

Linking Ancient and Contemporary

Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese Literature

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On the Literary Self-Consciousness of the Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties

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Abstract The period from the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) through the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-589) was an important period for the burgeoning self-awareness and sophistication of Chinese literature. In this period literature gradually detached itself from the traditional fields of the learning of the Classics and historiography, so that the special characteristics of literature became evident. The major genres of Chinese literature were established, while literary groups, schools and styles were formed. Finally, literature achieved an independent status, and a solid foundation was established for the thriving literature of the Tang (618-907).

Summary 1 Literary Self-Consciousness. – 2 The *Garden of Letters* and the Independence of Literature.

Keywords Literary Self-Consciousness. Six Dynasties. Golden Tower Master. *Jinlouzi*.

1 Literary Self-Consciousness

The distinction between *wen* 文 (refined literature) and *bi* 笔 (functional writing) originated during the Southern Dynasties,¹ but between the late Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) and the Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220-420) period writers had begun to have a rather self-conscious awareness of the distinction between the two types of writing. Historical evidence shows that by the late Han, people had begun to compare the different roles performed by legal officers (*wenli* 文吏) and Confucian scholars. Legal officers were thought to excel in the practical genres, such as the official letter (*jian* 箋) and petition (*zou* 奏), while Confucian scholars were seen to excel at classi-

1 See biography of Yan Jun 顏竣 (d. 459) in *Songshu* (75.1959-1967). *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), chapter 44 «Zongshu» 總術 (General Summary) reports: «It is commonly said nowadays that there is both wen and bi. That without rhyme is bi, that with rhyme is wen. Wen is enough for writing, its principle covering both *Shijing* and *Shujing*; differentiating them by two names is something that has only arisen recently» 以為無韻者筆也，有韻者文也。夫文以足言，理兼詩書，別目兩名，自近代耳 (*Wenxindiaolong jiaoshi* 1962).

cal studies.² The motives behind both types of writing were not in any sense literary, but they did encourage literature's burgeoning self-awareness. Wang Chong 王充 (27-100 C.E.) of the Eastern Han had already made this implicit differentiation in his *Lunheng* 論衡 (Discussing Weighing), identifying the *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) and *song* 頌 (eulogy) as the genres employed by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 C.E.), Fu Yi 傅毅 (ca. 47-92 C.E.) and other literati in their writings. This gradual process carried out by the Wei had reached the point where terms like *wenxue* 文學 and *wenzhang* 文章 began to be used to describe *belles lettres* in the strict sense of the term, which showed the beginnings of a self-conscious awareness of literature.³

The distinction between *wen* and *bi* was basically meant to divide literary and non-literary writing into two groups. This is an inevitable tendency in the history of literature and is rooted in historical causes. As literature developed over time, and the status of literature grew and became more independent, the distinction between *wen* and *bi* gradually became clearer. At the same time, the special characteristics of literature became more clearly recognizable, and during the Southern Qi 齊 (479-502) and Liang 梁 (502-557) dynasties this development became a major topic of literary criticism. The opinions of Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-520) and Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508-554) on the distinction between *wen* and *bi* may be taken as representative.

Liu Xie, in the «Zongshu» 總術 (General Summary) chapter of *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), summarized contemporary opinion as follows: «*wen* is rhymed, *bi* is unrhymed» (see note 1). Rhymed genres include poetry (*shi* 詩), rhapsodies (*fu* 賦), eulogies (*song* 頌), encomiums (*zan* 讚), condolences (*diao* 弔), dirges (*lei* 誄), etc., while unrhymed genres include the edict (*zhao* 詔), patent of enfeoffment (*ce* 策), proclamation (*xi* 檄), and dispatch (*yi* 移). Using rhyme to classify writing as either *wen* or *bi* is simple and clear, as it is using formal features to define the division between *wen* and *bi*. Liu Xie used

2 The basic annals of Emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 125-144) in the *Hou Hanshu* records that in 132 CE: «At the beginning, [the Emperor] commanded the local administrative regions to recommend the filial and incorrupt, limited to those over forty in age; Confucian scholars had to be familiar with the *zhangju* 章句 school of exegesis, and legal officers had to be capable of writing official letters (*jian*) and petitions (*zou*), in order to be selected» 初令郡國舉孝廉, 限年四十以上, 諸生通章句, 文吏能牋奏, 乃得應選 (*Hou Hanshu* 6.261). Also, the biography of Hu Guang 胡廣 (91-172) records: «At this time director of the imperial secretariat Zuo Xiong 左雄 recommended reforming the *chaju* system, limiting it to people aged forty or older, testing Confucian scholars in classical scholarship, and legal officers on writing of memorials» 時尚書令左雄議改察舉之制, 限年四十以上, 儒者試經學, 文吏試章奏 (*Hou Hanshu* 44.1506). For more on the conflict of Confucian scholars and legal officers, see *Chengcai* 程材 chapter 12 in *Lunheng jiaoshi* (1990), pp. 533-545. For a related discussion, see Yan Buke 1996.

3 See note by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451) in *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, quoting *Dian lue* 典略, which praises Po Qin 繁欽: «Qin not only excelled at official writings (*shu ji* 書記), but also at *shi* and *fu*» 欽既長於書記, 又善為詩賦, which already shows a clear distinction of *bi* and *wen* (*Sanguo zhi* 21.602).

exactly this standard to divide the genres he analyzes in the *Wenxin diaolong*. Of the thirty-three genres he discusses in his treatise, those from «Illuminating Poetry» (*mingshi* 明詩) to «Humor and Enigma» (*xieyin* 諧隱) are rhymed *wen* genres, while those from «Histories and Commentaries» (*shizhuan* 史傳) to «Records and Documents» (*shuji* 書記) are unrhymed *bi*.⁴

Unlike Liu Xie, Xiao Yi puts greater emphasis on the fundamental properties of literary composition. In the «Liyan» 立言 (Establishing Words) chapter of *Jinlou zi* 金樓子 (Master of the Golden Tower) he wrote:

There were two kinds of ancient scholars, and there are four kinds of modern scholars. The students of the various masters, who passed on their teachings one after the other, and were thoroughly familiar with the classics of the sages, were called *ru* (Confucian scholars); the followers of Qu Yuan 屈原, Song Yu 宋玉, Mei Sheng 枚乘, and Sima Xiangru, worked only with *fu* (rhapsodies), so they were called *wen*. The *ru* scholars of today are deeply learned in the various masters and the histories, but only know the facts and do not understand the principles behind them, so this is called (*xue* 學). As for those who are not good at poetry, such as Yan Zuan 閻纂, or who are good at proclamation and presentation essays, such as Bo Song 伯松, men of this ilk are called *bi*. Those who recite songs that are full of sorrow and longing are called *wen*. But most scholars are not good at composing new poems, and keep to their elaborate commentaries. They are poor at change within continuity (*tongbian* 通變), and dull at the use of the mind (*xinyong* 心用). Scholars cannot determine the truth or falsity of the rites and music or recognize the meaning of the teachings of the classics, but can only uphold the old words and have at a hand's grasp their plentiful learning. Still they draw from the current at its source (*yi yuan zhi liu* 挹源之流), and just for this they are worthy of esteem. When *bi* is lacking then writing does not deserve the name of literature; but when it is excessive then it is said not to grasp the meaning. Though its clever grace is divine (*shen qi qiaohui* 神其巧惠), this is the limit of *bi*. As for *wen*, they are spread out profusely like damask, the *gong* and *zhi* notes are subtle and fine, a perfect matching like lips meeting, so heart and spirit tremble. The ancient *wen* and *bi* are also different in origin.

4 The book *Rules of Wen and Bi* (*Wenbi shi* 文筆式) which appeared a short time later also followed a similar statement throughout: «The proper way of literary composition must be either *bi* or *wen*. As for *wen*, it may be poetry, rhapsodies, inscriptions (*ming*), eulogies, admonitions (*zhen*), encomiums, condolences, or dirges; as for *bi*, it may be edicts, patents of enfeoffment, dispatches, declarations (*zhang*), petitions (*zou*), letters (*shu*), or communications (*qi*). That is to say, with rhyme it is *wen*, without rhyme it is *bi*». *Wenbi shi* is included in *Wenjing mifu lun* 文鏡秘府論. Both Luo Genze 羅根澤 (1935), and Wang Liqi 王利器 (*Wenjing mifu lun jiaozhu* 1983), date it to the Sui dynasty.

然而古人之學者二，今人之學者有四。夫子門徒，轉相師受，通聖人之經者謂之儒，屈原宋玉枚乘長卿之徒，止於辭賦則謂之文。今之儒博窮子史，但能識其事，不能通其理者，謂之學。至如不便為詩如閻纂，善為章奏如柏松，若此之流，泛謂之筆，吟詠風謠，流連哀思者，謂之文。而學者率多不便屬辭，守其章句，遲於通變，質於心用。學者不能定禮樂之是非，辯經教之宗旨，徒能揚榷前言，抵掌多識。然而挹源知流，亦足可貴。筆退則非謂成篇，進則不雲取義，神其巧惠筆端而已。至如文者，惟須綺縠紛披，宮徵靡曼，唇吻適會，情靈搖盪，而古之文筆，今之文筆，其源又異。(Jinlou zi 9b, 1937)

Here Xiao Yi introduces the concepts of *wen* and *bi* on the basis of a contrast between contemporary and ancient scholars. The two different types of ancient scholars are Confucian (*ru*) and literary (*wen*), while the four different types of contemporary scholars are Confucian, academicians (*xue*), literary, and practical writers. This is an improved conception since it reflects the real development of literature and scholarship. For the time being we will leave Confucians and academicians aside. What is interesting here is Xiao Yi's distinction between *wen* and *bi*. He does not use the presence or absence of rhyme as a dividing line, but instead emphasizes the fundamental properties of the genres. For his definition of *bi*, he says: «When *bi* is deficient then writing does not deserve the name of literature, but when it is excessive then it is said not to grasp the meaning. Though its clever grace is divine (*shen qi qiaohui* 神其巧惠), this is the limit of *bi*», and also gives the examples «not good at poetry like Yan Zuan 閻纂, good at proclamation and presentation essays like Bo Song 伯松». Presentation and proclamation essays are of course unrhymed genres, so they would naturally belong to the category of *bi*, but Xiao Yi categorizes Yan Zuan as *bi*, thus overcoming the notion that rhyme was the fundamental distinction between *wen* and *bi*. As for the definition of *wen*, he says that «reciting popular songs, they are rich in sorrow and longing», and also that «they are spread out profusely like damask, the *gong* and *zhi* notes are subtle and fine, a perfect matching like lips meeting, so heart and spirit tremble». Here he emphasizes the rhetoric, rhythm, and sound of the words, and their emotional effect. It must be admitted that this distinction is by no means scientific, since it is not clear which writings «spread out profusely as damask, with tones of *gong* and *zhi* that are subtle and fine», or which make «the heart and spirit tremble». This is not an objective standard, but in his understanding of the fundamental nature of literary works Xiao Yi far surpassed the other critics of his day. What he is proposing is not a strict classification of genres, but the requirements and proper realm for literary works. Considering the tendency of Southern Dynasties critics to overvalue *wen* and undervalue *bi*, the status of literary works was broadly accepted to be higher than that of non-literary ones. The Biography of Ren Fang 任昉 (460-508) in the *Nan shi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties) says that once Ren Fang «was known as a literary talent, people in those

days would say, 'the prose (*bi*) of Ren and the poetry of Shen (Yue)'. When Ren Fang heard this he thought it sorely mistaken. Late in life he came to enjoy composing poems, and wanted to be recognized as a better poet than Shen. But Ren Fang used too many allusions in his poetry and his compositions were not very fluid. Earlier on in Ren Fang's career, all the gentlemen of the capital had envied him, but now he strained too much, and it was said his talent was finished» (*Nanshi* 59.1455). Comparing this story to the period of Han and Wei, it can be seen without a doubt that the status and value of literature had been raised.

2 The Garden of Letters and the Independence of Literature

The histories include Biographies from the *Garden of Letters* («Wenyuan zhuan» 文苑傳), beginning with Fan Ye's 范曄 (398-445) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han). Fan Ye completed his work in the first year of the Yuanjia reign of Emperor Wen of the Song (424),⁵ and in the fifteenth year of the same reign (438), Emperor Wen established four Academies (*guan* 館): Confucian learning, *Xuanxue*, Literature, and History. That literature was established as an independent department in this bureaucracy was a mark of its new self-awareness and independence. Fan Ye did not write a preface to the Biographies from the *Garden of Letters* section of his *Hou Hanshu*, so his purpose in making it a separate section is unclear. But in his «Letter to my Nephews from Prison» («Yu zhong yu zhu sheng zhi shu» 獄中與諸甥姪書), Fan Ye explains that in his various biographical evaluations of the authors, «for each one I had a refined intention and profound purpose». In particular, with regard to the biographical evaluations ranging from «Officials of Enforcement» (*Xunli liezhuan* 循吏列傳) to «The Six Yi» (*Liuyi liezhuan* 六夷列傳), he says that «the force of my brush was free and untrammled, and truly those were compositions deemed remarkable throughout the realm. Those essays, put together, are probably not less than Jia Yi's *Disquisition on the Excesses of the Qin*. If I were to compare my works with the writings of the Bans, it is of only these that I would not be ashamed».⁶ From this we can understand Fan Ye's high regard for these biographical evaluations. It is thus highly regrettable that he did not write biographical evaluations for the biographies in the *Garden of Letters* section. Writers of literature in the Han had a status comparable

5 *Songshu* 69.1819: «Fan Ye was demoted in 424 to governor of Xuancheng 宣城, and felt dissatisfied, out of the various versions of the *Hou Hanshu* he compiled his own».

6 吾雜傳論, 皆有精意深旨, 既有裁味, 故約其詞句。至於《循吏》以下及《六夷》諸序論, 筆勢縱放, 實天下之奇作。其中合者, 往往不減《過秦》篇。嘗共比方班氏所作, 非但不愧之而已 (*Songshu* 69.1819).

to actors,⁷ and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC-18 AD) once said that writing *fu* was like insect-carving and seal-script written by children, not something for adults to do. As for these famous authors of literature, historians selected those «writings whose significance was far-reaching and vast» (*Shitong tongshi* 1986, p. 123). They compiled biographies for the authors of the most famous pieces, such as Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BC). Although ‘establishing words’ was one of the three ways of achieving immortality in Confucianism, this usually referred to the works of the hundred schools of philosophy that clarified and expounded principles, while *fu* could not help but suffer the criticism that they were «elaborate to the point of missing the truth, wandering without limits until they forgot how to return» (*Shitong tongshi* 1986, p. 124). Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721) discusses the successes and failures of the histories with regard to their form, and with good reason, but if it were not for the compilation produced by Sima Qian and Ban Gu during the Western Han, when the bibliographical system of the Four Categories, one of which was for literary collections, had not yet been devised, it is hard to imagine how any literary works would have been preserved for later ages. In this respect the judgments of historians often seem illogical to people of later eras. During the transition from Han to Wei, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) composed the *Lunwen* 論文 (Discussing Literature) essay in *Dianlun* 典論 (Canonical Opinions), publicly asserting that «literature is the great work of managing the state, the worthy business that never fades», and also that «human life some time must end, so that fame and pleasure cease with the body; the two have a fixed date on which they must expire, and cannot compare with literature which is imperishable. For this reason the writers of the past devoted their lives to the brush and ink, expressing their thoughts in their writings. They did not rely on the words of the capable historians, nor entrust themselves to fleeting forces, but their name and reputation were naturally handed down to later ages». Cao Pi, as heir to the throne, proclaimed that the value of literature was equal to that of history. Although this essay possesses certain political implications, it is still a product of the circumstances in which literature was becoming self-conscious, and is also a mark of literature’s growth and development towards independence (Cai Rongnan, Fu Gang 1986). Precisely because of this cultural shift, even though the histories did not begin to include a «Garden of Letters» chapter until as late as the Liu-Song dynasty (420-479), starting from the end of the Han the histories did frequently record works of literature, thus embodying Cao Pi’s views.

7 According to *Hanshu*, Emperor Wu supported Dongfang Shuo, Mei Gao, and other literary men as entertainers 朔、皋不根持論，上頗徇優畜之 (*Hanshu* 64.2775).

Fan Ye did not compose a preface to his «Garden of Letters» chapter; on the contrary, the succeeding *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (History of the Southern Qi), *Liangshu* 梁書 (History of the Liang), and *Weishu* 魏書 (History of the Wei), etc., all supplemented the literary biographies with prefaces (*xulun* 序論) or evaluative postscripts (*zhuanlun* 傳論). Once biographies were established for authors, and literary compositions considered a means to ‘establishing words’, parallel to ‘establishing virtue’ and ‘establishing merit’ (the other two traditional means of achieving immortality), literature had truly achieved independent status.

Another mark of literature’s newfound independence and self-awareness is the compilation of individual collections and anthologies. According to the Bibliographical Treatise (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) of the *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui), the Literary Collections category (*jibu* 集部) of the Four Category system (*siku* 四庫) originated in the Eastern Han, though some modern scholars believe that the cataloguing of literary composition began with Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232; Yao Mingda 1957). The biography of Cao Zhi in the «Annals of Wei» of the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, records that during the Jingchu 景初 era (237-239), Emperor Ming 明宗 (r. 227-239) issued an edict to compile all the *fu*, eulogies, poems, inscriptions, and over one hundred miscellaneous essays written by Cao Zhi, and to store copies both within and outside the palace. This is a clear example of the compilation of a literary collection. In fact, Cao Zhi also compiled his own works during his life time: chapter 55 of the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Categorized Collection of Arts and Letters) quotes Cao Zhi’s *Qian lu xu* 前錄序 (Preface to Former Collected Works).⁸ People of the Han and Wei still valued the writings of the philosophers most, but literary collections were also valued by writers and society as a whole, a fact that must have influenced Cao Pi’s comment that writings can make reputation survive after death. It was in this period that the compilation of personal collections rapidly grew in popularity. By the Southern Dynasties it was said that «every family has its writings, and everyone has his literary collection» (文集盛於二漢, 至家家有製, 人人有集, *Jinlouzi shuzheng jiaozhu* 2014, v. 4, p. 659). The practice became so common that Wang Yun 王筠, for instance, made a collection for each official post he held.

The rise of individual collections in turn inspired the further compiling of anthologies. As early as the Wei, books with the characteristics of anthology had begun to appear. For example, the *Shulin* 書林 (Forest of Calligraphy) of Ying Qu 應璩 (190-252), listed in the «Bibliographical Treatise» of

8 «When I was young I enjoyed the *fu*, what I admired was the elegant and fair, the impassioned and bold. I wrote many *fu*, but they were composed for various occasions, so many are overgrown weeds. Thus I have edited and selected them, and made a separate ‘Former Collection’ of 78 pieces». 余少而好賦, 其所尚也, 雅好慷慨, 所著繁多, 雖觸類而作, 然蕪穢者衆, 故刪定別撰, 為《前錄》七十八篇 (*Yiwen leiju* 1985, p. 996).

the *Suishu*, must have been an anthology of different styles of calligraphy. Also, Cao Pi in his «Letter to Wu Zhi» («Yu Wu zhi shu» 與吳質書) clearly states that as he recalled his departed friends Xu Gan 徐干, Chen Lin 陳琳, Ying Yang 應瑒, Liu Zhen 劉楨, and others, he «collected some of their surviving works and made them into an anthology». Although this book unfortunately has not survived, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433) did write a set of poems entitled «Imitations of the Poetry Collection of the Wei Heir Designated in Ye» («Ni Wei Taizi Ye zhong jishi» 擬魏太子鄴中集詩), proving that Cao Pi completed the collection, and that it also survived until the Liu-Song. From the Wei and Jin onward, anthologies became more and more common. According to the Sui «Bibliographical Treatise», at that time there were 107 literary anthologies extant in 2213 *juan*. Including books that had already been lost in the Sui, the catalogue lists 249 books in 5224 *juan*. The Literary Collections Category increased in magnitude primarily because the quantity of literary works had grown, but also because of the influence of the burgeoning field of literary criticism. In Chinese literary criticism, besides the actual writings through which critics express their ideas, more often they express their opinions through the compilation of anthologies. One example is Zhi Yu's 摯虞 (d. 311) *Wenzhang liubie ji* 文章流別集 (Literary Collection Classified by Genre), of which the Sui «Bibliographical Treatise» says that it «culled the finest blossoms, and pruned the profuse». The anthology collected and edited the writings of previous eras, dividing them into categories beginning with poetry, *fu*, and the other genres. Zhi Yu expressed his opinions on historic works of literature through the process of compiling his anthology. Indeed, in this period it was often a single person who compiled several different anthologies. For example, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433), a celebrated poet, compiled eight different anthologies, showing that he was not only a writer, but also devoted to compilation. Of these eight anthologies, four were of poetry. They were compiled in different ways so as to express different ideas about literature, and in this way literary criticism led to the compilation of more anthologies.

The new self-awareness of literature was expressed in regard to poetry with the motto 'poetry follows feeling' (*shi yuan qing* 詩緣情). Since even before the Qin Dynasty, Confucian texts emphasized the principle that «poetry expresses what the mind is intent on» (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志).⁹ The Great Preface to the *Book of Odes*, as a seminal document of Confucian poetics, makes a comprehensive statement of this tradition. And while the essence of the phrase 'poetry expresses intention' (pinyin and characters) is that it emphasizes the political role of poetry, it does not pay adequate attention

9 See *Yaodian* 堯典 chapter of *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Shangshu zhengyi* 2015. 1.28) and *Yue ji* 樂記 chapter of *Liji* 禮記 (*Liji zhengyi* 1999, 19.1073).

to the basic characteristics of literature. Beginning with the Wei and Jin, Cao Pi, in his «Disquisition on Literature» (*Lun wen* 論文), first proposed the idea that «poetry and *fu* should be beautiful», taking beauty as the basic requirement of literature, thereby contradicting the traditional view that poetry expresses what the mind is intent on. Cao Pi's slogan was not just an idiosyncratic idea, but the inevitable consequence of literature's gradual trend towards independence. For example, in the Han, Yang Xiong had criticized the «*fu* of the rhapsodists» for being «beautiful to the point of impropriety» (詩人之賦麗以則). In the practice of the authors of this period, the fundamental principle of literature demanded that they tend towards beautiful and ornate writing. Similarly, Xiao Tong's prescription in the Preface to the *Wenxuan* was that writers should «base their writings on the facts but add luster, change the source information to make it more impressive». Although pentasyllabic verse originated in the later period of the Eastern Han,¹⁰ it had already rapidly achieved a very high level of artistic accomplishment,¹¹ and this was another historical factor behind Cao Pi's pronouncement. After Cao Pi, Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303), in his «*Fu* on Literature» («Wen fu» 文賦), proposed that «poetry should trace feeling with elegant beauty» (詩緣情以綺靡). There has been continual controversy about what it means for poetry to follow feeling (Zhang Shaokang 1984), but Lu Ji had already abandoned the traditional principle that «poetry expresses what the mind is intent on». The relation of the two elements in his statement, feeling and elegant beauty, is not clear, and Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898-1948) said that this was an entirely new idea (Zhu Ziqing 1990). Since the Jin dynasty, writers and critics have often extolled the principle of 'tracing feeling',¹² which shows how this period began to unchain itself from political indoctrination, to emphasize aesthetic values in poetry.

Flourishing literary production in turn encouraged the growth of literary criticism. During the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties there were a significant number of essays and larger works that engaged in criticism based on aesthetic values in literature. The richness of these discussions and the diversity of the types of criticism established a foundation for the literary criticism of later times. The basic elements of literary criticism, such as the personality of an author, the style of a work, the process and technique of writing, the influence of social context and natural environment, the critical attitude and the differentiation of genres

10 Here I follow the conventional view.

11 Zhong Rong's *Shipin* praises the 'Old Poems' as «warm and lovely in style, their intention sorrowful but far-reaching, startling to the mind and moving to the soul: one could say each word is worth a thousand in gold» (*Lidai shihua* 1981).

12 See Xiao Zifan 蕭子範, «Qiu zhuan Zhaoming taizi ji biao» 求撰昭明太子集表, and Wang Yun 王筠, «Zhaoming taizi aicewen» 昭明太子哀冊文 (*Quan Liang wen* 1958, pp. 3084, 3338).

were all treated in depth. With regard to form, Cao Pi's «Disquisition on Literature» is a topical essay, Lu Ji's «Fu on Literature» is in the form of a fu, Zhong Rong's *Evaluation of Poetry* and Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* are both critical treatises, but Shen Yue, in his «Biographical Evaluation of Xie Lingyun» from the *History of the Song*, and Xiao Zixian, in his «Biographical Evaluations of Literature» from the *Nan Qi shu*, both discussed the development of literature within an official history. From Cao Pi's isolated essay to the appearance of Zhong Rong's and Liu Xie's major treatises, the style of literary criticism grew increasingly precise and detailed. Above all, Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* is a work of grand scale and elaborate design. Divided into fifty chapters, the first five chapters are the core of the entire work. The remaining chapters can be divided into two parts: the first twenty chapters discuss various literary genres, analyzing their origins and development, specifying the genre and its formal requirements, and so on, in order to «trace the origins in order to show the results, explain the name to elaborate its significance, select the writings to determine the pieces, elaborate the reasons to compose a system». The next twenty-four chapters are basically a theory of composition, primarily treating the basic theory and technique of writing, such as structure, style, rhetorical devices, the relationship between literature and social life or natural environment, and so on. The final chapter, entitled «Elaborating Intention» (*Xuzhi* 序志), is the general postface to the work. The appearance of the *Wenxin diaolong* demonstrates the level of maturity in literary criticism that was reached in this period. As to the issues treated by literary criticism since the Wei and Jin, they were all included by Liu Xie and analyzed more thoroughly than before. The establishment of a comprehensive system of literary criticism was another consequence of the flourishing literary production of this period.

The Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties was a period when separate Northern and Southern states opposed each other, and as a result cultural history in this period shows an uneven development. Southern culture was relatively advanced, and literary production reached a high level of achievement. The North, especially early in this period, was mainly imitating the Southern culture. Several quite famous writers were clearly earning their living borrowing from the works of Southern writers (*Bei Qi shu* 37.492).¹³ In spite of this, Northern Dynasties writers still had a distinctive style, as the «Preface to Literary Biographies» of the *Suishu* observes:

13 «[Wei] Shou 魏收 (506-572) in his discussions would often belittle Xing Shao's 邢邵 [Xing Qiu 虬 fl.480-500] writing. Shao once said: 'Ren Fang of Jiangnan had a style fundamentally too loose. Wei Shou does not just imitate it but steals from it in large swathes.' When Shou heard about this he said: 'That guy often goes thieving amid the works of Shen Yue - what does he mean by saying that I steal from Ren Fang?'» 收每議陋邢邵文。邵又云：「江南任昉，文體本疏，魏收非直模擬，亦大偷竊。」收聞乃曰：「伊常於沈約集中作賊，何意道我偷任昉。」(*Bei Qi shu* 37.492).

«South of the Yangzi River the court and poems were advanced, and they esteemed the pure and refined. North of the Yellow River writing had an honest and upright character, emphasizing noble spirit. With a noble spirit, the idea overcame the words; pure and refined, the rhetoric surpassed the meaning. For popular use, the idea should be superior, but literary refinement is better for reciting and singing. This is the overall difference between the success and failure of Northern and Southern writers».¹⁴ Overall, Northern Dynasties literature emphasized the practical, favoring Confucian doctrine in its philosophy, and up-holding ritual propriety and fixed principles, meaning that it was relatively realistic. In the selection of genres, too, it was somewhat different from Southern Dynasties literature, as the North had a preference for the applied genres. Northern Dynasties unrhymed prose (*sanwen*) was very advanced, surpassing that of Southern Dynasties writers (Cao Daoheng, Shen Yucheng 1991). But although the North and South were on hostile terms, cultural exchange was still very common, and also quite diverse in its form, including: the mutual exchange of ambassadors from North and South, Southern writers and literati taking refuge in the North for various reasons, commerce (especially cultural commerce) in the border region, the mass migrations on both sides due to war, and so on. A famous case is Yu Xin's migration from South to North. His literary style had a tremendous influence on Northerners. This not only directly helped to advance Northern literature, but Yu Xin himself gained valuable experience in the North. His compositions written in the North, expressing his longing for home, anger at the fall of his home country, and the sorrows of travel, won him undying fame in the history of literature. These works were the product of the interaction between Northern and Southern cultures. Yu Xin's success shows that Northern literature already had its own distinctive qualities, and in many respects had caught up with and even surpassed Southern literature.

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14 然南北好尚，互有異同。江左宮商發越，貴於清綺；河朔詞義貞剛，重乎氣質。氣質則理勝其詞，清綺則文過其意。理深者便於時用，文華者宜於詠歌。此其南北詞人得失之大較也 (Suishu 隋書, 76.1163).

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