not merely supplemental knowledge, but a necessity in order to have a life that supersedes the basic needs of food and clothing (lines 23–26). Instead of using old writings to show off one's learning, one should cherish them as an integral part of life itself. In this way, compassion may be extended across time.

Guanxiu interrupts the moral admonitions again, this time with an extended reflection on life and death (lines 27–32). He draws on three well-known metaphors for the brevity of human life: the rainbow, the shadow, and the galloping horse. In the extant literature, his is the first right-hand inscription to include a reflection on death since Cui Yuan's. The point, in both cases, is to put proper conduct in perspective. One must seize the day and do good deeds before regret takes over. From a Buddhist perspective, this is even more urgent. Human rebirth is a rare opportunity to improve one's place in the universe and even achieve liberation from *samsāra*. One should use it to prepare to ascend to the Jade Hall, the dwelling place of the gods.

In light of the brevity of life, there is no point indulging in sensuality, selfishness, and all manner of frivolous activities, as Guanxiu enumerates in the poem's next section.

胡為自墜	Why would you lower yourself	<i>drwih</i>	K
言虛行偽	By speaking empty and acting falsely?	<i>ngiwe</i>	K
豔殃爾壽須戒	Lavishness will ruin your life: it should be controlled,	<i>keaj</i>	K
36 酒腐爾腸須畏	Alcohol will rot your guts: it should be feared.	<i>?wj+j</i>	K

Man's life between heaven and earth is like a white colt passing a crack in the wall—suddenly it's finished. Rapidly surging, all things come forth; smoothly subsiding, all things reenter. Having evolved they are born, then they evolve again and are dead. Living things are sorrowed by it; mankind is saddened by it.

人生天地之間，若白駒之過郤，忽然而已。注然勃然，莫不出焉；油然漻然，莫不入焉。已化而生，又化而死，生物哀之，人類悲之。

See *Zhuangzi jishi* 22.755; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 216–7. For more on these allusions, as well as comparisons with other traditions' metaphors for the brevity of life, see Paul Kroll, "Between Something and Nothing (Presidential Address)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127.4 (2007): 405–6.

<sup>77</sup> Jade Hall: here, the dwelling place of transcendents. See Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305), "Fu on the Wu Capital" 吳都賦, lines 151–54: "Within their storied peaks and layered fastness / Is the realm of the transcendents. / Their jade halls face eave to eave; / Their stone chambers are closely joined" 增岡重阻，列真之宇，玉堂對霤，石室相距。See *Wenxuan* 5.208; translation adapted from David R. Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or, Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1:383.

	勵志須至	A will of determination shall reach [its goals]	<i>tsyijH</i>	K
	撲滿必破	Smash-full jars are always destroyed. <sup>78</sup>	<i>phaH</i>	L
	非莫非於飾非	There's no wrong wronger than adorning wrongs,	<i>pj+j</i>	H
40	過莫過於文過	And no fault faultier than embroidering faults. <sup>79</sup>	<i>kwaH</i>	L
	及物陰功	By extending hidden merit to creatures	<i>kuwng</i>	M
	子孫必封	Your sons and grandsons will be enfeoffed.	<i>pjoung</i>	M
	無恃文學	Don't count on literary study—	<i>kaewk</i>	F
44	是司奇薄	Those who do so have unlucky fates. <sup>80</sup>	<i>bak</i>	F
	患隨不忍	Disaster comes with not forbearing, <sup>81</sup>	<i>nyinX</i>	-
	害逐無足	Destruction follows discontent.	<i>tsjowk</i>	F

These twenty lines covers a broad range of topics, but most notable are their warnings about the danger of literary life. The most direct statement of this is lines 43–44, in which the reader is advised against making a livelihood from literature. Many great poets, from Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 300 BCE) onward, met unfortunate fates. The kind of desires and ambitions stoked by literature can lead one to dissatisfaction, creating still greater risk for the would-be writer (lines 45–46). Ambition breeds discontent.

Poetry was also frequently composed at lavish social gatherings, where there would be plenty of alcohol and sumptuous fare. Guanxiu warns against both (lines 35–36). As a verbal art, poetry could be accused as being nothing but vain, empty speech (line 34), which the Buddhist precepts explicitly forbid.<sup>82</sup> Literary talent can also be used to immoral ends, making wickedness attractive. Such wrongs, adorned in fine rhetoric, are the worst kind (lines 39–40), a statement

<sup>78</sup> Smash-full jars: the early imperial Chinese equivalent of piggy banks, which are smashed to pieces when full so one can use the coins stored inside them. An early reference can be found in a letter supposedly written by Zou Changqing 鄒長倩 (second century BCE) to Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 preserved *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記, annot. Zhou Tianyou 周天游 (Xi'an: San Qin chubanshe, 2006), 5.215–16. *Xijing zaji*'s textual history is fraught, and it has been attributed variously to Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE), Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–363), Wu Jun 吳均 (469–520), Xiao Ben 蕭贛 (d. 549), and anonymous compilers. On the various theories regarding *Xijing zaji*'s authorship, see Knechtges and Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 3:1648–56.

<sup>79</sup> The sense here is that by “adorning” a wrong or “embroidering” a fault, one is trying to cover them up. The earliest reference to “embroidering faults and adorning wrongs” (*wenguo shifei* 文過飾非) is Zhong Hui's 鍾會 (225–264) “Biography of My Mother, Ms. Zhang” (Mufuren Zhangshi zhuan 母夫人張氏傳): “Ms. Sun debated a broad range of things with wisdom and skill—her words were enough to adorn wrongs and embroider faults, but in the end they were incapable of harm” 孫氏辨博有智巧，言足以飾非文過，然竟不能傷也 (Yan Kejun, *Quan Sanguo wen*, 25.2380).

<sup>80</sup> See the “Fu on a Widow” (Guafu fu 寡婦賦) by Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300): “How unlucky was the fate I met— / The unrelenting disaster heaven brought down!” 何遭命之奇薄兮，遭天禍之未悔 (*Wenxuan* 16.736); cf. Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, 3:183–92; and Nicholas Morrow Williams, “Pan Yue's ‘Study of a Widow’ and Its Predecessors,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132.3 (2012): 347–65.

<sup>81</sup> *Analects* XV.27: “The Master said, ‘Clever words ruin virtue, and not forbearing in little things ruins great plans.’” 子曰：巧言亂德，小不忍則亂大謀 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 77).

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., the fourth major precept of the *Brahma Net Sūtra* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經, T 1484: 24.1004c), which forbids “false speech” (*wangyan* 妄言).

Guanxiu emphasizes through his striking repetition of the words “wrong” (*fei* 非) and “fault” (*guo* 過).

Ironically, Guanxiu’s admonitions against the danger of literature display careful literary embellishment. The rhymes are dense. Five straight lines (33–37) rhyme without interruption. Other stanzas continue with an overabundance of rhymes. Three of the stanzas here are metrically audacious. In lines 33–36, 37–40, and 49–54, the meter switches between four and six characters while maintaining a strict rhyme. Allusions pile up, especially allusions to the moral guidelines of the *Analects*. Guanxiu is showing off his literary abilities as he warns against the dangers of cultivating those same abilities. We may suspect, again, that he is trying to outdo his predecessors.

Guanxiu settles the contradiction of literary rhetoric by advocating balance in the opening of the poem’s final stanza, translated below. “This” (*ci* 此) should be balanced by “that” (*bi* 彼). *Gong* 宮, the first note of the pentatonic scale, should be balanced by *zhi* 徵, the fourth note (lines 47–48). By seeking within himself, the ideal man establishes *jie* 節—idiomatically “virtue,” but more literally the quality of being well-measured or -regulated (line 50). He does not turn his back on the “utmost principle” of balance (line 62). But as we have seen from Guanxiu’s bombastic literary style, this is not the well-measuredness of temperance. Rather, it is the balancing of extremes. A strong warning against the literary life must be balanced with a formally complex literary style, and an attempt to surpass one’s literary predecessors must be balanced with sufficiently humble language.

After this, the final fourteen lines, introduced with a hypermetrical two-character phrase, shift the focus from self-cultivation to helping others in their development. At the same time, Guanxiu introduces a bevy of rhymes and allusions.

	一此一彼	One of this and one of that:	<i>pjeX</i>	O
48	諧宮合徵	Harmonize with <i>gong</i> and match <i>zhi</i> .	<i>triX</i>	O
	親仁下問	To be close to the humane, ask questions of inferiors, <sup>83</sup>	<i>mjunH</i>	-
	立節求己	To establish virtue, seek within yourself. <sup>84</sup>	<i>kiX</i>	O
	惡木之陰匪陰	A dead tree’s shade isn’t shade;	<i>?im</i>	-
52	盜泉之水匪水	Thief Spring’s water isn’t water. <sup>85</sup>	<i>sywijX</i>	O
	世孚草草	The world’s trust is flimsy,	<i>tsbawX</i>	-
	能生幾幾	Those who can survive are few.	<i>kjiX</i>	O

<sup>83</sup> *Analects* I.6: “Being close to the humane, [a disciple’s] concern for all should overflow” 汎愛眾而親仁 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 4), and V.15: “Zigong asked, ‘For what reason was Master Kong Wen called Wen?’ The Master said, ‘Diligent, he loved to study and was not ashamed to ask questions of his inferiors. It’s for this reason that he was called Wen’” 子貢問曰：孔文子何以謂之文也？子曰：敏而好學，不恥下問，是以謂之文也 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 21).

<sup>84</sup> *Analects* XV.21: “The Master said, ‘The gentleman seeks it within himself, the petty man seeks it from others’” 子曰：君子求諸己，小人求諸人 (cf. Leys, *Analects*, 77).

<sup>85</sup> See the opening lines of the “Ballad of a Fierce Tiger” (Menghu xing 猛虎行) by Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303): “Though thirsty, I won’t drink Thief Spring’s water / Though hot, I won’t rest in a dead tree’s shade” 渴不飲盜泉水，熱不息惡木陰 (*Wenxuan* 28.1293).

	直須 如冰如玉	You should just be Like ice, like jade— <sup>86</sup>	<i>ngjowk</i>	F
56	種桃種李 嫉人之惡 酬恩報義 忽己之慢	Plant peaches, plant plums. <sup>87</sup> Detest the wickedness in others, Repay acts of kindness and rightness. Tear down the indolence in yourself,	<i>liX</i> <i>ʔak</i> <i>ngjeH</i> <i>maenH</i>	O F O -
60	成人之美 毋擔虛譽 無背至理 恬和慙暢	And develop what is praiseworthy in others. Shoulder not an empty reputation, And don't turn your back on the utmost principle. <sup>88</sup> Be tranquil and peaceful, modest and easygoing,	<i>mijX</i> <i>yoH</i> <i>liX</i> <i>trhangH</i>	O - O -
64	沖融終始 天人之行 盡此而已 丁寧丁寧	And you'll be content from end to beginning. The actions of heaven and humans Are these and no more. I urge and urge you,	<i>syiX</i> <i>baeng</i> <i>yiX</i> <i>neng</i>	O P O P
68	戴髮含齒	All you with hair upon your head, and teeth filling your mouth. <sup>89</sup>	<i>tsyhiX</i>	O

Being upright, direct, pure, and full of foresight—those are the qualities one should aspire to (lines 55–56). To achieve those goals, especially the final one of looking to the future, one needs to help others in their own process of moral cultivation (lines 59–60). Mentorship is essential, but most are too lazy to take on this task.

Guanxiu, like Cui Yuan and Bai Juyi, concludes with a reflection on the importance of practicing the precepts he has just laid out (lines 65–68). He claims to have exhausted the topic, that there is no moral conduct beyond what he has laid out in his poem (lines 65–66). Zhi Dun is the only other *zuoyouming* writer to have made a similar claim for his poem. But Zhi Dun's claim is in fact the opposite of Guanxiu's. His point is not about comprehensiveness, but about the proper realm of

<sup>86</sup> See the opening lines of “Chant for a White-Headed Man” (Baitou yin 白頭吟) by Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414?–466): “Straightforward as a line of vermillion silk, / Pure as ice in a jade pot” 直如朱絲繩，清如玉壺冰 (*Wenxuan* 28.1327). “Ice in a jade pot” became a widely used figure for purity in later times.

<sup>87</sup> *Hanshi waizhuan* 7.20: “If you plant peach and plum trees in the spring, you will have shade to be under for the summer and fruit to eat in the fall. If you plant tackedweed in the spring, you won't be able to pluck its leaves in the summer and you will cut yourself on it in the fall. From this we can see, it's all in what you plant” 夫春樹桃李，夏得陰其下，秋得食其實；春樹蒺藜，夏不可採其葉，秋得其刺焉；由此觀之，在所樹也 (*Hanshi waizhuan jishi* 7.263–64; cf. Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan*, 244).

<sup>88</sup> *Liezi* 列子: “Balance is the utmost principle of the world, and it applies to the things within it also” 均，天下之至理也，連於形物亦然 (*Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, comp. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979], 5.171; cf. A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of Tao* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 105).

<sup>89</sup> *Liezi*: “Whatever has a skeleton of six feet, a distinction between hands and feet, hair worn on its head and a mouth filled with teeth, and tilts forward as it runs is called ‘a person,’ and yet a person may have the mind of a beast. Even if they do have the mind of a beast, we consider them kin on the basis of their appearance” 有七尺之骸，手足之異，戴髮含齒，倚而趣者，謂之人，而人未必無獸心，雖有獸心，以狀而見親矣 (*Liezi jishi* 2.83; cf. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 53).

action and contemplation for a normal human: consider the accomplished person, for that is the limit of human understanding. Guanxiu, by contrast, states that all that is necessary to be a good person has been summarized in the preceding verses.

The poem concludes with an exhortation to practice his sayings, once again addressing the reader's imagined future. Guanxiu highlights the importance of this passage formally by introducing a supplemental rhyme on lines 65 and 67 and by emphasizing his command with doubled echoic binome *dingning dingning* 丁寧丁寧 (MC \**teng-neng teng-neng*). While Guanxiu does not go so far as to disown disobedient descendants like Bai Juyi, he stresses his aphorisms' importance with visceral imagery. The reader is defined as one who, echoing the *Liezi*, has those physical features which distinguish humans from animals—hair and teeth (line 68). The object of address is not the specific reader who encounters Guanxiu's inscription, but any human. We see here an echo of the first two lines of the poem, in which the "you" is defined as one whose goodness and conduct constitute their very self. One's actions, in this sense, are like one's hair and teeth, the thing that makes one fully human. Pay them no heed, and one might as well have the mind of a beast.

The final line of Guanxiu's poem is just one of many bold claims he makes for his own work. He surpasses Bai Juyi, Cui Yuan, Zhi Dun, and all others in his work's comprehensiveness. It describes the moral laws of the universe that form the basis of karma. It can help one ascend to the Jade Hall of the transcendents. Failure to heed its warnings results in a swift death at the hands of ghosts. It advocates for compassion and empathy where others focused on personal cultivation or public reputation. It emphasizes balance as the key to goodness, but a balance comprised of extreme counterweights. In breadth, in length, in style, in feeling, in import, in high-mindedness, and in boldness of vision, Guanxiu's "Right-hand Inscription" surpasses all that came before.

And this, precisely, is its goal. Though ostensibly written for the incapable "people of this age," it is, in fact, mainly written for his predecessors, especially Bai Juyi. The self-other spectrum of address has basically collapsed, as he removes himself from the verse's intended audience and instead addresses a generic "you" that can be identified with any human. Guanxiu speaks directly to all readers, warning what will happen if they ignore his advice. The moral laws of the universe are known, and a disastrous fate awaits the incautious, but that fate is not predetermined, and Guanxiu's inscription can help change it. In this, it makes bigger, more audacious claims than any of his predecessors. It is meant to be a monument looming over past, present, and future.

## CONCLUSION

Bai Juyi's and Guanxiu's poems come to us late in the process of literarization. They are written primarily as literary works, displaying a self-consciousness of their place in the literary tradition. The mode of address we see here is different from those in Cui Yuan's, Bian Lan's, and Zhi Dun's verses. The Tang poems do not primarily speak to the present and immediate future of the reader—the practical advice reminiscent of admonitory verses in the Chinese and other literary traditions. This remains, but is subsumed by the much larger literary tradition. The verses instead sit Janus-faced, with one eye on past literary predecessors and the other on

future inheritors. In their game of one-upmanship, they are addressed mainly to other writers.

The subgenre of right-hand inscriptions is a heterogeneous one. While they are bound together by their short, pithy saying and liberal allusions from classic texts like the *Analects* and *Zhuangzi*, their forms of address push them in different direction. All of the right-hand inscriptions examined in this paper are direct at some point, using second-person pronouns and imperative particles. One (Zhi Dun), however, shifts early on to indirect admonition, offering a description of an exemplary figure to emulate. While some of these inscriptions are addressed clearly to others (Bian Lan, Zhi Dun, Guanxiu), two are presented as mainly personal compositions (Cui Yuan, Bai Juyi). But even these two are aware of larger audiences: both were written on walls where they could be seen by others, and Bai Juyi's even includes a paradoxical address to his descendants.

We should keep at the forefront of our minds the fact that the medieval Chinese literary tradition included many genres of verse beside *shi*-poetry. Though these played significant roles in a writer's career, they are often ignored or marginalized in literary history. As Paul Kroll explained in these pages two decades ago, taking other verse genres into account would do much to expand our sense of the range of themes, tropes, and vocabulary of Tang poetry.<sup>90</sup> While we have certainly made progress on this front in the last twenty years, there remains much work to be done.<sup>91</sup> The right-hand inscriptions analyzed here, as a peculiar subgenre of the inscription (*ming*), offer a particularly clear window on the evolving dynamics of address and admonition in Tang poetry.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Thomas J. Mazanec is assistant professor of premodern Chinese literature and cultural studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His main research areas are medieval Chinese poetry, Buddhism, digital humanities, and translation. His first book, *Poet-Monks: The Invention of Buddhist Poetry in Late Medieval China*, is being reviewed for publication. He is currently engaged in several translation projects, working on a second monograph on the limits of lyricism, and co-editing *The Worst Chinese Poetry: A Critical Anthology*.

Correspondence to: Thomas J. Mazanec, Department of East Asian Languages & Cultural Studies, UC Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106. Email: mazanec@ucsb.edu

<sup>90</sup> Paul W. Kroll, "The Significance of the *Fu* in the History of Tang Poetry," *T'ang Studies* 18-19 (2000-01): 87-105.

<sup>91</sup> Xiaojing Miao's recent dissertation has done much to advance the field in this regard. See Miao, "Beyond the Lyric: Expanding the Landscape of Early and High Tang Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 2019).