

From: The Oxford Handbook of
Classical Chinese Literature
(1000 BCE - 900 CE). Ed. by
Wibke Denecke, Wai-yeec Li
and Xiaofei Tian. Oxford:
Oxford U.P., 2017. PP. 26-90.

SECTION TWO

BASICS OF LITERACY

From: The Oxford Handbook of
Literary Studies
Ed. J. B. (Ed. 2008 - 2009)
Oxford University Press
ISBN 978-0-19-920680-0

BASICS OF LITERACY

I. Technology and Media

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION (XIAOFEI TIAN)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 3

THE CHINESE WRITING SYSTEM

IMRE GALAMBOS

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

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

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

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

NATIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF CHINESE WRITING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND THE EARLY STAGES OF THE SCRIPT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ORTHOGRAPHY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LITERACY

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHINESE CHARACTERS BEYOND THE BORDER

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER 4

LITERARY MEDIA

Writing and Orality

CHRISTOPHER M. B. NUGENT

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

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

EARLY WRITING MEDIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

WRITING AND THE ORAL CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PAPER AND OTHER SURFACES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A poem is based on that which the mind is on intently. In the mind it is being intent; coming out in words it is a poem. The affections are stirred within and manifested in words, and only after this does one write them on paper. (Kūkai 1983: 129)

The debt here to the “Great Preface” is obvious, as is the continued association of poetry and the spoken (or sung) word, but something has changed as well. Writing might be the last stage that takes place only after the poem has already become an aesthetic whole, but it is a necessary one to transform the work into a material object.

Later in the dynasty, we find the stage of vocalization passed over altogether, as the compositional process goes directly from inspiration to realization as written text. In the influential description of his own compositional process found in his “Da Li Yi shu” 答李翊書 (“Letter in Reply to Li Yi”), the Mid-Tang writer Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) says of the emotions he is driven to express, “When they are grasped in the heart and pour from the hand, it comes like a flood” 當其取於心而注於手也，汨汨然來也 (Han 1987: 170). The hand, like the brush it presumably holds, is no longer a mere recorder of the sounds that constitute the literary work, it is the primary conduit.

Han Yu’s compositional process has a sense of spontaneity that we can trace back to the “Great Preface” model, yet one of the most distinctive changes in the conceptualization of literary composition in this period, and one closely tied to the increased focus on writing specifically, is the notion that composition is a lengthy and difficult process of decisions and revisions. Stephen Owen has described this notion of “working on a poem” as a move towards “the idea of poetry as an art rather than a transparent adjunct to experience” (Owen 1996: 108). The Late Tang writer Li Shangyin’s 李商隱 (ca. 813–ca. 858) “Li He xiaozhuan” 李賀小傳 (“Short Biography of Li He”) includes the following description of the short-lived but highly influential Mid-Tang poet Li He’s 李賀 (790?–816?) compositional technique:

He would always go off riding a donkey followed by a young Xi slave. On his back he carried an old tattered brocade bag. If he happened to get something, he would write it down at once and throw it in the bag. When he went back in the evening, his mother had a serving girl take the bag and empty out its contents, and when she saw how much he had written, his mother burst out with, “This boy won’t stop until he has spit out his heart.” Then she lit the lamps and gave him his dinner. Li He next had the serving girl get what he had written; then grinding ink and piling up paper, he would complete them, at which point he would throw them into another bag. (Li 1998: 13; tr. Owen 1996: 113)

The final poem here is the end result of a process of production. It is very much a material object produced from other material objects. Throughout this passage there is an emphasis on the physicality and materiality of the different stages of the compositional process. Li He “gets,” or “obtains” (*de* 得), the parts of what he will eventually assemble into a poem. He records these and “throws” (*tou* 投) them into a bag. The poet is exhausted and needs food and illumination to continue to the next stage of his work.

Again we see specific mention of the materials: ink is ground and paper piled up. When the poems are completed, they are again thrown into a bag. There is nothing here about sound, and though the moments of inspiration might be spontaneous, the process of turning them into literature requires the explicit expenditure of physical effort and material supplies.

This transformation of conceptions of the process of literary production is surely tied to the changes in material media on which that literature was produced. We can see, in this description of Li He's process (which, of course, may well have been an invention of Li Shangyin or merely the stuff of legend), a microcosm of the larger transition that Meyer attributes to the spread of bamboo as a lightweight writing material. Li He takes the scattered words and phrases that come into his mind and combines them in a new form; he gives them a new context within the structure of a poem, with the aesthetic requirements that form imposes. Whether Li He actually did compose in this way is beside the point. That Li Shangyin would imagine him doing so, and that this story would hold so much sway in the tradition, tells us that changes in material media had altered forever the way literature would be conceived.

THE CONTINUING ROLES OF ORALITY AND MEMORY

Though the invention and spread of paper in China led to the production of written texts on a scale greater than the world had ever known, orality and memorization continued to play important roles, even in the lives of the highly literate elite. Vocalization, for example, was often still a part of the composition process, albeit in more limited contexts. The *Wei shu* 魏書 (*History of the Wei*) portrays Emperor Xiaowen of the [Northern] Wei 魏孝文帝 (r. 471–499) regularly composing in an oral mode: “He was fond of literary writing. He would compose poems, rhapsodies, epitaphs, and hymns following his mood. There were great literary works that he would dictate orally on horseback, without a single character to be changed when they were complete” (*Wei shu* 7.187). Being on horseback or in other circumstances that would make writing difficult (ranging from being on a boat in churning waters to suffering imprisonment at the hands of the Tang rebel leader An Lushan 安祿山 [ca. 703–757]) is a common part of descriptions of oral composition in the Six Dynasties and Tang periods. Explicit mentions of oral composition appear to diminish in the later part of the Tang, but this mode of composition was still noted in titles, playing off the model of the “Great Preface,” as a way to indicate an immediate emotional response to a specific circumstance. In the preface to his poem “Xu Ru ting mashang kouhao” 徐孺亭馬上口號 (“Orally Composed on Horseback at the Xu Ru Pavilion”), Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818) describes his frequent visits to a ruined pavilion containing moss-covered stelae with works of poets

from earlier in the dynasty. Moved by the vicissitudes of time and the threads connecting the present and the past, he writes, “Thereupon, while on my horse I orally composed a single quatrain to lodge my melancholy” 因於馬上口號絕句詩一首以寄愀愴 (QTS 326.3657). More directly stirred by the present, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) claims to have responded with twelve short poems entitled “Chengwen Hebei zhu Jiedu ruchao huanxi kouhao jueju shi’ershou” 承聞河北諸節度入朝歡喜口號絕句十二首 (“Upon Receiving the News That All of the Hebei Military Commissioners Had Entered the Court, I Was Joyful and Orally Composed Twelve Quatrains,” Du 1980: 1624–1629). In titles and descriptions such as these, we catch only the smallest glimpse of what was likely a very common practice. As poetry increasingly became an art requiring prolonged effort and revision through the course of this period, the notion that poetic composition was fundamentally connected to orality remains valid.

Just as works of literature continued to be composed orally, so were they passed on to others that way. Chapter 5 in this volume addresses the topic of oral circulation of literature in more detail, but it is worth saying a few words here on the important role memory played in the preservation and circulation of literature in these periods. Prior to the widespread use of paper, it is clear that literature was “inscribed” in the mind more often than it was written on a material surface. A key example is, again, the *Poems*, with variant patterns in excavated texts that indicate these texts were written down from memorized words rather than from physically present written characters. Similarly, the received tradition from this period, both poetic and philosophical, shows a close connection to these works’ original oral context. The extensive use of stock phrases, parallelism, repetition, and similar structural conventions indicates that these texts grew out of a world in which the works that survived were often those that could be committed to memory (Meyer 2012: 251).

While China appears never to have produced the kinds of systematic treatises on mnemonic methods that we find from Greco-Roman times through medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque Europe, it is clear that a strong memory was a praiseworthy personal trait even after memorization and orality were no longer the dominant mode of textual transmission. In biographies of Han and later figures, we frequently find such phrases as “after reading something once he was usually able to recite it from memory” (*Hou Han shu* 62.2058). Another passage says of its subject that “Whatever his eyes saw, he could instantly recite. Whatever his ears happened to hear, his heart would not forget” (*Hou Han shu* 80.2653). Even in this age of more readily available writing materials, cost remained a factor. The biography of Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100), author of the *Lun heng* 論衡 (*Balanced Discourses*), notes: “His family was poor and lacked books. He would often visit the markets and shops of Luoyang and read the books they sold. After seeing them once he was instantly able to recite them from memory” (*Hou Han shu* 49.1629). It is worth noting that in all of these cases the presence of a written text is stated or implied. This was not the predominantly oral world of the pre-imperial period; memorization still played an important role, but it appears to have been increasingly based on what the eyes saw rather than what the ears heard.

This pattern continued into the post-Han periods. Xing Shao 邢邵 (ca. 496–561) of the Northern Qi 齊 (550–577) is described as casually setting texts to memory as a break from seemingly more recreational activities: “tired from drinking and playing around, he looked broadly through the classics and histories. He read through them quickly, remembering them after a single glance and not forgetting a thing” (*Bei Qi shu* 36.475). The Early Tang writer Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638) was reputed to have had a particularly capacious and accurate memory, with the ability to write down full texts silently and without error (*Jiu Tang shu* 72.2566). Later in the dynasty, Han Yu recounts a story originally told by Yu Song 于嵩 about his acquaintance, the famous, though ultimately defeated, general Zhang Xun 張巡 (709–757):

He once saw Song reading the *Han shu* [*History of the Former Han*] and asked him, “Why do you keep reading this?”

Song replied, “I’ve not yet mastered it.”

Xun said, “My way with books is that I read something no more than three times and I never forget it for my whole life.”

He then recited the book that Song was reading and did not get a single character wrong in the entire scroll. Song was surprised and thought that Xun just happened to be familiar with this scroll. He then randomly pulled out other rolls to test him and it was like this for all of them. Song took still more books from his shelves and tested Xun with questions. Zhang Xun smoothly recited each without hesitation. Song accompanied Zhang Xun for a long time and never saw him reading much. (Han 1987: 77)

The figures in these stories are, of course, extraordinary, and should not be taken to indicate the mental powers of the average literate man in the period. But there is every reason to believe that for poetry in particular, works were regularly committed to memory and circulated by passing through this medium at various stages. It is no doubt not mere coincidence that one of the most popular form of literature, “regulated verse” (*lüshi* 律詩), had a number of characteristics that made it particularly easy to memorize quickly. Parallelism, tonal alternations, rhyme, and brevity all had independent aesthetic appeal, but the fact that they were great aids to memorization surely assisted in the rapid circulation and survival of so many works in this form.

Terms such as “text” and “literature” inevitably privilege the written word, and there is no doubt that words written on physical surfaces played crucial, even defining, roles in the lives of the cultural elite in all the periods covered in this volume. These were people who understood their past and present through writing and hoped to extend their own legacy to future generations the same way, whether their words were inscribed on bronze, paper, or the walls of a tavern. Yet the diversity of media in this literary world remains striking. The words of the past came to life anew through constant recitation that put them in the ears and minds of new listeners. The poetry of a good friend was as likely to be heard as to be read in many cases. Classical Chinese literature exists for us today because it was written down, but we must remember that writing, important

though it was, was only one of the forms in which it existed for those who created and first experienced it.

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CHAPTER 5

MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

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THE term “manuscript culture” refers broadly to aspects of producing and circulating texts by hand-copying. Though it was scholars of medieval and Renaissance Europe who first undertook sophisticated analysis of the specific characteristics that distinguish manuscript culture from print culture, many of their insights and approaches are applicable to any context in which texts are reproduced by nonmechanized means. Whether the subject is a ninth-century Irish monk copying the Bible or a court academician in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) a thousand years earlier, they both produced texts more slowly and with a far greater degree of variation in each copy, by intention or error, than would be the norm in later print-based contexts.

I organize my discussion here thematically, with the main topics being production, circulation, and change. Within each of these topics, in addition to thematic subtopics I will also deal with the issue of diachronic difference, covering a span of nearly two thousand years and writing surfaces ranging from bronze and bamboo to silk and paper. Works such as the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*, hereafter the *Poems*), the main text of which might have taken no more than one hundred pages of Tang paper, would have required over a thousand two-foot-long bamboo strips, resulting in a mass of material far more difficult to move from place to place. Such differences mean that while our main topics apply to the entire time span in question, the issues involved play out quite differently depending on the specific period.

PRODUCTION

Our focus in this section is on producing texts (or, more precisely, documents), as opposed to producing literary works. That is, it is not abstract notions of literary composition but rather the creation of material objects—written texts—with which we are concerned. Printing, after all, did little to change the mechanics involved in authorial composition prior to the invention of the typewriter. Long after printing became the

dominant mode of textual reproduction, indeed well into the twentieth century, writers worldwide continued to compose literary works using a pointed object (albeit with a softer point in the case of a Chinese writing brush) they held in their hand. The important issue here is that prior to the spread of printing, each *additional copy* of their work was produced in this same manner.

The key features of textual reproduction in a manuscript culture are those of time and effort. Every single reproduction of a text required someone to write out every stroke of every character anew. A balance always needed to be struck between care—and thus in many cases legibility and accuracy—and speed. For professional scribes, evidence indicates that payment was made on the basis not of time spent but of objects produced. Different types of texts would also call for very differing degrees of care; many Buddhist texts discovered in Dunhuang and surrounding areas display a far more skilled and meticulous hand than do copies of popular contemporary poetic and narrative works from the same trove of manuscripts.

There was nothing “automatic” about the procedures of textual reproduction in the manuscript culture of pre-print China. Each individual copying of a text required an intentional decision to invest the time and effort, or money, involved. For the texts we are considering as literary (as opposed to, for example, administrative documents produced by the state) from this long period in China, textual reproduction was a task undertaken by both professional scribes and ordinary literate individuals. Beginning in the fifth century CE, we find numerous accounts of men who copied texts to earn money. Some did this as a sideline or as part of the process of their education, while others made it their primary occupation, working as household scribes for wealthy families (Tian 2007: 79–80). While we lack detailed accounts from the Tang of scribes who made their living copying literary works specifically, we do know that bookstores in the capital city Chang’an did a brisk business in the period and that there was a commercial market for poetry, especially by well-known poets in the later part of the dynasty (Nugent 2010: 214–220).

More frequent are descriptions of literary works being copied by authors themselves, or by their friends, families, and “fans” (*haoshizhe* 好事者). In these cases, which likely accounted for the largest part of the circulation of literary works, a text was almost always originally copied for a personal (i.e., noncommercial) reason. Authors most often copied their own literary works in order to give them to their friends or superiors. In the Tang, we see a full range of writers from Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) to the monk-poet Jiaoran 皎然 (ca. 720–ca. 798) depicted copying out selections of their poems to give to acquaintances and to those whom they would like to have as such. The famous friends Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) and their circle wrote about this with great frequency, but there is every indication that it was common among all elite men. An institutionalized form of this practice was known as “circulating scrolls” (*xingjuan* 行卷 or *wenjuan* 溫卷, lit. “warming scrolls”), whereby exam candidates and others seeking patronage or favor from influential men in the capital would circulate small sets of writings to these figures (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of the exam system). Indeed, the recycling and reselling of these scrolls (which were often discarded,

unread, by their intended recipients) was part of the commercial book trade and resulted in a number of amusing anecdotes concerning candidates who bought such scrolls only to submit them under their own name to their original authors (Nugent 2010: 216–219, 223–224; Mair 1978).

When family members copied a writer's works, it was most often a younger relative either working at his elder's request or copying the literary collection of his father or uncle who had died. Bai Juyi writes of having his nephew copy out portions of his massive collection, and Pei Yanhan 裴延翰 describes collecting and copying the poems of his uncle Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852) in a preface to the latter's collected works. Wei Ai 韋諱 compiled and copied out the works of his older brother Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (ca. 836–910) while the latter was still alive; a disciple of the monk Qiji 齊己 (fl. 921) was charged with editing and copying his spiritual patriarch's poetic works after the latter unexpectedly passed away. These were labors of love and filial duty, but especially in the case of full collections, they were labors nonetheless. By a very rough estimate, copying out Bai Juyi's full collection would have taken a single person over a month of eight-hour workdays. Few writers before the Song were as prolific as Bai, and none seem to have had the same obsessive concern with maintaining their collection, but even more ordinary collections must have taken some time to compile and copy; that task does seem to have fallen primarily to younger male relatives. Indeed Han Yu's good friend Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814) once lamented that as he had no living sons to copy his writings, his "elderly chantings mostly just drift away" 無子抄文字, 老吟多飄零 (Nugent 2010: 223, 249, 255–257; QTS 584.6767).

A great deal of textual reproduction was undertaken by individuals simply to have their own copies of works they enjoyed or considered important. From the earliest stages of the use of paper as a writing medium, we see descriptions of the popularity of literary works being indicated by frequent copying. So many people were said to have copied Zuo Si's 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305) "Rhapsody on the Three Metropolises" ("Sandu fu" 三都賦) that, in what later became a cliché of praise, "paper in Luoyang grew costly" 洛陽紙貴. A related common phrase used to indicate popularity of a work was that "everyone copied and circulated it" 人皆傳寫.

Copying facilitated not only ownership of a work but mastery as well. The spread of affordable paper of decent quality made repetitive copying of important texts a regular part of elite education, but it was not only children who were seen as benefiting from such practice. Xiao Jun 蕭鈞 (472–493) of the Southern Qi 齊 (479–502) is said to have copied out all of the Five Classics, in part because having done so ensured that he would remember their contents (Tian 2007: 81). Zhang Shen 張參 (fl. 776) of the Tang is portrayed as having spent his twilight years writing out the text of the Classics as well, believing that "copying books was better than reading them" (Li 1978: 3.54). Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) writes of the Buddhist Master Fangji 方及 that "Whenever he encountered the writings of an accomplished scholar, he would make a fair copy with his own hand and review it tirelessly" (Liu 2000: 25.666).

Not all "texts" that circulated did so based solely on written copies; circulation could often be based partially or even primarily on voice or the content of memory. It is clear

that orality and memory played particularly important, and in some cases dominant, roles prior to the Han. We know that a great many texts were written down in this period because archeologists have found them, but the content of those texts, and the types of textual variation in particular, indicate that texts were often written down based on an aural or memorized source rather than a written one. Excavated texts of the *Poems* in particular display a substantial degree of variance that appears to be primarily based on paronomastic borrowings in which different graphs were employed to record the same word (Kern 2005: 178–179). This is a strong indication of oral circulation at some point in the transmission process. Written texts in this period existed in dependent relationships with memorized and oral versions. Some have argued that many written versions of pre-Han works would have been nearly impossible to read without the readers having previously been instructed in, and even committed to memory, most of the work in question, though this is not always apparent from the received (as opposed to excavated) versions of these works we have today (Kern 2010: 27–28). Likewise, many written texts would be reproduced orally as performances or ritual recitations, with such performances being key to their use and transmission (Richter 2013: 172; see also the discussion in Chapter 4 of this volume). The “manuscript culture” of pre-Han China was arguably as reliant on mouths speaking words (and ears hearing them) as it was on hands writing characters.

Even in later periods, when writing was clearly the dominant mode of reproducing literary works, there are numerous accounts of using oral exemplars when reproducing texts. Prefaces to literary collections often include comments that many of the author’s works were scattered and lost and that some of the contents of the collection “were obtained from people’s mouths” 得之於人口 or that they had been “circulated orally” 傳於人口. In his description of how he went about compiling the posthumous collection of his teacher, the monk Guanxiu 貫休 (832–912), Tanyu 曇域 notes that he sought out people who had committed Guanxiu’s works to memory, or had “silently remembered them” (QTW 922.9604). Similarly, writing about compiling the collection of his brother Wei Zhuang, Wei Ai laments that written copies of many of the poems had been destroyed, leaving him to rely on “those that he could recite.” He would also silently record his brother’s scattered chantings (Wei 2002: 483–484).

CIRCULATION

For our purposes here, we can consider a text to have circulated when some or all of its content has been transferred from one person to another. A letter sent but never read has not, in the way we are using the term here, circulated; a letter that was written, never leaves the desk on which it was composed, but is read by a second person at that desk has. This distinction is important because our key issue is how literary works came to be known by an audience. Because most circulation involves textual reproduction,

whether partial or full, outwardly manifest or occurring only in someone's mind, many of the issues discussed in the previous section will come into play here as well, with the role of orality proving especially crucial.

Our evidence for how texts circulated in the pre-Han period is limited, but much of it points to a web of inextricable connections between written and oral circulation. We see this in physical form in the excavated texts of the *Poems*, with their substantial variation in written graphs used to represent the same sound, and thus the same word, in the spoken language. While it is possible that any given excavated document may have been directly copied from another written exemplar, the types of variation across multiple documents strongly indicate that at some point along the process of circulation, and likely at many, these texts were reproduced from either an oral or a memorized source. In such a context we must be careful about our terms: if this is textual circulation, what constitutes the text that circulates? For the audience of the time we might say that the linguistic contents of the text circulates “successfully” even when the two copies of that text look very different because conventions of representing spoken sounds with written graphs had not yet stabilized. A teacher might recite a portion of the *Poems* to two students who then, immediately or later from memory, wrote down two very different graphic representations of what their teacher intoned. Yet if each of these students were to orally convey what they learned to their own students, the contents of those recitations might well be identical, and also identical to what they *heard* from their teacher.

The excavated witnesses give us a glimpse of a fluid and local textual world in the Warring States (481–221 BCE) and before. Circulation of such works as the *Poems* likely took place primarily within small groups of teachers and disciples. It is only in such a context of oral instruction and shared linguistic culture that these surviving written texts would lose their apparent opacity and seeming variation (Kern 2002: 164). Some scholars have argued that written instantiations of works like the *Poems* and what we now think of as philosophical texts are best seen as a secondary phenomenon, ancillary to the primary oral modes of circulation. They served as “repositories of didactic material”—small portions of a fuller educational context (Richter 2013: 172). Indeed many of these sorts of written texts could only continue to circulate in a context of continuous and repeated teaching and transmission within groups of teachers and students, both because they required explanation or previous understanding and because of their physical fragility (Lewis 1999: 55). As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, there were textual media in early China far more durable than strips of bamboo, such as vessels cast in bronze and carved stone stelae; yet these too functioned in close connection to orality in terms of the way the texts inscribed on them circulated. Indeed the early historical tradition attributes the survival of the *Poems* through the Qin bibliocaust to the fact that people committed them to memory and transmitted them orally. The *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) claims of these works that, “under the Qin they remained intact because they were recited from memory and not only [written] on bamboo and silk” (*Han shu* 30.1708).

With the increasing availability of higher-quality paper beginning in the third and fourth centuries, writing plays a much more dominant role in the transmission of

literary works. The most basic accounts of literary works circulating take the form of clichés of praise similar to the comment that the popularity of Zuo Si's works caused the cost of paper in Luoyang to rise due to constant copying. We frequently find claims made of writers that their works were “widely circulated and copied among people” 人間盛傳寫, or that “each time he composed a piece everyone copied and circulated it” 每製一篇人皆傳寫 (QTS 617.7113; QTW 508.5165). These could refer to local circulation, such as the claim about the Early Tang poet Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂 (ca. 661–702) that “his writings were copied and circulated in Luoyang, and in the markets, shops, streets, lanes, and alleys they were continually recited,” or of transmission across borders, as we see in an anecdote about emissaries from Korea and Japan who would visit the court and “all have people go copy [Zhang Wencheng's] writings and then leave; such were the distances to which his talented writings spread” (QTW 238.2412; Liu 1984: 129).

More revealing are descriptions of the specific ways in which literary works would pass from one hand to another. This process typically began with authors, who were often the first to make copies of their own works; in most cases they made these copies to pass along to other people. Throughout the Tang period, when poetry had become a truly social art, writers would be expected to have copies of some of their recent poems on hand to give to acquaintances (in addition to being able to recite a few upon request). They would also frequently send their writings through the official or unofficial post to friends stationed in distant parts of the empire. When visiting a friend and being shown some of his writings, it was not uncommon to copy some pieces out on the spot to take away and savor again later.

It was these sorts of copies, spread among friends and acquaintances, that would be sought out by later compilers putting together literary collections and anthologies. Such collections and anthologies, both large and small, played their own key roles in circulation, especially in the later parts of the period. The act of compiling gathered together works that had been scattered and might otherwise be forever lost. Collections protected these works as well; they gave them a context, both of other works by the same author and of prefaces, postfaces, and similar writings that further anchored them to the author and his biography. Anthologies of works by multiple authors drew connections between works in different ways, emphasizing the aesthetic or even moral value of the works included. Crucially, both single-author collections and anthologies not only gathered works together but also served as a base from which the works would go back into the world and circulate again. We have numerous accounts of people reading collections and anthologies—long and short, clearly partial or seemingly complete—and copying them anew (see Chapters 15, 19, and 20 for more detailed discussions of collections and anthologies).

This copying, we note again, took time and effort. As a result, people tended to copy only what they valued—whether for enjoyment or knowledge. This could happen on the scale of copying just parts of someone's collection: surely even Bai Juyi's closest friends and most ardent admirers still only took the time to copy out a limited number of pieces from his ever-growing collection. But it might also come into play on the scale of a single work. There are numerous accounts of people copying down individual lines

or couplets from poems, with at least one writing manual from the Tang suggesting that those who desired to improve their own writing should keep on their person a small notebook of such excerpts. This practice was hardly new to the Tang; Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), who, along with his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE), led the team of copyists and compilers who essentially created our received version of pre-Han literary tradition, had long before compiled such works as the *Xinxu* 新序 (*Matters Newly Arranged*) and the *Shuoyuan* (or *Shuiyuan*) 說苑 (*Garden of Persuasions*), which consisted largely of excerpts—often substantially reworked and reworded—from earlier works. The practice of “producing epitomes” (*chaoshu* 抄書), of copying out excerpts from other works, was an important part of literary culture following the spread of paper. Literate men would produce epitomes from works ranging from Buddhist sutras and Confucian Classics to histories and literary collections, both to aid their study and simply to possess their own copies of pieces and parts of works they particularly enjoyed or thought important (Tian 2007: 82–83; see also Chapter 10 of this volume).

Most of the manuscripts discussed thus far were intended for private reading by individuals. There are, however, other modes of circulation that were considerably more public. Poems were regularly inscribed on public places, and would often be transmitted to a broad audience and to distant locales through such a mode of transmission. There are over a thousand surviving poems from the Tang period alone that indicate in their title that they were originally inscribed on some sort of exposed surface (other than paper), and these no doubt represent only a small fraction of the poems that were disseminated this way (both from the Tang and from earlier periods). Poets would often inscribe a poem on a wall when paying a visit to an acquaintance, whether a friend, monk, or courtesan. While the audience for a poem on a friend’s wall might be limited, the walls of monasteries and brothels were likely viewed by greater numbers of visitors. Some of the most popular spots for inscribing poems were, unsurprisingly, on transportation routes. There are examples of poems inscribed on bridges, mountain pass fortifications, taverns, and post-stations. Towards the end of the Tang, we find increasing mention of monasteries and post-stations in particular putting up “poetry boards” (*shiban* 詩板) specifically intended for the public posting of poems. There are also accounts of readers copying works from such locations and circulating them further (Nugent 2010: 199–207).

Certain features of public inscription anticipate aspects of the later print culture. Like printing blocks, a single publicly posted poem would serve as the template for multiple copies (though unlike impressions made by a printing block, each handwritten copy likely introduced variants, either intentionally or by accident). Publicly posted poems were also, like printed works, aimed at a more anonymous audience. When a poet copied out one of his recent poems to give to a friend, the circulation of his poem was circumscribed by that connection. The poem might circulate further, finding itself before the eyes of strangers, but the initial stage was an intimate one. When a poem was written up on the wall of a post-station, even its immediate audience could be unknown to the poet. Yet the poem itself maintained a tie to its creator, and could, though happenstance, still convey this connection to the right audience. One of the

most poignant accounts of the circulation of literary works in the Tang describes Yuan Zhen's chance discovery of a poem by his friend Bai Juyi on a pillar of a riverside inn. As Bai describes it, "He saw that there were a few lines of characters on a dusty wall. Reading them, it turned out that it was one of my old poems . . . but he did not know who had inscribed it. [He] could not stop sighing, then composed a piece and sent it to me together with my original poem that he had transcribed. When I examined this poem, it turned out that it was a quatrain that I had given to a Chang'an singing girl, Ah Ruan, fifteen years before when I had just passed the exams" (Bai 1988: 922). By the time Yuan Zhen encountered Bai's poem fifteen years after its original composition, it had surely been read, recited, and copied by many dozens of people who had never met its author. But a chance encounter with that author's closest friend sent the poem back with a new context and additional layers of meaning that surely went far beyond what Bai Juyi imagined when, as a young man in Chang'an, he dashed off a quick verse for a singing girl.

CHANGE

Bai Juyi does not tell us whether his poem had changed over the course of fifteen years of circulation—he likely would not have remembered his original composition with enough precision to know—but it is clear that the process of circulation did change literary works over time. Indeed this is one of the fundamental features of manuscript culture and has important implications for our understanding of the stability of literary works and our notions of the role of the author.

The most basic sort of change that figures prominently in manuscript culture is that of simple loss. Indeed, a surprising aspect of this story of Bai Juyi's poem is that the poem survived at all. Literary works, especially when written on such perishable materials as bamboo strips and paper, were fragile things, in constant peril of fire, rot, reuse, and general neglect. While the extent and effectiveness of the famed Qin bibliocaust may well have been grossly exaggerated by historians in the succeeding Han period, literary works were destroyed in massive numbers when rebellions arose and ruling houses were overthrown. What was perhaps the most tragic true bibliocaust occurred at the hands of one of history's greatest bibliophiles. In 554, facing the end of his rule, the Liang ruler Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (Emperor Yuan 元帝, r. 552–555) set his great library of over 140,000 scrolls alight, destroying what may well have been the largest collection of literary works in the world up to that time (Tian 2007: 94–95). While his true motivations will never be known, the effect was clear: our understanding of pre-Tang literature would always have massive gaps.

Of course, a great number of works faded away in much less dramatic fashion; they simply did not meet readers who liked them or thought them important enough to expend the effort required to copy them. The survival of Bai Juyi's poem to Ah Ruan was exceptional. It was the kind of verse—written not to secure the author a place in literary

history or send to possible patrons, but to fulfill the immediate needs of a very casual social situation—that likely suffered the greatest extent of loss. Yet much poetry that was written (and recited) was of precisely this sort.

Anthologies and encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書; see Chapter 10 for a detailed discussion) simultaneously preserved works, or at least portions of works in the case of the latter, and stand as indications of what was not preserved. They are the material manifestations of the selective pressures, particularly acute in a manuscript culture, that result in some works surviving while others do not. For every work that makes it into an anthology, individual collection, or encyclopedia, there are dozens left out. This proportion of loss is often noted explicitly by compilers of individual literary collections. For encyclopedias in particular, we can see it in the great number of works excerpted that we know today *only* from such excerpts, as the full works from which they came long ago fell out of circulation.

It is worth noting further that, especially in the case of individual collections, the compilers sometimes left works out not out of loss or neglect, but because they used the collections to craft a particular view of the writer. The compiler might intentionally omit works that did not fit their criteria, as when Lu Chun 陸淳 (d. 805) compiled a redacted set of the Early Tang poet Wang Ji's 王績 (590?–644) works from which he “expunged those words of action and made complete [Wang Ji's] ambition to be unbound” 祛彼有為之詞，全其懸解之志 (Wang 1998: 388; see also Chapter 15). Similarly, Fan Huang 樊晃, dissatisfied with the subset of Du Fu's poems circulating orally in his region, put together a new collection of Du Fu's works in six *juan*. In his preface he expresses concern that the poems circulating in the eastern areas are more frivolous, and thus people there “have never known that he has lofty and upright compositions” 曾不知君有大雅之作 (Du 1980: 2237). We can easily imagine a similar economy at work but left unstated in the compilation of countless other literary collections from the period. Works that conformed to a compiler's notion of the author's proper style would be included; those that did not would be left out. Such a pattern might not only create a skewed presentation of the full range of a poet's works but also result in spurious attributions being accepted while accurate ones were not.

The fires of war, the slow decay of neglect, and the biased hands of compilers hardly ceased their work with the invention and spread of printing, but the nature of textual reproduction in a manuscript culture meant that any given work was likely to exist in far fewer copies than would printed works. It was often the case that a specific copy of a work was the *only* copy of that work in existence, or one of only a very few. We see numerous accounts of compilers hunting far and wide in taverns and private homes on the off chance that they would be able to find pieces by the author whose works they were attempting to bring together. The survival of a work in the age of manuscripts was always tenuous, with even popular works falling out of circulation and disappearing. Wei Zhuang's long narrative poem “Qinfu yin” 秦婦吟 (“Lament of the Lady of Qin”) was one of the most famous and beloved poems of its day, with accounts of it being memorized and recited so widely that its title became part of Wei Zhuang's nickname. Yet Wei Zhuang eventually sought to disassociate himself from the work and did not allow it to

be put into his collection. Ignored (or perhaps never seen) by Song 宋 (960–1279) printers, the famous poem disappeared for a thousand years before being found in multiple copies in the caves at Dunhuang. It is now the longest poem that survives from the Tang, but were it not for the dry desert air and the luck that protected the sealed-off caves from destruction, it would have been lost a millennium ago.

For works that did survive, a different sort of change was always at work. Alteration is an inevitable consequence when texts are copied by hand: circulation creates variation. Scholars studying medieval European literature have long known this to be the case, as the durability of parchment has left them with a substantial trove of diverse manuscripts that embody this variation. While scholars working on pre-print Chinese literature long lacked these sorts of materials, there were strong indications of variation in no longer extant manuscripts, with printed editions beginning in the Song including numerous annotative notes that “one version says” (*yizuo* 一作), followed by an alternative character or phrase. It was not until certain archeological finds became available over the last century—for scholars of the Six Dynasties and Tang, the finds at Dunhuang, and for scholars of early China, bamboo strips and silk manuscripts excavated from Warring States and Han tombs and an increasing number of inscribed bronzes—that scholars have had access to a substantial mass of written materials produced in the periods they studied. As we examine these materials, we begin to get a clearer picture of the complex array of variation whose echoes persisted into the age of print.

In the case of the Dunhuang manuscripts, we might consider much of this variation unintentional. That is, as texts were copied, the scribes made “mistakes”—changes in the original that they did not intend. This could encompass a range from accidentally writing a homophonous or orthographically similar character to “eye skips,” that is, unintentionally moving to a later section with the same character or a similar phrase while copying and skipping over the text in between. In manuscripts from Dunhuang, it is often relatively easy to identify such errors when multiple copies of work have been found. Many times an accidental phonological or orthographic substitution will result in a character that simply does not (and, more importantly, *did* not) make any sense in context, and it is clear which character was likely intended. In some cases, scribes (or later proofreaders) would catch a mistake and write in a correction.

The situation is much more complex for manuscripts from the earlier periods, especially before the Han. Because regional differences in scripts were far more pronounced and homophonous substitutions very common, it is considerably more difficult to determine definitively that a given instance of variation is due to scribal error rather than to different transcription practices. As discussed above, the vast majority of variants in the excavated versions of the *Poems* are graphic in nature and involve the use of different written characters to represent the same sound (and thus word) in the spoken language. This practice was widespread, and we can thus reasonably assume that this variation was not a hindrance to understanding for the scribes and readers of the precise geographic and linguistic contexts in which these manuscripts were produced. However, already in the Han we see this graphic variation causing difficulties of interpretation that would only grow worse as time passed and readers were

increasingly separated from the texts' original productive context (Kern 2002: 162, 164; Shaughnessy 2006:145–146).

In more recent work on European manuscript culture, there has been a great deal of resistance to scribal changes being reflexively described as errors, as in many cases such an assumption conceals the probability that often such alterations were intentional. Scribes, especially for secular literary works, were not mindless copyists whose only goal was to produce a perfectly faithful reproduction of the document in front of them. Rather, they saw themselves as free to alter works as they saw fit, whether to correct what they deemed to be errors or to actually improve the work they were transmitting.

While attitudes towards the integrity of texts in pre-print China do not correspond precisely to those of medieval Europe, it is clear that scribes and others in China also intentionally altered texts in the process of transmission. We have seen above how works such as encyclopedias excerpted and rearranged the written works they preserved; there are numerous accounts of professional singers, whose repertoire was based in part on contemporary poetry, truncating and altering well-known poetic works in their performances as well. A similar situation has been extensively documented from the written evidence of the practice of troubadours in medieval France, and in both cases this was probably far more common than we can determine from surviving written records. In many cases, these improvisations went the way of most oral poetry: experienced only by their immediate audience and gone forever after the performances ended. In the case of China, we can still find traces in multiple versions of *yuefu* 樂府 poems that were written down and made it into the later print cultures, or in the vastly different versions of certain popular poems from the Tang that became traditional songs of drinking and parting from friends.

Texts were altered in nonperformative contexts with some regularity as well. It is clear that in the pre-Han period philosophical texts would be rearranged and reworded in the process of transmission with little concern for fidelity to an original text, whether in written or memorized form. In later periods, there are accounts of poets revising their own poems many years after having originally composed them. Some revisions would be for aesthetic reasons, others for practical ones. For example, young men in the capital who circulated their works to possible patrons or influential officials had to carefully revise their writings to avoid the personal taboo characters of the recipients. As these *xingjuan* were apparently recycled and sold in bookshops to candidates who would then pass them off as their own, the accumulation of changes over time could be substantial (Nugent 2010: 231; Moore 2004: 150; Fu 1986: 281–282, 284).

More telling perhaps are accounts of readers altering texts by other writers. Some revision of works was likely common as a stage in the compilation of literary collections, but this could take place in less formal contexts as well. A late Tang anecdote about an exam graduate surnamed Wei 韋 provides a glimpse of what may have been a common practice. He once had a favored courtesan “copy out the poems of Du of the Ministry of Works (i.e., Du Fu). The version he had acquired was full of errors and lacunae. When the courtesan corrected them as she was copying, the meaning and order of the text was clear. Because of this, Wei was especially infatuated with her” (Li 1998: 2085;

Tian 2005: 8; Nugent 2010: 229–230). As modern readers long accustomed to thinking of the poems of Du Fu as great works of art that are unique expressions of the master's intent, we find such an attitude shocking. But though Du Fu's place in the Chinese literary pantheon was already on solid ground by the late Tang, his poems were not yet objects of textual scholarship per se. They were objects of admiration and even awe, but still part of a literary landscape that had not yet become the subject of study it would be in the Song. The implication of this anecdote is not that Wei and his concubine thought Du Fu was a bad poet and that one could make his poems better by changing them, but rather that she and Wei believed she was a sufficiently skilled reader to recognize "errors" that had crept into the poems over a century or so of transmission and could aptly correct these errors so that the proper "meaning and order" (*wenli* 文理) of the text would be restored. Texts were seen as fluid, but not all changes were for the better.

IMPLICATIONS

Grasping the realities of manuscript culture does not simply let us better envision the material conditions of literature in pre-print China, it deepens, and in some cases substantially alters, our understanding of that literature and its relationship to the received tradition. Excavated versions of the *Poems* have provided evidence that the received version of the collection may not be fundamentally different from what was apparently circulating around 300 BCE. Only a single poem of the twenty-six appearing in these excavated manuscripts is not also present in the received version. While it is true that the texts found on the excavated documents differ substantially from those found in the received *Poems*, the sounds, and thus the words the graphs represent, show far less variation. In other words, our received version of the *Poems* gives us a pretty good idea of the versions of the work from the late Warring States (Kern 2010: 21). At the same time, the graphic variation implies that the literary culture surrounding the *Poems* in the Warring States likely included a substantial oral component of which we can only see traces in the received tradition. Some scholars dispute the notion that this graphic variation and its relative diminution in the Han period are convincing evidence of a shift from oral to primarily written modes of transmission (Shaughnessy 2006: 260). In this view, the standardization of written versions of the *Poems* and other texts is due not to an increase in written transmission but to the gradual standardization of the writing system (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of the writing system). In either case, attention to the specific attributes of manuscript production lets us understand this earlier context in a way that would be very difficult were we to focus only on received texts.

Similarly, excavated manuscripts of the writings of the pre-Qin philosophical "schools" have necessitated a reassessment of these works as well. There are strong indications that though there were many written texts in this period, the transcription practices they used required a previous understanding of the text to make sense of its written version, which would have been primarily nonlinear and reliant on oral exchange

(Richter 2013: 172, 174). The written depended on the oral in a way that it would not just a few centuries later. These manuscripts further imply that in many cases not only was there no real sense of separate “schools” of thought prior to the Han, but that our very notion of a “book” with a specific “author” attached is very much a result of the compilation, recopying, and reorganization undertaken by scholars in the early Han court (Kern 2010: 64; for a different account of the “messiness” of excavated pre-Qin texts, even to an audience of only five hundred years later, see Shaughnessy 2006: 131–184). It is not necessarily that the received tradition has not passed on the thought of early China, but rather that the tradition has passed it on through the filter of Han and later compilers, who molded it into something far more organized and compartmental than it was in its original context.

Understanding the realities of manuscript culture brings into sharp relief the extent to which the received tradition has been mediated by the choices made by copyists, compilers, and editors over the centuries. This in turn reveals just how tenuous the connection between an author and the specific wording of works attributed to him can sometimes be. We can see the impact of manuscript culture in this regard even when we no longer have access to contemporaneous manuscripts. By meticulously examining specific choices between variants inherited from pre-print manuscript versions of Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 (Tao Qian 陶潛, 365–427) poetic works, Xiaofei Tian has shown how the received versions of Tao Yuanming’s works, to a meaningful extent, not only are the work of Tao himself but also reflect a long history of copyists and editors who had particular (and evolving) notions of what Tao would, or must, have written. Choices that seemed obvious to a Song editor may well obscure readings that might have made more sense to readers in Tao Yuanming’s own time (Tian 2005: 12, 221).

When we *do* have documents surviving from pre-print times, the disjunctions can be even more jarring (as we have seen with the excavated bamboo texts). A final example from the Tang illustrates this nicely. One of the High Tang poet Li Bo’s 李白 (701–762) most famous works, “Qiang jin jiu” 將進酒 (“Bring in the Ale”), includes a line that has long been seen as the highlight of the poem, even as a definitive declaration of Li Bo’s exuberant and confident poetic personality. In the received version, dating back to a Song woodblock print edition, it reads “Heaven gave birth to my talents, they must be put to use!” 天生我才必有用. Scholars have used this line not only to characterize the poet himself, but also to date the poem to a specific period in his life when they feel he would have been most likely to express such confidence that his talents would indeed be put to use by the state. None of the three manuscript versions of this poem found in Dunhuang, however, ends the line this way. Instead, the last three characters of the line in those versions read “I have outstanding talents” 有俊才, which, in fact, better conforms to the likely rhyme scheme of the poem. These manuscript versions are currently the oldest texts of the poem we have and predate the Song edition by at least a century. This does not mean that they are in some sense more “original” in that they more closely match the words of the poem as Li Bo wrote it. We simply cannot know; examination of manuscript cultures consistently shows that earlier witnesses are not necessarily more “accurate.” We do, however, now know that this poem circulated with quite different

wordings during the Tang itself. We may think that the most unsettling possibility here is that one of the most famous declarations of Li Bo's poetic persona was written not by him but by later editors of his writings, but it is perhaps just as interesting to consider the possibility that Li Bo himself wrote his famous declaration as we have come to know it, only to have it changed into something far less striking and circulated in that form in a time not far removed from his own life (Nugent 2015).

Many issues characteristic of manuscript culture do not end with the spread of woodblock printing beginning in the late eighth century. The connections between manuscript and print cultures were arguably much stronger in China than they were in Europe following the spread of movable type printing beginning in the late fifteenth century. Even with the dominance of print in many areas of textual production in China, works continued to be regularly copied by hand well into the twentieth century. Printed copies of works would thus be transformed into manuscripts, and those manuscripts would often be the basis for a new print edition (Chia 2002: 11). Moreover, the xylographic method that defined print culture in China was more fundamentally based on handwritten manuscripts than printing with movable type would be. Every printing block was directly based on a handwritten copy that was pasted on it to be carved in reverse (Chia 2002: 42). Thus understanding manuscript culture and its influence on literature and society gives us invaluable insights not only into the period prior to the spread of printing, but into the full history of literary production and circulation in China until very recent times.

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CHAPTER 6

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING TO LITERATURE

RONALD EGAN

It is widely recognized that calligraphy and painting have a special relationship to the literary arts in the Chinese tradition. It would eventually become commonplace to speak of poetry, painting, and calligraphy as the “three excellences” (*sanjue* 三絕) or the three arts that the person of refinement ideally would master. Even if it was rare for an individual to excel at all three, the idea that a single person might cultivate them jointly speaks to the intimate connections and shared aesthetic that were perceived among the three. The pairing of painting and poetry (the “sister arts”) is one that is familiar to us in Western aesthetics and can be found already in ancient Greece. It is calligraphy in the Chinese scheme of artistic expression that is apt to strike us as unexpected, so that the place of calligraphy in China, as well as its relationship to the other arts, requires special attention and explanation.

CALLIGRAPHY: CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

From early in the imperial period, by the first and second centuries of the Common Era, there was already the practice and appreciation of calligraphy as an art. By that time, writing with the brush had become well established, and paper had been invented and was widely available. (On these developments, see Chapter 4.) It was of course the adoption of the brush, which replaced various instruments of incision previously used for writing, that made possible the distinctive traits of later calligraphy in China; the early invention of paper was also important for providing a flat, smooth, and dimensionally large medium to which writing could be applied. If the Chinese had continued to write

on bamboo slips, metal, or silk, or had been forced to write, even with a brush, on papyrus or parchment (as did their Roman contemporaries), the art of calligraphy would never have developed as quickly or reached such heights as it did.

To account for the recognition of calligraphy as a major art form in China, one naturally thinks of the special features of the Chinese writing system. There are the astounding quantity of unique graphs (more than fifty thousand of them), the complexity of their form (with many individual characters requiring more than ten separate brush strokes), and the minute graphic variations that often distinguish one character from another. Surely all of these must have played a part in the elevation of writing into a high art. Yet Chinese characters can be analyzed into a rather small number of distinct stroke types. Viewed in that light, the writing system is not all that different from many others in which calligraphy never became a major art. It is possible that the formal characteristics of the Chinese writing system are not the sole reason that calligraphy developed as it did, and that cultural factors also played a part. These may include the early prestige of writing, owing largely to its centrality in ancient ritual and the operation of the bureaucratic state, and even its role in differentiating the Chinese from the peoples who lived beyond their borders.

In the Later Han period, there also appeared the earliest essays about calligraphy. These were important for setting forth notions of the art that proved to be enormously influential upon later calligraphy theory and criticism. They were also instrumental in linking the art to older ideas about the origins and nature of writing itself as well as to early philosophy and metaphysics. Here is a representative passage found in Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78–143) essay "Caoshu shi" 草書勢 ("The Configuration of Draft Script"):

When we observe its models and images, there is propriety wherever we look. The rectangular forms do not match the carpenter's square; the round ones do not accord with the compass. Lowered on the left and raised to the right, from far away it looks like a leaning precipice. A bird stretches its neck, standing erect, intent on flying off. A wild animal recoils with fear, poised to race away. Here, there are dots and dabs that resemble a string of pearls which, though broken, remains intact. With anger and frustration contained inside, they display themselves with abandon and create marvelous forms. There, there are tremulous strokes perilously elongated, like a withered tree that stands on the edge of a cliff. The slanting strokes and dots off to the side are like a cicada clinging to the branch. Where the brush stroke ends and the configuration is terminated, the dangling threads are tucked in a knot, and it resembles a scorpion that has inflicted its venomous bite and darts to a crack or crevice, or a hunting snake that dives down a hole, its head disappearing but its tail trailing behind. Consequently, when you look at it from afar it resembles a peak that has collapsed or a bluff that has caved in. But when you examine it close at hand, you find that not a single stroke could be altered. Its workings are supremely subtle and its essentials are marvelous, always right but never the same. Here, I have just given an approximation of its general appearance; such is its configuration, more or less. (Cui 1974: 36.1066)

This passage has features that are typical of writings about calligraphy from all periods: the exuberant list of analogies with natural forms, the stress upon the restless changeability of the brushwork, and the assertion that ultimately the calligraphy defies description and partakes of something that can only be called “supremely subtle” and “marvelous.”

It is important to understand that this is not simply rhetorical flourish, although to be sure there is ingenious wordplay here bordering on the bombastic. In describing calligraphy this way, Cui Yuan and others after him were drawing upon a store of earlier philosophical thought about writing, “images,” nature, and the cosmos. Readers of their time would not have failed to perceive echoes of that earlier body of writing in Cui Yuan’s passage, and these echoes would have filled Cui’s passage with implications of claims of deeper significance for the “draft script” he is writing about, just as Cui intended they would.

The passage calls to mind statements in the *Classic of Changes* and commentaries on it about the invention of the trigrams in high antiquity by the legendary sage Fu Xi 伏羲. He created them, we are told, by gazing up at the sky and observing the “images” (*xiang* 象) of the heavenly bodies there and looking down at earth and observing the “models” or “patterns” (*fa* 法) in the terrain. The trigrams, from which the sixty-four hexagrams were derived, are thus inspired by natural forms but, representing human values and cosmic principles, embody more abstract and higher meaning than physical forms could ever convey. Later, it was asserted that Chinese characters were derived in much the same way. In the postface to his dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Explanation of Simple Graphs and Analysis of Composite Characters*), Xu Shen 許慎 (d. ca. 149) tells us that the ancient sage Cang Jie 倉頡 invented characters by following Fu Xi’s lead and modeling them on the tracks of animals and birds he observed: “According to their category he made images of the natural forms, and so called it ‘pattern/writing’ (*wen* 文)” (Xu 2002: 15.997). Thus, the images (*xiang*) that are symbolized by the trigrams and hexagrams are based on natural forms but also embody abstract and eternal principles of change and constancy, and characters themselves are derived from patterns found in nature. When Cui Yuan looks at draft script calligraphy, what he sees is informed by this history of thinking about the natural and cosmic derivation of “images,” “patterns,” and “models” that humans make and manipulate. (For more on early Chinese thinking about the origin of the writing system and its relation to astrological and worldly “patterns,” see Chapter 3.)

A salient feature of prose accounts of calligraphy, seen in the Cui Yuan passage, is that the images and analogies keep changing. Not only do they change, they range through a great variety in form, tone, and affect: violent, intimidating, delicate, sublime, etc. This is because the writer is recreating a particular way of viewing the brushwork (or imagining it, in Cui Yuan’s case). The calligraphed page is not viewed as a single entity, however complex, or holistically. Instead, it is “read” as the words would be read if they were ordinary writing, not calligraphy: from top to bottom of each vertical column, and the columns left to right. Through this “reading,” the viewer reenacts the movements of the brush as it was wielded down and

across the page or scroll. Calligraphy is created as a linear process, and it is viewed that way too. This is reflected in the linear string of images and analogies in Cui Yuan's prose.

Yet there is a sense, in Cui Yuan's passage and other early writings on calligraphy, that calligraphy also lies beyond description and partakes of "the marvelous." No single analogy or metaphor works for long. And all of them are ultimately just that: likenesses or mere approximations. The language that writers use to evoke this quality of mystery they perceive in the brushwork varies, but they keep returning to it: "The rectangular forms do not match the carpenter's square, the round ones do not accord with the compass"; "But when you examine it close at hand, you find that not a single stroke could be altered. Its workings are supremely subtle and its essentials are marvelous, always right but never the same" (Cui 1974: 36.1066); "When you examine it close at hand, the ends and junctures cannot be distinguished, and the ideographic components cannot be traced" (Cai Yong 蔡邕 [133–192], "Zhuan shi" 篆勢 ["On the Configuration of Seal Script"], Cai 1974: 36.1064); "When you look at it closely, the mind is confused and the eye dazzled" (Wei Heng 衛恒 [d. 291], "Li shi" 隸勢 ["On the Configuration of Clerical Script"], Wei 1974: 36.1065). Cai Yong's essay "Bi lun" 筆論 ("On the Brush") says that calligraphy "must partake of physical forms" and goes on to say that it must resemble walking, flying, lying down and standing up, etc. Only then, he asserts, can it be considered calligraphy (as opposed to ordinary handwriting) (Cai 2007: 8–9). But the operative word is "resemble" (*ruo* 若). Calligraphy resembles the movements of animate and inanimate things in the world, but it is not that movement. Calligraphy as it is described in these writings hovers between the physical world that it resembles and something higher, and the latter is something words cannot fully capture. This reminds us of the "images" spoken of in the *Classic of Changes*, which are inspired by physical things but are not those things and were believed to represent cosmic principles.

But what is it, exactly, that calligraphy captures or expresses? Cai Yong makes the unexpected statement that "calligraphy is dispersion" (*shuzhe san ye* 書者散也) and proceeds to elaborate on this alliterative equivalence this way:

One who wants to do calligraphy must first disperse everything in his heart, trust his feelings and indulge his nature, and then express them in calligraphy. If someone feels pressed upon by external affairs, then even with a rabbit-hair brush from Zhong Mountain, the brushwork will not be good. To do calligraphy, you must sit quietly and still your thoughts, make the intent appropriate to the occasion, refrain from speaking, vacate some breath, and collect and concentrate your spirit and demeanor, as if appearing before the ruler. Then whatever you produce will be outstanding. (Cai 2007: 8–9)

We see, then, that "diffusion" (or "scattering") does not refer to a complete emptying of the emotions and self, but rather purging the heart/mind of mundane external cares, so that one's inner self can be expressed without distortion. This is a conception of calligraphy as something profoundly expressive of the calligrapher's character, a notion that would become a cardinal principle of thinking about the art.

Cai Yong alludes to the calligrapher's "intent" only in passing. Later, in the writings of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), the man conventionally considered China's supreme calligrapher, the role of *yi* 意 ("idea, intent, meaning, import") becomes a fundamental component and value. But whose or what *yi* is it? In Wang Xizhi's letters to friends, we find such statements as these: "The *yi* [in your calligraphy] has gradually become more profound"; "There is *yi* among all the dots and strokes"; "the insufficiency [of inferior calligraphy] lies in its *yi*"; "I am yet unable to make my 'flying white' script superior, but at least its *yi* is truly excellent" (Li 1984: 2.419). In such comments, the *yi* in calligraphy is not simply the calligrapher's "intent" that he had in mind as he wielded the brush. It is a quality that has become intrinsic to the brushwork itself and can be discovered there presumably by any viewer, even those who have no connection with the calligrapher and no idea what he was "thinking" or "intended" when he picked up his brush. In other words, this *yi* has become separate from the calligrapher. It has also become, in Wang's view, the single most important criterion for evaluating calligraphy. It is distinct from technical proficiency. *Yi* may be lacking when technique is excellent, and it may be present when technique is lacking. This is, then, an aestheticized and objectified *yi*. It is the "import" or "meaning" or even "style" that we appreciate in art. Calligraphy is no longer simply a projection of the calligrapher's person or self. It has become an art that may be evaluated by objective aesthetic standards (although, naturally, not all viewers will arrive at the same judgment). One more point is crucial: the *yi* that Wang Xizhi is finding (or not finding) in the calligraphy he examines has little or nothing to do with the semantic or literal meaning of the words written on the page. Apropos of this, we should note that many of surviving examples of Wang Xizhi's own calligraphy (or more probably copies of the same) are fragments of personal letters on utterly quotidian subjects, so that their literary or intellectual content is actually very slight. Yet such is Wang's stature in calligraphic history that the aesthetic *yi* of these compositions is perceived to be weighty indeed.

The historian of aesthetic thought Li Zehou plausibly suggests that such thinking is heavily influenced by the statement in the "Xici zhuan" 繫辭傳 ("Appended Words") section of the *Classic of Changes* that "the sage established the 'images' (*xiang*) in order to fully express his ideas." Moreover, closer to Wang Xizhi's time, the philosopher Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), in his commentary on the *Changes* and elsewhere, wrote extensively on the complex relationship between "words," "images," and "meaning." It is likely that Wang Xizhi's thinking about calligraphy and his perception of *yi* "meaning" in its forms owed much to Wang Bi and other participants in the "arcane learning" (*xuanxue* 玄學) movement.

There is much in common between these early writings on calligraphy and pre-Tang writings about literary writings, whether poetry or literary prose. Literary theory is discussed in other essays in this volume (see Chapters 1 and 23); here we simply note in passing some of the common ground between the two. There is, first, a common vocabulary of key terms and concepts regarding the artist, his inspiration, and how that is channeled into artistic expression. Key terms in the discourse on calligraphy, including

“idea/meaning” (*yi*), “breath” (*qi* 氣), “spirit” (*shen* 神), “thought” (*si* 思), and “image” (*xiang*), are likewise the central terms used in texts that discuss the act of writing, such as Cao Pi’s 曹丕 (187–226) “Lun wen” 論文 (“Discourse on Literature”), Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261–303) “Wen fu” 文賦 (“Rhapsody on Literature”), and Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (ca. 460s–520s) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon*). Second, there is much overlap between the processes of preparation and artistic creation described for the two arts. The dual focus on inner quiescence and outward gaze or exploration that we have seen in Cai Yong’s description of the calligrapher is later replicated and expanded in Lu Ji’s description of literary production. Shared as well between the two is the assumption about what the external gaze focuses upon, that is, what it is in the external world that the calligrapher mimics and what the poet derives his inspiration from; primary among these is the world of nature—specifically, seasonal floral imagery and marked faunal patterns, as well as dynamic processes in nature (animal movements, swirling waters, etc.).

Finally, there is, even at this early stage in writing about these arts, candid avowal of mysteries involved concerning both inspiration and the way in which the arts affect their audience. In fact, this takes the form of more than passing acknowledgment or reluctant admission; it is something emphasized and featured, as we have seen earlier regarding calligraphy. Later, Lu Ji would famously stress the inexplicability of the ebb and flow of literary inspiration. Liu Xie, in turn, would stress the disconnection between “word,” “thought,” and “meaning,” and how often, for better or worse, there is an imperfect match between them. Moreover, despite his exhaustive attempt to describe all aspects of both the “literary mind” and the intricacies of what it produces (“dragon carving”), Liu Xie despairs that no critic can ever fully explain the “subtleties” of the best literary work and finally comes to the point where he must “put down his brush.” The early essays on calligraphy quoted above may be said to anticipate such admission of the limitations of criticism and analysis. Still later, what has been called the cardinal principle and ideal of Chinese poetics, that there must be a “meaning” (or “affect”) that surpasses the words, outlasts them, and cannot ever be described by them, may be viewed as an extension of this early awareness of the key transcendent aspect of all arts. Naturally, there are likewise themes in the writings about the arts that are not held in common, such as the pervasive insistence in writings about writing that it serve moralistic and state-centered purposes. Such a demand would be more difficult to make for calligraphy (although some much later writings about this art do make this claim, albeit indirectly, for example in the “uprightness” perceived in the calligraphy by the Tang statesman and martyr Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 [709–785]).

We will have more to say later about the conjunction of calligraphy with poetry (and painting) in artistic production and transmission. But here we have seen that in the early thinking or theoretical writings about these visual and literary arts there is already considerable common ground in terminology, concept, and beliefs about inspiration and the “meaning” of the two arts.

PAINTING: CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

We turn now to the other visual art that is closely connected with poetry in the Chinese tradition. Painting had been practiced in China since antiquity, but in the early imperial period it was generally considered secondary to the “higher” visual art of calligraphy. Critical and theoretical writings on painting likewise lagged behind those on calligraphy, discussed above. When painting theory did emerge during the Northern and Southern Dynasties and Tang periods, the art was often said to share a common origin with calligraphy. In such statements, we may glimpse a deliberate effort to elevate the status of painting by connecting it with the form whose stature as a major art form, rather than a mere craft, was already secure.

Painting is conventionally thought in China to be comprised of a few conventional subjects or genres: landscape painting, birds and flowers, and portraiture (Buddhist or Daoist painting may be counted as a subgenre of the last of these). There are other subjects that are also painted, but these are the major ones. Of these three, it is landscape that is by far the most intimately connected with poetry. Yet as a painted subject, landscape was somewhat slow to develop. Its first flourishing occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries, although we usually think of it not reaching full maturity until the Five Dynasties and Song periods (10th–13th c.). In any case, the number of “landscape paintings” that have been survived from earliest times through the Tang (or even the number of paintings that contain a landscape component) is so small that it is difficult to generalize about its history and development.

We begin, then, with some remarks about concepts related to portraiture. We know from surviving works (inscribed on stone, painted on silk, etc.) as well as the textual record that early portraiture had a strong didactic element: often it was legendary cultural heroes, emperors, exemplary ministers, clan ancestors, etc. whose likenesses were recorded in portraits. For our purposes, a key aspect of early thinking about such painting was the notion that as important as formal elements may have been, there was, beyond form, something else looked for in a portrait that was considered essential. That something was usually called the *shen* 神, which was understood as the “spirit,” “soul,” or inner essence of the person. The belief that every person is endowed with such a “spirit” was already widespread by the Han dynasty. A dichotomy of *xing/shen* 形/神 was thus posited for portraiture: *xing* (“form, shape”) designated the formal elements of the person depicted, and *shen* designated the inner nature of the person as captured in the image. One way of thinking about the dichotomy was that both elements were equally important and needed to work as a complementary pair. But the dominant way of thinking about them gave some priority to *shen*, the understanding being that no matter how skillfully the formal elements might be depicted, if in the end the more intangible “essence” of the person’s character—what made him, after all, who he was—was not captured, the portrait could not be considered successful. The complementarity of the two and the primacy of *shen* as the portraitist’s ultimate goal are aptly suggested by the pithy

dictum coined by the early master Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 345–ca. 406) in an essay on portraiture: *yi xing xie shen* 以形寫神 (“use form to depict the spirit”).

Writings about landscape painting extended this notion of there being something beyond form, the transmission of which was the painter’s ultimate goal, to that subject as well. But other terms and concepts were introduced to add to and complicate the concept of “spirit” applied to persons. In doing this, critics writing on landscape painting drew upon rich bodies of philosophical thought, both classical and contemporary.

Classical Daoist thought had long before established the idea of Nature as being the embodiment of the Way (Dao) and the closest analogue to its ultimate principles. The Way cannot be described in words, but it can be glimpsed in the great pageant of Nature as evoked in countless passages in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Closer to the time of the first seminal essays on landscape painting, of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Daoist revival of that time, the spread of Buddhist conceptions of the universe, and the school of Arcane Learning, which drew variously upon strands of Daoist and Buddhist thought, provided new impetus for a spiritualized apprehension of landscape. The “You Tiantai shan fu” 游天台山賦 (“Rhapsody on an Outing to Tiantai Mountain”) by the Arcane Learning thinker Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371) refers repeatedly to the transcendent qualities of the mountains, using a range of roughly synonymous terms (e.g., *ling* 靈 “numinous,” *miao* 妙 “marvelous,” *xian* 仙 “the godly, divine,” and *xiangwai* 象外 “beyond image”) in describing the mountain landscape and its purifying effect upon him as he contemplates it mystically (*yi xuan dui shanshui* 以玄對山水). In a series of rhymed panegyrics on a painting on the theme of “The Shadow of the Buddha” (*foying* 佛影), the Pure Land Buddhist monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–417), patriarch of the Donglin 東林 Monastery on Lu Mountain, strongly implies that the Buddha’s shadow is not just the image famously discovered on a cave wall in India but may be found manifest in the Lu Mountain landscape itself (“Wanfo yingming” 萬佛影銘 [“Inscriptions on Shadows of Ten Thousand Buddhas”]). Accounts of excursions into the mountains by Huiyuan and his followers likewise speak of the landscape as possessing “divine beauty” and “mystical sounds.” It was not a coincidence that the monasteries themselves were situated deep in mountain landscapes: it was precisely because such settings verged on the “ineffable” (*buke ce* 不可測) truths of their religion.

Two seminal essays on landscape painting give prominence to such thinking, now applied not to nature but to painted representations of it. Zong Bing’s 宗炳 (374–443) “Hua shanshui xu” 畫山水序 (“Preface to Landscape Painting”) is the earliest extant general account of landscape painting. In the opening, he boldly posits an analogy between the relationship that landscape has to the Dao and the insight into the Dao that was possessed by the ancient sages (who invented the trigrams, writing, etc.): “The ancient sages patterned their inner spirit on the Dao, and the worthies, after them, comprehended it; landscape gives pleasing expression to the Dao with its forms, and the humane man delights in it. Are the two not similar?” (Zong 1973: 583). The statement about the “humane man” delighting in landscape comes from the *Lunyu* 論語 (the *Analects*). But no such explanation for that person’s delight in landscape is given there.

The linkage with landscape's embodiment of the Dao is Zong Bing's invention. Later in his essay, Zong Bing makes a remarkable claim for landscape painting: in terms of the beneficial effect it has upon the viewer (purifying and calming his mind), it surpasses real landscape. The reason is that real landscape is so vast that the eye can only take in fragments of it. A person viewing a painting, by contrast, can apprehend an entire mountainscape in all its complexity.

Before Zong Bing, Gu Kaizhi had already written the numinous into a description of landscape painting. It is true that Gu's "Hua Yuntai shan ji" 畫雲台山記 ("Record of Painting Cloud Terrace Mountain") concerns a particular painting rather than presenting a generalized statement about the art (as Zong Bing was to do). It is important, nevertheless, as the earliest detailed account of a landscape painting by the painter himself. This was a landscape painting that depicted religious persons situated in the landscape: Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the Han dynasty Daoist and founder of the Five Pecks of Rice School, and two of his known disciples. Gu Kaizhi identifies these men in his prose description of the painting (though they are not referred to in the title of the painting and might not have been recognized by a viewer of the painting). We do not know if this painting was based on experience of the mountain or came from Gu's imagination. Regardless, it is not just that this landscape features religious persons. The landscape itself is rich with mystical meaning and was deliberately drawn that way, according to the artist himself. He tells us, for example, that Zhang Daoling is depicted in front of two sheer cliffs. The space between the cliffs, which Zhang must be gazing into, is drawn to appear "forbidding and undefiled: a place inhabited by gods" (Gu 1973: 582). Of course, the gods are not depicted in the painting, but their domain in that empty space is what Zhang Daoling is concentrating on.

This overtly religious background to early landscape painting is significant for several reasons. First, even when the subject matter becomes conventionalized and aestheticized in the later history of painting, and even after the explicit connection with religion becomes muted in the process, that connection retains a residual presence. It is always there, at least in the background, and keeps getting evoked in writings about painting even if not explicitly asserted. It would be impossible to understand the dominance of landscape in Chinese painting history without some awareness of this dimension. Second, this religious aspect of landscape painting constitutes an important link with landscape poetry of the same early period (the Jin and Southern Dynasties). This common spiritual grounding draws the two arts together. As different as were the dynamics and course of development within each form of artistic expression, they also shared aspects of their conceptual underpinning.

Third, and most important for our interests here, this early shared conceptual orientation helps us to understand a crucial later commonality in aesthetic values: it was expected that each art would express something beyond what meets the eye (brushed likenesses of nature's forms, words written on the page). To be outstanding, a composition, whether poem or painting, was required to convey some "meaning" beyond the formal features of the art, and that "meaning" (or "beauty," "feeling," "flavor," etc.) necessarily lay beyond whatever could be fully described in the words of the reader or viewer

(or critic). Critics often referred to some kind of “vitality” or “liveliness” to evoke the quality that was expected. This is what we find in the first of Xie He’s 謝赫 (479–502) “Six Laws” (*liufa* 六法): *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 (Xie 1973: 355). The precise interpretation of this “law” has been endlessly debated, but it clearly indicates that a “vitality” (*shengdong*) must be present in the perceived “aura” (*qi*) and “bearing” (*yun*, or “resonance”) of the painted subject. Once formulated, Xie He’s law was regularly invoked as an ideal for calligraphy and poetry as well.

To a certain extent, the demand for something beyond mere form, mechanical representation, or literal meaning may be understood as an aestheticized transformation of the spirituality that poet and painter had first perceived in nature. We encountered this aesthetic value earlier, when discussing conceptual values shared by calligraphy and poetry. There too the world of nature played a prominent role, whether in the affinities that were perceived between calligraphic and natural forms or in the wandering forth of the poet’s mind through the external world. The subject matter of landscape as treated in painting and poetry, with its deep roots in the religious contemplation of nature, was readily reconciled with and further reinforced the same aesthetic preference.

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE THREE ARTS IN PRACTICE

With the conceptual background in mind, now we turn to the convergence of poetry, calligraphy, and painting in practice. Here, we must first acknowledge that the heyday of that convergence really comes in the later imperial period, which chronologically falls outside the scope of this volume. It was in the Song through Qing dynasties that the coordinated use and interplay of the three arts reached its height. But before that, in the Tang period, there was already a considerable amount of interaction among the three, which has its own interest and also anticipates future developments.

When we mention the convergence of these arts, we think first of poems inscribed on paintings (*tihua shi* 題畫詩). The practice of adding a poetic inscription on the surface of a paper or silk painting will, for most of us, best epitomize the interplay of the three “arts of the brush,” for there we have, on a single surface, the painted image, the words of a poem, and the brushwork of the calligrapher who inscribed the poem onto the painting. This came, of course, to be a dominant way that the three arts coalesced in China and eventually throughout Asia as the Chinese practice spread. It should be noted at the outset that there are various possibilities concerning the provenance, order, and identity of the compositions and artists involved. The poem may be composed by the painter or by someone else (either contemporary with the painter or later). The calligrapher may be the painter, the poet, or a third person. Sometimes, it is the poem that is written first, and the painting is done to “illustrate” the literary work. In other cases, the poem that is inscribed onto a painting predates the painting but the painter did not have it in mind

when he executed his work: it was a later owner or aficionado who recalled an apt poem and added it to the painting, in effect transforming the painting retrospectively into a visualization of the earlier poem.

The practice of adding a poem to a painting is already well attested in the Six Dynasties period. But in that early and formative stage of *tihua shi*, the painting tended to be a mural on a wall, or a painting on a screen, or a painted fan. It was easy for such an artwork to be damaged or lost, so that many of the inscribed poems would be lost (if a copy of them had not been separately preserved). So far as we know, the habit of inscribing a poem on a silk or paper painting became widespread only in the Tang, and with that the survival and transmission of such poems, if not the original paintings themselves, increased dramatically.

Several factors may be adduced to account for this increase in the production of poems inscribed on paintings. Painting itself enjoyed new attention and prestige at the Tang courts. The emperors of the early and High Tang periods were themselves fond of painting, and they conspicuously collected it and favored painters at their courts. A few painters, such as Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 601–673), came from powerful families and rose to high office themselves. Other painters, like Li Sixun 李思訓 (ca. 651–ca. 716), were even members of the imperial clan. The early Tang emperors were also collectors and devotees of calligraphy. Many stories relate Emperor Taizong's 唐太宗 (r. 626–649) obsession with Wang Xizhi's fourth-century masterpiece, "*Lanting ji xu*" 蘭亭集序 ("Preface to the *Orchid Pavilion Collection*"), the years he spent searching out the original, and his infamous command, after he finally procured the work, that it be placed in his tomb when he died. Developments in the aesthetics of painting also played a part. Before the Tang, writings about painting consistently emphasize the importance of "likeness" (*xingsi* 形似) even as they also give attention to qualities that transcend formal likeness. But as we move into the Tang, distinctly more attention is given to nonformal qualities perceived in painting, variously referred to as "spirit," "meaning," "breath," etc. Formal likeness is de-emphasized as a painterly ideal. This made it easier to think of painting as an analogue of poetry, in which qualities that likewise transcended what was explicitly presented (in the medium of words rather than brushstrokes) were held to be the mark of the highest achievement. The aesthetics of the two arts, visual and verbal, grew to share more in common, and the arts themselves thus converged. It began to seem more natural for poetry to occupy space on a painting, since the ideals of the two coincided so closely. Indeed, a particular painting was sometimes singled out as a set theme in Tang civil service examinations. This was not done regularly, but that it was done at all must have encouraged literati to become accustomed to thinking poetically about painting.

Tang poets became fond of adopting paintings as the subjects of their poems. They wrote about all manner of paintings: landscapes, Buddhist and Daoist murals, sacred mountains, portraits of exemplary sages and statesmen, imperial ladies, horses, birds, and trees. Their poems are often richly descriptive of the painted images, but just as

often are not confined to such description. The greatest master of poems on paintings was Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), who wrote some twenty-five poems in this subgenre, his favorite subjects being landscape, horses, and birds of prey. One of the strengths of Du Fu's poetic treatment of painting is the unpredictability of his exposition. Typically, he begins with the painted image or with the painter (who in several cases was someone he knew), but then moves on to a different topic. In poems on landscape paintings, Du Fu is apt to "enter into" the world of the painting, treating it fancifully as an alternative and idealized space that stands in contrast to the world the poet (and others) actually inhabit. His poems on horses or birds of prey tend to juxtapose the painted image as one of virility and strength with its counterpart in the real world, which by contrast is timid or weakened. These are poems that are infused with Du Fu's celebrated vexation over the condition of the empire, wracked as it was by rebellion and incompetent leadership. Whatever the subject and direction of the exposition, Du Fu's poems, several of which are lengthy and complicated in their structure, feature reflections on a few enduring issues: the relation of the artistic image to its counterpart in reality; the creative process itself, that is, the dynamic between the painter and the art of painting; the effect of art upon the viewer (usually the poet); and the meaning and value of art. As a group, Du Fu's poems on paintings mark a new stage in thinking about painting and its larger cultural significance and also bring the two arts together as never before. These poems were a powerful inspiration for and influence upon the later development of poems on paintings in the Song and later dynasties.

What was the relation of the calligraphy of the inscribed poem to the painting on which it was inscribed? This question assumes, first, that "poems inscribed on paintings" were actually written on the painting, or on a piece of paper (or silk) added to the original painted scroll. We cannot be sure that this was always so. In some cases, probably even with some of Du Fu's "poems on paintings," the poem may simply have taken the painting as its subject rather than actually have been written for inscription on the painting. The number of authentic Tang paintings with poetic inscriptions that have survived is so tiny, if there are any at all, that it is impossible to generalize about the practice. We know from later periods that the calligraphy of such inscriptions on paintings was sometimes executed in such a way as to interact visually with the style of the brushwork in the painting, either as a close stylistic complement or, in rare cases, a deliberate and eye-catching contrast to the painter's brushwork. But we do not know if this kind of interplay was cultivated as early as the Tang.

It was not only in poetic inscriptions on paintings that the "arts of the brush" converged. Calligraphy itself was often poetic; that is, the text that was written out on a calligraphic page or scroll might well be that of a poem, composed either by the calligrapher or some earlier writer and then selected by the calligrapher as a text. Even when the text was not a poem, it was likely to be a piece of literary prose (e.g., a preface to a poetry collection, a dedicatory inscription for a temple, an encomium for a person, a sutra, or a selection of a classic), so that the finished work would likewise present to the

viewer a text of some literary or historical interest together with brushwork of aesthetic appeal. When the Tang monk Huaisu 懷素 (737–799) composed his “Autobiography”—which, written out in his “wild draft” (*kuangcao* 狂草) calligraphy, would become his most iconic work—he filled it with quotations of poems and couplets descriptive of his own incomparable brushwork. There is also the special case of essays or treatises on calligraphy that are themselves prized for their brushwork. The *Shupu* 書譜 (*Treatise on Calligraphy*) composed by Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (646–691) is such a composition. What is believed to be the preface to the work written out in Sun Guoting’s own hand, in a style derived from the draft script of Wang Xizhi, is one of the premier examples of Tang-period draft script (now held in the collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei). Such calligraphic masterworks inspired their own succession of later colophons and inscriptions, appended to them by collectors and other aficionados, much as paintings did.

We have been concerned here with the elite and scholarly tradition of inscribing poems or other writings onto paintings, which helped to give Chinese painting its distinctive “literary” look and meaning. It should be mentioned that more popular traditions of painting also frequently featured the addition of written inscriptions. Religious paintings, for example the Daoist and Buddhist paintings from the medieval period discovered in the caves of Dunhuang, also often have inscriptions, whether they are passages from religious texts or poems or colophons. The elite painting tradition may be the best known today, but elite artists did not have a monopoly on the impulse to combine visual images with textual inscriptions.

It may be prudent to conclude with some cautions regarding how we think about the convergence of the three arts of the brush. There is no question that poetry, calligraphy, and painting share much in common in the Chinese tradition, including the same tools of writing brush, ink, and paper (often this is the case, but not always, because there are, indeed, special brushes for painting and calligraphy, not to mention colored pigments); a vocabulary used to describe the practitioner’s state of mind, relation to the material, inspiration, and the moment of artistic execution; certain aesthetic values; reverence for the natural world and the idea of artistic inspiration drawn from nature; and grounding in a shared background of Confucian-Daoist-Buddhist thought. Still, it is easy to overstate the closeness of the three arts. This is especially apt to happen when “Chinese art” is invoked as a foil or contrast to artistic expression elsewhere (as in “the West”) or when diachronic change within the Chinese tradition is ignored in favor of the construction of overarching generalizations. We may consider the case of the Tang figure Wang Wei 王維 (701–761). Wang Wei is known, above all else, for his quietist nature poetry. He was also an occasional painter, and a long scroll of his famous mountain estate, Wangchuan Villa, depicts scenic sites on the grounds that, in some versions of the scroll, are inscribed with Wang Wei’s well-known quatrains on those same sites. The scroll exists in numerous later engravings and copies that are supposed to derive from an original painting by Wang Wei himself. Ever since the Song dynasty poet and critic Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) declared that “there is poetry in his painting and painting in his poetry,” Wang Wei has epitomized the supposed “interchangeability” of painting and poetry in China, that is, their shared aesthetic and common purpose. One problem with

this approach to Wang Wei, however, is that he was not thought of this way until some three centuries after his death. Tang dynasty sources take very little note of Wang Wei's activity or achievements as a painter. Furthermore, the idea that he excelled equally in the two arts, as well as the assertion that his work in one form was essentially equivalent to his work in the other—these are both Song dynasty inventions that have little currency in his own day.

This habit of thinking about Wang Wei is part of a larger tendency to reduce poetry and painting to replicas of each other. The impulse to do so may be understandable, traceable perhaps more than anything else to the ubiquity of inscribed landscape paintings from the later dynasties, which are so familiar in museums and publications around the world. The truth is that as much as the two arts did share, there were always important aspects of each that had no counterpart in the other. This is clearest with poetry. The ballad tradition in Chinese verse, narrative poetry, much of occasional poetry as well as the verse of social exchange, poems on historical sites, frontier poetry, romantic songs—nearly every subject category, subgenre, and mode of poetic expression aside from nature poetry and poetry on certain “objects” (e.g., fans, birds, flowers, etc.), is sparsely represented in Chinese painting. Once we throw calligraphy into the mix, the expressive uses and purposes of the three arts of the brush are seen to be even more scattered. Actually, the enduring high stature of calligraphy in China, which seems to have no close parallel in most major cultures, and which clearly fulfilled expressive purposes that neither poetry or painting could approach, may serve as a reminder of just how diverse is the range of artistic forms and aesthetic effects in the native context.

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