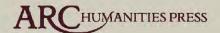


FU POETRY ALONG THE SILK ROADS THIRD-CENTURY CHINESE WRITINGS ON EXOTICA

by XURONG KONG





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THIRD-CENTURY CHINESE WRITINGS ON EXOTICA

by
XURONG KONG



This book is dedicated to my three children
Dingwen Troy Yang 楊鼎文
Dingyan Lucas Yang 楊鼎言
Dingyi Madison Yang 楊鼎儀

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MORE THAN TWENTY years ago, my advisor Robert Joe Cutter suggested I study the often-neglected poetry genre, yongwu fu. Since that time, I have always wondered why the poems were produced, and why their numbers rose and fell around the third century. Dr. Cutter often encouraged me when I ran into difficulties, saying, very slowly, surely, and calmly, "You are the expert, and you will do it." With that encouragement, I never quit. I hope this book brings a measure of delight to my beloved advisor.

Ten years ago, I was offered the chance to teach world history and was invited by Fan Ziye 范子烨, a senior scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, to translate two major historical works for China Book Company 中華書局: Selections from the History of the Later Han 後漢書選譯 and Selections from Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government 資治通鑑選譯. This experience inspired me to connect literary writing with the Silk Roads. When I first showed my book proposal to Dr. Fan in Beijing in 2011, he was very supportive, commenting that "this project can easily receive funds of one million dollars." I did not receive a million dollars, but I was awarded the Released Time for Research grant from Kean University and financial support from the Share Foundation; I was also nominated three times for a Fulbright scholarship and received a Fulbright Specialist grant.

It was Sue Gronewold, my colleague and mentor at Kean University, and her husband, Peter Winn, a renowned historian of Latin America, who brought me to the world of global history. They have continuously offered me priceless advice on my career development, scholarly research, and even personal matters. Both of them read the book and helped me to strengthen arguments.

After studying these poems from a world-history perspective, it has become clear to me that a substantial number of the objects written about during this period were foreign, and that substantial numbers of the fu are sources for modern terms for these objects, even those whose currency in Chinese culture has since vanished. This discovery, in the context of what I knew about the period, encouraged the speculation that these fu were written with a specific purpose. I started with the pomegranate, since it is decidedly foreign. My colleagues, Chris Bellitto, Elizabeth Hyde, Brian Regal, and Nira Gupta-Casale at Kean University read that chapter, commented on it, and helped me tremendously in revising it. In the summer of 2015, Chen Zhi 陳致, then the Director of Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology at Hong Kong Baptist University, invited me to give a talk on the pomegranate, where I received many valuable comments. That month I was invited to give the same talk at the Institute of Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, where I received comments and encouragement from Liu Yuejing 劉躍進 and Jiang Yin 蔣寅, two famous scholars in the field of classical Chinese literature. The article on the pomegranate was published with Early Medieval China, and Michael Farmer, the editor of the journal, helped me shape and revise it. The thirty-six fu on six objects that comprise this study suggest that the genre of yongwu fu was not simply a literary exercise, but rather an instrument for filtering foreign objects, ideas, and culture, thus rendering them suitable for Chinese tastes. Because I was excited and eager to share my discoveries while writing this book, the following scholars welcomed my project and supported it with talk or grant invitations: Keith Knapp, ABE Yokinobu, Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, Pan Shuxian 潘殊閒, Zhang Jianwei 張建偉, and Zong Fan 踪凡.

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Meghan Fang 方耿美 read this book carefully, provided countless valuable comments, and spent hours with me on Zoom to clarify and improve the manuscript. Elizabeth Hollander offered professional guidance on revising the entire manuscript. The anonymous reviewer helped me to improve my arguments. Stephen West, Nicholas Morrow Williams, and Danna Messer from the press offered me friendship and professional assistance, which made the publishing process possible and joyful.

I would like to dedicate this book to my family. Kong Xianbang 孔憲邦, my father, was the first person who introduced me to the field of classical Chinese literature. He told me that "humanities are an all-purpose adhesive." I chose to believe it. Tian Jinfeng 田金鳳, my mother, believes I am the best, and her belief encourages me to become better; she spent five years in America taking care of my three kids, which is the best gift I could ever ask for. Yang Xinsong 楊新嵩, my husband, cheers for me when I succeed, and complains about unfair treatment if I fail; he provides me the needed financial and spiritual support that any working woman needs to pursue a career dream. I hope Dingwen, Dingyan, and Dingyi will forgive me for spending more time on my research than on them.

I cannot overstate my gratitude to all these people mentioned above. Without them, this decade-long journey would not have started, nor culminated in this book.



Introduction

A CENTURY OF WRITING ON OBJECTS

THE SILK ROADS, ¹ arguably the first information superhighway, connected many regions, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean and the East China Sea. During the Han Dynasty, approximately during the late first century, the Silk Roads was established as an ancient network for commercial trade. By the third century, the entire network of trading routes was already well-defined. With the help of the rich scholarship on this subject, we have decent knowledge of the ancient trading routes, its scope, its timeline, its complex networks, its development, and its values. ² In recent years, the Silk Roads have generated a rich amount of scholarly works on early medieval China: for example, Chen Sanping's *Multicultural China in the Early Middle Ages* (2012); John Keischnick and Mier Shahar's *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought* (2014), but neither of these focus on literary writing.

Bringing the perspective of material culture to examine the Silk Roads is also not a new idea, and can be seen in Edward Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (1985) and in Meir Shahar's *Oedipal God: The Chinese Nezha and His Indian Origins* (2015). Again, literature does not play a key or focal role in either of these two works.

Early medieval Chinese literary studies have received more attention in recent years, as we see in Antje Richter's Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China (2013); Howard Good's Xun Xu and the Politics of Precision in Third Century AD (2010); Timothy David's Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China (2016); Nicholas Morrow Williams' Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics (2015); and Timothy Chan's Considering the End: Morality in Early Medieval Chinese Poetic Representation (2012). Yet, these important works do not consider outside influence on Chinese literary writing.

^{*} All works in the notes in abbreviated form (surname and short title) are cited in full in the bibliography at the end. Where no pagination is provided (e.g., for an article), the entire cited work is intended. Scholars' names in Chinese are also provided in the bibliography. Citations of Chinese literature use the "juan plus the page number" system.

I Since the word "Silk Roads" was popularized by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905), a German geologist, originally in 1877, it gradually became a conventional term referring to the ancient trading routes and communications among different regions and cultures. For more information on the historical background of the term see Chen, "The Invention of the Silk Roads." This term is chosen for this book because it fits my research. Although the ancients did not use this term, they were well aware of foreign goods and exchange, as seen in their literary and historical writings. Also, this book focuses more on Chinese culture through the perspective of how the Chinese reacted to the Silk Roads, and how they impacted Chinese literary writings.

² Select books on the Silk Roads include Benjamin, *Empires of Ancient Eurasia*; Liu Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China*; Mair and Hickman, eds., *Reconfiguring the Silk Road*; and Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road*.

Some books combine classical Chinese literature and cross-cultural studies, such as Tamara Chin's Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination (2014) and Tian Xiaofei's Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China (2012). One ends at the beginning of the third century, the other begins with the fourth century; together, they leave the third century unexamined.

My contribution lies in the area of the literary history of the Silk Roads, focusing directly on the impact of the Silk Roads on third-century Chinese writing. This cross-cultural and interdisciplinary analysis of material objects presented in third-century poetry sheds light on how Chinese elite, inspired by their encounters with exotic objects and cultures, enriched their own culture by means of cultural negotiation through literary writing. Various stages of the negotiation process are visible in literature: the arrival, political functions, elite contemplation, and cultural assimilation. In addition, through vivid case studies, this book brings to life the complicated and intertwined trading networks, religious encounters, and political debates through close readings of poetry.

In this book, the third century refers to the period between 196 and 317, beginning with General Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) capture of Emperor Xian of Han 漢獻帝 (r. 189–220) and ending with the movement of the Eastern Jin's 東晉 capital to Jiankang 建康 (modern Nanjing 南京). This period witnessed the decline of the powerful Han Empire and the rise of the Sima 司馬 clan as they gradually gained power in the Wei State and eventually unified China as the newly formed Jin Dynasty. It was also during this time that the centre of Chinese culture began to shift southward.³

The third century also witnessed the end of the first globalization brought by the Silk Roads. When Zhang Qian 張騫 (d. 114 BCE) was sent to the West to look for possible alliances, he failed in his mission, but successfully discovered an existing trade path between India and the Shu region (modern Sichuan). His later trips to the Western Regions laid the foundation for the establishment of the well-guarded Silk Roads. Afterwards, fresh ideas, unique commodities, and various people all passed along these trade routes. That busy traffic seemingly ended by the third century when a plague contributed to the fall of the Han and the Roman Empires, and again surged during the Tang Dynasty. Because of these interruptions, the early influence of the Silk Roads upon China, particularly during the third century, is often ignored.

Besides the known history-related reasons, the absence of the Silk Roads in classical Chinese literature studies also lies in the style in which ancient Chinese intellectuals described their encounters with foreign cultures. The tendency was to sanitize foreign elements from the goods and ideas imported into China, to make them appear already integrated with Chinese culture and tradition. Classical Chinese texts do not appear to acknowledge the novelty or impact of foreign goods, ideas, or trade. Based on my limited knowledge, current scholarship has paid little to no attention to the role literature plays in the Sinification of material objects. Nevertheless, we find among the surviving

³ De Crespigny "believes there is room for a general survey of the third century, which saw the transition from a long-unified empire to a comparable period of disunity and conflict," in the second part of his article "The Three Kingdoms and the Western Jin."



works from the third century an impressive amount of yongwu fu 詠物賦 (rhapsody on objects), a literary description of objects encompassing plants, animals, and crafts.⁴

In order to understand yongwu fu, we must first determine their precise definition as well as the scope of their corpus. Wu, according to Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124), refers to "the myriad things." Fu (rhapsody or fu poetry) is a major genre of Chinese literature, typically focuses on things or objects, particularly suitable for description and exposition, and its rhyme pattern places it between prose and poetry. In his "Wen fu" 文賦 (Fu on Literature), Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) wrote, "Fu gives form to an object, and is limpid and clear" 賦體物而瀏亮. Similarly, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–522) wrote that fu "expresses intentions by describing objects" 體物寫志也. Precisely because describing objects is a fundamental feature of all fu, in order to distinguish yongwu fu from other fu it is crucial to mark the boundaries of wu in yongwu fu. Critics both ancient and modern do not provide clear explanations of wu in this usage, but they have applied various, although sometimes conflicting, principles to classify fu. This, in turn, allows us to infer their conception of wu.

The word yongwu appears as a poetic subgenre in Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (ca. 469–518) Shipin 詩品: "Xu [Yaozhi] is good at composing yongwu pieces in shorter lines" 許 [瑤之] 長 于 短 句 詠 物. 9 Since this is the only place Zhong Rong used this term, we cannot tell much about its connotations for him. However, in the preface to *Wen xuan*, although he does not use the word, Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) gives some sense of the scope of the yongwu genre:

Telling of cities and habitats are Sir Based-on-nothing and Lord No-such; Warning against hunts and excursions are "Tall Poplars" and "Plume Hunt." As for Narrating a single event, Celebrating a single object—Poems inspired by wind, clouds, plants and trees, Pieces on fish, insects, birds, and beasts—

⁴ Although object (*wu*) refers to myriad things, its scope in this study encompasses those objects that are tangible, palpable, and not on a grand scale, and as such this study will omit other things such as buildings and natural scenes. For further discussion on the definition of yongwu fu, see Kong, "Wen xuan he sanshiji wenxue," 11; Chu Hsiao-hai, "Du Liang Han yongwu fu zazu"; Knechtges, "Riddles as Poetry"; Qu Duizhi, *Zhongguo pianwen gailun*, 17–18; Wan Guangzhi, *Hanfu tonglun*, 276; Graham, "Mi Heng's 'Rhapsody on a Parrot," 39; Ma Jigao, *Fu shi*, 43; Gong, "Wenbian ranhu shiqing"; Yuan Jixi, *Fu*, 70 and 135; Cao Daoheng, *Han Wei liuchao cifu*, 27; Yu Yuxian, *Liu chao fu shulun*, 330–37; Knechtges and Wang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 2:1398–1507; 3:1951–56; and Williams, *The Fu Genre of Imperial China*.

⁵ See Duan, Shuowen jiezi zhu, 2a.10.

⁶ In this book, I use the terms fu, rhapsody, fu poem, or fu poetry equally for textual variations.

⁷ Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, annot. Li Shan, 17.766. For English, see Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, trans. Knechtges, 3:219.

⁸ See Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, annot. Fan Wenlan, 2:134. For English, see Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving Dragons*, trans. Shih, 89.

⁹ See Zhong Rong, *Shi pin zhu*, comm. Wang Zhong, 258. Xu Yaozhi lived in the Qi Dynasty 齊 (479–502).

4 INTRODUCTION

One could extend and broaden the list And never record them all.¹⁰

述居邑則有憑虛亡是之作,戒畋獵則有長楊羽獵之制。 若記一事詠一物,風雲草木之 興,魚蟲禽獸之流,推而廣之,不可勝載矣。

Xiao Tong juxtaposes fu on cities and hunting with fu on a single event and single object, and provides examples of the single objects, such as meteorological phenomena and natural living things. His fifteen categories of fu include many yongwu pieces, especially in the "Natural Phenomena," "Birds and Animals," and "Music" groups. 11 Grace Fong, based on Xiao Tong's comments, draws the conclusion that "the category of objects suitable for description in the fu is almost infinitely expandable — any living thing or natural phenomenon as well as an artifact is a potential candidate for poetic elaboration. "12

Unlike Fong, who focuses on the two categories "Natural Phenomena" 物色 and "Birds and Animals" 鳥獸 to define wu, Yang Licheng 楊利成 includes four of the Wen xuan categories—"Palaces and Halls" 宫殿, "Rivers and Seas" 江海, "Natural Phenomena" 物色, and "Birds and Animals" 鳥獸—as yongwu pieces. To him, the first six categories in Wen xuan—"Metropolises and Capitals" 京都, "Sacrifices" 郊祀, "Plowing the Sacred Field" 耕籍, "Hunting" 田獵, "Recounting Travel" 紀行, and "Sightseeing" 遊覽—have to do with politics and religion 政教; and the last five categories—"Aspirations and Feelings" 志, "Sorrowful Laments" 哀傷, "Literature" 論文, "Music" 音樂 and "Passions" 情—belong to human affairs 人事, while the middle four focus on wu.¹³ Based on the understanding and interpretations of Xiao Tong by modern scholars, yongwu in Xiao Tong's system includes animals, plants, and meteorological phenomena, but not buildings and seasons.

Unlike his contemporary Xiao Tong, Liu Xie did not include natural phenomena in his classification, but rather added man-made objects to yongwu fu:

As to those works whose themes are plants, animals, and other miscellaneous things, they express feelings, which arise in response to external situations, feelings which are reactions to chance experiences with various scenes. In describing the external situations, the language should be delicate and closely knit; and in forging metaphors in relation to the nature of things, appropriateness in principle should be emphasized. These are in the realm of minor works, but are crucial points in the achievement of the qualities of the wondrous and the skilful.

至于草區禽族,庶品雜類,則觸興致情,因變取會。擬諸形容,則言務纖密, 象其物宜,則理貴側附。斯又小制之區畛,奇巧之機要也¹⁴

¹⁴ See Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, annot. Fan Wenlan, 2:135. For English, see Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving Dragons*, trans. Shih, 91.



¹⁰ See Xiao Tong, Wen xuan, trans. Knechtges, 1:77.

II See the list summarized by Knechtges in *Wen xuan*, 1:29; Liao, *Wei Jin yongwu fu yanjiu*, 2; Yu Yan, *Lidai yongwu shi xuan*, 5.

¹² Fong, "Wu Wenying's Yongwu Ci," 323.

¹³ Yang Licheng, "Zhaoming Wen xuan futi fenlei chutan," 317–18.

Like Xiao Tong, Liu Xie did not use the word yongwu, but he did define this subgenre in terms of content and form: this sub-genre should describe certain objects, such as plants, animals, and man-made objects, and should be concise and possessed of verisimilitude. Immediately preceding these words, Liu Xie also remarked on fu on capitals, palaces, parks, and hunting by saying that these types of fu were to "set the boundaries of a state and to mark the divisions in the country" 體國經野 and that "their significance lies in their glorification of the state" 義尚光大.¹⁵

Eight centuries later, the Yuan 元 (1306–1368) scholar Zhu Yao 祝 堯 began to use the term yongwu fu, mentioning it three times in his book *Gufu bianti* 古賦辨體. He first labelled Mi Heng's 彌衡 (173–198) "Yingwu fu" 鸚鵡賦 (Fu on the Parrot) and Zhang Hua's 張華 (232–300) "Jiaoliao fu" 鷦鷯賦 (Fu on the Wren) as yongwu fu; he then went on to state that yongwu fu must be allegorical.¹6 Zhu considered Xie Zhuang's 謝 莊 (421–466) "Yue fu" 月賦 (Fu on Moon) to be a fu on a "scene" 景物, and so stated that such fu should take yongwu pieces like those in the "Fu pian" 賦篇 of *Xunzi* 荀子 as models.¹7 Zhu, therefore, distinguished yongwu pieces from fu on scenes. For him, meteorological and geographical phenomena were "scenes", not wu. In other words, works about the moon or snow, for example, should not be called yongwu fu, but jingwu fu 景物賦 (fu on scenery).

In summary, these critics agreed that wu included animals and plants, and excluded architecture. However, they had different ideas about natural phenomena, such as bodies of water, weather, and celestial phenomena. A similar situation still exists today. Modern scholars tend to agree that the scope of wu includes animals, plants, and crafts, but there is disagreement about natural phenomena and architecture. Some scholars separate natural phenomena from yongwu subjects: for instance, Qu Duizhi 瞿兌之 (1894–1973) classified fu into ten categories, one of which is called shanchuan 山川, including fu on mountains and rivers, such as Guo Pu's 郭璞 "Jiang fu" 江賦 (Fu on the River); one is called jingwu 景物, including fu on natural phenomena like Xie Zhuang's "Fu on the Moon"; and one is called wulei 物類 including fu on objects, like Zhang Hua's "Fu on the Wren." Wan Guangzhi 萬光治 also considers fu on palaces and halls as yongwu. William T. Graham, Jr. only mentions animals and plants as yongwu subjects when defining this genre. Some scholars, however, do consider natural phenomena as proper yongwu subjects: Ma Jigao 馬積高 in his Fushi 賦史 considers Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Wind" 風賦 a yongwu fu. Gong Kechang 龔克昌, Yuan Jixi 袁濟喜, Cao Daoheng

¹⁵ See Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, annot. Fan Wenlan, 2:135. For English, see Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving Dragons*, trans. Shih, 91.

¹⁶ Zhu Yao, Gufu bianti, 4.33b and 5.13b.

¹⁷ Zhu Yao, Gufu bianti, 6.10b. On the "Fu pian," see Knechtges, "Riddles as Poetry."

¹⁸ Qu Duizhi, *Zhongguo pianwen gailun*, 17–18.

¹⁹ Wan Guangzhi, Hanfu tonglun, 276.

²⁰ Graham, "Mi Heng's 'Rhapsody on a Parrot," 39.

²¹ Ma Jigao, Fu shi, 43.

曹道衡, and Yu Yuxian 于浴賢 all take fu on natural phenomena to be yongwu fu.²² By contrast, Liao Kuo-tong 廖國棟 and Chu Hsiao-hai 朱曉海 are the only two scholars who include buildings in the yongwu subgenre.

In light of all these critical insights, when defining subject matter for yongwu, I consider natural living things such as animals and plants, as well as man-made objects, but exclude natural phenomena and buildings mainly because they are fundamentally different, largely in terms of scale, which prevents close examination. A suitable definition of yongwu fu, then, will be as follows: a subgenre of fu that describes objects, both living and manmade, that are tangible and palpable and not of grand scale. This definition delineates the yongwu fu in terms of content. The remaining parts of this book will define this subgenre further in terms of form, specific themes, and values.

In accordance with this understanding of yongwu fu, I have surveyed surviving yongwu fu from the Han, Wei, and Jin times, and discovered forty-eight pieces from the Later Han 東漢 (25–220), seventy-nine from the Wei 魏 (220–265), 181 from the Western Jin 西晉 (266–317), and seventy from the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420).²³ The production of rhapsodies on objects increased rapidly towards the end of the Eastern Han and reached its heyday during the Wei-Jin era.²⁴ This genre was almost unknown before the later Eastern Han,²⁵ and was largely out of fashion after the Wei-Jin period.²⁶ The cultural milieu, particularly intercultural exchanges, might shed some light on this phenomenon.

We already established the larger parameter of wu, now we need to examine the meaning of wu in the historical and cultural contexts. When cross-referencing the objects in third-century rhapsodies with the exotic goods listed in Laufer's Sino-Iranic and Schafer's The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, one finds that nearly a hundred and fifty out of 378 rhapsodies are about exotic goods, such as fruits, plants, herbs, animals, precious stones, and other crafts. Preliminary further close reading of the remaining rhapsodies suggests that one major purpose of yongwu fu is to react to exotica. This study is an initial step to examine the relationship between foreign goods and yongwu fu.

Some scholars claim that the Han writers were fond of describing exotica to attract people's attention and to normalize foreign objects. The exotica from the Western Regions fulfilled the desires of the Han writers and therefore offered fu this genre and those fu writers perfect chances to display their talents.²⁷ I argue that this practice matured in the third century due to the confluence of circumstances that encouraged this

²⁷ See Xue, "Qian tan Handai wenxue," 47.



²² Gong, "Wenbian ranhu shiqing"; Yuan Jixi, Fu, 70 and 135; Cao Daoheng, Han Wei liuchao cifu, 27; Yu Yuxian, Liu chao fu shulun, 330 and 337.

²³ This list is available for research consultation upon request from the author.

²⁴ Liao Kuo-tung stated that during the Wei-Jin times, there were more than eight hundred fu, half of which were yongwu fu; see Liao, *Wei Jin yongwu fu*, 29. In this book, I exclude fu on cosmology and buildings, which amount to nearly one hundred pieces of fu.

²⁵ Milburn, "Rhapsodies on Midiexiang," 32.

²⁶ Fu writing in general decreased after the Western Jin, as there are seventy pieces from the Eastern Jin, which lasted nearly 155 years. Hu Axiang also noticed this change; see his book *Wei Jin bentu wenxue*, 170–71.

burst of writing on exotic goods. First, the Chinese had accumulated enough information about non-Chinese material cultures, and this gradually and naturally forced Chinese elites to respond and react to them; second, the genre and practice of rhapsodic writing had sufficiently evolved so that objects could be described with accuracy and precision; third, there were several interactive and influential literary circles, whose members had access not only to exotic goods, but to one another's work, so they reinforced and promoted yongwu fu, and complemented each other. Each of these conditions— availability of the imports, the literary development of the genre, and the influential circles of dedicated poets—must be understood before proceeding to the texts themselves.

Accumulated Exotica

The Chinese had established contact with others living in the vast Eurasian lands before Zhang Qian's time, but it was only after Zhang Qian was sent to the Western Regions that China began to communicate with others on a greater scale and in a more organized way. With the foundation for the establishment of the well-guarded Silk Roads, more fresh ideas, unique commodities, and diverse people flowed along these trading routes.

Over the next two hundred years, frequent cultural exchanges did not diminish, even with natural and man-made disasters and chaos. Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1877–1912), a German geographer who coined the term "Silk Roads," asserted that for several centuries after the Han withdrew from Central Asia beginning in the second century CE, overland exchanges of any consequence ceased. But Daniel C. Waugh argues that when talking of cessation of exchanges, Richthofen seems specifically to be referring to the trade, if diminished, now being in the hands of merchants other than the Chinese. Besides foreign traders or merchants, Buddhist preachers also became active in both directions, to and from China, and played a key role in trading and urban development. Chinese envoys were continuously sent to establish contacts or improve relations. Inspired by the profits of their trade with others, ambitious Chinese merchants set forth along the Silk Roads. One example that demonstrates continued trade throughout the third century is *Weilüe* 魏略, written by Yu Huan 魚豢 (fl. third century) between 239 and 265, listing 65 different products imported to China from the Roman Empire alone.

Imperial gardens and palaces, of course, were the first locations to host these foreign goods. The literary genre fu that describes the rare exotica stored in imperial gardens and palaces began with Zhang Qian's journey and reached its zenith four hundred years later with Zuo Si's 左思 (250–305) composition "Rhapsody on Three Capitals" 三都賦.32

²⁸ Waugh, "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads'," 4.

²⁹ See the chart listing the numbers of Buddhist preachers between the first and sixth centuries, in Liu Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China*, 147.

³⁰ See "Dayuan liezhuan" in Sima, *Shi ji*, 123.3171–72. Jian Bozan comments that these so-called envoys must be brazen merchants; see his book *Qin Han shi*, 315–16.

³¹ Yu Taishan, "Weilüe," 137; McLaughlin, Rome and the Distant East, 179–80.

³² See biography of Zuo Si in Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, 92.2377. As many residents of Luoyang loved "the Sandu fu," they copied it to the extent that the price of paper at the capital spiked.

The first single book dedicating several volumes to various exotic goods, *Bowu zhi* 博物誌 by Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), became possible only after hundreds of years of accumulating knowledge of other regions, customs, and products, both within and outside of China. Emperor Ling of Han 漢靈帝 (r. 168–189) showed strong interest in "foreign costumes, canopies and hanging, stools, postures, food, harps, flutes, and dances" 胡服、胡帳、胡柴、胡쌀、胡鳖(以胡১)。 胡萝,和d his taste influenced the entire upper class at the capital, 33 one of many examples. Clearly, substantial and ongoing efforts, politically and economically, were made to import foreign commodities into China, and the resulting accumulation of such wares finally became available to third-century elites, whose writings contribute to the cultural normalization of these foreign goods.

Literary Ability

At this period there were three well-established literary genres: lyric poetry (shi 詩), Music Bureau poetry (yuefu 樂府), and fu poetry or rhapsody (fu 賦). Lyric poetry, represented by the Classic of Poetry 詩經, and Songs of the South 楚辭, often considered the precursor of fu, were both predominantly lyrical;³⁴ Music Bureau poetry was fundamentally narrative;³⁵ and rhapsody was known for being descriptive.³⁶ For instance, when the Western Jin scholar Wei Quan 衛權 (b. 220) commented on Zuo Si's "Rhapsody on Three Capitals," he praised its diction because it was not "superficial and flowery" 苟華 in that "[for] various things and different kinds,/ [he] presents them [according to] illustrations and books" 品物殊類,稟之圖籍.³⁷

Rhapsody on objects, as a subgenre of rhapsody, is also called the lesser rhapsody (xiaofu小說). Where grand rhapsody covers a variety of things containing long passages, rhapsody on objects focuses on just one thing and is generally shorter in length. Its unique tripartite structure allows it to be exquisitely more descriptive.³⁸ The first part usually discusses origin and external appearance to some degree; the second part tends to explain the object's practical features or functions; and the last part praises its virtues or merits. This structure allows for static and/or dynamic descriptions depending on the object, suiting it perfectly for defining and refining new things one at a time.³⁹

³⁹ For more discussion on this structure, see Kong, "Origins," 271.



³³ See "Wuxing zhi 1" 五行志1 in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 13.3272.

³⁴ Idema and Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature*, 116. For more discussion on lyrical tradition, see Chen Shih-hsiang, "The Shi-ching" and "On Chinese Lyrical Tradition."

³⁵ Dong Naibing, Zhongguo wenxue, 217.

³⁶ Xu Gongchi argues that even the descriptive feature of fu was the result of years of evolving with a strong interest in natural history; see Xu, "Handai," 21.

³⁷ See "Zuo Si Sanduo Fu" 左思三都賦略解序 in Ke and Zeng, Liang Han Wei Jin, 203.

³⁸ Stephen Owen used the term "tripartite structure" to render "sanzhun" 三準 used by Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 when he describes Lu Ji's ideas on the relationship among words, objects, and writings; see Qian, "Quan Jin wen," 1177; Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 81–82. In this book, tripartite structure refers to the compositional arrangement practised by rhapsodists.

Rhapsody on objects apparently began as a court fashion. When Emperor Xuan of Han 漢宣帝 (r. 74–49 cE) was questioned about his preference for lesser rhapsody, he defended the genre:

The greatest of the fu pieces have the same moral principles as the ancient Songs, while the least of them are rhetorically ornate and designed to delight. They are like silk and crepe in a seamstress' work or the odes of Zheng and Wei in music. According to the current mores, everyone considers these as things that please the ears and eyes. Fu, by comparison, still contain moral instruction about humaneness and propriety, and must provide information about birds, animals, plants, and trees. That is far better than the antics of entertainers and jesters or games such as bo and yi.

辭賦大者與古詩同義,小者辨麗可喜。辟如女工有綺穀,音樂有鄭衛,今世俗猶皆以 此虞說耳目,辭賦比之,尚有仁義風諭,鳥獸草木多聞之觀,賢於倡優博奕遠矣。40

Here he claims that rhapsodies on objects, such as birds, animals, plants, and trees, were valuable, as they are of entertainment and moral edification. About one hundred years later, Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 76-ca. 157) criticized his contemporaries who had abandoned the literary tradition of eulogizing virtues and expressing intentions, and instead focused on exotic, unique, or abnormal things to attract people's attention and praise. Wang's criticism simply confirms that rhapsody on objects was in fashion during the second century.

The writing of rhapsodies on objects, furthermore, was feverishly promoted by the court towards the end of the second century. On March 15, 176, Emperor Ling, despite some opposition, established a new academy within the imperial court, located inside the Hongdu Gate at the South Palace in Luoyang. The presumed reasons for building a second university beside the Imperial Academy (Taixue 太學) are various: foremost, it was suspected of being a strategy to help Emperor Ling form a trusted force to fight against influential scholars and powerful generals; but it was also apparently established to promote Confucianism by carving Confucian Classics on stone, which was called "Hongdu shijin" 鴻都石經, and by compiling the dictionary Huangxi pian 皇羲篇. Regardless of the purpose, this reform received more criticism than praise from Confucianists, mainly because the emperor selected and promoted university students or candidates based on their technical skills and did not follow the traditional and local recommendation system. The petition of the prominent scholar Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192) demonstrates this conflict:

⁴⁰ See the biography of Wang Bao 王褒傳 in Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 34.2829; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 15.

⁴¹ See "Wuben" 務本篇 in Wang Fu, Qianfu lun jian jiaozheng, comm. Wang Jipei, 19.

⁴² Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu*, 8.340; also see the footnote by Li Xian 李賢 (654–684) in *Hou Han shu*, 8.341. Yang Minggang, "Hongdu," 130.

⁴³ Qian Zhixi, "Hongdu," 98.

⁴⁴ Wang Xinhui, "Hongdu," 134.

⁴⁵ Qian Zhixi, "Hongdu," 76–78; for recommendation system, see Loewe, *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires*, 74–76.

In the first year of Guanghe [178], [Emperor Ling] established the Hongdu Gate Academy. He had painted the portraits of Confucius and his seventy-two disciples. The students were all selected for employment and recommended for appointment by provincial and commandery authorities or the Three Excellencies, who were ordered to do so by imperial decrees. Some went out to serve [in the local administration] as inspectors and governors, while others entered the palace as masters of writing and palace attendants. There were even those who were enfeoffed as marquises and who were granted noble titles. The scholar gentry were ashamed to be ranked with them.

光和元年,遂置鴻都門學,畫孔子及七十二弟子像。其諸生皆敕州郡三公舉用辟召,或出為刺史、太守,入為尚書、侍中,乃有封侯賜爵者,士君子皆恥與為列焉.46

The students were recommended "by imperial decrees," which means it was the emperor, not officials or local influential clans, who controlled the selection procedure. What might have vexed the scholar class even more were the criteria for the screening of candidates:

Earlier, the emperor had been fond of learning, and had composed fifty chapters on "Huangxi." Thus, he recruited students who were able to compose essays and rhapsodies. Originally, he had been inclined to summon men based on their classical learning, but later those who were recruited were all those who could compose court documents and were skilled at writing bird seal script. The number eventually reached several tens. The assistants to the palace attendants, Yue Song and Jia Hu, mostly recommended unscrupulous and opportunistic types, who all awaited imperial command at the Hongdu Gate. They enjoyed expounding on local customs and minor village affairs. The emperor enjoyed this very much, and he appointed them to positions without following the proper sequence of promotions.

初,帝好學,自造皇羲篇五十章,因引諸生能為文賦者。本頗以經學相招,後諸為尺 牘及工書鳥篆者,皆加引召,遂至數十人。侍中祭酒樂松、賈護,多引無行趣埶之 徒,並待制鴻都門下,憙陳方俗閭里小事,帝甚悅之,待以不次之位.47

At the beginning, students were chosen based on their knowledge of the classics, but later on they were selected for their calligraphic and compositional abilities. These technical skills were essential for carving stone classics and recording official documents, ⁴⁸ but Cai Yong was dissatisfied with them since the Hongdu candidates did not apply these essential skills to promote the classics. Instead, they used their talents to tell "local and minor" stories and seek promotions:

With students competing for profit, writers [of fu] teem like bubbles in a frothing cauldron. The most eminent among them draw somewhat upon the moral teachings of the classics, but the lowest of them string together vulgar sayings in the manner of entertainers and jesters. Some plagiarize others' compositions and falsely claim them as their own.

而諸生競利,作者鼎沸。其高者頗引經訓風喻之言;下則連偶俗語,有類俳優,或竊成文, 處冒名氏.49

⁴⁹ See "Cai Yong zhuan" in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 60b.1996; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 14 and 16.



⁴⁶ See "Cai Yong zhuan" in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 60b.1998; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 16.

⁴⁷ See "Cai Yong zhuan" in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 60b.1991-92; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 11.

⁴⁸ Wang Xinhui, "Hongdu," 134.

Such minor skills as painting, calligraphy, and fu writing have no application in rectifying the state and handling administration.

夫書畫辭賦,才之小者,匡國理政,未有其能.50

According to Cai Yong, the writing about "local customs and minor village affairs" is full of entertainment employing plain diction, yet lacks moral values and bears no application to state affairs. Unfortunately, their works are all lost, so again, Cai Yong's criticism opens a window for us to understand their style, which he called "fushu":

...at the Hongdu Gate, they recruit and assemble multitudes of petty men who compose *fushuo*, and are favoured in their time for such minor arts as writing in worm script.

又鴻都門下,招會群小,造作賦說,以蟲篆小技見寵於時.51

Fushuo, according to David Knechtges, is a type of rhapsody that involves displays of wit, jokes, and amusing stories. Ironically, Cai Yong's "Rhapsody on the Dwarf" could be considered as a fushuo, or the Hongdu Gate School style of composition.⁵²

That said, it should be mentioned that it was a common practice among the Chinese elite to separate writings for state affairs from personal written accounts. Take the example of Cao Cao, who offered Emperor Xian of Han a "spring wine made by a ninestage fermentation process" 九醞春酒 from his hometown Bozhou (modern Boxian 毫縣, Anhui 安徽). Along with this special tribute, Cao Cao wrote a memorial explaining how he modified the ingredient composition and fermentation process to make this wine sweeter and tastier for the emperor. Even though it is difficult to date this document, Cao Cao's passion for wine is well-known, particularly in his literary writings, such as these lines composed in 210: "Who can unravel these sorrows of mine?/ I know only one man, the God of Wine" 何以解憂,唯有杜康("Duange xing" 短歌行).55

⁵⁰ See "Cai Yong zhuan" in Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu*, 60b.1996; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 25.

⁵¹ See "Yang Ci zhuan" 楊賜傳 in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 54.1780; Knechtges, "Court Culture," 26.

⁵² Knechtges, "Court Culture," 23 and 34.

⁵³ Cao Cao, Cao Cao ji, 40.

⁵⁴ No research has been conducted on dating this memorial, but I attempt to connect it with two other documents by Cao Cao in 214: "Rang Jiuxi biao" 讓九錫表 and "Rang Niuxi ling" 讓九錫令, in which Cao Cao hypocritically refused to accept the title of Nine Distinctions offered by Emperor Xian of Han see Cao Cao, *Cao Cao ji*, 39 and 80; for details on this event, see de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord*, 383–89. The connection here is that the three writings all apply the number nine. Similarly, there were only five ranks in nobility, and no nine stages of fermentation in wine; therefore, Cao Cao might have invented the noble title and wine name to symbolize or legitimize his unexceptional position, which is merely lower than a king but much higher than a marquis, traditionally the highest nobility. De Crespigny suggested dating it earlier in the period between 196 and 220, when Cao Cao was seeking to reassure his royal "hostage/captive" of his good will (personal communication to the author, December 4, 2018).

⁵⁵ See Cao Cao, Cao Cao ji, 8; for dates, see Zhang, San Cao nianpu, 111.

In contradiction to his personal writing to the ruler Cao publicly issued a decree banning alcohol in 207,⁵⁶ which directly caused the death of Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208).⁵⁷

Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551) speaks vividly of this dual attitude in writing: "For establishing oneself one needs first of all to be cautious and serious, for writing one further needs to be unconventional and unrestrained" 立身先需謹慎,文章且須放蕩.⁵⁸ For any member of the ancient elite, "establishing oneself" unavoidably included formal writing for state affairs, so here Xiao Gang essentially distinguishes between casual writings and formal writings, thus defining standards similar to those that Cai Yong applied to criticize the writing of Hongdu scholars; clearly, they do not disapprove of the writing itself, but rather its purpose.

Emperor Ling of Han established Hongdu Gate Academy, summoned the talented practitioners of painting and rhapsody, welcomed foreign goods, promoted mundane or secular feelings, 59 and indirectly promoted "literary consciousness" 文學自覺 that later prevailed among Wei-Jin writers, 60 who were the leading rhapsodists on objects, as we will see in this book. This political and cultural reform took place while the emerging literary genre, rhapsody on objects, had reached a stage that required political aid to secure or even boost its visibility. 61 Emperor Ling and his writing circles, the Hongdu scholars, not only encouraged future rulers and nobles to recruit talented writers in order to promote the interests of the ruling class, but also motivated more writing circles to write about daily life, represented by exotic objects. 62 When later rhapsodists combined Emperor Ling's two preferences, namely, rhapsody and foreign goods, writing on objects flourished. These rhapsodists also brought the critical and opposite voices into consideration; therefore, their purpose of writing yongwu fu expanded, as we will see in the political agenda of the fu poems.

Writing Circles

The third century raised more prolific writers than any other pre-Tang period. Two hundred years later, these third-century writers were well regarded in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, *Shipin* 詩品, and *Wen xuan* 文選, three major works of literary criticism which deal with writings and writers of all periods, reflecting the acceptance of third-century literary styles. (2a. 465–520) assessed twenty-five writers from the Wei

⁶³ These criticisms did not focus on yongwu fu, but the writers valued by Xiao Gang, Zhong Rong,



⁵⁶ Zhang Keli, San Cao nianpu, 96.

⁵⁷ See "Kong Rong zhuan" 孔融傳 in Chen Shou, Sanguo zhi, 70.2272.

⁵⁸ See Xiao Gang's letter to his son Xiao Daxin 蕭大心 (523–551) "Jie Dangyang gong Daxin shu" 誠 當陽公大心書, in *Quan Liang wen*, 11.3010a; for a translation see Marney, *Liang Chien-wen Ti*, 95; Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 173–74.

⁵⁹ Zhang Chaofu, *Hanmo*, 120–27.

⁶⁰ Wang Yongping, "Han Lingdi," 11–17.

⁶¹ Wang Yongping, "Han Lingdi," 13.

⁶² Fan Wenlan connects Jian'an literature with the Hongdu Gate Academy; see his comments on "Shixu" in Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, annot. Fan Wenlan, 9.681n16.

State and twenty-three from the Western Jin. ⁶⁴ Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 467–519) evaluated 122 poets, forty-one or one-third of whom were from the third century: fifteen from the Wei and twenty-six from the Western Jin. Among the eleven poets in the upper grade in Zhong Rong's ranking system, eight were from the third century. ⁶⁵ Among the hundred and thirty writers selected in *Wen xuan* by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), twenty-three were from the Wei and thirty-four were from the Western Jin, totalling fifty-seven writers (43 percent) in *Wen xuan* from the third century. Among the 480 pieces of writing in *Wen xuan*, seventy-nine were from the Wei and one hundred and nine were from the Western Jin, 187 in total or 38 percent of the *Wen xuan* collection. ⁶⁶

These three critics had different views on literature, but they drew similar conclusions about who perfectly represented the third century. Let us take the example of Zhong Rong's pointed comment, which introduces the two most famous coteries of writers in the third century:

In the Jian'an period (196–220), Cao Cao and his sons [Cao Zhi 曹植, 192–232, and Cao Pi 曹丕, 187–226] sincerely loved polite letters. The Duke of Pingyuan and his brother [refers to Cao Zhi and Cao Pi] gloriously became beams in the house of literature. Liu Zhen [d. 217] and Wang Can [177–217] became their "attendant wings." There were "those clinging to the Dragon and the phoenix" who brought up the rear, numbering in all more than one hundred. An abundance of wonderful writing came to completion in this age. Thereafter, continuing into Jin times [265–317], literature fell into decline. In the Taikang region [280–289], the "three Zhangs," the "two Lus," the "Pan pair," and the "single Zuo," suddenly rose up and followed in the wake of the Jian'an period sovereigns. The earlier poetic legacy was not yet at an end. There was truly a restoration of belles lettres.

降及建安,曹公父子篤好斯文,平原兄弟郁為文棟,劉楨、王粲為其羽翼。次有攀龍托鳳,自致於屬車者,蓋將百計。彬彬之盛,大備於時矣。爾後陵遲衰微,迄於有晉。太康[晉武帝年號]中,三張、二陸、兩潘、一左,勃爾復興,踵武前王,風流未沫,亦文章之中興也⁶⁷

Inspired by the literary circles of the Later Han and aided by his political influence, Cao Cao successfully attracted many gifted literary talents to form a court writing circle. Its representatives were Liu Zhen, Wang Can, Xu Gan 徐幹 (171–217), Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212), Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217), and Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217). ⁶⁸ This active cir-

and Liu Xie were active and prolific, as we will see in the following chapters.

⁶⁴ See the data on the comparison of *Wenxin diaolong* and *Wen xuan* in Shimizu, "Sairon Monzen to Bunshinchōryū to eikyō kankei," trans. Jin and Zhang as "Zailun Wen xuan."

⁶⁵ Cao Daoheng, "Wenxuan yu Xijin wenxue," 11.

⁶⁶ This data combines my own research with that of Shimizu Yoshio, *Shin Monzen gaku*. I made some changes: for example, Shimizu Yoshio mistakenly put Liu Kun 刘琨 into the Eastern Jin Dynasty, whereas I listed him under the Western Jin. Cao Daoheng also points out that, "Wen xuan selected plenty of works from the Western Jin such as Pan and Lu, which reflects a certain historical view. For this phenomenon, we should undertake further research, and should not ignore it"《文选》所以大量选录西晋特别始潘陆之作,其实是反映了一个历史阶段的看法。对这一现象,我们应该深入研究,而不应加以忽视. See Cao, "Wen xuan yu Xijin wenxue," 126.

⁶⁷ Zhong, *Shipin*, 1; for English, see Wixted, "Life Configurations," 110.

⁶⁸ The last five were added according to "Wang Can zhuan" in Chen Shou, Sanguo zhi, 21.599:

cle often gathered upon the orders of the Cao brothers. Five writers from this circle, namely Cao Pi, Cao Zhi, Wang Can, Chen Lin, and Ying Yang were involved in the two compositional activities on the rosemary and the agate bridle, as seen in the following chapters.

Less than half a century later, the newly established Western Jin court followed Cao's example to attract literary talents and promote dynastic interests. 69 Its talented writers included Zhang Zai張載 (ca. 250–ca. 310), Zhang Xie 張協 (ca. 255–307), Zhang Kang 張 亢 (fl. 317–325), Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303), Lu Yun 陸云 (262–303), Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300), Pan Ni 潘尼 (ca. 250–311), and Zuo Si 左思. Here we see brothers (the three Zhangs and the two Lus), an uncle and nephew (the Pans), as well as siblings (Zuo Si and his younger sister Zuo Fen 左芬, d. 300). Zuo Fen did so well in writing that in 271 she was summoned to the court as a lady-in-waiting for Emperor Wu of Jin 晉武帝 (Sima Yan 司馬炎, r. 265–290), and was later promoted to Honourable Companion (guipin 貴嬪) in 274. 70 This group of writers was described as "the men of talents of the Jin" by Liu Xie. 71 The members also discussed among themselves various political and literary issues: 72 when completing his well-known piece "Rhapsody on the Three Capitals," Zuo Si asked Zhang Zai to write a preface.

One other name should be added to the literary circle of the Western Jin. It is true that Fu Xuan was not highly appreciated in fifth-century literary history: Zhong Rong listed him under the Lower Grades, 74 Liu Xie briefly commented that "Fu Xuan's writing is didactic" 傅玄篇章,義多規鏡,75 and *Wen xuan* includes only one of his poems.76 However, these later assessments do not accurately represent his political and literary significance.

Fu Xuan, zi Xiuyi 休奕, was a native of Niyang 泥陽 (modern Ningxian 寧縣, Gansu), born at the end of the Han, and lived through the Wei and one decade of the Jin. In 245, he was selected to assist in composing *Wei shu*, the official history of Wei. Later, he was transferred to the position of Magistrate of Wen 溫 (modern Wenxian, Henan), the hometown of the Sima clan. By fulfilling this duty, Fu Xuan established a good relationship with the Sima clan, which paved the way for his later prominence after Sima Yan 司馬炎 (236–290) established the Jin dynasty. The new emperor advanced Fu Xuan's noble stature to viscount and honoured him with the post of cavalier attendant-in-ordinary

together these seven were known as Jian'an qizi 建安七子.

⁷⁶ Xiao Tong, Wen xuan, annot. Li Shan, 29.1257.



⁶⁹ Toshiyuki Satō listed seven writing circles during the Western Jin, and offered a detailed discussion on their members in his book *Xijin wenxue yanjiu*, trans. Zhou Yanliang, 29–106.

⁷⁰ See Zuo Fen's biography in Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, 31.957–62.

⁷¹ Liu Xie, Wenxin diaolong zhu, annot. Fan Wenlan, 6.67.

⁷² Toshiyuki Satō, *Xijin wenxue yanjiu*, trans. Zhou Yanliang, 177–83.

⁷³ See the biography of Zuo Si in Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, 92.2376.

⁷⁴ Zhong, Shipin, 57.

⁷⁵ Liu Xie, Wenxin diaolong zhu, annot. Fan Wenlan, 10.701.

(sanji changshi 散騎常侍), and finally metropolitan commandant (sili jiaowei 司隸校尉) in 275.77

Fu Xuan was one of the key composers of Jin court music, and also a prolific writer. He composed Fuzi 傅子, which "totalled one hundred and forty headings, and several hundreds of thousands of words. In addition, there were collected essays of over a hundred juan."⁷⁸ Fu also composed various literary works: 99 *yuefu*, 33 poems, 59 rhapsodies, and 22 epigraphs.⁷⁹ Fu Xuan's extant thirty-nine rhapsodies on objects, more than any other poet's writings during Wei-Jin times, serve as an excellent example of the methodology of describing objects verisimilarly.⁸⁰

Not only did his political and literary influence ensure him an important position within the Jin learned group, it also helped spread his distinct writing style into the Jin Dynasty.⁸¹ One anecdote testifies to his impact: when completing the "Rhapsody on the Mengsi Pond" 濛汜池賦, Zhang Zai presented it to Fu Xuan, who introduced or promoted Zhang at the court on the strength of his writing skills.⁸²

In the chapters on the pomegranate, the monkey, the peacock, and the lotus, we will read rhapsodies by representative Jin writers such as Fu Xuan, Zuo Fen, Zhang Xie, Zhang Zai, Pan Yue, Pan Ni, along with other "men of talents," such as Ying Rosemary Zhen 應負 (d. 269) and Xiahou Zhan 夏侯湛 (243–291).

Elites in the third century were beginning to experience exotica in their daily lives, and yongwu fu was its perfect mode of expression. In addition, competition for literary eminence among peers was also commonplace, and coteries of talented men began to coalesce. If only a handful of individual writers had favoured and practised this style of writing, their work on exotica might have long been gone, since it would hardly have received sufficient attention, either from their peers or from later generations. It was only when groups of influential and skilful writers made conscious efforts that this genre became fashionable and attracted more support and resources, which in turn allowed the genre to flourish. As we will see, the writers either gathered together to write under a powerful figure, such as the composition on the rosemary and the agate bridle under the order of Cao Pi, or they wrote with friends or colleagues over a single object, such as the pomegranate.⁸³

The following six chapters illustrate the mature state of rhapsody on objects by examining six exotic goods and fu poems written about them: nine pieces of rhapsody on the pomegranate, eight on the lotus, five on rosemary, five on the horse, four on the

⁷⁷ See "Fu Xuan zhuan" in Fang Xuanling et al., Jin shu, 47.1317; Kong, "Fu Xuan ji," 72–75.

⁷⁸ Paper, "The Life," 77–78; Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, 47.1323.

⁷⁹ Based on Lu, Xian Qin liang Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi and Yan Kejun, Quan Jin wen, vols. 45-46.

⁸⁰ For further study on Fu Xuan's fu, see Kong, "Fu Xuan's (217-278) Rhapsodies."

⁸¹ For further discussion on Fu Xuan's influence, see Kong, "Origins of Verisimilitude," 267–288.

⁸² See the biography of Zhang Zai in Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, 55.1518.

⁸³ For the discussion on the writing circle of Wei and Western Jin and their locations, see Hu, *Wei Jin*, 165; also see the discussion on the seven writing circles during the Western Jin in Toshiyuki Satō, *Xijin wenxue yanjiu*, trans. Zhou Yanliang, 29–106.

peacock, and four on the agate bridle. The six goods in thirty-five poems analyzed in this book have been selected because they share the following conditions: the rhapsodists' shared knowledge and background, the relatively complete texts, and relevant contents of these fu poems. The authors of these fu were the most influential poets and historians of their time, composing nearly one tenth of the third-century fu poems. Their ability to compose and their access to foreign goods enable them to better record and reflect their encounters. The thirty-five poems in this book are chosen also because they are either complete or near complete, which make thorough analysis possible. In addition, they represent assimilation into Chinese culture at three different levels: courtly luxury, popular commodity, and sacred images.

Courtly luxury, represented by rosemary and the agate bridle, surfaced briefly in Chinese writings as political metaphors and then disappeared so completely that only the Chinese terms for their names remain. Chapter One examines the five rhapsodies on rosemary and related historiographical documents; traces the etymology of *midie*, rosemary in Chinese, to Linear B, the precursor of Greek; and analyzes the different purposes for Cao Pi, Cao Zhi, and their followers. Their collective expressions did not bring this Mediterranean herb to life in Chinese culture, but the social energy encoded in their writing continues to generate interest in the lives of the Caos. Chapter Two focuses on four rhapsodies on the agate bridle written by Cao Pi and his followers. Textual and historiographical analysis of these writings reveal the "shared codes" among Chinese, Central Asians, and Indians through religious and commercial exchanges, also demonstrating how Cao Pi skilfully integrated the agate with the Five Elements theory to legitimize his coming rule. Although the rarity and beauty of these two imports brought them attention at court, imperial favour did not sustain them long, and their existence in Chinese culture was brief and unrepeatable.

The pomegranate and trained macaque, by contrast, began as courtly luxuries but were fully assimilated into Chinese popular culture as objects of pleasure and entertainment, and remain there to the present day. Chapter Three explores the process of transforming the pomegranate, a Persian import, into a Chinese cultural staple by examining nine rhapsodies written during Wei-Jin times. Considering also some later reflections upon the fruit, it appears that the Chinese collectively accepted its exotic features but strongly denied its foreign origin. Chapter Four traces the linguistic and cultural origins of the trained macaque, imported from India. Through textual analysis and intellectual history of the five rhapsodies on the monkeys, we see how Chinese elites welcomed the animal and its uniquely imitative training as exotic entertainment, while at the same time filtering out its foreign religious significance.

The sacred associations of the lotus and the peacock, on the other hand, were profound: each embodied the elements of rarity, utility, and truth, which could successfully merge with existing Chinese traditions, eventually allowing them to become Chinese sacred icons in their own right. In each case, however, the object's sacred associations had to be aligned with its tangible presence. Chapter Five juxtaposes the purely notional image of the peacocks in antique literature with four third-century rhapsodies on the actual birds, only lately introduced into China. By exploring material exchange with other cultures to the south, we see Chinese poets transforming what had once been a



purely mystical bird into a hybrid being, ideal as well as real, reshaping this tangible foreign bird to blend with an ancient and intangible tradition. Examining eight rhapsodies on the lotus with the aid of historiographical documents, Chapter Six uncovers the influence of early translated Buddhist sutras, linguistically, in that *lianhua* replaced *fuqu*, the traditional name for lotus in China, and, in terms of iconography, in the transformation of the native lotus from an ordinary flower to a cultural icon with three profound associations: detachment, sun-like radiance, and lotus-picking activities. This chapter also explains the crucial role played by Chinese writers in the course of rejuvenating Chinese images following inspiration by Indian culture.

These thirty-six rhapsodies on six objects suggest that the genre of Rhapsody on Objects was not simply a literary exercise, nor a mode of courtly amusement and competition, but also an instrument for filtering foreign objects, ideas, and culture, thus rendering them suitable to Chinese tastes and speculation. While these fu poems themselves were produced to fulfil a variety of immediate desires or demands, they indeed enriched Chinese culture and tradition with new objects and ideas, while maintaining the traditional understanding that makes China the centre of the world, keeping other places peripheral, politically, culturally, and spiritually. As we will see, these rhapsodists engaged in deliberate cultural negotiation between foreign goods and their own tradition, and their writings played a crucial role in blending new and unfamiliar imports into Chinese culture. In the end, they successfully established names and literary conventions that reinforced or exploited exotic prestige while controlling their influence.

The focus on exotic goods in this book is inspired by *Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran*, published in 1919 by Berthold Laufer (1874–1934). This botanic encyclopedia investigates the Asiatic migration of nearly fifty plants through Chinese documents. To Laufer, exotica carried multiple economic, agricultural, and medicinal values, as he claims, "The Chinese merit our admiration for their farsighted economic policy in making so many useful foreign plants tributary to themselves and amalgamating them with their sound system of agriculture. The Chinese were thinking, sensible, and broad-minded people, and never declined to accept gratefully whatever good things foreigners had to offer."

Fu Poetry, however, moves to embrace other values of exotic goods by looking at their complex acceptance through the lens of poetry. This book considers the cultural and spiritual changes that took place as a result of these exchanges of exotica. Exotic goods arrived at a time known for its "tremendous exposure of literary activities";⁸⁶ they

⁸⁴ For further discussion on the negative assessment of rhapsodies on objects see Lu Kanru, "Zuo Si pingzhuan," 54; Zhongguo, *Zhongguo wenxue shi*, 223; Xu Gongchi, *Wei Jin wenxue*, 259, 261, and 271; Ye Fengyu, *Xi Jin zuojia*, 215; Luo Zongqiang, *Wei Jin Naobeichoe wenxue*, 63; Wang Lihua, *Xi Jin shifeng*, 19–20; Tang, "Cong Jian'an dao Taikang," 20; Nie, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue shi*, 71. Nicholas Williams edited eight articles written by contemporary fu scholars to define and promote fu, which is descriptive, philosophical, lyrical, and political; see Williams, *The Fu Genre of Imperial China*.

⁸⁵ Laufer, Sino-Iranica, 189.

⁸⁶ This expression was used by David Knechtges for Han times, but the tradition continued until Wei-Jin times. See Knechtges, "Culling the Weeds," 202.

earned the attention of the learned men, and became muses for the rhapsodists. The rhapsodists in turn provided exotica opportunities to merge into Chinese culture with new names, new associations, and new images; success was not guaranteed, however, for the poets' purpose might be mainly to ponder the centrality of existing political power. Succeed or fail, exotica inspired our poets to create shared social energy, full of different voices, kind or harsh, foreign or native, remote or near. Embedded in writing, this diverse energy has survived, preserving endless impressions of the third century.

