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in modern China. As described in the epilogue, traditional medicine for women was still valued by doctors in China as a better alternative to Western obstetrics in the early twentieth century. The postpartum care meticulously analysed in the last chapter is still practised today and some of the concoctions are even globally commercialized.

In theoretical terms, Wu brilliantly revises Furth's notion of the androgynous body and proposes another way of imagining the body as "infinitive," "one that serves as the basis for all human bodies, to be conjugated into male and female, young and old, robust and delicate, Southern and Northern, depending on circumstances" (p. 232). The invention of *fuke* in the Song was thus not a production of gender difference, but a new way of explaining gender differences. Such differences were minimized in literate Ming-Qing medicine except for illnesses pertaining to childbirth. For Furth, late imperial doctors were "stepping back" from the Song distinctive female body. For Wu, these doctors simply saw this female body as just a variation of the infinitive body. In other words, it was no longer a question of the androgynous or the gendered body, but that of a distinct individualized body that late imperial doctors came to be interested in. This notion of the infinitive body further liberates our imagination of the body from all possible boundaries.

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Sound and Sight: Poetry and Courtier Culture in the Yongming Era (483–493). By Meow Hui Goh. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 192. $50.00.

Sound and Sight is the latest contribution to the growing body of interpretive scholarship by means of which we have been reassessing the cultural heritage of the Six Dynasties over the last twenty years. In this book, Meow Hui Goh constructs a picture of the life of the courtier-poet in the Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502) through a close reading of selected poems by Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499), and Wang Rong 王融 (467–493), commonly recognized as the three foremost poets active in the decade-long reign of Emperor Wu 武帝, when Qi court culture reached its zenith.

Looking back over Six Dynasties literary scholarship of the past decade, one feels that a book-length treatment of these three major poets was simply waiting to be written. Richard Mather's magisterial compendium of annotated translations of the poetic corpora of all three[1] furnished a basis for comparison in making new interpretations; Cynthia

[1] Richard B. Mather, *The Age of Eternal Brilliance: Three Lyric Poets of the Yung-ming Era (483–493)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), in which he builds upon the work begun in *The Poet Shen Yüeh (441–513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), a detailed study of Shen Yue's life, thought, and writings.

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Chennault's study of *yongwu shi* 詠物詩 ("poems about objects") in the Southern Qi[2] laid the ground for further analysis of the place of this vitally important sub-genre in their work; and Xiaofei Tian's portrait of the literary culture of the Liang 梁[3] (in which Shen Yue, who survived his fellow poets to rise to even greater eminence, figures prominently) was an invitation to write a "prequel" extending the treatment of overlapping issues back into the preceding dynasty.[4] Building on these foundations, Goh has struck out in a different direction and, out of simple constituents, developed a spare and elegant new thesis.

The author begins with the term *shengse* 聲色, literally, the "sound and sight" of her title. In its original meaning of "pleasures of the senses," *shengse* has always carried strong overtones of moral condemnation,[5] which Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769), writing on literary history, co-opted to describe what he saw as an excessive preoccupation with ornate surfaces in Six Dynasties poetry and the disastrous eclipse of fundamental values that this betokened. Goh sets out to redefine *shengse* as a morally neutral literary term, especially as applied to the experiments of the poets of the Yongming 永明 era out of which was born the distinctive period style known as *Yongming ti* 永明體. "Sound" refers to a heightened sensitivity to the sounds of words that inspired these poets to make the prosodic innovations involving tonal antithesis with which the Yongming style has become identified;[6] "sight" refers to the keen interest they showed in the world around

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2 Cynthia L. Chennault, "Odes on Objects and Patronage during the Southern Qi," in *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History: In honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman,* ed. Paul W. Kroll and David R. Knechtges (Provo, UT: T'ang Studies Society, 2003), pp. 331–98.

3 Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

4 Out of a substantial bibliography of English and Chinese sources, Goh cites these three with the greatest frequency.

5 Goh cites an early use in a Shang 商 dynasty proclamation that strictly disapproves sensual indulgence; however, since all the pre-Zhou 周 material in the *Shang shu* 尚書 actually dates from the late Warring States, this cannot be attested.

6 Shen Yue is historically credited (or taxed, as the case may be) with the invention of tonal prosody, but it is more likely that he was only one of a number of poets contributing to the formation of a theory that reached full elaboration only in the hands of the early Tang poets—the infamous "four tones and eight defects" (*sisheng babing* 四聲八病) that have been the bane of Chinese school children ever since. The author argues that the theory was attributed to Shen through a deliberate act of interpolation in the *Nan shi* 南史 . I find a remarkable concurrence between the chain of reasoning by which she arrives at this conclusion (pp. 22–23) and that presented by Lin Jiali 林家驪 in Shen Yue yanjiu 沈約研究 (Hangzhou 杭州 : Hangzhou daxue chubanshe 杭州大學出版社 , 1999), pp. 253–55.

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them and the unprecedented acuity with which they depicted what they saw. Together, "sound and sight" stand for a new poetics, founded on a new mode of seeing and hearing, one that, Goh argues, grows out of a focused attention to the multifarious phenomena that make up the stream of our conditioned existence— or, to borrow Blake's phrase, the world in all its "minute particulars."

Since the Wei 魏 (220–265) and Jin 晉 (265–420), with the growing importance of literary distinction as a mark of useful talent, the ability to write—especially to write poetry—had come to the fore as a way of showing one's employability to a potential patron through whom a position of prestige or influence might be obtained. During the Qi and Liang, when princely courts, like those of Renaissance Italy, stood at the heart of élite cultural life, philosophical speculation, and artistic productivity, members of the ruling family often made the most powerful patrons; among these, the Prince of Jingling 竟陵王 (Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良, d. 494), the patron of the three Yongming poets, commanded the largest and, arguably, most brilliant salon of all. Seeking patronage in this milieu meant that, in order to show one's own merit, one had to stand out above others.[7] For this reason we see the rise of a dynamics of competition and one-upmanship in court poetry, especially poetry arising from public performance, in which are embodied not only the desire to do well, but to do better than others, not only to compose the most original poem, but to accomplish this with the greatest speed and the least apparent effort, of all those present. The author duly notes the premium on "novelty and transformation" (*xinbian* 新變) in this period that motivates the metaphorical brilliance and prosodic virtuosity of its poetry (pp. 15–16); but what interests her is how such an approach to creativity can be explained in terms of Buddhist metaphysics.

It is axiomatic that Buddhism, already fully entrenched in the early Six Dynasties, had by the fifth century penetrated all aspects of both élite and mass culture. Twentieth-century scholars drew the connection between the encounter with Sanskrit and the discovery by the Chinese of the tonal nature of their own language, noting how the chanting of Buddhist sutras, with many transliterated terms, may have suggested the possibility of treating the tone of a word as a separate element to be manipulated for auditory effect.[8] Tian went on to connect Buddhist meditation, and its ideal of concentrating the mind as the key to enlightenment, with the development of an "intensely visual" approach to poetry in the Palace Style, visual in the sense that it places emphasis

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7 This was perhaps the reason behind the subtle shift in emphasis from the traditional view of poetry as the vehicle of sincere intent, still held in the Wei-Jin, to one, prevalent in the Qi and Liang, in which poetry becomes important as a means of self-display.

8 Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 , Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤 , Victor H. Mair, Tsu-lin Mei 梅祖麟 , and Richard Mather, to name a few. As some have remarked, it is perhaps no accident that Shen Yue and Zhou Yong 周顒 (d. 488), both of whom practised tonal prosody and contributed to its theoretical formulation, also wrote learned treatises about Buddhism.

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on the act of seeing itself.[9] Taking these conclusions a step further, Goh seeks to prove an ontological basis in doctrinal Buddhism for the poetics of both "sound" and "sight" in the work of the Yongming poets.

Avers Goh, the time-honoured Confucian principle of using literature to identify able men to serve the state became, in Six Dynasties practice, conflated with the Buddhist concept of the "worthy one" (*xianzhe* 賢者), one who is wise as opposed to "obtuse" (*yu* 愚). Subjecting Shen Yue's famous expository essay "On the Non-Extinction of the Spirit" (*Shen bumie yi* 神不滅義)[10] to careful dissection, Goh finds in it an important source of the "hybrid concept of personal worth" (p. 20) that she believes to be the guiding principle behind the culture of the patron-protégé relationship at the Qi court. More importantly, Shen's "argument" contains a detailed exegesis of the nature of existence and the steps through which the wise man may, in seeking to apprehend that nature, progress toward enlightenment. What makes a man wise is his ability to analyse thought—meaning both the mind and the perceptions generated by the mind—into the endless "succession of thought-instants" (*nian* 念) of which it is in fact composed, and in so doing to advance from insight into the emptiness of perception, to the emptiness of both the perceiving self and the act of perceiving, and finally to emptiness itself (p. 19). The author detects a close analogy between the operations of the mind of this "worthy one," as it works painstakingly through smaller and ever more subtle refinements, and the poetic practice of the courtier-poet.

Especially in *yongwu* poetry, a form designed at once to challenge and to cultivate the powers of observation, Goh sees a particularizing approach to the analysis of minutiae as the distinguishing mark of the Yongming poet. Using examples from all three poets, she shows how the aim of these poetic encounters is not so much to show the object in a refreshing new light as to discover something about it that is hidden or exists only in potential. Thus, Xie Tiao on bamboo, Shen Yue on budding lotus, and Wang Rong on the dodder all present views constructed from "minute happenings" (p. 49)—underlying processes of transformation—in revealing which the poet reveals his own discerning eye. Goh makes a trenchant comparison between Shen's "New Lotuses: By Imperial Command" and an early treatment of lotus blossoms by Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), contrasting the steady outward movement of Zhang's vision with the way in which Shen, who begins with the unsightly appearance of the lowly (*jian* 賤) buds and ends with the "purple" and "red" stored inside their "inch-hearts," keeps our eyes closely trained on an

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9 *Beacon Fire,* p. 234, and the foregoing section, pp. 224–33.

10 Written by Imperial command at the Liang court to respond to a fellow courtier's treatise "On the Extinction of the Spirit" (*Shen mie lun* 神滅論), this brilliantly argued defense of the indestructibility of the *atman* has also been extensively studied by Mather and Tian. The author acknowledges the particular influence of the latter on her own understanding of Shen's doctrinal thinking.

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aspect of the object we cannot see but that the poet, with his "lingering and penetrating" gaze, sees *through* in order to reveal the truth that lies beneath (pp. 49–51).[11] Noting the powerful allegorizing tendency in Southern Qi *yongwu* poetry, Chennault saw this as motivated by the courtier-poet's wish, in describing the object, simultaneously to present his own case to his patron. While accepting this interpretation of *yongwu* poetry as a forum for negotiating value, Goh points out the focus on "the subtle, the unnoticed, and even the invisible" as the unique distinction of the Yongming achievement in this form, which alters the world in the act of perceiving it, making it "more real and yet more illusory" (p. 55).

The author's persuasively argued case—that the new poetics of Yongming-era court poetry was founded on, and in practice subtly guided by, Buddhist principles— takes up roughly the first three chapters of *Sound and Sight*. In the remaining three chapters, she extends her study into the world outside the court, as her poets encountered it in their poetic excursions.[12]

Chapter Four deals with the garden in Yongming poetry. With the growth of the capital Jiankang 建康 to a city of unprecedented size, the garden—a privately owned space in the suburbs—came to represent in Six Dynasties aesthetics an intermediary space between the human realm (of those engaged in society) and the wilderness (the domain of the recluse). Here, says Goh, by setting himself at a certain distance from the capital, the poet could temporarily withdraw from court life without becoming detached from it, and explore, without having to commit to, his inclination for a peaceful life in retirement. From a suburban retreat, the logical next step is complete removal from the environs of the capital city: Chapter Five retraces the path taken by Shen Yue and Xie Tiao as they went out on assignment to provincial posts, and Chapter Six follows them in their encounters with the natural landscape along the way, as the author rounds out her portrait of the courtier-poet's life away from the court. For Goh, the twin poles of yearning in this arena take the form of the poet's attachment to the capital as the emblem of a life of committed service on the one hand and, on the other, nostalgia for his hometown, the projected locus of his final escape from the turmoil and perturbations of political involvement.[13]

The author continues her analysis of the poetics of "sight" and "sound" in these three chapters by examining the way the Yongming poets handle the perception and representation of space in the garden and of motion as they travel through the landscape.

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[11] In both pieces, the poet addresses the Emperor he is eager to serve, but the courtly gesture with which Zhang ends his poem, as he appeals to a lord whose gaze he fears may shift elsewhere, pales beside the emblematic connection that Shen draws between the flower buds about to explode with colour and the ardour filling his own "unworthy" (*jian*) heart.

[12] Primarily those of Xie Tiao and Shen Yue.

[13] As the author notes, this is complicated in the case of Xie Tiao, whose hometown was Jiankang.

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Consistent with the distinctive qualities she has identified in their *yongwu* poetry, Goh finds an interest in presenting views that show the vantage point of the viewer, such as doors and windows that, by framing a garden, show it as being perceived by human eyes (p. 75); or shifting views of a landscape, captured as specific moments created by the play of light and shadow or the movement of clouds and rain (p. 112), that accentuate not the landscape but the individual act of observation, not beauty itself but its momentariness and, above all, the mind that perceives it as so. Through these encounters, as nature becomes a space for his mind to "roam" and then "vacate," the poet enters into a "forgetting" that brings him closer to "a Buddhist state of absolute and complete void" (pp. 71–72).

Xie Tiao, who was at his best and most prolific during his brief respite from court politics as the Grand Warden of Xuancheng 宣城太守 (495–497), comes naturally to the fore in the last two chapters. Goh traces the evolution of the poetic journey in his work, filiating it to such influences as the travel poems of Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303)[14] and his own ancestor Xie Lingyun's 謝靈運 (385–433) monumental landscapes. She also attempts to situate these excursions into the natural world in the context of the nascent aesthetics of landscape painting, showing how, given the strong visual emphasis of the Yongming poets, the contradictory impulses of desire for possession and the need for transcendence that are implicit in their poetic encounters can be both illuminated and complicated by a painter's perspective. To the extent that these additional lines of thought take different aspects of cultural history into account, they enlarge the scope of the book and enrich the reader's experience; but precisely because the second half of the book is more ambitious than the first, parts of it are not fully integrated into Goh's main argument. However, since garden poetry and the poetry of landscapes were destined to grow into two of the most important sub-genres in Tang 唐 poetry, perhaps the work done in these chapters will become the foundation for another book, one in which the author assesses the role of Xie Tiao and his fellow poets as pioneers of major movements later taken up in the Tang—in addition to the prosodic experiments with which the present book begins.[15] In this way, Goh's study of the contributions of the Yongming poets would be even more complete.

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[14] Lu Ji wrote two famous poems (partially quoted on p. 90) commemorating the journey from his native place, the recently subjugated state of Wu 吳, to the Western Jin capital of Luoyang 洛陽, where he soon became one of the new dynasty's pre-eminent court poets. The complex mixture of emotions in these and later poems, in which this ambitious young man expresses his alienation from the pursuit of power, clearly resonated with Xie Tiao's personal conflicts.

[15] In her introduction to *A Grammar of the T'ang Poetic Journey* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1990), Suk-hong Cheung (now writing as Chang Shu-hsing 張淑香) briefly describes the way in which the landscape poetry of the Six Dynasties influenced the evolution of the Tang travel poem. Her final chapter is titled "The Return: The Dialectics of the Strange Land and the Homeland."

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I would like now to take issue with the author on two points. First, a note on the translation of the poems: as Goh has ably demonstrated, the Yongming poets and their compeers were intensely interested in the "minute particulars" of what they saw and heard, and they accordingly invested a great deal of energy in finding out new ways to present their perceptions of sensory phenomena. When successful, the result is a fresh and arresting perspective that makes the reader feel that he is experiencing these sights and sounds (and sometimes smells and tastes) as never before. Given the milieu in which these poems were being composed, however, the immediate audience of any poetic performance would have included not only the patron that one was seeking to impress but also the fellow poets that one was hoping to surpass, so that, properly managed, a given performance should succeed in evoking the appreciative resonance of the one as well as a certain amount of envious admiration from the other. Since the complex psychology of performance is necessarily encoded in the finished piece, the translation too should, in addition to being accurate, hopefully convey something of the excitement of this process, its drama and flair, as embodied in the images and gestures by means of which these poets strove to realize themselves in the act of creation.

For example, in the series of linked verses by different poets extolling the beauty of their host's garden on p. 70, Retainer He 何從事 kicks off with the first quatrain, of which lines 3 and 4 are rendered thus: "As their slanted leaves move with the mild whirlwind, / Their lengthy stalks await the high-soaring cranes" 傾葉順清飆，脩莖佇高鶴. I suggest a slightly different reading: "Tumbling leaves bow down to the briskly eddying wind, / Among the lengthy stalks a tall crane stands watch."[16] The rapid movement of the leaves as they tend towards the horizontal makes a pleasant contrast with the stationary perpendicularity of the crane, but the antithesis smacks a little of contrivance. Contrast this with a couplet by Xie Tiao from another garden poem, which the author translates: "Frosty pathways, in multitude, crisscross in webs; / Fall field-dividers are becoming dense from profuse undergrowth" 霜畦紛綺錯，秋町鬱蒙茸 (ll. 5–6, p. 75). I suggest the following emendation: "Frosty pathways crisscross in orderly profusion, / Rampant overgrowth has overwhelmed the field-paths in fall."[17] Together, these two images form a snapshot of late fall, just as the vegetation is about to die back with the onset of a cold spell; in their sensitive attention to quotidian and un-poetic details, they also make a good example of the kind of insightful observation that is such a key part of the Yongming signature. The parallelism here is a good deal more artful, but being subtler, feels more natural than Retainer He's rather wooden couplet. The descriptive verbs *fen* 紛 and *yu* 鬱 are complementary in that both include the lexical meanings of "dense" and "profuse,"

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16 "Tumbling leaves" is an example of prolepsis; the crane is keeping guard over its territory with its long neck sticking up.

17 The raised paths (*ting* 町), once highly visible, are covered with weeds that have been allowed to grow unchecked since the end of the harvest.

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but contrastive in that the former is applied to man-made objects neatly laid out and the latter an unruly vegetable mass; but, lest this antithesis seem too tidy, it is offset by the visual alliteration, slightly de-centred, in the repetition of the silk radical in the third and fourth characters of line 5, and of the grass radical in the fourth and fifth characters of line 6. Xie's poem is a response "harmonizing with" a poem by Shen Yue on "Strolling Through the Garden" (p. 74); as is appropriate to the contemplative theme and the more personal nature of the exchange, Xie's tone is courteous and restrained, but—even as he pays homage to the older poet and the poem that has inspired his own—his desire to excel, and to exceed the original, still shines through.[18] Retainer He gives a fair-to-middling performance; from Xie Tiao we get a truly masterful one. But, whether or not one wishes to highlight the interactive aspect of the poetry of the Yongming era, the process of creative engagement through which a poem of this kind comes into being is no less important as a constitutive element of the poem than the physical artifact in which it is inscribed, and hence is something that should not be overlooked.

Next and last, Goh frames her evaluation of the Yongming poets in terms of an act of rehabilitation. She opens by exonerating their interest in "sight and sound" from the historical charge of being morally tainted or, at best, lacking in moral substance, and ends with the following summation of their achievement: "[T]he representation of sound, sight, space, and motion could now fully represent the poetic self. Rather than shifting the attention to the 'surface' or 'exterior' forms of poetry, the Yongming poets were calling attention to the perceptive mind behind their process of seeing and hearing. Not conceding that they were merely crafting the outer, they established themselves as a new kind of poetic and aesthetic subject" (p. 122). It seems to be an occupational hazard of Six Dynasties cultural historians that, at some point in their narrative, they feel the need to make a case for the high seriousness of the work under study.[19] In the present instance, by reading the innovative experiments of the Yongming era as ultimately pointing back to the poet's self (the locus of the "intent" or *zhi* 志 that in the orthodox view is the true source of lyric poetry), the author implicitly puts the Yongming poets in the line of succession, stretching from the end of Han 漢 down to the High Tang, from which they (and most other Six Dynasties poets) have traditionally been excluded. Without questioning this view

18 Following Mather, Goh has rendered the last two characters in this poem, *qingcong* 青蔥, as "green onions." I take *qingcong* as a descriptive epithet (belonging to the same class of alliterative compounds as *linglong* 玲瓏, *mimeng* 迷蒙, and *pengpai* 澎湃), suggesting the deep green hues of a lush expanse of verdure.

19 This is particularly true of scholarship on Palace Style poetry, the dominant poetic form of the late Six Dynasties, with its strong erotic bent; see the spirited defence mounted by Anne Birrell in *Games Poets Play: Readings in Medieval Chinese Poetry* (Cambridge, England: McGuinness China Monographs, 2004), her groundbreaking re-evaluation of the poetics of the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠.

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of literary history, I wonder why the author finds it necessary to fit these poets into the mainstream, as it has come to be defined, and whether in doing so she—along with others like myself—is influenced by a system of values whose validity should perhaps be re-examined.

It was the good fortune of the three men in this book to be recognized as great poets in their own lifetime, and their ill fortune, when literary tastes changed, to have their work held up against new standards of excellence and be found wanting. What is interesting, however, is not that period styles can go out of fashion, but the unmitigated vehemence with which the literary culture of the Six Dynasties was rejected as a whole. The change began with the self-scrutiny of the Mid-Tang poets, gained ground as the poetics of "recovering the past" (*fugu* 復古) became entrenched, and was fully fixed by the canon formation of the Song 宋. Before this, Six Dynasties poetry was read with sensitive appreciation: Li Bo 李白 (701–762) showed his fervent admiration of Xie Tiao in frequent borrowings and imitations,[20] and the Six Dynasties poets loomed large among Du Fu's 杜甫 (712–770) favourites.[21] Gradually, however, the qualities of "novelty and transformation," once so highly prized, became paltry and insignificant as two individuals— Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427) and Du Fu— rose from obscurity to become the cynosure of classical Chinese poetry for all time.

In their respective roles as the greatest pre-Tang poet and the greatest poet since the Tang, Tao Qian and Du Fu have several things in common. First, they were little involved in political life and virtually unknown in poetic circles in their own day.[22] Hence they wrote mostly in private, producing few works, if any, for court occasions or social exchange, and their poetic voice is an intensely personal one. Second, lacking a contemporary audience, they knew that they were writing for posterity and, accordingly,

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[20] Notwithstanding his lip service to the still incipient poetics of "recovering the past" in such poems as "Ancient Airs" 古風 , No. 1—a brilliant poem, but jejune as literary criticism.

[21] To the extent that Du Fu wrote literary criticism at all, he praised the Six Dynasties poets. He makes this flattering comparison about Li Bo's style: "Clean and fresh, a Yu Xin [incarnate]; / Robust and unrestrained, [he is another] Bao Zhao" 清新庾開府，俊逸鮑參軍 ("Remembering Li Bo on a Spring Day" 春日懷李白); and, on his own ambition to become a great poet, he says wistfully: "Where can I get inspired thoughts like those masterly hands Tao [Qian] and Xie [Lingyun]? / I'd let them do all the work, and just go tagging along" 焉得思如陶謝手，令渠述作與同遊 ("Going out on the river, its waters swelling like the sea, I casually wrote these short lines" 江上值水如海勢聊短述). It is greatly to Du Fu's credit that he was one of the first to accord Tao Qian equal status with Xie Lingyun.

[22] Tao Qian, who appears in the "Biographies of Recluses" 隱逸傳 of the *Jin shu* 晉書 , was not even considered a poet by most of his contemporaries; Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) was the first to appreciate Du Fu's gifts as a poet, and the hagiography of the "poet-sage" (*shisheng* 詩聖) began to be constructed only in the Song.

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were concerned as well as extremely self-conscious about how their work would be read.[23] Third, each is *perceived* as writing mainly about one thing.[24] Fourth, informed by this tendency to see a unitary thematic focus in his work, the editing begun by the poet himself was assiduously continued by scholars from the Song through the Qing 清 to produce, in each case, a poetic corpus that could be seen as representing the poet's development over the course of a lifetime.[25] Thus came to be created, from Du Fu's infinite variety and the almost fathomless depths of Tao Qian's seeming simplicity, these monolithic canonical bodies.

The idea that a poet's work—whether it be a short fragment or his entire corpus—can stand for the individual himself gave rise to a system of values in which the unity, integrity, and transparency of the poetic self became paramount. Set beside this new model of what constitutes good (as opposed to merely skilful) poetry, and by which they would no doubt have been appalled, the Six Dynasties poets—the Yongming poets in particular—did not stand a chance. Public performance tends to depersonalize the poet's voice, and the dynamics of competition promote attention to and the elaboration of surface detail rather than the exploration of inner worlds.[26] Moreover, the tradition of reading a poet's work to understand his growth as a human being favours those who live to be old men: the average courtier-poet of the Qi and Liang was lucky if he reached the age of forty. Wang Rong, who died at twenty-five, left a substantial body of poems, yet it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be made to yield a portrait of the developing artist, nor do the individual poems reflect anything of his personal life. This may be one reason why, despite his scintillating accomplishments as a poet, Wang makes only a few fleeting

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[23] Du Fu excised everything he had written before the age of twenty-four from his own collection; Tao Qian—with his elaborately "anonymous" autobiography and his carefully written poems headed by prefaces insisting how he just happened to toss them off—is an interesting study in the construction of spontaneity.

[24] Tao Qian served in a minor post for eighty days, but finding it—as he says—not to his liking, retired to spend the rest of his life as a farmer: all his writing proceeds from, and revolves around, this momentous decision. For Du Fu, the one event to which he became bound for life was the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion and its chaotic aftermath (755–763), or rather, his own failure to serve his Emperor during these troubles. This image of Du Fu as a single-minded patriot is to a large extent the invention of the Song poets: Du Fu himself, who sought "novelty and transformation" in his own work, would likely have been dismayed at being thought of as such a plain and homespun creature.

[25] Editors and commentators have worked exceptionally hard to perfect a chronology of Du Fu's life based on the arrangement of his poems.

[26] Paradoxically, because performance pieces are the immediate embodiment of the poet's creative intent, they are spontaneous in ways that the poems of Tao Qian, which are meant to impress us as artless and natural, cannot be.

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appearances in this book. Shen Yue lived a record-breaking seventy-one years, and his collected works can certainly be interpreted as representing chronological progression, but even in the poems about his private life his voice is distant and impersonal—to the point of earning him the posthumous epithet of "hidden" (*yin* 隱).[27] Xie Tiao has fared better in critical reception than his fellow poets, justly, in that he is the most gifted of the three, but possibly also because he is the one among them with a poetic collection that—in the consistency of the poet's self-presentation and an overall unity of voice and mood—bears a certain resemblance to High Tang poetry,[28] as it was envisioned by later ages, and in this way can be made to approximate the model described above. This may be one reason for his disproportionate representation in this book.

Indeed, to go by the stolid values of the mainstream literary tradition, with their gerontocratic and sexually puritanical bias, one would hardly know what to make of the Yongming poets or the society that produced them. Shen Yue, now remembered (by misattribution) as the pedantic bore who invented tonal prosody,[29] was a self-confessed libertine;[30] Xie Tiao, whose later poems are filled with the brooding melancholy of a man conscious of his impending doom, was nevertheless capable of a delight in his own artistry that for sheer exuberance and beauty is unmatched even by the Tang poets with whom he is often invidiously compared; and Wang Rong, disliked for his arrogance and eventually sentenced to death for overweening ambition, also proved himself deeply devoted to Buddhism in the religious poems that make up close to one-third of his extant writings. Wang Rong, especially, poses a conundrum to readers weaned on a steady diet of great poets. To the extent that a personality can be inferred at all from his poetry, it is a contrarious one, made up of many opaque and refractive surfaces, none of which seems directly connected to the essential man, and this may make him unpalatable to literary tastes conditioned to expect a more rounded and organized presentation of self. Certainly, someone so calculated in his art, and yet to all appearances innocent of the notion that an artist has an image that he can actually control, presents an interesting bundle of contradictions. But we are living in a different age from the one that formed the canon from which poets like Wang Rong were excluded. Perhaps, in this fractured post-modern

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27 Perhaps this reflects the circumspection that enabled him to outlive most of his contemporaries to serve eleven Emperors over three dynasties.

28 The highest accolade that many commentators seem capable of awarding Xie Tiao is to say that some of his poems could have been written by a Tang poet.

29 The surest indication that Shen Yue knew nothing about half the rules he is supposed to have devised is that many of his poems do not conform to them.

30 In the "Text of Confession and Repentance" (*Chanhui wen* 懺悔文) that he wrote as a Buddhist act of penance, Shen talks about the relations he enjoyed with both sexes as a young man, but sees as regrettable only the excessive number of these encounters, not the fact that he had had them; discussed in *The Poet Shen Yüeh,* pp. 77, 169–73.

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world, a multiplicity of voices, or the absence of a single voice, can serve to express a new form of authenticity.

Jacques Gernet, echoing the prejudices of hostile Chinese historians down the centuries, made a famous statement about the Six Dynasties as "marked right from the start by the decline of the state, the collapse of the urban economy, and the dismemberment of the empire."[31] Scholars have since shown that the Six Dynasties, far from being effete, decadent, or moribund, was an age of economic growth and cultural advancement, and that its society was filled with "youthful *élan*" and "experimental energy"[32] of the kind that imbues the creative endeavours of the Yongming poets. Ironically, of Gernet's three descriptive phrases, at least two can be applied with better accuracy to our own time. We have therefore all the more reason to wish to learn from these remarkable poets, and—in the same way that they helped their contemporaries to see and hear the world anew—perhaps we can, with the help of Meow Hui Goh's interpretations, see and hear them again as if for the first time.

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31 Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization,* trans. J. R. Foster (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 172.

32 Used to characterize Palace Style poetry in *Games Poets Play,* p. 350, but applicable to Six Dynasties culture as a whole.

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