

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Big Cats Will Play: Tang Taizong and His Advisors

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The Poetics of Sovereignty: On Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty. By Jack W. Chen. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Published by the Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2010. Pp. xvii + 445. \$49.95/£36.95.

Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (Li Shimin 李世民, 599–649, r. 626–649) has been accorded a place in China's grand narrative that surpasses that of almost every other emperor in the long succession of 559 listed sovereigns. He is credited with having formulated a concept of emperorship that was open, principled, and benign. His court discussions have been accepted as the expression of the medieval dynastic state at its most compassionate. His account of emperorship plays powerfully to the later history of the Tang, traditionally China's "golden age." It also relates to the issue of how worthy of respect, or indeed pride, for today's historians the dynastic system at its most open, energetic, and compassionate might be. His achievement as emperor and the ideology that underlay it has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. The recent *The History of Chinese Civilization* by the historians of Peking University in its English version characterizes his reign, the Zhenguan 貞觀 period (627–649), as an era which was "looked upon by later ages as a time of ideal government, which excited the greatest admiration and inspired emulation."¹

¹ Yuan Xingpei et al., *The History of Chinese Civilization*, Vol. 3: *Sui and Tang to mid-Ming Dynasties (581–1525)*, ed. and trans. David Knechtges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 89.

Scholars writing in English early demarcated the two different approaches that Professor Chen combines in his thorough and ambitious book on Taizong. They have explored the emperor's own contribution to medieval emperorship and have focused more sharply on his verse, itself an aspect of that emperorship. C. P. Fitzgerald's *Son of Heaven*, published eighty years ago, followed closely the account of Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Zizhi tong jian* 資治通鑑, accepting its narrative outline and moral assessments.² Arthur Wright introduced a lasting theme in accounts of Taizong when he attempted to dissect contrasting elements in his image, in "The Man and the Persona."³ His treatment foreshadows the concern for "rhetorical performance" and "actual views" of Professor Chen's own study (p. 274). Significant and rounded contributions were made by Howard J. Wechsler.⁴ Denis Twitchett's study of the Tang imperial family provided an account at a characteristically straightforward historical level. His analysis of Taizong's two treatises on emperorship too accepts them as straightforward homilies intended to provide guidance for the Tang line.⁵ Stephen Owen first explored the special features of Taizong's verse.⁶ Hellmut Wilhelm and David Knechtges later added to the sophistication of this analysis.⁷

The challenge these scholars confronted in deriving an authentic image of the historical figure of Taizong suggests a great irony. Their analyses depend on primary historical sources for the medieval period, and especially for Taizong's own reign, which are centred on the emperor to an extraordinary degree. These primary sources tend to isolate Taizong from his immediate court context, from the palace community, mostly made up of women, eunuchs, entertainers, religious figures, technical experts,

² C. P. Fitzgerald, *Son of Heaven: A Biography of Li Shih-Min, Founder of the T'ang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933). For an analysis of Taizong's character, see pp. 125–28, "The Character of Li Shih-Min."

³ Arthur F. Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung: The Man and the Persona," in John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith, eds., *Essays on T'ang Society* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 17–32.

⁴ See particularly, Howard J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); idem, "T'ai-tsung (Reign 626–49) the Consolidator," in Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 3: *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, Part I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 188–241.

⁵ Denis Twitchett, "The T'ang Imperial Family," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 7, no. 2 (1994), pp. 1–61; idem, "How to Be an Emperor: T'ang T'ai-tsung's Vision of His Role," *ibid.*, 9, nos. 1–2 (1996), pp. 1–102.

⁶ Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T'ang* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 52–59.

⁷ Hellmut Wilhelm and David R. Knechtges, "T'ang T'ai-tsung's Poetry," *T'ang Studies* 5 (1987), pp. 1–23.

and his own immediate kin, in which as emperor he spent most of his waking hours. Their dominant theme is Taizong's engagement with twenty or so of his civil advisors, particularly as these concerned issues of statecraft and political morality. The perspective of these early sources is thus both refracted and highly focused. They beg the question of whether they form part of a "seamless" archive for Taizong's reign, to use the metaphor sometimes applied to Tang official historical sources, or whether it is possible to lift the seams and glimpse other historical realities beneath them. Have the ideologues who surrounded Taizong throughout the reign, the filterers and adaptors, the men who transposed the spoken word of a northerner and a soldier into the elegant, measured cadences of literary Chinese, done their work so effectively that the ruthlessness, violence, volatility, and licence as well as the energy, intelligence, and occasional generosity of the original man are now beyond authentic retrieval? Could the trend in post-modernist scholarship towards downplaying the agency of the author result in neglect of scholarship's duty to account in full detail for the shape of the sources for Taizong's reign that we now have? This review will do no more than suggest possible lines for unstitching. But it will also accept the findings of the conclusion of Professor Chen's book, that "for Taizong, it was poetry that allowed him not simply to justify his reign, but more importantly, to imagine it, and in the act of imagination, to shape both the reign's historical reality and himself" (p. 383).

Chen's perspective on Taizong's emperorship shows him aware of the need to avoid the hagiographical note. It is shaped by cultural theory: he aims to show "how Taizong inherited a discourse on sovereignty (and as such, was an unconscious participant in a historical linguistic and cultural community) and how he transformed the inherited discourse" (p. 10). He wants the reader to understand Taizong's verse in the context of an analysis of "a more synchronic understanding of how imperial court poetry functioned in the operations of sovereignty and cultural ideology" (p. 8). In answer to the insistent question of whether Taizong, born and bred a soldier and horseman, himself composed the verse that now bears his name, he advocates "[a] broader notion of authorship that is relevant to discussions of imperial poetry, since the emperor was, in many ways, a construction of the polity and of the political imagination" (p. 161). He returns to this idea in his conclusion, but finally implies more individual agency to Taizong than at the start of his book, emphasizing the idea that Taizong's poetry represents the emperor's own idealization of his rule (p. 382).

Acceptable though these conclusions are, it is still worth attempting a brief overview of the main features of the documentation for Taizong's reign, both in prose and verse. The record for the reign was in the hands a group of ambitious court-centred scholars, most of whom had lived through a period of great turbulence and who sensed the rarity of the opportunity before them. Many of them were indeed lucky to have survived the warfare, divided loyalties, and intrigues of the previous

decade. Their account was given further focus and shape by their successors some ten decades later, in the middle decades of the reign of Taizong's great-grandson, the emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (Li Longji 李隆基, 685–762, r. 712–756). Followers of the more recent political narratives in China need no reminding of how effective state authority is in shaping the political record, especially as it concerns the political leadership, and how ample the opportunities for distortion are. As in modern China, so in the ancient empire, except for one factor. The political statements and the state-centred verse that survive from Taizong's reign are, like their modern counterparts, infused with a high sense of morality. But they were given their edge, eloquence, and sense of optimism by the unshakeable conviction of the court scholars of the time and the emperor himself that theirs was the only serious outlook on the imperial state that an educated and responsible man could promote. They had one model only for the state and they believed that it had been amply tested by history, both recent and remote. There was less cynical intellectual repression of alternative visions of the state than there has been recent times, simply because such alternative visions did not exist. But the question remains as to the extent of their distortion of the picture of the apex of political life. How selective were the historians and editors in building up the image of Taizong the emperor, leader of the cultural tradition, and verse writer? Can a more authoritative understanding of Taizong the man ever be derived?

In the first section of this book Professor Chen explores the medieval ideal of emperorship in broad terms. He draws on the full range of Chinese statecraft writings from early times until the reign of Taizong himself. In the second, he focuses on the verse that had become, by the sixth century, an integral part of court culture, one in which an emperor was expected to lead. He analyses the poetry that has survived in Taizong's name, describing its historical antecedents, and subjecting it to a thorough analysis. His approach demonstrates wide reading in both the primary sources and the large theoretical literature that may be brought to bear on this topic. This is a substantial and well-researched book.

The sources for the political climate of the Zhenguan era have, therefore, been refracted and re-focused by the scholars who surrounded Taizong and by their institutional successors. Their distillations reached mature form in two compilations produced under Taizong's great-grandson Xuanzong. The first, which relates closely to the first half of Chen's book, and which Chen carefully assesses (p. 26, n. 41) and cites extensively, is the exceptionally well-known *Zhenguan zheng yao* 貞觀政要.⁸

⁸ Wu Jing 吳兢, comp., *Zhenguan zheng yao*, edited and with critical introduction by Xie Baocheng 謝保成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003, hereafter *ZGZY*). A particularly useful feature is that at the end of each *ZGZY* entry the editor has listed all other Tang sources that contain versions of the entry. Notes also indicate discrepancies between *ZGZY* and other sources.

This is a compendium of court discussions and written submissions to Taizong drawn mainly from the primary level of documentation surviving in the early eighth century, the “veritable records” (*shilu* 實錄) of Taizong’s reign. The second is the *Chuxue ji* 初學記, a literary prompt book for princes, which contains the earliest extant selection of Taizong’s verse and which relates to the second section of Chen’s book.

The compilation and submission of the *Zhenguan zheng yao* has been persuasively dated to 729.⁹ This compendium is the work of Wu Jing 吳兢 (670–749), a long-serving official scholar who held posts close to the apex of political power. Wu Jing had started his career under the empress Wu (Wu Zhao 武曩, 624–705, r. as emperor 690–705). He was also witness to the continued blood-letting and feuding of Xuanzong’s court and to the emperor’s own pleasure seeking. Xuanzong faced the same political and statecraft issues as his great-grandfather had done: the questions of access to the throne by officials and of political dissent; problems of imperial or court extravagance; the acute instability of the succession; and the dangers of foreign adventurism. The *Zhenguan zheng yao* is indeed an eloquent endorsement of early seventh-century political ideas as to how to confront these issues. It records not only the emperor’s own clearly formulated principles for imperial conduct, but also numbers of eloquent, learned, and extended memorials by his advisors setting out their political ideals. Taizong himself mentioned over two hundred communications from Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), his most celebrated interlocutor, alone.¹⁰ A high proportion of these records were of oral interactions. But in addition to these there were large numbers of written presentations (*feng shi* 封事).¹¹ These episodes are also recorded in other Tang sources, principally the *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 and the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書. Cumulatively, they indeed create an image of committed and principled rulership, and above all a willingness on the emperor’s part to listen to advice. Indeed, reading through the sources for Taizong’s relations with his scholars, it sometimes seems to verge on the churlish to challenge the noble impression they create.

Yet it is as well to bear in mind that neither these sources nor the *Zhenguan zheng yao* attempt a comprehensive description of the Zhenguan court. Nor indeed would the primary sources on which Wu Jing is likely to have drawn to compile it, the

⁹ Xie Baocheng, “*Zhenguan zheng yao* chengshu shijian shangque” 貞觀政要成書時間商榷, in *ZGZY*, pp. 13–27.

¹⁰ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 62. A variant, “three hundred,” is noted on p. 64.

¹¹ E.g. *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 67, referring to Wang Gui 王珪 (571–639); *juan* 2, p. 100, referring to Wei Ting 韋挺 (589–647), Du Zhenglun 杜正倫 (d. after 658), Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638), and Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557–637); *juan* 2, p. 140, referring to Wei Zheng in 637.

“veritable records” for the reigns of Gaozu 高祖 (Li Yuan 李淵, 566–635, r. 618–626) and Taizong.¹² The surviving lists of official posts and their functions that formed the structure of both the palace and the civil bureaucracy are precisely that: they are skeletal and do not breathe. The records that provided Wu Jing with the material for the *Zhenguan zheng yao*, on the other hand, are charged with vitality, though the extent to which this is rhetorical energy is something that will be touched on below. For these *shilu* and the accounts that draw from them, the *Jiu Tang shu*, the *Cefu yuangui*, and Sima Guang’s *Zizhi tong jian*, surely also refract and distort, in the context of an overall picture of his life, particularly the frequency of Taizong’s interactions with his officials. Access to the emperor was one of the insistent concerns of his advisors: they identified political and social isolation from the civil bureaucracy as one of the greatest dangers that emperors faced (pp. 32–34). They themselves, and in his turn Wu Jing seven or eight decades later, had every reason to foreground the frequency and degree of intimacy between Taizong and his scholarly advisors. For this reason alone they were unlikely to reject his “rhetorical performance,” in favour of his “actual views” (p. 274), a distinction that will recur in the pages that follow.

The Palace Context

It is as well therefore to remember that the court in which the emperor spent the overwhelming proportion of his time formed a distinct social community within the Tang polity. This community was separated by physical distance and by procedural barriers from the civil administration, the source of the insistent flow of political and moral advice to Taizong. It was also socially demarcated from the wider “outer bureaucracy.” Tang palaces, as Chen ably establishes, provided the theme for descriptions of the whole polity and its cosmological underpinnings. But, just as “ritual,” in Xunzi’s dictum, enforced “distinctions and differences,”¹³ so also did palaces: they concentrated symbols, but they also made harsh divisions, social and political. The emperor lived in a vast community staffed by highly structured palace services. Though formally its head, he was clearly not in full administrative or social control of this community. This is proved, for example, by his relations with his first crown prince, Li Chengqian 李承乾 (d. 645, pp. 44–46). The civil officials resident in the capital, Chang’an, entered this community only in certain rigidly prescribed contexts, in or after the court levees of the “inner” and “middle” courts (*nei chao* 內

¹² Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T’ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 123–28.

¹³ Xunzi 荀子 (edition in *Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series*), “Yue lun 樂論,” p. 77.

朝 and *zhong chao* 中朝) that were scheduled, at first daily for fifth degree officials and above, and then less frequently.¹⁴ They met the emperor less often by invitation, in feasts provided on excursions and when he travelled with a formal retinue away from the main palace precincts. Tang officials themselves characterized these communities as distinct.¹⁵

The Chinese court was unlike the courts of medieval or renaissance Europe, in that the main interface between the emperor and his civil advisors was an isolated space deep inside the palace complex. In Taizong's reign, the emperor met his officials at the Liangyi dian 兩儀殿, situated within the Taiji dian 太極殿 complex, perhaps some 500–600 metres north of the heavily guarded main entrance, the Chengtian men 承天門.¹⁶ A very approximate idea, suggestive only rather than definitive, of how often, in the documentation, Taizong discussed statecraft issues with his civil officials collectively or in a group may be deduced from Wu Jing's *Zhenguan zheng yao*. Taizong reigned for twenty-three years, from 626 until his death in 649. Wu Jing in the *Zhenguan zheng yao* records eighty-six instances of his addressing “his attendant officials” (*shi chen* 侍臣), collectively, though not each of these may represent a discrete episode.¹⁷ Thus this averages at a rate of under four times each year. But there is a heavy concentration in the early years of the reign, with nearly one quarter being in the first two years of the *Zhenguan* era. There are only ten instances after 642,

¹⁴ David L. McMullen, “Disorder in the Ranks: A Political Analysis of Tang Court Assemblies,” *T'ang Studies* 28 (2010), pp. 1–60, is a preliminary attempt to characterize these different assemblies and their political function.

¹⁵ Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–784), “Yu Guo puye shu” 與郭僕射書, in *Yan Lugong wenji* 顏魯公文集 (edition in *Sibu congkan*), *juan* 11, p. 4b. This letter is analyzed and set in its historical context by Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 63–66. The translation does not include the passage in which Yan implicitly divides the polity into three estates, the “local villages” (*xiangli* 鄉里), the imperial ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟), and the court (*chaoting* 朝廷). See McMullen, “Disorder in the Ranks,” p. 33.

¹⁶ *Tang liu dian* 唐六典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), *juan* 7, p. 217; Hiraoka Takeo 平岡武夫, *Tōdai no Chōan to Rakuyō* 唐代の長安と洛陽, *Chizu* 地圖 (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1956), maps 13–15. The existence of the guards is inferred from their presence at the corresponding gate of the Daming 大明 palace.

¹⁷ See Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 35, quoting *Zizhi tong jian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956, hereafter ZZTJ), *juan* 195, p. 6131, for *sichen*; and p. 74, quoting ZZTJ, *juan* 192, pp. 6053–54, where *zuoyou* is translated “officials,” rather than “his entourage.” Apart from *sichen*, terms of address like “*gongqing* 公卿” might also be used, and this would, of course, increase the count of episodes. The emperor also often addressed individual scholar advisors.

and none at all after 645. This profile is evident in other records of exchanges, for example between the emperor and individual officials. Taizong was more open to discussion and interaction with his scholarly civil officials early in his reign. As Wei Zheng pointed out in 638, his commitment to hearing dissenting views waned as he settled to supreme power.¹⁸ In his later years, therefore, he did not always fulfil the ideals he had earlier formulated with his advisors. This profile is significant in any overall assessment of his reign.

The term “attendant officials,” though not statutory, thus suggests an audience that was distinct from and much more formal than his “entourage” (*zuoyou* 左右). The latter usually designated the people who formed a retinue for the emperor within the palace, often in very much less structured contexts than those of scheduled audiences. The palace was also where the crown prince and the emperor’s sons grew up, and his advisors pointed to how it was women who overwhelmingly dominated this community: the crown prince grew to manhood “at the hands of women.” Significantly, in stating this, they used exactly the same language as in a description of Chen Houzhu 陳後主 (Chen Shubao 陳叔寶, 553–604, r. 582–589), the last sovereign of the sybaritic Chen court in the south, and an epitome of decadent rule.¹⁹ This was, moreover, a society that operated behind closed doors. A century later, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) was to immortalize this aspect of palace life when he wrote that, “The delights within the palace are pursued in secret, and are little known by those outside it.”²⁰ Other special factors operated here: it was in this environment that the emperor was most likely to develop relations with favourites, relationships to which the verb to “dote” (*chong* 寵), suggesting irregular favour, was applied. It was likely that a proportion of the controversial policy decisions that Taizong took, and which his advisors disputed with him, for example about palace building and foreign campaigns, he made not in open discussion with his advisors, but with members of this less formal “entourage” present, in the inner palace environment. Just occasionally, women in the inner palace intervened in these political discussions and even more rarely, their protests, admired with enormous condescension, were preserved. When decisions were made within the palace, it was only later that the

¹⁸ ZGZY, *juan* 2, pp. 142–43.

¹⁹ Wei Zheng, “Zhu wang shan e lu xu” 諸王善惡錄序, in *Chen shu* 陳書, comp. Yao Silian (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), *juan* 6, p. 119. For eunuchs as members of Taizong’s “entourage,” see ZGZY, *juan* 5, p. 291. It is worth noting, on the other hand, that in 639 Wei Zheng claimed to have been in Taizong’s “entourage” for more than ten years; see ZGZY, *juan* 10, p. 536.

²⁰ *Jiu jia ji zhu Du shi* 九家集注杜詩 (edition in *Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series*), *juan* 30, p. 461, “Long ago” (“Su xi” 宿昔).

emperor might attempt, successfully or not, to justify them in discussion with advisors. Taizong lent his ear to protestors from outside the palace community, from the civil administration, certainly, especially early part in his reign, and even rewarded them for their courage, but he by no means always followed their advice. Indeed a characteristic response was to express appreciation to a critic, reward him with an honorarium and then neglect his counsel.

Taizong and Scholarship

A feature of Chen's account of the concept of emperorship is that it proceeds by extended citation of both pre-Qin and medieval statecraft writing. This is a valuable account of how emperorship had evolved before the Tang. But the question in any attempt to retrieve a sense of Taizong's own role is just how well-versed in historical statecraft writing he himself was. Only one remark relates to his early education: he was taught the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 by Zhang Houyin 張後胤 (d. after 651), a southerner from Suzhou 蘇州 whose father had been appointed to the staff of Yang Liang 楊諒 (d. 604 or after), Sui prince of Han 漢, commander general at Bingzhou 并州 (Taiyuan 太原), where Taizong lived as a child,²¹ and indeed he was later to show that he knew this text.²² His interest in scholarship and literature was said to have started

²¹ *Jiu Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, hereafter *JTS*), *juan* 189A, p. 4950.

²² For example, *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 62; James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 5: *The Ch'un Ts'ew, with the Tso Chuen* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford and Co., 1872), p. 84; *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 102: here, Taizong alludes to *Zuozhuan* (Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 191), in which two examples of subjects who had treated their lords violently were re-employed none the less. But this was again a part of the general repertory of dignified allusions in use at this time. See *ZZTJ*, *juan* 185, pp. 5774–75, written message by Li Mi 李密 (582–618) in 618; also *Jin shu* 晉書, comp. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 87, p. 2266. For another example of Taizong's use of the *Zuozhuan*, see *ZGZY*, *juan* 5, pp. 268–69, in which Taizong alludes to an episode (Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 129), but more specifically to an anecdote that had attached itself to this incident, in which Hong Yan 弘演, a loyal servant of Yi gong 懿公 removed his own liver and replaced it with the liver of the dead Yi gong. This story originated in *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳 as an example of loyalty, but was incorporated in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, the prompt book commissioned by Gaozu, Taizong's father; see *Yiwen leiju* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 20, p. 366. For another instance of Taizong's knowledge of the *Zuozhuan*, see *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 391 and Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 121, referring to duke Zhuang's 莊 murder of Shuya 叔雅 for the sake of the succession, a justification for Taizong's murder of his brothers for the sake of the Tang.

in 621, when he founded the Wenxue guan 文學館, deliberately drawing in scholars from “all quarters of the world.” But Chen points out that the function of this college related more to policy than to literary composition (pp. 133–34). Taizong refounded this academy as the Hongwen guan 弘文館 at the start of his reign (p. 134), providing it with a library of 200,000 scrolls. In this and in other measures he took to encourage learning, he signalled his intention to maintain close relations with scholars.²³ Taizong himself stated that he turned to the learned tradition only in 628, after peace had been achieved, “I cannot hold book scrolls myself, and so have others read them and I listen to them.”²⁴ It is from this point on that he claimed to have read historical sources. From his own recorded remarks in the *Zhenguan zheng yao* alone, a sense, albeit a refracted and incomplete one, of his range of learning can be derived.²⁵

He was able to cite the canonical works from the start of his reign. In 627, committing himself to restraint in his building programme, he cited the *Shang shu* 尚書, Qin history, and the *Laozi* 老子.²⁶ Again in 627 in conversation with Fang Xuanling, he cited the *Shang shu*, the *Mao shi* 毛詩, and the *Analects*.²⁷ In 628, he cited the *Analects* statement that “If the common people have insufficient, then how can the ruler have enough?”²⁸ In 629, he asked the canonical scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) about the meaning of *Analects* 8.5.²⁹ He cited the *Han shu* 漢書 almost verbatim in a homily to his officials on slander.³⁰ In 628, he cited the *Shang shu* and the *Zhou yi* 周易.³¹ In 630, he cited the Laozi’s famous dictum on the evil of weaponry.³² In 637, on excursion at the Jicui 積翠 pond at Luoyang, he wrote a

²³ ZGZY, *juan* 7, p. 375; ZZTJ, *juan* 192, p. 6023.

²⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 349.

²⁵ What follows is intended to be suggestive rather than an exhaustive list.

²⁶ ZGZY, *juan* 6, pp. 317–18.

²⁷ Ibid., *juan* 3, p. 155.

²⁸ Ibid., *juan* 8, p. 466; *Analects* 12.9.

²⁹ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 324. The text of *Analects* 8.5 reads, “Though able, to ask questions of those without ability. Though having much, to ask questions of those with little, possessing yet being as if without; being full yet appearing void.” Taizong gave Kong 200 bolts of silk for his answer.

³⁰ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 340; *Han shu* with commentary by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), *juan* 77, p. 3247. This saying was, however, common currency; see *Jin shu*, *juan* 62, p. 1690; *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), *juan* 62, p. 1488, where the historian, Wei Zheng, cites it. It was incorporated in the *Yiwen leiju*, Gaozu’s literary prompt book; see *Yiwen leiju*, *juan* 65, p. 1160.

³¹ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 323.

³² Ibid., *juan* 9, p. 475.

poem on the *Shang shu*, in which he stated that “as the sun declines, I relax with its one hundred sections; with lamps above, I open the fivefold canon.”³³ He may well have read the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋, because his empress chided him for having forgotten an anecdote it told.³⁴ Another case when he is described as reading a canonical book, the *Zhou li* 周禮, overnight has with justification been doubted as a reliable record.³⁵ He cited or referred to the *Analects* throughout his reign. By 634, he stated again that he was reading, adding that since the start of the Zhenguan era, “I have never set aside books.” He made a similar remark in 638.³⁶ He included more recent histories among the works he mentioned. He three times cited the famous minister and strategist Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) as an example of impartial or balanced judgement.³⁷ He cited Jin 晉 history on several occasions.³⁸ In 635, he also stated that he read the histories of the Northern Zhou and Northern Qi, works that he himself commissioned in 629 from his scholars and that were submitted in 636.³⁹ He referred again in 640 to reading histories.⁴⁰ In 642, he told his attendant officials that he had read the biography of the Jin period emperor Liu Cong 劉聰 (emperor of the Xiongnu 匈奴 state of Han, d. 318) and accepted the lesson that his empress had given him that he should not build a palace. He added what seems essentially the remark of a man who is not an addictive reader, “When people read books, it is because they wish to broaden their hearing and seeing, to bring profit to themselves.”⁴¹

³³ Ji Yougong 計有功, *Tang shi jishi* 唐詩紀事 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), *juan* 4, p. 46. The poem extracts the simplest of moral messages: “Benighted sovereigns who indulge their feelings are many; enlightened rulers who control themselves are few.” Wei Zheng responded with a poem on the Western Han.

³⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 99; *Yanzi chunqiu* (edition in *Sibu congkan*), *juan* 1, pp. 16a–17a; cf also above at n. 22.

³⁵ Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, pp. 61–62 and n. 33. Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 42–43.

³⁶ ZGZY, *juan* 10, p. 535.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, *juan* 5, pp. 278–79, at the start of his reign; *juan* 5, pp. 283–84, in 628; *juan* 8, p. 449, in 633; *juan* 6, p. 342; *juan* 10, p. 535, in 638.

³⁸ ZGZY, *juan* 9, p. 475, incident of 630.

³⁹ ZGZY, *juan* 8, p. 468.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *juan* 7, p. 391.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *juan* 6, p. 321; in the present *Jin shu*, commissioned in 642 and completed probably in 644, this incident is recorded in the biography of Liu Cong’s empress Liu E 劉娥; see *Jin shu*, *juan* 96, p. 2519.

In another remark, Taizong indicates familiarity *Mao shi* and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 with the *Zuozhuan* on the issue of the use of taboo names for emperors.⁴² He quoted the *Mao shi* again to emphasize the danger of covetousness.⁴³ It is tempting to infer that, like some who are not natural readers, he had a favourite book, for in 629 he gave a copy of the *Han ji* 漢紀 by Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209) to Li Daliang 李大亮 (586–644), like himself a military man, stating: “You should, in your leisure from public business, read books, and so I am also giving you a copy of Xun Yue’s *Han ji*. This book has a concise and essential narrative, and its discussions are profound and wide; it takes to the limit the substance of conducting government and treats exhaustively the right conduct between prince and minister.”⁴⁴ Indeed Han history, Han emperors, and especially the history of Han conquests in the north-west and famous Han generals, remained in his mind until late in his reign: he cited Han Wendi 漢文帝 (Liu Heng 劉恆, 202–157 B.C.E., r. 180–157 B.C.E.) as an example of imperial frugality in 628; he cited Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 B.C.E.) as an example of untrustworthiness in 643.⁴⁵

It should not, however, be taken as proven that Taizong read independently and widely. In the context of his court discussions, this list suggests conventional rather than exploratory reading. Limits to his reading are suggested by the fact that he had early commissioned two digests of historical sources. The first is the *Qunshu zhi yao* 群書治要, a compendium of canonical and early historical statecraft that Taizong ordered for himself and that Wei Zheng completed for him in 631.⁴⁶ This work is surely more revealing than either Wechsler or Chen suggest. It lifted the passages that Taizong’s scholar advisors thought significant from a total of over sixty works, from early times to the Jin period. Significantly, it was fifty *juan* in length, and was thus far too long to function as a quick prompt book. It was the seventh-century equivalent of a sizeable encyclopaedia of political wisdom, intended to save the emperor reading time. It offered an efficient route to minimum learning, and that was what Taizong, as a soldier and horseman, needed. The second, much shorter, was on the conduct of princes, and was compiled as a monitory text for them, relevant to the politically

⁴² ZGZY, *juan* 7, p. 393; this was on the subject of the absence of taboos in ancient China; he referred to the “Yong” 雝 ode; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4: *The She King*, pp. 589–90; idem, *The Ch’un Ts’ew*, pp. 94–95.

⁴³ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 363, quoting the “Sang rou” 桑柔 ode; see Legge, *The She King*, pp. 519–27, at pp. 525–26.

⁴⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 104; *Cefu yuangui*, comp. Wang Qinruo 王欽若 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, hereafter *CFYG*), *juan* 673, pp. 6b–7a.

⁴⁵ ZGZY, *juan* 5, p. 314.

⁴⁶ Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, pp. 131–32, 168–69.

always problematic issue of managing them, discussed below.⁴⁷ The commissioning of these two works suggests that at the start of his reign he was indeed not a reading man himself, needing help to access the works of history. It was his own energy and commitment that convinced him to read and acquire knowledge of history.

In the *Zhenguan zheng yao*, Taizong only once quotes from a *belles-lettres* source. This was in 628, when he cited a couplet from the famous “Ai Jiangnan fu” 哀江南賦 by the celebrated southern writer Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581).⁴⁸ It need not be supposed that this was the only occasion on which verse from the period of disunion or the Sui escaped his lips. But the summary given above indicates that those who recorded his conversations were especially keen to document his familiarity with the Confucian canon and with the histories. Moreover, a number of the names he cites from history were frequently cited by scholar advisors. They belonged to the common stock of historical references made in court discussions, probably in Sui as well as in early Tang, for in these discussions for a speaker or writer to appeal to the past was a matter of prowess. Many such references had also been included in the literary prompt books that the scholar community compiled for high authority, the *Bei tang shu chao* 北堂書鈔 by Yu Shinan in the Sui and the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641) in Gaozu’s reign. In many cases it is most unlikely that Taizong was the first to bring them up. A case in point is that of Guan Longfeng 關龍逢 and Bi Gan 比干, murdered by the evil tyrant Zhou 紂 at the end of the Shang 商 dynasty for fearless admonition. Taizong’s first citation of a remonstrator from antiquity, made in 628, was Jizi 箕子, mentioned in the *Analects* as a good man for feigning madness.⁴⁹ Taizong’s point was to emphasize the extreme courage needed to remonstrate. Bi Gan and Guan Longfeng were cited first by Wei Zheng in conversation with Taizong in 628,⁵⁰ then again in 632 by Wei,⁵¹ by Taizong in a proclamation in the same year,⁵² and then again by Wei in 648.⁵³

⁴⁷ ZGZY, *juan* 4, pp. 214–16.

⁴⁸ Ibid., *juan* 6, pp. 330–31.

⁴⁹ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 85; *Analects* 18.1; Taizong was considering the case of Yu Shiji 虞世基 (d. 618), brother to his favourite southern scholar Yu Shinan. Yu Shiji had failed to remonstrate courageously against Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝, and Taizong was inclined to lenience. Yu Shinan compiled the *Bei tang shu chao*, ironically incorporating in it references to Jizi’s imprisonment; see *Bei tang shu chao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1989), *juan* 13, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955, hereafter *THY*), *juan* 58, pp. 997–98.

⁵¹ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 124.

⁵² Ibid., p. 100.

⁵³ Ibid., *juan* 3, p. 166. In these cases, Wei Zheng renders Guan Longfeng as Longfeng, to meet the demand of his parallel style.

The largely conventional nature, in seventh-century terms, of Taizong's reading may be suggested by analysis of his apparent lack of interest in the *Mencius*. In his account of emperorship, Chen devotes some space to Mencian ideas (pp. 52–56). But the question should be pressed: how important was the Mencian view of dynastic authority to the early seventh-century court? Secondly, did Taizong himself in his discussions ever quote from the *Mencius*? The issue is important because Mencius's position on dynastic authority is to some extent ambivalent, potentially subversive even, and because his ideas on the "interior emphasis" within the Confucian tradition, which were to go on to play a major role in the Neo-Confucian revival of the late Tang and Song, were foreign to the seventh-century temper in statecraft and were generally not foregrounded in this period. Some idea of the court's interest in the *Mencius* can be gained by considering what themes from within the work were in play among the emperor's scholar advisors. Here, conveniently, some important indications are available. The excerpts from *Mencius* that Wei Zheng and his commission included in the *Qunshu zhi yao* emphasize the Mencian concept of goodness (*ren* 仁) and compassion in the ruler and describe Mencius's concern to keep the loyalty of the common people. But Wei Zheng omitted reference to the two most radical Mencian doctrines, the idea that heaven and the people combined to sanction the ruler, and the "interior" concept of the inherent goodness of human nature. And he did not cite Mencius's emphasis that "the unifier of the empire" should be "one who is not addicted to killing."⁵⁴ The citations of *Mencius* made in the great canonical scholarly project of the reign, the *Wu jing zheng yi* 五經正義, point in the same direction: the commission's interest was predominantly in practical aspects of statecraft.⁵⁵ Mencian language was seldom used by advisors in court discussions and Wei Zheng quoted the *Mencius* directly only once.⁵⁶ Perhaps the exception was the Mencian characterization of the ruler as "the father and mother of his people." This phrase, which originates in the *Shang shu* and occurs in the *Mao shi*, was certainly in use in Taizong's court

⁵⁴ *Qunshu zhi yao* (edition in *Sibu congkan*), *juan* 37, pp. 1a–6b.

⁵⁵ For a preliminary estimate of Mencius in the *Wu jing zheng yi*, see David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 81–82.

⁵⁶ In *ZGZY*, *juan* 1, p. 18, memorial of 637, Wei Zheng used a Mencian phrase; see *Mengzi* (edition in *Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series*), p. 6; James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 2: *The Works of Mencius* (Hong Kong and London: Trubner and Co., 1861), p. 35, translates "That ramble, and that excursion, were a pattern to the princes." For the direct quotation, see *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 404, memorial of 640, quoting Mencius, p. 30; Legge, *The Works of Mencius*, p. 194. This passage was included in *Qunshu zhi yao*, *juan* 37, p. 6b. Chen quotes this passage (p. 52), but does not note that Wei Zheng cited it in court. Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 also used the *fluxin shouzu* 腹心手足 distinction in *ZGZY*, *juan* 9, p. 507, memorial of 640.

discussions, for example by Wei Zheng in 628.⁵⁷ Taizong himself used it in 628, rejecting a request from his ministers that he build a detached pavilion on high ground to escape the summer heat.⁵⁸ In 633, he argued that for the people to love their ruler as they did their parents was the best form of auspicious sign the ruler could have.⁵⁹ He cited parenthood again, weeping as he did so, as it occurred in the *Mao shi* in 643, in rejecting the idea of celebrating his birthday.⁶⁰ He used the phrase again in 642, but preceded it by the *Zuozhuan* phrase *yizhao ren* 億兆人, stating, “I am the father and mother of the myriad people,” or by the phrase “all living creatures” (*cangsheng* 蒼生).⁶¹ Such citations of so widely used a metaphor, however, cannot be taken as referring specifically to the *Mencius*.

Another suggestive example concerns the phrase “grass and fire-wood-cutters,” signifying the common people of the countryside. This originated in the *Mao shi* “Ban” 板 ode, which quotes a “saying of earlier people that the ruler should ‘consult the grass and firewood cutters.’”⁶² The phrase was also Mencian: Mencius defines the park of a ruler of integrity as a place where “grass and firewood cutters go.”⁶³ Much use of this phrase was made in the medieval tradition of admonition to the throne: in 627, Wang Gui told Taizong that he accepted the opinion of “grass and firewood cutters”;⁶⁴ Wei Zheng told the emperor in 628 that the ability to consult them defined an enlightened ruler.⁶⁵ He used the phrase again in 637,⁶⁶ and in 640 in connection with the need to heed admonition.⁶⁷ Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648) used it in the text of his great memorial admonishing Taizong again enfeffment (*fengjian* 封建).⁶⁸ Yu Shinan told Taizong, when warning against his hunting activities “not to resist the requests of and grass and firewood cutters.”⁶⁹ Liu Rengui 劉仁軌 (602–685) did the same.⁷⁰

⁵⁷ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 113. James Legge, *The Shoo King* (London: Trubner and Co., 1865), Vol. 2, p. 333; idem, *The She King*, Vol. 2, p. 273, “Nan shan you tai” 南山有臺.

⁵⁸ ZGZY, *juan* 6, p. 319. See *Mengzi*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ ZGZY, *juan* 10, p. 521.

⁶⁰ Ibid., *juan* 7, p. 416. This was the “Lu’e” 蓼莪 ode. Legge, *The She King*, Vol. 2, pp. 350–52; ZJTJ, *juan* 198, pp. 6242–43, dates to 643.

⁶¹ ZGZY, *juan* 9, pp. 478–79.

⁶² Legge, *The She King*, Vol. 2, p. 501.

⁶³ *Mengzi*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 84.

⁶⁵ Ibid., *juan* 1, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., *juan* 5, p. 293.

⁶⁷ Ibid., *juan* 3, p. 150.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

⁶⁹ Ibid., *juan* 10, p. 515.

⁷⁰ THY, *juan* 27, p. 514, but accepting the reading in the *Siku quan shu* edition.

In formal edicts of the Zhenguan period, the phrase is used: it recurs in an edict of the seventh month of 627, proclaiming restrained policies for corvee;⁷¹ and in an amnesty of 628.⁷² But such edicts, it is argued below, though they were issued in the emperor's name, were unlikely to have been composed by him. In fact, Taizong does not appear to have used the phrase himself, either in dialogue or in hand-written proclamations. Chen implies that Mencian ideas had infused the statecraft tradition of the seventh century. But there is no trace in Taizong's remarks of a Mencian concern for inner mental composure, or of familiarity with Mencian language. The emperor does not appear to have made special use of either Mencian moral analysis or Mencian metaphors. If it is possible, therefore, a sharper delineation of the climate in statecraft in the early seventh century and the position of the *Mencius* are to be preferred.

Taizong in his statements on the importance of the people also used the metaphor of the ruler as the boat and the people as the water. This was a metaphor that originated in the *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語 and in the *Xunzi*.⁷³ He cited this metaphor in delivering a homily to the crown prince in 644. But by this time at least, this saying had become an established nostrum among his advisors. The emperor had already had it quoted to him four times before, by his advisors, by Wei Zheng in 632, 637, and 640, and by Cen Wenben 岑文本 (595–645) also in 637.⁷⁴ Taizong's own choice of metaphors tended to be drawn from day-to-day experience: from archery, the bow, and from another love, horses, in a homily to the crown prince in a similar way.⁷⁵ Or he likened the state at the end of the Sui to a sick man in need of cure.⁷⁶ He also cited

⁷¹ *CFYG*, *juan* 147, p. 3a; *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集, comp. Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1959), *juan* 107, pp. 552–53.

⁷² *CFYG*, *juan* 84, p. 2b.

⁷³ *Xunzi*, p. 26, “Wangzhi” 王制; *Kongzi jiyu* (edition in *Sibu congkan*), *juan* 1, p. 25b, “Wu li jie” 五禮解.

⁷⁴ See *ZGZY*, *juan* 1, p. 34, incident of 632, in which Wei Zheng quotes source as “an ancient saying” (*gu yu* 古語); *juan* 1, p. 18, memorial of 637 by Wei Zheng; *juan* 10, p. 527, sealed memorial by Cen Wenben in 637, attributing the saying to Confucius; *juan* 7, p. 405, memorial of 640 by Wei Zheng, attributing the saying to Xunzi; *juan* 4, p. 213, Taizong's homily to the crown prince in 644. In 627, Taizong used a similar metaphor, but comparing the ruler to the fish and his servants as the water; see *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, pp. 83–84.

⁷⁵ For the bow and arrow, see *ZGZY*, *juan* 8, pp. 446–47; *juan* 1, p. 26, “early Zhenguan”; for the homily to the crown prince, see *ibid.*, *juan* 4, p. 213; for his devotion to a particular steed, see *ibid.*, *juan* 2, p. 99.

⁷⁶ *ZGZY*, *juan* 1, p. 33.

gem cutting,⁷⁷ metallurgical processes, smelting and casting.⁷⁸ Here it was surely the soldier and man of action speaking, rather than the man of books.

***Fengjian* and the Princes**

The recorded discussions with scholar officials in the Zhenguan era tended to coalesce around specific issues, a fact that surely made Wu Jing's use of thematic headings in the *Zhenguan zheng yao* natural. One such a policy issue was that of enfeffment (*fengjian*).⁷⁹ This issue is compounded with that of the status of the princes of the blood in relation to the civil officials. Taizong identified the *fengjian* issue as crucial throughout his adult life. Gaozu had implemented an indiscriminate enfeffment programme, and Taizong's scholar advisors clearly wished to prevent or restrict further expansion.⁸⁰ They established the issue and the ancient vocabulary that was specific to it as a topic of discussion and dissent early in Taizong's reign.⁸¹ Documents Taizong issued use the terminology associated with *fengjian* from as early as 621, when, founding the Wenxue guan (pp. 131–34), he referred to himself as a “vassal protector” (*fanwei* 藩維), an ancient term associated with *fengjian*. His long-term preoccupation with this issue is demonstrated by the fact that early in his reign he commissioned the digest of records on the conduct of princes in history mentioned above. The preface of this, by Wei Zheng, survives, and it uses ancient *fengjian* terminology.⁸² As emperor, Taizong twice tried without permanent success to implement a system of devolution of provincial power by the enfeffment of imperial princes and high officials, a measure of his commitment to the idea.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷⁸ Ibid., *juan* 2, pp. 62–63.

⁷⁹ Ibid., *juan* 3, pp. 172–90.

⁸⁰ *JTS*, *juan* 60, p. 2342; *ZGZY*, *juan* 3, p. 173. Cf also *ZZTJ*, *juan* 190, p. 5961.

⁸¹ Wu Jing in *ZGZY* reserved a special section for *fengjian*; see *ZGZY*, *juan* 3, pp. 172–90. For exploration of the terminology of *fengjian*, in the seventh and early eighth centuries, including, see David McMullen, “The Emperor, the Princes and the Prefectures: A Political Analysis of the Pu’an Decree of 756 and the *fengjian* Issue,” paper presented to a conference held at the National Central Library, Taipei, 23–24 November 2010, to commemorate the scholarship of the late Professor Denis Twitchett (1925–2006) and held for an intended volume to be edited by Chen Jue 陳珪 of National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.

⁸² *ZGZY*, *juan* 4, pp. 214–18; the terms that were to recur in the debate include *pan shi* 盤石, *wei cheng* 維城, and *wei fan wei han* 為藩為翰. Wei Zheng, *Zi gu zhu houwang shan e lu* 自古諸侯王善惡錄 (or simply *Zhuwang shan e lu* 諸王善惡錄), divided into two sections, for good and for evil examples. See also Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, p. 114.

⁸³ *ZGZY*, *juan* 3, pp. 174–75; *JTS*, *juan* 64, p. 2424.

Chen characterizes this debate as “ideological,” implying that the motives behind these initiatives were not practical but idealistic (p. 60). There are, however, grounds for suggesting another reading for Taizong’s advocacy of the ancient ideal. These grounds concern real-politic quite as much as ideology, and they derive from precisely the day-to-day contacts the emperor had with the two communities with which he was engaged, his own immediate family and his civil officials. From a sixth- or seventh-century emperor’s point of view, the *fengjian* debate gave dignity to certain very specific concerns. It offered a practical means for an emperor to control, protect, and perpetuate his own imperial blood-line, and thus his dynasty itself. In the early stage of the dynasty’s foundation, Gaozu may have seen dividing the empire among the princes and sending them to high provincial commands away from the capital as an expedient both for preserving the imperial line and for preventing the violent rivalries among them that vitiated the early Tang court. Thus his appointment of Taizong, then prince of Qin 秦, to the governor-generalship of Luoyang in 626 has been seen as an attempt to remove him from the toxic feuding among his brothers of the years 624–626.⁸⁴

Secondly, as Howard Wechsler recognized, the relationship between Taizong and his advisors, though represented as predominantly harmonious, was often marked by irritation or anger on the part of the emperor. The high medieval period in the Chinese state witnessed a long sectional conflict between the imperial family and the increasingly powerful and articulate civil government. Indeed, this conflict of interests is precisely the subliminal theme of the *Zhenguan zheng yao*. The tension between the imperial clan and the civil bureaucracy was encapsulated in the binomial “relatives [of the emperor] and men of worth” (*qinxian* 親賢). Taizong saw in the *fengjian* issue a chance to shore up the power of the imperial clan, the *huangqin* 皇親, against that of the career officials in the ever more powerful bureaucracy, to “establish borders and screens in order support the royal house” (*jian fanping yi fu wangshi* 建藩屏以輔王室).⁸⁵ For civil officials and for scholar advisors, the same issue challenged their ambition to control the emperor and his kin, the succession and indeed the palace community itself.⁸⁶ Taizong himself identified this political tension between his princes, relatives by blood, and his senior civil officials, and he recognized the need for compromise. In 631, for example, he accepted a rebuke from Dai Zhou 戴胄 (d. 633) positively, saying, “Dai Zhou has no blood relationship with me, yet . . . he

⁸⁴ ZZTJ, *juan* 191, p. 6004; Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, p. 92.

⁸⁵ JTS, *juan* 64, p. 2424, edict of 637.

⁸⁶ In ZGZY, the two headings of “Fengjian” and “Taizi zhu wang ding fen” 太子諸王定分 are juxtaposed; see ZGZY, *juan* 3, pp. 172–90 and *juan* 4, pp. 191–99.

reports on every critical issue to me.”⁸⁷ But he reacted furiously when the status of his sons in relation to high civil officials was imputed. An incident of 636, when Taizong was told that officials of the third grade and above despised the imperial princes, stung him to extreme anger.⁸⁸ In 639, he objected to Wang Gui’s insistence that princes of the blood should acknowledge third grade officials as their superiors.⁸⁹ His protectiveness for the imperial clan and the community in which they lived extended to the palace community more widely. In yet another episode, he was angry because civil officials had “belittled my palace women,” ejecting them from accommodation in an inn on their way from the Jiucheng 九成 palace to the capital, purloining the accommodation for themselves.⁹⁰

Developments after Taizong’s death show that his fears on behalf of the imperial Li clan in the face of internal dissent and of the power of the civil bureaucracy were justified. Partly to meet the demands of governing the expanded empire and partly to shore up support for her own rule, the empress Wu greatly increased the size of the civil bureaucracy and its selection and recruitment systems. At the same time, government came increasingly “from within the palace,” meaning that the empress used increasingly autocratic means to achieve her political aims.⁹¹ It is entirely reasonable to posit that this expansion was accompanied by a higher sense on the part of civil officials of their own power. After Taizong’s death, a succession of civil officials continued to make the case against *fengjian*. And the very survival of the imperial Li clan was continually also threatened by internecine court feuding. In the blood-letting that followed the empress Wu’s usurpation, the “princes of the imperial clan followed one another to death by execution, almost to the point of their extinction,” and even the ablest Lis “could not escape the tiger’s mouth.”⁹² Taizong may well have been convinced, as was Liu Zhi 劉秩 (d. c. 758), a rare mid-eighth-century advocate of *fengjian*,⁹³ that dispersing the imperial princes through the empire might indeed give his own blood-line, the imperial clan, a better chance of surviving murderous inner court rivalries.

⁸⁷ *THY*, *juan* 30, p. 551; *JTS*, *juan* 70, pp. 3533–34.

⁸⁸ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, pp. 135–36, dated 636; *ibid.*, *juan* 7, pp. 401–2. For another attempt by a civil official to control the ritual conduct of princes of the blood, see *ibid.*, *juan* 7, pp. 394–95. There are variants as to the date of this episode.

⁸⁹ *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 401; *JTS*, *juan* 71, pp. 2558–59; see also *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 394.

⁹⁰ *CFYG*, *juan* 327, pp. 2a–b; *JTS*, *juan* 71, pp. 2548–49.

⁹¹ *THY*, *juan* 3, p. 33, “from after [the start of] the Yonghui 永徽 period” (649); *ZZTJ*, *juan* 200, p. 6317, in 659.

⁹² *JTS*, *juan* 6, p. 199; *ibid.*, *juan* 86, p. 2839, historian’s comment.

⁹³ *THY*, *juan* 47, p. 830. For the fuller context, see McMullen, “The Emperor, the Princes and the Prefectures.”

The later history of this tension indicates again that inter-clan feuding within the court and sectional tension between the imperial clan and the civil bureaucracy remained factors in high level Tang politics into the eighth century. Xuanzong as a newly ascended emperor made a concerted drive to rehabilitate the Li clan after the reverses that followed the Princes' Revolt of 688, the Wu Zhou 武周 interregnum and the Wu and Wei 韋 conflict of Zhongzong's 中宗 (Li Zhe 李哲, 656–710, r. 684 and 705–710). The term *qinxian* remained in use through the Kaiyuan 開元 and Tianbao 天寶 periods (713–756). To accept the well-mannered and erudite discussions on *fengjian* by Taizong's advisors at face value and to detach the debate about *fengjian* from the very immediate and visceral political concerns it embodied is to underestimate the political tensions and their potential for violence that ran through the seventh-century state (cf. p. 40).

Building

Palaces and the imperial building programme were a major concern for the seventh-century court. Chen demonstrates their centrality in both the statecraft writing and in the verse of Taizong's reign. His analysis of Taizong's verse gives prominence what he calls "the discursive history of the palace" (p. 287). This is able literary criticism, sound literary history, and of much interest to read. He describes how palaces, though ideologically central to the state, were also, by long literary tradition, the site of conflicting values, of "the troubling rhetoric of empire" (p. 309). He shows how Taizong's own construction of one palace, the Daming 大明 palace embodies, or even magnifies this conflict (pp. 275, 294–10). But the record of Taizong's building projects is perhaps even more complex than his account suggests, given that restraint in building was one of the insistent concerns of his scholar advisors. Here again there is evidence of a harsh conflict of interests, a disjunction between rhetoric and reality, and a striking lack of consistency on the emperor's part that is muted by the well-mannered tone of the surviving sources.

Taizong was a builder almost from the start of his reign. Even as prince of Qin, he had allowed his father to build a separate palace for him, the Hongyi 宏義 palace, in the imperial park to the west of the main palace complex. It was in this palace, renamed the Tai'an 太安 palace, after Taizong had deposed his father, that Gaozu resided. In 632, a memorial by Ma Zhou 馬周 (601–648) suggested that the palace was too humble and proposing further building, that the gates and towers be reconstructed "attention being paid to height and spaciousness so as to meet expectations from all quarters, so that your great filial piety shines forth throughout the empire."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *THY*, *juan* 30, p. 549; *CFYG*, *juan* 14, p. 2a.

But this plea by a scholar advisor for a more imposing structure ran sharply counter to the general tenor of scholarly advice to Taizong. More usually, it was the emperor and the agencies within the palace responsible for construction, specifically the directorate of works (*jiangzuo jian* 將作監) and the directorate of imperial workshops (*shaofu jian* 少府監), who, sometimes acting independently of, and against the wishes of, the civil bureaucracy took initiatives for building.⁹⁵ There are also indications, from the way in which the leading palace construction experts were demoted as well as re-engaged, that the emperor was particularly impatient and irascible where his building schemes were concerned. For their part, the emperor's scholar advisors normally considered excessive building fully as dangerous a trait as excessive hunting, or foreign adventurism, or, as will be shown below, as interest in *belles-lettres*.⁹⁶

The record, however, is not straightforward. Gaozu had been criticized for extravagant construction.⁹⁷ Taizong at the start of his reign provided his advisors with eloquent reassurance of his intention to curb imperial interest in building.⁹⁸ Yet such affirmations were belied by events. The crown prince Li Chengqian, for example, living within the palace complex, "built terraces and belvederes beyond number." In 631, Taizong rebuilt the Sui palace Renshou 仁壽 (pp. 293–94). This, renamed the Jiucheng palace, had been built under the Sui at enormous cost to the labour force and was "highly ornate." The palace was reconstructed under the directorship of the palace service master carpenter Jiang Xingben 姜行本 (d. 645),⁹⁹ who was praised and rewarded for his performance. Now with a permanent director and staff, it was much used by the emperor.¹⁰⁰ When one of his advisers, Yao Silian, objected to refurbishment, Taizong justified himself and paid him off with an honorarium, but did not accept his advice.

⁹⁵ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, pp. 130–31; *ibid.*, *juan* 4, pp. 560–61, "Xiezi tai ben zhuan di si" 寫字臺本卷第四; *THY*, *juan* 51, pp. 886–87. In this incident, Fang Xuanling and Gao Shilian 高士廉 (576–647) had encountered Dou Desu 竇德素, of the directorate of the imperial workshops, and asked what more building was going on at the northern gate of the palace, Taizong was informed, and asked Fang Xuanling, "You only know about things to do with the southern offices (*nan ya* 南衙). If I have some small construction at the northern gate, how does that involve your business?"

⁹⁶ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 139, Wei Zheng's reply to Taizong dated 637.

⁹⁷ *ZZTJ*, *juan* 189, p. 5922, episode of 621.

⁹⁸ See especially *ZGZY*, *juan* 10, pp. 511–12, early in the reign; *ibid.*, *juan* 6, pp. 317–22, incidents of 627, 628, 630, and 642.

⁹⁹ *JTS*, *juan* 59, p. 2333.

¹⁰⁰ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 103; *JTS*, *juan* 59, p. 2333; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 193, p. 6088; *JTS*, *juan* 44, p. 1888; *Tang liu dian*, *juan* 19, p. 530; Yang Hongnian 楊鴻年, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao* 隋唐宮廷建築考 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 1–3.

The complicated record for the “Luoyang palaces” (Luoyang gong 洛陽宮), which Chen does not mention, is also suggestive of underlying tensions.¹⁰¹ In 621, as prince of Qin, Taizong had inspected them, offering a condemnation of the extravagance of Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 (Yang Guang 楊廣, 569–618, r. 604–618) that was to become routine (pp. 292–93). He had even ordered the demolition of three Sui precincts in the complex, a gate tower (duan men lou 端門樓), the Qianyang 乾陽 hall, and the Zetian 則天 gate and its watch-towers.¹⁰² But this contempt for the extravagance the complex represented was not permanent. In 630, the emperor ordered repair of the Qianyuan dian 乾元殿 within the complex as a base for hunting. Then, when Zhang Xuansu 張玄素 (d. 664), with support from Fang Xuanling, objected, he ordered that work be stopped, conceding that “if on some later day we were to come on some matter to Luoyang, even if we were to hold court out in the open (*lou zuo* 露坐) there would be no harm done.”¹⁰³ In 631, the same year that he had ordered the reconstruction of the Sui Renshou palace, Taizong intended again to rebuild the Luoyang complex, which was in a ruined state. He was dissuaded by eloquent dissent from Dai Zhou.¹⁰⁴ None the less, after some time, he ordered Dou Jin 竇璡, a master carpenter from within the palace services and not a mainstream civil official, to proceed with reconstruction. This official, however, appears to have exceeded his brief: he “excavated ponds and raised hills, with carving and decoration that was extravagantly ornamental. The emperor was furious and ordered them dismantled and dismissed Jin from his post.”¹⁰⁵ It is significant that it was a palace official who interpreted Taizong’s acquiescence to Dai Zhou’s protest as a temporary position only, rather than as a final policy decision. By taking this initiative and exceeding his brief, he hoped to earn private credit with the emperor. There are, moreover, other indications that protests were overridden and the work was carried through: the director of the buildings at Luoyang was again the master carpenter in the directorate of works Jiang Xingben, and his biography states that “he was in overall control of them, and was commended for his thoroughness and effectiveness and very generously rewarded.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ For the term “Luoyang gong”, standing for Luoyang, see *JTS*, *juan* 3, p. 47.

¹⁰² *ZZTJ*, *juan* 189, p. 5918.

¹⁰³ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, pp. 94–96; *JTS*, *juan* 75, pp. 2639–41; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 193, p. 6088; *THY*, *juan* 30, pp. 551–52.

¹⁰⁴ *JTS*, *juan* 70, pp. 3533–34; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 193, p. 6088.

¹⁰⁵ See also *CFYG*, *juan* 56, p. 7b; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 193, p. 6088.

¹⁰⁶ *JTS*, *juan* 59, pp. 2333–34. Jiang, who was rewarded with seventy slave girls for successes in Taizong’s Korean campaign, and remained in favour with Taizong until his death, was killed by an arrow at the siege of Gaimou 蓋牟 in 645, for which see *ZZTJ*, *juan* 197, pp. 6219–20.

In 634, a further objection from a local official from a county near Luoyang to the burden reconstruction placed on the local population again stung Taizong to fury. After an intervention by Wei Zheng, Taizong backed down, rewarding the local official, Huangfu Decan 皇甫德參, and affirming the importance of remonstrance.¹⁰⁷ In the spring of 637, Taizong, having in the new year built the Feishan 飛山 palace,¹⁰⁸ enjoyed an excursion in a “dragon boat” (*long zhou* 龍舟), a vessel identified with the profligate Sui Yangdi,¹⁰⁹ on the Jicui pond within the Luoyang complex. He used the occasion to condemn Yangdi’s extravagance yet again, claiming of the palace complex “and they are all mine now.”¹¹⁰ One sealed memorial submitted at about this time in connection with an imperial hunt, stated that the corvée demands from the populations “from Huai 懷 and Luo 洛 eastwards,” for building projects “seemed no less than in Sui times.” Taizong’s reaction to what was surely an incendiary remark of rare courage was to consider the memorial “defamatory and slanderous” (*dihui* 詆毀), and it took Wei Zheng’s restraining response to calm him.¹¹¹

In the seventh month of the same year, a flood at Luoyang caused major damage, and Taizong, responding to the memorials of Cen Wenben and Wei Zheng, ordered only limited reconstruction.¹¹² After calling for sealed memorials, he ordered the demolition of the Mingde 明德 palace and the Xuanpu 玄圃 court within Feishan palace and the distribution of the materials to flood victims.¹¹³ But another record indicates that the emperor still expected the Luoyang palace services to be prompt and efficient: visiting Luoyang in 638, he punished the staff of the Xianren 顯仁 palace for dereliction.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ ZZTJ, *juan* 194, p. 6109; cf. ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 106, in which Wu Jing includes Wei Zheng’s memorial of admonition to Taizong, but omits the context. The incident is here dated to 634. See Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁸ JTS, *juan* 3, p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ Sui shu, *juan* 3, pp. 63–64. For the Jicui pond as site of a Sui extravaganza, see ZZTJ, *juan* 180, p. 5626.

¹¹⁰ ZGZY, *juan* 10, pp. 512–13. See CFYG, *juan* 40, p. 16a, where the pond is call Jicui 集翠. In *Tang shi jishi*, *juan* 4, pp. 45–46, Taizong is recorded as having been on this pond when he composed his poem “On the *Shang shu*,” to which Wei Zheng responded with a poem “On the Western Han.” See Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T’ang*, pp. 32–33. CFYG, *juan* 113, p. 10b, specifies the “dragon boat,” a term that connotes Sui extravagance.

¹¹¹ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 140.

¹¹² THY, *juan* 43, pp. 778–79; JTS, *juan* 37, pp. 1351–52; ZGZY, *juan* 10, pp. 526–27.

¹¹³ JTS, *juan* 3, p. 48; also *juan* 37, pp. 1351–52; THY, *juan* 43, pp. 778–79; Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 12–13. The same year he ordered the repair of the temple to Laozi at Bozhou 亳州 and the temple to Confucius at Yanzhou 兗州.

¹¹⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 2, p. 145.

There were major building projects at Chang'an. The most important, the Daming palace, was started in the winter of 634 (pp. 294–95). Taizong's declared intention in building this palace was to provide his deposed father with a retreat. As a cause it was welcomed, for "senior ministers and the officials competed to use their private resources to support the labour services."¹¹⁵ In the event, however, Gaozu became ill before it was completed, and "did not in actuality take up residence there." None the less, Taizong's most elaborate *fu*, "Rhapsody on Looking Out from the Layered Terrace" ("Lin cengtai fu" 臨層臺賦), is considered to be a description of this building. Chen's translation and analysis (pp. 296–310) shows that there is a glaring contradiction between the record for the palace's construction and the exalted language of the *fu*. That contradiction is underscored by the conclusion of the *fu*, in which Taizong claims for it, not an expression of filial concern for the father whom he had forced off the throne in 626, but its full "significance as the unifying center of empire," "the cosmological and political center that defines and organizes all space around it" (p. 309), and from which, of course, the current emperor reigns and rules.¹¹⁶

The same note of profound ambivalence or disjunction between claims of frugality and actual expenditure is present in the documentation for Taizong's tomb at Zhaoling 昭陵. This was initiated with insistence on frugality by edict of 637,¹¹⁷ and completed only in 649. The second generation craftsman and long serving palace service official and building specialist Yan Lide 閻立德 (d. 656) was involved.¹¹⁸ It included a covered way built round the sheer face at the top of the mountain, numerous statues in stone of foreign leaders who had submitted to Tang authority and elaborate provision for satellite burials.¹¹⁹ In 636, Taizong's empress had died and had been buried at the same site. In that year, Taizong erected a viewing tower of several

¹¹⁵ *THY*, *juan* 30, p. 553; *CFYG*, *juan* 14, p. 2a.

¹¹⁶ The palace, when Taizong stopped the work on it, may have been more complete than the sources suggest. For when in 661 Gaozong refurbished it for his own use, the verb used was *xiu* 修 ("repair" or "refurbish"); see *CFYG*, *juan* 14, p. 2a; *THY*, *juan* 30, p. 553. *CFYG*, however, lists buildings added to the site. *ZZTJ*, *juan* 200, p. 6329, says "made" (*zuo* 作).

¹¹⁷ *Tang da zhaoling ji*, *juan* 76, p. 431; *JTS*, *juan* 3, pp. 46–47; cf. also *THY*, *juan* 20, p. 395, conversation dated 644 between Taizong and his attendant officials, and subsequent edict.

¹¹⁸ *JTS*, *juan* 77, p. 2679; and *THY*, *juan* 20, p. 395, double column entry, stating that Yan Lide wanted the covered way deployed around the cliff at the top of the mountain removed and the attendants and guards to leave. "The emperor sobbing disallowed this. Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (d. 659) and others with support from the ritual classic submitted repeat memorials making this request, and it was done according to [Yan Lide's] memorial."

¹¹⁹ Listed in *THY*, *juan* 21, pp. 413–14.

storeys in the imperial park so that he might view the tomb complex at Zhaoling and that of his recently deceased empress. Her tomb included accommodation at the summit for palace women to offer services. Construction of this too had been in the charge of Yan Lide; but he was dismissed, for “insolence and laxity” (*man jie* 慢解).¹²⁰ It was Wei Zheng’s scorn for this project and his inference that Taizong had shown inadequate filial respect for this father, whose tomb, the Xianling 獻陵, also supervised by Yan Lide, was comparatively modest, that then led the emperor to “weep and to destroy the pavilion.”¹²¹

Taizong’s commitment to building continued on to the last decade of his reign. In 640, planning a progress to Luoyang, he again ordered Yan Lide, now grand carpenter of the directorate of works, to build a palace for avoiding the heat, the Xiangcheng 襄城 palace in the western hills of Ruzhou 汝州. The conscripted labourers numbered at 1,900,000, and the expense matched this gigantic force.¹²² Visiting the palace a year later, the emperor encountered great heat and found the spot full of poisonous snakes. In a fury, he dismissed Yan Lide and dismantled the palace, distributing the timbers to the common people. No comment, no protest or imperial statement is recorded for this episode, which for expense and scale must surely have rivaled the projects of the Sui emperors. This episode, which was to Taizong’s discredit, was not mentioned in *Zhenguan zhengyao* and was barely touched on by *Jiu Tang shu*. In another incident in 642 that was recorded as exemplary self-scrutiny by the emperor, Taizong had already collected the material for further building at Lantian 藍田, near Chang’an, when he read a passage from the *Jin shu* 晉書 admonishing against palace building quoted above and desisted.¹²³ But in 644 he built the Tangquan 湯泉 palace at the hot-spring resort of Lishan 驪山, east of Chang’an, and in charge of the construction were again the same two senior palace service officials, Jiang Xingben, now a great

¹²⁰ *JTS*, *juan* 3, p. 46.

¹²¹ *ZZTJ*, *juan* 194, p. 6123. See Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, p. 137.

¹²² *ZZTJ*, *juan* 195, p. 6154; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), et al, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 100, p. 3941, biography of Yan Lide, gives the number of conscripts as “over a million.” See also *JTS*, *juan* 3, pp. 51–52; *CFYG*, *juan* 14, p. 2b; *juan* 42, p. 12b; *juan* 105, p. 17a; *juan* 113, p. 11a; *THY*, *juan* 30, p. 560; Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 88–89.

¹²³ *ZGZY*, *juan* 6, pp. 321–22; *CFYG*, *juan* 56, p. 7b has significant variants, stating, “We have recently at Lantian 藍田 procured timber intending to build a separate hall (*dian* 殿), drawing its regulations from the Liangyi 兩儀 and also to construct a storied pavilion (*chongge* 重閣). The timber is already complete. But I have thought of this far off episode of [Liu] Cong.” This project was then stopped.

general of the left palace guards (*zuo tun wei jiangjun* 左屯衛將軍),¹²⁴ and Yan Lide whom he had so angrily dismissed only years before, now holding the rank of minor carpenter in the directorate of works (*jiangzuo shao jiang* 將作少匠).¹²⁵ Taizong composed a high flown inscription for engraving on a stele to mark this project, and this has survived in rubbing form at Dunhuang 敦煌.¹²⁶

Towards the end of his reign, he built two more lavish palaces, both in the vicinity of Chang'an. The first was the Cuiwei 翠微 palace high up in the Zhongnan 終南山 hills, initially started by Gaozu.¹²⁷ This Taizong rebuilt in early 647, as a refuge from the summer heat, using timbers from a demolished building.¹²⁸ The architect was again Yan Lide, who had followed his father in holding offices in the palace directorates.¹²⁹ It was here, in the Hanfeng dian 含風殿, that the emperor was to die in 649.¹³⁰ Later in 647, because the Cuiwei palace did not satisfy him and was not large enough to accommodate his officials, he ordered the construction of Yuhua 玉華 palace, “about eighty miles to the north of the capital,” again under the supervision of Yan Lide. This, the final building project of his reign was significant in several respects. Though orders were given for a frugal construction for his own part of the complex, other parts were lavish and extremely costly.¹³¹ An inference is that Taizong planned to move the seat of government away from the capital, at least during summer months. He visited it in 648, and two of his senior scholar advisors, required

¹²⁴ *Chang'an zhi* 長安志 (edition in *Siku quan shu*) for Jiang Xingben, who ran a career in the palace guards and was a hydraulic engineer. See also *JTS*, *juan* 59, pp. 2333–34; *ZGZY*, *juan* 9, p. 477, in 640; *JTS*, *juan* 49, p. 2113, in 634.

¹²⁵ *CFYG*, *juan* 113, p. 13a; Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 43–44; *Tang Taizong quanji* 唐太宗全集, comp. and ed. with comm. by Wu Yun 吳雲 and Ji Yu 冀宇 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004), pp. 622–23. The rubbing is held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France; see Imre Galambos, “Manuscript Copies of Stone Inscriptions in the Dunhuang Corpus: Issues of Dating and Provenance,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 63, no. 4 (2009), pp. 809–26, n. 3.

¹²⁶ *CFYG*, *juan* 113, p. 13a. Wu Yun and Ji Yu, *Tang Taizong quanji*, pp. 622–23, do not provide an MS no.

¹²⁷ *JTS*, *juan* 2, p. 15; Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ *JTS*, *juan* 3, p. 59, noting that the palace was initially called the Taihe 太和 palace. It had been demolished in 636. Taizong is recorded as having visited it in 649, to die there that year; see *JTS*, *juan* 3, pp. 60, 62. See also Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, p. 18.

¹²⁹ *JTS*, *juan* 77, p. 2679.

¹³⁰ For the Hanfeng dian, see Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 145–46.

¹³¹ *Tang da zhaoling ji*, *juan* 108, p. 559, for the edict commissioning construction, dated seventh month of 647; pp. 559–60, for the edict granting tax exemption for Yijun 宜郡 county households following completion of the palace, dated second month of 648.

to attend court there, Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (575–648) and Fang Xuanling, died in this palace. This and the Cuiwei palace were recorded not least because of another protest, by Xu Hui 徐惠 (627–649), the young consort of his final decade, again unsuccessful.¹³² That protest was incorporated eight decades later in the *Chuxue ji*, the editor of which was Xu Hui's kinsman, Xu Jian 徐堅 (659–729).¹³³

The same contradiction that is so evident between the Daming palace and Taizong's claims for frugality in its construction is even more apparent in two imperial pronouncements relating to the Yuhua palace. The documents concerned are the edict issued on seventh month of 647 commissioning construction and the edict that followed a few months later, in the second month of 748, granting tax privileges to the registered households of its county. Chen does not use either of these documents; but these are important formal ideological statements, in which precisely the “troubling rhetoric” of palace building is stated in stark terms. They are also significant in an analysis of Taizong's literary achievement because it can virtually be proved that they were not written by Taizong himself, but by one of his scholar advisors.

The edicts are highly allusive and replete with appeals to remote and more recent history. They belong to a wide category of formal and lengthy dynastic pronouncements that in many later cases bear the names of the official scholars who composed them. What is more, in the eighth month of 647, one month after the commissioning of the Yuhua palace, Taizong had issued an edict cancelling a projected celebration of the Feng 封 and Shan 禪 rites on Mount Tai 泰山 (pp. 328–51). And this edict at one point describes the Cuiwei and Yuhua palaces, using phrasing that was very close to the edict commissioning the construction of the Yuhua building itself. This edict was thus issued while the Yuhua palace was still under construction, and, as Chen points out, ends with “a command to the laborers working on the Yuhua palace” to “cut costs and be economical” (p. 349). This edict, which Chen translates and analyses at length (pp. 343–51), bears the name of Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 (592–672), then in high favour with the emperor.¹³⁴ Xu was to be infamous as one of the villains in the grand narrative of the seventh century, for assisting the empress Wu in her climb to power. It is inherently improbable that his name would

¹³² ZZTJ, *juan* 198, p. 6248; ZGZY, *juan* 9, pp. 492–98, esp. p. 493.

¹³³ Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 24–25. Later, the Yuhua palace was made even more famous by Du Fu's poignant description; see *Jiu jia ji zhu Du shi*, *juan* 3, p. 51. The poem is translated by William Hung, in *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 114. Du Fu, visiting it in 757, described it as derelict and used his description of it to mourn the transience of imperial wealth.

¹³⁴ JTS, *juan* 82, p. 2761. In 643, Xu had completed *shilu* for the Wude 武德 and Zhenguan reigns, and been rewarded with the gift of 800 bolts of silk and promotion.

have been added at the end of this prestigious edict. Despite Chen's reservation therefore (p. 343, n. 63), it is very likely that Xu composed all three pronouncements for the ailing emperor, just as it is most unlikely that Taizong himself composed these texts, a point that will be taken up in considering his literary abilities in the final section of this review.

In this commissioning edict, Taizong is represented as justified by remote precedent in moving from Chang'an. He also claims to implement an austerity that had the sanction of high antiquity. He describes how the Cuiwei palace had proved inadequate as a remedy for his health problems and had not worked for his officials. He had therefore decided to build another: "And so I had pursued my aim for purity and austerity, fundamentally without feelings for the grand and beautiful. Each foot of timber and each foot of ramping will in all cases involve selecting the functional. Each inch of work and each inch of labour will not mean corvée service in vain. Yet still I feared that I was remote and had contravened government and was about to give rise to resentments. It was not that I rejoiced in giving toil to others and exhausting their strength, or that I loved lofty chambers and decorating walls. It was merely that I wished to nourish my nature and preserve my life, not for myself alone to preserve selfishness and preserve myself, bring ease to my soul and pray for longevity, but surely rather for the state and for the people."

This lofty message, however, relates only very uneasily to descriptions of the scale and style of the finished Yuhua palace. If Xu Jingzong is accepted as its author, then it also shows that Taizong's advisors were fully complicit in "the troubling rhetoric" of palace building and the misrepresentations it involved. Though parts of the building answered Taizong's demand for frugality, the overall cost, which included spacious accommodation for the crown prince and provision for the civil administration, was enormous: "apart from this, the various items for construction were procured by disrupting the market, while the fees for breaking the labour schedules and hiring labour were reckoned by the countless millions."¹³⁵ And when Taizong visited it, he ordered the palace service official Wang Xiaoji 王孝積 to construct a building of thirteen bays, the Ziwei 紫微 hall at the Xiandao 顯道 gate, which was of "patterned glazed tiles, and double bases, lofty, spacious, imposing, and grand. When the emperor saw it he was greatly pleased."¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *CFYG*, *juan* 14, pp. 4b–5a; *THY*, *juan* 30, pp. 555–56; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 198, p. 6253; Yang Hongnian, *Sui Tang gongting jianzhu kao*, pp. 24–25, 209.

¹³⁶ The palace was formally abandoned in 651, and converted to a Buddhist monastery. The gardens and the offices built for the officials were "all returned to their former owners." See *CFYG*, *juan* 14, p. 5a.

It may seem harsh to charge Taizong with straying from his ideals in these, the closing years of his reign. But this brief summary shows the same deficit between claims of restraint and austerity and actual practice that ran through accounts of his building projects throughout the reign. Whether at Luoyang in the 630s or at Chang'an throughout his reign the record was one of inconsistency, of acceding to eloquent and historically informed objections from his advisors and others, and then ignoring them, of construction and then ill-tempered demolition, followed ultimately by grand construction in his late years. Chen's study ends with what must be seen as a final statement on Taizong's building programme. In his "Imperial Capital Poems" ("Di jing pian" 帝京篇), Taizong incorporated an idealized survey of his reign and its achievements, including its building programme, claiming a frugality and that marked him out as superior to many of his imperial predecessors. This frugality, however, was surely in fact relative rather than absolute, restrained only in comparison with the Sui, rather than in any longer perspective.

Taizong and *Belles-Lettres*

Is Taizong's attitude to the seventh-century literary heritage, and his verse itself, the subject of the second and major section of Chen's book, susceptible to the same sort of analysis, of unpicking at the seams, as some of his political statements and as his attitude to building? Chen provides a broad survey of pre-Tang and early Tang literary ideals to parallel to his accounts of the general concepts of emperorship. He establishes eloquently the importance of literary sophistication in court culture and the challenge it presented for imperial leadership. Yet in dealing with attitudes to verse, especially imperial verse, the need is even greater to be alert against accepting at face value the irenic, controlled, and refined modes of expression inherent in the verse itself, and particularly in court verse. Valuable and thorough though Chen's survey is, there is again a risk of losing focus on the visceral nature of the interaction between Taizong and his advisors on this issue.

A preliminary point, applicable also to the surviving verse of Xuanzong,¹³⁷ concerns the question of how representative the present collection of Taizong's verse really is. Neither Chen nor the writers of the recent, voluminous commentary on Taizong's

¹³⁷ David McMullen, "The Emperor as Court Poet: Xuanzong's Use of the Verse Tradition in Early Eighth Century China," article to be published in John McKinnell, ed., *Ambition and Anxiety: Courts and Courtly Discourse, c. 700–1600* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, forthcoming). This article was written for a conference on "Courts and Courtiers" at the University of Durham in 2004. Its approach and conclusions would, self-evidently, have benefitted greatly from reading Chen's book.

œuvre offer a comprehensive account of the transmission of his verse.¹³⁸ But there is a case for arguing that what survives may represent a filtering fully as significant as that imposed on Taizong's statecraft discourse by Wu Jing in compiling the *Zhenguan zheng yao*. At almost exactly the same time as Wu Jing completed the *Zhenguan zheng yao*, over sixty of Taizong's poems were selected and anthologized in a work produced by the intellectual heirs to the Zhenguan scholarly advisors. This was the *Chuxue ji*, a *leishu* 類書 or encyclopaedia in the tradition of the *Bei tang shu chao* and *Yiwen leiju*. It was compiled on Xuanzong's command with the express purpose of providing a repertory of model literary compositions in all genres for his "children," the Li princes.¹³⁹ The compiling commission included Zhang Yue 張說 (667–730), Wei Shu 韋述 (d. 757), and Xu Jian, precisely official scholars and colleagues who served for decades alongside Wu Jing.¹⁴⁰

This compilation was certainly intended to be normative: its aim was to present the princes with a concise repository of works that provided standards for their own compositions. It was also unquestionably intended to reinforce for the mid-eighth-century imperial clan the grand narrative of the dynasty and Taizong's central role in it. Just to what extent this compilation presents a distorted selection of the verse by Taizong available to the *Chuxue ji* compilers is hard to know; but this is not a question that should be brushed aside.

A background, related feature of the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-century verse tradition deserves emphasis at this point: verse composition was a form of entertainment that took place in a court environment which was often characterized by licence and lack of restraint. The community concerned here was closer to the imperial "entourage," the group about which Taizong felt so protective, than to the scholarly officials attending scheduled meetings. Participation in this entourage certainly varied according to the emperor's itinerary and social programme. That this "entourage" at its least formal and relaxed was the setting for verse composition may be proved by the records for Xu Hui, his favoured but puritanical young consort, who ran a brief but stellar career in the late Zhenguan court. A woman would not have

¹³⁸ Chen describes (pp. 237–41) how a collection of fifty-one poems by Taizong and his scholar advisors, centred round the verse of Xu Jingzong, was transmitted to Japan, where it became known under the misleading title *Hanlin xueshi ji* 翰林學士集. See also Wu Yun and Ji Yu, *Tang Taizong quanji*, p. 668.

¹³⁹ *Chuxue ji* edited with an introduction by Si Yizu 司義祖 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962). *Da Tang xin yu* 大唐新語 (Taipei: Ren'ai shuju, 1985), *juan* 9, p. 137; *THY*, *juan* 36, p. 658; adds, "They wanted the Crown Prince and all the princes to consult it in composing literature."

¹⁴⁰ *Da Tang xin yu*, *juan* 9, p. 137.

had access to formal assemblies at which the emperor's attendant officials were present; yet several poems by her written for the emperor survive.¹⁴¹ Moreover, scholars and advisors from the civil bureaucracy by no means always dominated the emperor's informal company. We are told that "even at times when he took excursions, feasted, ate and drank, people like the eighteen scholars [of the original Wenxue guan] would be among [Taizong's] company."¹⁴² This is an important, if rather late, remark, because it confirms that scholar advisors represented only one category of person taking part in such leisure activities.

Chen provides a thorough and critically informed account of the Zhenguan court's engagement with *belles-lettres*.¹⁴³ He highlights the "tension between the stylistic inheritance of the Southern Dynasties and the classicist restoration of the Han poetic ideology" (p. 212). He shows how the Zhenguan scholars repeated their austere critique of literary history in officially commissioned histories, in the *Qunshu zhi yao* as seen above, and in individual memorials of dissent. Their insistent concern was surely deep-rooted: the emperor's participation in verse composition was precisely another aspect of his conduct, along with hunting, building, and foreign adventurism, that was on or beyond the margins of their control. Chen concedes that verse composition took place in a range of social settings when he states that "an emperor who wrote poetry in his leisure was engaged in a potentially dangerous activity. Poetry stood in ambivalent relation to the work of sovereignty . . . [some forms of poetry] risked corrupting custom through surfeits of pleasure" (p. 304).

Just as in the case of the *fengjian* issue and the record of friction over building projects, there is a case, therefore, for reading early Tang polemics on the literary tradition as addressing a much profounder clash of values than that implicit in the high-flown and dignified written critique the records imply. In the view of Taizong's advisors, a nadir in court verse had been reached in the Chen dynasty, when verse composition had become compounded with sexual scandal in court entertainments that made a mockery of and court sobriety and, on occasion, of Buddhist piety as well. Throughout the sixth and seventh centuries and into the eighth, verse composition continued to be linked to court entertainments, in which there might be rowdiness and ribaldry, savage humiliation of individuals, or other forms of licence.

¹⁴¹ See the very full analysis by Paul W. Kroll, "The Life and Writings of Xu Hui (627–650), Worth Consort, at the Early Tang Court," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 35–64; also *JTS*, *juan* 51, pp. 2167–69.

¹⁴² *JTS*, *juan* 166, p. 4329, biography of Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831).

¹⁴³ This perspective on the literature of Taizong's court, including both poetic practice and critical attitudes, was first described in English by Stephen Owen; see *The Poetry of the Early T'ang*, pp. 3–13.

Members of imperial family who lost out in the toxic competition for power within the Sui and early Tang courts were often censured generally for living a licentious or extravagant style. Taizong's own brothers, whom he murdered in 626 to clear his way to the throne, were charged in this way.¹⁴⁴ Another nadir came several decades later, documented for the reign of Taizong's grand-son Zhongzong, Xuanzong's uncle, criticism of whom Xuanzong later encouraged. A few years later, Xuanzong himself took part in such extravaganzas with his brothers and cousins. Thus, eight decades after the Zhenguan period, the emperor's sybaritic life style and interest in morally lax verse and music greatly concerned his sober-minded advisors, Wu Jing and Xu Jian surely among them.¹⁴⁵ In a sense then, for the medieval courts, the proverb should be reversed: when the mice are away, the cats will play. What could be more natural that, in selecting exemplary works for the princes, Xu Jian and the *Chu xue ji* commission should choose only those sober, respectable poems by their great-great-grandfather that they deemed worthy of their dynasty?

Further analysis of the Li imperial family's engagement in verse over Taizong's lifetime will show that the received picture, dominated by Taizong's own verse, is a distorted one. Just as the *Zhenguan zheng yao* represents a selected and distorted view of Tang court life, so the verse that survives from Taizong's court provides only a partial view of court activity in music and verse. Here the trend was towards increasing activity by the princes, but of the loss of almost all their verse. "No man is an island," and Taizong, it must be emphasized again, did not live alone in the palace community. His main company was provided by his many women, his uncles and brothers and his own children, to some of whom he showed special devotion. His father Gaozu's kinsmen had been rowdy and violent men, disrupting the good order of the court, as likely to brawl as to compose verse. They were also clearly sensitive about their status in relation to the emperor's high civil officials and scholar advisors.¹⁴⁶ The *Zhenguan zheng yao* records that Taizong was particularly intimate with two: of one, Li Xiaogong 李孝恭 (591–640) it is recorded: "[he] was by nature extravagant and high-living and he valued excursions and feasting. He had more than one hundred singing girls and female dancers. Yet he was generous and indulgent, and retiring in manner, without any boastful or arrogant demeanour. Taizong treated him with extreme intimacy, so that not one of the imperial clansmen could rival him [for the favour in which the emperor held him]."¹⁴⁷ This suggests that Taizong found congenial

¹⁴⁴ Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁵ *JTS*, *juan* 95, p. 3011; *juan* 86, p. 2833.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, *juan* 60, pp. 2339–58; and McMullen, "Disorder in the Ranks," pp. 35–41.

¹⁴⁷ *JTS*, *juan* 60, p. 2349.

the company of a man who had no political ambitions, but indulged extravagantly in song and dance. It hardly suggests that, in the company of his own kin, the emperor was obsessed with the restraint that his advisors so insistently urged on him.¹⁴⁸ The second, Li Daozong 李道宗 (600–653), a powerful and successful soldier, was charged with unruly behaviour in court assemblies. But he was said to have been a lover of learning, respectful of good men and observant of propriety and yielding with his every action. Taizong was said in person to have cauterized his foot injury in 645 on campaign in the north-east.¹⁴⁹ These men were surely likely to have composed song or verse texts; but if they or any other members of this generation of Li princes did so, none has survived.¹⁵⁰

Of Gaozu's twenty-two sons, Taizong's half brothers, only Li Yuanjia 李元嘉, prince of Han 韓 (d. 688), was seriously commended for learning and scholarship.¹⁵¹ But there is a clear indication that this second generation of the dynasty started to appropriate more refined values than those of their uncles.¹⁵² Li Yuanguai 李元軌, prince of Huo 霍 (d. 688), was highly commended by Wei Zheng. Li Yuanchang 李元昌, prince of Han 漢, ordered by an unwilling emperor in 643 to commit suicide for plotting with the crown prince,¹⁵³ and Li Yuanyi 李元懿, prince of Zheng 鄭 (d. 673), were said to have loved learning when young. Li Yuanyu 李元裕, prince of Deng 鄧 (d. 665), was said to have "loved learning and to have been skilled at discussing definitions and principles"; Li Lingkuai 李靈夔, prince of Lu 魯 (d. 688), Gaozu's nineteenth son, was said to have been skilled musician and to have loved learning.¹⁵⁴ Others, like Li Yuanli 李元禮, prince of Xu 徐 (d. 672), were commended for martial skills, including archery. But still others, like Gaozu's twentieth son, Li Yuanxiang 李元祥 prince of Jiang 江, were by-words for venality and greed.

Taizong had fourteen sons.¹⁵⁵ The oldest, presumptive heir apparent, Li Chengqian, until his deposition in 643, is portrayed as having lived a life of histrionic licence and irresponsibility within the very same larger court complex in which Taizong himself lived (pp. 44–46). He was an obsessive drummer, and among his

¹⁴⁸ Taizong was also liberal in presenting meritorious servants with women: he gave Li Daliang 1,000 bolts of silk and slave girls (*nübei* 奴婢) 150 in number, and these "he passed on to his relatives"; see *JTS*, *juan* 62, p. 2389.

¹⁴⁹ *ZGZY*, *juan* 9, p. 483; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 198, p. 6229, dates to 645.

¹⁵⁰ *ZGZY*, *juan* 6, pp. 325–26.

¹⁵¹ *JTS*, *juan* 64, p. 2427.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 2413–39.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2425–26.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2434.

¹⁵⁵ Biographies in *JTS*, *juan* 76, pp. 2647–67.

other excesses was an addiction to building. The third, Li Que 李恪, prince of Wu 吳, was said to have had “civil and military ability” and to have resembled Taizong, but after Taizong’s death was resented by Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, implicated in a rebellion and executed. The severely obese Li Tai 李泰 (618–652), prince of Wei 魏, his fourth son, was from youth addicted to literature and composition. Taizong himself commended his literary style, implying that he had what his other sons lacked. He lived outside the main palace complex, in the Yankang 延康 ward of the capital, and Taizong showed him exceptional favour, allowing him to be carried into court. This incurred the censure of Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–558), and when Taizong moved him into the main palace complex, intending to manoeuvre him into the heir apparenancy, Wei Zheng too expressed his displeasure.¹⁵⁶ There are indications that Li Tai may have been, like Sui Yangdi and Taizong himself, attracted by southern court culture.¹⁵⁷ He was implicated in Li Chengqian’s downfall, demoted and sequestered at Junzhou 均州, dying finally in exile at Yunxiang 鄖鄉 in modern Hubei. The geographical treatise *Kuodi zhi* 括地志 was compiled under his direction. But Li You 李祐, Taizong’s fifth son, was another byword for pleasure seeking, being, like Taizong himself, addicted to hunting, as was his sixth. Of the others, his seventh and eighth, were not commended for erudition; only his tenth Li Shen 李慎, prince of Ji 紀, was said to have been fond of learning.

On this evidence, what place verse composition had within the larger palace community peopled by these princes is hard to tell. But a related fact is perhaps as telling: of this large group of close imperial kinsmen, only three of Gaozu’s sons, Taizong’s half-brothers, have poems extant: one was Li Yuanli 李元禮, Gaozu’s tenth son, and his single poem is a Buddhist homily against eating living creatures.¹⁵⁸ The second was Li Yuanguai, who, after Taizong’s death, wrote a linked verse with his nephew, Li Zhi 李治, the emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628–683, r. 650–683).¹⁵⁹ The third was the learned Li Yuanjia, prince of Han, whose single poem was a court composition again for Li Zhi, from 643 the crown prince, the future Gaozong, thus

¹⁵⁶ *ZGZY*, *juan* 6, p. 350; *JTS*, *juan* 76, pp. 2653–55.

¹⁵⁷ Taizong is recorded as having delivered a written encomium on Yu Shinan, the representative of southern culture to his favoured prince Li Tai on Yu’s death; see *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 75. In 628, Tai was enfeoffed as prince of Yue 越 and given the post of governor general of Yangzhou 揚州, Sui Yangdi’s capital; see *JTS*, *juan* 76, p. 2653.

¹⁵⁸ *Quan Tang shi bubian* 全唐詩補編, ed. Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), *juan* 4, p. 684. The poem was inscribed in stone in the Northern Song period.

¹⁵⁹ *Quan Tang shi bubian*, *juan* 7, p. 736.

written when Taizong was on the throne.¹⁶⁰ Only one of Taizong's own sons, Li Zhen 李貞 (d. 688), prince of Yue 越, has a poem surviving. It need hardly be supposed that these were the only poems these men wrote. Li Tai, admired by Taizong himself for his literary style, is certain to have composed verse. What it rather means is that any verse this group did write in court contexts, in the emperor's company or otherwise, was not considered a priority for preservation. Two of these poems, those by Li Yuanjia and by Li Zhen, were edited into the *Chuxue ji*, the literary reference work written for the edification of Xuanzong's sons.¹⁶¹ In the case of Li Zhen's poem, the reason was surely that Li Zhen was the leader of the abortive rebellion of Li princes against the empress Wu in 688, in which so many Li princes perished. His heroism secured him a place in the grand narrative of the Li imperial house.¹⁶² Moreover, the *Chuxue ji* also incorporates the poem by Gaozong himself for which Li Zhen's was a response.¹⁶³

This pattern of the loss of almost all the verse by the early Tang imperial clansmen is in sharp contrast to the numbers of poems surviving from the hands of Taizong's scholar advisors, a significant number of which survive. Of course, random factors operate in the transmission of any and every Tang poem. But in contrast to the verse of the princes, a collection of fifty-one poems of court poetry, "organized around thirteen topics . . . all matching poems by members of Tang Taizong's court",¹⁶⁴ was taken to Japan, probably at an early date. This suggests clearly how Taizong's advisors, in recording and collecting the verse of the court, focused on the emperor himself and on their own engagement with him, to the almost complete exclusion of members of the imperial clan. In effect, they isolated the emperor from the social community in which he lived, making him "an island," and using him as a vehicle for their political and literary ideals. They left it to their successors, some seven or eight decades later, to retrieve and preserve the very few respectable poems by imperial princes that had survived the purge of the Li clan by the empress Wu. The resulting picture of the literary milieu in which Taizong lived is, as a result, very incomplete.

¹⁶⁰ *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, comp. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), *juan* 6, p. 65; a note states that this poem was written when Gaozong was crown prince; Taizong was therefore emperor and the poem was written on a court occasion.

¹⁶¹ *Chuxue ji*, *juan* 10, pp. 233–34, for Li Yuanjia's poem; *juan* 7, p. 146, for Li Zhen's.

¹⁶² *Quan Tang shi*, *juan* 6, p. 66.

¹⁶³ *Chuxue ji*, *juan* 7, p. 146.

¹⁶⁴ These were contained in an anthology entitled *Hanlin xueshi ji*, preserved in Japan and reintroduced into China in the late nineteenth century. See Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, pp. 237–38.

A consequence of this almost exclusive focus on Taizong is that his attitudes to *belles-lettres* are relatively well documented. He was by early training and experience above all a soldier. His early instruction, it was shown above, was at Bingzhou in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 by Zhang Houyin.¹⁶⁵ It was at Bingzhou therefore that Li Yuan re-activated the Sui policy of drawing in southern scholars to his entourage, but the process was in its infancy at this stage. Taizong himself claimed that he was exclusively a soldier in his early youth. And although it would be unwise to infer too much from this, for men with military backgrounds, the *Zuozhuan* was often the key to literacy. Early specialization in the *Zuozhuan* was recorded as a feature of a number of generals of the Tang period, including Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (d. 756), Tian Hongzheng 田弘正 (764–821), Wang E 王鐔 (760–815), Li Guangbi 李光弼 (708–764), and Ma Sui 馬遂 (726–795).¹⁶⁶ Not one of these is survived by any quantity of verse.¹⁶⁷ An exercise that remains to be conducted is to identify more fully the use made of the *Zuozhuan* in Taizong's surviving corpus of verse and in his court discussions. Having been trained early in this text, it might be expected that allusions and other references to it might recur in poetry from his own hand.

Taizong himself composed in the “palace style,” the style identified with the sybaritic courts of the last southern dynasties. The fascination that he had, like that of the Sui emperor Yangdi, for southern court culture lasted through his reign and greatly concerned his advisors. In 645, for example, he asked of Cen Wenben, “Which of the famous ministers of the Liang and Chen deserve praise, and do they have progeny whom one could bring into service?”¹⁶⁸ He certainly read the literary collections (*wen ji* 文集) of the Sui emperors, and also the famous compositions by representative southern authors, for it was shown above that he quoted from Yu Xin's “Ai Jiangnan fu” in a homily to his attendant officials in 628.¹⁶⁹ He may well have composed more in the southern court style or listened to more compositions from this period than the records suggest. It is highly significant that in 631 Wei Zheng made the condemnation of the values expressed in the “compositions of emperors of recent times” the first point in his preface to the *Qun shu zhiyao*, his digest of writing on statecraft. To give this issue such prominence in the preface to a digest that was not about *belles-lettres* at all, but rather about statecraft, indicates how acute he felt the dangers of this form of indulgence were. The exchange Taizong had with Yu Shinan on the topic has been

¹⁶⁵ *JTS*, *juan* 189A, p. 4950, biography of Zhang Houyin.

¹⁶⁶ McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China*, p. 297, n. 53.

¹⁶⁷ Geshu Han has one poem preserved at Dunhuang and one in a *biji* source; see *Quan Tang shi bubian*, *juan* 13, p. 850.

¹⁶⁸ *JTS*, *juan* 190A, p. 4985. The likely date for this remark, which was made when Gaozong was “in a vassal [post]” is 645; see *ZZTJ*, *juan* 197, p. 6218.

¹⁶⁹ *ZGZY*, *juan* 6, pp. 330–31.

analyzed by Chen (pp. 146–48) and also by Xiaofei Tian.¹⁷⁰ The “seductive” (*yan* 豔) or “palace style” (*gong ti* 宮體) poems that Taizong confessed to having composed “for fun” have not survived, so that no idea can be derived of how many he composed and on what themes; but the earlier account of this interaction implies that they originated in a context in which Yu Shinan, the leading exemplar of the moderate side of southern court culture, was not present and that Taizong showed them to him later.¹⁷¹

Taizong, however, most clearly revealed his own, highly unconventional opinion on the court music and verse performances of the late southern dynasties in an incident of 628 that Chen does not mention. In this he expressed a view that contravened one of the basic tenets of the traditional theory of music and verse that his advisors promoted, namely that it was politically significant because it identified the mood of the people. When a scholar advisor, Zu Xiaosun 祖孝孫,¹⁷² presented a newly drafted series of court musical compositions, Taizong suggested that music and ritual were created by the sages “in response to things, rendering it rhythmically.” But then he added, “How could good or evil in administration be caused by this?” Answering the objection that followed from Du Yan 杜淹 (d. 628), he stated that a man responding to music did not have his mood changed by it, for a man’s mood existed prior to his hearing it. Music merely confirmed his existing mood. “How can musical notation move a man? When a man who is happy hears it, he is delighted; when a man who is depressed hears it, he is mournful. Mournfulness or delight are present in a man’s heart, it is not that they derive from the music. . . . What question can there be of the sadness and resentment of [a piece of] music making someone who is delighted sad?” He thus rejected the view deriving originally from the Han exegesis of the *Mao shi* that the music and verse of the late southern courts were necessarily “the notes of a state that is perishing,” and could have a pernicious effect on listeners. He then indicated that he had access to two of the most notorious compositions of the late southern courts, Chen Houzhu’s “Yu shu houting hua” 玉樹後庭花 and the “Banlü” 伴侶 song and could have them played to his advisors. These songs, which glorified the beauty of his palace women, had been identified as a nadir in court decadence.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Full references are supplied by Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 147, n. 101. See Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, MA: Published by the Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2007), pp. 185–88, 210.

¹⁷¹ See the version in *Da Tang xin yu*, *juan* 3, pp. 41–42.

¹⁷² *JTS*, *juan* 79, pp. 2709–10.

¹⁷³ *Chen shu*, *juan* 7, p. 132; *JTS*, *juan* 28, pp. 1040–41; *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 417; Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), *juan* 142, p. 3654, small column entry; *THY*, *juan* 32, p. 588.

There are several ways in which this incident may be interpreted. One is that Taizong was more deeply fascinated by these late southern court compositions and performances than Chen allows. Taizong implies that they are altogether less dangerous than his advisors maintain. He indicates that the music is still available to him and that “were I to have it played for you, I know that you would simply not be made mournful [by it].” Another inference is that, as a soldier and a man of action, he enjoyed sensuous music at face value and simply did not believe that its mere musical performance could have the insidious effect that his advisors described. And it can only be recalled that Taizong was on especially intimate terms with his uncle Li Xiaogong, with his over one hundred singing girls, and that he himself made a gift of 150 slave girls to the unwilling Li Daliang. He certainly had the resources to mount whatever performances he wished within the confines of his palace complex, and his aspiration “not to listen to pipes and strings and not to pursue the hunt,” made in 642, was surely no more than that.

Taizong’s attitude to *belles-lettres* thus seems inconsistent. At the start of his reign, he told his advisors that he preferred the plain-speaking messages of “memorials” (*shu* 書) to the indirect and high-flown diction of the *fu* 賦 (pp. 273–75). He objected to the inclusion of four named *fu* in the biographies of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.–C.E.), Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c. 179–117 B.C.E.) and Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 C.E.) in *Han shu* and *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, calling them “florid and ornate, and without benefit to moral encouragement or admonishment” (p. 273).¹⁷⁴ Chen characterizes this as “a rhetorical performance and not as presenting the emperor’s actual views on the rhapsody” (p. 274). In 638, he again expressed his suspicion of literary skill, refusing to allow his compositions to be collected in a *wenji* as Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, 464–549, r. 502–549), Chen Houzhu and Sui Yangdi had done.¹⁷⁵ He also read the literary collections of the Sui sovereigns, remarking on the discrepancy between their high moral tone and the base actions of the sovereigns themselves.¹⁷⁶ He thus rehearsed two incompatible views of the literary scene. In his interaction with his advisors, he was recorded as citing the canons and histories, quoting a late southern composition only once. But in less guarded moments, he was also, like Sui Yangdi, fascinated by southern refinement and licence. In the course of his reign, he compromised, acquiring the skill to compose that answered both his own desire for cultural sophistication and his advisors’ insistence that he compose in a sober and exemplary style. He left a legacy of poems that were considered models for his great-great grandsons.

¹⁷⁴ ZGZY, *juan* 7, p. 387.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 388; CFYG, *juan* 40, pp. 16a–b.

¹⁷⁶ ZGZY, “Xiezi tai ben *juan* di si” 寫字臺本卷第四, pp. 566–67.

He was probably never, however, a literary virtuoso. It may well be that his compositions were checked over before being given public exposure, by Shangguan Yi 上官儀 (608–664).¹⁷⁷ It is also very clear that other categories of writing that were issued in his name, particularly the highly crafted, demanding, and allusive edicts of political or ideological importance, were composed for him. In Gaozu's reign, Yan Shigu 顏師古 and the southerner Chen Shuda 陳叔達 (d. 635) were especially praised for such compositions; in Taizong's reign, it was his favoured southerner Yu Shinan.¹⁷⁸ It was shown above that the edicts relating to the Yuhua palace were almost certainly composed for him by Xu Jingzong. There remains a disjunction between the sort of remarks Taizong made to his advisors about reading and the erudition and poetic sophistication that Chen brings out in analysing the emperor's monumental compositions. But that disjunction is likely to have been bridged at least partly by his advisors, for whom the emperor's literature was such a concern. Taizong had great ambition, and he surely collaborated with his scholars, exploiting the established tradition of court verse to craft an image of what Chen so persuasively characterizes as, "a reign of sagely exemplarity, thereby transforming the problematic realities of empire into something pure and flawless" (p. 383). He was also, perhaps at a naïve level, aware of the deficit between literary representation and historical reality. For on reading the Sui emperors' *wenji*, he remarked, "When I read the literary collections of the Sui rulers, they are truly and talented, and they knew too how to take delight in the spirit of Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 and to hate the behaviour of Jie 桀 and Zhou 紂. And yet their management of affairs was the opposite of what they said. Why was this so?"¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

A modern reader of the sources for the Zhenguan reign might be forgiven for inferring that Taizong spent a high proportion of his time in intense and elevated discussions with his Confucian courtiers, with occasions for dignified poetry interspersed. But the disjunction between what Chen calls "rhetorical performance" and "actual views," between the rhetorical mode of the sources and the reality of palace and political life, must not be overlooked. This review certainly does not claim to say the last word on

¹⁷⁷ Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T'ang*, p. 53; Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 258. The basis for this observation is *JTS*, *juan* 80, p. 2743.

¹⁷⁸ It is tempting to assume that an edict like that of 634, which opens with, "We have recently searched through the canon and the histories," was crafted by advisors; See *ZGZY*, *juan* 4, p. 201.

¹⁷⁹ *ZGZY*, "Xiezi tai ben *juan* di si," pp. 566–67.

Taizong the man, the blood he shed, and his own sweat and tears. A detailed sense of how the court spent its time is also beyond its scope. Yet in the quest for a more authoritative understanding of the individuality of one of the towering figures in Chinese history, it is as well to recall that the apex of the Zhenguan state was a place where extremes of anger or other emotions were frequently recorded. Anger is perhaps the emotion that can be identified with most confidence across a time span of nearly 1,300 years. An emperor held “the levers of life and death,” and Taizong recognized the danger of impulsive, extra-judicial decisions to execute taken when angry.¹⁸⁰ According to the *Zhenguan zheng yao*, he came close to executing extra-judicially or actually executed five or six figures.¹⁸¹ He admitted to having killed the president of the board of justice (xingbu shangshu 刑部尚書) Zhang Liang 張亮 (d. 636) “in a towering rage.” He might subsequently express regret at have executed in anger a man on suspicion of sedition, as he did also in the case of Zhang Wengu 張蘊古 (d. 631), assistant at the court of justice (dali zheng 大理丞).¹⁸² He showed no compunction in murdering the crown prince Li Chengqian’s catamite and several accomplices.¹⁸³ At the same time, and against the advice of his civil officials, he showed extreme fondness for favourites within the palace, his preference for his fourth son the obese and scholarly Li Tai being only one example. It is less the extremes of his emotion that seem relevant here than the inconsistency they involved. His emotional life was apparently otherwise volatile: as a teen-age soldier he was depicted as having wept copiously at his father’s tent, to persuade him to adopt more ambitious and aggressive campaigning tactics.¹⁸⁴ In 643, he “wept at length” on his birthday, citing the “Lu’e” 蓼莪 ode,¹⁸⁵ contemplating the loss of his parents,¹⁸⁶ a response that seems entirely inconsistent with his harsh treatment of his father from the time he deposed him

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., *juan* 2, p. 87, incident of 631. The phrase “levers of life and death” originates with the mid-Tang scholar Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), who remarked, in an essay on Hua Tuo 華佗, whose death was caused by Cao Cao’s 曹操 (155–220) anger, “I would observe that since the Cao Wei 曹魏 [dynasty] the numbers of men of ability whom the holders of the levers of life and death have through a single [fit of] temper killed are many.” See *Liu Yuxi ji* 劉禹錫集 (Shanghai: Shanghai remin chubanshe, 1975), pp. 50–51.

¹⁸¹ *ZGZY*, *juan* 2, p. 111; *juan* 6, p. 345; Taizong expressed regret for having done this in *ZGZY*, *juan* 8, p. 431, incident of 631.

¹⁸² *ZGZY*, *juan* 5, p. 287; *JTS*, *juan* 69, p. 2516; *ZGZY*, *juan* 8, p. 431; *JTS*, *juan* 190A, pp. 4993–94.

¹⁸³ *JTS*, *juan* 76, p. 2648.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., *juan* 2, p. 22.

¹⁸⁵ Legge, *The She King*, pp. 350–52. His advisors had urged him to show filial respect to Gaozu, breaking their rule on austerity in building, urging Taizong to rebuild the palace to high levels of grandeur to demonstrate his filiality. See above, n. 94.

¹⁸⁶ *ZGZY*, *juan* 7, p. 416; *ZZTJ*, *juan* 198, pp. 6242–43, dates to 646.

until Gaozu's death in 635. Chen also gives a full analysis of the episode in which Taizong, on excursion in the imperial gardens, to the consternation of his entourage (*zuoyou*), impulsively swallowed a handful of the locusts who were then plaguing the region (pp. 73–76). Again, at the height of the succession crisis over Li Chengqian, the emperor dramatically threatened to self-harm.¹⁸⁷ Such impulsive or volatile behaviour, combined with the record of murderous feuding within his court, conflicts with the impression of control conveyed by the measured phrasing of his statecraft utterances and, even more so, by the disciplined refinement of his verse. It suggests that the consistency in emotional response that a modern psychology expects was absent in seventh-century understanding of an individual's behaviour. Or else that those recording the emperor's responses were freer than their modern counterparts to idealize Taizong's individual actions, to isolate them from the general context, and to consider his excesses elsewhere irrelevant to them. An authentic understanding of his individuality thus remains elusive.

In summary, the strengths of this very considerable study lie in its analysis of medieval statecraft discourse understood in its broadest sense, and in Chen's highly informed and insightful literary historical analysis of Taizong's poems themselves. The author has clear principles for his analysis and he has applied them thoroughly to Taizong's surviving verse. But the post-modernist tendency to downplay the role of individual agency in reconstructing a historical ambience may yet risk doing a disservice to understanding the emperor in sharper focus. Taizong was brought up as a soldier, a horseman, and a man of action. At an early stage, as prince of Qin in 621, he recognized the need to recruit scholars and to endorse some of their values. He knew that sound administrators deployed empire-wide were essential to the survival of his own imperial line and the stability of his vast empire. He recognized the crucial difference between what he called the "government from within [the palace]" (*nei zheng* 內政) that the northern barbarians practised¹⁸⁸ and dynastic government shared with the civil administration (*gong li* 共理) that had been the Chinese ideal since Han times.¹⁸⁹ He acquired the language of his scholar advisors and spoke it with some

¹⁸⁷ *ZZTJ*, *juan* 197, p. 6196.

¹⁸⁸ *ZGZY*, *juan* 9, pp. 478–79.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, *juan* 7, p. 400. This episode is undated; but in another undated episode, in *ZGZY*, *juan* 4, pp. 197–98, his advisor Chu Suiliang reminded him of the origin of this phrase, in a remark by Han Xuandi 漢宣帝 (Liu Bingyi 劉病已, 91–48 B.C.E., r. 74–48 B.C.E.); *Han shu*, *juan* 89, p. 3624. The quotation was commonly made into Tang times; see for example, *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 61, p. 2016, biography of Zuo Xiong 左雄; also in the *Jin shu*, in which Taizong was involved; see *juan* 33, p. 994; also by Xuanzong in an edict of 720; see *Tang da zhaoling ji*, *juan* 103, p. 526; and in *JTS*, *juan* 185A, p. 4781, historian's introduction.

eloquence. He understood his advisors' ideals and gave them his time and attention, and he was a persuasive speaker. By his late forties, he could engage competitively with his advisors in scholarly and literary banter and in verse composition.¹⁹⁰ They in their turn responded rapturously, by selecting and preserving every lofty dictum he formulated, isolating it, exaggerating its moral message, and often rejoining with their own, even more elaborate formulations of political morality.

Yet, the Taizong of the *Zhenguan zheng yao* and of the *Chuxue ji* is likely to be only part of the picture. His own priorities were often different from those of his advisors. And it was precisely the interaction sparked by these differences, combined with an unusual, if fitful, talent for emollience in Taizong himself, that resulted in the distinctive and historically important body of material from the Zhenguan period that Chen has analysed. The foregoing analysis of three themes in his court discussions, those of the *fengjian* issue, the emperor's building programme, and the problem of the southern literary heritage, has suggested that there were in each case real, ongoing and unresolved clashes of interest between the emperor and his advisors and that the records of these are distorted by the commitment to idealize.

Taizong himself, it was shown above, realized that a process of idealization had operated in the cases of the Sui emperors' *wenji*. Much of the *Zhenguan zheng yao* and the emperor's verse is coloured by rhetoric, "spin," or idealization, and this idealization was taken to a further extreme in Taizong's verse. The scholar advisors were not as well in control as their inherent optimism and commitment to idealize sometimes led them to imply. The contour of the reign indicates that the emperor slid into precisely the kind of extravagant and despotic rule that he and they had wished earlier in the reign to avoid. To explore the emperor's ideology as thoroughly as Chen has done and to analyse his verse in its historic context as closely as he has done is to make an invaluable contribution to understanding the medieval concept of emperorship. But in the case of Taizong, this sort of approach should not deter scholars from continuing to confront the challenge of searching for a more detailed understanding of the emperor's own role. Taizong himself, it should be added, is unlikely to be diminished by such exercises.

¹⁹⁰ ZZTJ, juan 197, p. 6209; cf. the different wording in ZGZY, juan 6, p. 337.