EDITED BY

WIEBKE
DENECKE

WAI-YEE
LI

XIAOFEI
TIAN

The Oxford Handbook *of* CLASSICAL CHINESE LITERATURE (1000 BCE–900 CE)

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CLASSICAL CHINESE LITERATURE (1000 BCE–900 CE)

Edited by
WIEBKE DENECKE, WAI-YEE LI,
and
XIAOFEI TIAN

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Wiebke Denecke
Wai-yee Li
Xiaofei Tian

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Contributor List

Sarah M. Allen, Wellesley College

Daniel Boucher, Cornell University

Jack Chen, University of Virginia

Yu-yu Cheng, National Taiwan University

Tamara T. Chin, Brown University

Wiebke Denecke, Boston University

Rebecca Doran, University of Miami

Glen Dudbridge, University of Oxford

Stephen Durrant, University of Oregon

Ronald Egan, Stanford University

Imre Galambos, University of Cambridge

Wilt L. Idema, Harvard University

David R. Knechtges, University of Washington

Peter Kornicki, University of Cambridge

Paul W. Kroll, University of Colorado

Wai-yee Li, Harvard University

Nam Nguyen, Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City

Christopher M. B. Nugent, Williams College

Stephen Owen, Harvard University

Michael Puett, Harvard University

Paul Rouzer, University of Minnesota

David Schaberg, UCLA

Anna M. Shields, Princeton University

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Sim Kyung-ho, Korea University

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Xiaofei Tian, Harvard University

Paula Varsano, UC Berkeley

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Timeline of Chinese Dynasties

Shang (Yin) Dynasty 商 (ca. 1300–1046 BCE)
Zhou Dynasty 周 (ca. 1046–256 BCE)
  Western Zhou 西周 (ca. 1046–771 BCE)
  Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–256 BCE)
    Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (770–481 BCE)
    Warring States Period 戰國 (481–221 BCE)
Qin Dynasty 秦 (221–207 BCE)
Han Dynasty 漢 (206 BCE–220 CE)
  Former/Western Han 前漢 / 西漢 (206 BCE–8 CE)
  Xin Dynasty 新 (9–23)
  Later/Eastern Han 後漢 / 東漢 (25–220 CE)
Wei 魏 Dynasty (220–265) / Three Kingdoms 三國
Jin 晉 Dynasty (265–420)
  Western Jin 西晉 (265–316)
  Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420)
Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (420–589)
Sui Dynasty 隋 (581–618)
Tang Dynasty 唐 (618–907)
Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960)
Song Dynasty 宋 (960–1279)
  Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127)
  Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279)
Yuan Dynasty (Mongols) 元 (1271–1368)
Ming Dynasty 明 (1368–1644)
Qing Dynasty (Manchus) 清 (1644–1911)

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SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

KEY CONCEPTS OF "LITERATURE"

STEPHEN OWEN

To give an account of the Chinese conception of literature is, at its root, a comparative question, positing a universal category, "literature," which has a peculiarly Chinese inflection. The enterprise founders on the historicity of the relatively recent concept of "literature" and its earlier counterpart, "poetry" (in its primary sense), in the European tradition, with an unmanageable diversity of inclusions and exclusions. However strong particular opinions may be, we still do not agree on what is and what is not literature, and a rough collective agreement on a word is necessary to stabilize comparison. It would, moreover, be perverse to take the contemporary academic construction of the field (as fluid as it still is) and attempt to refer that back to pre-900 CE Chinese conceptions of some rough analogue of our own blurred category. It is fine to construct contemporary anthologies of premodern Chinese works, to do studies, and to make reference works like the present one, all working with our contemporary scope of literature, but it is not valid to use that as a reference point for the Chinese understanding of "literature" in, say, 500 CE.

Such an act of comparison is, moreover, essentially unequal, taking a category of one tradition and looking for it in another. This act presumes that not only will we find a commensurate analogue, but that the counterpart of "literature" will involve questions of commensurate gravity. This is not the case. What we find instead are two histories that diverged. One began with Aristotle and a very broad notion of "poetry," clearly distinguished from verse, sustaining over two millennia of critical reflection, eventually becoming "literature" (with the term "poetry" eventually redefined as a lyric genre within that larger field of "literature"). The other began with *shi* 詩, the rough analogue of "poetry," but tied to a certain kind of verse (that is, not all verse is *shi*, but all *shi* is in verse). As we will see, a discursive field developed, including but not limited to *shi*; this field is the rough analogue to "literature." For a brief period, that field was subject to critical reflection, but such critical reflection had entirely disappeared before

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the end of the period covered by this volume. The genre *shi*, however, did sustain over two millennia of critical reflection, as did, to a far lesser degree, other genres within the "literary" field.

The "literary" and the "idea of the literary" are different things. The task here is not to identify the former. Most contemporary readers recognize that *Zhuangzi*'s 莊子 wondrous fusion of thought and imaginative writing is, in some profound sense, literary. It could not have been done in the plain discursive prose of his age. Our range of reference is before 900 CE, and *Zhuangzi*, however much admired and used in literary writing, was not itself generally considered *wen* 文, the term we turn to when we look for something analogous to literature. We might endure that exclusion, but then we have to face the fact that every petition to the throne, however banal and poorly written, *was* considered *wen* (as the worst nineteenth-century verse in English is technically "literature," even if it is execrable poetry).

Wen, our rough analogue for "literature" in China, is best considered as a discursive field, a system of genres, recognized as distinct from other kinds of writing. We will consider what makes works within this system collectively distinct from other discursive fields; then we will consider attempts to theorize that distinction and the abandonment of that enterprise in favor of genre-based theory.

To speak about a conception of "literature" as a general field, a system of genres distinct from other kinds of writing, is not tenable before the early third century CE. Poetry (*shi*), one of the primary constituent genres of the literary field, had been highly theorized since late antiquity (see Chapter 23) with reference to the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*). And there was a more fluid sense of other particular genres through lineages of famous texts.

Shi was a more restrictive category. On the surface, it was immediately clear whether a text was or was not *shi*. The definition of *shi* in the "Great Preface" ("Daxu" 大序) to the *Shijing* is: "The Poem articulates what the mind is intent upon" (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志). Although there were many poems in which it is hard to see that definition, and although that definition was varied in significant ways, it was not possible to negate the old definition and seriously claim "The poem (*shi*) does *not* articulate what the mind is intent upon." *Wen*, the emergent analogue of "literature" in the third century, was a different kind of category; it had a wide range of usage outside texts in language and gained depth by resonance with those other frames of reference. Moreover, it was not always clear whether a given text should or should not be considered *wen*. The easiest recourse for identifying *wen* was a system of genres, but many genres lay on the ambiguous margins of *wen*, with some instantiations of those genres clearly judged to be *wen*, while other instantiations were probably not *wen*; e.g., some letters were *wen*, and some were not.

To understand *wen*, it is best to consider its historical transformation into a discursive field. I will not here go back to the earliest usages of the term, but rather consider such early usages as they were used in later periods, when they were anachronistically drawn into attempts to explain *wen*.

Between earliest antiquity and the early third century, there was abundant material that we now would consider literature from a variety of perspectives, but there was no

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sense of literature is a distinct field of discourse. In the first decades of the second half of the first century CE, in Wang Chong's 王充 (27–100 CE) chapter on "An Explanation of Writing" ("Shu jie" 書解) in *Lun heng* 論衡 (*Balanced Discourses*), there was a developed sense of *wen* as something like "patterned grace" in writing, the counterpart of a writer's inner qualities and drawing on an earlier discourse of *wen*, but this clearly did not yet constitute a distinct field (Wang Chong 1990, 1149–1150). Wang Chong, however, gives us one essential characteristic of *wen* as it would develop in the next century: there is some essential correspondence between the inner character of the person and that person's writing. Such a correspondence between the interior of the speaker and its linguistic manifestation in text has a basic similarity to the theory of *shi* in the "Great Preface" to the *Shijing*. But there is also an essential difference. The state of mind of the speaker of one of the poems in the *Shijing* was circumstantial and externally determined, a response to the situation of the times. Wang Chong's *wen* revealed a quality of the inner person that was not circumstantially determined. This quality, however, was not yet differentiated into types, and it was not presumed to be present in the writing of everyone.

Before considering the discourse of *wen* as it came to constitute a field, we should outline the field negatively, defining it by the other discursive fields that were "not literature." The nature of "poetry," *shi*, was a theoretical question; the nature of *wen* as a larger field of discourse that included poetry was initially a bibliographical question. In the bibliographical system as it was evolving during the Six Dynasties (see Chapter 11), literature was not "Classics" (*jing* 經), not "Masters Literature" or the "literature of knowledge" (*zi* 子) and not "History" (*shi* 史). This fourth discursive field is not named for any of the standard words and phrases usually used in Chinese literary thought; it is called "collections" (*ji* 集), the shorter writings of individuals in a variable, but restricted, range of genres—a genre system (see Chapter 15).

The collection of *wen* is *ji* 集, the shorter works of one individual or many individuals. This bibliographical container gives us a basic insight into the idea of literature that is often missing in the grander discourse of *wen*. Some of the works in a collection could have been included as a chapter in a treatise of Masters Literature (see Chapter 14), or they could have been a biography or historical discussion appropriate for a history, or they could have been a discussion of a Classic, but their shortness involves closure and focus, and they are read not as knowledge per se but in terms of their historically contingent author. Works in a *ji* are understood as historically local acts of composition, in contrast to writings in other fields, which are projects over extended time. Those projects obviously involved particular acts of composition, but they were parts of a whole. To take the example of Masters Literature, a master was allowed to compose only one book (and even if such a book is divided into "inner" and "outer" chapters, such a division is understood as some difference in content rather simply an ongoing production of chapters). Chinese scholars like to assign dates to literary works, dates that are the putative date of composition; as a project of indeterminate duration, the Masters treatise has only a date of completion, if that is known. The "master" himself might live on after his treatise was done; although the author of works in a *ji* might compile provisional

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versions of his collection, the collection was "complete" only with the author's death, so that it was essentially a posthumous construction. The Chinese literary text might convey the wisdom of the sages, might contain knowledge, and might be historically true and a contribution to historical knowledge, but there was a surplus; defining the putative parameters of that surplus may be the best way to talk about something like "literature." The centrality of the historically contingent author, the organizational principle of a collection, *ji*, is an essential part of that surplus.

A chapter or discussion of writing and rhetoric had been a common part of the treatises in Masters Literature. In his *Dian lun* 典論 (*Normative Discourses*), Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) included a chapter entitled "Discourse on Literature" ("Lun wen" 論文). In its current form, the "Discourse on Literature" is about the literary field, specifically about the "Seven Masters of the Jian'an Reign" (*Jian'an qizi* 建安七子), each having a distinct temperament and each having strength in a specific genre. The field of letters, as Cao Pi describes it, is constituted by an orderly set of complementary differences, each singular strength simultaneously implying a limitation. Occasionally, Cao Pi makes reference to *wen* simply as "good writing," in the sense in which Wang Chong had used it, and he closes with a praise of the "discourses" (*lun* 論), of Xu Gan 徐幹 (171–218). While the single *lun* was to become part of the literary genre system, Cao Pi here refers to a long treatise by Xu Gan, a work of Masters Literature, which, in contrast to the partial excellences of the literary field, promises a complete summation of knowledge—as does Cao Pi's own treatise, *Dian lun*. A literary field has not been fully established here, but it is emergent.

Works of Masters Literature preferred terms of general authority and balanced impartiality: Wang Chong's *Lun heng*, Xu Gan's *Zhong lun* 中論 (*Discourses on the Mean*), Cao Pi's *Dian lun*. By contrast, Cao Pi describes the writers of *wen* as being very good at some things and not at others, individual strengths mapped onto the particular strength of genres. Instead of the serene whole of the treatise in Masters Literature, the "Seven Masters" are literally in a horse race, each trying to outdo the other.

The survival of the "Discourse on Literature" presents an interesting complication. While *Dian lun* survives only in fragments, the "Discourse on Literature" was preserved in Xiao Tong's 蕭統 (501–531) *Wen xuan* 文選 (*Selections of Refined Literature*), from the early sixth century, under the genre "discourse" (*lun*). Because other extant fragments seem to belong to the "Discourse on Literature" chapter and because the discourse is much shorter than most chapters in treatises in Masters Literature, it is probable that Xiao Tong selected and perhaps restructured the chapter in its current form. The early sixth century did have a very strong sense of *wen* as a discursive field, and we cannot tell how much the current form of "Discourse on Literature" as preserved in *Wen xuan* represents Cao Pi's original chapter and how much it represents the motivated excerpting of Xiao Tong. We should note, however, that the metamorphosis of the chapter into a literary "discourse" (*lun*) is particularly effective because of Cao Pi's personal and elegiac engagement with the "Seven Masters"; rather than conveying impersonal authority, Cao Pi's voice of personal engagement mediates his claims and becomes itself part of those claims.

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If the sense of *wen* as a distinct discursive field was still not fully developed in the third century, there was considerable interest in and discussion of the genres of writing that came to constitute it. Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) described *wen* through one of its genres, the "rhapsody" (*fu* 賦). "The Rhapsody on *wen*" ("Wen fu" 文賦, also "Rhapsody on Literature"), is an exceptionally rich text, essentially on compositional practice, beginning with a meditation on the universe, then the process of organizing speculative experience, followed by a spontaneous process of writing. As in Cao Pi's "Discourse on Literature," a set of genres, each with distinct characteristics, is enumerated. One might well argue that Lu Ji's compositional procedures are better suited to poetry or even poetic exposition than to a petition to the throne or to a stele inscription. But in the present context, the issue is how Lu Ji's account defines a field of literature. The obvious answer is that Lu Ji's compositional procedures involve short texts: they are inapplicable to long-term projects, such as Masters treatises or Histories; they involve thought but not "research" in sources; unlike the Classics, they are not a summation of knowledge but an occasion of composition.

Lu Ji speaks of the compositional process in terms undifferentiated by individual disposition or genre and allows for all the variations he can imagine, but the particular demands of a given genre mediate between general meditation and production. Internal division and difference remain central to the literary field.

The third century also saw the beginning of compiling literary collections, usually posthumous, and the earliest anthologies. The most influential early anthology was that of Zhi Yu 摯虞 (d. ca. 312), working around the turn of the fourth century. The anthology itself is lost, but there are numerous quotations from the headings of its generic divisions. The title is *Wenzhang liubie ji* 文章流別集 (*Collection of Literature Arranged by Genre*), echoing Cao Pi's notions of complementary generic divisions that together create a whole. Zhi Yu's use of the popular water metaphor, however, adds a temporal dimension, of a watery totality that divides into different branches like the delta of a river. In the surviving fragments of the genre introductions, we see Zhi Yu trying to trace each genre back to antiquity, and, where possible, to the Classics. This is the first clear iteration of a shared early Middle Period idea of literature as a linear derivation from the Classics, leaving open the question of whether the writer should return to the Classics or should embrace change as necessary and good.

The field of early medieval literary genres bore little resemblance to Aristotle's "poetry" or to Sanskrit *kāvya*. Pride of place went to rhapsody (*fu*, a long rhymed description or account) and to classical poetry (*shi*), but they included letters, petitions to the throne, inscriptions of various kinds, laments, and funerary genres—in short, the different kinds of largely public writing that a member of the educated elite might be called upon to produce. Narrative frames for poetic expositions might contain patently fictional interlocutors ("Master No-Such") or famous speakers from the past; fictive narrative, however, was generally not included within the scope of literary genres, with the notable exception of parable. Narratives that we would call "historical romance" were classified in one of the special subsets of history such as *biezhuan* 別傳 (separate biography, like those of Qin Jia 秦嘉 or Cai Yan 蔡琰 [ca. 170–ca. 215]), suggesting their dubious historical reliability; if those narratives contained poems or letters, the poems or

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letters might be included in the category of *wen*, under the name of the character to whom they were ascribed in the narrative. Anecdotes and supernatural tales eventually came to be included among the bibliographical subsets of Masters Texts, under rubrics that suggest their lack of credibility and seriousness, or appeal to a certain set of beliefs.

There was extensive interest in and discussion of literary texts through the fourth and fifth centuries, usually with a focus on particular genres and largely on poetry. The great attempt to discuss *wen* as a general field came again only around the turn of the sixth century. A lay scholar studying in a Buddhist monastery, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 460s–520s), undertook the unprecedented step of writing a treatise on *wen*. From one point of view, this was itself an evolution of Masters Literature, in that it involved the composition of one big book with many chapters. Earlier Masters treatises had sought to cover all fields of knowledge, inflected by the particular interests of the "master"; Liu Xie's work, however, took what would have been one chapter of a Masters treatise and turned it into a book. From another point of view, this book was essentially a *śāstra*, a systematic treatise on a single field of knowledge, a basic genre in South Asian literature appearing at a time when Sanskrit texts were coming into China in large numbers.

Liu Xie's book was entitled *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, roughly translated as *Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon*. It was in fifty chapters, divided between chapters on genres and chapters on theoretical issues, with a final postface in which Liu Xie gave an account of how he came to write the book. Liu Xie claimed to have had a dream of Confucius as a child, and despairing of making an original contribution to commentary on the Classics, he turned instead to writing on literature as an outgrowth of the Classics.

The first chapter, "Its Origin in the Way" ("Yuan Dao" 原道), is a fully developed exposition of *wen*, drawing on conventional associations and adding new ones to link the field of "literature" with the larger sense of *wen* as "external patterning" and thereby ground literature in nature. *Wen* was a very old term, which had acquired a wide range of usage, and writings about literature such as Liu Xie's treatise often anachronistically drew on those associations. In its larger sphere of usage, *wen* was "pattern," the external manifestation of inner quality on the surface; for example, in a sumptuary regime the patterns on clothing corresponded to status and role that would otherwise be invisible. *Wen* referred to civil virtues and graces, in distinction from *wu*, the military aspect of society. *Wen* was also the ultimate signifying dimension of pattern—in other words, "writing." And within writing itself, *wen* gradually became "embellishment," in opposition to "substance" (*zhi* 質). In the *wen*/*zhi* opposition, the ideal was the "perfect balance" (*binbin* 彬彬) between the two. Wang Chong's treatment of *wen* in the "Explanation of Writing" chapter is a good example of the evolution of the term: *wen* is a quality in writing that shows the human quality of the writer, but it is clearly not rhetorical embellishment, which Wang Chong strongly opposed.

By Liu Xie's time, normal style in the genres that made up the literary field was highly "embellished," a quality of which Liu Xie sometimes disapproved and sometimes approved. On the negative side, this was seen as *wen* and *zhi* failing to achieve "perfect

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balance," with an excess of *wen*. In "Its Origin in the Way," Liu Xie's task was to naturalize the gorgeous. He began by drawing on two established compounds using *wen: tianwen* 天文, the "pattern of the heavens" (i.e., the patterns and motions of heavenly bodies), and *diwen* 地文, "the pattern of earth" (topography). As these showed splendid outward appearances according to the essential nature of Heaven and Earth respectively, so human beings, whose essential nature is mind—and following from that, language—had their external manifestation in patterned language, *wen*. His repeated declarations that this was "natural" remind us of the doubt that he was trying to dispel: that literary language might be thought to be rhetorical and artificial.

Such grand claims for *wen* were capacious, but their very capaciousness encouraged Liu Xie to cross the boundaries by which the discursive field was commonly understood by his contemporaries. His chapter on the Classics (3), "Zong jing" 宗經, was to be expected, laying the groundwork for the derivation of later genres, but the following chapter on the Apocrypha to the Confucian Classics (4), "Zheng wei" 正緯, was obviously included for symmetry and was far from any imaginable sense of *wen* among Liu Xie's contemporaries. The standard genres of the usual field of *wen* were included, but so were those other discursive fields that had negatively delimited *wen*: Historical Writing (16), "Shi zhuan" 史傳; and Masters Writing (17), "Zhuzi" 諸子. The chapter on "Discourse and Persuasion" (18), "Lunshui" 論說, even included commentary on the Confucian Classics. This left Liu Xie with the problem of what writing was "not *wen*." Contemporary understanding did have a term for this: *bi* 筆, roughly translated as "plain writing." In "General Technique" (44), "Zong shu" 總術, Liu Xie eventually addressed this issue, first rejecting the most naive distinction, which made *wen* rhymed and *bi* unrhymed, then rejecting a barely comprehensible thesis by Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384–456), surviving only in Liu Xie's refutation. In the end, Liu Xie himself could not propose a credible distinction to demarcate the sphere of *wen* by identifying what was "not *wen*."

Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon was a great experiment, grasping for something that had identity beyond merely a system of genres. The concept of *wen* was drawn so broadly that, while there was bad *wen*, there was no kind of writing that was explicitly excluded. In *Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* we can, however, see the outlines of the boundaries of *wen* by the tacit exclusions, most notably the rich world of anecdote, such as *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of Tales of the World*), and of fantastic tales, texts that occupy a large place in the modern, Western-influenced concept of "literature."

A few decades after *Wenxin diaolong*, we have Xiao Tong's *Wen xuan*, the inheritor of Zhi Yu's *Wenzhang liubie ji*. For several centuries, this was the most influential anthology representing *wen* in a broad sense. It was a work grounded in the court, either prepared or overseen by Xiao Tong, the Crown Prince, who was intensely aware of his institutional role as a supporter of culture. This kind of anthology, covering the full range of the "literary" field as it was understood in the early sixth century, was often a unifying imperial act, continued in the seventh century with the court-sponsored *Wenguan*

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cilin 文館詞林 (*Forest of Compositions of the Literary Academy*) and, after the founding of the Song Dynasty in the late tenth century, the imperially sponsored *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (*The Flower of the Garden of Letters*), whose contents began in the sixth century, where the *Wen xuan* left off. This was followed by Lü Zuqian's 呂祖謙 (1137–1181) *Song wen jian* 宋文鑑 (*Mirror of Song Literature*), an imperially commissioned anthology of Northern Song writings. Such anthologies were designed to represent an era and retained the broad sense of *wen*. We even have a private anthology on the model of the *Wen xuan*, the Tang *Guwen yuan* 古文苑 (*Garden of Ancient Literature*), including early material not included in Xiao Tong's anthology.

The real inertia in the maintenance of a general sphere of "literature" was in the "collected works" of an individual, the *ji*, including poetic expositions, poetry, and shorter prose writings. Dynastic histories often made a place for "biographies of men of letters" (toward the end of the biographical section), but there was no critical attempt to define what they meant. The important political figure who was also a famous writer would be given a more prominent place in the biographies and not included in "biographies of men of letters." The famous writer who was the son of a prominent political figure would usually be given a short biographical notice after his father. To be included in "biographies of men of letters" effectively meant that they were famous only for their writing. The earliest extant example of this category appears in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han*) by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), with a brief "summary verse" (*zan* 贊) attached at the end. Some of the "biographies of men of letters" (often referred to as "garden of *wen*," *wenyuan* 文苑) in later histories have introductory sections praising the importance of literature, but none reflect on the category of *wen*, and they are implicitly content to understand it as the kind of writings included in a "collection."

If there was a field of *wen* in the sixth century that could possibly sustain reflection, that field virtually dissolved over the course of the Tang, surviving only in the inertia of the bibliographical system, certain forms of anthology, and the historical category of "biographies of men of letters," made up of short biographies of those writers whose prominence did not merit a full biography earlier in the "biographies" section of the standard histories.

In popular criticism, we see the forces at work in the eighth-century materials the Japanese monk Kūkai 空海 (774–835) collected in *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡秘府論 (Ch. *Wenjing mifu lun, The Secret Treasury of the Mirror of Letters*). It very title gestures to the category *wen*, but in actuality the texts it includes are overwhelmingly about *shi*. Even the section entitled "On Meaning in *Wen*" ("Lun wen yi" 論文意), though it begins grandly, quickly turns to poetry, *shi*, which dominates the essay (though there are scattered references to rhapsodies and to prose pieces). The essay speaks of "making *wen*" (*zuo wen* 作文) (*Wenjing mifu lun* 1365), but immediately reveals that it means *shi*. In the following sections, "On Genre" ("Lun ti" 論體) and "On Position" ("Lun wei" 論位), the same "making *wen*" refers primarily to prose. Since *Bunkyō hifuron* is a compilation of various sources, the only conclusion we can draw is that during the Tang the discourse on poetry was becoming distinct, and a discourse on prose was conducted in generalities that might include poetry, but were more appropriate for prose forms.

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In short, the possibility of general critical reflection on *wen* as including all kinds of writing in a "collection" was gradually supplanted by critical reflection on particular genres, or on the grouping of "prose" genres. The theoretical leisure of Liu Xie composing his treatise in a Buddhist temple gave way to the pragmatic, pedagogic needs of young men who needed to master different discursive forms for their careers. This was not always the case in the Tang, but it was pervasive. *Bunkyō hifuron* begins some essays with grand statements, but it also tells its reader to keep a writing brush and a lamp handy at night in case he wakes up with inspiration. From the early ninth century we have a "Manual of Rhapsodies" ("Fu pu" 賦譜), which is not at all interested in what a rhapsody "is," only in how to compose one according to the rules. Popular criticism merged seamlessly into sets of model compositions for different genres, such as Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772–846) model sets of "judgments" (*panwen* 判文) and model answers to examination questions.

By the early ninth century, with the resurgent interest in "old-style prose" (*guwen* 古文), the term *wen* was losing its broader sense of "literature" and acquiring its more restrictive meaning of "prose," the complementary opposite of *shi*. Already in the early decades of the ninth century, we begin to have a new notion of the "poet," *shiren* 詩人, as someone who writes only poetry and is obsessed with poetry. Even if one can argue that *wen* still retained something of its broad sense around the turn of the ninth century, we have no doubt about *wen*'s more restrictive meaning as "prose" by the mid-ninth century. Playing on the figure of the obsessed poet, Liu Tui 劉蛻 (821–after 874) writes of his obsession with prose: "Eating and drinking I never forget prose (*wen*); in the darkness I never forget prose. In sorrow and in rage, in illness and merriment, in a crowd and traveling on a mission, I never once fail to have prose on my mind" (*Quan Tang wen* 789.8266).

By the end of the period covered by this volume, we have entered the stage of late imperial literature. Although anthologies modeled on *Wen xuan* were still as inclusive as the standard form of the "collection," virtually all critical discourse was divided generically: there was a tradition of critical discourse on *shi*, another on old-style prose, and another on parallel prose (*siliu* 四六), which might include discourse on rhapsodies, *fu* (though there was a distinct tradition of critical writing on *fu*). Some of the newer genres, such as song lyric (*ci* 詞) and vernacular lyric (*qu* 曲), each acquired its own distinct critical tradition. Change came from new genres appearing outside the margins of the old genres. A good example can be seen in stories, which were increasing in sophistication and popularity from the late eighth through the ninth century. While such stories were usually kept out of authorial "collections," there are enough cases where the promise of a serious moral lesson led to an ambiguity in classification that we can see the boundary between the "literary" and the previously "nonliterary" collapsing. The new song lyric form (*ci*) was at first excluded from literary collections, but by the twelfth century began to be included—at or near the end of a collection.

Our discussion here is somewhat artificially constrained by the year 900. As Liu Xie had discovered, the margins of the "literary" opened to other discursive fields against which the literary field had taken shape. By the thirteenth century, critical discussions

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of "old-style" (*guwen*) prose could not help drawing from the Classics, the Histories, and Masters Literature. Using selections from these other fields later became standard in old-style prose anthologies. The boundaries of "literature" in the old sense remained relatively clear until the early twentieth century, but texts that were interesting in what we consider (and late imperial critics considered) to be a "literary" way were growing outside the old genre system, and many texts within the old genre system were no longer read—immortalized in print, but ignored. A new, broader sense of "literature" gradually emerged; the importance of this broader field of texts, including drama and fiction, was recognized, but there was no attempt to define a field as such.

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CHAPTER 2

PERIODIZATION AND MAJOR INFLECTION POINTS

STEPHEN OWEN

THE periodization of literature has more historical interest than theoretical interest. Periodization is a function of a virtual literary historical narrative, organizing selective evidence to produce a coherent narrative of change of one particular sort. The most significant variable is the way in which literature is granted greater or lesser autonomy within an integral narrative of culture and politics. As this process works out in history, we can observe, first, the larger discourse of change that underwrites the earliest accounts of periodization, and, second, the internalization and inertia of certain modes of periodization in subsequent accounts.

We might first consider the act of periodization that abruptly terminates the present volume at the year 900. This is a felicitous date of convenience because it roughly gestures to both traditional Chinese periodization and to more recent macronarratives of Chinese cultural history. Our date is very close to the nominal end of the Tang Dynasty in 907, corresponding to the last gasp of a major dynasty. The rich body of recent scholarly literature on the "Tang-Song transition" makes 900 an acceptable intermediate date of convenience for a narrative of fundamental change, beginning with intellectual changes inaugurated in the early ninth century, the gradual dissolution of an old aristocratic culture, and emergence of a new world of Northern Song literary culture in the first quarter of the eleventh century. Finally, our date satisfies the more recent mode of narrative that seeks the ground of discursive culture in material culture: the earliest known print edition of a collection of poetry, that of Guan Xiu 貫休 (832–912), was done at the end of the second or the beginning of the third decade of the tenth century. Thus our date brings us to the edge of print culture. The periodization of very large spans is, of course, a blunt tool. Despite a long span of war, devastation, and social upheaval on either side of 900, it was a period of great stability, and it would be difficult to find any major change in literature for the eighty years preceding 900 and a hundred years

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following that date. In regard to print culture, the first known printing of a literary collection is more symbolic than substantive. We know that poetry was being printed and sold in broadside over eighty years earlier, and that that large-scale, commercial printing of literary works did not begin until the second half of the eleventh century and was not fully established until the first half of the twelfth century. All this is to remind us that the date that demarcates a period is a function of the narrative, rather than the narrative being a function of the date.

We are, however, left with an unmanageable span of almost two millennia of textual production in this volume, and it would be useful to further divide that by some other date of convenience with something of the resonance of 900, though with the same essential fuzziness. Allow me to choose 200 CE as such a date, anchoring the first appearance of paper in roughly the first century CE and its subsequent spread to become the dominant medium of writing. While we know that bamboo slips and wooden tablets continued to be used long after this date, paper seems to have become increasingly widespread in elite venues in the century before and after 200. This seems the best way to account for the dramatic increase in literary production in the roughly two centuries of the Eastern Han as compared to the two centuries of the Western Han. This is not to suggest that Eastern Han works were necessarily composed on paper, but rather that they were recent enough to survive into an age when circulation on paper became increasingly common. The consequences of paper—as compared to bamboo strips and wooden tablets—were immense. It made possible new script-forms that could be written far more quickly; it made distribution of larger texts no longer dependent on wagonloads; and it made possible a personal library on a physical scale smaller than a warehouse. The famous anecdote that Zuo Si's 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305) "Rhapsody on the Three Metropolises" ("Sandu fu" 三都賦) was so popular that it made the cost of paper rise in Luoyang may come from a somewhat later source, but the anecdote remains interesting in taking for granted not only that those interested would copy it on paper—and could afford to—but also that the supply was limited.

The felicity of this date of convenience is in its correspondence with the rise of classical poetry and a variety of new genres, with the appearance of the literary "collection" and the discursive field of *wen* 文 (see Chapter 1). The plague of 217, which took the lives of so many famous writers of the time, was seen as the end of an era—a "period"—laying the groundwork for the first attempts to periodize literature in the centuries to follow.

We will first look at the problems of periodizing texts of antiquity before the imperial period and the early imperial period. Then we will consider the received terms of cultural change and their assumptions, which provided the basis of the first attempts at literary periodization. We will then address the formation and transformation of periodization between 200 and 900, focusing on the literary historical work of the fifth and sixth centuries as well as the periodization of the Tang. Finally, we will raise some of the problems for periodization posed by distortions in the textual record.

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Antiquity

In the roughly seven or eight centuries of received texts from before the imperial period, we can see large changes between the putatively earliest texts and the latest texts. While we can identify major changes that occurred, we cannot date them except very roughly. If we look at shorter spans of a few centuries, we are on safer grounds if we identify "differences" rather than "changes." These differences might possibly be historical change, but we cannot discount regional differences, differences of scribal convention, and other factors. Obvious linguistic differences between the earlier chapters and the last chapters of the *Analects* are taken to be evidence of historical difference, but those differences might simply represent two communities that differed in terms of the way in which Confucius's words were reported. The sequence of arrangement of sections in a work is too often taken as actual historical sequence of composition. Many ancient texts in the received tradition are layered, sometimes with sections that are probably Han (or, more problematically, a Han version of earlier material), and many seem to have been put together into "books" by the needs of Han bibliography. We commonly see similar material rewritten in new contexts, and the differences may represent distinct local writing traditions or different contexts as much as historical change.

The gross historical divisions in this era are the Western Zhou (ca. 1046 –771 BCE), the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE), the Spring and Autumn Period (770–481 BCE), and the Warring States Period (481–221 BCE). These are rough dates to produce a continuous year-line. Perhaps one of the most significant changes, occurring in the Warring States, was the change from the ubiquitous citation of speech ("Master X said . . .") to the essay, with a presumed author who does not appear as the speaker. Even in this case, however, we are mapping difference as historical change; and while it is almost certainly the case that cited speech preceded uncited discourse, this does not mean that, within a particular family of discourse, cited speech might not have been the mode of composition long after essays using uncited discourse appeared. In short, despite the large body of texts, unknown variables make it impossible to provide enough dates to do anything like periodization. We have an increasingly large corpus of archeologically recovered texts, but these come almost entirely from one region and one limited period in ancient history. These do not allow us to make large generalizations about practices elsewhere and in other periods.

We are on somewhat more secure grounds when we enter the first phase of the imperial period, the Qin (221–207 BCE) and the Western Han, but the record is so thin and many texts are so problematic that it is better to think of works and authors rather than the thicker record that makes literary history possible. We can be certain of the prominence of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE), and recognize his influence on Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), but the attempt to do a "literary history" of the Western Han poetic exposition in any greater detail finds "periods" characterized by one or two

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authors and one or two works. The relatively secure works are surrounded by other works of dubious authenticity. Dating is often based on assumptions which, if examined in detail, are themselves in question. We can begin to see lineages and knowledge of earlier texts, but we do not have enough secure material to talk about periods—apart from the very large presence of empire.

The "Terms" of Cultural Change

The prefaces of the Mao version of the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) and their subcommentaries did not in themselves constitute literary history, but they did provide some of the most basic assumptions through which to think about literary change, along with some terms by which to represent those assumptions. The Mao interpretation mapped the poems in the *Shijing* at different points in the first four centuries of the Zhou dynasty, which saw the gradual decline of Zhou power. This process was understood as increasing moral decline, in which those lower in the social hierarchy bore the consequences of the failings of those above them. The poems were interpreted as voices from those historical moments. This mode of interpretation forever linked the story of literature to a morally inflected political context, with particular attention to the motif of decline. While later literary historical interpretation modified this model in interesting ways, the most basic assumptions have lasted to the present.

The basic form of decline theory is the transition from *zheng* 正, the "norm" and the "proper," to *bian* 變, the term of change. This binary opposition had its origins in the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), where *bian* as "change" was an inevitable and essentially neutral term. In the context of the Mao interpretation of the *Shijing*, however, *zheng* (a term interchangeable with another *zheng* 政, "[good] governance") was represented by voices speaking from the condition of good government, a voice celebrating good government, or a voice from good government itself to exert influence on the people. From *zheng* the poems in the *Shijing* pass into *bian*, in this sense best understood as "deviation"; these poems either directly criticize some consequence of misrule or indirectly criticize misrule by holding up the model of the past. When mapped on history, *zheng*, embodied in the putatively earliest poems, passes into degrees of ever greater *bian*, "deviation." Speaking from different moments and locales, the poems bear witness to a rudimentary narrative of a dynasty gaining the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) and then losing it by degrees.

This rudimentary narrative lay at the heart of the theory of a "dynastic cycle." The narrative would be modified to account for the contingencies of real history, both political and literary. In the case of political history, the Zhou model of King Xuan 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE) was appropriated to account for a phase of "restoration" that interrupted decline and postponed the inevitable end. The task of the literary historian was to identify texts and qualities in texts that instantiated the given assumptions. To some degree, this kind of literary historical narrative, tied to the dynastic cycle, lasted throughout the

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imperial period. Within a given dynasty, certain reigns were often chosen to represent the subdivisions of the process.

The historically determined process of movement from *zheng* to *bian* became from early on linked to another process, anchored by the binary opposition of *zhi* 質, the "plain" and "substantive," and *wen* 文, the "ornamented" and "literary," which at its extreme becomes "merely literary" (see Chapter 1). This binary opposition had a range of reference that extended well beyond the literary sphere, but the literary sphere was where this putatively cultural change became most visible. Although the ideal was the "perfect balance," *binbin* 彬彬, of *zhi* and *wen*, there was a strong inclination to understand the relation between the two terms as a process, by which cultural forms passed from simplicity to ornament. Although this was often attached to the dynastic process, it could also be used for larger and smaller historical intervals.

The binary opposition of "plain"/"ornamented" has remained one of the deepest assumptions in the Chinese reception of literature. Given two poems of roughly the same kind, at least one of which is undatable, the poem with parallelism, references, and high-register diction will seem somehow later than the poem in a plainer register. The "plain"/"ornamented" binary was, however, also used as a class marker; if a simple poem is given as anonymous in some sources and attributed to an elite poet in other sources, plebeian anonymity will be preferred.

In the long duration of Chinese cultural and literary history, there was the implicit need to "reset the clock," to return to origins and cultural forms that seemed to embody the "proper" or the "plain." Articulation of this value became increasingly common through the course of the middle period. The declaration that literature had returned to some version of the "proper" could be understood as a compliment to the current ruler, and in some venues of writing literary history, it was obligatory. In his chapter on "Temporal Sequence" ("Shi xu" 時序, Liu 45), Liu Xie (see Chapter 1) improbably attributed the restoration of literary perfection to the [Southern] Qi (479–502), the brief dynasty during which he was writing the chapter. It is hard to justify this judgment in the extant record.

The more interesting problem was reconciling actual judgment with the ideological disposition to a narrative of decline from ancient simplicity to hollow rhetorical flourish. Writing in the early sixth century, Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 468–518) deplored the excessive ornamentation of his contemporaries, and in his top grade of poets he gave pride of place to the anonymous "old poems" (*gushi* 古詩). He characterized the poetry of Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) as possessing "ancient directness" (*guzhi* 古直), a quality that would seem to deserve some respect. But Cao Cao is placed in the lowest of his three grades of poets. Too much "ancient directness" was, perhaps, unpalatable. Somewhat earlier, Liu Xie had offered an ingenious intervention in the decline narrative by the metaphor of dyeing: literature is like plain cloth which can be beautiful if you dye it only once; if you continue to dye it, it becomes muddy and ugly. Hence literature should stay close to its origins in the Classics and continuously return to those origins—but always take one step beyond origins. If the theory of decline in the Mao interpretation of the *Shijing* began with the "proper" and best and then went downhill, around the turn of the sixth

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century we see forces that implicitly seek a new period of raw beginnings that lead to a subsequent period of perfect balance and perfection, followed by decline.

The application of these cultural processes to literary history was essentially deductive rather than inductive: the process itself was the given assumption, and the literary historian discovered its presence in actual texts, passing the appropriate judgment. A shared understanding of historical process could, however, easily produce completely opposite judgments, depending on how it was applied; for example, in his chapter "The Elucidation of Poetry" ("Ming shi" 明詩) Liu Xie treated the poets of the Western Jin as rhetorically excessive, thus marking a decline from the perfection of the early third century; a decade or two later, Zhong Rong treated the same period as a height of poetry, returning to and perfecting the poetry of the early third century. Periodization was by dynasty or reign, with the shared assumption of process used to articulate the significance of period change.

Here we should note that premodern China had no system of continuous dating; history could be articulated only through dynasty names and reign names. Continuous literary history could be represented only through reference to a continuous line of political rule, and thus a historical narrative was immanent in all literary historical accounts. Nevertheless, there were moments and points of view that enabled a mode of periodization that did not correspond to dynastic change and a *zheng/bian* agenda. We see this first in a surviving passage from Tan Daoluan's 檀道鸞 *Xu Jin Yangqiu* 續晉陽秋 (*Sequel to* [*Sun Sheng's*] *Annals of the Jin*) from the first half of the fifth century. Giving an account of the poetry of the third and fourth centuries, Tan Daoluan describes a series of changing interests that cannot be easily mapped onto political change, culminating in a major change (apparently for the better) in the penultimate reign of the Eastern Jin (Owen 2006, 41 f.). Formalist accounts of genres also could often not be easily mapped onto accepted political narratives. From the eighth century on, critics of poetry recognized that "regulated verse" (*lüshi* 律詩) reached formal perfection in the hands of Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (ca. 656–712) and Shen Quanqi 沈佺期 (ca. 656–ca. 715), working during some of the politically darkest and most corrupt days of the dynasty. Although literary history could never be entirely detached from political history, there were forces at work that complicated the decline narrative and forced a degree of autonomy on the account of literary history.

Eventually, the model of the dynastic cycle developed new ways to reconcile fundamental assumptions with the clear evidence of historical contingency. It was becoming increasingly obvious that literary change did not always match up perfectly with dynastic change, when the writings should have represented the voices of a world well governed. Eventually the *zheng/bian* model was supplemented by the theory of "lingering influence" (*yufeng* 餘風). The literary court of Emperor Taizong of Tang 唐太宗 (r. 626–649) did not seem much different from the literary establishments of the short dynasties that preceded his reign, even though Taizong was much admired as an exemplary founding ruler who set the dynasty on a firm footing. How could the literary record fail to bear witness to the "good government of the Zhenguan Reign," acknowledged throughout the Tang and afterward? The *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New History of the*

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Tang) explains this as follows: "When the Tang arose, belles lettres continued the lingering influence of Xu [Ling] and Yu [Xin, both sixth-century court poets]; the whole world admired and emulated them. [Chen] Zi'ang 陳子昂 (ca. 661–702) first changed to the dignified and proper style" (Ouyang Xiu 1975, 4078). Chen Zi'ang's work takes us seven decades into the Tang, almost a quarter of the dynasty. In the same way, the late Tang style "lingered" more than a century after the fall of the dynasty, through the Five Dynasties and about six decades into the Song. In short, the dynastic model for literary history was a deep assumption, but it permitted a degree of modification when theory did not match historical reality. The theory of "lingering influence" contributed to a new term in periodization, by which the cultural height of a dynasty was deferred by the introduction of a new phase, "early."

The Fifth and Sixth Centuries

We earlier discussed the ideological disposition to describe literary change in terms of a process moving from the plain to the ornamented. This was initially conceived as a general process not yet mapped onto the specifics of literary history. Around the turn of the fourth century, we see this assumption in its simplest terms in Zhi Yu's 摯虞 (d. ca. 312) comment on "inscription" (*ming* 銘): "Ancient inscriptions were the ultimate in terseness; modern inscriptions are the ultimate in prolixity" (Deng Guoguang 1990, 187). Zhi Yu's subsequent examples leap quickly from high antiquity to Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), who is "canonical and proper" (*dianzheng* 典正). However, the final example he offers, which seems structurally to embody the undesirable prolixity of the present, is Li You 李尤 (44–126), an Eastern Han writer working two generations *earlier* than Cai Yong. In short, a literary historical narrative is proposed and apparently demonstrated by a series of cases, but the final, anchoring case is out of sequence.

The fifth and sixth centuries saw numerous attempts to instantiate such earlier assumptions regarding literary change in the specifics of literary history, leading to quite detailed periodization, attached to dynasties, phases of dynasties, or specific reigns. When we look at these accounts together, however, we find remarkably little agreement on the specifics in characterizing a given period. We find little agreement on the values assigned to different phases in the process: in some instances plainness is best; in some instances balance between plainness and ornament is best; and in a few rare cases we find that novelty is best. There is, however, almost universal agreement on the process. The process is sometimes a macrohistorical event beginning in remote antiquity and concluding in the vapidly ornamented present. In other accounts, the process restarts itself many times. No one gave relatively detailed accounts of literary historical change more often than Liu Xie, and the inconsistency of particulars in those accounts is striking, even though the processes are the same.

Five-syllable line poetry was a "new" form, presumed to first appear in the Western Han. There was general agreement that it reached a height of "plain vigor" in the Jian'an

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Reign (196–220 CE) and that it had undergone many changes. While fifth- and sixth-century authors disagreed on which changes were for the better and which were for the worse, the case was closed with the fall of the South. In the histories of the Southern Dynasties, composed in the first half century of the Tang, there was universal agreement that the Southern literature of the sixth century represented the extreme of a frivolity and decadence that was the embodiment of moral bankruptcy and the cause of the South's destruction.

This seemed to define a clear "period." There was, however, one small problem. The late Southern Dynasties style remained the predominant influence during the Sui and, as mentioned above, during the first part of the Tang. Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (541–604) commanded a return to simplicity in literary style, but his successor Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (569–618) was fascinated by Southern literature and culture. Just as the late Southern Dynasties style was seen as both symptom and cause of the fall of the South, Emperor Yang of Sui's beguilement by Southern literary culture was blamed for his own fall and the fall of his dynasty. While one might suggest that Emperor Yang's disastrous obsession with conquering Korea was the more significant cause of dynastic destabilization, the interest in some of his languid poems as the symptoms of illness in the body politic suggests the imagined stake in literary production.

The Tang

If the historians had reached a consensus that the late Southern Dynasties (and Emperor Yang of Sui's reign) were poetically "decadent," the Tang's increasing political success suggested that that they were not too far off the mark in moral governance, even under the "lingering influence." Taizong and his court produced thematically acceptable verse, even if it remained in the Southern (or late Northern) court style. For example, Taizong could write a beautifully parallel couplet on the patterns made by his horse snorting in the water: the Northern warrior has somehow appropriated the delicate finesse of the Southern poet. Throughout the seventh century, we have declarations of literary change that return literary style to the "proper"—even if it is often hard to detect such radical transformation in literary production. The eighth and ninth centuries retrospectively singled out the work of Chen Zi'ang (661–702) as embodying a significant breach with the recent literary past and a successful "restoration of antiquity" (*fu gu* 復古), in effect the "beginning" of Tang poetry. While in some of his work Chen Zi'ang did indeed adopt a stylized moral tone and vaguely imitated the style of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), the vast preponderance of literary production represented a gradual evolution of the old Southern court style rather than a radical reaction against it. In short, within the Tang itself the single most common moment defining a "period" was what "should have happened" rather than what was happening.

In the Tang imagination, Chen Zi'ang marked a "period," but on the whole Tang intellectuals seem to have been less interested in telling literary historical stories than their

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Southern Dynasties predecessors. The Tang was intensely aware of prominent earlier writers, both Tang and pre-Tang. The An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) loomed large as marking the end of an era, but Tang writers did not refer to it as the end of a specific literary historical period; Tang intellectuals associated certain reigns with a particular style. The Yuanhe reign 元和 (806–820) was considered a "period" in the ninth century. However, the full periodization of Tang poetry awaited retrospective consideration by their successors.

The Zhou model of dynastic process in the Mao interpretation of the *Shijing* was perfection at the beginning, followed by a gradual falling away, *bian*. The implicit model of "early," "high," and "late" eventually, in the thirteenth century, became explicit in the periodization of the Tang, with the "early Tang" linked to "lingering influence," and the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) defining the "High Tang." The century and a half after the An Lushan Rebellion and Xuanzong's abdication became "late." This version of the "late Tang" involved immense changes in literature and was useless as a period term. Enumerating "normative [period] styles" (*ti* 體), in *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (*Canglang's Remarks on Poetry*, before 1244), Yan Yu 嚴羽 broke up that too-long period by returning to the older practice of defining a period style roughly by a reign title; the long "late Tang" was divided into the "Dali style" (for the Dali reign 大曆, 766–779), the "Yuanhe style" for the Yuanhe reign, and the "late Tang style" for everything thereafter. This intrusion of periods particular to the Tang (the Dali and Yuanhe reigns) undermined a set of terms that were tied to the general "dynastic cycle" and could be applied to any dynasty. This was remedied by the creation of a "mid-Tang," growing as a period concept through the fourteenth century and given final form in Gao Bing's 高棅 (1350–1423) *Tangshi pinhui* 唐詩品彙 (*Graded Compendium of Tang* Poetry, 1393). Although this four-phase division of dynastic literary history is most strongly associated with the Tang, the terms were irregularly applied to later dynasties as well, taking the dynastic cycle for granted as the premise of literary history.

Periodization and Its Complications

Often we might like to free ourselves of the legacy of premodern periodization, especially in those cases when periodization is driven by ideological assumptions about what "should have happened." We need, however, to consider the ways in which earlier literary history becomes an inevitable part of our current attempts to reassess literary history. Perhaps the most obvious issue is the way in which literary production was itself driven by assumptions about "what should happen." We may properly contextualize Chen Zi'ang's version of "returning to antiquity" as only a small part of the very different literary work of his age—and indeed only a small part of his own work. Nevertheless, that part of his work exerted a disproportionate influence on his successors.

A more serious issue is the way in which subsequent premodern literary history has distorted the record, favoring the reproduction of manuscripts that instantiate one

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particular later view of what was important. Changes in taste could lead to radical losses that distort the record, and in some cases later eras might well have preferred what was lost to what was preserved. Early bibliographies remind us how much more was lost than was preserved, and we cannot always trust the old consolation that only the "best" was preserved.

In some cases, we have an explicit record of changes in taste that allow us to correct the distortions of transmission. Comments from the fifth and sixth centuries are explicit about the popularity of "arcane discourse" (*xuanyan* 玄言), in the poetry of the first half of the fourth century. The reaction against that fashion later in the fourth century was so sharp that only a few examples have been preserved. Those few examples, not represented in the standard anthologies, would probably have been overlooked were it not for repeated reference to the literature of "arcane discourse" in fifth- and early-sixth-century remarks on the history of poetry.

Without such roughly contemporary comments, however, misjudgment is easy. Looking over the extant record, it would be easy and obvious to talk about the "rise of poetry in the five-syllable line" from the beginning of the third century CE on; and there is little doubt that the Caos—first ruling, then reigning—were great supporters of five-syllable-line poetry. We must, however, take into account the fact that only two collections of literary works have been preserved roughly intact from before the end of the fourth century (setting aside the poetry collection of Ruan Ji, which may have been taken out of a fuller collection that survived through the Song dynasty). Both of these collections, those of Xi Kang 嵇康 (ca. 223–ca. 262) and Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303), have as many or more poems in the four-syllable line as we have in the five-syllable line. The recovery of fascicles from the mid-seventh-century *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林 (*Forest of Compositions of the Literary Academy*) reminds of how many poems in the four-syllable line have been lost. Here we see how the literary values of the fifth and sixth centuries, when the five-syllable line came to be preferred, influenced the preservation of earlier poetry. We can still talk about the "rise of poetry in the five-syllable line," but the process was contested, and the history of poetry requires more nuance.

As we suggested at the beginning of this essay, periodization is a function of a virtual literary historical narrative, anchored by decisions about which authors and works are important. Were we to depend only on the poetry anthologies done in the Tang itself, our history of Tang poetry would look very different from current versions. Were we to be restricted to the extensive manuscript record preserved at Dunhuang, Tang poetry would look different still.

Here we need to consider the degree to which what we think of as the periodization of "literature" is actually periodization of certain genres. If we are talking about the "mid-Tang," defined roughly as the last decade of the eighth century to about 827, we might find resonance between a resurgent "old-style" prose (*guwen* 古文) and some aspects of poetry, thus giving the illusion of a coherent shift in literary interests. In "rhapsodies" (*fu* 賦), however, this same period was the heyday of "regulated rhapsodies" (*lüfu* 律賦), which represent values almost diametrically opposed to those of "old style" prose and poetry.

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There is a strong desire in Chinese literary history to tell "one story," to decide (often anachronistically) which authors or genres are most important and to make that the main plot. As the extant record grew through the Tang, the reader of the primary texts becomes aware of many different stories unfolding simultaneously. The desired clarity of periodization dissolves. Received periodization is deeply engrained in the current understanding of Chinese literature, and it structures our attention to certain authors, works, and genres rather than others. It is an essentially conservative force that foregrounds one story while blurring others. It would perhaps be in our collective interest to give it up in favor of mere chronology, allowing us to tell different ongoing stories rather than a single story.

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SECTION TWO

BASICS OF LITERACY

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I. Technology and Media

Editor's Introduction (Xiaofei Tian)

In classical Chinese literary studies, it has finally, and fortunately, become an increasingly quaint notion that literature can exist, or ever existed, as a transcendent entity or disembodied content separated from its physical media. Such a materialist turn in recent years is also a historicist turn, as the issues of technology and media in literary production are closely tied to the changing conditions of a society in its specific historical context. The opening section of the Handbook aims to introduce the reader to the mechanisms of Chinese literature that have played a crucial role in the development of that literature.

The consideration of Chinese literature necessarily begins with that of the Chinese writing system, which is distinguished by two things: it is one of a small handful of writing systems with an independent origin in the ancient world; yet, unlike the other independently invented writing systems like the Sumerian or the Mayan, the Chinese script enjoys an unbroken duration for over three millennia and is known as the oldest continuously used writing system. Some of its specific features have produced a deep impact not only on Chinese but also on other East Asian traditions that have adopted Chinese characters. Its monosyllabic nature—that is, each character represents a single syllable and usually a word—contributes to a number of distinctive formal features of Chinese poetry and prose, such as parallelism. Despite popular misperception, Chinese characters are not pictographs or ideographs, but logographs

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that represent the sounds and words of a living language. This nevertheless should not obscure the fact that the written language of the premodern period—*wenyan wen* (Literary Chinese or Classical Chinese)—constitutes a language largely separate from the spoken language of any given period and of any particular region. Perhaps the most salient point about the Chinese writing system is that its stability over the centuries has ensured the remarkable continuity of Chinese literary and cultural tradition, but also masks its enormous changes over the course of history, including its elastic absorption of a large amount of foreign vocabulary during the early medieval period (that is, between the first and seventh century CE), when Buddhist texts were being imported from India to China and translated from Sanskrit into Chinese on a large scale.

The next chapter in this section explores the various media through which literature—both in the broad sense of the word and in the narrower sense of belletristic writings—was created and transmitted prior to the spread of printing. Bones and shells, bamboo and wood, as well as bronze and stone, all constituted early writing media. These writing materials are durable, but also cumbersome. Silk was much lighter, yet costly. The technology of paper therefore marked a major turning point in the wide dissemination of texts, especially when paper became increasingly easy and cheap to produce. In the early third century, Emperor Wen of the Wei 魏文帝, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), had sent one silk copy of his book *Normative Discourses* and his belletristic writings to the Wu ruler Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252) and one paper copy to Sun Quan's chief minister, Zhang Zhao 張昭 (156–236). After his death, Cao Pi's son and successor, Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 226–239), ordered *Normative Discourses* inscribed on stone and displayed outside the Imperial University. These different types of writing media—stone, silk, and paper—each indicated a different level of functionality and import for Cao Pi's works.

Cao Pi was also the man who made the famous statement: "In literature, *qi* is the principal factor." A historical understanding of the concept of *qi* 氣—breath—situates it in an age when literature maintained close ties to oral composition and performance. Besides oral recital, musical performance of *shi* poetry was also a common phenomenon, as in the well-known story of several Tang dynasty (618–907) poets secretly betting on whose quatrain would be sung by the most beautiful of the singing girls at a banquet. The golden age of Chinese poetry was thus never a static world of written texts, but a dynamically mobile world of multimedia performances.

Mobility characterizes manuscript culture, the topic of the third chapter in this section. Manuscript culture is an expedient umbrella term referring to the age of manuscript books in contradistinction from the age of print culture. Simply put, before printing became widespread, hand-copying was the single most important means of textual transmission. Unlike a printed book, which has many identical copies of the same print run, each and every hand-copied manuscript is a unique entity. While a hand-copied text may have an author, in most cases we no longer have the master copy

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approved by the author but are left only with multiple copies of a hypothetical source text. This is particularly true when the primary medium of textual transmission was the easily destructible paper rather than parchment. Just as Western historians of the book have become cognizant of the importance of manuscripts despite the continuous focus on print, literary scholars and historians in Chinese studies have also begun to pay attention to the complex dynamics of manuscript culture.

Here, however, two salient points must be raised. First, manuscript and print are not mutually exclusive, and the boundary between manuscript and print culture is porous and fluid. Some scholars believe that printing was used in China for religious purposes from as early as the sixth or seventh century, although printing did not become widespread until after the tenth century, the cutoff point for our volume. But even long after that, print never superseded manuscript, which persisted well into the twentieth century. The use of paper also overlapped with that of other writing materials, not to mention with oral transmission and memorization. It is easy to exaggerate either the "revolutionary" nature of printing or the power of paper manuscripts; instead, concomitance and interaction of these different forms are more enabling concepts in understanding the matrix of manuscript culture. Second, the age of manuscript culture itself has different stages: the bronze and bamboo of the early period imposed certain limits on textual production and dissemination that could be circumvented by paper, and necessarily entail different conceptualization. Texts reproduced on paper greatly facilitated the increase of a robust book trade, which in turn made it possible for private individuals to form their own libraries.

One of the first mentions of a large private library—the one that belonged to the scholar Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192)—appeared toward the end of the Eastern Han (25–220), which was about the same time as the spread of paper. Earlier, the Ban family, the most illustrious scholarly and literary family of the first century CE, also enjoyed a large private book collection, but that was only because Emperor Cheng of the Han 漢成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) bestowed on Ban You 班斿 (fl. 30 BCE) a generous gift of duplicate copies of books in the imperial library. Ban You's home thereupon became a gathering place for many scholars who were eager to see his books. The historian Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), the son of Ban You's nephew, relates an illustrative anecdote retold later by the third-century writer Xi Kang 嵇康 (or Ji Kang, ca. 223–ca. 262): the writer and scholar Huan Tan 桓譚 (23 BCE–56 CE) once asked to borrow a copy of *Zhuangzi* from Ban You's son Si 嗣, but Si refused his request, claiming that Huan Tan was too much under the adverse influence of Confucianism to benefit from Zhuangzi's teachings. *Zhuangzi* was a commonly available title in Xi Kang's time, but clearly had not been such two centuries before. The scholar Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143) once sent his friend the present of ten thousand cash and a paper book in ten scrolls, *Xuzi*, with an apology: "Being too poor to afford silk, I could only use paper [to copy this book out]." *Xuzi* was a philosophical work like *Zhuangzi*. Books on paper, here sent around as a material gift, certainly proved much easier to circulate than those on bamboo or wood.

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Paper technology also plays an important role in the rise of literature's "sister arts" calligraphy and painting. The last chapter in this section explores the relationship of calligraphy and painting to literature, especially to poetry, which remained the most privileged genre in premodern times. The "three arts of the brush"—poetry, calligraphy, and painting—share a discursive affinity, as the development of the theories and aesthetic ideals of calligraphy and painting are closely related to literary thought and poetics. Their association is also manifested on the physical level, as the subgenre of "poetry on painting" was first developed in early medieval times, and such poems were often inscribed, as a calligraphic display, on the painting surface. Although many such poems from the period covered by this volume are detached and disembodied from the paintings they depict, the words are nevertheless meant to conjure visual images as well as represent the "spirit" animating the visual images. Sometimes, in the hands of a great poet like Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), writing a poem on a faded visual image—for instance, cranes (known in the Chinese tradition as immortal birds) painted on a crumbling wall behind an office building—became an occasion to reflect on the relationship between immortal art and its all-too-fragile physical medium.

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CHAPTER 3

THE CHINESE WRITING SYSTEM

IMRE GALAMBOS

The Chinese script is among the main writing systems of the ancient world, and with its over three millennia of documented history is the only one that has been in continuous use essentially in the same form until today. The earliest surviving examples of Chinese writing go back to the late Shang 商 (ca. 1300–1046) period, around 1300 BCE, which is considerably later than some of the inscriptions written in Egyptian and Mesopotamian scripts. This had led to the hypothesis that the Chinese script may have been imported from West Asia (e.g., Mair 1992), but to this day there is no credible proof supporting this theory. Instead, the available evidence suggests that the Shang script was an indigenous invention dating not much earlier than our earliest extant examples.

Starting with Jesuit contacts with China, from about the early seventeenth century there was a growing interest among Western scholars with regard to how the Chinese script compared with other writing systems of the world and what its nature was. Initially, Chinese characters were understood in the West as being able to communicate ideas directly without the need to be vocalized, that is, without the medium of language and speech. These arguments usually emphasized how people in various parts of China, and even in neighboring countries, who spoke different dialects or languages and thus were unable to understand each other verbally, could resort to writing as an efficient means of communication (e.g., Bacon 2008: 122–123; Nieuhof 1669: 157–161). Peter Stephen Du Ponceau (1760–1844) was the first to criticize this understanding, arguing that Chinese characters in fact represented words of spoken language and not ideas independently of language (Du Ponceau 1838: xxxi–xxxii). With the development of the academic discipline of linguistics came the belief that languages in general shared similar characteristics and that true writing was a graphic representation of language, which by definition was inseparable from pronunciation. In the second half of the 1930s, a

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heated debate developed in Western Sinology precisely on the issue of whether Chinese writing was ideographic or logographic, that is, whether the characters represented ideas or words (Creel 1936; Boodberg 1937; Creel 1939; Boodberg 1940; Lurie 2006). The debate subsequently subsided, but the issue is still of interest, even if most scholars today would agree that Chinese characters record Chinese language, whatever variety or dialect it may be, and that scripts in general cannot communicate ideas directly. Having said that, there is sometimes perhaps too much emphasis on the phonetic aspect of the script and its indebtedness to spoken language, disregarding the rich substratum of extraphonetic possibilities that can be, and indeed often have been, utilized in literary or political writings.

Before the archaeological discoveries of the modern age, the history of the script was seen in light of traditional accounts written during the Eastern Han 漢 dynasty (25–220). We know no earlier descriptions of the origins of writing, even though by this time the script had been in use for about a millennium and a half. The Eastern Han description of the origin of writing was so influential that it remained in use for the following 1,900 years and to some extent is still used today. Archaeological discoveries, especially those in the first half of the twentieth century, were invariably interpreted against this model, leading to a number of difficulties. In most cases, it is easier to abandon much of the traditional terminology, because the old terms do not seem to be identifiable with what is in front of us and, at the same time, they carry a wealth of additional connotations attached to them during the last two thousand years.

Native Accounts of the Early History of Chinese Writing

The earliest native accounts of the history of the Chinese writing system date to the Eastern Han period, around the late first century CE. These appear in the "Postface" of the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Explanation of Simple Graphs and Analysis of Composite Characters*, hereafter *Shuowen*), completed by Xu Shen 許慎 (d. ca. 149) around AD 100 (Boltz 1993: 429), and the roughly contemporaneous "Yiwenzhi" 藝文志 ("Monograph on Arts and Writings") of the *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) (Hulsewé 1993: 129–130), even if the latter had probably been adopted from earlier sources. Although these two accounts display a number of important differences, in many respects they are quite similar, and it is likely that they ultimately go back to the same source. The version in the *Shuowen* is more elaborate and contains details not available in the *Han shu*, perhaps as the result of the *Shuowen*'s more pronounced interest in the script, as opposed to the literary focus of the "Yiwenzhi."

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According to the *Shuowen* account (see also Chapter 6), the first signs were the work of the mythical ruler Pao Xi 庖羲 (also known as Fu Xi 伏羲) who composed the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) of the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*) by observing the signs (*xiang* 象) of heaven and the patterns (*fa* 法) on the ground. This latter was also identified as the "prints of birds and beasts" (*niaoshou zhi wen* 鳥獸之文). In addition to this description, the *Shuowen* provides another story, according to which in the time of Shennong 神農, the Divine Husbandman, people were using knots on threads, but with time this proved to be insufficient to record their affairs. As a solution, Cang Jie 倉頡, historian of the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, created writing, once again by observing the prints of birds and beasts on the ground. Whether the story of Pao Xi and that of Cang Jie are two alternate myths or in fact represent consecutive stages of the same narrative, they signify that at the earliest stage writing was said to have arisen from imitating various patterns in the natural world, especially the footprints of animals.

The *Shuowen*, however, also provides technical details about Cang Jie's invention of writing, claiming that he first created the simple-component characters called *wen* 文 ("patterns") and then, by combining the forms and sounds (*xing sheng* 形聲) of these, the multicomponent characters called *zi* 字 ("name, character"). The word *zi* is explained as referring to the multiplication (*ziru* 孳乳) of characters, implicitly connecting it with *zi* 子 ("child, offspring"). Yet the dichotomy between *wen* and *zi* is clearly based on the two syllables of the word *wenzi* 文字 ("writing, script"), which by Han times, but not much earlier, was a commonly used binom. Xu Shen separates the binom into its constituents and rationalizes them as two distinct items, a point of view also reflected in the title of the *Shuowen*: (i) "explicating simple characters" (*shuowen* 說文) and (ii) "dissecting complex characters" (*jiezi* 解字). This explication of the meaning of the words *wen* and *zi*, however, is unattested in other early sources and may not reflect a historically accurate etymology.

Even if the terms *wen* and *zi* did not signify a distinction between complex and simple characters, Chinese writing in general indeed consists of single-component or multicomponent graphs, which by definition represent two sequential stages. As to the principles according to which characters were composed, the *Shuowen* identifies the following six principles, calling these *liushu* 六書, or the "six scripts" (English translation of terms adopted from Boltz 1994, 144–145).

(1) *zhishi* 指事 ("indicating the matter"): expressing concepts inferentially or symbolically, rather than through pictorial representation;
(2) *xiangxing* 象形 ("representing the form"): depicting objects graphically as pictographs;
(3) *xingsheng* 形聲 ("formulating the sound"): combining a phonetic and semantic component;
(4) *huiyi* 會意 ("conjoining the sense"): putting together two characters and use their semantic values to approximate the meaning of a new word;

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(5) *zhuanzhu* 轉注 ("revolved and redirected [graphs]"): rotating existing characters to represent cognate words (this explanation is only a conjecture, because the *zhuanzhu* category is hard to interpret, mainly because very few characters are explicitly identified as belonging to this category);
(6) *jiajie* 假借 ("loaned and borrowed [graphs]"): borrowing existing characters for their phonetic value to represent new words.

The *Shuowen* account continues with more specific details about the subsequent history of the script, describing how a certain historian called Zhòu 籀 from the court of King Xuan of the Zhou 周宣王 (r. 827/825–782 BCE) compiled a work called *Dazhuan* 大篆 ("Great Seal Script"), in which he modified the so-called "ancient script" (*guwen* 古文), allegedly used by Confucius (551–479 BCE?) and Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (fl. fifth century BCE). With the decline of Zhou rule, regional powers grew in strength, eventually forming the seven large states of the Warring States, which were no longer controlled by a central authority and thus had their own languages and scripts. According to the *Shuowen*, this situation changed when the First Emperor of the Qin 秦始皇帝 (r. 246–210 BCE) brought the regional states under his control and created a unified empire. His chancellor Li Si 李斯 (ca. 280–208 BCE) proposed to unify the script and discard everything that did not agree with the Qin script. As a means of promulgating the new standard, leading officials created three different textbooks, each of which relied on *dazhuan* characters of historian Zhòu, at times heavily abbreviating and altering those. The new script was, says the *Shuowen*, the *xiaozhuan* 小篆 ("small seal script") script. The Qin empire also saw the appearance of *lishu* 隸書 ("clerical script"), which primarily grew out of the need for a simple and easy way of writing in the newly founded bureaucracy. Following this, a variety of different calligraphic styles came into being, with additional styles emerging later on.

This traditional account of the origin and early history of the Chinese script over time became extremely influential and lay at the basis of all subsequent discussions concerning the history and nature of Chinese characters. Considering it in the light of the intellectual milieu of the Eastern Han period, when it was written, it is apparent that Xu Shen did not compile the *Shuowen* purely for linguistic or philological purposes but saw the script as the prerequisite for successful government (Boltz 1994: 150–151). In the "Postface," he stressed that "writing is the foundation of the classics and the arts, the beginning of royal government; it is the means by which people of the past reach posterity, by which people of the future know the past" (Galambos 2006: 143). It is this belief in historical continuity that is reflected in his overview of the history of writing. Part of this perspective on history was seeing the Han as reimplementing the central power of the Zhou that had allegedly preceded the chaos of the Warring States period (481–221 BCE) (Galambos 2006: 143–144). Accordingly, Xu Shen's account portrays the Qin unification of writing as a restoration of an original order that existed before the world sank into disorder, which inevitably signified a general moral decline. He sees orthography, and the script in general, as symptomatic of the moral and political situation.

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Archaeological Evidence and the Early Stages of the Script

The twentieth century yielded an unprecedented amount of manuscripts and inscriptions, and these allow us to reinterpret the origin and early development of Chinese writing. This is not to say, however, that similar discoveries were completely absent in earlier times. We have records of old manuscripts coming to light from at least Han times. One of the earliest recorded cases was the discovery of *guwen* documents in the old residence of Confucius, which allegedly yielded copies of documents dating back to the Xia and Shang dynasties, as well as copies of the *Lunyu* 論語 (the *Analects*) and *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*) written in the so-called tadpole script (*kedou wenzi* 科斗文字) (Kong Anguo 孔安國 [d. ca. 100 BCE], "Preface to the *Classic of Documents*" *Shangshu xu* 尚書序). These documents were transcribed into the modern script and promptly integrated into scholarly discourse. To name another famous incident, in 279 several texts, including the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 (*Bamboo Annals*), were found in the tomb of King Xiang 襄 of Wei 魏 (r. 318–296 BCE) in Ji 汲 County, modern He'nan province (Shaughnessy 1993). Later on, during the Song dynasty (960–1279), a general interest in collecting antiquities was yet another important trend that brought ancient inscriptions into the focus of scholarly attention, resulting in a number of important works on epigraphy and paleography.

In general, these premodern textual discoveries were evaluated according to the traditional understanding of the nature and history of writing, ultimately going back to the Eastern Han accounts. Indeed, the trend of interpreting discoveries within the framework of the traditional model of the Chinese script continued to the modern age, and can be met with even today. One of the major sources of problems is that it is difficult to match archaeological material with what is being described in early sources. We cannot unambiguously identify what terms such as *dazhuan, zhòuwen* ("the script of [the historian] Zhòu"), and *guwen* refer to with regard to the inscriptions and manuscripts that come out of the ground today. English translations such as "great seal script" are of course also flawed, as they rely on the idea that the *zhuan* 篆 script was used on seals, a notion that goes back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western encounters with China. Similarly, it is hard to classify the peculiar type of script used on the relatively large number of bamboo-slip documents from the ancient state of Chu 楚, and it is evident that we cannot ascribe it to any of the categories mentioned in the *Shuowen*, apart from calling it a regional script. Yet these bamboo slips are clearly not exceptional, because a considerable number of them have been unearthed in recent decades, and some contain important parallels with transmitted texts well known from traditional scholarship.

Therefore, current research tends to avoid using the traditional Chinese terms, choosing instead descriptive terms according to the media, time frame, provenance, use, and other characteristics that can be associated with the material. The archaeological

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material has also forced us to re-evaluate the history of Chinese writing and make significant modifications to the traditional model. Among the most important materials in this respect are oracle-bone inscriptions produced by the Shang and Zhou peoples around the thirteenth to eleventh centuries BCE. These were divination records carved onto turtle shells and bovine scapulae by royal diviners, and today they represent the earliest examples of Chinese writing (Keightley 1978). They are not mentioned in traditional sources and thus seem to have been completely forgotten by the time Han intellectuals turned their attention to the history of their script. Likewise, there is no record of the variety of pottery marks found at Banpo 半坡, Jiangzhai 姜寨, and other Neolithic sites, which may possibly represent a form of proto-writing, although their connection with each other, and especially with the late Shang script, is still unsubstantiated.

Even though the archaeological material provides important clues to the origin of Chinese writing, it does not fully resolve the problem. Opinions vary on how far the oracle-bone inscriptions are removed from the initial stage of the script, ranging from decades to centuries. But the inscriptions nevertheless provide firsthand evidence about a stage in the history of the script earlier than that known to the Han dynasty scholars who formulated the traditional models. Accordingly, our understanding of how Chinese characters were born somewhat differs from traditional accounts. Instead of the *liushu* model, starting from the Republican period of the twentieth century Chinese palaeographers advanced the *sanshu* 三書 ("three scripts") theory, which itself went through several stages of modifications (Tang 1935; Chen 1956; Qiu 2000). Generally speaking, this theory considers that the overall majority of characters were formed according to three principles, and these principles may also represent three evolutionary stages. According to Chen Mengjia's 陳夢家 (1911–1966) model, advanced on the basis of Tang Lan's 唐蘭 (1901–1979) original idea, the three types of characters were (i) pictographs, (ii) phonetic loans, and (iii) semanto-phonetic compounds (Chen 1956: 75–83). Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 suggested replacing the category of pictographs with that of "semantographs" (Qiu 2000: 106).

According to William G. Boltz, the three stages of the development of Chinese characters were (i) the zodiographic (i.e., graphs originally drawn to depict objects were chosen to represent words of the language), (ii) the multivalent (i.e., pre-existing characters were used for writing new words, either adopting the phonetic or semantic values of the original character), and (iii) the determinative (i.e., additional—either semantic or phonetic—components were added to characters to differentiate them). Boltz also asserts that the same principles were at work at the birth of other major writing systems of the world (Boltz 2000). This naturally leads to the conclusion that the Chinese writing might have also evolved into a syllabary or an alphabet, and indeed, Warring States manuscripts demonstrate a tendency towards desemanticization. This trend, however, was arrested by the Qin-Han standardization of writing and the scholars' attitude towards the script and the tradition it embodied (Boltz 1994: 168–177). In a sense, this evolutionary potential was accomplished by later phonetic systems that stem from Chinese characters, such as the Japanese *kana*, the *nüshu* 女書 ("female script") from Hu'nan

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province, and the *zhuyin fuhao* 注音符號 ("phonetic symbols") introduced during the Republican period and still used in Taiwan.

Orthography

Recent archaeological discoveries also provide material for reconstructing subsequent developments in the history of the Chinese script. One of the most interesting aspects is the transition from the Warring States period to the dynastic era, especially the Qin and Han periods. A striking contrast with the traditional accounts of this transition is that there is little immediate proof of the unification of the script during the time of the First Emperor of the Qin. For example, the edict plates officially issued by the Qin government display a surprising degree of orthographic inconsistency, and the same variability is also evidenced in Qin and Han steles (Galambos 2006: 35–39). This indicates that the reforms may not have been as sweeping as described in Han sources, which in any case tended to overstate the strictness of Qin administrative and punitive measures. Moreover, the transition from Warring States scripts to the clerical script seems to have taken much longer than a few years, and there is evidence that the clerical script was used long before the unification of China. Similarly, the regional characteristics of scripts did not disappear with the reign of the First Emperor but are evidenced even in some Han dynasty tombs.

Nevertheless, even if it took significantly longer than Han sources claimed, the transition to the clerical script was a major episode in the history of writing. The process, called *libian* 隸變 or *liding* 隸定 ("clericization"), essentially involved a component-level transcription of pre-Qin characters to clerical ones (Zhao 2009). In the majority of cases, the transcription was straightforward and the new characters consisted of the same components as the old ones. Yet there are also many cases when the structure of new characters did not reproduce the orthography of old ones. One of the reasons behind the discontinuity of orthographic structure was the variability of the script, a phenomenon amply demonstrated by the archaeological record (Galambos 2006). Scribes and other literate people in early China—and all the way through modern times—often wrote characters, especially complex ones, with variable structure, attesting to the relatively flexible attitude towards orthographic uniformity at the time. Technically speaking, these variants were not seen as "mistakes" but merely alternate, and perfectly acceptable, ways of writing the same character.

There is some anecdotal evidence that writing characters incorrectly may have influenced records left for posterity. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Mr. Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*) includes an amusing story that involved Zi Xia 子夏, one of the main disciples of Confucius, who was known for his literary skills and his supposed role in transmitting and editing the classics, including the compilation of the Mao

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commentary to the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*). The story describes Zi Xia's encounter with a textual problem while on the road:

> When Zi Xia was going to Jin 晉, he passed through Wei 衛, where someone read a historical record, saying, "The Jin army and three pigs crossed the Yellow River" 晉師三豕涉河. Zi Xia remarked, "That is wrong! It should say *jihai* 己亥 [not "three pigs" 三豕]. The character 己 is close to 三 ('three'); and the character 豕 ('pig') resembles 亥." Arriving in Jin, he enquired about it, and the text indeed said: "The Jin army crossed the Yellow River on the *jihai* day" 晉師己亥涉河. (*Lü* 2002: 1527)

The story contrasts everyday attitudes towards writing with the high intellectual standard of scholars exemplified by Zi Xia, who was able to make sense of a phrase in an archival record when it was no longer comprehensible to others. His ability to decipher corrupted pieces of text betrays an overall sensitivity to textual and palaeographic issues. Despite his own literary sophistication, he was no doubt used to reading characters written with inconsistent orthography, which would have been quite common during his time. The story does not condemn the writing habits that led to the corruption of the text but rather praises the skills of Zi Xia, who not only reconstructed the original phrase but also identified and explained the cause of the problem.

Han sources also contain occasional references to the significance of correct and consistent writing, usually in the context of criticizing mistakes. For example, the *Shiji* 史記 records how the official Shi Jian 石建 submitted a proposal but accidentally wrote the character *ma* 馬 ("horse") with one stroke missing, and was terrified of the consequences of his negligence (*Shiji* 103.2766). The correct way of writing characters is also an issue raised by the famous Han bibliographer and editor Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) in his "Appendix" ("Fulu" 附錄) to the newly compiled *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (*Intrigues of the Warring States*), where he complained that the books he had to work from had a multitude of mistakes and often omitted half of the characters, writing, for instance, the character *xiao* 肖 in place of *zhao* 趙, or the character *li* 立 in place of *qi* 齊. Even though Liu Xiang calls these mistakes, these were by no means unusual forms of those characters, as is amply evidenced by newly discovered manuscripts and inscriptions. Liu Xiang's attitude towards these nonstandard characters demonstrates that despite their common use at the time, at least toward the end of the first century BCE intellectuals and officials were concerned with orthographic consistency and the standardization of the script. Because the transmission of early Chinese texts to later periods involved multiple stages of editing by such standardization-minded scholars, our corpus of transmitted literature from the pre-Han period is based to a significant degree on their efforts. In contrast, manuscript sources that have not gone through such normalization typically reveal a more flexible, or even haphazard, attitude towards orthography.

Nonstandard forms were not limited to manuscripts but were also commonly carved on medieval stone inscriptions. Judging from the available material, ordinary scholars and scribes not only had little interest in trying to avoid using such characters but at times purposefully chose such forms for the sake of diversity, perhaps as a way of making

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the calligraphy and the text more interesting. With the shift to paper manuscripts, character variants remained in common use, despite the complaints voiced by elite scholars. For example, in the sixth century Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 591) complained about the proliferation of nonstandard characters not only in the popular sphere but also in the classics and the commentaries (Galambos 2011: 400). Indeed, the Dunhuang manuscripts, the bulk of which come from the ninth and tenth centuries, display an amazing variety of nonstandard variants. While we may question how representative the manuscripts from the northwestern garrison town of Dunhuang are for the whole of China, we see a very similar picture of orthographic flexibility in stele inscriptions that survive from Central China. Since medieval times, variants on paper manuscripts have been commonly referred to as *suzi* 俗字 ("popular or vulgar characters"), in contrast with the *zhengzi* 正字 ("correct characters") that represented the official standard. Judging from manuscript evidence, texts produced in an official capacity were written in a relatively standard orthography. Most impressive in this respect are Tang Dynasty (618–907) official documents and Buddhist sutras commissioned by the Tang court—these were normally written in a meticulous hand with no variants whatsoever. As we move toward less official types of manuscripts, the number of *suzi* greatly increases. Especially manuscripts containing works of vernacular literature and students' writing exercises are irregular, in terms of both handwriting style and orthography. In general, the less skilled the handwriting is in a manuscript, the more *suzi* we are likely to find in it. In addition, such manuscripts may also replace characters with others that have the same or similar pronunciation (phonetic borrowing), betraying the lack of concern not only for the structure of particular characters but also for which character stands for which word.

When dealing with variant forms, we should keep in mind that orthographic standards changed from one time period to the next, and one generation's variant may have been another's standard form. For example, the character *gao* 高 ("tall") was at times written as 髙, and today the latter is usually referred to as a variant. Yet this form, called in Japan *hashigodaka* はしご高 (i.e., the character 髙 with a middle section written as a ladder), was the official standard at certain periods during the Tang (Ishizuka et al. 2012: 86–87). Unfortunately, as we do not have records of what the standard was at any given point in history, this information can only be accumulated piece by piece on the basis of officially sanctioned manuscripts and inscriptions (Ishizuka 2012). Some medieval dictionaries (e.g., *Ganlu zishu* 干祿字書, *Longkan shoujian* 龍龕手鑑) attempt to distinguish standard characters from nonstandard ones, but they are generally unspecific with regard to the chronological aspect of their usage. The situation is further complicated by the fact that what these dictionaries claim to be the standard does not always accord with actual practice and may instead represent a prescriptive ideal to which they subscribed. For instance, the eighth-century dictionary *Ganlu zishu* follows the *Shuowen* in recognizing 朙 as the standard form of the character *ming* 明 ("bright"), even though this form is almost never used in Tang manuscripts and therefore cannot have been the standard (Galambos 2011: 399).

Despite the seemingly haphazard nature of *suzi* characters, they were anything but random. Regardless of their popularity, the variants we see in medieval manuscripts

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were surprisingly stable, and many of them remained in use for over a millennium. In fact, a significant portion of the *suzi* seen in the Dunhuang manuscripts survived in the handwritten tradition up to the twentieth century, and many of them served as the basis for the simplified characters used in Mainland China today. The continuous use of the same *suzi* for many centuries testifies to the continuity of manuscript culture in medieval and early modern China, regardless of the recurring periods of political disunity and chaos. The surviving manuscripts from Dunhuang contain relatively few variants that do not commonly occur in other manuscripts, and most such cases are outright mistakes made by inexperienced copyists or people with a relatively low level of literacy.

Literacy

We possess little information about the extent of literacy in early and medieval China. The wide range of excavated texts points to literate communities, but in most cases it is hard to estimate which groups and how large a segment of the overall population were producing and using these texts. As the Japanese example tells us, the presence of early inscriptions did not necessarily entail literacy even on a small scale, because writing could be, and at times certainly was, employed nonverbally for reasons of prestige and power (Lurie 2011: 15–66). In China, where writing is indigenous and has a more direct connection with the language than in early Japan, similar considerations would nevertheless have been at play. The oracle-bone inscriptions were produced by literate diviner groups, but it is difficult to judge whether the Shang kings or anyone else besides the diviners, and presumably the spirits, were expected to be able to read them. It is hypothesized that during the Western Zhou period, the transcription and archival of the sometimes quite lengthy court audiences would have been a sizable challenge to literate personnel at the court, and thus the practice would have contributed to the increase of literacy and its spread beyond the confines of the court (Falkenhausen 2011, Li 2011).

The literary and philosophical texts of the Warring States texts habitually talk about learning and its application for taking an office. Although it is possible that this culture of learning and ritual education involved a significant oral component, there is no doubt that written texts were also a vital part of it. The literate population probably consisted of the elite layers of society, those who ruled and those who helped them to rule. Education was a means of control and was largely in the hands of clan members, and lineage narratives constituted the basis of written knowledge (Cook 2011: 302). The development of various schools of learning and the eventual transmission of their masters' teachings in writing corroborate the prevalence of literacy, even if for a relatively small portion of the total population. This is further corroborated by excavated Warring States manuscripts, many of which were clearly produced within the framework of a highly advanced manuscript culture, which could not have existed without an active base of people involved in various forms of literary production and use.

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It is possible, however, that we underestimate the extent of literacy and that it was not limited to the elite, but some commoners also possessed basic literacy skills. The *Mozi* 墨子, for example, discusses certain regulations which had to be posted in public places for commoners, who were expected to understand them (Yates 2011: 341–342). Military personnel would have been required to write reports to, and read orders received from, their superiors, and there are surviving specimens of letters sent by ordinary Qin soldiers back home (Yates 2011: 362–363). It is possible that the soldiers who sent these letters did not write them themselves but had to rely on someone else's help in their unit to write them on their behalf. Even so, this case still suggests that writing was relatively widespread among the nonelite sections of society and that even those who were not, or not fully, literate could make use of writing. There is also indication that some women in the early dynastic period would have been literate, especially those who ran businesses or were heads of households, as they would have been motivated, and in some cases required, to interact with the administrative and legal systems of the state (Yates 2011: 364–367).

The vast quantity of surviving manuscripts from Dunhuang confirms the prevalence of literacy in medieval China. Most of this material is Buddhist in content, demonstrating that this was a highly literate religious tradition that explicitly encouraged the dissemination of written scriptures for the sake of accruing karmic merits. There were undoubtedly different levels of education among members of the *saṃgha*, ranging from eminent monks who composed elaborate commentaries and sermons in elegant language to those who could only follow on paper the texts they already knew. But the monastic community on the whole was no doubt highly literate, and written scriptures played a major role in the lives of monks and lay believers. Communities of other faiths—Daoists, Christians, and Manicheans—were just as reliant on written texts and developed their own textual traditions. The Dunhuang manuscripts reveal that even lay education was closely connected with Buddhism, as numerous colophons testify that lay students were learning literacy skills in local monasteries and making copies of secular and religious texts alike (Zürcher 1989). In fact, a considerable number of manuscripts, including works of popular literature, may have been produced as part of such educational activity (Mair 1981).

Naturally, this does not mean that the majority of the population was literate. Many documents (contracts, land deeds, association circulars, etc.) found in Turfan and Dunhuang illustrate that people often could not even sign their own name and instead used various marks and mutilated characters. Unfortunately, there is little information on what segment of the population was illiterate, and the question is further complicated by the peripheral location and multilingual character of these regions where not being able to write Chinese characters did not automatically entail illiteracy. Finally, it is worth remembering that, as in most cultures, literacy was never a binary concept; there would have been many levels to it, depending on social background, vocation, and exposure to writing. As it is the case even today, the literacy needs of a farmer would have been quite different from those of the educated elite, and the two would have represented vastly

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different levels of textual sophistication, which would have inevitably shown in the quality of the manuscripts they produced.

Chinese Characters beyond the Border

The Chinese script, along with the massive corpus of religious and secular literature written in it over the centuries, formed the backbone of Chinese civilization, creating a textual tradition stretching from the Bronze Age until today. Yet the dynasties that ruled over the territory of today's China were ethnically and culturally diverse, and calling them "Chinese" is only a convenient simplification. From the medieval period, the same script was also used by peoples who lived beyond the boundaries of the Chinese states and spoke different languages. The spread of the Chinese script was closely connected with the spread of Chinese-type Buddhism, and in many cases Buddhist texts functioned as the primary vehicle for the spread of the script. Among the most important countries that adopted the Chinese script were Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Kornicki 2008). Of these, only Japan continues to use the Chinese script, intermixing it with two kinds of *kana* syllabaries, which ultimately also derive from Chinese characters.

Texts written in Chinese characters on the Japanese archipelago can be documented starting from the fifth century, while widespread literacy appears from the seventh and eighth centuries (Lurie 2011: 1). With the widespread use of the script, different ways of reading developed. One of them was phonetic reading, which entailed reading a character using its Chinese pronunciation, or more correctly, a Japanese approximation of its Chinese pronunciation. At the same time, characters would also have a native Japanese reading that depended on what word they represented. In Korea, analogous methods of reading Chinese characters developed, and by at least the seventh century the Chinese script and texts written in literary Chinese were in common use in the states of Koguryŏ 高句麗, Paekche 百濟, and Silla 新羅. In Vietnam, a Chinese-style civil service examinations system was introduced in 1075, in which the Confucian classics comprised the bulk of the curriculum. All formal writings were done in literary Chinese (*Hán văn* 漢文), whereas for the vernacular literary tradition a native writing system called *chữ nôm* 字喃 ("southern writing") was in use from around the fifteenth century (for a more detailed discussion of the Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese use of the Chinese script, see Chapter 33).

Because Japan, Korea, and Vietnam still exist as distinct countries, they are most commonly mentioned in the context of the spread of the Chinese script. Nevertheless, there were other regions where the script was also used, either in its original or modified form. The Uighurs of Gaochang 高昌 (around present-day Turfan 吐魯番, Xinjiang), for example, in addition to the variety of phonetic scripts employed to write their language (e.g., Runic, Sogdian, Brahmi, Uighur), also used Chinese characters in Buddhist commentaries and sutras. Excavated texts demonstrate that they often intermixed Chinese characters in texts written with the Uighur script, much as it was and is still done in Japan, where the phonetic *kana* are mixed with Chinese characters. In doing so, the

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Uighurs vocalized the Chinese characters, depending on the context, either in Uighur or according to a received Chinese pronunciation (Takata 1985, Shōgaito 2004). Again, this received Chinese pronunciation did not reflect how Chinese was spoken in Gaochang at the time of writing the text but was based on the Dunhuang dialect of the ninth and tenth centuries, adapted to the phonetic structure of spoken Uighur. The Uighurs seem to have limited the use of Chinese characters to Chinese Buddhist texts.

The Chinese script also served as the basis for the so-called Siniform scripts in northern China (Kychanov and Kara 1996). Among these, the large Khitan script (*Qidan dazi* 契丹大字) was introduced in 920 by Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 907–926) of the Liao 遼 dynasty (Kane 2009). In contrast with the predominantly phonetic Khitan small script (*Qidan xiaozi* 契丹小字), the large script was logographic and consisted of characters modeled after the Chinese example, at times modifying existing Chinese characters and even directly adopting some of those. The Jurchen 女真 large script of the Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234), invented around 1120, was in turn based on the large Khitan script, further modifying that. Shortly after founding the Xixia 西夏 state, the first Tangut emperor Li Yuanhao 李元昊 (r. 1032–1048) introduced a native Tangut script which was also inspired by the Chinese script, although much more loosely than in the case of the Khitan or Jurchen scripts. None of the approximately 6,000 Tangut characters was borrowed from the Chinese script, yet the strokes were unmistakably those of Chinese characters. Not only that, but the structural principles of character formation were also those of the Chinese script.

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CHAPTER 4

LITERARY MEDIA

Writing and Orality

CHRISTOPHER M. B. NUGENT

A literary work can exist today in a dizzying array of formats, from ink marks on paper to ones and zeros electronically encoded, from words spoken once to a small audience at a poetry reading to lyrics heard by millions over the radio. While we might associate this wide array of textual reproduction with the modern digital age, the textual environment of Classical Chinese literature was itself strikingly diverse. People sang poems at parties and intoned them at funerals; they wrote letters on scented paper and cast hymns on bronze; they carefully copied works into personal collections stored securely in monastic vaults and scrawled them drunkenly onto the walls of taverns. While much critical work on Classical Chinese literature has historically oriented itself toward abstract, almost platonic ideas of a "work" that exists independent of any particular material manifestation, archeological finds of the last century have given scholars opportunities to pay much closer attention to the material media of literature from these earlier periods and to earnestly take up the Shakespeare scholar David Scott Kastan's claim that "literature exists, in any useful sense, only and always in its materializations, and that these are the conditions of its meaning rather than merely the containers of it" (Kastan 2001: 4).

The different media of literary production and reproduction influenced Classical literature's formats, structures, and transmission. Certain media enforced strict limits, while others allowed considerable freedom. Some could preserve a text for millennia but hamper its circulation; others lent themselves to rapid but temporally bound transmission, resulting in a brief period of popularity that we know about through secondhand accounts, while the work itself no longer exists in any form. I use "media" here in a broad sense that encompasses not only visible objects such as bamboo slips and brushes, but also voice, sound, and memory. Literature was produced, preserved, and transmitted in these forms as well. As much as writing was arguably a more widespread and advanced activity in pre-print China than it was anywhere else in the world, it was always closely tied to the oral, both in its literary structures and practices.

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Early Writing Media

The earliest extant written documents from China are the inscribed scapulae of cattle and plastrons of tortoises that record the divinatory acts of the Shang 商 (ca. 1300–1046 BCE) royal court. These "oracle bones" do not appear to have been used for writing that would fall into even our broad category of literature, and were rarely used after the fall of the Shang. They do not appear in the historical record until their rediscovery in the modern period. At the same time, excavated oracle bones hint at a much larger world of literary production than that for which we have extant evidence. Traces of cinnabar and some form of black ink on the bones, together with a vermillion inscription on an excavated Shang jade, indicate the use of a brush as a writing instrument going back much further than the time of the earliest extant excavated examples (Bagley 1999: 182; Tsien 2004: 22). An early form of the character *ce* 冊, meaning here a document consisting of bound bamboo or wood strips, appears in these documents as well, indicating that such a writing medium was already in use, though the earliest surviving examples are from many centuries later.

The great preponderance of extant objects containing writing from the succeeding Western Zhou period (ca. 1045–771 BCE) are excavated bronze vessels and weapons. It is in the inscriptions on these objects that we find what one scholar has called "the fountainhead of Chinese literature" (Kern 2010: 12). Bronze vessels served a range of purposes during this period (and up through the Warring States period [481–221 BCE]), from the private and domestic to the public and ceremonial, making it problematic to characterize them with any single description. Some inscriptions seem strictly bureaucratic, while in others we find the same sort of literary language used in sections of the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*, hereafter the *Poems*) and other received literary works dating from the early Zhou. The substantial number of surviving inscribed bronzes (which, though numbering in the thousands, are clearly but a fraction of those that must originally have been produced) and their evident importance in elite society at the time give strong indications of a robust culture of writing.

The durability of the material from which they were made has led to inscribed bronzes being our main set of textual sources from the pre-imperial period, but this should not imply that bronze was the primary medium for general textual production in that period. Though we do not have surviving examples until hundreds of years later, it is clear that strips of bamboo (and, on occasion, similarly shaped slips of wood) were used contemporaneously with inscribed bronze casting and likely much earlier as well. Bamboo has been cultivated in China for thousands of years and had a northern range that overlapped with the central Zhou cultural sphere. It grows quickly and requires only limited preparation (cutting, drying, and the removal of the green surface layer) to ready it to serve as medium for writing with a brush and ink (Tsien 2004: 113–114). The traditional manner of writing Chinese in vertical lines likely originated with writing on bamboo strips and was carried over to other media. After the strips were written on,

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they would be bound with strings of hemp, silk, or leather and rolled up into scrolls, also a format that would be largely continued when paper became the dominant medium centuries later.

Bronzes and bamboo are representative of a distinction between two broad types of writing media that will remain valid even up through the spread of printing: those used for ordinary writing (including both composing and copying) by individuals and those used primarily for public display. Cast bronzes and the engraved stone of later periods were clearly of the latter category. It is unlikely that any author ever composed a literary work by impressing onto a bronze casting mold or chiseling into stone. These were instead media used to record works that had already been composed and written down on more malleable (and, alas, perishable) media such as bamboo, wood, or silk (and later paper). Inscriptions on bronze vessels, in most cases, were meant specifically to disseminate, or at least to display, texts to an audience. They are manifestations of literature in a completed state, in which the text has been purposely fixed in a particular form by a collaborative effort extending well beyond the author. Writing on lighter materials, such as bamboo, silk, and paper, was more individual. While these media could be used for display and certainly disseminated literary works to a broader audience in many contexts, they were also used widely by individuals to record texts for their own personal uses, whether their own writings or those of others.

Any single object might fit securely into one of these two categories, but in the Western Zhou period in particular the categories were closely intertwined. Bronze vessels were but the final product of a process that involved producing and reproducing text in a range of media. The character *ce*, noted above as representing the word for bound bamboo strips, is an interesting example of the intersection of different textual forms. For inscriptions on bronze vessels conferring official appointments, the text of the appointment proclamation was first written down on bamboo, then recited aloud at the appointment ceremony, and finally cast into bronze on a bell or vessel. While the bound bamboo strips would not have had the full display value (or the longevity) of the cast bronze, they played crucial ritual roles. Descriptions of appointment ceremonies tell of how the bamboo document of "royal command" would be bestowed upon the appointee, who would then attach it to his garment as part of the ceremony (Li 2011: 274). This document would serve as the basis for the bronze inscription, but would itself (along with other copies on bamboo) likely be stored in the royal archive and in that of the family of the appointee (Shaughnessy 1999: 299).

Writing and the Oral Context

As we move from the Western Zhou into the Spring and Autumn (770–481 BCE), Warring States, and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) periods, though inscribed bronze objects continue to be cast, the more extensive spread of writing on bamboo and, to a lesser

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extent, silk came to play a much larger role in the spread of writing in a range of contexts. But before further discussion of these and other light writing materials, it is important to give a sense of the oral (and aural) contexts in which written texts were produced and circulated. As we can see from the above brief description of an appointment ceremony, written documents functioned as different modes of display that, in some cases, depended on the oral reproduction of the texts they contained to have their full impact. In the case of commemorative verses cast onto bronze vessels, it is likely that the number of people who would have heard these verses orally performed is far greater than that of those who would have read the actual written text with their own eyes. The aesthetic structures of these verses, with their close similarities to the *Poems*, indicate an intention for oral performance as well (Kern 2000: 94–95).

Kern further argues that while the character *ce* does indicate a noun meaning "bamboo document," it can also function verbally to indicate the recitation of the text on that document and is indeed functioning in this way in descriptions of appointment ceremonies found on Zhou bronzes, where he thus translates the term as "announcing" or "reciting" (Kern 2007: 152–154). Other scholars disagree with some aspects of Kern's interpretation, though none dispute that a key part of the ceremony was the recitation of the text that would be cast in bronze and given to the recipient of the appointment (Shaughnessy 1999: 298; Li 2011: 274–277).

Later, memorial stone stelae in the Han, even though intended to be *read* by a wide audience and publicly displayed as written texts, circulated orally as well. As K. E. Brashier has convincingly argued, these texts were meant not only to be read but to be committed to memory and transmitted by recitation. The stelae frequently exhort the reader to orally perform the texts inscribed on their surfaces, using terms such as "intone" (*yong* 詠) and "chant" (*song* 誦). They also display a set of structural and aesthetic devises such as cliché, exaggeration, loci, and verse used by a range of literary traditions throughout history as mnemonic aides (Brashier 2005: 254–260).

Returning to the Zhou and considering the *Poems*, we again find a context in which the dominant medium is oral. There is evidence indicating that the *Poems* circulated primarily through memorization and oral recitation, with texts written out on bamboo playing only secondary roles prior to the Han. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the particular variant patterns in excavated bamboo manuscripts of the *Poems*, which are predominantly of a graphic, rather than phonetic, nature, indicate a relatively stable oral text that was represented by a wider array of written forms. In one interpretation, this substantial graphic instability suggests that the written text may have been fully understandable only in the context of individual instruction and oral transmission between teacher and student (Kern 2010: 27–28; for an opposing view, see Shaughnessy 2006: 260). In certain contexts, the written documents may have functioned as prompts or mnemonic aides; they were subsidiary to the oral versions that students would memorize and quote at rhetorically appropriate moments. Although the limited surviving sources can make it difficult to determine exactly how a document would have been used, some recent scholarship has looked at punctuation and other formal aspects of texts found in excavated documents to make informed speculations that while some

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were created primarily to transmit the written texts they contained, other were meant to refresh the memory for texts already learned or to aid oral recitation (Richter 2011).

This dependency on a larger oral context for the production of meaning was not limited to poetic texts; it was true of what are often categorized as the "philosophical" texts of the Warring States period as well. Some scholars have argued that the rhetorical structures of excavated documents imply a missing oral context. Dirk Meyer sees certain texts as being "context-dependent" in that they only functioned meaningfully within the context of oral explanation, often in a group setting. He argues that these context-dependent texts, perhaps surprisingly given their inherent ambiguity and corresponding need for further explanation, actually proved *more* likely to survive into later times. Their ambiguity allowed them to function in a range of different explanatory contexts and take on different meanings in different interpretive communities (Meyer 2012: 1, 227–228, 232). The ephemerality and changeability of the oral contexts thus proved a key component of longevity of written texts dependent on them. While this oral context is now lost to us, we can envision it involving both oral circulation of the larger sets of ideas that gave concrete meaning to the written texts and oral composition, as new explanations and rhetorical contexts were created over time to accompany the written texts.

Meyer sees a clear connection between changes in philosophical debate and the media used to record and convey texts. In his view, the increased use of bamboo as a writing material in the late Warring States was key to the emergence of syncretic abstract philosophical thought, as more and more thinkers had access to written versions of texts and would record their own ideas in writing as well (Meyer 2012: 240–241). The change he identifies is a gradual one, and it is really in the Han, by which time the use of bamboo was extensive and even the more expensive medium of silk appears to have been in common use for writing (one writer mentions carrying a four-foot strip to take notes during his travels), that we can observe some of the trends Meyer identifies having a substantial impact on the literary tradition (Tsien 2004: 130). The compilation, reorganization, and, in many cases, rewriting of the pre-imperial tradition by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and his collaborators at the Han imperial library (see also Chapters 3 and 11) represent a radical moment of syncretization, a concentrated version of the lengthy and diffuse process Meyer sees taking place in the philosophical realm that here reaches into all areas of literary production. A mass of written materials, many of which depended on an oral context to produce meaning, were now stripped of that context and put into new forms and orders in which they could exists as full autonomous written texts. This transformation, in which the material context of more widely used lightweight writing materials and the administrative and educational needs of the Han bureaucratic state intersected, resulted in a fully new version of pre-imperial literature based on identifiable authors, self-contained "books" divided into chapters, and distinct schools of thought associated with those books. The transition was not always smooth, and these newly compiled works often suffered from the lack of the oral context in which their constituent parts had first come into being. As Kern has pointed out, excavated texts from the late Warring States are often more coherent and meaningfully structured in mnemonic terms than versions we know from the received tradition (Kern 2010: 62). Prior to relatively recent

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work on excavated materials, the Han-created tradition was the only tradition known to us, and the old oral context, so crucial to the creation of meaning in pre-imperial times, was replaced by commentaries trying to make sense of the gaps and deficiencies that its absence created.

It is important to be clear that there is substantial scholarly disagreement about the relative roles of writing and orality in the pre-imperial period. Edward Shaughnessy and others correctly note that the "concrete" evidence consists entirely of *written* texts. While this is necessarily true, the evidence that other scholars use in support of a more orally focused paradigm has proven persuasive in many contexts as well. There is, however, little disagreement that texts existed throughout this period in a range of both written and oral forms. The relative importance of these forms and the precise roles they played will continue to be points of dispute as more archeological discoveries emerge.

Paper and Other Surfaces

Perhaps no other invention has played as crucial a role in preservation and dissemination of knowledge in human history than paper (for detailed accounts, see Hunter 1978; Carter and Goodrich 1955; Tsien 1985; Pan 1998). The impact on literary culture in China was tremendous as well, though we must not forget that this impact developed over the course of many centuries and is most accurately seen as the continuation of trends that had begun with the increasingly widespread use of bamboo and silk as writing media. Paper consists of macerated plant fibers that have been suspended in water and then thinly spread on a fine screen, either by lifting the screen through the water or by pouring the solution onto the screen. It was most likely first discovered in the form of felted layers of fibers left on mats that had been used in the process of washing rags. Once dried, the crossed fibers of the felted layer give it structural cohesion and allow it to be peeled off from the base mat. Remarkably, this basic form and the essentials of its manufacture have changed little over the millennia, and, in spite of frequent claims that it will be replaced by other technologies, the production and consumption of paper continues to increase year by year.

As with most materials and practices of great cultural importance, the "invention" of paper was traditionally attributed to a single individual, in this case the second-century CE eunuch Cai Lun 蔡倫 (ca. 50–121 CE), who was credited with making the discovery in 105 CE. Cai Lun is a known historical figure, and he was almost surely responsible for certain improvements in the production of paper, in particular an expansion in the types of raw materials that could be used, but archeological finds have shown that paper had been in use for hundreds of years by Cai Lun's time. Tomb excavations have pushed the use of paper back well into the second century BCE, with early examples including wrappings for medicines on which the names of the medicines are written and even a piece of paper with a map drawn on it with black ink (Tsien 2004: 146–147). These specimens likely show the limits of writing on paper at this earliest stage of its development.

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By the second century CE, however, it was being produced in a form refined enough for writing using the long-extant fur-tipped writing brush and either lampblack or black ink (primarily made from pine soot); by the third century, its use as a writing material in China was widespread.

The advantages of paper over previous writing media are clear. It was easier to produce and prepare than silk, and far cheaper. By the third century, a wide range of materials were being used in paper production, including hemp (and related bast plants), the bark of mulberry trees, and many different grasses and reeds. The most prized paper continued to be made from hemp. Early versions were likely made from macerated soaked rags and fishing nets, with production becoming more specialized later on. Hempen and rattan paper were the primary sort used for official governmental documents in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and were also favored for calligraphy and related uses. The supply of rattan gradually ran out, and both it and hemp (which had many other important uses as well, especially in textiles) were largely replaced by bamboo by the end of the eighth century (Tsien 2004: 163).

Though most paper could likely be written on in its raw form, it was improved by the use of sizing (such as starch) to keep ink from running and by treatment with various insecticidal powders and dyes to keep the bookworms at bay. These would often give the paper a yellow hue, and many of the paper scrolls discovered in the caves at Dunhuang are of this sort (and have, of course, survived for well over a thousand years). Beyond preservative uses, different dyes added to paper's aesthetic appeal as well, with certain colors associated with specific regions and uses. The famed calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361 or 321–379) was said to have used violet-colored paper. By the Tang period, at least ten different colors were used for personal stationary, with the best known likely being the hibiscus-dyed red note paper created by the courtesan Xue Tao 薛濤 (760s–830s), who used it to correspond with some of the most famous poets of the age (Tsien 1985: 92–93). Abundant and cheap though it was, paper remained a scarce enough resource that even finer sorts used for writing could be repurposed for less exalted uses. The scholar Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 591) thus specifically points out in his *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*) that "if paper has the language of the Five Classics or the names of great worthies, we do not dare use it for unsanitary purposes" (Yan 1980: 66).

It is important to keep in mind that, just as the creation of writing did not bring an end to oral culture, paper did not quickly replace other writing materials, even after its production methods had reached a high degree of sophistication and the paper was of high quality. Bamboo continued to be used as a writing material, especially in outlying areas, up to the fourth century. Silk, likewise, was in relatively widespread use though the sixth century (Tsien 2004: 98). Though bamboo and other forms of wood were cumbersome to transport and more difficult to write on, they had properties that recommended them over paper in certain contexts. One was ease of production. In comparison to a material like the parchment used in medieval and Renaissance Europe, which was both expensive and difficult to produce (requiring the long and unpleasant process of tanning animal skins), paper production was simple and cheap. Bamboo, however, required even

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less processing and grew abundantly (and quickly) in many regions. Wood and bamboo could also be reused in ways that paper could not. In a manner similar to the reuse of wax tablets and parchment in Europe, writing on wood and bamboo could be shaved off, resulting in a fresh surface. This method could be used to correct an error or to reuse a set of strips for an entirely new text. The fact that wood shavings with characters written on them were discovered at Dunhuang (likely the result of reusing wood for practicing writing) shows that these materials were used well after the spread of paper in certain areas (Tsien 2004: 114–115).

Even in the Tang period, long after paper had become the dominant writing medium for all forms of literature, poetry in particular continued to appear on a wide range of surfaces, from the walls of monasteries to the thighs of courtesans. Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) famously claimed of his friend Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) that his works "are written on the walls of every palace, monastery, and post station" (Yuan 1982: 555). Inscribing poems on public surfaces was such a common practice in the Tang that it must have been difficult to walk through a city like Chang'an without encountering it at every turn. Monasteries, temples, taverns, and post-stations were particularly popular locales for such inscription, no doubt in part because frequent visits by travelers could potentially result in widespread circulation of a poet's works. Some such places would install "poetry boards" (*shiban* 詩板) for poets to write on, perhaps so that walls would not need to be repeatedly whitewashed. There are similarities here, especially in terms of circulation, to the inscription of literary works on stone stelae. But while, as noted above, it seems unlikely that people ever directly composed in the medium of stone, they do seem to have composed poems by brushing them directly onto these various surfaces. There are thousands of poems surviving from the Tang whose titles indicate that they were written on public surfaces, and this number surely represents a fraction of the total that were composed in such circumstances through the period (Nugent 2010: 199–210).

The multitude of surfaces that met poets' brushes in this period notwithstanding, the widespread use of cheap paper of decent quality was a crucial development that had a massive influence on literary culture through the period. It is difficult to get an accurate account of the extent of paper production, but the totals for administrative use can give us a broad sense. The Department of Public Revenue alone is recorded to have used some five hundred thousand sheets of paper annually in recording the budget in the ninth century. The Academy of Scholarly Worthies (*Jixian yuan* 集賢院) is said to have used sixteen million sheets to copy its contents of approximately five hundred thousand scrolls (Yang 2000: 11). While similar figures do not exist for private use, it was clearly ubiquitous among the literate classes. We see by this period a confluence of material conditions and social developments in which the direction of influence is difficult to determine. The wide availability and affordability of quality paper unquestionably increased the ease of acquiring the materials necessary for literary training. While the literate elite still made up a very small sliver of the overall population, it was larger in both gross and fractional terms than at any time in Chinese history. The higher number of literate men allowed for the further development of the bureaucratic system, entry into which was increasingly influenced by success on the civil service exam, or at least

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training in the types of writing required for that exam (see Chapter 7 for more detailed discussion of the exam system). These factors in turn resulted in a much greater demand for paper and thus incentives to streamline and increase its production.

Over the course of this period during which paper became the dominant writing medium, from the end of the Han through the Tang, we also see important changes in the conceptualization of literary production that are likely tied to these changes in the technology of writing. Perhaps the most striking is the increasingly close association between literary composition and writing. This may seem obvious, but as we have seen above, the written text was not necessarily seen as the *primary* conduit of literary works until the late Warring States or Han. Even then we often see literary composition conceived in oral terms. The "Daxu" 大序 ("Great Preface [to the *Poems*]"), now believed to have been put together in its final form in the first century CE by Wei Hong 衛宏 (fl. ca. 25 CE), famously states that "The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them" 情動於中而形於言, 言之不足故嗟歎之, 嗟歎之不足故詠歌之 (tr. Owen 1992: 41). The focus here is very much on sound, whether of spoken words (*yan* 言) or sighs and songs. Though this statement has become canonical, it may well have been more of an ideological reaction against the increasing use of written text rather than a simple description of how poetry was composed. In either case, there is a clear focus on the oral that would soon change in accounts of literary production.

By the late third century CE, we begin to see literary composition conceptualized not in terms of voice but of writing. In his famous "Wen fu" 文賦 ("Rhapsody on Literature"), Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) describes someone composing a literary work as follows: "With strong feelings he puts aside the book and takes his writing brush/to make it manifest in literature" 慨投篇而援筆, 聊宣之乎斯文 (Lu 2002: 20; tr. Owen 1992: 94). It is not that sound has no role to play, as Lu Ji also writes "A stream of words flows through lips and teeth" 言泉流於唇齒, but there are constant references to the work of the brush as well. Interestingly, Lu Ji's rhapsody refers to the writing brush and silk (*hao su* 毫素), rather than paper, but it is likely the latter that was changing larger concepts of literary production. Liu Xie's 劉勰 (ca. 460s–520s) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon*) also makes constant reference to the brush, rather than the voice, as the producer of literature.

This transformation is even more marked by the Tang, and the references we find in this period refer almost uniformly to paper. Two short passages from an essay attributed to the Tang poet Wang Changling 王昌齡 (ca. 690–ca. 756) entitled "Discussion of Literary Ideas" (*Lun wenyi* 論文意) found in the eighth-century anthology of Six Dynasties and Tang writings on poetry and poetics preserved in Japan as the *Bunkyō hifuron* (*Wenjing mifu lun* 文鏡秘府論, *The Secret Treasury of the Mirror of Letters*) show that by that point writing, not voice, was firmly established as the final stage in literary composition:

> Now when one's writing is roused, first it moves the *qi* [breath, or vital energy]. The *qi* is born in the heart and the heart puts it forth in words. It is heard by the ear, seen by the eye, and recorded on paper (Kūkai 1983: 139).

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