THE INVENTION OF CHINESE BUDDHIST POETRY:
POET-MONKS IN LATE MEDIEVAL CHINA (C. 760–960 CE)

Thomas J. Mazanec

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Advisors: Anna M. Shields
Stephen F. Teiser

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation presents an alternative history of late medieval literature, one which traces the development of Chinese Buddhist poetry into a fully autonomous tradition. It does so through a careful study of the works of poet-monks in the late medieval period (760–960), especially Guànxiū (832–913) and Qíjì (864–937?). Weaving together the frayed threads of the literary traditions they inherited, these poet-monks established a tradition of elite Buddhist poetry in classical Chinese that continued in East Asia until the twentieth century. This dissertation also breaks new methodological ground by using digital tools to analyze and display information culled from medieval sources, and by using poetry composition manuals to understand medieval Chinese poetry on its own terms.

The introduction systematically analyzes the meanings of the concept of “religious literature” and situates this study of poet-monks therein. Part I, comprised of chapters 2, 3, and 4, presents a social history of poet-monks first by examining the invention of the term “poet-monk” in the late eighth century and its development until the tenth, then by mapping literary relations in the late medieval period using social network analysis. It demonstrates the existence and importance of poet-monks to the literary culture of this time. Part II, comprised of chapters 5 and 6, turns to the monks’ poetics at their most extreme: first the wild excess of repetition in song, madness, and incantation; then the austere devotion of “bitter intoning” (kǔyín) and the identification of poetry with meditation. Both extremes are the fruit of the poet-monks’ deliberate mixing of literary and religious practices. The conclusion brings the various threads together to show how the poet-monks identified their religious and literary practices, hints at why their work had been neglected in both Buddhist and classical literary circles, and reflects on the implications of this dissertation for the study of religious poetry.
Thus, this dissertation provides one way of answering the question of how to define religious poetry and, in the process, sheds light on an overlooked corner of Chinese literary history, reconstructing an entire subtradition to demonstrate their fusion of religious and literary practices.
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No part of this dissertation has been previously published in any form, but I have had the good fortune of receiving feedback on my materials at multiple conferences. The idea of retriplication, which forms part of the core argument of chapter 5, was presented at the Western Branch Meeting of the American Oriental Society in November 2012. One text translated and examined in chapter 7 was presented as “Putting Tang Poetry to Work: Another Look at Guanxiu’s Poem Found in P.2104 and S.4037” at the conference Prospects for the Study of Dunhuang: The Next 20 Years in September 2014. An early version of chapter 4 was presented as "Exchange Poems in Late Medieval China” as part of a seminar on Literary Networks for the American Comparative Literature Association’s annual conference in March 2015. The outline of chapters 2 and 3 has been presented as "What Is a Poet-Monk?" for the American Oriental Society’s Western Branch meeting in October 2016. Some of the material in chapter 6 was presented, with a different spin, in December 2016 as “Jia Dao: Religious Poet?” for the Princeton Workshop on Chinese Religious Poetry.

The Princeton Workshop on Chinese Religious Poetry, convened on December 2–3, 2016, was instrumental in helping shape the ideas for the introduction and conclusion of this dissertation. I would like to thank the workshop participants for two days of robust discussion. Jason Protass, my co-organizer and fellow poet-monk enthusiast, has been a fantastic conversation partner over the past two years—I hope we can continue to work together for many more.
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Conventions

Translations

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. In cases where I have used another person’s translation, I have carefully checked it against the original and modified when necessary, always indicating so in my notes.

Titles of poems and other literary works are usually translated into English, followed by Chinese characters. Transliterations of such titles are included only when deemed necessary.

Given the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, in which scholarly understanding is paramount, I have not made literary quality the main focus of my own translations. In general, I use a slightly more stiff, literal translation style than I have adopted in other works.

Transliterations

Chinese is transliterated into full Hànyǔ pīnyīn 漢語拼音, which includes tonal diacritics. There are two reasons for this choice. The first is that there is no reason, except carelessness, conformity, or coercion, that one should avoid doing so. Tones are an integral part of all Sinitic languages, and it is no trouble to add them into one’s writing. A standard computer’s keyboard (such as the one on the 2012 Macbook Pro on which this dissertation was written) makes it easy. The second reason is that the tones of Middle Chinese were the very basis of medieval Chinese prosody. I have sought to remind my reader of the importance of tones in the earlier period by keeping them in transliterations of modern pronunciations.

Transliterations into Modern Standard Mandarin use the common pronunciations of characters (yǔyīn 語音) rather than their literary pronunciations (diūyīn 讀音). Therefore, the poet 李白 is Lǐ Bái, not Lǐ Bó. The literary pronunciations were in the first place an artificial creation of the early twentieth century that were meant to be used with stopped final consonants to
preserve the classical entering tone (rùshēng 入聲, still used in southern dialects). Such pronunciations are an archaic holdover that few people in mainland China still use. Moreover, the literary pronunciations do not really get any closer to the sound of Middle Chinese than the common pronunciations do. If scholarly convention is to transcribe all Sinitic writing produced in China into Mandarin, then one might as well use the most widely understood version of modern Mandarin.

Transliterations of Middle Chinese follow the Baxter-Sagart system, most recently published in William Baxter and Laurent Sagart’s 2014 *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction*. For poems, I have included the rhyme words in Middle Chinese for the sake of reminding the reader that these poems were meant to be heard. If there is more than one rhyme in a poem, I have added stanza breaks where the rhyme changes and have included upper-case letters (A, B, C) next to the Middle Chinese in order to indicate the rhyme scheme of these poems. In the cases of off-rhymes (usually entering-tone rhymes with different medials or cross-rhymes between rising and departing tones), I have added an asterisk (*) next to the letter.

Modern cities with standard English transliterations that are not based on Hányǔ pīnyīn are treated as English words and written accordingly. Hence, for 東京, 京都, and 臺北, I write Tokyo, Kyoto, and Taipei, not Tōkyō, Kyōto, and Táibēi.

**Transcriptions**

Pre-1950s Chinese texts have all been transcribed with traditional characters (fántízi 繁體字). For works published since the latter half of the 1950s, I have transcribed them with the character set in which they were originally published. For example, one important book recently published in Běijīng is written in simplified characters (jiàntízi 簡體字) as Tángmò Wúdài luànsì wénxué yánjiū 唐末五代亂世文學研究, not 唐末五代亂世文學研究.
The names of scholars who have written in Chinese are transcribed into standard pīnyīn just like other Chinese words. If a Chinese scholar has published in another language with a different transliteration, that is listed alongside the pīnyīn. Hence, 饒宗頤 is listed as Ráo Zōngyí (Jao Tsong-yi).

**Genders**

For unspecified third-person pronouns, I have used the male forms for the main chapters of this dissertation (e.g., “a poet believes it is his duty to…”). This is meant to reflect the assumptions of an educated person in late medieval China, for whom the default actor in the literary world was male. Aside from a few notable exceptions, women were generally not regarded as major figures of importance in the ninth- and tenth-century world of elite culture. To help rectify the imbalance of pronouns, I have used the female pronoun (“her duty to…”) in the introduction, which is written at further discursive remove from the main subject matter of the dissertation.

**Citations**

In most cases, books are cited in footnotes as “Author, *Abbreviated Title*, page #.” In cases of premodern works in which multiple registers have been printed on a single page, the register is indicated with a lower-case letter (a, b, c) following the page number. *Juàn* 卷 (‘‘fascicle”) numbers in Chinese works are followed by a period, then page number (e.g., Sīmā Qiān, *Shìjī*, 55.2034). Premodern works with no author listed in the citation have no comma separating title from *juàn* number (e.g., *Xīn Tàngshū* 202.5763). Works in the Taishō Buddhist canon are identified by title and translator (if applicable), followed by serial number in the canon, a comma, volume number, colon, page number, and register (e.g., *Sīwèi lǜèyàofă* 思惟略要法, trans. Kumārajīva 鸠摩羅什, *T* no. 617, 15:300c).
The bibliographic trail I have left is long, winding, and overgrown. More than 545 sources are cited in 889 footnotes on 369 pages. This is no accident. The stated purpose of a doctoral dissertation is to make a new contribution to a field of academic inquiry, but its true purpose is to establish a new scholar’s credentials. For this reason, dissertations are always written in a state of mild paranoia, knowing that at least its first readers will approach it with a skeptical eye, so the writer must display his work in a more explicit manner, often at the expense of readability. In this way, my footnotes have swollen with the gout of proof and pedantry, and many will surely be let go in the published works that will emerge out of this one.

Nonetheless, I have not laid bare every aspect of my research process in the following pages. The many theoretical works that have fundamentally shaped my approach to literature (by Benjamin, Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, Meschonnic, Culler, Jameson, Spivak, Moretti, Felski, etc.) remain uncited unless immediately relevant to the point at hand. The purpose of this practice is to keep the reader’s focus on my subject matter rather than my methodology. The one exception to this is chapter four, which makes its methods explicit because it is doing something that is relatively unfamiliar to a sinological audience.

I have also not provided complete reading notes for all poems, which would include metrical diagrams, patterns of alliteration and assonance, and an explicit rendering of a poem’s inner logic in prose. Literary history uses poems and other texts as evidence to support a larger thesis. While I have always made much effort to understand a literary work on its own terms, what I present to the reader is only the aspect of my interpretation that supports my point. In some cases I have also extended this approach to entire poems: I will sometimes present only one poem in a series, or one couplet from a poem, if that is the only part of the poem I deem relevant.
for the argument I am currently making. A full, annotated translation of the complete works of these monks is a worthy project, but it is a different one from this dissertation.

Tone

In keeping with the credentialing purpose of a dissertation, I have had to adopt the standard tone of scholarly writing—one of dispassionate, formal, omniscient objectivity. Markers of the vernacular idiom I use in everyday life (contractions, filler words, qualifiers like “somewhat,” etc.) are not included. Jokes and witticisms have been removed. The third-person plural abounds (“our understanding of medieval China”) while the second person appears only in translations. At the same time, for the sake of readability, I have avoided the jargon of critical theory. Reading about actors in a time and place different from one’s own is hard enough. I find no need to foreground the reification of intersubjectivity under the aegis of a non-Hegelian dialectical bricolage in precisely those terms.

I make clear these conventions, which normally remain unwritten, in order to remind the reader that scholarly prose is its own literary genre with unique ways of shaping its content. This dissertation is not just a presentation of a historical subject, but an intervention in a field, a display of knowledge, a performance of authority, and a consecration into a profession. It is but one possible take on my subject matter, written under very specific discursive (and temporal) restraints. It does not exhaust the possible ways of thinking or writing about Chinese Buddhist poetry, which are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.
Chapter 1

Introduction

“Poetry is meditation for Confucians” 詩為儒者禪
—Qīchán 棲蟾, from “Reading the Venerable Qíjǐ’s Collection” 讀齊己上人集

This is the opening line of a poem written by one Buddhist monk to another, sometime in the early tenth century, not long after the great Táng dynasty 唐 (618–907) collapsed and the land fell under the control of regional strongmen. The line makes a curious claim: that the practice of poetry is somehow the same as the practice of meditation. That is, the two are not just analogous, but functionally the same. The main verb is not “like” (rú 如, which would also fit the meter). It is wéi 為, “to be,” “to act as.” It is stronger than the English copula “is”; it implies making, effecting. Poetry does what meditation does.

At the same time, poetry works in a different realm from meditation. It is “for Confucians,” those elites who participate in and transmit the classical tradition that can be traced back to the sages of high antiquity. Poetry is elite verbal art. It stems from the canonical Book of Odes 詩經, an anthology of verse (purportedly edited by Confucius himself) which contained the songs and state hymns of the Zhōu 周 confederacy’s long history (1046–256 BCE). Familiarity with its forms and means of composition was required for participation in the civil service bureaucracy. By contrast, it is implied, meditation is for Buddhist monks. It is a practice which involves not just concentration and mental training, but also visualization of supernatural beings, confession of sins, and devotion to deities. Buddhism and poetry operate in separate spheres of activity.

1 QTS 848.9609–10.
And yet this claim is undermined by the very fact of its stated author and its subject matter. A Buddhist monk is praising, in verse, the literary collection of another Buddhist monk. If poetry is really something “for Confucians,” then the author and the audience are out of their element. They should be practicing real meditation rather than “meditation for Confucians.” Why should monks participate in the literary world, a world created and inhabited by the Confucians who were sometimes hostile to their very way of life? Were they just seeking converts, or did they think they could bring something new to the literary world?

At its most narrow, this dissertation is an attempt to understand this single line of poetry. It will explore the literary, religious, and social practices of a handful of so-called “poet-monks” (shīshēng 詩僧) in order to explain how it was possible to make such a statement about poetry and meditation in the early tenth century. To do so will mean to understand what a poet-monk is, how the poet-monk came to be viewed in a certain way in the late medieval period, what sorts of things poet-monks did in their writings, and how they thought Buddhism and poetry could be functionally equivalent.

Thus, more broadly conceived, this dissertation traces the origins, development, and flourishing of a self-conscious tradition of Buddhist poet-monks in late medieval China. It argues that the later generation of these monks invented something called “Buddhist poetry” in its fullest sense—elite verbal art that was understood to accomplish the same ends as Buddhism. That is, the poet-monks worked to establish a fundamental unity between Buddhist and literary practices. Although this view of poetry did not become dominant in China, it is of considerable interest to anyone who would like to understand the relationship between literature and religion, or Chinese literary history. The fact that the poet-monks established a unity on the basis of physical and linguistic practices—meditation, poetry composition, incantation, recitation,
1.1 Religious Poetry

The more general problem of religious poetry is the animating question of this dissertation. That is, I have wagered that a thorough study of the poet-monks on their own terms will lead to a better understanding of the ways in which poetry and religion intersected in late medieval China, and that this, in turn, can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and religion in a broader, comparative perspective. This dissertation aims to contribute not just to the study of medieval Chinese poetry or Buddhism, but to the fields of comparative literature and religious studies as well. Though vexed, the question of Chinese Buddhist poetry can help broaden our understanding of religious poetry—shake it free of its provincial Eurocentrism and give it real comparative depth.

1.1.1 The Question of Chinese Buddhist Poetry

We have fortunately moved well past the age in which scholars could describe Chinese literature as being “in the main a secular literature.” Just within the so-called “mainstream” of Chinese literary history, it has become increasingly clear that the stories and practices of the major religious institutions have shaped Chinese poetry considerably. Major portions of the canonical forebear of the poetic tradition, the Book of Odes (Shījīng 詩經), consist of sacrificial

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2 Hawkes, “Literature,” 86–87. See also Burton Watson’s remarks in The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry, in which calls the Chinese literary tradition “unusually humanistic and commonsensical in tone” (3), and Kenneth Rexroth’s essay on Dù Fù 杜甫 (712–770) as the world greatest secular poet, who embodies “a more mature, saner culture than Homer” (Classics Revisited, 92).

3 This is not to ignore the fact that didactic, ritual, and scriptural verses sometimes show real literary brilliance. These should not be ignored by the literary scholar simply because they do not seem to contribute to an idea of the mainstream (which is often retroactively constructed). For examples in just medieval China, see, e.g., my “The Medieval Chinese Gāthā and Its Relationship to Poetry”; Kroll, “The Divine Songs of the Lady of Purple Tenuity”; Mair, T'ang Transformation Texts; and the many studies on Dūnhuáng songs by Rén Bántáng 任半塘 and Wáng Xiǎodùn 王小盾.
hymns and eulogies that were almost certainly performed in early rituals of ancestor worship. The other major forerunner of classical poetry, the Songs of Chǔ (Chúcí 楚辭), are long suspected to have been part of shaman-like rituals. The religious verses of Celestial Masters (Tiānshī 天師) Daoists are among the earliest examples of rhymed pentameter, perhaps even antedating its use by Cáo Pī (187–226). The tonal prosody of regulated verse, perhaps the most iconic of Chinese poetic forms, was very likely the result of an attempt to approximate Sanskrit’s distinction between “light” and “heavy” syllables for the purpose of chanting Buddhist texts. The occasional Buddhist sympathies of major poets like Wáng Wéi 王維 (701–761), Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846), and Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037–1101) are well known, if not precisely how these sympathies related to their poetry. Many other examples could be produced. In short, the idea of religious poetry in China is no longer rejected outright, and scholars in religious and literary studies have recognized the importance of speaking across disciplinary boundaries.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to speak of occasional moments of overlap between literature and religion, and it is quite another to claim that an elite poet is writing something we might identify as self-conscious “religious poetry.” Stephen Owen has argued that there is no such thing as “Buddhist poetry,” at least in elite Táng verse. In discussing Jiǎorán’s circle of poet-monks in the latter half of the eighth century, he writes unequivocally that “they were in no sense

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4 See Martin Kern’s summary of the field, in which he describes many of the Odes as “the primary texts of early Chinese religious and cultural memory” (Kern, “Early Chinese Literature,” 24). For more detail, see Kern, “Bronze Inscriptions, the Shijing and the Shangshu.”
5 On the shamanic context of the Songs of Chǔ, see Hawkes, Songs of the South, 42–51; and Sukhu, The Shaman and the Heresiarch.
7 On this theory, see Mair and Mei, “The Sanskrit Origins of Recent Style Prosody”; on its implications for the idea of world literature in premodern China, see Klein, “Indic Echoes.”
8 On Wáng Wéi and Bái Jūyì, see, e.g., Chén Yǐnchí, Sū-Táng fóxué yú Zhōngguó wénxué, 121–50 and 162–80. On Sū Shì, see Grant, Mount Lu Revisited; and Egan, Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi, 134–68. On other Táng poets’ religious views, see Fujiyoshi Masumi, “Tōdai bunjin no shūkyōkan.”
9 The influence of religious traditions on major works of Chinese literature is not limited to poetry. For examples across numerous genres, see Yu, Comparative Journeys, 158–87.
religious poets: with a few exceptions, when Buddhism appeared in their work, it was the lay Buddhism of capital poetry."\(^{10}\) Their work, he claims, only appears Buddhist because of a biographical fallacy. The early poet-monks, like all but a few major poets, follow the conventions of literary discourse, and are no more Buddhist than anyone else. While Owen’s view has been challenged,\(^{11}\) it brings to the fore a major hermeneutic problem. Given that many Buddhist texts had early on adopted indigenous terms to translate foreign concepts, and given that these concepts developed in new, interesting ways over the course of several centuries, it is often very difficult to tell when a term is being used in a technical, Buddhist sense. Kūng 空 can simply describe physical emptiness, but it can also translate Nagārjuna’s śūnyata, meaning the ultimate emptiness of phenomena’s permanent, independent essence. Gōng 功 may be one’s personal achievements, one’s successes for the benefit of the state, or meritorious deeds that produce good karma. One must be sensitive to the generic and discursive conventions of any text that uses these words in order to interpret them properly.

On the other hand, it is perhaps premature to dismiss a poet’s religious background outright. As Paul Kroll has shown in his studies of Lì Bái 李白 (701–762), a poet’s participation (and ordination) in a religious tradition can have great impact on his poetry. Lì Bái’s interest in Daoism is not confined to his wild persona or his allusions to the Zhuāngzī, but extends to “the sacred scriptures, solemn practices, and holy mysteries comprehended in the religious sphere of the Shang-ch’ing 上清 and Ling-pao 靈寶 traditions.”\(^{12}\) Poems written in the arcane jargon of the initiate cannot be understood without some grasp of the initiate’s rites. Only through a

\(^{10}\) Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, 282. For my own take on these poet-monks, see sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 of this dissertation.

\(^{11}\) For example, Williams, “The Taste of the Ocean,” argues convincingly for the influence of Hóngzhōu teachings on Jiāorán’s poetics.

\(^{12}\) Kroll, “Li Po’s Transcendent Diction,” 100.
reconstruction of the full doctrinal and liturgical context of eighth-century Daoism do some of Li’s seemingly obscure poems finally become clear. We do injustice to the humanity of medieval poets if we deny the reality of their religious sentiments expressed in verse. Such sentiments are, of course, mediated by discursive norms, but that does not make them any less apparent.

Still, it would be an error to reduce any poet merely to his religious commitments, and it would be an even grosser error to project a modern understanding of a religion back on to the Táng dynasty. This is what William Nienhauser has pointed out in his review of Mike O’Connor’s selected translation of Jiǎ Dǎo 贾岛 (779–843). The poet-translator O’Connor interprets Jiǎ Dǎo’s entire ouevre with reference to his early training as a Buddhist monk (Jiǎ left the order around the age of 33). But Nienhauser convincingly shows that many lines interpreted contemplatively by O’Connor in fact must be read against the political background of the mid-ninth century. Jiǎ Dǎo, though no doubt knowledgeable in Buddhism, was also embroiled in factional disputes at court, and much of his work cannot be understood except against such a background.¹³

Thus, one should not be too eager to see religion in poetry without first seriously considering the possibility of the discursive and historical factors that may be just as important to reading a poem. But one also must not shy away from the possibility of religious poetry simply because it combines two equally difficult discursive traditions.¹⁴ In this regard, two recent works by Paul Rouzer and Jason Protass, which demonstrate a firm command of both Buddhist and literary sources, are especially welcome contributions to the field.

¹³ Nienhauser, “The Other Side of the Mountain.” I treat different aspects of Jiǎ Dǎo’s work in sections 2.2, 6.1, and 6.2.1 of this dissertation.
¹⁴ See Teiser, “Perspectives on Readings of the Heart Sūtra,” on the need to read sensitively (but boldly) across these disciplinary boundaries.
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Faced with making sense of the heterogeneous collection of poems attributed to Hánshān寒山 (“Cold Mountain”), Rouzer redirects our attention from Buddhist writing to Buddhist reading. That is, he is less interested in the hand or hands responsible for producing the Hánshān corpus than in tracing how one might make sense of this corpus in a hermeneutically responsible way. In pursuit of this goal, Rouzer posits “a specifically Buddhist poetics, a way of defining ‘Buddhist poetry’ from the perspective of the reader.”¹⁵ In opposition to the traditional Chinese method of interpreting poetry through its author’s biography (and hence erroneously positing a coherent Self behind the author), Rouzer asserts that a Buddhist approach would emphasize “a type of reader-response criticism.”¹⁶ Such a Buddhist poetics is guided by five rules, derived from lines in the Hánshān corpus:

1) a reader must be in a properly purified state of mind in order to understand the Hánshān poems’ message;
2) the poems contain deeper meanings that lie beneath the surface of the text;
3) the poems’ “most important audience” consists of a small group of sympathetic readers;¹⁷
4) the poems may act as a guide for Buddhists, just like sūtras;
5) the poems participate in both mainstream and Buddhist traditions, using literary language as a kind of skillful means to convey Buddhist meanings.¹⁸

Rouzer’s Buddhist poetics is an interesting alternative justification of reader-response criticism, different from either Iser or Fish in its theoretical basis, but it does not tell us much about what “Buddhist poetry” might have meant in Táng China. It is particular to the Hánshān corpus, which

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¹⁵ Rouzer, On Cold Mountain, 57.
¹⁶ Rouzer, On Cold Mountain, 61.
¹⁷ Compare this formulation to book 7, lines 30–31 of John Milton’s Paradise Lost, in which the speaker urges the muse: “still govern thou my Song, / Urania, and fit audience find, though few.”
¹⁸ Rouzer, On Cold Mountain, 56–57.
is itself an anomaly in medieval Chinese literary history. This corpus seems to have had almost no impact on mainstream Chinese poetry, in the Táng or after, and even later Buddhist sources quote it infrequently. That is, in medieval China, Rouzer’s Buddhist poetics would not have been applied to mainstream, elite-style verse (“poetry” in the higher sense of the term). It could only have been applied to an instructional text, something that contemporaries would not have dubbed “poetry.” A collection of semi-vernacular verses attributed to a legendary Buddhist hero such as Hánshān may or may not have been read in this way: there is simply no evidence from the Táng period. No matter the implications of Buddhist doctrines like “emptiness” and “no-self,” poems—even those written by Buddhist monks—were understood to be rooted in the personality, experience, and discursive mastery of an author.

This is why, when Rouzer seeks an earlier Buddhist reader as a model for his own interpretive strategy, he repeatedly invokes the sermons of the eighteenth-century Japanese Zen master Hakuin (1736–1813). Hakuin’s understanding of Hánshān texts are fascinatingly different from modern, western readings, and we should be grateful to Rouzer for bringing them to light. But unless one asserts an essentialized “Buddhism” that does not change across 10 centuries and 1100 miles, one cannot assert that Hakuin’s readings represent a medieval Chinese Buddhist poetics. Rouzer’s “Buddhist poetics” succeeds as an expedient means to provide thoughtful readings of a popular corpus of Táng verse to a western audience, but it provides little insight

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19 Rouzer himself admits this at one point (On Cold Mountain, 45).
20 Intriguingly, one of the earliest solid references to the figure of Hánshān in poetry comes from a work by the poet-monk Guànxìù (832–913), in which he writes, “Of masters, you are fond of Master Hánshān; / Of songs, you only take delight in songs of the Way” (寄赤松舒道士二首, in Hú Dàjùn 11.523–34; QTS 830.9360).
21 Hánshān was not the only such figure. Other versifying heroes include Layman Páng (龐居士) and Wáng Fánzhì (王梵志).
into the intersections between religion and poetry as they would have been understood in medieval China.

Jason Protass’s recent dissertation, on “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry” in the Sòng dynasty (960–1279), does not attempt to define a universal “Buddhist poetics.” Instead, drawing on John Felstiner’s study of Paul Celan, Protass understands “traces” of a religion in a literary work to be “tensions” as well. In the case of monastic poets in the Sòng, these tensions center around the problem of the emotions. That is, poems by Sòng monks reveal inherent contradictions between poetic and monastic ideals—aesthetics and ascetics, one might say. By reading poems written by monks in parallel with “explicitly Buddhist genres of text,” he aims to find the Buddhist poetics that animates these monks’ literary works.²³

Protass’s framework is productive, shedding much needed light on the monastic literary culture of the Sòng, but it cannot be applied to the ninth and tenth centuries. The tensions of the Sòng are conditioned by changing attitudes toward monasticism and poetry that are the result of institutional transformations which took place after the time period I have focused on. The Northern Sòng saw the crystallization of Chán into a fully developed religious organization, with elaborate lineages, formalized monastic codes, and clear boundaries. This process of formalization was aided in part by new dynamics in patronage and the state’s promotion of public monasteries.²⁴ It may be that such institutionalization brought to the fore the tensions Protass sees, ones long latent in monastic Buddhism. However, by starting with tensions, Protass’s study is blind to potential assertions of the ultimate unity of Buddhism and poetry. Its very starting point necessarily precludes the sort of thing Qíchán asserts in his poem to Qijì, and it is precisely this assertion of unity which is the subject of my own study.

²⁴ See Schlütter, How Zen Became Zen, esp. 31–77; and Brose, Patrons and Patriarchs.
1.1.2 Toward a Theory of Religious Literature

As the brief survey above has suggested, definitions of “religious poetry” or “religious literature” can vary widely. Some scholars simply never bother to define their terms in anything but the most vague way. Others equate “religion” with any totalizing system with a “metadiscursive capacity” to translate anything into its own terms. Still others, attempting clarity, nonetheless embed an evaluative hierarchy in their descriptions. And many scholars of “religious literature” in the west barely even acknowledge the existence of non-Abrahamic religions. In light of such shortcomings and disagreements, it seems that any theory of religious poetry must attempt to be as clear as possible, be as broadly applicable as possible, and refrain from making pre-emptive evaluative judgments. Therefore, a little low structuralism, with its penchant for tables, lists, and diagrams, may help bring the potential meanings of “religious literature” into sharper focus.

A literary text, like any text, implies both a producer and an audience. Classic literary models (and modern writing guides) might describe this in terms of communication. An author has a message (the content) which she communicates to a reader through the medium of the text. We can render this naïve model as a diagram:

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25 This discussion addresses the concepts of “religious literature” and “religion and literature,” not ideas of God, the sacred, the non-material, etc. that show up in the work of critical theorists and philosophers who have become major figures in literary theory. On this, see, e.g., de Vries, Philosophy and the Turn to Religion, which points to works by Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Martin Heidegger, and late-period Jacques Derrida. Many other works that have exerted a major influence on literary theory, from Hegel to Benjamin to Agamben, could be added to these. See also Weidner, “ Thinking Beyond Secularization.”

26 For example, “Christian” and “nonsecular” is Patrick Diehl’s only explicit definition (The Medieval European Religious Lyric, 2), though his later examples imply that he means “liturgical” and “doctrinal” verses.

27 See Brown, “ The Dark Wood of Postmodernity.”

28 See Eliot, “Religion and Literature,” who deems the “religious and devotional poetry” of poets like Herbert and Hopkins to be a variety of “minor literature” and the “religious propaganda” of Chesterton’s The Man Who Was Thursday to not even rise to the level of literature.

29 Though one may think that this would have disappeared decades ago as many Theology departments broadened their outlook to become departments of Religious Studies, it still continues to this day. In the 2016 Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion, only four of thirty-eight contributions even touch on non-Abrahamic religions, and each of these four essays treat only modern, North American encounters with these traditions (the Beat poets, Leonard Cohen, etc.).
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Figure 1.1

Literary communication, naïve model.

Any part of this diagram may be considered “religious” for the sake of defining religious poetry. The author or the reader may be a practitioner of a religion. They may therefore seek to communicate or discover religiously significant content. Likewise, a text itself (such as a scripture) may be regarded as religious in some way.

Of course, literature is more than just a straightforward communication of a message to a reader, like a message sent in a bottle or a landscape seen through a window pane. Even an author who simply wishes to communicate a message must do so in a literary form which shapes that message, and any reader must interpret the text to extract that message. A more honest diagram might be rendered as follows:

Figure 1.2

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30 This is what people usually mean when they say a literary work is “about” Buddhism or any other religion.
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Literary communication, including form and interpretation. These may intervene and alter the content of a text.

Form and interpretation interfere with the transmission of content (hence the dotted lines) and even change the very nature of that content (hence the distinction between \textit{content}_1 and \textit{content}_2). But they do much more as well. An author actively shapes the idea of the form in the broader literary culture in which she is situated, and she is also shaped by it. A reader’s expectations, likewise, is shaped by forms, and in turn, that reader’s individual understanding of a form shapes her experience of the text. Turning to the second dotted line (interpretation), readers interpret and reflect pre-existing interpretive methods. Authors write in anticipation of being interpreted in certain ways, even as clues (such as generic markers) they put in their works help create those interpretive expectations. The “religious” of religious literature may be embedded in form. There are, after all, distinctly religious genres like the sūtra, the gospel, or the psalm. Other genres become religious over time. The religious may also be embedded in interpretive strategies, such as Hakuin’s readings of Hánshān, or the Christian readings of pagan texts in medieval Europe, or the four levels of exegesis (literal, tropological, analogical, and anagogical) systematized by Thomas Aquinas. These hermeneutics, applied to any text, may turn that text into religious literature.

Formal and interpretive expectations emerge out of discourses. These discourses are neither unified nor static. They are multiple, overlapping, and historically contingent. Author and reader may draw on very different kinds of discourses in their understandings of forms and interpretations. Nonetheless, we may conceive of these discourses as a baseline which give rise to expectations:

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31 See Miller, \textit{The Wind from Vulture Peak}, 289–333, which argues that the \textit{waka} 和歌 underwent “Buddhification” in the Heian period.
32 See, e.g., Newman, \textit{Medieval Crossover}.
33 A modern approach to these four levels of exegesis can be found in Lynch, \textit{Christ and Apollo}. 

Figure 1.3

Literary communication, including discourse. Discourses give rise to formal and interpretive expectations. Authors’ and readers’ access to these discourses is mediated by information management technologies.

Discourses, moreover, do not exist out in the ether, as part of a nebulous zeitgeist, to be taken for granted by any person. An author or reader must actively access these discourses through various technologies of information management, such as encyclopedias, classification systems, and memorization techniques. These technologies, not just the discourses themselves, may be particularly religious. For example, the “memory palace” method of memorization, though not religious in its origin, was coded as “Christian” when brought into China by the missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610).

At this point, it may be worthwhile to complicate the concepts of “author” and “reader.” These words, in fact, cover two concepts: 1) the actual producers and audiences of a text, and 2)

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34 On Ricci’s use of the memory palace, see Spence, The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci. On the history of this technique, see Yates, The Art of Memory.
the *speaker* and *implied reader* that are projected by the text itself. That is, the very features of a text assume a voice that is putting forth the text and a reader that will make sense of it. These are separate from the actual hand(s) that produced the text and the eyes and ears that receive it. Moreover, the producer and the audience may consist of entire communities, not just individual actors.

![Diagram](attachment:diagram.png)

**Figure 1.4**

Literary communication, understood communally. The naïve concepts of “author” and “reader” are further divided into actors external to the text (producers and audiences) and projections internal to the text (speaker and implied reader). Producers and audiences may consist of entire communities that are bounded by doxa.

These communities encounter a text within historical, political, social, and performative contexts that utterly shape the way they approach the text. These factors set limits on conceptions of what sorts of forms, interpretations, and discourses are thought to be possible—limits which Bourdieu
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calls *doxa*. The producer(s) and audience may share a single doxa. A didactic religious text’s first audience will have the same doxa as its producer. Audiences in other times and places (such as modern scholars of medieval China) inhabit a different doxa from the producers of a text, even as they attempt to overcome that gap by reconstructing the producers’ doxa for the sake of interpretation. Doxa, being a term that covers ideas like “worldview” and “ideology,” is very commonly shaped by religious doctrines. Definitions of “religious poetry” most frequently focus on doxai, often in the form of theology or beliefs. However, doxa may also be understood as fields in which practices—bodily actions that connect to larger structures of meaning—are performed.

Finally, we must add to our diagram the mediation of the material in and on which the text is transmitted. The producer’s relationship with the text is shaped by materials (paper, printing, orality, etc.), and the audience’s experience of the text is subject to the decay and restoration of those same materials.

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Literary communication, understood materially. The materials in and on which a text is instantiated, transmitted, and encountered mediate the producer’s and the audience’s experience a text. Material production and reproduction also change the text itself. A text is not a static object that exists outside of time, one which our access to changes with its material instantiations. Rather, materiality changes the text itself. Moreover, a producer’s very production of a text will vary depending on the materials available to her, and audiences will in turn shape the text by reproducing it (or not) on to new materials. Material production and reproduction may be coded as religious. Scribes working in temples, for example, may copy texts according to ritual guidelines in pursuit of religious goals. The very act of printing was, in

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36 Much scholarship on the importance of the materiality of medieval Chinese poetry has been published in the last decade. See especially Nugent, Manifest in Words, Written on Paper; and Tian, Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture.

37 See most recently Lowe, Ritualized Writing.
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its earliest days, understood to be religious. These factors may also give one a reason to regard a text as religious literature.

Thus, conceiving of literature as an act of communication, we discover that “religious literature” may cover many different kinds of texts, rooted in different sources of religiosity. A text’s producers, audiences, speakers, implied readers, forms, and interpretations may be religious, as may be the discourses the text draws upon, the technologies of information management the text’s producers and readers use to access these discourses, and the materials in which the text is produced and reproduced. This provides at least ten ways of defining the concept of “religious literature.” Any theory of religious literature must cover at least all of these areas in order to be comprehensive.

Moreover, communication is not the only way to theorize literature. Some of the categories listed above hide further complexity that we may wish to disaggregate for the sake of clarity. For example, discourses may imply the use of individual words or lexical strings (religious jargon), but it also indicates whole complexes of ideas associated with such jargon. Form embeds aspects as diverse as a text’s setting (a temple, Vulture Peak, Jerusalem), its topic (the deeds of a founder, the afterlife), and its theme (the illusory nature of reality, the importance of living virtuously). Doxa covers not just assumptions about what is possible, but also the field in which rituals and social practices (such as the exchange and publication of poems) take place. Furthermore, all these categories and subcategories can relate to religion in multiple ways. For example, the producer of a text may be a supernatural being (the Holy Ghost, a ghost), a religious professional (Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rowan Williams), a lay practitioner (Dana

39 This discussion has purposefully avoided assuming a single definition of “religion,” which few scholars agree on. Different definitions of religion would provide even more ways of defining religious poetry.
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Gioia, Christian Wiman), someone neutral to the religion (Norman Greenbaum, who wrote the song “Spirit in the Sky”), or someone hostile to the religion (Richard Dawkins, Hán Yù 韓愈 in his anti-monastic essay “The Origin of the Way”源道). The content of a text may likewise be explicitly religious (creeds and hymns), implicitly so, neutral, or hostile. Similar breakdowns of attitudes could be performed for nearly all the categories listed above. One could then assign names to all of these attitudes to the different categories of literary communication and create a new classificatory system of religious literature.\footnote{That is, in the manner of Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsestes*.}

But such a task would be more trouble than it is worth, since redefinitions of literary terms rarely catch on, and since doing so would reify my own quirks of interpretation. My point is not that the diagram of literary communication given above is definitive or even complete; it is that “religious literature” is an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of phenomena. In order to be useful to academic inquiry, the scholar must communicate clearly to the reader what exactly she means by it.

In this dissertation, I focus mainly on the *producer* and the *act of production*. That is, I focus on the religious identity of certain poets (Buddhist monks) because, from this, one may assume with some certainty that they regularly participated in religious practices. This allows me to explore the ways in which the practice of literary production may have drawn on or been identified with religious practices, such as meditation and incantation.\footnote{In this, I go beyond the approach of Louis Martz in his study of the English metaphysical poets, *The Poetry of Meditation*, which asserts that aspects of the metaphysical poets’ work were modeled on Jesuit meditation techniques (but did not perform such techniques).} Buddhist monks committed themselves to religious pursuits, often making great sacrifices for these pursuits. If they wrote elite poetry, they were by definition poets as well. Thus, methodologically, this dissertation argues that *practice* is the most fruitful approach to the question of religious poetry.
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In addition to curtailing the attempts at historical mind-reading that is so common to studies of religious poetry, this approach asserts the importance of bodily action to religion. The poet-monks studied in the following pages found several ways to reconcile religious and poetic practices, and it is the purpose of this dissertation to explore those ways.

1.2 The Late Táng and the Late, Late Táng

Beyond the question of “religious poetry,” this dissertation intervenes in Chinese literary historiography. It argues that the traditional conception of the High Táng (712–763) as the golden age of poetry seriously distorts our understanding of the development of Chinese literature. In particular, the resulting narrative marginalizes the works of late ninth and tenth-century poets, who in fact did many bold and interesting things in their works.

The poet-monks at the center of this study lived through the collapse of the Táng dynasty and its aftermath, or roughly 870–940. Any research on this period is made difficult because of its malignment in literary historiography. The history of Táng poetry is normally written as a story of growth and decline in four stages. The early Táng (618–712) develops out of the palace-style poetry of the Suí (581–618) and earlier dynasties, and personal expression occasionally juts out of courtly exercises. 2) The High Táng (712–763) marks a high point in which artistry, personality, and virtue combine in various ways to create the masterpieces that would be so highly regarded in later generations, exemplified especially by masters such as Lí Bái 李白, Dù Fù 杜甫, Wáng Wéi 王維, and Mèng Hàorán 孟浩然. The Táng is also at the

42 The first clear division of Tang literary history into four periods (Early, High, Middle, and Late) can be found in Gāo Bīng’s 高棅 anthology Tángshī pínhuì 唐詩品匯 (first edition pub. 1393). As Paul Kroll notes, this dominant schema “is not objective but evaluative and owes at least as much to considerations of political and moral history as it does to the complex realities of literary history” (“Poetry of the T’ang Dynasty,” 275). Poets of the ninth century would hardly have regarded themselves as living at the end of the dynasty. See also Tián Gōngyǔ, Tángshī yúyuàn, 1–17, for a history of the periodization of late Táng literature, especially 9–10 for a critique of the concept of “lateness.”
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height of its political power at this time, the largest and most cosmopolitan empire in the world. All this comes crashing to a halt with the Ān Lūshān Rebellion (755–763), to which several of the great poets bear witness. 3) The Míd Táng (763–836) is the age of recovery, transition, geographic spread, and increased self-consciousness. It produces its own set of canonical masters—politically high-minded and more direct in their diction—such as Bái Jūyì, Yuán Zhēn, and Hán Yù. 4) After the Chángqing reign period, the Late Táng (836–907) marks a turn toward formalism, ermeticism, escapism, sensuality, and decadence. Though a few brilliant stars burned brightly in the early part of this era—people like Lǐ Shāngyīn, Dù Mù, and Wēn Tíngyún—it is generally characterized by decline. The most interesting literary development is the ennoblement of the song lyric (cí 詞), which would become a major genre about a hundred years later. As for elite-style poetry (shī 詩), it continued to get worse and worse until the mid-eleventh century revival centered around Ōuyáng Xiū (1007–1072).

Many scholars, either implicitly or explicitly, further divide the Late Táng into two distinct periods: an earlier one (836~874) of innovation and a later one (874–907) of imitation. Following the logic of late-night television show naming, we might call these “the Late Táng” and “the Late, Late Táng.” The major works of the earlier period are lauded for the breadth of their imagination, their unique vision, or their formal innovations, while poets of the later period

43 The earlier limit of the Late Táng is a matter of debate by literary historians. Tián Gēngyū notes that various scholars have argued for the first year of the Bǎoli era (825), the first year of the Tāihé era (827), and the first year of the Kāichéng era (836). The last of these is the most commonly accepted, since it immediately follows the Sweet Dew Incident which marked the eunuchs’ consolidation of power at court. Tián Gēngyū, for his part, prefers to date the Late Táng from the beginning of the Huíchāng era (841). See Tián Gēngyū, Tángyīn yúyùn, 11–13.

44 In Chinese, this distinction is made with the terms “Late Táng” (Wǎn-Táng 晚唐) and “end of Táng” (Tángmò 唐末).
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are seen merely as being the first generation to perpetuate Late Táng trends, which go on more or less unchanged for about one and a half centuries. This characterization uses a standard trope of Chinese literary historiography, that literature reflects political and social realities. Because the period of 874–976 is marked by the dissolution of the Táng empire into regional kingdoms, its literature must necessarily be inferior. As far back as the early twelfth century, Wú Kě 吳可 wrote that “the poetry by men from the end of the Táng is weightless, frivolous” 唐末人詩輕佻. 45 Most critics since have repeated some version of this tired cliché. They reject this period as overly formalist, an example of decadence that results either in an excess of sensuality and ornament or in a degenerative indulgence in vulgarities. An inferior sociopolitical realm must create inferior works of literature.

This approach to literary history is not limited to the late medieval period, 46 nor to premodern Chinese scholars. It appears front and center in Stephen Owen’s influential tome The Late Tang (826–860), the 2006 conclusion of his monumental four-part series on Táng literary history that began with The Poetry of the Early T’ang in 1977. 47 Owen sees the Late, Late Táng poets as being in a state of arrested development, “traumatically ossified” in their backward gaze. He goes so far as to claim that “the vast majority of poems composed during this period [860–1030] simply carry on the kinds of poetry created in the period encompassed by our study [827–860].” If there is anything of interest in this later period, it is “in poetry’s refusal to change, in its

45 Cándǎi shǐhuà 1.8a. For more on the history of denigrations of Late Táng poetry, see Tián Gěngyú, Tángyīn yúyǔn, 73–81. Although we also find several literati from the waning years of the Táng complaining about their own era—such as Wú Róng’s 吳融 preface to the work of Guànxiū 貫休 in the year 900 (see section 3.2.1)—these are qualitatively different from later historiographical characterizations.
46 The poetic works of the Qi 齊 (472–502) and Liáng 梁 (502–587) dynasties are also frequently described as decadent, sensual, and formalist due to their situation in a period of sociopolitical chaos. See, e.g., Chén Sòngxiōng, Qi-Liáng lìcí hénglùn, 1–10; and Wǔ Yún, Wěi-Jìn nánběicháo wènxué yánjū, 1 (the latter quoted in Tian, Beacon Fire and Shooting Star, 2–3).
47 Owen’s work is no longer influential only in western sinology. Having recently been translated in Chinese by Jiǎ Jínhuá 贾晋华 and Qián Yán 钱彦, his four books on the Táng have gained much attention from mainland and Taiwanese scholars.
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fine couplets, its absorption in pleasures both sensual and aesthetic.”

According to Owen, the literary past crystallized into a “repertoire” during the Late Táng, one which subsumed the voices of the poets drawing on it, for after 860 “there were no more strong poetic personalities to leave a lasting mark on the poetry of the next millennium.” It was only with Ōuyáng Xiū in the 1030s that an individual writer rose above the status of “epigone.”

This may seem like nothing more than Owen’s justification for ending The Late Tang where he does, in 860. But, in fact, it is more deeply rooted in his methodology. According to Owen’s assumptions about literary history, poetry cannot change until Ōuyáng Xiū. I mean here not just the fact that Owen’s description of the Táng as a single narrative arc necessitates the late period being one of “decline” (although that certainly is true). Rather, I refer to Owen’s fundamental approach to literature: that it is dominated by linguistic-ideological discourses which only a few “strong poetic personalities” agonistically overcome to give us their own innovations, which in turn become their own discourses. This is classic Foucault, filtered through the prism of Harold Bloom. Literary history consists of powerful individuals battling

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48 Owen, The Late Tang, 6–7.
49 Owen, The Late Tang, 16. Owen goes on to single out Li Shāngyīn as the only one who established his own distinctive style in this period.
50 Owen, The Late Tang, 567.
51 Owen, The Late Tang, 6.
52 Owen repeats many of these ideas in his essay for The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, “The Cultural Táng (650–1020),” especially 358–73, and in his essay on periodization for The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE), in which he writes that “it would be difficult to find any major change in literature for the eighty years preceding 900 and a hundred years following that date” (Owen, “Periodization and Major Inflection Points,” 13–14).
53 Owen’s most direct articulation of this view is in his essay on Liú Xié 刘勰 struggling to assert his own thoughts on literature through the “discourse machine” of parallel prose, which amplifies and expands according to predictable rules (Owen, “Liu Xie and the Discourse Machine”). This assumption about the dominance of the discourse machine can be found just beneath the surface of many of Owen’s essays, such as his view that the High Táng poet-monks articulate only a surface-level engagement with Buddhist tropes familiar from mainstream poetry (the poet-monks are not strong enough personalities to win the battle against the norms of poetry), or his view that the contemporary poet Bei Dao’s work is inferior because it is written in a delocalized, “global” idiom aimed at an audience that will discover it in translation.
54 See, e.g., Foucault, “What Is an Author?” on the relationship between the individual writer (or rather, his author-function) and the discourses in which he participates, noting that some authors become “founders of discursivity,” producing “the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts” (154). Foucault does not articulate such
against language, language conceived as an impersonal force embodying a set of rules and ideologies. Strong poets win and make their contribution; weak poets lose and get swallowed by the discourse. This approach obscures other ways of tracing literary historical change. It leaves no room for gradual change, for cooperation, for innovation within form, for the inner humanity of any figure not deemed “strong.”

This problematic understanding of literature, and its warping effect on our views of the late medieval period, is not unique to Owen.\textsuperscript{55} Some version of it is endemic to the field as a whole. Many other examples of dismissals of the late medieval period in English-, Japanese-, and Chinese-language scholarship could be produced.\textsuperscript{56} I single out Owen because he has been so influential, and because he is otherwise such a sensitive and erudite reader of Táng poetry. The characterizations offered by Owen and other recent critics just put a modern spin on the old trope of a chaotic age producing inferior literature. Literature of the late medieval period does not attend to whatever the critics deem to be the most important matter, be that Confucian concern

\textsuperscript{55} To provide just a few examples: the \textit{Columbia History of Chinese Literature} does not even address the late medieval period: Paul Kroll’s chapter on “Poetry from the T’ang Dynasty,” 274–316, contains but passing references to the late ninth century and concludes with the fall of the dynasty in 907, while Michael Fuller’s chapter on “Sung Dynasty Shiɔ Poetry,” 337–369, begins with the founding of the Sŏng in 960. Yoshikawa Kōjirō also dismisses this entire period in a few brief pages (\textit{An Introduction to Sung Poetry}, 49–52). In Chinese-language scholarship, the situation is no different: Niè Shìqiào divides the Late Táng into the two “schools” of Lǐ Shāngyīn 李商隱 (812–858)/Dù Mù 杜牧 (803–852) and Pi Rixiŭ 皮日休 (833–?)/Lù Guīmĕng 陸龜蒙 (mid/late ninth cent.) and tells us nothing about poet-monks (\textit{Tăngdài wên xué shí}, 220–286). For the post-860 period, he covers only Luò Yǐn 羅隱 (833–909), Niè Yīzhōng 蕭夷中 (late ninth cent.), and Dù Xūnhé 杜荀鶴 (846–904). Li Cóngjūn, following many other critics, characterizes this period as one of “decline” and devotes only 5% of his pages to it despite the fact that it covers 16% of the Táng, chronologically speaking (\textit{Tăngdài wên xué yànbiàn shí}, 667–706). Luo Yuming likewise devotes less that 3% of his pages on Táng poetry to this period (\textit{A Concise History of Chinese Literature}, 1:373–376). Tián Gēngyú’s \textit{Tăngshī yìyün}, despite spending nearly one hundred pages problematizing the idea of the Late Táng, falls back into the old critical habit of holding up the earlier poets as the greatest of this era. Li Díngguāng’s otherwise excellent \textit{Tângmò Wûdài luânshí wên xué yànjū} dismisses the role of religion, parroting the Marxist clichés that it is an “escape” or “opiate” (51–52, 70).
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for the state, modernist concern for realism, Marxist concern for the people, or post-structuralist concern for discursive innovation.

These shortcomings emerge not from any inherent attribute of the literature produced during the period of 874–940. Rather, they are the result of centuries of historians and critics characterizing this period as “late.” A comparison with the literary historiography of Western Late Antiquity is instructive. Similarly situated between two major periods (the unified Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, roughly 3rd–7th centuries), it had long been maligned as an era of decadence, degeneracy, imitation, formalism, and superstition. The main problem, many recent review articles have concluded, is that literature of this era had been judged by external standards (modern ideas of innovation, classical theories of aesthetic unity). If one instead takes this literature on its own terms, looking at problems of intertextuality, religious literature, or creativity within constraint, a new vista of research possibilities opens up.

This is why I have attempted to take the poetry written in my main period of research (roughly 860–940) on its own terms. To do this, I have gone out of my way to retrieve my standards of interpretation from the poetry manuals (shīgé 詩格) produced during this time, some even compiled by the poets under discussion. Similarly, when discussing Buddhist practice, I have attempted to rely on texts that we know the poet-monks read or teachings that they likely would have come into contact with. Although we can never know exactly what things were in

57 See McGill, “Latin Poetry,” 335: “The criticism [of Late Antique poetry] ascribes to it attributes commonly used to stigmatize lateness: decadence, a lack of aesthetic harmony, frivolity, and creative exhaustion.” Such a list could just as easily summarize criticism of late ninth and tenth century Chinese poetry. See also Formisano, “Toward an Aesthetic Paradigm of Late Antiquity,” 277–81.
59 For an excellent study of Late Antique Latin poetry which does just this, see Roberts, The Jewelled Style. On the importance of this methodological approach, see, e.g., Shanzer, “Literature, History, Periodization,” 919: “[Scholars] must also learn how to make any reading, even of a text that may seem rebarbative or worthless, valuable by using it, or at least working out who could use it and for what. Whether one likes it or not is irrelevant (except for oneself), one must think rather about what it illuminates. It is a mute and perhaps resistant witness. Can one get it to testify?”
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these poet-monks’ libraries, tracing out allusions, quotations, social relations, and early biographical descriptions can lead us in the right direction. In this way, I hope to have placed limits on my own speculative impulses and avoided anachronistic judgment.

That said, I am not attempting here a full reconstruction of literary culture during the late medieval period. Although I have occasionally had to engage in macroanalysis and summon up literary norms in order to provide context for my arguments, I have made no attempt to be comprehensive. Rather, I am tracing one thread through this tapestry, from its earliest splash of color to its next major stitch. This thread is intricately interwoven with the rest of the cloth, yet it does not constitute the complete thing.

1.3 Some Definitions

Many of the key terms used in this dissertation are contested, both in modern academia and in premodern China. Humanistic research affords few stable concepts on which one can hang one’s hat and come back later to find it again unchanged. Indeed, this can be taken as a law: the telos of any humanistic inquiry is to undermine its own terms of inquiry. Nonetheless, we cannot, like Rabelais’s Panurge and Thaumaste, throw out language completely. Problematic terms must be recognized, defined, and occasionally bracketed but never completely abandoned if we are to say anything at all about a humanistic subject. Before embarking on the study proper, it is necessary to clarify a few important words that I use.

_Poetry_. I use this term to refer to works of verbal art which were understood by late medieval audiences to participate in a prestigious literary tradition. “Poetry” as I use it covers roughly the same semantic ground as _shī_ 詩 in its broader sense, including the genres of _gēxíng_ 歌行 (“song” or “ballad”) and _yuèfǔ_ 樂府 (“music bureau-style poem”). Key texts in this

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60 François Rabelais, _Pantagruel_, chapters 18–21.
tradition during the late medieval period included the early anthologies *Book of Odes* 詩經 (*Shī* in its canonical sense) and the *Songs of Chǔ* 楚辭, as well as the influential sixth-century anthology *Wénxuān* 文選. In this regard, the semantic range of *shī* was slightly narrower than “poetry” in its contemporary English sense. However, it still carried with it the same implicit act of elevation. *Shī* was at the core of late medieval Chinese ideas of literariness, and anything which lacked this quality would be excluded from the concept, including some forms of Buddhist verse.\(^6^1\)

*Monk.* This term translates *sēng* 僧 (itself an abbreviated transliteration of the Sanskrit *samgha*), always referring to *Buddhist* monastics. Monks lived in same-sex communities devoted to religious pursuits, shaved their heads, often wore patchwork (or at least distinctive) robes, and ideally remained celibate and refrained from consuming meat and alcohol.\(^6^2\) Many entered the monastery as novices around the age of seven and took full orders at twenty. Importantly, for the late medieval period, monks are not considered to be literati (*shì* 士 or *shìdàfū* 士大夫). That is, even though many were highly educated or were scions of elite families, their lives were not structured around the goal of serving the civil bureaucracy.\(^6^3\) Monasticism was usually a lifetime commitment, but there are examples in the late medieval period of adult monks laicizing and of adult laity taking monastic vows.\(^6^4\)

*Buddhism.* In this dissertation, I nearly always use this term to mean “Buddhist monasticism” and the writings and rituals understood as important to monastic traditions and

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\(^{6^1}\) By this I refer to the *gāthā* (Chinese: *jisòng* 偈頌). On this topic, see my “The Medieval Chinese Gāthā and Its Relationship to Poetry,” in which I explore the definitions of “shī” and “poetry” at greater length.

\(^{6^2}\) This characterization of monks derives from Kieschnick, “Buddhist Monasticism.”

\(^{6^3}\) Monks could serve as religious administrators in capacities that often overlapped with civil administration. One example is the “Samgha Rectifier” (*sèngzhèng* 僧正), who was responsible for the affairs of Buddhist monks and nuns within a prefecture (*zhōu* 州). In the late medieval period, this position was appointed by prefectural authorities. See *Fóguāng dàcídìan*, 6:5716–17.

\(^{6^4}\) I discuss a few of these examples in section 2.2.2 below.
communities. That is, I am not focused on lay Buddhism. Some of the literati I discuss were lay practitioners, but I am interested in them more as literati rather than as lay Buddhists.

*Religion.* When I use this term (and its adjectival form “religious”), I almost always do so in a rhetorical way to signal that the claim I am making has comparative implications. After all, there was no single word corresponding to “religion” in medieval China, only words for “teachings” (jiào 教), “paths” (dào 道), “forests” (lín 林), “lineages” (zōng 宗), “families” (jiā 家), and “laws” (fǎ 法). Nevertheless, that does not rule out “religion” as a useful comparative category, so long as we understand its limitations.65

*Confucianism.* This term translates Rú 儒, referring to the mainstream, classical Chinese tradition which venerates the sages of high antiquity and upholds the teachings and rituals attributed to them. This tradition stresses competence in the six arts (ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics), proficiency in the classics, filial piety, and loyalty to the state. I prefer this somewhat misleading translation to the transliterated “Ruism” or the hopelessly vague “classicism” for the rhetorical effect made possible by its familiarity. The texts and traditions associated with Rú were part of the shared culture of anyone with more than a passing level of literacy in medieval China. Nevertheless, Rú was understood to hold authority over different spheres than Buddhism and Daoism. Literary and bureaucratic life fell under the domain of Rú. Poetry was often understood as a space to display Rú values. Therefore, when poet-monks say they are equating Rú practices with Buddhist ones, they are making bold claims. In order to reproduce something of this effect in English, I have had to use the terms “Confucian” and “Confucianism,” no matter how inaccurate they may be.66

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**Practice.** I mainly use this term to refer to rituals and meditation, that is, consciously patterned movements of the body that are regarded as significant or efficacious within a “field.” Linguistic habits, especially in their performative aspect, may fall under this category as well. I use this term to get away from the attempts at historical mind-reading that characterize so much research on religious poetry. That is, the beliefs and worldviews of medieval poet-monks are of little concern to me. I do not seek to find Buddhist “thought” or “philosophy” in Táng poetry. What I want to explore are the actions (and their traces) of poet-monks, along with their impact on cultural discourses. Of course, practice makes sense to the practitioner due to that person’s *habitus* (which exists within doxa, as outlined above). Practice involves bodily movements and poses which retain traces of the larger structures and histories in which they are embedded. All of this is to say, when I mention the “practices” of poet-monks in this dissertation, I mean the actions they may have actually performed (to our best guess)—exchanged poems, recited words, read texts, sat in certain postures, concentrated in certain ways, visualized certain things. These are to be understood as *actions*, not as expressions of feelings, nor as representations of beliefs, nor as outcomes of discourse machines. The fields of medieval Chinese poetry and medieval Chinese Buddhism certainly shaped the horizons of these monks’ thoughts and practices, but the monks were also active participants, in possession of bodies, who shaped and changed the fields they inhabited.

**Meditation.** This usually translates the Chinese *chán*, itself an abbreviated transliteration of the Sanskrit *dhyāna* (“meditation,” “contemplation,” or “mental absorption”).

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67 *Habitus* can be defined as “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 53).

68 Or as Bourdieu puts it, a little more loquaciously: “Every social order systematically takes advantage of the disposition of the body and language to function as depositories of deferred thoughts that can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effect of re-placing the body in an overall posture which *recalls* the associated thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, give rise to states of mind... Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *embodied*, turned into permanent disposition” (*The Logic of Practice*, 69–70).
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Medieval Buddhist meditation covered a wide range of practices used for both personal and communal rituals, aimed to achieve a variety of ends. Some sought simple mental training, others a method of escape from the mundane, others the appearance of efficacious visions, others a path to bodhisattvahood, and many others a combination of these. Meditation will be treated at greatest length in section 6.4 of the dissertation, but it will show up earlier in other ways.

1.4 The Structure of This Dissertation

My study consists of two major sections focusing on the social history and the poetics of the poet-monks, followed by a concluding synthesis. The first explores the changing roles that poet-monks actively adopted and were passively placed into in late medieval literary society. Chapters two and three consist of a historical study of the word “poet-monk” (shīsēng 詩僧) from two angles. These chapters examine the meaning of the term, who was using it, and to what end, along with its geographical spread. They demonstrate that “poet-monk” was originally an outsider’s term used to describe a specific community of monks in southeast China in the late eighth century and only gradually spread across the Táng empire, eventually referring to a relatively stable concept adopted by both monks and laypersons. Chapter four switches methodological focus from the diachronic development of the category of “poet-monk” to the synchronic relations of poet-monks. Examining the heyday of poet-monks (860–940), I use social-network analysis to argue for the centrality of Buddhist monks in the network of late medieval literary relations as reconstructed from thousands of exchange poems. Extant records suggest that monks were anything but marginal to the literary world. Being more mobile than secular literati, monks were exposed to a wider array of literary practices and potential audiences. This may help explain their penchant for striking literary techniques.
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Section two turns to poetics, using the more traditional method of historicized close reading to argue that the poet-monks asserted a unity between poetic and religious practices. Chapter five examines the most conspicuous feature of the monks’ poetry: the heavy use of repetition, especially at the level of the individual Chinese character. Repetition shows the poet-monks at their most extreme, bringing together discourses of Buddhist apophasis, literary madness in song-style poetry, and the numinous power of incantation. The repeated sounds used by these monks, especially in song-style poems, may be considered incantatory in the strict sense of the term: that is, their aural quality is performative, effecting the numinous power of a spell. Chapter six moves from one extreme of the monks’ poetics to the other, from their most exuberant to their most austere. It also turns from one kind of evidence (poetic techniques) to another (poetry manuals and other writings about poetic composition). This chapter treats most directly the equation of poetry and meditation. It shows how this equation resulted from the convergence of two streams in the literary tradition: the kūyín (“bitter intoning”) aesthetic that encouraged the obsessive pursuit of perfectly wrought parallel couplets and the idea of poetry composition involving physical stillness and mental roaming. It also shows how the equation mobilized the Buddhist concept of the inseparability of mundane and ultimate reality to justify poetry as a kind of non-cultivation—the practice of meditation in everyday life. Poet-monks drew on these discourses to describe poetic composition as a kind of meditation. That is, they asserted that poetry and meditation were two “gates” to the same goal. Poetry, like meditation, leads to heightened perceptual awareness and thus to the ultimate goal of Buddhist monasticism, awakening to ultimate reality and to the fact that ultimate reality is perfectly interfused with the mundane world.
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Section three, the conclusion, brings together the dissertation’s main points and suggests a few reasons why the late medieval poet-monks are not well-known in Chinese literary history, reasons related to developments in both Buddhist monastic and mainstream literary traditions. Despite this later marginalization, the poet-monks’ works have much to tell us about the idea of religious poetry, suggesting new lines of inquiry for further comparative research.
Part I:
A Social History of Poet-Monks
Chapter 2

The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

2.0 Introduction

Shīsēng 詩僧 (“poet-mono”), like any word, has a history. It came into being at a specific time and place, and its meaning shifted significantly over the two centuries following the High Táng period. It should not be taken as a stable, transcendent category of literary actor, as many previous scholars have done. Rather, it was a tool used for both the marginalization and self-justification of Buddhist monastics living during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries who took the writing of poetry very seriously. This chapter and the following one describe exactly what happened to this term, “poet-mono,” from the Mid Táng to the Five Dynasties period, or roughly 760–960, guided by three sets of questions:

1) Who was using the term “poet-mono” and to whom were they applying it? Were the connotations positive or negative?

2) Where exactly was the term being used? To what places did it spread and why?

3) What assumptions were being made about the relationship between Buddhism and poetry? Were they seen as distinct or similar? In what ways?

In short, the three classic journalistic questions of who, where, and what, all qualified by when. History, like chemistry, is the study of change. Therefore, the goal of a literary history should be to delineate this change and the factors contributing to it. Otherwise, we are left with a static,

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1 Burton Watson, for example, admits that the term came into being at a specific time but sees no problem using it “retroactively to refer to Buddhist writers of the early T’ang” (“Buddhist Poet-Priests of the T’ang,” 31). Zhā Minghào, Zhuānxīngzhōng de Táng Wùdài shīsēng qǐntí, 1, says essentially the same thing. Wáng Xiūlin, following Sūn Chāngwǔ, provides a slightly more nuanced picture, defining poet-mons as either “renunciant Buddhists who were skilled in poetry or were famous for their poetry” or else “poets who donned the kaśāya,” but qualifies this notion by noting that they did not become a real group until the Late Táng (Wáng Xiūlin, Wān-Táng Wùdài shīsēng qǔntí yánjìū, 1–5; Sūn Chāngwǔ, Chānsī yú shāqīng, 316).
essentialized Chinese literary culture outside of time. Against this, a survey of poems and prefaces to poetry collections by literati and monks alike will show us the winding path the word “poet-monk” took throughout this period. In short, there is an abundance of evidence for significant developments—social, geographic, and semantic—over the 200 years under question.

This first chapter focuses on the first hundred years of the poet-monk (760–860), tracing the arc of this concept’s early development and concluding with a bird’s-eye view of the situation by mapping poet-monk activity with GIS software. Its partner, chapter 3, returns to close readings of poems and prefaces written during the second hundred years (860–960), at the peak of poet-monks’ influence and productivity. Together, these chapters posit the existence, development, and flourishing of a poetic subtradition which challenges the dominant narratives of Táng literary history. The writing of elite poetry (shī 詩) did not become ossified after the deaths of Lǐ Shāngyǐn 李商隱 (812–858) and Wēn Tíngyún 溫庭筠 (812–870), but continued to grow in new directions largely thanks to the work of these poet-monks.

2.1 780–820: The Birth of Poet-Monks

2.1.1 On Jiāngnán

By the eighth century CE, Buddhism was firmly entrenched in Chinese life. Having first come to China via northwestern merchants and monks around the time of Christ, it soon weaved its way into the very fabric of elite society. It had been promoted and suppressed, patronized and demonized by centuries of would-be emperors (and one empress) by the time-period under consideration. Buddhists of this era were roughly as far separated from Buddhism’s entry into China as we are from Thomas Aquinas. In the intervening seven and a half centuries, Buddhist

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2 Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, 26–27, informs us that “the first sign of the existence of a Buddhist community of (no doubt foreign) monks and Chinese laymen” appears in 65 CE at the court of Lǐ Yīng 劉英, King of Chǔ.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

temples had become part of the landscape, and monks part of the social structure. According to
the official histories of the Táng, in the years 713–755, there were 126,100 monks housed in
5,358 temples. Gernet, Buddhism in Chinese Society, 6. Gernet is careful to note that the real number probably exceeds this—the
total number of monks recorded in the official histories most likely does not include hermits or members of communities with only a handful of people.
This amounts to around 15–18 monks per thousand households. Depending on whether one uses the total number of registered households for 726 (7,069,565) or 742 (8,525,763). See Twitchett, “Hsüan-tsung,” 419, and refs. therein.
By comparison, the United States reported about 429,000 clergy members in the year 2010, or fewer than 4 per thousand households. So, relative to its population, High Táng China had around four to five times as many Buddhist clergy as the United States has of all clergy members, of any tradition, sect, or denomination. Monks were abundant, far beyond anything a twenty-first century American would be used to. Buddhism was everywhere.

Jiānghnán 江南, in particular, proved to be a haven for the religious tradition. Jiānghnán (literally, “South of the [Great] River”) refers to that area south of the Yangtze River that stretches from Sūzhōu and Hángzhōu in the east to Nánchāng and Jiǔjiāng in the west. Its wonders were first internalized by the Chinese literati during the period of mass migration in the early fourth century, smitten as they were with all the new sights, sounds, and smells they encountered. Buddhism rose to prominence in this region from the very beginning thanks to the loyal patronage of the court official Wáng Dǎo 王導 (276–339) at Jiānkāng 建康 (modern Nánjīng) in the first half of the fourth century and of local gentry at western Jiānghnán in the latter half of the fourth century.6 Buddhism became popular among the elite, its proponents holding debates with “arcane studies” 玄學 philosophers, its practitioners developing new creeds and rituals. It was during this time that the learnèd monk Huìyuán 慧遠 (334–417) established a

3 Gernet, Buddhism in Chinese Society, 6. Gernet is careful to note that the real number probably exceeds this—the total number of monks recorded in the official histories most likely does not include hermits or members of communities with only a handful of people.
4 Depending on whether one uses the total number of registered households for 726 (7,069,565) or 742 (8,525,763). See Twitchett, “Hsüan-tsung,” 419, and refs. therein.
6 Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, 97 and 114.
major Buddhist center on Mt. Lú 嵐山, called Dōnglín temple 東林寺, where a fellowship of 123 lay and monastic practitioners met to devote themselves to meditation and veneration of Amitābha. Known as the White Lotus Society 白蓮社, it was seen retroactively as the founding of the Pure Land sect. The White Lotus Society is also notable for including artistic luminaries such as the painter/calligrapher Zōng Bīng 宗炳 (375–443) and the soon-to-be famous poet Xiè Língyún 謝靈運 (385–433), and therefore it became a touchstone for later intermixing between the clergy and literati. The Jiāngnán region proved to be one of the most innovative and resilient loci for medieval Chinese Buddhism, and would persist as such for centuries to come. This perhaps reached its peak in the Táng dynasty. According to one scholar’s estimates, 22% of “eminent monks” 高僧 in the first half of the Táng, and 51% of those in the second half, came from the Jiāngnán region.

Jiāngnán was as well known in the medieval period for its literary culture as for its Buddhism. During the Ān Lùshān Rebellion of 755–763, many of the capital elite moved to the Jiāngnán area temporarily to avoid the violence and wait for the restoration of the Táng. Some stayed longer. After order was restored, the Táng instituted a system of military governorships (jièdūshǐ 節度使) that cycled major political figures to positions outside of the capital, leading to a general decentralization of power. The fleeing literati and the military governors, combined with eastern Jiāngnán’s wealth as a riverside trading center, meant that it was in place to become

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7 For an overview of Huīyuán’s life and teachings, see Chang and Knechtges, “Huiyuan,” in Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature, 410–13; and Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, 204–39. Despite some later legends, it is very unlikely that the poet Táo Yuān míng 陶淵明 (365–427) was associated with the White Lotus Society.
8 Duàn Shuāngxǐ, Tángmò Wǔdài Jiāngnán xīdào shīgē yǎnjiǔ, 12, drawing on data collected in Lǐ Yínghuǐ, Tángdài fójìào dǐlǐ yǎnjiǔ.
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an alternate cultural center. Many of the most important literati of the Mid Táng spent at least some time here, often rubbing shoulders with Buddhists. This confluence of religious and cultural prosperity, along with growing political decentralization, created the right conditions for the emergence of a robust poet-monk movement.

2.1.2 Earliest Use

Though the first Jiāngnán monk to be praised as a poet in extant records is Língyī (727–762), we do not find the term “poet-monk” applied to him during his lifetime. The word, however, is in use by the mid-eighth century. Its first extant use comes from the title of a poem by Jiǎorán (720?–797?), a late-blooming poet-monk who did not take full orders until his forties.

Replying to “Parting with Shàowēi, Poet-monk of Xiāngyáng” (In the poem, I respond to the significance of the venerable monk’s dream of going home) 酬別襄陽詩僧少微（詩中答人歸夢之意）

9 On the southeast as an alternative cultural center, see Jīng Xiǎodōng, Jiāngnán wénhuà yǔ Tángdài wénxué yánjiū, esp. 301–335, who counts at least 48 known, important literati who moved from the capital region to Jiāngnán after the Rebellion and believes that the Mid-Táng resurgence of the Qí-Liáng style is a direct result of this relocation. See also McMullen, “Historical and Literary Theory in the Mid-Eighth Century,” 316. On these scholars’ relation to Buddhism, see McMullen, “Historical and Literary Theory,” 312–13, and Sūn Chāngwǔ, Chánshì yǔ shìqíng, 317. Much has been written on the military governorship system, more than can be surveyed here. For an overview of some of its political dynamics, see Peterson, “Court and Province in the Mid and Late T’ang,” esp. 476. On its importance to the literary history of the latter half of the Táng, see Dài Wěihuá, Tángdài shǐfù yǔwénxué yánjiū.

10 See, e.g., Dúgū Jí (725–777), “Inscription for the Pagoda of the Late Vinaya Master Língyī of Qìngyún Temple in Yángzhōu of the Táng, with Preface” 唐故揚州慶雲寺律師一公塔銘並序, which praises Língyī as the successor of such literary luminaries of the Southern Dynasties as Pān Yuè (247–300), Ruān Jī (210–263), Jiāng Yān (444–505), and Xiè Língyùn (385–433). Though Dúgū Jí notes how Língyī “would always be engaged in composing poems and songs whenever he got a break from meditating and chanting” 每禪誦之隙, 輒賦詩歌事, he never places the monk under a distinct label reserved for poet-monks (Liú Pēng and Li Tāo, Pílíng jí jiùzhǔ 9.203–209; QTW 390.3962–64).

11 QTS 818.9217. On this being the earliest appearance of the term “poet-monk,” see Ichihara Kōkichi, “Chū-Tō shoki ni okeru Kōsa no shisō ni tsuite,” 219. The next-oldest extant use of the term, according to Ichihara, is Wúkě’s 無可 “Sent to a Poet-monk” 贈詩僧 (QTS 813.9154). When attempting to find the first use of anything in the Táng, it is helpful to bear in mind the fact that many more texts survive from the period after the Ān Lushān Rebellion (755–763) than before it, and therefore the earliest instances of a phenomenon are often lost to us. Nevertheless, given the importance of several poets who were monks in the early medieval period, such as Zhī Dūn (314–66), Huíxū 惠休 (mid fifth cent.), and Bāoyuè 寶月 (late fifth cent.), it is striking that the term does not appear far earlier. This has led some scholars, such as Bāo Děyì et al, Náncháo shīshēng yánjiū.
Jiǎorán 皎然 (720?–797?)

證心何有夢  Why are there dreams to bear witness to the mind?  

示說夢歸頻  Let me explain your repeated dreams of going home.  

文字齎秦本  For words, you carry in mind the books of Qín,  

詩騷學楚人  In poetry, you study the men of Chǔ.  

蘭開衣上色  Orchids bloom the color of your robes,  

柳向手中春  Willows bend toward the spring in your hand.  

別後須相見  We shall surely meet again after this parting:  

浮雲是我身  My body is in the floating clouds.

While there would be much to unpack in the contents of this poem (the obsession with language in lines 3–4, the comparison of the orchids’ color to the monk’s purple robes in line 5, the hint of impermanence undermining the promise of reunion in lines 7–8), what concerns us here is the title. First, Jiǎorán’s poem is a response to an unknown earlier author. This means, at the very least, that the title of this poem is not the first use of the word “poet-monk.” The original poem to which it is responding, written by a third party, must precede it. So we can conclusively say that the first use of the term “poet-monk” is lost to us. Second, the term “poet-monk” is used as an identifying label. Paired with Shāowěi’s place of origin (Xiāngyáng), it serves as an index for locating the monk, socially and geographically. He is not just a monk but a poet-monk, someone with the necessary learning to participate in literary exchanges, who has memorized the classics (line 3) and can write in the style of the laments of the Songs of Chǔ 楚辭 (line 4). Nonetheless, his status as a poet is subordinated to his status of a monk: in classical Chinese, modifier comes before modified, so shī (“poet”) must modify sēng (“monk”). He is a mainly a monk, but one who has some training in poetry. “Poet-monk” is here a social label much like a literatus’ official title and place of origin: it places the monk within elite society. However, as we will see, the poet-monk’s place is on the margins.

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12 I.e., Qū Yuán 屈原, Sòng Yù 宋玉, and others associated with the Songs of Chǔ 楚辭. For more on Qū Yuán’s significance to the poet-monk tradition, see section 5.3.2 of this dissertation.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

Jiǎorán’s poem points to a new development already underway. A group of monks is beginning to gain a reputation for their poetry. We can find corroborating evidence for this in some remarks from a contemporaneous anthology, the Zhōngxīng jiānqì jí 中興間氣集 (Collection of [poets with heroic] intermediary qì from the restoration) by Gāo Zhòngwǔ 高仲武.\(^{13}\)

自齊梁以來，道人工文者多矣，罕有人其流者。一公乃能刻意精妙，與士大夫更唱迭和，不其偉歟。如「泉湧階前地，雲生戶外峰」，則道猷、寶月，曾何及此。

Since the Qí and Liáng dynasties, there have been many religious skilled at literature, but rare are those who have entered its stream. Língyī is capable in attention and detail, and has often exchanged poems with the literati—how could he not be mighty? As for “A spring wells up on the ground before the steps, / A cloud emerges from the peaks beyond the door,” how could Dàoyóu or Bǎoyuè match this?\(^{14}\)

Gāo Zhòngwǔ has taken notice of these poetry-writing monks and selected their finest, Língyī, for inclusion in his anthology. Gāo is at pains to justify his choice here. First, by saying that Língyī “exchanged poems with the great literati,” he posits “literati” as a separate category from “poet-monk.” This fact may seem obvious at first glance, but it is worth stressing: Língyī and his interlocutors are not all subsumed under a unified category of “poet”; instead, he is distinct from the others because he inhabits a different place in society (Buddhist monk, not imperial bureaucrat). That is to say, poets are defined primarily by their social roles. At the same time, these social roles are parallel in some way. The phrase “enter the stream” (rùliú 入流) was most frequently used to describe those who embarked on a career of civil service,\(^{15}\) but Gāo

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\(^{13}\) Tángrén xuăn Tāngshǐ xīnbīn zēngdìngběn, 516.

\(^{14}\) Bó 帛 Dàoyóu (ca. 329–ca. 399): secular surname Féng 馮, a monk known for his erudition and literary talent. He has one poem preserved in Gāosēng zuàn 高僧傳 (T no. 2059, 50:357b), collected now in Lù Qīnlí, Jīnshī, 20.1088. See Knechtges and Chang, Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature, Part One, 47–48. Bǎoyuè (mid-6th cent.): monk whose work was included in Yùtái xīnyòng 宇臺新詠. For more on him, see the note to Guànxiū’s poem “Looking over the Poetry Collections of Jiǎorán and Nánqīng” in section 3.2.2.

\(^{15}\) See, inter alia, the petition of Liú Xiángdào 劉祥道 (596–666):

今之選司取士，傷多且濫。每年入流數過一千四百，傷多也；雜色入流，不加銓簡，是傷濫也。
appropriates it here to describe Língyī’s acceptance into literary society. It is implied that the literary world, like the official bureaucracy, is a distinct sphere of activity which one can enter or leave, with its own ranks and paths of ascendancy. Língyī’s poetic career in some ways mirrors the official careers of the literati.

Second, Gāo points out precursors to the current group of literary monks, noting that they are not a complete novelty. There were monks writing poetry over three hundred years prior, such as Dàoyóu and Bǎoyuè. This rhetorical move appears in many discussions of poet-monks in the following centuries: the need to appeal to history for justification, even though those prior monks had little to do with what was happening in the Táng. Gāo admits that most of these earlier monks “did not enter the stream” of truly great literature: they were mere versifiers. And so they serve as a contrast to the “mighty” Língyī. Third, Gāo needs to prove the poet-monk’s worth by appealing to his association with literati poets. The monk cannot stand on his own, but must be stamped with the approval of his non-renunciant counterparts. This is a strategy that appears often in ninth-century accounts of poet-monks. While Gāo Zhòngwǔ demonstrates a familiarity with a burgeoning poet-monk tradition, the rhetorical assumptions of his comments imply that these monks are not widely known or respected. Poet-monks remain a new and isolated phenomenon. To understand the ways in which they were isolated, and how they began to break out beyond that isolation, we must turn to an essay written some 50 years later.

2.1.3 Setting the Terms: Liú Yūxī on Língchè

In our current selection of ministers and choice of scholars, I am troubled by the fact that they are abundant and overwhelming. Every year, the number of those who enter the stream is over 1400, far too many. With such mixed varieties entering the stream, if we will not be more discriminating, they will be far too abundant.

This petition is preserved in Jiù Tángshū 81.2751; Táng huìyào 74.1334; and QTW 162.1654.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

We can place the invention of the term “poet-monk” sometime in the mid-eighth century, prior to Jiǎorán’s use of it, as a social label which found a place for well-educated monks somewhere within elite society. As more Buddhist monks became accomplished in poetry at this time, all of them based in Jiāngnán, a separate category was created for them. Eventually, they became conspicuous enough to merit a full discussion by the poet and long-exiled statesman Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 (772–842), who discussed them in his “Notes on Venerable Língchè’s Literary Collection” 慨上人文集. His essay opens with a nod to the past, then proceeds to Língchè’s precocious childhood and youth, careful to note his expertise in both literary and religious practices. Liú’s essay would remain extremely influential for centuries, setting the basic terms of the discourse around poet-monks as they spread beyond Jiāngnán.

Notes on Venerable Língchè’s Literary Collection 慨上人文集
Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫

There is a long history of monks skilled at poetry. The Venerable Xiū composed the “Sorrows of Parting,” and Dharma Master Yuē wept for Minister Fàn. Both of them were favorably praised by talented literati of the time. Thereafter there were many of them in succession.

17 Venerable Xiū: Huìxiū 惠休 (fifth century), secular surname Tāng 湯, whose “Sorrows of Parting” was preserved in the Wénxuān, 31.1480. More on his life can be found in the biography of Xú Zhànzhī 徐湛之 in Sōngshū 71.1847. Dharma Master Yuē: Huiyuē 慧約 (c. 452–535), secular surname Lóu 廖, was a monk known for his learning and intelligence. Though the poem mentioned here (presumably on the powerful patron Fàn Tài 範泰 [335–428]) is no longer extant, he was an associate of many prominent poets, including Shèn Yuē 沈約 (441–513). His biography can be found in Xu gāosēng zhuan 續高僧傳 (T no. 2060, 50:468b–70a).
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

The Venerable Língchè was born in Kuàijī, originally of the Tāng clan. He had an acute curiosity, was obsessed with learning, and could not bear to be ordinary. When he took leave of his father and brother to become a renunciant, he took the name Língchè [“Numinous Discernment”], and was styled Yuánchéng [“Original Limpidity”]. He upheld the sūtras and śāstras, but loved verse with his whole mind. He studied how to write poetry under Yán Wéi (j.s. 757) when the latter came to Yuè [i.e., Kuàijī], and he gradually earned a reputation. When Yán Wéi passed away, he went to Wúxīng and traveled with the elder poet-monk Jiǎorán and discussed the arts with him a great deal. Jiǎorán wrote a letter of recommendation for him to the poet Gentleman Attendant Bāo Jí (d. 792), who was very pleased to receive him. He also wrote a letter to Gentleman Attendant Lǐ Shū (d. 834). At this time, everyone said that the great literary stylists were Bāo Jí and Lǐ Shū. Consequently, the Venerable Língchè’s reputation was bolstered by these three gentlemen, like a cloud grabbing hold of the winds, his branch and leaves lush and flourishing. He gained access to such talented men through his writing, and he persuaded the eminent men [of court] with his understanding of meditation. His unrestrained discussions were very refined, and his light conversation was full of diverse flavors.

Like Gāo Zhòngwǔ, Liú Yūxī feels the need to give poet-monks a long (literally, “respectable”) history. To do this, he points to two fifth-century monks, Huīxiū and Huīyuē. Both monks wrote admirable poetry and consorted with the top literati of their time. One of Huīxiū’s poems was even enshrined in the anthology Wénxuān. With these two prominent examples at the head, Liú could create a lineage for Língchè, alluding to all the others in between with the stock phrase, “thereafter there were many of them in succession” 厥後比比有之. The poet-monks were justified: they could be traced back to a Wénxuān author.

After the following biographical portion, which lists Língchè’s hometown, clan, names, and remarks on his early love of learning, Liú Yūxī goes on to show how Língchè climbed the social ladder through personal connections with four great poets, namely Yán Wéi, Jiǎorán, Bāo Jí, and Lǐ Shū. Only one of them (Jiǎorán) is a fellow monk, and that monk is known mainly for his literary abilities. Liú Yūxī is not attempting a religious hagiography, which would at this

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18 On Bāo Jí’s life, see Jiāng Yǐn, Dàlǐ shīrén yǎnjū, 540–51.
19 I.e., his conversation was multifaceted, since he could speak on both literary and Buddhist matters.
20 The Wénxuān was practically required reading by examination candidates in the Táng, on which see, e.g., Knechtges, Wen Xuan, 54.
point describe Língchè’s skills at memorization or the different subjects he studied (vinaya, meditation, incantation, etc.) and under which masters. Instead, we have a literary biography, one which connects him to famous poets of the southeast at this time.

But Língchè’s religious activity is not downplayed, either. In fact, the two sides are put in parallel to each other: others are drawn to him for both his writing and his understanding of meditation. Língchè’s appeal is his complexity. The capital elites find him fascinating because his conversation is full of “diverse flavors” 多味. That is to say, he can talk about both literary and religious matters with authority. Implicit in this statement is the fact that most monks could not. Buddhist monks participated in a different discursive tradition and needed literacy mainly in its own canon; writing poetry, by contrast, required knowledge of the large corpus of shared classical texts, from the Book of Odes and Songs of Chǔ to the later works compiled in the Wènxuàn. Monks rarely learned these texts and therefore were not regarded as participants in the main, classicist stream of Chinese civilization. Hence the literati’s curiosity about Língchè and other poet-monks. They marveled at these strange creatures who seemed to be able to speak out of both sides of their mouths.

21 See Kieschnick, The Eminent Monk, 112–30, for more on the norms of describing monastic learning in medieval hagiographies.
22 The ideal of “completeness” (quán 全 or bèi 備), in which a writer mastered many kinds of texts and genres in order to attain versatility, was widespread among the mainstream literati in the early ninth century. For more, see DeBlasi, Reform in the Balance.
23 This sometimes slid into extreme denunciations of the monastic community. Cf. the memorial of Péng Yǎn 彭偃, a senior official at court around the same time Língchè arrived, who felt that “most monks and nuns… were uneducated persons of questionable moral character who would not shrink from committing criminal acts ranging from tax evasion to fornication, theft, and murder” (Weinstein, Buddhism under the T’ang, 91; QTW 445.4545).
24 Further evidence for Liú Yǔxī’s attitudes toward literate monks can be found in the preface to his poem “Parting with Master Hàochū at Hǎiyáng Lake” 海陽湖別浩初師, in which he marvels at Hàochū’s “grasp of outside teachings” 得執外教 and the “purity” of his poetry 為詩頗清, which, along with his ability to play chess, “brought him favor from the literati” 以取幸於士大夫 (Liú Yǔxī jiānzhèng 29.965; QTS 362.4086). Though this depiction is flattering, it is condescending, and further reaffirms the monk-literatus distinction. In the preface to another exchange poem, Liú worries that when his fellow Confucian literati see him reading Buddhist writings, they will “blame me for being dragged into Buddhism after becoming sleepy, saying that there are two Ways” 諉予困而後授
Língchè’s literary skills would eventually lead to a trip to the capital, during which he became involved in court politics. Liú Yǔxī continues:

貞元中，西遊京師，名振輦下。緇流疾之，造飛語激動中貴人，因侵誣得罪，徙汀州，會赦歸東越。時吳、楚間諸侯多賓禮招延之。元和十一年，終於宣州開元寺，年七十有一。門人遷之，建塔於越之山陰天柱峰之陲，從本教也。

In the Zhēnyuán era [785-805], he traveled westward to the capital, where his reputation resounded up to the emperor. Then, when the black robes [i.e., monks] became jealous of him, rumors were invented to agitate the eunuchs, and he was found guilty because of this slander. Because of this, he moved to Tīngzhōu until the general amnesty [805], when he returned to Eastern Yuè. At that time, the aristocrats of Wú and Chǔ often invited him in as their guest of honor. In Yuánhé 11 [816], he passed away at the Kāiyuán Temple in Xuānzhōu at the age of 71. His disciples moved his body to a pagoda built near the shady side of a peak at the Pillar of Heaven (Tiānzhù) Mountains, in accordance with his instructions.

The Zhēnyuán era is one of the heights of royal patronage for Buddhism during the Táng dynasty. During this time, Emperor Dézōng 德宗 (r. 779–805) sponsored the repair of dilapidated monasteries, the establishment of a translation institute, and the enshrinement of the relic of the Buddha’s finger bone at Fǎmén temple 法門寺. The eunuchs, many of whom were high-ranking generals, are also said to have been devout Buddhists.25 Perhaps the imperial favors were distributed unevenly. Perhaps the entrenched court monks tried to quash any competition as soon as it came to their attention. There are no other records of this incident aside from this passage. Whatever it was, the charges were serious enough to send Língchè packing for the far south, all the way to Tīngzhōu (in modern Fújiàn province), until he could move back to his home region when a general amnesty was declared. There he was again fêted by the cognoscenti of Jiāngnán, a hometown hero who could tell tales of the glorious capital and the southern wilds.

25 See Weinstein, Buddhism under the T’ang, 95–99.
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Liú Yūxī’s biographical summary of Língchè’s life in many ways mirrors Liú’s own story. Liú was also a prodigy who traveled to the capital and rubbed shoulders with the highest bureaucrats, only to fall victim to political factionalism and be exiled to the deep south before a rehabilitation late in life. He relates some of this story as he tells of his personal interactions with Língchè.

初，上人在吳興，居何山，與晝公為侶。時予方以兩髦執筆硯，陪其吟詠，皆曰孺子可教。後相遇於京、洛，與支、許之契焉。上人沒後十七年，予為吳郡，其門人秀峰捧先師之文來乞詞以誌，且曰：「師嘗在吳，賦詩近二千首，今刪去三百篇，勒為十卷。自大曆至元和，凡五十年間，接詞客聞人酬唱，別為十卷。今也思行乎昭世，求一言羽翼之。」

Early on, Venerable Língchè lived at Mt. Hé in Wúxīng and was a companion of Jiǎorán. At that time, I served as the child holding his brush and inkstone, accompanying him as he chanted. Everyone called me “a child worth teaching.” Later, we met in the capital at Luòyáng, and were as close as Zhī Dùn and Xǔ Xún. When the Venerable Língchè had been gone for seventeen years [c. 833], and I was serving in Wú commandery, his disciple Xiūfēng took his master’s writings to me and requested words for a memorial. He said: “My master was regularly in Wú and wrote nearly 2,000 poems, which I have pared down to 300 and put into 10 fascicles. Throughout the 50 years from the Dàlì [776-779] to the Yuánhé era [805-820], I have asked poets for their exchange poems with him, which comprise another 10 fascicles. Today, I wish to circulate these works to illuminate the world. I beseech you for one sentence of assistance.”

Liú Yūxī knew and admired Língchè as a child, serving him as a scribe on at least one occasion. This fact serves to elevate both men in the eyes of the reader: those who already admire Língchè

26 More specifically, Liú Yūxī was banished after the failure of Emperor Shùnzōng’s 順宗 (r. 805–806) reforms and his subsequent abdication. By hinting at the fact that Língchè was forced out of the capital around the same time (post-Zhēnyuàn and pre-amnesty), Liú strengthens the parallels between their life stories.

27 This alludes to a phrase from the biography of Zhāng Liáng 張良 (d. 186 BCE) in Shìjì 55.2034–35. According to a well-known anecdote, the young Zhāng once met an old man on a bridge who instructed him to grab the man’s shoes and put them on his feet for him. Though annoyed, Zhāng obliged because of the man’s age. The elder man called Zhāng “a child worth teaching.”

28 These meetings between Liú Yūxī and Língchè must have taken place prior to 805. As for the monk Zhī Dùn 支遁 and the literatus Xǔ Xún 許询, their friendship is recounted in an anecdote found in New Account of Tales of the World 世說新語: “Zhī Dùn, Xǔ Xún, and other persons were once gathered at the villa of the Prince of Kuáijí, Simá Yù. Zhī acted as dharma master and Xǔ as discussant. Whenever Zhī explained an interpretation there was no one present who was not completely satisfied, and whenever Xǔ delivered an objection everyone applauded and danced with delight. But in every case they were filled with admiration for the forensic skill of the two performers, without the slightest discrimination regarding the content of their respective arguments.” See Shíshūo xīnyū jiǔshū, “Wénxué” 文學, no. 40 (4.227); translation adapted from Mather, Shih-shuo Hsin-yü, 120.
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will feel a sense of kinship with Liú and perhaps see him as an heir to the monk’s poetic style, while those who already admire Liú will now look up to Língchè since they know the latter was once the former’s teacher. He creates a virtuous circle of mutually reinforcing reputations. After this line, Liú gives us the highlights of his interaction with the eminent monk, skipping over vast swaths of time, from Liú’s childhood in the 780s, to their meeting in the capital around 805, to the disciple’s request for a preface in 833.

Most interestingly, Liú recounts the process of producing and promoting Língchè’s poetry. First, his disciple Xiùfēng is responsible for collecting his master’s corpus of 2,000 poems and selecting the best 300 for inclusion in the definitive edition. In this he follows the strict guidelines of the classicist tradition, which maintains that Confucius himself edited down the canonical Book of Odes 詩經 to its 300 most edifying poems. These monks are imitating their secular counterparts, with the disciple taking on the role of the son responsible for his father’s literary reputation. Second, Xiùfēng makes an additional, smaller collection of his master’s verse, of Língchè’s exchanges with the notable poets of his time (probably including Yán Wéi, Jiáorán, Bāo Jí, Lì Shū, and Liú Yǔxī himself) and those poets’ exchanges with him.29 Xiùfēng’s aim in making this collection, no doubt, was to bolster his master’s reputation by drawing on the social capital of the better known poets. This was common practice among Mid-Táng literati,30 and it should not surprise us to see poet-monks adopting the same strategy. The effect was roughly analogous to a modern publicist’s press kit featuring blurbs from respected writers or scholars. It was a way of signaling to potential readers the importance and acceptability of the subject’s work.

29 This is probably the “Collection of Exchange Poetry by the Monk Língchè in Ten Fascicles” 僧靈徹詶唱集十卷 listed in the eleventh-century imperial catalogue preserved in Xīn Ťângshū 60.1624. Today, a mere 16 of his poems survive, along with a handful of fragments. See QTS 810.9131–34. On “smaller collections” (xiǎoji 小集) of an author’s works, see Owen, “The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang,” 304–12.
30 See Shields, One Who Knows Me, 139; and Nugent, Manifest in Words, 210–12.
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Liú’s notes conclude with another strategy for promoting Língchè: an evaluation of the new phenomenon of poet-munks, drawing out what he vaguely alluded to in the opening of his essay.

Because I offer my evaluation: What the world calls “poet-munks” mostly come from southeast of the Great River. Língyī traced the source, then Hùguó came after him. Qīngjiāng stirred up the wave, and Fǎzhèn flowed along after him. They played their unique rhymes which made it into men’s ears for a moment, but they weren’t the tones of grand music. Only Jiāorán of Wǔxīng was able to master all forms of poetry. After Jiāorán, Língchè succeeded him.31 For example, his poem “Lotuses at Yuánxin Temple” says: “Sūtras come to White Horse temple / A monk arrives in Redcrow year.”32 And “In Exile in Tīngzhōu” says: “Green flies act as mourners / On yellow ears are sent letters home.”33 These can be said to be the territory of a creator—why consider him to be prominent among only the world of poet-munks?

The poet-munks, Liú tells us, are both a recent and a local phenomenon. Though they had distant roots in the Wénxuàn writers, it was Língyī who led the way for the monks of the eighth century. He “traced the source,” that is, drew out and channeled the headwaters, and became the start of a new tradition. Língyī, like Língchè and all the other poet-munks mentioned here, is from the Jiāngnán region and spent the majority of his life there. The water metaphors continue, as the other poet-munks contribute to the flow, but all stay within their own stream. That is, the poet-munks mentioned here are isolated geographically, socially, and literarily. Moreover, they are a flash flood: strong and sudden, but quick to ebb away. Their songs “made it into men’s ears for a moment, but they weren’t the tones of grand music.” If we had only these men, the poet-munks would be little more than a fad.

31 For biographical information on all these monks, see Appendix A.
32 “White Horse temple”: located in Luòyáng, where Buddhism reputedly first came to China in 64 CE. “Redcrow”: an auspicious bird, thus a “Redcrow year” is an auspicious year.
33 “Yellow ears”: dogs.
But Jiǎorán was an exception. Unlike the other poet-monks who float along in their own stream, he is “able to master all forms of poetry.” Jiǎorán is the first poet-monk who is worth listening to as a poet in his own right, not just as a curious hybrid of poet and monk. He deserves this respect because he exhibits a thorough knowledge of literary genres and literary history. To Liú Yūxī, a “poet-monk” is a monk who plays at poetry—like a “female author” or “black poet” in early 21st century American literary discourse, the poet-monk is primarily defined according to his non-literary identity. The scholar-official, by contrast, is an “unmarked” writer whose social status is not made visible (functionally equivalent to the American white male author).

Only Jiǎorán is able to transcend his markedness, due to a versatility which demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the literary tradition. And Língchè is the only one who inherits his mantle. The very last lines of the preface state directly what Liú had been hinting at all along: he is more than your run-of-the-mill versifier; he is a creator.

The term I translate here as “creator,” zuòzhě 作者, is highly charged. Although it could in some cases simply mean “writer” (in the Táng as it does today), it often harkened back to the words of the “Record of Music” 樂記 from the classic Book of Rites 禮記.

故知禮樂之情者，能作；識禮樂之文者，能述。作者之謂聖；述者之謂明。明、聖者，述、作之謂也。

Therefore, those who understand the inherent condition of rites and music are capable of creating [them]. Those who are familiar with the ornamental patterns of rites and music are capable of transmitting [them]. The creators are known as sagely, and the transmitters are known as bright. The bright and the sagely are other words for transmitting and creating.

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34 This is a common evaluation of Jiǎorán. For an articulation of it in English, see Owen, The Great Age of Chinese Poetry, 288.
35 Etymologically, zuò 作 first meant “to arise” (qǐ 起) and then, by extension, “to give rise to,” whence we get the later meaning of “make, create.” See Shuōwén jiézì 8.3b.
36 See Lǐjì 19.669; translation adapted from Legge, Li Chi, 2:100.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

A creator is one who grasps the very nature of the two pillars of Chinese civilization: the rites of the state cult and the music which brings people under its righteous influence. His arts conform to the patterns of proper civilization. He is a sage. Allusion to this concept crops us repeatedly in the Táng, and by the end of the dynasty it is one of the highest compliments a poet can receive.

When Liú Yúxī calls Língchè a creator, he is saying that the monk is a full participant in the production of Chinese civilization according to its classicist norms. He transcends the other poet-monks; he participates in mainstream, Confucian culture.

So “poet-monk” is hardly a flattering term during the late eighth and early ninth century. It is a social label used mainly by the literati to classify a group of monks from the Jiāngnán region who tried their hands at poetry. The classically trained official is the unmarked literatus, free to be defined by his literary ability. The poet-monk, in contrast, must be defined and named by his social role, being a religious professional. Their songs fail to enter the great stream of the classical tradition. What is implied by such remarks is that poetry itself was seen as essentially a literati activity and thus the poet-monk as a curious newcomer, a religious play-acting at being a

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37 See, e.g., the Record of Music: “Ritual, music, punishment, and governance are one in the end: they are means by which the people’s minds are unified, producing the Way of order” 禮樂刑政，其極一也，所以同民心而出治道也 (in Lǐjì 19.663). For a discussion of this passage and other early texts on music and governance, see Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 49–56.

38 On allusions to this in the Táng, see, for example, the opening of Lí Huá 李華 (715?–774), “Preface to the Literary Collection of Lí Mián, Filial Duke of Qīnghé, Sent to the Minister of the Bureau of Rites” 贈禮部尚書清河孝公崔沔集序: “Literary writings [should] have their roots in creators, and joy and sorrow [should] be tied to the times. When they are rooted in creators, they are records of the six classics. When they are tied to the times, they delight in the civil and martial and lament for Kings Yōu and Lì” 文章本乎作者，而哀樂係乎時。本乎作者，六經之誌也；係乎時者，樂文武而哀幽厲也 (QTW 315.3196). For more on Lí Huá’s theory of civilization, see McMullen, “Historical and Literary Theory in the Mid-Eighth Century.” See also Jiǎorán’s opening remarks in Shīshì: “As for the function [of poetry], letting loose one’s intentions must be perilous and fixing lines must be hard. Though what I grab hold of is from within myself, what I attain is the face of the divine. Those lines full of heavenly truth, which vie with Creation—their meaning can be grasped, but it’s hard to put it into words. If one is not a creator, one cannot understand them.” 其作用也，放意須險，定句須難。雖取由我衷，而得若神表。至如天真挺拔之句，與造化爭衡，可以意會，難以言狀，非作者不能知也 (Shīshì jiàozhǔ, 1.1; Quán Táng-Wūdài shígē huìkǎo, 222; cf. Williams, “A Taste of the Ocean,” 12). On “creator” as high praise in the late Táng, see also Guǎnxǐ’s eulogistic poems for Líu Dérén, Jiǎ Dào, and Zhūgě Jué, “Reading the Poetry Collections of Líu Dérén and Jiǎ Dào: 1 of 2” 齋讀劉得仁賈島集二首 (其一) (Hú Dàjùn 7.368–71; QTS 829.9340) and “Thinking of Zhūgě Jué: 1 of 2” 怀諸葛覺二首 (其一) (Hú Dàjùn 9.471–73; QTS 830.9354).

39 On “mainstream” Mid-Táng literary culture, see DeBlasi, Reform in the Balance, 3–7.
writer. Jiăorán and Lingchè are the exceptions that prove the rule. They are chimeras, composed of both Buddhist and writerly parts. They are monks, but they are also creators—idealized practitioners of classical rites and songs who could sway the minds of the people. Poet-monks were not yet fully accepted due to their geographic and cultural isolation. Soon, however, they would tread the path to the cultural center, a path which led to Cháng‘ān.

2.2 820–860: The Spread to the Capital

As we move into the ninth century, to the latter half of the Mid Táng and into that period normally designated as the Late Táng, the fame of Jiăorán and Lingchè spread beyond Jiăngnán, and with it the idea of the poet-monk. In particular, poet-monks began to flow into the capital, Cháng‘ān, which functioned as the cultural as well as the political center of the Táng (see section 2.3 below). The largest city on earth at the time, it was where fortunes were made: examinees and eunuchs, merchants and mandarins, priests and prostitutes converged in this most cosmopolitan of cities. The corridor between Cháng‘ān and the secondary capital Luọyáng was home to an overwhelming majority of elite families, including those of poets and their patrons.40 Though the emperors could be fickle in their support of Buddhism, the capital provided ample opportunities for the enterprising poet-monk.

2.2.1 Poetry as Upāya: Bái Jūyì and Poet-monks in the 820s

Into the early ninth century, the term “poet-monk” retained its more narrow meaning. It could not yet be applied to any Buddhist monk who wrote poetry; rather, it appears to refer specifically to the group of Jiăngnán monks associated with Lingyī, Jiăorán, and their circle. By

40 On the importance of the capital corridor, see Tackett, The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy, esp. 82–88. For a brief overview of Cháng‘ān as the center of late Táng literary culture, see Feng, City of Marvel and Transformation, 6–9. On Cháng‘ān generally, see Xiong, Sui-Tang Chang‘an. In mainland Chinese scholarship, “Cháng‘ān studies” is such a large topic that it has become a subfield in its own right. For a recent example, see Táng yánjiū 唐研究 21 (2015), a special issue devoted to the topic.
the 820s, however, we begin to see a change. The term started to move beyond its birthplace and into the capital region, where it would be picked up by some and resisted by others. Bái Jūyi 白居易 (772–846), the ardent poet and lay Buddhist, had traveled to Jiāngnán twice during this time (822–824 in Hángzhōu, 825–826 in Sūzhōu). When he arrived back in Cháng’ān after his second stint in Jiāngnán, he wrote a poem for a monk who was particularly skilled in literature named Dàozōng 道宗. In the process of evaluating the monk’s work, Bái’s preface debates the worthiness of the earlier poet-monk group and finds them lacking.

Preface to “Ten Rhymes Inscribed for the Venerable Dàozōng” 題道宗上人十韻序

Bái Jūyi 白居易

普濟寺律大德宗上人法堂中，有故相國鄭司徒、歸尚書、陸刑部、元少尹及今吏部鄭相、中書韋相、錢左丞詩，覽其題，皆與上人唱酬，閱其文皆義語，予始知上人之文為義作，為法作，為方便智作，為解脫性作，不為詩而作也。知上人者云爾，恐不知上人者，謂為護國、法振、靈一、皎然之徒與？故予題二十句以解之。

In the dharma hall of the lawful, most virtuous Venerable Dàoyī in Pǔjì temple, there were poems by former ministers of state: Minister of Education Zhèng, Minister Guī, Minister of Justice Lù, and Vice Governor Yuán, as well as Administrator Zhèng of the Ministry of Personnel, Administrator Wéi of the Central Secretariat, and Assistant Director of the Left Qián. All of the inscriptions I saw were responses to the venerable monk, all the people I saw were court worthies, and all the writings I inspected were words of rightness. And so I began to understand that the Venerable One’s works were written for the sake of rightness, for the sake of the Dharma, for the sake of upāya-wisdom, and for the sake of liberation, but not merely for the sake of poetry. Those who understood the Venerable One spoke of him this way, but I fear that those who don’t understand the Venerable One would consider him a disciple of Hùguó, Fǎzhèn, Lingyī, and Jiǎorán. Thus I write these twenty lines to explain this.

41 Zhū Jīnchéng, Bái Jūyì jì jiānjìao 21.1445–49; QTS 444.4978. This work was probably written some time in 827–828.
42 Technically, this means the “most virtuous one of the vinaya.” The term “most virtuous one” (dàdé 大德) is a translation of the Sanskrit bhadanta, used as an address for eminent monks.
43 Minister of Education Zhèng: Zhèng Yúqìng 鄭餘慶 (746–820); Minister Guī: Guī Dēng 歸登 (754–820); Minister of Justice Lù: unknown; Vice Governor Yuán: Yuán Zōngjiān 元宗簡 (jinshi 799); Administrator Zhèng of the Ministry of Personnel: Zhèng Yǐn 鄭鎰 (752–829); Administrator Wéi of the Central Secretariat: Wéi Chūhòu 韋處厚 (773–828); Assistant Director of the Left Qián: Qián Huī 錢徽 (755–829).
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

There are some parallels here with Liú Yūxī’s preface to Língchè’s works. Bái Jūyi’s evidence for Dàozōng’s literary skill is indirect. He refers to exchange poetry Dàozōng received from prominent officials, not to quotations from the monk’s own poetry. He never mentions actually reading Dàozōng’s works, only other people’s responses to it. This is the same strategy that Língchè’s disciple used to promote his master’s work and Gāo Zhòngwǔ used to justify his selection of Lingyī’s poems for his anthology—drawing on the social capital of his connections. These monks can be appreciated because they have been endorsed by trustworthy writers. Bái Jūyi is swayed by the promotional material.

More telling are the differences. Whereas Liú Yūxī praised Língchè and Jiǎorán for their literary skills, calling them “creators,” Bái Jūyi praises Dàozōng for precisely the opposite reason, that is, because he subordinates his literary activity to the propagation of the Dharma. Although some fools—namely, “those who don’t understand the Venerable One”—associate Dàozōng with the poet-monks, those who truly get him (like Bái) understand that this is not right. As an exemplary monk, Dàozōng writes for the sake of lofty Buddhist ideals, not for the sake of poetry. To Bái Jūyi, the earlier poet-monks were mere aesthetes masquerading as monks, and Dàozōng should not be considered part of their lineage. Poetry, then, should not be considered an end in itself but rather a form of upāya (Ch. fāngbiàn 方便), an adaptive pedagogical tool. Like a raft, it must be abandoned once you have crossed the river. Otherwise, words will weigh you down.

But in this difference we find another commonality with Liú’s preface to Língchè’s works: “poet-monk” is a term of disparagement. In order to praise Língchè and Jiǎorán, Liú must claim that they cannot be contained by that term. Likewise, in order to praise Dàozōng, Bái must distinguish him from the original poet-monks. Either way, these literati cannot esteem these
monks while they still fall under the label of “poet-monk.” A poet-monk is never a real poet. Either he does not have sufficient literary skill to truly “enter the stream” (as Liú says of Lingyī et al.), or he overindulges in frivolous verbiage (as Bái says of Lingyī et al.), or he uses poetry to spread Buddhist wisdom (as Bái says of Dàozōng), or he completely transcends the category of “poet-monk” (as Liú says of Língchè). In none of these cases, however, can a poet-monk really be a poet in the same way that a literatus is one.

Bái Jūyi’s poem further clarifies his position, praising the instrumentality of Dàozōng’s verses.

**Ten Rhymes Inscribed for the Venerable Dàozōng 題道宗上人十韻**

Bái Jūyi 白居易

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>以詩爲佛事</td>
<td>Makes poetry his Buddha-work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>一音無差別</td>
<td>No deviation or disparity from the One Sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>四句有詮次</td>
<td>A definite order to his quatrains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>欲使第一流</td>
<td>He wants to serve the very best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>皆知不二義</td>
<td>And in all cases understands the idea of non-duality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>精潔霑戒體</td>
<td>Pure and clean, [his poems are] imbued with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the forms of precepts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>閒淡藏禪味</td>
<td>Relaxed and light, they carry the flavor of meditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>從容恣語言</td>
<td>At ease, they give free rein to language,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>繽紛離文字</td>
<td>Dim and distant, they leave behind words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>旁延邦國彥</td>
<td>To the sides, they reach scholars of neighboring states,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>上達王公貴</td>
<td>Above, they touch kings, dukes, and nobles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>先以詩句牽</td>
<td>First they draw you in with poetic lines,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>後令人佛智</td>
<td>Then they draw you in to Buddhist wisdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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44 Doctrine-discussions: a technical Buddhist term, Chinese translation of the Sanskrit upadeśa, referring to expositions of doctrine in catechistic format.

45 Buddha-work: a translation of buddha-kṛtya, this term refers to the daily practices prescribed for Buddhist adherents (prayers, worship, rites, etc.).

46 One Sound: the single, unified truth of the Buddha-Dharma.

47 All the descriptions from here to line 16 could refer either to Dàozōng himself or to his poems: in classical Chinese, there is no clear subject. In a sense, the distinction is moot because among the hyperliterate elites of medieval China, one’s writings were considered an extension of one’s person (similar to the identification of textual and physical bodies). For more on this idea of “distributed personhood,” see section 4.2.1 of this dissertation.
Many people love the master’s lines, but only I understand the master’s intent. It’s not like the Venerable Huixiū’s, whose many blue-cloud thoughts were in vain.

Just as in the preface, Bái Jūyi praises Dàozōng for his poetry as a means to understand Buddhism. Although lines 3–6 seem to hint at an equation between the two, it is clearly the religious practices that are given primacy. After all, Dàozōng “makes poetry his Buddha-work,” not the other way around: Buddha-work is the end goal. There is historical precedent for writing this kind of poetry: Buddha and bodhisattvas used verse to expound their teachings (lines 1–2). Though later generations would say that “the flavor of meditation” is antithetical to true poetry, Bái praises it here (lines 9–10). Dàozōng’s poems dazzle with the wonders of finely crafted language, but their ultimate goal is to leave language behind (lines 11–12). In this he is superior to Huixiū, the monk whose work was immortalized in the Wénxuăn (lines 19–20). Huixiū was the chief antecedent of the Mid-Táng poet-monks, and like his successors, he is said to have invested too much effort into poetry written for its own sake, not for the sake of teaching Buddhist doctrine and practice.

Indeed, Bái describes Dàozōng as having a two-step process for spreading Buddhism to the Táng literati: use poetry to draw them in, then once they have been hooked, bring them into contact with Buddhist wisdom (lines 15–16). In this way, elite verse written by monks is little more than a highbrow version of the “Song of the Realization of the Way” 證道歌, a popular tune of the early ninth century that outlines the essentials of meditative practice. This was a

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48 The second couplet of Huixiū’s “Sorrows of Parting” reads: “The sunset merges with clouds in the blue, / The fine one, faraway, has yet to come” 日暮碧雲合，佳人殊未來 (Wénxuăn 31.1480).
49 In a poem to a monk, the early Qing literatus Shū Wèi 舒位 went so far as to say that “the flavor of meditation is like a shit stick” 禪味如是乾屎橛. Quoted in Chén Qíyuán 陳其元 (1812–1882), Yongxiānzhāi bǐjì 庸閒齋筆記, 12.290. A “shit stick,” more commonly known as a “toilet rod” (cèchóu 厕籌), is a wooden stick used to clean oneself after defecation, used in early India and described in the Vinaya, supposed to be one hand span of the Buddha and four finger breadths in length. See Heirman and Torck, A Pure Mind in a Clean Body, 67–107, for more on these objects and other Buddhist toilet practices.
common attitude amongst literati sympathetic to Buddhism. Liáng Sü 梁肅 (753–793), for example, describes his friendship with a monk named Língzhǎo 靈沼 thus: “At first we came together through literature; later we connected through the Way” 初用文合，晚以道交. 50 Elsewhere, in his stūpa epitaph for a monk simply known as “Reverend Lǜ 律和尚 (692–772), Liáng Sü describes the Reverend’s “Confucian-Buddhist travels” 儒釋之遊 with such luminaries as Hè Zhīzhāng 賀知章 (659–744) and Lǐ Yōng 李邕 (675–747) and relates how he used such friendships to promote Buddhist practice: “In leading his contemporaries, he always first moved them with literature and then more broadly fixed them down with precepts” 其導世皆先之以文行，宏之以戒定. 51 This was the simplest way of reconciling Buddhist and literary practice, one which predated the phenomenon of poet-monks. A monk’s writing, in this view, should always be motivated by proselytism and didacticism. It is different in kind from the writing of literati—even if this difference is praised by sympathetic readers and writers such as Liáng Sü and Bái Jūyi.

But Bái Jūyi was nothing if not a man of contradiction, and perhaps his views on poet-monks were more complicated than this one preface lets on. This may have been because he saw a little bit of himself in them. A leading literary figure since attaining his jinshi degree at the age of 28, Bái became increasingly drawn to Buddhism in his later years. 52 The two concerns of the

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50 See his “Preface: Seeing off the Venerable Língzhǎo on His Journey to Shòuyáng” 送靈沼上人遊壽陽序 in QTW 518.5268. For more on Liáng Sü, see Jiǎng Yǐn, Dàlì shén rén yánjū, 570–99.
51 See his “Stūpa Epitaph for the Reverend Lǜ of Kāiyuán Temple in Yuēzhōu” 越州開元寺律和尚塔碑銘 in QTW 520.5288.
52 Burton Watson identifies 815 as the year that Bái Jūyi’s interest in Buddhist began to grow (Watson, “Buddhism in the Poetry of Po Chü-i,” 7). Luó Liántiān 羅聯添 has shown that Bái showed interest and familiarity with Buddhism in his early years, began to read widely in the Buddhist scriptures and exchange more poems with monks in the early Yuánhé era (806–821), and was engaged in more serious devotional activities near the end of his life (Luó Liántiān, “Bái Jūyi yǔ Fó-Dào guànxì chóngtàn”). Nevertheless, Bái longed for material comfort even as he maintained an ideal of private cultivation. In 829, he coined the term “middling recluse” (zhōngyǐn 中隱) to describe
poet-monk, religious and poetic practice, were also his own, as he makes clear in another poem from the 820s.

Poem on Being Fond of Singing 愛詠詩
Bái Jūyì 白居易

辭章詠詠成千首 The phrases and stanzas I have sung come to a thousand; syuwX
2 心行歸依向一乘 My mind and actions take refuge in the One Vehicle. zying
坐倚繩床閑自念 Leaning back in a corded chair, I idly think to myself: nemH
4 前生應是一詩僧 In a previous life, I must have been a poet-monk. song

The first couplet establishes an opposition through antithetical parallelism: Bái has busied his life working to become a famous poet, but his true desire is to devote himself to the Dharma. The second couplet attempts to reconcile this opposition: he sits in a monk’s seat and self-deprecatingly imagines himself as a poet-monk in one of his past lifetimes. Just as with “Ten Rhymes Inscribed for the Venerable Dàozōng,” Buddhist doctrine and ritual take precedence over the work of poetry. But the resolution is ironic: Bái Jūyì, a poet obsessed with Buddhism, in a previous lifetime was a Buddhist monk obsessed with poetry. In both lifetimes, there is a slight misalignment between his profession and his obsession. As a monk, he wasted his time writing poetry; as a poet, his mind seeks after the true Dharma. It is almost as if he is paying off a karmic debt in his current lifetime, getting his previous life’s wishes bitterly fulfilled. Elsewhere, in fact,

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This approach. On the “middling recluse,” see Yang, Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere, 36–50; and Jia, “The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism and Tang Literati,” 189–224.
53 Zhū Jīncéng, Bái Jūyì jí jiānjīào 23.1579; QTS 446.5010. Zhū arbitrarily assigns this poem to the year 824, when Bái was serving as tutor to the crown prince in Luòyáng, but I have found no evidence, internal or external, for this. My own hypothesis is that it was written sometime after “Ten Rhymes Inscribed for the Venerable Dàozōng” (827–828).
54 One Vehicle: the way of the bodhisattva, in which all other traditions of Buddhism are harmonized.
55 Corded chair 繩床: a kind of fixed-frame chair with a back and sides, as well as a seat made of rattan, on which one could sit cross-legged for meditation. It is described by the pilgrims Xuánzàng 玄奘 (602–664) and Yìjìng 義浄 (635–713) in their Indian travelogues. Because it features prominently in translated scriptures, it became a staple of Buddhist monasteries by the Táng dynasty. For more on the corded chair, see Kieschnick, The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture, 236–40.
he did express that his prolific literary output was likely due to a “poetry debt” from a previous lifetime.\textsuperscript{56} One hopes that he finally found balance in his next rebirth.

To Bái Jūyì, then, “poet-monk” still referred to a specific group of Jiāngnán poets and was a term of marginalization. A monk who indulged in the writing of frivolous poetry was not living up to his duties, even if Bái could sympathize with his conflicted interests. The ideal monk Dàozōng used his literary skills to pique the literati’s interest in Buddhism but made sure never to end the conversation there. Like Bái Jūyì’s “new yuèfǔ” 新樂府 which utilized poetic forms to achieve Confucian ends—namely, praise and blame of those in power—poetry written by Buddhists should make use of literature for Buddhist ends.\textsuperscript{57} Those who get caught up in literature may be punished by being reborn as a lay Buddhist poet. Nevertheless, Bái’s writings reveal that the idea of the “poet-monk” was spreading beyond Jiāngnán and into the capital region, even if it was not a title that one should claim proudly. This idea of the separation between the two practices would continue throughout most of the ninth century, but a new aesthetic ideal—one of suffering and difficulty—soon emerged to shape both.

\textit{2.2.2 Jiǎ Dào, Wúkě, and the Next Generation}

\textsuperscript{56} See “Fifteen Poems in Illness: Explaining Myself” 病中詩十五首自解 (Bái Jūyì jí jiānjiào 35.2395; QTS 458.5199), in which he writes:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
我亦定中觀宿命 & I have observed my previous existences \[0.5em]
多生債負是歌詩 & is songs and poems. \[0.5em]
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{57} The “new yuèfǔ” 新樂府 of Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846), Yuán Zhēn 元稹 (779–831), and Lǐ Shēn 李紳 (772–846), which dates to about 802–810, sought to bring back the old idea of verse as a vehicle for the praise and blame of those in power. Among the key points was that they would use “direct and cutting” language 言直而切 (from Bái Jūyì’s preface to “New Yuèfǔ” 新樂府序, QTS 426.4689; Zhū Jǐnchéng, Bái Jūyì jí jiānjiào 3.136) and “no longer fall back on [convention]” 無復依傍 (from Yuán Zhēn’s 元稹 description of Dù Fǔ’s yuèfǔ titles in “Preface to Yuèfǔ under Old Titles” 樂府古題序, Zhōu Xiànglù, Yuán Zhēn jí jiàozhù 23.674). As Bái Jūyì summed it up in his own preface: “I write these for the lord, for the vassals, for the people, for things, and for events; I do not write these for the sake of literary refinement” 為君、為臣、為民、為物、為事而作，不為文而作也 (QTS 426.4689; Zhū Jǐnchéng, Bái Jūyì jí jiānjiào 3.136). For a recent, annotated edition of Bái Jūyì’s new yuèfǔ poems, see Chén Xiāng, Bái Jūyì “xīn yuèfǔ” 注解.
In 810–811, a little over a decade before Bái’s writings on poet-monks, a young monk named Wúběn 無本 (779–843) came from the distant northeast to the capital corridor, scrolls of his own poetry in tow, to seek fame for himself. His work caught the attention of the powerful literatus Hán Yù 韓愈 (768–824), and the two maintained a correspondence in verse for a time. He would spend most of his life in the capital region, living and exchanging poems with Yáo Hé 姚合 (775?–855?) and his younger cousin Wúkě 無可. Though he enjoyed the company of the era’s most important poets, Wúběn was never content to lead a monastic life, and, somewhere along the way (likely in 812), decided to laicize so that he could take the imperial exams. He failed, remaining discontent for many years, until finally being directly appointed to a minor post in the Sichuān backwater of Chángjiāng in Suīzhōu 遂州長江 in the year 837, at the age of 57. He is better known to history by his secular name, Jiǎ Dào 賈島.

Due to his early life as a monk, there is a strand of criticism which regards Jiǎ Dào as essentially a poet-monk. This line of discourse usually bases itself on Ōuyáng Xiū’s 歐陽修 (1007–1072) comment that “Jiǎ Dào was once a monk, therefore he had this flavor of austerity and stillness which also manifested itself in his poetry in such a way” 島嘗為衲子，故有此枯

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58 For an overview of Jiǎ Dào’s life, see Lǐ Jiāyān, Jiǎ Dào niànpǔ, supplemented by corrections in Fù Xuāncóng, Tǎng cáozī zhuan jìaojìān, 2:5.314–36 and 5:5.220–22. For a translation of some of his poems into English, see the creative renderings of Mike O’Connor, When I Find You Again It Will Be in the Mountains. These, however, overemphasize Jiǎ Dào’s religious commitments and make more than a few interpretive blunders, so it is best read with William Nienhauser’s review, “The Other Side of the Mountain,” in mind. Aside from Owen’s subsection on Jiǎ Dào in The Late Táng (123–31), the only extensive study of him in English is Catherine Witzling’s 1980 dissertation, “The Poetry of Chia Tao (779–843): A Re-examination of Critical Stereotypes.” Traditional Chinese scholarship mainly discusses Jiǎ Dào as a lesser figure in the Hán Yù-Méng Jǐào literary circle of the Mid Táng or else rail against his decadent, negative influence. However, several recent essays have argued for granting him a greater place in Táng literary history. For an overview of Chinese-language scholarship from 1980 to 2000, see Zhāng Zhēnyīng, Hánshì de diyín, 131–56. For recent studies on his importance in the history of Táng poetry, see Zhōu Yúkǎi, “Jiǎ Dào gé shìgē yǔ Chánzōng guānxī zhī yānjū”; Jiǎng Yín, “Jiǎ Dào yǔ Zhōng-Wān Táng shīgē de yìxiānghuà jìncéng”; and Zhāng Zhēnyīng, Shǐyì de níngjū. The articles collected in Zhāng Zhēnyīng’s two books represent the best work on Jiǎ Dào in any language at the time of this writing. On the date of Jiǎ Dào’s laicization, see Bái Àipíng, “Jiǎ Dào wéi sēng ji huánsú shījiān dìdiǎn kāo.”
This line is a clearly an attempted stereotyping of Jiǎ’s verse by referring to his monastic identity. It is dismissive. This is especially clear when we look at the context in which these remarks appear.

This purpose of this passage is not only to mock rhetorical excess in poetry; it is also to poke fun at Buddhists. Ōuyáng’s promotion of “ancient-style prose” 古文 and disdain for Buddhism are well-established and need not be elaborated on here.

To Ōuyáng, Jiǎ’s Buddhist youth permanently set him on the wrong path toward illogic and abuse of language.

This line of discourse appears repeatedly in criticism of the late imperial period and culminated in its most forceful expression in an essay by Wén Yīduō 聞一多 (1899–1946),
which declares Jià Dào’s influence on nearly two centuries of poets to be negative, diverting them from the observation of real life in order to craft exquisite couplets. One of the reasons for this, says Wén, is that Jià Dào was at heart a monk, not a true literatus:

我們若承認一個人前半輩子的蒲團生涯，不能因一旦反俗，便與他後半輩子完全無關，則現在的賈島，形貌上雖然是個儒生，骨子裏恐怕還有個釋子在。

We must admit that if someone has spent the first half of his life in a career of cattail mats [i.e., a monastic career], he cannot laicize in a day, leaving no connection whatsoever to the latter half of his life. So this Jià Dào, though he looks like a Confucian in all appearances, is still a monk in his bones.65

Like Ōuyáng Xiū, Wén Yīduō ties Jià Dào to his youth as a monk in order to cast doubt about his bona fides as part of the mainstream, Confucian literary tradition. As part of his project of constructing a modern Chinese literature, Wén needs to praise writers with aesthetics of “realism.” Monks, in this scheme, are cut off from the outside world, without any knowledge of real life, and therefore turn to craftsmanship instead.

The latest manifestation of this line of discourse is Zhāng Zhēnyīng’s essay on the “air of monastic robes” 僧衲氣 in Jià Dào’s poetry. In it, Zhāng describes Jià Dào as a poet-monk superior to Jiàorán, Língyī, Guànxī, Qǐjī, or Hánshān,66 one who is “Confucian on the outside and Zen on the inside” 外儒內禪.67 That is, he takes the negative line of criticism stretching from Ōuyáng Xiū to Wén Yīduō and turns it on its head. Though he makes Jià’s monasticism a positive attribute, he keeps the same terms of debate. According to Zhāng, one of the reasons Jià must be regarded as such is because many of his poems have a Buddhist setting, whether they be the paradigmatic “monkish” poet (Jiāngzhōu shǐhuà jiānzhù, 2.144). Cf. some similar remarks by Lù Shìyōng (mid-17th cent.) in “Shìjīng zōnglún,” 1.29.

65 Wén Yīduō, Tángshí zálún, 37.
66 Zhāng Zhēnyīng, Hánshì de diyīn, 60–61. For many reasons, most chiefly his limited integration with high literati culture (and the fact that a single “Hánshān” most likely did not exist), I do not regard Hánshān as a poet-monk.
67 Zhāng Zhēnyīng, Hánshì de diyīn, 66. Interestingly, Lǐ Dingguāng describes late Táng poet-munks in precisely the opposite way, saying that “they donned the external robes of religion but were still literati in their bones” 他们披着宗教的外衣，骨子里仍是文人 (Tángmò Wùdài luànshì wénxué yánjǐ, 52).
exchange poems with monks, other poems set at monasteries, or images which describe monastic life. Another reason is that he made use of Buddhist language and allusions in his works.

However, such Buddhist settings were common in Táng poetry: as Paul Demiéville pointed out many years ago, monasteries were as much sites of retreat for literati as they were sites of religious activity. There, the literati could escape court life, sip tea, discuss metaphysics with the monks, and publish their poetry by inscribing it on temple walls. Ji Đạo’s number of poems with a Buddhist setting is no greater than many other non-monastic poets of the ninth century. Moreover, in poems written for monks—whence all of Zhāng’s evidence for Ji Đạo’s Buddhist language comes—it was common among literati to sprinkle in a few allusions to Buddhist scriptures and practices. Any educated person in the Táng would have had a thorough enough knowledge of Buddhism to weave in a reference or two on the proper occasion. Writing verses on Buddhist people and places using discursive cues from Buddhism makes Ji Đạo nothing more than a typical early ninth-century poet, a participant in one of the most widely practiced subgenres of his day.

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68 Demiéville, “Tchan et poésie II,” 322–33.
69 Just under 26% of Ji Đạo’s exchange poems are directed to monks (73 out of 328). While this is higher than average, it is not rare for a non-monastic poet. Other ninth-century literati with equal or greater numbers include Lý Đồng 李洞 (35%), Zhāng Qiáo 張喬 (32%), and Cáo Sōng 曹松 (31%), and Wú Róng 吳融 (26%). For more detail, see Table 1 in chapter 4 of this dissertation.
70 For an overview of some of the ways the capital elites engaged Buddhist music, painting, architecture, tea culture, and ritual in their literary works, see Wáng Zāojūn, Tángdài Cháng ān fójiao wénxué, 76–121; on the rich tradition of poetry on the capital’s temples, see 166–93.
71 Zhāng also cites Ji Đạo’s scarcity and poor deployment of allusions as another reason he should be considered a poet-monk. Poet-monks, he claims, have a weak command of allusions, a phenomenon which “is directly related to the fact that monks read less and pay less attention to contemporary affairs” (Hànhshi de dīyín, 71). A mere glance over the works of Guànxū, Qǐjī, or Jiāorán would prove this point wrong (despite Zhāng’s claims to the contrary), as will become apparent in chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation. I do not mean to completely discount Zhāng’s essay: his remarks on the aesthetic fields of kǔ 苦 (bitterness, suffering) and jì 寂 (tranquility, solitude) and their relationship to Buddhist thought and practice (67–70) are quite insightful, and I will draw on them in those later chapters. His discussion of the differences between Wáng Wéi and Ji Đạo (72–75) is also very illuminating.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

In fact, though Jiǎ Dǎo was a monk until his early 30s, he was never called a poet-monk during his own lifetime or for several centuries after.\(^\text{72}\) The term is never applied to him in any contemporaneous records, and he never uses the term himself.\(^\text{73}\) Jiǎ Dǎo was not unfamiliar with the term, since he certainly would have heard it from his cousin Wúkě, who wrote a poem titled “Sent to a Poet-monk” 贈詩僧.\(^\text{74}\) Their mutual friend Yáo Hé in turn described Wúkě with this word in the opening of his poem “Sent to the Venerable Wúkě” 寄無可上人.\(^\text{72}\) These lines also show us how the term has changed since the Mid Táng.

十二門中寺 Of the temples within the twelve gates [of the capital],
詩僧寺獨幽 Only the poet-monk’s temple is secluded.

It is noteworthy that a capital-based poet is using this term to refer to a capital-based monk during the second quarter of the ninth century, without making an explicit reference to Jiǎorán’s circle.\(^\text{76}\) This is a sign that that the term has begun to lose its specificity: it no longer necessarily invokes the Jiāngnán monks of the late eighth century. This may be due to a wider circulation of the original group’s poems. The preface by Liú Yūxī, the famous man of letters who spent many years in the capital, may have given Língchè’s collection some legs. It may also be due to the fact that the original group of poet-monks had all passed away by now. Língchè, the youngest of them, died in 816, at least a decade prior to the time period under discussion. Their moment had,

\(^{72}\) The earliest evidence I have found of Jiǎ Dǎo being labeled a “poet-monk” comes from Yán Yǔ’s thirteenth-century Cānglǎng shīhùa, 1.15a. For this passage, see section 7.3 of this dissertation.

\(^{73}\) He appears to use the term in line 3 of “Seeing off Adjutant Wáng of Shān Prefecture” 送陝府王司馬, which reads, “You invited a poet-monk to stop by the waters of Threegate” 請詩僧過三門水. But the character shī 詩, “poet” is actually a manuscript error for chí 持, “upholding,” as attested in earlier editions. Thus, the line is referring to an “upholding monk,” i.e., one who upholds and venerates the scriptures. See Qi Wènbàng, Jiǎ Dǎo jī jiàozhù 9.442–43; Li Jiānkūn, Jiǎ Dǎo shìjì jiàozhù 9.354–55; Wényuàn yìnghuà 278.1441; and QTS 574.6678.

\(^{74}\) QTS 813.9154.

\(^{75}\) Wú Héqǐng 4.176–178; QTS 497.5644–45.

\(^{76}\) We can trace Wúkě during the years 823–843 based on references in his exchange poetry, but know almost nothing of his life before and after these two decades. The majority of this time was spent in Cháng’ān or nearby Wànnián 萬年, and is marked by datable exchanges with Yáo Hé. Though it is very hard to date this particular poem to a given year, a conservative guess would put it in the same twenty-year period as his other writings.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

it seemed, passed. As a new crop of poet-monks sprang up, they had no direct connection to their predecessors.

There is evidence for this new generation of poet-monks, with no direct connection to Línghè’s circle, in an exchange poem by Xǔ Hún 許渾 (788–860). He writes to a monk and a self-styled recluse, both of whom he describes in stereotyped terms.

Sent to the Venerable Zhòngyí of Tiānxīáng Temple and Recluse Sūn of Fúchūn 寄天鄉寺仲儀上人富春孫處士
Xǔ Hún 許渾

詩僧與釣翁 Poet-monks and old fisherman ʔuwwng
千里兩情通 Have sentiments which meet across a thousand miles. thuwng
雲帶雁門雪 Clouds bring Goosegate’s snow, ʔswjet
水連漁浦風 The water connects the fishing bank’s winds. ʔpjuwng
心期榮辱外 Your minds look beyond honor and shame, ʔngwajH
名掛是非中 Your names hang between true and false. ʔtrjuwng
歲晚亦歸去 And at year’s end, you also head back ʔkhjoH
田園清洛東 To fields east of the limpid Luò. ʔtuwng

In the first couplet, Xǔ Hún portrays his recipients as a “poet-monk” and a “fisherman,” two types of people who have withdrawn from political society in favor of a quiet life near the river.

The fisherman as righteous recluse has a long history in China, going back at least to the story of Lǚ Shàng 呂尚 being discovered by King Wén of Zhōu 周文王 (trad. r. 1099–1050 BCE) and being appointed minister soon after, in the Records of the Grand Historian. Poet-monks are said to have a similar “sentiment” (qíng 情) to such fishermen. From the rest of the poem, it is

77 Luó Shíjīn, Dīngmào jì jiānzhèng, 1.12–13; QTS 528.6037–6038. Little is known of “Venerable Zhòngyí” other than a brief mention in Yuánhào’s 元浩 biography in the Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳 (T no. 2061, 50:740b) and one other poem addressed to him (by Zhāng Hū 張祜 [782?–853?]). Tiānxīáng Temple was located in Rụ̀nzhōu 潤州, near modern Sūzhōu. “Recluse Sūn” refers to Sūn Lù 孫路, also addressed in a poem by Xiàng Sī 項斯. Fúchūn, famous for having been the former dwelling place of eminent recluse/fisherman Yán Zǐlíng 嚴子陵 (1st cent. AD), is the name of a mountain located in the western part of modern Tōnglú county 桐廬縣 in Zhèjīāng province.
78 Goosegate is the name of a commandery located in modern northwest Shānxī.
79 See Shōjī 32.1477–79. Fishermen could also be stereotyped as “wise rustics”—uneducated people who prove to be smarter than their famous or noble interlocutors. For more on this type, see Berkowitz, “The Moral Hero,” esp. 22–24.
clear that this sentiment is a delight in the beauty of the natural world. So the poet-monk, at least in Xu Hūn’s eyes, has become a stock figure who lives outside of mundane, urban society.

“Poet-monk,” as a term, has begun to change. No longer does it refer to the Língyī-Jiāorán circle (who, in fact, dwelled in a bustling city) but to a more generic “type” of person one could encounter near the mountains and rivers. And by the second half of the ninth century, poet-monks were firmly entrenched as part of the repertoire of stock figures in reclusion poetry. For example, Lái Pēng 来鹏 (active 840s–880s), in the mountain-set verse “Rising from an Illness” 病起, observes how “Roots pierce the flat dirt, put forth lotus leaves; / Shoots pass by the east side of my home, become a bamboo glade” 藕穿平地生荷葉，筍過東家作竹林, before concluding with the line, “Poet-monks and drinking buddies regularly seek each other out” 詩僧酒伴鎮相尋.80 In this typical “medical retreat” poem, teetotaling poet-monks and drunken lay poets are both depicted as part of the landscape, coming together to exchange verses and celebrate the mountains. They are no longer individuals, but archetypes.

But Jiǎ Dàō, it seems, was never part of this group: he never claimed the label “poet-monk,” nor did he use it to describe others, despite the fact that he knew about it. Nevertheless, he was in fact one of about a half-dozen poets in the mid-eighth century who were educated as monks and later laicized.81 And many of these other monks would be claimed by those who constructed a self-conscious poet-monk tradition several decades later. As we will see in section 3.2, Guànxiū and Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷 both place the laicized monk Zhōu Hè 周賀 in a lineage of poet-monks. Guànxiū similarly describes Zhūgē Jué as an exemplary predecessor. Literate

80 QTS 642.7357.
monks who laicized in middle age were not viewed as apostates, nor as Confucians in Buddhist robes; rather, they were praised for their accomplishments in poetry.  

Though there are no extant descriptions of Jiǎ Dǎo as a poet-monk, he did exert an enormous influence over the poet-monks as a whole, and over the entire poetic world of the ninth and tenth centuries. Wén Yīduō once called this period “the Jiǎ Dǎo era” 賈島時代. We can see this in the enormous amount of poems written about him in later generations, and in the frequency with which he is quoted in poetry manuals compiled over the next century. Most importantly, he came to be seen as the paragon of an aesthetic called kǔyín 苦吟, meaning “bitter intoning” or “painstaking composition.” We can think of kǔyín as the medieval Chinese equivalent of the starving artist: the image of the poet as one toiling away in poverty, spending days or weeks crafting the perfectly balanced parallel couplet. It stressed labor and precision over spontaneous inspiration or erudition. As Stephen Owen has noted, the implication of a kǔyín-based philosophy is that anyone can become a poet, if only they put in the effort. This included those people who did not spend their lives preparing for the civil examinations, such as monks and women. Such an aesthetic also stressed a total absorption in craft, a kind of trance-like state that could be comparable to meditation. In this way, it appealed to the poet-monks of

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82 For example, Huìxū (fifth cent.), who laicized later in life, was praised by many—including Guànxìú and Qìjī—for his poetry. Another example of a laicized monk who became widely respected for his literary talents despite his shifting religious loyalties was Wéi Qǔmóu 韋渠牟 (749–801). Skilled in literature as a child, it is said that Wéi was praised early on by none other than Lǐ Bái, from whom he received instruction in writing yuèfǔ. He took orders as a Daoist priest by the age of 20, then left Daoism to become a Buddhist monk sometime before the age of 27. By 30, he had left religious life altogether and embarked on an official career, becoming military retainer of Zhèxī 浙西節度 from and an erudite 博士 of the court. He spoke with skill on all three teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) before Emperor Dèzhōng in 796 and maintained friendships with Jiǎorán, Yán Zhēnquīng, and Quán Dēyù. See his biographies in Jiǔ Tángshū 85.3728–29 and Xīn Tángshū 92.5109–10; and Quán Dēyù’s epitaph in Guō Guāngwěi, Quán Dēyù shīwén jí 23.344–46 and QTW 506.5145–47.

83 Tángshī zálan, 40.

84 For more evidence of Jiǎ Dǎo’s importance in this period, see sections 6.1 and 6.2 of this dissertation.


86 Cf. Owen on the homology between kǔyín and monastic practice: over the course of the ninth century, he says, it “gradually became an absolute absorption in craft that involved the expenditure of time and energy. Such devotion
the late medieval period, theoretically giving them special access to the fundamentals of poetic practice. And Jiǎ Dǎo, as the embodiment of kǔyín, could become a model of the true poet.  

Jiǎ Dǎo can serve as a dividing line, marking the beginning of the next generation of poet-monks. Although not considered a poet-monk himself, he was closely connected to one (his cousin Wúkē) and set a new literary model for later poets of all kinds, especially the monks. Jiǎ Dǎo and his circle had no connection to Jiāngnán. They were, essentially, capital poets, even when they traveled beyond Cháng’ān.

2.2.3 Resilience at Court and Capital

As Jiǎ Dǎo was becoming the paragon of the starving, hard-working poet in the mid-ninth century, we find an increasingly large amount of poet-monks honored at the capital, often by the emperor himself. Conventional Buddhist history describes this period as one of persecution and anti-Buddhist sentiment, thanks to the well-known Huìchāng suppression of foreign religions of 842–845. But the reality of official attitudes toward Buddhism at this time was much more complicated. The purges of this period did not mean a complete elimination of Buddhists at the capital, but a withdrawal of support for many suspicious practices associated with fringe monks. There were good economic reasons for laicizing unregistered monks and limiting the

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was a vocation with strong and explicit parallels to the vocation of Buddhist monks” (“Spending Time on Poetry,” 176). Though Owen is analyzing kǔyín in terms of an economic metaphor—“investment” and “returns” (as he does elsewhere with Bái Jūyì; cf. The Late Tang, 45–65)—the religious metaphor could just as easily be applied, and in fact would become a critical cliché in the late imperial period (cf. Lynn, “Orthodoxy and Enlightenment”). The poetry-meditation comparison is the subject of chapter 6 of this dissertation.

87 For more on the importance of kǔyín to the idea of the poet-monk, see chapter six of this dissertation, as well as Wáng Xiùlín, Wàn-Táng Wūdài shìshèng qùntī yánjū, 269–76, especially 271 on Jiǎ Dǎo.

88 See, e.g., Ch’en, Buddhism in China, 389–90: “After the persecution of 845, however, there was no such recovery [as after earlier persecutions]. Instead, the sangha declined farther and farther as an intellectual and spiritual force.”

89 Cf. Weinstein, Buddhism Under the T’ang, 119, who explains that the “undesirable” monks who were forced into laity in 842 “were defined as those who mutilated themselves with fire, practiced magic, or bore tattoos or lash marks on their bodies, i.e. were ex-convicts. Also to be laicized were monks who were deserters or ex- artisans as well as those monks who failed to keep their vow of chastity.”
amount of wealth individual monks could own.\textsuperscript{90} Moreover, we would do well to keep in mind that the reason a purge was seen as necessary was precisely \textit{because} the Buddhist church was so popular and powerful. One decree limited the number of slaves that could be owned by monastics: monks were permitted one male slave and nuns two female slaves.\textsuperscript{91} Although the persecution did become quite intense by 845, it did not last long. After the death of the hysterically anti-Buddhist emperor Wǔzōng 武宗 in 846, his successor, Emperor Xuānzōng 宣宗, was an ardent supporter of Buddhism and quickly reversed his predecessor’s policies, ushering in a new age of prosperity. The number of monasteries in the capital increased fivefold, and hundreds more were built at the prefectoral level and in the towns where the military governors were based.\textsuperscript{92} When Buddhism came back, it was stronger than ever, more tightly woven into the fabric of elite society. Thus, we should not see 845 as a watershed point which marked a sudden, fundamental change in the history of the relationship between Buddhism and literature. Rather, the spread of the idea of the poet-monk from Jiāngnán to the capital and the rest of the empire should be seen as a slow, evolving one.\textsuperscript{93}

One poet-monk who was honored by the court after the suppressions of the 840s was Yuánfú 元孚. Though few details of his life have survived, scattered evidence suggests that

\textsuperscript{90} For an overview of these reasons, see Gernet, \textit{Buddhism in Chinese Society}, 29–62.
\textsuperscript{91} Ennin 圓仁, \textit{Nittō guhō junrei kōki} 入唐求法巡禮行記, qtd. in Weinstein, \textit{Buddhism Under the T'ang}, 119.
\textsuperscript{92} Weinstein, \textit{Buddhism Under the T'ang}, 138. Longdu Shi’s recent dissertation has definitively proven some of these points, showing that “the recovery of the clergy [after the Huíchāng persecutions] was swift and substantial” (“Buddhism and the State in Medieval China,” 197). Indeed, he argues that the Huíchāng persecutions should be considered a significant milestone in the history of Chinese Buddhism because it marks “the conclusion of the prolonged confrontation between the monastic community and the imperial state in the medieval period” after which Buddhism’s “legitimate presence as an integral part of Chinese society and culture…would no longer be challenged” (207).
\textsuperscript{93} In this I am arguing against Wáng Xiùlín, \textit{Wán-Táng Wùdài shǐshēng qíntí yánjū}, who starts his study at 845 because, he claims, the rise of poet-monks and the Huíchāng suppression “naturally…are integrated like thousand threads and ten thousands filaments” 自然…有着千丝万缕的联系 (18). The many primary texts he quotes for socio-historical background do not actually support this claim, but rather demonstrate the importance of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion, the collapse of social structures in the last decades of the ninth century, and the rise of regional powers (21–35). For more on the swift recovery of Buddhism after the Huíchāng suppression and the continuity of Buddhist traditions from the mid-ninth to mid-tenth centuries, see Brose, \textit{Patrons and Patriarchs}, 33–41.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

Yuánfú came from the Jiāngnán region and was based in Xuānzhōu in the 830s. He later moved to the capital and was named an “inner offerer” 内供奉 by Xuānzōng (r. 846–859)—a monk who presided over rituals at the imperial palace. The poet Chén Táo 陳陶 (803?–879?), who never successfully ingratiated himself with the capital elite,\(^4\) once wrote a poem to him teeming with religious and political references.

Sent to Clergyman Yuánfú 寄元孚道人\(^5\)
Chén Táo 陳陶

| 梵宇章句客 | Stanza-and-line traveler from Indic eaves,\(^6\) h\text{kaek} |
| 佩蘭三十年 | From whose waist orchids have hung for thirty years,\(^7\) n\text{en} |
| 長乘碧雲馬 | Long have you ridden a blue-cloud horse;\(^8\) m\text{aeX} |
| 4 時策翰林鞭 | At times, cracked a Hànlín whip,\(^9\) p\text{jien} |
| 囊事五嶽遊 | You once roamed the Five Marchmounts, y\text{uw} |
| 金衣曳祥煙 | Auspicious mist trailing from your golden robes, ?\text{en} |
| 高攀桐君手 | High have you climbed with hands of Lord Paulownia, s\text{yuwX} |
| 左倚鸑鷟肩 | To the left have you leaned with the shoulders of a simurgh,\(^10\) k\text{en} |
| 哭玉秋雨中 | You wept jade in the autumn rain, t\text{rjwu}\text{ng} |
| 摘星春風前 | Clasped stars before the spring wind, d\text{zen} |
| 横軸截洪偃 | Your horizontal yoke carries Hóngy\text{ǎn},\(^11\) ?\text{jonX} |
| 12 應几見廣宣 | Leaning on an armrest, you see Guāngxuān,\(^12\) s\text{wjen} |

\(^4\) Despite having sat for the exams several times, Chén never passed. Afterward, he lived as a recluse in Hóngzhōu, where he exchanged poems with Guānxū, among others. Anecdotes about him and evaluations of him stress his purity and unwillingness to get mixed up in political life. See the biographical notes on him in Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cáizǐ zhuan jiàojuàn, 3:8.414–20.

\(^5\) QTS 745.8470.

\(^6\) Stanza-and-line traveler: one who writes poetry (the two main units of which are stanzas and lines). Indic eaves: metonymically refers to a Buddhist temple.

\(^7\) Orchids hanging like pendants from the waist is unmistakably an image borrowed from the Lisāo 離騷, in which Qū Yuán wears them as symbols of his virtues (according to traditional commentaries). For an English rendering, see Hawkes, Songs of the South, 67–95.

\(^8\) Blue-cloud horse: a horse capable of traveling into the horizon of clouds in the blue sky.

\(^9\) Hànlín whip: a writing brush. The couplet is saying that he is capable of traveling to far and fantastical places through his writing.

\(^10\) Lord Paulownia: said to be the Yellow Emperor’s healer. This obscure couplet likely refers to images mentioned in Yuánfú’s now-lost literary collection.

\(^11\) Hóngy\text{ǎn} (502–564): monk of the Chén dynasty, famed for both Buddhistic and literary writings. See his biography in the Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks 續高僧傳, T no. 2060, 50:476b–78c.

\(^12\) Guāngxuān: poet-monk from Shū who rose to prominence in the capital region in the Yuánhé era (806–821). Only 17 of his poems are extant. For more biographical details, see Appendix A; Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cáizǐ zhuan jiàojuàn, 1:3.541–44 and 5:3.110–11; Hirano Kenshō, “Kōsen Hōnen hō—Tōdai shisū den”; and Wáng Zāojū, Tángdài Cháng'ān fójiao wénxué, 287–306;
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

爾來寤華胥  Lately you’ve awakened from Huáxū.  
石壁孤雲眠  A lonely cloud sleeping at a stone wall.  
龍降始得偈  A dragon descending, you began by attaining gāthās;  
龜老方巢蓮  Now a tortoise aged, you shall nest in a lotus.  
騶虞誰能牽  Who could draw out the zōuyū?  
內殿無文僧  Without a literary monk in the inner palace,  
驃虜谁能牽  Who could draw out the zōuyū?  
因之問楚水  For this, I beseech the waters of Chǔ  
吊屈幾潺湲  And mourn Qū Yuan with a rivulet of tears.

The references of this overwritten poem, meant to flatter, leap from political to religious and back in a dizzying array. Most intriguing are the attempts to combine these varied discourses.

The Five Marchmounts (line 5) are simultaneously the sites of the First Qin Emperor’s circuit of power and the homes to powerful Buddhist temples. Yuánfū has trod them all. The “auspicious mist” of the next line feels Daoist, but it is actually a common image in poems written to emperors and high ministers, often for their birthdays. Two indirect references to the Yellow Emperor (lines 7, 13) merge the otherworldly with the political: though the Yellow Emperor is associated with mythic and supernatural realms, he is still revered as an emperor. And Yuánfū, like the Yellow Emperor who dreamed of Huáxū (line 13), has sunk into a deep trance and emerged with a vision of how to renew the empire. Perhaps only those who immerse themselves in meditative visions can truly transform the world.

More explicit connections to the Buddhist tradition are found in other parts of the poem. The two monks to whom Chén Táo compares Yuánfū were both highly literate and closely connected to the central court (lines 11–12). Guǎngxuān, the more recent of the two, lived at the

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103 This refers to a story in the Lièzǐ 列子 in which the Yellow Emperor dreams of the realm of Huáxū, where a kind of enlightened ambivalence pervades the land and none suffer. It is said that the Yellow Emperor spent twenty-eight years to get his own kingdom up to the same level, then, when he had finally achieved his goal, he ascended to heaven. See Lièzǐ jìshì 2.39–43; English translation in Graham, The Book of Lieh-tzu, 33–35.
104 The zōuyū 雒虞 comes from Ode 25 of the Book of Odes 詩經. According to the orthodox Máo commentary, it is a righteous animal which does not eat of any living creature (only those that have died natural deaths) and which appears when a sage-ruler is on the throne.
105 See, e.g., QTS 44.542–43, 44.546, 64.748, 80.870, 92.998, 357.4025, 664.7607, etc.
capital and presented many poems to Emperor Dézōng 德宗 (r. 779–805). Hóngyān, the more distant one, was so renowned for his literary skills that Xiāo Gāng 蕭綱 (r. 550–551), poet-emperor of the Liáng dynasty, is said to have commanded him to laicize and become one of his ministers. Hóngyān was able to refuse only because of his extraordinary willpower.\(^{106}\) Chén Táo is bringing up precedents for court Buddhists with extraordinary literary skills, putting Yuánfú in their company. Most cleverly, Chén alludes to the mythical zōuyú of the Book of Odes, a sort of freegan beast which will eat only the meat of animals that have died of natural causes (lines 15–16). His implicit claim is that a “literary monk” would be the most qualified to lead the auspicious zōuyú into the world. Such a monk, well versed in the classics, would be able to identify the creature, and, being a vegetarian himself, would share a similar spirit. Through this allusion, Chén Táo playfully makes Buddhists necessary elements of an orthodox court.

By the third quarter of the ninth century, there are more attempts to wittily engage literary monastics on their own terms, as we saw in Chén Táo’s allusion to the zōuyú in his poem to Yuánfú. Fāng Gān 方干 (d. 885?), another exam failure who spent most of his life in retirement in the mountains, makes clever references to Buddhist doctrine in a poem to an otherwise-unknown monk named Huáijīng.

### Sent to Poet-monk Huáijīng

**Fāng Gān 方干**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Characters</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>幾生餘習在</td>
<td>dzojX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>時復作微吟</td>
<td>ngim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>坐夏莓苔合</td>
<td>hop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>行禪檜柏深</td>
<td>syim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>入山成白首</td>
<td>syuwX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>學道是初心</td>
<td>sim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>心地不移變</td>
<td>pjenH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having trained for several lives, again you compose subtle chants. You sit through the summer, merging with the moss, and walk in meditation deep in the juniper and cypress. After entering the mountains, your head grew white, but you study the Way with the mind of a beginner. Your mind’s ground does not shift or alter.

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\(^{106}\) T no. 2060, 50:476c.

\(^{107}\) Hú Cāifū, *Fāng Gān shīxuàn*, 66; *QTS* 649.7454.
Like Bái Jūyi, Fāng Gān posits multiple lives for poet-monks. Here, this is used to flatter the recipient, saying that his poetry is so well-crafted that he must have spent multiple past lives in practice (lines 1–2). He then portrays Huáijìng as being so absorbed in his religious practice that he blends into the natural landscape (lines 3–4), oblivious to the change of seasons (lines 7–8).

The closing couplet plays on the technical term “mind’s ground” (xīndì 心地), i.e., the true, original mind as the grounding of all phenomena. Because the poet-monk is in touch with his true mind, even the cold and heat do not affect him. Fāng Gān shows a comfortable familiarity with the idea of a poet-monk and knows how to deploy Buddhist language in a poem given to one. There is a creeping equivocation being made now between meditation and poetry: an endless amount of time of practice, stillness, and observation of natural phenomena leads to a sudden moment of insight and inspiration. Although this equation would not become fully developed until well into the tenth century, there are hints of it here in the work of someone like Fāng Gān, who spent much of his time with highly literate monks.¹⁰⁸

The familiarity and playfulness exhibited by Fāng Gān in this poem show just how much the term “poet-monk” had developed in the past century.

As we can see in the poems by Xǔ Hún, Chén Táo, and Fāng Gān, and in the examples of Jiǎ Dǎo, Wúkē, and Guǎngxuān, the poet-monk became a more well-known figure throughout the middle of the ninth century. He was no longer confined to Jiàngnán, but made inroads at the capital. Jiǎ Dǎo and his cousin Wúkē were the two most important figures of this period, capital-dwellers who romanticized their lack of success and became paragons of the kūyín 客隱 aesthetic.

Although Jiǎ Dǎo was not, strictly speaking, a poet-monk, his philosophy of total absorption in

¹⁰⁸ In addition to Huáijìng, he either sent poems to or received poems from Wúkē, Jiǎ Dǎo, Zhōu Hé, Guǎnxū, Qijí, Shǎngyán, Xǔzhōng, Kēpēng, Qǐngyuè, and seven other lesser-known monks. For more on the meditation-poetry equivalence, see chapter 6.
the crafting of couplets became a model for future poet-monks. Moreover, his life—in which a Buddhist’s robes are traded in for an official’s cap—foreshadowed that of many others who came to be considered part of the poet-monk tradition, such as Zhōu Hè and Zhūgē Jué. Most importantly, Jiǎ Dǎo (in his early years) and Wúkē helped increase the visibility of the idea of the poet-monk at the cultural center. This helped create a fertile ground for poet-monks during the restoration of Buddhism in the late 840s and 850s. During this period, poet-monks such Yuánfù would delight the emperors by presenting their works at court, and literati like Chén Táo would praise them in bombastic terms, going so far as to proclaim them upholders of the orthodox Confucian tradition. Poet-monks were spreading throughout the empire, and the best were celebrated at the capital by the emperor himself.

2.3 Beyond Jiāngnán: Geographic Trajectories of Poet-Monks

At this point it is worthwhile to pull back from the close reading of texts and get a sense of the larger trajectory of the development of the term “poet-monk.” It may help to clarify things by going big before going small again. As we will see, extant records related to poet-monks increase sharply at the end of the ninth century, so rather than go into every one in detail, we will be forced to examine them more selectively. But there are two ways of reading selectively: 1) to read deeply in selected texts, and 2) to read selected information from a great many texts. We will start with the second method, extracting information from historical records to show the spread and restabilization of poet-monks in geographic terms before returning to the first method, reading poems and prefaces is greater detail in the next chapter. We begin quantitative and end qualitative.

To that end, I have mapped out where the poet-monks were located over the course of two and a half centuries (713–960). My data come from the chronological history of Táng
literature by Fù Xuán cóng, which is based on a combination of historical records (biographies, epitaphs, lists of examination graduates, etc.) and information embedded in exchange poems (prefaces, official titles, settings). Fù and his team of researchers used these kinds of data to triangulate exactly where a given poet was located at a particular time. It is an impressive extrapolation from limited historical records, and I believe it is sufficient to give us a picture of large-scale literary trends. In particular, I have used Fù’s chronology to quantify the number of years poet-monks spent in different places and have visualized these on a map of the Táng empire. Such a visualization will afford us a bird’s-eye view that would be very difficult to imagine from a long list of places, dates, and names. In this way, we can spot geographic trends that would have otherwise been invisible to us.

Looking at these data, we can divide the history of late medieval poet-monks into four periods which very roughly correspond to the traditional periodization of late medieval literary history: 1) High and Mid Táng, 713–820; 2) Late Táng, 821–880; 3) End of Táng, 880–907; and 4) Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, 907–960. Although the periods are roughly the same as traditional literary history, the poet-monks present a narrative arc quite different from the normal story of Táng literature. Rather than a gradual decline from the glories of mid-eighth century, we will see a growth that culminates in an explosion of innovation and creativity during those periods that previous scholars have assumed to be stagnant.

The first period is illustrated by Map 2.1, which focuses on the most concentrated time of early development, 731–790. As we can clearly see, poet-monk activity is heavily concentrated in the eastern Jiàngnán region, especially in the Súzhōu-Hángzhōu area. This corroborates what

109 The definition of “poet-monk,” for the purposes of these visualizations, is broad. Simply put, I have included those monks for whom some poetic writings and biographical information have survived. That is, I have excluded only those monks without extant poems or whose only surviving verses are didactic reformulations of Buddhist doctrine in verse. For a full list of these actors and a link to my dataset, see Appendix B.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

Liú Yǔxī stated in his preface to the works of Língchè: “What the world calls ‘poet-monks’ mostly come from south of the Great River.” 世之言詩僧多出江左.\(^{110}\) It was the home base of Jiǎorán, Língyī, Língchè, and many more. The poet-monks were originally a local group concentrated in the southeast. They made occasional pilgrimages to holy mountains—such at Mt. Lú 廈山, located in the western end of Jiāngnán—and a few journeys to the capital, but mostly they remained in one very specific region.

The second period is illustrated by Map 2.2, which covers the years 810–870. During this time, the idea of the poet-monk spread throughout the empire. While we still find a great deal of activity in the poet-monks’ birthplace (Sūzhōu-Hángzhōu), it has become far more diffuse. More monks spent greater amounts of time at Cháng’ān, sponsored by wealthy patrons, including the emperor himself. The poet-monk began to achieve cultural acceptance in the middle of the ninth century, and therefore can be seen in the highest echelons of literary society. Mt. Lú, which had once been a site of pilgrimage, became a new hub for poet-monks, one which would continue to develop in the decades ahead. Hóngzhōu, which established itself as an important Buddhist town in the 780s thanks to the presence of the renowned master Mǎzǔ Dàoyī 马祖道一, began to attract a fair share of poet-monks.\(^{111}\) And Chéngdū, a sort of secondary cultural center frequented by the powerful people at the capital, began to grow its own poet-monks. Despite being nearly 1200 miles (or 1900 kilometers) from the homes of the first monks who claimed this title,

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\(^{110}\) See also Zhào Lín 趙璘 (jīnshì 834), Yīnhuà lù 因話錄 4.94, in Táng guó shǐ bù, Yīnhuà lù: 江南多名僧。貞元、元和以來，越州有清江、清晝，婺州有乾俊、乾輔，時謂之「會稽二清」，「東陽二乾」。

There are many famous monks in Jiāngnán. Since the Zhēnyuán and Yuánhé eras [785–821], there have been Qīngjiāng and Qīngzhōu [i.e., Jiǎorán 皎然] in Yuèzhōu, and Qiánjùn and Qiánfǔ in Wúzhōu. They were known at the time as the “Two Qings of Kuāijī” and the “Two Qiàns of Dōngyáng.” Unfortunately, there seems to be no information on the “Two Qiàns” aside from this passage. Qīngjiāng and Jiǎorán are both better documented. For basic biographical information, see Appendix A.

\(^{111}\) On the growth of the Buddhist community in Hóngzhōu, see Jia, The Hongzhou School, 17–19.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

Chéngdū had a number of men who were working in the same poetic tradition. During this era, poet-monks were no longer oddities, but a part of the literary scene. They went mainstream.

Everything changed in the third period (Map 2.3), which covers the years from the Huáng Cháo Rebellion to the final collapse of the Táng dynasty (880–907). This is when Huáng Cháo’s troops rampaged through Jiāngnán and up to the capital region, leaving smoldering wreckage in their wake. They would eventually set fire to Cháng’ān, the cultural center of the Chinese world.\(^{112}\) In response, poet-monks fled from urban temples to safer non-urban centers, such as the Buddhist centers located on sacred mountains like Mt. Lú and Mt. Héng 衡山. Indeed, at this time the poet-monk Xiūmù 修睦 became Saṃgha Rectifier 僧正 of Hóngzhōu and used his official appointment to make nearby Mt. Lú into the most important grounds for poet-monk activity in the waning years of the Táng. Nearly every important poet-monk of the period lived there at one point during the late ninth century.

Moreover, the very act of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion’s large-scale butchery of the capital elites left a void at the Táng’s cultural center. Tens of thousands of the most powerful and well-educated literati were murdered, and many of the survivors fled for the relative safety of the south.\(^{113}\) Among the educated, there was widespread recognition that a fundamental shift had taken place, that the cultural sphere could no longer be conceived as a unified whole. Evidence for this shift abounds. For example, the anonymous philosophical text *Wúnéngzǐ* 無能子 (Master Incapable), which advocates abandoning the entire medieval social system of lords and vassals in favor of a return to quietistic naturalism, presents itself as being written in direct response to the

\(^{112}\) For a vivid summary of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion and its devastating effect on the elites of the capital, see Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, 187–234. For more on the capital’s collapse during this time, see Schafer, “The Last Years of Ch’ang-an,” esp. 154–70.

\(^{113}\) Although the south witnessed great destruction as well, it was relatively brief and limited in scale compared to the north, and the strength of the de facto local rulers (first military governors, then kings) allowed for a speedier recovery from the general chaos of the 880s. On this point, see Gù Lìchéng, *Zōuxiàng nánfāng*, 32–43.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

Huáng Cháo Rebellion.\textsuperscript{114} The preface implies that the only logical response to the chaos of the period is a kind of primitivism rooted in classically Daoist principles, since civilization has failed to bring anything but tragedy. Another literatus, Péi Yuè 裴說 (late ninth/early tenth cent.), put his feelings into a quatrain:

Taking Backroads to My Hometown during the Chaos 亂中偷路人故鄉\textsuperscript{115}
Péi Yuè 裴說

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>愁看賊火起諸烽</td>
<td>I look with sorrow on the rebels’ fires arising from their beacons;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>偷偷餘程悵望中</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一國半為亡國燼</td>
<td>Our whole state has half-become the ashes of a fallen state;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>數城俱作古城空</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the chaos of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion raged on, Péi Yuè saw civilization crumbling before his very eyes. The destruction manifested itself at the levels of state and city, as each became nothing but ashes and emptiness. Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊 (836–910), writing about the ruination visited upon Jiāngnán in the 880s, described the fracturing thus: “Having a land, having a family—both are dreams, / And those who were dragons, who were tigers became nothing” 有國有家皆是夢，為龍為虎亦成空.\textsuperscript{116} Sīkōng Tú 司空圖 (837–908) made the universal personal, writing of the fallen world’s effect on his own life one of his counterintuitive or “mad” quatrains.

Mad Inscriptions: 2 of 2 狂題二首（其二）\textsuperscript{117}
Sīkōng Tú 司空圖

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>須知世亂身難保</td>
<td>Know that it’s hard to preserve one’s life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{114} Wùnèngzǐ jiàozhù, 78. For more on Wùnèngzǐ and the anarchic utopia it posited against the failed Táng order, see Steavu, “Cosmogony and the Origin of Inequality,” esp. 312–25.
\textsuperscript{115} QTS 720.8269.
\textsuperscript{116} “Shāngyuán County” 上元縣. See Niè Ānfú, Wéi Zhuāng ji jìzhù, 4.148; QTS 697.8017. On the surface, this poem is about the Three Kingdoms period (220–280), but the topic is clearly used as a figure to describe current events.
\textsuperscript{117} Zū Bāoquán and Táo Lìtiān, Sīkōng Biāoshèng shǐwén ji jīānjiào, 3.79; QTS 633.7264.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

in an era of chaos;

2 莫喜天晴菊併開 Delight not at heaven’s sunlight and the chrysanthemums’ bloom. ketoj

長短此身長是客 Long or short, in this life I’ve long been itinerant— khaek

4 黃花更助白頭催 The yellow flowers help to hasten the whitening of my hair. tshwoj

The stress of living through one of the most troubled times in history up to that point has taken
its toll on the speaker. He alludes to the peripatetic lifestyle he has had to adopt in order to
survive all the violence which has overwhelmed the land. In the midst of such sorrow, he can
take no delight in the joys of nature, for its very exuberance seems to mock him. The
chrysanthemums, normally thought to extend one’s life, ironically bring on signs of aging in the
speaker. Further examples of such laments could be produced *ad infinitum*.\(^{118}\) Clearly, to the
educated Chinese of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the idea of a unified world was no
longer tenable.

But this destruction also presented a rare opportunity for cultural reinvention. As
civilization was threatened, it became plastic, moldable. Thus, a space was opened up for
relatively minor or marginalized figures—such as poet-monks—to grow and attempt to reshape
literature in their own image. And they seized this opportunity. Even though the poet-monks had
become a familiar figure in literary society by the mid-ninth century, it was not until this period
of instability that we really see rapid growth in their numbers. One may object that this
represents only an increase in the number of *records* for poet-monks and not an increase in their
actual numbers. However, this only leads us back to the same conclusion: people with a higher
status in literary society are more likely to have had their records preserved, and therefore if we
see a great number of records for poet-monks, they most likely have moved up a notch in
society. This could also result from a relative move upwards when the top rung of the ladder

\(^{118}\) For more such examples, see Lǐ Dīngguāng, *Tàngmò Wùdài luànshì wènxué yánjù*, 59–67.
Chapter 2: The Invention of the Poet-Monk (760–860)

(i.e., the capital elite) was lopped off. Although it may not be the case that the elites were all simply physically eliminated, the destruction of the capital and the displacement of tens of thousands of the most powerful people would certainly have shaken the foundations of elite culture. This, combined with the existence of a strong poet-monk figurehead like Guànxiū 貫休, may have been enough to encourage rapid growth among poet-monks.

In the fourth period (Map 2.4), which corresponds to the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms following the end of the Táng (907–960), the poet-monks were resettling in the newly stabilized regional kingdoms. Although traditional historiography sees this period as one of “transition” 轉型 and “chaos” 亂, it did not always appear so to the people who lived through it. To put it another way: the people of this period did not know that there would be a series of “Five Dynasties” and “Ten Kingdoms” that would end with the establishment of the Sòng in 960 (and its consolidation of power in 974). In fact, many of the literary elites (both religious and non-) had great hopes for the regional rulers, that they might enact a cultural renaissance that would reunite the fractured empire.

One example of this was the kingdom of Shǔ 蜀 (capital: Chéngdū) in the first few decades of the tenth century. Wáng Jiàn 王建 (847–918), Shǔ’s illiterate ruler who left his kingdom to an incompetent son, has been judged unfavorably by history. But he succeeded in attracting many of the most important poets, Buddhists, and Daoists to his court as he began to break away from the Táng. Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊, Dù Guāngtíng 杜光庭, and the preeminent poet-

119 See Song Chen, Review of *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, 236.
120 On the political and economic power of the southern kingdoms during the tenth century, see, e.g., Schottenhammer, “Local Politico-Economic Particulars of the Quanzhou Region During the Tenth Century”; Clark, “Quanzhou (Fujian) During the Tang-Song Interregnum, 879–978”; and Worthy, “Diplomacy for Survival: Domestic and Foreign Relations of Wu Yüeh, 907–978.”
monk Guànxiū all threw their lots in with Wáng Jiàn and were handsomely rewarded for it.\textsuperscript{121} The other prolific poet-monk of the tenth century, Qíjǐ 齊己, also set out to go to Shǔ to meet Guànxiū and his disciple Tányù 談域 but was waylaid by the ruler of Jingnán 捷南, who forced the monk to become Saṃgha Rectifier of his newly established kingdom—an appointment that Qíjǐ occasionally spoke of as imprisonment.\textsuperscript{122} All of these men clearly thought that Shǔ was poised to become the next Cháng’ān, the hub of civilization as they knew it. Although Shǔ’s plans began to fall apart in the 920s, these poets were not entirely wrong: Chéngdū contained the most advanced printing technology and would soon produce the literary collection that would elevate the burgeoning genre of cí 詞 (song lyric) poetry—the Collection among the Flowers (Huājiān jí 花間集).\textsuperscript{123} In similar ways, other poet-monks saw the kingdoms of Jingnán (capital: Jingmén 捷門), Chū 楚 (capital: Chángshā 長沙), Min 閩 (capital: Chánglé 長樂), and the Southern Táng 南唐 (capital: Jīnlíng 金陵) as the bastions of civilization after the fall of the Táng. In short, many of these new kings were aspiring emperors, competing to produce the next world-conquering empire.\textsuperscript{124} One of the ways to strengthen a claim to legitimacy was to draw in leading poets, artists, and religious leaders through promises of patronage. As Benjamin Brose has recently demonstrated, these rulers drew on prominent Buddhists’ cultural capital in different ways. Chéngdū and Hángzhōu attracted highly regarded monks displaced from the capital while

\textsuperscript{121} For more on the Former Shǔ regime (as it is now called), see Wang, \textit{Power and Politics in Tenth-Century China}. An overview of Wéi Zhuāng’s life can be found in Yates, \textit{Washing Silk}, 1–35. On Dú Guāngting, see Verellen, \textit{Du Guangting}.

\textsuperscript{122} See, e.g., Sūn Guāngxiàn’s 孫光憲 narration of this episode in his preface to Qíjǐ’s works: “In his later years, he planned to go to Min-Méi [i.e., Shǔ], but he ‘took the wrong road’ and went to Zhūgōng… Although he entered and exited the Vermillion Gate [of the king’s palace], he never removed his white sandals [of mourning]” 晚歲將之岷峨，假途渚宮…雖出入朱門，而不移素履. See Sūn Guāngxiàn, “Preface to the \textit{White Lotus Collection}” 白蓮集序, in QT\textit{W} 900.9390–91; Pān Dingwū 598–99; Wáng Xiūlín 619.

\textsuperscript{123} On the compilation of the \textit{Collection among the Flowers} and its relation to Shǔ literary culture in the tenth century, see Shields, \textit{Crafting a Collection}, esp. 106–18.

\textsuperscript{124} That many of these rulers began their careers as leaders of bands of outlaws, often from humble origins, was beside the point. Military success and strategic patronage could overcome such biases. On the small-time origins of several founders of the southern kingdoms, see Clark, “Scoundrels, Rogues, and Refugees.”
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the smaller southern cities—such as Hóngzhōu and Fúzhōu—promoted locally-renowned clerics in an attempt to match these efforts. Thus, many of the poet-monks were drawn to regional kingdoms like Shū.

The other trend during this period was for poet-monks to relocate to religious centers—such as Mt. Lú, Mt. Héng, and Hóngzhōu—where they could keep the would-be emperors at arm’s length. As we have seen, this trend had already emerged in the mid-ninth century and gained traction during the fall of the Táng. Though such sites often relied on the patronage of political rulers for support, they also provided an alternative power structure that was based on religious merit. Remote from urban centers and relatively inaccessible due to their elevation, such sacred mountains were spared much of the violence of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion and its aftermath. Buddhist temples in these areas made a concerted effort in the ninth and tenth centuries to establish strong relationships with local rulers and patrons. Such relationships benefitted both parties: the temples would receive financial and political support from their patrons, while the patrons would accrue merit and legitimacy by sponsoring Buddhist activities. Thus, places like Mt. Lú, Mt. Héng, and Hóngzhōu served as alternative hubs for poet-monks after the collapse of the Táng.

So the big picture that emerges from looking at the geographical distribution of poet-monks from 713 to 960 is a development in four stages: 1) birth in Jiāngnán, 713–810; 2) spread

125 Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*, especially 30–47. See too Makita Tairyō, *Godai Shūkyōshi kenkyū*, 151–95; and Abe Chōichi, *Chūgoku zenshūshi no kenkyū*, 81–176. However, we must also remember that the “regions” under discussion were not stable entities but had to be actively reconstituted and reimagined as such, especially as central power faded away in the late ninth century and led to new divisions and unifications in the tenth century. For one example of such spatial reconceptualization, see Líu Xīnguāng, “Tángmò Jiāngnán diyu kōngjiān de fēnhuà yǔ zhēnghé.”

126 Robson, *Power of Place*, 258. Robson also discusses Mt. Héng as a site of poet-monk activity (citing Língchè, Guānxì, Qíjí, and others) in 298–331 of the same work.

127 Scholarship on these alternative poetic hubs is relatively undeveloped. A good preliminary study of poetic circles on Mt. Lú during the late Táng and Five Dynasties can be found in Jiā Jìnihuá, *Tángdài jīhuì zōngjì yǔ shīrénqún yánjiù*, 237–56.
to the capital, 810–880; 3) growth and dispersal across the empire, 880–907; and 4) consolidation in new cultural centers, 907–960. These four stages correlate closely with some of the large-scale historical developments we know about late medieval China. 1) The poet-monks emerged out of an area that is rich in both Buddhist and literary culture just as power began to decentralize because of political changes following the Ān Lûshân Rebellion. 2) Poet-monks gained recognition across the empire and began to drift to the capital as peace was restored and elites returned to their home region. With the notable exception of Wûzîng in 840–845, the emperors and nobles of this period were lavish patrons of Buddhism, attracting poet-monks to the capital. 3) The Huáng Cháo Rebellion caused thousands (literati and monks alike) to flee urban centers and left a void at the cultural center, creating the space for poet-monks to develop further and gain traction in literary society. 4) As some regional rulers attempted to establish their own universal dynasties (or, at least, fully autonomous kingdoms), they attracted numerous monks and literati in an effort to assert their own religious and cultural legitimacy. Some poet-monks were wooed by these promises of lavish donations, while others retreated to sacred mountains such as Mt. Lû and Mt. Héng. These four stages, of course, ought to be understood not as distinct periods but as general trends that waxed and waned, overlapping with one another. Geographical analysis of poet-monks’ movements provides a rough outline of the historical background of poet-monks. GIS, in this way, is like a finger pointing to the moon: it gives us a general direction in which to cast our eyes. We now return to our telescope and look at a few craters in detail.

2.4 Conclusion

The term “poet-monk,” as we have seen, is not a neutral label, intuited from the meaning of the characters shī 詩 and sēng 僧, which can be applied to monks writing poetry in any time or
place. It was, rather, a regional label invented in Jiāngnán some time in the second half of the eighth century to designate a specific group of people, namely, the coterie of monks centered around Língyī and Jiāorán. Moreover, “poet-monk” was likely a term of disparagement in its early history, as both Liú Yǔxī and Bái Jūyì took pains to distinguish their praiseworthy subjects from the term. However, as monks continued to write poetry throughout the ninth century, in places beyond Jiāngnán (such as the capital), literati attitudes began to relax. As we continue to trace the term’s usage in the following chapter, we will see that poetry and Buddhism in fact became increasingly intertwined and that the poet-monk’s double identity would increasingly be considered an advantage. By the middle of the tenth-century, the poet-monks will be seen as members of their own distinct tradition, a tradition constructed not only by the literati, but by the poet-monks themselves.
Map 2.1

Poet-monk activity, 720–790. Measures the total number of years spent by poet-monks at various places. Larger circles correspond to more years of poet-monk activity in a given place. For example, if Lingchè spent the years 770–771 in Kuàiji, this is measured as two years of poet-monk activity there. If both Lingchè and Húguó spent the years 770–771 in Kuàiji, this counts as four years of poet-monk activity there. Created with Palladio (http://palladio.designhumanities.org). In this period, poet-monks are concentrated in the southeast, around Hángzhōu.
Map 2.2

Poet-monk activity, 810–870. In this period, poet-monks are becoming more prominent in the capital region of Chang’an.
Map 2.3

Poet-monk activity, 880–907. In this period, many poet-monks flee urban centers to escape the destruction of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion.
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Map 2.4
Poet-monk activity, 907–960. In this period, poet-monks stabilize in regional capitals (such as Chéngdū and Hángzhōu) and sacred mountains (such as Mt. Lú).
Chapter 3

The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

3.0 Introduction

The last decades of the Táng dynasty, as mentioned in the previous chapter, were filled with some of the most devastating violence that the Chinese world had ever seen. Cháng’ān, the capital of the land for most of the millennium since its unification under the Qín dynasty in 221 BCE, was burned and sacked in 881, never to recover. The empire was clearly on its last legs, with much of the power in the hands of local military governors (jièdùshǐ 節度使), some of whom would become the regional kings of the tenth century. During this upheaval, with the cultural center ripped open, the poet-monks were scattered throughout multiple regions, rarely concentrated in a single place. This opened up a potential space for poet-monks to become more prominent in the literary world. As we will see, this prominence was due not only to a passive obedience to discursive norms created by the literati, but also due to an active attempt by the poet-monks themselves to invent their own tradition.

3.1 880–907: A Literary Position

Shàngyán 尚顏 typifies the development of the idea of the poet-monk at the end of the Táng dynasty. A monk born to the powerful Xuē 薛 clan in the 830s, he lived a long and storied life, reaching nearly a hundred years of age before dying in the 920s. Not as prolific or idiosyncratic as his contemporary Guànxiū, he was nonetheless highly regarded in literary society, exchanging poetry with the major writers of his day. Though only 34 of his poems

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1 For more detail, see Schafer, “The Last Years of Ch’ang-an.” Technically, the Qín capital was located across the Wěi River 渭河 from Cháng’ān at Xiányáng 咸陽, and Cháng’ān itself only became the capital in 200 BCE, following the rise of the Hán dynasty. Nonetheless, the two cities were regarded as being in essentially the same place throughout Chinese history.
survive, we are fortunate to have two surviving prefaces to his works which, taken together, can give us insight into attitudes toward poet-monks at the end of the Táng.

The first preface, by the southern bureaucrat Yán Ráo 顏蕘, opens by connecting Shàngyán to his distant cousin, the famed poet-statesman Xuē Néng 薛能.² If Yán Ráo is to be believed, the latter praises his Buddhist relative in rather startling terms.

Preface to the Venerable Shàngyán’s Literary Collection 顏上人集序³
Yán Ráo 顏蕘

顏公姓薛氏，字茂聖。少工為五言詩，天賦其才，迥超名輩。蕘同年文人故許州節度使尚書薛公字大拙，以文人不言其名，擅詩名於天下，無所與讓。唯於顏公，許待優異。每吟其警句，常曰：「吾不喜顏為僧，嘉有詩僧為吾枝派，以增薛氏之榮耳。」性端靜寡合，而價譽自彰。名公鉅人，爭識其面。

Shàngyán was surnamed Xuē and styled Màoshèng [“Luxuriant Sageliness”]. In his youth, he was skilled at pentametric poetry, which he had a natural talent for, far surpassing his more famous contemporaries. Though the literati never spoke the name of Xuē Néng—my fellow graduate of the examinations and the former military commander of Xūzhōu—his skillful poems monopolized the entire empire, for there was nothing in them to decry. Shàngyán was the only [other] one who deserved to be regarded as exceptional. Whenever [Xuē Néng] would recite [Shàngyán’s] startling verses, he would say: “Though I am not happy that Shàngyán is a monk, it is good to have a poet-monk in our branch [of the family], that it may increase the glory of the Xuē clan.” By nature [Shàngyán] was upright and calm, shunning the company of others, and his fine reputation was self-evident. Famous nobles and great men vied to get to know him.

² For an overview of Xuē Néng’s biographical sources, see Táng cáizǐ huán jiàojīn, 3:7.308–20 and 5:7.364–70. He is perhaps most famous for being the military governor of Zhōngwǔ 忠武節度使 who was overthrown by his mutinous officer Zhōu Ji 周岌 (d. 884) and killed along with his family as they attempted to flee to Xiāngyáng 襄陽 (see Sǐmá Guǎng, Zhītǐ tōngjiàn, 253.8233–34). Xuē’s reputation has not fared well after his death in 881: he was prone to making self-important pronouncements in the prefaces to his poems, a practice which drew the ire of later critics (especially when paired with his failures as an administrator). Because of his poor reception, there has been little scholarship on him in any language: Mó Liāng wrote a short but powerful essay on his anxiety of influence, “Dàjiā yǐnyǐng xià de jīlù,” and Duān Shuāngxiá, Tángmò Wǔdài Jiàngnán xīdào shìgē yánjìu, 103–18, discusses him as part of a Confucian undercurrent in late Táng Jiāngxī. The only other real engagement with his work can be found in Yuè Jiǔwǔ’s M.A. thesis on him, “Lùn Xuē Néng,” from which he published several articles as well. However, Xuē was highly regarded in his own day. Zhēng Gǔ 鄭谷, for example, opened a poem on reading Xuē Néng’s collection by saying: “Every piece is lofty and true / Truly an array of airs of the states” 篇篇高且真，真為國風陳 (Yán Shòuchéng, Zhēng Gǔ shì jìzhù, 3.434–37; QTS 676.7759). Lǚ Yánrǎng 盧延讓 (jinshi 900) greatly admired Xuē as well, writing verses in his style (even if they were met with derision from literati). See Táng zhìyán jiàozhù, 6.119; Táng cáizǐ huán jiàojīn, 4:6.408.

After the standard opening for a preface—name and evidence of youthful talent—Yán Ráo immediately begins establishing the reputation of Shàngyán’s relative Xuē Néng, and then transferring that reputation to Shàngyán himself. Xuē Néng’s poems, apparently perfect in execution, dominate the literary world. Though he himself is not well-known, his works are respected. His name is on everyone’s heart, if not on their lips. Yán then proceeds to show how Shàngyán is his cousin’s equal in poetry. In fact, he is the only one on the same plane of being “exceptional” 優異, an adjective implying uniqueness as well as quality. His verses are “startling”—they grab the attention of educated men everywhere, even though he generally keeps aloof from the hustle and bustle of literary networking. Despite his social distance, the literati “vie to get to know him” since his talent naturally draws them in.

Most surprising is the way in which Xuē Néng praises Shàngyán, as reported in this preface: “Although I am not happy that Shàngyán is a monk, it is good to have a poet-monk in our branch [of the family], that it may increase the glory of the Xuē clan.” First, we must recognize that becoming a monk, forsaking one’s traditional reproductive duties in favor of the monastic lifestyle, is frowned upon here. Xuē Néng is decidedly averse to Buddhism. But at the same time, he is not averse to poet-monks, who are regarded highly, even to the point of increasing his family’s reputation. Xuē Néng sees the “poet” half of the term poet-monk as dominant, and revels in Shàngyán’s literary reputation. Poetry, after all, was intimately tied up with the mainstream, classical tradition. To write a good poem, the sort of thing respected by discriminating critics, one must be able to effortlessly deploy allusions to this tradition, from the Book of Odes and Analects to the Wénxuǎn and Bái Jūyì. Poetry was the highest form of cultural capital. What is surprising here is that Xuē Néng implies that being a poet-monk was a legitimate

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4 If extant records of exchange poetry are any indication, this claim is misleading. As will be demonstrated in section 4.4.2, Shàngyán was extremely well-integrated into medieval literary networks.
path to literary success. That is to say, the “poet-monk” was familiar enough of a figure by this time that it was seen as one of several options for gaining a reputation in the cultural sphere (much like taking the imperial examinations, serving as an official, becoming a “recluse,” etc.). While it may not have been Xuē Néng’s favorite path, he grudgingly accepted it as a real one that Shàngyán could take.⁵

Xuē Néng, as depicted here, is a long way from the neutral-to-negative opinion of poet-monks held by Liú Yūxī in the early ninth century, who seemed to regard most monks’ verse as something inferior to that of the literati. The contrast with Bái Jūyi’s position, as sketched in the preface to his poem on Dàoxuān (section 2.2.1), is even more instructive. Bái, too, sees poet-monks as primarily poets, but stresses that this is not the role that they are supposed to fill. A good Buddhist (like Dàoxuān) should use poetry to serve the dharma, regard it as a form of upāya used to draw in the literati. Xuē Néng, by contrast, sees poet-monks as legitimate participants in literate society. More than fifty years after Liú and Bái, the poet-monk is celebrated as a real poet by at least one non-Buddhist peer.

From here, Yán Ráo proceeds to relate his personal connection to Shàngyán and how he came to be charged with writing a preface for the monk’s works.

⁵ There is also, of course, the strange fact that Shàngyán could increase the glory of his birth family by becoming a monk (albeit a poet-monk). After all, monks are supposed to be renunciants, those who have “left the home” (chūjūa 出家), severing their secular connections. In fact, the Buddhist monk’s act of renunciation was never so absolute as we like to imagine it. Many writings, particularly those that do not belong to an explicitly Buddhist tradition, connect monks to their birth families. See, e.g., Hào Chūnwén, Tāng hòuqī Wùdài Sōngchū Dānhuáng sēngní de shèhuì shēnghuò, 76–96; Shinohara, “Taking a Meal at a Lay Supporter’s Residence”; and Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 34–50. Even in the early Indian tradition, monks seem to have retained their secular reputations and wealth upon conversion. See Gregory Schopen’s essays collected in Buddhist Monks and Business Matters, esp. 1–18. For more on literati-Buddhist connections in the cultural sphere, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.
When I was serving as a minister in Jing and Fú, Lù Xīshēng (d. 895?) was serving as Supervising Secretary in one of the nearby states. One day he said to me, “Shàngyán came from Jīngmén to kindly visit me, then departed when the mood left him. I never sent him any lines. Could I ask you to write something on parting on behalf of our friendship?” So I composed something at this request, but I had not yet looked at his works. A few years later, I left Héjiāng and floated on downstream. On the day that I arrived in Jīngmén I realized my error [of forgetting this task]. So I read his works and looked at their distinctive traits, and then I knew that the master’s high reputation had not been achieved in vain. As for [others’] poems presented to him on parting, such as Grand Mentor Wéi Zhènggōng’s, there were 43 poems in all. I made of these a separate volume, to which Secretary Lù wrote a preface. I continued to add to the bouquet of his pure blossoms while serving as a historian, and thought it fitting to write the master’s name into the “garden of letters” biographies. Though my editorial work was not yet ready, I feared neglecting this task.

Yán Ráo at this point has heard of Shàngyán but never read anything by him. A few years after being asked to write to Shàngyán on behalf of a fellow official, he finally decides to familiarize himself with the monk’s works and is delighted to see that his reputation holds up. Yán Ráo, of course, is finding more ways to praise his subject, this time through the lens of personal experience. Again we see the implication that Shàngyán is a real poet, not just a hobbyist like the earlier poet-monks. Yán Ráo uses one of the same strategies for establishing Shàngyán’s fame as Liú Yǔxī did for Lingchè: create a small collection of his exchanges with important poets of the time, which could circulate independently. As in the earlier case, this allows him to bask in the other poets’ reflected glory. Similarly, Shàngyán’s name is added to the “garden of letters biographies” of the records that would be edited into an official history in future.

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6 I.e., biographies of famous writers that would be put into the history books.

7 The practice of assembling collections of exchange poetry to bolster an individual’s reputation continued throughout the ninth century. For example, the imperial catalogue of Táng anthologies from the eleventh century, preserved in the 新唐書 lists several collections of exchange verses between various writers and the prominent official Linghū Chù 令狐楚 (766–837). These include collections of verses between Linghū and Lǐ Féngjī 李逢吉 (758–835), between Linghū and Liú Yǔxī, and between Linghū and the monk Guángxuān (see 新唐書 60.1623–24). The same catalogue also lists several collections of exchanges between brothers, some of whom would presumably have been more famous than others.
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generations. By adding him here, Yán Ráo demonstrates his deep admiration for Shàngyán’s literary abilities, claiming that he should be considered a man of letters above all else.

In the preface’s conclusion, where we would normally find a summary evaluation of the writer’s works, Yán Ráo offers a moving testimony to his admiration for Shàngyán as both a poet and as a person. He even seems to become sympathetic to Buddhism because of his relationship with Shàngyán.

今且掇師之序於詩集之前，其五言、七字詩凡四百篇，以為儒釋之光。余與師周旋殆將十稔，始仰師為詩家之傑，今與師為方外之期，契分知心，言之無愧，若師本教之行，自為其徒所宗，則非愚儒之所敢知也。光化三年孟夏序。

Now I attach my preface to the master’s works to the beginning of his poetry collection. In all, there are some 400 poems in five- and seven-character meter, which can serve as the light of Confucians and Buddhists. I have been around with the master for nearly ten years. Though at first I looked up to the master as an outstanding poet, now I anticipate a meeting with him beyond this world. I am not ashamed to speak of our close friendship. Since the master grounded himself in practicing what he taught, he was naturally revered by his disciples. Is this not, then, something that foolish Confucians can dare to understand?

Written in the first month of the summer, Guānhuà 3 [May 900].

Again we find Shàngyán presented as an exemplary poet, but another twist is added this time. He is not just a poet who happens to have been a monk, but a poet-monk, one whose works “can serve as the light of Confucians and Buddhists” 以為儒釋之光. He is the culmination of both traditions. Though Buddhism and poetry (as the province of Confucians) remain distinct, we find here an increasing confidence in their ability to be harmonized in the figure of the poet-monk. Moreover, Yán Ráo regards Shàngyán as one who upholds universal values—practicing what you preach—that both Buddhists and Confucians should heed. Yán Ráo calls his own people “foolish” by comparison. Although the superiority of Confucianism is still implied, Yán Ráo boldly declares that he is “not ashamed” to speak of his friendship with the monk since he is such
Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

a morally and culturally upright figure. Shàngyán is admirable from whatever angle you look at him, but especially from the multicultural angle—he can synthesize two distinct traditions.

The other surviving preface to Shàngyán’s works, written by one Lǐ Tóng 李詷, praises the poet-monk in similarly Confucian terms. The style of this preface is very different, emphasizing elegance and allusions over personal narrative, but the same themes appear. Lǐ begins with a long introductory section on the nature of poetry, repeating the orthodox Confucian poetics of the “Great Preface” 大序 to the Book of Odes. In the second half, he addresses the works of Shàngyán specifically, using an opaque critical vocabulary that vaguely recalls some of the classic metaphors of Buddhism.

From “Preface to the Venerable Shàngyán’s Literary Collection” 顏上人集序

Lǐ Tóng 李詷

釋門高德顏公尚為詩,不入聲相得失哀樂怨歡,直以清寂景構成數百篇。其音清以和,其氣剛以達。妙出無象,虛涵不為。冷然若懸,未扣而響。信其功之妙也,不可得而稱矣。信其旨之深也,不可舉而言矣。嗚呼!河漢蕩蕩而東,人見其浮重載矣,不知其所以浮者何也。雅頌鬱鬱而南,人見其化夷俗矣,不知其所以化者何也?吾師復不拔於彼植於此,其所以者,何也?詷常蒐文獵儒,乘邱索穴,睹師之作,異而序之不足。舉師之美,為後人宗旨也。

The poetry written by the eminent and virtuous monk Shàngyán does not enter into [the world of] voice, physical traits, gain and loss, sorrow and joy, regret and delight; he simply draws on the pure and quiet landscape to create several hundred poems. [The poems’] sound is pure and harmonious, their breath strong and penetrating. Their mystery goes beyond the imageless; their emptiness contains non-action. They are cold, as if suspended [in space], and echo without being knocked. Indeed, such is the excellence of his merit that one cannot obtain it [i.e., read it] without praising it. Indeed, such is the profundity of his intentions that one cannot speak of them without complimenting them.

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8 QTW 829.8731.
9 QTW’s only note on Lǐ Tóng is that he lived during the Guānghuā era (898–901). Tóng 諸 is probably not a mistake for Dong 洞, since Lǐ Dong likely died in 897 and since there is no record of exchange poetry between Shàngyán and Lǐ Dong.
10 Cf. Lù Jī 陸機 (261–303), “Fù on Literature” 文賦: “[The poet] tests the void and non-existence to demand of it existence, / Knocks upon stillness and silence, seeking a tone” 課虛無以責有，叩寂寞而求音 (Wénxuàn 17.765; Quán Jin wén, 97.2012, in Yán Kějùn, Quán shànggǔ sāndài Qín Hán sānguó lìxué wén). For other translations into English, along with commentary, see Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 118–19; and Knechtges, Wen Xuan, 3:217. On the significance of this passage to late medieval poetics, see section 6.4.1 of this dissertation.
Alas! The Yellow and Hàn Rivers roll on in the east: men see that heavy loads float on them but do not understand the means by which they float. How can this be? The Elegantiae and Hymns [of the Book of Odes] are densely clustered in the south: men see that foreigners’ customs are transformed, but they do not see the means by which they are transformed. How can this be? My master [i.e., Shàngyán] does not uproot over there and plant over here: how does he do it? Often I ride to the hills and search caves to find culture and hunt down Confucian works.11 Looking upon the works of the master, they are unique, and writing a preface to them is not enough. I hold up the master’s beauty as an ideal for future generations to aim for.

In the first part of this evaluation, Shàngyán’s work is primarily seen as being beyond the human: his poems transcend the mundane world of sense and emotion, presenting the landscape in a neutral matter. Their images hang suspended, objectively, in mid-air, to be examined from any angle. Unlike the poet of Lù Jī’s “Rhapsody on Literature” 文賦, who knocks the void in search of a tone, Shàngyán’s poems sound without being touched. At the same time, this void in which they dangle strongly recalls the “emptiness” of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And his poems are described as his “merit” 功, a term that could be read in a technical Buddhist sense as an action that leads to supernatural favor and a higher rebirth.

In the second paragraph, Lǐ Tóng switches to a more mainstream classical frame of reference, using language reminiscent of the Book of Odes and Songs of Chǔ. This culminates in Lǐ’s narration of his own search for “culture” 文 and “Confucian works” 儒 in the wilderness, a scout (like Mencius or Xúnzǐ) hoping to find the sort of unrecognized talent so consistently lauded in the ancient classics.12 Oddly enough, it is a Buddhist monk he finds at the end of his search for an exemplar of the Confucian arts. Like Yán Ráo, Lǐ Tóng marvels at Shàngyán’s

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11 I.e., works of the “six arts” 六藝 propounded by the Confucian classics: rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics. This phrase calls to mind the description of Mencius and Xúnzǐ in the chapter summary of the Shìjì: “Hunting down the remaining writings of Confucian ink, [Xúnzǐ] illuminated the system of ritual duty; cut off from the desired end of King Hui, [Mencius] listed out the gains and losses of the past world” 獸儒墨之遺文，明禮義之統紀，絕惠王利端，列往世興衰 (Shìjì 130.3314).
12 This was a common rhetorical stance taken by preface-writers to the author of the collection under discussion—their discovery of hidden talent thanks to their endless searches for good art.
excellence and calls on the literati to imitate him. Although a Buddhist, he can Confucian with the best of them.

Shàngyán was not the only monk who was praised as a poet in mainly Confucian terms. Another example is a poem written by Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用, a literatus active in the late ninth century. In it, he lauds an unnamed “literary monk” in consciously classical, orthodox language.

Looking over a Literary Monk’s Scroll 覧文僧卷

Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用

| 雖無先聖耳 | Though I have not the ears of the Former Sage, |
|—— | —— |
| 異代得聞韶 | In this later age, I’ve heard the Sháo. |
| 怪石難為古 | Hard it is for strange stones to be ancient, |
| 奇花不敢妖 | Marvelous flowers dare not bewitch. |
| 調高非郢雪 | Your lyric tone is lofty, denying the “Snows” of Yǐng, |
| 思靜礙箕瓢 | Your thoughts are still, blocking the gourds of Ji. |
| 未可重吟過 | While you’ve never been one to stress chanting, |
| 雲山興轉饒 | Amid cloudy mountains, your were overwhelmed with inspiration. |

Much of this poem is obscure, probably referring to specific moments in the monk’s collection that are now lost to us. Nevertheless, the allusions sketch out the frame of reference with which

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13 QTS 645.7395.
14 Former Sage: Confucius. The Sháo: legendary music associated with the ancient sage-king Shùn 舜. In Analects VII.14, it is said, “When the Master was in Qi, he heard the Sháo, and did not know the taste of meat for three months. He said, ‘I had never conceived that there could be music as great as this.’” 子在齊聞韶，三月不知肉味。曰：『不圖為樂之至於斯也。』
15 The quality of being “ancient” or “old” (gǔ 古) was a loaded one during the late Táng. On the one hand, it was associated with “ancient prose” / “ancient culture” (gǔwén 古文) which sought to restore orthodox Confucian morality by eschewing ornate embellishments in favor of a more austere literary style (see, e.g., DeBlasi, Reform in the Balance, 115–46, for a recent treatment of the founding texts of the ancient prose movement in the Mid Táng). On the other hand, being “ancient” or “old” could also be associated with an aloof stance toward the world which ensured one’s purity, as in the category of “Lofty and ancient, profound and untroubled” 高古奧逸 in Zhāng Wéi’s Shīrán zhānké tǔ (late ninth cent.?), which sorts contemporaneous and recent poets according to various qualities.
16 “Snows” of Yǐng: according to the “Dialogue with the King of Chǔ” 對楚王問 by Sòng Yù 宋玉, one of the earliest singers in Yǐng (capital of Chǔ) sang several songs to which hundreds or thousands of people wrote responses, but when the bard sang “White Snows of Sunlit Spring” 陽春白雪, no more than ten dared write a response because it was “too refined” 彌高 and “too singular” 彌寡. See Wénxuàn 45.1999–2000.
17 Gourds of Ji: it is said that when the archetypical recluse Xǔ Yòu 許由 dwelt on Mt. Ji, he took a gourd someone had left behind and tied it to a treebranch as a sort of wind chime. It soon began to annoy him, and he got rid of it. See the preface to the “Ditty on Mt. Ji” 箕山操 attributed to him, preserved in Tàiping yúlán 571.2712 and Lù Qinli, Xiān-Qín Hán Wéi Jìn Nánběichāo shì, 11.307.
Lǐ Xiángyòng praises the monk. He is superior to the point of being aloof, going beyond even the “White Snows of Sunlit Spring” 阳春白雪, a classic example of a poem that could not be matched (line 5). His mind, calmed by meditation, is as still as the righteous recluse Xù Yóu 许由 (line 6). Most boldly, Lǐ compares the monk’s poems to the Sháo, an ancient song which Confucius himself said was unbelievably beautiful (lines 1–2). The classical grandeur of the monk’s songs can be recognized even by those lacking Confucius’ acute ear. Indeed, they combine, as few do, being strange with being ancient (line 3), being new and surprising with being elegant and classical. Just as with Shàngháyán, this literary monk is lauded for adhering to Confucian norms. He is most definitely a player in the literary world.

Poet-monks in this period were accepted as part of literary society, albeit on the literati’s terms. Unlike earlier periods, there was the background assumption that monks can make good poets, and that a poet-monk is one kind of poet among others. They received praise from literati with few of the qualifications reserved for Língché, even if the basis of such praise was their connections to literati and their knowledge of the Confucian tradition. Nonetheless, we see here real signs of poet-monks’ higher status to corroborate what the geographic analysis had hinted at. In the wake of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion, poet-monks have spread out across the land and filled in the void left by the capital elite. Or, to look at it from another angle: in the late ninth century, more monks have started writing elite verse in an attempt to integrate themselves with high literary society. Due to the upheavals caused by Huáng Cháo and other rebels, the literary world could no longer be seen as a unified whole, with its center in Cháng’ān. This destabilization meant that the formerly peripheral zones and actors could attempt to reconstitute the world around themselves, create new cultural spheres. Poet-monks, as one type of peripheral figure, did
just that. Thus, as their place in literary society became more secure in the following decades, a need arose to articulate a tradition of poet-monks.

3.2 907–940: Establishing the Tradition

As the poet-monk became a definite position within literary society over the course of the ninth century, we find more and more monks all over the empire writing many different varieties of poetry. Poet-monks clustered in the new regional centers of power, gathering once again after a period of scattering in the late ninth century. As the poet-monk became a respectable position in literary society, more monks claimed the title.

This anxiety of abundance led to the need to sort out the varieties of poet-monks, discover lines of affinity, judge the superiority or inferiority of individual poets, and forge ties between recent practitioners and their early predecessors. In short, it was necessary to establish a tradition.

3.2.1 Literati Construct the Poet-monk Tradition

The language of lineage would have been familiar to an educated person in Táng China from at least three distinct sources: 1) the mainstream culture’s genealogical charts that facilitated ancestor veneration, 2) religious and intellectual traditions’ view of the transmission

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18 On this point, see Map 2.4. For further evidence, consider the fact that the term “poet-monk” (shīsēng) and its near-synonyms (“chanting monk” or yīnsēng 吟僧 and “literary monk” or wēnsēng 文僧) are used to describe named individuals in our extant corpora of Táng prose and poetry, of which 12 (60%) date to the mid ninth century or later and 10 (50%) date to the late ninth century or later. These figures are even more striking when one considers the fact that 6 of the individuals called “poet-monks” (30%) are those first named as such in Lìu Yūxí’s preface to Língché’s works. Thus, both a strict definition of “poet-monk” (those named as such in extant Táng writings) and a loose definition of “poet-monk” (monks who are known to have written elite poetry with a high degree of literariness, as used in chapter 2’s maps) confirms the general trend of increased numbers of the “poet-monks” in the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

19 The genealogy is among the oldest genres of writing in China. Many bronze inscriptions from tenth century BCE onward, such as the “Shǐ Qiáng pán” 史墻盤, list out or narrate family lineages. On these early texts, see, among others, Brashear, Ancestral Memory in Early China. The concern with ancestral lineages remained strong into the Táng and can be seen in many documents, most notably in tomb epitaphs (mízhímíng 墓誌銘), which nearly always begin with an account of one’s ancestors. For an overview of this genre of writing for the Táng, see Tackett, The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy, 13–25; on tomb epitaphs in the early medieval period, see Davis, Entombed Epigraphy. For an example of tomb epitaphs’ continuing construction of ancestral lineages in the tenth century, see Schottenhammer, “A Buried Past.”
of teachings from master to disciple, and the dominant theory of literary genre which saw later forms as growing out of one of a handful of classics. By the late Táng, all of these sources had been around for centuries and were thus part of the intellectual repertoire of anyone literate enough to write a poem or preface. Indeed, attempts to establish a poet-monk tradition were already present in Liú Yūxī’s 833 preface to the works of Língchè. He found distant precursors in the fifth century (Huixū, Huìyuē), a source for the contemporary movement (Língyī), a few lesser successors (Hūguó, Qīngjiāng, Fāzhèn), and an orthodox lineage of transmission (Língyī → Jīǎorán → Língchè). On closer inspection, this lineage would not hold up: Jīǎorán was in fact about seven years older than Língyī, and Língchè owed as much of his poetic success to the literati Bāo Jí and Lí Shū as he did to Jīǎorán. But for the sake of clarity, anyone constructing a lineage must leave out such messy details.

Although Liú Yūxī’s preface contained some of the same rhetorical moves as a tradition-establishing document, he still saw the poet-monks as a local phenomenon tied to eastern

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20 Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian traditions all demonstrate an acute concern with mapping and evaluating the various lines of transmitted teachings. The scholarship on Buddhist lineages is too abundant to give even a cursory overview here. Major works in English on just the construction of ninth- and tenth-century Chán lineages include McRae, Seeing through Zen, esp. 1–21; Jia, The Hongzhou School, esp. 107–18; Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, esp. 45–114; Welter, Monks, Rulers, and Literati; Brose, Patrons and Patriarchs; Morrison, The Power of Patriarchs, esp. 13–90; Cole, Fathering Your Father; and Foulk, “The Spread of Chan (Zen) Buddhism.” The various teachings of institutional Daoism, like Christianity and Islam, are ultimately based on divine revelations given to a founder—such as Zhāng Dàolíng 张道陵—for the Heavenly Masters tradition—and passed down through a series of orthodox successors. For an introduction to the importance of lineages in Daoism, see Skar, “Lineages,” and Benn, “Transmission,” in Pregadio, Encyclopedia of Taoism, 1:11–15. Michel Strickmann, in fact, regards such lineages as so important to the tradition that those who do not “safeguard and perpetuate their own lore and practices through esoteric rites of transmission” are not considered “Daoist” in his book (“On the Alchemy of T’ao Hung-ching,” 165). The Confucian obsession with lineage can likewise be seen at least as far back as the “Arrayed Biographies of Confucians” 儒林列傳 in Shìjī 121.3115–29, the main concern of which is to distinguish the lineages of teaching various classical texts. In the Táng, students of ritual and classical texts were still known as “disciples” (dìzǐ) of their teachers, and, as David McMullen notes, “the sense of loyalty associated with Buddhist or Taoist teachers was transferred to the more general social context of the scholarly bureaucracy” (State and Scholars in T’ang China, 49). On the possible relationship between elite genealogies and Buddhist lineages, see Jorgensen, “The ‘Imperial’ Lineage of Ch’án Buddhism.”

21 See, e.g., the “Revering the Classics” 禮經 chapter of the late fifth-century systematic work of literary theory, Wénxīn diàolièng, which explains how each named genre grew out of one of the Confucian classics (Liú Xié, Zēngdìng Wénxīn diàolièng jiàozhù, 3.26–27).
Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

Jiāngnán. By the late ninth century, we begin to find attempts to rein in the expanding tradition, to weed out the inferior specimens and highlight only the finest blossoms. Artistic proliferation creates a need for lineages, for canons. Zhèng Gǔ (851?–910?), one of the most important literati poets of the time and an associate of Qǐjì and other poet-monks, draws directly on the language of Buddhist lineages to discuss the poet-monk tradition in a poem sent to Wénxiù 文秀.22

Sent to the Poet-Monk Wénxiù 寄題詩僧秀公
Zhèng Gǔ 郑谷

靈一心傳清塞心
可公吟後楚公吟
近來雅道相親少
唯仰吾師所得深
好句未停無暇日
舊山歸老有東林
冷曹孤宦甘寥落
多謝攜筇數訪尋

Língyī’s mind was transmitted to Qīngsài’s mind,
And after Kě’s intoning came Chú’s intoning.24
In recent years, comrades on the proper way are few—
I can look only to my master for the depth of what he grasps.
Unceasing [in your pursuit of] lovely lines, you have no days of rest.
For old mountains to retire to, there’s Dōnglín.
For this cold cleric, this lowly official, sweetness is few and far between:
Many thanks for grabbing your bamboo cane and seeking me out sometimes.

22 Zhèng Gǔ was widely respected by his peers for his poetic talent and by later generations for his decision to go into reclusion during the waning days of the Táng dynasty. He described himself as “one who labored and suffered in the Airs and Elegantiae” 勤苦於風雅 (“Self-Preface to the Cloud Terrace Compilation” 雲臺編自序, in Zhèng Gǔ shì jiānzhù, 462). The 18th-century editors of the Sìkū quánshū zōngmù tìyào called him “the thumb [i.e., highest authority] of the Late Táng” 晚唐之巨擘 (151.3173). For an overview of biographical sources, see Táng cáizǐ zhuàn jiàojiān, 4:152–72. For more on his life and poetry, see the introduction to Yán Shòuchéng, Zhèng Gǔ shì jiānzhù, 1–20; and the many remarks throughout Duàn Shuāngxī, Tángmò Wǔdài Jiāngnán xīdào shǐgē yǎnjū. For an overview of mainland Chinese scholarship on Zhèng Gǔ from 1980 to 2005, see Shĕn Wénfān and Yán Xuēyìng, “20 shìjì 80 niándài yǐlái guónèi Zhèng Gǔ shǐgē yǎnjiù shùpíng.”
23 Yán Shòuchéng et al, Zhèng Gǔ shì jiānzhù, 3.395–96; QTS 676.7754. Wénxiù: also known in some texts as Yuánxiù 元秀, a southern poet-monk of the late ninth century. For biographical information, see Appendix A.
The first line of this poem ("X’s mind was transmitted to Y’s mind" X 心傳 Y 心) strongly recalls the language of “mind-to-mind transmission” 以心傳心 that was popularized by the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch 六祖壇經. The famous story, about Hóngrēn 洪忍 passing on his dharma to Huinéng 惠能, is precisely about orthodox transmission and the fact that mental affinity overrides all else. Huinéng’s rival, Shénxiù 神秀, is said to have been the favored student, and Huinéng himself was supposedly illiterate. The master does not make the obvious choice, but opts instead for the disciple with a similar mindset. Similarly, Zhèng Gǔ emphasizes mental affinity above all, drawing lines of connection between poet-monks who probably never met or knew each other. Língyī died in 762, over 50 years before the recipient of his mind, Zhōu Hè, was born. Wúkě and Huáichǔ lived at opposite ends of the ninth century in different parts of the empire, the former around Cháng’ān and the latter at Mt. Báizhào 白兆山 (in modern Héběi province). There was no direct, literal transmission between these monks, but, as poet-monks, Zhèng Gǔ suggests they have the same mind, a mind of which Wénxiù partakes.

The sense of a poet-monk tradition is further emphasized in the third couplet of the poem. Line 5, describing Wénxiù’s obsessive pursuit of good couplets, calls to mind the dogged work ethic of the kǔyín aesthetic, an aesthetic strongly associated with Jià Dào, his monk-cousin Wúkě, and other poets of the mid-ninth century with ties to Buddhism. Line 6 suggests that Wénxiù plans to spend his later years at Dōnglín temple on Mt. Lú. As our geographical analysis above has shown us, Mt. Lú was one of the lasting hubs for poet-monk activity from the Mid Táng up through the Five Dynasties. Dōnglín temple, moreover, was one of Mt. Lú’s most famous temples, where Huíyuán was said to have established the White Lotus Society in 402 and

\[ For the original line, see T no. 2008, 48:349a. For an English translation, see Yampolsky, The Platform Sutra, 133. \]
where other poet-monks of the late medieval period, such as Shàngyán, Qíjí, and Xiūmù, spent much of their lives. Zhèng Gǔ is suggesting that Wénxiù will fit in at Dōnglín temple, that he will be able to commune with likeminded monks of both the past and the present. He could be among those who, like him, would be potential candidates for receiving the transmission of the great poet-monks’ minds.

Several decades after Zhèng Gǔ’s poem, discussion of lineage transmission remained vibrant. Most of these lineages, as constructed at the turn of the tenth century, coalesce around Guànxiū. His large collection of idiosyncratic poems, accomplishments in painting and calligraphy, and sharp wit made him one of the most influential (and divisive) artists of his age. His works were collected and published at least twice, each with its own preface. We will look at the second one, written by his disciple Tányù, in the next section. Here we focus on the first preface, written during his lifetime by the eminent literatus Wú Róng, which praises Guànxiū exclusively as a poet. Ever since Lǐ Hè’s works became popular, Wú Róng complains, poets have been derivative, copying Lǐ’s overly flowery style. By contrast, Guànxiū, whose “skill is divine and cleverness remarkable, being extremely good at songs and poems” 機神穎秀，雅善歌詩, takes up the tradition of praise and critique. This evaluation is clear from both the frame of his argument and the terms by which he praises Guànxiū. Wú Róng begins his preface by discussing the purpose of poetry.

夫詩之作者，善善則詠頌之，惡惡則風刺之。茍不能本此二道，雖甚美，猶土木偶不主於氣血，何所尚哉？

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26 The preface states that it was written on January 7, 900. On Wú Róng’s life and reputation, see his biography in Xin Tāngshù 203.5792, as well as Bái Jùncái, “Wú Róng niánpǔ,” and Fù Xuángòng, Táng cáizí zhùan jiǎojiān, 4:9.221–32.

Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

As for the writing of poetry, one should sing hymns to call the good good, and one should satirize to call the wicked wicked. If it is not based in these two methods, though it be highly praised, it is but an earthen or wooden replica housing no blood or vigor. What is there to exalt in such poetry?

Alluding to a long tradition stretching back to the Book of Odes 詩經, Wú Róng describes the goal of poetry to be moral suasion.28 All ornament, all aesthetics must serve this goal, or else society risks falling into decline. Guànxiū’s work upholds this ideal.

上人之作，多以理勝，復能創意，其語往往得景物於混茫自然之際，然其旨歸，必合於道。太白、樂天既逝，可嗣其美者，非上人而誰？

Most of the writings of the venerable monk [Guànxiū] are superior for their truth, and are capable of producing new mindsets. His words always take hold of scenes and objects from the edges of the unformed Self-so, but their real aim29 is always to merge with the Way. Since Lǐ Tàibái and Bái Lètiān have passed away,30 if this venerable monk is not the inheritor of their praiseworthy, then who is?

To anyone familiar with Guànxiū’s work, this evaluation may sound strange. After all, his stylistic innovations were among the most bold of his day.31 Wú Róng recognizes this, praising Guànxiū’s use of language and imagery, but chooses instead to highlight how the monk employs all of his extraordinary abilities in the service of a more noble goal. They aim to merge with the Way, which here refers not to the transcendent principle of the Daoists or Buddhists, but to the orthodox Way of the sage-kings transmitted by the classics. In previous generations, this Way was upheld by Lǐ Bái and Bái Jūyì, and now it has been passed on to Guànxiū. Though Wú Róng’s preface does not establish its own, separate lineage of poet-monks like Zhèn Gǔ’s poem, it ennobles the idea of the poet-monk by placing Guànxiū in a literary lineage. That is, poet-monks are seen as potential inheritors of the orthodox Way of poetry.

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28 On this theme in the “Great Preface” 大序 to the Book of Odes, see Van Zoeren, Poetry and Personality, 99–115.  
29 Literally, “[the place to which] their aims return.”  
31 On some of these innovations, see chapters five and six of this dissertation.
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Within the next few decades, Guànxiū became the cornerstone of the new generation’s conception of the poet-monk tradition. In 938, Sūn Guāngxiàn 孫光憲 (d. 968)—one of the most learned, bookish literati of the mid-tenth century, best known as a prominent writer of song lyrics (cí词) and the compiler of the anecdote collection Bēimèng suŏyán 北夢瑣言 (Trifling words from north of Yúnmèng 雲夢)32—wrote a preface to the works of Qǐjī in which he evaluates his subject in terms of an established poet-monk tradition. This may be surprising, since Sūn’s Bēimèng suŏyán carries a sustained, open hostility toward nearly all things Buddhist.33 But since poet-monks have become a literary tradition in their own right, he can compartmentalize them from the frauds, fools, and fearmongerers he sees in the rest of the saṃgha. There seems to be a stable set of references for the poet-monk tradition on which Sūn can draw, without any need to lay out an entire lineage again.

From “Preface to the White Lotus Collection” 白蓮集序34
Sūn Guāngxiàn 孫光憲 (d. 968)

議者以唐來詩僧，惟貫休禪師骨氣混成，境意卓異，殆難儔敵。至於皎然、靈一，將與禪者並驅於風騷之途，不近不遠也。江之南，漢之北，緇侶業緣情者，靡不希其聲彩，自非雅道昭著，安能享茲大名！

In discussing the poet-monks from the Tán onward, meditation master Guànxiū blended together and perfected their bones and breath: his perceptual awareness was outstanding and unique, impossible to match. As for Jiǎorán and Língyī, they raced down the path of poetry alongside meditation, neither near nor far [from it]. South of the Great River and North of the Hán, among the black-clad adherents who maintain that desire is caused by karma, there are none who don’t cherish their melodies and colors. And yet if they’re not

32 For basic information on Sūn Guāngxiàn and Bēimèng suŏyán, see Halperin, “Heroes, Rogues, and Religion,” 414–16. For more detail, see the studies collected in Fāng Rui, Sūn Guāngxiàn yù Bēimèng suŏyán yánjiù. On his “bookishness,” see the remarks of Zhōu Yǔchōng 周羽翀 (late 10th/early 11th cent.) in Sān Chǔ xīnlù 三楚新錄: “In between the wars, distressed that his library was incomplete, he sent out emissaries on the roads. Though not yet wealthy, he gave them cash and silk to purchase [books]. Thereupon, within three years, [his collection] had reached tens of thousands of volumes” 患兵戈之際，書籍不備，遇發使諸道，未嘗不厚加金帛購求焉，於是三年間致書及數萬卷 (Sān Chǔ xīnlù 3.4).
33 See Halperin, “Heroes, Rogues, and Religion,” 426–29, who concludes that “in Sun Guangxian’s portrayal, Buddhists do not constitute so much a religious group as a loosely organized band of ne’er-do-wells, to be regarded with suspicion.”
34 QTW 900.9390–91; Pān Dīngwù 598–99; Wáng Xiùlín 619.
dazzling illuminations of the Refined Way,\textsuperscript{35} how could they enjoy such a grand reputation?

There is here, as in Liú Yǔxī‘s preface to Língchè’s works, a sense of development. The earliest poet-monks—Jiāorán and Lingyī—are said to pursue their literary and religious practices in parallel. While their works are “dazzling” examples of poetic practice and have brought them much fame, they are mainly appreciated by their fellow monks, “those who maintain that desire is caused by karma.” It is not the literati, the ultimately authoritative judges of poetry, who have given their poems a grand reception, but cloistered monastics. They “raced down the path of poetry alongside meditation” and maintained a safe, middling distance from poetry, “neither near nor far” from it. Their two vocations are parallel lines—i.e., lines that never cross, neither in conflict nor in integration.\textsuperscript{36} Just as Língchè was full of “diverse flavors,” able to talk out of both sides of his mouth but never to fully integrate his two vocations, so are Jiāorán and Lingyī living multiple lives. But instead of being praised by the literati for their versatility, they are implicitly faulted for a kind of shallowness. It is only Guānxiū who “blended together and perfected their bones and breath.” Sūn is saying that Guānxiū was a key turning point: only he was able to fully integrate Buddhist and poetic thought. His method of combining these practices helped him develop a heightened “perceptual awareness” 境意, which made him the most prominent poet-monk of the time.\textsuperscript{37} Although Sūn Guāngxiàn nowhere endorses Buddhism wholesale, he does

\textsuperscript{35} Refined Way: the practice of the classical arts.

\textsuperscript{36} This diverges from the portrayal of Jiāorán in his biography in the Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks, where it is claimed that Jiāorán resolved to stop writing poetry in 785, only to take it up again in 789 at the urging of Lǐ Hóng 李洪 (T no. 2061, 50:892a; English translation in Nielson, The T‘ang Poet-monk Chiao-juan, 57–59). Whether or not this was actually true, it shows that these were the kinds of stories circulating around Jiāorán, and thus an attitude toward Jiāorán which Sūn did not explicitly adopt.

\textsuperscript{37} Meditation manuals translated from Indian sources explicitly made these claims about improved perception. See, for example, the “Dharma Blossom Samādhi Method” 法華三昧觀法 discussed in the Brief Introduction to the Methods of Contemplation 思惟略要法, which promises that “for those who practice in this way, the five desires will be gone of themselves, the five hindrances will be eliminated of themselves, and the five roots [i.e., eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body] will be strengthened, and one will thereby enter into concentration” 習如是観者，五欲自
implicitly recognize that the meditative practice of a poet-monk can heighten one’s perception, the basis on which poetry is built. In this way, Sūn portrays Guànxiū as the culmination of a distinct tradition with its own developmental arc, one which had been building since the late eighth century.

Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用 (late ninth/early tenth cent.), likely writing a few decades prior to Sūn Guāngxiàn, also regarded Guànxiū as the key figure in a later lineage of poet-monks. Lǐ, a skilled writer of yuèfǔ in his own right, posits Guànxiū as the channel connecting the monk Xiūmù to the mainstream literary tradition of song-style poetry.⁹⁰

Reading a Compilation of the Venerable Xiūmù’s Songs 讀修睦上人歌篇⁴⁰
Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用

李白亡 李白之 passed, ⁴⁰
李賀死 李賀之 dead. ⁴⁰
陳陶趙睦尋相次 Chén Táo and you, Zhào Mù, sought to succeed them.⁴¹
須知代不乏騷人 You must know that this generation does not lack for Sāo-poets,⁴²
貫休之後 But for heirs to Guànxiū, ⁴³
惟修睦而已矣 There is Xiūmù alone. ⁴³
睦公睦公真可畏 Lord Mù, Lord Mù, truly you are formidable—

断五盖自除，五根增长即得禅定 (Sīwéi lùiyǎofó 思惟略要法, trans. Kumārajīva 墾摩羅什, T no. 617, 15:300c; this passage is also discussed in Wang, Shaping the Lotus Sutra, 20).

⁴⁰ Of Lǐ Xiányòng’s 186 extant poems, 39 of them (20%) are either written to yuèfǔ titles or employ the mixed meter characteristic of such verse. Sòng critics, though they recognized this as Lǐ’s favorite form to work in, held generally ambivalent attitudes toward his songs. See, for example, the remarks collected in Chén Bóhǎi, Tāngshī huìpíng, 3:2782.

⁴¹ Here and elsewhere I use the term “song-style poetry” to translate the genre known as gēxíng 歌行. It is distantly related to cí 詞 (“song lyrics”) but quite distinct from it. For more on the distinction between cí and gēxíng, see section 5.3.1 below.

⁴² Sāo-poets: refers to the “Lísāo” 離騷 (Encountering sorrow), the inaugural poem of the Songs of Chù 楚辭 attributed to Qū Yuán. The “Lísāo” was generally considered the fountainhead of mixed-metered, song-style poetry (see, e.g., the remarks by Zhí Yú 摮虞 [late third cent.] in his Discussion of Literary Genres 文章流別論, collected in Quán Jin wèn 77.1905, in Yán Jiūn, Quán shànggǔ sāndài Qín Hàn sānguó lìchūn wén). The term “men of Sāo” (literal translation of “Sāorén” 驚人) usually referred to poets generally, but it always contained this allusion buried just beneath the surface.
開口向人無所忌  When you open your mouth to others you shrink from nothing! giH A
才似煙霞生則媚  Your talent is like the morning mist, charming and new; mijH A
8 直如屈軼佞則指  Your uprightness like the bend-sack flower, pointing out flatterers. tsyijX *A
意下紛紛造化機  Your thoughts teem, teem with the workings of the Fashioner; kjij ~A
筆頭滴滴文章髓  Your brush drips, drips with the marrow of literature. swjeX *A
明月清風三十年  For thirty years, the bright moon and the clear breeze nen -
12 被君驅使如奴婢  Have been chased by you like a slave. bjieX *A
勸君休  I urge you to rest— xjuw -
莫容易  Be not so rash! yeH A
世俗由來稀則貴  The world has long thought rare and precious kwjijH A
珊瑚高架五雲毫  Tall coral shelves and brushes of five-colored clouds. haw -
16 小小不須煩藻思  [These things] are so small they need not vex your thoughts of writing. siH A

Lǐ Xiányòng delineates an orthodox transmission of song-style poetry within literary society as a whole, not just within the world of poet-monks. Though he does not explicitly distinguish between generic subtypes, it is clear from a number of clues that he means to focus on song-style poems. The poem’s title tells us that this poem is a response to reading a collection of “Venerable Xiūmù’s Songs” 修睦上人歌. It is written in a mix of three- and seven-character meter, the most popular form for such verse at the time. It praises Xiūmù’s boldness and

43 The “bend-sack”屈軼 flower, also known as the “flatterer-pointing”佞指 flower, is a legendary plant which is said to grow up during the rule of sage-kings such as Yáo 尧. In Wáng Róng’s 王融 “Preface to Poems on the ‘Bent Creek’ Festival on the Third Day of the Third Month” 三月三日曲水詩序 (commissioned March 29, 491), we find the following: “Purple shoots flower and vermilion blossoms bloom; sprigs of flattery grow and plants of experience multiply” 紫脫華,朱英秀; 佞枝植,歷草孳. Tián Qiúzǐ 田俅子, quoted in Lǐ Shàn’s 李善 Wēnxuǎn 文選 commentary, tells us: “In the time of the Yellow Emperor a plant grew on the steps to the Imperial Hall. When a flattering minister would enter the court, the flower would point to him. It was called the ‘bend-sack’ flower. In this way, no eloquent man dared approach it” 黃帝時,有草生於帝庭階,若佞臣入朝,則草指之,名曰屈軼,是以佞人不敢進也 (Wēnxuǎn 46.2063).
44 In these lines, Lǐ Xiányòng is saying that the world has always valued the sort of rare talent manifested in Xiūmù’s writing.
imagination—qualities normally associated with song-style verse—rather than their decorum, balance, “purity” 清, “antiquity” 古, or “laboredness” 苦, which we would expect to see if he were discussing poetry more generally. And the predecessors evoked, Lǐ Bái (702–762) and Lǐ Hè, are most highly regarded among later Táng poets for their verses in nonstandard, song-style meters.45

In the lineage of song-style poetry outlined by Lǐ Xiányòng, Lǐ Bái (702–762) was the paragon of the form, and Lǐ Hè (790–816) took the reins from the earlier poet. Both were bold writers with a penchant for fantastical imagery and unconventional rhythms, the sort of qualities best displayed in mixed-meter songs. But with the two Lís gone from this earth, the true line of inheritance is uncertain. In lines 2–4 of this poem, Lǐ Xiányòng tries to establish his own: Chén Táo (803?–879?) 46 → Guànxiū (832–913) → Xūmù (d. 918). Chén Táo, the only non-Buddhist, lived many years at Hóngzhōu, a thriving center for innovations in Buddhist doctrine in the ninth century, and exchanged poems with Cái Jīng 蔡京 (a laicized poet-monk) and Guànxiū. Guànxiū, for his part, was perhaps the most influential poet-monk of the period and, as we have seen, came to be as looming a figure as Jiăorán in the tradition. Zànínng’s 贊寧 (919–1001) hagiography of Guànxiū in the Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳 agrees with Lǐ Xiányòng’s evaluation, declaring that “his style is not inferior to the two Lís, Bái and Hè” 體調

45 On Lǐ Bái, see the remarks by Yīn Fán 殷璠 (mid-eighth cent.) in Héyuè yīnglíng jí 河岳英靈集, which singles out his mixed-metered “The Way to Shū is Hard” 蜀道難 as representative (Tǎngrèn xuăn Tángshī xīnbān, 171; for more on this point, see Kroll, “Heyue yīnglíng jí and the Attributes of High Tang Poetry,” 188) or the comments in Běnshì shī 本事詩 that focus on his relative dearth of regulated verse (Běnshì shī 3.17). On Lǐ Hè, see Dù Mù’s preface to his works (Wú Zàiqìng, Dù Mù jí jìnián jiǎozhù, 10.774) or the evaluative comments in his official biography in Jiǔ Tángshī 87.3722. The importance of these two figures and the aesthetic of madness in song is examined in greater detail in section 5.3.3.

46 Confusingly, there were two men named Chén Táo who lived in Hóngzhōu during the late ninth and early tenth centuries: one lived 803?–879?, the other 894?–968?. This has been the source of much confusion since the Sòng dynasty, introducing many errors into the historical record, some of which have probably not been properly sorted out. Lǐ Xiányòng is certainly talking about the older Chén Táo, since the younger was a teenager when Lǐ died.
What Lǐ Xiányòng implies in his lines is that the poet-monks are the true inheritors of the song-style tradition. The rest of the poem, which we will not examine in great detail, confirms this. Xiūmù is praised in terms we normally find reserved for brash, otherworldly poets like Lǐ Bái: he is “formidable” (line 5), “holds back nothing” (line 6), overflowing with ideas (lines 9–10), “rash” (line 13), and unable to be contained by even the finest writing accoutrements (lines 15–16). Xiūmù is admired for his restless energy—a quality that in many ways is antithetical to the stereotype of the monk as a meditative bonze. This is significant because it means that poet-monks are taking over what had previously been considered a secular tradition. While certain songs had long been popular in the Chinese Buddhist tradition for their didactic value (such as “The Five Turns of the Night Watch” 五更轉 and “The Twelve Hours” 十二時), they had never been seen as part of the mainstream literary tradition. But here, as in Wú Róng’s preface to Guànxiū’s works, the poet-monks are the keepers of poetry. Lǐ Xiányòng’s opinion was doubtless not the only one out there, nor even the dominant one. But the very fact that it was possible for a literatus to take this position is evidence for the importance of poet-monks to the literary world.

In these tenth-century poems, it is clear that “poet-monk” has become a label for a social position in the literary world, and it is around this position that writers sought to invent a tradition. Poet-monks move from being peripheral figures—either mere curiosities or souls in parallel—to players in the sphere of poetry. With this development came a need to establish lines of “orthodox” poet-monks who passed on the tradition over generations. At the same time, it also meant that it was necessary to find precursors to the poet-monks in earlier centuries. Predecessors like Zhī Dùn, Huixiū, and Huíyuē could be used to justify contemporary monks’

\[47\] T no. 2061, 50:897b.
practice, demonstrating that they, like their literati counterparts, had deep roots in civilization. In some cases, their precursors were not monks at all, but major poets of the mainstream tradition. As full participants in literary society, poet-momks were now legitimate candidates for becoming heirs to Li Bái’s song-style verse. Poet-momks had their own tradition, and could even become the inheritors of others’.

3.2.2 Poet-Monks Construct the Poet-momk Tradition

It was not just the literati who needed to make sense of the proliferating poet-momks. As we reach the end of the Táng and enter the Five Dynasties era, we find an increasingly acute sense of self-awareness among the poet-momks themselves. That is, “poet-momk” no longer was an outsider’s label, but became an insider’s term, reclaimed from its early, negative connotations. It went from being etic to emic. Poet-momks became active participants in shaping the idea of the poet-momk. They created their own tradition.48

Among Guànxiū’s many poems on reading,49 we find one on the work of two earlier poet-momks, Jiǎorán and Zhōu Hé (the latter referred to by his style name, Nánqīng or “Southern Clarity”). The very fact of placing these two names together in the title of his poem is an argument for their continuity. The two poets lived in different times and places (eastern Jiāngnán

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48 In many ways, this parallels developments in Buddhism more broadly. It was during the same time—the mid tenth century—that elaborate Chán genealogies and the related literary genres of “lamp-transmission records” 傳燈錄 and “records of sayings” 言錄 emerged. Although earlier records of Chán lineages exist (such as the biography of Fārú 法如 in 689 and the Lídài fābāo jì 歷代法寶記 composed around 774, on which see Yanagida Seizan, Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū, 6:335–46), the more systematic ones which represent the emergence of a full-fledged Buddhist subtradition came later: the Transmission of the Bāolín Temple (Bāolín zhuàn 寶林傳) was likely compiled in 801, the Patriarch’s Hall Collection (Zútáng jí 祖堂集) was compiled in 952, the Record of the Source Mirror (Zōngjīng lù 宗鏡錄) was compiled in 961, the Recorded Sayings of Master Wùdé of Fén̄yang (Fén̄yang Wùdé chánshī yǔlù 汾陽無德禪師語錄) was compiled in the first years of the eleventh century, and the Jingdé Lamp Transmission Records (Jīngdé chuándēnglù 景德傳燈錄) was completed in 1004. The creation of such records, much recent scholarship has argued, is coextensive with the creation of “Chán” itself as a distinct (or at least dominant) school. See Foulk, “The Ch’an Tsung in Medieval China”; Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch’an Buddhism”; Sharf, Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism, 7–10; and Welter, Monks, Rulers, and Literati. 49 Guànxiū’s other poems on reading poetry include ones about the Lísāo 離騷, Dù Fù 杜甫, Jiǎ Dǎo, Měng Jiǎo 孟郊, Liú Děrén 劉得仁, Gù Kuāng 顧況, and Yáo Hé 姚合.
Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

in the late eighth century, the capital corridor in the first half of the ninth) and wrote in very
different styles (Jiǎorán was a jack of all trades, Zhōu Hè specialized in regulated verse). The
only thing that connects them is their shared experience as poet-monks and the fact that both can
be seen as precursors to Guànxiū himself.

Looking over the Poetry Collections of Jiǎorán and Nánqīng 覽皎然集南卿集

Guànxiū 貫休

學力不相敵 Your scholarship is without match;  
清邏鬱鬱同 So pure, we still seek to imitate you.  
高於寶月月 Loftier than Bǎoyuè’s moon—
4 誰得射雕弓 Who could shoot your carved bow?  
至鸞逢姚監 Your utmost vision touched Yáo Hé;  
良工遇魯公 Your craftsmanship agrees with the man of Lǔ.  
8 千古共清風 The sum of a thousand ages’ purest airs.

dek
duwng
ngwjot
kjuwng
kaemH
kuwng
zjenH
pjuwng

50 Hú Dàjùn 2:16.775–76; QTS 833.9397.
51 The adjective used here, qīng 清 (“pure”), puns on the dharma names of the two poet-monks, Qīngzhòu 清昼 (“Pure Daylight”) and Qīngsài 清塞 (“Purity Bastion”).
52 Bǎoyuè was a monk of the late fifth century. One of his poems, a version of “Traveling’s Hard” 行路難 written in the persona of a lonely woman whose soldier-husband has travelled to the frontier, was collected in the famed anthology New Songs from a Jade Terrace 玉臺新詠. His description of the moon in that poem reads:

凝霜夜下拂羅衣 Frozen frost falls by night,  
浮雲中斷開明月 Floating clouds part,  
夜夜遙遙徒相思 Night after night—afar, afar  
年年望望情不歇 Year after year—I gaze, I gaze,  
我的感情消不盡 my feelings fade not.

See Lù Qǐnlì, 1480; Yuèfǔ shījì 70.1001; Yùtài xīnyōng jiānzhù 9.415–16. For an alternative English translation, see Anne Birrell, New Songs from a Jade Terrace, 247.
54 Lǔgōng 魯公 (“the man of Lǔ”) most likely refers to Gōngshǐ Bān of Lǔ 魯公翰班, a legendary carpenter of pre-imperial times mentioned in Mencius 4.A.1: “Li Lóu’s sight and Master Gōngshù’s skill could not form squares and circles without a compass and L-square” 離婁之明,公輸子之巧,不以規矩,不能成方員. Lǔgōng could also be interpreted as “the Duke of Lǔ,” in which case it would refer to the High Táng calligrapher Yān Zhēnqīng 顏真卿 who held the title of “Commander Duke of Lǔ” 鄒郡公. I find this possibility unlikely since Guànxiū elsewhere stresses madness (not craftsmanship) as the most admirable quality for a calligrapher to have. In this line, I take yù 遇 in the sense of “agree with, accord with” 遇合,投合 (definition 3 in Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn), found in common phrases such as yùshí 遇時 (“agree with the times”), yùshì 遇世 (“agree with the age”).
Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

Following the norms of late Táng poems addressed to two people, Guànxiū puts his subjects in parallel with each other. In couplets 1 and 3, he describes Jiǎorán in the first line and Zhōu Hè in the second. Jiǎorán, author of several important works of literary criticism, is praised for his scholarship (line 1), and Zhōu Hè, the practitioner of austere parallelism, is admired for his purity (line 2).\(^5\) Jiǎorán’s poems were seen by Yáo Hé, who included four of them in his anthology *Collection of Utmost Mystery* 極玄集 (line 5); Zhōu Hè’s poems show the kind of craftsmanship once found in the works of the famed carpenter Gōngshū Bān of Lǔ 魯公輸班 (line 6). Guànxiū himself is fully aware of their differences: Jiǎorán is characterized by his learning, Zhōu Hè by his craftsmanship. One is a scholar, the other a laborer. This makes him putting them together even bolder. Though they are different kinds of poets, they are both poet-monks, and both precursors to Guànxiū.

Couplets 2 and 4 do not display the same kind of antithetical structure.\(^6\) Each expresses a single idea in two lines. Lines 7–8 form a straightforwardly laudatory sentence, albeit hyperbolic, and need no detailed explication here. Lines 3–4, however, show how this poem is constructing a poet-monk tradition. Bāoyuè, the monk whose *yuèfǔ* 楽府 (“music-bureau” songs) were

\(^5\) Zhōu Hè was described by contemporaries as “being pure and refined in poetic structure” 詩格清雅 and as “emphasizing the pure, marvelous, upright, and refined” 清奇雅正主. See *Táng zhíyán jiàozhù* 10.207, and Zhāng Wéi, *Shěrrén zhūkē tū*, 8.

\(^6\) A look at the tonal patterning of the poem (thinking in terms of “level” 平 vs. “deflected” 仄 tones, as the Táng poets themselves did) reinforces the sense that couplets 1 and 3 are parallel while couplets 2 and 4 are not. If we mark level tones with an open dot (○) and deflected tones with a closed dot (●), the poem’s tonal pattern can be charted as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{1} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} \\
\text{2} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} \\
\text{4} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} \\
\text{8} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●} & \text{●}
\end{array}
\]

Note that the tones of lines 1 mirror those of line 2, and those of line 5 mirror line 6. That is to say, couplets 1 and 3 demonstrate perfect tonal parallelism while couplets 2 and 4 do not. For more on the poet-monks’ use of tonal patterning, see section 6.3.2 of this dissertation.
collected in a popular sixth-century anthology, is drawn into the tradition. Though none of Bǎoyuè’s surviving poems touch on Buddhist thought or practice in any way, he is claimed as a poet-monk. Line 3 is a dense entanglement of word play: “lofty” (gāo 高) is used in the sense of both physical height and unreachable purity, and the “moon” refers both to Bǎoyuè’s description of the moon in his poem “Traveling’s Hard” 行路難 and to Bǎoyuè himself, whose name literally means “Precious Moon.” This playful punning only serves to call attention to the line, to stress the continuity of the poet-monk tradition over 400 years, from Bǎoyuè to Jiǎorán to Zhōu Hê to Guànxìū. In this way, Guànxìū takes up the idea of the poet-monk and claims it as his own. What had once been a term of derision he makes a badge of honor.

Not long after Guànxìū’s death, his disciple Tányù gathered the master’s writings and, surely frustrated with the way Wú Róng’s essay strayed far from its subject, wrote his own preface to Guànxìū’s collection. This second preface tells us much more about Guànxìū’s life and also something about his relationship with other monks. It opens with a description of some of Guànxìū’s religious training and practices. As a child, he set to memorize a thousand characters of the Lotus Sūtra per day, until he could recite the entire text from memory within a month. After his full ordination at twenty, he spent three years studying the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith 大乘起信論, attributed to Aśvagoṣa. All through this time, he was friends with a neighboring monk named Chūmò 處黙 with whom he recited the scriptures and wrote poems. As Tányù tells us, “Whenever they would get a break from their intense religious cultivation, they would exchange matching poems with each other” 每於精修之暇，更相唱和.

57 In addition to the this poem, Guànxìū compares his own friendship with a literatus to Jiǎorán’s friendship with Qin Xi 秦系 in “Given to Summoned Gentleman Xū” 贈許徵君 (Hú Dàjùn 15.722–23; QTS 832.9390), further demonstrating the fact that he saw Jiǎorán as a model on which to base his own poet-monk persona.
58 Tányù, “Preface to the Collected Works of Master Chányuè” 禪月集序 (Hú Dàjùn 1294–96; QTW 922.9604–05).
59 For an English translation of this text, see Hakeda, The Awakening of Faith. For two studies of the sūtra in English, see Lai, “The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna” and Jin, “Through the Lens of Interpreters.”
Chǔmò regarded Guànxiū highly, saying that he “holds an unbridled talent and harbors the way of the Self-So” 抱不羈之才，懷自然之道. Guànxiū was clearly admired by his fellow monks for these talents. His early lectures on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith attracted listeners hundreds of miles away. When he reached Shǔ in his later years, “a meditation chamber was built especially for him, and he was invited to be the supervisory monk” 特修禪宇，懇請住持, presumably because of the respect he commanded among his fellow monastics. When he died, “there was no one among the literati or commoners in the city [of Chéngdū] who did not grieve” 在城土庶無不悲傷. Though Tányù does not explicitly situate Guànxiū in a poet-monk tradition, he emphasizes his importance to the monastic community, just as Wú Róng stressed his literary significance. But Tányù’s depiction of Guànxiū, unlike Wú Róng’s, is multi-dimensional: he holds up his master’s achievements in both religious and literary realms as the basis for his widespread acclaim. In highlighting Guànxiū’s artistic gift, coupled with his devotion to the practice of Buddhism, Tányù makes him into an ideal model of the poet-monk that others may emulate.

A generation younger than Guànxiū, Qíjǐ (864–937?)继承 a more fully developed concept of the poet-monk, one with a strong sense of its own history and continuity. In fact, Qíjǐ had at the ready an entire repertoire of poet-monk references, culled from previous literati and monks. When he sends a poem of encouragement to Wénxiù—whom we saw earlier praised by Lǐ Xiányòng in Confucian terms—he harkens back to “the time of Jiǎorán and Língyǐ” 皎然靈一時 and is “joyous” that with Wénxiù these predecessors’ “pure airs have not died out” 貞風喜未衰. When he looks toward the Great River from his dwelling on Mt. Lú, he

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60 For more on Qíjǐ, see the biographical sketch in Appendix A.
61 “Sent to Master Wénxiù” 寄文秀大師, in Wáng Xiùlín 1.56–57; Pān Dìngwǔ 1.59; QTS 838.9454–55.
alludes to a poet-monk precursor mentioned in Liú Yúxī’s preface, declaring, “I’d like to take off to the Southern Dynasties / When Huixiū was among the poet-monks” 欲向南朝去，詩僧有惠休. Qījī very clearly sees himself as a poet-monk, the inheritor of a well-defined literary tradition. He does not construct that tradition anew, as did earlier poets, but he does reinforce it and strives to embody it.

After the death of Guànxiū in early 913, Qījī became the most prominent (and prolific) poet-monk in the land. As such, he became a sort of de facto leader for the tradition. The Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks, for example, describes a tenth-century monk named Zōngyūān 宗淵, originally from the northeast, who traveled first to Mt. Lú to study with a meditation master, then to the kingdom of Jingnán 荊南 to study poetry with Qījī. Given Qījī’s many connections, and the large percentage of his exchange corpus with fellow monks, it is likely that Zōngyūān was not the only one to have done so. Sometime in the 920s or 930s, Qījī heard of a rogue monk composing poetry in the north. Qījī seemed genuinely surprised that a poet-monk could have escaped his notice, and sent him the following poem.

Sent to Qīnggū of Xúzhōu 寄許州清古
Qījī 齊己

北來儒士說 A Confucian scholar from the north says sywet -
許下有吟僧 There’s an intoning monk at Xū, song A
白日身長倚 Leaning his body all day long ḍjeX -
清秋塔上層 On the top floor of a pagoda in the clear autumn dzong A
言雖依景得 Though [his] words rely on the scene to be grasped, tok -

62 “Written on the Road to Xúnyáng” 尋陽道中作, in Wáng Xiūlín 3.163; Pān Dīngwū 3.171; QTS 840.9482.
63 At least, of those whose works have survived. Guànxiū’s disciple Tányū 曇域 is said to have left behind a ten-fascicle poetry collection (titled Lónghuá jí 龍華集) and a highly regarded commentary to the etymological dictionary Shuōwén jiézì 說文解字, but very little of any of this survives. However, we do know that he and Qījī were in contact with each other in the years following Guànxiū’s death, as evidenced from their exchange poetry.
64 T no. 2061, 50:899a.
65 These connections are explored in chapter 4 of this dissertation.
66 Wáng Xiūlín 4.200–01; Pān Dīngwū 4.206; QTS 841.9493.
Qiji, serving as Samgha Rectifier in the kingdom of Jingnan, plays the role of the elder statesman. His poem acts as an invitation to Qinggu, that the latter might join the larger community of poet-monks. The self-deprecation of line 8 is a standard humble remark that one would write to a stranger, suggesting that the two are not well acquainted. But he wants to get to know Qinggu better, engage with him not through roaming Confucians (line 1), but through the person directly (line 7).

Qiji also writes about the craft of poetry in words that could be interpreted as either descriptive or prescriptive (lines 5–6). In either case, lines 5–6 provide a fascinating glimpse into Qiji’s conception of a Buddhist poetics. He posits a dichotomy between the two levels of reality: 1) the mundane, associated with the visible world, which can be grasped by a poet so long as he uses sufficiently honest language, and 2) the ultimate, associated with the truth/principle (li 理), which can only be seen after one has entered into nonbeing (i.e., enlightenment). The two levels of truth was a fundamental concept in Mahayana Buddhism, borrowed here to articulate a theory of poetry not dissimilar from some of his contemporaries’ theories of enlightenment. The mundane and the ultimate are held in tension: they are considered to be fundamental opposites, and yet the everyday world can serve as a doorway to realization. A gap stretches out between the two, but a momentary encounter with the physical

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67 It is unclear whether he is admiring Qinggu’s verse for these qualities or admonishing him to bring these qualities into his poetry. My translation opts for the former interpretation because the middle couplets of regulated verse tend to be descriptive, but an exhortation would fit well with Qiji’s adopted role as master here.

68 See, e.g., the discussion in the Awakening of Mahayana Faith 大乘起信論 (T no. 1666, 32:576a–c; Hakeda, The Awakening of Faith, 38–43). For a particularly vivid staging of the two levels of truth, see Faure, The Rhetoric of Immediacy, esp. 53–58.
landscape as an independent, objective reality can sometimes act as a catapult launching one over the yawning abyss and into enlightenment.\(^{69}\)

Holding poetry and Buddhism in parallel is one of the hallmarks of Qíjì’s poetry. Parallelism is among the most distinctive features of Chinese poetry of the medieval period and of Chinese literature more generally.\(^{70}\) In the following poem, Qíjì uses the dialectical tension of parallelism to assert a fundamental identity between poetic and meditative practice, an insight best understood and realized by the poet-monk.

**Meeting a Poet-Monk** 逢詩僧\(^{71}\)

Qíjì 齊己

| 禪玄無可並 | Meditation’s mysteries—they cannot be equaled, bengX *A |
| 詩妙有何評 | Poetry’s marvels—how can they be critiqued? bjaeng A |
| 五七字中苦 | You suffer in five or seven characters, khuX - |
| 4 百千年後清 | Then are purified after hundreds or thousands of years, tshjieng A |
| 難求方至理 | Though hard to find, you arrive at principle, liX - |
| 不朽始為名 | When you “do not wither,”\(^{72}\) you’ll make a name, mjieng A |
| 珍重重相見 | We cherish and value seeing each other often, kenH - |
| 8 忘機話此情 | Forgetting plans and talking of these things.\(^{73}\) dzjieng A |

In each of the first three couplets, Qíjì focuses on meditation in the first line and poetry in the second. The opening presents us with a paradox: things that cannot be “equaled” or “critiqued” are beyond human comprehension, yet they are precisely the poet-monk’s area of expertise. The

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\(^{69}\) See Yin Chūbīn, “Hú-Xiāng shíshēng Qíjì yú Wéiyāngzōng,” who sees in this couplet an affinity with the Wéi-Yáng lineage’s doctrine that “the physical illuminates the mind” 即色明心 in the moments preceding sudden enlightenment (26).

\(^{70}\) Many poetry manuals from the Táng offer guidance on writing parallel couplets, such as the “Twenty-nine Types of Parallelism” found in *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡秘府論 (see Kūkai, *Wénjìng mìfùlùn* [Bunkyō hifuron] huījiāo huīkāo, 2:678–848). This is not the place to articulate a full theory of parallelism, but for a general introduction in English, see Plaks, “Where the Lines Meet.”

\(^{71}\) Wáng Xiùlín 5.242; Pān Dìngwǔ 5.249–50; *QTS* 842.9506–07.

\(^{72}\) “Do not wither”: a circumlocution for “establishing oneself through words” 立言. See Zuózhùàn, Duke Xiāng, year 20: “The most exalted establish themselves through virtue, then establish themselves through deeds, then establish themselves through words, not abandoning [the task] even after a long while: this is called ‘not withering’” 大上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言，雖久不廢，此謂之不朽.

\(^{73}\) “These things” is an idiomatic translation of cìqíng 此情, which more literally means “the circumstances we are in and the inner mental and emotional responses to them.” I take cìqíng to refer to all subjective and objective experience shared by Qíjì and his interlocutor, for which the first six lines of the poem are metonymy.
word used at the end of line 1 for “equaled” (bìng 並) more literally means “place side by side, in parallel with,” so Qiji is saying that nothing can be put in parallel with the fruits of meditation. And yet he spends the rest of the poem doing just that: he matches poetry and meditation in parallel couplets. Thus the paradox at the heart of the poem: Qiji does what he claims cannot be done.

The middle couplets present the path that the poet-mono must tread in similar terms. The goals, given in lines 5–6, are different: in poetry, one seeks to establish a reputation; in meditation, one strives for ultimate truth. Yet both promise a kind of transcendence beyond normal human life. A poet’s words live on after death, and insight into Buddhist reality leads to the attainment of nirvana. Both require long journeys of intense striving (lines 3–4), be it in the crafting of pentametric and heptametric lines or the countless rebirths on the bodhisattva path. Qiji stresses their similarity through a playful switch of words. “Suffering” (kǔ 苦, line 3) can be understood as a technical Buddhist term (duḥkha) for the misery of life in saṃsāra, the First Noble Truth, but here it is used to describe poetic practice, drawing on the rhetoric of kǔyín (“bitter intoning”) we saw associated with Jiǎ Dǎo and his poet-mono admirers. “Purified” (qīng 清, line 4), on the other hand, is frequently used to describe austere, dignified descriptions of landscapes in poetry, but here it is used to describe the fruits of Buddhist practice. In this way, Qiji writes an underlying unity of literary and meditative practices into his poem, even as he denies its possibility in the first two lines. This is what poet-mono do, according to Qiji: live in the tension between the two truths of mundane and ultimate reality, use words to point to practice, practice to broach transcendent principle. The poet-mono whom he meets understands this as well, and the two become so absorbed in the conversation that they lose track of their plans (line 8).
This idea of the poet-monk as the one who understands and performs the underlying unity between poetry and meditation reaches its apex in a poem about Qījì. It opens with the boldest assertion about a poet-monk in the medieval period.

Reading the Venerable Qījì’s Collection 讀齊己上人集
Qīchán 栖蟾

詩為儒者禪 [Your] poems are meditation for Confucians,  
dzyen A

2 此格的惟仙 Their form is truly transcendent.  
sjen A

古雅如周頌 Ancient and elegant like the Hymns of Zhōu,  
zungH -

4 清和甚舜弦 Pure and harmonious as the strains of Shùn.  
hen A

冰生聽瀑句 Ice forms: your couplet on hearing the cascade:  
kjuH -

6 香發早梅篇 A fragrance wafts: your piece on early plums.  
phjien -

想得吟成夜 Contemplating them, I chant them until night,  
yaeH -

8 文星照楚天 And your literary star lights up the heavens of Chǔ.  
then A

The opening line can be interpreted as either a specific reference to Qījì’s own poetry or a general statement about the nature of poetry—“Poetry is meditation for Confucians.”

Essentially, it does not matter, since Qījì was viewed as an exemplary poet-monk who provided a model for others to imitate. The line states that poetry and meditation are fully identical at their roots: the only difference is that one is primarily the task of a Confucian scholar, the other the task of a Buddhist monk. And a poet-monk is someone who translates one into the other. Qīchán makes explicit what Qījì and others had been hinting at earlier: Buddhism and Confucianism are basically the same, even if their outward manifestations are different. Both poetry and meditation...
involve a heightened sense of perception, a knack for ordering thoughts and objects, countless hours of hard striving toward a suddenly realized goal, and a final achievement of supramundane insight. This sense of identity is reinforced by lines 3–4, which praise Qiji’s work in terms taken directly from the ancient classics. The Hymns of Zhōu are the oldest layer of the Book of Odes, and the strains of Shùn are the perfect songs of the most righteous sage-king in history. The grounds of comparison, moreover, are “ancient and elegant” (gǔyǎ 古雅), adjectives inextricably associated with the idea of Confucian orthodoxy (zhèng 正). The monk resembles a sage.

Furthermore, the very structure of the poem demonstrates the “perceptual awareness” (jìngyì 境意) which is cultivated in meditation, the powers of observation for which Sūn Guāngxiàn praised Guānxiū in the preface to Qiji’s works. It proceeds through the six sense-fields (Ch. liùjìng 六境, Skt. ṣaḍ viṣayāḥ) systematically. After line 1 states the process of meditation, line 2 begins with shape or form (the field of sight), focusing on the poems’ “structure” or “grid” (格). Lines 3–4 attend to hearing (声), comparing Qiji’s works to exemplary classics of music. Line 5 proceeds to touch (触), as some of Qiji’s best lines are said to have the coldness of ice, while still linking back to the sound emphasized in the previous couplet. Line 6 stresses smell (香) and taste (味), alluding to a poem which seems to exude the sweet smell and taste of the plums it describes: we must remember that “fragrant” (香) was applied as often to delicious food as it was to pleasing fragrances. Line 7 concludes with thought (法), the sensory field which integrates the other five, corresponding to the mind. Together, these six senses make up the totality of human experience. In this way, it mirrors some of the practices described in earlier meditation manuals translated from Indic languages, those which formed the basis for later practices. The Dharmatara-dhyāna sūtra 達摩多羅禪經, for example, proceeds through the six senses, likening each to an animal
which must be leashed.\textsuperscript{77} The \textit{Candraprabha-samādhi sūtra} 月燈三昧經 takes a different approach, systematically deconstructing the six organs 根, their corresponding senses 情, and consciousness 識 of them for 105 lines.\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{Śūraṅgama sūtra} 首楞嚴經 (also known as the “marrow of meditation” 禪髓) proceeds through the six sense faculties in the same way.\textsuperscript{79} These practices demonstrate the importance of methodically proceeding through all six senses in the course of meditation.\textsuperscript{80} As Qīchán does this in his own poem, he enacts the claim of line 1, that “poetry is meditation for Confucians.”

With the combined powers of meditation and poetry, Qījí’s poems are able to summon forth the natural world (lines 5–6) and illuminate the night that has descended upon the land of Chū, one of the cradles of civilization and home to China’s first named poet, Qū Yuán 屈原 (lines 7–8). In calling Qījí’s works “meditation for Confucians,” Qīchán affirms the outward distinction between the Confucian and Buddhist spheres of activity at the same time that he claims that they are one.\textsuperscript{81} From remote antiquity, poetry was the tool by which the literati praised the state, but Qījí, as the ideal poet-monk, appropriates it for the Buddhists. In effect, he performs a tonsuring of the classical literary tradition.

\section*{3.3 Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{77} T no. 618, 15:322c, translated by Buddhabhadra 佛陀跋陀羅 at Mt. Lú in the early fifth century.
\textsuperscript{78} T no. 641, 15:624c–25c, translated by Xiāngōng 先公 in the mid-fifth century. Interestingly, the order of the senses given by this text (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought) is very close to that presented by Qīchán in the poem (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and thought).
\textsuperscript{79} T no. 945, 19:114c–15c, trans. attrib. Pramiti 般刺蜜帝 in 705; cf. Śūraṅgama Sūtra Translation Committee, \textit{The Śūraṅgama Sūtra}, 95–102. This text was in fact explicitly recommended to the literatus Wēi Zhuāng by the poet-monk Guānxù. For more, see section 4.1.
\textsuperscript{80} For more background on early medieval meditation manuals, see Greene, “Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience,” 15–138; and Yamabe, “\textit{The Sūtra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi},” 39–114.
\textsuperscript{81} For more on the precise grounds of the similarity between poetic composition and meditation, and on how this came to be, see chapter 6 of this dissertation.
Chapter 3: The Era of the Poet-Monk (860–960)

Guànxiū and Qijī can be understood as the culmination of a concept and a social position that had been developing for over two centuries. They were monks who were not only conversant in both Buddhist and poetic discourses, but able to integrate the two into a coherent practice. Their peers saw them as leading lights of the literary world—poets whose perceptual awareness was heightened through meditation, monks whose insight into non-duality was aided by their poetic parallelisms. They portrayed themselves as mere iterations of precursors like Huixiū and Bāoyuè, but they were in fact something completely different. Whereas those earlier monks slipped in and out of standard poetic personae with little trace of their monastic identities, Guànxiū and Qijī sought a full harmonization of their religious and poetic practices. We will explore the ways in which they did this in detail later, but for now it is enough to note that they both shaped and were shaped by a poet-monk tradition that grew out of the High Táng, as well as the unrestrained songs of Lí Bái and the kùyín aesthetic exemplified by Jiā Dāo. From the mid-eighth to the mid-tenth century, the poet-monk changed in geographic, social, and cultural position. What began as a local Jiāngnán curiosity gradually spread to the capital region, scattered across the empire, then settled down in a variety of local power centers. Along the way, the literati grew to understand poet-monks as participants in their own tradition, that is, the Confucian tradition, of which poetry was the highest art.

A variety of factors contributed to these developments. In the eighth century, the decentralization of power following the Ān Lùshān Rebellion, combined with Jiāngnán’s rich cultural and Buddhist heritages, provided a healthy environment for the poet-monks’ infancy. In the early ninth century, emperors’ and capital elites’ patronage of Buddhism brought more poet-monks to Cháng’ān and other urban centers, where they eventually grew to be an established part of literary society. In the last years of the Táng, the incredible destruction wrought by Huáng
Cháo’s armies left a void at the cultural center, creating the space for a diversity of voices to grow, including the voices of the poet-mons. From this time through the middle of the tenth century, sacred peaks like Mt. Lú and Mt. Héng’s relative isolation from battle, along with their temples’ connections with local rulers, made them attractive to many poet-mons. Some of the more famous poet-mons, such as Guànxiū and Qíjì, found refuge in the capitals of the newly established regional kingdoms. The kings and would-be emperors, like their Táng predecessors about a century prior, lavished these poet-mons with honors in an attempt to lure them to their kingdoms and establish themselves as cultured, legitimate rulers.

Such political, geographical, and social realities created the conditions under which a self-conscious, self-sufficient poet-monk tradition could flourish, a tradition which did not see itself as inferior or wayward, but as the fullest embodiment of high cultural values, whether those values came from Buddhist scriptures, Confucian classics, or any other source. As we have seen, over the course of about two hundred years, poet-mons went from being a local curiosity of the Jiāngnán region to an established part of literary society. But how exactly they fit in to that society is difficult to say from the evaluative comments embedded in poems and prefaces—judgments are mixed. Instead, we must examine the actual practices of exchanging poetry using other methods of inquiry. In the process, we will discover how a poet’s sense of his own being was intimately related to his literary ties.
4.0 Introduction

We have seen how poet-monks occupied an uncertain place in the discourse of the late medieval period. They began as a local Jiāngnán curiosity, of whom people like Liú Yǔxī spoke faint praise, then, with the crumbling of the Táng, became an accepted part of literary society for whom a tradition had to be constructed, and finally, as they were recruited by the regional powers of the tenth century, they took control of their own discourse and wore the label “poet-monk” as a badge of honor. Some, like Bái Jūyì, regarded them with suspicion. Others, like Yán Ráo, saw them as “the light of Confucians and Buddhists.” As a whole, literati held ambivalent attitudes toward these poet-monks.

Such was the discourse around poet-monks, but what about actual literary practice? That is, do we see any disconnect between the metadiscourse and the practice? Did those with ambivalent attitudes keep their distance from poet-monks? Alternatively, did poet-monks attempt to preserve their uniqueness by isolating themselves from the rest of literary society? When we look at what people did with poems instead of what they said about them, how does that change our understanding of literary history? Do poet-monks appear to be central or peripheral to the story that emerges? After all, many later critics, including Ōuyáŋ Xī and Sū Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), looked on the works of poet-monks with disdain precisely because they assumed the
monks to have little connection to life outside of monasteries, lending it “an air of vegetables and bamboo shoots” 氣含蔬荀. 

Similarly, Fàn Xīwén 范晞文 (fl. 1260) believed that poet-monks after Jiǎorán and Língchè did not write good poetry because their experience was not wide enough. Was there any truth to these stereotypes which would come to dominate later characterizations of monks’ poetry?

To dig beneath the literary historical discourse, previous generations of scholars had to keep in mind loads of information, more than a human brain can manage. Anecdotes, biographies, tomb inscriptions, prefaces to poems and literary collections, and titles of exchange poems contain many valuable factoids, but sifting through them all and piecing them together requires a superhuman mind. Now, with the advent of new technologies for information management, we can see these facts at a distance. In particular, we can build databases and use network science to pinpoint exactly where various poets are positioned in our existing records of Táng literature and to quantify just how central or peripheral they are to those networks. In this chapter, I catalogue over 6,800 exchange poems written by hundreds of poets to create a network map of relations represented in poetry for the period of roughly 860–960. These poems represent the distributed personhood of these poets, that is, the agency and sense of self which extends beyond a person’s physical body by means of his literary works. Combining an analysis of this network with close readings of selected exchange poems—using a method I call literary paleontology—will show us just how central poet-monks are in late medieval literary society. It will also help us get away from static models of literary history, such as “schools” 詩派 and

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1 For a discussion of these tropes, see Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry,” 116–58; and Yang, Dialectics of Spontaneity, 40–45.

2 The full passage reads: “As for the poetry of Táng monks, all except for a few like Jiǎorán and Língchè are underlings. They were corrupt and unteachable. They had neither a capacious spirit nor broad experience” 唐僧詩，除皎然、靈徹三兩輩外，餘者卒，皆衰敗不可救，蓋氣宇不宏而見聞不廣也 (Fàn Xīwén, Duichuāng yěyǔ, 5.11b).
“regional cultures” 地域文化, emphasizing instead the dynamic movement of poets between groups. To get a handle on these things, we must first get a sense of how the late Táng might have understood literary exchange and social networks.

4.1 On Exchange Poetry

In the epigraph to this chapter, the ninth-century poet Luó Yǐn imagines human language as a trap, inverting an old metaphor from the Zhuāngzǐ 莊子. For the Zhuāngzǐ, the net of language is a tool used to trap meaning: “A net’s use is in fish: once you’ve caught a fish, forget the net.... Language’s use is in meaning; once you’ve caught the meaning, forget language” 蒸者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃……言者所以在意，得意而忘言.3 For Luó Yǐn, however, language traps us. It is not simply a tool, but an all-encompassing snare, binding humans to each other in their own world. Exchange poetry, as the sociopolitical art par excellence, should be the knottiest net. According to Confucius himself, “poetry can be a means of sociality” 詩可以群.4 At the same time, the Buddhist saṁgha claimed to occupy a world apart. Its members renounced the dusty world in favor of monastic cells deep in temple complexes. In a world dominated by the common values of filial piety and public duty, these monks were literally those who “left the family” (chūjiā 出家).5 They would have no parents but for their masters, no siblings but for their fellow clergymen, no children but for their disciples. They would not take part in the civil service examinations, the primary path to success for which their lay cousins spent decades

3 Zhuāngzǐ jīshì 26.944.
4 Analects XVII.9. Of course, the original meaning of this phrase referred to the Odes 詩經 specifically (not poetry in general) and implied the sustaining of a proper hierarchy (see Jia, “An Interpretation of ‘Shi Keyi Qun’ 詩可以群”). But several references to this phrase in the Táng imply that it came to be understood in the broader sense. See Yū Shào 于邵 (mid-eighth century), “Preface to ‘Seeing off Vice Censor Zhāng Back to Wēibó’” 送張中丞歸魏博序 (QTW 427.5354) and Liáng Sù 梁肅 (752–793), “Preface to the Poetry Collection of the Gathering at Vice Censor Cuí’s Wooded Pavillon in Late Spring” 晚春崔中丞林亭會集詩序 (QTW 518.5262–63).
5 On Chinese monastic ideals of renunciation, see Kieschnick, The Eminent Monk, 16–66.
preparing. Instead, they would be occupied by the daily rituals of venerating the sūtras, reciting gāthās, and chanting dhāraṇī.

But neither the Buddhist monastic community nor the realm of poetry is truly separate from the mundane world. In fact, both claims ought to be balanced by contrary evidence. Buddhist temples and monasteries required the patronage of wealthy, powerful donors to survive and in turn offered to create and accumulate good merit on behalf of the state or other patrons.⁶ Monks from elite families often continued to be considered part of the family.⁷ And poetry was the most prestigious art form of the time, the basic currency of cultural capital, the means by which one could gain a name for himself. It was tested on the official examinations and exchanged amongst the elite.⁸ Buddhism and poetry were as much means by which to engage the world as means by which to escape it. No matter how much they protested, practitioners of both were still caught up in the net.

Indeed, occasional poetry is one of our main sources for Táng literary history. The bulk of Táng poems were written on specific occasions for specific readers. These occasions can be either explicit or implicit, and are indicated through a variety of means, including the poem’s title, a preface written by its author, and the narrative context in which it may appear (such as a biography, funeral inscription, or literary anecdote). The vast majority of these poems, however, are not read closely. Our understanding of literary history has heretofore been limited to a fraction of poems written by a few of the most famous writers—often those collected in the 1763 anthology Three Hundred Táng Poems 唐詩三百首, compiled nearly 800 years after the end of

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⁶ See, e.g., Brose, Patrons and Patriarchs, which discusses the patronage system during the tenth century in detail.
⁷ As we saw in chapter 3, the monk Shàngyán 尚顏 could still bring glory to the Xuē 薛 clan by being a poet-monk. Jiǎorán 皎然, in multiple places, speaks with pride of being a descendant of the poet Xiè Língyùn 謝靈運 (e.g., “At Dágōng Meditation Studio in Miàoxǐ Temple…” 妙喜寺達公禪齋…. QTS 815.9173).
the Táng as a textbook for schoolchildren. Indeed, if we look at Zeb Raft’s online “Chinese Poetry in Translation: A Bibliography,” which catalogues translated poems in thirty-eight of the most influential anthologies and monographs on classical Chinese verse in English and French, we find only 4,348 poems from the Suí, Táng and Five Dynasties period (581–960), out of the roughly 55,227 extant poems from the period, or about 7.87% of the total. Our understanding of Táng poetry rests mainly on this small fraction of the extant corpus—a corpus which itself is only a small remnant of what once existed. Like other “distant readers,” I am trying to rectify this skewed approach to literary history in the present chapter.

Exchange poems are a good place to start. If we look for poem titles which contain the 36 most common words which unambiguously indicate exchange, we will find 20,417 poems, which comprises about 37% of QTS. This number does not include any of the thousands of poems which use more ambiguous terms (like xiè 謝, “thanking” or “apologizing,” which can also be a surname) or list only a person’s name without a verb. Based upon my own experience cataloguing poems, I would estimate that around 60–70% of the QTS (33,000~38,000 poems) is comprised of exchange poetry. Given the widespread practice of writing poems to commemorate

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10 Raft’s bibliography is available at http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/chinesepoetry. It is, of course, far from complete. Recent efforts made by the Library of Chinese Humanities series at DeGruyter—such as Stephen Owen’s complete translation of Dù Fù—are doing much to change the situation. The total number of extant poems from the Táng and Five Dynasties has been calculated by adding together the number of poems in QTS (over 48,900) and QTSBB (6,327).
11 A perusal of the catalogue of the Song dynasty’s imperial library, preserved in the Xīn Tángshū, gives us the titles of dozens of poetry collections with thousands of poems which are no longer extant. See also Dudbridge, Lost Books of Medieval China.
12 Cf. Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature.”
specific social occasions (parting, reuniting, celebrating, etc.) and the expectation of embedding that information in the poem’s title or preface, there is a lot we can learn from an occasional poem’s packaging. The recent strides made in Táng literary chronology are largely due to a more systematic analysis of the information culled from such poems. When weighed against facts culled from other sources (biographies, tomb inscriptions, letters, etc.), these data can give us a much fuller picture of an individual’s life, travels, and social relations.\(^\text{14}\)

In this chapter, I am interested in exchange poetry—an umbrella category meant to cover several Chinese terms: zèngdāshi 贈答詩 ("poems given and answered"), jiāowāngshī 交往詩 ("poems of association"), chànhèshī 唱和詩 ("poems sung and harmonized"), and nígūshī 擬古詩 ("poems imitating antiquity"). The most typical exchange poems involve one person “sending” 寄 or “giving” 贈 a poem to another person, which the recipient might “reply to” 酬, “respond to” 答, or “match” 和. Starting in the late eighth century, the recipient would sometimes respond to the original poem using the same rhyme words as the original, creating a kind of “call-and-response” format.\(^\text{15}\)

An example will illustrate some of this genre’s peculiarities. In the wake of the Táng dynasty’s collapse, the capital-based poet Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊 (836–910) fled to Shǔ in the southwest. Wéi Zhuāng was perhaps the most popular poet of his day, as his long poem narrating the destruction of the capital Cháng’ān, “Lament of the Lady of Qín” 秦婦吟, captured the sense

\(^{14}\) For an excellent model of this kind of scholarship, see Fù Xuáncóng et al, Táng Wúdài wénxué biānmiàn shí.

\(^{15}\) See Zhào Yǐwǔ, Chànhèshī yànjiù, 390–416; and Tǎng Yīnfēi, “Zhōng Táng chànhèshī shùlùn.” Zhào notes that prior to the Dàlì era (766–780), the term chànhèshī referred to matches in meaning rather than rhyme. See too Hú Zhēnhēng (1569–1642), Tángyīn guīqìān 3.26: “[The practice of] following rhymes begins in the Dàlì era with Lǐ Duān and Lú Lún’s responses to [poems on] being laid up with illness at a temple in the wilds” 至大歷中，李端、盧纶野寺病居酬答，始有次韻.
of tragedy that had enveloped the land.\textsuperscript{16} He and Guànxiū had met once in 887, in Guànxiū’s home region of Wúzhōu 婺州. Some twenty years later, both had moved to Shǔ in search of the protection and patronage of its newly established king, Wáng Jiàn 王建.

Sent to Master Chányuè 寄禪月大師\textsuperscript{17}
Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊

| 新春新霽好晴和 | Newly cleared in the new spring,       | hwa |
| 間闊吾師鄙怪多 | Having been long separated from my master, | ta |
| 不是為窮常見隔 | It is not that we were eternally separated by poverty, | keak |
| 只應嫌醉不相過 | But we probably didn’t see each other because you dislike drunkards. | kwa |
| 雲離谷口俱無著 | Clouds leave from the valley’s mouth, each unattached; | trjak |
| 日到天心各幾何 | How many times has the sun reached the heavens’ heart?\textsuperscript{19} | ha |
| 萬事不如碁一局 | The ten thousand matters are not like a chessboard. | gjowk |
| 雨堂閑夜許來麼 | I idle in the rainy courtyard until evening—will you come by? | ma |

The social nature of this poem is obvious. It functions like a clever invitation letter, praising the recipient while mocking himself (lines 2, 4). It also alludes to their shared history (lines 3–4) and similar circumstances, both enjoying the same weather in Shǔ (line 1) and the fruits of old age (line 6). Wéi Zhuāng also knows to make a reference to Buddhism when addressing a monk: the


\textsuperscript{17} Niè Ānfú, \textit{Wéi Zhūang ji jiānzhú}, 10.397–98; Hú Dājun 19.874; \textit{QTSBB} 52.1537. Master Chányuè: Guànxiū. Hú Dājun and Niè Ānfú both date this poem to 908.

\textsuperscript{18} Mean and stingy: allusion to \textit{Shìshūō xīnyū}, chapter 1, account 2: “Zhōu Chéng frequently said, ‘If for two or three months I have not seen Huáng Xiàn, then a mean and stingy mind has already sprung up within me’” 周子居常云：「吾時月不見黃叔度，則鄙吝之心已復生矣」 (\textit{Shishuō xīnyū jiānshū} 1.3; trans. adapted from Mather, \textit{Shi-shuo Hsin-yü}, 2).

\textsuperscript{19} Heaven’s heart: the apex of the sky. In this line, the first hemistich is a poetic kenning for “noon,” which itself refers metonymically to a day. Thus, the line emphasizes the age of both the speaker and recipient, in the manner of “How many days have now passed up by?”
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clouds of line 5 are “unattached” (wúzhuó 無著)—a technical Buddhist term referring to release from desire (Sanskrit: asamgha)—and they practice this unattachment by floating away from the valley. The poem concludes by denying the kind of calculation that has brought both of them to Shǔ (strategic thinking that is useful in chess) and instead invites the recipient for a pleasant evening chat. The relatively easy diction and minimal use of allusions demonstrates Wéi’s decorum, as he does not want his message to be lost on his recipient.

Nothing was lost on Guànxū, however. Upon receiving the invitation, he wrote a response using the same rhyme words (which I have bolded in my translation).

Replying to What Minister Wéi Sent 酬韋相公見寄
Guànxū 貫休

鹽梅金鼎美調和  Salt and prunes in a metal tripod,  
you adjust them beautifully;21  
詩寄空林問訊多  You send your poem to this grove of emptiness  
with more inquiries,22  
秦客弈棋拋已久  You long ago cast aside [this world  
like] the chess-playing traveler from Qín;23  
楞嚴禪髓更無過  The Śūraṃgama Sūtra, marrow of meditation,  
is even more faultless.  
萬般如幻希先覺  The ten thousand kinds of things are an illusion:  
few are those who foresee it;  
一丈臨山且奈何  In one span I overlook the mountains:  

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21 Salt and prunes: metaphor for governance through adjusting laws and regulations. The phrase comes from the Book of Documents 尚書, “Charge to Yuè, III” 說命下: 

爾惟訓于朕志,若作酒醴,爾惟麴糵;若作和羹,爾惟鹽梅。爾交修予,罔予棄,予惟克邁乃訓。 

Teach me what should be my aims. Be to me as the yeast and the malt in making sweet spirits, as the salt and the prunes in making agreeable soup. Use various methods to cultivate me; do not cast me away—so shall I attain to practice your instructions. 

22 Grove of emptiness: Buddhist monastery.
23 See Rén Fǎng, Shìyì jì, 1.16:

信安郡石室山，晉時王質伐木至，見童子數人棋而歌，質因聽之。童子以一物與質，如棗核。質含之，不覺飢。頃餓，童子謂曰：「何不去？」質起視，斧柯盡爛。既歸，無復時人。 

In the Jin dynasty (265–420), Wáng Zhì went to Stonehouse Mountain in Xin’ān to fell trees. Seeing a few youths playing chess and singing, he went over to listen to them. A youth gave him something that looked like a jujube pit. Zhì held it and ate it without realizing. He had been hungry. The youth said, “Why don’t you leave?” When Zhì looked up, his ax handle had completely rotted. When he returned, the people were no longer of his own era.
what really is that?24

With this vain critique of Pingjin’s fine pearls,25

I don’t know whether or not any more people will reach your gate.26

Guànxiū’s reply politely undercuts Wéi Zhuāng at every turn. He playfully adopts the tone of the superior man, acting surprised by Wéi’s many inquiries to visit (line 2) and showing off his knowledge of the literary tradition with many allusions (lines 1, 3, 7). He takes Wéi’s vague Buddhist pun and turns it into what we might call a “teachable moment.” Guànxiū insists that Wéi Zhuāng would do better to study a sūtra on meditation (line 4) and realize the emptiness of the phenomenal world (line 5) than make jokes about Buddhism. The attitude of superiority reaches its climax when Guànxiū mocks his interlocutor’s use of metonymy, even going so far as to explain it in a note: if the moment of noon can represent a day, then one span (zhàng 丈, roughly equivalent to ten English feet in the Táng) can represent an entire journey to the top of a mountain. Guànxiū then seems to back down, calling his own critique “vain” and underlining his fallibility with a metrical error (zhū 珠 of line 7 should be an oblique tone, but it is level). But with the last line, Guànxiū twists the knife one last time, referring to his own influence. He believes that even his joking critique may have caused Wéi Zhuāng’s disciples to flee (line 8), in contrast to the dozens of disciples that have encircled Guànxiū in Shū. Although Guànxiū literally adopts Wéi Zhuāng’s terms (including the interrogative particles hé 何 and má 麼, unusual as rhyme words), he turns them against Wéi. Such poetic exchanges were surely playful

24 An original note reads: “If the sun reaching the heavens’ heart is one day to the Minister, then going to the mountains by day is one span for an old monk” 日到天心，乃相公之日，老僧日去山乃一丈耳. That is, Guànxiū is poking fun at Wéi Zhuāng’s use of metonymy.
25 Pingjin: name of a town in Hán times, here referring to Gōngsūn Hóng 公孫弘 (200–121 BCE), enfeoffed as Marquis of Pingjin by Emperor Wǔ of the Hán (156–87 BCE). By the late Táng, this allusion was used to refer to any exemplary official.
26 Reach your gate: in addition to its literal meaning, this phrase also means “those who have come to one’s gate [to study],” i.e., disciples.
endeavors, but they were still competitive. In this exchange, at least as it was represented in Guànxiū’s poetry collection, the poet-moon has won.

Related to these sorts of call-and-response poems are the group compositions of “linked verses” 聯句, a practice which also took off in the late eighth century. These would involve a group of poets, usually between two to four individuals, each writing couplets to the same rhyme to form a single poem. In the summer of 843, Duàn Chēngshì 段成式 (d. 863) traveled to a number of temples in the capital with his friends Zhāng Xīfù 張希復 and Zhèng Fǔ 鄭符, where they wrote a series of these verses on their surroundings. In a few of these poems, a monk named Shēng 昇 participates.

Linked Verses on Traveling to the Temples of Cháng’ān, Yúnhuá Temple on Dàtóng Lane: Impromptu Verses 遊長安諸寺聯句，大同坊雲華寺，偶聯句

| 共入夕陽寺 | Together we enter the temple in the evening light | ziH |
| 因窺甘露門 | And peek at Sweet Dew Gate. | mwon |
| ——昇上人 | ——Venerable Shēng |
| 清香惹苔蘚 | Pure incense clings to the moss, | sjenX |
| 4 忍草雜蘭蓀 | Plants of Endurance mix with calamus. | swon |
| ——鄭符 | ——Zhèng Fǔ |

On friendly yet competitive poetic exchanges earlier in the Táng, see Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, 133–42, 159–73.

On this series of verses, see Soper, “A Vacation Glimpse of the T’ang Temples of Ch’ang-an: The Ssu-t’a Chi by Tuan Ch’eng-shih”; and Ditte, “Conceptions of Urban Space in Duan Chengshi’s ‘Record of Monasteries and Stupas.’”

*QTS* 792.8920. Yúnhuá temple was established first as Dàcī temple 大慈寺 in 586. Its name was changed to Yúnhuá in the Dàlì era (766–800), and it went defunct during the Huicháng 會昌 suppression of foreign religions in 845. See Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang’an*, 307, for a record of this temple, and 252–74 for an overview of temples in the capital.

“Plants of Endurance” (also written as rěn rúcǎo 忍辱草) are a type of plant described in the “Lion-Roar Bodhisattva” 師子吼菩薩品 chapter of the *Mahāpārinirvāṇa-sūtra* 大般涅槃經. Native to the Himālayas, it is said that cows who eat of it will produce ghee (*T* no. 374, 12:525c).
We use “flying pincers” to respond to nimble gāthās\(^{31}\) top
And rely on new poems in our debates.\(^{lwon}\)
—Duān Chéngshi

Ruined pennons top the old temple, \(^{tshraet}\)
Drawings of saints gleam from its high walls. \(^{hwjon}\)
—Zhāng Xīfū

Who would envy the cage-piercing birds, \(^{tewX}\)
Or stop the gibbons in the windows? \(^{hwjon}\)
—Duān Chéngshi

One tune, only one nature; \(^{sjiengH}\)
Three words and three pennons.\(^{32}\) \(^{phjon}\)
—Zhāng Xīfū

This poem hangs together remarkably well for a group composition, in part because the norms of Táng poetry composition were so widely known and practiced.\(^{33}\) Descriptive scenes of the ruined temple are enveloped in assertions of unity. The group of poets enters “together” (line 1) at sunset. At the conclusion they remain tied together, metaphysically as well as physically, sharing “one nature” and the “three pennons” of form, emptiness, and observation which are in fact one (lines 11–12). The “one tune” of a monk’s preaching further prompts them to remember the “three words” said by Ruān Xiū when asked about the differences between Confucius and Lǎozǐ:

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\(^{31}\) “Flying pincers” is a style of argumentation described in the Guīgūzi 鬼谷子. Jià Gōngyán 賈公彥 says that it involves “investigating true and false claims, grabbing them with pincers as they fly” 察是非語, 飛而鉗持之 in his subcommentary to the Rites of Zhōu 周禮 (Zhōuli zhūshū 23.798). The fifth-century literary theorist Liú Xié 劉勰 called it “the quintessential technique” 精術 of persuasion (Zēngdìng Wénxùn diàolóng zhù 18.245).

\(^{32}\) The “one tune” refers to the sound of an eminent monk preaching the dharma; the “one nature” is the interpenetrating Buddha-nature which unites all sentient beings (more on this below). The “three pennons” are, according to Lì Shān’s 李善 influential Wénxùn commentary, form 色, emptiness 空, and observation 観; they are three forms of desire, able to sway humans like pennons in the wind, and they are said to be one at root (Wénxùn 11.500). The “three words” are “aren’t they one?” jiāng wùtóng 將無同, referring to Ruān Xiū’s 阮脩 reply when asked about the differences between Lǎozǐ 老子 and Zhuāngzǐ 莊子, on the one hand, and Confucius on the other. See Shìshū xīnshù jiānjī 4.207; for an English translation, see Mather, Shih-shuo Hsin-yü, 107.

\(^{33}\) By the late eighth century, these norms were openly discussed in composition guidebooks such as the Bunkyō hifuron 筆鏡秘府論 and the Shīshī 詩式, giving rise to the genre of “poetry standards” 詩格 which became incredibly popular in the tenth century. For an overview, see Wang, “Shige.”
“aren’t they one?” 將無同. In the theme of the poem, as well as the practice of writing linked verses, a sense of fundamental concord is asserted.

Linked verses and poems of gift-giving and -receiving are only two of the many kinds of exchange at this time. Such poems can be seen as the records of attempts to establish real connections with other, living humans, connections which could be exploited for social, cultural, economic, religious, and political ends. But the more we look into the extant body of Táng poetry, the more it seems that real exchanges overlap with imagined exchanges. The verb “thinking of” (huái 懷) was often used when writing to a distant or recently deceased friend, and thus usually reflected a personal relationship in the actual, lived world, outside the realm of letters. However, the poet-monk Guànxiū stretches the usage of this verb in a poem to a precursor who lived several generations before him, another monk named Zhūgě Jué 諸葛覺 (late 8th/early 9th century).

**Thinking of Zhūgě Jué (1 of 2) 懷諸葛覺二首（其一）**

**Guànxiū 貫休**

Zhūgě, you are a creator  諸葛子作者  tsyaeX
Whose poems I once carefully read.  詩曾我細看  khan
You left the mountains to look for Mèng Jiāo  出山因覓孟  maengH
And trod snow in search of Hán Yù.  踏雪去尋韓  han
Miù Dúyī wasn’t wrong in weeping for you,  謬獨哭不錯  tshak
You who could never drink of the common stream.  常流飲實難  nan
Yet I know that you, one who knows my tone, are gone:  知音知便了  lewX
You’ve headed back to your old river’s dry banks.  歸去舊江干  kan

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34 Hú Dàjùn 9.471–73; *QTS* 830.9354.
35 An “original note” 原注 reads: “He met Mèng Jiāo and Hán Yù in Luòyáng” 遇孟郊、韓愈於洛下.
36 Miù Dúyī 謬獨一 was a contemporary of Guànxiū’s. An “original note” 原注 on this couplet reads: “Miù’s ‘[Weeping over?] Zhūgě’ says: ‘Longing is drawn forth as the clefts of Wū rise ahead / Chants are untangled as the clouds of Shàn part’” 謬《諸葛》云：「思 Csv胥起，吟索刻雲開」. The note refers to a now-lost poem on Zhūgě Jué by Miù Dúyī.
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Just as with a poem about “thinking of” a friend, this piece asserts a kind of intimacy across distance. But instead of a relationship built through personal, face-to-face interactions, this one grew out of reading (line 2). Guànxìū’s connection to Miù Dúyī brings him closer to Zhūgē Jué, and Zhūgē Jué brings him closer to the literary titans Mèng Jiāo and Hán Yù (lines 3–4).

Reading, along with active participation in the diachronic community of poets, creates layers of knowledge and recognition (zhī 知) which ties Guànxìū to these poets. The choice to use “thinking of” (more literally, “harboring [thoughts of] in my breast”) in the title reinforces Guànxìū’s message: the verb of intimacy implies a close communion with a likeminded predecessor, something more personal than a typical eulogy for a poet.

At a slightly further distance, we find the more common gesture of remembering historical figures upon visiting their tombs, memorial temples, and former dwelling places. Another poet-monk of this period, Xūzhōng 虚中 (867?–c. 933), set a reflection on the legacy of the poet Hè Zhīzhāng 贺知章 (c. 659–744) at the site of his old home.

Passing by the Former Residence of Palace Library Director Hè 經賀監舊居
Xūzhōng 虚中

不戀明皇寵 Not enamored of the emperor’s favors, 
trhjowngX

歸來鏡水隅 You came back to your niche by the reflecting water.38 ngjux

道裝汀鶴識 In religious attire, you were familiar with sandbank cranes; syik

4 春醉釣人扶 Drunk in spring, you stood next to fishermen. hjux

逐朵雲如吐 Clouds bud slowly, like being spit— thuX

成行雁侶驅 Geese in formation rush off together. khjux

蘭亭名景在 Were the famous scenes of the Orchid Pavilion still present,39 dzojX

37 OTS 848.9605.
38 Reflecting water: pond.
39 Orchid Pavilion: the site of the famous gathering of poets celebrating the Lustration festival in 353, immortalized by Wáng Xīzhī’s 王羲之 (303–361) calligraphy in the “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection” 蘭亭集序. For a study in English, see Swartz, “Revisiting the Scene of the Party.” I render “Lántíng” 蘭亭 as “Orchid Pavilion” rather than as a transliterated proper noun for its evocative quality to the English reader, despite the fact that “Lán” referred to a local stream and “tíng” to an administrative division. On the meaning of Lánting, see Knechtges, “Jingü and Lanting.”
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8 蹤跡未為孤 Your tracks would have never been alone. ku

Xūzhōng deftly balances such a poem’s needs for historical reflection and for landscape description. After refusing imperial emolument, Hè returns to his true home in a remote area. Couplet two has Hè Zhīzhāng surrounded by the stereotypical symbols of retirement: interest in Daoism and the cranes of longevity (line 3), drinking and fishing with rustic men (line 4). The third couplet, which seems the most divorced from the poem’s message, is actually crucial to its meaning: by likening the clouds to spit, Xūzhōng calls to mind Daoist notions of ingestion, creating a connection with the previous couplet, and by describing the geese as flying “together” (literally “as companions,” lǚ 侣), he emphasizes the sense of a community built up around Hè Zhīzhāng’s work. This theme is underscored by the last couplet, with its reference to the Orchid Pavilion collection of 353 (line 7) and its assertion that Hè would never have been alone had the poets of that gathering still been physically present (line 8). Hè Zhīzhāng is a good man out of his time. However, Xūzhōng implies that he can take comfort in the knowledge that he is part of a literary community that transcends time, that part of himself—his writing—has its place among the great writers. Xūzhōng, Hè Zhīzhāng, and the poets of the Orchid Pavilion collection belong together. The monuments of past poets become sites where future poets gather together.

4.2 Distributed Personhood and Indra’s Net

4.2.1 The Distributed Textual Body

An exchange poem is not just a representation of a connection between a poet and addressee. It is an object with its own agency (it acts on others) and with an embedded agency (it

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40 In a Daoist context, “spit” (tú 吐) could mean either the expulsion of something harmful from the body (sometimes as part of a series of breathing exercises), or, when paired with “absorb” (nà 纳), could also mean “to manifest as accomplished [divinity].” See Reiter, “Taoist Transcendence and Thunder Magic,” 432; Jia, “Longevity Technique and Medical Theory,” 18. As Jia notes, the locus classicus for the Daoist implications of tú is chapter 15 of the Zhuāngzǐ: “pant, puff, exhale, inhale—spit out the old and absorb the new” 吹呴呼吸，吐故納新 (Zhuāngzǐ jīshì 6.535).
is a vessel by which others’ intentions are extended). Poems are not static evidence of some pre-existing social reality, but dynamic constructors of literary-social relations.

Poets, like all of us, possess a quality known as “distributed personhood.” The things they produce and put out into the world are extensions of themselves. In *Art and Agency*, Alfred Gell illustrates this concept by describing the land mines laid down by Pol Pot’s soldiers in Cambodia. On one level, the mines themselves have agency: they act on people (by blowing them up). But on a higher level, the mines are vessels which spread the agency of those soldiers who laid them, and of those officers who commanded them to be laid. Thus, as agents, the soldiers and officers are “not just where their bodies were, but in many different places (and times) simultaneously.”41 This concept is perhaps easier to understand now, in the age of social media, than it was when Gell wrote about it eighteen years ago. We constantly post things online, separated from our physical bodies, which are still thought to constitute our selves. We circulate writings, photos, videos, and other forms of content which act on others without our direct presence.

An idea like distributed personhood would have been familiar to those who lived in the Táng through several different channels. Most obviously to the literati, rulers were known to be able to distribute their agency.42 At the other end of the spectrum of political engagement, those

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41 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 21. Similarly, Marilyn Strathern describes the “partible” nature of people as conceived in Melanesian society: “The condition of multiple constitution, the person composed of diverse relations, also makes the person a partible entity: an agent can dispose of parts, or act as a part. Thus ‘women’ move in marriage as parts of clans; thus ‘men’ circulate objectified parts of themselves among themselves” (*The Gender of the Gift*, 324–25).
42 In the early ninth century, Jiáng Fáng 蔣防 (d. 836) could write in his “Discussion of the Ministry of Personnel” 吏部議 (*QTW* 719.7402):

所謂群吏者，君之耳目。君以眾耳聽天下之哀樂，則無遠不聞矣。君以眾目視天下之得失，則無遠不見矣。

What are called “officials” are the eyes and ears of the monarch. If the monarch listens to the sorrows and joys of the empire with his ears, there is nothing distant that he cannot hear. If the monarch looks at the gains and losses of the empire, there is nothing distant that he cannot see.

In the system Jiáng describes, the ruler’s will is carried out through ministers and emissaries who act not as themselves but as parts of his body. They act as vessels of the ruler’s agency.
who pursued a hermetic life could understand their practice as an attempt to rid themselves of their distributed personhood.

I’ve recently gone back to the mountains and forests:
Many activities are my person. 
What is my physical body?
Who is wise and humane?
Be still and silent, bring idle activity to an end,
And then you will know heavenly truth.
— Shen Qiānyún 沈千運, from “Written in the Mountains” 山中作

The “person” here is composed precisely of all the activities or affairs (shì 事) in which one is involved. But in order to achieve the ultimate goal of reclusion, a realization of one’s genuine nature endowed by heaven, one must halt all of these activities. That is, one’s personhood can only be transcended if one recognizes that it is tied up in one’s daily affairs.

In the same way, in the late medieval period a poem sent somewhere or inscribed on a wall allowed its writer to extend his agency across space and time. His textual corpus was as much a part of him as his physical corpus. As Cáo Pī 曹丕 (187–226) wrote in one of the fundamental essays on literary criticism for the medieval period, “the ancients entrusted their persons to their brush and ink, and revealed their intentions in their writings and collections” 古之人者, 寄身於翰墨, 見意於篇籍. With their personhood placed into their writings, they could extend their agency across time and space: “The span of one’s life is exhausted after a certain time, and joy and honor come to a halt with the person. To bring these two things [lifespan and honor] to a state of permanence, nothing is better than the inexhaustibility of literature” 年壽有時而盡, 榮樂止乎其身。二者必至之常期，未若文章之無窮. Through

43 Reading jiē 皆 in its sense as xié 偕 (“equivalent to”) here.
44 QTS 259.2888.
45 From Cáo Pī, “Essay on Literature” 典論論文, in Wénxuǎn 52.2271. For other translations of this passage, see Miao, “Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han,” 1026; and Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought,
writing, an author can ensure that he lives long after his own death, and that his mind may affect others.

There is evidence, too, that a poem specifically could stand in for a person in late Táng China. Its relationship to its author was essentially metonymic. Thus we find many couplets where the poem offers a glimpse, across time and space, of its author or its author’s mind.

一臥三四旬 Laid up for thirty or forty days straight,
數書惟獨君 These few writings are all I have of you.
—JIà Dào 贾島 (779–843), from “Laid up with Illness, I Reply to Hán Yú’s Letter with Running Brush” 臥疾走筆酬韓愈書問

把君詩一吟 As I start to read out your poems,
萬里見君心 I see your mind across ten thousand miles.
—Cuī Tú 崔塗 (jinshi 888), from “Reading Fāng Gān’s Poetry, I Think of His Villa” 读方干詩因懷別業

秋吟一軸見心胸 In autumn, when I read out from your scroll,
I see the feelings of your breast.
萬象搜羅詠欲空 You gather from among the ten thousand images,
you chant of a desire for emptiness.
—Dù Xúnhè 杜荀鶴 (846–904), from “Reading the Poems of Vice Director Zhāng” 讀張僕射詩

One of the conventions of exchange poetry is absence. In a poem sent with a letter, this is the physical absence of the recipient. In a poem on parting, this is the imminent absence of the recipient. In a poem written on a person’s death or at their grave, this is their unjust absence from the present age. But objects can help bridge that gap, especially when the object is the fruit of the absent person’s labors. Works of art, such as poetry, are superior to other objects in that they

68–69. I follow Owen’s reading of the most important phrase here, 必至之常期 (“To carry both to eternity”), over Miao’s (“These two things must end with their appointed time”) because it more powerfully reinforces Cáo Čéng’s main point, that "Literature is the great task of giving order to the state, a magnificent feat that withers not" 盖文章經過之大業，不朽之盛事, and that literature can ensure that one’s “reputation is passed down to posterity” 聲名自傳於後.

46 Qī Wénbāng, Jì à Dào ji jiăozhù, 7.345–56; Lǐ Jiànkūn, Jì à Dào shìji jiăozhù, 7.276–77; QTS 573.6663.
47 QTS 679.7770.
48 QTS 692.7966.
49 In the manner of Wordsworth’s “Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour” (from his poem “England, 1802”).
Chapter 4: The Fellowship of the Poet-Monk

grant access to the person’s heart and mind. The story of Zhōng Zǐqī 鍾子期, who understood Bó Yá’s 伯牙 thoughts by listening attentively to his playing of the zither, was popular in the Táng, and had long been crystallized in the word zhīyīn 知音 (“one who knows your tone,” i.e., one who really understands you). This story emphasizes the fact that, for someone in medieval China, art provides access to its creator’s mind. Not only that, it stresses that a work of art is incomplete without an audience. Qījì makes a similar point in one of his poems on Jiǎ Dào.

Reading Jiǎ Dào’s Collected Works 讀賈島集
Qījì 齊己

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>遺篇三百首 You left behind three hundred poems,</td>
<td>syuwX -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>首首是遺冤 Poem after poem has been wrongly left aside.</td>
<td>ʔwjon A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>知到千年外 I know that over a thousand years hence</td>
<td>ngwajH -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>更逢何者論 They’ll meet someone else to discuss them.</td>
<td>lwon A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>離秦空得罪 You left Qín, pointlessly accused,</td>
<td>dzwajX -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>入蜀但聽猿 And entered Shǔ, where you heard gibbons.</td>
<td>hwjon A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>還似長沙祖 You were like your Chángshā ancestor:</td>
<td>tsuX -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>唯餘賦鵩言 His only remains are his words on the owl.</td>
<td>ngjon A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jiǎ Dào’s absence and neglect trouble the speaker. He was unjustly slandered and sent to the lonely wilderness of Shǔ (lines 5–6). His poems need to meet up with someone capable of discussing them in order to be understood, even if it is over a thousand years hence (lines 3–4). The anxiety over Jiǎ Dào’s legacy, as embodied in his collected works, is summarized in the opening couplet with a pun. Yī 遺 is used in two senses. In line 1, it is what the poet “left behind”

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50 This trope has a long history in the Chinese literary tradition, rooted in the formulation “poetry puts into words what’s intently on one’s mind” (shī yán zhì 詩言志) in the Book of Documents 尚書. See Shāngshū 3.46; English translation and discussion in Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 26–29.
52 Wáng Xiùlín 6.301–02; Pān Dìngwǔ 6.312–13; QTS 843.9525.
53 In 837, Jiǎ Dào, after returning to laity and becoming an official, was slandered and sent to a variety of posts in the Shǔ area until his death in 843.
54 Refers to a legend about Jiǎ Yì 賈誼 (200–168 BCE), Grand Mentor to the Prince of Chángshā. It is said that one day an inauspicious owl perched in his room, bringing a great sadness upon him which led him to write his “Fù on the Owl” 鵩鳥賦.
55 Perhaps Qījì was referring to this dissertation: writing in 2016, I am separated from Jiǎ Dào’s death in 843 by 1,173 years.
to posterity; in line 2, it is what posterity has "left aside" (yí), that is, ignored. The fusion between poetry and self is stronger in the closing couplet, in which Jiǎ Dǎo is compared to Jiǎ Yí. The latter is said to be survived only by his famous poem, the “Fù on the Owl.” The key word, yú 餘 (translated as “remains”) refers most literally to leftover food, the bits of a feast that remain once all have eaten their fill. This root metaphor makes an important point: leftovers are actual parts of the original food, as Jiǎ Yí’s poem was once an actual part of him.56 In the same way, Qíjǐ implies, Jiǎ Dǎo’s three hundred poems constitute his remains, too. Jiǎ Dǎo’s personhood extends to Qíjǐ and even someone writing 1,000 years later. To encounter the works is to encounter the man.

4.2.2 Perfect Interfusion

The idea of “distributed personhood” has another analogue in the late Táng. Throughout the ninth century, the concept of the “perfect interfusion” (yuánróng 圓融) of all phenomena was widespread among Buddhists.57 Briefly, perfect interfusion meant that no phenomenon is fully inseparable from any other phenomenon. Each is “empty” (Ch. kōng, Skt. śūnya) of fundamental individuation—the existence of any person (or any thing) is completely dependent on others. The ontological basis for this understanding of reality is the “mind-only” (Ch. wéixīn 唯心, Skt. citta-mātra) doctrine which maintains a form of idealism. The mind is the place in which all reality

56 One might wish to read yú in another sense, such as “descendant,” in which case we would identify the “Fù on the Owl” as Jiǎ Yí’s metaphorical child. But in line 7, Jiǎ Dǎo is said to be a distant descendant of Jiǎ Yí, meaning that, to the poet, the “Fù on the Owl” could not have been his only child.
57 Perfect interfusion is generally associated with Huāyán 華嚴 (Jp. Kegon, Skt. Avatāṃsaka) Buddhism, but, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, many of these “Huāyán” ideas were expounded in lineages we think of as Chán and Tiāntái 天台. See, e.g., Kimura, “Huayan and Chan”; Benicka, “(Huayan-like) Notions of Inseparability (or Unity) of Essence and its Function (or Principle and Phenomena) in some Commentaries on ‘Five Positions’ of Chan Master Dongshan Liangjìe”; Huang, “Huayan Thought in Yanshou’s Guanxin Xuanshu”; Wēi Dàorú, Zhōngguó Huāyánzōng tōngshì, 202–11.
has its ultimate grounding. We experience mind as our own, individual minds, but in fact there is no differentiation.\(^{58}\)

To take it a step further, “perfect interfusion” applies not only to phenomena in the world. The doctrine, as articulated in the late Táng, usually referred as well to the idea that there is no barrier between “principle and phenomena” (lǐshì 理事), that is, ultimate and mundane reality are one. It is a mistake to let go of the phenomenal world and cling instead to principle. Wéijìn 惟勁, a monk based on Mt. Héng 衡山 around the same time Guànxiū and Qījī lived there in 899, put it a different way in some verses written at the turn of the tenth century:

| 智身由從法身起 | The wisdom body arises from the dharma body,  |
| 50 行身還約智身生 | And the conditioned body emerges still bound by the wisdom body, |
| 智行二身融無二 | The two bodies, wisdom and conditioned, interfuse without being two, |
| 還歸一體本來平 | And return instead to a single substance, their original tranquility.\(^{59}\) |

The ultimate and mundane forms of a buddha are interdependent. Both the wisdom body and the conditioned body emerge out of a single, underlying substance. The *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* 大乘起信論, a text which Guànxiū studied and preached on for three years, makes the same point about the nondual nature of the Buddha’s various bodies in the form of a dialogue:

問曰：「若諸佛法身離於色相者，云何能現色相？」答曰：「即此法身是色體故能現於色。所謂從本已來色心不二。以色性即智故色體無形，說名智身。以智性即色故，說名法身遍一切處。」

Question: If the Dharma-body of the buddhas is free from the manifestation of corporeal form, how can it appear in corporeal form?
Answer: Since the Dharma-body is the essence of corporeal form, it is capable of appearing in corporeal form. The reason this is said is that from the beginning corporeal

\(^{58}\) “Mind only,” which grew out of Yogācāra, was shared across nearly all forms of East Asian Buddhism. See Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 348.

\(^{59}\) From his “Hymn on the Grounds of Realization” 覺地頌, in *Jíngdé chuándēnglù 景德傳燈錄* (T no. 2076, 51:453c).
form and Mind have been nondual. Since the essential nature of corporeal form is identical with wisdom, the essence of corporeal form which has yet to be divided into tangible forms is called the “wisdom-body.” Since the essential nature of wisdom is identical with corporeal form, the essence of corporeal form which has yet to be divided into tangible forms is called the “Dharma-body pervading everywhere.”

The point made by the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* is not restricted to buddhas, but results from its fundamental ontology. Form and mind are not two. Form and wisdom are identical. That is, though one appears to partake of unconditioned perfection and the other appears to be merely part of our mundane reality, they are in fact perfectly interfused.

The idea of perfect interfusion would also have been familiar to Qijì through the teachings of the so-called “Wéi-Yǎng lineage” 無仰宗 of Chán. Qijì was a native of the Chú 楚 (roughly modern Húnán 湖南) region and spent his early years on Mt. Wéi 潋山. There is no evidence that Qijì was part of this lineage, but he certainly was familiar with its teachers. He wrote one poem on the patriarch Yǎngshān Huiji’s 仰山慧寂 (807–883) pagoda and addressed others to elders of Mt. Yǎng who were likely connected with the lineage in some way. One of the Wéi-Yǎng lineage’s core teachings was nonduality. Huiji 慧寂 (814–890) once asked his master, the Wéi-Yǎng patriarch Língyòu 靈祐 (771–853), “What is the grounds of the true Buddha [i.e., the basis of his glorified dharma body]?” 如何是真佛住處. To this, Língyòu replied that they are “ever mutually abiding: principle and phenomenon not being two, the true

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60 T no. 1666, 32:579c; translation adapted from Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith*, 72.
61 It is also possible that Guǎnxīū was familiar with this lineage, having traveled to the Chú region in 898–899.
62 “Leaving an Inscription at the Pagoda of the Master of Mt. Yǎng” 留題仰山大師塔院 (Wáng Xiùlín 1.17–19; Pān Dingwǔ 1.20–21; QTS 838.9445).
63 “Sent to Elder Guāngwěi of Mt. Yǎng” 寄仰山光味長者 (Wáng Xiùlín 5.236–37; Pān Dingwǔ 5.244–45; QTS 842.9505); “At the River in Yīchūn, Sent to the Elder of Mt. Yǎng: Two Poems” 寄春江上寄仰山長老二首 (Wáng Xiùlín 8.464–65; Pān Dingwǔ 8.449–50; QTS 845.9564); “Sent to the Monk of Bright Moon Mountain” 寄明月山僧, which may refer to Huiji’s disciple Míngyuè Dàochōng 明月道崇 (Wáng Xiùlín 2.108–109; Pān Dingwǔ 2.117; QTS 839.9468).
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Buddha is thus-thusness” 相常住，事理不二，真佛如如.⁶⁴ The point being made is essentially the same as in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. The Buddha’s two bodies are, at basis, nondual, because the two levels of reality are nondual, or perfectly interfused.

One of the most popular illustrations of perfect interfusion is Indra’s net of jewels. In this image, the god Indra has a vast net, and at each point of intersection there is a well-polished gemstone. If you look closely at any given gem, you will find in it a reflection of all others. As the *Mahāsatya Nirgrantha sūtra* 大薩遮尼乾子所説經 says, in a verse proclaimed by the Buddha:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>自取最上乘</th>
<th>與衆生下法</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seize for yourself the highest vehicle</td>
<td>as well as the dharma under all sentient beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 與衆生下法</td>
<td>上因陀羅寶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above, the jewels of Indra—</td>
<td>隨處青光色</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>隨處青光色</td>
<td>With their deep green shining appearance—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>普照物皆同</td>
<td>Reflect all phenomena just the same:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 而寶無分別</td>
<td>the jewels are without distinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>領無上智寶</td>
<td>The jewel of the Buddha’s unsurpassing wisdom’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>開光明照世間</td>
<td>light reflects the entire world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>同一菩提色</td>
<td>The one form of bodhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 離諸分別心</td>
<td>is free from a mind of discrimination.⁶⁵</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All minds are ultimately the same, with the same form of bodhi. All phenomena reflect each other and are reflected in the ultimate reality of the Buddha’s wisdom. The basis of this concept is the fundamentally idealistic conception of the reality held by many Chinese Buddhists in the late medieval period. There is nothing outside of mind, and all mind has the same grounding; therefore, all phenomena are mutually interfusing.⁶⁶ Perfect interfusion, illustrated by Indra’s Net,

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⁶⁶ Fǎzàng 法藏 (643–712) explains this clearly when describing the ten stages of practice for his followers: “[The jewels in] Indra’s Net repeatedly reflect because the dharma nature of mind-only and tathāgatagarbha are perfectly interfused, making all other phenomenon unobstructed in the same way” 因陀羅網重重影現，皆是心識.
assumes a model of intersubjectivity that is even more extreme than distributed personhood. One is present not only in the works of one’s own hand, but everywhere, given one’s fundamental interconnection with all phenomena.

Guànxiū was familiar with these discourses and could deploy them at will in his own writing. A poem sent sometime in the late 860s to a Daoist priest who lived on Mt. Tiāntái, in fact, stages the tension between the conventional understanding of intersubjectivity (distributed personhood) and the ultimate understanding of it (perfect interfusion). In particular, he plays with differences in Buddhist and Daoist terminology to create a poem that reads as both a letter of friendship and an assertion of the superiority of Buddhism.

Sent to a Friend of the Way from Mt. Tiāntái 寄天台道友

大是清虛地 That truly is a land of purity and vacuity, 
高吟到日晡 Where we chanted until twilight. 
水聲金磬亂 The sound of water throws off the metal chimes, 
雲片玉盤粗 And clouds lash against jade dishes. 
仙有遺蹤在 Transcendents’ footprints remain— 
人還得意無 But are humans satisfied? 
石碑文不直 The script on the stone stele isn’t straight, 
壁畫色多枯 And the shape of the wall paintings are mostly haggard; 
冷立千年鶴 Thousand-year-old cranes stand up in the cold 
閑燒六一爐 And encircle the six-one furnace at their leisure. 
松枝垂似物 Pine branches droop, looking like animals; 
山勢秀難圖 The mountain’s grandeur is abundant, hard to depict. 
紫府程非遠 The route to the purple palatine is not far away. 
清溪徑不迂 The path of the clear stream doesn’t wind. 
馨香柏上露 Dew on the fragrant cypress,

如來藏法性圓融故, 令彼事相如是無礙. For the original, see the Record of Plumbing the Mysteries of the Flower Ornament Sūtra 華嚴經探玄記 (T no. 1733, 35:347b); for a discussion of this passage and its context, see Hamar, “Deconstructing and Reconstructing Yogācāra.”

67 Hú Dàjùn dates this poem to the winter of 866, as Guànxiū was himself traveling on Mt. Tiāntái. However, the conclusion of the poem encourages one to read it as a letter, which means that Guànxiū must have sent it later, after he had already left Mt. Tiāntái.

68 Hú Dàjùn 7.380–81; QTS 829.9341.

69 Six-one furnace: crucible for creating immortality elixirs.

70 Purple palatine: abode of Daoist transcendents.
Mt. Tiāntài overwhelms the signs of human activity. Its “grandeur” or “power” (shì 勢, a word which can also mean “topography”) makes it impossible to depict (line 12). Man-made instruments, such as copper chimes and jade dishes, are made useless by the interference of the mountain’s wind and water (lines 3–4). Cranes—those symbols of longevity which appear in the natural world—gather curiously around the humans’ furnace for smelting alchemical concoctions (lines 9–10). By contrast, the writings and paintings left by previous generations of people, especially Daoists, are being worn down to oblivion (lines 7–8). It is this fact, the plenitude of the mountain which swallows up any human attempt to lay claim to it, that makes it a “land of purity and vacuity” (line 1). That is to say, its very grandeur reveals the impermanence of human activity by comparison, the first step to realizing the impermanence of all phenomena. In this way, it is not only a land (dì 地) of purity and vacuity, it also serves a stage (dì 地, Skt. bhūmi) of religious practice, in which one realizes the essential purity and vacuity of mind.

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71 Master of Tóngbó: Wáng Zìqiáo 王子喬 or Wáng Qiáo 王僑, a “realized man” 真人 said to have lived in the sixth century BCE on Mt. Tiāntài, also known as Mt. Tóngbó, in a golden palace. Perhaps most relevant is a reference in “Alas That My Lot Was Not Cast” 哀時命, collected in the Songs of Chǔ: 令茫茫而無歸兮 Far and forlorn, with no hope of return; 俠遠望此曠野 Sadly I gaze in the distance, over the empty plain. 下垂釣於谿谷兮 Below, I dangle my hook in the valley streamlet; 上要求於僊者 Above, I seek out transcendent. 與赤松而結友兮 I enter into friendship with Red Pine; 比王僑為耦 I join Wáng Qiáo as his companion. See Chūcì bìzhù 14.264–65; translation adapted from Hawkes, The Songs of the South, 266. 72 See the similar rhetorical move in the “Mountain-Dwelling Poems (12 of 24)” 山居詩二十四首（其十二），which opens with the line, “Blue clefts and misty cliffs can’t be painted” 翠竇煙巖畫不成 (Hú Dàjùn 23.986; QTS 837.9426; Mazanec, “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems,’” 115).
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All of this sets up the poem’s multivalent conclusion. Given the dominance of Daoist imagery so far, the róng 融 of line 18 would at first glance be understood in its alchemical sense, as the melting and fusion of substances inside to create a longevity elixir. But this interfusion is not “perfect.” Guànxiū asserts that real interfusion does not come from relying on anything external, but from an inner realization, that all phenomena have their basis in the mind. This is also why he says that for “worthies and sages there are no other methods”: there is no magic potion from which one can drink and suddenly gain transcendence. One must rely on oneself, and no one else, in pursuit of Buddhist goals. That is, Guànxiū puns on yuánróng in its Daoist and Buddhist senses to assert the superiority of Buddhism.

He underlines this point with the double meaning of the closing couplet. On the surface, it repeats the formulaic closing phrases of a letter (“I send word” 寄言, “take good care” 珍重) and compares the recipient to one of the Daoist heroes of antiquity. Along these lines, it would be easy to take the final three characters, bǎo zhī hū 保之乎 (“preserve it!” or “preserve it?”), as another stock phrase of well wishes. The pronoun zhī would refer to the recipient, and therefore it would repeat the meaning of the first two characters in the line to be something like “look after yourself!” or “would you look after yourself?” But at a deeper level, Guànxiū may be writing against convention to make his main point about Buddhism. In this reading, the yán of line 19 would refer to the aphoristic words of the preceding line (“Perfect interfusion lies only in the

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73 The need to come to realization on one’s own, and not rely on anyone else, is a common theme in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. See, e.g., the Madhyamaka śāstra 中論 (Nāgārjuna 龍樹, trans. Kumārajīva 鸠摩羅什, T no. 1564, 30:24a):

自知不隨他 From this, we know that one does not follow others—
寂滅無戲論 Calm, without conceptual elaboration,
無異無分別 Without separation and without discrimination: 是則名實相 This is called true form.

See Jay Garfield, The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, 49, for a translation of the same lines from Tibetan.

The pronoun of the last line, then, would refer to back to the same words, and the particle

$hū$ would be read in its interrogative (not emphatic) sense. Thus, Guànxiū is asking the
recipient if he can take care of his saying about perfect interfusion, for it provides the key to
enlightenment. The Tiāntāi Daoist must realize interdependence. That is to say, he must
transcend his conventional understanding of his personhood. He must realize that it is not only
bound up in the things he produces and the affairs that he is part of, but in all phenomena.
Whereas the recluse understood distributed personhood as something to be overcome, the poet-
monk sees it as something to be extended to all phenomena. The connections created by
exchange poetry are not to be denounced as worldly entanglements but celebrated as potential
prompts to enlightenment.

These concepts—distributed personhood and perfect interfusion—help us not only to
decipher the complex wordplay of Guànxiū but also to get closer to Táng poets’ own
understanding of the act of exchange. When a poet addressed a poem to someone else, be they
living or dead, he consciously staged a connection with that person. He was trying to claim, “I
am here, too.” The poem is a record of an assertion that their very selves are somehow
commingled. Realization of this may serve, as in Guànxiū’s poem, as a prompt to Buddhist
insight. But at a more mundane level, it is also a sign of how Táng poets thought of themselves.
Literary connections comprise the very fabric of these poets’ beings. Seen from this angle, the
exchange of poetry is a ubiquitous literary practice that can afford glimpses of literary relations
in the Táng on their own terms.

4.3 Literary Paleontology

If exchange poems are the records of the distributed personhoods of Táng poets, it is the
job of the literary historian to find as many of these as possible. That is, we not only have to
attempt to reconstitute the poets’ textual bodies, but also note carefully where those pieces came from and what they were doing in the places we found them, much like a paleontologist gathering the bones of ancient beasts. I use this metaphor deliberately. A paleontologist closely examines and arranges bone fragments in an attempt to reimagine first the full skeleton, then the sinews, skins, and even lives of long-deceased creatures. Similarly, a literary historian of a manuscript culture like the Táng works from necessarily limited fragments to reconstruct the patterns of relationships amongst individuals and groups. By using this literary paleontological method, I wish to emphasize the dynamic nature of literary relations in this period. Tracing out these connections in the form of a network stresses movement and flow. This reconstructed, dynamic model hopes to correct some of the misleading qualities of static models like “poetic schools” (shīpài 詩派) and stable “regional cultures” (dìyù wénhuà 地域文化).

4.3.1 Manuscripts and Data

In pursuit of such a reconstruction of literary relations, I have catalogued nearly 7,000 late medieval exchange poems involving over 1,400 identifiable individuals. The two main sources I have drawn upon are the standard, large-scale anthologies of Táng poetry:

1) the Quán Tángshī 全唐詩 (QTS), commissioned by the Kāngxī 康熙 emperor in 1705 and compiled by Péng Dīngqíú 彭定求 and others shortly thereafter;
2) the Quán Tángshī bǔbiān 全唐詩補編 (QTSBB), compiled by Chén Shāngjūn 陳尚軍 and published in 1992.

These editions have been checked against and supplemented by modern, annotated editions of a dozen or so of the major poets (for which see the bibliography). Since the most important period in our narrative is the establishment of the poet-monk as a figure in high literary discourse, I
have focused on the period of roughly 860–960 (corresponding to maps 3 and 4 in Chapter 2). Thus, what I provide here—and this will bear repeating—is a representation of a textual corpus as it exists in the present. Despite its gaps and deficiencies (which I will discuss shortly), I believe it can give us some indications of the large-scale patterns of elite literary society in the late medieval period. In particular, exchange poems map out the connections, real and imagined, of thousands of individuals as manifested in one very important form of literary practice.

In cataloguing these poems, I have examined the title—and, if available, the preface—of every exchange poem and extracted the following information for my database:

1) Writer (source)
2) Addressee (target)
   a) Generic?
      -Yes: the addressee is identified only by a generic term of address, such as “A Friend” 友人, “Someone” 人, “A Monk” 僧, “A Fisherman” 漁夫, “One Who Understands Me” 知己, etc.
      -Semi: the addressee is identified only by a surname or clipped name and title (ex: Scholar 王王秀才, Supernumerary Yuan 元员外, Venerable 用上人)
      -No: the addressee’s full name is given in a poem’s title or preface, or it can be easily identified using reference materials and modern, annotated editions of the poem
   b) Clergy?
      -Non-clergy, included “recluses”
      -Buddhist
      -Daoist
      -Deity
      -Unknown
   c) Contemporary?
      -Yes: the life spans of the writer and addressee overlap by at least fifteen years; generic/identifiable connections are assumed to be contemporary unless good evidence indicates otherwise
      -No: the addressee’s life span does not overlap with the writer’s, or the addressee is a deity

3) Verb used

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75 More specifically, this means that, for the purposes of this chapter, I have incorporated information from poems in QTS 558–561, 584–589, 594–763, 823–851, 854–855, as well as sections of QTSBB involving the poets mentioned in these portions of QTS. There are gaps in the QTS numbers because the QTS is not arranged in perfect chronological order and because Daoists and Buddhists are placed in a separate section at the end of the compendium.
4) Full title of the poem

So, when cataloguing the poem titled “Sent to Commissioned Lord Sòng” 寄宋使君 by Guànxiū 貫休, my initial entry would look like:76

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Generic?</th>
<th>Clergy?</th>
<th>Contemporary?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guanxiu</td>
<td>Commissioned Lord Song</td>
<td>Sent to</td>
<td>Semi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>宋使君</td>
<td>寄</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seeing as Mr. Sòng bears the official title “Commissioned Lord,” we know he is not a member of the clergy, and because Guànxiū uses the verb “sent to,” we can assume that they are contemporaries. Then, when I look in the annotated edition of Guànxiū’s poetry, I find that the modern scholar Hú Dàjùn identifies this person as Sòng Zhèn 宋震 and revise the entry accordingly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Generic?</th>
<th>Clergy?</th>
<th>Contemporary?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guanxiu</td>
<td>Song Zhen  宋震</td>
<td>Sent to 寄</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My data’s usefulness depends upon the ability to identify the addressees of the exchange poems, many of whom are indicated only by surname and title. “Generic” and “semi-generic” targets must be filtered out of any network map, otherwise two people with the same surname and title (e.g. “Scholar Liú” 劉秀才) who lived in completely different time periods would be considered the same person and create false connections. Likewise, the same person addressed by two different titles would create problems, further diffusing the graph. In order to make these identifications, I have relied on the work of other scholars, especially those who have edited annotated editions of Táng poets’ works. Each scholar, of course, varies in ability and style: for example, Lǐ Dìngguǎng 李定廣, the modern editor of Luó Yīn 羅隱 (833–909), is quick to make

76 For the sake of smoother text-encoding integration with some of the digital tools I am using, I have avoided using tonal diacritics in my spreadsheets. Along with a catalogue of the poems, I have created a catalogue of actors, which I will avoid describing here for the sake of space.
guesses, while Wáng Xiùlín 王秀林, the modern editor of Qíjǐ 齊己 (864–837?), is more cautious.\(^{77}\) Therefore, I must stress the fact that *my data are only as good as the existing scholarship*. I have very rarely attempted my own identifications, since such work takes a significant amount of time, and I am attempting to give a large-scale overview of exchange poetry in the ninth and tenth centuries.

This detail highlights a significant challenge of my project, and is the reason why I strenuously avoid reifying its data as a direct representation of literary and social reality. More famous poets are more likely to have received the attention of modern scholars, and therefore, more of the people addressed in the titles of their poems will have been identified. They will thus appear more significant in a network map since they have more connections. It is, essentially, a vicious cycle: the major writers appear even more important, while the minor writers appear even less important. And what is true of modern scholars is also true of the editors and transmitters of Táng poetry in the past. Those major poets whose works have been anthologized and quoted are more likely to have been carefully preserved over the past millennium.\(^{78}\) Similarly, poems written to or about major poets are also more likely to have been preserved in collections of the major poet’s works. Thus, with thousands of poems that were never preserved for more than a few centuries, the minor poets will have become even more marginalized as their famous cousins begin to occupy more important positions.

The challenges represented by the corpora of a manuscript culture do not end here. The survival of one’s literary works depended on at least four factors beyond the individual poet’s

\(^{77}\) In the case of a poet who has two or more modern, annotated editions of his works, I go with what I judge to be the more thorough and accurate one. For example, I have used Wáng Xiùlín over Pān Dīngwǔ for Qíjǐ. In the case of a poem with variant titles, I follow the modern editors; for poems with variant titles that do not have modern editions, I go with the first title provided in *QTS*.

\(^{78}\) For one example of how contemporaneous Táng poetry anthologies give us a markedly different picture of their poets from later critics, see Kroll, “*Heyue yingling ji* and the Attributes of High Tang Poetry.”
control. The first is the willingness of family members and friends to gather the poet’s scattered writings (exchange poems, poems inscribed on walls or objects, etc.) and compile an edition of his works.\(^79\) A lazy son or absent-minded friend could do much to diminish the size of an individual’s literary collection. The second is the compilers’ and transmitters’ access to safe storage places (such as the imperial library, personal libraries, or Buddhist monasteries) and to the newly emerging technology of woodblock printing.\(^80\) Such measures ensure the survival of early editions, either through their physical protection or through their reproducibility. The third is the shifting tastes of literary culture. If an author’s works come to be seen as a precursor to a movement or aesthetic, those works would attract the kind of critical attention that would lead to widespread interest and republication.\(^81\) The fourth and final factor in this incomplete list is sheer luck. For some poets, only their writings in one subgenre (such as *juéjù* 絕句) survive.\(^82\)

Additionally, even if an author’s collection were to be stored in a relatively safe place such as the imperial library, it could be destroyed during a major rebellion or period of dynastic change. Monasteries, too, would be sacked by anti-Buddhist rioters, some as recently as the Cultural

\(^79\) On the process of gathering poems to create an individual’s poetry collection, see Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper*, 239–47. Guànxìū’s disciple Tányù 曇域, for one, describes how he “found among draft editions and people’s memories about one thousand poems” 募稿草及暗記憶者約一千首 from which he composed Guànxìū’s collected works (“Preface to the Collected Works of Chányuè” 禪月集序, in Hú Dàjiùn 1296; *QTW* 922.9604–05).

\(^80\) Guànxìū, in fact, is the first known poet in the history of the world to have had his collected works printed. For the original reference to the printing of his works, see the conclusion of Tányù, “Preface to the Collected Works of Chányuè” 禪月集序: “It has about one thousand poems, was carved into woodblock in Chéngdū, and titled The Collected Works of Chányuè...” This preface was written in the fifth year of the Qiàndé era of the Great Shù, the guìwèi year, the fifteenth day of the twelfth month [January 23, 924] 約一千首，乃雕刻成都，題號禪月集...時大蜀乾德五年癸未歲十二月十五日序 (Hú Dàjiùn 1296; *QTW* 922.9604–05). For more on the circumstances surrounding the development of printing just prior to this time, see Barrett, “The Rise and Spread of Printing: A New Account of Religious Factors.”

\(^81\) This is the reason why the most well-represented poets in *QTS* are Bái Jūyì 白居易 (2643 poems), Dù Fǔ 杜甫 (1158), and Lǐ Bái 李白 (896). Statistics come from Liu et al., “Quán Tángshí de fēnxī, tānkān yù yìngyòng,” 46.

\(^82\) On this point, see Owen, *The Late Tang*, 12, 36–40; and Owen, “The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang,” 304–12.
Chapter 4: The Fellowship of the Poet-Monk

Revolution of the 1970s. On the other hand, poems that happened to circulate to the far western outpost of Dūnhuáng would be sealed in a cave around 1007 CE for unknown reasons, unearthed about 900 years later, carted off to libraries in London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Bēijīng, and Tokyo, and digitized and posted online for the world to see.

All of this is to say that the data found in these poems are necessarily skewed. To trust such information to accurately depict the real circumstances of literary culture in late medieval China is to take a leap of faith. The excavation of another Táng tomb next week, containing the lost works of someone like Tányù, could upend the whole project. Nevertheless, it is my hope that my graphs and analyses of them may give the reader a general idea of what we can learn from the extant corpus of late medieval Chinese poetry. They serve to get a new angle on surviving Táng poetry, and pointing to overlooked areas of our records which we can investigate further. As literary historians, we have no choice but to act as paleontologists. If poets possessed distributed personhood, then our task is to gather up their remains, analyze them as systematically as possible, and make hypotheses about the shape, movements, and interactions of full dinosaurs.

4.3.2 Networks

I have imported all of these incomplete and skewed data into the network-analysis program Gephi to illustrate the intertangled persons of the late Táng and Five Dynasties period. A network, at its most basic, is a way of schematically representing relationships. It consists of one or more nodes connected by edges (also known as links). Networks are especially useful for

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83 I experienced the results of this firsthand when I traveled to Dōnglin temple on Mt. Lú in February 2015 and found little of historical interest aside from a heap of broken ruins.

84 The Dūnhuáng manuscripts are available online at the International Dunhuang Project (http://idp.bl.uk).
understanding complex or multipolar relationships in a systematic way. In my case, the nodes are actors (poets and other individuals), and the edges are exchange poems. So Guànxiū’s poem to Sòng Zhèn, mentioned above, would be represented as a line connecting two dots (Figure 1). The more poems that connect two actors, the thicker the line and tighter the connection will be. Larger numbers of poets and poems will make the map more complicated, as when we visualize the nineteen linked verses written by Duàn Chéngshi and his companions on visiting the temples of Cháng’ān (Figure 2), one of which was translated above. This illustrates a number of the principles of network graphs. First, the most important thing is the nodes’ relative positions: the closer two nodes are, the more tight their connections. So Sū Xiàoxiǎo 蘇小小, the subject of one poem composed by Duàn, Zhāng, and Zhèng, is relatively far from the core group of the three poets, and is very far from the Venerable Shēng, who has no direct connection to her. Second, the nodes in this graph are sized according to their degree of participation: the larger the node, the more poems that person sent and received. Thus it is immediately apparent that the Venerable Shēng was involved in fewer compositions than Duàn, Zhāng, and Zhèng because of his relatively small size. On such a small scale, the network map does not tell us anything unexpected or interesting—the same information could be easily narrated, and perhaps better grasped, in prose. But when we expand the scale much further to include over 6,800 poems and 1,400 nodes, we may notice patterns that were previously unobservable. We are afforded a bird’s-eye view of the collectively dreamed literary connections of the late Táng.

Chapter 4: The Fellowship of the Poet-Monk

Figure 4.1
Network graph of one poem from Guànxiū to Sòng Zhēn. Created in Gephi.

Figure 4.2
Network graph of the poems in the Record of Temples and Stūpas (Sìtǎ ji 寺塔記). Created in Gephi, using the Yifan Hu attraction-repulsion model for layout. Nodes are sized according to degree.
4.4 Poet-monks in the Network

Buddhist monasticism, in its most ideal form, claims itself to be cut off from the dusty world of mundane reality, even while simultaneously depending on that world for its survival. Did the poet-monks of the late medieval period make good on this claim? Did they form a self-contained community, conversing primarily with other monks? Or did they fully engage the mainstream, non-Buddhist literary world, and in the end look no different from their lay counterparts? Were their persons distributed only amongst each other, or also to the literati (and to what degree)? As we mentioned in the introduction, many critics of the Sòng and later periods assumed poet-monks were so isolated from the rest of society that they had little understanding of the real world and thus made bad poets. But is there any truth to these claims?

4.4.1 The Centrality of Poet-Monks

The data we have extracted from our archive of exchange poetry can help us answer this question systematically. Table 4.1 lists the twenty-two poets from the late medieval period with at least sixty exchange poems to their name, and calculates the percentage targeted to Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, deities, non-clergy, and unidentified addressees. The first thing to notice is that no poet addressed a majority of his works to members of the clergy. Even the two most prolific and well-known poet-monks, Qíjī and Guànxiū, wrote large numbers of poems to laypersons, most of whom were literati of one sort or another. This is remarkable, considering the situation in later times. The Sòng poet-monk Hóngzhì Zhèngjué 宏智正覺 (1091–1157), for example, left eighty per cent of his exchange poems to other monks.86 This is about double the rate of the highest poet on our list, Qíjī. The reason for the relatively large number of poems to literati in the late Táng is related to poetry’s social function. Exchange poetry was put to a

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86 Byrne, “Poetics of Silence,” 155, lists 140 of Hóngzhī’s 175 exchange poems as being unambiguously addressed to monks.
variety of purposes other than the merely aesthetic: it could be used for flattering superiors, flaunting one’s education, or establishing a connection with a literary hero as easily as for thanking a friend. These goals are no less important to a learned monk in the late Táng than they are to a lay literatus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet (source)</th>
<th>Recipient (target)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qíjǐ 齊己</td>
<td><strong>41%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lì Dòng 李洞</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhāng Qiáo 張喬</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guànxiū 贯休</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cáo Sǒng 曹松</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wú Róng 吳融</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuē Néng 薛能</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lì Xiányòng 李咸用</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhèng Gǔ 郑谷</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dù Xúnghè 杜荀鹤</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lǐ Zhōng 李中</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fāng Gān 方干</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hán Wò 韓偓</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhāng Pín 張蠙</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xǔ Táng 許棠</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lǐ Tín 李频</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huáng Tāo 黄滔</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wéi Zhūng 韋莊</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xú Yín 徐夤</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pí Rìxiū 皮日休</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luó Yín 罗隱</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lù Guīméng 陸龜蒙</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1

Percentage of exchange poems addressed to clergy, ranked from highest to lowest percentage of corpus addressed to Buddhist monks. Includes those poets with at least 60 exchange poems to their name. Generic and semi-generic addressees have been included in these calculations.
Nevertheless, Qi ji and Guanxiu occupy the first and fourth position on our list. They were more likely to have written a poem addressed to another monk than most other major poets of their day. Qi ji, in fact, has a higher percentage of his poems addressed to monks (41%) than non-clergy (40%) — the only poet of whom this is true. What this suggests is that despite their pragmatic connections to the world of officialdom, Qi ji and Guanxiu maintained close ties to the Buddhist community and represented those ties in their literary works. This last point is worth emphasizing since it demonstrates, once more, that they do not see poetry strictly or even primarily as a secular art, rooted in the Confucian classics and connected to Buddhism only through the “lay Buddhism of capital poetry.” We can easily imagine a monk who would separate his literary and religious activities into distinct spheres, rarely if ever directing their poems toward other monks. We could also imagine a monk whose poetry was so deeply shaped by the discursive expectations of classical Chinese verse that there would be little trace of Buddhism left in it. But the late medieval poet-monks resembled neither of these types: their daily life as religious professionals seeped its way into their poems, unchecked by ambition or convention. This confirms, from a different angle, what we noticed about late ninth and tenth-century poet-monks in the preceding chapter: they no longer see their poetry as something separate from their monastic vocation. They are attempting to integrate the two, to create something that might be considered “Buddhist poetry.”

87 The two interlopers in our table, Li Dong (d. 897?) and Zhang Qiao (late ninth cent.), can be easily explained. Li grew up poor and, despite his natural abilities, failed the civil service examinations repeatedly; he spent much of his time prior to 891 in reclusion near Buddhist temples. Zhang dwelled for many years on Mt. Jiuhua 九华山, a sacred mountain dedicated to the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha 地藏 and a site of Buddhist pilgrimage since at least the early eighth century. The two, in fact, knew each other, as evidenced by two exchange poems Li wrote to Zhang.
89 On some of the tensions of Buddhist monks writing within the norms of the mainstream literary tradition, see Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry,” especially 159–211 on parting poems and 212–81 on poems of mourning.
Chapter 4: The Fellowship of the Poet-Monk

One may wonder whether our data are misleading precisely because of the skewed nature of our sources. As shown in chapters 2 and 3, exchange poetry was a form of social capital in the Táng. Evidence of literary connections with well-known writers could bolster one’s reputation. Is it possible, then, that monks are overrepresented in our corpus because they would have had greater incentive to preserve their exchanges with literati?

One way to attempt an answer to this question is by comparing poets’ extant corpora. That is, we can look at what percentage of a given poet’s corpus is comprised of exchange poetry. If poet-monks have more exchange poems, then they may be overrepresented in our data. But in fact, as Table 4.2 demonstrates, this is not the case. Poet-monks fall in the top half of the list, but they are by no means anomalies. This evidence suggests that their exchange poems were not preserved at an abnormally high rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Exchange Poems</th>
<th>Total Poems</th>
<th>Pct Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Pí Rìxiū 皮日休</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Lǐ Dòng 李洞</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Lǐ Zhōng 李中</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Lù Guīmèng 陸龜蒙</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Fāng Gān 方干</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Lǐ Pín 李頻</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Huáng Tāo 黃滔</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Qǐjǐ 齊己</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dù Xúnzhè 杜荀鶴</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Zhāng Pín 張蠻</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Shāngyān 尚顔</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Guānxìu 貫休</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Xū Tāng 許棠</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Luó Yǐn 羅隱</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: The Fellowship of the Poet-Monk

| 14 | Zhāng Qiáo 張喬 | 89 | 168 | 53.0% |
| 15 | Cáo Sōng 曹松 | 70 | 140 | 50.0% |
| 16 | Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷 | 146 | 311 | 46.9% |
| 17 | Xuē Néng 薛能 | 110 | 265 | 41.5% |
| 18 | Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊 | 117 | 313 | 37.4% |
| 19 | Xú Yín 徐夤 | 78 | 245 | 31.8% |
| 20 | Hán Wò 韓偓 | 97 | 314 | 30.9% |
| 21 | Wú Róng 吳融 | 81 | 285 | 28.4% |

Table 4.2
Percentage of extant corpora comprised of exchange poetry. Includes poets with at least 60 exchange poems, plus Shàngyán. Pí Rìxiū and Lù Guíméng are not counted in the rankings because of the overrepresentation of exchange poems in their corpora due to the survival of the Sōnglíng jí 松陵集, a collection of some 600 poems exchanged with one another.

But looking at the quantity of poet-monks’ literary exchanges only gets us so far; when we consider the quality of those connections, a slightly different picture begins to emerge. That is to say, a new story appears if we evaluate not just how many poems are written to certain kinds of people, but the extent to which those people are connected with the other poets. We must look at the network.

At this point, it is helpful to distinguish between the two main functions of social network software such as Gephi. The first is to visualize data. This results in a sleek image that can help give the viewer an intuitive sense of the network’s overall shape. So, for example, Figure 4.3 presents all of the relevant data I have collected for exchange poetry in the period of roughly 860–960.
Figure 4.3

Overview of network graph of late medieval exchange poems. Buddhist monks are highlighted in red, Daoists in blue. Produced in Gephi, using the Yifan Hu attraction-repulsion model for layout. Nodes are sized according to PageRank. An
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interactive version of this network map is available online at http://tommazanec.com/network-maps.

Just by looking at this map, we can get an impression of the network as a whole. Due to the nature of our source material (individual poets’ collections), we find many instances of a well-connected node surrounded by a handful of nodes connected only to them, pulling them away from the center. This is due to the fact that these individuals show up only once, connected to one person, with no other links. We also see, just to the right of the center, two large nodes very close together representing Pí Rixiū and Lù Guñméng. This represents their close friendship, textualized in the Sōngling Collection 松陵集, a work comprising about 600 of their exchange poems composed between the years 869–871. We can also see the relative centrality of Buddhist monks to the network: a lot of red appears in the main cluster. The two large, red nodes in the area are Guánxiū and Qìjí, the most highly regarded and prolific poet-monks of the era. Near them, we find the court monk Qībáí 棲白, the calligrapher Biànguāng 袨光, and many other prominent monks of the time period.

However, the results of a data visualization can vary tremendously depending on which program is used, which layout style is employed, what kinds of filters are applied, and many other choices. In the present situation, because the large network graph is unwieldy, not affording a clear view of the details, I can also filter out the weakest links, which breaks apart the network, leaving the main cluster looking like Figure 4.

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90 The tight relationship between Pí and Lù is not merely an illusion due to the survival of sources. They self-consciously created their own collection in order to present experiments in a relatively new verse form. The practice of writing poetry with the same or matching rhyme words (和韻 héyùn and 次韻 cìyùn) was only made mainstream in the early ninth century by Bái Jūyì and Yuán Zhēn. Pí and Lù took these experiments one step further than their predecessors by pursuing them in a broad range of verse forms (pentameter 五言, heptameter 七言, regulated and unregulated prosody, in short and long stanzas) and by being the first to write poems to the rhymes of earlier writers’ works (追和 zhuíhé). See Wáng Xījù, Pí-Lù shīgē yǎnjū, esp. 16; and Lǐ Fúbiāo, Pí-Lù yǎnjū, 196–202.
Figure 4.4

The main cluster of Figure 4.3’s network graph, after it has been filtered by degree (>2) and in-degree (>0). Nodes are sized according to PageRank.

With the “noise” of the most minor figures reduced, we get a much clearer picture of the relations between the major actors. Many more filters could be applied, to different degrees, to create different kinds of visualizations.

For this reason, to really understand the distributed personhood of poets in the late medieval period, we must focus on the second function of social-network software, to analyze properties of the network quantitatively. That is, we must remember that the visualization is just a representation, not the data itself. Perhaps the most important metric for our purposes—the
place of poet-mono—ks—is *centrality*. Measures of centrality attempt to answer questions about which node is the most important in the network. There are many different ways of doing this, some of which are better suited to our data than others. The most simple, *measure of degree* (the total number of inward and outward connections a node has), is not very illuminating for our purposes. It will correlate almost directly with the size of a poet’s extant corpus. By this measure, the most important figures are Qījì, Guànxiū, Pí Rìxiū, and Lù Guíméng. This is due to the fact that the former two have large extant corpora (over 700 poems each) and the latter two exchanged hundreds of poems with each other. However, this does not mean that they are necessarily well-connected with other poets of the era. PageRank, created by Google’s founders, is a more sophisticated measure of importance which takes into account not only a node’s degree but also the rank of the nodes to which it is connected. That is, if a minor poet receives a poem from the well-connected Guànxiū, it will count for more than if the same minor poet received a poem from someone with no other connections.\(^9^1\) The results, when applied to our data, give us a slightly different picture of importance to the network: the top five poets are Pí, Lù, Duàn Chéngshì, Fāng Gān 方干 (820?–885), and Zhāng Xīfù. But as these results show, PageRank favors self-enclosed exchange systems with many connections to each other: such actors have lots of “capital” in this metric, but spend it only on building up one another’s.\(^9^2\) This is the “influential” influencing only each other. Ultimately based on degree, it continues to favor those with large extant poetry collections and relatively few outside connections.\(^9^3\)

\(^9^1\) It also divides this by the number of a node’s outward links. So a link to my website from Facebook counts for little because Facebook links to millions of websites, but a link from Princeton counts for more because Princeton links to fewer websites.

\(^9^2\) The Pí-Lù example is obvious: they exchanged some 600 poems with each other. Duàn Chéngshì and Zhāng Xīfù are also high by this metric because of the survival of their linked verses in the *Record of Monasteries and Stūpas* (mentioned above). Only Fāng Gān is an unexpected result.

\(^9^3\) For the original paper on PageRank, see Brin and Page, “The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine.” For an introductory description, see Newman, *Networks*, section 7.4.
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A much better metric for our purposes is *betweenness*, which measures centrality from a different perspective. One way to think of this metric is by asking the question, “Which nodes, if removed, will disturb the network the most?” Or to put it more precisely: if one randomly selects two nodes in a network, what is the likelihood that a third node will lie on the shortest path between them? This way, we privilege those actors who have the most connections in the most complex portions of the network. To put it simply, if there is evidence that a poet is connected to many other actors who are also well-connected, then he must be integral to the network. If we do the calculations on our network of late medieval exchange poetry (Figure 5), we find that three of the five most “between” poets are Buddhist monks.

![Figure 4.5](image)

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95 The algorithm used for these calculations is described in Brandes, “A Faster Algorithm for Betweenness Centrality.”
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Chart of betweenness centrality rankings of the major late medieval poets, listing the top ten plus three other well-known poets. Buddhist monks are highlighted in red.96

Qījī and Guànxiū, the poets with the highest betweenness centrality rankings, should come as no surprise. As we have seen in previous chapters, they were widely regarded in their own time as among the greatest poets of the era. They also have some of the largest surviving collections of any Táng poets (fourth and eighth largest overall, by one scholar’s count),97 so we cannot be certain that this metric overcomes the biases in the sources. But seeing Shàngyán in fourth place gives us more confidence. Only 34 of his poems survive, compared to about 800 in Qījī’s collected works. Shàngyán appears central in our network because his surviving exchange poems connect him with some of the most important figures of his day, such as Qījī, Zhèng Gǔ, Wú Róng, Fāng Gān, and Lù Guǐméng, all of whom were themselves well-connected. He also lived nearly to the age of one hundred, so his connections span several generations. If we go further down the list of betweenness centrality, we will find other monks relatively close to the top, such as Xiūmù 修睦 (#26) and Qībái 棲白 (#31).

4.4.2 In Medias Res

Such a list cannot be a definitive “ranking” of the most important poets of late medieval China, but it can serve as a useful prompt for further investigation. For example, in traditional literary history, Shàngyán is virtually unknown, and it would be easy to overlook him without a large-scale view of late Táng literary exchange. But once we dig a little deeper, we find early

96 Again, the reader may worry about overrepresentation of certain kinds of connections due to the incomplete nature of our sources. We can address this by asking if there is any correlation between betweenness centrality rankings and either representation of exchange poetry in corpus (Table 2) or representation of monks within one’s exchange corpus (Table 1). Calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient for these values, we find a weak correlation between betweenness ranking and amount of monks in one’s exchange corpus (R=0.3119) and an even weaker correlation between betweenness ranking and representation of exchange poems (R=0.1119). This suggests that betweenness does not directly reflect either of these other factors.

97 Liu et al., “Quán Tángshī de fēnxī, tānkān yǔ yìngyòng,” 46.
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sources which refer to a four-hundred-poem collection of his pentameter and heptameter, a one-fascicle exchange poetry collection, and a five-fascicle poetry collection. 98 Not only was he a cousin of the high official Xuē Néng (as we saw in chapter three), he also participated in the important Buddhist communities on Mt. Lú and received recognition at court by the emperor. 99 Most surprising of all, he sent a poem to Lù Guíméng. The association with Lù is intriguing since the latter is known for his close association with Pí Rìxiū and a literary circle centered around official circles in Sūzhōu—a group which kept only loose ties to other parts of the literary world (at least, as they presented themselves in their poetry). Nevertheless, Shàngyán wrote to Lù after the latter had retired from official life.

Thinking of Recluse Lù Guíméng 懷陸龜蒙處士 100
Shàngyán 尚顔

Hiding in the southwest in your coarse robes, 布褐東南隱 ʔjinX
You carry on the tradition of Xiè Fū. 101 相傳繼謝敷 phju
Loftily you discuss the Way of the Master; 102 高譚夫子道 dawX
In silence you look at charts of seas and mountains. 103 靜看海山圖 du
Doesn’t it pain you to miss out on things? 事免傷心否 pjuX
And don’t you lack an opponent in chess? 棋逢敵手無 mju
Of the many flowers within the Pass, 104 關中花數內 nwojH

98 On his four-hundred poems in pentameter and heptameter, see the remarks in Yán Ráo 颜蒐, “Preface to the Venerable Shàngyán’s Literary Collection” 顏尚人集序 (translated in section 3.1), in QTW 829.8730–31; for his exchange poetry collection titled Collection of Shàngyán’s Presented Poems 尚顔供奉集, see Zhízhāi shūlù jiětí 直齋書錄解題 19.29; for his five-fascicle Jīngmén Collection 荊門集, see Sōngshí 208.5387.
99 On Shàngyán’s receiving a purple robe of honor at the capital around the year 900, see the opening of Qíjǐ’s poem “Replying to the Venerable Shàngyán” 酉尚顔上: “With purple ribbon and grey moustache, you’re nearing one hundred” 紫紗蒼髭百歲侵 (Wáng Xiùlín 王獻林 7.406–07; Pān Dǐngwǔ 盤鼎梧 7.403–404; QTS 844.9550–51).
100 QTS 848.9599.
101 Xiè Fū (313–362): scion of the powerful Xiè clan, known for shunning office in favor of retreating to Mt. Tàiping 太平山 (located in modern Wūníng county in Jìāngxī province 江西省武寧縣).
102 The Master: Confucius.
103 Charts of seas and mountains: perhaps refers to the visual diagrams which once accompanied the Classic of Mountains and Seas 山海經. In this, Shàngyán is likening him to Táo Qián 陶潛 (365?–427), who famously wrote a series of thirteen poems on reading the Classic of Mountain and Seas in his retirement.
104 Within the Pass: the area within Hāngǔ Pass 函谷關, i.e., the capital region.
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8 It’s only sweetflag I can’t see.\textsuperscript{105}  

Though we do not know whether this poem represents a social relationship between the two, Shàngyán certainly posits a literary one, imagining himself in a position to convince the reclusive poet to join the world of men again. He even adopts a friendly, conversational tone in lines 5–6, asking Lù rhetorical questions about his loneliness. The poem draws on the tradition of “beckoning recluses” 招隱 which dates back probably to the middle of the Hán dynasty,\textsuperscript{106} but what is most interesting for our purposes is the fact that it reverses our expectations about the recluse and the beckoner. As modern readers, we may imagine the Buddhist monk as the hermit and the lay official as the one intent on drawing him out. In Shàngyán’s poem to Lù Guǐméng, we see the opposite. To put it in the jargon of social network analysis, Shàngyán acts as a broker drawing Lù’s relatively closed-off network of eastern Jiāngnán poets closer to the center of literary activity.\textsuperscript{107} The monk is the beckoner, the official the recluse. This is also reflected in our betweenness centrality rankings: Lù Guǐméng is ranked significantly higher than Pí Rìxiū precisely because of his greater amount of connections to high-ranking poets such as Shàngyán, Qǐjī, and Luó Yǐn.

Qībái 棲白, another poet-monk of the mid/late ninth century, also appears well-connected in our network analysis. This is likely due to his long life lived between Jiāngnán (home to the major poet-monks) and Cháng’ān (the cultural and political center of the empire until its

\textsuperscript{105} Sweetflag (\textit{Acorus calamus}): sometimes ingested by alchemists and Daoists for its magic powers, this plant was used in many Táng poems as a symbol of a rare and valuable thing. See the concluding couplet of “Neighbor Girl” 鄰女 by Liù Jià 劉駕 (b. 822, \textit{jìnshì} 852): “Sweetflag blossoms are valuable / But rarely seen by humans” 菖蒲花可貴，只為人難見 (\textit{QTS} 585.6778). This usage can be traced back to the \textit{Songs of Chǔ} 楚辭, where the plant is called by its Chǔ names, quán 菖 and sūn 蒽. See, e.g., “Encountering Sorrow” 離騷 in \textit{Chúcǐ bǔzhù} 1.9, and “The Goddess of the Xiāng” 湘君 in \textit{Chúcǐ bǔzhù} 2.61.

\textsuperscript{106} See the poem “Beckoning the Recluse” 招隱士 in \textit{Chúcǐ bǔzhù} 12.232–34.

\textsuperscript{107} The concepts of brokerage and closure were developed by Ronald Burt to describe networks in the sciences and social sciences. For an application of these concepts to networks of American modernist poetry publication, see So and Long, “Network Analysis and the Sociology of Modernism,” 162–69.
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destruction in 885). Based at Jiànfú temple 蕙福寺 in the capital,他 served as an “inner offerer”内供奉—a kind of court ritual specialist—for Emperor Xuānzōng 宣宗 (r. 846–859). One of his exchange poems, written for a monk from the far west named Wùzhēn 悟真, survives in two manuscripts unearthed from the cache at Dūnhuáng in the early twentieth century (see Figure 4.6). All throughout the poem, Qībái describes Wùzhēn as being between things.

Respectfully Given to Dharma Master Zhēn of Héxī 奉贈河西真法師

Qībái 棲白

知師遠自燉煌至 I know that you, master, have arrived from far-away Dūnhuáng, tsyijH

藝行兼通釋與儒 You’ve perfected the skills and practices nyu

of both Buddhists and Confucians.

還似法蘭趨上國 You look like Fǎlán, kwok

hurrying to the capital,110

4 仍論博望獻新圖 And, discussing Bówàng, du

present a new map.111

已聞關隴春長在 I’ve heard that at the Pass and Lǒng dzojX

it’s always spring,112

4 更說河湟草不枯 And it’s said that by the River and the Huáng khu

the flora never withers.113

郡去五天多少地 When you’re five days gone from this prefecture, dijH

how many lands [will you have passed through]?

西瞻得見雪山無 Will you catch a glimpse of the Himālayas mju

as you look to the west?

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108  Jiànfú temple, established in the Jinglóng 景龍 period (707–710), was located in Fútú cloister 浮圖院 in Cháng’ān’s Ānrén ward 安仁坊. It was dedicated to and patronized by the court ladies. See Xiong, Sui-Tang Chang’an, 317.

109  Pelliot chinois 5668; Stein 4654. A typeset edition can be found in Quán Dūnhuáng shī 7:58.2914–16.

110  Fǎlán: Zhú Fǎlán 竹法蘭, Indian monk said to have brought Buddhism to Luòyáng in the first century CE who worked as a translator at White Horse temple 白馬寺.

111  Bówàng: Zhāng Qiān 張骞 (d. 113 BCE), Marquis of Bówàng 博望侯: Hán dynasty diplomat, the first known to establish contact with many of the peoples of Central Asia. There is no record of him having created a diagram or map, but his firsthand knowledge of Xiōngnú 匈奴 terrain is said to have been an enormous help to Hán military forces. See Loewe, A Biographical Dictionary, 687–89, and further references therein.

112  The Pass: border between the Central Plains 關中 and the western regions. Lǒng: roughly corresponds to modern Gānsú province in the west.

113  The River: The Yellow River 黃河. Huáng: The Huángshuǐ River 湳水, a large tributary of the Yellow which flows through Qīnhǎi and Gānsú provinces.
Qībái’s poem places Wūzhēn’s differences at front and center. He is from a far-away land (line 1) about which Qībái seems to have only secondhand information: the weather is always warm, and the vegetation never fades (lines 5–6). Both of these, as anyone who has traveled to Gānsū can attest, are not entirely accurate.114 Wūzhēn is compared to both a foreign missionary to China and a Chinese emissary to the Xiōngnú (lines 3–4): he is both Chinese and Central Asian. He is said to be skilled in the practices of both Buddhism and Confucianism (line 2). Qībái concludes by imagining Wūzhēn peering out over the Himālayas, past China, and to the birthplace of Buddhism in Lumbinī (line 8). Although the geography is wrong (the Qīnghǎi-Tibetan plateau separates the Himālayas from Dūnhuáng by over 600 miles), Qībái’s emphasis on betweenness and mobility is undiminished. Despite the fact that the poem is full of exoticizing clichés, Wūzhēn and his disciples preserved it, and it was copied into multiple manuscripts. This is due to something we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, in the prefaces to Língyī and Shàngyán’s works: collections of exchange poetry with famous people were used to bolster one’s reputation. In this case, it is Qībái, poet-monk of the capital and ritual specialist at Xuānzōng’s court, who acts as the eminent writer lending some of his cultural capital to a lesser-known figure.

114 Behind my own flippant statement lies the complicated history of water management in the northwest. See Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants*, 439–41, for some Qīng officials’ verses on their own attempts at managing Dūnhuáng’s water resources.
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Figure 4.6

Detail from Pelliot chinois 3886, verso. Contains exchange poetry between the Guāzhōu 瓜洲 (modern Yúlín 榆林) monk Wùzhēn 悟真 and the capital-based monk Qībái 栖白 during the mid-ninth century. A note on the recto side dates at least part of the manuscript to 960. Having perhaps been copied a century after the initial exchange, this suggests that these poems were cherished by Wùzhēn’s local community and passed on multiple times.

4.4.3 A Dynamic Model of Literary History

The importance of Qībái underscores another important point: we should not think of the major literary networks of late medieval China in terms of “schools” 诗派 or even geographic regions.115 Such views of literary relations are static, ignoring the fact that the most important

115 The concept of poetic “schools” is not helpful for this period because we have no firsthand evidence that Táng poets thought of themselves along these lines, which leads critics and historians to blur together aesthetic and social categories. On schools generally, see Wú Běnxìng, Wénxué fēnggè liù pài lùn; on schools in the ninth and tenth centuries, see Li Gǔi, Zhōng Táng zhì Běi Sòng de diǎnfān xuànzé yǔ shīgē yīngé, 56, 67–68; and Luó Wànwèi, Xiǎoyáo yījuànqīng, 157–67. Regional approaches to medieval literary history have flourished in the last decade or
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Linkages are the ones in between more stable places. In terms of both aesthetics and position in the network, the ones who travel beyond their own birthplaces and family homes are the most influential. If we look again at the central hub of the network as presented in Figure 4.4 and the Betweenness Centrality rankings in Figure 4.5, we will find this insight confirmed. Very few of these figures lived in a single place for extended periods of time. Some communities do seem to exist around important sites: in eastern Jiāngnán (Pí Rixiū and Lù Guīméng, Fāng Gān in his well-visited mountain retreat\textsuperscript{116} and Mt. Lú (Xiūmù’s community of poet-monks when he served as Samgha Rectifier 僧正 there from 899 to 929). But what makes these disparate communities part of a larger literary network is the efforts of those who traveled in between. On one level, this insight is obvious, even banal. When we measure importance as betweenness, the travelers who moved between multiple places will rise to the top. But in fact, this undermines the normal way of understanding Táng literary history, which is to imagine a series of discrete regions, the center of which is the capital region (Cháng’ān and Luòyáng) through which everyone else passes.\textsuperscript{117}

There is an obvious historical explanation for the capital not being a literary center in the late medieval period: the general chaos caused by the Huáng Cháo Rebellion in the 880s. If we were to examine Mid Táng exchange poetry, I suspect the majority of important poets would be long-term residents of Cháng’ān or those who expressed a desire to live there in their literary

\textsuperscript{116} Located at Mirror Lake 鑒湖, just south of Hángzhōu 杭州.

\textsuperscript{117} The only two other studies of late medieval poet monks, for example, write about literary history in this way. See Wáng Xiùlín 王小林, \textit{Wàng-Táng Wùdài shìshēng qíntí yánjū}; and Zhā Mínghào 查明昊, \textit{Zhuàn xìngzhōng de Táng Wùdài shìshēng qíntí}.
works. 118 By the end of the ninth century, the story of Zhèng Gǔ is more typical. Born in Yíchūn 宜春 (in modern Húnán), he traveled repeatedly to the capital to sit for the exams in his early years, and in that capacity established ties with important poets of the mid-ninth century. Arriving once again in 880, he found himself in the midst of Huáng Cháo’s violence and fled to western Shǔ (modern Sìchuān). When he finally attained his jinshì degree in 887, he did not stay around but continued to travel back and forth between Shǔ and the capital over the next decade before finally returning to his hometown of Yíchūn late in life. It was back in Yíchūn, now under the control of the warlord Gāo Jìxīng 高季興, that he met Qījí and other poets of the early Five Dynasties period, becoming a bridge between different times and places.

This brings us to another important observation: it is not the various official postings held by literati that produces the travel which results in literary connections at this time. Many of the best connected poets held no office. This contrasts sharply with the lives of earlier Táng poets (such as Zhāng Yuè 張說 [666–730], Zhāng Jiǔlíng 張九齡 [678–740], Bái Jùyì, and many others), whose promotions and demotions were the main force driving them all across the empire. Rather, for the late medieval period, it was a combination of sightseeing, pursuit of teachers and patrons, and flight from violence that led to poets’ travels. The life of Guànxiū is a case in point. Map 4.1 illustrates his travels over the course of his lifetime.

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118 I am currently in the process of gathering this data.
Map 4.1


Born in 832 in Lánxī 蘭溪, Guànxiū first left his hometown around the age of 16 to train at Wǔxiè temple 五洩寺 in Zhūjì county 諸暨縣, moved again at 24 to Sūzhōu 蘇州 to study under another master, and yet again to Mt. Lú 廬山 to study with another teacher at age 30. He also traveled to several sacred mountains to make pilgrimages: in addition to Mt. Lú, where he lived for several years at a time on different occasions (age 30–31, 39–40, 50–53), he visited Mt. Tiāntái 天台山 (age 35–36), Mt. Jiǔhuá 九華山 (age 38), the Zhōngnán mountains 終南山 (age
58), and Mt. Héng 衡山 (age 68). This kind of peregrination was common for monks of the late Táng,\(^{119}\) and may be one of the reasons why so many poet-monks rank so highly in betweenness centrality rankings. If it is a common part of one’s monastic training to travel for study and pilgrimage, then highly literate monks are much more likely to meet and exchange poems with local literati and fellow travelers.

Beyond the usual travels of a monk, Guànxiū’s political circumstances, along with his own irrepressible wit, forced him to spend even more time on the road. In 893, he moved to Hángzhōu to seek patronage from Qián Liú 錢镠 (852–932), the reigning military governor of the area and future founder of the splinter kingdom Wúyuè 吳越. Guànxiū wrote the ruler a flattering poem which included the line, “Your lone sword shines like frost and snow over fourteen prefectures” 一劍霜寒十四州, referring to the fourteen administrative areas currently under his governorship. Qián demanded that Guànxiū change the “fourteen” to “forty” 四十 to accommodate his ambitions. The monk responded by quipping that poems, like the territory under one’s control, cannot be easily altered. Qián immediately banished him, and he took to the road once more.\(^{120}\) Ten years later, in 903, he finally settled down in Chéngdū, where the newly established King of Shǔ, Wáng Jiàn 王建 (847–918), built a temple specifically for him. As Guànxiū traveled from one end of the collapsing empire to the other in search of patronage, he came into contact with many prominent poets, exchanging works with nearly everyone of

\(^{119}\) Even a cursory perusal of the Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳 (T no. 2061) will reveal dozens of examples.

\(^{120}\) For the poem, see Hú Dàjùn 26.1067–69; QTS 837.9436. For various versions of the anecdote, see the Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks (T no. 2061, 50:897a); Wényíng 文瑩 (mid-11th cent.), Continued Unofficial Records of Mt. Xīāng 繼湘山野錄, in Shuōkǔ; Fù Xuántóng, ed., Táng cāizī zhùaí jiàojiān, 4:10.433–35; and Tàngshì jishi jiàojiān, 2:75.1955.
importance.\textsuperscript{121} He could be influenced by them and in turn influence them. Both political and religious travels enabled Guànxiū to distribute his poems—parts of his personhood—all across the empire, where they lay waiting like land mines to explode in the minds of his readers.\textsuperscript{122}

4.5 Conclusion

The exchange poems of the late medieval poet-monks, as evidence of their distributed personhood, can reveal much about their place in literary society. Although the literati held ambivalent attitudes toward literary monks, the actual practice of writing and trading poems reveals a different story. The major poet-monks, such as Guànxiū, Qǐjì, Shǎngyán, and Qībái, were some of the most central figures of the period by nearly any measure we use. They produced the most surviving exchange poems, they were connected to the most important poets of the day, and they were some of the most important “brokers” tying together different parts of the graph. This allowed them not only to pick up new ideas, practices, and techniques from the various poets and monks they came into contact with, but also made them the conduits of exchange, the means by which such ideas and poems spread to different times and places. To gain these insights, I have relied on data derived from over 6800 exchange poems, assuming that the extant corpus of Táng poetry can provide us some insight into the ways poets positioned themselves in relation to each other. The patterns of personhood distribution do not necessarily

\\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, research in sociology has shown that, at least in the modern world, “weak ties” are more crucial for obtaining jobs, getting exposure to new ideas, and many other activities. That is, one’s acquaintances, not one’s close friends and family, are the channels through which one learns new things since they are more likely to be parts of different social circles. There is no reason to doubt that the same would have been true in medieval China. On this research, see Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties”; “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited”; and Easley and Kleinberg, Networks, Crowds, and Markets, 43–62.

\textsuperscript{122} Guànxiū once even stepped on one of his own mines: his “Mountain-Dwelling Poems” 山居詩, originally composed in 864, came back to him when he revisited the mountain where he wrote them seventeen years later. Unpleased with their corruption, he set about correcting and improving them. See my “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems,’” especially 101–03. Guànxiū’s wide travels also made the work of collecting and editing his works rather difficult for his disciple Tányù (see Nugent, “Literary Collections in Tang Dynasty China,” 11–13).
correspond to actual social communities, but rather offer some bone fragments from which we must attempt to reconstruct the whole skeleton.

But what was it that made these poet-monks so important, that literati would want to connect with them, that rulers vied to patronize them, that disciples swarmed to learn from them? What did they pick up in their travels and communicate to other people, that shaped their worlds?

As I have alluded to in various places throughout Part 1 of this dissertation, the poet-monks of the late medieval period cultivated expertise in both literary and religious practices. More than their Mid Táng predecessors, they made a conscious effort to integrate the two into a unified whole. Drawing on distinct discourses which had been considered separate spheres of activity, they produced a series of innovations that surely attracted the attention of those around them. Their fondness for repetition and their ability to fix their minds in preparation for meditation or poetry composition were deeply rooted in Buddhist practices yet transferred easily to their literary lives. But in order to fully understand these innovations, we must look deeply into their works and the literary theories in which they participated. In short, we must turn from history to poetics.
Part II:

The Poetics of Poet-Monks
Chapter 5

The Work the Poet-Monk: Poetry, Rhythm, and Repetition

Full religion is the large poem in loving repetition
like any poem, it must be inexhaustible and complete
with turns where we ask Now why did the poet do that?
—Les Murray, “Poetry and Religion”

5.0 Introduction

In Part I of this dissertation, we have focused on the social history of poet-monks. By examining a wide range of sources (prefaces, poems, biographies, funerary inscriptions) using various methods (close reading, GIS analysis, social network analysis), we have seen how the term “poet-monk” refers to a specific literary tradition that emerged in late eighth-century Jīāngnán and gradually came to play an important role in literary society across the entire Chinese realm. As travelers between regions, between groups, between discourses, they were among the most well-connected poets of their day. Simultaneously, at the turn of the tenth century, as the Táng empire crumbled, they began to articulate a new vision of poetry. Their dual vocations as monks and poets were not only reconcilable, but complementary.

Part II of this dissertation turns from history to poetics. Given the existence of a widespread, self-conscious poet-monk tradition, how were the late medieval poet-monks distinct from their contemporaries in the way they approached the writing of poetry? This section will examine the literary practices of the poet-monks at two extremes: in this chapter, we will see them at their most exuberant, and in the next, at their most austere. These chapters identify two distinct features of the poet-monks’ work and seek out precedents for them in religious and literary practices. By paying close attention to their poems’ formal qualities, allusions, and

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1 Learning Human, 98.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

metadiscursive lines about poetry, and tracing these findings back to practical guides (poetry manuals, sūtra commentaries, etc.) and the works of past poets, these chapters investigate the works of the poet-monks from the inside out.

In this chapter, we look at the poet-monks’ propensity for repetition in their poems. What exactly they are doing, how it functions in their poems, and what sorts of discourses and practices might have led them to employ such techniques. In short, the poet-monks drew on the literary discourse of madness, and on Buddhist discourses of apophasis and incantation when they used repetition. They actively placed themselves at the intersection of practices that were labeled “Buddhist” and “poetic” in order to create a new kind of poetry. In so doing, they sought to integrate, harmonize, and ultimately create identity between Buddhist and poetic practice.

5.1 Retriplication

5.1.1 Overview

Perhaps the most defining stylistic feature of the extant body of work by late medieval poet-monks is a fondness for repetition. In line after line, verse after verse, poem after poem, the poet-monks often deploy the same characters multiple times in obviously patterned ways, far more than many of their secular contemporaries. For example, if one were to open the collected works of Guànxiū, the third poem in the collection (“Song of Bright Spring” 阳春曲) ends by repeating a character three times in a row, a technique that I call retriplication. This is unusual in Chinese because, in standard uses of the language, reduplication (doubling) is usually the outer limit of repeating a single character. In the “Song of Bright Spring,” Guànxiū goes one step further. Bemoaning the destruction wrought by the Huáng Cháo Rebellion as it swept through his home region of Jiāngnán in the spring of 880, he builds to an emotional fever pitch which reaches its apex in the moment of retriplication.
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Song of Bright Spring (Written East of the Great River, 880) 陽春曲（江東廣明初作）

Guànxiū 贯休

為口莫學阮嗣宗

With mouth, do not imitate Ruăn Sîzōng,3

不言是非非至公

Who, not speaking of right and wrong, denied the impartial.

為手須似朱雲輩

With hands, we needs resemble the likes of Zhū Yún,

折檻英風至今在

Whose heroic spirit of breaking the balustrade would endure to the present.4

男兒結髮事君親

If boys would tie their hair and serve their lords and parents,

須斅前賢多慷慨

They must imitate the former worthies’ great resolve.

歷數雍熙房與杜

An array of ministers just—

Fáng and Dù,5

魏公姚公宋開府

Lord Wéi, Lord Yáo, and Sòng Kāifū—6

盡向天上仙宮閑處坐

Have fully ascended to that sylphic heaven above and idle in their palace.

何不卻辭上帝下下土

Oh, would they not leave the Emperor on High, and sink to this sunken earth?

忍見蒼生苦苦苦

Or could they stand to see us greylife suffer suffer suffer?7

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2 Hú Dàjùn 1:1.5–8; QTS 826.9302. According to the Yuèfǔ jiètiě 樂府解題, quoted in Yuèfǔ shǐjì 50.730, the function of the “Song of Bright Spring” was to “lament the season” 傷時. Its name is probably a variant of the famed “White Snow in Bright Spring” 陽春白雪 attributed to Sòng Yù 宋玉 (4th cent. BCE), a song so noble that no matter how many people tried, no one could write a worthy matching poem.

3 I.e., Ruăn Jí 阮籍 (210–263). In Ruăn Jí’s biography in the Jinshū 晉書, it is said that he was so absorbed in his reading that he would shut his door and block out the world, showing no concern for the public good. See Jinshū 49.3868.

4 Zhū Yún lived during the time of Emperor Chéng of Hàn 漢成帝 (Liú Ào 劉饒, r. 33–7 BCE). He bravely criticized Zhāng Yù 張禹, the Councilor in Chief 丞相 and Marquis of Ānchāng 安昌侯. Enraged, the emperor ordered Zhū Yún’s execution, but he grabbed hold of a nearby balustrade with such strength that it broke when imperial guards attempted to pull him away. Thanks to the intervention of other ministers, he was banished from court rather than executed. See Hānshū 67.2915.

5 Fáng and Dù: two celebrated Grand Councilors (zhàixiàng 宰相), Fáng Xuănlíng 房玄齡 (578–648) and Dù Rúhuì 杜如晦 (585–630), who served under the Táng emperor Tàižōng 唐太宗 (Li Shimín 李世民, r. 626–649).

6 Lord Wei: Wéi Zhēng 魏徵 (580–643). Lord Yáo: Yào Chóng 姚崇 (650–721). Sòng Kāifū (663–737): also known as Sòng Jīng 宋璟. All of these men were considered exemplary ministers.

7 Greylife: the common people.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

This is a yuèfǔ of witness. The seemingly detached, historical perspective of the beginning is undercut by Guànxiū’s personal stakes and his impassioned plea in the poem’s conclusion. The note to the title, identifying the time and circumstances of the poem’s composition, clues the reader in. It was precisely in July of 880 that Huáng Cháo’s forces swept through Guànxiū’s home region of Wūzhōu, forcing the monk to flee to Pílíng. The poet-monk diagnoses the cause of the Huáng Cháo Rebellion, calling out corrupt ministers’ selfishness. They are too much like the bookish Ruǎn Jí (lines 1–2), not enough like the bold Zhū Yún, who spoke truth to power even as armed guards dragged him from the emperor (lines 3–4). The critique of the decadent present age continues until the last three lines, at which point the tone of the poem shifts drastically. The meter changes to the highly unusual nine-character lines (what we would call “enneameter” in English) and the speaker’s thoughts turn heavenward, where he imagines the good ministers idling in transcendent palaces and implores them to descend messianically (lines 9–10). This obsession with other worlds is widespread in Guànxiū’s poetic corpus, and here he uses it to set up a contrast with the disaster spreading in the wake of Huáng Cháo’s rebellion.

The suffering Guànxiū witnesses, and which the gods in heaven might not be able to bear to see, is intensified with the retriplication of kǔ, meaning “bitterness” or “pain” in a general sense, and also duhkha or “suffering” in a technical, Buddhist sense. Guànxiū takes the normal method of intensifying an adjective—reduplication—and intensifies it further. The people do not just kǔ or kǔ kǔ; they kǔ kǔ kǔ.

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8 Sīmā Guāng, Zizhī tŏngjiàn, 253.8208, describes how Huáng Cháo’s troops, unable to defeat the Táng forces Xuānzhōu 宣州, attacked the lower Yangtze region (Zhèdōng 浙東, which included Wūzhōu) and continued their destruction into the Fújìan 福建 area.

9 The lines of enneameter could also be understood as lines of heptameter with two initial hypermetrical syllables (jìnxiàng 盡向 in line 9 and hébù 何不 in line 10).

10 On Guànxiū’s otherworldly imagination, see Schafer, “Mineral Imagery in the Paradise Poems of Kuan-hsiu.”
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

Guànxiū and Qíjǐ used retriplication to grab a reader’s or listener’s attention. Such an effect depends on the fact that retriplication is a relatively rare phenomenon in the late Táng, one that had not become a standard trope in mainstream poetry. Before we continue to explore retriplication using the classic tool of the literary critic (intuition based upon many years of reading), it is important to understand the big picture first. That is, we must make sure that we can articulate more precisely how closely this is associated with monastic poets.

To this end, I have searched databases of pre-Sòng Chinese texts for retriplicated characters, checked these results against the best critical editions of these sources, and traced them back to manuscript or early print editions whenever possible. After tossing out spurious results, there are 54 occurrences in 39 poems by 14 known authors and several unknown authors (for the full table, see Appendix C).\(^{11}\) When we sort out these occurrences and begin classifying them, previously unseen patterns emerge. Most clearly, a majority of retriplicatives are used by Buddhist monks (Figure 1). In addition to Guànxiū and Qíjǐ, they are also used by the poet-monk Xiūmù, the Japanese pilgrim Kūkai, and the anonymous lyricists of didactic Buddhist songs. Retriplication appears to be unusually favored by Buddhists. This tendency is even stronger than these simple numbers suggest: the three “unknown” uses of retriplication all come

\(^{11}\) At first, there appear to be 59 total instances of retriplication. However, a few of the results from the Quán Tángshī are clearly spurious or unreliable. For example, four of the results come from poems attributed to Lǚ Dōngbīn, the Daoist transcedent said to have been born in the late 8th century, but who was purely a legend conjured up by Sòng dynasty writers (see Jiā Jinhuá’s notes on his biography in Fū Xuâncóng, Tâng cài zhuàn jiâojìān, 4:10.392–404, which painstakingly traces the sources for Lǚ’s legend to the Sòng or later periods). Another is Luó Bînwâng’s駱賓王 (622–684?) juvenilia “On the Goose”詠鵝 (QTS 79.864), perhaps the best-known example of retriplication to casual readers of Tâng poetry, which reads in most anthologies as:

\begin{align*}
\text{鵝鵝鵝} & \quad \text{Goose, goose, goose!} \\
\text{曲項向天歌} & \quad \text{Your bent neck sings to the heavens,} \\
\text{白毛浮绿水} & \quad \text{Your white down floats in the green waters,} \\
\text{紅掌拨清波} & \quad \text{Your red pads splash in the clear waves.}
\end{align*}

However, this text represents a later variant. The earliest extant source for this poem—the twelfth-century anecdote collection Tângshī jîshì 唐詩紀事—gives only two iterations of “goose” in the first line (Tângshī jîshì jiâojìān 7.176). Thus, we should exclude this poem from our consideration of retriplication because it comes from an unreliable source (a story recorded nearly half a millennium after Luó Bînwâng lived) and because even that source does not actually give us retriplication.
from Dünhuáng manuscripts, which means that they were likely copied and definitely stored at a Buddhist holy site; and four of the “lay” uses come from a poem by Sīkōng Tù, the fervent lay devotee who infused his literary works with a great deal of Buddhist technical vocabulary. If we recalculate to include these seven instances, Buddhists would account for a full 82% of the 53 examples of retriplicatives found in our extant records.

![Figure 5.1](image)

**Figure 5.1**

Pie chart of retriplication in the Táng and Five Dynasties. “Buddhist” refers to those cases in which the author is a monk or, if from the Dünhuáng corpus, the poem itself is a didactic verse with a Buddhist theme. “Lay” refers to verses by literati, even those with known Buddhist sympathies. “Unknown” refers to anonymous verses which do not have clearly Buddhist content.

The trends are even more striking when we consider time as well. First, there are no uses of retriplication to be found prior to the Táng dynasty. While pre-Táng poetry displays a fondness for reduplication, it never takes the next step to three characters. This is likely due to the norms of elite poetry, which stress balance as one key aesthetic goal. Moreover, these norms helped shape a system of aesthetic value which encouraged the preservation of certain forms of
poetry over others. Vernacular verse and popular song would be acceptable only insofar as they were made to conform to high literary standards. But even in the Táng dynasty itself, retriplication was almost never used until the ninth century. And, as we can see in Figure 2, most uses of retriplication come from Buddhist monks of the late Táng or Five Dynasties period. This rare literary technique begins to appear in high literary writings just as the idea of the poet-monk is establishing itself (the early ninth century), and it will be most widely used by those very poet-monks (Guànxiū, Qíjí, Xiūmù, etc.) and some of the literati they are in contact with (Sīkōng Tú, Bái Jūyì). In short, retriplication becomes associated with Buddhist monks. The reasons for this association will become clear as we delve deeper into the literary and religious resources these poet-monks, especially Guànxiū, drew upon.

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12 Li Dingguăng, Tǎngmò Wǎdài luànshì wénxué yánjū, 157, also briefly notes the phenomenon of retriplication in the ninth and tenth centuries, calling it “three connected characters in one line style” 一句連三字體. However, he fails to make the Buddhist connection.
Bar graph of retriplication in the Táng and Five Dynasties, broken down by decade. Poems which cannot be dated with precision are assigned the year in which their author was forty-five years old. Dúnhuáng poems follow their rough dating in the standard catalogues, and those manuscripts dated only to a century are assigned the middle of that century (i.e., “ninth century” becomes “850” in this chart).

5.1.2 Background: Reduplication

In order to understand how the various types of retriplication work in late medieval Chinese verse, it is necessary to understand its basis in reduplication—the repetition of a character twice in a row. Though reduplication never had the same striking newness as retriplication, it carried with it a range of associations that were deeply embedded in the literary tradition. When a poet-monk employed retriplication in one of his poems, he was drawing on these associations, at times extending them or undermining them. If style is thought of as
deviance from a norm, then a stylistic innovation cannot be appreciated without a thorough knowledge of the norm from which it deviates.

Reduplication has been an integral part of Chinese from its very genesis. As in most languages, the doubling of a syllable in Chinese alters its meaning in a variety of ways. In the Chinese language family, “total reduplication”—i.e. the repetition of a single character—usually creates a sense of intensification or vividness. Reduplicatives can be found all throughout the earliest layers of the Chinese literary tradition, especially the Book of Odes. Its rhythm, usually created by the repetition of characters in a steady four-beat meter and a host of resonances across lines and stanzas, would later become strongly associated with an elite, formal style. The kinds of reduplication used in the Book of Odes can be found in much of the poetry before the medieval period. As such, it was one part of a poetic repertoire that would be shared by virtually all poets of the classical Chinese tradition, from the earliest times even up to the present day. One important touchstone of the early poetic tradition, the opening of the first of the “Nineteen Old Poems,” took this reduplication a step further.

行行重行行 Marching marching and marching marching:
與君生別離 From you have I been parted in life.
相去萬餘里 Over ten thousand miles apart,
各在天一涯 Each of us on heaven’s other shore.

—from “Nineteen Old Poems, #1” 古詩十九首（其一）

Considered by many to be the beginning of Chinese lyricism, the “Nineteen Old Poems” exerted a considerable influence over the later literary tradition. The first of these poems, a woman’s

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13 See, e.g., Todorov, “The Place of Style in the Structure of the Text,” and Barthes, “Style and Its Image.”
14 For example, the admittedly incomplete survey in Sun, “Reduplication in Old Chinese,” 43, lists at least 12 different meanings of reduplicative verbs in Mandarin, Classical Greek, Sanskrit, Vietnamese, Yi, Yoruba, Naxi, Ningsha, Mpwarntwe Arrernte, and Ilokano.
16 Lü Qīnlì, Xiān-Qín Hàn Wèi Jīn Nánhēichāo shì, 329; Wènxuàn 29.1343. For a translation and commentary in French, see Diény, Les dix-neuf poèmes anciens, 9, 49–59.
plaint of separation, doubles its reduplicatives in order to convey the missing lover’s hardships. A soldier, he marches ever further away from his beloved, given no rest until death in battle. The doubling and redoubling of the verb 行 (“march,” “move,” etc.) elegantly captures the relentless, never-ending nature of his trek. The line is so effective because it so blatantly violates poetic norms. The Book of Odes emphasized balance in such cases: lines of four syllables with a reduplicative on one side and two other characters on the other, written in a collective voice. The first of the “Nineteen Old Poems,” by contrast, overwhelms with the continuous march of the same sound before it switches to the heart-wrenching details of a personal lament.

The “Nineteen Old Poems” quickly became part of the medieval literary canon. As such, this set was widely imitated from at least the early fourth century on, as evidenced by Lù Jì’s 陆機 (261–303) homage. Already in the early medieval period, we find at least two other poems which employ the AA-X-AA formula. By the Táng dynasty, the pattern AA-X-AA was part of the poet’s standard toolkit. It appears 31 times in Quán Tángshī, by writers from all periods and social stations. Frequently deployed at the beginning of a lament of separation, it generally had an archaizing effect, in direct reference to the first of the “Nineteen Old Poems.”

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17 Wáng Shìzhēn 王世貞 (1526–1590), for example, calls this series “the ancestor of classical pentameter” 千古五言之祖 (Yìyuàn wǔyán 藝苑五言), in Dǐng Fǔbāo, Lìdài shīhūa xǔbiān, 978; quoted in Tian, “Woman in the Tower,” 3).

18 Lù Jì imitated the “Old Poems” as a set, but curiously, there is no imitation of “Nineteen Old Poems, #1” in Lù Jì’s extant works. Also, it should be said that the exact relationship between Lù Jì’s homages and the texts as we know them today is more complicated than has traditionally been supposed. At the very least, both drew on a shared language of poetic tropes, and the “Nineteen Old Poems” versions quickly came to be seen as the more fundamental of the two. For a further discussion of these issues, see Owen, The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry, 286–89.

19 Namely, “Old Ballad on Walking out of the Xià Gate” 古步出夏門行: “Marching marching, again marching marching: / The white sun presses upon the western hills” 行行復行行，白日薄西山 (preserved in a gloss to Cáo Zhī’s 曹植 poem “Given to Xú Gān” 贈徐幹 in Wénxuàn 24.1117; also collected in Lù Qīnli, Xiǎn-Qín Hán Wēi Jīn Nánběichāo shī, 268); and “Song of White Hair” 皚如山上雪 白頭吟: “Cold cold, again cold cold: / Married off, I shall not weep (also known as “White as Mountain Snow” 白頭吟, in Yùtái xǐng yòng jiānzhù, 1.14–15; Lù Qīnli, Xiǎn-Qín Hán Wēi Jīn Nánběichāo shī, 274; in a slightly longer version of the same poem, the couplet reads, “Cold cold, and cold cold: / Married off, I do not weep” 漂漾重漂漾，嫁娶亦不啼, for which see Sōngshū 21.622; Lù Qīnli, Xiǎn-Qín Hán Wēi Jīn Nánběichāo shī, 274).

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Each of these couplets is taken from the opening of a poem which emphasizes the distance between the speaker and reader. Like many of the exchange poems we examined in chapter 4, the poetic voice seeks to bridge the gap that it invokes, be it the gap of physical separation or the gap of death. The poems from which these couplets are extracted can be placed along a spectrum of explicit imitation of the “Nineteen Old Poems.” At one extreme are the continuations and imitations of Lí Bái and Bái Jūyì, which mark themselves in both title and formal structure as

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20 QTS 183.1863; Qū Tuiyuán and Zhū Jīnchéng, Lí Bái jí jiàozhù 24.1383–84.
21 QTS 425.4672; Zhū Jīnchéng, Bái Jūyì jí jiānjiào 2.259.
23 QTS 383.4294.
24 QTS 270.3009–10.
25 QTS 355.3984; Qū Tuiyuán, Liú Yǔxī jí jiānzhèng 30.994.
being second-order poems, using reduplicatives which highlight the same themes as the forced marches of the old poems. At the other extreme is Liú Yúxí’’s exile poem in which he obliquely recalls the distance evoked in the “Nineteen Old Poems” through the line’s formal structure, even though the repeated word’s semantic content is completely different: “gloomy gloomy” is an adjective describing his own psychological state, rather than the eternal wanderings of another person. In between, we find poems of separation—such as Róng Yù’’s and Zhānɡ Jí’’s—which clearly convey a similar emotional tenor as the “Nineteen Old Poems,” but are now focused on the parting of friends rather than the absence of a lover.

Táng poets used the AA-X-AA formula in a variety of ways, more or less associated with sorrow and separation. It was a special case of reduplication that carried on the intensifying function of the more common type of reduplication—the simple repetition of a character (i.e., AA). The double repetition of the “Nineteen Old Poems” was effective because it so boldly deviated from the balanced rhythms of elite poetry in the early and early medieval period and overwhelmed the reader with the stress of a single syllable. Over the course of several centuries, however, the deviation became commonplace. An instrument in the poet’s toolkit, it became an easily recognized allusion.

Indeed, there is evidence that repetition (including the AA-X-AA pattern) was at the forefront of poets’ minds in the late medieval period. A tenth-century manual on poetic composition by the monk Shénỳù 神彧 invokes it as the fourth of five ways of “proceeding from topics” 破題.26 In this manual, repeating an important character or set of characters is invoked

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26 “Shīɡé” 詩格, in Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīɡé huìkǎo 489. Not much is known about Shényù. Because this manual is listed after Lǐ Dònɡ’s 李洞 (d. 897?) in the Sòng bibliographic catalogue (Sònghăi 162.5410), and because it quotes mainly from late ninth and early tenth-century sources, Zhānɡ Bówěi believes it was likely compiled sometime in the mid tenth century (Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīɡé huìkǎo 486–87). Shényù’s five ways of proceeding from topics are: 1) following the topic 就題, 2) proceeding straightaway 直致, 3) leaving the topic 離題, 4) sticking to the topic 粘題, and 5) entering the arcane 入玄.
not simply as a means of grabbing the reader’s attention, but more specifically as an important way to set up the main topic of a poem.

四曰粘題，破題上下二句重用其字是也。禪月詩：「得力未得力，苦吟夏又殘。」此乃一句內粘二字也。方干詩：「至業未得力，至今猶苦吟。」此乃上下共粘二字也。《送僧》詩：「一衲與一錫，一身索索輕。」此乃上下共粘三字也。《古詩》：「行行重行行，與君生別離。」此乃一句粘四字也。《別友人》詩：「昔年相別今又別，今別還將昔別同。」此乃兩句粘四「別」字，又粘二「今」、二「昔」字。

Four: Sticking to the topic. In proceeding from a topic, a character is repeated in the first or second line of the couplet. A poem by Chányuè [Guànxiū] reads:

Successful (déli) but not yet aided (déli),
The summer fades away again as I intone with pain.\(^{27}\)

He sticks to the same two characters in a single line. A poem by Fāng Gān reads:

Though not yet effective in the task I am set upon (zhì),
Still I intone with pain to (zhì) this day.\(^{28}\)

He sticks to the same character in the first and second lines. A poem on “Seeing off a Monk” reads:

One (yī) patchrobe and one (yī) tin-ringed staff;
Your entire (yī) self worn out, treated lightly.\(^{29}\)

Here it sticks to the same character three times in the first and second lines. The “Old Poem” reads:

Marching marching and marching marching,
From you have I been parted in life.\(^{30}\)

Here it sticks to the same character four times in a single line. A poem on “Parting with a Friend” reads:

We parted in years past,

\(^{27}\) From “Thinking of Minister Xuē [Xuē Néng 薛能] and Shown to Commissioned Lord Wáng of Dōngyáng [Wáng Zào 王慥]” 懷薛尚書兼呈東陽王使君 (Hú Dàyún 18.832; \textit{QTS} 834.9406). The \textit{QTS} version of the second line gives “loud” (gāo 高) for “with pain” (kǔ 苦).

\(^{28}\) From “Given unto Magistrate Lù of Qiántáng County” 賜錢塘縣路明府 (\textit{QTS} 648.7444; Jiànjiè lù 8.9). The \textit{QTS} version does not include the repetition, reading instead as: “Though I’ve not been successful in the task I’ve set upon (zhì), / I still intone with pain to (dào) this day” 志業不得力，到今猶苦吟. This entire poem is translated in chapter 6.

\(^{29}\) The source poem for this couplet is not extant.

\(^{30}\) “Nineteen Old Poems, #1” (Lù Qīnlì, \textit{Xiān-Qín Hàn Wēi Jīn Nánbēicháo shī}, 329; \textit{Wénxuàn} 29.1343).
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and today part again.
Let us make today’s parting
the same as that past parting.  

Here it sticks to the character “part” (bié 別) four times and the character “past” (xī 昔) twice in two lines.

According to Shényù, the repeated characters emphasize their importance to the poem. This is most obvious in the final example, in which the character for “part” is used four times in the opening couplet of a parting poem. The Guànxiū example plays on two meanings of déli 得力 (literally “attain[ed] strength”), 1) being effective or successful and 2) receiving help. Guànxiū is doubly praising Xuē Néng: not only has he become a minister and a well-known poet; he has done so without receiving any special favors. Fāng Gān’s couplet sets up a poem about the practice of writing verse despite not “reaching” (zhì 至) his goal of passing the examinations and serving the imperial bureaucracy. The couplet on the monk uses “one” (yī 一) to establish a theme of unity which would contrast sharply with the theme of separation. In each case, the repeated character is a crucial part of the poem which works with the topic to establish the main purpose of the work. Repetition, to Shényù, makes the theme.

My point here is not so much the particulars of Shényù’s instructions, but the fact that the repetition of a character is explicitly stated as one way of approaching the act of poetic composition. Many late medieval poets took great pains to perfect every detail of their verses, and the patterns of repeated characters are one detail mentioned in this manual. Whether such patterns were lifted up as models to follow or condemned as mistakes to be avoided, their very presence in medieval guides to writing poetry means that they were regarded as important factors

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31 The source poem for this couplet is not extant.
32 The repetition of characters with the same tones in a row was also a concern in Táng poetics. Dubbed “inharmonious” 不調, Cuī Róng 崔融 (653–706) looked upon such repetition unfavorably, calling it “an enormous fault” 巨病. See the second of eight faults listed in his foundational “Newly Established Poetic Standards of the Táng Dynasty” 唐朝新定詩格 in Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkǎo, 135–36.
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to consider. Moreover, Shényù’s manual explaining the benefits of repetition comes out of the poet-monk milieu. Not only is Shényù himself a monk, his first example quotes the paradigmatic poet-monk Guànxìū, his first two examples use the phrase kūyìn, and his third example describes monastic tools and a disregard for the toll taken on the physical body (a hallmark of kūyìn discourse).33 As a whole, the manual quotes five of Guànxìū’s couplets and two of Qījǐ’s, and copies the idea of poetry’s ten “forces” (shì 势) from Qījǐ’s manual, Exemplary Forms of Fēng and Sāo Poetry 風騷旨格. Although we cannot date Shényù’s manual with precision, it is clear that he was familiar with the works of Guànxìū and Qījǐ, and possible that he had some sort of connection to them. By the late medieval period, the repetition of individual characters was a known poetic technique, discussed explicitly in writings on poetics and associated with the works of poet-monks. Retriplication was only a more extreme version of this same phenomenon.

5.1.3 Three Types of Retriplication

Retriplication was not a widespread poetic technique. As we have seen, there are fifty-four incidences of it in the entirety of QTS. But it was unusually favored by poet-monks, and its uses fall into certain patterns. Essentially, there are different types of retriplication, based on how they function in a poem: simple, complex, and anadiplotic.

Guànxìū’s “Song of Bright Spring,” which we looked at above, is an instance of what I call simple retriplication. It takes the same logic of classic reduplication and extends it: if doubling an adjective makes it twice as intense, then tripling it makes it three times as intense. In the late Táng, simple retriplication serves to roughen the poem in much the same way as the AA-
X-AA pattern of the “Nineteen Old Poems” did in the early medieval period. Retriplication was relatively rare, and therefore arresting. Moreover, this technique also gains some of its power

33 The importance of kūyìn in poet-monks’ poetry is explored in chapter 6.
from its simplicity. To repeat a single word is to not use a variety of other words (Roman Jakobson’s so-called “axis of selection”). When a character is relatively common, like kū, its repetition implies that the author has reached the limits of language. It is as if Guànxiū has thrown up his hands, removed all clever artifice, and is giving it to us in plain language. The people suffer. There is no other way to put it. Simple retriplication appeals to its reader directly, like an actor breaking the fourth wall.

But in Guànxiū’s “Song of Bright Spring,” there is another type of repetition. This is the use of a single character in two different senses back-to-back. In line 10, the speaker implores the righteous ministers to xià xià tǔ 下下土, “sink to this sunken earth.” The first xià, pronounced in Middle Chinese with a departing tone (qùshēng 去聲) as *haeH, functions as a verb meaning “to descend.” The second xià, pronounced with a rising tone (shǎngshēng 上聲) as *haeX, is an adjective describing tǔ (“earth”) as “below” or “lower.” Although the same character is used twice in a row, it is pronounced in two different ways and serves two distinct grammatical functions. This can happen even when a character’s pronunciation does not change. In line 2 of “Song of Bright Spring,” the poet Ruăn Ji is described as one who “not speaking of right and wrong, denied the impartial” (bùyán shìfēi . fēi zhìgōng 不言是非. 非至公). Here the negating particle fēi 非 falls across the caesura, which I indicate with a dot in the parenthetical transcription above. The line is comprised of two clauses describing Ruăn Ji: the first four characters tell us what he did (“not speak of right and wrong”), while the last three characters give us a moral evaluation (he is not worthy of imitation because he “denied the impartial”). The first fēi belongs to the nominal compound shìfēi of the first clause, meaning “right and wrong,” “affirming and denying,” or “true and false.” The second fēi is a verb of negation which takes as

34 “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” 358.
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its object the substantive adjective zhīgōng ("the impartial"). Although the character is used in two different senses, it is pronounced exactly the same (*pjī). It looks and sounds like classic reduplication, though it does not intensify in the same way. Rather, it makes the audience pause, linger over the line an extra moment to pick apart the grammar, run through the words again to make sure it makes sense. The reader must mentally repeat it.

When this kind of repetition is applied to three characters, I call it complex retriplication. This sort of retriplication, sometimes very difficult to parse, usually results from linking together two phrases which share a common character. A straightforward example can be found in one of Qíjǐ’s poems on the ceaseless march of time.

Song of Sun after Sun 日日曲
Qíjǐ 齊己

= Sun after sun, the sun rises east,  
= Sun after sun, the sun sets west.  
= Though you have the face of a divine transcendent,  
= Still you must become rotted bones.  
= Floating clouds disperse and reappear;  
= Sweetgrass dies and springs forth again.  
= I know not what the ancients of a thousand, ten thousand years ago have become.

The retriplication of the character rì 日, meaning both “sun” and “day,” sets forth the tone of unhalting flow of time from the very start of the poem. The same pattern appears in both lines of the opening couplet: the reduplicated rì (“day after day” or “every day”) functioning adverbially, and similar patterns...
then a single 里 (“the sun”) which acts as the subject of the sentence, followed by an adverbial direction (“in the east/west”) and a verb (“rises/sets”). Once again, the repeated word is split by a caesura: 里里. 里 dōng shàng 日日. 日東上 (line 1). The retriplication reinforces a more general theme of natural repetition: the unending cycle of nature, in which clouds and fragrant plants disintegrate and regenerate (lines 5–6). Time is an ocean, pounding ceaselessly against the shore of humankind, wearing down even the youthful faces of Daoist adepts into rotted skulls (lines 3–4). But the poem ends with a hint at rebirth. The ancients do not remain buried deep beneath gravemounds; according to the logic of karmic retribution, they could have become anything by now (lines 7–8).

In fact, this poem is a careful interweaving of multiple forms and techniques. In addition to retriplication, it is noteworthy for its rhyme scheme. Being a “song,” it can be looser with the rules of verse and so uses a slant rhyme throughout: all even lines end in an entering tone (rùshēng 入聲) with the same final consonant (-t) but have different medial vowels (-o-, -i-, -u-).

These would not count as rhymes under the strict rules of regulated verse, but the song-style form is looser and can accommodate such deviance. Similarly, the poem mixes two distinct meters: lines 1–6 are written in pentameter, while lines 7–8 are in heptameter. Both of these features—the off-rhyme on entering-tone words and the mixing of meters—set off the poem as part of a song-lyric tradition which we will explore later in this chapter.

At the same time, some of the poem’s other formal properties establish affinities with the regulated verse tradition. First, the poem is written in eight lines, the standard length of the most widespread varieties of regulated verse. More interestingly, the middle couplets of Qiji’s poem

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38 This is apparent if we look at prescriptive rhyme books, such as the Guǎngyùn 廣韻 (submitted to the Sòng court in 1008), which classifies the end-rhymes of this poem into three different categories (沒, 衛, and 物).
are grammatically parallel and follow the rules of regulated tonal prosody. In regulated verse, the middle couplets are the ones that are supposed to be the most tightly controlled, with strong parallelism and a strict meter used in the service of descriptions of the external world. Qiji’s lines do all of this, describing human aging and the mutability of natural phenomena in vivid, physical terms. When taken together with the more unconventional practices of retriplication, slant rhyme, and mixed meters, the result is a fresh take on human mortality and time’s ceaseless turning.

Complex retriplication can be used to more subtle ends as well. While Qiji’s “Song of Sun after Sun” is a fine specimen of lightly experimental Táng poetry, its use of retriplication is straightforward: verbal repetition sets up the theme of repetition in nature. One of Guànxìù’s poems written during a mountain retreat (and later revised) triples the conceptually-loaded character xīn 心 (“mind, heart”) in a reflection on his own meditation and isolation.

Mountain-Dwelling Poems: 8 of 24 山居詩二十四首其八
Guànxìù 貫休

心心心不住希夷
石屋巖巖鬚髪垂
養竹不除當路筍
愛松留礙人枝
焚香開卷霞生砌

Mind upon mind the mind does not abide in Xīyí41——
In a stone room on a craggy cliff, my sidehairs hang.
Helping the bamboo grow, I don’t weed out sprouts in the road;
Fond of the pines, I leave the branches that block others.
I light incense and open a scroll as roseclouds emerge from the steps;

39 If we represent level tones 平聲 as empty circles and deflected tones 仄聲 as filled circles, the tonal pattern of the middle two couplets can be represented as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{● ● ○ ○ ○ 任是神仙容} \\
\text{● ○ ● ● 也須成朽骨} \\
\text{○ ○ ● ○ 浮雲滅復生} \\
\text{○ ● ● ● 芳草死還出}
\end{align*}
\]

41 Xīyí: the ineffable realm of the mysterious. The origins of this term can be traced to Lǎozǐ 老子, chapter 14: “Seeing it without looking, I call it yí; listening to it without hearing, I call it xī” 視之不見名曰夷，聽之不聞名曰希. By the sixth century, it became more broadly used by followers of many traditions.
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捲箔冥心月在池  I roll up the screen and darken my mind:  
the moon is in the lake.  

多少故人頭盡白  How many of my old friends’  
heads have gone white?  

不知今日又何之  I don’t know where  
they’ve gone now.

Guànxiū here adopts the persona of the hermit monk, one who has so little contact with other people (even other monks) that he let his hair grow out (line 2). He begins the poem by recreating the process of coming out of a meditative trance. The mind cannot linger in Xīyì, the realm of the ineffable and the mysterious, known in doctrinal Buddhism as true thusness (zhēnrú 真如). It turns back to the mundane world: the poet’s rustic retreat (line 3), his love of the landscape (line 4), and his long-lost friends (lines 7–8). In lines 5 and 6, he attempts to meditate again—lighting incense, opening the scroll of a sūtra, “darkening” his mind—but each time, his natural surroundings distract him.42

The retriplicated xīn in the opening line sets up this theme of concentration and frustration. While deceptively simple in appearance (just one character repeated three times), it is remarkably difficult to tease out. The grammar of the last five characters is easy: subject-verb-object, meaning “the mind does not abide in Xīyì” (xīn búzhù xīyì 心不住希夷).43 But the reduplicated xīn draws on three meanings at play here:

1. “Every mind”: understanding the reduplication of xīn as an intensive quantifier, much like rénrénn ren (everyone”). This could be understood to mean either the minds of multiple people or the multiple minds of a single person.

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42 Guànxiū is likely drawing on the technical meaning of míng 冥 from early medieval “arcane studies” 玄學, which had come to be adopted in certain strands of Buddhist discourse. In this sense, míng is used as an adjective to refer to “the ineffable yet necessary complement to the evident” that is only visible to initiates (Kroll, “Between Something and Nothing,” 410). Here, used as a transitive verb with the object xīn 心, it means to “enable the mind to be aware of or connect to that which is míng.”

43 However, this parsing does violate the norms of caesura usage. This line follows a 2-3-2 pattern, whereas seven-character lines are supposed to be split up into 2-2-3. For more on caesura violation, see section 5.1.4 below.
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2. “Each thought”: as far back as the Book of Odes, xīn could refer to the thought produced by the mind. Doubling the character intensifies the quantity, as in #1. This use is attested in the following couplet from Qījī:

日日加衰病  Day after day adds to my frailty and illness,
心心趨寂寥  Each thought hastens toward loneliness.44

3. “Continuous thought”: an extension of #2. In a Buddhist context, xīn was sometimes used to translate the Sanskrit manas. Its reduplication in this sense indicates the unbroken string of thoughts which makes up consciousness. This use is attested in one of Guànxiū’s poems from another series on mountain dwelling:

孰知吾所適  Who understands where I am heading?
終不是心心  In the end, it is not continuous thought.45

My translation, “mind upon mind,” is meant primarily to render the first meaning while hinting at the other two. All three of these senses are more or less consistent with each other.46 But the immediate meaning of the phrase would have been nearly as opaque to a reader in late medieval China as it is to us. The retrilicated xīn is meant to arrest its audience, force them to re-read it. In this way, it enacts the central theme of the poem: the process of concentration and its interruption.

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44 “Stirred to Grief in Late Autumn” 殘秋感愴, in Wáng Xiùlín 4.224–25; Pān Dingwù 4.231; QTS 841.9500.
45 “Living at Ease at Tóngjiāng: 9 of 12” 桐江閑居作十二首（其九）, in Hú Dàjùn 10.493; QTS 830.9355.
46 Two other possible readings, which seem dubious to me, are:

- “Mind to mind” or “heart to heart”: referring to an emotional connection between two or more people, possibly the speaker’s “lost friends” of line 7. This use is attested in a poem by Mèng Jiāo on being bound by his concern for a close friend: “Heart to heart, again heart to heart: / Deeply are we tangled in care” 心心復心心, 結愛務在深 (from “Tangled in Care” 結愛, in QTS 372.4182; Huá and Yù, Mèng Jiāo shìjī jiāozhù, 1.30–31; Gué and Lí, Mèng Jiāo shìjī jiāozhù, 1.29).
- “Minding the mind”: in this interpretation, the first xīn is a verb (“to think of, to mind”), the second one its object. Although this verbal use of xīn is relatively rare, it does appear as early as the second century, in a work of parallel prose by Cáo Cāo 曹操 (155–220): “To the north I gaze at their honorable lands, and I mind the burial grounds” 北望貴土, 乃心陵墓 (from “Sacrifice for Former Defender in Chief Qiáo Xuán” 祀故太尉橋玄文, in Quán Wèi wén 全魏文 3.1071, in Yán Kějūn, Quán shānggǔ sāndài Qin Hàn sānxué liúcháo wén).
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There is one more dimension to Guànxiū’s tripled xiū worthy of our attention. To understand this, we must remember that most people at the time did not encounter poetry through words in a book, contemplated in private and in silence. They heard it intoned or saw it inscribed on walls. Guànxiū tells us as much in his preface to the “Mountain-Dwelling Poems.” After writing the poems and releasing them into the world, they began to change as they circulated.47

In the fourth and fifth year of the Xiántōng period [863–864], I wrote the twenty-four stanzas of these “Mountain-Dwelling Poems” at Zhōnglíng. As soon as I set my brush aside, somebody took my draft away. A little while later, some scattered verses were written upon walls and some others were sung from people’s mouths—I’d hear one or two poems sometimes, but always there were quite a few incorrect words and phrases. During the xīnchōu year of the Qiánfū period [881], while taking refuge from the rebels in a mountain temple, I happened to gather all the poems together in their original form. They were rustic and unrefined in their tone, and low and murky in their character. How could they be heard by sophisticated gentlemen? So one day, I took out my fine-haired brush to change them. Some I left, some I got rid of, some I fixed, and some I added to, but in all they came to twenty-four poems. They’re dazzling and dappled, they’re corroded wood, and they belong to the class of mountain ditties. If some writer should find them agreeable and wanted to start with the first and sing them out, that would be fine.

Guànxiū’s series of poems were primarily for the hearing. He relates how they were orally transmitted in the Zhōnglíng area, worries that they are not “worthy of being heard” by an elite audience, and recommends that they be “sung out.” And those who read Guànxiū’s poems saw them inscribed on walls, presumably of local temples. In these contexts, rettriplication would work to grab one’s attention in an immediate way. On a temple wall, the repeated characters would captivate the eye without being read: even someone illiterate in classical Chinese could

47 Hú Dàjùn 23.973; QTS 837.9425; Mazanec, “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems,’” 109. For an analysis of this preface in terms of textual transmission and practices of revision, see Nugent, Manifest in Words, Written on Paper, 228–32.
hardly fail to notice that 心心心 is an odd use of language. When heard aloud, the sound of *sim sim sim in extended level tones would create an incantatory effect, washing over the listener and lulling him into a state of equanimity, only to break with the departing tone of *drjuH (zhù 住, “abide”) and come crashing down on hard, clipped entering tones in the next line, which begins *dzyiek ?uwk (shíwū 石屋, “stone room”). That is to say, retriplication has a definite performative function, be that in written or oral form. Its sound and appearance are as important as its semantic meaning. As we will see below, this function comes from its connections with literary and religious performance traditions.

The third type of retriplication is anadiplotic retriplication. Anadiplosis (dìngzhēn 頂真) refers to a character or phrase used at the end of one line and the beginning of the next. Although the Chinese term dìngzhēn was coined in a much later period, the technique is as old as the poetic tradition itself, appearing in early layers of the Book of Odes 詩經 as a way to create connections between stanzas. Anadipotic retriplication differs from complex retriplication in both its form and function. Formally, the characters are separated by a line break, which is much stronger than a caesura. Depending on how the poem was written, this may or may not be easy to spot on a first glance, but it would definitely be apparent upon a close reading or recitation. Due to this formal difference, anadipotic repetition does not force the reader to pause and parse but rather creates resonances between lines, reinforcing a poem’s structure by strengthening its sense of sequence. In one of Guànxiū’s poems on an old yuèfū theme, he employs anadipotic retriplication to underscore its concluding theme of interconnection.

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48 Dìngzhēn is short for dìngzhēn xùmá 定真緒麻 (“thimble phrasing”), a poetic game played in the Sòng-Yuán period. See Williams, “A Conversation in Poems,” 505. For one conspicuous example in the Book of Odes, see Ode 247, “We Are Drunk” (Jìzuì 即醉). On the English word “anadiplosis,” see Lanham, A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, 8.

49 I refer to the fact that some written manuscripts were punctuated, as frequently found in the Dùnhuáng corpus. See Galambos, “Punctuation Marks in Medieval Chinese Manuscripts.”
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After “Ballad of the Bitter Cold” 擬苦寒行

Guànxiū 贯休

| North wind, north wind, | pjuwng | - |
| Ah, how harsh and noxious! | dowk | A |
| Snaps a strong man’s mind, | sim | - |
| Shricks the Goldbird’s feet. | tsjowk | A |
| Frozen clouds so turbid turbid | xjew | - |
| They keep a sheet of snow from falling. | tok | A |
| Its sounds curl ’round withered mulberries | sang | - |
| And trunks in the desert frontier. | sojH | B |
| The Yellow River is completely | teijX | - |
| Solid all the way to sea. | xojX | *B |
| A single ether binds [it all together]; | syowk | A |
| The myriad things are formless. | thojH | B |
| Only before my courtyard are | tsys | - |
| Branch after branch alive. | dzojH | B |

The retriplication appears across the break between lines 13 and 14, echoing the repetitions of the poem’s opening. “North wind” (line 1) and “turbid” (line 5) intensify with their doubling, emphasizing the harsh climate of the northern frontier. As the speaker mentally breaks down

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50 Hú Dàjùn 26.1065–66; QTS 20.235; QTS 826.930. According to the Yuèfǔ shǐjì, the “Ballad of the Bitter Cold” is one of six songs of the “pure harmony” 清調 variety which were sung from the Jìn 晉 to the Qí 齊 (265–502) dynasties but were no longer sung afterward (Yuèfǔ shǐjì 33.495).

51 Goldbird: the sun. In this metaphor, its “feet” are the rays of the sun.

52 That is, it blows to the eastern and western edges of the known world. Withered mulberries: a play on Fúsāng 扶桑, the name of a mythical tree in the far east.

53 Formless: the only appearance of this term prior to Guànxiū can be found in the abridged translation of the Pañcavimsatī-sāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra known as the Fāngguāng bōrě jīng 放光般若經 (trans. Mokṣāla 無叉羅 on June 23, 291). In that text, it refers to a type of samādhi (concentration) in which the practitioner “does not attain the appearance of the dharmas” 不得諸法態. See T no. 221, 8:24a; this usage is also quoted in the dictionary Yiqiéjìng yīnyì 一切經音義, T no. 2128, 54:357a. The next usage, aside from Guànxiū’s, comes in a poem by Sòng Qí 宋祁 (998–1061) which also plays on the technical Buddhist sense. The relevant couplet reads: “The drooping willow is formless, so you cannot boast of it; / Still it has some lingering feelings which come out as blossoms” 垂楊無態不堪誇, 猶有餘情解作花 (“Four Stanzas of Lyrics on Willows, #1” 楊柳詞四解 (其一)).

54 Hú Dàjùn wants to date this poem to 891, when he supposes Guànxiū must have traveled to the northwest. However, the only “evidence” for such a trip are several yuèfǔ on traditional frontier topics, which were more likely written after looking at an old book than at a frontier landscape. On the textual inspiration of Táng frontier poems, see Chan, “Beyond Border and Boudoir.”
in a land of dead trunks and withered mulberries (lines 7–8), he is everywhere
surrounded by the indifference of the landscape, be it the whiteness of clouds and snow (lines 5–6) or the Yellow River which has frozen solid all the way to the sea (lines 9–10). The harsh north
punishes with no relief. Yet the trying climate also clarifies things for the speaker. All things are
empty of form (line 12), part of the fundamental unity (line 11) assumed by the “perfect
interfusion” we noted in chapter four. This is emphasized by line 11’s call back to the A rhyme
even as the main rhyme changes for the third time. This moment of clarity then allows the
speaker to turn back to the landscape and see, instead of desolation, signs of life. The branches of
firs and pines are robust, crisscrossing and reaching over the break between lines 13–14. The
interconnection created by the single ether (\( qì \)) tying it all together is so powerful it even
manifests itself in the poem’s formal features as anadiplotic rettriplication.

Though all rettriplication looks basically the same on the page, it is actually used in three
distinct ways. Simple rettriplication builds on the intensifying function of reduplication without
interrupting the rhythm of the poem. It functions as a single linguistic unit. The other two
varieties, on the other hand, are split by the pauses of caesurae and lines. Complex rettriplication,
which uses the same character in at least two different ways, encourages the reader or listener to
halt and parse the line. This interruption works in tension with the incantatory nature of
repetition, thereby creating a very unusual reading experience. Anadiplotic rettriplication, on the
other hand, creates a connection across lines or stanzas, highlighting a poem’s formal structure
and often hinting at themes of unity. No matter the function, rettriplication was a rare technique
that served to disrupt a medieval reader’s or listener’s normal experience of poetry.

5.1.4 Rettriplication and Rhythm
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Retriplication was used to create connections across caesura breaks as well as line breaks. Being such a large unit by the standards of Táng verse, there are very few positions it could fill without breaking some kind of poetic norm. The standard rhythms of Táng poetry are 2-3 for pentameter (that is, two beats, pause, then three beats) and 4-3 or 2-2-3 for heptameter. In this way, simple retriplication could only comfortably fit the last three positions of one of these lines. Complex retriplication, with its inherent rhythmic breaks, could be deployed more freely, but it still encouraged greater rhythmic license. For example, in the first line of Guànxiū’s “Poems on Dwelling in the Mountains: 8 of 24,” which we examined earlier, the retriplication must be read against the expected rhythm:

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心心心不住.希夷 Mind upon mind, | the mind does not abide | in Xīyí.
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Instead of breaking down into the 2-2-3 rhythm expected in heptameter, we find 2-3-2. This is part of why the line is so difficult to comprehend at first glance, contributing to complex retriplication’s invitation to pause and re-examine the line. The 2-3-2 pattern appears in many other poems as well. In the following poem by Qíjī, written from one monk to another, he lays down specialized Buddhist vocabulary across the strong caesura.

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**Given to Tripiṭaka Zhìmān 贈智滿三藏**

**Qíjī 齊己**

1. **灌頂清涼一滴通**
   
   Lustrated with pure and cool [water] soaking everything, thuwng

2. **大毗盧藏遍虛空**
   
   With Mahāvairocana emptiness is everywhere. khuwng

3. **欲飛薝蔔花無盡**
   
   You want to soar [like] a champak blossom without limit, dzinX

4. **須待陀羅尼有功**
   
   But you must wait for your dhāraṇī to be efficacious. kuwng

5. **金杵力摧魔界黑**
   
   Your adamantine-mallet power smashes xok

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55 Wáng Xiūlín 7.347–48; Pān Díngwǔ 7.357–58; QTS 844.9538. All information we know about Zhìmān (literally, “Wisdom-full”) comes from this poem. Tripiṭaka refers to the “three baskets” into which the Buddhist scriptures are divided (sūtra, śāstra, and vinaya). As a title, it was used for Buddhist monks who had mastered all three divisions.

56 Mahāvairocana: the glorified form of Buddhahood, identified with the true (empty) nature of the cosmos.
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水精光透夜燈紅
Your crystal light penetrates
the red of night lanterns.

可堪東獻明天子
Being capable of making offerings in the east
to the bright Son of Heaven,

On you were bestowed a robe, a new response,
aiding the Airs of the States.

In the tenth century, as several regional kingdoms sought to establish themselves as the
legitimate successor to the Táng, religious professionals were highly sought after both for their
cultural prestige and their ability to access numinous and divine forces. Zhìmǎn, who
apparently has great facility with spells and the esoteric powers associated with them, has been
summoned by one of the kings in the east (line 7). Qǐjǐ flatters him accordingly, drawing on a
range of technical words to praise his power: Zhìmǎn has been “lustrated,” that is, ritually
purified and initiated into a tantric lineage (line 1); he sees “Mahāvairocana,” the Buddha’s
cosmic manifestation (line 2); and he wields an “adamantine mallet” (line 5) and emanates
“crystal light” (line 6). Qǐjǐ’s enthusiasm for Buddhist vocabulary overrides the caesura rules for
heptameter in lines 3–4.

欲飛薔薔花.無盡
You want to soar [like] | a champak blossom | without limit,

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57 Adamantine-mallet: jǐnchú 金剛杵 is an abbreviation of jīn 'gāng chǔ 金刚杵, that is, a weapon made of vajra
(indestructible metal or thunderbolt). It symbolizes the power of wisdom to defeat ignorance and evil spirits.

58 Red lanterns, in China as in the West, were associated with the pleasure quarters. Thus, Zhìmǎn’s mystic light is
said to overcome and purify such worldly impurity.

59 Wáng Xiùlin emends chóu 酬 (“response”) in this line to lèi 酴 (“libation”) based upon the SBCK edition of Qǐjǐ’s
works. I follow all other editions, including Pān Dingwǔ, in keeping it as chóu.

60 On the socio-political importance of poet-monks to the kingdoms of the tenth century, see section 2.3.
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But you must wait for your dhāraṇī to be efficacious.  

Instead of coming after the fourth character as expected, the pause is delayed until after the fifth character, creating an unusual 2-3-2 rhythm. This sort of strange rhythm is almost unavoidable when using Buddhist vocabulary in Táng poetry. Sanskrit builds its words out of expanded roots, prefixes, suffixes, and compounds, creating an enormous storehouse of polysyllabic vocabulary. These words sound very strange when transliterated into classical Chinese, with its fondness for monosyllables. That is to say, classical Chinese tends to compress, while Sanskrit tends to expand. It is much harder to meet all the regular caesura of a meter based on mono- and bisyllabic words when using imported vocabulary of three or four syllables. Thus, caesura violation is sometimes used to accommodate the special vocabulary of Buddhist discourse.

Such violations of poetic norms—be they caesuras or repetitions—would have been striking to a Táng poet’s audience. By deviating from standard uses of poetic language, these techniques have a roughening effect, arresting readers or listeners in their mental tracks and forcing them to pay closer attention. This effect is most obvious of all in complex retriplication, in which a poem’s underlying rhythm reads against the sound on the surface (the aural connection of repeated syllables), but it is also apparent in any of the techniques mentioned.

61 The huā 花 of line 3 cannot be read as a verb (which would restore the caesura to the normal position and make the line read “you want to soar like a champak and flower without limit”) for two reasons. The first is the strong parallelism between the three-character transliterated words “champak blossom” 薝蔔花 and “dhāraṇī” 陀羅尼. The second is the evidence from all surviving instances of zhěnbōhuā 薝蔔花 in Táng poetry that it is a set phrase, and it functions as a noun. See Lú Lún 龔洌 (d. 799?), “Seeing off Dharma Master Jīngjū 向定居法師: “The famous champak flower floats without ceasing” 薝蔔名花飄不斷 (QTS 276.3136); Bào Róng 鲍溶 (jinshi 809), “Lodging at Wūkōng Temple, Sent to a Monk” 住悟空寺贈僧: “You uphold the champak blossom” 維持薝蔔花 (QTS 486.5517); Guànxīu, “Written Upon Traveling to Dōnglín Temple Again: 5 of 5” 再遊東林寺作五首（其五）: “Dew drip-drips from white champak blossoms” 白薝蔔花露滴滴 (Hú Dàjùn 3:21.937–41; QTS 836.9420); and Guànxīu, “Vinaya Master” 律師: “The champak blossoms are red, the grass on the path green” 薝蔔花紅徑草青 (Hú Dàjùn 24.1044; QTS 837.9439).

62 We find similar accommodations for transliterated Sanskrit words in poems by other monks. See, e.g., line 7 of Guànxīu’s poem on the installation of a relic of Buddha at Fāmèn temple in Cháng’ān in April 873, “Hearing that the True Body has been Received” 開迎真身: “The blossoms | of the utpala tree | are to be held dear” 可憐優缽羅. 花樹 (QTS 836.9417; Hú Dàjùn 21.916–17).
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above. By intensifying, creating connections, or breaking apart rhythmic structures, they create a qualitatively different experience of a poem. In both theory (Shényù’s manual) and practice (extant poems), the repetition of characters was one of the most prominent features of poetry written by Buddhist monks in the late medieval period. It created new rhythms that would have been especially noticeable in the context of oral recitation or public inscription, rhythms that owed much to Buddhist modes of discourse.

5.2 Apophasis and the Catuśkoṭi

One of the clearest sources of the poet-monks’ propensity for repetition is the apophatic tradition of thought, that is, the tendency to articulate doctrine through negation. This has roots in both Buddhist and Daoist philosophic writings. Many of the core teachings of Chinese Buddhism—\textit{anātman} (“no-self,” Ch. wúwǒ 無我), \textit{nirvāṇa} (“extinguishment,” Ch. miè 滅), \textit{śūnyata} (Ch. kōng 空), and others—are in fact denials of other things. Daoism, too, has since chapter one of the \textit{Lǎozǐ 老子} proclaimed the inability of language to capture its highest ideal:

“The way that can be considered a way is not a constant way; / the name that can be considered a name is not a constant name” 道可道非常道，名可名非常名. Later developments in Daoism, from the third-century “arcane studies” (\textit{xuánxué} 玄學) onward, continued to develop these ideas. This made for happy moments of convergence between the two systems of thought, ones that proponents of synthesis would draw upon for centuries. Guànxiū, something of a syncretist himself, puts this propensity toward negation in a poem on the shape of the world in spring, as he repeats the character \textit{wú} 無 (“no,” “not have,” “nothing”) four times in a single line.

\texttt{Spring 春}^63

\texttt{Guànxiū 贯休}

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^63 Hú Dàjùn 21.915–16; \textit{QTS} 836.9417.
The opening couplet of this poem portrays nature as both a self-reliant mover of all things and an ultimately empty reality. The unreality of the world is driven home especially hard with the intense quadruple negation of line 2. A strong caesura after the fourth character establishes a contrast between the two hemistiches. On the one hand, nature is “nowhere no” 無處無, not empty anywhere, for it teems with life. On the other, it lacks both “shape” 象 and “self(-interest)” 私: it has no substance whatsoever. That is, the world is both abundant and non-existent—a perfectly logical stance if one takes the Buddhist idea of the interfusion of the two truths (mundane and ultimate) seriously. This sets up the major tension in the poem, between the power of the natural world to stir artists and writers (lines 5–6) and the unresponsiveness of the speaker in the face of springtime’s beauty (lines 3–4). Colorful flowers and flying geese are standard images of the classical spring poem, but the speaker cannot rouse himself to write about them. It is only men of convention, with their riches and careers, who are stirred to respond to the scenery. In the end, the speaker resolves this tension with a witty appeal to the Buddhist ideal of a

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64 Vast Furnace: Heaven and Earth.
steadfast mind: though he appears to be lazy, sleeping half the day, he is actually practicing no-

mind, non-attachment to the vicissitudes of the world (lines 7–8). He is responding, but to the

world’s ultimate reality—its emptiness, its negation.

The roots of Buddhist apophatic discourse, as mentioned above, are deep. The early

scriptures portray the Buddha as trying to quash irrelevant speculation by refusing to discuss

them. He called such speculations “questions which tend not to edification” (Skt. avyākṛta) since

answering them would fuel mental clinging and lead them astray. Among these we find

questions about the eternality of the world and the existence of the Buddha after entering into

nirvāṇa.\(^{65}\) The set of questions posed to the Buddha, which he refused to answer, took the form of

catuskoti, translated into English as the “tetralemma” or “four alternative positions” (Ch. sijù 四

句). The four possible positions, according to this logical structure, are:

1) A (yǒu 有),
2) not-A (wú 無),
3) both A and not-A (yì yǒu yì wú 亦有亦無),
4) neither A nor not-A (fēi yǒu fēi wú 非有非無).

A simpler rendering of these choices could be yes, no, both, and neither.\(^{66}\) Surely one of these

possibilities is the correct one. But the Buddha is frustratingly resolute in his silence, summing

up:

I have not elucidated that the Tathāgatha exists after death;
I have not elucidated that the Tathāgatha does not exist after death;
I have not elucidated that the Tathāgatha both exists and does not exist after death;
I have not elucidated that the Tathāgatha neither exists nor does not exist after death.\(^{67}\)


\(^{66}\) For this plain English rendition, see Priest, “The Logic of the Catuskoti,” 25.

\(^{67}\) *The Lesser Mālunkyāputta Sutta*, in Stryk, *World of the Buddha*, 148–49, translation lightly modified. For the

Chinese version of these lines, see the *Arrow Parable Sūtra* 箭喻經 in the *Middle-Length Agama Sūtras* 中阿含經

When presented with the four possible positions on the Buddha’s existence after death, he denies them all. They do not lead to a better understanding of suffering, its origins, and its cure, and thus even a true answer will be of no value to the devotee.

Later Buddhist thinkers would find the four positions a useful framework for thinking through their own concerns. Most famously, Nāgārjuna (second–third century CE) drew on this technique to elaborate his “Middle Way,” which extended the logic of no-self to all phenomena, asserting that they are empty of fixed, eternal essence. This doctrine of emptiness (Skt. śūnyatā, Ch. 空 kōng) would become foundational to the Mahāyāna schools that thrived in East Asia.

Nāgārjuna, like the Buddha of the Āgamas, used the four positions of the catuṣkoṭi only to deny them. Unlike the Buddha, he did not do this out of a commitment to silence, but in order to elaborate his own positions which could not be contained by the categories of mundane thought. In particular, he used the catuṣkoṭi when discussing six subjects: 1) causation, 2) the totality of factors in relative truth, 3) no-self, 4) the conditioned nature of reality (dependent origination), 5) the existence of the Buddha after death, and 6) nirvāṇa. For all of these, Nāgārjuna denies the validity of each of the four positions. That is to say, none of the choices of “A,” “not-A,” “both A and not-A,” and “neither A nor not-A” offer a sufficient explanation of these six subjects. The Middle Way is beyond all of them.

Such a philosophy, combined with the Indic tendency toward systematic lists, naturally leads to a rather curious and repetitious sort of vocabulary. The Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra describes the Buddha’s nirvāṇa as follows:

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69 Sanskrit handles this kind of vocabulary rather easily, as it has a tendency to pile many words into various sorts of nominal compounds (saṃśa). It is not uncommon to see an entire line of epic poetry in Sanskrit comprised of a single compound word. The breaking down and rewriting of such compounds into a grammatically sound prose gloss is one of the major forms of traditional Sanskrit commentary, on which see Tubb and Boose, Scholastic Sanskrit, 85–145. Classical Chinese, by contrast, has no such tendency outside of the Buddhist discursive tradition.
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非有非無，非有為非無為，非有漏非無漏，非色非不色，非名非不名，非相非不相
非有非不有，非物非不物，非因非果，非待非不待，非明非闇，非出非不出，非
常非不常，非斷非不斷，非始非終，非過去非未來非現在，非陰非不陰，非人非不
人，非界非不界，非十二因緣非不十二因緣。

Not something and not nothing, not created and not uncreated, not defiled and not
undefiled, not formed and not formless, not named and not nameless, not attributeful and
not attributeless, not existing and not existenceless, not substantial and not substanceless,
not cause and not effect, not dependent and not independent, not bright and not dark, not
manifest and not unmanifest, not constant and not inconstant, not ceasing and not
ceaseless, not beginning and not ending, not past nor present nor future, not comprised of
aggregates and not aggregateless, not sensate and not insensate, not cognate and not
incognate, not subject to the twelve phases of dependent origination and not free from the
twelve phases of dependent origination.\(^\text{70}\)

The list proceeds systematically through the attributes of existence and denies them and their
opposites. Each clause begins with the propositional negative \(fēi\) 非 (“it is not the case that,”
probably translating the Sanskrit verb \(nāsti\)), to which is frequently added the negative adverb \(bù\)
不 or the negating verb \(wú\) 無 (both probably translating the Sanskrit prefix \(a-/an-\)) to indicate
the second half of the paired attributes. The formal effect of the text is noteworthy. The structure
\(fēi\ X fēi\ \(bù\ X\) becomes a refrain and creates a sort of rhythm that overwhelms the passage. In the
end, the brute force of the formula’s repetition is the point to be made.

It is precisely this formula, found in many other Buddhist scriptures as well,\(^\text{71}\) which
Guànxiū deploys in the opening of one of his few explicitly Buddhist poems.

\(\text{Gāthās on the Nature of the Way: 2 of 3 道情偈三首（其二）}\)^{72}
Guànxiū 貫休

非色非空非不空 Not formed, not empty, \(\text{kuhng A}\)

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Nominal descriptors tend to be limited to 2–4 characters, and are never considered to be “part” of a new word. (The exception to this rule of classical Chinese’s minimal nominal descriptors is the case of commemorative texts, which pile on official and honorific titles.) So in Sanskrit the word \(śūnyatisūnyatā\) (the emptiness of emptiness) is
understood as nothing more than a genitive \(tatpuruṣa\) compound, but its Chinese translation \(kōngkōng\) 空空 is an
anomaly in its new linguistic context.

\(^{70}\) T no. 374, 12:487a (trans. Dharmakṣema 僧無訥 in 421).

\(^{71}\) A quick search of the \(Taishō\) canon lists 4,731 occurrences of this formula.

\(^{72}\) Hú Dājūn 19.872–73; \(QTS\) 835.9411.
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The first couplet of this poem uses highly controlled language in an attempt to describe Buddhist ontology. Four out of seven characters in the first line are negatives. The first two lines use only eight unique characters—非, 色, 空, and 不—account for over two-thirds (10/14) of the characters used therein. Despite this limited vocabulary, the poem still manages to fit the metrical requirements for well-formed regulated verse. At the same time, this restricted use of language alerts us to the fact that we are looking at didactic religious verse, not the typical high poetry Guànxìū usually writes. Both 色 and 空, after all, are technical Buddhist terms, and the patterns of negation are taken directly from the scriptures. The alliterative binom at the conclusion of line 2, 玲瓏, opens the door to a less restrained use of language, and we find a normal range of vocabulary in the final couplet. But this leads us to the story of Huìnéng.

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73 Compare to the Heart Sūtra, which also uses anadiplotic repetition to connect across grammatical breaks: “It is not the case that form is different from emptiness. It is not the case that emptiness is different from form. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form” 非色異空, 非空異色, 色即是空, 空即是色 (trans. Kumārajīva 鸠摩羅什, T no. 250, 8:847c).

74 Great Lú: Huìnéng 慧能 (638–713), secular surname Lú, later considered to be the Sixth Patriarch of Chán Buddhism, whose legend is famously depicted in the Platform Sūtra 六祖壇經. He was said to be an illiterate woodcutter from the south. For a thorough investigation of Huìnéng’s biographies, see Jorgenson, Inventing Huìnéng.

75 I.e., Huìnéng found enlightenment in this world. Bellows: metaphor for the world, emphasizing its emptiness. The locus classicus is Lǎozǐ 老子 5:

天地之間 The space between heaven and earth,
其猶橐籥乎 Is it not like a bellows?
虛而不屈 Emptied but not diminished,
動而愈出 Moving and further exceeding.
多言數窮 Much speech is soon exhausted:
不如守中 Better to maintain what’s within.

76 The fact that this poem is called a gāthā in the title reinforces this point. For more on gāthā as a pejorative term for “didactic Buddhist verse” in the late Táng, and on poet-monks’ reluctance to be associated with the term, see my “The Medieval Chinese Gāthā and Its Relationship to Poetry.”
the illiterate laborer who achieved sainthood by writing a poem. The “horsejaw pearl” 驪珠 is Guànxiū’s own literary take on the luminous mani (“pearl”), a Buddhist metaphor for the dharma. This metaphor became especially popular in the ninth century and tenth centuries, following Màzǔ Dàoyī’s 馬祖道一 (709–788) use of it. Màzǔ stresses how the mani changes color depending on what it touches, and thus it can illustrate the fact that all phenomena and all sensation are rooted in the mind. It is precisely this truth that Guànxiū says Huinéng found within “the bellows” 素籥 of heaven and earth. This kenning of “the bellows” harks back to the Lǎozǐ and reminds the educated reader of the world’s simultaneous productivity and emptiness. Repetition here is a literary technique for underscoring the poem’s religious aims: describing indescribable reality.

These repetitive, multi-layered negations perhaps reach their peak with Guàngdǐng’s 灌頂 (561–632) subcommentary to the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra. Guàngdǐng was to the Tiāntái patriarch Zhìyǐ 智顗 (538–597) what Plato was to Socrates: a disciple who reportedly transcribed his master’s teachings and fundamentally shaped the way later generations saw the master.78 His works were surely known in Chinese Buddhist circles, and Guànxiū in particular had traveled to both Mt. Tiāntái and Mt. Wǔtái, which were the main homes to the legacies of Zhiyǐ and Guàngdǐng in the ninth century.79 In his subcommentary, Guàngdǐng addresses the ontology of the Buddha’s vajra body 金剛身, seeking to explain how “the true body and the false body are formed interdependently” 是身非身因縁相成.80 To do this, he attempts to catalogue all possible positions toward “true” and “false” one could take, providing a rather expansive elaboration of

77 Jia, The Hongzhou School, 81.
78 See Penkower, “In the Beginning,” for Guàngdǐng’s role in shaping the legacy of Zhiyǐ.
79 Penkower, “T’iėn-t’ai during the T’ang Dynasty,” 317.
80 Guàngdǐng 灌頂, Subcommentary to the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra 大般涅槃經疏, T no. 1767, 38:83a.
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the *catuskoṭi*. This catalogue identifies “simple” 單, “repeated” 複, and “complete” 具足 forms of the fourfold schema. A full study of Guânding’s categories would be beyond the scope of this chapter, and is perhaps best left to the logicians, but one example might help us understand how this form of argumentation could have influenced literary style in Buddhist circles. In the “repeated” form of negation, Guánding essentially squares the original *catuskoṭi*. That is, he takes the positions A, not-A, both A and not-A, and neither A nor not-A, and fills in the variable A with the positions of the *catuskoṭi*. This gives us sixteen possible negatives:

非非。非不非。非亦非亦不非。非非非非不非。不非非。不非不非。不非亦非亦不非。不非非非不非。亦非亦不非。非非亦不非。非非非非不非。非非亦不非。亦非非亦不非。非非亦不非。亦非亦不非。亦非亦不非。亦非亦不非。亦非亦不非。

1) To false “false”;
2) to false “not false”;
3) to false “both false and not false”;
4) to false “neither false nor not false.”
5) To not false “false”;
6) to not false “not false”;
7) to not false “both false and not false”;
8) to not false “neither false nor not false.”
9) To both false and not false “false”;
10) to both false and not false “not false”;
11) to both false and not false “both false and not false”;
12) to both false and not false “neither false nor not false.”
13) To neither false nor not false “false”;
14) to neither false nor not false “not false”;
15) to neither false nor not false “both false and not false”;

81 Even Zhīyī reportedly admitted that the *catuskoṭi* are supposed to be difficult to understand:

四句皆不可思議，若有四悉檀因緣，亦可得説。如四句求夢不可得，而説夢中見一切事。四句求無
明不可得。

The four parts [of the *catuskoṭi*] are all beyond conceptual understanding, but they can be verbalized through the use of the four *siddhānta* [methods of teaching]. The four possibilities of the *catuskoṭi* are like a dream. Although one seeks [to find the source of] the dream [as to whether it is self-existing, from something else, both, or without a cause], it cannot be conceptually understood.

*Fāhuā xuányì* 法華玄義, T no. 1716, 33:699c; translation adapted from Swanson, *T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 219.
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16) to neither false nor not false “neither false nor not false.”

The punctuation and numbers, of course, are modern additions to this passage. A look at the original text (especially if one mentally removes the punctuation) reveals an almost comical amount of repetition of the character ひ (false,” “neither,” “nor”), appearing up to five times in a row. Logically, this formula could continue to be compounded into infinity. For example, the cubed form of 16 would be: “to neither false nor not false ‘neither falsing nor not falsing “neither false nor not false”’ 非非非不非非不非非非非不非. While the resulting formulas are difficult to grasp conceptually, they have a kind of haunting, incantatory rhythm to them. In his attempts to comprehensively account for metacognition, Guāndīng establishes an aesthetics of potentially endless repetition.

My purpose here is not to claim that poet-monks of the late Táng memorized or even studied Guāndīng’s commentary, although it is certainly the case that his and Zhiyì’s teachings influenced many forms of Táng Buddhism, including those later designated “Chán.” My purpose is to demonstrate that the very form of the catuskoṭi, combined with the logographic Chinese script, opened up the possibilities of repetitious language. The doubling of は (“true”) and ひ (“false”) had some precedent in the Chinese classics. In the Xúnzǐ 荀子, for example, we find the adage: “Regarding ‘true’ as true and ‘false’ as false—call it wisdom; regarding ‘false’ as true and ‘true’ as false—call it folly” は是非非謂之知，非是非謂之愚. However, it was not until a Chinese commentator (who was probably familiar with Xúnzǐ) elaborated upon an originally Indian form of logic that we get such staggering heights of repetition. It was such elite

82 T no. 1767, 38:83b–c. In my translation, “to false” means “to regard as false.” The verb ひ is used putatively, i.e., it imputes its properties onto its object, as in ひよく千裏に及ばぬ 不遠千里而来, “to come, not far-ing a thousand miles” [i.e., not considering a thousand miles far]. I use this rather awkward translation method to give the reader a sense of the repetition in the original.

83 In chapter 2, “Cultivating the Person” 修身 (Xúnzǐ 2.26).
monks, drawing on the multiple traditions at their disposal, that created the aesthetic possibilities later fulfilled by poet-monks at the end of the ninth century.

One such fulfillment can be found in another poem by Guànxiū. Here he opens with a reflection on the ontology and metacognition of true and false before pivoting to the more typical melancholic tone of exchange poetry.

Written Offhand, Having Thought of a Clergyman in the Mountains 偶作因懷山中道侶

Guànxiū 貫休

是是非非竟不真 Regarding the true as true and the false as false is not ultimately real. tsyin A
落花流水送青春 The falling petals and flowing water see off the verdant spring. tsyhwin A
姓劉姓項今何在 The one named Liú and the one named Xiàng—are they now? dzojX -
4 争利爭名愁殺人 They strove for fame, strove for fortune, grieving one to death. nyin A
必竟輸他常寂默 In the end, there is always a stillness in losing to others; mok -
只應贏得苦沈淪 In the same way, there is a painful stubbornness in victory. lwin A
深雲道者相思否 Clergyman of the deep clouds, do you think of me or not? pjuwX -
8 歸去來兮湘水濱 Come on back—xi— to the banks of the Xiāng. pjin A

Buddhist ontology is introduced here as a coping mechanism. The mundane world is not real: not this separation nor these tears bear any ultimate significance. This contrasts sharply with the verdant landscape (line 2), which teems with life. The focus on the landscape brings us to the

84 Hú Dàjùn 21.924–25; QTS 836.9418. Likely written in 898 or 899, when Guànxiū lived briefly in the Chángshā area.
85 Liú and Xiàng: Liú Bāng 劉邦 and Xiàng Yǔ 項羽, who famously battled each other in the “Chǔ-Hàn contention” during the Hán dynasty’s ascension in the late third century BCE.
86 Alludes to a few lines from the “Nine Laments” 九歎 of the Songs of Chǔ 楚辭:惜今世其何殊兮 Sad that the men of this age are so unequal, or沈淪其無所達兮 Some of clear vision who cannot win a hearing. See Chǔcí būzhù 16.305; trans. adapted from Hawkes, The Songs of the South, 297.
sense of place which suffuses the poem. The allusion to Xiàng Yǔ (232–202 BCE), the hero of Chǔ who famously battled future Hán-dynasty founder Liú Bāng (256–195 BCE), grounds us in the Chángshā region. Two allusions to the Songs of Chǔ (楚辭) (lines 6 and 8) reinforce this setting. Guànxiū lingers on the rich poetic history of the area, conjuring a tragic atmosphere with the phrase “the banks of the Xiāng” 湘水濱, the place where the wrongly accused poet-minister Qū Yuán drowned himself (more on him in section 5.3.2). These cultural heroes, no matter their striving, are dead and gone (lines 3–4). They show us that loss can be better than victory, in that it brings us stillness rather than suffering (lines 5–6). But all the lessons of antiquity and all the indeterminacies of Buddhist ontology are not enough. The speaker’s emotions overwhelm him, his equanimity falters, and he ends up longing for his friend, begging him to return (lines 7–8).

The tension between ideals and reality is set up by appealing to both metaphysical and historical justifications for detachment. The repetitious opening, with its echoes of Xúnzǐ and the catuskoṭi, acts as a kind of thesis statement for the poem, only to find itself undermined by the conclusion. A correct attitude to truth and falsity cannot prevent sorrow. Only an understanding of reality’s emptiness will help.

Songs from the Dǔnhuáng corpus also drew on this apophatic tradition, often in very conspicuous ways. Although we have no information about the author of the following verse (and therefore cannot definitively attribute it to a poet-monk), it is clearly Buddhist in theme and is written to a yuèfǔ song title that had long been part of both the high literati and the Buddhist doctrinal traditions. Given that the manuscript observes taboos related to Empress Wú Zétiān 武則天 (r. 690–705), it likely dates to the early eighth century, making it one of the earliest

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87 On Buddhist uses of the yuèfǔ “Traveling’s Hard” 行路難, which began very early on, see Wáng Xiàodùn, “‘Xínglùnán’ yǔ Wéi-Jin nánběicháo de shuōchāng yìshù,” and Zhèng Ācái, “Dǔnhuáng chánzōng gēshī ‘Xínglùnán’ zōnglùn.”
surviving examples of retriplication. Characters of negation (不, 非, and 無) appear 27 times in 20 lines, creating a kind of ontological maze. Although the reality of the concepts mentioned in the song would take some work to tease out, an oral performance would leave one overwhelmed by the repetitive, incantatory quality of the soundscape.

[行路難] [Traveling’s Hard]88
第六十
君不見
無心之大慧
廓落落無邊際
廓落廓落
無礙虛融離有無
廓廓落落

Do you not see
No-mind’s great wisdom?
Bare and broad, bare and broad,
it is without bounds or borders.89
Without obstacle it interfuses in void,
detached from being and non-

4 微妙疏通含一々
Subtly it pervades,
containing each and all.

切々疏通忘彼此
Each and all it pervades,
forgetting this and that.

如々平等論非是
With the equanimity of thus-thusness,
[one can] discuss denying affirming.

非是是是号空空
Denying affirming and affirming affirming,
are labeled empty emptiness.

8 空空亦空乃法尔
Empty emptiness is itself empty,
and for all dharmas it is so.90

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88 The main source for this song is the manuscript labeled Ryūkoku 024.3-4-1 (labeled as such in a cross-reference in Soymié, Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-houang (Fonds Pelliot chinois), vol. 3, 334–35). Photographic reproductions and a transcription can be found in Yoshimura Shūki, “Chōshin kōronan zankan kō,” 189–91. Modern collections of songs and poems found in Dunhuang manuscripts identify this song as being from the same cycle as the poems of two other manuscripts, Dx 665 (St. Petersburg) and Stein 6042 (British Library). See Rén Bántáng, Dūnhuáng gēcí zōngbiān, 2:1146–220; and Xiàng Chǔ, Dūnhuáng gēcí zōngbiān kuāngbù, 204–13. The St. Petersburg manuscript is reproduced in Éluosīxuéyuàn dōngfu yánjū Shèngdébǎo fēnsū et al., Éluósī kēxuéyuăn dōngfāng yānjūshū Shēngbídēbāo fēnsū cāng Dūnhuāng wēnxīán, 7:39. The manuscript from the Stein collection is reproduced in Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuàn lìshǐ yánjū suǒ Shèngdèbǎo et al., Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxuéyuăn lìshǐ yánjū suǒ Dūnhuáng wénxiàn, 10:53.

89 The use of the repetition character (given here as 々, but actually 々々) frequently indicates the repetition of multiple characters. Thus, the lines here should read kuòlùo kuòlùo 廓落廓落, not kuòkuò luòluò 廓廓落落. On the uses of the repetition character, see Galambos, “Scribal Notation in Medieval Chinese Manuscripts,” 8.

90 Empty emptiness is itself empty: the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra defines this as “when all dharmas are empty, and this emptiness itself is empty” 一切法空, is空亦空 (Dà zhídù lín 大智度論, attr. Nagārjuna, trans. Kumārajīva 鳳摩訶什, T no. 1509, 25:393c). In the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra 大般若波羅蜜多經 itsefl, “empty emptiness” is listed as the third of twenty varieties of emptiness (see T no. 220, 5:13b). A more doctrinally precise but less literary translation of this phrase would be something like “the emptiness of emptiness,” meaning that the linguistic concept of emptiness is itself metaphysically empty.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

法尔空空无他自
For all dharmas it is so: empty emptiness is without other or self.

慧眼明照恒不二
The wisdom eye reflects bright, ever not dualizing.

不二无知无不知
Not dualizing, it is without knowing, without not knowing.

12 無知不知称大智
Non-knowing does not know—call it great knowledge.

12 大智非明非不明
Great knowledge is not brightness, is not not bright.

明不明非明不明
Not bright is not brightness, is not bright, without bright brightness.\(^{91}\)

無明之照不照
Non-brightness’s reflecting, it does not reflect reflections.

不照之照乃無生
Not reflecting’s reflecting is without arising.

行路难
Traveling’s hard, Traveling’s hard.

無心甚清泰
No-mind is truly pure and tranquil.

涅槃生死不關懷
Nirvāṇa, birth and death show no concern.

20 蕩々如空無罣礙
Vast vast as emptiness, without impediment.

Reduplication is abundant in the poem, and there are ten cases of anadiplosis in a total of twenty-two lines, in many instances of which the second line picks up the phrase from the first line only to subvert or negate it. Double negation is matter of course here. All of this rapid-fire repetition seems to have led to a breakdown of the poem’s rhyme scheme: instead of one rhyme being carried from lines 2–17—as in the other poems in this cycle of “Traveling’s Hard”—we have four (two of which are slant rhymes, which accord in ending but not tone). This breakdown, perhaps, reflects on a phonic level the breakdown of binaries when one has reached no-mind, and the mundane rhyme-scheme, like the mundane world, falls to the wayside.

\(^{91}\) As Rén Bántáng notes, the copyist must have gotten lost in all of the repetitions here, since the line is two syllables too long. Nevertheless, I have translated the error apparent.
Moreover, we find in this verse, compared to those in many other Dūnhuáng manuscripts, that lines emphasizing sound over sense are abundant, such as in the following two couplets:

非是是是号空空 Denying affirming, affirming affirming are labeled empty emptiness.
空空亦空乃法尔 Empty emptiness is itself empty, and for all dharms it is so.

重复的句式给这些诗带来了咒语般的特质，增加了它们的可记性和流畅性。在这个最终系列中，我们发现了一种理想状态：形式与内容的完美结合，佛学的原理就在这催眠般的音景中显现出来。

许多中国佛教教义的负向性质就是僧诗人的重复行为的一个来源。《多闻》和《关定》对此进行了扩展，后期诗人将会借鉴这些做法。像《观心》这样的天才能够在这结构化的七言诗形式中利用这些可能性。更常见的情况是，这种反复的叙述出现在歌曲式的诗中，比如《乐府》中的“Traveling’s Hard。”在两种情况下，诗篇都是一种附带的效应——它的咒语式的重复，以及利用其音乐可能性。佛教的否定是僧诗人们重复倾向的一个来源。

§5.3 Of Song and Madness
§5.3.1 On Poet-Monks and Song Lyrics

那僧人和其他人的三复行为受到一首诗的口头表演影响是显而易见的。正如我前面所提到的，这种技术的惊人文学效果只会在朗诵时显现出来，而使我们感兴趣的正是这种音调和句法结构之间的张力。从这一点来看，在这首诗中就显得很诱人。更常见的情况是，这种反复的叙述出现在歌曲式的诗中，比如《乐府》中的“Traveling’s Hard。”在两种情况下，诗篇都是一种附带的效应——它的咒语式的重复，以及利用其音乐可能性。佛教的否定是僧诗人们重复倾向的一个来源。
direct line of influence from the kind of popular Buddhist verse found in Dùnhuáng manuscripts to the works of the late Táng poet-monks. After all, 11 out of 54 instances of retriplication come from this cache of manuscripts, and most of them treat Buddhist themes. These verses also represent a different strata of Táng literature that, prior to the manuscripts’ discovery just over a hundred years ago, little had been known about. Many of them, moreover, explicitly label themselves either as “songs” (qǔzǐ 曲子, gēzǐ 歌子) or “lyrics” (cí 歌), and a few even feature repeated nonsense syllables which only make sense as parts of a song.92

However, to draw such a simple line from the Dùnhuáng songs to the works of Guànxiū, Qíjǐ, and others would be misleading. For one, the Dùnhuáng lyrics are mostly variations on fixed song cycles, many of which follow set, numerically-determined forms such as the “Works on the Hundred Years [of Human Life]” 百歲篇, the “Twelve Months” 十二月, the “Twelve Hours” 十二時, the “Ten Inconstants” 十無常, and the “Five Turns of the Night Watch” 五更轉. When late medieval poet-monks wrote to predetermined titles, it was to the more prestigious yuèfū poetry of the elite. Secondly, many of the popular Dùnhuáng verses are explicitly didactic in purpose, with clear messages and a fixed, specialized vocabulary. Poet-monks, on the other hand, employ the broader vocabulary of mainstream poetry and are more suggestive in their messages. Their aims are at least partly aesthetic. As Qíjǐ wrote when he described the didactic gāthās of Jūdūn 居遁, “Though in form they are the same as poetry, their aims are not poetic” 雖

92 See, for example, “Song of the Twelve Months,” numbers 2 and 4, in the manuscript labeled Stein 6208, each of which ends with the nonsense syllables yě yě yě yě 也也也也 (MC: yaeX yaeX yaeX yaeX). For the texts, see Rén Bántáng, Dùnhuáng gēcí zōngbiān, 3:1254–63; Zēng Zhāomín et al., Quán Táng-Wǔdài cí, 2:1136–41; and Zhāng Xiǎohou, Quán Dùnhuáng shī, 149.5603–16 (cf. the similar text in Pelliot chinois 3812). Ráo Zōngyí and Paul Demiéville have also studied this text. Ráo likens the yě yě yě yě to the conclusion of a similar song cycle in twentieth-century Guǎngdōng 廣東 (Ráo’s home province, as Demiéville notes), which ends with the chanting of yā yā yā (Cantonese: aa3 aa3 aa3). See Ráo Zōngyī, Dùnhuáng qū, 868–73; Ráo and Demiéville, Airs de Touen-houang, 73–74, 117–18, plates XLIV–XLV.
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Poetry is verbal art. It does more than carry across a message; it uses language to discover and create patterns of imagery. It was precisely in this tradition that the poet-monks worked. Instructional verses, on the other hand, share no such goals. It is better to think of the song-style verses of Dünhuáng and the poet-monks as drawing on similar discourses and practices (namely, those associated with late medieval Buddhism) than as sharing a direct line of connection.

Similarly, the genre of verse known as “song lyrics” (cí 詞) is distinct from the song-style poetry that poet-monks like Guànxiū and Qijī drew upon. The poet-monks participated in high literary culture, writing verses that were understood to be “poetry” (shī 詩) in the elevated sense of the term. This term covered a variety of respectable genres, ranging from the tightly prescribed regulated verse (lǜshī 律詩) to the looser ancient-style verse (gūtīshī 古體詩), to the venerable music-bureau titles (yuèfǔ 樂府) that imitated the musicality of early medieval songs, to the ballads (xíng 行) and song-style poems (gēxíng 歌行) that permitted greater flexibility in meter and linguistic register. Despite the claims made by Ōuyáng Jiǒng 欧陽炯 (896–971) in his preface to the Collection among the Flowers (Huājiān jí 花間集), cí were generally not considered part of this tradition. They were “low” by comparison. There were few elite poets in the T’ang who wrote in this genre. As Pauline Yu has noted, “It is well known that literati of the late T’ang and Sung dynasties did not choose to include their tz‘u in the collections of their own works that many of them were beginning to assemble themselves.” This, combined with the low

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93 Z no. 1298, 66:726. For more on this statement, see my “The Medieval Chinese Gāthā and Its Relationship to Poetry.”

94 Of course, “poetry” and “didactic verse” are best understood as two ends of a spectrum, though some (such as Qijī in the preface quoted above) maintained that the categories were exclusive for polemical purposes. My point is that the majority of songs discovered among the Dünhuáng manuscripts fall closer to the didactic end of this spectrum.

95 QTW 891.9305–06.

96 See, e.g., James J. Y. Liu’s remarks that throughout the tenth century the cí “remained limited in scope and was still not considered as respectable as earlier types of poetry” (Liu, Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung, 4).
number of surviving *cí* collections “suggests the low esteem of a genre that the literati evidently took great pleasure in but did not deem worth their time and effort to collect.” As many scholars have pointed out, it was not until the compilation of the *Collection among the Flowers* in 940 that the *cí* began to be considered capable of becoming high literature. Indeed, “the claim made in the *Huajian ji* preface that the work represents elite culture is thus radically different from statements or descriptions of *quzì cí* in the Tang and represents a true innovation of the Shu anthology.” Even though the song-style poems written by the monks could resemble *cí* in form, there is absolutely no evidence that they themselves, their contemporaries, or their successors regarded these poems as being part of the *cí* genre. Guànxiū lived in Shǔ (where the *Collection* was compiled), knew Wéi Zhuāng (whose work was included in the *Collection*), and was praised by Ōuyáng Jiǒng (who wrote the first preface to the *Collection*), but he was not included in the *Collection*. Nor was he described as a writer of *cí* in any early biographical source. Qǐjǐ, similarly, was familiar with Sǔn Guāngxiàn (whose work was included in the *Collection*), but he was not included in the *Collection* nor described as a *cí* writer in any early source.

This distancing from *cí* may in part be due to theme: most early *cí* treated amorous topics, and the poet-monks, for obvious reasons, avoided such topics. Or it may be due to anxiety about literary status: if monks had only recently established their legitimacy as writers of *shī*, then perhaps they were careful to avoid anything that could be construed as “low” writing. They fought to be taken seriously, and writing *cí* would have harmed those efforts. Whatever the case,

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97 Yu, “Song Lyrics and the Canon,” 71–72. Indeed, the evolution of *cí* into a coherent genre occurred in stages over many generations, and was not complete until the late eleventh century. On this point, see Lin, “The Formation of a Generic Identity for *Tz’u*,” 25.
98 See, e.g., Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz’u Poetry*, 15; and Yu, “Song Lyrics and the Canon,” 73–79. Marsha Wagner, in *The Lotus Boat*, follows many earlier Chinese and Japanese scholars in its attempts to establish the existence of *cí* prior to 940. However, the result is largely a mix of precursors that likely would not have considered themselves to be “writers” in a “literary” genre.
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I have not found it productive to view the works of the poet-monks (even those in mixed meters or labeled “songs” 歌) through the lens of cí. To do so would be anachronistic, since it is almost certainly not the lens through which they viewed their own work. Rather, the monks’ self-conscious use of the term “poet-monk” (shīsēng), their obsession over literary predecessors such as Bái Jūyì and Lǐ Bái, and their attempts to combine poetic and Buddhist practices strongly implies that they viewed themselves as participants in an elite shī tradition.

5.3.2 Madmen of Chǔ

The poet-monk, as demonstrated in part 1 of this dissertation, is first of all a literary position. In order even to participate in literary society, a deep familiarity with the mainstream literary tradition is necessary. It should come as no surprise, then, that Guànxiū, Qǐjǐ, and others were extremely well-read and went so far as to represent their own reading in poetry. Counterintuitively (at least to one in the modern west), these poems on reading are where we find the poet-monks’ most explicit engagement with song. In these songs on the past, they employ retriplication and other forms of repetition to convey the aesthetic of madness (kuāng or diān 顛).

Madness, being defined by the dominant elements in a society, generally means embracing a way of thinking rejected by those in the mainstream. In medieval China, this often meant a sort of transcendent aloofness resulting from a person’s moral purity. The archetype of this kind of madness is Jiē Yú, the Madman of Chǔ 楚狂接輿, who once sang to Confucius:

鳳兮
鳳兮
何德之衰
往者不可諫
來者猶可追
已而

Phoenix—xī—
Phoenix—xī—
How your virtue has waned!
The past cannot be admonished,
But the future can still be remedied.
Give it up,
Give it up! Those who govern now are imperiled!  

Though the Madman would not stop to converse with Confucius, his meaning is clear. He assumes the moral high ground, railing against those in power. He uses his position outside normal society to critique those within it. His outsider status is embodied in his manner of speaking: rather than using normal speech or quotations from the canon (like Confucius and his disciples do), he sings a song of rhyme and repetition. His speech and quick disappearance provided a model for many Táng poets writing in the song style.

The other paragon of mad song in late medieval China was Qū Yuán 屈原 (trad. 343–278 BCE), the great statesman who was reputedly forced from his homeland after being slandered by jealous ministers and ended his life by throwing himself into the Mìluó River, located near modern Chángshā 長沙. While in exile, he is said to have composed the magisterial “Lísāo”離騷, or “Encountering Sorrow,” the core text of the anthology which came to be known as the Songs of Chū (Chúcí 楚辭). In the Records of the Grand Historian 史記, Qū Yuán famously says before his suicide, “The whole world is defiled and I alone am pure; all the masses are drunk and I alone am sober”舉世混濁而我獨清,眾人皆醉而我獨醒. If the whole world is mad and Qū Yuán the only one sane, then it must appear to be exactly the opposite in the eyes of the world. Qū Yuán, from the conventional point of view, is mad. Jiāorán, Guānxǐū, and Qījī all

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100 Analecls XVIII.5.
101 Shuāi 衰 and zhuī 追 rhyme in Old Chinese, Late Hán Chinese, and Middle Chinese.
102 See, e.g., Lǐ Bái, who began a poem with, “I am, at base, the madman of Chū— / My phoenix song laughs at Confucius”我本楚狂人，鳳歌笑孔丘 (“Ditty of Mt. Lú, Given to Imperial Attendant Lú Xūzhōu”呂山謠寄盧侍御虛舟, in Wáng Qì, Lǐ Tàibái quánjí, 14.677; QTS 173.1773).
103 On “Lísāo” as fountainhead of mixed-metered, song-style poetry, see, e.g., the remarks by Zhì Yú 摯虞 (late third century) in his Discussion of Literary Genres 文章流別論, collected in Quán Jīn wén 77.1905, in Yán Kějūn, Quán shànggǔ sàngái Qin Hán sānguó liùcháo wén.
104 Shījì 84.2486. Guānxǐū identifies with Qū Yuán’s lament in the sixteenth of his “Mountain-Dwelling Poems”山居詩: “Neither common nor saintly, I alone am sober”非凡非聖獨醒醒 (Hú Dàijun 23.991; QTS 837.9427; Mazanec, “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems,’” 118).
explicitly acknowledge their debt to Qū Yuán in their work, with poems titled “Lyrics Mourning Divine Balance” 吊靈均詞 or “Mourning at the Miluó River” 吊汨羅, among other, more subtle allusions. Guànxiū’s effort is the most interesting of these. Although he does not speak directly of Qū Yuán’s madness, he praises the ancient poet’s purity, which is the fundamental quality underlying his apparent madness. Guànxiū takes his praise one step further than others’ similar poems, going so far as to imaginatively venerate his relics.

Reading the *Encountering Sorrow Classic* 閔離騷經

Guànxiū 贯休

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<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>終須一去呼湘君</td>
<td>Once departed, he must call to the Xiāng goddess,</td>
<td>kjun</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>問湘神</td>
<td>And ask the Xiāng spirit</td>
<td>zyin</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 雲中君</td>
<td>And the lord in the clouds.</td>
<td>kjun</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>不知何以交靈均</td>
<td>Not knowing how to connect with Divine Balance,</td>
<td>kwjin</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 我恐湘江之魚兮</td>
<td>I fear the fish of the Xiāng River—</td>
<td>ngjo</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>死後盡為人</td>
<td>After death, they turn fully into humans,</td>
<td>njin</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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105 *QTS* 821.9255. “Divine Balance” is the name given to the speaker of the “Lísāo” by his father in the poem’s opening lines.

106 Wáng Xiùlín 10.563; Pān Dīngwǔ 10.544; *QTS* 847.9589.

107 Hú Dàjùn 1.3–5; *QTS* 826.9302. Given the scope of allusions in this piece, it is clear that Guànxiū does not refer only to “Encountering Sorrow” 鬼騷 when he mentions the *Encountering Sorrow Classic* 離騷經 in the title of his poem. Rather, he refers to the entirety of the Chúcí 楚辭, understood to be the work of Qū Yuán and others writing in his voice. The Xiāng goddess 湘君, which features so prominently in Guànxiū’s poem, is in fact nowhere to be seen in “Encountering Sorrow” itself, first emerging in the “Nine Songs” 九歌. “The lord in the clouds” 雲中君, likewise, is the title character of one of the “Nine Songs.” While the orchid 蘭 and angelica 芷 are featured in “Encountering Sorrow” as symbols of moral purity, they are never modified by the colors “red” 紅 and “white” 白 (“red” 紅 is found twice in the entire Chúcí, neither time modifying a specific flower; “white” 白 modifies “angelica” only once, in final section of “Summons of the Soul” 招魂: “Green duckweed lay on the waters, and white angelica flowered” 蒲蘋齊葉兮, 白芷生; see Chúcí bázhū 9.213; cf. Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 229). There is an irony here, since in the earliest bibliographic records, the “Lísāojīng” 離騷經 refered exclusively to the core text of “Encountering Sorrow”: the other works would have been considered zhuàn 傳 (see Chan, “The Jingzhuan Structure of the Chuci Anthology,” esp. 316–17). That is, Guànxiū’s usage of the term goes directly against its early Hán dynasty meaning: while the poet-monk invokes the whole anthology, the Hán bibliographers used the term to exclude the majority of the anthology.
8 曾食靈均之肉兮

Having once eaten the flesh of Divine Balance—xī—

個個為忠臣

Each became a loyal minister.

10 又想靈均之骨兮

Again I visualize the bones of Divine Balance—xī—

終不曲

Never bent:

12 千年波底色如玉

A thousand years beneath the waves, they look like jade.

誰能入水少取得

Who could enter the waters and grab them for a moment?

14 香沐函題貢上國

Bathing in incense, encasing with a seal, I offer them to the higher realm,

貢上國

I offer to the higher realm

即全勝

Something that beats all

和璞懸黎

Hépú, Xuánlí,

垂棘結綠

Chuíjí, and Jiélì.

In writing of the fountainhead of song-style verse, Guànxíù employs a series of strategic repetitions used for emphasis. The most obvious is the first two lines, which establish the setting: “The banks of the Xiāng / The banks of the Xiāng” 湘江濱，湘江濱. The phrase “the bones of Divine Balance” (lines 10 and 12) connect the two stanzas. And, near the closing, the phrase “I offer to the higher realms” 貢上國 repeats (lines 16 and 17). Additionally, we find a repeated reference to divine lords at the end of lines 4 and 6, creating an echo that becomes a secondary rhyme. Indeed, the rhymes in this poem are overabundant, recalling the aural density of the

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108 Higher realm: the imperial court.
109 Hépú, Xuánlí, Chuíjí, and Jiélì are four varieties of precious jade. The first two and the last one are mentioned in a letter by Fánzǐ 范子 to King Zhāo of Qin 秦昭王 (r. 306–251 BCE), as recorded in the Western Hán Strategies of the Warring States 戰國策: “I have heard of Zhōu’s Dǐè jade, Sòng’s Jiélì, Liáng’s Xuánlí, and Chú’s Hépú. These four treasures lacked only polishing to make them world-renowned objects. Is it not possible that you, sage-king, may reject something of value to your realm?” 臣聞周有砥厄,宋有結綠,梁有懸黎,楚有和璞。此四寶者,工之所失也,而為天下名器。然則聖王之所棄者,獨不足以厚國家乎 (Zhàngxuō cè 3.182; cf. J. I. Crump, trans., Chan-kwo ts’e, 102). Chuíjí is named after an area in the Kingdom of Jin 晉 known for its precious jade, as recorded in Zuòzhùàn 左傳, Xīgōng 僑公 2.
various 賦 of Li Bai 李白. The second stanza contains one stretch of five consecutive lines (13–17) which rhyme.\footnote{Or four consecutive lines, not counting the repeated \textit{guó} / *\textit{kwok} \textbf{國} of line 17. This poem is also formally noteworthy because Guànxiū tends toward tonal balance within each line, despite the fact that he is writing in the São style, which has no rules for tonal prosody. This is likely due to the dominance of tonally regulated meters (especially the “regulated seven” 津七 meter) during the late ninth century (on this point, see Li Dingguāng, “Tángshì de zuìhòu yícì xīnbiàn,” 65). However, the influence of regulated styles does not reach the level of the couplet, since no two consecutive seven-syllable lines are tonally balanced against each other.}

The most striking thing about this piece is the focus on Qū Yuán’s physical body. Most other poems on Qū Yuán in the Táng focus on his deeds, employing the trope of a good man being rejected because of his wicked environment, “a gentleman not meeting his time” 君子不 遇. Guànxiū, by contrast, is remarkably concrete. Qū Yuán’s “flesh” 肉 and “bones” 骨 are the central topics of stanzas 1 and 2, respectively. In the first stanza, the fish who consume the flesh of Qū Yuán after his suicide turn into humans, humans who will serve the empire as loyal ministers (lines 8–11). Guànxiū plays with the Buddhist concept of reincarnation to ascribe to Qū Yuán a righteousness with a supernatural power, one capable of transforming the natural world. This power first appears in line 3, where we see the flowers that Qū Yuán once wore, the ones that symbolized his virtues, cropping up along the banks of the Xiāng. However, there is something unnatural about it all: Qū Yuán called out to the various local spirits but was not rescued from his grim fate; thus, his body sat at the bottom of the river, consumed instead of transported to the spirit realm.

In the second stanza, Guànxiū focuses on Qū Yuán’s bones. After a thousand years of lying at the bottom of the river, they have become as smooth and precious as jade (line 14). Like the Buddha’s finger bone installed at Fāmén temple in the capital in April 873 (an event Guànxiū
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wrote about), Qū Yuán’s bones are destined for veneration. It is important that these bones are fully intact; like those of Jesus during the crucifixion, they were never bent or broken (line 13). They are pure, rare: they can only be described by using the names of the most precious jades of pre-imperial China (lines 18–20). The speaker, however, wishes he could grab them for but a moment in order to properly venerate them. He would bathe them in fine perfume, put them in a ritually consecrated box, and offer them to the rulers at court (lines 16–17).

Guànxiū’s poem is a meditation specifically on the body of Qū Yuán, the archetype of the unjustly slandered minister. It venerates his bones through a series of supernatural images that stress Qū Yuán’s difference from the rest of the world. Not bound by the normal strictures of society, he appears mad. But in the end, he is vindicated—he bodied turns fish into worthies, his bones become precious jades destined for veneration. He is deified. This world cannot contain his likeness.

5.3.3 Lǐ Bái and Latter-Day Madness

Aside from Qū Yuán, the poet-monks turned to more recent poets to find predecessors for their song-style verses. Foremost among these were Lǐ Bái (701–762) and Lǐ Hè (790–816). Their aloof madness is portrayed in their expansive, imaginative verse that roamed

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111 Guànxiū’s poem is titled “Hearing that the True Body has been Received” 聞迎真身 (QTS 836.9417; Hú Dàjùn 21.916–17). The crypt containing the finger bones was rediscovered in 1987, on which see Wang, “Of the True Body”; and Foulk, “The Buddha’s Finger Bones at Famensi.”


113 In the ninth century, another compelling model of song-style verse was the “new yuēfǔ” 新樂府 of Bái Jūyi 白居易 (772–846), Yuán Zhēn 元稹 (779–831), and Lǐ Shēn 李紳 (772–846), dating to about 802–810. Much scholarship of the last thirty years has cast doubt on the existence of a “new yuēfǔ movement,” arguing instead that the new yuēfǔ should be seen as a unique experiment instead (see e.g., Dù Xiǎoqín, “‘Qinzhōng yīn’ fēi ‘xīn yuēfǔ’ kǎolún,” esp. 65–66, and his survey of previous scholarship on 55). Nonetheless, the yuēfǔ experiments of Bái et al. clearly inspired later writers, including the poet-monks, even if they were not part of a self-conscious movement. As we saw in Wú Róng’s preface to Guànxiū’s works (chapter 3), Guànxiū was praised as the “inheritor” 嗣 of Bái Jūyi’s tradition of “critical remonstrance” 諷諫 in song (“Preface to the Collected Works of Master Chányuè” 禪月集序, in Hú Dàjùn 1292–94; Wényuàn yīnghuā 714.3688–89; QTW 820.8643), and Guànxiū himself wrote a continuation of one of Bái Jūyi’s versified collections of moral maxims (“Continuing Yáo Chóng’s ‘Right-hand
dreamlands and heavens in search of dragons and deities, filled with jade-ornamented maidens and drunkards scrawling out their verses in a stupor. These song-poems also provided a place for writers to show off their vocabulary, using obscure characters for rare or legendary items.

Although later critics would separate Lǐ Bái and Lǐ Hè into the archetypes of “celestial” and “nether” poets, many in the late Táng assigned them to the same class.114

Evidence of both Guànxiū and Qījī’s obsession with these two poets is abundant. Qījī, for one, at various times equated Lǐ Bái with Lǐ Hè and Lǐ Bái with Qū Yuán. Of the former pair, he describes the shared approach to literary composition they left behind in the world;115 of the latter pair, he lamented how both poets were unjustly exiled for their cavalier attitude toward the powerful.116 As we saw in chapter three, when Lǐ Xiányòng established a lineage of song-style

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114 On Lǐ Bái as celestial and Lǐ Hè as nether, see Tu, Lǐ Ho, 128–30. Tu’s classification follows generations of Chinese critics, starting with Sòng Qǐ (宋祁, 997–1061), who said that Lǐ Bái had “a transcendent’s talent” 仙才 and Lǐ Hè “a ghost’s talent” 鬼才 (reported in Wáng Déchén, Zhǐshì, 2.24b). Interestingly, many early uses bring up this characterization in order to deny it. For example, Yán Yǔ 嚴羽 writes that their difference is only in their choice of words, not in their essences: “People say that Lǐ Bái had a transcendent talent and Lǐ Hè a ghostly talent. This is incorrect. It’s just that Lǐ Bái [used] the words of a heavenly transcendent and Lǐ Hè, of a ghostly transcendent” 人言太白仙才，長吉鬼才。不然，太白天仙之詞，長吉鬼仙之詞耳 (Cāngláng shīhuà, 1.14b).

115 See the opening of “Returning Someone’s Scroll” 還人卷: “The shuttle and loom left behind by Lǐ Bái and Lǐ Hè / Has dissipated among the human realm, but I know not where” 君不見楚靈均千古沉冤湘水濱又不見李太白 (Wáng Xiùlín 10.560–61; Pān Dìngwǔ 10.540–41; QTS 847.9588). “Shuttle and loom” is a common metonym for weaving, which is itself often used metaphorically to describe literary composition.

116 See the end of Qījī’s yuèfǔ “Traveling’s Hard” 行路難 (Wáng Xiùlín 10.575; Pān Dìngwǔ 10.555–56; QTS 847.9591): 君不見楚靈均千古沉冤湘水濱又不見李太白一朝卻作江南客 Do you not see Divine Balance of Chǔ? A thousand years of sunken wrongs by the banks of the River Xiāng. And do you not see Lǐ Táibái? One morning, he was made to be an exile in Jiāngnán.
verse, it was Lǐ Bái—Lǐ Hè—Chén Táo—Guànxiū—Xiūmù. In the *Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks* 宋高僧傳, Zànning wrote that Guànxiū’s “lyrical style was not inferior to the two Lǐs, Bái and Hè” 體調不下二李，白、賀也. When Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037–1101) discussed the misattribution of a song on the calligrapher-monk Huáisù 懷素 (mid-eighth century) to Lǐ Bái, he declared that “it is absolutely not written by Lǐ Bái, but a poem by someone of Guànxiū or Qíjǐ’s cohort at the end of the Táng and Five Dynasties” 決非太白作。蓋唐末五代間貫休、齊己輩詩也, and that its “lyrical structure is inferior to Guànxiū” 貫休以下詞格. For our purposes, it does not matter whether or not Sū Shì is correct. What is important is that people of the tenth and eleventh centuries thought Lǐ Bái’s style was similar enough to Guànxiū’s and Qíjǐ’s that the confusion was possible in the first place. If there is a doubt about who wrote it, that means that the distinction is not clear, and that early readers understood them to be writing in similar styles.

The poet-monks’ works attest to their admiration for Lǐ Bái and Lǐ Hè as well. Guànxiū, when he seeks to pay previous poets like Dù Fǔ (727?–816?) a high compliment, compares them to Lǐ Bái. Elsewhere, the poet-monk is haunted by the ghost of Lǐ Bái: in the poem “Written in the Mountains” 山中作, Lǐ Bái, along with Xiè Língyùn 謝靈運 (385–433) and Xiè Tiào 謝朓 (464–499), represents poetry itself. Most directly, Guànxiū wrote two poems reflecting on a

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Lǐ Bái was said to have been kicked out of the court of Emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗 after getting drunk and offending the eunuch Gāo Lǐshì 高力士 and his co-conspirator Yáng Guìfēi 楊貴妃. See *Xīn Tàngshū* 202.5763.

117 “Reading a Compilation of the Venerable Xiūmù’s Songs” 閱修睦上人歌篇 (*QTS* 644.7386).

118 *T* no. 2061, 50:897b.


122 *Hú Dàjuàn* 5.294–95; *QTS* 828.9330. The relevant couplet reads: “Sometimes, there’s the sound of two or three ghosts laughing—/ I wonder if it’s Xiè the Elder, Xiè the Younger, or Lǐ Bái coming” 有時鬼笑兩三聲，疑是大謝小謝李白來.
portrait of Li Bái, the first of which is about the poet’s defining characteristic, his mad, celestial imagery.

Observing a Likeness of Li of the Hanlin Academy: 1 of 2 觀李翰林真二首（其一）

Guànxiū 貫休

日角浮紫氣  His sun-horn floats in the purple ether,\(^\text{124}\)  
凜然塵外清  Awful, pure beyond all dust.\(^\text{124}\)  
雖稱李太白  Since he is called Li Táibái,  
知是那星精  We know that he is the essence of that orb.\(^\text{125}\)  
御宴千鐘飲  At imperial feasts, he drank a thousand flagons;\(^\text{126}\)  
蕃書一筆成  Foreign script he wrote with a stroke of your brush.\(^\text{126}\)  
宜哉杜工部  How fitting it was when Dù Fǔ  
不錯道騎鯨  Rightly said that [Li] rode a leviathan.\(^\text{127}\)

\(^{123}\) Hú Dàjūn 7.357–60; \textit{QTS} 829.9338–39. Interestingly, the two poems in this series share the same rhyme (*–\text{eng}) but treat different topics. The first is about Li Bái’s work and persona, the second about the portrait itself.\(^{124}\) “Sun-horn”: a bulge in forehead, thought to be a sign of eminence. Guànxiū is here playfully literalizing the term, placing Li Bái’s protruding forehead in the actual sky. The color purple is used throughout Li Bái’s œuvre as a symbol of the cosmic power wielded by the Daoist divinities he invoked. The “purple ether” 紫氣 in particular is the condensed form of the essence of the sun, ingested by practitioners of Highest Clarity 上清 Daoism. See Kroll, “Li Po’s Purple Haze,” esp. 26–27.\(^{125}\) Táibái: (literally “great white”) the planet Venus. According to \textit{Táng zhíyán} 7.81, Hè Zhīzhāng 賀知章 (c. 659–c. 744)—one of the so-called “eight transcendents” 八仙 along with Li—was the first one to call Li Bái the “essence” of Venus. For more on Li Bái’s writings about Venus and its terrestrial counterpart Mt. Tàibái 太白山 (located in modern Shànxi province), see Kroll, “Li Po’s Transcendent Diction,” 113–17.\(^{126}\) This refers to an anecdote about Li Bái included on his memorial stele:

天寶初，召見於金鑾殿，元宗明皇帝降輦步迎，如見園、绮，論當世務，草答蕃書，辯如懸河，筆不停綴。  
At the beginning of the Tiānbǎo era (742–756), [Li Bái] was summoned to the Palace of Golden Simurgh Bells. The august emperor Xuánzōng descended from his carriage to welcome him. It was if he had seen the Lord of East Garden or Jǐ of Qǐ Hamlet [i.e., two of the legendary recluses known as the Four Hoaryheads of Mt. Shāng 商山四皓]. When [the emperor] discussed worldly affairs, [Li Bái] responded in foreign script and debated with a rushing stream [of words], his brush continuing without rest. See Fàn Chuánzhèng 範傳正 \textit{[jīnshì] 794}, “A New Epitaph for Lord Li, Hanlin Academician and Reminder of the Left” 賦左拾遺翰林學士李公新墓碑, (\textit{QTW} 614.6199–201). Cf. a similar anecdote in Liú Quánbái 劉全白, “Stele Inscription for the Late Gentleman Li of the Táng, Hanlin Academician” 唐故翰林學士李君碣記 (\textit{QTW} 619.6247).\(^{127}\) This refers to the concluding couplet of Dù Fǔ’s poem “Seeing off Kǒng Chāofú Back to the East of the Great River upon Retiring Due to Illness, and Shown to Li Bái” 送孔巢父謝病歸遊江東兼呈李白, which reads: “If you come across Li Bái riding a leviathan, / Tell me how he fares when I ask for news” 若逢李白騎鯨魚，道甫問信今何如. It should be noted that Guànxiū alludes to a variant from today’s “standard” version, which reads: “When you see Li Bái as you roam Yǔ’s caves in the south, / Tell me how he fares when I ask for news” 南尋禹穴見李白，道甫問信今何如. See \textit{Qiánzhū Dùshī} 1.20–21; \textit{DUSHI Jingquān} 1.32–33; \textit{QTS} 216.2259.
acts on earth, it is always against convention, be it his superhuman drinking (line 5), his writing of mysterious, foreign words (line 6), or his riding of rare aquatic beasts (line 8). Li Bai embodies the quality of madness (an extreme form of “strangeness,” or qí 奇) that is so desirable in song-style verse. To mortals, the divine may seem mad, for they are unrestrained by convention. As others have shown, Li Bai’s persona—especially in the three centuries following his death—came to be seen as a nexus of values associated with madness: excessive drinking, wild imagination, and flouting of convention. When Guanxiu looks admiringly at a portrait of the great poet, it is this madness that he sees.

Madness could be the result of drunkenness, divine inspiration, or both. It is precisely this quality that Guanxiu praises in calligrapher-monks like Huaisu 怀素 (b. 737) and Bianguang 毅光 (late 9th/early 10th cent.), and the reason he compares the latter to Li Bai. In the previous

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128 On the significance of foreign writing in the Tang, especially in the works of Guanxiu, see below.
129 See, e.g., Liscomb, “Iconic Events Illuminating the Immortality of Li Bai.”
130 On Bianguang, see “The Cursive Calligraphy Song of Master Bianguang” 毅光大師草書歌 (Hú Dàjùn 26.1063–64; QTS 837.9435–36). The relevant couplet in the latter poem reads: “When I see your untroubled tracks, it’s a combination of these two: / Gao Shi’s ballads and Li Bai’s poems” 看師逸跡兩相宜，高適歌行李白詩. On Huaisu, see “A Song on Looking at Huaisu’s Cursive Calligraphy” 觀懷素草書歌 (Hú Dàjùn 6.333–40; QTS 828.9335), especially the song’s opening (lines 1–6):

With the craziness of Crazy Zhang’s followers,
craziness wasn’t craziness;
Not until
Huaisu’s craziness
did this craziness begin.
The master didn’t speak of the scriptures,
didn’t explain meditation,
But wasted away his thew strength only
in cursive calligraphy.
Crazy and mad, still he feared
the spirits and sylphs.
He had divine assistance—untouched by men.

Crazy Zhang 張顛 refers to Zhang Xu 张旭 (8th cent), a friend of Li Bai and He Zhizhong. Early anecdotes in the Old History of the Tang and the Taiping guangji relate how Zhang Xu’s passion for calligraphy was only exceeded by his passion for alcohol, how he would frequently get drunk and “howl and run wild” 号呼狂走, and how his calligraphy was skilled, so capable of limitless transformations, that “he seemed to have divine assistance” 若有神助. It was these sorts of antics that earned him his colorful nickname (see Jiujing 190.5034 and Taiping guangji 208.1595–96). Especially relevant for how Guanxiu thought of Li Bai and Huaisu embodying the same kind
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

poem, madness was associated with the power to move mountains. In a quatrain on both Lǐ Bāi and Lǐ Hè, Qǐjǐ likens this madness to martial power.

Thanking Director Sūn of the Jīng Military Government for Showing Me His Yuèfǔ Song Collection: 28 Characters 謝荊幕孫郎中見示樂府歌集二十八字

Qǐjǐ 齊己

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If you were not a star, a fallen omen, / Then surely you were the pregnant soul of the River and Marchmounts

131 Wang Xiulin 10.584; Pān Dìngwǔ 10.564–65; QTS 847.9593. Director Sūn: Sūn Guāngxiàn 孫光憲 (for biographical information, see section 3.2.1).

132 According to legend, the first Qín Emperor 秦始皇 (260–210 BCE) possessed a divine whip which could cause rocks to move like horses. See Yīnyǔn xiāoshūō 殷雲小說, juàn 1, in Hán Wèi liúchāo bǐjī xiāoshūō dāguān, 1016.

133 Hú Dàjùn 2.68–70; QTS 826.9308.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

玄宗致之七寶牀 Xuānzōng gave him a seven-jeweled bed;  
Tiger Hall, Dragon Tower—
he was unworthy of nothing.\(^{134}\)  
One morning, the powerful man,  
after taking off his shoes,  
[Found] a single blackfly born upon the jade steps.\(^ {135}\)  
In front of the Hall of the Purple August one,  
five-colored scales  
Suddenly tore apart a golden hook.\(^{136}\)  
The great waves of [Zhèjiāng’s] five lakes are like silver mountains,  
Boats full of ale pass by,  
Since Hè has grown old and become a ghost,  
Who else would dare match this crazed madman?\(^{137}\)  
Did he not know that [dying in] a riverside tomb

134 Tiger Hall: abbreviation of White Tiger Hall 白虎殿, residence of Hán dynasty erudites, located in the royal Wèiyāng palace 未央宮, where the famed White Tiger Debates 白虎通 of 79 CE took place. Dragon Tower: name of a tower in the Crown Prince’s palace in the Hán dynasty, named for the bronze dragon atop its gates. See the note by Zhāng Yàn 張晏 (third cent.) in Hànshū 10.301.

135 Blackflies alighting on a palace were impurities which symbolized slander of the ruler. The locus classicus is Ode 219 of The Book of Odes, “Blackfly” 青蠅. Its first stanza reads:

營營青蠅 Buzz-buzz the blackfly,
止于樊 Alighting on a fence—
豈弟君子 O happy lordson,
無信讒言 Believe not their slander.

136 Cf. an account in the Yīzhōu tūjīng 冀州圖經, preserved in Yuānjiàn lēihán 442.9b:

太和三年，文明太后馮氏幸金河府，釣得鰲魚一雙，皆長三尺，以黃金鎖穿腮放於池內，後皆長五尺，沈泛相從。正光元年五月五日，天清氣爽，聞池內鏘鏘聲，水中驚沸，須臾雷電，其一浮天化五色虹而去，久之乃滅。

In Tàihé 3 [229], Empress Wénmíng of the Féng clan graced Jínhé Prefecture with her presence. While fishing, she caught a pair of carp, each of which were three feet long. She threw them back into the pool with golden hook threaded through their cheeks. Later they grew to five feet and swam about together. On the fifth day of the fifth month of Zhèngguāng 1 [June 6, 520], when the weather was cool and clear, there was heard a jangle-jangling in the pond. The water began to foam up, and thunder and lightning struck. One of the carp flew up into the heavens, transformed into a five-colored rainbow, and disappeared a while later.

137 Old Hè: Hè Zhīzhāng.
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This poem glistens of palaces and heavens: gold, silver, jade, gems. Nothing is too good for the divine poet, not the jewel-incrusted bed reminiscent of Buddhist heavens (line 3), nor the vast halls and soaring towers of the imperial palace (line 4). The Fashioner, the impersonal force of nature which shapes the world, speeds on at the command of his writing brush (line 2). He is a god of perception: miniscule blackflies do not escape his notice (line 6), and under his gaze the waves of Zhèjiāng’s five lakes—the site of the ancient minister Fàn Lì’s 范蠡 (6th cent. BCE) escape from office—crystallize into mountains (line 9). Boats of ale cannot sate him (line 10)—no one beside the late Hè Zhīzhāng could possibly keep up with him (lines 11–12). Lǐ Bái is a “crazed madman” who saw even death as nothing more than a drunken stupor (lines 13–14). The rhymes underscore the otherworldly feeling of the poem: although all rhyme words end with the same vowel sound (*–a), the tones are not entirely the same. The main rhyme uses the departing tone 去聲 (represented as –H) in lines 2, 6, 10, 12, and 14, whereas lines 4 and 8 have rising tones 上聲 (represented as –X). The effect is a slight unease, a kind of slanted sense that might be translated from a heavenly realm.141

138 An allusion to the legend of Lǐ Bái’s death being caused by an overconsumption of alcohol, a legend which had become common currency by the latter half of the ninth century. See, e.g., the fifth of Pī Rìxiū’s “Seven Poems of Fondness” 七愛詩, on Lǐ Bái: “In the end he got the disease of rotting sides / His drunken earth-ghost roams the eight culmina” 竟遭腐脅疾,醉魄歸八極 (Xiǎo Dīfēi, Pīzǐ wěnšōu, 10.106; QTS 608.7018). “Disease of rotting sides” likely refers to a pyrothorax infection caused by overconsumption of alcohol; “eight culmina” refer to the furthest ends of the earth.

139 The poet as a microcosmic fashioner whose powers threatened to compete with the Fashioner of the macrocosm had become a trope in the early ninth century. See Shang, “Prisoner and Creator,” and section 6.1 below.

140 See Guóyù 21.658–59, in which Fàn Lì, upon delivering a farewell speech to the King of Yù, “climbed aboard a light skiff to float upon the Five Lakes. No one knew what end he came to” 乘輕舟以浮於 五湖，莫知其所終極.

141 We should not underestimate the importance of slant or loose rhymes in medieval Chinese poetry. Though later generations codified Táng pronunciation into very rigid rhyme categories, recent research has pointed to a much more natural conception of rhyme than previously thought (see Williams, “The Half-Life of Half-Rhyme” and Vedal, “Never Taking a Shortcut,” 53–59). Moreover, it is very common for the pronunciation of words to be skewed when performed orally, as most of these poems were.
This sort of divine madness, associated with precious objects and mythical lands, gives the poet-monks license to experiment with prosody as well as rhyme. We find both in Qījǐ’s poem on reading Lǐ Hè.

Reading Lǐ Hè’s Song Collection 讀李賀歌集\(^{142}\)

Qījǐ 齊己

| 赤水無精華 | The Red River is without its essence,\(^{143}\) xwae  |
| 荊山亦枯槁 | And the Thistle mountains have withered away.\(^{144}\) khaW  |
| 玄珠與虹玉 | Dark pearls and rainbow jade, ngjowk  |
| 4 燦燦李賀抱 | Glitter glitter in Lǐ Hè’s embrace. bawX |

清晨醉起臨春臺 Waking up drunk in the bright of dawn, thoj  
he looks out from a spring terrace.

吳綾蜀錦胸襟開 Wú damask twill, Shǔ brocade khoj  
open up in his breast.\(^{145}\)

狂多兩手掀蓬萊 Overcrazed, with two hands loj  
he lifts up Pénglái.\(^{146}\)

8 珊瑚掇盡空土堆 Once he’s finished stitching coral together— twoj  
a pile of empty earth.

As in Lǐ Hè’s own verse, the images here are both vivid and obscure. They paint a bright picture for the reader even as they close off their precise references.\(^{147}\) The Red River, Thistle mountains,

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\(^{142}\) Wáng Xiùlín 10.546–47; Pān Dīngwǔ 10.523–24; QTS 847.9584–85.
\(^{143}\) Red River: located on southeast side of the mythical Kūnlún mountains in the far west.
\(^{144}\) Thistle mountains: mountain range located near Qījǐ’s latter-day home of Jīngmén 荊門.
\(^{145}\) Wú damask twill and Shǔ brocade are both high-end materials for writing, used here metonymically to refer to Lǐ Hè’s fine writing.
\(^{146}\) Pénglái: mythical mountain range located in the Eastern Sea.
and Pengláí would have been well-known to medieval readers, but dark pearls and rainbow jade, damask twill and brocade, are more visual than allusive. The final couplet, too, is more evocative than logical. Lì Hè’s body is somehow transformed, and he is able to lift up entire islands (albeit mythical ones) in the east. The coral stitched together are probably his dazzlingly well-wrought couplets, while the meaning of the “empty pile of earth” is unclear. Is it Lì Hè’s hollow burial mound, which he left behind as his body transformed into its transcendent form (a sort of Christian-Daoist reading)? Or is it the vanity of all literary accomplishment in the face of reality’s ultimate emptiness (a Buddhist reading)? Or is it simply an exhausted reservoir of natural imagery (a poet-as-maker reading)? Like Lì Hè’s own work, the images placed before us shift kaleidoscopically, never fully resolving.

Qìjī’s song is a far cry from regulated verse, but the prosody does follow its own internal logic. The first quatrain, all pentameter, rhymes on lines 2 and 4. There is little discernable pattern to its tones until line 4, which suddenly digs down into a series of oblique tones. This prepares us for a transition to the next quatrain, with a new meter and rhyme scheme. The profusion of rhyme (all four lines) seems to emerge from Lì Hè’s life of excess, in which he drinks through the night, produces priceless treasures, and lifts up the abode of transcendent.

Qìjī, demonstrating his own abundance, gives us three lines with the exact same tonal structure (lines 5–7) and a fourth with only one variation (line 8). There is a kind of relentlessness here, as the same sounds are presented to the reader over and over, changing only in their semantic content. Although Qìjī could be as restrained and subtle as the next craftsman of regulated verse,

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147 As Qián Zhòngshū wrote, the poems of Lì Hè “suddenly droop like a mountain of ice and shift like the sands of the desert” 如冰山之忽塌，沙漠之疾移 (Tányì lù, 50); cf. Frodsham, The Poems of Li Ho, xliii–xliv.
148 An educated reader might have known that, according to the Zhuāngzì, the Yellow Emperor once forgot dark pearls near the Red River on Mt. Kūnlún and dispatched Knowledge, Clearsight, Trenchancy, and Formlessness to retrieve them. In the end, only Formlessness succeeded in finding them (Zhuāngzì jīshì 12.414; cf. English translation in Mair, Wandering on the Way, 105). Catching the allusion, however, was not essential for understanding the poem.
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that was not the purpose of songs in the style of Lǐ Bái and Lǐ Hè. They were a celebration of plenitude, of imagination, of shaking off the mundane to ascend to the realm of the inconceivable.

The various components of aesthetic madness that we have outlined so far—reading, repetition, moral purity, divine imagery, and formal license—all come together in a poem by Guànxiū on the work of Gù Kuàng (727?–816?). Gù, self-styled “The Fugitive” (Būwēng 逋翁), was one of the more shocking characters of the latter half of the ninth century, a man of Jiāngnán known for his sharp wit and unconventional song-style poems (much like Guànxiū himself).149 Guànxiū pays tribute to Gù Kuàng’s madness by recreating it in a song packed full of the same sort of boldness.

Reading the Songs of Gù Kuàng 讀顧况歌行150
Guànxiū 贯休

| 雪泥露金滴瓦 | Snow-mud, dew-gold, ice drips onto tile.151 | ngwaeX - |
| 風楓火著僧留坐 | A fire burns in a maple’s dead trunk as this monk sits,152 | dzwaX A |
| 忽睹逋翁一軸歌 | Then suddenly I spot a scroll of the Fugitive’s songs153 | ka - |
| 4 始覺詩魔辜負我 | And start to feel the Poetry Demon has let me down.154 | ngaX A |
| 花飛飛 | Petals fly fly, | pjij B |

149 Huángfǔ Shí 皇甫湜 (777?–835?) said that his “unexpected and shocking language was not something that conventional people could reach” 意外驚人語，非尋常所能及 (QTS 686.7026; Wényuàn yínghuā 705.3638). Stephen Owen has also described Gù’s songs as having “an almost hallucinatory aura” (The Great Age of Chinese Poetry, 301).

150 Hú Dàjùn 1:3.154–57; QTS 827.9316. Hú dates this poem to 864 when Guànxiū visited Póyáng, but the poem clearly states that the speaker remembers seeing Gù Kuàng’s writing tablet in Póyáng, meaning that this poem must have been written later (if we trust its chronology).

151 “Dew-gold”: the dew on a chrysanthemum.

152 Some manuscripts give chēng 櫟 (tamarix) for zhāi 柆 (rotted trunk). I follow Hú Dájùn’s in giving zhāi 柆, partly because the word is found paired with “maple” (fēng 櫟) elsewhere in Guànxiū’s corpus. See “In Autumn, Thinking of the Daoist Master of Mt. Red Pine [Shù Dàojì 舒道紀]” 秋懷赤松道士 (Hú Dájùn, 12.587–88; QTS 831.9369–70) and “Thinking of the Recluse of the Southern Marchmount: 1 of 2” 懷南嶽隱士二首（其一）(Hú Dájùn 17.787–89; QTS 833.9398–99).

153 An “original note” says: “Gù Kuàng called himself ‘The Fugitive’” 冊自號逋翁也.

154 Poetry demon: the compulsion to write poetry, personified as Māra, the Buddhist god of delusion. For more on the trope of the “poetry demon,” see Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry,” 96–102.
Snow flutters flutters.

Pearls pile on piles around a threepearl tree.\(^{155}\)

A fox spirit climbs out of Xi Shi’s bones.\(^{156}\)

Thunder’s chariot presses on, breaks Weaving Maid’s loom.\(^{157}\)

I remember Seeing a stone slab in an old Póyáng temple once:

The Fugitive’s phrases—xī—the Fugitive’s writing tablets!

The Weaving Maid is a personified constellation (corresponding to part of Vega), so her loom could easily be broken by the Thunder god’s chariot, whose rumbling we hear below on earth. A similar image can be found in Zhāng Róng’s 浚融 (444–497) “Fù on the Sea” 海賦, who writes of ocean waves: “They split apart Mt. Tài, and the Kūnlún mountains crumble into each other, collapsing together / And with the full power of Thunder’s chariot they shake the Hàn, break heaven and burst its carriage” 既裂太山與崑崙相壓而共潰,又盛雷車震漢破天以折轂 (Yán Kějūn, Quán Qí wén, 15.2872).

155 Cf. the Classic of Mountains and Seas 山海經: “The threepearl tree is located north of [the kingdom of] Spitfire. It grows next to the Red River. Its trunk looks like a cypress, and its leaves are pearls” 三株樹在厭火北,生赤水上，其為樹如柏，葉皆為珠 (Shānhǎi jìng jiàozhù 1.192). Guànxiū likely read about it in Táo Qiān’s seventh poem on “Reading the Classic of Mountains and Seas” 閱讀山海經, which opens with the couplet, “Fresh, fresh the threepearl tree / Transplanted north of Red River” 灿粲三株樹,寄生赤水陰 (Lú Qīnlì, Quán Jīn shǐ 17.1011).

156 Xi Shī 西施 was a legendary beauty of the fifth century BCE. In supernatural tales of the Táng, fox spirits frequently transformed into beautiful women who seduced hapless young men. For more on fox spirits as seductresses in the late Táng, see Kang, “The Fox and the Barbarian,” 42–45.

157 The Weaving Maid 織女 is a personified constellation (corresponding to part of Vega), so her loom could easily be broken by the Thunder god’s chariot, whose rumbling we hear below on earth. A similar image can be found in Zhāng Róng’s 浚融 (444–497) “Fù on the Sea” 海賦, who writes of ocean waves: “They split apart Mt. Tài, and the Kūnlún mountains crumble into each other, collapsing together / And with the full power of Thunder’s chariot they shake the Hàn, break heaven and burst its carriage” 既裂太山與崑崙相壓而共潰,又盛雷車震漢破天以折轂 (Yán Kějūn, Quán Qí wén, 15.2872).

158 Yū Yì 廉翼 (303–345) and Wáng Xīzhī (303–361) were both famous calligraphers of the Jin dynasty. The Jīnshū 傳記 tells us that at first Wáng Xīzhī was inferior to Yū Yì, but that upon receiving one of Wáng’s letters, Yū admitted the incredible talent of his rival. See Wáng Xīzhī’s biography in Jīnshū 80.2100.

159 The final character, shā “death,” is a postpositional adverb intensifying the main verb ní 擬 (“imitate”). That is, Gu Kuang is able to “imitate Lí Bái to death.”

160 Crush [his legs]: I follow Hú Dàjūn in taking this to be an allusion to the fifty-third parable of the Hundred Parables Sūtra 百喻經, in which two disciples are tasked with rubbing their master’s hurting legs, each responsible for one leg. One is jealous of the other, so when one leaves, the other takes a stone and smashes (dǎzhé 打折) the leg...
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The repetitions begin in the second stanza and do not stop until the end. Hidden within a series of reduplicatives is the repeated character zhū 珠 (“pearl”) in two senses, once as the name of a tree and then as a descriptor of its precious leaves (lines 5–6). Gù’s nickname, the Fugitive, is used three times, twice in the same line (lines 3, 10). Guànhuī repeats key words as refrains in the final stanza (“apart” in lines 13–14, “can’t say it” in line 15) before finally closing with an alliterative binom and its inversion (line 16).

The speaker describes two encounters with Gù Kuàng’s writings. In the first, he reads a scroll in winter, and out comes forth a series of fantastic images—the three-pearl tree, the fox spirit, and the thunder god’s chariot breaking the loom of the Weaving Maid in the sky (lines 6–8). In the second (which happened earlier), he comes across Gù’s writing in two media at a temple: a public inscription and a set of smaller tablets (lines 9–10). The former is likely displayed prominently, while the latter is likely stored in the temple library. In this case, the speaker’s reading sparks thoughts of past cultural heroes (lines 11–12). From the way he praises Gù, it is clear that he admires both the content of his writing (hence the Lǐ Bái comparison) and its material form (hence the comparison to the calligraphers Yǔ Yì and Wáng Xīzhī). In fact, Gù Kuàng’s verse is so similar to Lǐ Bái’s that only someone with divine sight could distinguish the two (lines 13–14). As we have seen, this comparison to Lǐ Bái is possibly the highest compliment Guànhuī can give.

At the same time, the speaker feels a sense of healthy competition with Gù Kuàng: Yǔ Yì eventually did admit his inferiority to Wáng Xīzhī, and Gù Kuàng proved that it was possible to

his fellow disciple is responsible for. The second disciple returns, grows angry, and smashes (dǎzhé 打折) the leg the first disciple was responsible for. This episode is then related to internecine squabbling between Hinayanists (xiǎoshēng 小乘) and Expansionists (fāngděng 方等, i.e., Mahāyānists, who venerated some very long scriptures), saying that those who engage in such fighting are only hurting the dharma, just as the students are only hurting their master. See T no. 209, 4:551a, trans. Guṇavṛddhi 求那毘地 in 492.
imitate the inimitable Lǐ Bái. The allusion of the final line, to the Buddhist parable of rival disciples smashing their master’s legs out of jealousy, reinforces the sense of competition. But then the entire poem breaks down in the concluding couplet. The intensity of the repeated “can’t say it” (line 15) leads the speaker out of the ordinary discourse of poetry. It marks the limits of language. This then gives way to an alliterative binom (líluàn 離亂) which performs its own meaning of “mixed up” as it repeated in reverse. Presumably, this line refers to the speaker, to Gù Kuàng, and perhaps to Lǐ Bái as well. They are all parts of a jumbled up mass of poets whose styles overlap. In this way, there is no point in competing with one another, for they are all working from the same aesthetic of madness. To promote oneself at the expense of another mad poet would be akin to a disciple cutting off his master’s leg out jealousy of his companion. They are all working toward the same goal of unconventionality, of being wild or mad.

The tradition of aestheticized madness in song, as portrayed in latter-day poets like Gù Kuàng, Lǐ Hè, and Lǐ Bái, as well as distant predecessors like Qū Yuán, was another factor contributing to the poet-monks’ repetitious use of language. Repetition used in this way signaled one’s position outside of conventional society, a purity beyond the dust and grime. The celestial images of these songs are signs not only of the poet-monks’ broad reading and wild imagination, but also of the moral purity they sought to inhabit. At the same time, the song tradition was intimately tied up with the performative role of poetry—its orality (or simulated orality). In this way, the repetitions have an incantatory quality that creates the feel of song, even as they add nothing semantically. They hint at language’s non-representational ways of meaning.

5.4 Incantation

I have so far used the adjective “incantatory” in a vague, poetic way to describe some of the aural qualities of repeated syllables, but the term in fact corresponds to a specific part of
medieval Buddhist culture: recitation of dhāraṇī, mantra, and gāthā. In recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of such practices to the actual experience of Buddhism in the Táng dynasty. The recitation of spells and incantations was not restricted to Tantric and “proto-Tantric” forms of Buddhism, but were rather part of a general, pan-Asian Mahāyāna culture from which most East Asian Buddhist traditions drew. Such incantations were inscribed on dhāraṇī pillars all across the late medieval Sinosphere, often with supplementary text by eminent poets. It should therefore come as no surprise to see evidence of familiarity with these practices in the lives and works of late medieval poet-monks. Though the poet-monks are most closely associated with meditative (chán 禪) lineages and communities, there is compelling evidence that they were familiar with the “Tantric” ritual technologies that gained currency in the capital in the eighth century. We have already seen Qíjǐ’s deployment of the technical vocabulary of Esoterism in his poem “Given to Tripiṭaka Zhìmǎn” above. Guànxiū was also familiar with this terminology, and even found similarities between esoteric elements of Buddhism and the Elegantiae of the Odes. Wūkè 無可, Jiā Dào’s cousin, was famous for his

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161 On this point, see McBride, “Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinict Buddhism”; Strickmann, Mantras et Mandarins, 70–71; Copp, The Body Incantatory, esp. 3; Shinohara, Spells, Images, and Mandalas; Kischnick, The Eminent Monk, 82–96; Mollier, Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face, 20–22.

162 We know of at least 42 excavated dhāraṇī pillars that date prior to the Sòng dynasty reunification in 974, located in every corner of the Táng and post-Táng world. See the table in Liú Shūfēn, Mièzuì yǔ dìwàng, 54–60.

163 Even the supposedly “Daoist” Lǐ Bái wrote one such text. See the “Hymn, with Preface, for the Exalted Buddha’s Uṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇī at Chóngmíng Temple” 崇明寺佛頂尊勝陀羅尼幢頌並序 (Qū Tuíyuán and Zhū Jīncēng, Lǐ Bái jì jiùožhì, 28.1608–16; QTW 348.2–5). For a translation and study of this text, see Kroll, Dharma Bell and Dhāraṇī Pillar, 39–75.

164 The Sūtra 楞伽經, which Guànxiū called “the marrow of meditation” when urging the poet Wéi Zhuāng 韋庄 to study it, contains several long dhāraṇī (T no. 945, 19:134a–36c, 139a–41b) to which are attributed spiritual powers.

165 In “Inscribed on the Temple of Reverend Hóngshì and Shown to Commissioned Lord Dù” 题弘式和尚院兼呈杜使君, Guànxiū writes that “the two Elegantiae and the two Esotericae / Are concordant, each delights in itself” 二雅兼二密, 愀愔秖自怡 (Hú Dàjùn 14.675–76; QTS 832.9383). The “two Elegantiae” are two sections of the Book of Odes 詩經 (the “Greater Elegantiae” 大雅 and “Lesser Elegantiae” 小雅). The “two Esotericae” 二密 refer to the “esoteric of meaning” 理密 (i.e., secret doctrines taught by the Buddha) and the “esoterica of actions” 事密 (i.e., secret deed performed by the Buddha).
calligraphy of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā-dhāraṇī* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經. Incantations in Sanskrit, Chinese, and a blend of the two, we will see, were another resource the poet-monks drew on to achieve new aesthetic possibilities.

### 5.4.1 Guànxiū’s Fascination with India

Guànxiū’s work in particular reveals a lifelong fascination with all things Indic, a fascination tied to the sounds of Sanskrit. A series of five poems, written possibly in 891 when he was nearly sixty years old, is addressed to five Indian monks making a pilgrimage to Mt. Wǔtái. The series is, unsurprisingly, filled with Buddhist allusions, including a reference to Śākyamuni Buddha as “our early ancestor” 吾上祖. Despite his recognition of a shared devotion to the Buddha, the speaker is obsessed with the Indian monks’ foreignness. They have “blue lotus eyes” 青蓮目, they carry “pressed Brāhmī [writings]” 梵夾 and “icons drawn up on whitepile [cotton]” 白疊還圖像, and they “travel through several realms, / transforming the minds of many kings and emperors” 經幾國，多化帝王心, i.e., converting them to Buddhism.

Back in India, he imagines, the foreign monks had “sat atop the Snowy Peaks / And descended to

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166 See, e.g., the Ming critic Zhào Hán’s 趙崡 praise of Wūkě’s written rendition of this *dhāraṇī* (Zhào Hán, *Shímòjuān huá*, 4.16b).

167 He also had connections with monks from Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Guànxiū demonstrates an awareness that he occupies the position at the center of civilization and that he uses the cosmopolitan language of the area. For example, in “Seeing off a Man from Silla after He Has Passed the Examinations” 送新羅人及第歸, he concludes: “Upon arriving [in Silla], you must meet with tribute-paying emissaries / And send me a letter written in Chinese” 到鄉必遇來王使，與作唐書寄一篇 (Hú Dàjùn 21.925–26; *QTS* 836.9418).


169 Blue lotus eyes: technically, this is a description of the Buddha’s eyes (see, e.g., the opening of *Lèngyán jīng* 楞嚴經, *T* no. 945, 19:107a, which mentions the “Tathāgatha’s blue lotus eyes” 如來青蓮花眼) being applied to the monks. However, it is easy to see how Guànxiū would have been fascinated by non-Chinese monks’ physical similarities to certain aspects of the traditional descriptions of the Buddha.

the universe to look around” 雪嶺頂危坐，乾坤四顧低。171 The fourth poem, in particular, contrasts the inscrutable powers held by these foreigners with the physical pain they have experienced on their journey.

Running into Five Heavenly Monks Going to Mt. Wǔtái: 4 of 5 遇五天僧入五臺五首（其四）172

Guànxiū 貫休

塗足油應盡 Your footrub oil nearly used up, 173
dzinX
乾陁帔半隳 Your ghandāra banner half-destroyed. 174
xwjie
辟支迦狀貌 Pratyeka-buddhas in your appearance, 175
maewH
4 剃利帝家兒 Sons of a Kṣatriya family. 176
nye
結印魔應哭 The mudras you perform make demons weep,
khuwk
遊心聖不知 Your minds roam to places unknown by sages.
trje
深嗟頭已白 You sigh deep, hair turned white,
baek
8 不得遠相隨 Having not yet reached what you’ve followed afar. zwje

The poem is at pains to stress the monks’ Indiananness. Three lines open with transliterated Sanskrit terms (lines 2–4) and one more (line 1) with an object whose textual source is Fāxiǎn’s western travelogue of the early fifth century, Record of Buddhist States. The monks are said to belong to the ruling Kṣatriya class and look like early ascetics (lines 3–4). The speaker’s attitude toward them shifts between pity and awe. Their banner has been beaten to tatters by the weather (line 2), their foot salve emptied (line 1), their hair gone white (line 7), and still they have not reached their destination (line 8). At the same time, they can access incredible spiritual power through esoteric mudras (line 5) and can visualize unknown worlds in meditation (line 6). It is

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171 Snowy Peaks: the Himālayas.
172 Hǔ Dājùn 14.658–60; QTŚ 832.9380.
173 Footrub oil: translation of Sanskrit pāda-mraksana, protective oil used to wash one’s feet. It is described in the Record of Buddhist States 佛國記 by Fāxiǎn 法顯 (320?–420?), also known as the Biography of the Eminent Monk Fāxiàn 高僧法顯傳. See T no. 2085, 51:859b; English translation in Legge, A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms, 44.
174 Gandhāra: type of tree named after the region in ancient northwestern India (modern-day southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan) in which it grows. Its thick, brown bark was used to dye monks’ robes. See Běncāo gāngmù 37.2175. Here it presumably refers to a brown banner dyed in the same manner.
175 Pratyeka-buddha: solitary realizer. The term was mainly used in a disparaging manner in many Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. However, if we take the idea of perfect interfusion seriously, then there is no grounds on which to state that any of the “lesser” forms of Buddhism (Pratyeka-buddha, Hinayāna) are inferior.
176 Kṣatriya: the class of the military and ruling elite in ancient India into which Śākyamuni Buddha was born.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

not clear if Guànxiū was able to communicate with these monks (he did not know any foreign languages as far as we know, and we have no idea about the Indian monks’ abilities), or even actually met them. It may be that these monks were Tantric masters who claimed to wield such powers. Or Guànxiū may have just projected on to them an idea of Indian authenticity. In either case, Guànxiū’s five poems clearly demonstrate an association between Indianness, exoticism, and spiritual power.\(^{177}\)

The inscrutable yet potent nature of all things Indian in Guànxiū’s works is also apparent in his interest in the Brāhmī script.\(^{178}\) By the ninth century, there was a long history of elite Buddhists’ engagement with Indic writing, from the Lalitavistara Sūtra’s 普曜經 (translated in 308) list of sixty-four scripts to Xiè Língyùn’s 謝靈運 (385–433) study of Siddham and Amoghavajra’s 不空 (705–774) championing of esoteric rituals at the Táng court, culminating in the monk Zhīguǎng’s 智廣 (d. 806) Siddham textbook written in 800, the Xītánzì jì 悉曇字記.\(^{179}\) Two of Guànxiū’s poems use the metaphor of the graph of the vowel \(i\) in Brāhmī to represent the truth.\(^{180}\) This vowel looks like three dots in a triangle (\(\cdot \cdot \cdot\)), and was used metaphorically to describe the non-hierarchical relationship between the Dharma, Buddha, and Prajñā (wisdom), since one cannot create the graph by arranging the dots along a single vertical or horizontal axis. As the Buddha explains in the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra 大般涅槃經:

何等名為祕密之藏？猶如伊字三點：若並則不成伊，縱亦不成。如摩醯首羅面上三目：乃得成伊三點，若別亦不得成。我亦如是。解脫之法亦非涅槃，如來之身亦非

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\(^{177}\) In this and what follows, I aim to outline how Guànxiū’s allusions to Indian things staked “claims to authority, prestige, and patronage for local Buddhist institutions” and individuals, especially himself (quote from Young, Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China, 13).

\(^{178}\) Brāhmī first appeared in historical records in the third century BCE as a fully formed script throughout India. It would become the ancestor of nearly all other Indian scripts. For an introduction, see Salomon, Indian Epigraphy, 17–42. On the use of Indic scripts in China, see van Gulik, Siddham; and Chaudhuri, “Siddham in China and Japan.”


\(^{180}\) In addition to the poem analyzed below, Guànxiū uses the metaphor in “On Hearing that the Reverend Dàyuàn Passed Away: 3 of 3”聞大願和尚順世三首（其三） (Hú Dàjùn 12.576–80; QTS 831.9368).
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What kind of name can be given to the hidden storehouse [of my teachings]? It is like the three dots of the i-graph: horizontally, they don’t form i, and neither do they vertically. They are like the three eyes on the head of Maheśvara. The three dots [together] form the i-graph; when considered separately, they do not form it. It is like this with me, too. The dharma of liberation is not nirvāṇa, the person of the Tathāgatha is not nirvāṇa, mahāprajñā [great wisdom] is not nirvāṇa. These three dharmas are each unique and not nirvāṇa. I now firmly reside in these three dharmas, but for the sake of all sentient beings I declare my entrance into nirvāṇa, thus [being] the world’s i-graph.  

Though Chinese Buddhists rarely learned to speak or read the languages of South Asia with any competence, they showed a persistent fascination with its scripts. The metaphor of the i-graph is just one manifestation of a this broad interest. Indic scripts, such as Brāhmī and Siddham, were associated with spells (both written and spoken) which gave the practitioner access to esoteric powers. One of Guànxìú’s poems alluding to the i-graph subverts this assumption, acknowledging the ultimate emptiness of the teachings and powers it represents.

Presented to the Reverend of Dōnglín Temple 上東林和尚

Guànxìú 貫休

讓紫歸青壁 Declining purples, you returned to walls of green.
高名四海聞 Whence your great name is heard within the four seas.
雖然無一事 Even so, you have no concern for such matters:
得不是要君 How could this compel my lord?
道祇傳伊字 The Way only conveys the graph i;
詩多笑碧雲 Poetry mostly laughs at clouds in the blue.
應憐門下客 So have pity on this traveler beneath your gate
餘力亦為文 Whose remaining strength will be put toward literature.

181 T no. 374, 12:376c.
182 See, e.g., “Responding to Wáng Wéi” 酬王維 by Yuán Xián 苑咸 (mid 8th cent.), in which he also used the i-graph metaphor, and describes in the preface how Wáng Wéi “studied Indian writing” 學天竺書, and ascribes divine origins to the foreign script: “The lotus Brāhmī characters originally came from heaven” 蓮花梵字本從天 (QTS 129.1317).
183 Van Gulik, Siddham, 72, 78–79. See also Copp, The Body Incantatory, on the importance of inscribed spells in the late medieval period.
185 Declining purples: refusing official recognition in the form of a “purple robe” 紫衣 bestowed upon eminent monks by the emperor or others in high office. Wall of green: mountain covered in vegetation.
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Likely written in 861 when Guànxiū first traveled to Mt. Lú, this poem reads like a cover letter, meant to demonstrate his own skills and purpose while simultaneously flattering its recipient.\(^{186}\) The titular verb “presented” (\(shàng\) 上), indicating upward motion, along with the line that the recipient had once been favored at the imperial court (line 1), reveals that the young Guànxiū is likely trying to ingratiate himself with a senior monk who wields some authority, existing in a parallel world to the secular bureaucracy. The “walls of green” contrast with the walls of cities and palaces in which a civil administrator would dwell. The Reverend is not only famous (line 2) but wise, for he is not motivated by worldly honor, rightly having “no concern for such matters” (lines 3–4). Guànxiū encapsulates this wisdom in a pithy contrast between Buddhism and poetry. Whereas the Way transmits empty signs which point toward ultimate reality, poetry gives one access to a detached perspective of the phenomenal world (lines 5–6). That is, religion attempts to gesture toward higher truths, while literature encourages non-attachment to the lower, mundane world. One is an imperfect approach to perfect things, the other a perfect approach to imperfect things. The conclusion, in which the speaker resolves to dedicate himself to literary activity (line 8), implies not that he regards poetry as superior but that he can bring some kind of new and useful skill to Dōnglín temple. The delicate balance of the third couplet’s parallel structure resists creating a final hierarchy. The precision of the poem’s parallelisms also highlights Guànxiū’s own literary ability, as every single couplet adheres to a hyper-regulated pattern (to be described in chapter 6), and the interlocking rhyme scheme only reinforces this

\(^{186}\) There were also actual letters that functioned as cover letters in the Táng dynasty, fulfilling many of the same purposes with the same rhetorical techniques. According to Alexei Ditter, these include “framing the relationship between writer and addressee in ways designed to flatter the recipient, encourage a response, and make their interactions more socially acceptable…and insinuating the invaluable services a talented protégé would be able to provide” (“Civil Examinations and Cover Letters in the Mid-Tang,” 671).
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sense of technical mastery.\textsuperscript{187} The *k* graph is a symbol of the ultimate truth of Buddhism, but it is still only a symbol. It is more fitting to “laugh at the blue clouds” than to get bogged down in the fine points of doctrine. Poetry, Guànxiū suggests, is Buddhism in practice.

The most well-known example of Guànxiū’s fascination with India is his sixteen arhat (\textit{luóhàn 羅漢}) paintings.\textsuperscript{188} It is uncertain whether any originals survive—a recently discovered hemp-cloth painting may have come from his hand (Figure 5.3).\textsuperscript{189} No matter the status of this cloth painting, early descriptions of Guànxiū’s works provide us glimpses into how they were understood in the tenth century. In short, people were struck by the strange power that seemed to exude from the exotic, gnarled appearance Guànxiū had given his arhats. The *Record of Famous Painters of Yízhōu 益州名畫錄* (preface dated 1006) is the earliest prose description of them.

\begin{center}
師之詩名髙節，宇內咸知。善草書圖畫。時人比諸懷素師、閻立本。畫羅漢十六幀，隆眉大目者，朶頤隆鼻者，倚松石者，坐山水者，萇貌梵相，曲盡其態。或問之，云「休自夢中所覩，爾又畫釋迦十弟子亦如此類。」人皆異之，頗為門弟子所寶。當時卿相皆有歌詩求其筆，唯可見而不可得也。太平興國年初，太宗皇帝搜訪古畫日，給事中程公羽牧蜀，將貫休羅漢十六幀為古畫進呈。
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{187} A schematic representation the poem’s tonal structure and rhyme pattern looks as follows:

\begin{center}

\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|c|c|c|c}

譎紫歸青壁 & ● & ● & ○ & ○ & ● & A \\
高名四海閣 & ○ & ○ & ● & ● & ○ & B \\

雖然無一事 & ○ & ○ & ● & ● & ○ & C \\
得不是要君 & ● & ● & ● & ● & ○ & B \\

道祗傳伊字 & ● & ● & ● & ● & ○ & C \\
詩多笑碧雲 & ○ & ○ & ● & ● & ○ & B \\

應憐門下客 & ○ & ○ & ● & ● & ○ & A \\
餘力亦為文 & ● & ● & ● & ○ & ○ & B \\

\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{188} Arhat (literally, “worthy” or “praiseworthy”), in the Chinese Buddhist context, refers to an early disciple of the Buddha. For more on the conception and veneration of arhats in medieval China, see Joo, “The Arhat Cult in China.”

\textsuperscript{189} This claim that the hemp-cloth painting comes from Guànxiū’s hand should be afforded a skeptical eye. The known painting it most closely resembles comes from a set of somewhat dubious authenticity (the Kōdai-ji 高台寺 set). For a review in English of several sets of arhat paintings attributed or stylistically indebted to Guànxiū, see Loehr, *The Great Painters of China*, 54–60.
The master’s [Guànxiū’s] name in poetry was eminent and unsullied, known all throughout the realm. He was also skilled at cursive calligraphy and painting. Contemporaries compared him to Master Huáisù (737–800?) and Yán Libèn (601–673). When he drew his sixteen arhat paintings, they had enormous brows and large eyes, long necks and aquiline noses, and they were leaning against pines and rocks and sitting among mountains and rivers. Their barbarian visages and Indian features are brought out everywhere. When someone asked about them, he said, “I saw them in a dream, and then I painted ten disciples of the Buddha in this way.” People marveled at them, and they were treasured by his disciples. At that time, all of the officials composed songs and poems in pursuit of his brush, but they could only see [his paintings] and not take hold of them. When Emperor Tàizōng sought out ancient paintings in the beginning of the Tàipíng Xīngguó period (976–983), Minister Chéng Yù, who was in charge of Shū, presented Guànxiū’s sixteen arhat paintings to the emperor.

This entry attests to the arhat paintings’ enormous influence in their own time and on later generations. The fact that they inspired many poems and were given as tribute to the Sòng emperor as soon as the empire had been truly reunified means that they were among the most revered of their day. Their appeal is the result of their grotesque, foreign appearance. Their large noses, thick eyebrows, and other typically Indian features are dwelt on at length. Ōuyáng Jiǒng, who wrote the earliest surviving appreciation of them in verse, similarly observes that the arhats’ “forms are like emaciated cranes, their essential spirits robust; their crowns are like frontal...”

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190 Jonathan Hay, reading a variant which gives zhàng 帐 for zhèng 幔, proposes that these paintings may specifically be “pictorial wall hangings without rollers” (see Hay, “Tenth-Century Painting before Song Taizong’s Reign,” 295).

191 An early inscription on one set of paintings indicates that Guànxiū produced the first ten arhats at 880 while at Hé’ān temple 和安寺 and then another six some four years later at Jiānglíng 江陵. See Takasaki Fujihiko, “Rakanzu,” 39; Fong, “Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji,” 43–44, 54–55. However, it is very likely that he produced more after he had moved to Shū.


193 One example is their influence on nephrite jade carvings of arhats in the late imperial period, for which see Pearce, “Images of Guanxiu’s Sixteen Luohan Paintings in Eighteenth-century China.” The paintings’ considerable influence means also that they have attracted much scholarly attention which will not be surveyed in detail here. Some highlights include Kobayashi, Zengetsu daishi no shōgai to geijutsu, 379–403; Fong, “Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji,” 30–76; Takasaki Fujihiko, “Rakanzu”; Osvald, Chinese Painting, plates 114 and 115; Loehr, The Great Painters of China, 54–60; Miyazaki Noriko, “Sōdai butsugashi ni okeru Seiryōji jūroku rakanzō no ichi,” 214; Joo, “The Arhat Cult in China,” 85–92; and Yáng Xín, Wūdài Guānxīù luóhàn tú.

194 Many of these poems survive, coming from the brushes of Ōuyáng Jiǒng 欧陽炯 (869–971), Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037–1101), Wāng Zǎo 汪藻 (jinshi 1082), Gē Shèngzhōng 葛勝仲 (1072–1144), Wú Fèi 吳芾 (1104–1183), Hānshān Déqīng 憨山德清 (1546–1623), Lí Rihuá 李日華 (1565–1635), and Ōuyí Zhìxǔ 蕅益智旭 (1599–1655). These, along with other poems written about Guànxiū, have been conveniently collected in Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn Hú Dàjùn (1304–51).
eminences, their skullbones massive” 形如瘦鶴精神健，頂似伏犀頭骨麤 (see Figure 5.4). 195

The arhats’ unfamiliar images as emaciated foreigners was a shock to Guànxiū’s contemporaries, 196 and it was precisely their strangeness that gave them power.

195 From “A Song of the Arhat Paintings Guànxiū Produced after a Dream” 貫休應夢羅漢畫歌 (QTS 761.8638–39). The term fúxī 伏犀 (literally, “crouching rhinoceros”) refers to the rounded bulges in a person’s frontal bone located about three centimeters above the brows, known in English as the frontal eminence or tuber frontale. Variable in size and shape, they are the subject of much speculation in Chinese (and western) phrenology.

196 See too the notes on Guànxiū’s arhats in the imperial catalogue of paintings commissioned by Emperor Huīzhōng (r. 1100–1126), the Xuānhé huàpǔ 宣和畫譜, which describes how “the arhats’ features are wild, unlike anything the world has passed down. [They have] gigantic cheeks, sunken foreheads, deep-set eyes, and large noses; some have enormous brows and withered necks, and they are dark like the foreign tribes of the southwest. Of those who see them, none cannot help but stare in shock” 羅漢狀貌古野，殊不類世間所傅。豊顥、慼額、湥目、大鼻，或巨顙、槁項，黝然若夷䝤異類。見者莫不駭矚 (Xuānhé huàpǔ 3.12a; cf. Fong, “Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji,” 62). The paintings have continued to draw shocked admiration well into the twentieth century. In the 1940s, for example, Kobayashi Taichirō compared the arhat drawings to the works of surrealists (Zengetsu daishi no shōgai to geijutsu, 15).
Figure 5.3


Figure 5.4

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It is also important to note that Guànxiū painted these arhat images from dreams.\textsuperscript{197} This implies a possible divine inspiration for their production and attests to their significance as objects of religious devotion.\textsuperscript{198} We must remember that Guànxiū’s arhat paintings are not merely artistic portraits of a Buddhist subject, but religious icons. They were “real manifestations” of the arhats and thus worthy of worship by pious Buddhists.\textsuperscript{199} The \textit{Sòng Biographies of Eminent Monks} makes this clear, as it describes how Guànxiū’s dreams only came because of his own prayer requests.

Guànxiū was skilled with the small brush and proficient in the six laws [of painting],\textsuperscript{200} being especially adept at water and ink. His ability to depict likenesses was remarkable. At the request of the Qiăng family medical shop at Zhòng’an Bridge, he produced a hall of arhats, saying that for each arhat he painted, he had to pray, and then in a dream he would retain a response to his true appearance, and then he made it accordingly. [The arhats] are different from the ordinary style.\textsuperscript{201}

Guànxiū’s arhat paintings were not only objects for religious practice (being made for a devotional hall associated with a medical shop, where the ill likely would have made offerings

\textsuperscript{198} See, e.g., Robert Campany, summarizing the attitude toward dreams portrayed in the late fifth-century collection of Buddhist miracle tales \textit{Míngxiáng jì}: “Dreaming is a mode of real contact with other beings, not a mental event merely internal to the dreamer” (Signs from the Unseen Realm, 58).
\textsuperscript{199} Fong, “Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji,” 70–71. Indeed, Koichi Shinohara has stated that in medieval China, “paying respect to the Buddha appears to have been understood largely as a matter of paying respect to physical images” (Shinohara, “Stories of Miraculous Images and Paying Respects to the Three Jewels,” 184.
\textsuperscript{200} Six laws of painting: as laid out by Xiè Hè (late fifth century), these are: 1) “animation through spirit consonance” 氣韻生動; 2) “structural method in use of the brush” 骨法用筆; 3) “responding to things, image their forms” 應物象形; 4) “according to kind, set forth colors [and appearances]” 隨類賦彩; 5) “dividing and planning, positioning and arranging” 經營位置; 6) “transmitting and conveying [earlier models through] copying and transcribing” 傳模移寫. Translations are adapted from John Hay’s summary of renderings by Alexander Soper and James Cahill, in “Values and History in Chinese Painting, I,” 73–74. For more on the six laws, see the entirety of Hay’s article, as well as its sequel. On the possibility of the six laws’ Indian origins, see Mair, “Xie He’s ‘Six Laws’ of Painting and Their Indian Parallels.”
\textsuperscript{201} T’no 2061, 50:897a; cf. Fong, “Five Hundred Lohans at the Daitokuji,” 36.
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for healing) but also the products of religious practice. Guànxiū must pray to see their faces in a dream before he can paint them. We do not know whether or not Guànxiū would have met any real Central Asians by 880 (it certainly was possible), but it is clear that the dream is not only a source of visual cues for the arhat paintings. It is a sign of their spiritual efficacy as icons.

5.4.2 Indianness and Incantation

Guànxiū’s incredible literary skills were honed through his religious practices as much as his literary ones. His fascination with India, as we have seen above, worked its way into his aesthetic sensibility and manifested itself in both his painting and poetry. Perhaps the most visible (and audible) representations of Indianness in Táng China were the dhāraṇī in transliterated Sanskrit and pseudo-Sanskrit. In elite Buddhist circles of the late medieval period—the circles in which the major poet-monks moved—these texts were not seen as mere nonsense. Rather, as Paul Copp has shown, they were understood “not only to be coherent and meaningful, but also to be visual cues for the worship of icons.”

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202 Guànxiū, as far as we can tell, believed in the efficacy of such healing rituals. In a poem accompanying his giving someone a kind of cure-all pill, he instructs the recipient: “To the Jade-Browed, the Tamer of People, lift up your praises. / To the Gold-Wheel King, Indra, and Brahma, offer your rites” and then “All the patients who take the medicine became clear-headed.” See Shinohara, Spells, Images, and Mandalas, especially 1–14, on the importance of visions as signs of spiritual efficacy (in dhāraṇī practice) and how such visions eventually crystallized into the worship of icons and other images.

203 Guànxiū’s calligraphy may have been shaped by this aesthetic as well. As we saw above, he was praised for his cursive script in the manner of Huáisù and Yán Liběn. It is probable that he also found intriguing the unfamiliar graphs of Brāhma mentioned in his poems.

204 It is interesting to note that spells, talismans, and other kinds of magical writings in Chinese Buddhism were written in esoteric Chinese scripts as well as Indic scripts. On this phenomenon, see Robson, “Signs of Power.”

205 The necessity of spells’ surface-level incomprehensibility is a fascinating problem in the comparative study of religion. As many authors have shown, the phenomenon of investing foreign utterances with sacred power is widespread (see Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words”; Graf, Magic in the Ancient World, 218–20; and Copp, “Anointing Phrases and Narrative Power,” 155–58 and 169–72). The power of such spells (including dhāraṇī) seems to derive both from their meaninglessness to the uninitiated and from the knowledge that they are meaningful to someone somewhere—be it the religious professional, the “true” disciple of a founding figure (whose authenticity...
semantically rich utterances but also to be complexly layered texts combining performative narrative, philosophical and ritual detail, and consecratory sound.” 207 That is, the practices associated with dhāraṇī provided immersive sensory experiences in their recitation (sound), inscription (sight), infusion (smell), and ingestion (taste). 208

For our purposes—understanding the use of repetition in the poet-monks’ works—the most salient experience is sound. Most dhāraṇī are highly repetitive, with the same series of transliterated words produced over and over again. In the twenty-sixth chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, there is a dhāraṇī, spoken by ten rākṣasī and their mother, which is said to protect those who uphold the Lotus Sūtra. It reads:

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itime itini itime atime itime
nime nime nime nime nime
ruhe ruhe ruhe ruhe
stahe stahe stahe
stuhe nohe
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Whether or not one understands the semantic meanings of these words, their very repetition creates an intense sonic experience, as a limited number of phonemes are combined in a variety of ways. Ten individual characters are used in 43 positions, with l̀ 履 (MC *lijX) and x̀ 醬 (MC *xej) each accounting for 9 of them (21% of the total; combined 42%). The result is an extremely dense aural pattern. The combination of these various syllables, even when it is not simply a

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is attested by foreignness or antiquity), or the celestial being with divine hearing. Pure nonsense is meaningless, but sense that appears as nonsense only because it is inaccessible is meaningful.


208 See Copp, The Body Incantatory, for many examples of the power of inscribed, infused, and ingested spells. Ingestion, of course, involves more than the sensory experience of taste, but also embodiment and corporeal merging with a spell.

209 7 no. 262, 9:59b; cf. Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom, 322. I have broken up the spell into lines for the sake of clarity. This incantation is also collected as “a spell spoken by a rakṣasī” 羅剎女所説呪 in the fifth-century Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on the Great Golden Peahen Queen Spell 佛説大金色孔雀王呪經, attrib. Śrīmitra 尸梨蜜 (T no. 987, 19.481c). On this text and its relatives, see Sørensen, “The Spell of the Great, Golden Peacock Queen.”
single word like nime or ruhe or stahe repeated three or more times in a row, create resonance. For a medieval Chinese listener, the experience would have been sonically overwhelming.

There is also the possibility that the repetitions embedded in these dhāraṇī had a more profound significance to the late medieval Buddhists who heard them. The mid eighth-century monk Fāchóng 法崇, for example, explains the doubling of the word màotuóyè 冒馱野 (glossed as “able to awaken”) in a different dhāraṇī as representing the “two truths” of principle (lǐ 理) and phenomena (wù 物). As we have seen in our discussion of distributed personhood, the fundamental identity of principle and phenomena was an important doctrinal point to many varieties of late Táng Buddhism, including to the Awakening of Faith 起信論 that Guànxiū 菅溪 comunità spent three years studying and to the Hóngzhōu and Wéi-Yāng lineages familiar to many poet-monks. Verbal repetition—be it in a dhāraṇī or a retriplicated character in a poem—could provide a very clear illustration of the philosophical principle that there is identity in difference and difference in identity.

Many of these themes about incantation and repetition come together in a long poem by Qíjī on a monk’s recitation of the Lotus Sūtra. This is one of several poems written on the topic by Guànxiū 菅溪, Qíjī, and another poet-mono named Xiūyǎ. Such poems attest not only to the fact

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210 Of course, the simple explanation for the repetition of at least the ending syllables of these words is the fact that Sanskrit is an inflected language with nouns and adjectives that must agree in number and case. Indeed, as Hurvitz tells us, most of the spells are in the singular feminine vocative form or made to look like it, as is typical of such texts (Scripture of the Lotus Blossom, 320). However, it is doubtful that a medieval Chinese listener would have understood this.


that the *Lotus Sūtra* is one of the most important texts in all of East Asian Buddhism, but also that it was particularly important to the major poet-monks of the late medieval period. According to his disciple Tányù, Guànxiū memorized the *Lotus Sūtra* early in his youth and recited it daily. As Daniel Stevenson reminds us, to medieval Chinese Buddhists, the “internalization of text as memory…meant that the text itself became a part of the practitioner’s being, an imprint of mind that traveled with the individual from place to place and, in the indigenous perspective, from lifetime to lifetime.” Qíjì’s longer treatment of a sūtra-reciting monk, in particular, gives us a glimpse of what such an imprint looked like, attempting to describe and simulate one virtuoso performance of the *Lotus*.

Given to the *Lotus Sūtra*-Reciting Monk 贈念法華經僧

Qíjì 齊己

| 念念念兮入惡易 | Recite, recite, recite—*xī*— | yeH | - |
| 念念念兮入善難 | Recite, recite, recite—*xī*— | nan | A |
| 念經念佛能一般 | Reciting the *Sūtra* and reciting the Buddha one is capable of everything. | ban | A |
| 4 愛河竭處生波瀾 | Where the river of desire is dried up, a billowing wave comes forth. | lan | A |
| 言公少年真法器 | It is said that in your youth, you were a vessel of the true dharma. | khijH | B |
| 白晝不出夜不睡 | Never going out at day, never sleeping at night. | dzyweH | B |
| 心心緣經口緣字 | Thought after thought is conditioned by the *Sūtra*, as your mouth is conditioned by words. | dziH | B |

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213 Tányù 禪域, “Preface to the Collected Works of Master Chányuè” 禪月集序 (Hú Dājùn 1294–96; *QTW* 922.9604–05).
215 Wáng Xiǔlín 10.563–69; Pān Dìngwǔ 5.545–47; *QTS* 847.9589.
216 The term translated as “recite” here, *niàn* 念, literally means “be mindful of.” “Being mindful of the Buddha” (Skt. *budhānusmṛti*) and “being mindful of the scriptures” (Skt. *sutrānusmṛti*) by extension came to indicate the practice of recitation. Qījì draws on both meanings in these lines.
217 River of desire: metaphor of the danger of the passions, which can drown a person. In the *Huāyán jīng* 華嚴經, the Buddha vows to dry it up (*T* no. 279, 10:352c).
218 Vessel of the true dharma: the Buddha tells his disciples, “You are vessels of the true dharma” 汝是真法器 in the *Huāyán jīng* (*T* no. 279, 10:428a).
8 一室寥寥燈照地 Your cell is empty, empty,  
dijH  B
沈檀卷軸寶函盛 Aloewood, sandalwood, and scrolls  
dzyengH  -
fill precious cases;
薔薇香熏水精記 The sweet smell of champak,  
kiH  B
水晶叢軸寶函盛 crystal recollection.
空山木落古寺閑 Trees fallen on an empty mountain,  
hean  C
松枝鶴眠霜霰幹 A crane sleeps in pine branches,  
kan  C
frost and sleet dry up.
牙根舌根水滴寒 At the root of his teeth and the root of his tongue,  
han  C
waterdrops chill—
珊瑚捶打紅琅玕 Coral beaten by  
kan  C
red gemstone jade.
但恐 I fear only  
tsyet  D
蓮花七朵一時折 The seven lotuses  
will be snapped open in an instant:219
16 朵朵似君心地白 Each one is as pure as  
baek  D
his inmost heart.
又恐天風吹天花 And I fear that a heavenly wind  
xwae  E
will blow heavenly blossoms220
繽紛如雨飄袈裟 Profuse as the rain,  
srae  E
swirling about his kāṣāya.221
況聞此經甚微妙 Again, listen to this Sūtra,  
mjiewH  F
so subtle and mysterious,
百千諸佛真秘要 The true, esoteric essence  
jiewH  F
of a hundred thousand buddhas.
靈山說後始傳來 After being proclaimed on Vulture Peak,  
loj  -
it began to be transmitted:222
聞者雖多持者少 Those who hear it are many,  
syewH  F
but those who uphold it are few.
更堪誦入陀羅尼 You can also chant it into  
nrij  G

219 Seven lotuses: metaphor for the Lotus Sūtra, which is comprised of twenty-eight chapters 品 in seven fascicles 卷.
220 Heavenly blossoms are said to have fallen when eminent monks like Fǎyún 法雲 (467–529) or Jízàng 吉藏 (549–623) recited the Lotus Sūtra (Xù gāosēng zhūn 续高僧传, comp. Dàoxuān 道宣 [596–667], T no. 2060, 50:465a; Fózǔ tōngjì 佛祖統紀, comp. Zhìpán 志磐 in 1269, T no. 2055, 49:187a). Many other similar stories abound in Buddhist hagiographies.
221 Kāṣāya: monastic robe.
222 Vulture Peak: Língshān 灵山 (literally, “sacred mountain”) is an abbreviation of Língjìshān 靈鷲山, “Sacred Vulture Peak” (Skt.: Grñḍhakūṭaparvata), where the Lotus Sūtra is said to have been preached by the Buddha.
Chapter 5: The Work of the Poet-Monk

24  唐音梵音相雜時 Where Táng sounds and Brāhmic sounds are mixed together.  dhāranī,  dzyi  G

舜弦和雅風吹 Shùn’s strings harmonize, sweet airs blow.  tsyhwe  G

文王武王弦更悲 And the strings of King Wén and King Wǔ are all the more plaintive.  pij  G

如此 Thus

爭不遣碧空中 Ceaselessly striving in the azure heavens come dragons to heed,  thengH  H

有鬼來聽 come ghosts to heed,  thengH  H

亦使人間 Making those humans who hear them bow,  kean  H

聞者敏 who see them bow,  kjaengH  H

見者敏 And spontaneously their hearts are emptied,  khuwng  -

自然

性清淨 their natures purified.  dzjengH  H

此經真體即毗盧 The true bones of this sūtra are Vairocana.  lu  I

雪嶺白牛君識無 The white oxcart on the Snowy Peaks: do you not recognize it?  mju  I

Qíjí’s poem is both a representation of the monk’s recitation in song, and a literary performance of song as a kind of recitation. The opening simple retriplications of niàn 念 (MC: nemH) mark off the world of the poem as a kind of sacred space (dàochǎng 道場), imitating the sound of the monks’ chants. This incantatory quality continues throughout the poem with its dense rhymes: 30 out of 34 lines end with a rhyme word. The opening sounds give way to the message of the Lotus Sūtra: it is hard to maintain goodness, but the Lotus Sūtra, which gives one access to incredible powers (line 3) and is equated with the Buddha as his textual embodiment (line 33), can help.

The speaker then describes the intense training of the reciting monk: he spent every day and every night in his youth (lines 5–6) practicing in an empty monastic cell (line 8). Though his

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223 Vairocana: the cosmic form of the Buddha in his true dharma-body.
personal possessions are few, the *Lotus Sūtra* is properly venerated with incense and stored in a precious case (lines 9–10)—much like the bones of Qū Yuán in Guànxiū’s poem. Having memorized the text, it shapes the reciting monk’s every thought and word (line 7), making him a “vessel of the true dharma” (line 5). That is, he is a physical embodiment of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which is itself a textual embodiment of the Buddha and his dharma. The monk is deified. This brings the poem to the site of the *Sūtra*’s recitation, the body of a monk located in a humble mountain temple in winter (lines 11–12). The speaker zeroes in on the monk’s mouth, whence the sacred text issues forth into the world. He describes the mouth first in literal, visceral terms (drops of sweat on his teeth and tongue, line 13) and then in metaphoric, glorified terms (his teeth as coral, his tongue as red jade, line 14). As the site of the *Lotus Sūtra*’s re-creation, the monk’s mouth is afforded the same veneration that the *Sūtra* itself received in lines 9–10.225

Next, the speaker anticipates internal and external signs confirming the efficacy of the *Sūtra* recitation. The main verb used, kǒng 恐 (“fear”), does not indicate a negative state of mind but rather awe-filled anticipation—the feeling of butterflies in one’s chest. The internal sign of the *Sūtra*’s efficacy is the fact that the content of each fascicle, once opened, is revealed to be pure and untainted (literally “white”), just like the very ground of the reciting monk’s heart/mind (lines 15–16). Externally, flowers rain from the sky upon his recitation, as it did when the great monks of the sixth century chanted the text (lines 17–18). Like Guànxiū’s arhat dreams, these visions are important markers of the spiritual power of the monk’s recitation. Nevertheless, not everyone can grasp the *Sūtra* (line 22), for its power is “subtle,” “mysterious,” and “esoteric” (lines 19–20).

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Also like Guànxiū’s arhats, the Sūtra’s power is tied to its non-Chinese origins—in India (“Vulture Peak,” line 21) and, prior to that, in the heavenly realms of a hundred thousand buddhas (line 20). But the Sūtra does not remain irrevocably foreign, nor does it overpower the classical songs of China it comes into contact with. It brings out those songs in a new way, as a harmony to melody (line 25). Or, to switch metaphors, the Lotus Sūtra acts like salt, strengthening the inherent flavors that were already present in the original ingredients (see line 26). Qījī envisions a hybrid song in the form of a dhāraṇī: neither fully Chinese nor fully Indian, it has elements of the sounds of both (lines 23–24). Fitting in to neither category, it would draw on the numinous powers of both traditions, attracting listeners in all human realms, and above and below (lines 27–28), transforming in an instant those who would hear or read it (lines 29–32). The spiritual power of Buddhism and the aesthetic power of classical Chinese music would meld into a new song for a new, post-Tâng era. It would be, Qījī implies, something like the work of a poet-monk like himself. It would be Buddhist poetry.

Qījī’s poem is both an homage to and exemplar of a tradition of Buddhist chanting, one that emerges from a fascination with the esoteric power of Indian languages and attempts to merge this power with the classical songs of the poetic tradition. Repetition here is incantatory in the narrow sense of the term. It is part of an oral performance which accesses esoteric power and wields it in order to aid others, especially in their spiritual transformation. Such incantations are not jumbles of meaningless syllables, but rather sensory experiences whose meaning is performative: its very articulation enacts its purpose. It is not a mere sign pointing to a higher truth like the i-graph in Brāhmī. Rather, like Guànxiū’s arhat paintings, the recitation of the Lotus Sūtra is both a product of and an object for religious devotion. Qījī’s song simultaneously venerates and enacts such a recitation.
5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have pulled on one thread of the poet-monks’ poetics and seen how it is tangled up with a host of literary and religious practices. Retripllication is not only a real phenomenon that had previously gone all but unnoticed in literary history, it is one of the most obtrusive poetic techniques employed by monks of the late medieval period. It can be used to intensify (simple retriplication), force a reader to pause and parse (complex), and create connections across line breaks (anadiplotic). Although related to the technique of reduplication, it is by no means a simple extension of it. Being so rarely used, it would have been utterly defamiliarizing to Táng audiences. Being rather cumbersome within the strict meters of classical poetry, it was also related to the practice of caesura violation. In this way, retriplication represents the poet-monks’ literary style at its most manic.

Retripllication is the most extreme version of one kind of technique employed by the poet-monks—the repetition of individual characters in obtrusive ways. This literary technique emerges out of at least three distinct sources. The first is the apophatic discursive tradition in Buddhism, best exemplified by the *catuskoṭi*. The tendency to define key concepts through negation, the negation of negation, the negation of negation of negation, etc., leads to a peculiar use of language that sounded especially strange in the classical Chinese context. Both the elite poet-monk tradition (represented by Guànxiū) and the popular Buddhist song tradition (represented by the *yuèfǔ* “Traveling’s Hard” from Dūnhuáng) drew on the unusual rhythms of apophasis in order to establish new uses of language in poetry.

The second source is the aesthetic of madness in the tradition of song-style poetry. On the one hand, madness is a way of positioning oneself outside of society in order to maintain one’s purity or transcendence and occupy a place from which to critique the mainstream. In the late
medieval period, the main paragons of the mad poet were Qū Yuán and Lǐ Bái. At the same time, the sorts of repetitions used in these songs, especially their latter-day practitioners, demonstrate the limits of denotative language. They strive to overcome representation and bleed into performance.

The third source is the oral recitation of sacred texts, including the incantation of dhāraṇī. This practice stems from a larger fascination with the Indian origins of Buddhism and the sense of authenticity afforded to monks, scripts, images, and sounds associated with India. Though most closely associated with esoteric ritual technologies, incantation was also part of the shared culture of medieval Buddhism across Asia. Dhāraṇī could be extremely repetitive (especially from the perspective of the medieval Chinese) and semantically meaningless. However, the power of these texts came not from their semantic meaning, nor even their foreignness, but their performance. That is, in the act of uttering spells or reciting sūtras, the practitioner became the very site of that sacred text’s production and as such wielded its power. A poem like Qījī’s song of the Lotus Sūtra-reciting monk served both as an homage to and an exemplar of this kind of recitation.

The repetitions found all throughout the works of Guànxiū, Qījī, and other poet-monks are performative. Like incantations, their power is non-representational. Their patterns of sound act on the audience as sound, not just as language. It is also these patterns of sound that mark them as participating in the tradition of elite, song-style verse and the unconventional purity (madness) that is associated with it. Thus, the aural quality of these works is what makes them, in one sense, religious. Such poems utilize the same mechanism as spells. They function according to the same logic. They are the same in practice. This is one way they can be considered Buddhist poetry.
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The poetic repetitions inspired by (and partaking of) these practices emerge out of a close examination of poetic practice. In the next chapter, we will examine metadiscursive writings about the process of composing poetry, especially the kind of intense devotion and mental training it requires. In so doing, we will be traveling from one extreme of the poet-monks’ poetics to the other: from exuberance to austerity, from repetition to balance, from oral performance to silent meditation. And yet the act of concentration, idealized in kūyín and Buddhist meditation, is also one of intensity. It is not just the duty of these poet-monks, it is their passion.
6.0 Introduction

The brash performative qualities of a poem—its rhythms and repetitions, its use of apophasis, its enactment of incantatory power—were not the only areas in which the late medieval poet-monks’ religious practices merged with their literary practices. They were also instrumental in developing the relationship between meditation and poetry. As we will see, this was due to several strands in literary and Buddhist discourses converging in the late ninth century, most important of which was the kūyín （苦吟）（“bitter intoning” or “painstaking enactment of verse”）ideal. Intense devotion to poetry, to the point of physical and mental suffering, was upheld as an ideal in this tradition. At stake was the idea of the poet as a “Fashioner,” one who participated in the making and shaping of a microcosm, mirroring the impersonal forces of nature which made and shaped the macrocosm. The legacy of Jiǎ Dǎo was crucial to establishing and popularizing this particular sense of kūyín. At the same time, an older layer of the literary theoretical tradition, which saw the poet as one who sent his spirit to roam the cosmos, was also given new life in the late Táng as it mixed with the kūyín aesthetic and Buddhist meditation. This ultimately led to the assertion that poetry and meditation are not just analogous (as the critical clichés of post-Táng poetics have it),¹ but fundamentally the same, being two gates to the same goal. Qījǐ was the one who articulated this view most clearly, but it has its roots in one of his heroes nearly a century earlier, the ex-monk Jiǎ Dǎo. By asserting this fundamental unity, Qījǐ and others could turn the writing of poetry into the working out of one’s

¹ On the later development of the poetry-meditation metaphor, see Lynn, “Orthodoxy and Enlightenment.”
enlightenment. Poetry, then, would no longer be only a social, verbal, and classical art (though it would remain that); it would be another means of understanding the fundamental nature of all reality. It would not just, as the old adage goes, “speak what is intently on the mind” (yán zhì 言志) but would even “speak the Mind” (yán xīn 言心).²

6.1 Poetry Manuals: Poetic Practice and the Fashioning of the World

One of the best ways to understand the practice of poetry in the late medieval period is to read the most ubiquitous genre of poetry criticism at the time, poetry manuals (shīgé 詩格, literally “poetry frameworks” or “poetry standards”). These manuals, which can be traced back to the sixth century but reached their heyday in the tenth century, are comprised mainly of exemplary couplets classified by various poetic techniques and principles, which may or may not be accompanied by prose explanations. They are extremely useful because they make explicit many of the implicit assumptions of late medieval versifiers. Just as screenwriting manuals by gurus like Syd Field, Robert McKee, and Blake Snyder expose the underlying structures of most Hollywood films from a (putative) insider’s perspective, so too these poetry manuals give us a glimpse into the ways in which late medieval poets purportedly approached their own craft.³ Though often maligned as unsystematic and “targeted at beginning writers,”⁴ or forgotten because they fell out of favor in the mid-eleventh century,⁵ they are in fact important voices in the Chinese literary tradition. More than being just repositories for the earliest criticism of

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² *Nota bene:* this phrase (yán xīn 言心) does not appear in any Táng texts in this sense. I am merely offering an English-language pun to drive home my thesis.

³ See Field, *Screenplay*; McKee, *Story*; and Snyder, *Save the Cat!*. For a critical look at these screenwriting manuals, see Conor, “Gurus and Oscar Winners.” A more historically-minded analogue to these poetry manuals might be the *memoria* of medieval Europe, mentioned briefly in Wang, “Shige,” 116–17.


⁵ This is mainly due to the rise of the genre of “poetry talks” (shīhuà 詩話) following Ŭuyáng Xiū. On the development of this genre, see Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 60–108.
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canonical poets,⁶ they are crucial documents for the history of poetry. They lay bare many norms of the practice of poetic composition in the late medieval period.⁷

As has long been recognized, most poetry manuals from the late Táng onward are obsessed with Jiǎ Dǎo.⁸ In the poet-monk Xūzhōng’s 虛中 Handmirror of Streams and Categories 流類手鑑, Jiǎ Dǎo is the most frequently quoted of any poet.⁹ Qījǐ, in his Exemplary Forms of Fēng and Sāo Poetry 風騷旨格, cites Jiǎ Dǎo more often than anyone besides himself.¹⁰ In the Essentials of the Way of the Elegantiae 雅道機要 by Xú Yín 徐夤, Jiǎ Dǎo is cited third-most (8), after Qījǐ (14) and Zhōu Hè (11).¹¹ Lǐ Dòng 李洞 compiled an entire manual from only Jiǎ Dǎo’s couplets.¹² Another manual, called Secret Exemplars of the Two “Souths” 二南密旨, was attributed to Jiǎ Dǎo. Although almost certainly not written by the master himself, it was likely compiled by one of his many admirers at the start of the tenth century and attests to how highly regarded his name was at the time.¹³

The main concern of the poetry manuals is the fine art of the individual couplet. The craft of the couplet, and of the single character in that couplet, is invested with great significance.

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⁷ In what follows, I do not use the Twenty-four Classifications of Poetry 二十四詩品 attributed to Sīkōng Tú 司空圖. There are two reasons for this. First, they are more concerned with theory than practice, and it is the latter with which this present chapter is concerned. Second, they are of dubious authenticity. For a thorough look at the evidence for their being later forgeries, see Chén Shǎngjūn and Wāng Yǒnghuāo, “Sīkōng Tú Ērshíshí shǐjīn de biānwéi.”
⁹ Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkāo, 417–23.
¹⁰ Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkāo, 397–416.
¹¹ Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkāo, 424–49.
¹² This manual is listed in the Sòng dynasty imperial catalogue but no longer survives. See Sòngshǐ 209.5410.
¹³ Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkāo, 370–83. This is listed as Jiǎ Dǎo ‘s Secret Exemplars of Poetry Standards 賈島詩格密旨 in the Sòng imperial catalogue in Sòngshǐ 209.5409.
Sometimes this meant describing the mechanics of tonal prosody.\textsuperscript{14} Other times, methods of indirectly evoking imagery are highlighted. The monk Shényù’s 神彧 poetry manual, in a section titled “On characters that attain in poetry” 論詩有所得字, does the latter.

冥搜意句，全在一字包括大義。賈島詩：「秋江待明月，夜語恨無僧。」此「僧」字有得也。鄭谷《詠燕詩》：「閑几硯中窺水淺，落花徑裏得泥香。」此「香」字有得也。

When searching the unseen realm for meaningful couplets, the whole may be in one character which contains great significance. A Jiǎ Dǎo poem reads:

Awaiting the bright moon on a river in autumn,
Talking at night, you regret that there is no monk.\textsuperscript{15}

Here the character “monk” (sēng 僧) is what attains [the significance of the entire couplet]. In Zhèng Gǔ’s “Poem on the Swallow,” there is:

I peek at the shallow liquid in the unused desk’s inkstone;
In the path of fallen flowers, I get [wind of] a muddy scent.\textsuperscript{16}

Here the character “scent” (xiāng 香) is what attains.\textsuperscript{17}

The final character of both examples is what gives the couplet its poetic meaning. In the first example, it must be a “monk” (not just a “person” 人, *nyin* in Middle Chinese) first of all because of how remote the recipient (the subject of the poem) will be—monks are known for living in the wilds. Second of all, monks are known for their expertise in doctrines of impermanence. The recipient, the couplet implies, will be grieving his departure from his friends and would like to find consolation in the metaphysics of emptiness. If all phenomena are impermanent, then why grieve over the absence of friends and the vicissitudes of one’s life?

In the second example, “scent” (xiāng 香) clinches the meaning of the couplet in the way it evokes the image of its subject (a swallow) without ever directly depicting it. The two lines

\textsuperscript{14} Because most of these are so well-known and date back to the pre-Táng period, I will not treat them in detail here. The interested reader may wish to consult Bodman, “Poetics and Prosody.” Purposeful deviations from regulated meters will be discussed below, in section 6.3.2.

\textsuperscript{15} From Jiǎ Dǎo’s “Seeing off Cuī Dìng” 送崔定. See Qí Wénbāng, Jiǎ Dǎo jì jiàozhù, 3.109; Lì Jiànkūn, Jiǎ Dǎo shǐjì jiàozhù, 3.92; QTS 572.6632.

\textsuperscript{16} In received sources, this poem is simply titled “The Swallow” 燕. See Yán Shòuchéng, Zhèng Gǔ shǐ jiānzhù, 269–270; QTS 675.7737.

\textsuperscript{17} Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wùdài shīgē huìkāo, 493.
contrast on the sensory level, the first being sight, the second being smell. Through their sequence, they also imply a narrative: the speaker cannot concentrate to write (leaving his inkstone unused) and so, to refresh his mind, goes for a walk. There, he catches a whiff of mud in an otherwise clean scene. The mud, it is implied, is left behind by the swallow’s footprints. Its scent is a trace of a trace. To tie the scene together still further, the dark, viscous traces left behind by the swallow visually rhyme with the dark, viscous traces of ink that would have been left behind by writing a poem. However, both are absent: the poem is not written (the ink remains dry) and the swallow’s footprints are never seen (only smelled). Zhèng Gǔ’s couplet is a masterpiece of evocation, written in perfect parallel style. It was this kind of precision in language, hidden beneath relatively simple diction, that was strongly encouraged in poetry manuals.

Such detailed analyses of the mechanics of poetry may seem like an escapist formalism with few implications for large-scale, cosmological thought. The idea of ordering “images” (xiàng 象) is crucial to the idea of the world as conceived in these tenth-century poetry manuals. One of the most conspicuous features of this genre of poetry criticism, aside from its use of illustrative couplets, is its many lists of correspondences between “phenomena and images” (wùxiàng 物象). If read uncharitably, these lists seem to arrest the signification of images used in poems into rigid metaphors. That is, they appear to cut off meaning and flatten the categories of traditional poetics. But if taken on their own terms, they in fact invest the composition of poetry with the highest significance.

In the Secret Exemplars of the Two “Souths” 二南密旨, a poetry manual attributed to Jià Dào but almost certainly written by one of his admirers in the early tenth century, the ordering of

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images is said to have political and cosmological meaning. A section titled “A Discussion of Phenomena and Images Being How the Poet Creates an Effect” 論物象是詩家之作用 explains:

造化之中，一物一象，皆察而用之，比君臣之化。君臣之化，天地同機，比而用之，得不宜乎。

In the midst of fashioning [the world of a poem], any phenomenon and any image must be used after careful inspection, [for] they are comparable to the transformations [enacted by] the ruler and ministers. The transformations of the ruler and ministers partake of the same mechanism as heaven and earth. Is it not fitting to use them upon comparison?¹⁹

A poem is not created out of nothing. It is “fashioned” (zàohuà 造化) out of images and phenomena that already exist out there in the world. The poet is one who, through his careful attention to physical and mental images, takes these images and puts them into a meaningful, coherent form. In this way, he is like a governor, who arranges the people and institutions so that they may cohere, and he is like the uncreated force of heaven and earth (“nature”) which shapes all living creatures. All three—poet, ruler, cosmos—partake of the same fashioning, albeit on different scales. Each participates in wén.²⁰

The monk Xūzhōng expands on this point. In his Handmirror of Streams and Categories 流類手鑑, the category of “Yīn-Yáng’s Fashioning [of the World]” 陰陽造化 invests poetry with cosmic significance. The idea of “fashioning” through the ordering of “images” (xiàng 象) is central to Xūzhōng’s poetics, as it is to so many other poets of the late medieval period. It reveals that the poem is a microcosm of the macrocosmic universe, and the poet is the “Fashioner” of this miniature world. In this, Xūzhōng is similar to pseudo-Jiǎ Dào. What makes Xūzhōng distinct, however, is the Buddhist twist he adds.

²⁰ The idea of the poet as a “Fashioner” who mimics the cosmic Fashioner of things (zàohuāzhě 造化者, zàowùzhǔ 造物主) is not new to the late ninth or early tenth century. It first appears in the late eighth century, in the works of Mèng Jiāo 孟郊 and Hán Yù 韓愈. As Shang Wei has noted, in some of their works, poetry “conceals the code of creation. By making and controlling his microcosm, the poet symbolically enacts the process of cosmic creation and transformation” (“Prisoner and Creator,” 32).
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

夫詩道幽遠，理入玄微。凡俗罔知，以為淺近。善詩之人，心含造化，言含萬象。且天地、日月、草木、煙雲皆隨我用，合我晦明。此則詩人之言應於物象，豈可易哉？

The Way of poetry is hidden and remote, its principle enters into the arcane and subtle. Common people fail to understand it, taking it to be obvious. The minds of those skilled in poetry contain Fashioning (zàohuà), and their words contain the myriad images (xiàng). Heaven and earth, the sun and moon, plants and trees, mists and clouds all follow the self’s usage [of this way], and are hidden or manifest according to the merging of the self. This being so, a poet’s language responds to the images (xiàng) of phenomena. How could this be easy?²¹

Xūzhōng marries traditional literary ideas of universal order with the Buddhist emphasis on the mind as the ultimate ground of all phenomena. The mind can be accessed through the mind of the individual (wǒ 我, translated above as “self”). Images and phenomena are not ultimately based in either the external world or the words of the poet. The two are interconnected: phenomena arise together out of both. That is to say, the world of a poem is illusory, but it is no more illusory than the world. This is because all phenomena, and the cosmic images that underlie them, have their ultimate basis in the mind. This kind of “pure mind,” tathāgatagarbha philosophy would certainly have been familiar to the late medieval poet-monks. As Brook Ziporyn has noted, this doctrine is prominent in the Awakening of Faith and the Śūramgama sūtra—both texts we know that Guànxiū read and even preached on. It was also widely maintained in the Hóngzhōu and other “Chán” lineages that many of these poet-monks would have come across.²²

After this preface, Xūzhōng goes on to list fifty-five categories of metaphors, in which various things are said to stand for other attributes.²³ Such a list illustrates concretely the

²¹ Zhāng Bówěi, Quān Tāng-Wūdài shīgē huìkāo, 418.
²² Ziporyn, Evil and/or as the Good, 170–86. Ziporyn brings this doctrine up to distinguish it from the “omnicentric holism” that characterizes Tiāntái thought.
²³ These metaphors are mostly the standard ones of pre-imperial China, such as “the round moon, the kyrin, ducks and drakes are metaphors for the lord and his worthy vassal” 圓月、麒麟、鴛鴦，比良臣、君子也. However, Xūzhōng does manage to add Buddhist touches to his list, such as “nets are metaphors of the secrets of the dharma”
interdependence of poem and world. Both are comprised of “images” (xiàng) which fall into a set of fixed categories. This central idea, of the fashioning of world through images and language, is illustrated in Xūzhōng’s manual by the couplets of two poets: Jiǎ Dào and his ardent admirer Lǐ Dòng 李洞.

If one follows the logic of Xūzhōng’s poetics, and the poem and the world are seen as interdependent, then a poet of supreme craftsmanship such as Jiǎ Dào is more than an ordinary man. He assumes the role of a divine being and should be treated as such.

[Lǐ Dòng] fervently admired Jiǎ Dào, so he cast a brazen image of Dào and carried it in his cloth box. He would carry a rosary and chant to Jiǎ Dào Buddha a thousand times a day. Dòng inevitably copied out Jiǎ Dào poems and would repeatedly warn people, “This is no different from a sūtra. Make offerings to it with incense.”

Lǐ Dòng was not the only one who is said to have admired Jiǎ Dào with religious fervor. Sūn Shèng 孫晟, a Daoist priest, worshipped an image as well.

[Sūn Shèng] was a Daoist priest in his youth and skilled in poetry. At Jiānji Abbey on Mt. Lú he painted a portrait of the Táng poet Jiǎ Dào, hung it on the wall of his cell, and attended to it with rituals. The abbot, thinking this to be sorcery, drove him out with his stave. He was greatly ridiculed by his contemporaries.

While these anecdotes are almost certainly apocryphal jokes, they nevertheless follow naturally from the poetic theory outlined by Xūzhōng. If the poem is a cosmos, the product of images rooted in both the external world and the mind, then the poet takes on the role of a divine being and commands the kind of reverence due to a bodhisattva or god. Lǐ Dòng and Sūn Shèng simply

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24 Fù Xuánchéng, Táng cáizǐ zuàn jiàojiōn, 4:9.213.
25 Jiǔ Wàndài shì 131.1732.
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take a strain of thought in late medieval poetics to its logical conclusion.\textsuperscript{26} The poet as Fashioner (zhàohuàzhě 造化者), as creator (zuòzhě 作者), as craftsman (jiàng 匠) is embedded deeply in late ninth- and tenth-century literary thought, and in this system, Jiǎ Dǎo is king. The reason is that he was seen as the living embodiment of the kūyín 苦吟 (“bitter intoning”) aesthetic.

6.2 Kūyín: A Brief Overview

6.2.1 The Mèng Jiāo Strain: Kūyín for the Sake of the Examinations

The term kūyín—which can be translated as “bitter chanting,” “intoning with pain,” “painstaking composition,” or a variety of other ways—first appears in the work of Guō Zhèn 郭震 (656–713) in a quatrain on crickets.\textsuperscript{27} This poem uses yín to refer to the hum of crickets, a cry of pain at death in autumn, but not to the kind of intense devotion to poetry it would take on in later centuries. While the term was used a few more times in the first half of the Táng, it first gained a more specialized meaning in the work of Mèng Jiāo 孟郊 (751–814).\textsuperscript{28} To Mèng, kūyín is the vocal recitation of one’s own verses during the process of composition and revision.

Stirred at Night, Dispelling My Sorrow 夜感自遣\textsuperscript{29}
Mèng Jiāo 孟郊

\begin{tabular}{ll}
夜學曉未休 & Studying at night, still haven’t stopped by dawn, \textit{xjuw}
\hline
苦吟神鬼愁 & As I kūyín, the gods and ghosts worry. \textit{dzrjuw}
如何不自閑 & How is it I can’t rest? \textit{hean}
心與身為讎 & My mind and body are enemies. \textit{duyw}
死辱片時痛 & Disgrace in death is pain for a short while; \textit{thuwngH}
生辱長年羞 & Disgrace in life is humiliation for many years. \textit{sjuw}
\end{tabular}  

\textsuperscript{26}I am not, of course, implying that this strain of thought was comparing the poet as creator to a personal, creator god (as in the Abrahamic traditions). The poet, rather, partakes of the fashioning of the world as does any other being, only to a greater degree. The point I am making is similar to Stephen Owen’s idea of the “uncreated universe” in Chinese literature (Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics, 78–86), though I believe Xūzhōng and others would add to it a layer of Buddhist ontology (phenomena originate in the mind).

\textsuperscript{27}“Field-Cricket” 蟋，在 \textit{QTS} 66.758–59.


\textsuperscript{29}Hán Quānxīn, \textit{Mèng Jiāo jì jiàozhù}, 3.118; \textit{QTS} 374.4203.
The central preoccupation of this poem is personal success via the examination system: breaking off an osmanthus branch is a symbol of passing the examinations, and the fact that none of these branches are “straight” or “upright” causes the speaker much consternation (line 7). How is it, the speaker wonders, that the unworthy passed, while an upright poet like himself lingers in obscurity? Poetic composition was tested on the exams, and circulating a brief scroll of one’s verse (xíngjuàn 行卷) with the capital elites was a crucial first step in establishing one’s reputation at the outset of a bureaucratic career.\(^{30}\) It was therefore necessary to have a perfectly polished collection to succeed in Mid-Táng political and literary life. This led to an inflated rhetoric of intensity, much like the modern corporate lawyer who brags of working eighty hours per week. To prove his worth, Mèng Jiāo describes how he never rests (line 3), and even comes to consider his tiring body the enemy of his mind (line 4). The logic is a strange reversal of the high-mindedness often found in medieval literature, in which one’s historical legacy is more important than success in this life. Instead, Mèng Jiāo states that success in this life matters more than one’s reputation after death, since the pain of deathbed regret is over quickly, while the suffering of lifelong humiliation lasts decades (lines 5–6).\(^{31}\) Examination poetry, as the hallmark of personal success, is more important than life itself.

Such stakes meant that it was necessary to constantly revise one’s poems until each line was phrased perfectly. Liú Dérén 劉得仁 (early/mid ninth cent.), also working through the night, describes the process.

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\(^{30}\) On the social functions of verse, see Chapter 4.

\(^{31}\) Stephen Owen suggests that the phrase “disgrace in death” in this poem implies suicide (The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yü, 57). Searching through QTS and QTW, I cannot find concrete evidence to support this reading. Most references to “dying in disgrace” (sǐ yú rǔ 死於辱) and its opposite, “dying without disgrace” (sǐ wú rǔ 死無辱 or sǐ bù rǔ 死不辱) refer to an individual acting or failing to act with loyalty or bravery.
Fixing lines of a poem until morning,
My neighbors dislike my kūyín.
—Liú Dérén 劉得仁, “Events on a Summer Day” 夏日即事

Liú Dérén sat for the examinations multiple times over a twenty-year period but, as far as we can tell, never passed. Despite his repeated failures, he felt the compulsion to keep working at it, to keep going over his writings, reading them aloud until they sounded just right. In one poem, he describes how he “cuts to the bone in search of new lines” 刻骨搜新句. Elsewhere, he is ashamed for not having achieved anything despite how weary those same bones have grown.

Presented to Vice Director Cuī on Taking the Examinations: 2 of 4 省試日上崔侍郎四首（其二）

Liú Dérén 劉得仁

如病如癡二十秋 Like being sick or stupid
for twenty autumns — tshjuw
2 求名難得又難休 Seeking a name, it’s hard to achieve,
but even harder to rest. xjuw
回看骨肉須堪恥 Looking back at my flesh and bones,
I should surely be ashamed, trhiX
4 一著麻衣便白頭 Cloaked in coarse-hemp robes,
yet my head is white. duw

As this poem illustrates, when one’s whole sense of success is based on passing the examinations (politely referred to as “achieving a name” 得名, line 2), failure is devastating. Shame and poverty follow (lines 3–4). The poet, whether out of modesty or hyperbole or rhetorical norms, describes himself as a pitiable old man, ruined by his own bull-headed attempts to make a name for himself. To Liú Dérén and many others in the early and mid-ninth century, the examination was a measure of self-worth. At best, failure meant remaining on the margins of elite culture; at worst, it meant an utter negation of one’s very purpose in life.

32 QTS 544.2685–86.
33 “Baring my Feelings, Presented to One Who Knows Me” 陳情上知己 (QTS 544.6291).
34 QTS 545.6303–6304. Vice Director Cuī: Cuī Yù 崔玨 (mid-ninth cent.), younger brother of the Chancellor宰相 Cuī Gǒng 崔珙 (d. 854?).
6.2.2 The Jiǎ Dǎo Strain: Kǔyín for the Sake of Poetry

This strain of kǔyín—associated with Mèng Jiāo and the examination system—continued into the tenth century, but it did not become the dominant one. Rather, it was Mèng’s associate Jiǎ Dǎo who became most fully identified with the kǔyín aesthetic. The New Tang History’s assessment of Jiǎ Dǎo, for example, refers explicitly to kǔyín as part of his legacy.\(^\text{35}\) His very person is defined by this term, as attested by some of the poems memorializing him. Zhāng Pín 張蠙 (jìnshì 895), one of the capital elites who relocated to the southwest with the fall of the Táng, writes in “Grieving Jiǎ Dǎo” 傷賈，“In life you were a kǔyín person in a glorious age, / At death you were an exiled vassal in Chángjiāng” 生為明代苦吟身,死作長江一逐臣.\(^\text{36}\) Poet-monk Kězhǐ 可止(860–934), a northeasterner like Jiǎ Dǎo who traveled all across the empire, elaborates along the same lines.

Weeping over Jiǎ Dǎo 哭賈島\(^\text{37}\)
Kězhǐ 可止

燕生松雪地 Born in Yān, a land of pines and snow,\(^\text{38}\) \(\text{dijH}\)
蜀死葬山根 Died in Shǔ, buried at the foot of a mountain. \(\text{kon}\)
詩僻降今古 Your eccentric poems descended from new and old, \(\text{kuX}\)
官卑誤子孫 Your lowly post harmed your offspring. \(\text{swon}\)
塚欄寒月色 Your tomb fences in the form of the cold moon, \(\text{srik}\)
人哭苦吟魂 People weep your kǔyín ghost. \(\text{hwon}\)
墓雨滴碑字 The rain on your tomb drips on the epitaph \(\text{dziH}\)
8 年年添蘚痕 And adds moss to your traces every year. \(\text{hon}\)

What makes Jiǎ Dǎo a paragon of kǔyín, at least as implied by Kězhǐ’s poem, is a combination of things. First, similar to Mèng Jiāo’s strand of kǔyín, Jiǎ Dǎo was considered a failure in his official career. He failed the examinations multiple times, and when he finally received an

\(^{35}\) Xīn Tángshū 176.5268.


\(^{37}\) QTS 825.9292.

\(^{38}\) Yān: roughly modern Běijīng.
official post, it was a minor one in the obscure Sichuān backwater of Chángjiāng (line 4). This fact of his “exile” is repeated in nearly all other writings on him, and became a major component of his legacy. Second, as a result of his failures, Jiǎ Dǎo struggled in poverty and obscurity, neglected even by later generations (lines 7–8). As we will see, this was part of Jiǎ Dǎo’s image that he himself cultivated, and it became strongly associated with the kūyín aesthetic. Third, and perhaps the root cause of it all, is the fact that Jiǎ Dǎo’s poems are “eccentric, iconoclastic” (pì 僻), literally “outlying” or “marginal.” The term pì implies not only that Jiǎ Dǎo’s poems differed from many of his contemporaries, but also they were aloof, not bound by prevailing custom. We will go into some detail about what this implies about the kūyín aesthetic later. For now, suffice to say that this eccentricity is rooted in Jiǎ Dǎo’s attention to the details of crafting parallel couplets.

Such an image of Jiǎ Dǎo is not merely a retrospective construct of his later admirers, although many other such examples could be provided. Jiǎ Dǎo, too, identified his very self with kūyín.

The Last Day of the Third Month, Sent to Judge Liú 三月晦日贈劉評事
Jiǎ Dǎo 賈島

三月正當三十日 In the third month, right on
the thirtieth day, nyit

2 風光別我苦吟身 In the breeze and sunlight, you part with
my kūyín person. syin

共君今夜不須睡 Together with you tonight, we need not sleep—
dzyweH

39 Later generations’ supposed neglect of Jiǎ Dǎo is undermined by the fact that over a dozen important poets of this period also complained of Jiǎ Dǎo’s obscurity.
40 See, e.g., Xuē Néng’s 薛能 (817?–880s) poem “At Jiālíng Station, Seeing One of Jiǎ Dǎo’s Old Inscriptions” 嘉陵驛見賈島舊題, which opens, “Master Jiǎ’s fate is lamentable! / The only man of Táng who understood poetry” 賈子命堪悲, 唐人獨解詩, and closes, “These forty characters at Jiālíng, / Every one of them is a gift from heaven” 嘉陵四十字, 一一是天資 (QTS 560.6499). Or also Lǐ Ying 李郢 (jìnshì 856), “Grieving Jiǎ Dǎo and Wūkē” 傷賈島無可, which describes how Jiǎ Dǎo was “never bestowed with favor in his life and became an exile” 一命未沾為逐客 (QTS 590.6853).
41 Qí Wēnbāng, Jiǎ Dǎo jì jiào zhù, 10.513–14; Lí Jiànkuān, Jiǎ Dǎo shī jì jiào zhù, 10.415–17; QTS 574.6687.
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4  未到曉鐘猶是春  It’s still spring before the coming of the morning bell.  tsyhwin

*Kūyín*, in this poem, describes Jiā Dào’s very being. It is not just a stage in his life, the discomforting time between preparing for the examinations and passing them. It is his entire life. Although Jiā Dào did take the examinations and failed soon after laicizing in 812, he rarely used the rhetoric of *kūyín* to talk about the exams. Rather, he effectively separated it from the exam narrative. Like Liú Dérén, Jiā Dào frequently complained of his poverty, but the cause is different. It is his commitment to poetry as an end in itself, not as a means to an end, that causes this suffering.

Jiā Dào as “pure poet” was part of his own self-presentation. He often described himself as living in poverty, neglecting everything but his own craft of poetry. In one poem, for example, he complains about the poverty he suffers in daily life.

**Morning Hunger 朝饑**

Jiā Dào 賈島

市中有樵山  There’s a mountain of firewood in the market  *srean*  A
此舍朝無煙  But no smoke at my hut in the morning.  *jen*  A
井底有甘泉  There’s a sweet spring at the bottom of the well,  *dzwjen*  A

4  釜中乃空然 But my cooking-pan is completely empty.  *nyen*  A
我要見白日 I’d like to see the white sun,  *nyit*  -
雪來塞青天 But the snow covers the blue heavens.44  *then*  A
坐聞西床琴 As I sit to make heard my *qín* on the western bench,  *gim*  -

8  凍折兩三弦 Two or three strings snap, frozen.  *hen*  A

饑莫詣他門 When hungry, don’t go to others’ gates—  *mwon*  B

42 On the date and circumstances of Jiā Dào’s laicization, see Bái Àipíng, “Jiā Dào wéisēng ji huánsú shíjiān dīdiān kǎo.”
43 Qí Wènbāng, *Jiā Dào ji jiàozhù*, 1.6–8; Lì Jiānkūn, *Jiā Dào shíjī jiàozhù*, 1.5–7; *QTS* 571.6618.
44 Following the version of this poem given in Yáo Xuán’s 姚鉉 (967–1020) Táng wéncui 唐文粹, I give sāi 塞 ("cover, obstruct") instead of Lí Jiānkūn’s hán 寒 ("cold, winter"). See Yáo Xuán, *Táng wéncui*, 18.28b.
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10 古人有拙言 The ancient man’s words were foolish.\(^{45}\) ngjon B

Written in the unregulated “old style” 古體 and loaded with sharp contrasts between desire and reality, the poem reads like a comic morality poem of the legendary Hánshān 寒山. His troubles stem from lack of money (lines 1–2), lack of tools (lines 3–4), and lack of favorable weather (lines 5–8). The impoverishment is brought into sharp relief by the poem’s formal abundance. The rhymes overwhelm, opening the poem with four straight rhyming lines—emphasizing his embrace of an aesthetic of eccentricity (pì). The final couplet, with its shift in tone and new rhyme, give it the impression of being a supplement, a bonus couplet beyond the usual eight lines of a short pentametric poem. Alluding to Táo Qiān’s 陶潛 (365?–427) “Begging for Food” 乞食, it contrasts the kindness visited on the ancient poet with the bitter neglect Jiǎ Dǎo receives.

Whereas Táo Qiān’s “foolish words” led to a friendship formed with a donor of food, Jiǎ Dǎo remains isolated in his pain. This poem presents one element of Jiǎ Dǎo’s kūyìn: kū as duhkha, suffering.

Another poem speaks more directly to this lack of recognition for Jiǎ Dǎo’s works, despite the energy he puts into his literary life.

Singing My Feelings 詠懷\(^{46}\)

Jiǎ Dǎo 賈島

縱把書看未省勤 I go around grabbing things to read, never sparing any effort;\(^ {47}\) gjín

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\(^{45}\) The saying referenced in the final couplet is from the opening of Táo Qiān’s 陶潛 (365?–427) “Begging for Food” 乞食 (Lǜ Qinli, Tāo Yuānnìng jì, 2.48):

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>飢來驅我去</td>
<td>When hunger came, it drove me out,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>不知竟何之</td>
<td>Not knowing where I’d end up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>行行至斯里</td>
<td>Walking, walking, I reached this village,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>叩門拙言辭</td>
<td>Knocking on a door, my words foolish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{46}\) Qī Wēnbāng, Jiǎ Dǎo jí jiàozhù, 10.487–88; Lǐ Jiǎnkūn, Jiǎ Dǎo shǐjì jiàozhù, 10.395–96; QTS 574.6684.
Intense isolation is described in couplet after couplet, underlined by a sense of failure. Most striking of all is that the poem lacks any “objective correlative” couplet—a description of nature which appears purely external but in fact reflects the poet’s mood. Instead, the speaker is present in nearly every line, acting as the lone figure cut off from any companionship. He states directly that he is in “constant poverty” (line 2), that he has “never accomplished anything” (line 3). The only exception is the final line, in which birds drill away at trees with their beaks. Here, the birds are figures for the poet: shaping, crafting the tree trunks into something which contains their indelible mark but is ignored by humanity. Like Jiǎ Dǎo, they labor in obscurity. Kūyín is craftsmanship unappreciated.

Jiǎ Dǎo fundamentally changed the meaning of kūyín by dissociating it from the examinations and tying it to the writing of poetry itself. The poverty, suffering, and failure in Jiǎ Dǎo’s life are presented not as an ironic contrast to his obsession with poetry, but as precisely the result of his commitment to poetry. This comes through in the way Jiǎ Dǎo lets his readers know

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47 It seems that this character should be kān 看 (MC: *khan, “care for, look after”) instead of kàn 看 (MC: *khanH, “look at, read”) to fit the meter, but the level-tone reading makes little sense. Perhaps the distinction of meanings between the two pronunciations was not strictly observed.

48 Middle Marchmount: Mt. Sōng 嵩山 (located in modern Hénnán province).
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that he has put an enormous amount of effort into his lines. One poem, for example, contains the following, seemingly unremarkable couplet:

獨行潭底影  Traveling alone: shadows at the bottom of a pool,
數息樹邊身  A few breaths: a person beside the trees.
—Jiǎ Dào 賈島, “Seeing off the Venerable Wúkě” 送無可上人49

To these lines is appended an annotation by Jiǎ Dào himself (zìzhù 自注):

二句三年得，一吟雙淚流。知音如不賞，歸臥故山丘。

These two lines were attained after three years. As soon as I intoned them, a pair of tears fell from my eyes. If the one who knows my tone does not appreciate them, I will go back to lie down in my old hills.

The claim to intensity (measured by time rather than physical breakdown) is used to prove the sincerity of the poet’s pursuit of aesthetic truth, with a recognition of his worthiness.50 One thinks of the stories of bodhisattvas pursuing enlightenment over countless eons of rebirth. The poet is the ascetic, willing to put aside material comforts in order to attain a long-term benefit.51 By re-orienting the kūyín rhetoric of passion toward poetry itself, and away from success in the examinations, Jiǎ Dào fundamentally wrote new ideals for the late ninth and tenth-century poets to strive after.

6.2.3 Suffering and Intensity: Kūyín after Jiǎ Dào

Kūyín, as we have already seen, covered a range of phenomena and approaches to poetry, and these referents shifted over the course of the late Táng and afterward. The Jiǎ Dào strain, which separated kūyín from the examination system, became especially widespread in the late

49 Qi Wěnbāng, Jiǎ Dào jí jiàozhù, 3.119–22; LI Jiànkūn, Jiǎ Dào shījī jiàozhù, 3.100–01; QTS 572.6633.
50 For more on kūyín poetry as a “return” on a temporal “investment,” see Owen, “Spending Time On Poetry.”
51 A spurious anecdote, which nonetheless captures the deeper truth (as a myth often does), tells us how, “at the end of the year, Jiǎ Dào would take out the poems he finished that year and make an offering of food and ale to them, saying: ‘I have strained my spirit. With these I restore it’” 賈島常以歲除取一年所得詩,祭以酒食曰：「勞吾精神，以是補之」. The story is preserved in the Yùnxiān zájì 雲仙雜記, which is attributed to the late Táng but likely dates to the mid-Sòng (quoted in Tángrén yìshì huìbiān 1:20.1114).
ninth and tenth centuries, in part due to the literati’s waning faith in political stability and, hence, in the examination system itself. 52 If getting a jinshi degree is not a sure path to success, and if talented poets are routinely failed due to corruption and factionalism, why bother at all with it? Thus, by the very end of the ninth century, the idea of poetry as an end in itself—rather than as a means to a successful career—became much more popular than it had been. 53

The common assumptions underlying the various late Táng uses of kūyín are best explained by looking to the meanings of the two characters kū 苦 and yín 吟. Kū most literally means “bitter.” As seen above, it usually refers to the experience of the poet—be that the process of composition and revision (kū as “painstaking” or “laborious”) or the dire circumstances into which devotion to his art has put him (kū as “duḥkha” or “suffering”). But it could also refer to the experience of the reader, struck by the overwhelming beauty of another’s work, a feeling so intense it borders on pain. 54 Yín refers to the vocalization of a text, be it one’s own or another’s. It can refer to oral composition, oral revision, or the oral recitation of a completed work. At the center of the combined term kūyín are two interrelated concepts: the intensity of one’s devotion to poetry, especially its details, and the resulting toll on the body of the poet.

The physical pain of kūyín, however, came from the intensity with which poets worked on their craft. Multiple poets claimed that the process of composing poems ruined their hair:

![Chap 6 Passions of the Poet Monk](image-url)

52 See Oliver Moore, Rituals of Recruitment, 72, on the declining faith in official schools, and p. 91, on widespread “injustice” in prefectural examinations in the late ninth century. See also Xu Lēijn, Wān Tāngh rěnshī xuǐtái yánjiū, 252–58, on general disappointment in the examination system after the Huáng Cháo Rebellion.

53 On this point, see Lī Dīngguāng, Tāngmō Wēidāi luànshí wénxué yánjiū, 78–87, 100–01; and Táo Qīngmèi, “Tāngmō shīgē gǎimǎn de xīnbiăn,” 215–16.

54 See, e.g., the story about Hē Zhīzhāng “sighing in appreciation and kūyín-ing” 嘆賞苦吟 when he read Lī Bāi’s “Song of Perching Crows” (Bēnshishi 3.17); or the story of Bāi Jùyì, upon encountering a fine poem, “shaking his head, kūyín-ing, and sighing in appreciation a good while” 摘頭苦吟，歎賞良久 (Lū Yǔxī, 刘禹锡, “Preface to Five Inscriptions at Jīnlíng” 金陵五題序, in Qū Tūiyuán, Liū Yǔxī jī jiānzhèng, 24.708; QTS 365.4117).
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—Fāng Gān 方干 (d. 885?), “Given to Yú Fú” 贈喻鳧

吟安一個字 When I’m done composing (yín) a single character,
捻断数茎鬚 I’ve plucked out several clumps of my beard.

—Lú Yánràng 盧延讓 (jinshi 900), “Kǔyín” 苦吟

苦吟身得雪 Due to kǔyín, my person is snow;
甘意鬓成霜 In pursuit of sweet meaning, my sidehairs become frost.

—Lǐ Pín 李頻, “Going Back after Passing the Exams” 及第後歸

Péi Yuè (jinshi 906), a repeated examination failure from the southwest at the turn of the tenth century, wrote on this hair theme at greater length.

Sent to Cáo Sōng 寄曹松

Péi Yuè 裴説

莫怪苦吟遲 Don’t think it strange that your kǔyín come slowly,
詩成鬢亦絲 Or that when a poem’s finished, your sidehairs are white threads.
鬢絲猶可染 Sidehair threads can be dyed,
4 詩病卻難醫 But poetic maladies are hard to treat.
山暝雲横處 The mountain’s dim where the clouds stretch out,
星沈月側時 And the stars sink when the moon angles down.
冥搜不可得 You search the depths but cannot attain it—
8 一句至公知 In a single line, the most impartial will recognize [you].

That the creation of a poem could result in such a physical toll rests on an implicit equation between suffering, intensity of devotion, and efficacy of achievement. The more one puts into a poem, the more one gets out of it. For this reason, one trades health for literary achievement.

While the breakdown of the body is cause for concern, it is not nearly as alarming as the possibility of making mistakes in a poem. Formal achievements are more important than one’s health.

55 QTS 648.7444.
56 QTS 715.8212.
57 QTS 587.6819.
58 QTS 720.8261.
59 Most impartial: chief examiner of the imperial examinations, named for the ideal he is supposed to embody.
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Péi Yuè’s poem moves between the Mèng Jiǎo and Jiǎ Dǎo strains of kǔyín. The bodily harm that composition and revision causes the speaker is placed front and center. The poet must invest his energy and lose something of his vitality in order to get a good poem at the end. Yet at the same time, hope is still held out that the “most impartial” 至公 (line 8)—that is, the one presiding over the examinations—would recognize the labor put into his verses. Perhaps, Péi Yuè seems to say, a good examiner will recognize all the effort that went into writing these poems. If even one line is understood, then the thinning, whitening hair will be worth it.60

Because of this relationship between the amount of energy invested into writing and the quality of its achievement, these later poets followed Jiǎ Dǎo in portraying their intense devotion. Fāng Gān 方干 (d. 885?), like many others writing at the end of the Táng, finds in his kǔyín a purpose that is quite distinct from success in an official career. However, it is not just his hair that is ruined by the effort he devotes to his poems, but his entire mind.

Given unto Governor Lù of Qiántāng County 贽錢塘縣路明府61
Fāng Gān 方干

志業不得力 Though I haven’t the strength to achieve my ambitions, lik
到今猶苦吟 I still kǔyín to this day. ngim
吟成五字句 When I orally (yín) compose a line of pentameter,62 kjuH
4 用破一生心 I must lay waste to a whole lifetime of thoughts. sim
世路屈聲遠 The melodies of the wronged travel far on this world’s roads; hjwonX
寒溪怨氣深 The vitality of the grieved is lodged deep in cold streams. syim
前賢多晚達 Most of the former worthies reached their goals late: dat
8 莫怕鬢霜侵 Don’t be afraid of the frost creeping into your temples. tshim

Fāng Gān opens with a self-deprecating comment, that he is still addicted to poetry despite not achieving anything with it. Yet such a humble remark begs the reader to note the injustice of it:

60 We can also see the increasing dominance of this sense of kǔyín in the popularity of the iconography of donkey-riding scholars in tenth-century landscape paintings. On this, see Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon,” esp. 57–60.
61 QTS 648.7444; Jiǎnjiè lù 8.9.
62 QTS gives the graphic variant yín 讳 for yín 吟.
the investment of Fāng Gān’s energy into poetry should bring him recognition. He has, after all, laid waste to an entire lifetime of thought (line 4). While the speaker still holds out hope for success some day (lines 7–8), it remains faint. He identifies, instead, with the host of worthy gentlemen who were wrongly ignored because of their unfortunate circumstances, whose ghosts haunt the landscape (lines 5–6). Though they were remembered by history, they were wronged during their own lifetimes. The composition of poetry described here is a protest against the system rather than an attempt to join it. It is a comfort in obscurity rather than a path to success.

Fāng Gān continues to compose his kūyín poems, even if he alone recognizes their merit.

This complaint about other people’s shallow judgment, and its implied demand for reconsideration, remained a theme in the poetry of this period. In the case of poor Péi Yuè (once again), the wish seems to have finally come true.

裴說應舉，只行五言詩一卷。至來年秋，復行舊卷。人有譏者，裴曰：「只此十九首苦吟，尚未有人見知，何暇別行卷哉！」咸謂知言。

About to take the examinations, Péi Yuè circulated only one scroll of his pentametric poetry. When autumn came, he recirculated his old scroll. People mocked him, to which Péi said, “These are nineteen kūyín poems. Since no one has yet understood them, why would I think about circulating another one?” Everyone said he understood language.63

This anecdote turns on three hinges. The first is that Péi Yuè sunk an enormous amount of effort into a mere nineteen poems and believed that they were so well-crafted that they alone could establish his reputation. As we have seen, kūyín is measured by the amount of effort put into composition. The second hinge is that the craft of the poems was subtle, only recognizable after close consideration. That is, the fruit of Péi Yuè’s labor is not noticeable by most readers at first glance, but requires either extraordinary perception or repeated readings. It is craftsmanship that conceals its true artifice. The third hinge is that once people did give his poems another look,

63 Qián Yì (968–1026), Nánbù xīnshū 7.8.
they agreed with Péi Yuè’s own judgment, that the poems indeed contained previously unrecognized depths to them. After all, the readers conclude that he truly “understands language.” Once Péi Yuè refers to his poems as *kūyín*, people understand that such effort merits more time spent on reading, and they suspect that there must be more to them than meets the eye. *Kūyín* is a label that encourages rereading.

Others used the term *kūyín* not just to demand a reconsideration of their poems in the face of failure or mockery, but to proclaim poetry writing to be the very purpose of life. Dù Xúnhè 杜荀鶴 (846–904), another member of the elite who failed the exams many times, portrays himself this way repeatedly. In the opening of one poem he proclaims: “My Way is in pentameter” 吾道在五字.⁶⁴ That is, the path that he sees himself as following, the principle that structures his life, is poetry. He elaborates on this theme in a poem on *kūyín*.

*Kūyín* 苦吟⁶⁵
Dù Xúnhè 杜荀鶴 (846–904)

| 世間何事好 | Within this world, what is the finest?          | xawH |
| 最好莫過詩 | Nothing is finer than poetry.                   | syi  |
| 一句我自得 | When I attain a line on my own,                 | tok  |
| 四方人已知 | Everyone already knows it the four realms over. | trje |
| 生應無輟日 | In life, we should have no days of rest,        | nyit |
| 死是不吟時 | For death is when we shall no longer intone.⁶⁶  | dzyi |
| 始擬歸山去 | I prepare to go back to the mountains,           | khjoH |
| 林泉道在茲 | The path to the woody spring is right here.      | tsi  |

In this poem, *kū* clearly means “intense devotion” rather than “suffering” or “bitter.” The first couplet states explicitly that the speaker regards poetry as the “finest” (*hǎo* 好) thing in the world.

⁶⁴ “Thinking of My Old Residence on Mt. Jiūhuá on an Autumn Day” 秋日懷九華舊居, in QTS 691.7941.
⁶⁵ *QTS* 691.7944–45.
⁶⁶ This line must be read as a simple “subject–verb–object” sentence, with the final three characters, *bùyín shí* 不吟時, read as a compound object (i.e., “Death is when [we] do not intone”). It should not be read as an existential phrase (“In death, there is no time for intoning”), since that would require *wú* 無 instead of *bù* 不 in the third position.
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Therefore, to get the most out of life, one must spend every possible moment writing (line 5).

Like his contemporary Cuī Tú 崔塗 (jìnshi 888), Dù Xúnhè seeks to “intone in the morning and intone at dusk” 朝吟復暮吟. Poetic practice has changed from a means to an end in itself, at least in Dù’s self-presentation. Death is to be loathed not because it is an evil, but because it provides no more opportunities for creating and reciting poetry (line 6). Poetry is his very raison d’être. It is the meaning of his life.

One poet contradicted Dù Xúnhè and kept up his kǔyín activities even after death. A mid-ninth century anecdote describes how a man named Zǔ Jià, wandering on Mt. Shāng after he failed the examinations, once stopped in an empty Buddhist temple and had a strange encounter with a poet’s ghost.

秋月甚明，伡獨飄月，來去而行。忽有一人，自寺殿後出，揖伡共坐，語笑說經史，時時自吟。伡烹茶待之。「此人獨吟不已。」又云：「夫人為詩，述懷詆物。若不精不切，即不能動人。今夕偶相遇，後會難期。」遂朗吟云：「家住驛北路，百里無四鄰。往來不相問，寂寂山家春。」又吟：「南岡夜蕭蕭，青松與白楊。家人應有夢，遠客已無腸。」又吟：「白草寒路裏，亂山明月中。是夕苦吟罷，寒燭與君同。」詩訖，再三吟之。夜久，遂揖而退。至明日，問鄰人，云：「此前後數里，並無人居。但有書生客死者，葬在佛殿後南岡上。」伡度其詩，乃知是鬼，為文弔之而去。

The autumn moon was very bright, so [Zǔ] Jià went out alone to appreciate it. Suddenly, a man emerged from behind the temple. He clasped his hands to greet Jià and sat with him, telling jokes, discussing the classics and histories, and spontaneously intoning from time to time. Jià boiled some tea to offer him, [saying], “This guy never stops intoning when alone.” He also said, “Whenever one makes poems he must describe his feelings and criticize things. If [the poems] are not sincere or fitting, they won’t be able to move anyone. Tonight we met by chance. It will be hard to find a time to meet in the future.” Then [the visitor] composed a few pieces to describe his feelings. He intoned loudly:

My home is on the road north of the station,
I have no neighbors for a hundred miles.
Those who come and go don’t ask [after me],
Silent, silent is the spring of my mountain home.

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The night is serene on the southern ridges,
With its green pines and white poplars.
My family should be sleeping,
And my guests from afar have no feelings.

Again he intoned:
White plants in the cold path,
Uneven hills within the bright moon.
Tonight as my küyín ends,
I am a cold torch, just like you.

Upon finishing his poems, he repeated them over and over until deep into the night, when he clasped his hands and retreated. The next day, [Jià] asked someone nearby [about this], who said, “There’s no one living around here for a thousand miles. There was only a traveling scholar who died and was buried on the southern ridges behind the Buddhist temple.” Jià went through his poems and this time understood it was a ghost [he had encountered]. He left after writing a text mourning him.68

The verses in this anecdote are more like doggerel riddles than real poems,69 providing Zǔ Jià with clues about the ghost’s true identity. Pines and poplars, which are traditionally planted on burial mounds, line his grounds (poem II, line 2). His home is “silent” (I.4) and “serene” (II.1). His family sleeps and his visitors have no feelings (wúcháng 無腸)—a phrase that literally means they “lack innards” (II.3–4). Nevertheless, he goes on repeating his küyín (III.3) until nearly the dawn, presumably because, as a scholar, he routinely composed and recited poetry on social occasions. He “spontaneously” intoned texts (presumably poetry) even before Zǔ Jià admonished him to recite sincere verses. Poetry was his obsession in life, and continued to be his obsession in death.

Such an intense passion for poetry, beyond its use in the examination system, meant an attention to detail. As we saw with Péi Yuè, careless reading of a poem was one consideration, but the tenth-century poet Liú Shāoyǔ 劉昭禹 saw careless composition to be more consequential.

68 Tàipíng guǎngjì 344.2729. The Tàipíng guǎngjì gives as its source the Huìchāng jiéyǐ lù 會昌解頤錄 [Record of smile-breakers from the Huìchāng era (841–846)] by Bāo Xǔ 包嘯.
69 The verses show no attempt at tonal regulation, lack a rhyme on the first line, and employ only commonly used characters and simple grammar.
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[Liú Shāoyǔ] would often discuss poetry with people and say, “A pentametric poem is like forty worthy men. If you misplace one character, you’re a butcher. Seeking lines is like digging up a jade coffer: it has a base and a cover, but for the best discovery one must grab the jewels [inside].”

Poetry is something external. Lines are treasures to be extracted from jade boxes, things “sought” (mì 觀) and—as mentioned in other places—“attained” (dé 得). They are not invented by the poet but exist in the world on their own. Each character in a poem, moreover, is a minor sage and should be afforded proper respect. Even beyond the normal discourse of poetics, this implies an almost mystical approach to language, in which each character, in and of itself, has power beyond its meaning in the poem. As with dhāraṇī and other kinds of spells, each syllable contains a realm of significance.

The couplet is the basic unit of a regulated poem (lǜshī 律詩), and attention to a poem’s details necessarily means attention to couplets. As early as 836, Lǐ Shāngyìn 李商隱 (812?–858) described how Lǐ Hè 李賀 (790–816) would write couplets, throw them in a bag, then sort through them at the end of the day. The entire genre of poetry manuals (shīgé 詩格) is based on the premise that attention is best focused at the level of the couplet: these manuals are mostly devoted to classifying and analyzing exemplary couplets. This focus on couplets became even

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70 Ruăn Yuè, Shǐhuà zōngguī, 10.6. Compare the similar passage in Huáng Chè, Gǒngxì shǐhuà 7.6.
71 The phrase mìjù 見句 (“seeking lines”) appears thirteen times in QTS, all but one of which are from the ninth and tenth centuries. Déjù 得句 (“attaining lines”) appears twenty-nine times in QTS, all of which are from the ninth and tenth centuries. Qiújù 求句 (“look for lines”) appears only once in QTS, in a poem by Guànxiū. These are not exhaustive searches (which would include other formulations) but are meant to metonymically suggest the larger trends of how poets’ relationship to their own work changed.
72 See, e.g., Van Gulik, Siddham, 72, 78–79.
73 See Lǐ Shāngyìn’s “Little Biography of Lǐ Hè” 李賀小傳 (QTW 780.8149). For a translation and discussion, see Owen, The Late Tang, 160–63.
more pronounced in the late ninth and tenth centuries. Ōuyáng Xiū, for example, describes the work of Zhōu Pǔ 周朴, a poet and friend of Guànxiū who was executed when he refused to serve the rebel Huáng Cháo in 879, in precisely these terms:

如周朴者，構思尤艱，每有所得，必極其雕琢。故時人稱朴詩「月鍛季煉，未及成篇，已播人口」。

Zhōu Pǔ, for example, took great pains in putting together his thoughts. Every time he attained [a couplet] it necessarily exhausted his craftsmanship. In this way, contemporaries said that Pǔ’s poetry was “forged over months and smelted over seasons: before the whole poem was finished, they’d already be spread by word of mouth.”

The art of the couplet is separated from the art of the poem. Readers and writers seem to have been more interested in collecting striking or well-crafted couplets than in reading through entire poems or sequences of poems. This is because the parallel couplet is precisely where the most effort and the most artistry are on display. Zhōu Pǔ, each time he composes a couplet, “chisels and polishes” (diāozhuō 雕琢) until he has reached the very limit of his abilities. Like the miniature, the aesthetic of the couplet is one of precision and balance, thereby requiring an especially keen attention to detail.

The crafting of couplets led to poets’ paying the utmost care to all the details of a poem. This included the sonic qualities of a poem, especially its tonal patterns.

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74 On this point, see Lǐ Dìngguǎng, Tángmò Wǔdài luànshì wénxué yánjū, 103–04.
75 According to the Xīn Tāngshū biography of Huáng Cháo, when the rebel found Zhōu Pǔ in reclusion, “he asked him, ‘Are you able to follow me?’ [Zhōu Pǔ] replied by saying: ‘I will not even serve the Son of Heaven; how could I follow a bandit?’ Cháo was enraged by this, so he decapitated Pǔ” 諸子百家語曰：「能從我乎？」答曰：「我尚不仕天子，安能從賊？」衆怒斬朴 (Xīn Tāngshū 225.6454; trans. Levy, Biography of Huang Ch’ao, 17). For more on Zhōu Pǔ, see Fù Xuánkōng, Tāng cāizhū huà, 4.9.103–12.
76 Ōuyáng Xiū, Lìyì shìhuà, 1.5. See the similar evaluation in the preface to Zhōu Pǔ’s works in Lín Sōng’s 林嵩 “Preface to the Collected Poetry of Zhōu Pǔ” 周朴詩集序: “The master [Zhōu Pǔ] was deliberate in his thinking. In a whole month he would attain a single couplet or a single line, but it would always be startling. Before he had finished the entire work, it would already be on people’s mouths” 先生為詩思遲，盈月方得一聯一句，得必驚人。未暇全篇，已布人口 (QTW 829.8742).
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of the poet-monk Shàngyán 尚頣, wrote on this topic in his “Preface to ‘Breaking off a Willow Branch, Ten Poems’” 折楊柳十首序:

能專於詩律。不愛隨人，搜難抉新，誓脫常態。雖欲弗伐，知音其舍諸。

I, Xuē Néng, concentrate solely on poetic regulations. Not fond of following others, I seek out the difficult and select the new, I vow to break free of normal appearances. Although I hope not to brag, won’t those who understand my tone pardon it?77

The “poetic regulations” Xuē Néng refers to encompass many rules, chief of which is tonal prosody. In the post Jiǎ Dǎo period, tonal patterning became a highly refined art, often associated with “eccentric” (pì 僖), “pure” (qīng 清), or “painstaking” (kǔ 苦) verse. Although Xuē Néng portrays himself as an outlier, in fact he is following larger trends of the period. Like those dozens of poets who claimed that no one paid attention to Jiǎ Dǎo, Xuē Néng is unaware of how widely his attitude will be shared in the late ninth and tenth centuries. It was this aspect of kūyín, its attention to the details of tonal patterning, that Guànxiū and Qíjǐ brought to the fore.

6.3 Kūyín and Tonal Patterning in Guànxiū and Qíjǐ

6.3.1 Poet-Monks and Kūyín

The poet-monks of the late Táng and Five Dynasties were just as enthralled with the kūyín aesthetic as anyone else. Given how well connected they were with the literati, it is no surprise to find them drawing upon the Mèng Jiāo strand of kūyín when writing poems of encouragement to examination candidates.78 But the Jiǎ Dǎo strand was more attractive, for it proffered ideals similar to Buddhist monasticism: living in poverty and austerity, toiling away at

77 QTS 561.6518.
78 See, e.g., Guànxiū’s “Seeing off a Friend to Lingwài” 送友人之嶺外 (Hú Dàjùn 13.627–28; QTS 831.9375) and “Seeing off Liú Tì to His Appointment at Mǐn” 送劉逖赴閩辟 (Hú Dàjùn 12.588–89; QTS 831.9370); Shàngyán’s “Seeing off ‘Sure to Succeed’ Liú” 送劉必先 (QTS 848.9600); Qíjǐ’s “Seeing off Scholar Zhū to Mǐn” 送朱秀才歸閩 (Wáng Xiùlín 6.327; Pān Dìngwǔ 6.338–39; QTS 843.9533); and Mùyōu’s 慕幽 (mid-tenth cent.) “A Response Matching Something Sent by a Friend” 酬和友人見寄 (QTS 850.9624–25).
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a self-cultivation practice, and sacrificing one’s body out of intense devotion for a text.79 The

_Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith_, a text that Guànxiū studied and preached on for three years, also

advocates a practice of zeal similar in kind to that expected in _kūyín_ discourse.80 So did the

_Treatise on the Essentials of Guarding the Mind_ 供心要論, a set of practical instructions on

meditation attributed to Hóngrén 弘忍, in which the patriarch says:

努力努力。今雖無用，共作當來之因。莫使三世虛度，枉喪功夫。《經》云：「常處地獄，如遊園觀。在餘無惡道，如己舍宅。」我等眾生今現如此，不覺不知，驚怖殺人，了無出心。奇哉。

Make effort! Make effort! Although it may seem futile now, [your present efforts]

constitute the causes for your future [enlightenment]. Do not let time pass in vain while

only wasting energy. The sūtra says: “[Foolish sentient beings] will reside forever in hell

as if pleasant relaxing in a garden. There are no modes of existence worse than their

present state.” We sentient beings fit this description. Having no idea how horribly

terrifying [this world really] is, we never have the intention of leaving! How awful!81

The exertion of effort, fighting against deluded complacency, becomes here the basis of

salvation.82 It is through striving that one achieves enlightenment. Passion is required. In the

text

easy to see how passion for poetry

bleeds into the territory of religion. Likewise, the attention to detail espoused in the _kūyín_


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79 On Chinese Buddhist ascetic ideals, see Kieschnick, _The Eminent Monk_, 16–50.

80 See The Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith (T no. 1666, 32:582a; trans. Hakeda, _The Awakening of Faith_, 90):

所謂於諸善事心不懈退，立志堅強遠離怯弱。當念過去久遠已來，虛受一切身心大苦無有利益。是故應勤修諸功德……

是故應當勇猛精勤，晝夜六時禮拜諸佛，誠心懺悔勸請隨喜迴向菩提。常不休廢，得免諸障善根增長故。

[The monk] should not be sluggish in doing good, he should be firm in his resolution, and he should purge himself of cowardice. He should remember that from the far distant past he has been tormented in vain by all of the great sufferings of body and mind. Because of this he should diligently practice various

meritorious acts, benefiting himself and others, and liberate himself quickly from suffering… He should, therefore, be courageous and zealous, and at the six four-hour intervals of the day and night should pay homage to the buddhas, repent with sincere heart, beseech the buddhas [for their guidance], rejoice in the

happiness of others, and direct all the merits [thus acquired] to the attainment of enlightenment. If he never abandons these practices, he will be able to avoid the various hindrances as his capacity for goodness

increases.

81 Chinese text is based on the critical edition compiled from seven Dūnhuáng manuscripts, as well as a few other

sources, by John McRae in _The Northern School_. This passage appears in the page labeled 八 (eight) in the back of

the book. The translation is also McRae’s, in _The Northern School_, 126–27.

82 As many studies have shown, this emphasis on passion and effort should not be read as belonging to a “gradual

enlightenment” theory distinct from a “sudden enlightenment” theory. The very dichotomy is false. Most teachers

would have emphasized that the two are complementary, not opposed.
aesthetic—like its precursor Jiǎorán 皎然—is reminiscent of Mǎzū Dàoyī’s 马祖道一 (709–788) notion of insight through attention to detail. But above all, poet-monks like Guànxiū and Qījǐ portray themselves as having a passion for the art itself.

Guànxiū’s writings on kǔyín share many themes with his contemporaries’. He often describes poetic composition as kǔ: hard, bitter, painstaking. As one poem has it, “Endless is the bitterness (kǔ) of seeking lines” 無端求句苦. Elsewhere, he writes that “In writing, one should exhaust one’s energy” 文章應力竭. Discussing the experience of his poetic practice, he says, “My mind labors bitterly (kǔ), but the flavor’s not bitter” 心苦味不苦, that is, his mind works hard but he becomes so absorbed in the process of composition that it does not feel laborious to him. Poetry, rather, is his life’s work. As he directly states in the opening of another poem, “What really is my purpose? / Lau-lau—I love only intoning” 我竟胡為者，嘮嘮但愛吟.

When he discusses the physical and spiritual toll of poetic composition on the poet, as well as the importance of individual lines, he sounds similar to Péi Yuè, Zhōu Pǔ, Dù Xúnhè, and others.

84 “Autumn Gazing, Sent to Commissioned Lord Wáng” 秋望寄王使君 (Hú Dājùn 15.710–11; QTS 832.9387–88). “Commissioned Lord Wáng” refers to Wáng Zào 王慥, one of Guànxiū’s frequent addressees and magistrate of his hometown of Wúzhōu 婺州 from 878 to 880.
85 “On Hearing that Supernumerary Lǐ Pín Died” 闻李頻员外卒 (Hú Dājùn, 12.603–04; QTS 831.9372). Although Guànxiū is ostensibly describing Lǐ Pín’s practice, it is clear that they agree on this view of literature.
86 “On a Winter’s Night, Sent to Executive Assistant Lú: 2 of 2” 夜寒寄盧給事二首 (其二) (Hú Dājùn 12.569–71; QTS 831.9367).
87 “Written Lakeside” 湖上作 (Hú Dājùn 15.731; QTS 832.9391).
88 It is important to note that Guànxiū and Qījǐ were not the only poet-monks who embodied this ideal. Guīrén 归仁, a relatively unknown poet-monk of the late ninth/early tenth century, also writes in a poem how “Everyday I suffer for poetry” 日日為詩苦 and “If I’m satisfied with a single couplet, / I forget all my ten thousand worries” 一聯如得意，萬事總忘憂 (“Diverting Myself” 自遣, in QTS 825.9293). My focus on Guànxiū and Qījǐ in the following paragraphs is due to their large extant literary collections.
89 Hú Dājùn 22.968–69; QTS 836.9423.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

河薄星疏雪月孤

The River barely visible, its stars few, the snowy moon alone;\(^{90}\)

松枝清氣入肌膚

The pine branches and pure air enter my fleshy skin.

因知好句勝金玉

And so I know that good lines are better than gold and jade:

心極神勞特地無

Mind exhausted and spirit toiling, and suddenly they’re gone.\(^{91}\)

Guànxiū here presents the poet as a shaman of nature: beneath luminous heavenly bodies, the trees and atmosphere enter his body (line 2). The imagery is concrete, physical: the poet inhales the landscape and exhales it into his work. The result is a poem more valuable than the most precious jewels (line 3). Then, all of the sudden, wearied from the toil, the poem has left his body (line 4). Guànxiū is describing the process of composition. External things enter the body of the poet, who then applies his own physical and mental energy into turning them into lines of verse, and finally, after much exhaustion, releases them to the world. But it is only because he has labored so intensely that he has attained such valuable lines. As with Jiǎ Dáo’s claim to have spent several years on a single couplet, the effort put in to writing correlates with the worth of the lines that come out of it.

Elsewhere, Guànxiū more explicitly posits his kūyīn ideal as a continuation of earlier masters. In this case, he sees himself as laboring for the sake of Jiǎ Dáo and Liú Dérén.\(^{92}\)

Reading the Poetry Collections of Liú Dérén and Jiǎ Dáo: 2 of 2 讀劉得仁賈島集二首其二

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\(^{90}\) The River: the Heavenly Hán River, i.e., the Milky Way.

\(^{91}\) Hú Dàjùn wants to interpret tèdì 特地 (a rather colloquial word in the late Táng) as “especially,” though I find the meaning of “suddenly” more plausible here. I am also apt to read wú 無 as a full verb (“lack”), meaning that one exerts a great amount of labor in order to “grasp” a poem, only to have it leave if one is not quick to put it into a poem. One could also understand wú as the marker of a rhetorical question (“…no?” or “isn’t…?”), in which case we would render the final three characters as “are they (the couplets) not extraordinary?”

\(^{92}\) Beyond Jiǎ Dáo and Liú Dérén, Guànxiū is quite taken by the idea that previous poets strained themselves with their hard (kū) thought. For example, he describes Miù Dúyī 謬獨一, a contemporary mentioned several times by Guànxiū but not otherwise known, by saying, “His thinking is hard (kū) like mine” 思還如我苦 (“Thinking of Miù Dúyī” 懷謬獨一, in Hú Dàjùn 14.668–69; \textit{QTS} 832.9382).

\(^{93}\) Hú Dàjùn 7.368–71; \textit{QTS} 829.9340. The first of these two poems displays hyper-regulated tonal prosody but is otherwise extraneous to the point I am making here.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

Guànxiū 貫休

役思曾衝尹 Laboring in thought, you once bumped into the governor.\footnote{This refers to a well-known anecdote about Jiǎ Dào, in which Jiǎ is so absorbed in his choice of words for a couplet (“pushing” 推 or “knocking on” 敲 a door) that he wanders oblivious through the streets of the capital and runs into the metropolitan governor Hán Yù, who finally tells him to pick “knock.” For the original anecdote, see Hé Guāngyuán, Jiànjìè lù 鑒誡錄 8.6; for a translation and discussion, see Owen, The Late Tang, 97–98.}
ywinX

多言阻國親 Often you spoke of blocking closeness with the state.\footnote{This line refers to an anecdote related to Liú Dérén, in which Liú, despondent after failing the examinations for twenty years, decided to hide away in the mountains. When word got out, an imperial scion sent a thousand chariots to find him. None were successful in their search. Cf. Táng cáizǐ zhuàn jiàojiàn, 3:6.184–85.}
tshin

桂枝何所直 How can one put a price to an osmanthus branch?\footnote{Osmanthus branch: symbol of success in the examinations. This line is meant to embody Liú Dérén’s attitude toward his own craft. This is especially clear because the next, parallel line refers to Jiǎ Dào’s self-presentation of his poverty.}
drik

From lowly alleys, you never rose above poverty.\footnote{This line refers to Liú Dérén’s difficulty in finding a government job due to his lack of connections with the imperial court. “Turning snow into boiling water” 湯雪 had been a metaphor for the difficulty of overcoming obstacles since the fourth century at the latest (cf. Hòu Hán shū, 711.2302–03: “Dissolving strongholds is harder than turning snow into boiling water” 消堅甚於湯雪).}
bin

馬病難湯雪 With a sick horse, it’s hard to turn snow into boiling water.\footnote{With a sick horse, it’s hard to turn snow into boiling water.}
sjet

門荒劣有人 When gates have been deserted, few are the people there.\footnote{With gates have been deserted, few are the people there.}
nyin

伊余吟亦苦 Mine own chanting, too, is bitter:

kuhX

為爾一眉嚬 I knit my brows for you.
bjin

As with most poems about two people, this one begins by alternating between its two topics, with line 1 about Jiǎ Dào and line 2 about Liú Dérén. These are allusions to anecdotes about the two. In each case, the stories tell us how complete absorption in craft paradoxically leads to political power: Jiǎ Dào once bumped into Hán Yù while contemplating the best word for a line of poetry, leading to Hán’s patronage of Jiǎ; and Liú’s reclusion made him seem so authentically committed to purity that a prince once devoted enormous state resources to finding him. The middle couplets contrast this with the poverty and loneliness characteristic of the kǔyín poet, pairing concrete imagery (osmanthus branch, boiling water on snow) with more general abstractions (poverty, “few are the people”). The final couplet shifts its linguistic approach, using...
first- and second-person pronouns instead of implying them. In doing so, the speaker is stating his connection to the poets as directly as possible. Guànxiū can best honor their legacies by getting down to work and writing with the same dedication.

Against the increasingly common kūyín ideal at the turn of the tenth century, Qǐjǐ wrote his own response poem on “Cherishing Intoning” (ài yín 愛吟). While Qǐjǐ himself was as committed as anyone to the kūyín aesthetic, one can imagine him writing this poem in order to rethink the dying metaphor, or perhaps to put a little non-dualism into practice.

Cherishing Intoning 愛吟
Qǐjǐ 齊己

正堪凝思掩禪扃 Will I truly be able to fix my thoughts and shut the gate to meditation? kweng

又被詩魔惱竺卿 This Indic adherent is once again vexed by the poetry demon. khjaeng

偶憑窗扉從落照 Leaning for a moment against the shutters, tsyewH I follow the falling light;

4 不眠風雪到殘更 Unable to sleep, gusts of snow kaeng continue until the last watch.

皎然未必迷前習 Jiǎorán need not have been zip deluded by his earlier tendencies;

98 In the Táng, the only meaning of yīyú 伊余 is “I, me” (see Hàn yǔ dà cidìăn, 1:1217). A careful examination of all of its 48 appearances in QTS and 2 appearances in QTW confirms that this is indeed the case.

99 Writing with the same dedication apparently meant writing in the same style of super-regulated verse as Jiǎ Dào and others, one which uses tonal parallelism for every character in each couplet. The tonal pattern of this poem contains only one non-parallel part, character 1 of lines 3–4:

役思曾衝尹 ● ● ○ ○ ○
多言阻國親 ○ ○ ● ● ○

桂枝何所直 ○ ○ ● ● ●
4 陋巷不勝貧 ● ● ● ○ ○

馬病難湯雪 ● ● ○ ○ ○
門荒劣有人 ○ ○ ● ● ○

伊余吟亦苦 ○ ○ ○ ● ●
8 為爾一眉嚬 ● ● ● ○ ○

This kind of super-regulated verse has not been described in any literary studies that I have seen, but is certainly real. See the discussion of Qǐjǐ’s “poems on objects” below.


101 Indic adherent: Buddhist monk.
Zhī Dùn would’ve been better off had he not been aware of his future lives. Their writings, passed down, have met an essential mirror.

Who ought to understand this feeling of idle singing.

Poetry here is seen not as an investment, a craft which requires ultimate devotion, but rather as a distraction. It is an outside force, made manifest as the “poetry demon”—a metaphor comparing the desire to write poetry to the demon Māra who attempted to break Śākyamuni’s concentration under the Bodhi tree, a metaphor which first gained currency in the mid Táng.

The use of “poetry demon” is surprisingly precise here. Qíjī’s desire to write poetry interrupts his attempts at meditation; thus, Māra succeeds here where he failed with the Buddha. The poet’s gaze traces the last lights of dusk as they reach out from the horizon, his mind is filled with thoughts of past poet-monks, keeping him from sleep. He cannot focus. The poem is not his life’s purpose, but the distraction from the tasks of his everyday life—meditating, sleeping. This everyday life is described as one of “idleness” (xián), i.e., not engaged in the business of serving the state. In doing so, Qíjī adopts the terms of mainstream political discourse, not the terms of the poetic outsider. He is just a lazy writer after all.

But the consequence of this rhetorical move is that Qíjī thereby justifies his own idleness. He is unproductive in his normal affairs not because he is simply lazy, but because he has been attacked by an outside force. His desire to write poetry is not self-motivated love of fame; it is

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102 Essential mirror: one with great discernment. In this case, Qíjī is referring to himself as one who understands Jiǎorán and Zhī Dùn.
103 The earliest uses of the term “poetry demon” seem to be by Liú Yǔxī (772–842) and Bái Jūyì (772–846). Less commonly, this term is used to describe those who do not understand the hardships of poetry. As Bái Jūyì writes in a letter to Yuán Zhēn in 815: “Those who understand me I take to be poetry transcendentals, and those who don’t understand me I take to be poetry demons. Why? Straining mind and spirit, laboring in sound and breath, from morning until night—if one does not understand for himself such pain, what could it be besides a demon?” 知我者以為詩仙，不知我者以為詩魔。何則？勞心靈，役聲氣，連朝接夕，不自知其苦，非魔而何 (“Letter to Yuan the Ninth” 與元九書, in Zhū Jīnchéng, Bái Jūyì jì jiānjìào 45.2795; QTW 675.6892a). On the trope of the “poetry demon” more generally, see Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry,” 96–102.
the result of a haunting. He cannot control it. This portrayal of poetry is similar to what we saw in Liú Shāoyǔ and others who describe lines as things that are “sought” and “attained”: poetry is external, and the poet, whether “affectionate” (ài) or “painsstaking” (kǔ) in his pursuit of it, is at the mercy of larger forces.

Nevertheless, when Qǐjǐ writes about the composition of poetry, he normally adopts the common terms of post-Huáng Cháo poetics and stresses the kind of craftsmanship and intensity associated with kūyín. In a eulogistic poem written upon Guànxiū’s death, he praises the older monk for precisely this quality.

吾師詩匠者 My master is a craftsman of poetry,
真個碧雲流 Who truly flows [like] a cloud in the sapphire. 104

— Qǐjǐ, “Hearing that Guànxiū Parted from this World” 闻貫休下世 105

The term used here for craftsman, jiàng 匠, literally means “carpenter” and implies that the poet brings to language the same kind of attention to shaping linguistic details as a carpenter does to wood. Writing is a specific kind of labor, the kind of painstaking crafting and polishing performed by an artisan. Elsewhere, Qǐjǐ stresses the intense devotion and physical breakdown of the kūyín ideal.

Sending Thoughts of Sēngdá, the Old Meditator of Jiāngxī 寄懷江西僧達禪翁 106
Qǐjǐ 齊己

長憶舊山日 Often I recall those days on our old mountain, nyit

104 Sapphire: the sky. Pān Dìngwǔ suggests that this may be an oblique way of placing Guànxiū in the tradition of Huìxiū 惠休, since a couplet in Jiāng Yān’s 江淹 (444–505) “Imitation of the Venerable Huìxiū’s ‘Lament on Parting’” 擬休上人別怨 mentions “clouds in the sapphire”: “As the sun sets, merging with the clouds in the sapphire, / The fine man has not yet come” 日暮碧雲合，佳人殊未來 (Wénxuǎn 31.1480). I find this allusion doubtful. The phrase “sapphire clouds” became a standard phrase by the Táng, appearing 206 times throughout QTS, rarely with this referent intended.

105 Wáng Xiùlín 2.94–96; Pān Dìngwǔ 2.102–03; QTS 839.9464–65.

106 Wáng Xiùlín 2.113–14; Pān Dìngwǔ 2.122–23; QTS 839.9469–70.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

與君同聚沙  When we made sand stūpas together.107  srae
未能精貝葉  Having not yet comprehended patra-leaves,108  yep
便學詠楊花  You learned to sing of willow down.  xwae
苦甚傷心骨  You toiled (kū) until your mind and bones ached  kwot
清還切齒牙  For purity that chatters teeth.  ngae
何妨繼餘習  What’s stopping you from continuing this habit?  zip
前世是詩家  You were of the poets in a previous era.  kae

Poetry composition is not just a physically and mentally exhausting activity (line 5), but also a commitment over multiple lifetimes. As the final couplet implies, Sēngdá has made a habit of it in his previous incarnations and shows no sign of stopping now. The poet is like a bodhisattva, spending multiple lifetimes, perhaps entire kalpas, preparing for his goal. Instead of enlightenment, the result is verse so pure that it “chatters teeth” (line 6)—a playful reversal of usual tropes of kūyīn’s physical consequences. Instead of the poem affecting the poet’s body, it brings about a reaction in the reader’s body. Though the reference to previous lifetimes is

107 Made sand stūpas: jūshā 聚沙 (literally “gather sand”) is short for jūshā chéngtǎ 聚沙成塔, “gather sand to make stūpas.” This refers to a children’s game (similar to modern children’s sandcastle building) which nevertheless produces merit for the children. The locus classicus is the second chapter of the Lotus Sūtra 妙法蓮華經:

108 Patra-leaves: the material on which South Asian texts were commonly written. Here it refers to Buddhist scriptures.

certainly playful, the very possibility its deployment reveals that poetry required the same level of effort and commitment as the monastic life.

The poet-monks Guànxiū and Qíjǐ frequently drew on kùyín discourse, finding in it a match for many aspects of monastic ideals. The glorification of poverty and physical suffering was just the most conspicuous of these. As we have also seen, kùyín implies a direct correlation between energy invested and quality of poem produced. This kind of correlation is similar to the law of cause and effect (“karma”) so prominent in Buddhism, in which deeds of compassion and devotion lead to merit, while wicked deeds lead to rebirth in evil realms. By this logic, the mental and physical energy invested in poetry can be understood as a meritorious act within a different discursive system. One venerates kùyín masters like Jiǎ Dǎo and Liú Dérén instead of Buddhas. One intones poems instead of scriptures or spells. The structure of the actions are the same; only the content is different. Both systems require complete devotion to their practice.

6.3.2 Qíjǐ’s Tonal Experiments

kùyín stresses technical mastery attained through great effort. The commitment to craft, the endless “attainment” of couplets, the balancing of lines in parallel—all of these mean that there is an incredible attention to detail among adopters of the kùyín aesthetic. Unceasing practice with a single aesthetic form (in this case, the parallel couplet of regulated verse) leads to great facility within that form and thus encourages experimentation. When one is comfortable with the rules, it makes stretching those rules easier. So kùyín and its relentless emphasis on precision in fact helped lead to the boundary-pushing prosodic devices of poet-monks like Guànxiū and Qíjǐ.

As is well known, Táng regulated verse required that the tonal class of certain characters had to alternate in prescribed patterns. In a line of pentameter, the second and fourth characters
should not be the same tone, and in a line of heptameter, the tones of the second, fourth, and sixth characters had to alternate. Additionally, rhyme words should be level tones (平声 píngshēng), non-rhyme ending words should be oblique tones (仄声 zèshēng), and the regulated tones of the first line of a couplet must be inverted in the second line of that couplet. The basicquatrain of regulated verse can be diagrammed as follows, using filled circles for oblique tones, open circles for level tones, and dashes for unregulated positions:

**Pentameter**

- ● - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○
- ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○
- ● - ○ - ● - ○ - ○
- ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○

**Heptameter**

- ● - ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○
- ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○
- ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○
- ● - ○ - ● - ○ - ○ - ○ - ○

While these rules may seem technical and a bit dry to the Western scholar, it is absolutely essential to keep them in mind when interpreting Táng poetry. They make up the underlying structure of the vast majority of verse written after the seventh century, and were at the forefront of any poet’s mind as he wrote, especially if he was writing regulated verse. Attempting to read Táng poetry without understanding tonal prosody is like trying to read Alexander Pope without knowing what an iamb is—one’s appreciation will forever remain shallow. The poet’s craft completely depends upon adherence to and departure from these rules, and they fundamentally shape a poem’s syntax, diction, and rhythm.

Poetry manuals from the Táng shed light on all the choices a poet would have had to make when writing a poem. Things like tonal “mistakes,” which many critics have assumed to be the result of a poet’s ignorance, reveal themselves to be conscious literary techniques. One
poetry manual, Master Greasepot’s Poetry Standards (Zhígū̀zǐ shīgē 炙轂子詩格) by Wáng Rui 王叡 (mid-ninth century), offers us a glimpse into just such a technique: an overuse of a single kind of tone. The eighth section of Wáng’s manual, titled “Cross-regulated style” 互律體 guides us through each line of a quatrain by Zhāng Zhìhé 張志和 (late eighth century):

詩云：
八月九月蘆花飛
（上四字全用側聲）
A poem reads:
In the eighth and ninth month,
reed flowers soar.
(The first four characters are all oblique tones.)

2 南溪老翁垂釣歸
By the southern stream, an old man
goes back to casting his line.
(The first four characters are all level tones.)

秋山入簷翠滴滴
（律全用平）
Autumn hills enter [a roof’s] eaves,
turquoise drip-drips.
(The regulated [characters] are all level tones.)

4 野艇倚檻雲依依
A skiff in the wilds leans against a railing,
the clouds gentle gentle.
(The regulated [characters] are all oblique tones.)

What Wáng points out is that Táng poets will create their own tonal meters, ones that are different from the standard sort found in “good” regulated verse. In this example, the important thing is the fact that the first and second line of a couplet mirror each other. If the first four characters of line 1 are all oblique tones, then the first four characters of line 2 should all be level

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109 Zhāng Bówěi, Quán Táng-Wúdài shīgē huìkǎo, 388–89. For the full poem, “The Fisherman” 漁父, see QTS 308.3492. The QTS version of the poem differs in several ways from the Zhígū̀zǐ shīgē version, but I will not address these differences here since it is clear which version Wáng Rui was writing about.

110 Wáng Rui’s analysis of the tonal prosody appears to be imperfect—lǎo 老 (MC *law.X) in line 2 and 滴 dī (*tek) in line 3 should be oblique tones, while yī 依 (*ʔjij) in line 4 should be a level tone. It is possible that Wáng is referring to alternate pronunciations of the problematic characters, pronunciations which were never collected in the prescriptive rhyme books on which historical linguists have based their reconstructions of Middle Chinese pronunciations.
tones. If characters 2, 4, and 6 of line 1 are level-level-oblique, then the corresponding characters in line 2 should be oblique-oblique-level. This is why Wáng calls this technique “cross-regulated”: the balance happens mainly at the level of the couplet, not the line.

What is useful for our analysis of late Táng poetics is not so much the specific details of the techniques described by Wáng Ruì but the fact that metrical play was an integral part of a poet’s craft. This may seem obvious, even banal, to a scholar of English, Greek, or Sanskrit literature, where the cataloguing and analysis of rhythm and meter is a well-established tradition. But there is hardly any such tradition for classical Chinese literature. The fact that the tones of Táng Chinese are masked by the characters’ modern pronunciation has made tonal analysis extremely difficult before the advent of historical-linguistic software. And those who have paid attention to medieval tonal prosody—mostly Chinese scholars who speak one of the southern dialects that better preserve some elements of Táng pronunciation—only look to see whether or not a poem follows the normal rules of regulated verse. However, it is clear from Wáng Ruì’s example, as from a close analysis of Táng poets’ actual practice, that the standard meters could be bent, broken, or rearranged in any number of ways.  

Qíjǐ was particularly adept at twisting the structure of regulated meter while somehow still adhering to it. He wrote frequently in this form: 730 of his 810 extant poems (90%) are some form of regulated verse (pentameter or heptameter, quatrain or octave). He had a masterful command of tones, often composing couplets in which every tone of the first line was set in parallel to its counterpart in the next. Some poems are comprised entirely of such couplets.

Thankful for a Remounting of an Old Landscape Scroll 謝重緣舊山水障子
Qíjǐ 齊己

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111 I have addressed the importance of tonal prosody before in my article “Jia Dao’s Rhythm.”
112 Pān Dìngwǔ 4.227; Wáng Xiùlín 4.220; QTS 841.9499.
The poem, like many of Qiji’s occasional works, provides a brief glimpse into the material life of a tenth-century monk. Someone has remounted a beloved landscape painting for the speaker and gifted it to him, so he celebrates the occasion in verse. After establishing the situation in line 1 and describing the image in line 2, Qiji contrasts the freshness of the landscape mounting (lines 4, 6) with the speaker’s inability to shift his perception, harboring the image of the old, rotting painting in his mind (lines 3, 5). Paintings and other material objects can easily be restored, but habits of the mind are not so easily altered. The final couplet then thanks the poem’s recipient for restoring the painting. The focus of the poem progresses deliberately from the object to the speaker to his interlocutor.

The most amazing part of the poem is what remains uncaptured by a modern translation or reading of the poem: the fact that Qiji achieves a sensible, even chatty tone while adhering to an extremely strict self-imposed meter. Not only is each couplet parallel in tones (i.e., the tones of line 1 are mirrored in line 2), but the quatrains follow exactly the same tonal pattern. Lines 1 and 5 share the same tonal structure, as do lines 2 and 6, 3 and 7, and 4 and 8. On top of all of this, the even lines still rhyme (MC *–in). The high level of craftsmanship undermines the image

113 These lines bear remarkable similarity to a couplet by Hán Wò 韓偓 (842–943):
明言終未實 When illuminating words have not yet taken shape,
暗祝始應真 Secret prayers start to become real.
From “Untitled II” 無題其二, QTS 683.7843–44.
of himself that Qíjì presents in the poem. He is not a doddering old fool, stuck in his ways, who only notices the painting’s restoration when he lies down again, but a sharp and quick-witted artist who bends the language to his will. Such an adept use of metrical prosody is a direct product of the kind of attention to detail advocated by kūyín discourse.

Qíjì, like many other poets of his time, often used the regulated heptametric octave to write “poems on objects” (yǒngwùshī 詠物詩). This poetic subtradition goes back to the fifth and sixth centuries, when it was much in vogue to write poems in great sensuous detail about the precious objects found in palaces—including zithers, parrots, jades, candles, and palace ladies.114 By the late Táng, poems on objects had become a standard poetic theme, and examples of them are abundant. These later poems gazed beyond the palace to focus on objects in an idealized bucolic setting, often a farm or temple, and described them with the subtler forms of parallelism that had become almost a science. Qíjì’s two finest poems in this style, later critics generally concur,115 are his “Early Plum” 早梅 and “Listening to a Fountain” 聽泉.

Early Plum 早梅116

Qíjì 齊己

萬木凍欲折 Ten thousand trees frozen, about to break, ● ● ● ● ●
孤根暖獨回 A solitary stem warm, returning alone. ○ ○ ● ● ○
前村深雪裏 In the deep snow of the last village, ○ ○ ○ ● ●
昨夜一枝開 A single pedicel bloomed last night. ● ● ● ○ ○
風遞幽香去 A breeze sends off its hidden scent, ○ ● ○ ○ ○
禽窺素豔來 Birds come to peer at its white allure. ○ ○ ● ● ○

114 See, e.g., Chennault, “Odes on Objects and Patronage in the Southern Qi”; Tian, “Illusion and Illumination.”
115 See, e.g., Fāng Huí 方回 (1227–1305), who writes of “Early Plum” in Yíngkuí lùsuǐ 瀛奎律髓, “Often I read just the first four lines by themselves. Those twenty characters are in fact supremely marvelous, and lines five and six are profound and attractive as well” 尋常只將前四句作絕讀，其實二十字絕妙，五六亦幽致. Zhōu Tíng 周珽 agrees in his Tāngshí xuǎnmáihuìtōnglín 唐詩選脈會通評林 (printed 1635), writing, “This poem and ‘Listening to a Fountain’ could be called the very height of poems on objects” 此與《聽泉》篇可稱詠物之矯矯者 (qtd. in Tāngshí huìpíng 3120–21).
The poem vividly portrays the emergence of a small sign of life in winter, the firstfruit of the coming annual resurrection. In a cold forest, filled with snow and ice, the speaker finds a single bud. Though completely natural, it is also out of place. The third couplet balances different kinds of motion: a breeze brings the plum’s sweet smell to the speaker’s nose, while birds flutter past him, eager to catch sight of the branch’s “white allure,” a decidedly lustful term. The poem concludes with a melancholic reflection on the cycle of birth and death, noting that even this blossom will soon “follow the course of nature” and die, yet we must enjoy it while it lasts. The poem adheres nicely to nearly all the rules of regulated verse. Couplet 2 has the complete tonal parallelism we saw in “Thankful for a Remounting of an Old Landscape Scroll,” and couplets 3 and 4 are close: only the first character (which is considered more flexible) does not follow the same pattern, using instead level tones in both lines.

Qiji breaks the rules of tonal prosody in one place, which, given the poem’s delicate balance, makes it all the more striking. Line 1 is comprised entirely of oblique tones. The sound of this poem’s opening is harsh, as we can see with its Middle Chinese reconstruction:

 اعتن عل 4

There is a tight patterning here that would not be apparent from reading the poem in Mandarin. The first two characters of each line are tied together with alliteration (mjonH muwk and ku kon), as are the fourth characters with their –wk final (yowk and duwk). Three of the characters of line 1 end with the clipped consonants of the entering tone (–k and –t), while the other two dive off
quickly with a departing tone (represented by $H$). The effect is that sharp pangs of the cold winter can be felt in the very sound of the poem itself. This is then contrasted with the four smooth, level tones of the following line which introduces us to the single spot of warmth which will give birth to the plum blossom.\textsuperscript{117}

Qi\j\i employs a similar technique in his other great poem on an object, “Listening to a Wellspring” 聽泉. This poem, like “Early Plum,” opens with a series of oblique tones, but the tonal structure runs even deeper.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Listening to a Wellspring 聽泉}\textsuperscript{118}
\textit{Qi\j\i 齊己}
\end{center}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
落石幾萬仞 & Falling over rocks for myriads of fathoms, \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
冷聲飄遠空 & Its cold sounds float off into the air. \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
高秋初雨後 & High autumn after the first rains; \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
半夜亂山中 & Midnight among the disarrayed mountains. \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
祇有照壁月 & There is only the wall-shining moon \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
更無吹葉風 & And nothing of a leaf-blowing wind. \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
幾曾廬嶽聽 & Often have I heeded it on Marchmount Lú, \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
到曉與僧同 & Together with monks into dawn. \\
\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet & ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ ⋅ \\
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{117}“Early Plum” is now best known for its connection to an anecdote about Qi\j\i showing it to the poet Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷 (851?–910?):

\begin{quote}
時鄭谷在袁州，齊己因攜所為詩往謁焉，有《早梅》詩曰：「前村深雪裏，昨夜數枝開。」谷笑謂：「數枝非早，不若一枝則佳。」齊己矍然，不覺兼三衣叩地膜拜，自是士林以谷為齊己一字之師。

Once, when Zhèng Gǔ was at Yu\-ā\n\-nzh\u{ }o, Qi\j\i grabbed the poems he wrote to go present them to him. The poem “Early Plum” read, “In the deep snow of the village ahead, / A few branches bloomed last night.” Zhèng Gǔ laughed, saying: “A few branches aren’t early. ‘A single branch’ would be better.” Qi\j\i was mortified, and without thinking grabbed his three robes and knocked the ground in prostration. Because of this, the literati called Zhèng Gǔ Qi\j\i’s “One-character teacher.” (Táo Yuè, \textit{Wùdài shībù}, 3.15–16.)

This story tastes too much of legend to take it as fact. The oppositions are just too neat: young vs. old, monk vs. poet, craftsmanship vs. spontaneity. Qi\j\i did in fact admire Zhèng Gǔ, with 18 extant poems addressed to the elder writer. The anecdote is likely a comic exaggeration of this admiration by contemporaneous literati. It is still preserved in modern Chinese as the origin of the set phrase \textit{yī zì zhī shī} 一字之師, “one-character teacher.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118}Wáng Xiùlín 6.311–12; Pān Dīngwù 6.323–34; \textit{QTS} 843.9528.
The oblique tones of the opening portray the rough surface of fallen stones which form the cliff face surrounding the titular wellspring. Again, this jagged opening is contrasted with the serenity of the object written about. In this case, it is the babbling of the spring which wafts like mist into the heavens. This creates a feeling of relief, although this time it is not the first sign of life in winter, but a refreshingly brisk autumn after a hot summer. Clarity is the dominating aesthetic: the still heavens above and the well-defined outlines of the rocks below. This makes for a more clean frame in which to place the poem’s object, the sound of the fountain.

More surprising is that Qijí repeats his prosodic deviance in couplet 3: line 5 uses oblique tones in both even characters. In this instance, he does not do it for the sake of a mimetic roughening, as in the first line of the poem. Rather, Qijí may have just liked the sound of bi 壁 (MC *pek, “wall”) and yuè 月 (MC *ngw jot, “moon”) next to each other, since both end with the hard consonants of entering tones. Bi 壁 (“wall”), after all, is the “mistake” character, and could have been replaced with qiáng 場 (MC *dzj ang) or yuán 垣 (MC *hjwon), both of which mean “wall” and have the correct level tone. Instead, he opts for aural resonance. This focuses the reader’s attention on the word “moon” (yuè 月), which is also the only image that is actually present in the couplet: “wall-shining” is its descriptor, and the “leaf-blowing wind” is explicitly said to be absent.

This brings us to the odd final couplet, the one which looks out at the larger world and gives us the speaker’s personal relationship to the object. First, it is strange because this is the first time we are told a definite place for the fountain: a monastic setting atop Mt. Lú 廬山, most likely at Dōnglín temple 東林寺, where Qijí lived for many years. Normally, such information would be presented in the title or first couplet of a poem. Secondly, the final character of line 7 could be read in two ways:
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

1. tīng / MC *theng: “hear”
2. ting / MC *thengH: “heed”

The first reading is the more common and expected one. It is the verb used in the poem’s title (translated as “listening to”), meaning paying close attention to the sounds of something. It is often used for what an audience does to music, as opposed to the more causal wén 閲, which implies less conscious attention. This reading paints an image of the speaker and his fellow monks stopping by the fountain just to enjoy its sound. The problem with this reading, however, is that *theng is far too close to the sound of the main rhyme, *–uwng, to make for good regulated poetry. The seventh line of an octave, in fact, is often the most unlike the poem’s main rhyme. Thus, we could choose to read the final character in the second way, as *thengH with a departing tone, meaning “heed” or “obey.” It goes one step beyond the first meaning: the listener not only hears the sound but makes a conscious effort to act in accordance with its wishes. In this reading, the fountain becomes a teacher, demanding the monks’ attention. It beckons to them, and they obey as they would their meditation master.\(^{119}\) If we opt for this reading, it forces us to

\[^{119}\text{This use of ting as “heeding” the sound of flowing water is also attested in a couplet by Hán Cóng 韓琮 (jinshi 824), in “Parting at the Waters of Chǎn in Late Spring” 暮春滻水送別 (QTS 565.6551):}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>English and Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>行人莫聽宮前水</td>
<td>Pedestrians do not heed the waters before the palace;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>流盡年光是此聲</td>
<td>What flows until the end of our years is this sound.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And in a couplet by Cáo Yè 曹頤 (jinshi 850), in “Listening to the Reverend Liú Play the Zither” 聽劉尊師彈琴 (QTS 592.6870):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>English and Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>曾於清海獨聞蟬</td>
<td>Once I heard crickets alone at the clear seas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>又向空庭夜聽泉</td>
<td>Another time I heeded a wellspring at night, facing an empty courtyard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And in a couplet by Wāng Zūn 汪遵 (jinshi 866), in “Summoning a Recluse” 招隱 (QTS 602.6960):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>English and Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>齊聽泉聲看鹿群</td>
<td>Don’t heed the wellspring’s sounds, but look at the herd of deer;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>丈夫才策合匡君</td>
<td>O man, your skill and scheming would befit the ruler’s aid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And in a couplet by Luó Yè 羅鄴 (831?–896?), in “Inscribed on a Waterfall Cave” 題水簾洞 (QTS 654.7512):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>English and Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>一片長垂今與古</td>
<td>One sheet drooping far down, new and old;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

go back to the very title of the poem and read the verb as “heeding” rather than “listening to” the wellspring, putting the entire work in new relief. We see in line 2 now the spring’s sounds as a call to purity through cold austerity. The wellspring becomes the rustic equivalent of Buddhist master, and nature a temple.

Such prosodic experiments are only possible when one is so deeply familiar with metrical rules that they are easily bent. The aesthetic of kūyín, with its attention to detail, craftsmanship, and parallelism, encouraged such mastery. If it is acceptable to portray oneself as a devotee of poetry as an end in itself—rather than as a means to professional success—then the subtle play of tonal patterning can be employed as an art form. Deviance from structural patterns are not “mistakes” to be marked down in an exam, but sites of formal experimentation. Kūyín justifies such innovations. Kūyín, as we have seen, also encourages a superior mental awareness to the small things—tones and rhymes, but also plums and fountains. The same painstaking attitude can be applied to sound, to sight, and to thought. The poet needs all three for the purpose of composition, just like the Buddhist monk needs all three for his practices of chanting and meditating.

6.4 Absorption and Meditation

6.4.1 In Buddhist Discourse

| 半山遙聽水兼風 | Half a mountain away, I heed afar the water and wind. |
| 手中孤桂月中在 | The lone cassia in my hand is in the moon— |
| 來聽泉聲莫厭頻 | Come heed the wellspring’s sounds, don’t avoid haste. |

And in a couplet by Guànxiū, in “Spring’s End, Sent to Zhōu Liàn” 春末寄周璉 (Hú Dàjùn 19.905–06; QTS 835.9415):

Many other examples could be provided. In all of these cases, tīng/tīng 听 must be read as tīng (MC: *thengH) for the sake of preserving the tonal prosody of what are clearly regulated poems in heptameter, just as in Qījī’s use. This logic recalls Gāo Zhòngwǔ’s praise of Língyī precisely for “being capable in attention and detail” 能刻意精妙 (section 2.1.2).
What late medieval monks did when they sat in meditation (zuòchán 座禪) or concentration (dìng 定) is surprisingly hard to pinpoint. By the time of the poet-monsks, many kinds of meditation with long histories were used in Buddhist monasteries. Although different lineages emphasized different kinds of practices, we must not imagine the lines between them to be absolute, nor membership to be exclusive. Just as a traveling Presbyterian may take communion at a Lutheran church despite not being a full member of that church, so too a monk trained in a Hóngzhōu-lineage monastery may practice at a Tiāntái monastery, no matter the doctrinal disputes of the theoreticians. To understand what it meant to practice meditation in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, it is helpful to keep in mind the major features of the landscape.

Perhaps the most immediately relevant understanding of meditation in the late medieval period is a brief instructional verse found in several Dūnhuáng manuscripts, including one in which it appears just after a poem by Guànxiū.\(^{121}\) Being copied as part of a manuscript which also contains a work by a poet-monk, we can assume that an early audience saw them as belonging to the same milieu.

**Inscription on Seated Meditation 座禪銘\(^ {122}\)**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>的思忍</td>
<td>Fix your thoughts on forbearance.(^ {123})</td>
<td>nyinX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>秘口言</td>
<td>Hide away the words of your mouth,</td>
<td>ngjon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>除內結</td>
<td>Get rid of internal entanglements,</td>
<td>ket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>息外緣</td>
<td>Put to rest external conditions.</td>
<td>ywen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>心欲攀</td>
<td>Your mind will want to clamor,</td>
<td>phaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>口莫語</td>
<td>But your mouth should not speak.(^ {124})</td>
<td>ngjoX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{121}\) Technically, just after the Guànxiū poem is a spell for getting rid of fear, then the verse on meditation follows. For more on this manuscript (Pelliot chinois 2104) and the poem by Guànxiū, see section 7.2.1.

\(^{122}\) For a typeset edition, see Quán Dūnhuáng shí, 13:158.5969–70. In some manuscripts, this verse is attributed to Qingyuán Xingsī 青原行思 (d. 740), a disciple of the sixth patriarch Huinêng 慧能.

\(^{123}\) In P.2104, sī 思 and rén 忍 are reversed, with a reversal mark in the margin.

\(^{124}\) The copyist had evidently forgotten to write mò 莫 the first time around, so it is written much smaller in the margins between the other two characters of this line.
This bit of doggerel does not represent a sophisticated view of meditation, but it is a useful baseline for reconstructing key elements of the practice of meditation in the late medieval period.

It warns the practitioner against all the potential distractions to meditative stillness (jing 靜).

Both the inner thoughts of an individual (lines 1, 3, 5, and 7) and his external use of language (lines 2, 4, 6, and 8) will resist. Mind and mouth must be tamed, for they result in “measuring” (i.e., analytic thought) and “quarrelling” (line 9), both of which are antithetical to the quietude advocated in this verse. Stillness—a state in which body and mind accord with one’s religious goals, a state more easily achieved in seclusion (line 10)—is the goal, for it is what leads to buddhahood (line 11). Meditation is an exercise is letting go of thought and language.

Stillness is widely acknowledged as the precondition of effective meditation, and sometimes, paradoxically, as its goal. Many of Qìjì’s poems describe his pursuit of stillness in meditation, only to be thwarted by a compulsion to write poetry.\(^{125}\) However, compared to the “Inscription,” Qìjì seems to have a looser idea of how stillness can be achieved. In one of his poems titled “Sitting in Stillness” 靜坐, Qìjì describes his physical posture during meditation: “I sit askew in a corded chair and let myself collapse; / My two eyes are clear, clear, closing and opening” 絆床欹坐任崩頹，雙眼醒醒閉復開.\(^{126}\) He does not adopt the kind of still, upright

\(^{125}\) See, e.g., “Written in My Thatch Hut on a Summer Day” 夏日草堂作 (Wáng Xiùlín 1.1; Pān Dìngwǔ 1.1; QTS 838.9441), “Sitting in Stillness” 靜坐 (Wáng Xiùlín 3.169; Pān Dìngwǔ 3.178; QTS 840.9484), “Sent in Reply to Judge Gāo Niǎn” 寄酬高輦推官 (Wáng Xiùlín 5.241–42; Pān Dìngwǔ 5.249; QTS 842.9506), and “Self-Description upon Inspiration” 吟興自述(Wáng Xiùlín 8.473; Pān Dìngwǔ 8.456; QTS 845.9566).

\(^{126}\) Wáng Xiùlín 8.431; Pān Dìngwǔ 8.423–24; QTS 845.9557.
posture that is frequently named as the proper position in meditation texts, but sits off-balance, a crumpled heap on a chair. In another poem with the same title, Qiji takes this further, claiming that he can “enter into a meditative trance” 入禅 in any kind of physical position, “sitting, lying, walking, and standing” 坐臥與行住. These are the “four postures” 四威儀 in which all monastic activity is performed. Qiji’s implication is that he has reached an advanced stage of mindfulness in which no physical activity will break his mental stillness. Meditation is a very broad term covering many different kinds of practices, including practices different from the formalized zazen 坐禅 familiar to the modern world.

It would be difficult to pinpoint exactly what sort of mental activity Qiji and other poet-monks may have engaged in when they meditated, but a brief survey of practices prior to their time may help provide some idea of what was possible. In the early medieval period, a wide array of activities are described in the meditation sutras (chānjīng 禪經) translated from Indic languages. The meditation techniques described in these scriptures usually begin with silent sitting and mental focus of a detail on the body (such as a toe) but soon proceed to contemplation of graphic images of disease and decay, and culminate in the appearance of supernatural beings—sometimes benevolent, often malevolent. The practitioner continued this cycle

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127 Wáng Xiùlín 3.143–144; Pān Dìngwu 3.152; QTS 840.9477
128 For example, one meditation in the Essentials of Meditation 禪祕要法經 (trans. Kumārajīva 鸠摩羅什, early fifth cent.) begins:

教繫念一處，端坐正受，諦觀右脚大指上。令指上皮，携携欲穿。……身諸毛中，一一毛孔，百千無量，諸脈雜汁，猶如雨滴，從毛孔出，疾於震雨，内外俱流，膿血盈滿。

Instruct [the practitioner] to fix his thoughts in a single place and, sitting upright in absorption, to carefully contemplate the big toe of his right foot, making the skin of the toe slowly stretch to the verge of tearing… From the uncountable hundreds of thousands of pores of his body various kinds of pus and other assorted fluids then pour forth like drops of water, faster than a violent shower of rain, such that both within and without [his body] there flows a profusion of pus and blood.

129 For example, when the previous meditation is completed, the practitioner will see a demon:

見大夜叉，身如大山，頭髮蓬亂，如棘刺林。有六十眼，猶如電光。有四十口，口有二牙，皆悉上出，猶如火幢。舌似劍樹，吐至于膝。手捉鐵棒，棒似刀山，如欲打人。
through many iterations, reaching ever higher states of concentration. These meditation practices were frequently performed in the context of repentance rites, with visions of different deities either verifying the practitioner’s attainment or revealing sins for which he needs to repent.\textsuperscript{130}

The Tiāntái lineage established by Zhìyǐ 智顗 (538–597) and crystallized by Guàndìng 灌頂 (561–632) also describes a range of approaches to meditation. Many of these practices had long histories prior to their systematization in late sixth century and would continue to be influential, outside the self-proclaimed Tiāntái monasteries as well as within them, for many centuries. The core practices can be classified under the “four forms of samādhi” 四種三昧 as described in the \textit{Great Calming and Contemplation} (Móhē zhīguān 摩訶止觀).\textsuperscript{131}

1. Cultivating Samādhi through Constant Sitting 常坐三昧;
2. Cultivating Samādhi through Constant Walking 常行三昧;
3. Cultivating Samādhi through Part Walking and Part Sitting 半行半坐三昧;

The nature of systems is to reconcile and ultimately erase tensions, and Zhìyǐ’s is no exception. The names of these meditation methods appear to be mere descriptions of bodily postures, but in fact they are broad categories that each cover several kinds of specific practices. For example, “Constant Sitting” is identified with “one practice samādhi” (Ch. yīxíng sānmèi 一行三昧; Skt. \textit{ekavyūha samādhi}). In Zhìyǐ’s descriptions, this involves sitting for ninety days and contemplating either the ultimate reality of the Buddha’s dharma-body or concentrating on the

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\textsuperscript{130} On one such rite, see Greene, “Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience,” 259–99.

\textsuperscript{131} See \textit{T} no. 613, 15:246c; trans. Greene, “Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience,” 372–73.
name, image, and merits of a particular Buddha. But, as Bernard Faure has shown, the term “one practice samādhi” was a site of dispute, subject to redefinition by different teachers. The third samādhi, “Part Walking and Part Sitting,” was in Zhiyi’s works alone identified with at least two practices: a repentance rite based upon the *Great Expanded Dhāraṇī Sūtra* 大方等陀羅尼經 and a program of *Lotus Sūtra* veneration which had multiple stages based upon different chapters. “Neither Walking nor Sitting” is the fourth, miscellaneous category, under which falls anything that cannot be subsumed into one of the first three categories. It includes an expansive kind of meditation known as “wherever the mind is directed” (*suìzǐyì* 隨自意) which aims to uncover the emptiness of mentation itself, apart from any particular object. It is the most direct approach to ultimate realization, but also the most difficult to practice, without a specific visual object to focus on. Zhiyi’s teachings attempt to reconcile all known meditation practices into a single system.

It would be wrong to think only temples directly affiliated with Tiāntái lineages practiced the four kinds of samādhi. Many kinds of meditation described by Zhiyi predated his systematization and continued to be used in various ways after it. Moreover, as late as 833, Zhiyi-centric lineages were not seen as something distinct from the Bodhidharma lineages that would later be called Chán. In a work dating roughly to that year, Zōngmi 宗密 (780–841) included Tiāntái as one “house” (*shì* 室) among the ten that characterize the diversity of meditation lineages (*zōng* 宗). The evidence seems to suggest not only that the term

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132 Stevenson, “The T’ien-t’ai Four Forms of Samādhi,” 69–70.
133 Faure, “One-Practice Samādhi in Early Ch’an.”
134 Stevenson, “The T’ien-t’ai Four Forms of Samādhi,” 82–104.
136 As Stevenson has written, Zhiyi’s systematizes “principles of self-cultivation that were recognized as universal by all Chinese Buddhists” (“The T’ien-t’ai Four Forms of Samādhi,” 10).
137 Chányuán zhūquánjí dūxú 禪源諸詮集都序, T no. 2015, 48:400b. See also Foulk, “Chan Literature,” 695.
“meditation” covered a wide range of practices, but also that monks drew on the full array available to them. Sectarian squabbles occasionally led some to label a rival lineage’s techniques heterodox or ineffective, but such polemics likely took place over the heads of most practitioners. Moreover, the very fact that such polemics exist means that people attempted to do the proscribed thing. Rules are only instituted if there is a potential for them being broken. It is likely that late medieval Buddhist monks engaged a range of meditative practices, unbounded by sectarian divisions.

Early documents from the Bodhidharma lineages also suggest a variety of meditative practices. Proper posture and control of breath seem to be common to most of these techniques, but they vary greatly beyond these basics. “Wall contemplation” (biguān 壁觀) involved becoming firm and still like a wall in order to contemplate emptiness, and “maintaining the mind” (shòuxīn 守心) could mean visualization of the sun (the brilliance of enlightenment or concentration on one’s own deluded, discriminating mind). The Treatise on Perfect Illumination (Yuánmíng lùn 圓明論) advocates constant practice, in which one permanently resides in meditation and wisdom, “never quitting during walking, standing, sitting, or lying down” (行住坐臥, 無有癈息). This emphasis on meditation in all things, because the Way can be found in everyday life, became especially popular among the ninth-century communities associated with Hóngzhōu—a place located just next to Mt. Lú, where so many poet-monks dwelled for decades. As one sermon attributed to Māzū Dàoyī 马祖道一 puts it:

138 Examples of these squabbles are abundant, to the point that they have dominated certain parts of the scholarship on medieval Chinese Buddhism. For one example, Dàoxuān 道宣 (596–667), in his remarks appended to the biographies of “meditation practitioners” (習禪), regards all meditation traditions known to him to be compatible except one—that of Bodhidharma. See Chen, Monks and Monarchs, 179.
140 McRae, The Northern School, 137.
141 McRae, The Northern School, 二十八 (twenty-eight); full translation on p. 212.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

一切法皆是佛法，諸法即解脫。解脫者即眞如，諸法不出於如。行住坐臥，悉是不思議用，不待時節。
All dharmas a Buddha-dharma, and all dharmas are liberation. Liberation is Thusness, and all dharmas never leave Thusness. Walking, standing, sitting, and lying—all these are inconceivable functions, which do not wait for a timely season.¹⁴²

Given the perfect interfusion of the ultimate and the mundane, one need not sit in silence to meditate. Activity in any posture can give one access to the “inconceivable,” that is, enlightenment which is beyond thought. The doctrine of the inseparability of principle and phenomena gave rise to the practice of non-meditation as meditation, something that came to be seen as a hallmark of the Hóngzhōu communities.¹⁴³ It was likely just such a practice, or something similar (such as Zhìyǐ’s “wherever the mind is directed”), that is alluded to in the lines of Qǐjǐ quoted earlier. This expanded view of meditation could be used to justify anything as a potentially liberative activity. By maintaining the right mindset, one of concentration (dìng 定) and forbearance (rěn 忍), one could turn anything into meditation—perhaps even the writing of poetry.

6.4.2 In Literary Discourse

The attention to detail and intense devotion to poetry which coalesced in kùyín is also related to an ideal of absorption: a person can fully devote himself to a singular goal if he is also able to block out extraneous thoughts or sensory input. This involves a kind of mental strength beyond the abilities of most humans. Poets must have an extraordinary capacity for concentration and visualization if they are to take part in the process of Fashioning (zàohuà), of shaping and re-creating the patterns of the cosmos in their literary works. Though this idea of a poet’s

¹⁴² Jingdé chuándēnglù 景德傳燈錄, in T no. 2076, 51:440a; translation adapted from Jia, The Hongzhou School, 77.
¹⁴³ See Jia, The Hongzhou School, 76–79.
concentration had deep roots in the classical literary tradition, its fullest flowering came when it cross-pollinated with the practices of Buddhist meditation.

The classical precedent for the poetic ideal of absorption was Lù Jī’s 陸機 (261–303) “Fù on Literature” 文賦. This text, anthologized in the supremely influential Wénxuàn 文選 (Selections of refined literature), would have been well known to any Táng poet.¹⁴⁴ Lù Jī describes how the poet takes a visionary journey in preparation for the act of composition.

其始也, 皆收視反聽, 耽思傍訊, 精騖八極, 心遊萬仞。其致也, 情曈曨而彌鮮, 物昭晰而互進。

In the beginning, [the poet] both Withdraws sight, suspends hearing, And deeply contemplates, seeks broadly, Letting his spirit race to the eight limits, Letting his mind roam ten thousand spans. Then, at the end, His feelings, first glimmering, become ever brighter, And things, clear and resplendent, reveal one another.¹⁴⁵

The “Fù on Literature” is one of the great achievements of literary criticism in the mainstream, “Confucian” tradition, but it also echoes parts of the Songs of Chǔ 楚辭, in which the speaker describes a spiritual journey to parts of the known world and beyond. Like Guànxiū’s poem on kūyín, it presents the poet as a shaman of the world.¹⁴⁶ He turns off his mundane senses to let his mind roam, revealing internal (qíng 情) and external (wù 物) realities in ever brighter relief, at which point he can channel them into the linguistic medium of a poem.

¹⁴⁴ Qǐjī, for example, praised Guànxiū’s work by comparing it to the Wénxuàn: “He strove to be equal the Crown Prince of Liáng, / To be esteemed like [those poets of] the Wênxuàn tower” 爭得梁太子，重為文選樓 (Qǐjī, “Hearing that Guànxiū Parted from this World” 闕實休下世, in Wáng Xiǔlín 2.94–96; Pān Dīngwǔ 2.102–03; QTS 839.9464–65). Crown Prince of Liáng: Xiāo Tǒng 蕭統 (501–531), compiler of the Wénxuàn. For more on his milieu, see Wang, The Age of Courtly Writing.
¹⁴⁶ See Hawkes, Songs of the South, 42–51; and Sukhu, The Shaman and the Heresiarch.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

Lù Jī’s “Fù on Literature” had a deep impact on literary theory and practice for centuries. One popular poetry manual of the Táng dynasty, attributed to Wáng Chānglíng 王昌齡 (d. 756?), describes the process of composition in terms of a similar spirit journey, though giving the poet’s mind a more active role:

夫置意作詩，即須凝心，目擊其物，便以心擊之，深穿其境。如登高山絕頂，下臨萬象，如在掌中。以此見象，心中了見，當此即用。

When mentally preparing to compose a poem, you must fix your mind, and your eyes will touch their objects. When you use your mind to touch them, you will deeply pierce their world. It’s like climbing the summit of a high mountain: when you look down on the ten thousand things, it’s like they are in the palm of your hand. When you see images in this way, you will see them clearly in your mind, and thus can they be put to use.

Before anything else can happen, the mind must reach the same state of concentration as described in Lù Jī’s fù. Once it is settled and focused (níng 凝), it can be used to “pierce” objects in a way that sight alone cannot. That is, the mind does not just see phenomena, it sees through them to get to their cosmic significance as images. The poet can then recall these images and arrange them into the world of a poem. But this only comes through mental absorption of the kind that “tires (kǔ) your mind and exhausts your intelligence, [wherein] you must forget your person” 苦心竭智，必須忘身, as the author writes in the passage just preceding this one. The

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147 Its impact can be felt perhaps most acutely on the “Daimonic imagination” (shén思) chapter of Wénxīn diàolóng, which also points out the necessity of mental stillness, the spirit journey of the imagination, the arrangement of mental objects, and the difficulty in putting all of this into poetry. For a translation and study of this chapter, see Egan, “Poet, Mind, and World.”


149 Quán Táng-Wǔdài shīgē huìkǎo, 162; Kūkai, Wénjìng mǐfúlún [Bunkyō hifuron] huījiāo huìkǎo, 3:1309; Bodman, “Poetics and Prosody in Early Mediaeval China,” 371. In the passage immediately prior to this one, the writer appears to contradict himself, saying that “Literary writings should never be difficult, nor should they be toilsome” 凡文章皆不難，又不辛苦, but the examples given makes it clear that this refers to the experience of the reader, not the writer.
mind, through the kind of toil in which one lets go his very self, can be trained to take hold of the images of the cosmos and re-create them in a poem.

As early as the late eighth century, Táng poets began to make explicit analogies between the kind of concentration espoused in poetic theory and the increasingly popular Buddhist practices of meditation.

“Knocking on stillness” comes out of distant contemplation,
Finding the marvelous originates in comprehending meditative wisdom.

“Knocking on stillness” comes out of distant contemplation,
Finding the marvelous originates in comprehending meditative wisdom.

—Yáng Jìyuán 楊巨源 (b. 755), “Given to My Cousin Màoqīng” 贈從弟茂卿

The first line of Yáng’s couplet synthesizes two sections of the “Fù on Literature.” The sort of spirit journey we examined earlier is said to be the basis of another one of the poet’s activities described in Lù Jī’s fù: “[The poet] tests the void and non-existence to demand of it existence, / Knocks upon stillness and silence, seeking a tone” 課虛無以責有，叩寂寞而求音. That is, the act of poetic creation, which seems to emerge out of nothing, is in fact the product of a spirit journey. The second line of Yáng’s couplet draws on the jargon of Buddhism to come at the same point from a slightly different angle. Intense mental concentration, divorced from sensory input, is what leads to new insight.

Later writers made this same point, that poetry requires the same kind of concentration as Buddhist meditation, using the language of kǔyín:

When your madness erupts, you chant (yín) as if weeping,
When sorrow comes, you sit as in meditation.

—Yáo Hé 姚合 (775?–855?), “Sent to Jià Dào” 寄賈島

Kǔyín: a monk entering concentration,
Péi Yuè’s lines are the more explicit of the two, making a direct analogy between meditation and kūйin across the caesura, but Yáo Hé’s are the more interesting. Not only do Yáo’s lines come from a poem addressed to the kūйin paragon Jiǎ Dāo himself, but they reconcile what seem to be two opposing qualities. “Madness” (kuāng 狂), the kind of fervor we saw associated with song in chapter five, makes way for the stillness of “meditation” (chán 禪), a transliteration of the Sanskrit dhyāna meaning “concentration.” First, the intense emotion of madness overwhelms the poet, which he must let out in weeping or poetry or some combination of the two. This experience, subjective and isolating, then brings the poet to a state of sorrow, a calm in which he can enter meditation (presumably to send his thoughts forth to gather more prompts for artistic creation). Poetry can prepare one for meditation, just as meditation can prepare one for poetry.

Líú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 (772–842), the exiled literatus who wrote the first history of poet-monks in the early ninth century, was perhaps the first to explicitly theorize the connection between meditation and poetic concentration. On the whole, he seems to have held ambivalent attitudes toward Buddhists’ attempts at writing high literature—after all, he praised Língchè 靈澈 precisely for transcending the category of “poet-monk.” However, in the preface to a parting poem given to the monk Hóngjǔ 鴻舉, he suggests the possibility that a Buddhist monk with literary inclinations may be capable of writing superior verse.

能離欲，則方寸地虛，虛而萬象入，入必有所泄，乃形乎詞，詞妙而深者，必依於聲律，故自近古而降，釋子以詩聞於世者相踵焉。因定而得境，故翛然以清；由慧而遣辭，故粹然以麗。

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153 QTS 720.8269. The earliest extant source for this couplet is the twelfth-century Tāngshī jìshì. See Tāngshī jìshì jiǎojiān 65.1748.
154 See section 2.1.3.
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When one is able to be free of desire, the ground of his heart is empty; when it’s empty, the ten thousand images can enter; once they’ve entered, they must come out, and so they take shape in phrases. For one’s phrases to be marvelous and deep, they must adhere to tonal meter. Thus, from the recent past on down, Buddhists who are becoming known throughout the world for poetry have come one after another. Attaining the poem-world in concentration, it is naturally pure; through their insight, they dispel [the images they have accessed] in language. In this way, their works are refined and striking.\textsuperscript{155}

Líu Yūxī blends together the classical expressive theory of the “Great Preface” 大序 to the Book of Odes 詩經 with the idea of the poet as Fashioner and with Buddhist concepts of quietude and emptiness. The classical discourse maintains that things stirred inside a person must be let out one way or another, whether through sigh, song, or dance.\textsuperscript{156} But instead of saying those things inside are emotions (qing 情) stirred by events in the world, Líu Yūxī asserts that they are the very images (xiàng 象) of the ten thousand things that make up reality, and that they will only enter into a mind that is completely still and empty. That is, the poet is no longer a passive recipient of events who responds spontaneously with an accurate, authentic reaction to the world. Instead, he is someone who must first cultivate his mind in order to prepare it for the arrival of the images. Not everyone is capable of being a poet. It is the province of those with a superior control of their mind. In this way, Buddhists have a potentially privileged relationship to poetry. They are experts in the mind, having honed it over many years of practice, cleansing it of desire’s interference. In this way, the world of their poems (jing 境, a word with connotations of “perception” as well) are also pure. Their ability to concentrate (ding 定), to settle their minds, can be applied directly to poetry. There is no noise distorting the images as they enter the monks’

\textsuperscript{155} Líu Yūxī, “Introduction to ‘Stopping by the Temple Hall of Dharma Master Hóngjǔ on an Autumn Day and Seeing Him off to Jiānglíng’” 秋日過鴻舉法師寺院便送歸江陵引 (Qū Tuiyuán, Líu Yūxī ji jiānzhěng, 29.956–58; QTS 357.4015–16). According to a different part of this introduction, it was written in the eighth intercalary month of Yuánhé 9, that is, between September 18 and October 16, 814. Cf. DeBlasi, Reform in the Balance, 107, which analyzes this preface in a very different context.

\textsuperscript{156} See Máoshī zhūshū, 1.13. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Van Zoeren, Poetry and Personality, 95, 108–11; and Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 41–43.
minds, nor as they come out in words. For this reason, the monks’ works are “refined and striking.” In modern parlance, we might say that Buddhist monks have a transferrable skill set. A calm mind, imbued with the images of the cosmos, is precisely what is required of poets. They are, after all, fashioners of the world.

6.4.3 Qījǐ’s Two Gates

The homology of poetic concentration and Buddhist meditation, suggested by Liú Yǔxī and others, came to its fullest expression in the work of Qījǐ. As we may recall from chapter four, Qījǐ was certainly familiar with monastics associated with the Wéi-Yǎng lineage. The Wéi-Yǎng lineage was particularly noted for its emphasis on the complementary nature of religious practice, ordinary life, and sudden enlightenment, and especially how the forms of the physical world can shed light on the mind (jí sè míng xīn 即色明心).157 The Buddhist communities at Hóngzhōu, where Qījǐ, Guànxìū, and other poet-monks lived for many years, similarly stressed “non-cultivation,” the possibility of turning any everyday action into meditation.158 Moreover, both of these positions were based upon an understanding of the perfect interfusion of the mundane and the ultimate, a principle common to nearly all forms of medieval Chinese Buddhism. Such doctrines left much room for an advanced practitioner to engage with the arts, and would have been convenient justification for a poet-monk.

Often, Qījǐ discusses poetry and meditation as the two distinct but complementary activities on which he spends most of his time. He opens several poems with lines like, “Outside

157 In the record of Huiji in the Jingdé Lamp-Transmission Records, one monk describes how he and the master were “discussing the Way, how form (Skt. rūpa) can illuminate the mind and how connections to phenomena can reveal the truth” 商量道，即色明心，附物顯理 (T no. 2076, 51:284b–c). On these teachings of the Wéi-Yǎng lineage, see Yín Chūbīn, “Hú-Xiāng shīshēng Qījǐ yǔ Wéi-Yǎngzōng,” 24–25.
158 Jia, The Hongzhou School, 76–79.
of meditation, I seek poetry’s wonders,\(^{159}\) and “Outside of monasticism, the
pleasure of idle chanting is purest”\(^ {160}\) In these lines, his Buddhist practice is
portrayed as primary, his poetic practice secondary. But sometimes he reverses the terms.
Another poem opens, “When I’ve no taste for chanting poems, I take up sūtras”\(^ {161}\) In exchanges with other poet-monks, he describes their activities in a similar manner: “In
addition to the work of sūtras and śāstras, you also take on the task of poetry”\(^ {162}\) he writes of the otherwise unknown Huixiān 惠暹. In a quatrain to a certain “Venerable
Guāng,” he echoes the kūyín language of Péi Yuè.

**Replying to the Venerable Guāng 酬光上人**\(^ {163}\)

Qǐjī 齊己

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>禪言難後到詩言</th>
<th>After the difficulties of meditation discourse, (ngjon)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 坐石心同立月魂</td>
<td>Sitting on stones, your mind is the same (hwon) as the soul of the moon out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>應記前秋會吟處</td>
<td>Recall how last autumn, (tsyhoH) when we met to intone,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 五更猶在老松根</td>
<td>We were still out at the fifth watch, (kon) by the roots of the old pines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qǐjī posits a sequential relationship between religious and literary activities (at least for the
Venerable Guāng) and, surprisingly, makes poetry the second stage, implying perhaps that it is
the more advanced of the two (line 1). In the second line, the Venerable Guāng sits on stones, his
mind pure and clear like the moon that shines overhead. This image of his physical and mental
stillness could describe either seated meditation or poetry composition. The point is moot,

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\(^{160}\) “Sent to My Brother Liào Kuāngtú” 寄廖匡圖兄弟 (Wáng Xiùlín 10.599–600; Pān Dingwǔ 10.583–84; QTS 847.9596).


\(^{162}\) “Given unto the Venerable Huixiān” 賦惠暹上人 (Wáng Xiùlín 7.397; Pān Dingwǔ 7.395–96; QTS 844.9548).

\(^{163}\) Wáng Xiùlín 10.597; Pān Dingwǔ 10.579–80; QTS 847.9596.
because the two look the same. The very ambiguity of the line, as it provides a bridge to a description of poetic composition through the night, underscores a connection between these practices. Though still distinct, poetry and meditation require their practitioners’ bodies to adopt similar poses. They share a repertoire.

When explaining his own approach to the composition of poetry, Qíjǐ ties together many of the strands already mentioned. The complementary nature of poetry and meditation, the obsession with formal perfection, and the physical toll of kūyín-style devotion to the craft of verse are all mentioned and exemplified in one of his more self-conscious poems.

**Explaining Intoning 喻吟**

Qíjǐ 齊己

| 日用是何專 | What do I focus on day to day? |
| 言疲即坐禪 | When tired from intoning I sit in meditation. |
| 此生還可喜 | Though this life is enjoyable, |
| 4 餘事不相便 | Everything else is not related to [this enjoyment]. |
| 頭白無邪裏 | My head white, there is nothing wrong within them; |
| 魂清有象先 | My ghost pure, real images are before me. |
| 江花與芳草 | Riverside flowers and fragrant grasses |
| 8 莫染我情田 | Don’t pollute the field of my inner self. |

Qíjǐ portrays poetry as his primary vocation and meditation as a welcome respite from it (line 2).

These two activities constitute the majority of his daily life (line 1), taking pleasure in them and

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164 Wáng Xiùlín 6.300–01; Pān Dīngwǔ 6.311–12; *QTS* 843.9525.
165 Real images: the cosmically significant “images” that make up both the phenomenal world and the world of a poem. In his poem “Stirred by a Whim in Mid-Spring” 中春感興, Qíjǐ equates these with the “impartiality” of nature: “In a single breath, unspeaking, is contained real images; / Where are the ten thousand spirits? Disappearing into the Impartial” 一氣不言含有象，萬靈何處謝無私 (Wáng Xiùlín 7.405; Pān Dīngwǔ 7.402; *QTS* 844.9550). Qíjǐ was fond enough of this couplet to list it as the example of “Great Elegantiae” 大雅 in the opening of his poetics treatise, “Exemplary Models of Fēng and Sāo Poetry” 風騷旨格.
166 Field of my inner self: refers to *Lìjī* 9.439–40:

The sage kings cultivated the lever of righteousness and the sequences of ritual in put the inner selves of human in order. Consequently the inner selves of humans were the field of the sage kings. They cultivated ritual to plough them. They laid out righteousness to plant them. They instituted learning to weed them. They rooted it in humaneness to collect them, and they employed music to give them peace.
little else (lines 3–4). Poetry is labor, and his hard work pays off. He achieves two of the poetic ideals described earlier: formal perfection (line 5, which also has overtones of a moral purity) and an emphasis on the “real images” of the cosmos (line 6). The latter, moreover, is only possible because his ghost is “pure” and thus capable of going on the kind of spiritual journey described by Lù Jǐ’s “Für on Literature.” The poem concludes by explicitly relating his poetic and religious practices. Contrary to what one may assume, the sensuous “riverside flowers” and “fragrant grasses” often depicted in poetry do not harm his unattached mind (lines 7–8). Qíjǐ may be subtly depicting himself as having achieved an advanced level of detachment, in which the practitioner is permitted to enjoy one’s sensory experience. That is to say, poetic and religious practice are not oppositional. In fact, it is precisely because of Qíjǐ’s advanced meditative practice that he may be so bold in his literary works.

In poems written to his literary hero Zhèng Gǔ, Qíjǐ further develops this relationship between poetry and meditation. One quatrain puts the two practices in parallel with each other, implying their fundamental unity.

Sent to Director Zhèng Gǔ 寄鄭谷郎中

Qíjǐ 齊己

人間近遇風騷匠 I have recently come across a craftsman of poetry dzjangH in the human realm,

2 鳥外曾逢心印師 And I once met a mind-stamped master srij

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167 The importance of line 7 is emphasized by its departure from regulated meter: the fourth character should have an oblique tone rather than the level tone of fāng 芳 (MC *phjang). This “mistake” is surely intentional, as it comes just two lines after the speaker boasts that there are no errors in his poems.

168 If we take Qíjǐ’s connections to the Wéi-Yǎng lineage seriously, we can see how this echoes the teachings of its founder Língyòu 端祐 (771–853), who once preached: “At all moments, see and hear what is ordinary—it is without any twists and turns—and don’t close your eyes or block your ears, but don’t let your emotions become attached to phenomena.”一切時中視聽尋常更無委曲，亦不閉眼塞耳，但情不附物 (Jǐngdé chuándēng lù 景德傳燈錄, in T no. 2076, 51:264c). Compare this, too, to the Hónghōu patriarch Báizhàng Huáihǎi’s 百丈懷海’s (720–814) highest stage of practice, in which one may indulge in the senses without risk of defilement (see Poceski, Ordinary Mind as the Way, 211).

169 This poem is itself formally bold. In addition to the tonal “mistake” of line 7, it features a secondary end rhyme (*-IX) in lines 3 and 5.

170 Wáng Xiùlín 10.582; Páнь Dìngwù 10.563; QTS 847.9592.
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

除此二門無別妙

There is nothing so singularly marvelous besides these two gates—

Beneath a riverside pine,
I trace my thoughts alone.

Poetry and Buddhism are “two gates” (line 3), that is, two approaches to the same end goal. In Buddhist writings, this phrase is often used to describe two seemingly contradictory approaches that are fundamentally interrelated and conditioned upon each other, such as the Lesser 小乘 and Greater Vehicles 大乘, or arising-and-ceasing 生滅 and true thusness 真如. Qiji, in his own poetry manual, describes poetry’s forty gates, which are various moods, attitudes, and realms—such as “satisfaction” (déyì 得意, #7), “turning one’s back on the times” (bèishí 背時, #8), “divinity” (shènxiān 神仙, #30), and “purity” (qīngjié 清潔, #40)—through which the poet must enter in order to attain his couplets. They are all distinct approaches which lead to the same goal—a well-wrought poem. The gate metaphor, to Qiji, is pluralist. It stresses that there can be multiple ways to enter into something. In the quatrain to Zhèng Gǔ, poetic composition and Buddhist meditation are two such gates. In the first couplet, they are embodied by the two guides mentioned in the first couplet, Zhèng Gǔ (line 1) and an unspecified “mind-stamped master” who is part of an orthodox lineage (line 2). Qiji positions himself as one who, having gone through both gates, finds himself at the same realm on the other side, where he sits in absorption, no longer with any teacher, following his thoughts as they go by (line 4). That is, poetry and

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171 Mind-stamped master: in Chán, a person who has received the true transmission of the dharma is said to have been “stamped with the mind of the Buddha” (Fóxīn yìn 佛心印). Beyond the birds: on a mountain. It is possible that this refers to Yàngshān Huìjì 仰山慧寂 (807–883), who was very influential in the western Jiāngnán region where Qiji grew up and whose life overlapped with Qiji’s by about 20 years.
meditation are two ways in to the same thing—stillness. Both gates lead to heightened mental concentration.\textsuperscript{174}

Qi\jǐ expands on this idea of mental concentration in another poem to Zhèng Gǔ. Here he draws on the discourse of \textit{kūyín} to invert the normal way it conceives of absorption. Instead of being a means to achieve two different ends (religious insight and poetic creation), absorption becomes an end in itself, something attainable through either literary or religious training.

\textbf{Sent to Director Zhèng Gǔ 寄鄭谷郎中}\textsuperscript{175}

Qi\jǐ 齊己

\begin{tabular}{ll}
詩心何以傳 & How could your poetry mind be passed on? \\
所證自同禪 & You’ve proven that it’s the same as meditation. \\
覓句如探虎 & Seeking for a couplet is like searching for a tiger; \\
逢知似得仙 & Finding understanding is like reaching transcendence. \\
神清太古在 & Your spirit is pure, antiquity resides therein; \\
字好雅風全 & Your words lovely, filled with the Elegantiae and Airs. \\
曾沐星郎許 & You were once praised as a purified starry gentleman,\textsuperscript{176} \\
終慚是斐然 & But were embarrassed that this was too ostentatious. \\
\end{tabular}

The language of Buddhist practice pervades these lines, even as it draws on classical discourse. Zhèng Gǔ’s poetry is imbued with “antiquity” (tàigǔ 太古) and the moral purity of the \textit{Book of Odes} 詩經 (lines 5–6). But Zhèng Gǔ also has a “poetry mind” (shīxīn 詩心) that can be “passed on” (chuán 傳) to his followers, just like the mind of a Chán patriarch (line 1). This implies not only the sense of a lineage we saw in chapter 3, but also that poetry is itself a practice implying a certain view of reality, like meditation, that leads to higher insights. One can cultivate one’s inherent poetry mind, just as one can cultivate one’s Buddha mind (fóxīn 佛心).\textsuperscript{177} It is on this

\textsuperscript{174} For more on the Buddhist origins of the term “gate” in this sense and its influence on late medieval poetic theory, see Zhāng Bòwèi, \textit{Chān yù shīxiù}, 30–34; and Wáng Xiùlín, \textit{Wǎn-Táng Wūdài shìshēng qùntí yánjiū}, 363–64.

\textsuperscript{175} Wáng Xiùlín 3.151–53; Pān Dìngwǔ 3.158; \textit{QTS} 840.9478.

\textsuperscript{176} “Starry gentleman”: a nickname for those who hold high office.

\textsuperscript{177} Qián Zhōngshū also noted this as a distinction between Táng and Sòng attitudes toward the relationship between poetry and meditation. Whereas Sòng poets take the relationship to be metaphorical, the Táng poets who mention
basis that Qíjǐ gives Zhèng Gǔ the highest possible compliment he can think of: he has proven the deep homology between poetry and meditation (line 2). Their fundamental root is not only theoretical, but something that Qíjǐ has witnessed in the work of Zhèng Gǔ. He has shown that one with a deeply cultivated poetry-mind can reach the same insights as one who has cultivated the Buddha-mind. As in the quatrain written to Zhèng Gǔ, Qíjǐ again asserts that poetry and meditation are two “gates” to the same goal.

The second couplet then follows logically from the first. It explains how it is possible that poetry and meditation ascertain the same thing. The enormous effort a poet like Zhèng Gǔ must make to achieve a perfectly wrought couplet is precisely the same effort needed to reach insight through religious practice. Qíjǐ clearly thought it a good couplet, as he included it in his own poetics treatise to illustrate “Hardship” (jǐnnán 艱難), one of poetry’s “Twenty Models” (èrshí shì 二十式). The third line, moreover, draws on one of the theoretical precursors to kūyín, a passage from Jiǎorán’s Models of Poetry (Shīshì 詩式):

又云：不要苦思，苦思則喪自然之質。此亦不然。夫不入虎穴，焉得虎子？取境之時，須至難、至險，始見奇句。成篇之後，觀其氣貌，有似等閒，不思而得，此高手也。

It is also said: “Hard (kū) thought is not necessary. When one thinks hard, he loses the substance of spontaneity.” This too is wrong. If one won’t enter a tiger’s lair, how can one catch a tiger? When obtaining the poem-world, striking couplets only begin to reveal themselves when one goes to the utmost difficulty, the utmost danger. After composing a piece, observe its appearance: if it seems easy, attained without thought, this is the work of a superior hand.179

the relationship (like Qíjǐ and Liú Yúxī), “all combine into one the mind of poetry and the mind of meditation” 皆以詩心佛心，打成一片 (Qián Zhòngshū, Tónghù, 260).

178 Zhāng Bówéi, Quán Táng-Wùdài shìgé huíkào, 405.

179 Jiǎorán 皎然, “Obtaining the Poem-World” 取境, in Shīshì jiàozhù, 1.39–41. This passage also made a deep impression on Guànxiū, who alluded to it when he praised a fellow poet-monk with the line, “You once ran into a tiger while seeking lines” 見句曾衝虎 (Hú Dàjùn 13.615–17; QTS 831.9373).
Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

Lines which appear effortless or spontaneous are never what they seem. That is the illusion of a master poet. As Borges once said, “Perfect things in poetry do not seem strange; they seem inevitable.” Underlying this breezy surface is the solid foundation of hard work. Poetry, like meditation, requires that one braves the rocky terrain of the human mind. Only through years of training, of concentration, of labor, can one attain the sort of perceptual awareness (jìngyi 境意) that is the fruit of both poetic and religious practice.

Qíjǐ elaborated this equation between poetry and meditation not only in poems written to Zhèng Gǔ. If that were the case, one may think that he is simply adopting the terms of his interlocutor for the sake of instruction, a form of upāya. Instead, even in poems describing his own meditation practice, he makes the same claim:

**Sitting in Stillness 靜坐**

Qíjǐ 齊己

Sitting, lying, walking, and standing (drjuH)

I enter meditation, still intoning. (ngim)

Over long days and months, this will (ngjwot)

Wear down my body and mind. (sim)

Simǎ Xiāngrú belittled silent deliberation; (syewX)

Hóngrèn’s address was profound. (syim)

On the path of old pines before my gate, (kengH)

Sometimes I get up to walk in the cool shade. (ʔim)

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180 Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, 4.

181 Recall chapter 3, in which we saw how Sūn Guānxìu 孫光憲 praised Guānxìu for precisely this quality as well: “his perceptual awareness was outstanding and unique, impossible to match” 境意卓異，殆難儔敵 (from “Preface to the White Lotus Collection” 白蓮集序, in *QTW* 900.9390–91; Pān Dingwǔ 598–99; Wáng Xiūlín 619).

182 Wáng Xiūlín 3.143–144; Pān Dingwu 3.152; *QTS* 840.9477

183 This line refers to the image of Simǎ Xiāngrú 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) as a gourmand and sensualist who was not willing to deliberate on matters of state. See Simǎ Xīngrǔ’s biography in Simǎ Qiān, *Shìjī*, 117.3053.

Chapter 6: The Passion of the Poet-Monk

The boldest claim here is the opening: poetry and meditation may be performed simultaneously. That is, the “non-cultivation” advocated in several late medieval Buddhist communities is limited not only to the four postures of sitting, lying, walking, and standing, but extends even to the composition of poetry itself. Qijí then proceeds using the same logic as the previous poem, drawing on the rhetoric of kūyín. The activity he is describing—whether that is taken to be meditation, poetry composition, or a hybrid of the two—takes a physical toll on his body. The two historical figures he draws on in the third couplet could not appear more different on the surface. Simā Xiāngrú did not stop from his sensual activities even to serve the state, instead composing audacious, aurally magnificent fù poetry. Hóngrën, the Buddhist patriarch, wrote a treatise on silent meditation. Yet the two are put in parallel, for both developed the same kind of deep perception of the world—one through poetry, one through meditation. The poem then concludes with the speaker rising from his meditation to stroll through a path of old pines and, presumably, write a poem about them. That is, taking his own equation of meditation and poetry writing seriously, the speaker goes out to put it into practice.

Qijí in these works brings to its fullest expression the assertion of a deep homology religious and poetic practice. If one takes for granted the interfusion of ultimate and mundane reality, if one believes that enlightenment is the realization of this interfusion, and if one assumes that one may therefore practice meditation in the midst of any other activity, then Qijí’s assertion makes perfect sense. It is a small step to go from saying, “wearing clothes, eating food, talking and responding, making use of the six senses—all these activities are dharma-nature” 著衣喫飯，言談祗對，六根運用，一切施為，盡是法性 to saying that poetry may serve a soteriological purpose. Qijí is merely bringing well-established practices into his own favored realm of activity,

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the writing of poetry. But this is not just a casual act of mindfulness; it is an act of asceticism. Both poetry and meditation require an intense concentration which may lead to physical suffering, but the fruit of both is a profound, salvific insight into the very nature of reality. From this perspective, the very term “religious poetry” is redundant, for religion and poetry are different paths to the same goal.

6.5 Conclusion

The homology between meditation and poetry came to its fullest expression in the work of a tenth-century poet-monk (Qiji) after it had been hinted at for much of the ninth century. The insight that these two practices are the same is the culmination of multiple arcs in the history of Chinese poetics. On the one hand, the classical tradition, from Lu Ji’s “Fù on Literature” on down, stressed the importance of the poet’s concentration and mental focus in the process of composition. On the other hand, the kùyín aesthetic, especially as it came to represent an ideal of pure poetry with Jiǎ Dǎo, emphasized the importance of effort and intense devotion to the detail of couplet craftsmanship. When these two strands came together in the late ninth century, and poet-monks who had spent much of their lives devoted to meditation practices encountered them, the match was obvious. Poetry and meditation became two gates which led to a greater perceptual awareness. And precisely this, the awareness of phenomena and their deeper significance as images, is the trigger which may lead one to a sudden insight into the emptiness of all things, otherwise known as enlightenment.

This is an understanding of poetry radically different from what is usually put forth by scholars of medieval China. To Qiji and other poet-monks, poetry is a verbal art, certainly, as well as a linguistic exercise, a social practice, an expression of one’s mind, and all the other
functions we normally attribute to poetry. But it is not only that. It is also a religiously significant practice.

Moreover, Qi ji avoids putting poetry and religion in a hierarchical relationship, in which one is subordinate to the other. While religious goals are seen as primary, both meditation and writing are seen as legitimate ways in to that goal. They are two gates to the same thing. One may even suppose that, since poets cultivate their practice without knowledge of their religious goals, they may be considered better Buddhists. A poet cannot be attached to the idea of enlightenment since he is unaware that he is pursuing it.

Qi ji attempted to combine religious and literary practices at a very specific time in Chinese history. The early tenth century saw the fall of the Tang and the rise of new powers, some hoping to become the next universal dynasty. In such a time of uncertainty, long-held truths would have been questioned. The very idea of civilization was malleable. Bold proposals for synthesizing the traditions of Buddhism and classical literature would have been possible. Qi ji’s equation, at the culmination of a 150-year tradition of poet-monks, was one such proposal.

The consequences of the poet-monks’ proposal rippled out through Chinese religious and literary history, though not so forcefully as what might have been. The poet-monks helped shape later literary culture in subtle ways, but on the whole, they represent a road not taken. Why they became a sidestreet to literary history, rather than the main road, is hinted at in the next chapter.
Part III:

Synthesis
Chapter 7
Conclusion: The First Chinese Buddhist Poetry

得句先呈佛 Attaining lines, you first offer them to the Buddha;
無人知此心 No one understands this mindset.
—Guànxiū 貫休, “Thinking of Qīyī of Wǔchāng: 2 of 2” (懷武昌棲一二首)

7.0 Introduction

The major poet-monks of the late medieval period placed themselves at the intersection of two distinct traditions—poetry and Buddhism—and attempted to harmonize these two traditions into a new synthesis. This integration is most conspicuous in the extremes of their poetics. At their most austere, they equate meditation and poetry in a modified version of kǔyín, saying that they are “two gates” leading to the same goal, a heightened perception of the true nature of things. At their most exuberant, the poet-monks’ repetitions disrupt familiar reading habits, undermine the mundane vision of reality, emphasize their own moral purity, and perform the incantatory power of spells and scriptures. Beyond their poetic practice, the late medieval poet-monks also positioned themselves socially as being fully poets and fully monks. Although they wrote large quantities of exchange poetry to other monks, they were also integral to the networks of literary relations as a whole. With their religious and political travels, they moved between groups and thus could serve as links and as conduits of information transfer. Furthermore, they appropriated a term of disparagement (shīsēng 詩僧) and built a distinct poetic subtradition around it, one which asserted that poetry was “meditation for Confucians.” In so doing, they brought to fulfillment in the late ninth and early tenth centuries a movement that had been gaining momentum since the mid-eighth century.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

This final chapter will emphasize these points once more through a reading of one of Guànxiū’s poems, tying together the major themes of this dissertation and explaining exactly what I mean when I call their work “the first Chinese Buddhist poetry.” After this, we will trace how both Buddhist and mainstream literary readers regarded them with puzzlement, rejecting the poet-monks’ synthesis in favor of a more distinct division between literary and religious practices. In the summary of the late medieval poet-monks’ reception, I will not proceed chronologically, but will instead highlight themes that recur over and over again.2 Finally, we will close with a reflection on what this means for the question we posed in the introduction, on the study of religious poetry.

7.1 Chinese Buddhist Poetry

In claiming that the poet-monks created the first Chinese Buddhist poetry, I mean something very specific. Their work sought to integrate literary practice and Buddhist practice into a seamless unity. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, they repeatedly made claims for the religious power of poetry and for the poetic power of religion. Although monks had written verse in Chinese since at least the fourth century, rarely had this kind of equation been attempted. With the possible exception of Zhī Dùn 支遁 (314–366), previous monks either wrote didactic and propagandistic verse that would have been considered beyond the purview of shī 詩 (classical poetry), or else wrote elite verse according to strictly prescribed poetic personas and occasions that restricted them from exploring any overlap with their religious practices. The late medieval poet-monks, by contrast, used elite poetry written to the highest standards as a way of living out their monastic calling. They saw no separation between their two vocations; both were

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2 The reader interested in tracing the development of Buddhist poetry in China after the tenth century would do well to consult Byrne and Protass, “Poetry: China (Song and After)”; and Egan, “The Northern Song (1020–1126),” 425–32.
means to a shared end. In this way, they saw Buddhism not merely as a supplement, but as a *fulfillment* of the classical literary tradition associated with Rú 儒, that is, “Confucianism.”

Many of these threads come together in a poem by Guànxiū, responding to one written by the famed poet Wéi Zhuāng, likely in 910 as Wéi was on his deathbed. In it, Guànxiū praises Wéi for his righteousness, applauds him for his late turn to Buddhism, and argues that he had been serving the Buddha all along by upholding the best elements of the Confucian cultural tradition.

Matching “Lying at Ease,” Shown to Me by Minister Wéi 和韋相公見示閑臥

Guànxiū 貫休

|刻形求得相 | With carving and engraving, you grasp forms; |
|事事未嘗眠 | Rarely do you sleep, having so much business. |
|霖雨方為雨 | If only continuous rain is rain, |
|非煙豈是煙 | How can non-mist be mist? |
|僮收庭樹果 | A serving boy harvests the courtyard tree’s fruit, |
|風曳案頭箋 | The wind drags desktop papers. |

3 Wéi Zhuāng’s poem is no longer extant, but it was apparently written not long before his death. An anecdote in Tángshī jìshì, in fact, understands his writing of it to be a hint that he knew his end was near:

In the poem “Lying at Ease,” he wrote: “Who knows what it means to ‘lie at ease’? / It’s not illness and it’s not sleep.” And also: “My hand falls along the carved eaves, / And my head inclines toward the straining cloth.” Those who were familiar with it knew that it was inauspicious. Later, he recited Dù Fǔ’s poem: “White sand, sapphire bamboo—sunset over a riverside hamlet; / We see each other off by the purple gate, the moonlight renews.”

He would recite this without ceasing. He died that year in Huālín [Blossom-grove] Ward and was buried at Báishā [White sands].

See Tángshī jīshì jiàojiǎn 68.1830–31.

4 Hú Dàjùn, 2:12.606–11; *QTS* 831.9372–73.

5 Carving and engraving: linguistic flourishes in poetry. Alludes to a passage in the first comprehensive work of literary theory, Wénxīn diàolóng:

自揚、馬、張、蔡,崇盛麗辭,如符畫孔治,刻形鐫法,麗句與深采並流,偶意共逸韻俱發。

Since Yáng Xiōng (53 BCE–18 CE), Sīmà Xiāngrú (179–117 BCE), Zhāng Héng (78–139 CE), and Cài Yōng (132–192 CE), fine phrases have flourished. Like Sòng painting and Wǔ casting, they indulged in a kind of carving and engraving. Their fine lines developed side by side with profound coloring, and their parallelism burst forth together with unbridled sonority.


6 “Non-mist”: auspicious weather. See the passage in *Shìjī* 27.1339:

若煙非煙,若雲非雲,郁郁紛紛,蕭索輪囷,是謂卿雲。卿雲見,喜氣也。

If there is mist that is not mist, or clouds that are not clouds, that are thick and blurry, dreary and desolate and twisting and turning, these are felicitous clouds. When felicitous clouds are seen, it is a good sign.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

仲虺專為誥
Zhòng Huǐ expertly made proclamations,\textsuperscript{7}  
kawH

何充雅愛禪
And Hé Chōng properly loved meditation.\textsuperscript{8}  
dzyen

靜嫌山色遠
In stillness you grudge the mountain scene’s distance;  
hwjonX

病是酒杯偏
Your flaw was a penchant for ale cups.  
phjien

蜩響初穿壁
The sound of cicadas starts to pierce the wall;  
pek

蘭芽半出磚
Orchid sprouts half-emerge from bricks.  
tsywen

堂懸金粟像
In your hall hangs an image of Golden Grain,\textsuperscript{9}  
zjangX

門枕御溝泉
Your doorway pillows an irrigation spring.  
dzwjen

旦沐雖頻握
Though you regularly wash your hair in the morning,\textsuperscript{10}  
ʔaewk

融帷孰敢褰
Who would dare to lift up Mǎ Róng’s curtains?\textsuperscript{11}  
khjen

德高群彥表
Your virtue and eminence are visible among crowds of the talented,  
pjewX

善植幾生前
How much goodness have you planted in your lifetime!  
dzen

修補鳥皮几
You fix up birdskin seats,  
kipX

深藏子敬毡
And hide your revered felt hat.\textsuperscript{12}  
tsyen

扶持千載聖
You uphold the sages of a thousand years,  
syiengH

蕭灑一聲蟬
And are pervasive [as] the sound of locusts.  
dzyen

棋陣連殘月
Your chess moves continue into the late months,  
gnwjot

僧交似大顛
And you have connections to monks like Dàdiān.\textsuperscript{13}  
ten

常知生似幻
You’ve always known that life is like an illusion,  
hwean

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\textsuperscript{7} Zhòng Huǐ: one of the ministers of the great ruler Tāng Tâyng, founder of the Shāng 商 dynasty in high antiquity. Proclamations attributed to him can be found in the Book of Documents (Shāngshū 2.110ff).

\textsuperscript{8} Hé Chōng (292–346): prime minister during the Eastern Jìn 東晉, an early patron of Buddhism in China. If his official biography is to be believed, Guànxiū is drastically understating things here: “Being by nature fond of the Buddhist canon, he esteemed those temples where Buddhism was practiced and supported monks by the hundred, squandering millions without restraint” (Jìnshū 77.2030).

\textsuperscript{9} According to an “original note” 原注, “The Minister frequently paid homage to the layman Vimalakīrti 相公常供養維摩居士.” Golden Grain: Vimalakīrti was known as the “Golden Grain Tathāgatha” in one of his earlier incarnations.

\textsuperscript{10} The washing of one’s hair in the morning symbolized one’s intent to remain pure despite corruption in government. Precedents for the practice include Yǔ the Great 大禹 and the Duke of Zhōu 周公.

\textsuperscript{11} Mǎ Róng 马融 (79–166 CE): famed scholar of the Eastern Hán and teacher of classical commentator Zhèng Xuán 郑玄. He was known for holding lavish concerts, “not limited to Confucian festivals” 不拘儒者之節, and would “sit in his great hall decorated with red gauze curtains, receiving students before him while music-girls were arrayed behind him” 常坐高堂, 施絳紗帳, 前授生徒, 後列女樂 (Hòu Hánshū 60.1972).

\textsuperscript{12} Revered felt hat: alludes to a story about Wáng Xiànzhī 王獻之 (344–386), who once scared off a thief who had broken into his home by telling him to take extra care of his family’s beloved green felt hat. See Wáng Xiànzhī’s biography in Jìn shū 80.2104–05.

\textsuperscript{13} As an “original note” 原注 tells us, this refers to “Meditation Master Dàdiān [732–824], who was esteemed by Hán of the Ministry of Personnel [i.e. Hán Yú 韓愈, 768–824]” 韓吏部重大顛禪師. In his “Letter to Minister Mèng Jiǎn” 與孟簡尚書書, Hán Yú describes Dàdiān as being “rather acutely intelligent, familiar with the principle of the Way” 顗聰明, 識道理, and as being a passionate conversationalist, to the point that “though he doesn’t fully explain essentials, there’s nothing impeding what comes from his heart” 雖不盡解要, 且自胸中無滯礙 (Mǎ Qíchāng, Hán Chānglí wénjī jiàozhù, 3.212; QTW 553.5601).
Chapter 7: Conclusion

維重直如弦  And emphasize being “straight a thread.”14  hen
餅憶ylko美  Of wheat foods, you remember the glory of waterlily soup,15  mijX

28 茶思嶽瀑煎  Of teas, you envision a concoction of marchmount waterfalls.16  tsjen

祗聞溫樹譽  You hear only praises of the Warm Chamber’s Trees,17  yoH
堪比竹林賢  And can be compared to the Bamboo Grove Worthies.18  hen
穎脫三千士  Three thousand great men shucking off their husks,19  dzriX

32 馨香四十年  Forty years of proliferating fragrance.20  nen
寬平開義路  Vast and level, you opened up a road of righteousness,  luH
淡泞潤清田  Clear and deep, you soaked fields of purity.  den
哲后知如子  Wise lords recognized you as a son,  tsiX

36 空王夙有緣  And you once had ties with the King of Emptiness.21  ywen
對歸香滿袖  Facing your rest, a fragrance fills your sleeves,  zjuwH
吟次月當川  And you chant of the moon in the river.22  tsyhwen

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14 According to the *Later History of the Hàn*, a children’s ditty from the twilight of Emperor Shùn’s 漢順帝 reign (115–144 CE) went, “Straight as a thread / On your way to being dead. / Twisted as a hook / Against the nobles’ looks” 直如弦，死道邊。曲如鉤，反封侯 (Hộu Hán shǔ 13.3281).
15 Waterlily soup: Hú Dàjùn believes this is a reference to an anecdote about Zhāng Hàn 張翰 (early fourth century), in which he views waterlilies and other plants, remarks on the common desires of men, then composes his “Fu on the Capital Burial Mounds” 首丘賦 (Jīn shǔ 92.2384). To me, it seems much more likely that it refers to a famous anecdote about Lù Jī 陸機 from the *New Account of Tales of the World*:

陸機頌王武子，武子前置飲羊酪，指以示陸曰：「卿江東何以敵此？」陸云：「有千里蓴羹，但未下鹽豉耳！」

When Lù Jī went to visit Wáng Jì, Wáng set before him several hú-measures of goat curd. Pointing them out to Lù, he asked, “What do you have east of the Yangtze river to match this?” Lù replied, “We only have waterlily soup from Thousand-Mile Lake and salted legumes from Mòxià.”

See Shishùō xínjū jiānshǐ 2.88; trans. adapted from Mather, *Shīh-shuo hsīn-yú*, 45. This story would have alluded to the time when Wéi Zhuāng visited Guānxīu in 887 in Wǔzhōu, located east of the Yángzī.

16 Concoction of marchmount waterfalls: a concoction made from waters gathered from one or several of the five marchmounts 五嶽, considered the pillars of the world, would have been regarded as especially pure.

17 Warm Chamber’s Trees 温[室]樹: alludes to an anecdote about Kǒng Guāng 孔光 (65 BCE–5 CE), who did not deign to respond when a rowdy, unworthy family member asked him what sort of tree grew in the Warm Chambers, one of the halls in Hán court’s Chánglè Palace 長樂殿 (Hán shǔ 81.3354).

18 The Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove: a famous, oft-depicted group of recluse from the mid-third century. Two manuscripts (*SBCK* and *QTS*) give bī 築 (“look down upon”) instead of bǐ (“be compared to”), which would make Guānxīu’s praise of Wéi Zhuāng incredibly hyperbolic (saying that he is so worthy that he could even look down upon the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove). Thus, I follow Hú Dàjùn in giving bǐ 比.

19 Shucking off husks: metaphor for “worthy ministers appearing.” This phrase comes from the *Shìjī* biography of Lord Pingyuán 平原君 (*Shìjī* 76.2366).

20 Forty years: though this seems like a plain phrase, it is in fact an allusion to the forty-year reign of the righteous minister of Chú 楚 known as Lìngyín Zìwén 令尹子文 (see Yú Zhīgū, *Zhūgōng jiùshì* 治宮舊事 1.5a).

21 King of Emptiness: Sākyamuni Buddha. Guānxīu is claiming that Wéi Zhuāng, being so noble, must have met the Buddha in a previous lifetime.
22 I understand 俨 當 (Middle Chinese: *tang*) as being used in its locative sense (“in”), a substitute for 在 (*dzojX*) for the sake of fitting the tonal meter.
Don’t say you’re ashamed at having thus arrived: 
that
Yáo’s heaven is Brahma’s heaven. 
then

In this poem, Guànxiū follows all the norms of a laudatory poem on an official. He praises Wéi Zhuāng with abundant references to the shared texts of mainstream literati (Records of the Grand Historian 史記, other official histories, New Account of Tales of the World 世說新語, Wénxīn diàolóng 文心雕龍, the letters of Hán Yù 韓愈), and to Confucian ideals in particular (the Book of Documents 尚書, the seven worthies of the bamboo grove 竹林七賢). Guànxiū’s knowledge of these discourses is clear, and thus he establishes himself as an authoritative speaker in this tradition.

At the same time, he creates an equivalence between the classical texts of the literary tradition and the goals of Buddhism. Hé Chōng, the great patron of Buddhism from the Jin dynasty, is put in parallel with the ancient sage Zhòng Huí (lines 7–8). Wéi Zhuāng is said to meditate on a ditty from the Hán dynasty (line 26) to remind himself that life is an illusion (line 25). His worth can be measured by the fact that he had connections in this life to “wise lords” (line 35), to elite monks (line 24), and in a previous life to the Buddha himself (line 36). Amidst all of his busy activity as a minister, he also finds time to pay homage to an image of the great layperson and bodhisattva Vimalakīrti (line 13). This culminates in the last four lines of the poem. As Wéi Zhuāng faces his final rest, he sings of the moon in the river (line 38)—a moon that is illusory (being a reflection) and thus a fitting metaphor for the world itself. He arrives thus...
at the realization of Buddhist insight into the nature of things (line 39) and sees Buddhism as the fulfillment of the classical Chinese tradition. That is, he comes to understand that the heaven of sage-king Yáo is precisely the same as that realm of bliss in which the Buddhist god Brahma abides (line 40).

In the process of creating this equivalence, Guànxiū employs many of the strategies we outlined in the last five chapters. The poem opens and closes with repetitions—shìshì 事事 in line 2, yǔ 雨 in line 3, yān 煙 in line 4, tiān 天 in line 40. It emphasizes the importance of connections in establishing its subject’s reputation (lines 24, 35–36). It stresses Wéi Zhuāng’s moral purity and aloofness, like the madmen celebrated in song (lines 9, 15–16, 20, 29–30). At the same time, it underlines how busy and hard-working he is, like the masters of kūyín (lines 2, 17–18). It uses negation and illusion to point to deeper realities (lines 4, 25, 36, 38). It also displays the formal craftsmanship found in kūyín: throughout the entire poem, the second through fifth characters of each couplet display complete parallelism.

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This may also be a direct refutation of the exclusionary lineage established for the Dào by Hán Yù in his seminal “ancient prose” (gǔwén 古文) essay, “On the Origins of the Dào” 道原: “Yáo transmitted it to Shùn; Shùn transmitted it to Yǔ; Yǔ transmitted it to Tāng; Tāng transmitted it to Kings Wén and Wǔ and the Duke of Zhōu; Kings Wén and Wǔ and the Duke of Zhōu transmitted it to Confucius; Confucius transmitted it to Mencius” 堯以是傳之舜，舜以是傳之禹，禹以是傳之湯，湯以是傳之文武周公，文武周公傳之孔子，孔子傳之孟軻 (QTW 558.5650). That is, if one traces back the “orthodox” source of the Confucian Dào to its very root, one finds that it comes from a Heaven that is the abode of a Buddhist deity, too. For more on Hán Yù’s lineage for gǔwén and its transformations in the Sòng, see Skonicki, “Guwen Lineage Discourse in the Northern Song.”

The tonal pattern of the first eight lines of the poem is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Tonal Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Yáo’s heaven is Brahma’s heaven”: it is this kind of equivalence that I mean when I claim that the poet-monks were the inventors of Chinese Buddhist poetry. As we have seen in many places throughout this dissertation, the synthesis of Buddhism and poetry is precisely what Guànxiū, Qíjǐ, and others like them tried to achieve around the turn of the tenth century.

Meditation and incantation were two of the most common practices of a late Táng monk; poetry composition was the most widespread practice of a late Táng literatus. The poet-monks were those who sought to practice both in concert. They did not place one kind of activity over the other, nor did they see one as a metaphor for the other. They were two methods, representing two traditions, that should be seen as mutually fulfilling. The Confucian literary tradition could not fully develop into itself, according to these poet-monks, if it did not draw on Buddhist practices. And Buddhism would not find its fullest expression until it was articulated in classical Chinese verse. Buddhist and Confucian practices are mutually interpenetrating. They are, like principle and phenomena, two ways of seeing the same thing. They are perfectly interfused.

7.2 Poet-Monks among Buddhist Readers

7.2.1 Embracing the Poet-Monks

The poet-monks’ ability to combine Buddhist and classical literary practices in this way made them very attractive to other elite monks. They had proved that it was possible to do both at the same time, to find in traditional Chinese culture a way of serving the Buddha. That is, they had been able to justify Buddhist teachings and rituals to the non-Buddhist literati using the literati’s own terms. If sūtra chanters were nothing more than the mad singers of Confucianism, and if meditation was the same as poetry writing, Buddhism was not an alien religion; it was a transformative force on Chinese culture, a purifying agent that somehow made the classical...
tradition more fully itself. Thus, the poet-monks of the post-Huáng Cháo period became archetypes of those who took a literary approach to Buddhist practice.

Guànxiū’s “Mountain-Dwelling Poems” 山居詩 are perhaps the most influential in this regard. A series of twenty-four poems in regulated heptameter, they portray his retreat in the Zhònglíng mountains in 863–864. They embody a syncretistic spirit that draws on the language of Buddhism, Daoism, and classical reclusion, and they make use of a wide range of literary techniques. They became extremely popular soon after they were first written in the 860s, to the point that Guànxiū felt he had to put out a second, correct edition in 881. Their fame only grew after Guànxiū’s death in 913, as they sparked a tradition of mountain-dwelling poems written by Chán monks for centuries. Just a few of the people who wrote their own versions include such eminent monks as Yòngmíng Yánshou 永明延壽 (904–975), Shiwū Qīnggōng 石屋清珙 (1272–1352), Hānshān Dēqīng 憨山德清 (1546–1623), Hányuè Fǎzàng 漢月法藏 (1573–1635), and, in Japan, Zekkai Chūshin 絕海中津 (1336–1405). Many of these poems either explicitly acknowledge Guànxiū as an inspiration or develop themes that were first articulated in his work.

An even more striking case of Buddhist circles’ embrace of the poet-monks’ works is a text found in two Dūnhuáng manuscripts, Pelliot chinois 2104 and Stein 4037. This text contains a song-style poem by Guànxiū on a monk reciting the Lotus Sūtra. Like Qiji’s song on the same topic (section 5.4.2), Guànxiū’s emphasizes the transformative power of scripture recitation. A performance of the Lotus Sūtra is more than a performance; it is an actual embodiment of all the powers of that scripture.

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26 For a translation and more thorough introduction to these poems, see Mazanec, “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems.”’
27 For a translation of Shiwū Qīnggōng’s mountain-dwelling poems, see Red Pine, The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse. For an overview of Buddhist mountain-dwelling poems from the Táng to the Ming, see Qi Wēi 禹偉, Fójiao shānjūshí yānjū. For a more detailed study of late Ming and early Qing mountain-dwelling poems by Chán monks, see Liao Chao-heng. “Wán-Míng sēngrén ‘Shānjūshī’ lūnxī.”
In Praise of the Lotus Sūtra-Reciting Monk 謂念法華經僧

Guànxiū 贯休

空王門下有真子 Beneath the gate of the King of Emptiness, tsiX A
堪以空王爲使 Who's willing to serve sriX A
常持菡萏白蓮經 He always upholds the lotus blossom, keng -
4 屈指無人得相似 Count it out on your fingers: none ziX A
長松下 Beneath the tall pines, haeX -
深窓裏 Within the deep windows: liX A
歷々清音韻宮 Clear, clear are his pure tones, mjij *A
矩偈長行主客分 Short gāthās and long lines: pjun B
8 不使閑聲掛牙齒 When unused, the loose sounds tsyhiX A
掛外人聞 Outsiders hear, mjun B
聳雙耳 Heed their two ears: nyiX A
香風襲鼻寒毛起 A fragrant breeze enters their noses: khiX A
只見天花落座前 They see only heavenly blossoms falling before his seat. dzen -
12 空中必定有神鬼 In such emptiness, it is certain that kwjijX A
有那里須努力 My master must strive forth. lik C
年深已是成功積 Now advanced in years, tsjieC C
桑田變海骨爲塵 Mulberry fields turn to seas, drin -
16 根似紅蓮色 His roots are red like a lotus. srik C

28 The text below is based upon P.2104, which I have checked against S.4037 and modern, typeset editions (cf. Wu Chi-yu, “Trois poèmes inédits de Kouan-hieu”; QTSBB 1538–39; Zhāng Xīhòu, Quán Dūnhuáng shǐ, 7:55.2797–2800; Hú Dàjùn 1096–97; and Xú Jùn, Dūnhuáng shíji ěr cānjù juǎn jī, 18).
30 The original manuscript gives the final character as shì 事 (*dzriH), which is corrected to shǐ 使 (*sriX) in red on the manuscript. I follow the latter for the sake of a better rhyme; it is also the more difficult reading, since liāo shì 了事 is a common phrase meaning, essentially, “taking care of business."
31 The second character for “lotus blossom” (hàndàn 花譜) is written in P.2014 as ++ over 彌晶
32 P.2104 mistakenly writes jǔ 矩 (carpenter’s square, measure) for duǎn 短 (short). I follow S.4037 in emending it to duǎn. Short gāthās: the verse sections of the Lotus Sūtra. Long lines: the prose sections.
Guànxiū underscores the monk’s embodiment of the Lotus Sūtra’s numinous power through a focus on physicality. We find here references to specific body parts: the “fingers” 指 of line 4, the sounds “hanging from one’s teeth” 挛牙齒 in line 8, the “two ears” 雙耳 of line 9, and the “nose” 鼻 and “skin-hairs” 寒毛 of line 10. The body becomes a site of passage, with incense entering, musical notes leaving, and some “loose sounds” 閑聲 hanging from his teeth.\(^{33}\) It pays careful attention to such details because, as we saw in Qījí’s song, the body is the very place where the sūtra abides for the duration of the recitation. It is therefore a holy place, worthy of detailed description and even veneration.

Formally, this poem shows remarkable craft. The meter strikes a delicate compromise between regulated and unregulated verse. The majority of this poem’s lines follow a loosely regulated heptameter interspersed with pairs of trimeter. This choice allows Guànxiū to vary the meter of the piece without affecting its pace (two lines of trimeter are rhythmically equivalent to one line of heptameter). The final four lines follow a slightly different pattern, with a parallel heptametric couplet sandwiched between two parallel lines of pentameter (i.e., 5-7-7-5). This departure creates a sense of closure as the pace slows down: one must linger longer over the pentametric lines in order to make them rhythmically equivalent to their heptametric counterparts.\(^{34}\) The rhyme of the final quatrain reinforces this closing gesture. Whereas the rest of the poem rhymes on even lines (plus line 1) with the sound *-ij,\(^{35}\) the last four lines follow a new pattern. Here the rhyme words shift to hard-stopped entering tones. The first and last lines of

\(^{33}\) This vivid, if rather “vulgar,” image of things hanging from one’s teeth can be found in one of Guànxiū’s received poems as well: “If you don’t [eat] phoenix roast or kyrin meat / Let one of them hang from your teeth” 翔非鳳炙麒麟肉，燕能一掛於齒牙. From “Five Poems Written Offhandedly: 4 of 5” 偶作五首（其四） (Hú Dàjùn 5.292; QTS 828.9330).

\(^{34}\) On the creation of a sense of closure through the establishment of and departure from a rhythmic pattern, see Smith, Poetic Closure, esp. 38–50. The implied pause at the end of a metrically short line when placed next to long lines is a common feature to many poetic traditions. For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon in English verse, see Attridge, The Rhythms of English Poetry, 84–96.

\(^{35}\) Line 6 is an exception, ending with *-ij in a level tone 平聲.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

the stanza form a tight rhyme of *-ik, while the second line rhymes loosely with *-iek. The effect is that the final quatrain sets itself off as a new pattern, different from but related to the first twelve lines of the poem.

Much like Qijī’s song on a recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, this poem obsesses over sound. A servant of the Buddha (line 2), the lauded monk “upholds the scriptures” (line 3) through his recitation of them. His voice is clear and precise (line 6), differentiating between the verse sections (short gāthās 短偈) and the prose (long lines 長行) in his enunciation. The verses, being more essential, are likened to the “host” or “master” 主, while the prose is likened to a “guest” 客 (line 7). He changes his voice to emphasize the verses when he comes to them, most likely switching into a more melodic mode of recitation. His chanting is so lovely it draws in “outsiders” 外人, non-Buddhists (line 9). The smell of incense blown their way makes their hairs stand up (line 10), and they become enraptured in a vision of divine flowers falling before his seat (line 11). Such a vision, apparently, confirms the existence of supernatural beings (line 12).

In the closing stanza comes a shift of tone, matching the shift in linguistic tones. While the earlier sections are descriptive, the final lines are exhortative. Guānxǐū encourages “my master/teacher” 吾師 to “strive forth” 努力 (line 13). In his old age, the chanting monk has accumulated much merit (line 14). Therefore, though the land may turn to sea and his body to dust (line 15), the monk should not fear, for he is firmly planted in the Buddha-Dharma, with roots red as a lotus 根似紅蓮色 (line 16).

The fact that Guānxǐū could have written such a tightly crafted poem integrating themes from both Buddhist and classical poetic traditions should come as no surprise. The formal

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36 In the *Lotus Sūtra* 法華經, the teacher “who is able to explain the unsurpassable Dharma in this wicked world should be offered heavenly flowers and incense, as well as robes of heavenly jewels” 能於此惡世，廣説無上法，應以天華香，及天寶衣服 (*T* no. 262, 9:31a).
boldness, the attention to sound, the deep knowledge of Buddhist practice—these are hallmarks of his work. In addition to Qíjí’s poem on a Lotus Sūtra-reciting monk, it also bears remarkable similarities to a different Guànxiū poem in his received corpus.\(^{37}\) What is surprising is the context of the manuscript in which this poem appears.

Immediately following Guànxiū’s poem in both P.2104 and S.4037 is a long series of spells and mantras, meaning that the original context for the poem (or as close as we can ever get to it) is a set of efficacious religious texts. Guànxiū’s poem was a part of a ritual toolbox. Spells and mantras served a supremely practical purpose: they were the means by which one accumulated spiritual power and wielded it against malevolent forces. They are the province of the specialist, who knew what spell to use, where to find it, and how to properly recite it. The texts themselves contain an introduction (A), the spell itself in transliterated pseudo-Sanskrit (B), a description of its powers (C), and, sometimes, instructions on when to use it. The following spell is typical of such texts:\(^{38}\)

\[
\text{[A]} \\
\begin{align*}
\text{除一切怖畏說如是呪。} \\
\text{In order to get rid of all fear, say this spell.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{[B]} \\
\begin{align*}
\text{悼枳咤咤羅，卓枳嚧呵餘，摩訶嚧呵餘，阿囉遮囉多囉莎訶。} \\
\text{Taki, tatarataki, rokarei, makarokarei, ara, shara, tara, shaka.}\(^{39}\)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{[C]} \\
\begin{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{37}\) See “The Sūtra-Upholding Monk” 長持經僧, in Hú Dàjùn 2.104–05; QTS 826.9311.

\(^{38}\) I have taken P.2104 as my base text, checking it against S.4037 and P.2105. For catalogue entries on these manuscripts, see Gernet et al., Catalogue, 1:68–73; and Giles, Descriptive Catalogue, 186. This spell is adapted from the Dà nièpán jīng 大般涅槃經 (Skt: Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra), trans. Dharmakṣema 大毘婆舍夜 in 421, T no. 374, 12:370a.

\(^{39}\) Translation of the spell follows Yamamoto, The Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra, 10. Unfortunately, very little of the Sanskrit version of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra survives, so it is impossible to render this into a meaningful Indic original.
This spell is capable of putting back together one with a scattered mind, one who is terrified, one who is explaining the Dharma, and one who shall never be cut off from the true Dharma. For the purpose of overcoming heterodox ways, for the purpose of protecting oneself, for the purpose of protecting the true dharma, and for the purpose of protecting the great assembly [i.e., the samgha], say the spell in this way.

If there are any who can uphold it, they will be free of the fear of a mad elephant. If they reach an expanse of wilderness, an empty marsh, or a precipitous place, fear will not arise. Moreover, they will be free of the hardships of water, fire, lions, tigers, wolves, thieves, and bad rulers.

If there are any who can uphold this spell, they will be able to rid themselves of all these things, and thus these fears.

The spell is meant to calm the mind in the face of many kinds of difficulties. It works for specifically religious problems, such as trouble in explaining the Dharma, and it works with more mundane problems, such as wild beasts and corrupt officials. It is a sort of psychological salve, helping the practitioner confront fearful things. In a word, it is efficacious. This spell for getting rid of fear is the just one of many. Others include a “Spell for the Release of Purgatory” 地獄摧砕呪, a “Spell for when One is Meditating on the Three Paths” 若念三道呪, a “Spell for the Distribution of Food” 散食呪, spells to accompany offerings to bodhisattvas in each of the four seasons (offerings of incense 香, flowers 花, lamps 燈, and sweet dew 甘露 in spring, summer, autumn, and fall, respectively), and many others. Such texts are above all practical in nature. They are tools used to achieve specific results. It is for this reason that I would refer to the manuscripts in which these texts are instantiated as “ritual toolboxes.” A monk would consult this manuscript, wield a spell, then put the manuscript away.
These manuscripts are repositories of various ritual texts, and they were probably carried or studied by monks, to be deployed when they were called upon to recite these spells and mantras. The physical features of P.2104 illustrate this most clearly (see Figure 7.1): the main text, written in black ink, is accompanied by paratextual markings in red. In addition to corrections and notes, we also find a variety of symbols clearly indicating section breaks, a few punctuation marks, and lines which direct the reader’s eye to the next character. All of these markings make scanning over and reading the manuscript much easier, which affirms the fact that such texts were meant to be used (not just to be venerated or to be copied as a way of accumulating merit).  

A ritual specialist, called upon to recite a spell to exorcise a troublesome ghost, could quickly find the right text.

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**Figure 7.1**

40 For more on the use of similar markings in sūtra commentaries found in Dünhuáng, see Hureau, “Les commentaires de sūtra bouddhiques.”
Detail from Pelliot chinois 2104, verso. The red markings, which include section headings, lines of division, and corrections, imply practical use.

In addition to these spells, the manuscripts contain several other kinds of texts, in prose and in verse, that would have been particularly useful to a tenth-century monk. The work which comes just before Guànxiū’s poem is a “Transfer of Merit after the Comparing of Scriptures” 較經後迴向文. In a transfer of merit, the good merit accrued by one person’s positive act, such as the copying of a sūtra, would be transferred to a beneficiary. The “Transfer of Merit after the Comparing of Scriptures” is the kind of text that would have had great practical use in a Buddhist scriptorium, being the last step after the manual reproduction of a scripture, after comparing the copied text to its source to check for errors. By reciting these words, one formally completes the process and ensures that the whole thing will be efficacious.

The ritual toolbox also contains several texts in verse. There are three such sections common to these manuscripts: 1) a long “Digest of the Secret Essentials of Chán” (Chánmén miyào jué 禪門秘要決) in four-character meter; 2) several unattributed gāthās (which, in other sources, are attributed to the monks Běnjìng 本淨 and Jūdùn 居遁) in five- and seven-character meter; and 3) the brief “Inscription on Seated Meditation” (Zuòchán míng 坐禪銘) in three-character meter, which we examined in section 6.4.1. The first of these pieces, the “Digest,” closely resembles the “Song of the Realization of the Way” (Zhèngdào gē 證道歌), which was (and still is) a sort of primer on Chán, to be memorized by practitioners. It became extremely popular by the 830s, showing up in Chinese and Japanese catalogues throughout the ninth century. Its rhyme and meter doubtless facilitated memorization, making it an important didactic

41 For more on “transfer of merit” texts, and the ritual programs they were embedded in, see Teiser, “The Literary Style of Dunhuang Healing Liturgies,” and Teiser, “Ornamenting the Departed.”
tool within ninth- and tenth-century monastic communities. The “Inscription on Seated Meditation,” though less popular than the “Digest,” is also the sort of thing that would have been memorized by Buddhist practitioners: it contains instructions, in verse, on how to go about meditation. As part of our ritual toolbox, both pieces were tools used for the sake of preserving and sustaining the Buddhist community. The short meters of the “Digest” and “Inscription,” along with their rather dry language, set them off as being primarily oriented toward instruction, with little concern for style. They may be elegant, but it is unlikely that anyone considered them poetic. Likewise with the shorter gāthās by Bènjìng and Jūdūn—they are practical, instructional texts without much that would have been regarded as literary in them.

The fact that a literary song by Guànxiū appears in this kind of manuscript tells us about at least one early audience for the poet-monks. It means that a Buddhist community in Dūnhuáng read (or heard) Guànxiū’s song and understood its value to be religious. Despite its lack of an explicit doctrinal message, some readers recognized that it was trying to perform Buddhism in its very literariness. The fact that two manuscripts exist also shows us that its appearance is not just an accident, a stray text added by a scribe on a whim. No, it was copied from one version to the next. Someone saw the manuscript in its entirety, decided that it would be good to have another copy of it, and spent hours reproducing its entire contents, including Guànxiū’s poem. In the

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42 Whether or not the song was authored by Yǒngjiā Xuānjué 永嘉玄覺 (665–713), as tradition claims, is not germane to this chapter. My review of the evidence leads me to concur with Hú Shì 胡適, Bernard Faure, and Jinhua Jia in doubting this claim. See the useful summaries of previous scholarship on the topic in Xū Jūn, Dūnhuáng shǐji ēnjuàn jìkǎo, 4–7, and Jia, The Hongzhou School, 91–94.
43 See Zhāng Xīhòu, Quán Dūnhuáng shǐ, 13:158.5969–70. In addition to the three manuscripts under discussion, a version of this “Inscription on Seated Meditation” 坐禪銘 can be found in S.2165, in which it is attributed to “Śramaṇa Sīdā 思大和尚, a disciple of Huineng 惠能.
44 A third version of the ritual toolbox exists (Pelliot chinois 2105) which lacks Guànxiū’s poem but is otherwise the same as the other two. These texts are hard to date precisely, so we cannot say which is first. But either way, this is potentially even more interesting because it reveals an act of judgment about Guànxiū’s poem in the process of copying the manuscript. Either someone had the manuscript and decided Guànxiū’s poem fit, so they put it in, or someone saw Guànxiū’s poem in two versions, decided it did not fit, and removed it from the next iteration. In both
later tenth century, we see signs that some poems by poet-monks were understood to be enacting Buddhism through literature, and they were cherished for precisely that reason.

7.2.2 Rejecting the Poet-Monks

In the tenth century, some communities recognized the religious value of poems by poet-monks, including them in sermons and ritual manuscripts. But this warm reception did not continue unabated in the following centuries. Later attitudes toward the late medieval poet-monks were ambivalent at best. Even as Chán masters wrote their own mountain-dwelling poems and quoted the poet-monks in their sermons, other anecdotes and rulebooks saw in them a threat. As paragons of a literary approach to Buddhism, some worried that they stood at the top of a slippery slope and would encourage the faithful to slide into complacent Confucianism.

One example is a story about Guànxiū, Qíjǐ, and another poet-monk named Xuántài living at Mt. Shíshuāng in the late 880s. The 1238 collection Xù gǔzǔnsù yǔyào (Essential words of the old masters, continued) describes how the lay person Zhāng Zhuó came to Mt. Shíshuāng to call upon its head monk Shíshuāng Qìngzhū and was unimpressed with what he saw.

举禅月休禅师，在石霜充典座。一日张拙入山，访石霜，见其形貌枯悴，语言平淡，遂不喜之，拂袖而下。到知客寮，见禅月、齐巳、太布衲，议论琅琅。张乃问曰：
「三人中，何不推一人作长老？」禅月知张之意，轻於石霜，乃曰：「堂中五百眾，

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45 Xuántài: Southern poet-monk who had studied meditation with Déshān Xuānjìan and Shīshuāng Qìngzhū. None of his extant poems survive, but we have poems written to him by Li Xiányōng (QTS 645.7395; 645.7397), Qíjǐ (Wáng Xiǔlín 7.341–42; Pān Dīngwù 7.351–52; QTS 844.9537; and Wáng Xiǔlín 9.528; Pān Dīngwù 9.504; QTS 846.9580), Qīchān (QTS 848.9609), and Xiūmù (QTS 849.9618). See also his biography in Sòng gāosèng zhuan 宋高僧传, comp. Zànning 贊寧 (T no. 2061, 50:818a).

46 Shīshuāng Qìngzhū: famous meditation master, considered by some to be the fourth dharma heir of Southern Chán. During the tenth century, he was also understood to have been the founder of his own lineage (Shīshuāng), which was considered one of the eight major Chán lineages at the time, along with Wēi-Yāng 沃仰, Cáo-Dòng 曹洞, Déshān 德山, Linjī 至澄, Xuěfēng 雪峰, Yùnmén 雲門, and Fǎyuán 法眼. See Jia, The Hongzhou School, 115.
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似卑僧者，二百五十，勝卑僧者，二百五十。堂頭和尚，乃身肉菩薩。」張聞此語，再整威儀。

Guànxiū—Meditation Master Chányuè—was serving as head cook at Mt. Shíshuāng. One day Zhāng Zhuó came to the mountain inquiring after Shíshuāng Qīngzhū. When he saw that [Shíshuāng’s] appearance was withered and his speech plain, he was unhappy and left with a flick of his sleeve.47 When he arrived at the guests’ quarters, he saw Chányuè, Qījī, and Xuántài debating in a sterling manner. Zhāng asked them, “Why shouldn’t one of the three of you be recommended to become abbot?” Chányuè, understanding that Zhāng meant to belittle Shíshuāng, said, “Five hundred people gather at this temple: two hundred fifty lowly-seeming monks, and two hundred fifty superior monks. The head of our temple is a bodhisattva in the flesh.” When Zhāng heard this he fixed his attitude.49

The poet-monks’ refined speech contrasts with the simplicity of Shíshuāng’s. Zhāng Zhuó, taken in by appearances, wonders how it is possible that someone as renowned as Guànxiū can serve as cook, while the sickly, plain-spoken Shíshuāng can be abbot. Guànxiū disabuses Zhāng of his preconceptions about the relationship between linguistic refinement and religious insight. Achievement in one does not necessarily indicate achievement in another. Another version of this anecdote stresses that poetry is the main difference between the poet-monks and Shíshuāng. Guànxiū, Qījī, and Xuántài are said to have “made poetry their Buddha-work” 以詩筆為佛事, and Zhāng Zhuó suggests that one of them become head abbot because “he meant to slight Shíshuāng for not being skilled in poetry” 意少石霜不善詩筆.50 Both versions of this story hinge on recognizing the late medieval poet-monks as the epitome of literary refinement. Such high worldly status puts Shíshuāng’s simplicity in sharper relief. The attitude portrayed in this story—that linguistic simplicity should be equated with authenticity—is antithetical to the sort of

47 Flick of his sleeve: an expression indicating anger.
48 Tāi 太 is a mistake (or abbreviation) for Tài 泰.
49 Huíshì Shīmíng 昏室師明, Xǔ guīzūnsù yūyào 續古尊宿語要 (published 1238), in Z no. 1318, 68:397a.
50 See the commentary to the thirteenth case in Zhèngjué Niáng 正覺拈古, comp., Wànsòng lǎorén Píngchāng Tiāntóng Jué hēshǎng niāngǔ qīngyì lù 萬松老人評唱天童覺和尚拈古請益錄, annot. Xíngxiàng Píngchāng 行秀 評唱, (published 1230, republished 1607), in Z no. 1307, 67:467c. In this version, Xuántài is the one who delivers the words that reveal Zhāng’s prejudice, since he is said to be the only one among them who was fully enlightened.
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literary Buddhism practiced by Guànxìū and Qíjī.\(^5\) In fact, it recalls the subordination of literary to religious pursuits advocated by Bái Jūyì (see section 2.2.1). This attitude is conveyed most powerfully when it is put into the mouths of poet-monks like Guànxiū and Xuántài. Those who told and recorded this anecdote used the literary reputation of poet-monks to undermine the idea of practicing Buddhism through literature. Linguistic refinement, including knowledge of poetry, was just one more source of delusion.

As exemplars of a literary approach to Buddhist practice, the poet-monks represented a real danger to practitioners of the newly emerging Chán of the Northern Sòng dynasty. One risked becoming caught up in the beauty of literature and end up on a path away from monasticism. An example of this can be found in the Chán monastic codes codified in 1103, the Chányuàn qīngguī 禪苑清規. The section on scribes calls Guànxiū and Qíjī “poet-monks” with a note of disdain and implies that they lost a true mind of renunciation.

古詩書啟疏詞文字，應須遍覽以益多聞。若語言典重式度如法，千里眉目一眾光彩。然不得不一向事持筆硯輕侮同袍，不將佛法為事。禪月、齊己止號詩僧。賈島、慧休流離俗宦，豈出家之本意也。

[A scribe] should read widely—ancient and modern correspondence, poetry, and prose—to improve his knowledge. If the language used by the scribe is refined and elegant and his style fits the forms, then a letter sent a thousand miles away can be regarded as glorious by erudite men. [The scribe] must not use pen and ink to spite or intimidate his colleagues with no consideration for the Dharma. Chányuè [Guànxiū] and Qijī were only called poet-monks. Jiǎ Dāo and Huìxū drifted away to become secular officials. But is this the real meaning of renunciation?\(^5\)

Literary ability, when deployed in written correspondence, can help promulgate the dharma. It proves one’s learning and situates one as having agency in the world of literate Chinese

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\(^5\) The second version of the anecdote, in fact, quotes a poem by Fóyìn Líaoyuán 佛印了元 (1032–1098) which warns against attaching too high an importance on poetry, concluding: “Though Qijī and Guànxìū’s melodies shook the land, / Who would put them in a chart of patriarchs?” 齊己貫休聲動地，誰將排上祖師圖.

discourse. However, poetry is dangerous because it risks becoming a distraction from religious pursuits. It is at best supplemental, and sometimes antithetical, to the purposes of renunciation. Indeed, this passage reveals the “tremendous, widespread, and deeply felt monastic anxiety about poetry and poiesis” in the Sòng period.\textsuperscript{53} Guànxiū and Qǐjí become negative examples. They teetered on the brink of laicization, only one step away from being ex-monks like Jiā Dāo and Huixiū. The Chán practitioner would do well not to follow their lead.

Buddhist monastic communities held ambivalent attitudes toward the late medieval poet-monks. On the one hand, these poet-monks served as models for practicing Buddhism through literature. The many Chán masters who quoted and imitated their works speak to the fact that they maintained an admiring audience for centuries. The case of the Dūnhuáng manuscript P.2104 suggests that some communities even recognized the religious goals of the poet-monks’ works. On the other hand, literature was also dangerous. If one took an ideal like kūyín seriously, poetry was an all-consuming activity that was at best superfluous and at worst harmful to one’s monastic vocation. Poetry encouraged privileging literary skill over piety, which could delude unwise laypeople or eventually lead a novice away from the samgha and into the official bureaucracy. Poetry, as the verbal art par excellence, was a potential impediment: one needed linguistic training to communicate with the world at large, but overindulgence led one away from the ideals of renunciation. Many concluded that it was best to avoid literature altogether. Therefore, poet-monks like Guànxiū and Qǐjí should not be admired. They were the ones who walked up to the edge of monasticism and leaned out over the abyss.

### 7.3 Poet-Monks among Literati Readers

\textsuperscript{53} Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry,” 62.
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The other main audience for the poet-monks, of course, was the mainstream literary tradition. After all, poet-monks wrote in an elite style that implied a highly educated readership, and they sought precisely to synthesize the classical literary tradition and Buddhism. As we saw in chapters 5 and 6, the late medieval poet-monks aligned themselves on the one hand with the mad song-style verse of Lǐ Bái and Lǐ Hè, and on the other hand with the kūyín aesthetic of Jiǎ Dào. Neither association served them well among literati audiences in the coming centuries. In particular, the gūwén 古文 (“ancient prose” or “ancient culture”) movement which began to emerge as a major force in the late tenth and eleventh centuries rejected both of these ideals. As I have already mentioned briefly in section 2.2.2, the major gūwén spokesperson Ōuyáng Xiū 歐陽修 (1007–1072) was particularly hostile to Jiǎ Dào and the eleventh-century “Late Táng style” 晚唐體 that sought to imitate him.\(^{54}\) He, along with other advocates of gūwén, objected to what they deemed the frivolity of their verses. This could take two forms, either smallness of subject matter (poems on mere objects instead of on grand ideas of governance) or obsession with craft at the expense of subject. Poets embracing a kūyín aesthetic could be accused of both. Similar objections could be brought to those who continued the tradition of Lǐ Hè’s fantastical, song-style verse (sections 5.5.3, 3.2.1) and those who filled their works with erudite allusions (see Guànxiū’s works throughout). Such writing styles implied a hierarchy of language over content, and they would not be promoted by gūwén advocates. Add to this most gūwén adherents’

\(^{54}\) Scholarship on Ōuyáng Xiū and poetry is abundant. A good introduction in English is Egan, The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu, 78–122. For detailed studies of Ōuyáng’s literary style, see Féng Zhīhóng, Běi-Sòng gūwén yùndòng de xíngchéng, 164–82; and Zhū Gāng, Táng–Sòng “gūwén yùndòng” yǔ shìdàfǔ wénxué, 154–73. It should also be noted that in the eleventh century the term “Late Táng style” usually refers in fact to the period of about 860–907 (i.e., “end of Táng” 唐末), not 820–860 (see Lǐ Dingguāng, Tàngmò Wùdài luânsi wénxué yánjiū, 124–25).
antipathy toward Buddhism, and it is no wonder that the late Táng poet-monks were not highly regarded at this time.

To later generations, the poet-monks of the Táng were mainly known through the works of Jiǎorán, Guànxiū, and Qíjǐ. In the mid-seventeenth century, Máo Jìn 毛晋 (1599–1659) gave this idea concrete form when he put together a collection titled The Collected Poetry of Three Eminent Monks of the Táng 唐三高僧詩集, consisting of the three monks’ 1,920 poems in 12 volumes. Of the three major poet-monks of the Táng, Jiǎorán’s reputation fared the best in later centuries. This was partially due to the fact that he left behind a fairly extensive body of criticism, which proved to later readers that he thought deeply about poetry and afforded them a glimpse, it seemed, into his mind as a writer. But just as important was the accident of his birth. As someone who lived during the period dubbed the “High Táng” 盛唐, he was part of what would later be considered a golden age. Many later evaluations of the relative merits of Táng poet-monks place him first. For example, Yán Yǔ 嚴羽 writes in his famous Cānglàng shìhuà 滄浪詩話 (early/mid 13th cent.), “The monk Jiǎorán’s poetry is the best among monks in the Táng. Táng poet-monks include Fǎzhèn, Fǎzhào, Wúkě, Hūguó, Língyī, Qīngjiāng, Wúběn [i.e., Jiǎ Dào], Qíjǐ, and Guànxiū” 釋皎然之詩，在唐諸僧之上。唐詩僧有法震、法照、無可、護國、靈一、清江、無本、齊已、貫休也. In the late Ming anthology Táng Poetry, Sorted 唐詩歸, Zhōng Xīng 鍾惺 (1574–1624) distinguishes Jiǎorán from other monks by saying that his works do not carry the flavor of monasticism:

55 This is not to say that everyone who promoted gǔwén was averse to Buddhism. One early eleventh-century monk named Gūshān Zhiyùán 孤山智圆 (976–1022) attempted to reconcile gǔwén and Buddhism. See Skonicki, “Viewing the Two Teachings as Distinct yet Complementary.”
56 This only copy of this book appears to be in the National Diet Library of Japan 国立国会図書館. Its catalogue entry can be viewed online at http://iss.ndl.go.jp/books/R100000001-1065070330-00. It is also mentioned in Hsiao Li-hua, “Wăn-Táng shìshēng Qijǐ de shǐchán shìjiè,” 158.
57 Yán Yǔ, Cānglàng shìhuà, 1.15a
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Monkish poems have the air and habits of monkish poems. If you are a monk, you must not write monkish poetry, and then your works will not have the air and habits of monkish poetry. Jiǎorán is pure and far-reaching: he must have attained this in poetry, not in monasticism.58

Zhōng Xīng praises Jiǎorán at the expense of other poet-monks. He is exceptional precisely because he transcends his monastic identity and becomes a poet first and foremost. This is exactly the same claim Liú Yǔxī made about Jiǎorán in his notes on Língchè’s works (section 2.1.3). He is a poet in spite of being a monk, not because of it.

Those poet-monks who lived through the collapse of the dynasty were not as fortunate as Jiǎorán. Traditional criticism posits a necessary connection between the spirit of an age and the writings produced therein. By this logic, the poems of a time of collapse and disunity, such as the late ninth and tenth centuries, must necessarily reflect decadence and immorality. Qiǎji’S reputation survived as a fragment of its former self. By the Sòng dynasty, he was known chiefly for his mastery of tonal prosody, despite the wide variety of styles that he wrote in. For example, Wáng Máo (1151–1213) cited one of Qiǎjī’S poems to make a point about the proper pronunciation of zhòng 中 in one of its less common uses.

今言中酒之中，多以為平聲，祖《三國志》中聖人、中賢人之語。然齊己柳詩曰：「穠低似中陶潛酒，輭極如傷宋玉風。」乃作仄聲。或者謂平仄一意，僕謂中酒之中從仄聲。自有出處，按《前漢》論「軍士中酒」注「竹仲反」，齊己祖此。

When people today say the zhòng of zhòngjiǔ (“tipsy with alcohol”), most pronounce it with a level tone (*trjuwng). The locus classicus for this meaning are the words “tipsy sages” and “tipsy worthies” in the Record of the Three Kingdoms.59 However, Qiǎjī’S poem on a willow reads: “Clustered, it droops as if tipsy with Táo Qián’s ale, / Lithe, its

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58 Tǎngshì guì, j. 17.
59 In fact, only “tipsy sage” is used in this text. This comes from the biography of Xú Miǎo 徐邈 (171–249), an official who served under Cáo Cāo and Cáo Pī. His habit of getting drunk at court made the elder Cáo angry and the younger Cáo laugh. See Sānguó zhì 27.739.
ends seem to grieve with the airs of Sòng Yù.” Some say that level and deflected have the same meaning. I say the zhòng of zhòngjiǔ should be a deflected tone. There is a source for this, namely the Former History of the Hàn’s biography of Fán Kuài, in which “The soldier was tipsy with alcohol” is glossed as “trj–+–uwngH.” Qiji took this as his locus classicus.

Wáng’s proof for zhòng being pronounced with a deflected tone is only as good as the authority of his sources. For this reason, he grounds his explanation for the meaning in the ancient Record of the Three Kingdoms and his pronunciation in the work of Qiji. Because Qiji was known as a master of regulated verse who paid particularly close attention to tonal prosody, Wáng could cite him as an authority. The very fact that the couplet cited is written in a hyper-regulated, completely parallel style underscores his point. It is for this kind of craftsmanship that a Qīng-dynasty collection of regulated verse, the Jintī qiūyáng 近體秋陽, said that “so many of [Qiji’s] works are excellent that we cannot include them all” 篇多佳，收不可盡. They are exemplary models of regulated verse. This is also why Qiji, though generally regarded now as a minor poet, had some very devoted admirers throughout the centuries. Ji Yún 紀昀 (1724–1805), for one, ranked him above Guànxìū and Jiàorán, calling him “the foremost among poet-monks of the Táng” 唐詩僧以齊己為第一. And Zhōng Xīng, in his anthology of Táng poetry, remarks that “Qiji’s poetry has a kind of air of lofty sincerity and divine marvel” 齊己詩有一種高渾靈妙之

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60 This line comes from “Lyrics on Breaking off a Willow Branch: 3 of 4” 折楊柳詞四首（其三）(Wáng Xiùlín 10.592–93; Pán Dingwù 10.574–75; QTS 847.9595).
61 In this instance, zhòng must be read as a deflected tone (like modern zhòng) for the sake of tonal prosody. A diagram of this couplet reads:

![Diagrams](https://example.com/diagram.png)

62 The full annotation by Yán Shīgǔ 顏師古 (581–645) reads: “The zhòng about drinking alcohol refers to being neither drunk nor sober, hence it is called zhòng (“middle”). Zhòng is pronounced trj–+–uwngH” 飲酒之中也，不醉不醒，故謂之中，中音竹仲反 (Hànshū 41.2068).
63 Wáng Máo, Yèkè cónghū, 24.4
64 Quoted in Tángshí huìpíng, 3.3117.
65 Quoted in Fāng Hui, Yingkui lâsuí huìpíng, 12.437.
The continuity of the regulated verse form, which continued to be a favored form of poetic expression by educated Chinese all the way into the twentieth century, ensured that Qiji would find at least a small readership for centuries to come.

Indeed, when the editors of the annotated catalogue for the Sikū quánshū 四庫全書 (Complete books of the four treasures) evaluated Qiji’s work in the late eighteenth century, they offered qualified praise precisely along these lines. Though Qiji’s writings in looser meters are deemed unworthy of consideration, the editors maintain a fondness for some of his regulated heptametric poems.

Many were the monks who were skilled in poetry during the Táng dynasty. But of those whose collections have been passed down to today, there are only Jiāorán, Guànhuī, and Qiji. Jiāorán is pure but weak. Guànhuī is bold but uncouth. Qiji’s regulated heptametric poems do not break free of his contemporaries’ exercises. His old-style heptametric poems take the styles of Lú Tóng (775?–835) and Mǎ Yì (jīnshí 784) and shorten them into briefer stanzas. Being full of harsh and dissonant words, they are not worthy of consideration. Regulated heptametric poems, however, comprise sixty percent of his collection. Though they tend to follow the Wūgōng school [of Yáo Hé], they are uniquely robust in style. For example, his poems “Swordsman,” “Listening to a Zither,” and

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66 Zhōng Xíng, Tángshī guǐ, 36.844.

67 This echoes a line of criticism written by Zhāng Jiàochèn 張表臣 (early 12th century):

The prose of Hán Yú and the poetry of Lí Bái were full of new meanings. But when we come to the imitations of knitted brows by Lú Tóng, Guànhuī, and their like, or the borrowing of their footsteps by Zhāng Ji, Huángfū Shí, and their like, they’re strange and ugly, stiff and slavish.

See Zhāng Jiàochèn, Shānhū gōu shíhuà, 1.1b.

68 Wáng Xiùlín 1.48–49; Pān Dìngwǔ 1.50; QTS 838.9452.

69 There is no poem by this name in Qiji’s extant collection. The author is likely referring to “Listening to the Venerable Yè Play the Zither on an Autumn Evening” 秋夜聽業上人彈琴 (Wáng Xiùlín 4.209–10; Pān Dìngwǔ 4.215–16; QTS 841.9495), which is the object of multiple commentaries in later periods. See the remarks collected in Chén Bōhāi, Tángshī huìpíng, 3119–20.
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“Zhùróng Peak”70 contain remnants of the significance of the Dàlì era [766–780] poets. Among his quatrains, “Facing the Moon on the Fifteenth Night of the Gēngwǔ Year [910]”71 reads:

海澄空碧正團團 The sea is clear, the sky blue,
[the moon] is truly round.

2 叱想玄宗此夜寒 I intone and visualize Xuánzōng
cold tonight.

玉兔有情應記得 The feelings of the jade rabbit
ought to be recorded.72

4 西邊不見舊長安 From the western frontier, I cannot see
old Cháng’ān.

Such earnest feelings about the former rulers is something unreached by other Buddhists. It is fitting that he was close with Sīkōng Tú (837–908).73

The editors begin by placing Qíjí in the context of the other famous poet-monks of the Táng, Jiāorán and Guànxīū. Each has a positive quality mixed with a negative one. Qíjí is no exception: they find his work in most forms derivative and harsh, but his regulated pentameter has moments of glory. In particular, they single out a quatrain mourning the collapse of the Táng dynasty for its pathos and patriotism. His vision of the bright, full moon hanging in the sky contrasts with the mental image of a suffering emperor Xuánzōng and with the absence of the capital Cháng’ān.

Out of all the ideas and images in Qíjí’s corpus, it is the feeling of sorrow over the empire’s fall that the editors find praiseworthy. This is fitting, of course, because such sentiments fit well a neo-classicist, “Confucian” idea of what poetry should be. Though the editors praise some of Qíjí’s work, they silently omit all Buddhism from it. The poet-monk, once again, is nothing more than an inferior poet.

The more stylistically audacious Guànxīū did not fare as well as Qíjí over the years. Guànxīū’s penchant for deploying a mix of colloquialisms and archaisms seems to have

70 “Climbing Zhùróng Peak” 登祝融峰, in Wáng Xiùlin 4.185; Pān Dingwǔ 4.192; QTS 841.9489. Zhùróng: the god of fire.
71 Wáng Xiùlin 10.597–98; Pān Dingwǔ 10.581; QTS 847.9596.
72 Jade rabbit: Chinese legend states that a jade rabbit lives on the moon. This figure was often used as a synecdoche for the moon in poetry.
73 Sīkōng Tú became an important archetype of one who nobly opted out of official service as corrupt powers took hold of the central government in the 880s. For an articulation of this aspect of Sīkōng Tú’s biography in English, see Wah, Ssu-K’ung T’u.
particularly annoyed literati of later dynasties. Hú Zǐ 胡仔 (1083–1143) reports that Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037–1101) complained of Guànxiū’s poetry having “an uncouth air” 村之氣, and found it “very strange” that others “called him a man of discernment” 號有識者故深可怪. He Chǎng 賀裳 (fl. 1681) described Guànxiū’s verses as one of the more odious examples of the decadence rampant at the end of the Tang:

詩至晚唐而敗壞……甚則粗鄙陋劣，如杜荀鶴、僧貫休者。貫休村野處殊不可耐。如《懷素草書歌》中云「忽如鄂公喝住單雄信，秦王肩上搭著棗木 朔」，此何異僊父所唱鼓兒詞。又如《山居》第八篇末句云「從他人說從他笑，地覆天翻也只 寧」，豈不可醜。

Poetry fell apart during the late Táng…Most extreme are the vulgar and deficient, such as Dù Xúnhè and the monk Guànxiū. I especially can’t stand the coarse places in Guànxiū’s work. For example, his “Song on Looking at Huáisù’s Cursive Calligraphy” contains:

Swift as the Duke of Êzhōu 喊叫於王喜仲
yelling at Shàn Xiōngxìn,75
As the Prince of Qin bore on his shoulders
lances of jujube.76
How is this any different than the prosimetric chanting of a country churl? Another example is the last couplet of the eighth of the “Mountain-Dwelling Poems”:

Let other men explain
and let them laugh;
Earth upended and heaven overturned
would be all right, too.77
How can you not detest this?78

74 Hú Zǐ, Tiáoxī yúyín cónghuà qiánjí, 5.2b.
75 Duke of Êzhōu: Yùchí Gōng 尉遲恭 (585–658), a general famed for aiding in the establishment of the Táng dynasty, loyal to Lǐ Shìmín 李世民 (598–649), the eventual Emperor Tàizōng 唐太宗. According to Yùchí Gōng’s biography in the Old History of the Táng 舊唐書:
因從獵於榆窠, 遇王世充領步騎數萬來戰。世充驍將單雄信領騎直趨太宗, 敬德躍馬大呼, 横刺雄信墜馬。
While hunting among a crook of elms, Lǐ Shìmín happened upon [enemy leader] Wáng Shìchóng’s leading infantry and cavalry, who were coming by the tens of thousands for battle. Shichóng’s valiant general, the head rider Shàn Xiōngxìn, immediately rushed toward Tàizōng, whereupon Yùchí Gōng yelled, horse leaping, and thrust his spear into the side of Xiōngxìn, knocking him from his horse.
See Jiù Tángshū 618.2496.
76 Prince of Qin: a position which Lǐ Shìmín held before killing his father and becoming Emperor Tàizōng.
77 Hè Chǎng is actually quoting the twelfth of Guànxiū’s “Mountain-Dwelling Poems.” See Hú Dàjùn 23.986; QTS 837.9426; Mazanec, “Guanxiu’s ‘Mountain-Dwelling Poems,’” 115.
78 Hè Chǎng 賀裳, Zàijiǔyuán shīhuà 載酒園詩話, quoted in Chén Bóhǎi, Tángshī huìpíng, 3:3111.
What Hè Chāng finds so irritable about Guànxiū is his blasé attitude toward the norms of classical poetry. In the first example, Guànxiū flaunts the limitations of heptameter to indulge in enneameter (nine-beat lines), which Hè Chāng likens to the chanted prose interludes of popular prosimetric entertainment in his day. No matter that many other great poets of the Táng used enneameter in their song-style verses as well: to Hè Chāng, classical verse must display a tightly crafted, crystalline structure. The second example fits into a proper meter, but it is inefficient. It uses informal language, repeats characters, and “wastes” space on grammatical particles such as yě 也 and zhī 只 in the second line. These departures from the norms of classical poetry are, to a late Míng reader, grating. They smack of amateurism more than experimentalism.

Guànxiū’s reputation also suffered due to the fact that he was seen as representing an outmoded approach to literature. Like many other poets of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, his embrace of kǔyín made him a target of later writers’ mockery. Ōuyáng Xiū undermined Guànxiū’s reputation through satire. The following excerpt from his Talks on Poetry (Lùyī shīhuà 六一詩話) uses Guànxiū as an example of a poet whose intention is profound but use of language inept.

聖俞嘗云：「詩句義理雖通，語涉淺俗而可笑者，亦其病也。[……] 有《詠詩》者云：『盡日覓不得，有時還自來。』本謂詩之好句難得耳，而說者云：『此是人家失卻貓兒詩。』人皆以為笑也。」

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79 See, among many others, Lǐ Báí 李白, “The Way to Shǔ is Hard” 蜀道難: “The hardships of the way to Shǔ are much harder than climbing the blue sky” 蜀道之難難於上青天 (Qū Tuíyuán and Zhū Jīnchéng, Lì Báí jí jiáozhù, 3.199; QTS 162.1680; trans. adapted from Kroll, “The Road to Shu,” 228); Bái Jūyì 白居易, “Song of Nothing Can Be Done”: 無可奈何歌; "One does not abide in life—nor return from death. / It’s comparable to the favor and blame, the rise and decline of external things;/ Not that they leave ten times and come back once” (Zhū Jīnchéng, Bái Jūyì jí jiānjiào, 39.2638; QTS 461.5248); and Lǐ Shāngyǐn 李商隠, “The Stele of Hán Yù” 韓碑: “Pass it on for seventy-two generations / To use it as a jade tablet in the Fēng and Shàn rites, or as a foundation for the Hall of Light” 傳之七十有二代，以為封禪玉檢明堂基 (QTS 539.6154; trans. adapted from Owen, The Late Tang, 449).
Méi Shèngyú (1002–1060) often said: “Though the meaning of a line of poetry may be penetrating, it may be laughable if its wording is shallow and vulgar: this is a fault. […] There is a ‘Poem on Poetry’ which reads:

All day I search without finding;
Then it comes to me on its own.\(^{80}\)

These lines refer to the fact that a good couplet is hard to come by, but some explanations say: ‘This is a poem about someone losing a kitten,’ which everyone laughs at.”

Although this poem is ostensibly about someone’s misreading, it places the blame on the poet. Guànxiū should have anticipated that his couplet could have been taken out of context and adjusted his work accordingly. Perhaps this is also a jab at Guànxiū for writing a couplet so abstract, without any concrete referents. The poet’s meaning, in either case, is easily misconstrued, and therefore it should not be considered good poetry. Moreover, if we understand this story to be a joke (which it surely should be), we can also see that Guànxiū had a reputation as being one who was especially serious about poetry. The further the couplet strays from its original meaning, and the no-nonsense mind behind it, the funnier it becomes. Thus, while Ōuyáng Xiū’s remarks helped to erode Guànxiū’s reputation, we can see its mirror image in this passage as well. Making Guànxiū the butt of such a joke only proves that he was known as a serious poet. Nonetheless, the damage was done, and it may have been hard for later readers to regard Guànxiū quite as seriously as they had before.

Although the poet-monks of the late medieval period never entirely faded from memory, their reputations gradually declined over the centuries. Every audience, it seems, could find fault with them. On the one hand, Buddhists worried that these monks were not taking their religious commitments seriously enough. On the other hand, literati faulted them for using unrefined language in elite verse and for their embrace of an old-fashioned style. A prose epistle by the

\(^{80}\) From “Poetry” 詩, in Hú Dàjiūn 16.779; \textit{QTS} 833.9397. In the received edition of Guànxiū’s works, the first two characters of the first line read “In many places” 幾處 instead of “All day” 盡日.
poet Chén Shīdào 陳師道 (1053–1102), written on the occasion of parting with the eleventh-century poet-monk Dàoqián 道潜, sums up these contradictions nicely:

From “Epistle on the Occasion of Seeing off Cānlíáo” 送參寥序

Chén Shīdào 陳師道

夜相語，及唐詩僧，參寥子曰：「貫休、齊己，世薄其語，然以曠蕩逸群之氣，高世之志，天下之譽，王侯將相之奉，而為石霜老師之役，終其身不去；此豈用意于詩者？工拙不足病也。」由是而知余之所貴，乃其棄餘，所謂淺為丈夫者乎！

We talked together in the evening until reaching Táng poet-monks. Master Cānlíáo said: “Our era has low regard for the words of Guānxiū and Qìjí. But as for their wide-ranging and unique spirit and their world-transcending will, [then we see that] even when praised throughout the whole land and honored by kings, nobles, generals, and ministers, they remained servants of Master Shīshuāng, never leaving him until the end of his life. Why do people focus on their poetry? It is not right to fault them for their skill or clumsiness in literature.” From this I understood that what I value is what Cānlíáo tosses aside as superfluous, and that I am a man you would call shallow!

It is clear that by the late eleventh century, late medieval poet-monks like Guānxiū and Qìjí are not highly regarded. Presumably this is because of their experimental use of language, which came off as rough to those living in this later era which had been so thoroughly shaped by the “ancient culture” (gǔwén) movement. The monk Dàoqián, for his part, changes the terms of the debate. First, he departs from other Buddhist sources, like the Chán rulebook we saw earlier, and praises Guānxiū and Qìjí for their religious achievements. In particular, he singles out their devotion to the Chán master Shīshuāng—an incident likely drawn from an anecdote similar to the one we examined above. It is unclear whether or not the poet-monks actually did the things Dàoqián praises them for, as the sources are unreliable. In any case, he argues that literary skill is a trivial matter by comparison. The poet-monks’ most important quality is their religious loyalty. Dàoqián does not deny his contemporaries’ low regard for these poet-monks as poets; he only says that they have their priorities wrong. Chén Shīdào, the secular literatus and friend of Sū Shi

who comments at the end, disagrees with Dàoqián’s hierarchy of Buddhism over literature, but does not dispute his characterization of Guànxiu and Qǐjǐ’s works. He silently agrees that they are not great poets. As Dàoqián and Chén debate the merits of the late medieval poet-monks, they seem to both be in opposition to the monks’ most audacious stylistic experiments and instead focus on the general question of which is superior, poetry or religion. By this point, it seems, the poet-monks’ reputations have significantly eroded in both literati and elite Buddhist circles.

In doing so, the Sòng poets reinstated the binary opposition between poetry and religion. This is the same dualism that emerged in the first sustained writings on poet-monks (Liú Yǔxī’s “Notes on the Venerable Língchè’s Collection,” section 2.1.3) and that was later reaffirmed by Bái Jūyì in his idea of poetry as *upāya* (section 2.2.1). It was precisely this dualism that Guànxiù, Qǐjǐ, and others repeatedly equated with the illusory dualism of Buddhism’s “two truths,” the mundane and the ultimate—a dualism that they attempted to overcome by proposing ways of integrating the two into a harmonious whole. Poetry and religion, to the Táng poet-monks, should not be viewed as hierarchical. Nor should they be viewed as antithetical. Nor should they be viewed as entirely separate. Instead, they should be seen as harmonious—two gates which lead to the same place. But instead, the Sòng reinscribed this dualism—the tension between religious and literary practices, in which the two are seen as fundamentally separate. It is this same dualism that plagues us to this day in the theorization of religious poetry.

### 7.4 New Horizons of Religious Poetry

In the first chapter, I attended to the many ways of defining religious literature. Conceiving of literature as communication, I offered a diagram which suggested at least ten kinds of approaches to the topic. A text’s *producers, audiences, speakers, implied readers,*
forms, and interpretations may be religious. So may the discourses the text draws upon, the technologies of information management the text’s producers and readers use to access these discourses, and the materials in which the text is produced and reproduced. These could be further broken down within each category, and each category could be further subdivided according to an actor’s attitude toward religion in that part of the process.

The problem with this approach is that attitudes can never be fully known. They are easily misinterpreted. As Guànxiū wrote in the lines that serve as this chapter’s epigraph, “No one understands this mindset” 無人知此意. A focus on attitudes leads either to some form of theological criticism (this person sincerely held a certain belief, which influenced his writing) or to a quest for paradoxes and tensions (this person is complex, because he worked in oppositional or contradictory fields). These approaches are sometimes productive, but they lead to prescribed ends. In both cases, they assume two separate entities (“literature” and “religion”). These entities may influence or oppose one another, but in both cases, they remain distinct. In these pages, I have argued that it is better to focus on religious practices—what people actually did with their bodies that were seen as meaningful within certain fields. This allows one to break free of historical mind-reading and, just as importantly, allow for the possibility of overlap or even unity between literature and religion.

Buddhist monks were not the only people who engaged in religious practices in medieval China. Lay Buddhists had their own sets of practices, some of which required an ascetic commitment to self-sacrifice. Daoists, too, engaged in methods of incantation, drew on the powers of deities, and enacted rituals which patterned their lives. Though perhaps not as
numerically overwhelming as Buddhism,\(^{82}\) Daoism was the official religion of the Táng ruling house and enjoyed widespread participation throughout the empire. “Popular” religious rituals also helped shape the lives of people at all levels of society. A careful consideration of these various religious practices would likely bring to light important elements of medieval Chinese poetry. Perhaps poets sought to synthesize their literary and religious practices in completely different ways than the poet-monks. There is much potential for future research to recover other marginalized figures and uncover new dimensions of beloved classics.

Guànxiū, Qíjì, and others sought to break down the opposition between literary and Buddhist practices in their own works. Following their lead, I have sought to break down the opposition between literary and Buddhist studies in my own. The poet-monks cannot be understood only as literary actors, separated from the religious practices of meditation, incantation, and apophasis, and the doctrine of perfect interfusion. Likewise, they cannot be understood only as religious actors, separated from their centrality in literary networks, their allusions to poetic models like Jiă Dăo and Lǐ Bái, and their experiments with literary form. If, as scholars, we do not break down the normal barriers between literary and religious studies, between the Táng and Sòng dynasties, between principle and phenomena, between poet and monk, we will continue to overlook such figures as the late medieval poet-monks, and we will keep reifying our old categories of understanding Chinese cultural history. But those categories cannot hold. Yáo’s heaven is Brahma’s heaven.

\(^{82}\) Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an*, lists only 48 Daoist abbeys at the capital during the Sui-Táng period, compared to 193 Buddhist temples. This numeric difference may be exaggerated due to surviving sources, and the fact that Buddhist temples seem to have been renamed more often than Daoist abbeys.
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Appendix A

Biographies of Poet-Monks

Chūmò 處默 (late 9th century). Originally from the Wú-Yuè 吳越 region, Chūmò was an early friend of Guànxiū 貫休, and the two are said to have “cut off impurities” 削染 together. He was also a close friend of the famous poet Luó Yǐn 羅隱, with whom he traveled to the Hángzhōu area in the mid-9th century. The two were so close that when Luó Yǐn read Chūmò’s couplet, “The land of Wú ends as I reach the River / The Yuè mountains are many on the other shore” 到江吳地盡,隔岸越山多, he exclaimed, “This is my couplet! How did the master come up with it?” 此吾句也,乃為師所得邪. Presumably, their similar experiences and ways of thinking led them to have written the same couplet separately.

During the Huáng Cháo Rebellion of the 880s, Chūmò fled to Mt. Lú 廬山, a hotbed of poet-monk activity to which he had made a pilgrimage earlier in life. He likely died in the first decade of the 10th century. Early catalogues record a one-fascicle poetry collection titled The Monk Chūmò’s Collection 僧處默集. Eight poems of his poems can be found in QTS.

Sources

Fù Xuáncong, Tàng cí zhuàn jiào jiān, 1:3.547–48 and 5:3.113–14; Wú Rénchén, Shíguó chūnqiū, 1239.

Guǎngxuān 廣宣 (early 9th century). Perhaps from Jiāozhōu 交州 in the southeast (as implied by circumstantial evidence), Guǎngxuān rose to prominence while living in Shú 蜀 in the first decade of the ninth century. Sometime early in the Yuánhé 元和 reign period (806–820), he moved to Cháng’ān and began to serve at the imperial palace by 813. At the capital, he lived at
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Red Chamber Hall 紅樓院 at Āngúō Temple 安國寺, exchanging poems with the most prominent literati of his day, including Bái Jūyì 白居易, Yuán Zhěn 元稹, Hán Yù 韓愈, Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 (772–842), Zhāng Jí 張籍 (766?–830?), Línghù Chū 令狐楚 (766–837), and Xuē Táo 薛濤 (768?–832?). He fled the capital at some point in 824–826 for unknown reasons, only to return when Emperor Wénzōng (r. 827–840) came to the throne.

Very little is known about Guàngxuān’s Buddhist training or teachings. There are no biographies of him in the official histories or any of the Buddhist histories, so the details of his life must be pieced together from scattered references in contemporaneous prose and poetry. Early catalogues list a one-fascicle edition of his exchange poems with Línghù Chū and a one-fascicle collection of his own poetry called The Red Chamber Collection 紅樓集. Today, a mere seventeen of his poems are extant, collected in QTS.

Sources

Guànxiū 贯休 (832–913). Guànxiū was born in 832 in the village of Dēnggāo in Lánxī county 蘭谿縣登高里, a small town located just outside the city of Jīnhuá 金华 and a little over 100 miles south of Hángzhōu. His birth family, the Jīāngs, are said to have been well-educated Confucians, though their governmental posts must have been minor since there is no record of them in the official histories. At the age of seven suì, he left his family to become a monk at nearby Hé’ān temple, where he is said to have shown an early facility for learning: he would
memorize a thousand characters of the *Lotus Sūtra* every day until, after a few months, he could recite the whole thing by heart.

Although the Huíchāng religious persecutions erupted in Guànxiū’s early teens, they seem to have had little effect on him. We find no mention of them whatsoever in Guànxiū’s writings. Several years later, at the age of 20, he took formal monastic orders at Wǔxiè temple (about 65 miles northeast of Lánxi) and spent three years studying and preaching on the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. He was also growing as a poet. At 27, after he beat over one hundred others in a poetry contest on the occasion of Xuānyuān Jí’s departure for Mt. Lúofū, he quickly became one of the most highly regarded poets of his day.

The rest of his life would be characterized by wandering. From his 20s until his 70s, Guànxiū rarely lived in a given place for more than a year. Though he remained mostly in the Jiāngnán area (understood to span from roughly Hángzhōu in the east to Changsha in the west), he made trips to the capitals, to multiple sacred mountains, and all across the empire, from modern Běijīng in the north to modern Guǎngzhōu in the south.

Mt. Lú was one place he returned to time and again. It was the most important mountain in his native region of Jiāngnán—one of the Five Marchmounts which formed the pillars of the world and home to numerous temples of multiple religious traditions. It was located within a day’s hike from Hóngzhōu—home to a flourishing lineage of meditative Buddhism (the so-called “Hóngzhōu school”—and also served as a central gathering point for the rapidly growing numbers of poet-monks. Guànxiū lived there for three spans of time, namely 861–863, 870–871, and 880–885. The mountain seems to have embodied all the same contradictions as Guànxiū himself: imbued with the histories of Buddhism, Daoism, and
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classicism; reclusive yet well-connected; serene yet active. It was where Huiyuán 慧遠 reportedly founded the White Lotus Society four centuries earlier, of which the painter Zōng Bǐng 宗炳 was a member. It was where the poet Bái Jūyì wrote verses with monks in the early ninth century. A generation after Guànxiū, his admirer and self-styled successor Xiūmù 修睦 would serve as Saṃgha Rectifier of the mountain for 30 years (899–929).

Perhaps the most important event of Guànxiū’s life, and of the entire ninth century, was the Huáng Cháo Rebellion. The salt smuggler-turned-rebel commander’s sack and occupation of the capital, destroyed tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of lives and reduced the thousand-year-old capital of Cháng’ān to ruins. Guànxiū experienced the violence firsthand as the rebellion swept through his home county of Lánxī in July of 880, forcing him to flee to Pìlíng 毗陵 a few dozen miles northeast. What he saw—the utter destruction of his childhood home—was seared into his memory and resurfaces time and again in his later writings.

In the next few decades, as the central government fell apart, the warlords who wrested control of various regions sought to establish their own legitimacy by attracting literary and religious professionals. Being both, Guànxiū’s skills were in high demand. In 893, he moved to Hángzhōu to seek patronage from Qián Liú 錢镠 (852–932), the reigning military governor of the area and future founder of the splinter kingdom Wúyuè 吳越. Guànxiū wrote the ruler a flattering poem which included the line, “Your lone sword shines like frost and snow over fourteen prefectures” 一劍霜寒十四州, referring to the fourteen administrative areas currently under his governorship. Qián demanded that Guànxiū change the “fourteen” to “forty” 四十 to accommodate his ambitions. The monk responded by quipping that poems, like the territory
under one’s control, cannot be easily altered. Qián immediately banished him, and he took to the road once more.

Ten years later, in 903, he finally settled down in Chéngdū, where the newly established King of Shǔ, Wáng Jiàn (847–918), built a temple specifically for him and gave him the title Master Chányuè 禪月大師. There he attracted many disciples and reconnected with other intellectuals who had emigrated southwest, such as Wéi Zhuāng 韋莊 (836–910) and Dù Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933). When he died in early 913, he was buried north of the city at a pagoda built in his honor. Eleven years later, his disciple Tányù 磐域 collected and published Guànxiū’s works, consisting of nearly one thousand poems, in woodblock edition, making him the first individual in the history of the world to have his collected poems printed.

Guànxiū’s works cover a wide stylistic range, from tightly regulated occasional verse to exuberant ekphrasis in mixed meter. He was fond of mixing elements of different poetic styles, linguistic registers, and discursive traditions in search of new modes of expression. He set the standard for Buddhist “mountain-dwelling poems” 山居詩, a subgenre in which Yǒngmíng Yánshòu 永明延壽 (904–975), Shíwū Qīnggōng 石屋清珙 (1272–1352), Hānshān Déqīng 憨山德清 (1546–1623), Hányuè Fǎzàng 漢月法藏 (1573–1635), and Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (1336–1405) all wrote in later centuries.

Early critics regarded Guànxiū as the best of the poet-monks and as the true successor to poets as varied as Lǐ Bái 李白 and Bái Jūyì 白居易. In the Northern Sòng dynasty, Guànxiū’s work fell out of favor with the literati, who often characterized his verse as too “uncouth” for their tastes.
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Though these judgments reigned for nearly a thousand years, there have been efforts to revive his reputation in the last seventy. His modern biographer Kobayashi Taichirō, writing in 1947, compared his linguistic and imaginative experiments to those of Stéphane Mallarmé and his paintings to those of the surrealists.

Guànxiū’s work was first collected as the Western Marchmount Collection 西岳集 around 896, then re-edited by his disciple Tányù 領域 in 924 as the Collection of Master Chányuè 禪月集. Though this version was said to contain 1000 poems, modern editions contain closer to 724.

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Hùguó 護國 (mid 8th century). A Jiāngnán 江南 monk who, according to poet Líú Yǔxī 劉禹锡 (772–842), was the successor of the poet-monk tradition established by Língyī 靈一. Though famous throughout the Táng, very little is known of Hùguó today. Twelve of his poems can be found in QTS, fascicle 811. Later poems memorializing him were written by Zhāng Wèi 張謂 and Dù Xúnhè 杜荀鶴.

Sources

Jiǎorán 皎然 (720?–797?). Born into the aristocratic Xiè 謝 family, Jiǎorán claimed to be a tenth-generation descendant of the great poet Xiè Língyùn 謝靈運 (though, in fact, modern scholars have identified him as a twelfth-generation descendant of the statesman Xiè Ēn 謝安, grand-uncle of Xiè Liǎngyùn). Jiǎorán was firmly based in the southeast throughout his life, mainly in Wúxīn 吳興, but made occasional trips throughout the empire (especially in the late 770s and early 780s). Though curious about Buddhism from an early age, Jiǎorán did not become a monk until his 40s, around 767–768.

Jiǎorán was the major poet of the southwest in the latter half of the 8th century, accomplished in nearly every genre and style available at the time, able to switch from staid elegance to breezy vernacular to gentle irony. He also convened salons in which groups of literati, including the famous calligrapher Yán Zhēnqīng 頭真卿 and tea connoisseur Lù Yǔ 陸羽, would write “linked verses” 聯句—a kind of group composition in which individuals would take turn writing couplets to the same rhyme scheme to make a complete poem. Jiǎorán also
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wrote two influential works of literary criticism, one titled *Shīshī* (Paradigms of Poetry) and the other either *Shīpíng* (Criticism of Poetry) or *Shīyì* (Meanings of Poetry). These works classify and analyze a large number of couplets, focusing on minute detail and localized experience, eschewing grand unifying theories. Several scholars have argued that Jiǎorán’s approach to poetry is heavily indebted to the Hóngzhōu school of Chán洪州禪宗, given that the poet was probably personally acquainted with Mǎzǔ Dàoyī馬祖道一. However, early biographical sources imply that Jiǎorán may have been as catholic in his religious tastes as in his poetry tastes: he was originally trained as a *vinaya* 律宗 monk and demonstrated familiarity with the Tiāntái天臺宗 and Esoteric密宗 traditions in addition to Chán.

A ten-fascicle collection of his poetry containing 546 poems was compiled in the year 792, titled *Zhùshān Collection* 杼山集 after one of Jiǎorán’s residences. This same collection, sometimes retitled *Jiǎorán’s Collection* 皎然集, continued to circulate through the Sòng and Yuán dynasties, and much of it has come down to the present day. Early catalogues also record a ten-fascicle collection of exchange poems and linked verses titled *Wūxīng Collection* 吳興集. Today, 518 of his poems are extant: 516 in *QTS* (including 22 linked verses) and 2 in *QTSBB*. In addition to his works of literary criticism, mentioned above, he compiled several other prose works: *Biographies of Buddhist-Confucian Friendships* 儒釋交遊傳, *Gathered Selections from the Inner Canon* 內典類聚 (40 fascicles), *Clamorous Master* 號呶子 (10 fascicles), and *Tea Instructions* 茶訣 (1 fascicle). None of these works are extant.

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Kěpéng 可朋 (early/mid 10th century). From Dānléng 丹棱, located southwest of Chéngdū on the border of the Tibetan plateau, he seems to have stayed in the Sichuàn region his entire life. He became friends with the northeastern poet Lú Yánràng 魯延讓 when the latter moved to Shǔ in the early 10th century. In addition to being a monk, Kěpéng appears to have fully imbibed the Chinese archetype of the boozy poet and took to calling himself “the Drunken Shavepate” 醉髡.

It is said that he drank himself into heavy debts and would repay these by writing exchange poems. Later in life he caught the attention of poet/minister Ōuyáng Jiǒng 歐陽炯, who compared him to Mèng Jiāo 孟郊 and Jiǎ Dǎo 賈島. In 956, Ōuyáng presented Kěpéng to the king of Shǔ, where he was honored with a purple robe, 100,000 cash, and 50 bolts of silk. His collection of over 1,000 poems in 10 fascicles, titled Jadestack Collection 玉壘集, was recorded in early catalogues. Today, only five of his poems and a few scattered couplets (some of dubious attribution) survive.

Sources

Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cáizǐ zhuàn jiàojiān, 1:3.555 and 5:3.118–19; Wú Rěnchéng, Shígōu chūnqiū, 57.830.

Kězhǐ 可止 (860–934). Born into the Mǎ 馬 family of Fànyáng 範陽 (just southwest of modern Beijing), hometown of the poet Jiǎ Dǎo 賈島. He entered the monastic life at age 12, studying under a vinaya master named Fǎzhēn 法貞. He began his studies of the Confucian classics three years later, which led to a lifelong love of poetry. In the mid 890s, he moved to Cháng’ān 長安
and was invited to the inner court and given a purple robe of honor 紫袈裟 by Emperor Zhāozōng 昭宗, penultimate ruler of the Táng.

With the fall of Cháng’ān and the Táng Empire in the early tenth century, Kězhǐ fled back to the northeast to escape the carnage, where he was honored by the local military governor, Wáng Chǔzhí 王處直. During this time, he wrote a popular treatise on sudden and gradual enlightenment, which is no longer extant. In 928, he was summoned to Luòyáng 洛陽, where the new King of Qín 蜀 paid homage to him, installed him in a Pure Land temple, and conferred upon him the name Wénzhì 文智 (“Literary wisdom”). He died shortly after becoming ill on February 8, 934, surrounded by a host of disciples chanting the name of Amitābha 阿彌陀佛. His remains were placed in a memorial pagoda on May 13, 935.

A famed poet in his day, Kězhǐ left behind a 350-poem corpus titled the Three Mountain Collection 三山集 which circulated widely up through the Sòng dynasty. Today, only nine of his poems survive.

Sources

Língchè 靈澈 (749–816). Born into the Táng clan 湯 in Kuàijī 會稽, he became a monk early in life, taking the dharma name Língchè and the cognomen Chéngyuán 澄源. He was known for his curiosity, love of learning, and devotion to the literary arts. In his early years, he studied under the poet Yán Wéi 嚴維 in his hometown of Kuàijī and quickly became known as one of the top young literary talents. When his teacher passed away around 777, he moved to Wǔxīng to become a disciple of the preeminent High Tang poet-monk Jiǎorán 皎然. Connections with
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Jiǎorán and several important literati helped grow his reputation. He spent the years 784–786 traveling, first to Cháng’ān, then to Dōnglín Temple 東林寺 on Mt. Lú 嶴山. He moved back to Cháng’ān sometime in the 790s and was well-received until anti-Buddhist sentiment swept through the capital around the turn of the century. Língchè was slandered and fled to Tīngzhōu 汀州 in 805. He remained there until the general amnesty of 807–808, at which point he headed back east. He died about nine years later, in 816, at Kāiyuán Temple 開元寺 in Xuānzhōu 宣州.

Língchè was considered by many to be the primary inheritor of Jiǎorán’s mantle, a poet-monk capable of producing startling couplets and thinking deeply about literature. He maintained close relationships with important secular poets such as Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 and Liú Zōngyuán 柳宗元, and was commemorated in verse by the likes of Bái Jūyì 白居易 and Zhāng Hù 張祜, among others.

It is said that Língchè produced over 2,000 poems during his lifetime, which his disciple Xiùfēng 秀峰 pared down to a 300-poem collection in 10 fascicles. In the early Sòng dynasty, there circulated one ten-fascicle collection of Língchè’s own poems and one ten-fascicle collection of his exchange poems, both of which appear to have been lost sometime in the 12th or 13th century. Today, sixteen of his poems plus a handful of fragmentary couplets survive. The preface to the early ninth-century lineage text Bào lín zhuàn 寶林傳 was also written by a Língchè, but it is uncertain whether or not this refers to the poet-monk.

Sources

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jiānzhèng, 19.519–24; Sòng gāosēng zhuàn 宋高僧傳. T no. 2061, 50:802b; Tosaki
Tetsuhiko, “Hōrinen no joshia Reitetsu to shiso Reitetsu”; Yanagida Seizan, Shoki
zenshū shisho no kenkyū, 6: 351–65.

Língyī 靈一 (727–762). Secular surname Wú 吳. Born into a wealthy merchant family in
Guǎnglíng 廣陵 (modern Yángzhōu 扬州 in Jiāngsū province), he left home at age nine and took
the tonsure at age thirteen. He was known for his tireless studies of the vinaya and for his artistic
talent. He later moved to Yúnmén Temple 雲門寺 in Kuàijì 会稽 and then to Yífēng Temple 宜
豐寺 in Hángzhōu 杭州. He passed away on November 6, 762, at the age of 36 suì, while living
at Hángzhōu’s Lóngxīng Temple 龍興寺.

According to poet Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 (772–842), Língyī was the “original” poet-monk;
that is, he was the first Buddhist monk for several centuries to become regarded for his skill as a
poet. He was closely associated with other Jiāngnán poets of the High Táng, such as Huángfǔ
Rǎn 皇甫冉 and Yán Wéi 嚴維. Readers knew Língyī for his simple and direct natural imagery
and for his vivid descriptions of mountain temples, comparing him to Táo Qián 陶潛 and Xiè
Língyùn 謝靈運. Forty-three of his poems survive and can be found in QTS, fascicle 809.

Sources
Dúgū Jí 獨孤及, “Táng gù Yángzhōu Qingyún sì lǚshī Yīgōng tā mīng” 唐故揚州慶雲
寺律師一公塔銘, in QTW 390.3962–64; Fù Xuántāng, Táng cáizī zhuàn jiàojīan,
1:3.529–34 and 5:3.106–07; Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫, “Chè shànggrén wéngjí ji” 潭上人文集紀,
in Qū Tuiyuán, Liú Yǔxī jí jiānzhèng, 19.519–24; QTS 809.9123–30; Sòng gāosēng zhuàn
送高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50:799a–b.
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**Qībái** 棲白 (mid/late 9th century). Originally from the Jiāngnán region, he was associated with the famous poets Jiǎ Dǎo 賈島 and Yáo Hé 姚合 in his early years. Sometime prior to 851, he moved to Jiànfū Temple 薦福寺 in Cháng’ān and became a court monk, presenting poems to Emperor Xuānzōng 宣宗. He is said to have served three emperors, and therefore likely died sometime during Xīzōng’s reign (873–888). Although well-known and respected among most literati and monks, including Lǐ Pín 李頻, Xǔ Táng 許棠, Zhāng Qiáo 張喬, Cáo Sōng 曹松, Guànxiū 貫休, and Qījǐ 齊己, the famed poet Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷 considered him uncouth. A one-fascicle **Qībái’s Collection** 棲白集 is listed in early catalogues. Sixteen of his poems can be found in QTS, two of which were collected in the late Tang anthology **Yòuxuán jí** 又玄集. A few of his exchanges with a monk from the far west named Wǔzhēn 悟真 have been discovered among the manuscripts from Dūnhuáng. His name is sometimes erroneously written as Xībái 西白.

**Sources**

Egan, *Clouds Thick, Whereabouts Unknown*, 193; Fù Xuán cong, **Táng cǎizi zhuàn** jiàojiān, 1:3.546–47 and 5:3.113.

**Qīchán** 栖蟾 (late 9th/early 10th century). Originally from Dòngtíng 洞庭, little is known about Qīchán. He lived for an extended period of time in the Pingfēng Cliffs 屏風巖 on Mt. Lú 廬山, and at a secluded residence on Mt. Héng 衡山, the Southern Marchmount 南嶽, at the tail end of the Táng dynasty. He exchanged lines with fellow poet-monks Xūzhōng 虛中 and Qījǐ 齊己, some of which mistakenly refer to him as Xīchán 西蟾. Twelve of his poems are extant.

**Sources**
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Qi ji 崔 (864–937?). Born Hú Déshēng 胡德生 in Chángshā 长沙, he was orphaned early in life and subsequently became a cowherd for a temple on Mt. Wéi 渥山 at the age of seven. It is said that he would use a bamboo stick to write poems on the backs of cows. The abbot, marveling at the boy’s cleverness, recommended that he take the tonsure. Qi ji made his first home at Dàolín temple 道林寺 in his hometown of Chángshā, where he studied meditation (perhaps with masters in the Wéi-Yǎng lineage 渥仰宗) and became famous for his literary abilities.

Qi ji admired the poet Zhèng Gǔ 郑谷 and traveled to Cháng’ān to meet him around the turn of the tenth century. The second time they met, while Zhèng Gǔ was posted at Yíchūn 宜春 in 905, Qi ji presented a poem to his hero on “Early Plums” 早梅, which contained the couplet: “In the deep snow of the village ahead, / A few branches bloomed last night.” Zhèng Gǔ laughed at this couplet, saying, “A ‘few branches’ wouldn’t be early. It would be better if it were ‘a single branch.’” A mortified Qi ji knocked his head in thanks and ran away. From then on, the literati called Zhèng Gǔ Qi jī’s “one character teacher” 一字師 (or 一字之師), a phrase which has survived as an idiom to the present day. The above story must be taken with a grain of salt, as it comes from relatively unreliable anecdote collections, some of which cannot even agree on which poem Zhèng Gǔ corrected.

Around the year 915, Qi ji moved some 442 kilometers (275 miles) east to Dōnglín temple 東林寺 on Mt. Lú 廬山. In 921, Qi ji planned to travel to Chéngdū, which had been having a sort of cultural renaissance since breaking away from the Táng empire in the early 900s,
attracting many renowned poets and esteemed religious figures. However, when Qijī reached Jingzhōu 荊州, he was detained by the warlord Gāo Jīngxīng 高季興. But not all was lost for Qijī: Gāo, now the first king of Jingnán 荊南, built him a new temple in which to live and made him the new kingdom’s Saṃgha Rectifier 僧正. Qijī would live out the rest of his days here, dying probably in 937 (though some sources imply that he lived until 940 or 943).

Qijī, along with Jiǎorán 皎然 and Guànxīū 賦休, is considered one of the greatest poet-monks in Chinese history. Qijī is perhaps best known as a master craftsman of regulated verse, particularly for his poems on natural objects, such as “Early Plum” 早梅 and “Listening to a Wellspring” 聽泉. In this regard, he is considered one of the inheritors of the “bitter chanting” (kūyín 苦吟) aesthetic, associated with Jiǎ Dào 賈島 and Zhèng Gǔ. However, Qijī had wide-ranging tastes in poetry and also tried his hand at a number of bold, song-style poems in the vein of Lǐ Bái 李白, Lǐ Hè 李賀, and Guànxīū.

An important critic as well as poet, Qijī’s main work is the Exemplary Forms of Fēng and Sāo Poetry 風騷旨格. This manual gathers hundreds of couplets written by contemporaries and recent predecessors (including himself) and organizes them categorically. Though the Exemplary Forms lacks prose commentary, its innovative approach to literature is clear. Qijī is the first to propose ten “forces” 勢 for poetry, giving them such colorful names as “The Power of a Lion Pouncing Back” 獅子返擲勢 and “The Power of a Surging River Tilting One’s Palm” 洪河側掌勢. This schema would be imitated by later critics. Even when Qijī uses the traditional categories of literary criticism, such as “Great Elegantiae” 大雅, he redefines them to better cohere with his own poetic practice. Another section of Exemplary Forms, titled “Poetry Has Forty Gates” 詩有四十門 demonstrates Qijī’s indebtedness to the vocabulary of the burgeoning tradition of Chán
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literature (and, at least one scholar has proposed, to the Wéi-Yǎng lineage 潇仰宗 in particular).

But Qǐjǐ was no mindless cheerleader for the Chán tradition. In his only other extant work of criticism, a preface to the collected gāthās 僧 of the monk Jūdùn 居遁, he makes it clear that he regards such didactic verse as something less than poetry.

More than anyone else in the early tenth century, Qǐjǐ seems to have been the most invested in the idea of the poet-monk as the harmonizer of the Confucian and Buddhist traditions. In addition to maintaining close ties to both religious and secular social worlds, his poems are littered with allusions to previous monks who were admired by the literati for their artistic gifts, from Zhī Dùn 支盾 and Jiǎorán 皎然 to Jiǎ Dào and Guànxiū. The contemporaneous poet-monk Qīchán 栖蟾, writing about Qǐjǐ’s work, wrote, “Your poems are meditation for Confucians” 詩為儒者禪 and “Your literary star lights up the Heavens of Chǔ” 文星照楚天. The comparison between poetry and meditation was still new at this point, and would not become a critical cliché until at least the Sòng dynasty. To Qǐjǐ, the job of both poet and monk is to attain a heightened mental perception, to see the cosmic images (xiàng 象) of which all reality is comprised. Unlike some earlier poet-monks, he expressed no conflict or ambivalence about his dual identity.

Aside from poetry, Qǐjǐ was skilled at the zither 琴, chess 棋, and calligraphy, with copies of his brushwork circulating into the Yuán dynasty. He was also a connoisseur of tea, writing often of its fine flavors in his verse.

In 938, poet/historian Sūn Guāngxiàn 孫光憲 collected all of Qǐjǐ’s surviving poetry and published them without edits as The White Lotus Collection 白蓮集, 810 poems in 10 fascicles. The entire collection is extant, along with three poems and four scattered couplets which may be found in QTSBB. Extant prose works include his one-fascicle critical work Exemplary Forms of
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Fēng and Sāo Poetry 風骚旨格, his preface to Jūdūn’s gāthā collection, a note on the Wēi-Yāng monk Zhōushū 粥疏, and a “Record of the Yōngchāng Meditation Hall on Língyún Peak” 滿雲峰永昌禪院記. These works may be found in the two modern, annotated editions of his work edited by Wáng Xiùlín and Pān Dingwū.

Sources


Qīngjiāng 清江 (d. 811?). Probably born in Kuàijī 會稽 in the middle of the eighth century, he took orders sometime around 767–769 at Tiānzhú 天竺 monastery near Hángzhōu. It is also during this time that he became famous as a poet. Due to his bristly personality, he did not get along well with others and left the clergy after arguing with his teacher, Tányī 曙一, over petty issues. Later, as he traveled north to Luòyáng, he would beat himself up over this, lamenting,
“I’ve traveled over half the empire, but there are few like my first teacher!” He returned to Kuàijī in tears in the mid 780s, and was reinstated by his former master. He is also said to have studied meditation under Huizhōng 慧忠, who transmitted his teachings on to Qīngjiāng.

Highly regarded as a poet, Qīngjiāng was praised by the literati for his choice of words and his skill with the art of parallelism. He was one of the most famous poet-monks of the time, equal to Jiǎorán 皎然, and a frequent correspondent of the “Ten Talents of the Dàlì Era” 大曆十才子. A one-scroll collection of his poetry made its way into the hand of Ennin 圓仁 in the mid-ninth century (T no. 2166, 55.1078a). Today only twenty-two of his poems, some of dubious attribution, survive.

Sources


Qīngsài 清塞 (early ninth century). Also known by his secular name Zhōu Hè 周賀 or his cognomen Nánqīng 南卿. Originally from the Luoyáng 洛陽 area, he spent much of his youth wandering about, ending up at Mt. Lú 廬山, where he took monastic orders as a young man. But he may have been a less than fervent devotee to the Dharma. One anecdote tells us that when the poet Yáo Hé 姚合 saw Qīngsài weeping, he was filled with pity and hired the monk for a minor post in Hángzhōu. Immediately following this episode, in the Bāolì era (825–827), Qīngsài laicized and became Zhōu Hè once again. Modern scholars have questioned the veracity of this
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anecdote, since Yáo Hé did not serve in Hángzhōu until 834–835, and Qīngsài was a Buddhist monk when he traveled to Cháng’ān a decade after the events of the anecdote.

Qīngsài was, however, devoted to poetry, normally associated with the “bitter chanting” (kǔyín 苦吟) aesthetic which stressed the art of the well-crafted couplet. Later critics have often compared him to Jiǎ Dāo 賈島 and Yáo Hé, as well fellow poet-monk Wúkě 無可. Early catalogues record a one-fascicle poetry collection attributed to him, titled either The Poetry of Zhōu Hè 周賀詩 or The Poetry of Qīngsài 清塞詩. Today, ninety-three of his poems may be found in QTS, along with 4 couplets (some of doubtful attribution) in QTSBB.

Sources

Sēngluán 僧鸞 (late 9th century). Born Xiānyú Fēng 鮮于鳳 in the Shù 蜀 region, in his early years he pursued the patronage of the eminent prefect Xuē Néng 薛能 in Jiāzhōu 嘉州. When his efforts failed, he became a monk. In a theatrical flair, he insisted on taking the tonsure in front of a 100-foot elephant. Like many other poet-monks of his day, he spent time on Mt. Lú 廬山. Later, he traveled to the capital to present a poem to the emperor, who was delighted and bestowed on him a purple robe of honor. One of the chief ministers was so impressed with his literary skill that he offered Sēngluán a job. The monk quickly laicized and spent the rest of his life in a series of provincial posts. An admirer of the freewheeling songs of Lǐ Bái 李白, Sēngluán called the precision of Jiǎ Dāo 賈島, then in vogue, “lame and crabbed” 蹩澀. Two of his poems are extant, and can be found in QTS.
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It should be noted that practically all of the information we know about Sēngluán comes originally from Běimèng suǒyán 北夢瑣言, an anecdote collection not necessarily reliable as a source for history.

Sources

Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cáizi zhuàn jiàojiān, 1:3.552 and 5:3.116–17; Ruăn Yuè, Shīhuà zōngkui qiánjì, 8.93; Sūn Guāngxiàn, Běimèng suǒyán, 10.1.

Shàngyán 尚顏 (c. 830–c. 930). Born Xuē Māoshèng 薛茂聖, he was a distant relative of the poet/minister Xuē Néng 薛能. He was said to be upright, cool, and reclusive by nature. In his youth, he labored away at his pentametric poems, cultivating his innate literary talents. His first datable poem was written in 855, sending off Lù Gōng 陸肱 to the imperial examinations. He wandered throughout the empire for much of his life, with stints in Xúzhōu 徐州, Jīngmén 荊門, Xiázhōu 峽州, Mt. Lúshān 嶽山, and Héngyáng 衡陽. Shàngyán made at least two trips to Cháng’ān, one in the Jǐngfú era (892–894) and one in the Guānghuà era (898–901). He lived through the collapse of the dynasty as an old man, and lived on for several decades before dying sometime during the lifetime of fellow poet-monk Qījǐ 齊己 (864–937?). Shàngyán had an exceptionally long life, nearly reaching the age of 100 during one of the most tumultuous periods in Chinese history.

Shàngyán had become a monk in his youth and never laicized, but his family harbored mixed emotions about his monastic calling. The poet Yán Ráo recalled his cousin Xuē Néng as saying, “Though I am not happy that Shàngyán is a monk, it is good to have a poet-monk in our branch [of the family], that it may increase the glory of the Xuē clan.”
between the Confucian and Buddhist traditions. He exchanged poems with the major writers Lù Guīméng 陸龜蒙, Sīkōng Tú 司空圖, Lǐ Dòng 李洞, Fāng Gān 方幹, Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷, Wǔ Róng 吳融, and Chén Táo 陳陶, as well as poet-monk Qījǐ. Yán Ráo called Shàngyán’s poems “the light of Confucians and Buddhists” 儒釋之光. Lǐ Tóng regarded them as unique specimens of the Confucian arts, containing a kind of coldness and purity.

Yán Ráo’s preface to Shàngyán’s poetry, written in 901 (nearly three decades before Shàngyán’s death), mentions a 400-poem collection of pentameter and heptameter. Early catalogues record a one-fascicle collection of his exchange poems titled Collection of Shàngyán’s Presented [Poems] 尚顏供奉集 and a five-fascicle collection titled Jīngmén Collection 荊門集. Today, a mere 34 of his poems can be found in QTS.

Sources
Egan, Clouds Thick, Whereabouts Unknown, 201; Fù Xuǎncóng, Táng cáozǐ zhùǎn jiàojiān, 1:3.556–58 and 5:3.120; Lǐ Tóng 李詷, “Preface to the Venerable Shàngyán’s Literary Collection” 顏上人集序, in QTW 829.8731; Yán Ráo 顏蕘, “Preface to the Venerable Shàngyán’s Literary Collection” 顏上人集序, in QTW 829.8730–31.

Tányù 曇域 (late 9th/early 10th century). Also known as Master Huìguāng 惠光大師. An ardent student of the classics while growing up in Yánghōu 揚州, he later settled in Shǔ 蜀, likely as a result of the collapse of the Táng dynasty. A disciple of preeminent poet/painter/calligrapher-monk Guànxiǔ 貫休, he wrote the definitive preface to his master’s poetry collection Chányuè jí 禪月集 (which is also the world’s first printed poetry collection) in 923. Tányù was an accomplished artist in his own right, well-known for his calligraphy, poetry, and a commentary to the etymological dictionary Shuòwén jièzì 說文解字 which circulated widely throughout the
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kingdom of Shǔ. He maintained a correspondence with the other major poet-monk of his day, Qījǐ 齊己, though it is unlikely the two ever met face-to-face. Tányù’s ten-fascicle poetry collection, titled Lónghuá jí 龍華集, was lost sometime after the compilation of the Sòngshǐ 宋史 catalogue in the 14th century. Only three of his poems are extant, found in QTS.

Sources

Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cái zì zhuàn jiào jiān, 1:3.551; Sòng gāosēng zhuàn 宋高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50:897b; Wú Rénchéng, Shíguó chūnqī, 57.831.

Wénxiù 文秀 (late 9th century). Based in the Jiāngnán region, Wénxiù (also called Yuánxiù 元秀) was a friend of the poet Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷. He once traveled to Cháng’ān to present a poem at court, likely sometime in the 890s. Qījǐ 齊己 once compared him to the great High Tàng poet-monks Jiǎorán 皎然 and Língyī 灵一. Only one of his poems is extant.

Sources

Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cái zì zhuàn jiào jiān, 1:3.560.

Wényì 文益 (885–958). Important Chán monk of the Five Dynasties period, also known as Fáyán 法眼, Great Chán Master Fáyán 大法眼禪師, and the posthumous title “National Teacher of Qīngliáng [Temple]” 清涼國師. Born into the Lǔ 魯 family in Yúháng 餘杭 (modern Hángzhōu 杭州 area), he spent the majority of his life in the southeast, where he studied the Confucian classics and rubbed shoulders with the literati. He was once granted audience with the Southern Tàng king Lǐ Jīng 李璟 and posthumously honored in a stele inscription by the last king of the Southern Tàng, Lǐ Yù 李煜.
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Wényì was known as a great exponent of the *Huānyān jīng* 華嚴經, and is regarded in the Chán histories to be the founder of a distinct lineage, called the Fāyán lineage 法眼宗, which is said to have been spread through the efforts of his sixty-three disciples. His name often appears in the Chán gōng'ān 公案 (Jp. kōan) collections. He left behind a teaching record, the *Jīnlíng Qīngliángyuàn Wényì chánshī yǔlù* 金陵清涼院文益禪師語錄 (T 1991). In addition to his importance as a teacher, he is generally regarded as one of the superior poet-monks of the time, though only one of his poems have been preserved in *QTS*. Fourteen of his didactic gāthās may be found in the *Jīngdé chuándēnglù* 景德傳燈錄 (*T* 2076, 51.0454a23–c11).

**Sources**


Wúkě 無可 (early ninth century). The younger paternal cousin of the famous poet Jiǎ Dāo 賈島, he hailed from Fànyáng 範陽, just southwest of modern Běijīng. A monk from an early age, he spent most of his days in the Cháng’ān area, either at temples in the city, at temples located in the Zhōngnán mountains 終南山, or at the residence of the poet Yáo Hé 姚合. He was well-regarded for his technical skill in poetry, associated with “bitter chanting” (kǔyín 苦吟) aesthetic made popular by his cousin Jiǎ Dāo and friend Yáo Hé. Critics called his use of indirect imagery “beyond images” 象外. Wúkě is also said to have been a skilled calligrapher, admired especially for his rendition of the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyā-dhāraṇī* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經, which is no longer extant.
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A one-fascicle edition of his poetry, titled Wúkě’s Collection 無可集, is recorded in catalogues from the Sòng dynasty. Today, 101 of his poems can be found in Quán Tàngshī, along with two stray couplets in QTSBB.

Sources

Xiūmù 修睦 (late ninth / early tenth centuries). Lived for many years at Dōnglín Temple 東林寺 on Mt. Lú 廬山 before moving to the kingdom of Wū 吳國 later in life. Known for his song-style poems, the poet Lǐ Xiányòng 李咸用 compared him to Lǐ Báì 李白 and Lǐ Hè 李賀, and called him the greatest poet-monk since Guānxiū 貫休. Early catalogues list two poetry collections (perhaps identical) under his name, a one-fascicle Dōnglín Collection 東林集 and a one-fascicle Monk Xiūmù’s Collection 僧修睦詩. Twenty-seven of his poems are extant: twenty collected in QTS and seven in QTSBB.

Sources
Fù Xuáncong, Táng cáizì zhuàn jiàojiān, 1:3.544–45 and 5:3.111–12.

Xūzhōng 虚中 (867?–c. 933). Born in Yíchūn 宜春, he became a monk early in life and spent most of his days in what are now Jiāngxī and Húnán provinces. He counted an eclectic cast of characters among his friends in poetry: Mǎ Zhènxī 馬振希, a local official who later became a Daoist priest; the poet-critic and lay Buddhist Sīkōng Tú 司空圖; the famously reclusive poets Zhèng Gǔ 鄭谷 and Fāng Gān 方干; and fellow poet-monks Guānxiū 貫休, Qījǐ 齊己, Qíchán 棲蟾, and Shàngyán 尚顏. He also wrote a poetry manual titled Hand-mirror of Streams and Categories 流類手鑑, the preface of which stresses the importance of a poet’s unity with the deep patterns of the world. Its contents borrow much from Qījǐ’s manual Exemplary Forms of
Fēng and Sāo Poetry 風騷旨格. In addition to his literary skills, Xūzhōng is said to have been a bit of a gourmand, fond of roasts and fine tea.

A one-fascicle edition of his poetry, titled *Blue Cloud Poems* 碧雲詩, is recorded in early catalogues, and was still in circulation through the Yuán dynasty. Currently only 14 of his poems and 6 of his couplets can be found in *QTS*.

**Sources**

Appendix B
Poet-Monk Events

The following is a list of 47 poet-monks and the dates that they have been counted for the sake of the maps produced in section 2.3 of this dissertation. “Poet-monk” is defined broadly as any monk who has extant writings in verse that are not merely doctrinal in nature. Events are based on the chronology established by Fù Xuáncong and his collaborators in Táng Wǔdài wénxué biānnián shí. The dates I have listed are not the monk’s birth and death dates, but the years for which there is solid evidence that the individual was active as a monk—one can hardly be a poet-monk if one is not a monk. An asterisk indicates that, due to the uncertainty of the sources, the monk’s total years has only been counted for one year on the map. The full spreadsheet of all events is available at the following URL:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1kuWnTM6M3UH2gqVPLDq_niRou9yreAb-D4iVQ4JVvc0/pubhtml.

1. Jingyún 景雲, 720–770*
2. Lingyī 靈一, 735–762
3. Hūguó 護國, 746–774
4. Jiǎorán 皎然, 748–797
5. Fāzhèn 法震, 760–768
6. Língchè 靈澈, 765–817
7. Qīngjiāng 清江, 767–811
8. Liú Kē 劉軻, 790–818
9. Guāngxuān 廣宣, 790–836
10. Tāoguāng 韜光, 801–824
11. Hánxī 含曦, 806–821
12. Zhīxuán 知玄, 819–881
13. Wūkē 無可, 823–843
14. Zhōu Hè 周賀 (Qīngsài 清塞), 827–841
15. Yuánfú 元孚, 827–860
16. Guānxīū 賦休, 838–913
17. Chūmò 處默, 839–899
18. Shàngyán 尚顏, 841–921
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Qībái 棲白</td>
<td>846–888</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Jūdùn 居遁</td>
<td>848–923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Yūnbiāo 雲表</td>
<td>860–909</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Sēngluán 僧鸞</td>
<td>861–904</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Yīnluán 隱巖</td>
<td>861–909</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Qījǐ 齊己</td>
<td>870–938</td>
</tr>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Tán yüè 曇域</td>
<td>871–924</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Kēzhǐ 可止</td>
<td>871–934</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Zīlán 子蘭</td>
<td>873–904</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Shēn yàn 神宴</td>
<td>873–940</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Dānjiāo 淡交</td>
<td>874–880</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Qīng yún 濯雲</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Xūzhōng 虛中</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Qīchán 棲蟾</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Wēnxiù 文秀</td>
<td>888–904</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Ruòxū 若虛</td>
<td>890–949</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Wēn yì 文益</td>
<td>894–958</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Xiūmù 修睦</td>
<td>899–929</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Yāqǐ 亞棲</td>
<td>900–910</td>
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<td>38.</td>
<td>Qiánkāng 乾康</td>
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<td>39.</td>
<td>Qiányī 棲一</td>
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<td>40.</td>
<td>Guīrén 歸仁</td>
<td>907–911</td>
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<td>41.</td>
<td>Kěpéng 可朋</td>
<td>907–956</td>
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<td>42.</td>
<td>Qiánhòu 乾昼</td>
<td>910–933</td>
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<td>43.</td>
<td>Jǐnhuàn 景煥</td>
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<td>44.</td>
<td>Qīng huò 清豁</td>
<td>923–976</td>
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<td>45.</td>
<td>Guānwēi 貫圍</td>
<td>935–938</td>
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<td>46.</td>
<td>Kēzhǔn 可準</td>
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<td>47.</td>
<td>Wēn yù 文彧</td>
<td>945–946</td>
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## Appendix C

### All Instances of Retriplication Prior to the Sòng Dynasty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Clergy</th>
<th>Title (Ch)</th>
<th>Title (En)</th>
<th>Rep Word (Ch)</th>
<th>Rep Word (En)</th>
<th># Reps</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>行路難</td>
<td>Traveling's Hard</td>
<td>是</td>
<td>affirming</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Ryukoku 024.3-4; DHGCZB #701</td>
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<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>行路難</td>
<td>Traveling's Hard</td>
<td>空</td>
<td>empty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anadiploic</td>
<td>Ryukoku 024.3-4; DHGCZB #702</td>
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<td>785</td>
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<td>詩偈</td>
<td>Poetic Gāthās</td>
<td>空</td>
<td>empty</td>
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<td>空</td>
<td>empty</td>
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<td>詩偈</td>
<td>Poetic Gāthās</td>
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<td>nothing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>QTSBB 20.948-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wáng Jiàn</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>鳥夜啼</td>
<td>Bird Crying in the Night</td>
<td>夜</td>
<td>night</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>QTS 21.271; QTS 298.3379</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Children's Ditty] 小兒謠</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>打麥謠</td>
<td>Threshing Wheat Ditty</td>
<td>三</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>QTS 878.9945–46; Jiǔ Tángshū 37.1376</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bái Jiūyi</td>
<td>817</td>
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<td>鳥夜啼</td>
<td>Crow Cawing in the Night</td>
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<td>night</td>
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<td>QTS 424.4665</td>
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<td>Kūkai 空海</td>
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<td>Simple</td>
<td>T no. 2426, 77.363a6–12</td>
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<td>思</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>T no. 2426, 77.363a6–12</td>
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<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>生</td>
<td>born</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>T no. 2426, 77.363a6–12</td>
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<td>Kūkai 空海</td>
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<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>死</td>
<td>dying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>T no. 2426, 77.363a6–12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yuán Zhēn 元稹</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>答子蒙</td>
<td>Replying to [Lǚ] Zhìméng</td>
<td>紛</td>
<td>scattered</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anadiploic</td>
<td>QTS 421.4631–32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dù Mù 杜牧</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>雨中作</td>
<td>Written in the Rain</td>
<td>朝</td>
<td>morning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anadiploic</td>
<td>QTS 520.5944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>晴</td>
<td>eminent, lofty</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Pelliot chinois 3597; Beijing 8317; Quán Dūnhuáng shì 9.87.3763–64</td>
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<td>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</td>
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<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>真</td>
<td>real</td>
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<td>Complex</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix C: All Instances of Retriplication Prior to the Sòng Dynasty

| Unknown-Dūnhuáng | 850 | Buddhist | - | - | 清 | pure | 3 | Complex | Pelliot chinois 3597; Beijing 8317; Quán Dūnhuáng shī 9:87.3763–64 |
| Unknown-Dūnhuáng | 850 | Buddhist | - | - | long-off, long-lasting | 3 | Complex | Pelliot chinois 3597; Beijing 8317; Quán Dūnhuáng shī 9:87.3763–64 |
| Liú Jià / Liú Xiáng | 867 | Lay | 春夜二首其一 | Spring Evening: 1 of 2 | 夜 | night | 3 | Complex | QTS 585.6785; QTS 715.8216 |
| Liú Jià / Liú Xiáng | 867 | Lay | 春夜二首其二 | Spring Evening: 2 of 2 | 日 | day / sun | 3 | Complex | QTS 585.6785; QTS 715.8217 |
| Liú Jià / Liú Xiáng | 867 | Lay | 肖中感懷 | Stirred by Feelings at Qi | 家 | home / family | 3 | Complex | QTS 585.6786; QTS 715.8216 |
| Liú Jià / Liú Xiáng | 867 | Lay | 晩登迎春閣 | Climbing Springwelcom Pavilion at Dawn | 樹 | tree | 3 | Complex | QTS 585.6786; 715.8216 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 陽春曲 | Song of Bright Spring | 苦 | suffer | 3 | Simple | QTS 826.9302; Hú Dājuàn 1.5–8 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 富貴曲二首其二 | Song of Abundance: 2 of 2 | 日 | day / sun | 3 | Complex | QTS 826.9306; Hú Dājuàn 1.49–52 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 偶作二首其二 | Written Offhandedly: 2 of 2 | 路 | path | 3 | Anadiplosis | QTS 826.9310; Hú Dājuàn 2.36–99 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 送崔使君 | Seeing off Commissioned Lord Cuī | 日 | day / sun | 4 | Simple | QTS 828.9328; Hú Dājuàn 5.279–83 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 寄西山胡汾吳樵 | Sent to Hú Fén and Wú Qiáo in the Western Mountains | 句 | line [of poetry] | 3 | Complex | QTS 832.9382; Hú Dājuàn 14.670–71 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 秋末長興寺作 | Written at Changxing Temple at Autumn’s End | 行 | going | 3 | Complex | QTS 832.9384; Hú Dājuàn 14.682–83 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 偶作 | Written Offhandedly | 字 | word | 3 | Anadiplosis | QTS 833.9396; Hú Dājuàn 16.769 |
| Guànxiū 賄休 | 877 | Buddhist | 居詩二十四首其八 | Poems on Residing in the Mountains: 8 of 24 | 心 | mind | 3 | Complex | QTS 837.9426; Hú Dājuàn 23.982–83 |
| Guànxiū 賁休 | 877 | Buddhist | 擬苦寒行 | After ‘Ballad of Bitter and Cold’ | 枝 | branch | 3 | Anadiplosis | QTS 20.235; QTS 826.9303; Hú Dājuàn 26.1065–66 |
| Xiānmù 修睦 | 878 | Buddhist | 給玄泰禪師 | Seeing off Meditation Master Xuántài | 去 | leaving | 3 | Simple | QTS 849.9618 |
| Unknown-Dūnhuáng | 895 | Buddhist | 十二月曲子其二 | Song of the Twelve Months, #2 | 也 | [particle] | 4 | Simple | Stein 6208; DHGCZB #814; Quán Dūnhuáng shī
## Appendix C: All Instances of Retripping Prior to the Sòng Dynasty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</th>
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<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>十二月曲子其四</th>
<th>Song of the Twelve Months, #4</th>
<th>也 [particle]</th>
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<th>Simple</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sikōng Tú司空圖</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>題休休亭</td>
<td>Inscribed on Rest Rest Pavilion</td>
<td>休</td>
<td>rest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikōng Tú司空圖</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>題休休亭</td>
<td>Inscribed on Rest Rest Pavilion</td>
<td>休</td>
<td>rest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
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<td>Lay</td>
<td>題休休亭</td>
<td>Inscribed on Rest Rest Pavilion</td>
<td>莫</td>
<td>don't</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sikōng Tú司空圖</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>題休休亭</td>
<td>Inscribed on Rest Rest Pavilion</td>
<td>莫</td>
<td>don't</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qījǐ齊己</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>日日曲</td>
<td>Song of Sun after Sun</td>
<td>日</td>
<td>day / sun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qījǐ齊己</td>
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<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>禪念法華經僧</td>
<td>Given to the Lotus Sūtra-Reciting Monk</td>
<td>念</td>
<td>recite</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qījǐ齊己</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>禪念法華經僧</td>
<td>Given to the Lotus Sūtra-Reciting Monk</td>
<td>念</td>
<td>recite</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qījǐ齊己</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>過商山</td>
<td>Stopping By Mt. Shān</td>
<td>層</td>
<td>stacked</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
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<td>Qījǐ齊己</td>
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<td>Reading Jiǎ Dǎo's Poetry Collection</td>
<td>首</td>
<td>poem</td>
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<td>Xiūyá修雅</td>
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<td>閱誦法華經歌</td>
<td>Song on Hearing a Recitation of the Lotus Sūtra</td>
<td>土</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Song on Hearing a Recitation of the Lotus Sūtra</td>
<td>字</td>
<td>character</td>
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<td>Song on Hearing a Recitation of the Lotus Sūtra</td>
<td>句</td>
<td>line [of poetry]</td>
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<td>Anadiplosic</td>
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<td>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>*葡萄酒</td>
<td>*Wine</td>
<td>差 short [of a full cup]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Pelliot chinois 3706; DHGCZB #135; Quán Dūnhuáng shì 142.5391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>南歌子</td>
<td>Southern Song</td>
<td>天</td>
<td>heaven</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Simple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C: All Instances of Retriplication Prior to the Sòng Dynasty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unknown-Dūnhuáng</th>
<th>950</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>劍器辭</th>
<th>Lyrics on a Sword</th>
<th>勇</th>
<th>brave</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Stein 6537; DHGCZB #1512</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zànning 贊寧</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>錢唐潮信詩</td>
<td>Poem on the Tides of Qiántáng</td>
<td>未</td>
<td>[earthly branch]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>QTSBB 1443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zànning 贊寧</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>錢唐潮信詩</td>
<td>Poem on the Tides of Qiántáng</td>
<td>巳</td>
<td>[earthly branch]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>QTSBB 1444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Abbreviations


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