# Against the Monist Model of Tang Poetics

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## On the Standard Model of Classical Chinese Verse

"In the Chinese literary tradition," we have been told, "a poem is usually presumed to be nonfictional."[1] There are two related reasons for this presumption. The first is the "stimulus-response" or "affective-expressive" character of Chinese poetics, which, in "presum[ing] that a poet is moved by experience or observation to give expression in words," encourages readers, "in the absence of evidence to the contrary, [to] think that poetry is factual," spoken "*in propria persona*" about something that really happened in the life of the poet.[2] This vision of poetry as writers' "natural, spontaneous response ... to the evocative stimuli of the external world" is, in turn, grounded in the second reason, traditional China's "deep-seated conviction that all aspects of reality are intimately related to one another in a bond of primordial organicity."[3] This "primordial organicity" "presupposes a view of reality which is not hierarchically-oriented,"[4] "an immanent mode of thinking and ... an organic cosmology"[5] that prescribe "a fundamentally monistic view of the universe: the cosmic principle or Tao may transcend any individual phenomenon, but it is totally immanent in this world, and there is no suprasensory realm that lies beyond, is superior to, or is different in kind from the level of physical beings."[6] Since "dualistic think-

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1    Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 34.

2    Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 24, 108, 30.

3    Cecile Chu-chin Sun, "Mimesis and 興 Xing, Two Modes of Viewing Reality: Comparing English and Chinese Poetry," *Comparative Literature Studies* 43 (2006): 326–54, 338.

4    Ibid., 339.

5    Michelle Yeh, "Metaphor and *Bi*: Western and Chinese Poetics," *Comparative Literature* 39 (1987): 237–54, 247.

6    Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 32.

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ing … is foreign to the Chinese mind,"[7] in other words, "all reality, in the Chinese view, exists on one plane,"[8] "constituting a single, integrated whole, [such that] there is no external realm or dimension in which supposedly higher truth can be sought."[9] As a result, "traditional Chinese thinkers conceive of the ultimate reality, not as a transcendental entity diametrically opposed to the phenomenal world," but rather along "various nondualistic cosmological paradigms marked by an inseparable entwining of the 'metaphysical' (*xingshang* 形上) and the 'physical' (*xingxia* 形下)."[10] "Truth [thus] lies within the world, not beyond it, and is to be realized and experienced in this world;"[11] it is "deeply embedded in reality, neither above nor below the audience's own physical and moral world," ensuring that "writers are regarded not as making things up but as observing and reflecting on what they see around them."[12] In this sense, "the [Chinese] poem was an attempt not to create a vision of another realm, but to articulate the affinities between various [parts] of experience."[13] "In contrast to the dualistic view of the universe that lies at the basis of Western notions of poiesis, mimesis, and fictionality … [Chinese] literature sp[eaks] of the things of this world … of the actual personal, social, and political circumstances of the historical author. From this arises the persistent impulse to contextualize the elements of a literary work—to assume that they [refer] directly, even if veiled, to the author's empirical world, rather than representing the products of a fictive imagination."[14]

Although each of these claims could stand to be unpacked at more leisure, they are probably so familiar to readers of this journal that there is little reason to do so here. I think it is fair to say, in fact, that a vision roughly along these lines has represented the presumed standard model of Chinese poetics in most studies of premodern Chinese poetry in the Western academy for at least the last

7        Liang Shi, "The Leopardskin of Dao and the Icon of Truth: Natural Birth Versus Mimesis in Chinese and Western Literary Theories," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31 (1994): 148–64.

8        Andrew H. Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), 109.

9        Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, "The Central Tradition," *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies at the Univ. of Michigan, 1997), 34.

10       Zong-qi Cai, *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 107.

11       Yeh, "Metaphor and *Bi*," 249.

12       David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 14.

13       David Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation: The Literary Theory and Practice of Huang Tingjian* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), 190.

14       Pauline Yu and Theodore Huters, "The Imaginative Universe of Chinese Literature," reprinted in *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*, ed. Corinne H. Dale (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2004), 3.

thirty years. Sinologists have, of course, usefully detailed exceptions, including particular poetic genres and works that seem to run against these general orientations.[15] And particular instantiations of this paradigm have sometimes come in for criticism from scholars who see it as drawing too sharp a contrast between Eastern and Western literary worlds—arguments that have often had merit and sometimes overshot their target.[16] Yet the exceptions to this model are often presented as precisely that, and its critics have generally criticized the implications drawn from it (concerning, for instance, the impossibility of metaphor and allegory in Chinese poetics) rather than its basic aptness to the sources from which it is derived. At their most sophisticated, in fact, critics of the model have affirmed that it represented the dominant poetic ideology of

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15    Joseph R. Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, Univ. of Michigan, 1992), for instance, argues that the *yuefu* 樂府 tradition is a basic exception to these claims, and allowed Chinese authors an escape from their strictures. Nicholas Morrow Williams has also identified "imitation poems" as "one way of reading [and writing] poetry in the Chinese tradition" that was different from the "biographical approach" of the standard model; see *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Most recently, Thomas J. Mazanec has suggested that Buddhist poetry was sometimes contrasted to, and sometimes tried to merge with, the poetic mainstream described by this standard model; see "The Medieval Chinese *Gāthā* and Its Relationship to Poetry," *T'oung Pao* 103 (2017): 94–154, especially 96. Further claimed exceptions will also be discussed below, though it might be noted that many of these "exceptions" presume the general correctness of the standard model.

16    See, for instance, Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Chinese Metaphor Again: Reading—and Understanding—Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109 (1989): 211–21; Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993); idem, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2001); Zhang Longxi, "What Is *Wen* and Why Is It Made So Terribly Strange?" *College Literature* 23.1 (1996): 15–35; idem, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005); Yong Ren, "Cosmogony, Fictionality, Poetic Creativity: Western and Traditional Chinese Cultural Perspectives," *Comparative Literature* 50 (1998): 98–119; Ming Dong Gu, "Is Mimetic Theory in Literature and Art Universal?" *Poetics Today* 26 (2005): 459–98; and Eric Hayot, "Against Historicist Fundamentalism," *PMLA* 131 (2016): 1414–22, among others. Some scholars have critiqued this model not so much because it is wrong as because it is morally offensive (and indeed it can be; for an example of the morally suspect conclusions that can be drawn from it, see Cecile Chu-chin Sun, *Pearl from the Dragon's Mouth: Evocation of Feeling and Scene in Chinese Poetry* [Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies at the Univ. of Michigan, 1995], 174). For such critiques, see for instance Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), 1–25; Paul Rouzer, "Du Fu and the Failure of Lyric," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 33 (2011): 27–53; and Massimo Verdicchio, "Under Western Critical Eyes: Du Fu," *Comparative Literature Studies* 54 (2017): 211–28.

the tradition, and urged us to look instead at the work that has been necessary to create and sustain that ideology, which therefore reveals more fundamental continuities between East and West.[17] None have pointed out what seems to me the more basic fact that this standard model matches only poorly with what writers and readers of poetry said explicitly about the art in what is often assumed to be the high point of the tradition, the Tang dynasty.[18]

From a certain perspective, this mismatch should not be surprising. If relatively little work has gone into understanding the specifics of Tang literary theory, this situation partly results from the strategic character of the standard model, which was originally developed to offer a contrast with Western poetics writ large. The model, moreover, does not pretend to detail what writers of any particular time period felt compelled to say in response to the arguments of others: instead, it claims to represent what they never had to argue about.[19]

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17    Haun Saussy, for instance, admits the *shi* poem does have "associations of sincerity, occasional composition, and emotional release." His argument, indeed, is that the standard model accurately represents "what Chinese writers have always wanted [culture, poetry] to be, and who can blame them?" Yet this model should be understood as "purest imperial ideology," or rather, "a manual for constructing imperial ideology." It is, in other words, not what the Chinese have believed, but what they have wanted, and wanted their subjects, to believe. See "The Prestige of Writing: *Wen*, Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 75 (1997), 8, 22, 23. This is also the basic argument, as I understand it, of Saussy's *The Problem* as well.

18    I will try to demonstrate this point by means of a citational overabundance I hope readers will forgive. This rhetorical strategy tries to counterbalance the corresponding deficiency of previous discussions of the standard model, which are remarkably devoid of citations of actual literary or art criticism from any period before the Song. It will be noted that a larger number of my quotations from the Tang will derive from late-eighth and ninth centuries than from the seventh or early-eighth. To some degree this imbalance is a function of significant literary and literary critical transformations that have been well discussed elsewhere, most notably by Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages": Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996). It is, however, also a reflection of the better survival of texts from this later period.

19    There has, of course, been more specific work on Tang literary theory aimed at specialists. See, for instance, Richard W. Bodman, *Poetics and Prosody in Early Mediaeval China: A Study and Translation of Kūkai's* 空海 *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡秘府論 (Melbourne: Quirin Press, 1978, 2020); Yugen Wang, "*Shige*: The Popular Poetics of Regulated Verse," *T'ang Studies* 22 (2004): 81–125; Nicholas Morrow Williams, "The Taste of the Ocean: Jiaoran's Theory of Poetry," *Tang Studies* 31 (2013): 1–27; and Zong-qi Cai, "Toward an Innovative Poetics: Wang Changling on *Yi* 意 and Literary Creation," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 4 (2017): 180–207. There is also a significant body of scholarship on Tang poetics in Chinese and Japanese, of course, though even there it is less than we might expect and tends to be animated by different questions. See especially Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, *Zhongguo shixue yanjiu* 中國詩學研究 (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2000); idem, *Zhongguo gudai wenxue piping fangfa yanjiu* 中國古代文學批評方法研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua

It articulates the supposed founding presumptions of the tradition, what was assumed rather than declaimed and what was constant rather than what was fashionable. And because this model is explicitly foundational, the texts that give it voice are not generally contemporaneous with the poetry it underwrites, but rather early. This explains why the sources that have predominantly been cited to explain Tang poetry are classical works like the "Great Preface" to *Mao's Odes* 毛詩大序, the "Yueji" 樂記 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記, the *Xunzi* 荀子, the "Xici" 繫辭 commentary to the *Yijing* 易經, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and Han works of correlative cosmology.

Reading Tang dynasty discussions of poetry, however, I have come to doubt that writers and readers in this period did, in fact, take the doctrines of such classical works for granted, at least as these texts have been read by the proponents of the standard model. Tang writers do cite some of them, to be sure. But when they do, they read them through the lenses provided by the medieval philosophy and religion that more frequently define their vocabularies and their explicit paradigms. And this medieval thought cannot be described simply as "monist," "nondualist," or "immanent"—even if ideas along these lines are sometimes a part of the medieval picture. In this essay, therefore, I hope to add to recent scholarship that reads Chinese poetry in closer dialogue with intellectual paradigms more proximate to its own time, recognizing that these paradigms changed enough from period to period to discourage us from proposing a single model for the entire tradition.[20]

Ultimately, of course, we will want to refine our models down to the generation, the decade, or the *coterie*, as important studies have done for exceptional periods. Given the longstanding dominance of a single standard model, however, the disadvantage of doing only such fine-grained studies, in the absence of new work with a broader view, is that the particular decades, *coteries*, or individuals that receive this treatment may thus come to seem more discontinuous

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shuju, 2002); and Nagata Tomoyuki 永田知之, *Tōdai no bungaku riron: "fukko" to "sōshin"* 唐代の文学理論:「復古」と「創新」(Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2015).

20    Exemplary in this respect are Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2007); Meow Hui Goh, *Sound and Sight: Poetry and Courtier Culture in the Yongming Era (483–493)* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010); Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010); Michael A. Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Dynasty Poetry and the Problem of Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2013); and Williams, "The Taste of the Ocean."

from their chronological environs than they were.[21] For the moment, therefore, it can still be valuable to propose miniature "standard models" for more-or-less broad temporal periods—as I do here for the Tang—with the recognition that such models will eventually be superseded by more fine-grained work in the future.

Given the breadth of my subject—spanning roughly three hundred years of literary-critical thought—it is worth reemphasizing the heuristic intent of the model I propose here. I think it likely, in fact, that there was no coherent, nontrivial, intellectually satisfying set of propositions about poetry to which all Tang readers and writers would have assented; instead, poetic communication was probably mediated across this large span of time and space by a network or repertoire of not-necessarily coherent truisms. But as the persistence of the much-criticized standard model suggests, we in the present may need satisfying accounts of what poetry was and why it mattered more than did late medieval poets and readers, who inhabited a society wherein there was an inertia to the art we can no longer take for granted. If classical Chinese poetry is to continue to find any place at all in our contemporary worlds, that is, it will only be because we can put compelling questions to it. Such questions will often encourage us to extrapolate what a period's poets and readers might have said had they wanted to articulate a vision of poetry that was coherent, nontrivial, and intellectually satisfying. These questions run from the factual (is a given writer's work excitingly innovative or merely a variation on shared themes?) to the theoretical (how do innovations interact with the mainstream?), from the hermeneutical (how best do we understand poetry written under assump-

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21    A good example here is the Mid-Tang period, around the turn of the ninth century. This period has received a relative abundance of scholarly attention, often claiming that its literary thought is exceptional with regard to the Tang or even the tradition writ large. See, for instance, Shang Wei, "Prisoner and Creator: The Self-Image of the Poet in Han Yu and Meng Jiao," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 16 (1994): 19–40; Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages"*; Robert Ashmore, "Hearing Things: Performance and Lyric Imagination in Chinese Literature of the Early Ninth Century" (Ph.D. diss.: Harvard Univ., 1997); Kawai Kōzō 川合康三, *Shūnanzan no hen'yō: Chūtō bungaku ronshū* 終南山の変容: 中唐文学論集 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1999); and Fu Junli 傅君劢 (Michael A. Fuller), "'Ren wen': Zhong Tang shiqi shige he shenmei jingyan zhuanbian" 人文：中唐时期诗歌和审美经验转变, in *Kawai Kōzō jiaoshou rongxiu jinian wenji* 川合康三教授榮休紀念文集, ed. Lin Zongzheng 林宗正 and Jiang Yin 蔣寅 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017), 195–222. Though I can only agree with these scholars that the Mid-Tang was in certain respects a revolutionary period for poetic thought, one of the suggestions of this essay is that its difference from the rest of the Tang is easily exaggerated if we assume that the standard model characterized such thought throughout the first two-hundred years of the dynasty.

tions we do not share?) to the practical (how can we make this same poetry compelling nowadays?), and from the ethical (what do we owe its authors and original audiences?) to the political (how are Chinese poetics related to others around the world?). To answer such questions, we need standard models, and we will be better off using better heuristics rather than worse.

## The Medieval Intellectual Background

Whether or not early Chinese thought was "fundamentally monist" or "nondual"—and this assertion has been both made and disputed[22]—medieval Chinese philosophy and religion were not, or at least not in any simple way. This is not to say that medieval Chinese thought was "dualist" in the sense that it proposed dual sources for the world or divergent fundamental kinds.[23] And it is not to say, obviously, that ideas like "nondualism" (*bu er* 不二) were unimportant in the medieval intellectual context. Rather, the point to be made here is that, even where we do find assertions about the nonduality or ontological continuity of all things, they are generally made in contexts that either explicitly or functionally assume and instantiate epistemological distinctions, tensions, and even discontinuities.[24] According to the vast majority of medieval Chinese

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22 The question has been, and continues to be, intensely debated. Interested readers may find useful recent approaches to and recountings of the debate in Nahum Brown and William Franke, eds., *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), as well as in Joshua R. Brown and Alexus McLeod, *Transcendence and Non-Naturalism in Early Chinese Thought* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). Personally, my thoughts on the question have been shaped by Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2002), which argues that monism was not an assumption in early China, but rather one position among others. But since I cannot deal with early thought within the scope of this essay, let me just acknowledge the possibility that the tensions and dualisms I will argue are characteristic of medieval thought may also be apparent in certain earlier texts as well.

23 The word "dualism" can bear disparate meanings. Besides substance dualism, certain other kinds of dualism seem more likely to be salient in the Chinese context, including the dualism of words and things discussed by John Lagerwey in "Dieu-Père/Dao-Mère: dualismes occidentaux et chinois," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* (2012): 137–57, and "Chinese Dualism Revisited," in *"At the Shores of the Sky": Asian Studies for Albert Hoffstädt*, ed. Paul W. Kroll and Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 185–98.

24 I take the terminology of "epistemological" discontinuity from Francisca Cho Bantley, who writes that "Although Plaks ["Allegory in Hsi-yu chi and Hung-lou Meng," in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew Plaks, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 163–202] is correct in suggesting that ontological dualism is absent from the allegory

thought—be it Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian—there is, on the one hand, that which our normal, common sorts of cognition can access and normal forms of language can express; and there is, on the other, that to which neither of these predicates apply. As we will see, poetry will often claim to derive from and provide insight into the latter half of this dichotomy.

In the medieval period writ large, epistemological discontinuity was first and perhaps most influentially theorized by the philosophers that commonly go under the heading nowadays of "Obscure Learning" (*Xuanxue* 玄學). This term itself suggests a distinction in what different individuals can perceive or understand. Appearing first as the name of one of the Institutes for the Four Subjects of Learning (*Si xue* 四學) established by Emperor Wen of the Liu-Song 宋文帝 (r. 424–453) in 439, the term was retrospectively applied to the work of those thinkers who were recognized as exploring aspects of the cosmos, of governance, and of the sages' teachings that are "obscure" or "mysterious" (*xuan* 玄) and that thus cannot be cashed out into normal sorts of declarative language, turned into clear models, or communicated to most people. Within the Institutes, these thinkers' commentaries on texts like the *Laozi* 老子, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and the *Yijing* were given a place parallel to Ru-learning 儒學, which dealt with the concrete and generalizable models prescribed by some of the same ancient works. In this sense, the definitive characteristic of *Xuanxue* was not its focus on a particular range of texts or its espousal of particular doctrines so much as its inquiry into the obscurities subtending the exoteric models of the sagely tradition.[25] As Huang Kan 黃侃 (488–545) explains in his *Xuanxue*-inflected commentary on the *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu* 論語):

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of the *Journey* [*to the West*], nevertheless epistemological dualism is present. This distinction is vital to the Buddhist salvational schema." See her "Buddhist Allegory in the *Journey to the West*," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 48 (1989): 512–24, 515. The idea that Buddhist ideas of fundamental or ontological nondualism are characteristically invoked in the context of a practical or epistemological dualism is also discussed in Luis Gómez, "Purifying Gold: The Metaphor of Effort and Intuition in Buddhist Thought and Practice," in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1987), 67–168, especially 77–78: "The identity of delusion and enlightenment and the rejection of the path and its practice make sense only in the context of a community *already committed* to enlightenment and the path." Equally relevant is Eric M. Green, *The Secrets of Buddhist Meditation: Visionary Meditation Texts from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 56–57.

25    See Wang Baoxuan, *Xuanxue tonglun* 玄學通論 (Taibei: Wunan tushu, 1987), 1–2 and 11–15. For a discussion of the significance of the term *Xuanxue* in the late Six Dynasties and Tang, see Lucas Rambo Bender, "*The Corrected Interpretations of the Five Classics* (*Wujing Zhengyi*) and the Tang Legacy of Obscure Learning (*Xuanxue*)," *T'oung Pao* 104 (2019): 76–127, 83–89.

The *Six Classics* [composed by Confucius] are but the fishtrap and snare of the sages; they have no purchase on the fish or rabbit.[26] ... The [ultimate] meaning of the *Six Classics'* words thus cannot be heard [in them]. The reason for this is that Confucius' nature is matched in virtue with the Great and Endless Universal Dao; and this is so deep and distant that common sorts of people cannot understand it. Accordingly, we cannot hear his words [on these topics].

六籍是聖人之筌蹄，亦無關於魚兔矣。...而六籍所言之旨，不可得而聞也。所以爾者，夫子之性與天地元亨之道合其德，致此處深遠，非凡人所知。故其言不可得聞也。[27]

The exoteric models Confucius prescribed can thus be understood by most people and can be expressed in normal forms of language. But the nature that allowed him to come up with those teachings and their ultimate significance are inaccessible to most and incapable of transmission in words.

Beyond its delineation in this way of a bifurcated intellectual world, *Xuanxue* was often conducted through and explicitly concerned with fundamental distinctions that lend themselves to at least quasi-dualist readings. Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249?), for instance, divided the functioning of the universe into "Negativity" (*wu* 無) and "Actuality" (*you* 有), with Actuality encompassing all of those things and processes that have cognizable forms and appropriate names, and "Negativity" being defined by its ineffability: "one who would speak of it [directly] would miss its constant nature, and one who would name it would depart from its truth" 言之者失其常，名之者離其真.[28] Other *Xuanxue* thinkers disagreed about the importance of Negativity, but even they advocated similar epistemological divisions. Although Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), for instance, has been called an "antimetaphysical monist" for "his abolition

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26    This metaphor derives from *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 and Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 26.944. In its original context, the point is that words are to meaning as fishtrap or snare are to fish and rabbits: "once you have the meaning, you can forget the words" 得意而忘言.

27    Huang Kan 皇侃, *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏, ed. Gao Shangqu 高尚榘 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 3.110.

28    See Wang Bi 王弼, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), "Laozi zhilüe," 195. For a discussion of my decision to translate *wu* and *you* by "Negativity" and "Actuality," see Bender, "*The Corrected Interpretations*," 86n3. In brief, the vagueness of these translations allows them to adapt to the many different uses to which this vocabulary was put.

of the transcendent Dao or [Negativity]" that was propounded by Wang Bi,[29] nonetheless, he draws a clear distinction between what most people can appreciate about the sages and the truth about them.

> The term "sage" is nothing more than a name for one who attains their nature, but it is not sufficient to name that by which they attain it .... [The sage king] Yao in truth was a darkness; it is only his traces [that are properly called] "Yao." When from the perspective of the traces we try to observe his darkness, then it is not surprising that the internal [i.e., his darkness] and the external [i.e. his traces] are [as disparate as] two separate realms. Ordinary people only see Yao as "Yao"; they do not recognize his darkness.

> 聖人者，物得性之名耳，未足以名其所以得。…夫堯實冥矣，其跡則堯也。自跡觀冥，內外異域，未足怪也。世徒見堯之為堯，豈識其冥哉！[30]

As opposed as Guo Xiang might be to certain elements of Wang Bi's thought, we can recognize here nonetheless one of Wang's central oppositions: between the way things appear to most people and the mysterious processes "by means of which" (*suoyi* 所以) they actually function.[31] This is obviously not a dualism of substance, along (say) Platonic or Cartesian lines; it is rather a difference of perception. Most people understand the world, and the sages' actions within it, in crude ways. But *Xuanxue* thinkers can teach us to perceive other aspects of reality, aspects that defy common comprehension or exoteric expression in language.

It is largely this paradigm that suited *Xuanxue* to providing much of the vocabulary by means of which early-medieval intellectuals in the regions where it was ascendant grappled with the newly introduced soteriology of Buddhism.[32] Buddhism too was often understood as teaching that most people

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29  Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003), 18.

30  *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu* 南華真經注疏, annot. Guo Xiang 郭象 and Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1.15.

31  For a useful discussion of this aspect of Wang's thought, see Rudolf G. Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003).

32  This is a complex topic that has inspired significant research and some disagreement. For the classic introduction in English, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The*

most of the time do not perceive important truths, and that these important truths cannot be captured in normal sorts of language. Seeing a key congruence here, some intellectuals simply appropriated dualities drawn from *Xuanxue* to discuss Buddhist enlightenment. The poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), for example, wrote a treatise that terms unenlightenment "Actuality" and enlightenment "Negativity," and claims, moreover, that the two are utterly distinct.[33] Others found this language too simplistic, and denied that the Buddhist goal was either "Actual" or "Negative." Yet even they introduced new dichotomies. Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414), for instance, defines nirvāṇa as "transcendent" (*chu* 出), "beyond Actuality and Negativity, since the division of Actuality and Negativity is confined to the objects of the six sense organs, and nirvāṇa does not abide among the objects of the six sense organs" 出有無者，良以有無之數止乎六境之內，六境之內非涅槃之宅.[34]

> The kind of *dao* nirvāṇa is … cannot be captured by forms or names, and … cannot be known through a mind oriented towards Actuality. It exceeds all Actualities, rising mysteriously above them …. It threads together [the universe], and there is nowhere it is not, and yet it alone transcends beyond Actuality and Negativity. Thus, those who speak of it [directly] miss its truth; those who try to know it contradict its simplicity; those who deem it Actual depart from its nature; and those who deem it Negative harm its substance.

> 夫涅槃之為道也，…不可以形名得，…不可以有心知。超群有以幽升。…彌綸靡所不在，而獨曳於有無之表。然則言之者失其真，知之者反其愚，有之者乖其性，無之者傷其軀。[35]

Rather than merely negating the dual division posited by *Xuanxue* thinkers like Wang Bi, Sengzhao has replaced it with another. Where *Xuanxue* thinkers had seen themselves as recognizing what lies beyond ordinary cognition, Sengzhao places everything they understand on the side of the mundane, as opposed to the transcendent truth sought by Buddhist practitioners.

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*Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, third edition (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 81–95.

33  See his "Bian zong lun" 辯宗論, in Daoxuan 道宣, *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 18, T. 2103: 52.224c–228a.

34  Sengzhao, *Zhaolun* 肇論, T. 1858: 45.159b4–6. "Transcendent" is the translation given by Rafal Felbur in John P. Keenan, Rafal Felbur, and Jan Yün-hua, *Three Short Treatises by Vasubandhu, Sengzhao, and Zongmi* (Moraga: BDK America, 2017), 112.

35  Sengzhao, *Zhaolun*, T. 1858: 45.157c5–13.

While it is true that Buddhist thought often aspired to a "nondual" vision, therefore, such nonduality should not be taken (as some literary critics have done) as equivalent to monism, with the absence of tension or distinction that monism is often taken to imply.[36] To the contrary, medieval Chinese Buddhist thought worked over a proliferating series of dualities, including the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*, *wei* 為) and the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*, *wuwei* 無為), emptiness (*śūnyatā*, *kong* 空) and form (*rūpa*, *se* 色), absolute (*paramārtha-satya*, *shengyi di* 勝義諦) and conventional (*saṃvṛti-satya*, *shisu di* 世俗諦), supramundane (*lokottara*, *chu shijian* 出世間) and mundane (*laukika*, *shijian* 世間), and the mind-in-its-suchness (*xin zhenru men* 心真如門) and the mind-that-arises-and-ceases (*xin shengmie men* 心生滅門). Of course, such dualisms were generally posited so as ultimately to be overcome, as is explicitly the point, for instance, in the long litany of dualities discussed in the "Entering the Gate of Nondualism" chapter 入不二法門品 of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* 維摩詰所說經.[37] Yet as medieval Chinese commentaries on this chapter make clear, overcoming such dualisms was itself a spiritual goal whose attainment marked a distinction between practitioners. In the words of Daosheng 道生 (ca. 360–434):

Each of the bodhisattvas who speaks in the first section [of this chapter] about the meanings of nonduality makes it seem that there is some nonduality that can be spoken of. But if there is a nonduality that can be spoken of, then it is nondual in opposition to duality. Therefore Mañjuśrī makes it clear to them that where there is nothing that can be spoken of, only there do we find nonduality .... Yet though Mañjuśrī has made it clear that there is nothing that can be spoken of, he has not made it clear that he is [still] speaking of not speaking. Therefore Vimalakīrti remains silent [when asked about nonduality], using no words to express that words cannot get the truth .... that words and traces end at not speaking.

生曰：前諸菩薩，各說不二之義，似有不二可說也。若有不二可說者，即復是對二為不二也。是以文殊明無可說，乃為不二矣。...文殊雖明無可說，而未明說為無說也。是以維摩默然，無言以表言之不實。...言迹盡於無言。[38]

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36    Pauline Yu, in particular, makes this equation. See *The Reading of Imagery*, 201–5.

37    Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, trans., *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra* 維摩詰所說經 2, T. 475: 14.550b 29–551c26.

38    *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 8, T. 1775: 38.399a29–c11.

As Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) puts it in his commentary on the same passage, these various bodhisattvas "are all speaking of the principle of nonduality, but they grasp it to differing degrees of depth" 不二之理乃同，而得有深淺之異.[39] In this sense, Buddhist thought often depicted experience as stratified by distinctions of vision and understanding, despite and even in its claims of nonduality.

What medieval Chinese Buddhism contributed to Tang poetics, therefore, was less often an "ontological egalitarianism" teaching that "concrete and transcendental reality are one the same," as Pauline Yu has argued,[40] and more often a vocabulary for discussing how poetry reaches beyond common perception into visions that cannot be communicated by normal means.[41] The poet-monk Jiaoran 皎然 (ca. 720–ca. 798), for instance, comments in his *Statutes of Poetry* that:

> A poet's reaching the utmost [of the art] can only come through contact with the numinous. One who gets it will do so at the gate of nonduality; one who misses it, will miss by a thousand leagues. How could it be known through words?
>
> 夫詩人造極之旨，必在神詣。得之者妙無二門，失之者邈若千里，豈名言之所知乎？[42]

Praising Jiaoran's own poetry, similarly, Yu Di 于頔 (d. 818) writes:

> When he unveils mysterious (*xuan*) truths, he matches deeply with true reality (*tathātā*), in a way that others cannot comprehend …. He holds emptiness and stillness secret within and opens outwards expedient

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39  Jizang 吉藏, *Wemojing yishu* 維摩經義疏 5, T. 1781: 38.978a28.

40  Yu, *The Reading of Imagery*, 204, citing William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983) and D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 14.

41  Buddhism also contributed, among other things, a vocabulary for, and perhaps also a practice of, concentration. For more in-depth discussions of the relationship between Buddhism and verse, see Thomas J. Mazanec, "The Invention of Chinese Buddhist Poetry: Poet-Monks in Late Medieval China (c. 760–790 CE)," (Ph.D. diss.: Princeton Univ., 2017), Jason Protass, *The Poetry Demon: Song-Dynasty Monks on Verse and the Way* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2021), and Stephen Owen, "How Did Buddhism Matter in Tang Poetry?" *T'oung Pao* 103 (2017): 388–406.

42  Shi Jiaoran 釋皎然, *Shishi jiaozhu* 詩式校注, ed. Li Zhuangying 李壯鷹 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2003), "Shishi xu," 2.

means (*upāya*). He renders language miraculous in his writings and exhausts the visions of the mind in his meditative wisdom: these are the Buddhists' compassionate ferry and torch of wisdom. I, however, am someone who roams 'within the square' [i.e., the mundane world];[43] how could I be sufficient to knock upon his mysterious (*xuan*) gate?

其或發明玄理，則深契真如，人不可得而思議也。…中秘空寂，外開方便，妙言説於文字，了心境于定惠，又釋門之慈航智炬也。余游方之內者，何足以叩玄關。[44]

Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), similarly, praises a poet he identifies as a Buddhist in terms that mark him as distinct from the normal run of mankind.

| 何階子方便， | How could I reach up to your expedient means?— |
|---|---|
| 謬引為匹敵。 | it was a mistake to bring me in as your match …. |
| 精微穿溟涬， | Essential and faint, you penetrate back to primal chaos; |
| 飛動摧霹靂。 | soaring in flight, you drive on thunder …. |
| 君意人莫知， | Your thoughts no one understands— |
| 人間夜寥闃。 | back in the mortal world, the night is vast and still.[45] |

In such invocations of Buddhism—far though they may sometimes be from the internal discourse of the monastic institution—we can see that the religion characteristically provided metaphors not of "ontological egalitarianism," but rather of esotericism. Whatever its claims about the ultimate nature of the world, those claims were understood by those Tang thinkers who invoked a Buddhist vocabulary in talking about poetry as embedded in a framework that marked adepts off from the common run of mankind.[46]

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43  For the derivation of the opposition between what is "within the square" and "beyond the square," and some discussion of its intellectual importance, see Willard J. Peterson, "Squares and Circles: Mapping the History of Chinese Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 47–60; Robert Ford Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42 (2003): 278–319, 308–9; and T.H. Barrett, "The Advent of the Buddhist Conception of Religion in China and its Consequences for the Analysis of Daoism," *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 9 (2009): 149–65.

44  Yu Di 于頔, "Wuxing Zhou gong ji xu" 吳興畫公集序, in *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, ed. Li Fang 李昉 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 720.3678b.

45  Du Fu 杜甫, "Ye ting Xu shi song shi, ai er you zuo" 夜聽許十誦詩愛而有作, in *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu* 杜甫全集校注, ed. Xiao Difei 蕭滌非 et al., 12 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 3.592.

46  This point holds no matter how deeply we are inclined to think Buddhism penetrated

Similar tropes can also be found in contemporary discourse linking poetry to medieval Daoism. Wu Yuanheng 武元衡 (758–815), for example, praises the Daoist Liu Shang 劉商 (fl. late eighth c.) as "transcending into absolute liberation and roaming primal chaos where there are no gaps" 超然懸解，與漫汗游乎無閒, and thus as writing ballads "possessed of thought reaching into the recondite darkness, which [therefore] hold within a propensity to flight" 思入窅冥，勢含飛動.[47] Liu Cang 劉滄 (*jinshi* 854), similarly, praises a Daoist recluse as "Holding immortality within with overwhelming *qi*, glowing of shaved jade flakes, and thus composing works of refined significance that enter the mysterious and subtle" 浩氣含真玉片輝，著書精義入玄微.[48] And Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818) writes that the literary writings of the Daoist Wu Yun 吳筠 (d. 778) are "based in his mysterious (*xuan*) vision and came forth [therefore] as utmost words, words that secret the Dao within them" 本於玄覽，發為至言，言而蘊道.[49] In statements like these—many more of which could be cited—the special insights that Daoist adepts possess are depicted as manifesting themselves in literature that itself transcends the mundane.

Medieval Daoism was, like Buddhism (and sometimes under its influence), a religion that often emphasized the difference between what the initiated and the uninitiated could perceive. Numerous Daoist texts, for instance, advised that certain auras, growths, and elixir ingredients would appear only to adepts of a certain level of attainment, implying that sacred locations would appear different to different people. So too, indeed, would one's own self: as we read in the early Lingbao 靈寶 scriptures, "Humans are, in fact, the most numinous of beings. But [most] people do not know themselves and [consequently] cannot preserve their spirits so as to ward off evils. Those who understand this fact do not seek for aid from gods in heaven, but rather are satisfied with [the numinous potentials of] their own bodies" 夫人是有生最靈者也，但人不能自

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literati thought in general. Several scholars have recently argued that this penetration was not deep, at least when it came to thought about poetry; see, for instance, Owen, "How Did Buddhism Matter," and Fuller, *Drifting*, 155–63. I suspect, however, that such arguments devolve upon preconceptions about what Buddhism teaches, a distinctively modern and Western "textbook Buddhism."

47 Wu Yuanheng 武元衡, "Liu Shang langzhong ji xu" 劉商郎中集序, in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 713.3682b.

48 Liu Cang 劉滄, "Zeng Zhuanxu shan ren" 贈顓頊山人, in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, ed. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 586.6795.

49 Quan Deyu 權德輿, "Zhongyue Zongxuan xiansheng Wu zunshi ji xu" 中嶽宗玄先生吳尊師集序, in *Quan Deyu shiwen ji biannian jiaozhu* 權德輿詩文集編年校注, ed. Jiang Yin 蔣寅 et al. (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2013), 487.

知，不能守神以御眾惡耳。知之者則不求佑於天神，止於其身則足矣.[50]
And these differentiated vistas could be expanded even further too, with the
entirety of reality viewed differently by adepts than by the more mundane-
minded. As described by the (probably Sui-dynasty) *Benji jing* 本際經, for
instance, the mundane world is a "prison of *saṃsāra* [literally: cyclical birth
and death]" 生死獄 born of "deluded thinking" 妄想.[51] "Once one experiences
enlightenment," however, "then all suffering and joy, guilt and good fortune,
distinctions and inequalities, and all thoughts of love and hate, all good and
bad actions—all of these vanish, like things seen in a dream" 猶如夢中見種種
事，苦樂罪福差別不同，而亦扵中生愛憎想，起善惡行，比覺之後一切都
无.[52]

> At this point one's mind no longer gives rise to discrimination, is firmly
> fixed in clarity and purity, reaches the margins and the depths [of the
> manifest cosmos], has no pollution or obstructions, and in stillness
> becomes gradually purer until one enters the perception (*jing*) of truth
> .... Once one has practiced all of these [attainments], one transcends even
> the status of the Seed People and rises to heaven in daylight, going beyond
> the Three Pure Heavens, to the Mystery Beyond Mystery, where one enjoys
> forever a lifespan without limit, returns to the root and to one's nature,
> embodies and enters the clear and vacuous, and understands that Nega-
> tivity is not Negativity and Actuality is not Actuality.

> 扵如是心不生分別，決定清淨，直達邊底，无有染滯，靜然徐清，入
> 實相境。...結習已盡，超種民位，白日騰舉，出到三清，玄之又玄，
> 享无期壽，反根復命，體入清虛，了无非无，知有非有.[53]

Here again we see how a vision of ontological nonduality can become part of
a pragmatic epistemological duality. And we can also see another fact worth
noting, that Daoism could often be ambiguous as to where exactly its consum-
mations lay. In many cases, Daoist immortals were indeed imagined as leaving
behind the human realm to enjoy their transcendence elsewhere, whether on
the Immortal Isles or the Kunlun mountains, or in (or "beyond") the heavens.

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50    *Taishang lingbao wufu xu* 太上靈寶五符序 (DZ 388), 3.20a.
51    *Dunhuang ben* Taixuan zhenyi benji jing *jijiao* 敦煌本《太玄真一本際經》輯校, ed.
      Ye Guiliang 葉貴良 (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 2010), 139.
52    *Dunhuang ben* Taixuan zhenyi benji jing *jijiao*, 139.
53    *Dunhuang ben* Taixuan zhenyi benji jing *jijiao*, 139–40.

In other cases, though—as perhaps here in the *Benji jing*—medieval Daoism did not claim that the world perceived by adepts was *other* than that perceived by the uninitiated, but rather that adepts perceived it *better*. In such texts, we might say that the Daoist world was "tensional": that it was differentiated but not truly divided.

Whether divided or merely differentiated, however, the point to be made here is that even "tensional" visions usually bore entailments that differentiate them from the monist or immanent vision of the standard model. This point can perhaps be illustrated by what is perhaps the closest genuinely medieval paradigm for the standard model: the role texts and textuality played in the Shangqing 上清 and Lingbao traditions. Many of the scriptures of these traditions depict themselves as "having existed alongside primal *qi* and been born with the great beginning" 與元氣同存，元始俱生, or even as "having created heaven and established earth, begun the transformations of people and spirits, and served as the roots of the myriad things" 生天立地，開化人神，萬物之根.[54] At first glance, this vision of the world as quite literally subtended by text seems quite apposite to the standard model, by which the lived world is inherently meaningful and merely awaits transcription by the human poet—as François Jullien puts it, "l'ordre du naturel … est déjà de 'l'art' et constitue ainsi un précédent par rapport au développement spécifique du texte littéraire."[55] Yet the parallel breaks down when we reflect that not only were these Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures supposed to be revealed only to a select few, but more fundamentally, the revealed texts were not the scriptures in their original forms. Instead, the original scriptures needed to be translated,

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54 *Dongzhen taishang suling dongyuan dayou miao jing* 洞真太上素靈洞元大有妙經 (DZ 1314), 1b, and *Tongmenlun* 通門論, in Ōfuchi Ninji, *Tonkō dōkyō zokurokuhen* 敦煌道經圖錄編 (Tokyo: Fukubu shoten, 1979), P2256, 727. See also *Shangqing sanyuan yujian sanyuan bujing* 上清三元玉檢三元布經 (DZ 354), 2a. For a discussion of such claims, see Stephen Peter Bumbacher, "Cosmic Scripts and Heavenly Scriptures: The Holy Nature of Taoist Texts," *Cosmos: The Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society* 11 (1995): 139–53; Hsieh Shu-wei 謝世維, "Writing from Heaven: Celestial Writing in Six Dynasties Daoism" (Ph.D. diss.: Indiana Univ., 2005); idem, *Tianjie zhi wen: Wei-Jin-Nan-Bei chao Lingbao jingdian yanjiu* 天界之文：魏晉南北朝靈寶經典研究; and Wang Chengwen, "The Revelation and Classification of Daoist Scriptures," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 775–888. See also Poul Andersen, *The Paradox of Being: Truth, Identity, and Images in Daoism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2019), 97–110.

55 François Jullien, *La valeur allusive. Des catégories originales de l'interprétation poétique dans la tradition chinoise* (*Contribution à une réflexion sur l'altérité interculturelle*) (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1985), 52.

often several times, in order to become comprehensible to the limited faculties of even the most advanced human adept.[56] As explained in the Shangqing *Zhengao* 真誥, if the true texts "were mistakenly revealed to beings with skeletons and had to be subject to the vicissitudes of the [mortal] world, it would both blemish their refined and perfected chants and break the bans requiring a separation [between mortal and transcendent realms]" 苟騫露有骸之物，而得與世進退，上玷逸眞之詠，下虧有隔之禁.[57] In this sense, these scriptures play an intermediary role, operating on both sides of a divide they serve simultaneously to efface and to mark, offering the linguistic translation of something they themselves protest, in the words of the early-Tang Daoist Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (ca. 608–ca. 669), "cannot be discriminated by means of words and cannot be known through the thoughts of the mind" 不可以名言辯，不可以心慮知.[58] Such texts, as a result, can only have a paradoxical relationship to what they reveal—a vision of textuality that created opportunities for poetry theorists to claim that the art's non-normal language and the non-normal cognition it required could likewise offer special access to otherwise inaccessible, esoteric realms of meaning.

It is my contention that wherever in medieval culture we do not find a simpler dualism, we find at least a tensional vision of reality along these lines. Even the Classicism (often called "Confucianism") of the Tang, with its relative focus on the mundane world, displays this fundamental orientation. According to the "Bibliographic Treatise" 經籍志 of the *Suishu* 隋書, for instance, an esoteric Dao lies at the basis of the sages' teachings in the Classics and the daily practices these Classics encourage.[59]

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56  For instance, a listing of five stages of translation 五譯成書 is given in the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶无量度人上經大法 (DZ 219), 2.1a–2b.

57  Tao Hongjing 陶弘景, ed., *Zhengao* 真誥 (DZ 1016), 1.8a.

58  Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, *Laozi Daodejing kaiti xujue yishu* 老子道德經開題序訣義疏, *Zhonghua daozang* 中華道藏, ed. Zhang Jiyu 張繼禹 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004), vol. 9, 234a. For Chongxuan Daoism and its use of the tetralemma, see Friederike Assandri, *Beyond the Daode jing: Twofold Mystery in Tang Daoism* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2009).

59  Although the "Bibliographical Treatise" is only ambiguously "Confucian"—in the sense that it lists much more than the Classics and their commentaries—it is what we might consider a "Classicist" work, affording Buddhism and Daoism (especially what is now called "religious Daoism") only a peripheral place in the canon. See Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 81–84.

The Dao is the mystery of the myriad things and the ultimate secret of the common people depend upon the Dao on a daily basis but do not know its function in their lives. The sages embodied the Dao as their nature ... [but since] its obscure (*xuan*) power is deep and distant and thus cannot be fathomed with words or images, therefore the Former Kings were afraid that people would be confused and so placed it "beyond the square." The *Six Classics* therefore rarely discuss it.

道者，蓋為萬物之奧，聖人之至賾也。…百姓資道而日用，而不知其用也。聖人體道成性，…其玄德深遠，言象不測。先王懼人之惑，置于方外，六經之義，是所罕言。[60]

On this account, the Classics resemble the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* and the Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures, simultaneously connecting us to an esoteric truth and screening us from it at the same time. As I have argued in an earlier issue of this journal, this basic vision of the Classics is also the overarching common theme of the *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義 series of Classical subcommentaries, which was promulgated by the Tang court in 653 and which may foreground its inheritance from *Xuanxue* partly in order to claim a place alongside Buddhism and Daoism in an intellectual world that was, by the early seventh century, fundamentally structured around an exoteric-esoteric divide.[61]

Yet though early Tang Classicism was often at pains to suggest its analogy to contemporary Buddhism and Daoism, it was generally more positive and less paradoxical about the role that texts could play in mediating the Dao to mundane faculties. In the first lines of the Tang subcommentaries' introduction to the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), for instance, we read that:

The Dao is at base void and quiescent: it partakes neither of names nor of words. But since forms arise on account of the Dao, and since things are picked out by names, all of the *Classics* and the histories go by things and establish names .... Thus the words of the *Classics* are the fishtraps and snares of the sages' intent.

道本沖寂，非有名言。既形以道生，物由名舉，則凡諸經史因物立名。…是言者意之筌蹄。[62]

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60    *Suishu*, 隋書, by Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 34.1003.

61    See Bender, "*The Corrected Interpretations*."

62    *Shangshu zhushu* 尚書注疏, in *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋

Much the same account of the texts' relationship to the Dao is given in the introduction to the subcommentary on the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) as well.

> The truths expressed in the *Yijing* concern both Negativity and Actuality, but the images of the *Yijing* are only within Actuality. This is because when the sages created the *Yijing*, they did so at base to provide a teaching, and what a teaching provides will always be provided within Actuality.

> 易理備包有无而易象唯在於有者，蓋以聖人作易，本以垂教，教之所備，本備於有。[63]

Since the subcommentary goes on immediately after this passage to confirm that "the Dao is Negativity" 道即无也, the point here is that, while the *Yijing*'s sagely authors understood the Dao, it lies beyond what they could communicate to mundane understanding.[64] Yet these subcommentaries are not, for this reason, advocating or providing means towards the transcendence of our mundane limitations, as Buddhist and Daoist texts often do. Instead, the Classics are understood as mediating the ineffable Dao to us in a way that is, ideally, enough to keep us in conformity with it, even if we do not (and will not ever) understand it.

If the Buddhist and Daoist idea that text can represent a paradoxical gateway to ineffable truths provided a certain kind of justification to poetry, then, Classicism often provided another, one more concerned with its value to morality and politics. Many writers, for instance, traced literature's role in the state back to the *Classic of Poetry*, which according to the Tang subcommentaries preserved traces of an almost mantic practice by which the ancient Zhou court divined the mysterious cycles of an otherwise obscure universe through the poetry produced by its people. As the *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 explains in its opening lines:

> The arising of sadness and happiness is a mysterious part of what is so-of-itself; the beginnings of joy and anger are not within human control. Swallows and sparrows, therefore, express their feelings in their chirping, and simurghs and phoenixes dance and sing. In this way, the antecedents

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本十三經注疏附校勘記, originally edited by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) in 1816 (rpt. Taibei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1965), 1.5a.

63　*Zhouyi zhushu* 周易注疏, in *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji*, 1.4a.

64　*Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.4a.

of poetry's logic are at one with the creation of the universe, and the use
of poetry's traces changes according to its cycles.

若夫哀樂之起，冥於自然；喜怒之端，非由人事。故燕雀表喟噍之
感，鸞鳳有歌舞之容，然則詩理之先，同夫開闢；詩迹所用，隨運而
移。[65]

Equally important, the Classics offered models that derived ultimately from the
sages' esoteric insights, models that writers could imitate and thus reactivate
for the present. As Liu Mian 柳冕 (ca. 730–804) puts it in a discussion of why
*wenzhang* 文章 (literary writings) matter:

[Confucius'] disciples said: The Master's *wenzhang* [here: the Classics]
can be heard, but how his nature matched with the Dao of heaven cannot
be heard. This is because that part of the sagely Dao to which [we normal
people] can aspire to and reach is *wen* [writings, culture]; and what we
cannot aspire to and reach is the sages' nature.

門人云：夫子之文章，可得而聞也。夫子之言性與天道，不可得而聞
也。即聖人道可企而及之者文也，不可企而及之者性也。[66]

These texts depict literature mediating the Dao to the mundane in two different
ways, mantic and exemplary. And both of these functions were encapsulated
for Tang theorists in what is by far the most common Classical citation to which
they appealed in justifying literary writing, the *Yijing*'s advice that rulers should
"observe the *wen* of heaven [the stars, meteors, and other astral signs] to inves-
tigate the changing seasons and observe the *wen* of mankind [often interpreted
as centrally including literature] in order to complete the transformation of all-
under-heaven" 觀乎天文以察時變，觀乎人文以化成天下.[67]

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65  *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩注疏, in *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji*, "Maoshi
zhengyi xu," 3a.

66  Liu Mian 柳冕, "Da Quzhou Zheng shijun lunwen shu" 答衢州鄭使君論文書, in *Quan
Tang wen* 全唐文, ed. Deng Hao 董浩 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 527.5359b.

67  *Zhouyi zhushu*, 3.62b. For citations see, for example, *Chenshu* 陳書, by Yao Silian 姚思廉
et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 34.453; *Suishu*, 76.1729; *Nanshi* 南史, by Li Yanshou
李延壽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 72.1761; *Beishi* 北史, by Li Yanshou 李延壽 (Bei-
jing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 83.2777; and *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書, by Li Baiyao et al. (Beijing:
Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 45.601; along with more than a dozen instances in *Quan Tang wen*
from throughout the entire temporal extent of the dynasty, including 183.1861a, 202.2046b,
322.3266b, 349.3537a, 368.3735a, 368.3736a, 394.4014a, 489.4997b, 527.5356b, 628.6342a,

A third moral and political justification for literature was also drawn from the *Yijing*. This Classic, whose graphs were often discussed in the Tang as the first instance of *wen* and the progenitor of the writing system,[68] was commonly held to have played a formative role in creating the mundane world as the Chinese experienced it, with all the moral implications that were found in its hierarchical and correlative structures. According to the *Zhengyi*, the sages created the *Changes* "in order to categorize the dispositions of the myriad things" 以類萬物, for "if they had not done so, those dispositions would be impossible [for most of us] to know" 若不作易，物情難知.[69] In other words, within a cosmos that would have been characterized for most people by its incomprehensible obscurity,

> The sages created the *Yijing* in order to provide an [exoteric] teaching. This is why the *Qian zao du* says, "Confucius said: In the time of great antiquity, people had as yet no distinctions among them, and the myriad things were not yet differentiated and did not yet serve as clothing, food, vessels, and tools. [The primal sage] Fu Xi then looked up and observed images in heaven, looked down and observed models in the earth, and looked in between and saw what was appropriate for the myriad things. Then he created the eight trigrams, in order to communicate the power of spiritual beings and in order to categorize the characters of the myriad things. Therefore, the *Yijing* is that which separates heaven and earth, orders human relationships, and makes clear the way of the king. Thus, Fu Xi drew the eight trigrams, establishing the five [phases of] *qi* in order to establish the five virtues that correspond to them; and he imaged and modeled heaven and earth, making *yin* and *yang* accord so as to set in order the relationships of ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife."

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671.6853a, and 788.8241a. For a use of this same passage in a context genuinely concerned with omens, see *Jinshu* 晉書, by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 11.277.

68    See, for just a few instances beyond those to be mentioned below, Gao Jian 高儉, "Wensi boyao xu" 文思博要序, in *Wenyuan yinghua* 699.3606b; Liu Su 劉肅, *Da Tang xinyu* 大唐新語, ed. Xu Denan 許德楠 and Li Dingxia 李鼎霞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), "Xu," 1; and Wei Hao 魏顥, "Li hanlin ji xu" 李翰林集序, in Li Bai 李白, *Li Bai quanji biannian jianzhu* 李白全集編年箋注, ed. An Qi 安旗 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), "fulu," 1950.

69    *Zhouyi zhushu*, 8.166b.

作易所以垂教者，即乾鑿度云：孔子曰：上古之時，人民無別，羣物未殊，未有衣食器用之利。伏犧乃仰觀象於天，俯觀法於地，中觀萬物之宜。於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。故易者所以斷天地，理人倫，而明王道。是以畫八卦，建五氣，以立五常之行；象法乾坤，順陰陽，以正君臣父子夫婦之義。[70]

Following this model, literary writings were sometimes thought of as sustaining the shared cultural world the sages had created. As Gao Jian 高儉 (575–647) puts it in the introduction to an early-Tang literary encyclopedia, they "allow the myriad things, despite their multitudinousness, to share the same categorizations and allow people to share the same sounds [i.e., the same concerns and dispositions] despite the distances between them" 萬物雖眾，可以同類，千里雖遙，可以同聲。[71] The calligraphy theorist Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (fl. 713–42), similarly, writes:

> The *dao* of *wen* is brilliant …. It applies names and words to Negativity, and governs and controls the myriad Actualities …. It molds and circumscribes the cosmos, separating and differentiating *yin* and *yang*. Through it, it becomes possible to live on high plains and down low by rivers; through it, the soil becomes rich enough to grow crops; and thus through it, the wilds of the eight directions are made accountable. It provides order to human affairs, and makes manifest the correct form of governance.

> 文也者，其道煥焉。…名言諸無，宰制群有。…範圍宇宙，分別陰陽，川原高下之可居，土壤沃瘠之可植。是以八荒籍焉，綱紀人倫，顯明政體。[72]

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70    *Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.4a–b.

71    Gao Jian, "Wensi boyao xu," in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 699.3607b.

72    Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, "Wenzi lun" 文字論, in Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, ed., *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, annot. Wu Liangcheng 武良成 and Zhou Xu 周旭 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2019), 4.129. Throughout this essay I will cite discourse on other arts, including calligraphy, painting, and music. I claim, and hope to suggest here, that the discourse on all these arts was continuous and shared important themes. If we confine ourselves to discourse on poetry specifically, or even *wen* more generally, we can often see only fragmentary outlines of assumptions and claims that are better spelled out with regard to other arts. The reason for this, I hypothesize, has more to do with the vagaries of transmission than with real differences between thought in these artistic realms. In particular, poetry and *wen* more generally were more subject to the moralizing critique of Song-dynasty Daoxue 道學 than were the other arts, which may account

Here literature (*wen*) is depicted as integral to civilization (*wen*), prescribing an exoteric structure to a world that is too vast and multifarious for most of us to simply observe and understand. As we will see, this vision of literature as possessing an almost cosmogonic significance will make an important contribution to Tang literary thought that cannot be reconciled with the standard model of poets transcribing realities already out there in world.

It is partly because the Classics provided such varied and powerful models for literature's moral significance that the latter was often taken to fit, overall, within the purview of the Ru 儒 (Classicists or Confucians), with poetry in particular denoted synecdochally as an offshoot of the *Classic of Poetry*. Yet in concluding this brief survey of the major intellectual traditions of medieval China, it is important to note that the structural similarities between *Xuanxue*, Buddhism, Daoism, and medieval Classicism generally ensured that literary discourse did not need to choose between them. When Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858), for instance, invokes Classicist references to praise a friend's verse, the terminology he uses sounds remarkably like the liberation of the Buddhist or Daoist initiate:

> Your thoughts match with mysterious [*xuan*] incipiencies, and your destiny is clear of the fetters of the vulgar [a term that in a Buddhist or Daoist context would mean "the laity"]. Thus you ascend and descend at the margin of the Four Beginnings [of the *Classic of Poetry*] and wander freely among its Six Principles.

> 固以慮合玄機，運清俗累，陟降於四始之際，優游於六義之中。 [73]

Even more explicitly, Xu Yin 徐夤 ( *jinshi* 894) suggests that although poetry is a Classicist art, it is the Classicist analogy of the most esoteric form of Buddhism.

> Poetry is the Chan of the Confucians. If one single phrase [in a poem] tallies with the Dao, all eternity is known.

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partly for the better survival of technical and theoretical works about them. That, however, is a subject for a future paper. For the very fragmentary survival of Tang poetry and *wen*, see Stephen Owen, "The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang: The Case of Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67 (2007): 295–326.

73 Li Shangyin 李商隱, "Xian silang Julu gong qi" 獻侍郎鉅鹿公啟, in *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu* 李商隱文編年校注, ed. Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇 and Xu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 1188.

夫詩者，儒中之禪也。一言契道，萬古咸知。[74]

For others, poetry could be a space where different intellectual traditions met. Quan Deyu, for instance, whose praise of the literary writings of the Daoist Wu Yun we already cited above, calls Wu "the greatest in recent times of all those who have roamed 'beyond the square' and spoken through the Six Principles [of the *Classic of Poetry*]" 近古遊方外而言六義者，先生實主盟焉.[75] Similarly, a poem of uncertain attribution describes the monk Daoqian's 道虔 (n.d.) poetry as a convergence of Classicism and Buddhism:

律儀通外學，　Your Buddhist observances thread your Confucian
　　　　　　　　learning,
詩思入玄關。　and thus your poetic thoughts enter the gate of mys-
　　　　　　　　tery.[76]

Most elaborately, Jiaoran suggests that great literature is analogous to the mysteries shared by all the Three Teachings:

If Confucians were to venerate this way of writing, they would call it the crown of the *Six Classics*; if Daoists were to appraise its value, they would say it resides at the Gate of All Wonders; if Buddhists were to worship it, they would say it penetrates the secrets of the King of Emptiness.

向使此道尊之於儒，則冠六經之首；貴之於道，則居眾妙之門；崇之
於釋，則徹空王之奧。[77]

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74　Xu Yin 徐夤, *Yadao jiyao* 雅道機要, in Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, ed., *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao* 全唐五代詩格彙考 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), 439. Xu may be drawing here upon an idea from the Chan 禪 school of Tang Buddhism, that a single word or phrase can express the entirety of the Buddhist teachings. Alternately, the word translated as Chan might be rendered *dhyana*: that is, "poetry is the meditation of the Confucians." The last clause here could also be rendered, "all eternity will know it."

75　Quan Deyu, "Zhongyue Zongxuan xiansheng Wu zunshi ji xu," in *Quan Deyu shi wen biannian jiaozhu*, 488.

76　This poem is variously attributed to Dai Shulun 戴叔伦 (732–789), Fang Gan 方干 (836–888), and Lingche 靈澈 (746–816); see *Quan Tang shi*, 273.3082, 649.7450, and 810.9132. The poem is attributed to Dai Shulun in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 221.1104a, where it reads "your poetic thoughts enter the gate of *chan* (i.e. *dhyāna*, Buddhist meditation)" 詩思入禪關. The "gate of mystery" was sometimes a term for the main gate of a monastery; in other cases, it could be a synonym for the "gate of the Dharma" 法門. It also features in the opening chapter of the *Laozi*. To some degree, the ambiguity of this term itself makes the point.

77　Shi Jiaoran, *Shishi jiaozhu*, 1.42. Following variant 崇/精.

Whatever the precise relationships among the intellectual traditions of medieval China and between them and poetry, we can see in all such comments the impact on literary thought of the fundamental epistemological distinction I have argued is pervasive throughout late-medieval intellectual culture. It is this distinction, I suggest, that should warn us away from the less-tensional monism of the standard model. And it is the pervasiveness of the distinction—the fact that invocation of an epistemologically discontinuous world did not suggest sectarian affiliation or rejection of other traditions—that justifies my attempt in the next two sections to outline an alternate general model for Tang poetics.

## On the Esoteric Creativity of Tang Poetry

The monism imputed to the Chinese cosmos by proponents of the standard model is often taken to diminish or even obviate the literary-theoretical importance of the concept of creativity. Since, we are told, Chinese thought posits no "other" realm where meaning could be hidden, it therefore assumes that "significance and pattern are [already] latent in [this] world." As a result, the traditional Chinese poet must strive for "the authentic presentation of 'what is,' either interior experience or exterior percept … like Confucius, he 'transmits but does not create.' "[78] "In China," in other words, "the poet was not generally held to be the 'maker' of his poem but rather its 'recorder,' … more of a participant in the creative process than its initiator. Events happen, emotions are felt; it is the business of the author to record these events and emotions as accurately as possible. For him to depart from the 'reality' of the circumstances would be, at best, folly, at worst, falsehood."[79] As a result, what we in the modern West might be inclined to call "poetic creation in the Chinese tradition is [rather] a spontaneous response to and engagement with concrete stimuli in external reality,"[80] and "instead of recognising the writing of poetry as a 'creative act,' … Chinese critics [thus] regard the genesis of poetry as a 'natural' process."[81] This vision of natural process is also supposed to be characteristic of the Chinese "Uncreated Universe" in general, which thus provides the

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78    Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 34, 84.

79    Victor Mair, "The Narrative Revolution in Chinese Literature: Ontological Presumptions," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 5 (1983), 9.

80    Cecile Chu-chin Sun, *Pearl from the Dragon's Mouth*, 172.

81    Siu-Kit Wong, ed., *Early Chinese Literary Criticism* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1983), xviii.

model for the processural character of poetry.[82] "Given the lack of a notion of creation ex nihilo and of fictionality (owing perhaps to the conspicuous lack in indigenous Chinese cosmogonic thinking of a creator-figure), ... traditional Chinese poetics and criticism continued to operate under [the assumption of a] stimulus-response model, [by which] specifying concrete historical sources and references for any poet's work ... could provide a ready-made, supposedly irrefutable meaning for it as simply a record of that experience."[83]

Having now seen, however, that immanence and monism describe only poorly the tensional or even discontinuous world of medieval Chinese thought, we will not be surprised to find that the standard model also distorts Tang ideas about poetry's genesis. Rather than reading poetry as a record of experience in the mundane world, it was in fact much more common for Tang critics and theorists to suggest that successful verse—like successful artworks of other kinds as well—derived from obscure sources opposed to the mundane. As a result, Tang writers generally depicted poets not as "recording" or "representing" mundane experience, but rather precisely as creators: drawing upon the obscure sources of the manifest cosmos to further its creation, to recreate it, or to reveal new aspects of it that had previously remained obscure and undifferentiated.[84]

In some cases, claims about poetry's mysterious derivation are little more than sighs of wonder, only tacitly signaling the importance of the obscure in the medieval worldview. Jiaoran, for instance, is clearly speaking metaphorically when he writes that "even though [my best lines] come from within me, it seems to me as if I got them as a gift from the numinous" 雖取由我衷，而得若神授.[85] So too, most likely, is the author of the *Jinzhen shige* 金鍼詩格 when he praises a poet as having written "two couplets of lines derived from the assistance of the numinous, [lines of such quality] that few have attained to this level since the time that people became capable of writing poetry" 此二

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82    Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 78.

83    Pauline Yu, "Allegory, Allegoresis, and the *Classic of Poetry*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43 (1983): 377–412, 411.

84    It may be worth mentioning here that the standard model seems often to take for granted what Paul R. Goldin has called "the myth that China has no creation myth." As Goldin writes, however, "one can find literally dozens of creation stories in Chinese literature," and, indeed, "narratives displaying a concept of creation *ex nihilo* are found in China after all," including some that are more unambiguously *ex nihilo* than anything found in either the Greek or Hebraic traditions. See Paul R. Goldin, "The Myth that China Has No Creation Myth," *Monumenta Serica* 56 (2008): 1–22, 14 and 15.

85    Shi Jiaoran, *Shishi jiaozhu*, "Shishi xu," 1. Jiaoran uses this trope repeatedly. See, for example, *Shishi jiaozhu*, 2.153.

聯神助之句，自能詩者鮮到於此.[86] Yet even if neither writer is literally refer-
ring to the "spirit writing" that was a common phenomenon in other medieval
contexts, both invoke this practice to suggest that there is some increment of
unaccountable inspiration necessary for the production of truly great poetry,
an element of mystery that places it outside of the normal range of our mental
processes.

Elsewhere, the claim that poetry derives from beyond the mundane could
have more significant intellectual entailments. The idea that poetry partook
of "the numinous," for instance, could sometimes account for its inexhaustible
transformability—a characteristic that, according to *Xuanxue* and *Xuanxue*-
inflected Classicism, should appertain only to entities that are obscure or sub-
tle, not defined by a fixed form.[87] As Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837–908) writes, for
instance:

> Literature in general is difficult, but poetry's difficulties are especially
> difficult …. [Its composition, therefore,] relies on reaching the ultimate.
> After this, its thousand transformations and myriad forms are numinous
> of themselves, even though we cannot understand what makes them so.
> How, therefore, could it be easy?
>
> 文之難，而詩之難尤難。…本於詣極。此外千變萬狀，不知所以神而
> 自神也。豈容易哉.[88]

For Sikong here, the point seems to be that poets can create a novel form only by
reaching something like the cosmic "ultimate" or "ridgepole"—often equated
by medieval Classicism to the Dao or Negativity—that gives rise to the myriad
things by not being any definable thing itself.[89] A similar vision of creativity is
also invoked by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731) when he writes:

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86　Bai Juyi 白居易, attrib., *Jinzhen shige* 金鍼詩格, in Zhang Bowei, ed., *Quan Tang Wudai
shige huikao*, 350.

87　See the definition of "the numinous" given by Han Bo 韓伯 (fl. fourth c.) that is preserved
in the *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義: "Spirit is the ultimate of transformation; it is a word for
that which is miraculous in the myriad things, that which cannot be sought through form"
神也者，變化之極，妙萬物而為言，不可以形詰者也. *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.149a.

88　Sikong Tu 司空圖, *Sikong Biaosheng shi wen ji jianjiao* 司空表聖詩文集箋校, ed. Zu
Baoquan 祖保泉 et al. (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2002), "Wenji" 2.193–94. Sikong is
specifically speaking about *jueju* 絕句 poetry in the last three sentences.

89　See Han Bo's discussion of the *taiji* 太極 in *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.156b–7a. Note that the editors
of the *Zhengyi* thought the *taiji* was one step removed from Negativity in the direction of
form.

Words are that by which intent (*zhi*) is expressed, and literature (*wen*) comes about through the juxtaposition of things. What the mind cannot conceal within itself, it expresses in the body and countenance; the phrases that [accompany this expression] must not be lowly, so we mix them into appealing forms. As we thus drum on and make dance the myriad images, they enter into the realm where language applies; and as we proliferate and mix the five tones, they emerge from a realm without sound. How could anyone who has not exhausted the numinous and embodied the miraculous participate in such a process?

夫言者志之所之，文者物之相雜。然則心不可蘊，故發揮以形容；辭不可陋，故錯綜以潤色。萬象鼓舞，入有名之地；五音繁雜，出無聲之境。非窮神體妙，其孰能與於此乎？[90]

Zhang's logic here relies on two tropes of late-medieval Classicism we have already discussed above. The first is the idea, spelled out in the introduction to the Tang subcommentary to the *Classic of Documents*, that the sages "establish names" even though the Dao itself—which is the ultimate object of their teachings—"partakes neither of names nor of words." The second is the late-medieval mythology of the *Yijing*, that before the primal sage Fu Xi created the hexagrams of the *Yi*, the world appeared to mankind an undifferentiated chaos to which no names applied. Zhang's point, then, is that literature continues the sagely project of making manifest and malleable a reality that is, in itself, not easily accessible to linguistic expression. Thus even though he echoes here the canonical expressivist statement so often emphasized by proponents of the standard model—that "poetry articulates intent" 詩言志[91]—Zhang depicts expression itself as a process that partakes of the mysterious, crossing the boundary we saw established throughout medieval thought between what is within "the realm where language applies" and what is beyond it.

This account of the artistic process as drawing from "beyond the square" to produce a product "within" it is pervasive in Tang discourse about the arts. Per-

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haps the most influential of all earlier literary-theoretical statements[92] was Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) depiction of writing as "a trial of Negativity to demand Actuality, a knock upon silence, seeking sound" 課虛無以責有，叩寂寞而求音, whereby literary phrases emerge unaccountably, "from the depths, like swimming fish with hooks in their mouths" 若遊魚銜鉤而出重淵之深, and the process of literary manifestation ends up "caging heaven and earth in a fixed form and crushing all things beneath the brush's tip" 籠天地於形內，挫萬物於筆端.[93] Echoing this vision, Zhang Huaiguan describes the process of writing calligraphy as "molding and circumscribing that which has no form and responding to that which has no settled character, seeking from the void in order to establish new shapes and, having leveled all differences and brought everything back to unity, matching tallies with the darkness and quaffing the subtlest essences" 範圍無體，應會無方，考沖漠以立形，齊萬殊而一貫，合冥契，吸至精.[94] A similar process is evoked as well in Lü Wen's 呂溫 (772–811) "Rhapsody on Music's Emergence from the Void" 樂出虛賦, which portrays music as "deriving from Negativity and entering into Actuality" 從無入有, "coming forth from the most subtle stages of being and emerging from what has no gaps" 因妙有而來，向無間而至, and "having roots in what is ultimately still and silent" 根乎寂寂.[95] Jiaoran likewise describes paintings as "forms born from vacant Negativity" 形生虛無 and as "turning emptiness into Actuality" 翻空作有.[96] Speaking about literature, Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (708–784) describes a fellow writer as "caging the primeval void, wielding mysterious creation, deploying primal *qi* in the outstanding blade-tip of his words, and pressing in upon that which has no gaps as he dissects it at the joints" 牢籠太虛，撽捴玄造，擺元氣而詞鋒首出，軋無間而理窟肌分.[97] And about poetry in particular, Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) writes that one must "smelt the primal

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92    See Zhang Huaiguan's comment: "Lu Ji's 'Rhapsody on Literature' is truly a famous work. If it did not reach to an ultimate vision, it would not have succeeded in causing the hearts of later men to bow to it" 如陸平原文賦，實為名作，若不造極境，無由伏後世人心. Zhang Huaiguan, "Wenzi lun," *Fashu yaolu*, 4.130.

93    See Lu Ji 陸機, *Lu Ji ji* 陸機集, ed. Jin Taosheng 金濤聲, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 1.2. I have modified translations from Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 101, 110, 118.

94    Zhang Huaiguan, "Shu duan" 書斷, in *Fashu yaolu*, 7.193.

95    Lü Wen 呂溫, "Yue chu xu fu" 樂出虛賦, in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 150.341b.

96    Jiaoran, "Zhou zhangshi Fang hua Pishamen tianwang ge" 周長史防畫毗沙門天王歌, in *Quan Tang shi*, 821.9258.

97    From his "Langji xiansheng Xuanzhenzi Zhang Zhihe beiming" 浪跡先生玄真子張志和碑銘, *Yan Lugong ji* 顏魯公集, in *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (*skqs*), comp. Ji Yun 紀昀 et al. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1983–86), 9.11a.

basis of all things so as to be able to carve and engrave their myriad shapes" 鍛鍊元本，雕礱群形.[98] In all such comments, the focus is on the gap that intervenes between the final form of an artistic product and the formless source from which the artist drew it.

Accessing this formless source was often held to depend upon achieving a special, ultramundane state of mind. In some cases, this ultramundane state was exactly that cultivated by religious adepts in their attempts to escape the epistemological limitations of most people confined to the mundane world. Jiaoran, for instance, describes the work of a Daoist painter in the following terms:

道流跡異人共驚，　A man of the Dao, his traces are strange,
　　　　　　　　　　all men are shocked thereby;
寄向畫中觀道情。　he lodges [his intent] within the painting
　　　　　　　　　　so they can observe the truths of the Dao.
如何萬象自心出，　How can it be that the myriad images
　　　　　　　　　　come forth from his mind,
而心淡然無所營。　when his mind is placid and empty,
　　　　　　　　　　and toils at no affairs?[99]

Liu Yuxi writes, similarly, of a Buddhist monk:

The Sanskrit word *śramaṇa* [monk] is equivalent to the Chinese words "one who rids himself of desire." If one can separate oneself from desire, then one's square-inch [mind] will be void. If it is void, then the myriad images can enter, and if they enter, they will inevitably leak out, taking form in words that will necessarily adhere to tonal regulations. It is for this reason that in the recent past, Buddhist monks have followed one after another in being famous for their poetry. It is because they can concentrate their minds [in meditation] that they get visions [*jing*], and thus [their poetry] is unfettered and pure; it is through their wisdom that they send forth words, and so [their poetry] is refined and beautiful.

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98　Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫, "Dongshi Wuling ji ji" 董氏武陵集紀, in *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu* 劉禹錫全集編年校注, ed. Tao Min 陶敏 and Tao Hongyu 陶紅雨 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 14.1569.

99　Jiaoran, "Feng ying Yan shangshu Zhenqing guan Xuanzhenzi zhijiu zhangyue wu pozhen hua Dongting san shan ge" 奉應顏尙書眞卿觀玄眞子置酒張樂舞破陣畫洞庭三山歌, in *Quan Tang shi*, 821.9255.

梵言沙門，猶華言去欲也。能離欲，則方寸地虛，虛而萬象入，入必
有所泄，乃形乎詞，詞妙而深者，必依於聲律，故自近古而降，釋子
以詩聞於世者相踵焉。因定而得境，故翛然以清；由慧而遣辭，故粹
然以麗。[100]

More commonly, however, the attainments of religious adepts were invoked merely as metaphors for mental states unattached to any particular religious practice. Of particular note in Liu Yuxi's discussion, for instance, is the word "visions" (*jing* 境), a term of Buddhist meditational art describing the "confirmatory visions" that appear to meditators when they have attained a certain spiritual advancement.[101] This term had already become common in poetic theorization several decades previous to Liu Yuxi's pointedly Buddhist usage here, and with many of the same implications. In one of the essays on poetics dubiously attributed to Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–756), for instance, we read:

> When your eye strikes upon a thing, you need your mind to strike upon it: to deeply penetrate the vision [*jing*] of it, as if you had climbed the cut-off peak of a tall mountain and were looking down on the myriad images, [as small and comprehensible] as if they were in the palm of your hand. When you see an image in this way, your mind sees it completely, and at this point, it can be used in a poem. Then mountain forests, sun and moon, and the landscape will be true, and when one sings them out, it will be like seeing the sun or moon reflected in water.

> 目擊其物，便以心擊之，深穿其境。如登高山絕頂，下臨萬象，如在
> 掌中。以此見象，心中了見，當此即用。…山林、日月、風景為真，
> 以歌詠之，猶如水中見日月。[102]

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100 Liu Yuxi, "Qiuri guo Hongju fashi siyuan bian song gui Jiangling" 秋日過鴻舉法師寺院便送歸江陵, in *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 2.250.

101 Eric M. Greene has recently shown that in the medieval period, the terms *jing* and *jingjie* 境界 denoted "confirmatory visions" that appeared to a meditator in the course of practice and allowed for the divination of his or her progress along the path to enlightenment. Note that the authority of these visions was questioned by the Chan school beginning in the eighth century; this semiotic shift does not seem to have made the concept any less popular in literary theorization, however. See Eric M. Greene, "Visions and Visualizations: In Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology," *History of Religions* 55 (2016): 289–328, and idem, *Chan Before Chan: Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2021).

102 Wang Changling, attrib., "Lun wen yi," *Bunkyō hifuron*, "Nan," 1312.

Another text also ascribed to Wang Changling makes much the same point in discussing poems that aim at descriptive verisimilitude:

> If you want to write a landscape poem, you need to spread out before yourself a vision [*jing*] of springs and stones and clouds and peaks, extremely beautiful and of the utmost grace, and you need to spiritualize that scene within your mind. You need to [imaginatively] place yourself within that vision as you see the vision within your mind, as thoroughly as if it were in the palm of your hand. Then you need to exert thought so as to completely see the images of the vision: in this way you will achieve verisimilitude.

> 欲為山水詩，則張泉石雲峰之境，極麗絕秀者，神之於心。處身於境，視境於心，瑩然掌中，然後用思，了然境象，故得形似。[103]

In both quotations, "vision" is merely an analogy: aspiring poets are not enjoined to commit themselves to actual Buddhist meditation. But the analogy is significant, since it suggests that the mental state from which poetry derives is different from, and perhaps even discontinuous with, the more mundane sorts of experience and perception that characterize our normal lives.

   This emphasis on the esoteric derivation of poetry explains why several Tang writers deny fairly explicitly that poets should simply "present what is, either interior experience or exterior percept," claiming, instead, that one has to transcend the world in order to represent it successfully. One of the essays on poetics dubiously attributed to Wang Changling, for instance, pointedly mocks a poem it takes as merely describing things perceived, commenting that "If you have [appropriate] perceptible forms of things to put into a poem but no ideas or inspiration, even if you write skillfully, it will be of no use" 若有物色，無意興，雖巧亦無處用之.[104] Instead of noting faithfully what one has seen, one needs instead to "focus one's mind beyond heaven and the four seas and exert thought in the space before primal *qi* has come into being" 凝心天海之外，用思元氣之前, "blocking out all mundane worries and affairs" 須屏絕事務 so as to allow one's store of experiences to "merge and give rise to inspirations" 合而生興, which "must themselves go beyond the visions (*jing*) of the mass of people … gathering the heavens and the four seas into the square-inch of the mind"

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103   Wang Changling, attrib., "Shige" 詩格, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao*, 172.
104   Wang Changling, attrib., "Lun wen yi" 論文意, in *Bunkyō hifuron huijiao huikao* 文鏡秘府論彙校彙考, comp. Henjō-Kongō (Kukai) 遍照金剛 (空海), ed. Lu Shengjiang 盧盛江 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), "Nan," 1361, 1339.

意須出萬人之境，...攢天海於方寸.[105] Xu Yin is even more explicit, advising poets that:

> Those who would write poetry need to seek and search [for lines]. When they have not yet gotten a line, they need first to make sure that their poetic ideas come before the images [they use to express them], for when a poem's images arise after the poetic ideas [that organize them], this is true skill .... And every time you set out to seek and search, it is appropriate to cast your thoughts into the depths and into the distance, so that your embodiment of truth will be mysterious and subtle.

> 凡為詩須搜覓。未得句，先須令意在象前，象生意後，斯為上手矣。...凡搜覓之際，宜放意深遠，體理玄微。[106]

Xu's description of poets "seeking and searching" for lines "in the depths and in the distance" is elsewhere referred to shorthand as "seeking in the darkness" (*mingsou* 冥搜). Such a search could, no doubt, be stimulated by a particular event in the observable world—as it is in a poem of Du Fu's, for example, when he visits a Buddhist monastery.[107] But the process was more frequently depicted as a mental journey beyond the confines of one's concrete experience. As Yin Fan 殷璠 (fl. 750s) puts it, for example, "there is no need to travel far or seek out ancient sites in order to begin 'seeking in the darkness'" 何必歷遐遠，探古迹，然後始爲冥搜.[108] Liao Rong 廖融 (fl. 936), similarly, describes a fellow poet as "amassing thought while roaming [his mind] throughout the gray seas, / his seeking in the darkness penetrating the grotto heavens" 積思遊滄海，冥搜入洞天.[109] Liu Shaoyu 劉昭禹 (fl. 909) also makes the same point when he writes, "I get these lines in the depths of the night, / and only then does my mind return from beyond the heavens" 句向夜深得，心從天外歸.[110] And Jiaoran likewise describes composition as a spiritual adventure beyond the confines of the body:

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[105] Wang Changling, attrib., "Lun wen yi," *Bunkyō hifuron*, "Nan," 1327, 1370, 1370, 1315.

[106] Xu Yin, *Yadao jiyao*, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao*, 445–46. Xu is clearly drawing here upon the hermeneutics of the "Xici" commentary to the *Yijing*.

[107] See Du Fu, *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, 2.295–96.

[108] Yin Fan 殷璠, *Heyue yingling ji*, in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編, ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 et al. (revised edition, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 191.

[109] Liao Rong 廖融, "Xie Weng Hong yi shi bai pian jian shi" 謝翁宏以詩百篇見示, in *Quan Tang shi*, 762.8654.

[110] Preserved in Ji Yougong 計有功, *Tang shi jishi jiaojian* 唐詩紀事校箋, ed. Wang Zhong-yong 王仲鏞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 46.1564.

You need to keep your attention continuously on perilous straits and pluck the remarkable from beyond images, writing lines that stir into flight, and inscribing thought of the darkest mysteries. A pearl of great rarity must surely be found under [the deadly scales of] a black dragon's chin; how much more is this the case of *wen* that communicates with the hidden and holds transformation within?

固須繹慮於險中，采奇於象外，狀飛動之句，寫冥奧之思。夫希世之珠，必出驪龍之頷，況通幽含變之文哉？[111]

In all such examples, the image of the poet is not of an artist engaged in the observation and tracing of the mundane world, but of someone who—in the words originally of Lu Ji, and repeated verbatim by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638) in a seventh century treatise—"retracts his vision and reverts his hearing" 收視返聽, cutting himself off from perception in order to generate images from elsewhere.[112] As Pei Xiaoyuan 裴孝源 (fl. early seventh c.) puts it, writing of painting, an artist's ability to perfectly "imitate the form of things, a myriad types without mistake" 隨物成形，萬類無失 thus depends upon his having "fixed his mind beyond things" 心專物表.[113] Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (fl. 847–875), similarly, writes that if a painter's "thoughts are on the five colors [present in the things of the world], then he will not be able to successfully paint their images" 意在五色，則物象乖矣.[114] And Fu Zai 符載 (fl. 789) recommends that the artist's "thoughts must darkly merge with mysterious transformation, such that the things [to be depicted] are there within the storehouse of his spirit, rather than in his eyes and ears; ... his *qi* must merge with the vacant and silent, so that he becomes a companion of the spirits; .... and he must reach the essence of the Dao and the utmost of artistry through mysterious enlightenment" 意冥元化，而物在靈府，不在耳，...氣交沖漠，與神為徒，...道精藝極，當得之於元悟. If a painter does this, Fu avers, his art "will no longer be [mere] painting, but rather the true Dao itself" 非畫也，真道也.[115]

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111    Jiaoran, *Shiyi* 詩議, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige*, 108.

112    Yu Shinan 虞世南, "Bisui lun" 筆髓論, in *Quan Tang wen* 138.1402a.

113    Pei Xiaoyuan 裴孝源, "Zhenguan gongsi huashi xu" 貞觀公私畫史序, in *Quan Tang wen*, 159.1629b.

114    Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2019), 2.28.

115    Fu Zai 符載, "Jiangling siyu zhai yanji guan Zhang yuanwai hua song shi tu" 江陵陸侍御宅讌集觀張員外畫松石圖, in *Quan Tang wen*, 690.7066a. Here as often in *Quan Tang wen*, 元 is serving as a taboo-character replacement for 玄.

Besides illustrating once more the frequency with which artistic achievement was analogized to religious attainment, Fu's comment here also suggests another common figure for artistry: the creation of the universe. Fu actually makes this point after describing a painter's work in unmistakably cosmogonic terms, whereby the painting begins with "flowing lightning striking the void, startling blasts infringing upon heaven, crashing, crushing, whirling, and striking, splitting, flashing, speeding, and dividing" 流電激空，驚飆戾天，摧挫斡掣，撝霍瞥列, and ends with a completed landscape of "precipitous rocks and deep waters" 石巉巖，水湛湛.[116] Similar descriptions of the artist's accomplishment are found throughout the Tang, belying claims by proponents of the standard model that the phrase "'creative process' implies an analogy which does not apply in the Chinese case."[117] Also writing of paintings, for instance, Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (*jinshi* betwen 806 and 820) says that painters' "minds return to the source of cosmic creation" 心歸造化, that their work "tallies with the accomplishments of cosmic creation" 符造化之功, and "responds through their hands to their thoughts as swiftly as cosmic creation, such that their paintings give forth clouds and wisps, and their washes form wind and rain, just like the skillfulness of the gods" 應手隨意，倏若造化，圖出雲霞，染成風雨，宛若神巧.[118] Du Fu, similarly, describes a painter's skill by:

反思前夜風雨急，　　thinking back on the night [you painted it,]
　　　　　　　　　　　when wind and rain blew hard:
乃是蒲城鬼神入。　　it must have been ghosts and gods
　　　　　　　　　　　entering [the city].
元氣淋漓障猶濕，　　The screen is still wet
　　　　　　　　　　　from drenching with primal *qi*;
真宰上訴天應泣。　　the True Creator complained above,
　　　　　　　　　　　and Heaven must have wept.[119]

Here Du Fu appeals to an image of the artist "stealing the prerogative of creation from heaven and earth" 奪得乾坤造化權 (drawn most likely from the

116    Fu Zai, "Jiangling siyu zhai yanji guan Zhang yuanwai hua song shi tu," in *Quan Tang wen*, 690.7065b.

117    Siu-kit Wong, "Wen-hsin tiao-lung," in William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (1986; rpt. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 2003), vol. 1, 890.

118    Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄, *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄, annot. Wen Zhaotong 溫肇桐 (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 1985), 2, 35, 35.

119    Du Fu, "Fengxian Liu shaofu xin hua shanshui zhang ge" 奉先劉少府新畫山水障歌, in *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu*, 2.528.

literature surrounding Daoist alchemical practices) that is found commonly in surviving Tang materials.[120] Cen Shen 岑參 (ca. 715–70), for instance, writes of a painter as "exhausting heaven and earth in wielding his brush ... which has proved itself capable of stealing the accomplishments of cosmic creation" 揮毫天地窮，...能奪造化功;[121] Zhang Yanyuan describes a painter as "spiritually borrowing heaven's creativity" 神假天造;[122] Gu Yun 顧雲 (*jinshi* 874) describes a writer as "whirling a literary blade that smashes the caves of cosmic creation" 文鋒斡破造化窟;[123] and Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836?–910) describes poets as "stealing from cosmic creation such that thunder and clouds spurt and surge, and putting the ghosts and gods to work such that wind and rain speed to command" 奪造化而雲雷噴涌，役鬼神而風雨奔馳.[124] Other similarly antagonistic or competitive visions of the relationship between the artist and cosmogenesis abound, especially from the Mid-Tang on, when we find Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) depicting a poet's writings as "competing with the accomplishments of creation" 詩爭造化功, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) wondering "how creation can stand [a friend's poetic] engraving" 造化何以當鐫劖, Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814) writing of a poet as "striking a blow against cosmic creativity as the myriad Actualities rush to follow your commands" 擺造化，萬有隨手奔, Li He 李賀 (ca. 790–ca. 817) speaking of a writer's brush as "patching creation such that no credit can be given to heaven" 筆補造化天無功, and three ninth-century poet monks describing Li Bai's 李白 (701–762) poetry as "whipping cosmic creation to a gallop" 鞭馳造化, "riding cosmic creation" 驅造化, or "scraping creation empty so that there was nothing left" 搜掊造化空牢牢.[125] More irenic relationships between artists and the world were, however,

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120    *Xiuzhen shi shu* 修真十書 (DZ 263), 7.1b.

121    Cen Shen 岑參, "Liu xianggong zhongshu jiangshan huazhang" 劉相公中書江山畫障, in *Cen Shen shi jianzhu* 岑參詩箋注, ed., Liao Li 廖立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), 1.305.

122    Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, 2.27.

123    Gu Yun 顧雲, "Chiyang zui ge zeng Kuanglu chushi Yao Yanjie" 池陽醉歌贈匡廬處士姚巖傑, in *Quan Tang shi*, 637.7304.

124    Wei Zhuang 韋莊, "You xuan ji xu" 又玄集序, *You xuan ji* 又玄集, in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*, 773.

125    Bai Juyi 白居易, "Da Liu Hezhou" 答劉和州, in *Bai Juyi shiji jiaozhu* 白居易詩集校注, ed. Xie Siwei 謝思煒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 24.1870; Han Yu 韓愈, "Chou Simen Lu si xiong Yunfu yuanzhang wang qiu zuo" 酬司門盧四兄雲夫院長望秋作, in *Han Changli shiji biannian jianzhu* 韓昌黎詩集編年箋注, ed. Fang Shiju 方世舉 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 7.414; Meng Jiao 孟郊, "Xi zeng Wuben" 戲贈无本, in *Meng Jiao shiji jiaozhu* 孟郊詩集校注, ed. Hua Chenzhi 華忱之 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995), 6.301; Li He 李賀, "Gaoxuan guo" 高軒過, in *Li Changji geshi biannian jianzhu* 李長吉歌詩編年箋注, annot. Wu Qiming 吳企明 (Beijing: Zhonghua

also possible. Li Bai himself, for instance, writes that a poet's "writings participate in creation" 製作參造化; Xu Guangpu 徐光溥 (fl. 934) describes a poet as "using his thought in such a way as to secretly connect with the artistry of cosmic creation" 運思潛通造化工; a pseudo-Wang Wei 王維 (699–759) describes painters as "completing the work of creation" 成造化之功; and Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (ca. 660–712) writes that garden design can be "equal to the numinous techniques of cosmic creation" 侔造化之神術.[126] Or, more equivocally, a poet might possess a "brush of cosmic creation that connects with the numinous" 造化筆通神; might "mysteriously possess a hand of cosmic creativity that once opened the furnace of heaven and earth" 粵有造化手，曾開天地爐; might "connect with cosmic creation at his brushtip, revolving heaven and earth in his palm" 筆端通造化，掌內運乾坤; might "let heaven and earth enter his breast …, so as to control the images of things [and] … with the mind of a sage or worthy, be as complete as cosmic creation" 天地入胸臆，…物象由我裁，…苟非聖賢心，孰與造化該; might reveal that "the source of cosmic creativity can be either spread out from or shrunk down into the square inch of the mind" 造化源，方寸能展縮; or might, simply, "shake hands with the creator of things" 握造化手.[127]

Whatever the precise details of the relationship between artistic and cosmic creativity, however, it should be clear enough from these examples—and again, many more could be cited—that the two were commonly held to be analogous.[128] If I may speculate for a moment on why proponents of the standard

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shuju, 2012), 1.87; Shi Guanxiu 釋貫休, "Chang si Li Taibai" 常思李太白; Sengluan 僧鸞, "Zeng Li Can xiucai" 贈李粲秀才; and Shi Qiji 釋齊己, "Du Li Bai ji" 讀李白集, all in Jin Taosheng 金濤聲 and Zhu Wencai 朱文彩, ed., *Li Bai ziliao huibian: Tang–Song zhi bu* 李白資料彙編：唐宋之部 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), "Tang Wudai," 62, 61, 66.

126    Li Bai, "Chou Cui wu langzhong" 酬崔五郎中, in *Li Bai quanji biannian jianzhu*, 3.232; Xu Guangpu 徐光溥, "Ti Huang Jucai qiushan tu" 題黃居寀秋山圖, in *Quan Tang shi*, 761.8637; Wang Wei 王維, attrib., "Huaxue mijue" 畫學祕訣, in Wang Wei, *Wang Wei ji jiaozhu* 王維集校注, ed. Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), "fu lu," 1232; Song Zhiwen 宋之問, "Taiping gongzhu shanchi fu" 太平公主山池賦, in *Shen Quanqi Song Zhiwen ji jiaozhu* 沈佺期宋之問集校注, ed. Tao Min 陶敏 and Yi Shuqiong 易淑瓊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2001), 5.637.

127    Yao He 姚合, "He zuozhu xianggong yuzhong zuo" 和座主相公雨中作, in *Quan Tang shi*, 498.5671; Pi Rixiu 皮日休, "Feng Xun ciyun" 奉訓次韻, in *Songling ji jiaozhu* 松陵集校注, ed. Wang Xijiu 王錫九 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), 2.432; Cen Shen, "Miao shizhong wange qi yi" 苗侍中輓歌其一, in *Cen Shen shi jianzhu*, 3.637; Meng Jiao, "Zeng Zheng fuzi Fang" 贈鄭夫子魴, in *Meng Jiao shi ji jiaozhu*, 6.294; Qian Qi 錢起, "Mei Yang shiyu qingwen jian shi" 美楊侍御清文見示, in *Qian Qi shi ji jiaozhu* 錢起詩集校注, ed. Ruan Tingyu 阮廷瑜 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1996), 3.227; Jia Dao 賈島, attrib., *Ernan mizhi* 二南密旨, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao*, 376.

128    There is, indeed, so much discourse along these lines that a fuller accounting of this anal-

model have nonetheless asserted that China lacks the concept of "creativity" supposedly so central to Western literary critical discourse, it may be, paradoxically, because the Tang analogy is in a sense less analogical than the Western one tends to be. It is true, that is, that the Chinese poet does not "ape [the] divine singularity" of the "primal Maker," and that, "with no creative deity to emulate, [she] … does not think to make the world anew"[129] or to create a "heterocosm—an autonomous being that could serve as an end in itself and be read independently of its context and tradition."[130] Instead of figuratively "creating" a new "world," the Tang artist tends to be depicted as either creating something within the existing cosmos or as recreating it according to a new vision. It is this more literal creativity that provides the kernel of truth in the standard model's claim that Chinese poetry was a "monist" or "this-worldly" art. This kernel of truth, however, should not be elaborated into the claim that Tang readers looked to poetry merely for a transcription of events "neither above nor below the audience's own physical and moral world." Quite the contrary, because writers drew their creative powers from beyond the mundane world in which most of us live most of the time, Tang readers often looked to poetry precisely in hopes of transcending it.

## Esoteric Reading

The standard model's account of Chinese poetry comes attached to a prescriptive set of "rules of reading": the "shared norms" and "fundamental presumptions in the process of forming meaning" by means of which traditional Chinese readers sought to "aesthetically know a literary text."[131] Because "the Chinese universe is not split into two separate modes of reality and … there is not a metaphysical world hidden independently beneath the physical world," therefore "Chinese culture leaves no room for a theory that allows literature to betray factual reality and at the same time still be able to defend it [*sic.*]

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ogy and its intellectual significance in medieval China will have to await another occasion. The earliest definite instance of the analogy I have found comes from Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78–143) "Hejian xiang Zhang Pingzi bei" 河間相張平子碑, in Yan Kejun 嚴可均, ed., *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), "Quan Hou Han wen," 45.719b.

129 Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 84.

130 Yu and Huters, "The Imaginative Universe," 4.

131 Stephen Owen, "Transparencies: Reading the T'ang Lyric," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39 (1979): 231–51, 232.

on the ground of imitating something beyond that mode of existence."[132] As a result, "poems were read as describing historical moments and scenes actually present to the historical poet"[133] and the reading process aimed at revealing "not a metaphysical truth ... but the truth of this world, an historical context," "inferring lessons from the world as it actually is or was."[134]

I would not dispute all of the pragmatic conclusions that have been drawn from these sorts of statements; in particular, medieval readers do seem, as Stephen Owen has detailed, to have as their basic procedure "read the poet in the act of reading the world," at least in some subgenres.[135] Yet critical comments on poetry from the Tang generally do not substantiate the claim that the final object of the reading process was therefore "the truth of this world, an historical context." Instead, poetry was more often depicted as transfiguring the mundane world, releasing us from it, or revealing obscurities beyond it. And given the nature of the epistemological divisions characteristic of medieval thought, these possibilities often prove difficult to distinguish from one another.

The idea that poetry transfigures the world can be found throughout Tang descriptions of the reading process. Wang Ji 王績 (ca. 590–644), for instance, describes seeing the world of his experience differently when he reads the work of the great Southern Dynasties poet Xie Lingyun.

> Every time I encounter a clear day between heaven and earth, I go out in my boat and chant Xie Lingyun's poem on "Going Against the Current to Lonely Isle." As if in a daze, I exhaust thought of slopes and marshes, mountains and forests. The immortal isles of Yingzhou and Fangzhang seem mysteriously before my eyes.
>
> 每遇天地晴朗，則於舟中詠大謝亂流趨孤嶼之詩，渺然盡陂澤山林之思，覺瀛洲方丈，森然在目前。[136]

Wang seems here to be playing on the Daoist idea, mentioned above, that people of low spiritual attainment are unable to perceive the transcendent par-

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132    Shi, "The Leopardskin of Dao," 152.

133    Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 57.

134    Yu, "Allegory, Allegoresis," 410.

135    Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 73.

136    Wang Ji 王績, "Da chushi Feng Zihua shu" 答處士馮子華書, in *Wang Wugong wen ji: Wu juan ben huijiao* 王無功文集：五卷本會校, ed. Han Lizhou 韓理洲 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 4.148.

adises and numinous efflorescences hidden in the natural world. When he goes out into that world himself, therefore, he sees less than he does when he reads Xie Lingyun's poetry and comes to see instead through the latter's more spiritually advanced eyes. This idea, that writing could communicate a sort of adept vision, is also found Xu Mengrong's 許孟容 (d. 818) praise of a friend and fellow poet who "always wrote and composed based upon the Dao" 屬詞匠意，必本於道, such that when Xu "opened the book-boxes and scrolls [containing his writings], it was as if I had ascended to the Mysterious Gardens [of the immortals]" 發篋開卷，如升玄圃.[137] These same metaphors of the immortal isles and the Kunlun mountains may also be in play when Liu Yuxi writes that the poetry of a friend made him feel "as if he were soaring over azure cliffs or floating upon tiered waves, such that everything he saw and heard was not of this dustblown world" 杳如搏翠屏，浮層瀾。視聽所遇，非風塵間物.[138] And Liu uses this same trope again when describing his experience reading the poetry of Bai Juyi.

| | |
|---|---|
| 吟君遺我百篇詩， | As I intone the hundred poems you sent me, |
| 使我獨坐形神馳。 | they send my spirit speeding, even as my body sits alone. |
| 玉琴清夜人不語， | A jade zither on a cool night: no one speaks; |
| 琪樹春朝風正吹。 | gem trees on a spring morning: the wind now blows. |
| 郢人斤斲無痕跡， | The craftsman of Ying wields his axe without any trace;[139] |
| 仙人衣裳棄刀尺。 | the immortals cast aside measuring tapes when fashioning their robes. |
| 世人方內欲相尋， | People of the world "within the square" may want to seek you out, |
| 行盡四維無處覓。 | but though they travel throughout the four extremes, there's nowhere they could find you.[140] |

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137  Xu Mengrong 許孟容, "Mu gong ji xu," 穆公集序, in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 704.3632a–b.

138  Liu Yuxi, "Dongshi Wuling ji ji," in *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 14.1569.

139  This refers to a story from the *Zhuangzi*. A skilled artisan of Ying was able to slice a piece of mud off his friend's nose without his friend flinching and thus coming to harm. But he could not perform the feat with anyone else. See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 24.843.

140  Liu Yuxi, "Hanlin Bai ershi'er xueshi jian ji shi yibai pian yin yi dakuang" 翰林白二十二學士見寄詩一百篇因以答貺, in *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 2.177.

Here again, the "gem trees" are probably the legendary trees of the Mysterious Gardens of Kunlun. Though Bai's hundred poems were presumably not fictions of roaming with the immortals, he has apparently described his experience in such a way as to make it seem strange and unfamiliar to people who dwell "within the square." Skilled readers like Liu Yuxi, however, can follow him into the transfigured, immortal landscapes of his poems.

In these descriptions of the reading process, we see how transfiguration of the mundane world can blend into a rhetoric of release from its limitations. This sort of release was also discussed in other ways as well. In the preface to his literary encyclopedia, for instance, Gao Jian writes that literature allows us to "not be immortals and yet sit face to face with antiquity, to block up our doors and windows and yet see far into the distance" 非松喬而對振古，墐戶牖而覷遐方.[141] Zhang Huaiguan writes similarly:

> When it comes to thinking about worthies and wise men across a thousand years, one looks at their traces upon silk and bamboo: their plans are then there in one's vision, and their managing of affairs glows brightly. In their words one can examine their deep feelings, and make it so that there is nothing hidden, even a hundred generations after the fact. This is what makes [the written word] worthy of respect. With it, one's body may be in a single place, but one may hold within feelings of ten thousand miles, and with it, one can give expression to one's aspirations and give beautiful form to one's spirit. Opening the seals and observing the traces [of a writer's brush] can be as pleasurable as meeting face-to-face. This is what makes [the written word] capable of bringing joy.

> 若乃思賢哲于千載，覽陳迹于縑簡，謀猷在覿，作事粲然，言察深衷，使百代無隱，斯可尚也。及夫身處一方，含情萬里，標拔志氣，黼藻精靈，披封睹迹，欣如會面，又可樂也。[142]

Much this same set of points is also suggested by Liu Yuxi, this time with regard to poetry specifically:

> A hundred ideas can be illuminated by but a fragmentary statement, and ten-thousand scenes can be deployed while one gallops in one's chair—one skilled at poetry is capable of this. [Similarly,] although poetry's

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141    From Gao's "Wensi boyao xu" 文思博要序, in *Wenyuan yinghua* 699.3606b.
142    Zhang Huaiguan, "Shu duan," *Fashu yaolu*, 7.193.

forms have changed, its inspiration remains the same, and though past and present have different tones, its principles merge darkly—one who understands poetry is capable of [recognizing] this.

片言可以明百意，坐馳可以役萬景，工於詩者能之。風雅體變而興同，古今調殊而理冥，達於詩者能之。**143**

In each of these quotes, the reading experience does seem to involve communing with a writer at another historical moment—"reading the poet," perhaps, "in the act of reading the world." Yet as Liu Yuxi suggests, the point of establishing this connection lies less in knowledge of yet one more mundane historical reality than in the transcendence of any particular moment and the access such transcendence provides to obscure, contextless truths.

This third vision of reading, by which it mediated insights into mysteries beyond the mundane world, is also found pervasively throughout surviving Tang criticism. Gao Zhongwu 高仲武 (fl. c. 779), for instance, writes that the significance of Huangfu Ran's 皇甫冉 (714?–767?) poetry lay "far beyond the circumstances and emotions [it depicts]" 遠出情外,**144** and their contemporary Dai Shulun 戴叔倫 (732–789), similarly, is quoted as having maintained that:

> The scenes poets evoke are like when the sun is warm on Indigo Fields and the fine jade there gives off mist: you can gaze after them, but you cannot fix them in your eyes. They are images beyond images, scenes beyond scenes—how could they be easy to discuss?

> 詩家之景，如藍田日暖，良玉生煙。可望而不可置於眉睫之前也。象外之象。景外之景。豈容易可談哉。**145**

Liu Yuxi too echoes this vocabulary of the "beyond":

> Poetry is the most profound of literary forms. When one gets its meaning, its words are forgotten; thus it is subtle and difficult. Its visions (*jing*) arise

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143  Liu Yuxi, "Dongshi Wuling ji ji," *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 14.1569.

144  This is a variant reading; see Gao Zhongwu 高仲武, *Zhongxing xianqi ji* 中興間氣集, in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*, 478n2. The original text is uncertain, though this comment would not have been out of place in Gao's criticism.

145  Quoted by Sikong Tu in his "Yu Ji Pu shu" 與極浦書, in *Sikong Biaosheng shiwen ji jianjiao*, "Wen ji" 3.215.

beyond images; thus it is refined and few understand it. To miss its sense by so much as an autumn hair is to miss it by a thousand miles.

詩者，其文章之蘊邪！義得而言喪，故微而難能；境生於象外，故精而寡和。千里之繆，不容秋毫。[146]

Others were even more explicit about the access poetry reading ideally gave to obscurities beyond our mundane experience. The monk Xuzhong 虛中 (867?– c. 933), for instance, prefaces his remarkably unintuitive readings of contemporary verse by arguing that "the *dao* of poetry is shrouded and distant, its organizing principles reaching into the dark and subtle. Common people do not understand this and take it superficially to concern the close-to-hand" 夫詩道幽遠，理入玄微。凡俗罔知，以為淺近。[147] Li Hua 李華 (715?–774?) too praises a friend's writings as "often entering the obscure and [thus] hitting the target of the Elegantiae" 多入玄中雅, and Bai Juyi lauds Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779–831) verse as "refined and subtle, its thought entering the obscure" 精微思入玄。[148] Even on its own, the word "obscure" (*xuan*) seems sometimes to have functioned as a term of praise, with Yao He 姚合 (ca. 780–ca. 850) entitling his anthology of Tang-dynasty verse the *Anthology of [Poems that] Take Obscurity to an Extreme* 極玄集 and Wei Zhuang working, in his continuation of Yao's anthology, to "once more gather obscure poems so as to assemble an *Anthology of [Poems that are] Even More Obscure*" 今更採其玄者，勒成又玄集。[149] Because Yao's preface to his anthology is almost entirely lost, it is uncertain whether he called the poems he selected "obscure" on the basis of their derivation from the realm "beyond the square" or their requirement that readers access that realm in order to understand them. Perhaps both directions were implied: as Liu Zhangqing 劉長卿 (ca. 726–ca. 790) writes of paintings by Li Cou 李湊, these works might have "drawn their images from Negativity so as to give rise to ideas beyond all images" 無間已得象，象外更生意。[150]

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146    Liu Yuxi, "Dongshi Wuling ji ji," *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 14.1569.

147    Seng Xuzhong 僧虛中, *Liulei shoujian* 流類手鑑, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao*, 418.

148    Li Hua 李華, "Yang qicao ji xu" 楊騎曹集序, in *Li Xiashu wenji* 李遐叔文集, *SKQS*, 1.18b. Bai Juyi, "Jiang lou ye yin Yuan jiu lüshi cheng sanshi yun" 江樓夜吟元九律詩成三十韻, in *Bai Juyi shi ji jiaozhu*, 17.1339.

149    Yao He, *Ji xuan ji* 極玄集, and Wei Zhuang, "You xuan ji xu," *You xuan ji*, in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*, 665–710, 773.

150    Liu Zhangqing 劉長卿, "Guan Li Cou suo hua meiren zhangzi" 觀李湊所畫美人障子, in *Liu Zhangqing shi biannian jianzhu* 劉長卿詩編年箋注, ed. Chu Zhongjun 儲仲君 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), "biannian shi," 82.

We should not assume, of course, that just because a given poem's import was "beyond its images" that it was not, therefore, in some way connected to or concerned with the historical context emphasized by the standard model. One means of drawing this connection was through a language of omens, as is the case, for instance, in several Late Tang *shige* 詩格 ("Poetry Standards"— a loosely-defined genre that generally contained lapidary judgments depicted as educating novice readers in the intricacies of the poetic art) that read contemporary poems as containing political "omens" (*zhao* 兆) apparently distant from their explicit imagery.[151] This sort of reading would have been justified, for Tang readers, by the mythology of the *Classic of Poetry* discussed above and by the continuing practice of gathering and submitting poetic omens for the edification of the court, as for instance the great poet Gao Shi 高適 (d. 765) did in the Tianbao period (742–756) when he memorialized a mantic palindrome poem written by a woman "who possessed a nature matched with the mysterious and faint, embodied the still and silent, was refined and subtle with the root of the Dao, and sped to the gate of the mysterious" 性合希夷，體於靜默，精微道本，馳騖元關.[152] Taking poetry as this sort of omen would have required readers both to look past its apparent imagery to its unspoken historical context and also to look past that historical context to the more mysterious processes that were understood as giving rise to history. As Lü Yanzuo 呂延祚 (fl. ca. 718) explains in his account of the process by which he and the other members of the *Wuchen* 五臣 commentators annotated the *Wenxuan* 文選 anthology:

> When we assessed the matters [the poems] spoke of, [we could tell that their authors] lodged their minds in the hidden and subtle, darkening its omens, and that they adorned the things [they were ostensibly discussing] to subtly criticize [the politicians of their age], borrowing other eras to tether their feelings about their own. If one does not have mysterious understanding, one cannot penetrate the text's meaning.
>
> 揆度其事，宅心隱微，晦滅其兆，飾物反諷，假時維情，非夫幽識，莫能洞究。[153]

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151 See, for example, *Ernan mizhi*, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige*, 378. For the *shige* genre, see Yugen Wang, "*Shige*." For the language of omens in Late Tang *shige*, see my "Poetic Omens and Poetic History," in *Reading Text and World: Literary History in and beyond China*, ed. Sarah M. Allen et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, forthcoming).

152 Gao Shi, "Wei Dongping Xue Taishou jin Wangshi ruishi biao" 為東平薛太守進王氏瑞詩表, in *Quan Tang wen*, 357.3626a–3627b.

153 Lü Yanzuo, "Jin jizhu Wenxuan biao" 進集注文選表, in *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 六臣注

Just as Lü and his collaborators felt the need to "penetrate" the false surface images of the *Wenxuan* poems to get to their real meanings, so too do they depict the poets themselves observing in their historical moments not what was patent to mundane faculties, but rather what was "hidden and subtle."

When we examine Tang claims about the moral and political significance of literature, we can often find this sort of esotericism structuring the discourse. Zhang Yue, for instance, explains in his preface to the literary collection of the great early-Tang poetess Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664–710) that *wen* "was what the former kings used to order heaven and earth, investigate humanity and the spiritual, explore the silent and still, and reflect upon the deep and dark" 先王以是經天地，究人神，聞寂寞，鑒幽昧.[154] Lu Cangyong 盧藏用 (ca. 660–ca. 714), similarly, suggests in his famous preface to the writings of Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂 (661–702) that Chen's poetry "makes clear the subtle and hidden, almost revealing the incipiencies of transformation, and reaching to the margin between heaven and man" 至於感激頓挫，微顯闡幽，庶幾見變化之朕，以接乎天人之際—an achievement that is elsewhere ascribed to official history and the astrological arts of the court diviners.[155] The same comparison is also made in the *History of the Northern Qi* 北齊書, which argues that "Understanding the truths of the hidden and manifest and clarifying the margin between heaven and man—all this lies with *wen*" 達幽顯之情，明天人之際，其在文乎.[156] Most elaborately, Shang Heng 尚衡 (fl. second half of the eighth c.) writes:

> Should we say that the arising of *wen* occurred in middle antiquity [with the composition and elaboration of the *Yijing*],[157] or should we say that it had no beginning? The way of heaven involves the five phases of *qi* by which its Five Wefts are differentiated, the way of earth involves the

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文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統, annot. Li Shan 李善 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), "Wenxuan biao," 1a–b.

154   Zhang Yue, "Zhongzong Shangguan Zhaorong ji xu" 中宗上官昭容集序, in *Zhang Yue ji jiaozhu*, 28.1318.

155   Lu Cangyong 盧藏用, "Chenshi ji xu" 陳氏集序, in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 700.3611a. Probing the "margin between heaven and man" is first mentioned as one of the goals of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (c. 145–86 BCE) massive *Records of the Historian*. See Sima Qian, "Taishi gong zixu" 太史公自序, in *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 117.3319; the phrase also appears as a description of astral divination in the "Tianguan shu" 天官書, *Shiji*, 27.1344. It continues to be used in this latter sense in late-medieval texts as well; see, e.g., *Weishu* 魏書, by Wei Shou 魏收 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 91.1945.

156   *Bei Qi shu*, 45.601.

157   The first flourishing of *wen* implied here is Fu Xi's creation of the *Yijing*, which the "Xici" commentary dates to "middle antiquity" 中古. See *Zhouyi zhushu*, 8.173a.

five colors by which the five directions are differentiated, and the way of mankind involves the five constant behaviors by which the five virtues are differentiated. The *Yijing* thus says that [rulers should] "examine the *wen* of heaven to know the changing times, and observe the *wen* of mankind to complete the transformation of all under heaven." If there were not the Five Wefts, then how could heaven be known? If there were not the five directions, then how could earth be distinguished? And if there were not the five virtues, then how could mankind be transformed? This is why the *dao* of *wen* is so far-reaching, why the margin between heaven and man can be attained through it …. The reason that the ancients valued *wen* … is that it weaves together the margin of heaven and man, reaches the origin of human nature and of heaven's decree, rectifies the positions of ruler and subject, and enlightens and stirs reactions from the mysteries of the ghosts and spirits.

文道之興也，其當中古乎？其無所始乎？且天道五行以別緯，地道五色以別方，人道五常以別德。易曰：觀乎天文以察時變，觀乎人文以化成天下。非五緯，孰可以知天？非五方，孰可以辨地？非五常，孰可以化人？文之為道，斯亦遠矣。天人之際，其可得於是乎？…古人之貴有文者，…杼軸乎天人之際，道達乎性命之元，正復乎君臣之位，昭感乎鬼神之奧。[158]

Shang Heng invokes here both the divinatory and cosmogonic justifications that, as we saw above, the *Yijing* offered Tang literature. For Shang, literature both reveals to readers—especially readers at court—the hidden moral characters of the people and also allows writers—and the court that promotes their writings—to shape them, partly through continuing the revelation of the morally structured cosmos begun by Fu Xi. It is in this sense that *wen* should be a central concern for rulers and ministers, who were, like writers, also discussed as having "virtue equal to creation" 德侔造化, possessing "benevolence the same as creation" 恩造化同, attaining "accomplishments neighboring on creation" 功將造化鄰, "wielding the authority of creation" 操造化權, or "commanding the forge of creation" 操持造化爐.[159] Both writers and rulers, that

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158    Shang Heng 尚衡, "Wen dao yuangui" 文道元龜, in *Wenyuan yinghua*, 369.1890b–91a.

159    See, for instance, *Suishu*, 5.101; Zhang Yue, "Fenghe chunri xing Wangchun gong" 奉和春日幸望春宮, in *Zhang Yue ji jiaozhu*, 1.29; Sun Di 孫逖, "Fenghe Li youxiang shanghui Changlin ting" 奉和李右相賞會昌林亭, in *Quan Tang shi*, 118.1196; Bai Juyi, "Fengchou Huainan Niu xianggong Si'an jian ji ershisi yun" 奉酬淮南牛相公思黯見寄二十四韻,

is, were inheriting the paradigmatic work of the sages as it was understood in early Tang Classicism: namely, drawing upon the obscure to manifest an order for the world.

This complex of ideas renders it difficult to differentiate literature's capacity to transfigure the mundane, its ability to release readers from it, and its capacity to mediate insights beyond it. Jiaoran, for instance, describes poetry both as revealing obscurities beyond the mundane and as doing so in such a way that mundane-minded people will not recognize that their world has been transformed.

> Poetry is the flower and fruit of the universe's wonders, the quintessence of the *Six Classics*. Although the ancient sages did not work at poetry [specifically], its subtlety and wondrousness are equivalent to their writings. The deep secrets of heaven and earth, sun and moon, and mysterious transformation, and the subtle darkness of the ghosts and spirits—if refined thought seeks in these, then the myriad images can no longer hide their wonders .... When it comes to outstanding lines of such perfect naturalness that they compete with creation, one can understand them in one's mind, but they cannot be described in words. Anyone who is not a creator himself will not even recognize them.
>
> 夫詩者眾妙之華實，六經之菁英。雖非聖功，妙均於聖。彼天地日月玄化之淵奧，鬼神之微冥，精思一搜，萬象不能藏其巧。...至如天真挺拔之句，與造化爭衡，可以意會，難以言狀，非作者不能知也。[160]

Jiaoran's claim in these last lines seems to be of a piece with his advice to poets elsewhere that even lines that derive from "wracking one's thought" 苦思 and that "inscribe thought of the darkest mysteries" 寫冥奧之思 should seem "simple and easy, as if they had been attained without any thought at all" 有其易貌，若不思而得也.[161] The point is that when poets draw from the mysteries beyond the square, they create images that become new visions of, and create new possibilities within, the lived world—and only fellow "creators" will know how difficult this task really is.

Jiaoran thus suggests that the boundaries of the mundane are constantly being pushed back as the world is successively recreated by writing, with later

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in *Bai Juyi shi ji jiaozhu*, 33.2527; and Yao Hu 姚鵠, "Xiangzhou xian Lu shangshu" 襄州獻盧尚書, in *Quan Tang shi* 553.6403.

160    Shi Jiaoran, *Shishi jiaozhu*, "Shishi xu," 1.

161    Jiaoran, *Shiyi*, in *Quan Tang Wudai shige huikao*, 208.

sages and then later poets inheriting the cosmogonic project initiated by Fu Xi in the *Yijing*. And Jiaoran was not alone in depicting poetry in roughly this way. Yuan Jing 元兢 (fl. 668), for example, disparages another critic for highlighting a couplet from a Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–99) poem that, although it is gorgeous poetry, nonetheless represents what everyone already does, rather than creating something new.

> Looking out at dusk, there is no one who does not smelt his imaginations into mist and clouds, refine his emotions into forests and peaks …. Thus, a person of middling talent could perhaps occasionally get a couplet as good as this. It does not match the wondrousness of [another couplet by Xie Tiao]: "By the setting sun the flying birds return; / sorrows come, and come without end." … [Here, Xie] is saying that as he strokes his breast, his cares have nothing to light upon; and so he raises his eyes and his yearning increases. His intent can only be on the person [to whom the poem was written], but he lodges this feeling in the birds. As the sun sets, he follows them with his gaze until he cannot see them anymore; the twilight birds return to congregate together, and so his sorrows come flying with them. How beautiful was Xie Tiao, to conceptualize his yearning like this!

> 夫夕望者，莫不鎔想煙霞，煉情林岫。…中人已下，偶可得之；但未若落日飛鳥還，憂來不可極之妙者也。…謂捫心罕屬，而舉目增思，結意惟人，而緣情寄鳥，落日低照，即隨望斷，暮禽還集，則憂共飛來。美哉玄暉，何思之若是也。[162]

For Yuan, what makes a line of poetry truly great, it would seem, is that it goes beyond what a "person of middling talent" could see on their own, creating new vistas out of common experiences.

> If you understand [Xie Tiao's] meaning and the way he expresses it in *wen*, then every time you think of [his line,] "A cold lamp lights my nighttime dream," it will cause your soul to be shocked from sleep in the middle of the night, and if you've seen his "The clear mirror saddens my morning locks," then always in the humid months, unawares a chill will steal upon your temples.

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162   "Ji lun" 集論, in *Bunkyō hifuron*, vol. 3, "Nan," 1555. Since the authorship of this text is unmarked in most editions, its attribution to Yuan Jing is less than certain. For a defense, see Luo Genze 羅根澤, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), vol. 2, 27–28.

若悟此旨而言於文，每思寒燈耿宵夢，令人中夜安寢不覺驚魂，若見
清鏡悲曉髮，每暑月鬱陶不覺霜雪入鬢.[163]

Yuan had, presumably, slept before beside a lamp on a cold evening, and is
likely to have seen his hair graying on a spring morning. But these experiences
had never struck him as wondrous—he had never really noticed them, picked
them out of the undifferentiation of mundane time—until he read Xie's lines.
Great poetry, he thus suggests, should be simultaneously revelatory and, once it
is articulated, inescapable, transfiguring the experience of a good reader such
that she will no longer be able see the world through her previously veiled,
mundane eyes.

In contrast to the standard model's claim that "the natural order is already
'art,'"[164] then, comments like Yuan's suggest that reading poetry can make it so:
that the world can become art for a reader when it is revealed, transfigured,
and rendered translucent by great literature. If, therefore, Tang theorists did
sometimes suggest that "the patterns of human cultural creations can … be
identical to the patterns of the cosmos,"[165] and if they might indeed have found
it possible to "say that *wen* [literature] is itself the cosmos, not a sign in place
of something else, but a sign that is the very thing to which it refers,"[166] it is
not because the poet was for them the "passive scientist of the natural order,"
merely bringing to light the "significance and pattern … latent in the world."[167]
Instead, as Jiaoran writes about painting:

苟能下筆合神造，　If one can use one's brush in a way
　　　　　　　　　　that merges with the creative power of the
　　　　　　　　　　numinous,
誤點一點亦為道.　　even if one makes a mistaken stroke,
　　　　　　　　　　that too will be the Dao.[168]

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163　"Ji lun," *Bunkyō hifuron*, vol. 3, "Nan," 1540.
164　François Jullien, *La valeur allusive*, 52.
165　Bol, *'This Culture of Ours'*, 95.
166　Allen, *In the Voice of Others*, 19.
167　Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 23, 34.
168　Jiaoran, "Zhou zhangshi Fang hua Pishamen tianwang ge," *Quan Tang shi*, 821.9258.

## On the Role of Philosophical Language in Tang Poetics

If, as I suspect, Jiaoran's comment on painting could equally be applied to poetry, it is perhaps most striking for the open-endedness it imputes to the creative power of *wen*. To be sure, Fu Xi and the sages that succeeded him had revealed the cosmos in a way that had normative force. And, in the other direction, Zhang Huaiguan recognizes that "barbarians of various types all have their own forms of writing that point at the same things [ours does]" 戎狄 異音各貌，會於文字，其指不殊, indicating that "the miraculous Dao of heaven is equally applied to all beings, even if they appreciate it with different degrees of depth" 天之妙道，施於萬類一也，但所感有淺深耳.[169] Yet though such considerations suggest that there might have been implicit boundaries on how far *wen* could transform the world of experience, we should not assume, as proponents of the standard model have often done, that therefore the Chinese believed the world was always already an "orderly cosmos," that there was "an ordering principle … inherent in all that exists … called the Way (*dao*)" that merely had to be discerned and written down.[170] Whatever its foundation in earlier sources, this account is less characteristic of Tang thought, or of medieval thought in general, than it is of later equations of Dao and *li* 理 (inherent pattern) that were consolidated over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and remained influential throughout the late-imperial period. We should resist, therefore, the back-projection of this immanent vision onto the Tang.

Resisting this back-projection should, in turn, challenge some of the most common ways we talk about Tang poetry. Consider, for instance, the claim cited in the first sentence of this essay, that "In the Chinese literary tradition, a poem is usually presumed to be nonfictional." In a world underwritten by an immanent order, there might well be a strong pressure on poets to write "nonfiction," since in such a world, meaning is inherent in every situation, and, moreover, "Every situation permits but one moral evaluation. With regard to any matter whatsoever, the writer's standpoint and the feelings he experiences are supposed to be entirely appropriate to the situation. The formulation of his own judgment then coincides exactly with the description of the situation; and this formulation, being the correct interpretation, shall be utterly convincing."[171] On this vision, "every poem becomes a test" of the author's perspicacity and truthfulness, and if a poem is anything other than truthful, it can only

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169    Zhang Huaiguan, "Shu duan," *Fashu yaolu*, 7.214–15.

170    Idema and Haft, "The Central Tradition," *A Guide to Chinese Literature*, 34.

171    Idema and Haft, "The Central Tradition," *A Guide to Chinese Literature*, 42.

be a lie. (Actually, it is not entirely clear that the standard model even allows this much: "A poem may lie, but that fact, if discovered, becomes one more [true] aspect of the poem's historical moment.")[172] If, however, the significance of poetry is not supposed to be identical to the pre-existing, inherent order of the lived world—if, instead, it is presumed to represent an esoteric insight into or a vision deriving from obscure realms beyond our normal capacities of perception—then authors do not need to commit themselves to merely transmitting what is already there to be observed. We might not want to call their work "fiction," perhaps, but we probably should not call it "nonfiction" either.

Tang China is not, therefore, the well-matched nonfictional antithesis for the supposedly fiction-centric West that proponents of the standard model have often depicted it as being, but may rather represent a more interesting contrast in its investment in poetic models that are largely oblique to questions of fiction and nonfiction. And recognizing these models should, I think, resolve some of the problems that have arisen from the standard account of the nonfictionality of the mainstream tradition, particularly the vast chasm that seemed to intervene between such "mainstream" *shi*-poetry and the supposedly "fictional" subgenres of the *yuefu* 樂府 tradition. Tang writers themselves seem not to have noticed or much cared about this purported chasm, and indeed in many *yuefu* poems it can be difficult to know whether the scene depicted is wholly imagined or merely heightened by poetic convention. For Tang writers and readers, it would seem, the question of whether a poem was a fiction or not simply was not as salient as it is for us, allowing Tang poetry to wander heedless across a spectrum of what we might consider fictionality and nonfictionality.[173] What mattered was not so much whether it matched what was already there in reality, but how powerful, how penetrating, and how transformative was the vision it provided.

In this sense, the engagement of Tang literary discourse with medieval Chinese philosophy did not prescribe a method to the art nearly so rigid as the prescriptions of the late-imperial, immanent vision upon which our standard model is built. Because the mundane world was inherently suspect for medieval thinkers, writers could play fast and loose with any aspect of it

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172    Michael A. Fuller, "Pursuing the Complete Bamboo in the Breast: Reflections on a Classical Chinese Image for Immediacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53 (1993): 5–23, 21.

173    A similar point has been made with regard to Tang narrative literature by Sarah M. Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2014). See also Jack W. Chen and Sarah M. Allen, "Fictionality in Early and Medieval China," *New Literary History* 51 (2020): 231–34, which, incidentally, also shows why *yuefu* is so problematic for the standard model.

they chose in order to enhance the power of their art. And likewise, because the "realm beyond the square" was esoteric, its precise relationship to experience—or to anything else, for that matter—was impossible to fully specify. For these reasons, we cannot rely on medieval thought in the way proponents of the standard model have relied on (their interpretation of) earlier canonical texts: that is, as providing the philosophical "background" of poetics, the cultural cosmos within which poetry had to function. It was, instead, characteristic of medieval China that its philosophy and religion pointedly refused to answer many of the questions a theory of poetic meaning might ask. They did provide important paradigms for poetic success, including the cultural-cum-cosmogonic creativity of Fu Xi, the flash of enlightenment sought by Buddhists, and the Daoist adept's capacity to see hidden wonders in the world. But such models were largely schematic and inherently unstable: as soon as you pin down the realm "beyond the square," it is no longer itself.

In this sense, the esotericism of the medieval Chinese thought upon which literary discourse drew in the Tang allowed poetry to be important without always requiring it to justify that importance in terms of other, more-easily defined arenas of human concern. Of course, many did try to justify poetry, claiming, for instance, that it was of crucial importance to the health of the state. Yet even if there were people who truly believed these claims—and there were—it was also possible to aver, as Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852) did, that:

> 高人以飲為忙事，　　Lofty men take drinking
> 　　　　　　　　　　as an urgent affair;
> 浮世除詩盡強名。　　in the mundane world, besides poetry
> 　　　　　　　　　　it's all just "forced names."[174]

"Forced names" comes from the *Daode jing*, wherein Laozi writes that "There is a thing indistinctly formed, that arose before heaven and earth .... I do not know its name, so I give it the style name 'Dao,' and if I were forced to give it a name, I would call it 'Great'" 有物混成，先天地生，...吾不知其名，字之曰道，吾強為之名曰大.[175] Du Mu's suggestion, then, is not merely that the sober judgments of the mundane world lack the standing to judge the ecstatic visions of poetry, but moreover that poetry is, in fact, the only language that can adequately speak to realities mundane language inevitably distorts. If, as

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174    Du Mu 杜牧, "Huzhou zhengchu zhao Li Ying xiucai" 湖州正初招李郢秀才, in *Du Mu ji xinian jiaozhu* 杜牧集繫年校注, ed. Wu Zaiqing 吳在慶 (Beijing; Zhonghua shuju, 2008), "Fanchuan wenji" 3.459.

175    *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋, ed. Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 25.101.

has frequently been averred, Chinese poetry reached its apogee in the Tang, it may be partly because the epistemological dichotomies of medieval thought made statements like this one possible.

## Acknowledgments

## Abstract

In recent decades, a significant amount of Western scholarship on traditional Chinese poetry and poetics has either proposed or assumed a vision of the art underwritten by the supposed "monism," "nonduality," and "immanence" of traditional Chinese world-views. This essay argues that although these were important ideas in certain periods and contexts, they cannot be taken as unproblematically defining the world of thought in which poetry operated during the Tang dynasty. Instead, Tang writers more routinely drew in their discussions of art upon the epistemological tensions and discontinuities posited by medieval intellectual and religious traditions. For this reason, they often outlined models of poetry very different from those most common in contemporary criticism.

## Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, un nombre important d'études occidentales sur la poésie et la poétique chinoises traditionnelles ont proposé ou assumé une vision de cet art sous-tendue par les supposés "monisme", "non-dualité" et "immanence" de la vision traditionnelle du monde en Chine. Cet essai soutient que, bien que ces idées aient été importantes à certaines périodes et dans certains contextes, elles ne peuvent pas être considérées comme définissant de façon univoque l'univers mental dans lequel la poésie s'écrivait pendant la dynastie Tang. Au contraire, dans leurs discussions sur l'art poétique, les écrivains Tang faisaient fréquemment intervenir les tensions épistémologiques et les discontinuités soulevées par les traditions intellectuelles et religieuses médiévales. De ce fait, ils ont souvent esquissé des modèles de poésie très différents de ceux que l'on trouve le plus souvent dans la critique contemporaine.

## 提要

在近數十年中，大量關於中國傳統詩歌和詩學的西方研究或主張或假設了這樣一種觀點，即認為這門藝術受到了中國傳統世界觀所謂 "一元性"、"非二元性" 以及 "內在一體性" 的背書。本文認為，雖然在特定時期和個別語境下上述三者確為十分重要的概念，它們卻不能被直接用來定義詩歌在唐朝時期所以運作的思想環境。相反，唐朝作者在他們關於藝術的討論中更為常規地引入中古時期思想與宗教傳統所提出的認知論層面上的衝突與斷層。由此，他們經常勾勒出一些完全不同於當代批評中最為普遍的詩歌範式。

## Keywords