
SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 304

July, 2020

Naturalness versus Novelty: The Ideal of Poetry in the Late Jin Dynasty

by
Xiuyuan Mi

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

FOUNDED 1986

Editor-in-Chief

VICTOR H. MAIR

Associate Editors

PAULA ROBERTS

MARK SWOFFORD

ISSN

2157-9679 (print) 2157-9687 (online)

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series dedicated to making available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. The editor-in-chief actively encourages younger, not yet well established scholars and independent authors to submit manuscripts for consideration.

Contributions in any of the major scholarly languages of the world, including romanized modern standard Mandarin and Japanese, are acceptable. In special circumstances, papers written in one of the Sinitic topolects (*fangyan*) may be considered for publication.

Although the chief focus of *Sino-Platonic Papers* is on the intercultural relations of China with other peoples, challenging and creative studies on a wide variety of philological subjects will be entertained. This series is *not* the place for safe, sober, and stodgy presentations. *Sino-Platonic Papers* prefers lively work that, while taking reasonable risks to advance the field, capitalizes on brilliant new insights into the development of civilization.

Submissions are regularly sent out for peer review, and extensive editorial suggestions for revision may be offered.

Sino-Platonic Papers emphasizes substance over form. We do, however, strongly recommend that prospective authors consult our style guidelines at www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc.

Manuscripts should be submitted as electronic files in Microsoft Word format. You may wish to use our sample document template, available here: www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot.

All issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* are free in PDF form. Issues 1–170, however, will continue to be available in paper copies until our stock runs out.

Please note: When the editor goes on an expedition or research trip, all operations may cease for up to three months at a time.

Sino-Platonic Papers is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Naturalness versus Novelty:
The Ideal of Poetry in the Late Jin Dynasty

Xiuyuan Mi

University of Pennsylvania

The semi-nomadic origin of the Jurchen people tends to lead to the assumption that literature under the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1126–1234) has a bolder, more heroic style compared to literature under Han regimes, especially the Song dynasty.¹ This stereotype is furthered by Yuan Haowen's (1190–1257) unparalleled influence on our understanding of Jin culture. Yuan's apparent dismissal of the Northern Song poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) and the Jiangxi School of Poetry in his meta-poetic commentary, "Thirty Poems on Poetry," seems to be solid evidence against an excessively ornate style. *Remarks on Poetry at the Southern Bank of the Hu River* (*Hunan shihua* 滄南詩話), the only systematic Jin poetry criticism preserved till this day, presents similar ideas. The author, Wang Ruoxu 王若虛 (1174–1243), exhausts every means to attack the poetry of Huang Tingjian and the Jiangxi School: not only their style, but also their poetic themes, formal semantics, and literary tropes. Given the prestige of Yuan and Wang, especially the latter's vehement condemnation of eccentric poetic diction, it is easy to assume that Jin literati preferred a plain style. Liu Qi's 劉祁 (1203–1259) criticism of "novel" 尖新 poetry and Zhao Bingwen's 趙秉文 (1159–1232) exaltation of Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037–1101) spontaneity seem to consolidate this point.²

This assumption perhaps fits well with the Chinese imagining of the geographical north and the

¹ John Timothy Wixted, *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yuan Hao-wen (1190–1257)*, Munchener Ostasiatische Studien, b. 33. (Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 69–73; Chang Kang-I Sun and Stephen Owen, eds., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 515.

² Liu Qi, *Guiqian zhi* 歸潛志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 85; Zhao Bingwen, *Xianxian laoren Fu shui wenji* 閒閒老人滄水文集 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2016), 352–53. Hereafter, *Fushui ji*.

nomads. Based on transmitted sources, some scholars have reached the conclusion that there were two schools of poetry during the Late Jin: Yuan, Wang, Zhao and their followers, representing authentic Jin poetry, characterized by a plain style, and the opposing style of the leading literati, characterized by an obsession with empty figures and idiosyncratic diction, propagated by the Jiangxi School.³ While this distinction holds true under certain circumstances, I argue that to view the Jin ideal of poetry as elevating the plain over the elaborated, and the heroic over the delicate oversimplifies the diversity of Jin literature and underestimates the sophisticated connoisseurship of Jin literati. I also argue that a distinctive school of poetry such as the Xikun 西崑 in the early Northern Song did not exist in the Jin dynasty.⁴ The so-called “Literary School of the Present Dynasty” 國朝文派 was a rather loose term encompassing poets of diverse styles and lacked a specific group of followers adhering to a set of poetic principles. Moreover, since the civil service examinations excluded poetry composition, the idea of “exalting personal intention” 尚意 inherited from the Northern Song was promoted to an unprecedented level: effective expression therefore became the core and foundation of good poetry.

The following pages advance my argument in three sections. The first section addresses the controversial views during the late Jin on the style of Huang Tingjian and the Jiangxi School, that is, the allegedly ornate poetry, and the contemporary reception of those poems. The second section examines Wang Ruoxu’s radical opinion on lucid language and the extent to which other leading literati aligned with his position. The third section looks into the *Anthology of the Central Plain* (*Zhongzhouji* 中州集) and criticism of poetry by Yuan Haowen and other literati. I hope to demonstrate that the literati’s positions cannot be understood as pro-plain or pro-baroque, and their identities as poet, critic and connoisseur need to be distinguished.

ANTI-OSTENTATION: THE PROBLEM WITH HUANG TINGJIAN AND THE JIANGXI SCHOOL

Huang Tingjian’s two famous slogans for poetry-writing — “stealing the embryo and transforming the

³ Hu Chuanzhi, *Jin dai wenxue yan jiu* 金代文學研究 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2000).

⁴ Xikun was a poetry school in the early Northern Song, known for its members’ pursuit of exquisite language, which had been faulted by literati of later generations for making poetry lapse into superficiality.

skeleton” 奪胎換骨 and “adding a drop of [elixir] to iron to make gold” 點鐵成金 — rendered him susceptible to the criticism of wanting in originality.⁵ Like most of his contemporaries as well as the Jin literati, Huang admired the great Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), but understood Du’s greatness to be a result of “not having a single word in his poem lacking precedent examples” 無一字無來處.⁶ He believed that people did not recognize Du’s borrowing of earlier texts because they read too little, and, as the slogans indicate, he encouraged them to adopt existent writings to make their own poems. The Jiangxi school, constructed retrospectively long after Huang’s death, is therefore most known for their rigorous training in poetic diction and extensive use of classical allusions.

Wang Ruoxu lambastes Huang’s slogans as advancing sly plagiarism,⁷ whereas the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth poems in Yuan Haowen’s “Thirty Poems on Poetry” deprecate the Jiangxi poets, and arguably also their master.⁸ In the midst of Wang Ruoxu’s furious attacks on Huang, he offers some insights into Huang’s shortcomings:

Shangu’s [Huang Tingjian] poetry is novel yet not perceptive, stringent yet not untrammelled. [He] shows off his learning to make [his poetry] rich, modifies clichés to make [his poetry] new. However, as for the purely natural [quality], as if one flowing from the heart, [his poetry] is insufficient.⁹

山谷之詩，有奇而無妙，有斬絕而無橫放，鋪張學問以為富，點化陳腐以為新；而渾然天成，如肺肝中流出者，不足也。

⁵ Wang Ruoxu, *Hunan yilao ji* 澠南遺老集 (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2006), 479.

⁶ Huang Tingjian, “Da Hong Jufu shu III” 答洪駒父書三 *Yuzhang huang xian sheng wen ji* 豫章黃先生文集, 19: 23b.

⁷ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 479.

⁸ Yuan Haowen, *Yuan Haowen quan ji* 元好問全集 (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chuban she, 2004), 270. Qian Zhongshu reads the two poems as Yuan’s attempts to distinguish Huang Tingjian from his Jiangxi disciples, of whose poetry Yuan obviously disapproves. See Qian Zhongshu, *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄 (Taipei: Shulin chuban youxian gongsi, 1988), 153.

⁹ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 463.

Wang acknowledges Huang's creativeness and impeccable form, but regards his poetry as merely a craft, lacking the spirit of natural expression, the essence of poetry passing down from the "Great Preface" of *The Odes*. To Wang, Huang's habitual use of allusions is little more than a display of erudition. Wang's poetic outlook was influenced by his uncle Zhou Ang 周昂, who expresses his disapproval of Huang's poetry in a subtler manner:

The style of Luzhi [Huang Tingjian] is heroic and idiosyncratic. He is good at developing novel forms and indeed has merits in his own way. Yet the style has absolutely nothing to do with Shaoling [Du Fu]. People from the past generations thought [he] inherited [Du's] principles [of poetry-writing] because they all failed to gain a deep understanding.¹⁰

魯直雄豪奇險，善為新樣，固有過人者，然於少陵初無關涉，前輩以為得法者，皆未能深見耳。

Zhou's comment suggests that Huang has a unique style despite claiming to be a follower of Du Fu. However, the veiled gesture of disapproval cannot be overlooked: given that Du Fu had become a token of poetic perfection by that time, asserting Huang's poetry "has absolutely nothing to do" with Du's excludes him from the pantheon of great poets. Similarly, Yuan Haowen's twenty-eighth poem states that the Jiangxi school has neither Du Fu's "classic elegance" 古雅 nor Li Shangyin's "refined purity" 精純. The twenty-ninth poem further criticizes the futility of belabored composition — the Jiangxi poet Chen Shidao, the subject of Yuan's criticism in the poem, is said to waste his mental energy in vain in order to perfect his verse.¹¹

The objection to Huang Tingjian and the Jiangxi poets is not about poetic innovation and excessive use of allusions but rather addresses a deliberate and ostentatious quality found in their

¹⁰ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 437.

¹¹ Yuan, *Yuan Haowen quan ji*, 270.

poems. In his comments on Huang Tingjian's "Orangutan Brush" 猩毛筆,¹² Wang scorns the following couplet as flamboyant praise of the poet's own assiduity:

平生幾兩屐	In this life, how many pairs of clogs can I wear?
身後五車書	After I die, there will be five carriages of books. ¹³

The first half of the couplet alludes to an anecdote of the Eastern Jin dynasty minister Ruan Fu 阮孚 (ca. 278–326): Huang uses Ruan's extreme enthusiasm for clogs to highlight his own supposed detachment from objects of this world.¹⁴ The second invokes a remark in *Zhuangzi*: "Huishi is erudite, his books fill up five carriages" 惠施多方, 其書五車. The connection between the two anecdotes and the poetic narrative they form is rather loose. Moreover, turning a poem meant to be on a brush in a direction with dense reference and a self-exalting import irritates Wang. He concludes this entry asserting, "this is a riddle of a vulgar man, how come it suffices to be a poem!"¹⁵

Wang's intense dislike for Huang was famous in his time, but not all literati disapproved of him. According to Liu Qi's *Guiqian zhi*, Wang made another critical comment on "Orangutan Brush" on another occasion by questioning how one brush can be so durable as to write five carriages of books. Lei Yuan 雷淵 (1184–1231), a literatus known for his pursuit of novel diction, toyed with the title and retorted: "How can the hairs of an orangutan be capable of making only one brush?" which Liu Qi's father Liu Congyi regarded as making Wang a laughing stock.¹⁶ Such a response does not necessarily indicate their appreciation of this poem, but rather implies a reserved attitude toward Wang's criticism. The most admired literatus during the Jin was no doubt Su Shi, but Huang was not underappreciated.

¹² The original title is "A Rhymed Reply to Qian Mufu on the Orangutan Brush" 和答錢穆父詠猩猩毛筆. The brush was a gift Qian Xie brought back from his official trip to Korea. See *Huang tingjian shi jizhu* 黃庭堅詩集註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 149.

¹³ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 475.

¹⁴ *Shi shuo xin yu* 6: 15.

¹⁵ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 475.

¹⁶ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 96.

Li Chunfu 李純甫 (1177–1223), another towering figure in the late Jin, once praised Wang Tingyun's 王庭筠 (1151–1202) writing, saying: “Dongpo's [Su Shi] style transforms into that of Shangu [Huang Tingjian], and Shangu's style transforms into that of Huanghua [Wang Tingyun]. It is difficult for people to reach his [i.e. Wang's] level” 東坡變而山谷，山谷變而黃華，人難及也.¹⁷ Li emphasizes here that Wang Tingyun's accomplishment is a result of inheriting the style of Huang and accordingly that of Su. That he associated Huang with Su should not be surprising, as the former was the most senior among Su's disciples and a faithful friend. The complication lies in Huang's incontestable influence on the Jiangxi school. Yuan Haowen in his later writings speaks positively about Huang several times, but on the defects of the Jiangxi poets he never relents.¹⁸ Zhao Bingwen on one occasion praised a poem of Liu Qi 劉跂, a younger contemporary of Su Shi, as extremely similar to Su's “Matching to the Poems by Tao Yuanming” sequence and thus should not be considered a member of the Jiangxi school.¹⁹ If Huang was deemed a great poet despite some limitations, the Jiangxi poets adhering to his principles excessively pursued what they thought to be sophisticated poetry, so much so that they were rendering their lines maladroit or even incomprehensible.

WANG RUOXU'S RADICAL APPROACH AND THE VIEW OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The criticisms we can see today in *Hunanji* 滄南集 show that Wang Ruoxu is extremely fastidious about language, faulting the semantics and syntax of not only his contemporaries but also canonical masterpieces like *Shiji* and his most beloved Su Shi. Nevertheless, this inclination did not result in an emphasis on strict compliance with form and meter. To Wang's taste, coherent poetic narrative and apt description of the poetic subject are of paramount importance: figures and allusion can be used if accurate enough in the given case, but romanticization and exaggerated emotion are impermissible. In a nutshell, Wang's conception of poetry was by and large aestheticized everyday speech.

¹⁷ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 119.

¹⁸ “Thirty Poems on Poetry” was written in Yuan's late twenties.

¹⁹ “Ti xueyi xiansheng Liu Sili shitie hou” 題學易先生劉斯立詩帖後 in Yuan, *Yuan Haowen quan ji*, 842.

Wang suggests that composing poetry for its own sake is the cause of defective language. He cites Su Shi's "Preface to *Former Anthology of Travelling toward the South*" 南行前集敘 to demonstrate the natural and spontaneous quality in ideal writing:

Clouds float in mountains and above rivers; flowers blossom from bushes and trees. [It is because] the exuberance brims [within] and becomes visible without. Even if one desires otherwise, how could it avail? Therefore I have written numerous essays; yet never dare to harbor the thought of *composing* them.²⁰

山川之有雲，草木之有華，充滿勃鬱而見於外，雖欲無有，其可得耶？故予為文至多，而未嘗敢有作文之意。

Here writing is depicted as a spontaneous act analogous to natural phenomena. One writes because he cannot help it. Wang includes quite a few instances to demonstrate his disapproval of deliberated expression. Following are two examples, one by Wang Tingyun, and the other by an anonymous poet:

猛拍闌干問興廢	I hit the railings hard, asking the [cause] for the rise and fall of a state;
野花啼鳥不應人	Yet the wild flowers and chirping birds would not reply.
半生客裏無窮恨	Half of my life I spent adrift; my boundless sorrow
告訴梅花說到明	I tell the plum blossoms till [it is] dawning. ²¹

In the first couplet, Wang Tingyun reveals his impassioned discontent about court politics; however, in the second half of the couplet, the strong burst of feeling dwindles into a silent despondency veiled in the faintly desolate scene of unresponsive wild flowers and birds. The author of

²⁰ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 461.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 476.

the second couplet, in composing a typical lament of a drifting life away from one's hometown, claims to have poured out his grievances to plum blossoms for a whole night to intensify a sense of forlornness. However, Wang Ruoxu comments on the first couplet, contending that it would be indeed absurd if the flowers and the birds did respond, and ridicules the second couplet, saying: "I don't understand why he needs to do this at all [i.e. talk to the plum blossoms]."²² Wang seems to be quibbling about the plausibility of the acts, but what he stresses beyond this superficial criticism is the lack of genuineness. He thinks one cannot, with any sincerity, expect flowers or birds to respond to a question, nor can one actually stay up all night talking to plum blossoms. Such couplets are therefore a product of devising rather than a spontaneous expression.

The genuineness Wang advocates also includes the proper use of figures and reference, especially in the case of a "poem on objects" 詠物詩. One poem on an ink plum blossom, an image popular at the time, uses the Eastern Han beauty Wang Zhaojun as a metaphor for the subject. The other court ladies, wearing complex coiffures and heavy cosmetics, are comparable to ordinary flowers: they serve to set off the pure unadorned beauty of Wang Zhaojun, that is, the noble character of the plum blossom. The entire poem reads like a recounting of the famous anecdote of Zhaojun, who refused to bribe the court painter for a beautified portrait presented to the emperor. Wang Ruoxu criticizes the tenuous connection between the title and the actual poem and remarks that the reader would never have guessed the poem was about a flower, let alone a plum blossom, so that even more impossible would be a painting of a plum blossom. Likewise, he denounces a certain Peng Yuancai of the Northern Song for using the fair-complexioned scholar He Yan 何晏 (ca. 195–249) as a metaphor for a crabapple blossom, which is usually crimson or bright pink. Since similar poems on ink-blossoms were found in the works of Jiangxi poets, and making He Yan a metaphor for a flower started from Huang Tingjian,²³ Wang attributes the popularity of using such incongruent figures to the Jiangxi school.²⁴ The poets

²² Ibid.

²³ Huang uses He Yan as an analogy for the roseleaf bramble; see "Guan Wang zhubu jia tumi" 觀王主簿家酴醾 in *Huang Tingjian shi jizhu*, 1200. Wang thinks it betrays Huang's penchant for unusual figures, but regards it as a passable usage.

²⁴ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 485–88.

sacrificing aptness for novelty while seeking to “transcend” the normative poetics were held accountable for the decline of poetry.

Wang Ruoxu’s view was popular among a substantial group of literati. Yuan Haowen remarks in Wang’s funerary biography that half of the literati circle were Wang’s students, and that no one was able to offer a “definitive opinion” 公論 on literature and peoples’ characters after his death.²⁵ Likewise influenced by Su Shi, Zhao Bingwen also values naturalness and spontaneity, as can be seen in his “Reply to Li Tianying” 答李天英書.²⁶ The most interesting case is nevertheless Li Chunfu’s poetic theory. In his preface to Liu Ji’s 劉汲 collected works, Li states:

When a speech conforms to [natural] principles, it is called belles-lettres; when belles-lettres has meters, it is called poetry. Yet that which is called poetry is transformed from belles-lettres — how can it have a fixed form? Therefore *The Three Hundred Pieces* [i.e. *The Odes*] may be of greater or lesser [length], can be long or short, peculiar or plain, casual or grave. It follows wherever one’s intention goes: even the distressed and enthused speeches of laborers and married women are mingled with the sayings of the sages and worthies and do not seem inferior. After all, everyone talks only about his own will.... Since the Qi and the Liang dynasties, [poetry] was harmed by tones and forms, becoming similar to [the lyrics sung by] entertainers. Since the time of Shen [Quanqi] and Song [Zhiwen], punctuation rules have been developed. Then a most vulgar one would tell himself this is a secret unknown since Lingjun [i.e. Qu Yuan], and this is the first laughable matter. Li Yishan [Shangyin] liked to employ arcane allusion and use unusual words. Many people of the late Tang imitated him, calling [the style] “Xikun Style,” which is seriously lacking in elegance and pristine simplicity. Yet they mock Du Fu as a countryside scholar. This is the second laughable matter. Huang Luzhi had extraordinary talent and went off from the writing norms, regarding the vulgar as the elegant, the banal as the innovative. He [nonetheless] did not violate the central

²⁵ “Hanlin Wang gong mubiao” 翰林王公墓表 in Yuan, *Yuan Haowen quan ji*, 444.

²⁶ Zhao and Wang had minor disagreements over the materiality of ideal language. See Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 88.

principle, as if it were the insight given at the end of a Chan Buddhist discourse. The gentlemen of Jiangxi unanimously exalted him, establishing their own school. The better ones among them deliberate profoundness, the inferior ones imitate to the extent of plagiarizing. They all claim: “Han Tuizhi [Yu] writes poetry like belles-lettres, like Master Lei of the imperial ensemble dancing.” They also proclaim: “if one learns from Tuizhi with no avail, then he is a Bai Letian [Juyi].” This is the third laughable matter. Alas! As this kind of notion becomes popular, how could there be poetry in this world anymore? Lately I read Liu Xiyan’s poems. They are unadorned yet not uncultured, limpid yet not meager, simple and cogent, serene and flavorful...²⁷

言中理謂之文，文而有節謂之詩。然則詩者，文之變也，豈有定體哉。故三百篇…大小長短，險易輕重，惟意所適，雖役夫室妾悲憤感激之語，與聖賢相雜而無愧，亦各言其志也已矣…齊梁以降，病以聲律，類俳優然。沈宋而下，裁其句讀。又俚俗之甚者，自謂靈均以來，此秘未睹，此可笑者一也。李義山喜用僻事，下奇字，晚唐人多效之，號“西昆體”，殊無典雅渾厚之氣，反詈杜少陵為村夫子，此可笑者二也。黃魯直天資峭拔，擺出翰墨畦徑，以俗為雅，以故為新，不犯正位，如參禪著末後句為具眼。江西諸君子翕然推重，別為一派。高者雕鐫尖刻，下者模影剽竄，公言：韓退之以文為詩，如教坊雷大使舞。又云：學退之不至，即一白樂天耳。此可笑者三也。嗟乎！此說既行，天下寧復有詩邪。比讀劉西岩詩，質而不野，清而不寒，簡而有理，淡而有味…

Aside from his admiration of Huang Tingjian, Li’s ideas presented here are not at all idiosyncratic: *The Odes* is regarded as the paradigm of poetry because of its sincerity, and the baroque form of Qi-Liang verse is dismissed, Li Shangyin’s penchant for arcane diction is faulted,²⁸ criticism is

²⁷ Yuan, Haowen, ed. *Zhongzhouji* 中州集 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014), 94–95.

²⁸ Poets of the Xikun School from the early Northern Song were just Li Shangyin’s admirers, not his followers. Their notoriety for pursuing ornate diction confused some people, like the monk Huihong, who believed Li Shangyin started the Xikun trend.

directed against Han Yu's idiosyncratic style, and Bai Juyi's famous plainness is repudiated. The quality of Liu Ji's writing that Li Chunfu praises — "unadorned yet not uncultured, clear yet not meager, simple and cogent, serene and flavorful" — complies with Wang Ruoxu's standards for good poetry. However, several sources indicate that Wang and Li, as colleagues serving at the Hanlin Academy, were constantly engaged in debates because of their drastically different views on literary composition. Wang Ruoxu once remarked: "Zhichun [Chunfu], though talented, is fond of writing bizarre sentences and strange words that lack taste. 之純雖才高, 好作險句怪語, 無意味.²⁹ Liu Qi also expresses a gentle disapproval of Li for mingling Chan Buddhist sayings into his writing, and regards Li's works in his later years as verbose and improper.³⁰ This attitude was probably influenced by his father Congyi, who once observed: "Half of Zhichun's writing at old age is convoluted. Masters in the past like Su and Huang also talk about Chan, how could they have arrived at this [confused form]?" 之純晚年文字半為葛藤, 古來蘇黃諸公亦語禪, 豈至如此?³¹ Congyi's criticism is especially notable because he did not belong to Wang Ruoxu's or Zhao Bingwen's group. Liu Qi in fact recalls Congyi's liking for difficult rhymes and his claim that it would be a special accomplishment if he could make such a rhyming scheme adequate to express his intent.³² It is worth noting that both Wang and Li were much respected during that time and attracted numerous students, many of whom apparently followed both of them to learn writing. While the literati's distinctive taste for poetry may still be attributed to their different views on Huang Tingjian, I would like to suggest that the line between the natural and the novel or the plain and the ornate, was not as pronounced as it seems. In the next section, I will demonstrate the point by examining the commentaries in *Anthology of the Central Plain* (*Zhongzhouji* 中州集).

Li's poetry was approved of by some prestigious literati like Yuan Haowen, although Li Chunfu's view was also not uncommon.

²⁹ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 88.

³⁰ In the entry on Li, Liu praises his poetry for being "bold and unique, simple and classical" 雄奇簡古. There might be a change in his style over time, but his received poems are not dated. See *Guiqian zhi*, 6.

³¹ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 119.

³² *Ibid.*, 90.

*ANTHOLOGY OF THE CENTRAL PLAIN: THE LITERARY OUTLOOK OF
YUAN HAOWEN AND OTHER POETS*

Zhongzhouji is a volume Yuan Haowen compiled with the intention of preserving Jin literature after the Mongol Conquest. He calls the poets members of the Zhongzhou School, but the poems in the anthology are extremely diverse in style: Zhongzhou, or the Central Plain, is therefore more a geographical rather than stylistic notion. The poets' biographies recorded in the *Zhongzhouji* show that by then Yuan Haowen was much more tolerant in his criticisms than he was in his late twenties, when he wrote the famous "Thirty Poems on Poetry." That said, the subtext of Yuan's writing in *Zhongzhouji* betrays a personal taste, either of a certain poet or of the reception of a certain poem. In the case of Lei Yuan and Li Chunfu, for instance, he refrains from making any comment on their poetry or giving exemplary lines from among those that were well received, but focuses on describing their admirable characters. Given the association of the two names with the novel form, it is possible that Yuan intentionally chose to remain silent on this to maintain a relatively objective voice, as the anthology is not of the "Remark on Poetry" (*shihua*) genre. *Zhongzhouji* is a good source to use to examine the general climate of Jin poetic ideals. Its eclectic nature asks the reader to distinguish the literati's distinctive roles as a poet and a critic: one's predilection for writing in certain styles does not mean he is unable to appreciate poems written in others. The rest of this section is organized as case studies, mainly of poets regarded as key figures of "The Literary School of the Present Dynasty." The notion of this school is attributed to Xiao Gong 蕭貢, who regards Cai Gui 蔡珪 (d. 1174) as "the progenitor of the authentic tradition" 正傳之宗, with Dang Huaiying 党懷英 (1134–1211) coming after him and Zhao Bingwen coming after Dang. Yuan Haowen claims that this idea had been accepted unanimously since Xiao proposed it. In addition to these three figures, I also include two pieces respectively by Liu Zongyuan and Wang Tingyun that Yuan juxtaposes with Dang's poem to illustrate the style that was viewed as "authentic."

1. CAI GUI

Michael Fuller thinks Cai Gui "reintroduc[ed] intentional crafting after the earnest simplicity" during

the early Jin, when leading literati were mostly of Song origin.³³ However, the so-called crafting is not even remotely comparable to that of the Jiangxi school. Although he occasionally introduces an interesting word that enhances the general atmosphere, poems with lucid language predominate Cai's composition preserved in the *Zhongzhou ji*. A couplet in his "Spring Shade" 春陰 can serve as a good example:

似聞啼鳥來幽樹 [I] seem to hear a chirping bird coming to the secluded tree,
已有游絲曳好風 Already there is a gossamer pulled by the gentle wind.³⁴

This is a typical poem on a spring landscape, but the couplet is special in that it suggests the poet's sharp perception. The first half implies that an originally indistinct tweet is becoming louder, and the second indicates the poet sees gossamer threads swaying in the air. Notably, Cai does not say the wind is blowing the gossamer but rather that the gossamer is pulled by the wind, rendering the poetic perspective more sophisticated. The verb *ye* 曳 has a connotation of tenderness, and the word itself is more literary and lively than *qian* 牽 or *yin* 引, both of which mean pulling. The simple epithet *hao* 好 immediately after balances the quaintness of *ye*, ensuring the poem maintaining its simple elegance.

2. DANG HUIYING

Zhao Bingwen holds Dang in high regard, comparing his poetry to that of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (ca. 365–427) and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433).³⁵ The comparison might seem odd at first glance, since Tao is famous for his plain yet tasteful language in describing pastoral idylls, while Xie is known for his "difficult dictions, dense allusions, and crafted parallelisms."³⁶ Tian Xiaofei observes that Tao and Xie are

³³ Chang and Owen, eds., *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, 515.

³⁴ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 45.

³⁵ See "Zhuxi xiansheng wenji yin" 竹溪先生文集引 in *Fu shui ji*, 319. *Zhongzhou ji*, 162. Yuan Haowen also respects Dang more than the majority of the Jin poets. In Dang's biography, Yuan invariably calls him Dang *gong*, or Mr. Dang. With the exception of Zhao Bingwen, he follows the common practice of using peoples' courtesy names (*zi*).

³⁶ Chang and Owen, eds., *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, 235.

similar in their struggle with the world of nature,³⁷ but what Zhao means by characterizing Dang's poetry as Tao and Xie combined probably points more to his stylistic similarity to Xie and spiritual affinity to Tao, in addition to a predilection for themes on natural sceneries. The following example is from Dang's "Late Chrysanthemums by the West Lake" 西湖晚菊. According to Yuan Haowen, the poem has its origin in Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 (773–819) "Playfully on the Peonies in Front of the Stairs" 戲題階前芍藥. Su Shi also wrote four poems on various flowers, modeling them after Liu's piece. Yuan remarks that Dang's "Chrysanthemums" derives from Liu and Su, but regards Wang Tingyun's "On a Daylily from Prison" 獄中賦萱 as the only work that is of a fineness equal to that of Liu's original.³⁸ I am including a section of Liu's poem and a couplet from Wang's after the sample piece of Dang to make a comparative analysis:

鮮颺散幽馥	Fresh wind dissipates the hidden fragrance
晴露隨餘滋	After clearing up, dew complements the ample moisture.
蹊荒綠苔合	On the desolate trail verdant moss [on each side] joins.
采采歎後時	The luxuriant [flowers] lament the time to come. ³⁹

孤賞白日暮	Alone it admires the setting sun;
暄風動搖頻	In cozy wind, it waves frequently.
夜窗藹芳氣	At night, the window is shrouded by its fragrance;
幽臥知相親	Lying in seclusion, [I] know we hold each other dear. ⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 185.

³⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁰ Liu Zongyuan, *Liu Zongyuan shi jian shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 231.

晚雨沾濡之 向我滋如訴	The evening rain moistens [the daylily], It drips as if pouring out its [grievance] to me. ⁴¹
----------------	---

Dang's diction in the first couplet is a little affected. *Xianbiao* 鮮飈, the phrase standing for fresh wind, is a relatively unusual expression that can be easily replaced by the more lucid *qingfeng* 清風 without harming the tonality. In the second line, a plain stylist would simply talk about the rain rather than using dew and moisture on the petals to imply the weather. In comparison, Liu employs a simple yet elegant language. It unfolds the posture, motion and fragrance of the peony in a relaxed rhythm — each line depicts only a single scene. A touch of forlornness is subtly enhanced through *gu*'s 孤 (alone) contrast with the word *xuan* 暄, which denotes the warmth of the wind. The word *ai* 藹 (shroud) in the third line is highly exquisite and apt, conveying at once the peony's lushness and fragrance. Yuan Haowen admires this poem's refreshing lucidity and mellow beauty, observing that Liu's grief in fact deepens as the narrative voice becomes increasingly tempered.

While Liu Zongyuan's depiction of the peony is an expression of his profound sorrow in exile, Dang Huaiying uses the chrysanthemum in late autumn to symbolize his wistful longing to withdraw from court life as well as his lament for fleeting time. The rhythm of Dang's poem slows down in the second couplet, and the style begins to resemble the Liu poem. The chrysanthemum is personified as was the peony in the original. Growing moss is thoughtfully set in contrast with the chrysanthemum about to fade, and the voice of the personified flower gradually migrates to the poet's own musing voice in the remainder of the poem. Liu's treatment of the peony is however more sophisticated. While the chrysanthemum is a token of the recluse poet Tao Yuanming and therefore a common allegory for a will to withdraw from the court, the peony is a flower signifying sensuous splendor, atypical as a trope for sorrowful feeling. The peony's graceful beauty and poised movement in Liu's poem gives a picture of pensive tranquility. Yet, when examined against background of the scene of its composition, the personified flower reveals the poet's solitude showing through the verse's seeming serenity. "Lying in seclusion, [I] know we hold each other dear," is the only line that betrays a tint of this sentiment by establishing a rapport between the poet and the poet's personification.

⁴¹ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 184.

According to Yuan Haowen, Wang Tingyun did not intend to imitate Liu Zongyuan's poem on the peony while composing his own on the daylily, but chanced to “conform to it” 與之合.⁴² He cannot mean that the two poems are similar in style. With fewer epithets, the rhythm of Wang's poem is more rapid than Liu's, which, together with its rhyme in oblique tone (as opposed to the rhyme in level tone in the other two poems), imbues the language with a hard-edged feeling.⁴³ Liu's refined language portrays the exquisite beauty of the peony, whereas Wang's linguistic characteristics construct an image of the daylily with extraordinary stamina in the first two-thirds of the poem. The following couplet (translated above) gives an unexpected, cathartic turn, and consequently it subverts the previous display of stamina. The two verbs *zhanru* 沾濡 and *xuan* 漣, both related to the motion of water, seamlessly migrate impassive description to expressive complaint. *Xuan*, meaning both “drip” and “weep,” presents at once the natural and the personified daylily. Here we also see an interlocution between the poet and the personified poet, intensifying the note of desolation. The fact that the daylily is also called *wangyou cao* 忘憂草, the herb that enables people to leave their sorrow behind, makes Wang's poem even more delicate thematically.

Both Liu and Wang choose a counter-intuitive subject to express their sadness, and both construct a dual personality by having a personified self to converse with. Yet those characteristics per se are not what make Yuan exalt them as having “attained the authenticity of the classical poetry” 得古詩之正者.⁴⁴ Refined technique is not deliberated, but is a *result* of fitting expression, of either sorrow in exile or despair during incarceration. By contrast, Yuan views Dang's “Chrysanthemum” as lacking in language, but commends the poem's rich intent. Poetic diction is not unimportant, but it is secondary to thematic expression. This will be clearer in the following analysis of Zhao Bingwen.

Zhao's pivotal status in the Jin literati circle is acknowledged in various sources.⁴⁵ Liu Qi remarks that Zhao imitated Wang Tingyun's poetry style in his youth, then turns to Li Bai and Su Shi, and finally

⁴² Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 185.

⁴³ See “Auditory Effects of Chinese and the Bases of Versification,” in James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 20–38, for a discussion of tonality in Chinese poetry.

⁴⁴ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 185.

⁴⁵ *Jinshi*, 2429, Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 5. “Xianxian gong muming” 閒閒公墓銘 in *Yuan Haowen quan ji*, 400–404.

synthesizes the style of the Tang poets.⁴⁶ Yuan Haowen admires Zhao’s poems in all forms, and encapsulates their respective characteristics: the heptasyllabic classical has an untrammelled vigor, the regulated verse is magnificent, the quatrain is of unparalleled fineness, and the pentasyllabic classical combines the contemplativeness of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) and the simplicity of Tao Yuanming. The following example is from the poem composed in his thirties that first gained him fame.

浮雲世態紛紛變	The ways of the world [are like] floating clouds, changing in a muddle.
秋草人情日日疏	The human touch [is like] the autumn grass, dwindling day after day.
李白一杯人影月	Li Bai has a cup [of wine that joins] the man, the shadow, the moon.
鄭虔三絕畫詩書	Zheng Qian has three perfections: painting, poetry, and calligraphy. ⁴⁷

Unlike Wang Ruoxu’s radical naturalism, Zhao believes one should not hold onto a certain style: “it can be sometimes unique and archaic, sometimes plain, why constrain yourself?”⁴⁸ What Zhao means by “unique and archaic” 奇古 points more to poetic idea than poetic diction, though he does not disapprove of unusual language as long as it complies with the rule of spontaneity.⁴⁹ Zhao’s own poetry rarely uses abstruse words, but excels in conveying layered meaning through ordinary language. His specific word-choice virtually rejects analysis — the figures and the voice are almost austere yet so apt that the reader can immediately tell it is from a virtuoso poet.

Commenting with more precision than Liu Qi, Yuan Haowen recognizes in a colophon that Zhao’s poetic heritage is from the High Tang poets Wang Wei 王維 and Wei Yingwu 韋應物, both

⁴⁶ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 5.

⁴⁷ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 198.

⁴⁸ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 87.

⁴⁹ See Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 15. Zhao appreciates Ma Zhiji’s poetry, known for its difficult diction.

known for limpid sentences and taste lingering beyond words.⁵⁰ The translated couplets are from a poem Zhao sent to Wang Tingyun after the Censorate quashed the latter's prospects of serving as an academician.⁵¹ Neither floating clouds nor autumn grass is an uncommon simile, nor do they have a fixed symbolic meanings. Zhao accentuates the unpredictable movement of the clouds to portray the capricious ways of the world. The adverb *fenfen* 紛紛 further stresses the bustling manner of the change. Likewise, the thinning autumn grass seems all too natural to characterize the waning affinity among people. In the following couplet, Zhao contrasts the depressing reality with Wang's talent by equating his artistic accomplishment with that of Li Bai and Zheng Qian 鄭虔, Li's contemporary famous for his accomplishment in poetry, painting, as well as calligraphy. At the time, Wang was withdrawing to Huanghua mountain as a result of the unhappy event. This poem not only shows Zhao's empathy and understanding of Wang's decision but suggests that Wang soon would cheer up, given his talent as an all-around artist. Wang Tingyun admired this piece of consolation by his younger friend, despite being known for avoiding plainness in his own writing.⁵²

The dichotomy between the natural and the novel is more precisely that between poetry that can be read as a linguistic incarnation of thoughts and feelings, and poetry that merely comprises words without life. Esteemed by numerous literati who otherwise held differing opinions, Zhou Ang presents a theory that captures the essence of Jin literary ideal:

Writing should have the intent as the master and the words and phrases as the servants. When the master is powerful and the servants are weak, then no order would they fail to obey. People today often indulge those whom they employ to serve to the extent that [the servants become] domineering and uncontrollable. In an extreme case [they]

⁵⁰ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 105.

⁵¹ See *Jin shi* 126.2731.

⁵² Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 86.

conversely make their master serve. Even though they exhausted the finest words, how can it be the authentic [style] of literature?⁵³

文章以意為主，以字語為役，主強而役弱，則無令不從。今人往往驕其所役，至跋扈難制。甚者反役其主，雖極辭語之工，而豈文之正哉？

Zhou places intent at the center and insists that literary technique must *serve* as a means to express the intent. It should be noted that the notion of “weak servants” does not mean inferior language, but only that language should be treated as a means rather than an end. In fact, there were quite a few poets admired by pro-natural and pro-novel literati alike. I here give a few examples with brief comments to illustrate the point.

A. *Li Yu* 李燾

春光為誰作駘蕩	To whom is the spring offering [its] pleasant scenery?
造物若我哀龍鍾	The Creator, if like me, would grieve over [my] senility. ⁵⁴

Li Yu probably had a closer relationship with Li Chunfu than with Zhao Bingwen.⁵⁵ According to Yuan Haowen, Li was extremely talented and learned, and he essentially excelled in everything a literatus could possibly engage with. Yuan describes Li's writing as splendidly fine, whereas Li Chunfu praises his acute sense in all arts (i.e. poetry, painting, calligraphy) as well as official affairs.⁵⁶ The above couplet has a sharp turn of narrative voice in the middle that changes the mood of the poem. The two objects *daidang* 駘蕩 (pleasant scenery) and *longzhong* 龍鍾 (senility) are carefully matched yet appropriate enough to render the verse magnificent.

⁵³ Wang, *Hunan yilao ji*, 437.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁵⁵ Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 40.

⁵⁶ Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 319.

B. *Qin Lüe* 秦略

荒陂何處墳三尺 Where on the desolate hill [stands] the three-feet tomb?
 老眼他鄉淚數行 In a strange land [my] old eyes shed streams of tears.⁵⁷

Qin Lüe became a professional poet after failing several times in the *jinshi* (i.e. presented scholar) examination. Yuan Haowen remarks that Qin like to craft his words for effect but did not want others to notice it in his poetry. The translated couplet is from an elegy for his wife. Yuan Haowen borrows Wang Anshi's remark to comment on this poem: "it seems plain yet belongs to the most outstanding; the composition seems effortless yet is in fact strenuous" 看似尋常最奇崛，成如容易卻艱難。⁵⁸ The immaculate match of the parts of speech establishes a rapport between the living and the dead; the thought's migration from the desolate tomb in his hometown to the poet's feeling of helplessness from afar accentuates his grief. And all is expressed in ordinary language.

C. *Ma Jiuchou* 麻九疇

誰料并州天絕處 Who could have expected at the place Bingzhou's sky vanishes
 相逢梁苑雪消時 [We] would meet in the Liang Garden when the snow thaws?⁵⁹

Ma Jiuchou enjoyed extraordinary fame during his time — it is said that even the uncultured commoners were familiar with his name. Zhao Bingwen is reported to have stuck a piece of Ma's writing on his wall and read it repeatedly day and night.⁶⁰ Wang Ruoxu and Li Chunfu, despite seeming to disagree all the time, both appreciated Ma's brilliant style.⁶¹ Ma's poems collected in *Zhongzhou ji* show

57 Ibid., 452.

58 Ibid., 451.

59 Ibid., 375.

60 Ibid., 369.

61 Liu, *Guiqian zhi*, 15.

an unconstrained imagination characterized by unusual diction or allusions, dense figures, as well as a minimal use of epithets. Yuan Haowen describes his mature poetry as profound and sharp.⁶² The couplet translated above is from a poem Ma wrote for Yuan when the two friends met unexpectedly after long separation. The farewell scene embodied in the vanishing sky skillfully suggests their reluctance to part, as it implies one friend was seeing the other gradually disappearing toward the horizon. Consequently, associating their encounter with thawing snow stresses the ecstasy of the reunion and endows the verse with aesthetic refinement. Though a relatively straightforward poem among Ma's works, the seamless blending of emotion and its surroundings demonstrates the poet's exceptional command of poetic expression. The choice of diction does not lean toward the plain side, but it is concise and effective, which can account for the unanimous approval of his poetry by all of the leading literati.

CONCLUSION: THE IDEAL OF POETRY AND LITERATI CULTURE

I have demonstrated above that the Jin ideal of poetry elevates effective expression above anything else despite the ostensible division of opinions on the natural and the novel. The mutual disapproval between the two groups should not be understood as a disagreement over whether poetry writing should focus on poetic theme as opposed to poetic diction. From the works by pro-natural literati, we can see they mainly object to empty poems that were composed to flaunt a mastery of language and were not against refined language itself. While criticisms by the pro-novel group are not well-preserved by comparison, we may deduce that their objection to some plain stylists is about the potential inadequacy of simple diction to serve poetic expression. Wang Tingyun's appreciation of Zhao Bingwen, the universal admiration of Ma Jiuchou, and Yuan Haowen's praise for the poets known for crafting indicate that there was not a strict division between the two groups: a poem conforming to the ideal of expression would be appreciated regardless of its style.

In the chapters of *Guiqian zhi* devoted to biography-like entries on the major literati, Liu Qi usually ends an entry with a few representative couplets, without giving comments. He seems to assume that the reader would be able to extract information about the discussed literatus from the poems given. In the *Zhongzhou ji*, Yuan Haowen often follows a few examples of a poet's writing with "[the style] is

⁶² Yuan, *Zhongzhou ji*, 369.

like this person” 似其為人。⁶³ This claim is usually preceded or followed with an account of, for instance, a staunch minister’s remonstrance, a recluse’s defiance of the court, or an artist’s absorption into his art. Interestingly, when Yuan likes a literatus but disapproves his poems, as in the case of Lei Yuan, he would elaborate on the person’s admirable deeds and remark that the person merely treated poetry as diversion. The association between poetry and expression and the belief that poetry is a reflection of one’s character still dominated during the Jin dynasty.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chang, Kang-I Sun, and Stephen Owen, eds. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Hu Chuanzhi. *Jin dai wen xue yan jiu* 金代文學研究. Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2000.
- Huang Tingjian. *Huang Tingjian shi jizhu* 黃庭堅詩集註. Zhonghua shuju, 2003.
- . *Yuzhang Huang xiansheng wenji*, 豫章黃先生文集, *Sibu congkan chubian* 四部叢刊初編. Shanghai: Shang wuyin shuguan, 1933.
- Liu Qi. *Guiqian zhi* 歸潛志. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.
- Liu Zongyuan. *Liu Zongyuan shi jian shi* 柳宗元集校釋. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993.
- Qian Zhongshu. *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄. Taipei: Shulin chuban youxian gongsi, 1988.
- Wang Ruoxu. *Hunan yi lao ji* 溇南遺老集. Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2006.
- Wixted, John Timothy. *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yuan Hao-wen (1190–1257)*. Munchener Ostasiatische Studien, b. 33. Wiesbaden, West Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982.
- Yuan, Haowen, ed. *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014.
- . *Yuan Haowen quan ji* 元好問全集. Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chuban she, 2004.
- Zhao Bingwen. *Xianxian lao ren fushui wen ji* 閒閒老人滏水文集. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2016.

63 For example, “Liu Ji,” “Feng Bi” 馮璧, “Ma Jiuchou” 麻九疇, “Wang Libin” 王利賓 in Yuan, *Zhouzhou ji*, 95, 355, 369, 564.

All issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* are accessible to readers at no charge via our website.

To see the complete catalog of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, visit

www.sino-platonic.org