



Literary Virtue: A Moral Cornerstone of Chinese Literary Theory

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Abstract Literary virtue is a foundational concept in classical Chinese literary theory, which places great value on the personal morality of a writer. After a brief introduction to the origins of the term, this article notes how literati, in their capacity as officers of the state, were held to strict moral standards while, at the same time, in their capacity as writers, often sought to break free of moral constraints, leading to a common slogan that “literati lack morals.” The next section demonstrates that critics who emphasized literary virtue created a clear hierarchy with morality first and literariness second, though they often had different ideas about what this meant. Some prioritized practical skills in governance, others emphasized not being “vulgar,” others aimed for a consistency between inner nature and outer emotional expression, and still others, especially in later periods, called attention to poetry by “men of ambition” who expressed concern for the state during times of crisis. Subsequently, this article calls attention to a nineteenth-century theory of literary virtue that runs counter to the traditional moralizing norms of historiography. Finally, the conclusion offers a comparative reflection on the evaluation of writers by their moral actions in the West, including the “cancel culture” phenomenon.

Keywords morality, literature and ethics, literati culture, Confucianism, cancel culture

One of the greater challenges for modern Western readers of classical Chinese literature is to understand the important role of a writer’s personal morality in the evaluation of his work. Especially for those trained in “close reading,” pre-twentieth-century Chinese critics’ obsession with a writer’s biography and their supposed adherence to (or deviation from) Confucian ethical norms appear unusual. Whereas close reading seeks to understand a work first as a self-contained object with its own internal dynamics (and only then beginning to place it in its broader historical

context), much mainstream Chinese literary criticism assumes that a literary work can only be understood as part of a network of relations among the work, the author, and the world. As a result, normative Confucian critics from at least the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) onward have often judged literary works with reference to the social and political actions of their authors.

The key term for naming this assumed relationship between writing and morality is “literary virtue” (*wende* 文德), used mainly to designate the concept that literati (*wenren* 文人, *wenshi* 文士) should be virtuous. This article traces the development of this concept from its origins in preimperial texts (antiquity to 221 BCE) to the nineteenth century. The first section notes how literati, in their capacity as officers of the state, were held to strict moral standards. At the same time, in their capacity as writers, they often sought to break free of moral constraints, leading to a common slogan that “literati lack morals” (*wenren wuxing* 文人無行). Then, we demonstrate that critics who emphasized literary virtue created a clear hierarchy with morality first and literariness second, though they often had different ideas about what this meant. Some prioritized practical skills in governance, others emphasized not being “vulgar” (*su* 俗), others aimed for a consistency between inner nature and outer emotional expression, and still others, especially in later periods, called attention to poetry by “men of ambition” (*zhishi* 志士) who expressed concern for the state during times of crisis. Next, we call attention to a nineteenth-century theory of literary virtue that runs counter to the traditional moralizing norms of historiography. Finally, we conclude with a comparative reflection on the evaluation of writers by their moral actions in the West, including the “cancel culture” phenomenon.

Origins of Literary Virtue

The term *wende* 文德 (literary virtue) is composed of two characters, *wen* 文 and *de* 德, both representing concepts central to classical thought that can be translated by a range of English terms. The etymon of *wen* is “pattern,” and it can refer to the patterns of the heavens, the earth, and humanity. While it may refer to the written word, especially in the aestheticized form of belles lettres, it also may refer to culture and civilization more generally.¹ The meaning of *de* is similarly broad, carrying strong connotations of power and efficacy in early texts. It refers not only to morality but also to the inherent charisma of a person, with political and cosmic implications.² Both terms imply correspondences among the human, heavenly, and earthly realms. As such, the compound *wende*, which we translate here as “literary virtue” for the sake of consistency, had a range of meanings before settling into its primary one, which designated an assumed correspondence between a person’s literary and moral development.

One early idea associated with literary virtue was the “establishment of the state through virtue” (*yide liguo* 以德立國), which held that the inner charismatic power of a ruler, strongly associated with his impeccable morality, served as the foundation of a polity. A statement attributed to the Duke of Zhou 周公 (11th c. BCE) in the *Classic of Documents* (Shangshu 尚書) proclaims that, “Great Heaven has no affections; it helps only the virtuous” 皇天無親，惟德是輔.³ The preceding Shang dynasty had lost the empire because of its final ruler Zhou’s 紂 lack of virtue, while King Wen 文王 (the “Civil” or “Literary” king, r. 1099–1059 BCE) of the subsequent Zhou dynasty received the mandate from Heaven on account of his virtue and was able to bring the empire under his control. The legitimacy of the new Zhou regime was understood to lie in its sovereign’s virtue, not in the mandate of heaven.

The Zhou sought to govern through virtue. The term *wende* (literary virtue) appears frequently in early manuscripts, but it usually refers to the virtue of King Wen, as in the verse “Clear Temple” from the canonical *Book of Odes* (Shijing 詩經): “Great, great were the officers in number / Who upheld the virtue of Wen” 濟濟多士，秉文之德.⁴ Later, *wende* came to refer to “civil virtue,” in contrast with “martial achievement” (*wugong* 武功), as in *Analects* 16.1: “If distant peoples will not submit, cultivate civil virtue [*wende*] to make them come” 遠人不服，則修文德以來之.⁵

The meaning of the term *wende*, through generations of classical commentary, gradually grew in importance until it became one of the foundations of the classical, normative cultural system. The term “literati” (*wenren*) in pre-imperial times meant “people of civil virtue” (*wende zhi ren* 文德之人) and in this case did not refer to writers generally but more specifically to ancestors, especially those who followed the political norms of the Zhou and were accomplished in the rites and music.⁶ Such “people of civil virtue” were those who had assisted in governance, promoted education, served as moral exemplars, and sought to earn the admiration of all.

The two main terms for writers, *wenren* and *wenshi*, come from the pre-imperial term for knight or scholar, *shi* 士.⁷ The *shi* occupied a unique place in the hierarchy of early social classes. On the one hand, they occupied the bottom rung of the aristocracy, which were ranked, in order, emperor, nobles, grandees, and knights (*shi*). On the other hand, they were first among the traditional “four classes of people” (*simin* 四民): knights, farmers, artisans, and merchants; the *shi* thus played an important role mediating between the aristocracy and the lower classes.⁸ These *shi* also saw themselves as the guardians of tradition. Their ideal figure was the sage (*shengren* 聖人) or the gentleman (*junzi* 君子), one who resolutely pursued the Dao with no desire for material things, who could serve as an exemplar for the common people. As it says in “The Greater East” from the

Shijing: “Where the gentleman treads, / The lesser men look” 君子所履，小人所視。⁹ The words and deeds of a gentleman were a model for the common people, so there were strict moral requirements for how a *shi* should conduct himself.¹⁰

In the Han dynasty, as literature developed, scholars (*wenshi*) gradually separated from the *shi* and became an independent class. They saw themselves as a new social group with important societal responsibilities. In governance they aimed, in the words of the “Preface to the *Fu* on the Two Capitals” (Liangdu fu xu 兩都賦序) by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE), “to express the feelings of the emperor’s subjects and convey subtle criticism and advice” 抒下情而通諷諭 and “to proclaim the superior’s virtue and demonstrate utmost loyalty and filial obedience” 宣上德而盡忠孝.¹¹ With these solemn (and risky) tasks as his charge, much attention was paid to a scholar’s moral character. Thus when Wang Chong 王充 (27–after 100 CE) mentions the term *literary virtue* eight times in *Arguments Weighed* (Lun heng 論衡), he refers to the virtue of literati.¹² From this point onward, literary virtue became a major topic in Chinese literary criticism.

Wang Chong’s essay in *Arguments Weighed* marks a turning point in the history of the concept of literary virtue. He distinguished the literati who “composed essays and wrote discourses” 造論著說 from other Confucian scholars, also noting that “literati are worthy of respect” 文人之當尊. This is because through their writings, literati encouraged goodness and warned against evil, helping clearly distinguish right from wrong. “The placid serenity of the literati is the sign of the prosperity of a state. . . . The fact that eminent literati live in a state proves that it is the age of a sage” 文人之休，國之符也 鴻文在國，聖世之驗也.¹³ Because the writings of the literati are so important, Wang Chong invented the concept of literary virtue as we know it, which stressed that literati must be virtuous. Thus, he said: “The stronger a person’s virtue, the more refined his writing will be, and the more prominent his virtue, the more brilliant his writing will be” 德彌盛者文彌縟，德彌彰者人彌明.¹⁴ Inner virtue and exterior literature must be identical.

While Wang Chong coined the term *literary virtue*, the idea behind it, of the identity of inner virtue and exterior literature, was not new. In the *Analects* Confucius (trad. 551–479 BCE) long ago said: “One who has virtue always has words” 有德者，必有言.¹⁵ In the early lexicography *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* (Shuowen jiezi 說文解字), the character for virtue (*de* 德) is given with the alternative form 惇, with the component *zhi* 直 (upright, straight) over *xin* 心 (heart, mind). Xu Shen 許慎 (40–121 CE) explains: “It is attained externally in relation to others, and it is attained internally in relation to oneself” 外得於人，內得於己也.¹⁶ This means that virtue comes from a sincere heart of benevolence and that by being generous to others you help them obtain virtue. Confucius’s saying that “one who has virtue always has words” means that the words of a virtuous person are not only good but also beneficial to

others. The *Book of Changes* and the *Mencius* discuss this ideal consistency between inner mind and external speech from the perspectives of the speaker and the listener, respectively.¹⁷ The “Record of Music” (Yue ji 樂記) from the *Book of Rites* says, “Music is the flower of virtue” 樂者，德之華也 and “a harmonious obedience accumulates within and its fine blossom blooms without” 和順積中而英華發外.¹⁸ Music is the perfect external display of inner virtue. If one is good in heart, then his words, his lyrics will be measured and peaceful in tone. Although these discussions of the relationship between virtue and words or music do not directly mention literary virtue, they laid the foundation for the later discourse. It is not until Wang Chong that we find an explicit discussion of the intrinsic connection between literature and virtue. For this reason, Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936) noted in the “General Outline of Literature” (Wenxue zonglüe 文學總略) from his *Critical Evaluation of the National Heritage* (Guoguo lunheng 國故論衡) that Wang Chong is the inventor of the theory of literary virtue.¹⁹

Do “Literati Lack Morals”?

Serving in both the political and cultural realms, literati acutely felt the lofty moral requirements placed on them by Confucian classicism. At the same time, many literati sought to push against such strictures, often in the name of a kind of creative freedom that was articulated in classical texts that lay on the margins of the normative, Confucian tradition, such as *Zhuangzi* 莊子.²⁰ This tension between creativity and moral constraint led to the popular idea that “literati lack morals” (*wenren wuxing* 文人無行). While the earliest instance of this precise phrase appears to be the thirteenth century, the idea can be traced back much further. Wang Chong, for example, had pointed out in *Arguments Weighed* that Hanfeizi 韓非子 lobbed such criticisms at classical scholars in the third-century BCE.²¹

A little more than a hundred years after Wang Chong proposed his theory of literary virtue, when the eunuchs held influence at court in the late second century, they established the Hongdu Gate school 鴻都門學.²² Originally created to promote classical studies, it later drew in “thousands of people skilled in writing official documents, composing poetry, and producing calligraphy—some who came from the provinces entered into the Secretariat or the Chancellery and were enfeoffed with noble titles” 後諸能為尺牘詞賦及工書鳥篆者，至數千人，或出典州郡，入為尚書、侍中，封賜侯爵。²³ Because these scholars of humble origins were promoted to high office on the basis of their literary talent, and because they were supported by the eunuchs, they provoked the ire of aristocratic classicists such as Yang Qiu 陽球 (d. 179), Yang Ci 楊賜 (d. 185), and Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), who submitted memorials calling for the

abolition of the Hongdu Gate school. This episode not only shows us the tension between the National Academy (Taixue 太學) and the Hongdu Gate school during the second century but also illustrates the inherent tension between traditional Confucian morality and the literary arts. Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223), writing a thousand years later, attributed the fall of the Han dynasty to “the Hongdu school overshadowing the classical arts with the minor skills of rhetoric” 鴻都學以詞賦小技掩蓋經術.²⁴ While this episode may not have ultimately been the decisive factor in the fall of the Han, it did establish the idea that the eunuchs promoted literary rhetoric at the expense of Han dynasty classicism, which, objectively speaking, accelerated changes.²⁵ This led to, in the words of Li E 李譔 (late 6th c.), “three generations of rulers of Wei promoting literature and rhetoric, ignoring the great Way of the gentleman while enjoying the lesser art of insect carving” 魏之三組，更尚文辭，忽君人之大道，好雕蟲之小藝。²⁶

At the same time, the aristocratic classicists' criticism of the Hongdu Gate school was quickly transferred to the emerging class of the literati. For this reason, the popular notion circulated that literati lack morals. The aristocratic Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253) had harsh words for the literati of the late Han: “Wang Can 王粲 (177–217) suffered from fatness and stupidity, Po Qin 繁欽 (d. 218) had no restraint whatsoever, Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212) was plagued with a weak body, Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217) was truly careless, and Lu Cui 路粹 (d. 214) was rather vicious by nature” 仲宣傷於肥臃，休伯都無格檢，元瑜病於體弱，孔璋實自粗疏，文蔚性頗忿鷙。²⁷ Later figures like Yang Yin 楊惲 (511–560), Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 591), and Wang Tong 王通 (584–617) continued this line of criticism by harshly judging the moral conduct of past literati.²⁸ Such statements gradually spread more widely across social classes, as if all literati were completely bereft of virtue. “Literati lack morals” can thus be seen as the opposite of literary virtue or, rather, as an act of judging literati according to the standard of literary virtue. This idea, when it became widespread, could be oppressive to literati on both aesthetic and official fronts.

Why should this judgment, that literati lack morals, come about in the first place? In addition to being part of aristocratic classicists' attempts to curb the influence of humble-born literati, it is due to a fundamental conflict between the artistic freedom valued by many literati and the strict moral requirements placed on them by the normative Confucian tradition.

In the preimperial period, when people spoke of the relationship between human nature and the emotions, they seem to have generally held the position that human nature is calm while the emotions are active, even going so far as to say that human nature is good while the emotions are evil. They believed that emotions can be stirred by external phenomena and can easily lead to disorder if not restrained. This is why the “Great Preface to the *Mao Shijing*” (Maoshi daxu

毛詩大序) says that literary works “emerge from the emotions” 發乎情 but “go no further than rites and moral principles” 止乎禮義.²⁹ However, the literati’s creative process involves “stirring the emotions and letting phrases come forth” 情動而辭發, thereby potentially crossing the boundaries of ritual propriety and righteousness.³⁰ The poet-emperor Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551) once said, “The Way of proper conduct is different from that of literature. In conduct, you must prioritize being cautious and respectful, while in writing you must let yourself loose” 立身之道，與文章異；立身先須謹慎，為文且須放蕩。³¹ Different rules apply to proper conduct and to writing. While the former requires caution and respect, the latter requires liberating the mind, even to the point of complete inhibition.

Yan Zhitui also recognized a distinction between literature and scholarship, stating that while scholarship requires the patience to accumulate knowledge slowly, literature requires innate talent. In the chapter on “Literature” in *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*, he writes:

The essence of literary writings is such that they reveal one’s emotional stirrings and responses, give expression to one’s spiritual nature, and cause one to draw upon and show off one’s talent; so an author neglects the cultivation of integrity but is decisive in advancing himself.

文章之體，標舉興會，發引性靈，使人矜伐，故忽於持操，果於進取。³²

In modern parlance, we would say that artistic pursuits require emotional sensitivity, leading literati in their roles as writers to speak rashly because they follow their feelings. In life one must adhere to social norms, while in writing unrestrained freedom is valued. The inherent conflict between these two positions is why the saying “literati lack morals” became so prevalent. To put it another way, there are different standards for morality and aesthetics. If you judge aesthetic works by moral standards, it naturally leads to the conclusion that “literati lack morals.”

Literati often found themselves being rejected, demoted, or facing various other kinds of setbacks and for these reasons were prone to “sounding forth when not in equilibrium” (*buping ze ming* 不平則鳴), as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) put it.³³ The same author elsewhere said: “Literature is often written after traveling out into the wilds. As for the princes and nobles, with their spirits filled and ambitions satisfied, even if they have the talent and interest for it, they lack the free time to write” 文章之作，恆發於羈旅草野。至若王公貴人，氣滿志得，非性能而好之，則不暇以為。³⁴ Princes and nobles are more concerned with political intrigue, constrained by pragmatic realities, and therefore most of them lack the energy to engage in literary writing. But literati who were demoted or exiled

when they lost political battles quickly became political outsiders. This, paradoxically, freed them from worldly pursuits and gave them a more detached perspective on social reality. In this way they could more deeply reflect on current social problems or existential questions. This is what Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) meant by saying that poetry is “well crafted only after ruin” (*qiong er hou gong* 窮而後工).³⁵ Failed literati could be innovators, not mere custodians of the old morality. Indeed, they could disrupt the old morality, proclaiming a new one in its place. In this way, they were at the forefront of new social trends. However, the general public often misunderstood this aspect of literati identity, which led to criticism from the nobles and commoners alike.

By the late imperial period, the slogan “literati lack morals” could become a powerful tool for staunch conservatives to stifle intellectual and moral innovation. As poet Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608–1647) once lamented:

Sages and worthies wrote in order to give vent to their fervor. Later Confucians, however, spoke of “loyalty and honesty” and “inferiors not talking about their superiors’ faults,” and therefore their writing shrank. More and more, when a Confucian speaks, a petty person will use his literary writings to kill him.

皆聖賢發憤之所為作也。後之儒者則曰忠厚，又曰居下位不言上之非，以自文其縮然。自儒者之言出而小人以文章殺人也日益甚。³⁶

As Chen Zilong outlines here, the slogan that “literati have no morals” is often just a pretext for unscrupulous people to use someone’s writing to attack their character, thus imposing a sense of constraint on authors.

In their daily lives writers are bound by social norms, and there is nowhere for them to vent about society’s lack of recognition for their talent. However, once they enter the realm of literature, norms are looser, and they can let loose the thoughts and feelings that they had previously repressed. Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) put it this way: “In times of utmost sorrow, bitter tears flow, everything is turned upside down, and there’s no time to pick your sounds” 窮愁之時，痛哭流涕，顛倒反復，不暇擇音。³⁷ Having “no time to pick your sounds” here means simply expressing your whims, speaking your thoughts, and breaking free of convention. Literary works written in such a direct manner may deviate from established moral standards, leaving readers with the impression that “literati lack morals.”

Of course, it is also common for writers to deceive readers by creating false personae in their literary work.³⁸ For instance, Pan Yue 潘岳 (243–300), a close friend of the powerful official Jia Mi 賈謐, plotted against the crown prince Sima Yu 司馬遙 (278–300), earning him the contempt of the people. Although this action betrays him as ambitious and unscrupulous, he wrote a “Rhapsody on Idle

Living” (Xianju fu 閒居賦) in which he declared himself a man of purity who was willing to live humbly.³⁹ Literature served as his disguise. Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257) exposed this facade in his “Quatrains on Poetry” (Lunshi jueju 論詩絕句):

The mind’s images, the mind’s sounds are generally untrue—	心畫心聲總失真
How can one see the person in their literary works?	文章寧復見為人
From the lofty, timeless sentiments in his “Rhapsody on Idle Living”	高情千古《閒居賦》
Who would believe that Pan Yue would bow to the dust of the road?	爭信安仁拜路塵 ⁴⁰

When writers’ words are inconsistent with their actions, it creates the impression that “literati lack morals.”

The ubiquity of the idea that “literati lack morals” shows the intense pressure that Confucian classicism placed on premodern writers. Its strong emphasis on morality clashed with the rebellious nature of much literary writing, leading to Confucian classicism’s tendency to suppress creativity. Throughout the imperial period, there were debates over whether the imperial examinations should prioritize the classics or poetry, and poetry often came out on the losing side. Tang scholar-official Liu Mian 柳冕 (d. 804) represents the mainstream when he says, “The classics should be respected, and literati looked down upon” 尊經術，卑文士。⁴¹ In a cultural tradition that judges poetry by the standards of classical morals, it is no surprise to find a stereotype like “literati lack morals.”

This stereotype has, in fact, hindered the careers of many writers, including Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433).⁴² It is as if literary talent and official success were thought to be mutually exclusive. Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462–561) referred to such people as those who are “highly gifted but have no important position” 高才而無貴仕。⁴³ Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), in his poem “Recalling Li Bai at the Ends of the Earth” 天末懷李白, wrote, “In literature success is hated” 文章憎命達。⁴⁴ If literati faced such challenges even in the golden age of the High Tang, one can only imagine their misfortune in other eras. Centuries later, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) systematically categorized the grievances of literati in his work “The Nine Fates of Literary Types” (Wenzhang jiuming 文章九命) as “(1) poverty, (2) jealousy, (3) disgrace, (4) contortion, 5) exile, (6) punishment, (7) early death, (8) lack of a good end, and (9) lack of descendants” 一曰貧困，二曰嫌忌，三曰玷缺，四曰偃蹇，五曰流竄，六曰刑辱，七曰夭折，八曰無終，九曰無後。⁴⁵ The idea that these unfortunate fates were the destiny of most literati meant that many scholars did not consider themselves primarily to be writers. This harkens back to *Analects* 1.6, where Confucius states, “If, after doing your duties, you have any remaining

energy, you may study literature” 行有餘力則以學文, emphasizing “duties” over “literature.”⁴⁶ However, Han Yu took this a step further in statements like “be a poet in your spare time” 餘事作詩人, as did Liu Zhi 劉摯 (1030–1097) with “it is not worth being thought of as a literatus” 一號為文人便無足觀. Here, one comes away with the impression that many educated people in antiquity were ashamed to be called literati.⁴⁷

In the Ming, as the southeast grew in prosperity, particularly fierce factional struggles led some literati to move there to distance themselves from the court and challenge orthodox beliefs. Leading writers of the late Ming like Tu Long 屠隆 (1543–1605), Zhao Nanxing 趙南星 (1550–1628), Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), and Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624) began to directly question the commonplace that “literati lack morals.” They asked if it was really true that all literati necessarily lacked morals and, consequently, if a lack of literary talent meant that one was a moral person.⁴⁸ In reality, there were many moral literati. Moreover, *Analects* 19.11 had long ago given literati some leeway when it stated, “When one does not go over the line in regard to great virtues, one may go past and back to it in regard to small virtues” 大德不踰閑, 小德出入可也.⁴⁹ If humor, crudeness, stubbornness, arrogance, and impatience were signs of “lacking morals,” as Yan Zhitui claimed, then there would indeed be very few flawless literati. The Ming writers’ objections to the idea that “literati lack morals” reveals how some needed to break free from strict orthodoxy to fully develop.

The judgment that “literati lack morals” is not an inevitable one. It stems from assumptions baked into mainstream Confucian classicism, in which literature was held in high regard and literati were judged based on the moral standards of the gentleman (*junzi*). The led, repeatedly, to the same negative judgment. But nobody is perfect. Is there anyone in the world who could live up to the standards of the sages?

In reality, in traditional literary criticism, personal character was closely linked with literature, often even conflated with it. Many people believed that “a person is like their writing” (*wen ru qi ren* 文如其人), that one could see a person’s true character by reading their literary works. For this reason, literature was often read biographically, and critics could use biography to dismiss a person’s writing. Even more common was to use their writing to dismiss the person. Moral evaluation would often surpass, or even replace, aesthetic evaluation. For instance, the corrupt minister Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126) is said to have been a renowned calligrapher, but his calligraphy was purposely not transmitted to posterity due to his immoral character. The eunuch Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1567) was skilled in poetry, but his collection *Poetry from the Hall on Mt. Qian* (*Qianshan tang ji* 鈐山堂集) has rarely been reprinted due to his infamous reputation. Even the renowned Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427) was criticized by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), compiler of the influential anthology *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wen*

xuan 文選), for hinting at romantic affairs in his “Rhapsody on Stilling the Passions” (Xianqing fu 閑情賦), calling it a slight flaw in otherwise spotless jade, and Li Bai 李白 (701–762) received similar criticism from poet-statesman Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086).⁵⁰ Many other canonical poets, such as Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂 (659–700), and Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (d. 712), were criticized by later generations for their questionable politics.⁵¹ Their literary achievements were rejected because of political, moral, and even personal faults. Although such evaluations may seem unfair to a modern eye, they were understood to play a crucial role in upholding mainstream Confucian morals, and thus we must view them in their proper historical contexts.

Literati’s Virtue

Literary virtue is a theory based on early Confucian ethics. It has been an important concept in literary criticism ever since Wang Chong’s first discussion of it, remarked on by virtually all theorists of literature. It makes virtue primary, literature secondary—the hierarchy is very clear. It is generally believed that those who are advanced in both virtue and literature are gentlemen (*junzi*), while those who are skilled in literature but lack virtue are petty people (*xiaoren* 小人).⁵² Of course, people have vastly different understandings of what constitutes literary virtue, depending on their assumptions.

Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 521) strongly opposed the popular idea that “literati lack morals” by saying that “a scholar’s appointment depends on his usefulness in accomplishing practical matters” 士之登庸，以成務為用。⁵³ Scholars must have practical abilities in addition to their literary ones. Prior to this, Wang Chong had noted that taking care of practical matters would leave no time for writing literature, which assumed there was a conflict between writing and duty. However, during the early medieval period (3rd–6th c.) many prominent scholars lacked skill in governance, even looking down on those who had it, and engaged instead in “pure conversation” (*qingtan* 清談) about metaphysics. Some would later blame dynastic collapse on this tendency.⁵⁴ In light of this, Liu Xie stressed the importance of literati’s practical abilities in governance, including criticism of the social ills of their time. Later, Ouyang Xiu would point out that literati should “focus on the ills of the time and not just speak empty words” 中於時病而不為空言, and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) that their “words should strike at the very faults of the world” 言必中當世之過.⁵⁵

This is an important aspect of literary virtue. There had long been the idea that “those superior in study become officials” 學而優則仕, and thus literati were not only readers but also participants in politics.⁵⁶ The concept of belles lettres

in premodern China, *wenzhang* 文章, included not just expressive, lyrical poetry but any form of writing engaged in by a literatus. At its grandest, this meant sacrificial prayers and governmental writings and, at its smallest, word games and private correspondence. Therefore, it was expected of literati that “their writing must be applied to the governing the state, and the burden must be shouldered with the sturdiness of a pillar or beam” 摛文必在緯軍國，負重必在任棟樑。⁵⁷ In times of crisis, it was especially important to encourage literati to speak truth to power and to stress the practical relevance of literature. People believed that one should “talk about matters of one’s own heart only when there is nothing going on, but sacrifice oneself for the ruler in times of crisis” 無事袖手談心性，臨危一死報君王, and even held that “a literatus is not worthy of notice” 文人便無足觀。⁵⁸ Some literati may be actively involved in upholding justice by satirizing the wicked, while others may more passively hide away and amuse themselves with their writings. But no matter which approach they took, literati should aspire to upholding virtue according their own path.

When the examination system was newly introduced in the Sui and Tang (589–907), this opened new pathways to an official career for middle and lower literati, thus more fully realizing the ideal that “those superior in study should become officials.” With these new pathways open, it was inevitable that fish would mix in with the dragons. Since literati were involved in governance, some stated that literati must prioritize virtue over literary writing when they entered officialdom. Pei Xingjian 裴行儉 (619–682) criticized Wang Bo 王勃 (650–676) by saying that, despite his talent, he was too impetuous and shallow to receive a post: “The farthest-reaching scholars put capacity and insight first and the literary arts second” 士之致遠，先器識而後文藝也。⁵⁹ This idea of “capacity and insight” is more morally oriented than Liu Xie’s focus on administrative ability we saw earlier. In the Mid Tang, Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725–777), Han Yu, and other advocates of “ancient culture” (*guwen* 古文) also paid great attention to a writer’s moral character.⁶⁰ Dugu Ji, drawing on Pei Xingjian, wrote, “Put virtue first and literary study second” 必先道德而後文學。⁶¹ Han Yu, alluding to Confucius, stated, “The words of a humane and just person are ample and amicable” 仁義之人，其言藹如也。⁶²

From the Tang and Song dynasties onward, the priority of practical skills over literary ones was widely accepted. This was especially true of the neo-Confucian philosophers and their successors, who placed great emphasis on ethical conduct at the expense of literary expression. For example, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) said, “I do not know any who apply themselves to morality, then subsequently to their capacity for literary expression, which is nothing more than an art” 不知務道德而第以文辭為能者，藝焉而已。⁶³ To Zhou, pursuit of the Way (Dao) comes before the arts. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) also believed

that, as long as one possessed excellent and pure moral character, “one can become capable in poetry without studying it” 其於詩固不學而能之。⁶⁴ This idea of the prioritization of practical ethics does not mean that they wanted to get rid of literature entirely. However, Zhou Dunyi’s and Zhu Xi’s statements deny literature’s independence.⁶⁵

In the Song dynasty several new facets of literary virtue emerged from this emphasis on moral conduct. These include a greater emphasis on avoiding vulgarity, a new philosophical ideal of rectifying one’s emotions with one’s inner nature, and an increased valorization of poetry by men of ambition. We examine each of these in turn below.

First, people began to emphasize that the character of literati should “not be vulgar” (*busu* 不俗). Literati were, ideally, those who shaped societal values. This role carried over to officialdom, where they were to serve as models for other officials. Because of these lofty ideals, readers from the Song onward placed high demands on educated people’s moral character. Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) said, “Scholars are born into the world and can act in hundreds of different ways, but they must not be vulgar. Vulgarity cannot be cured” 士生於世，可以百為，唯不可俗，俗便不可醫也。⁶⁶ Huang Tingjian’s use of “not be vulgar” here draws on the ideal articulated in *Analects* 8.6 that a gentleman “cannot waver when facing a great matter” 臨大節而不可奪。⁶⁷ That is, one must have uncompromising integrity no matter what great challenges one encounters. In this discourse, figures like Yang Xiong and Pan Xu 潘勖 (ca. 160–215), who found themselves on the wrong side of history when they switched political allegiance, were criticized on the grounds of violating the principle of “not wavering when facing a great matter.”⁶⁸

The late Qing poet He Shaoji 何紹基 (1799–1873) wrote the following in his “Memoir on Being Dispatched to Qian” (Shi Qian cao zixu 使黔草自敘):

A person and his writing are one. One is perfection as a person, and the other is perfection as a writer. Since antiquity, anyone who visits loyal ministers, filial sons, eminent people, knights-errant, sophisticated classicists, and prominent scholars will see that these people resemble their writing. If the person is not perfected, he will work at literature in a superficial manner—carving fat or trimming mulberry—and what good will that do? So what then is it essential to put your effort into? It is fully captured in the words “don’t be vulgar.” So-called vulgarity does not necessarily mean just lacking capability. When I refer to “being vulgar,” I mean floating along with the filth, with no sense of right or wrong in your breast, sometimes following fads, sometimes imitating the ancients. But when I refer to “not being vulgar,” I mean continuously rising and falling, alone in your comings and goings, being in touch with any stirrings, and following what is right when you see it. . . .

Of the former sages' many warnings against vulgarity, none is better than Huang Tingjian's: "To not waver when facing a great matter can be considered 'not being vulgar.'" If you wish to learn how to act as a person or how to create literature, the goal is nothing more than this.

人與文一，是為人成，是為詩文之家成。伊古以來，忠臣孝子、高人俠客、雅儒魁士，其人所詣，其文如見。人之無成，浮務文藻，鏤脂翦楮，何益之有。顧其用力之要在乎？曰「不俗」二字盡之矣。所謂「俗」者，非必庸惡陋劣之甚也。同流合污，胸無是非，或逐時好，或傍古人，是之謂「俗」。直起直落，獨來獨往，有感則通，見義則赴，是謂「不俗」。……前哲戒俗之言多矣，莫善於涪翁之言曰：「臨大節而不可奪，謂之不俗。」欲學為人，學為詩文，舉不外斯指。⁶⁹

For He Shaoji, the writer and his writing must be perfectly unified. The crucial point for a writer lies in not being vulgar, and it begins with their personal development. Vulgarity means slavishly copying the ancients, getting absorbed in worldly matters, and not thinking for oneself, while a lack of vulgarity means genuinely experiencing things, offering original insights, and being willing to die for one's principles. Liu Xizai 刘熙载 (1813–1881) summarized this with the phrase "poetic quality emerges out of personal quality" 詩品出於人品, and slightly later, Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) proposed that "there has hardly been anyone who lacks a noble and great character but possesses noble and great literary ability" 無高尚偉大之人格，而有高尚偉大文章者，殆未之有也。⁷⁰ Both of these highlight the value placed on literati's character, a central feature of literary virtue that runs through the entire history of Chinese literary thought.

Second, the new philosophical concept "rectifying inner nature and emotions" (*xingqing zhi zheng* 性情之正) was introduced in the Song. This idea advocated using pattern (*li* 理) to rectify one's emotions, thereby correcting and guiding emotional expression.⁷¹ The brothers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) believed that the emotions, being the stirrings of one's inner nature, should be in line with what is right. Zhu Xi frequently mentioned "rectifying inner nature and emotions" when he discussed poetry, such as in the preface to his commentary on the *Shijing*:

Only the "South of Zhou" and "South of Shao" sections were personally transformed by King Wen in order that their virtue would be perfect, and everyone can use them to rectify their inner nature and emotions. Therefore, when [these poems] manifest in language, they can delight without overindulging in wantonness, and they can mourn without reaching the point of injury. For these reasons, the two sections are the only main warp of the *Airs*. From the "Airs of Bei" onward, each state's degree of order is different and so are the people's worthiness, so what [poems] come out when stirred

contain right and wrong, good and bad in uneven amounts. The so-called Airs of the Former Kings are mutated in this way.

惟《周南》《召南》，親被文王之化以成德，而人皆有以得其性情之正。故其發於言者，樂而不過於淫，哀而不及於傷。是以二篇獨為風詩之正經。自《邶》而下，則其國之治亂不同，人之賢否亦異，其所感而發者，有邪正是非之不齊。而所謂先王之風者，於此焉變矣。⁷²

Zhu Xi considers the first two sections of the *Shijing* to be the proper airs, which by regulating joy and sorrow allow one to “rectify inner nature and emotions.” This concept refers to balancing one’s emotions by using inner nature and *li*: getting a handle on one’s emotions, suppressing socially unacceptable emotions, ensuring that one’s emotions follow from reason, and displaying them in an appropriate manner.

The growing influence of neo-Confucianism caused a reevaluation of many previous slogans about literature, such as that poetry is a “sounding forth when not in equilibrium” (*buping ze ming*) or that it is “well-crafted only after ruin” (*qiong er hou gong*). In his “Written after Huang Donggu’s Poetry” (Ti Huang Donggu shi hou 題黃東谷詩後), Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357–1402) writes:

People in the past said that poetry could ruin a person, so, hoping to avoid ruin, they would never go back to studying poetry. Facing setbacks and feeling stifled is what we call ruin, while following your aims and feeling satisfaction is called success. There are three types of people whose ruin has nothing to do with being poor and lowly: those whose minds do not comprehend the essentials of morality, whom we call ruined in mind; those whose bodies do not follow the path of ritual and duty, whom we call ruined in body; and those whose mouths do not speak the laws of the sages, whom we call ruined in mouth. These three types have one thing that unites them: even if they were to secure a position in a lofty tower or spacious mansion, wielding the authority of a managing general or minister, enjoying the perfect gifts offered to them, with enough chariots and horses and clothing and food to flaunt around town, and yet if they lacked the right words when they wanted to speak with their mouths, or felt burdened when they wanted to be happy in their minds, their ruin would be the same as before. Without the troubles of these three types, they would have no regret in mind and fault in body, their aspirations would be fulfilled, and the words they speak would be literary. At the highest level, this would mean proclaiming the origins of ethical governance and education. At the next level, this would mean describing the beauty of folkways and landscapes. At the lowest level, this would mean seeking out the nature of plants and animals and relating the songs of women and children.

昔人謂詩能窮人，諱窮者因不復學詩。夫困折屈鬱之謂窮，遂志適意之謂達。人之窮有三，而貧賤不與焉：心不通道德之要，謂之心窮；身不循禮義之途，謂之身窮；口

不道聖賢法度之言，謂之口窮。三者有一焉，雖處乎崇臺廣廈，出總將相之權，入享備物之奉，車馬服食非不足以誇耀市井，然口欲言而無其辭，心欲樂而有其累，其窮自若也。無三者之患，心無悔而身無尤，當其志得氣滿，發而為言語文章，上之宣倫理政教之原，次之述風俗江山之美，下之探草木蟲魚之情性、狀婦人稚子之歌謠。⁷³

Confucianism holds that a noble person should be concerned about the Way, not poverty. Fang Xiaoru creatively misreads Mei Yaochen's statement about "ruin" to state that true ruin is not understanding morality, not performing the rites, and not speaking of the sages' laws. In all three of these cases, people would not be happy even if they had great wealth. But if they free themselves of these three types of ruin, they would feel fulfilled and be able to produce literature that could speak of governance, relate customs and landscapes, and describe the natural world. Such people would feel unburdened, moving about freely, and be completely in touch with their inner selves. But if poets merely whine about their own misfortunes, society will look down upon them.

On the contrary, literati were expected to cultivate their moral character, deepen their understanding of classical ideals, and learn how to internalize them. Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1796) states in *Clear Explanations of Poetry* (Shuo shi zuiyu 說詩碎語) that, "with a first-rate heart and first-rate learning, one can produce first-rate poetry" 有第一等襟抱，第一等學識，斯有第一等真詩。⁷⁴ Of course, overemphasizing this "rectification of inner nature and emotions" may lead to the suppression of one's individual emotions and desires. The debate over poetry between Shen Deqian and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1796) directly embodies the tension between the ideals of "rectifying inner nature and emotions" and "genuinely realizing one's inner nature and emotions" (*xingqing zhi zhen* 性情之真).⁷⁵

Third, there came a new emphasis on the writings of "men of ambition" (*zhishi* 志士). As early as the Tang dynasty, Shang Heng 尚衡 (fl. c. 760) had divided literature into three levels: literature of gentlemen, literature of men of ambition, and literature of rhetoricians (*cishi* 詞士), but his categorization had little impact on later critics.⁷⁶ It was during the Song-Yuan transition (late 13th c.), and especially the Ming-Qing transition (mid-17th c.), when some literati displayed admirable integrity in their resistance against foreign invasions, that they showcased a new personal strength, and thus "men of ambition" emerged as a new type of actor out of the broader category of literati. Ming loyalist Peng Shiwang 彭士望 (1610–1683), in his "Letter to Wei Bingshu" (Yu Wei Bingshu shu 與魏冰叔書), distinguished between "the writings of literati and the writings of men of ambition" 文人之文與志士之文, stating that literati wrote merely in search of fame and glory, whereas the literature of men of ambition emerged from genuine convictions, faced reality, and addressed societal ills.⁷⁷ Peng

Shaosheng 彭紹升 (1740–1796) used the term “poetry of men of ambition” (*zhishi zhi shi* 志士之詩) to praise the works of loyalists such as Xie Ao 謝翱 (1249–1295) and Du Jun 杜浚 (1610–1686).⁷⁸ Distinguishing men of ambition from talented literati became widespread in theories about poetry during the Qing, with the poetry of men of ambition being valued far more than that of mere “talents” (*caizi* 才子) or “poets” (*shiren* 詩人). The distinction between “men of talent” and “men of ambition” is drawn explicitly in Ye Xie’s 葉燮 (1627–1703) “Preface to *Secret Roamings*” (*Miyou ji xu* 密遊集序).

Throughout history, there has been poetry by men of talent and poetry by men of ambition. To work at carving and to labor over engraving in order to gallop upon the field of windblown blossoms and moonlit dew, and to never be able to do it after selecting a person or a scene, but to always do it by following people and scenes and going all in on pleasant sounds and images—this is the poetry of men of talent. To situate oneself in the normal world and make full use of the *qi* of the world throughout the four seasons, to experience their changes and delve deep into the thoughts of people throughout history, to be able to write of a definite person, to be able to create after encountering a definite scene, such that, with just a few words, one could make the reader remember them, sigh over them, and not dismiss them—this is the poetry of men of ambition.

Poetry by men of talent could be written, or it could not be written. With poetry by men of ambition, however, even if one did not want to write it, it would still be written. Poetry by men of talent, though it may lead to fancy footwear and cushy positions, is often not passed down. Poetry by men of ambition, even should it add to poverty and stress, is always passed down. Poets of talent are too numerous to count on your fingers. While no generation lacks poets of ambition, those who pushed the extremes are Tao Qian in the Jin dynasty, Du Fu and Han Yu in the Tang, and Su Shi in the Song. They reached the pinnacle of poetry, and in fact reached the pinnacle of ambition. They achieved its essence by rooting themselves in their eminent and luminous inner natures, solidified their learning by experiencing the changes of the world, matured their knowledge by meeting with misfortune and melancholy, and then wrote with the kind of talent that is incapable of nothing. This is not something that so-called talented men could achieve or even hope for. In this way, when we pass down the poetry, we are passing down the person.

古今有才人之詩，有志士之詩。事雕繪，工鏤刻，以馳騁乎風花月露之場，不必擇人擇境而能為之，隨乎其人與境而無不可以為之，而極乎諧聲狀物之能事，此才人之詩也。處乎其常而備天地四時之氣，曆乎其變而深古今身世之懷，必其人而後能為之，必遭其境而後能出之，即其片語隻字，能令人永懷三歎而不能置者，此志士之詩也。才人之詩，可以作，亦可以無作；志士之詩，即欲不作，而必不能不作。才人之詩，雖履豐席厚，而時或不傳；志士之詩，愈貧賤憂戚，而決無不傳。才人之詩，古今不可指數；

志士之詩，雖代不乏人，然推其至如晉之陶潛，唐之杜甫、韓愈，宋之蘇軾，為能造極乎其詩，實其能造極乎其志。蓋其本乎性之高明以為其質，曆乎事之常變以堅其學，遭乎境之坎壈鬱怫以老其識，而後以無所不可之才出之。此固非號稱才人之所得而幾，如是乃為傳詩，即為傳人矣。⁷⁹

“Poetry by men of talent” is like what Yang Xiong called “the writing of rhetoricians, which are dazzling but excessive” 辭人之賦麗以淫, written to incite emotion, all style and no substance.⁸⁰ There is nothing necessary about such poetry. “Poetry by men of ambition” is different. What Ye Xie calls “situating oneself in the normal world and making full use of the *qi* of the world throughout the four seasons” is similar to what Jin Shengtian 金聖歎 (1610–1661) called “the primal melody of the world” 天地之元聲, in which the poem contains no word or phrase that goes against the world, but stands on behalf of the world and embraces everything in it.⁸¹ Ye’s “experiencing change and delving deep into the thoughts of people throughout history” is similar to the connection between “my thoughts” 我之思 and “the thoughts of thousands of years” 千百年以上之思 proposed by Mo Bingqing 莫秉清 (1622–1690), in which the poet conveys the thoughts and values of humans from antiquity to the present.⁸² This larger self is “able to produce after encountering a definite scene,” that is, write true feelings based upon the poet’s actual experience. As exemplary poets, Tao Qian, Du Fu, Han Yu, and Su Shi achieved great accomplishments in terms of both their poetry and their ambitions. A poet should have an enlightened quality to him, tempering his knowledge with experience and thereby becoming a “man of ambition.”

This idea of the “poetry of men of ambition” was well regarded in Qing poetry circles. As we have already noted, in the eighteenth century, Peng Shaosheng praised the integrity of earlier loyalists Xie Ao and Du Jun as being exemplary “men of ambition.” Later in the Qing, Zhang Jiliang 張際亮 (1799–1843) classified poetry into three categories, namely, “the poetry of talents,” “the poetry of scholars” (*xueren zhi shi* 學人之詩), and “the poetry of men of ambition.”⁸³ He recommended the poetry of men of ambition as being especially relevant during the perils of the early nineteenth century. Such men of ambition “never forget the empire for even a day” 未嘗一日忘天下 and keep in mind “readers thousands of generations hence” 千百世後讀之者. Unlike lesser writers, “their ambition is never to be a poet, and therefore theirs alone is the crafted poem” 蓋惟其志不欲為詩人，故其詩獨工。⁸⁴ Zhang Jilang is similar in many ways to Ye Xie, but we find a greater sense of sadness in Zhang’s letter. His idea of poetry by men of ambition is focused on concern over the empire and compassion for the people, drawing a close connection between an individual’s personal emotions and the broader, societal hardships wrought by dramatic historical change. In the history of poetry, those whose works touched upon the

entire body politic, such as Du Fu, Li Bai, Han Yu, and Su Shi, could be considered “men of ambition.” The late Qing saw the emergence of much “poetry of ambition,” setting off a surge of patriotic literature at the end of the imperial period, which has continued into modern times.

The study of literary virtue should thus not be limited just to the surface meanings of the terms *literature* and *virtue*. Rather, it must fully grasp the theoretical understanding of a writer’s moral character in literary criticism. In this way, we can discover the richness of the full connotations of the traditional discourse on literary virtue and how it changed in response to different circumstances.

Virtuous Writing

Literary virtue refers not only to a writer’s moral cultivation but also to virtue during the act of writing. People articulated this from early on, but they came at it from different angles and expressed it in different ways. The “Appended Phrases II” section of the *Yijing* reads:

The words of someone who is about to revolt have a sense of shame about them; the words of someone who entertains doubts in his innermost mind tend to prevaricate; the words of a good person are few; the words of an impatient and impetuous person are many; the words of someone who tries to slander good people tend to vacillate; and the words of someone who has neglected his duty or lost his integrity tend to be devious.

將叛者其辭慚，中心疑者其辭枝，吉人之辭寡，躁人之辭多，誣善之人其辭遊，失其守者其辭屈。⁸⁵

“About to revolt” and “a sense of shame” are about one’s mental state when speaking. If one speaks a certain way, then they will write a certain way. Writers must be allowed a certain degree of mental freedom, but they should not indulge in their personal whims, nor should they use their writing as a bludgeon to attack others. This is especially important in historical biography, which traditionally aims to balance the impartial reporting of facts with moral judgment. But writers, inevitably influenced by the things and people around them, may sometimes massage the truth. For this reason, Liu Xie noted that “only a pure heart can properly discern the principle of a matter” 析理居正，唯素心乎。⁸⁶ The “pure heart” mentioned here refers to a fair mind freed from personal interests. Literature was considered a powerful tool to ensure the common good of the empire and should be treated accordingly.

Careful analysis of literary writing often allows one to catch a glimpse of its inspiration. When that inspiration is at its peak, talent may trump propriety, and

the full range of emotional responses, from joy and laughter to anger and scorn, may find their way into one's work. For example, Su Shi, known as a boldly straightforward person, once said: "Words come from the heart and rush through the mouth. If you spit them out, they'll run against others, but if you swallow them in, they'll run against oneself. I believe that it's better to run against others, so I spit mine out" 言發於心而沖於口，吐之則逆人，茹之則逆余，以為寧逆人也，故卒吐之。⁸⁷ But writing without any restriction may very well get one into trouble. The fact that Su Shi faced charges of *lèse majesté* in the infamous "Crow Terrace Poetry Case" (Wutai shi'an 烏臺詩案) is not unrelated to his personality. His student Huang Tingjian once reflected: "Dongpo's writings wowed the entire empire, but his shortcoming lay in his fondness for inveighing against others. It would be prudent not to follow in his tracks" 東坡文章妙天下，其短處在好罵，慎勿襲其軌也。⁸⁸ Song and Ming neo-Confucians highly valued sincerity while maintaining an amiable manner. Coupled with the rising authoritarianism of the period, literary theory emphasized suppressing one's talent and bringing one's unrestrained individuality into line with stylistic norms.

In his work *On Literature and History* (Wenshi tongyi 文史通義), Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) wrote essays on both "Historiographic Virtue" (Shide 史德) and "Literary Virtue," saying:

The ancients, in their discussion of literature, talked only about literary style and nothing more. Liu Xie based his work upon Lu Ji's teachings and proposed a discussion of the "literary mind" [*wenxin* 文心]. Su Zhe (1039–1112) based his works upon Han Yu's teachings and championed the notion of "literary spirit" [*wenqi* 文氣]. [In both cases] one can say that these teachings became more refined as their implications were worked out. No one, though, has ever discussed "literary virtue," and students should reflect upon this deeply.

古人論文，惟論文辭而已矣。劉勰氏出，本陸機氏說而昌論「文心」；蘇轍氏出，本韓愈氏說而昌論「文氣」，可謂愈推而愈精矣。未見有論「文德」者，學者所宜深省也。⁸⁹

In this passage it appears that Zhang is introducing a new sense of the term *literary virtue*. Previous writers discussed literary virtue as referring to literati's moral cultivation in their everyday lives. Zhang, by contrast, refers to the intentions of literati at the moment of writing. In "Historiographic Virtue," he writes, "What is virtue? It the mindset of one who writes" 德者何？謂著書者之心術也。⁹⁰ This mindset should "foreground reverent attention while writing" 臨文主敬。⁹¹ When writing, one must adopt an attitude of equanimity and objectivity. "Anyone who would write literature in the ancient style," he says, "must maintain reverent attention and sympathetic concern" 凡為古文辭者，必敬以恕。⁹² The term "reverent attention" (*jing* 敬) refers to examining one's own mindset, achieving a state

of tranquility, aligning one's spirit with *li*, and regulating emotions without indulging in them. One's emotions should be rooted in one's nature, which should be displayed without distortion. The term "sympathetic concern" (*shu* 恕) means understanding people and the world, being able to put yourself in the shoes of the ancients, and avoiding personal bias. Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) criticized previous historians and literati for how they offered criticism with excessive subtlety, complained against authorities, and tended to write out of a sense of indignation. He believed such attitudes violated natural moral principles, coming from "fools who are discontent with their lot in life, criminals within the Confucian school" 愚不安分，名教中之罪人.⁹³ He advocated that writers of literature and history should have sincere, loyal intentions, and keep in mind the subject's proper duties to his ruler.

Zhang Xuecheng's concept of literary virtue went against traditional historiographic practices, such as praising virtue and condemning evil through subtle inferences. It also deviated from Liu Xie's idea that "treachery should be punished and evil warned against through an honest scribe's direct writing" 姦慝懲戒，實良史之直筆.⁹⁴ At the same time, Zhang's ideas reflect his own historical circumstances. Private historical writings flourished in the late Ming, especially during the transition to the Qing, when Ming loyalists wrote literary and historical works that opposed the new regime. The reigns of emperors Kangxi and Qianlong (1654–1796) saw the expansion of literary inquisitions closely related to efforts to suppress heterodoxy during the revision of the *History of the Ming* (Mingshi 明史) and the compilation of the *Complete Library of the Four Treasures* (Siku quanshu 四庫全書).⁹⁵ These efforts aimed to establish a new sense of subjects' duty toward their rulers and to reinforce the legitimacy of the new dynasty.⁹⁶ Zhang Xuecheng's concept of literary virtue aligned with the prevailing state ideology of the Qing during this period, but it was later criticized by Zhang Taiyan, who said that it "only teaches people to flatter" 徒教人以諂耳.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Let us end by shifting to a comparative perspective. Although the concepts of morality may differ from Chinese ones, classical Western literary theories also stress the importance of a writer's moral character. Plato (429?–347 BCE) believed that poets, unrestrained by facts, invented fictitious stories primarily for pleasure. For this reason he expelled poets from his ideal republic, advocating instead that poets imitate the virtuous philosophers. We can think of this as Plato's theory of literary virtue. Later, Denis Diderot (1713–1784) stated, "If the moral system is corrupt, the taste will be false. Truth and virtue are the friends of the arts. Are you an author? Are you a critic? Then start by being a good person" (*Si le système moral est corrompu, il faut que le goût soit faux. La vérité & la vertu sont les amies de*

beaux Arts. Voulez-vous être auteur? voulez-vous être Critique? commencez par être homme de bien).⁹⁸ In other words, genuine aesthetic taste cannot exist without sufficiently elevated morals, and both writers and critics should have a well-developed moral character. This would be Diderot's theory of literary virtue. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) placed greater emphasis on aesthetic self-discipline, but he also held that beauty is a good sign of morality. It was only in the era of Romanticism, especially after the rise of aestheticism, that the connection between beauty and goodness was severed. By the time we reach Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), for example, he could state, "Yes, all the arts are immoral, except for those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good."⁹⁹

This separation of literature from the moral character of the writer was further encouraged by tendencies in mainstream Western literary criticism in the twentieth century. The pedagogical success of "practical criticism," in which I. A. Richards (1893–1979) asked his students to read poems without revealing the identity of their authors, inspired the midcentury rise of the so-called New Criticism, which at its extreme became "synonymous with the practice of explicating texts in a vacuum," shorn of the biographical context of their authors.¹⁰⁰ Much structuralist and poststructuralist criticism of the latter half of the century continued to downplay authors' personal actions or motives, seeing instead the literary work as an independent object with its own systems for making (or unmaking) meaning. Even politically engaged literary criticism, as we find among Marxist, New Historicist, postcolonial, and feminist literary analyses in the latter half of the twentieth century, is typically more invested in exposing systems of power that lay behind literary works than in pondering the personal moral conduct of an author.¹⁰¹ The youthful collaboration of deconstructionist critic Paul de Man (1919–1983) with the Nazi regime brought the issue of biography back into relevance, though this remained in the realm of metareflection on the discipline of literary and cultural theory.¹⁰² It is only in the twenty-first century, in the wake of the Me Too movement and the rise of "cancel culture," that the West has begun to see renewed interest in the moral conduct of artists.¹⁰³ This could be thought of as a new form of literary virtue.

In early twentieth-century China, the modernizers associated with the May Fourth movement undermined the dominance of mainstream Confucian morality but failed to firmly establish a new one. Instead, they embraced certain ideas about romanticism and aestheticism that they had gathered from the modern West. Consequently, in the field of literary theory, aesthetics and morality were placed in opposition to each other, and the traditional theory of literary virtue was neglected, whether intentionally or unintentionally. A writer's personal integrity is rarely discussed by modern Chinese literary theorists, apparently assuming that it is not literature's responsibility to offer moral instruction.

An exception is Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋 (1903–1987), who published an article in 1928 titled “Literati Have Morals” (Wenren you xing 文人有行) that said, “As both a person and as a literatus, one should act virtuously. . . ‘Literati lack morals’ is a fact that needs to be urgently remedied. ‘Literati *have* morals’ is the ideal that literati should strive for.”¹⁰⁴ Liang Shiqiu offered an important critique of the malpractice of his time. Throughout Chinese history, the responsibility for promoting social morals has largely depended on literary figures.

In light of this long tradition, abandoning the idea of literary virtue would leave us with a soulless literary theory, one that would be considered vacuous or even detrimental to the future development of literature. To completely abandon the theory of literary virtue would mean turning away from the idea of writers actively participating in the construction of society’s morals, which would also be detrimental. Of course, norms change over time, and we cannot demand that contemporary writers adhere to outdated moral codes. However, writers should strive for a nobility of character and an openness of mind; they should uphold basic, widely agreed upon moral concepts; and they should see themselves as leaders in promoting new moral standards. This should be an essential theme in contemporary Chinese literary discourse. Contemporary Chinese theorists could propose their own, new theories of literary virtue.



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Notes

1. For discussions of the range of *wen*’s early meanings, see, e.g., Gu, “Patterns of Tao”; and Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon.”
2. On the meanings of *de*, see, e.g., Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*, 59–61; and Wang H., “Genealogical Study of *De*.”
3. *Shang shu zhengyi*, 17.484 (“Zhou Shu: Cai Zhong zhi ming” 周書：蔡仲之命 [The Documents of Zhou: The Charge to Cai Zhong]); translated in Legge, *Fifth Part of the Shoo-king*, 490.
4. “Qingmiao” 清廟 [Clear Temple] (Mao no. 266), in *Maoshi zhushu*, 1885. The commentary of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) makes it clear that this refers to King Wen. Another reference can be found in a speech in *Guoyu*, 48 (chap. 3, “Zhou yu xia” 周語下 [Speeches of Zhou II]).
5. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 16.1302.

6. See, e.g., Zheng Xuan's gloss of *wenren* in the phrase "pursue filial piety with respect to your predecessors in *wen* [culture/literature]" 追孝於前文人, in *Shang shu zhengyi*, 20.542 ("Wen hou zhi ming" 文侯之命 [The Charge to Marquis Wen]); and Mao Heng's gloss of *wenren* in the phrase "proclaim it to the *wenren*" 告於文人, in *Maoshi zhushu*, 1822–23 (from "Jiang Han," Mao no. 262).
7. The *shi* were initially a class of warriors that later evolved into civil functionaries, hence its standard translations as "knight" or "scholar," depending on context. On the meaning "knight," see, e.g., *Zuozhuan*, "Xigong" 僖公, year 28 (Durrant et al., *Zuo Tradition*, 1:416–17), which refers to military officers as *shi*. *Wenren* and *wenshi* were used in practically synonymous ways, despite having the latter being technically narrower.
8. The *shi*'s low rank in the aristocracy is outlined in the "Regulations of the Kings" chapter of the *Book of Rites*, for which see *Liji zhengyi*, 11.2861 ("Wang zhi" 王制 [The Regulations of the King]). On their superior position among the four classes of people, see Li X., *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 8.400 (chap. 20, "Xiao Kuang" 小匡).
9. *Shijing*, "Da Dong" 大東 (Mao no. 203), in *Maoshi zhushu*, 1120.
10. See, e.g., Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 15.680 and 7.319.
11. In Xiao T., *Wen xuan*, 1:13; translated in Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, 1:95.
12. See Huang H., *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, 1.8 (chap. 1, "Fengyu" 逢遇 [Success and Luck]), 2.40 (chap. 5, "Xing'ou" 幸偶 [On Chance and Luck]), 20.867 (chap. 61, "Yiwen" 佚文 [Lost Texts]), 28.1149 (chap. 82, "Shujie" 書解 [On Literary Work]), and 30.1205 (chap. 85, "Ziji" 自記 [Autobiography]).
13. Huang H., *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, 20.867–68 ("Yiwen" 佚文 [Lost Texts]); translated in Forke, *Lun-Hèng*, 2:278–79, with modifications.
14. Huang H., *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, 28.1149 ("Shu jie" 書解 [On Literary Work]); cf. Forke, *Lun-Hèng*, 2:229.
15. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 28.1226 ("Xian wen" 憲問 [Xian Asked]).
16. Xu S., *Shuowen jiezi*, 10b.337 ("Xin bu" 心部 ["Heart" Classifier]).
17. This passage from the *Changes*, found in "Appended Phrases II," is translated and discussed in the section on "Virtuous Writing" below. The *Mencius* reference can be found in section 2A.2, for which see *Mengzi zhushu*, 2A.5841: "If someone's expressions are one-sided, I know that by which they are obscured. If someone's expressions are excessive, I know what they have sunk into. If someone's expressions are heretical, I know that by which they are separated from the Way. If someone's expressions are evasive, I know that by which they are overwhelmed" 諛辭知其所蔽, 淫辭知其所陷, 邪辭知其所離, 遁辭知其所窮 ("Gongsun Chou shang" 公孫醜上); translated in Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 41.
18. *Liji zhengyi*, 38.3330 ("Yue ji" 樂記 [Record of Music]).
19. Zhang T., *Guogu lunheng shuzheng*, 2:1.270. Zhang is also referred to as Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 in modern scholarship.
20. On Zhuangzian freedom, which can refer both to freedom from and freedom within constraints, see Lai, "Freedom and Agency in the *Zhuangzi*."
21. For the thirteenth-century appearance of this phrase, see the biography of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 found in Huang Z., *Huangshi richao*, 46.211. For Wang Chong's remark, see Huang H., *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, 10.434 ("Fei Han" 非韓); translated in Forke, *Lun-Hèng*, 1:435.
22. On the "long, sad tale of the way in which the power and influence of officials waned while that of consorts' families, favorites, or eunuchs grew" in the second century, see Twitchett

- and Loewe, *Ch'in and Han Empires*, 219–376 (quotation at 304); on the Hongdu Gate school in particular, see 333.
23. Yuan Hong, *Hou Han ji*, 24.466.
 24. Ye S., *Xixue jiyuan xumu*, 26.364.
 25. On this point, see Chen Y., “Shu *Shishuoxinyu*,” 48.
 26. See his “Shang Sui Wendi shu” 上隋文帝書 (Letter Presented to Emperor Wen of Sui), in Huang and Jiang, *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan*, 259.
 27. This remark is preserved in a quotation in one of Pei Songzhi’s annotations to the *Annals of Wei* (Wei zhi 魏志), found in Chen S., *Sanguo zhi*, 21.604. Another example is Cao Pi’s “Letter to Wu Zhi” (Yu Wu Zhi shu 與吳質書), preserved in Chen S., *Sanguo zhi*, 21.602.
 28. See Yang, “Wende lun” 文德論 (On Literary Virtue), referenced in Wei, *Wei shu*, 85.1876 (“Wen Zisheng zhuan” 溫子昇傳 [Biography of Wen Zisheng]); Yan Z., *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, 4.237 (chap. 9, “Wenzhang” 文章 [Belles Lettres]), translated in Tian, *Family Instructions*, 185; and Wang T., *Zhong shuo jiaozhu*, 2.43.
 29. Translation from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 47 (modified); cf. Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, 96.
 30. This phrase comes from Liu Xie, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 10.592 (chap. 48, “Zhiyin” 知音 [Understanding the Tone]).
 31. *Quan Liang wen* 全梁文 (Complete Prose of the Liang), 11.6019, in Yan K., *Quan shanggu sandai*.
 32. Yan Z., *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, 4.238. (chap. 9); translated in Tian, *Family Instructions*, 189.
 33. “Song Meng Dongye xu” 送孟東野序 (Essay on Seeing Off Meng Dongye), in Liu and Yue, *Han Yu wenji huijiao jianzhu*, 9.982. For a full English translation of this essay, see Hartman, *Han Yu*, 230–31.
 34. “Jingtang changhe shi xu” 荆潭唱和詩序 (Preface to *Poems Exchanged at Jingtang*), in Liu and Yue, *Han Yu wenji huijiao jianzhu*, 10.1122.
 35. See his preface to the poetry collection of Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060), in Zhu D., *Mei Yaochen ji*, 3:1162. The full quote makes it clear that poetry does not cause the ruin but that ruin can facilitate the writing of well-crafted poetry.
 36. See his “Shi lun” 詩論 (On Poetry) in Wang Y., *Chen Zilong quanji*, 3:21.690–91.
 37. From his “Xu Xiaoxiu shi” 敘小修詩 (An Account of Xiaoxiu’s Poetry), in Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao*, 4.188–89. Xiaoxiu is the style name of Yuan Hongdao’s brother Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1626).
 38. Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 521) describes literary deception in *Zengding Wenxin diaolong*, 7.412 (chap. 31, “Qing cai” 情采 [The Affections and Coloration]); translated in Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 243.
 39. For an English translation of Pan’s “Rhapsody,” see Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, 3:145–58.
 40. Yao, *Yuan Haowen quanji*, 11.230. See also the translation and discussion in Wixted, *Poems on Poetry*, 62–67.
 41. From his “Xie Du xiangong lun Fang Du erxiang shu” 謝杜相公論房杜二相書 (Thanking Minister Du for His Letter on My Essay on Ministers Fang and Du), in Dong, *Quan Tang wen* 527.5354.
 42. See his biography in Shen Y., *Song shu*, 67.1772.
 43. See his “Bian ming lun” 辨命論 (Disputation on Fate), in Yan K., *Quan shanggu sandai*, 57.6573. This was later quoted by Yin Fan 殷璠 in the eighth century to describe Chang Jian 常建 (ca. 708–ca. 764), for which see Fu, *Tangren xuan Tangshi*, 165.

44. Xiao D., *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, 3:6.1475. translated in Owen, *Poetry of Du Fu*, 2:151. The term *mingda* 命達 (success) in this line clearly refers to success in office, rather than artistic success, underlined by the reference to the “wronged soul” (*yuanhun* 冤魂) of Qu Yuan 屈原 in the poem’s concluding couplet. Critics from the twelfth century to the present concur with this reading, for which see Xiao D., *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, 3:6.1477.
45. Wang S., *Yanzhou shanren sibu gao*, 151.12a–31b.
46. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 1.34.
47. Han Yu’s statement comes from his poem “Replying to Xiba, Twelve Rhymes” (He Xiba ershi yun 和席八十二韻), in Fang S., *Han Changli shiji*, 11.619. Liu Zhi’s statement is recorded in his official biography in Toqto’a et al., *Songshi*, 340.10858.
48. Tu Long, “Reply Letter to Grand Scribe Wang Yinchang” (Da Wang Yinchang taishi 答王胤昌太史), in Tu, *Qizhenguan ji*, 15.301; Zhao Nanxing, “Letter in Reply to Zhang Yuanli” (Da Zhang Yuanli 答章元禮), in Zhao, *Zhao Zhonggu gong wenji*, 17.29a–b; Hu Y., *Shi sou*, 330 (“Xubian yi” 續編一 [Addition One]). Xie Zhaozhe wrote “A Disputation on ‘Literati Lack Morals’” (Wenren wuxing bian 文人無行辯) to refute this idea in his *Wenhai pisha*, 6.19b–21b.
49. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 19.1508.
50. For an English translation and analysis of Tao Qian’s “Rhapsody on Stilling the Passions,” see Hightower, “Fu of T’ao Ch’ien.” For Wang Anshi’s comment, see Hu Z., *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua qianji*, 6.37.
51. Ruan Ji supported the Sima 司馬 clan that overthrew the Cao regime and would eventually establish the Jin 晉 dynasty in 266. Chen Zi’ang and Song Zhiwen served at the court of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705) during the Zhou interregnum of the Tang dynasty, widely seen as a time of political turmoil.
52. See, e.g., Li Gang’s 李綱 (1083–1140) remarks in “Preface to Guling’s *Transmitting the Old: A Literary Collection*” (Guling chenshu gu wenji xu 古靈陳述古文集序), in Zeng and Liu, *Quan Song Wen*, 3748.26.
53. See Liu Xie, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 10.596 (chap. 49, “Cheng qi” 程器 [Evaluating Capacity]).
54. In the *Jin shu* biography of Liu Dan 劉恢, Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371) eulogized him by saying that he “occupied office without doing the things of office, and took care of things without a mind hung up on things” 居官無官官之事，處事無事事之心。See Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, 75.1992.
55. See Ouyang Xiu’s “Letter on Literature to Editor Huang” (Yu Huang jiaoshu lun wenzhang shu 與黃校書論文章書) in Li Y., *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 68.988; and Su Shi’s “Preface to the Literary Collection of Master Fuyi” (Fuyi xiansheng wenji xu 晁繹先生文集叙) in Z. Zhang et al., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu*, “Wenji” 文集 (Literary Collection), 10.968.
56. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 38.1705.
57. Liu Xie, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 10.596 (chap. 49, “Cheng qi”).
58. This first saying comes from Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), in his *Yan Yuan ji*, 1.51. The second is attributed to Fang Dacong 方大琮 (1183–1247) in his “Letter Thanking Zhao of the Granary for Promoting a Talented Writer” (Xie Zhao Cangyuan ju wenhua qi 謝趙倉院舉文華啓), in Zeng and Liu, *Quan Song wen*, 7394.151, and quoted in numerous variations.
59. The earliest source for this quotation is the Mid-Tang story collection *Da Tang xinyu* 大唐新語 (New Accounts of the Great Tang); see Liu S., *Da Tang xinyu*, 7.114. For a study and translation of this anecdote, see Chan, “Literary Criticism and the Ethics of Poetry.”

60. “Ancient culture” (*guwen* 古文) refers to a variety of attempts by Tang intellectuals to reinvigorate culture after the near collapse of the empire during the An Lushan Rebellion in the 760s, often by reinvestigating ancient models, stressing a plain literary style and personal morality. It came to be seen as a precursor of the “neo-Confucian” (*Lixue* 理學) movement that would emerge in the late eleventh century. Introductions in English can be found in Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 108–47; and DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance*, 115–46.
61. From Liang Su’s 梁肅 postface to Dugu Ji’s literary collection. See Liu and Li, *Pilingji jiaozhu*, 20.436.
62. From Han Yu’s “Reply to Li Yi’s Letter” (*Da Li Yi shu* 答李翊書), in Liu and Yue, *Han Yu wenji huijiao jianzhu*, 6.700.
63. From “On Letters” (*Wenci* 文辭), passage 28 of *Penetrating the Scripture of Change* (*Tongshu* 通書), in Chen K., *Zhou Dunyi ji*, 2.36.
64. From Zhu Xi’s “Response to Yang Songqing” (*Da Yang Songqing* 答楊宋卿), quoted in Luo, *Helin yulu*, 6.112.
65. For more on literature’s relationship to moral learning, especially as it came to be articulated by the followers of Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi, see Liu Ning and Yugen Wang’s contribution to this special issue, “Literature and the Way: The Theoretical Foundation and Historical Development of *Wendao* 文道.”
66. From his “On the Poetry of Xi Shuye, To My Nephew Jia” (*Shu Xi Shuye shi yu zhi Jia* 書嵇叔夜詩與姪履), in Liu L., *Huang Tingjian quanji*, “Bieji” 別集 6.1428. Xi Shuye is alternate name of the poet Xi Kang 嵇康 (ca. 223–262).
67. Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, 15.678.
68. Yang Xiong and Pan Xu both served usurpers of the Han throne (Wang Mang 王莽, r. 9–22 CE, and Cao Cao 曹操, 155–220, respectively) after having previously served the Han. Both wrote literary compositions justifying these overthrows.
69. He, *He Shaoji shiwen ji*, 3.781.
70. See Liu Xizai, *Yi gai*, 2.421 (chap. 2, “Shi gai” 詩概); and Wang Guowei’s essay “Wenxue xiaoyan” 文學小言 (Remarks on Literature), in Xie and Fang, *Wang Guowei quanji*, 14:94.
71. Pattern (*li* 理) is a core concept in neo-Confucian thought. It refers to a unifying cosmic coherence that can be expressed differently in different phenomena. It has also been translated as principle, law, reason, order, and coherence. For an introduction to this concept in English, see Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism*, chap. 2, “Pattern and Vital Stuff”
72. Zhu X., *Shiji zhuan*, 2.
73. Fang Xiaoru, *Sunzhizhai ji*, 538.
74. Shen D., *Shuo shi zuiyu jianzhu*, 14 (chap. 1, no. 6).
75. For summaries of this debate in English, see Waley, *Yuan Mei*, 167–74; and Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 263–67.
76. See his “Lessons on Literature and the Way” (*Wendao yuangui* 文道元龜), reproduced in Dong, *Quan Tang wen*, 394.4014.
77. Peng Shiwang, *Chigongtang wenchao*, 2.8a–b. For more on Peng Shiwang, see Zhou, “Peng Shiwang de shiji.”
78. See Peng Shaosheng’s “Explaining Writing” (*Xu wen* 叙文), in Peng Shaosheng, *Erlinju ji*, 3.6b.
79. Ye X., *Jiqi wenji*, 8.7a. For an introduction to Ye Xie’s theories of poetry in English, see Pohl, “Ye Xie’s ‘On the Origin of Poetry.’”
80. Yang X., *Fayan yishu*, 2.49. For a full English translation of this passage, see Yang X., *Exemplary Figures*, 25.

81. Jin, *Guanhuatang xuanpi*, 2.121.
82. “Xu Jiana shicao xu” 徐嘉訥詩草序, in Mo, *Huating Mo Jiashi*, 73:18.
83. See his “Letter in Response to Governor Yao Shifu” (Da Yao Shifu mingfu shu 答姚石甫明府書), in Zhang J., *Zhang Hengfu wenji*, 3.1a–5b.
84. “Letter in Response to Pan Yanfu” (Da Pan Yanfu shu 答潘彥輔書), in Zhang J., *Zhang Hengfu wenji*, 3.13b–14a.
85. *Zhou yi zhengyi*, 8.190 (“Xici xia” 繫辭下); translated in Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, 96.
86. Liu Xie, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 4.207 (chap. 16, “Shi zhuan” 史傳 [Historiography and Biography]).
87. This quotation can be found twice in Su Shi’s extant oeuvre: “Record of the Hall of Thought” (Sitang ji 思堂記) and “Recording Tao Yuanming’s Poetry” (Lu Tao Yuanming shi 錄陶淵明詩), in Z. Zhang et al., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu*, “Wenji” 文集 11.1146 and 67.7555.
88. Liu L., *Huang Tingjian quanji*, “Zhengji” 正集 18.424.
89. Zhang X., *Wenshi tongyi*, 3.278; translation adapted from Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History*, 82.
90. Zhang X., *Wenshi tongyi*, 3.219; cf. Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History*, 77.
91. Zhang X., *Wenshi tongyi*, 3.279; cf. Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History*, 84.
92. Zhang X., *Wenshi tongyi*, 3.278; cf. Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History*, 83.
93. Zhang X., *Wenshi tongyi*, 3.221; cf. Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History*, 81.
94. Liu Xie, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu*, 4.207 (chap. 16, “Shi zhuan”).
95. On the compilation of the *Complete Library*, see Guy, *Emperor’s Four Treasures*.
96. See Yang N., “Zhang Xuekai de ‘jingshi’ guan.”
97. From “Letter on National Learning” (Yu ren lun guoxue shu 與人論國學書), collected in *Taiyan wenlu chubian* 太炎文錄初編, in Xu J., *Zhang Taiyan quanji*, 4:370.
98. Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, 297.
99. From “Critic as Artist,” pt. 2, in Wilde, *Intentions*, 177.
100. For his method, see Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 3–5. The quoted description of New Criticism is from Graff, *Professing Literature*, 146.
101. Rita Felski, for example, has critiqued much Western literary criticism as it has been practiced from the late twentieth century onward for being primarily concerned with suspecting texts of implicit ideologies and then “unmasking” them. See Felski, *Limits of Critique*.
102. See de Man, *Wartime Journalism*; and Hamacher et al., *Responses*, as well as the many reviews of these works.
103. See, for example, the extensive reflection on the disconnect between artistic talent and personal morality in Dederer, *Monsters*. In the conclusion of his much-discussed *Professing Criticism*, John Guillory lists the “moral/judicial” as one of five “rationales” for literary study that “emerges from the long-duration study of literature,” along with linguistic/cognitive, national/cultural, aesthetic/critical, and epistemic/disciplinary (348).
104. In *Xinyue* 新月 1, no. 2 (1928): 1–6, repr. in *Xinyue (diyi juan)*.

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