

# The Beginning of Literati Poetry: Four Poems from First-century BCE China

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## Abstract

This article examines a set of four tetrasyllabic poems from the first century BCE, situating them between the ancient poetry of the *Shijing* and the medieval poetry that would appear two centuries later. The author outlines the emergence of a learned elite in the latter half of the Western Han and shows how the intellectual and socio-political background of this group is instantiated in the poems. As statements of a classicist mentality ascendant in the late Western Han, the poems stand firmly in their age, but as products of this newly emerging group they bear definite connection to the literati poetry of medieval China. Thus, the poems offer a viewpoint onto both the scholarly culture of the first century BCE and the poetic culture of early medieval China.

## Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse à un ensemble de quatre poèmes quadrisyllabiques datant du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle avant notre ère en les situant à mi-chemin entre la poésie antique du *Shijing* et la poésie médiévale. L'auteur décrit l'émergence d'une élite savante pendant la seconde moitié des Han occidentaux et analyse la façon dont les circonstances intellectuelles et socio-politiques de ce groupe s'illustrent dans les poèmes. En tant qu'expression d'une mentalité classiciste devenue dominante à la fin des Han occidentaux ces poèmes sont bien de leur époque; mais dans la mesure où ils émanent de cette élite en train de s'imposer ils se connectent incontestablement à la poésie lettrée de la Chine médiévale. De la sorte, les poèmes présentés donnent un aperçu aussi bien de la culture savante du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle avant notre ère que de la culture poétique du début du Moyen Âge chinois.

## Keywords

Chinese poetry, literati, Han Dynasty, *Shijing*, classical scholarship

## Introduction

There is, on the surface, a notable gap in the early history of Chinese poetry. On the one hand we have the three hundred and five poems of the *Shijing* 詩經, songs from as early as the eleventh century BCE, perhaps assembled as an integral collection by the sixth century BCE. On the other, we are witnesses to a burst of poetic composition in the late second century CE, the beginning of an elite poetic practice that continued with great consequence throughout the history of imperial China. Relatively little poetry seems to have been produced in the seven hundred years between these two points.

Two immediate explanations for this gap can be offered. First, we are considering only a certain type of “poetry,” the *shi* 詩, and if we look to other kinds of poetry we find much to appreciate in this intervening period, in particular the *Chuci* 楚辭 and a number of *fu* 賦 (“rhapsody” or “poetic exposition”) and songs (*ge* 歌). It is, then, a gap only in the early history of *shi*-poetry; but this leads to the second explanation, which is that the “*Shi*” of the *Shijing* and the “*shi*-poetry” from the second century onward are the same word but not the same thing. The poems of the *Shijing* were songs collected by the Zhou court and transmitted by scholars who maintained and refined those court traditions even as their original political circumstances disappeared. The *shi*-poetry of the second century was no revival of this ancient practice, but a new poetic phenomenon that enjoyed the prestige of this classically distinguished name. Properly speaking, then, there is no “gap,” be it of poetry generally or of *shi*-poetry specifically.

Nevertheless, we cannot but be intrigued by an isolated set of four lengthy and little-noticed *shi*-poems dating from the middle of the first century BCE, found in the *Hanshu* 漢書 biography of Wei Xian 韋賢.<sup>1</sup> Where do these poems stand between the poetry of the *Shijing* and the *shi*-poetry of the medieval age? More precisely, what literary culture produced these poems, and how does it relate to those cultures that preceded and followed it? In the following pages, I examine the

<sup>1</sup> The first and the third of these poems have been the subject of a dedicated study: Michael Friedrich, “Die Ahnen und das Ich. Zu einem Archaismus in der Han-zeitlichen Dichtung und seiner Funktion,” in *Das andere China: Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 405-34.

socio-political, scholarly, and literary background of the poems and their authors; present the poems in full translation, reading them as a sort of allegorical representation of the emergence of the “literati” in the late Western Han; and draw connections between these “first literati poems” and the medieval literary culture that would follow.

## The Literati<sup>2</sup>—the Poets and their Milieu

The first two poems of our set (hereafter referred to as the “Wei poems”) are attributed to one Wei Meng 韋孟. Wei Meng is a shadowy figure because most of what we know of him comes from the poems themselves; the rudimentary biographical information provided by the *Hanshu* is little more than an introductory note to the poetry attributed to him. Wei was a native of Pengcheng 彭城 (modern Xuzhou 徐州) and served as tutor to three generations of Chu “kings,” i.e., Han princes enfeoffed in Chu. The last of these kings entered into rebellion, whereupon Wei is said to have composed the first poem of the set, known as the “Poem of Admonition” (“Fengjian shi” 諷諫詩).<sup>3</sup> When the king ignored his remonstrations, Wei went into exile in Zou 鄒, a region some one hundred kilometers north of Pengcheng. Zou was in the heart of Lu 魯, the homeland of Confucius and Mencius and a center of classical scholarship, and there Wei Meng gathered his disciples and committed himself to the Confucian tradition.<sup>4</sup> The second work, “Poem from Zou” (“Zai Zou shi” 在鄒詩), was written as he made this move.

<sup>2</sup> I employ the term “literati” here despite the fact that the learned stratum of the Han dynasty was a very different group of people from those of the Song dynasty onwards, with whom the label is most often associated. I prefer it to the more unwieldy “scholar-official” because I wish to emphasize this group’s inherent bond with literary writing, incipient if not yet established in the poems under study here.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that none of these poems has a true title; the ones that have been adopted by various anthologies are derived from the *Hanshu* introductions to the poems (translated with the poems below).

<sup>4</sup> I am aware that many scholars have taken to using the word “classicist,” or even simply “Ru” 儒, in place of “Confucian.” It is true that “Confucian” is a term with no Chinese equivalent, and that it has been used in such a general way as to lump very different intellectual groups and concerns into one. However, there is no more apt term to describe the ethos of the Wei family and their poems, as will be clear from Poem II, below.

The attribution of these two poems to Wei Meng is put in doubt by the *Hanshu* itself, which follows the second poem with the comment: "Some say that these poems were composed by his eager descendants, to recount the intent of their ancestor" 或曰其子孫好事，述先人之志而作是詩也。<sup>5</sup> While there is no incontrovertible evidence that Wei Meng did or did not write these poems, the inclusion of this suspicion in the very source in which the poems come to us suggests that it should not be dismissed casually, particularly in light of the poems' resemblance to the poems by his descendant, Wei Xuancheng.<sup>6</sup> Although for sake of convenience I will continue to refer to Wei Meng as the author of the first two poems in our set, I think it entirely plausible that they were the creations of his descendants, and, as I shall argue below, I believe the more important point is that the four "Wei poems" relate to one another as an integral set. They constitute a family, of revered ancestors and "eager descendants."

With the second pair of poems we arrive on much more solid historical ground. Their author, Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 (d. 36 BCE), was the son of Wei Xian 韋賢 (142-61 BCE), and a descendant of Wei Meng. Wei Xian was a renowned classical scholar in Zou, recruited to the capital as an Erudite (*boshi* 博士) and, in 86 BCE, brought into the imperial court as tutor to the eight-year-old Emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 86-74). He held prestigious appointments in the 70s, and he played some role in the establishment of Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73-49). For this merit he was awarded an honorary fief ("marquis within the passes," *guannei hou* 關內侯), and his fief was regularized (to *liehou* 列侯) in 71, when he became chancellor (*zaixiang* 宰相). Chancellor was, constitutionally speaking, the highest office in the land, although in his day the reins of power were in the hands of the generalissimo Huo Guang 霍光 (d. 68 BCE). Wei Xian retired from office—in fact, he was probably forced out—in 67 and died several years later.

<sup>5</sup> *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962; hereafter "HS") 73.3107.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Friedrich argues, persuasively, that the first poem by Wei Meng betrays the ideals of the first century CE and is not reflective of the literary, scholarly or political circumstances of Wei's time. See Friedrich, "Die Ahnen und das Ich," 419-21, 429. On somewhat less evidence, Friedrich goes as far as to suggest that the author of the Wei Meng poems was none other than Wei Xuancheng himself.

Wei Xuancheng, then, was the son of a prominent scholar whose qualifications in classical learning had enabled him to rise out of the provinces to the highest ranks of imperial office, and Xuancheng followed in his father's footsteps, continuing the family studies as a youth and pursuing an official career. On the death of Wei Xian, Wei Xuancheng was awarded the family fief and rose quickly through the bureaucratic ranks. In 55 BCE, he was appointed Master of Ceremonials (*taichang* 太常), one of the prestigious Nine Chamberlains (*jiu qing* 九卿) at the top of the imperial bureaucracy, but in 53 a ceremonial lapse cost Wei Xuancheng his official position, and his family fief was reduced to an honorary one. His first poem, the "Poem in Self-Rebuke" ("Zihe shi" 自劾詩), is said to date from this time. After this setback, however, Xuancheng returned quickly and energetically to the path of officialdom. He was made tutor to an imperial prince and in 51 he participated in the famed debates on the classics at the Shiqu Pavilion 石渠閣. Rising through a series of important posts in the 40s, Wei Xuancheng was finally made chancellor in 42, and his family fief was restored. The second of his poems, the "Warning to My Descendants" ("Jie zisun shi" 誡子孫詩), was composed some time between this triumph and his death, as sitting chancellor, in 36.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the Wei family will be fleshed out considerably when we come to the poems, which are highly personalized narratives inspired by the authors' predicaments at the junctures noted above. Our concern here must be to place the authors of the poems in the proper socio-political context, namely, the rise of the literati class and "literati families" (*shi zu* 士族).<sup>8</sup> Putting the poems in this context allows us to read them as testaments to the intellectual and political issues of their particular age, and this is especially important because it is

<sup>7</sup> This portrait is drawn from the Wei family biography at *HS* 73.3101-15.

<sup>8</sup> "Literati families" (*shi zu*) are the focus of Yu Yingshi's 余英時 classic study of the literati in this period: "Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi" 東漢政權之建立與士族大姓之關係, *Xinya xuebao* 1.2 (1956); rpt. in Yu Yingshi, *Zhongguo zhishi jieceng shi lun: gudai pian* 中國知識階層史論: 古代篇 (Taipei: Lianjing, 1980), 109-203. The relationship of the literati families with the development of the imperial bureaucracy in the late Western Han is discussed in Xu Zhuoyun 許倬雲 (Hsu Cho-yun), "Liang Han zhengquan yu shehui shili de jiaohu zuoyong" 兩漢政權與社會勢力的交互作用, *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 35 (1964); rpt. in Xu, *Qiugu bian* 求古編 (Taipei: Lianjing, 1982), 453-82.

precisely their identity as “literati poetry” that provides the strongest link between the Wei poems and the medieval tradition of *shi*-poetry that would take shape some two centuries later.

Learned men had played a significant role in China’s political culture since antiquity, but it was only in the first century BCE that this group took shape as a coherent political class. The most tangible evidence for the appearance of the literati as a relatively coherent group is probably the fact that the term *shidafu* 士大夫 (“literati,” or “scholar-official”) only gains currency from this time.<sup>9</sup> In essence, the emergence of this group can be traced to the consolidation of the Han empire under Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141-87). Control over all the land in the empire now belonged to the emperor and the central government, and as the feudal courts disappeared over the course of Emperor Wu’s reign, men of talent gravitated toward the capital and into the ranks of imperial service. These men and their progeny formed the basis of the new literati class.

As imperial control expanded, the ranks of the imperial government grew rapidly. This growth took place at all levels of the bureaucracy, but it was the institutionalization of classical scholarship at the central court that was of particular importance in the development of the literati. We can get a sense of both the rapid growth of the literati class and its close bond to the imperial bureaucracy by looking at the numbers of students associated with the Imperial School (*taixue* 太學) in the first century BCE. These were students of the classics, but more fundamentally they were literate men granted state stipend and the right to dwell in the capital until they proved their qualifications and gained appointment to regular office. According to the *Hanshu*, Emperor Wu had established five Erudites (*boshi*) with a quota of fifty students under their direction;<sup>10</sup> in the first quarter of the first century BCE, Emperor Zhao expanded the quota to 100, and in mid-century this number was doubled again. In the reign of Emperor Yuan—under whom Wei Xuancheng served as chancellor—the student ranks were opened to anyone with knowledge of a single classic; this proved too

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<sup>9</sup> See Yu, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli,” 178-81.

<sup>10</sup> When, and even whether, Emperor Wu established these Erudites is a matter of some dispute, and the impact of his reign on the development of state scholarship may have been less significant than that of the emperors who followed in his wake.

great a burden on the state and the quota was set at 1,000 students, but by the turn of the Common Era the quota was increased to 3,000, with more spots created in the provinces.<sup>11</sup> This expansion of the scholarly apparatus directly reflects the political rise of men of learning in the last century of the Western Han.

The consequences of this change in the socio-political landscape can hardly be overstated. A symbiotic relationship was developed, between scholars who desired government appointment and a government that needed their service, and obedience, in the ranks of the empire. Powerful literati families would hold great sway over most of the medieval dynasties, and men of learning continued to be the backbone of the bureaucratic system throughout the history of imperial China. Furthermore, this literati class would come to identify closely with the *shi*-poem, a relationship most famously seen in the incorporation of poetic composition into the Tang dynasty examination system.<sup>12</sup> The socio-political type represented by Wei Xuancheng, then, had scarcely existed a generation before him, but it would quickly take shape as one of the most influential groups in the empire, developing an intimate association with *shi*-poetry, as well as other forms of literary writing. The Wei family poems offer us a snapshot of the literati in its formative stage, and “literati poetry” in an early form.

### The Translation of the Classical World—the Wei Poems and the *Shijing*

The Wei poems unmistakably evoke the *Shijing*. Their literary form—a four-syllable meter with rhymes on the even lines—is derived from the *Shijing*, and they make ample use of *Shijing* rhetoric. The fact that they are called “*shi*” is also a clear gesture to the Classic. Nonetheless, there is also an unmistakable difference between the Wei poems and their ostensible model, in theme, form, and diction alike. This difference

<sup>11</sup> These figures are drawn from the account at *HS* 88.3596; see also Yu, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli,” 110-11.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that the *shi*-poem was only one of the literary arts tested on the exam, and its presence there was more as a measure of skill than a testament to the ideological importance of the genre.

arises from the fact that the poems are, rather than “imitations” of the *Shijing*, “actualizations” or “translations” of that classic as it was understood in the late Western Han. In other words, the Wei poems refer not so much to the *Shijing* as a specific text as to the classical world it was understood to depict.

The Wei family was known for its *Shijing* studies: the *Hanshu* “Accounts of the Scholars” (Rulin zhuan 儒林傳) identifies a “Wei family learning” (Wei-shi xue 韋氏學), tracing it back to the founder of the “Lu 魯 school” of the *Shijing*, “Venerable Shen” (Shen Gong 申公).<sup>13</sup> Their connection to the Lu school, however, was not limited to the *Shijing*. The “Bibliographic Treatise” also cites the Wei family as a “lineage” (*jia* 家) of the Lu school transmission of the *Lunyu* 論語,<sup>14</sup> and the “Accounts of the Scholars” connects them with the *Guliang* 穀梁 commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋. The last record is most instructive. It is said that when Emperor Xuan was considering the relative merits of the *Guliang* and *Gongyang* 公羊 commentaries, Wei Xian joined with two Lu compatriots to support the *Guliang*, “saying that since Master Guliang came from the Lu tradition of learning, and the *Gongyang* school is of the Qi tradition, we ought to promote *Guliang*” 言穀梁子本魯學，公羊氏乃齊學也，宜興穀梁. The *Guliang* was triumphant in the imperially sanctioned debate of 51 BCE.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> HS 88.3608-9. Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895-1990) has shown that the division of classical scholarship into various schools and lineages probably only arose in the late Western Han; see Qian Mu, *Liang Han jingxue jinguwen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文評議 (1958; rpt. Taipei: Dongda, 1989), 195. This division into schools seems to have been taking place during Wei Xuancheng's lifetime, and it is in this sense that we can suggest that he represents a true “Lu school.” However, when we discuss the purported founder of the Lu school, the “Venerable Shen,” it should be recognized that he was only the founder in retrospect, and that by all appearances no such “school” existed in the early years of the Han dynasty, when Shen was active.

<sup>14</sup> See HS 30.1717.

<sup>15</sup> See HS 88.3618, where the date is given as 53 BCE; but the imperial annals of Emperor Xuan (HS 8.272) state clearly that the *Guliang* was granted an Erudite position after the Shiqu debate of 51 (in which Wei Xuancheng participated). In the *Hanshu* “Bibliographic Treatise” record of *Lunyu* studies, cited above, only one representative of the Qi school *Lunyu* is granted the status of a “lineage” (*jia*), while all six of the Lu *Lunyu* scholars, including the Wei family, were considered “lineages.” This likely reflects the ascendancy of the Lu school vis-à-vis the Qi in the late Western Han, when the bibliography that is the basis of the “Treatise” was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE).



This suggests a degree of opposition between the scholarship of Lu and Qi, and we may wonder if the Wei poems should be regarded as Lu school statements in a factional dispute. The divisions between schools of Han dynasty learning are rather ill-understood today, but the Qi school has generally been associated with a cosmological brand of interpretation, while the Lu school by contrast seems to have been more conservative in its exegesis.<sup>16</sup> This much is suggested by the comments of the “Bibliographic Treatise” on the “Three Schools” (the Qi, Lu, and Han 韓) of *Shijing* interpretation:

Early in the Han dynasty, Venerable Shen of Lu made glosses and explanations (*xun gu*) on the *Shijing*, while Yuan Gu of Qi and Master Han of Yan both wrote commentaries (*zhuan*). Sometimes drawing passages from the *Chunqiu*, or selecting from various explanations, none attained the original meaning of the work. With no better alternative, the Lu school is the closest to the original.<sup>17</sup>  
漢興，魯申公為詩訓故，而齊轅固、燕韓生皆為之傳。或取春秋，采雜說，咸非其本義。與不得已，魯最為近之。

This is hardly an endorsement of the Lu school, perhaps because the bibliographer did not wish to embroil himself in classicist factional battles, but the Lu learning is presented as a less embroidered alternative to the traditions of Qi and Han. We can elaborate on this evaluation by putting it together with a slightly more expansive description in the biography of the “Venerable Shen,” where it is said that “in his teaching he only provided glosses and explanations of the Classic itself; he had no commentary (*zhuan*), and he did not pass down dubious points [of interpretation]” 申公獨以詩經為訓故以教，亡傳，疑者則闕弗傳。<sup>18</sup> Despite some uncertainty as to whether the Venerable

<sup>16</sup> For an account of Qi and Lu studies, see Qian Mu, *Liang Han jingxue*, 198-200, where the contrast is made in terms similar to the ones I use here. For the most outstanding examples of “Qi school” *Shijing* interpretation from the period under discussion, see the memorials by Yi Feng 翼奉 and Kuang Heng 匡衡 at *HS* 75.3167ff and *HS* 81.3333ff, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> *HS* 30.1708. The translation in James Robert Hightower, “The *Han-shih wai-chuan* 韓詩外傳 and the *San-chia shi* 三家詩,” *HJAS* 11 (1948): 241-310 (translation on p. 256), differs slightly. Like the account of Qi and Lu studies of the *Lunyu* (see note 15), this statement likely reflects a late Western Han view.

<sup>18</sup> *HS* 88.3608. This is a problematic passage, and here Hightower chooses a different interpretation of the final portion: “Doubtful points he omitted, handing down no teaching about them” (p. 269). This passage and that from the “Bibliographic Treatise” cited above

Shen actually composed a *zhuan*-commentary, these passages show that the Lu school was known for a rather circumspect interpretative approach.

Two anecdotes in the biography of the Lu scholar Wang Shi 王式 (fl. early first c. BCE) make clear that this characterization of the Lu school was current in Wei Xuancheng's time. I quote them at length because they may help us to contextualize the composition of the Wei poems. The first reads:

Wang Shi served as tutor to the King of Changyi.<sup>19</sup> When Emperor Zhao died [in 86 BCE], the King inherited the throne, but he was deposed for his licentious conduct, and all of his ministers from Changyi were sent to the gallows. Only the Commandant Wang Ji and Head of Courtiers Gong Sui were given a commuted death sentence for having admonished (*jian*) the king numerous times. Thus when Wang Shi was in jail awaiting execution, an investigator reprimanded him, saying: "As the king's tutor, how could you have not written a letter of admonition (*jian shu*) to the king?" To which Wang replied: "Day and night I instructed the King in the three hundred and five poems of the *Shijing*. When we came to poems of loyal ministers and filial sons, I would never fail to recite them (*song*) over and again for the king, and when we came to poems about the lords who had strayed from the way of kings, I would never fail to doggedly present them to my king,

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imply that the Venerable Shen did not write a "commentary" (*zhuan*), which was presumably a more expansive interpretation than "glosses and explanations" (*xun gu*) that hew closely to the text of the classic. The problem is that a passage in the *Hanshu* biography of the King of Chu says that Shen did compile such a *zhuan*-commentary: "The Venerable Shen was the first to make a *Shi* commentary, known as the 'Lu *Shi*' 申公始為詩傳，號魯詩 (HS 36.1921-22). This is hard to reconcile with the two passages I cite here, and is further complicated by the fact that the *Shiji* 史記 version of HS 88.3608 contains a variant reading (SJ 121.3121). While the alternative chosen by Hightower is possible, there are also justifications for the reading I adopt here. First, we may note that while the *Hanshu* "Bibliographic Treatise" does not list a *zhuan* commentary for the Lu school, there are *zhuan* for both the Qi and the Han. More importantly for the purposes of my argument, we can conclude, based on the *Hanshu* passages cited here, that by the first century CE—and perhaps even a century earlier, in the time of the bibliographer Liu Xin—it was understood that the founder of the Lu school had not written a *zhuan*-commentary and that this distinguished the Lu school from the Qi and the Han. Since the Lu School of the *Shijing* continued to rank amongst the Erudites in the Eastern Han, it seems unlikely that the compiler of the *Hanshu* would be mistaken on this point.

<sup>19</sup> The second king of Changyi, Liu He 賀, was a grandson of Emperor Wu and nephew of Emperor Zhao. He took his fief in 86 BCE, the year of Emperor Zhao's accession, and on Zhao's death he was nominated to succeed him as emperor. Liu He lasted only 27 days on the throne before being dismissed for "licentious conduct."

with tears streaming from my eyes. I admonished him by way of the three hundred and five poems of the *Shijing*—that is why there is no letter of admonition from me.” The investigator reported this to his superiors, and Wang Shi’s death sentence was also commuted.<sup>20</sup>

式為昌邑王師。昭帝崩，昌邑王嗣立，以行淫亂廢，昌邑群臣皆下獄誅，唯中尉王吉、郎中令龔遂以數諫減死論。式繫獄當死，治事使者責問曰：「師何以亡諫書？」式對曰：「臣以詩三百五篇朝夕授王，至於忠臣孝子之篇，未嘗不為王反復誦之也；至於危亡失道之君，未嘗不流涕為王深陳之也。臣以三百五篇諫，是以亡諫書。」使者以聞，亦得減死論。

This passage implies that Wang Shi’s *Shijing* studies were based on a simple and sincere recitation of the poems, without resort to explanatory commentary. Most striking here is the parallel with the circumstances of Wei Meng, who was also tutor to a wanton king. We may wonder if Wei’s “Poem of Admonition” (*jian shi* 諫詩) was intended as the kind of “letter of admonition” (*jian shu* 諫書) Wang Shi was unable to produce, proof that the tutor had tried to provide moral guidance to his rebellious ward.<sup>21</sup> More generally, the picture Wang draws of himself tirelessly instructing his wayward prince is quite similar to the one produced in Wei Meng’s poems. Wei Meng’s recitation of his own *Shijing*-inspired poem is not far from Wang Shi’s tireless recitation of the original classic. The “tears streaming from [his] eyes” is especially informative, as it shows that Wang Shi made his points not through explication but by proving, existentially, how deeply he understood the morals conveyed in the Classic. The Wei poems could be understood as a similar manifestation of the scholar’s wisdom.

Wang Shi’s approach is given further substance in the next anecdote in the *Hanshu* account. After his reprieve, Wang has returned home and is refusing to accept students, but three young scholars have found their way to him:

<sup>20</sup>) *HS* 88.3610.

<sup>21</sup>) The *Hanshu* account of the rebellion of Liu Wu (*HS* 36.1922-24) recounts the righteous remonstrations of several of the king’s ministers but makes no mention of Wei Meng. Hence, we could also read the poems as his descendants’ effort to prove that Wei was as loyal as his righteous colleagues. Indeed, the sons of two of Wei’s colleagues were ennobled for their fathers’ loyalty to the imperial throne during the rebellion; see *HS* 17.638.

They inquired about several poems in the Classic, but Wang turned them away, saying: "What I learned from my teacher is just this [i.e., the poems themselves]. Embellish them as you wish." And he refused to teach them any more.  
問經數篇，式謝曰：「聞之於師俱是矣，自潤色之。」不肯復授。

Later, two of these students applied to be students under the Erudites at the imperial court:

When they came to the Erudites, they lifted up the hems of their robes and ascended the hall, keeping strictly to the proper ritual countenance. When they were tested in recitation and explanation, they were found to follow the methods [of their school], and when in doubt they made like Confucius, who said nothing [when he was ignorant of a matter].<sup>22</sup>  
...詣博士，摳衣登堂，頌禮甚嚴，試誦說，有法，疑者丘蓋不言。

The cynic might take the disciples' pretentious conduct at the examination as a sign of just the sort of "embellishment" Wang was mocking, but a charitable reading of the story is probably more appropriate. Wang's simple method—recitation of the *Shijing* text, with concise explanations—would seem to have lacked the dazzling interpretations with which students might distinguish themselves on the stage of classical studies, but this austere teaching had good effect on two of his pupils, who internalized his instruction and enacted a perfect ritual performance at their examination, distinguishing themselves by following Wang Shi and the Venerable Shen in their cautious approach to the Classic. The Wei poems could also be regarded as a performance of this kind.

In sum, this picture of the Lu school of *Shijing* learning suggests a conservative approach, with a focus on recitation of the poems of the Classic itself and without undue philosophizing. In this regard, we should observe the marked absence in the Wei poems of any reference to the workings of Heaven or the cosmos, when in fact it would be

<sup>22)</sup> One of the three scholars is Chu Shaosun 褚少孫, known to later ages as the author of some supplementary passages to the *Shiji*. The interpretation of the idiosyncratic phrase "made like Confucius..." follows the gloss of Yan Shigu; commentators cited at *Hanshu buzhu* 補注 (Wang Xianqian 王先謙, ed. photo-reprint, Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1975; hereafter "*Hsbz*") 88.17b explain the phrase without reference to Confucius, but all agree that it has to do with speaking only about that which one knows.

easy to find such examples in the *Shijing* itself.<sup>23</sup> The disasters in the Wei poems are all man-made, and in this disavowal of cosmology, if we may read it as such, we might see a conscious stand of opposition to the cosmologically involved Qi school exegesis. This sense is reinforced when we read the poems together with the remaining material in the biography, a long account of the debates on the reform of the imperial temple system in the first century BCE, debates in which Wei Xuancheng played a significant role.<sup>24</sup> In short, Emperor Wu had sponsored a rampant establishment of imperial temples in the provinces, intended as a symbol of imperial power but constituting an enormous drain on the state treasury, and Wei Xuancheng and a group of like-minded officials sought to bring it within more reasonable limits, leveraging their classicist learning to argue for a more austere program of temples and sacrifices. These ideals of austerity and conservatism are explicitly opposed to the grand schemes of scholars associated with the Qi school, and they fit well with the style and substance of the Wei poems.

When the Wei poems are put in the context of this tradition of Lu school learning, it becomes evident that they may have been intended as evidence of the Wei family's erudition in classical studies, bolstering the family's standing as pre-eminent literati of their day. They are in some sense "literary compositions," but more accurately they should be regarded as "actualizations" of the Classic and its teachings, like the tears of Wang Shi or the ritually appropriate paces of his students.

It is important to stress, however, that the Wei poems do not instantiate the *Shijing* alone, just as the Wei family's studies were not limited to that individual classic. In the classicist conception current in Wei Xuancheng's time, the *Shijing* was not merely an anthology of poetry, but a book of poems chosen by Confucius to illustrate the moral les-

<sup>23</sup> For example, "Shao min" 召旻 (Mao 265), which opens: "Severe heaven, in its angry night, / Heaven casts down its many misfortunes" 旻天疾威，天篤降喪。

<sup>24</sup> For an account of these debates, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), 154-92, esp. 179-80. For further arguments about the relationship of these poems to these debates, see Friedrich, "Die Ahnen und das Ich," 431-32.

sons of the Zhou dynasty in its rise, brilliance, and decline.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the *Shijing* was bound inextricably with other classical texts that Confucius was thought to have passed down, and with the Zhou cultural model he had espoused. When we relate the Wei poems to the *Shijing*, we are actually relating them to a larger web of classical texts and the lessons that they were considered to hold, and to the late Western Han classicists' revival of the Zhou cultural model (as they understood it) in their own times.

As a result, many points in the poems where we might, at first glance, think we are seeing the influence of the *Shijing* actually reflect the broader world of Han classicism. This is true even of the four-syllable form of the poems. To be sure, the four-syllable couplets rhyming on even lines is a form distilled from the *Shijing*, and it is this formal feature above all that identifies the Wei poems as poetry in the tradition of the *Shijing*; but in fact it has broader classical connotations. The *Shangshu* 尚書, which covers some of the same historical period as the *Shijing* "odes" (*ya* 雅) sections on which the Wei poems are based, uses four-syllable cadences to a significant degree,<sup>26</sup> and in Wei Xuancheng's time this four-syllable cadence was being invoked in classically inspired prose. The best example of this contemporary trend might be the imperial edicts (*zhao* 詔) of this time, which are replete with four-syllable passages that, while they do not rhyme regularly and

<sup>25</sup> The best formulation of this viewpoint is found in the deathbed speech of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 father, Tan 談, at *SJ* 130.3295: "The whole world sings the praises of the Duke of Zhou, telling how he gathered songs about the Virtue of Kings Wen and Wu, how he spread the Airs of Zhou and Shao, made known the thoughts of [the ancestors] Taiwang and Wang Ji, and on up to Gong Liu, thus esteeming [the Zhou founding ancestor] Hou Ji. And after the collapse of the Zhou under Kings You and Li, when the kingly way had lapsed and music and rites had fallen into decay, Confucius restored the old and revived the discarded, editing the *Shi* and the *Shu* and writing the *Chunqiu*, and to this day scholars model themselves on him" 夫天下稱誦周公，言其能論歌文武之德，宣周邵之風，達太王王季之思慮，爰及公劉，以尊后稷也。幽厲之後，王道缺，禮樂衰，孔子脩舊起廢，論詩書，作春秋，則學者至今則之。

<sup>26</sup> On four-syllable passages in the *Shangshu* and their possible connection to the meter of the *Shijing*, see Ge Xiaoyin 葛曉音, "Siyan ti de xingcheng jiqi yu cifu de guanxi" 四言體的形成及其與辭賦的關係, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 2002.6: 151-61, esp. 151-53. Ge's examples are all from the *jinwen* text, though not necessarily reflecting the earliest strata of the work, where the four character cadences seem a good deal less frequent. It should also be noted that the four-syllable cadence, in prose and in verse, is frequently encountered in Eastern Zhou and Warring States literature, without necessarily having "classical" connotations.

would not be mistaken for poetry, represent a conscious literary allusion to the classical ethos of the *Shangshu* and the *Shijing*. To cite one brief example, from 67 BCE:

I am laggard, and have not been enlightened in my guidance of the people. For this I toss and turn, waking at dawn, brooding and worried over the myriad corners of the empire, never forgetting the good masses....<sup>27</sup>

朕既不逮，導民不明，反側晨興，念慮萬方，不忘元元...

While the Wei poems use the four-syllable meter to evoke the voice of the loyal and devoted minister-poet of the *Shijing*, the emperor uses the four-syllable cadence to evoke the kingly voice of the *Shangshu*. These two gestures are of a piece, matching parts of the classicist mindset ascendant in the late Western Han. Both the Wei poems and the imperial edicts are ways of actualizing the Zhou ideal.

“Actualization” is a useful term to describe the way in which the Wei poems gesture back to the *Shijing* in a greater effort to recreate the world and teachings of that classic, but it should be supplemented with the idea of “translation.” The world of the late Western Han was, needless to say, vastly different from the state and society of Western Zhou times, nearly a thousand years in the past, and as such it was inevitable that the Zhou would be understood and reinterpreted in terms of the Han experience. Inasmuch as the Wei poems look back to the *Shijing* and classical world, they are also translating that classical world into the linguistic and socio-political conditions of their own time.

As the Zhou ideals were translated for Han times, so was the *Shijing* language itself. The divergence of the Wei poems from the poetry of the *Shijing* is perceptively encapsulated in the formulation of the sixteenth-century critic Feng Weine 馮惟訥 (*jinshi* 1538), who, commenting on the first poem, noted that “in narration (*xushi*) and in diction (*buci*) Wei’s poem constitutes a form of its own” 蓋其敘事布詞，自為一體。<sup>28</sup> Since the narrative form of the Wei poems will figure prominently in my discussion of the poems below, I will here limit

<sup>27</sup> HS 8.250. The translation does not reflect the four-syllable cadences in the original. The four-syllable cadence features prominently in many other edicts from this period; see, for example, HS 8.253-54, 8.259, 8.263, 9.281, 9.285, and 9.290.

<sup>28</sup> Feng Weine, comp., *Gushi ji* 古詩紀 (Siku quanshu ed) 146.7a.



myself to a few observations on the poems' diction. To begin with, at nearly every turn we find the Wei poems translating, in effect, classical ideals into Han language. In the fourth poem of the set, for instance, Wei Xuancheng describes the proper carriage of his ancestors, saying that they were "well-arrayed and in good order" 是列是理 (line 34). Proper carriage is a very classical ideal, with strong roots in the *Shijing*; but neither *lie* ("well-arrayed") nor *li* ("in good order") is used this way in that work.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in the "Poem of Admonition," "The five zones of the realm fell to pieces" 五服崩離 (line 21) refers to a fundamental aspect of the Zhou polity, that the "five zones" will be stable only with good leadership at the center, but "fell to pieces" (*beng li*) is not at all a classical turn of phrase. In their conception, the Wei poems represent the classics as the Han scholar understood them, but they make free use of low antique and contemporary Han usage, coated with an appropriate veneer of *Shijing* effects.<sup>30</sup>

There is a particularly prosaic quality to the Wei poems, evident even when they avail themselves of characteristic *Shijing* techniques, and this makes them resemble translations even more. The following lines from Wei Xuancheng's "Poem of Self-Admonition" can serve as a general example:

<sup>29</sup> *Lie* does not appear in the *Shijing*. *Li* is used only (Mao 51, 59, 65, 72) in the sense of surveying and dividing up new land.

<sup>30</sup> One particular type of low antique diction may merit special attention. We find several terms in the Wei poems that have no place in the classical canon but that seem to betray an intimate connection with the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), the catalogue of Western Zhou political structure that perhaps took its final form in the latter half of the Western Han, though many of its materials probably go back at least to the Warring States period; on the *Zhouli*, see William G. Boltz, "Chou li," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, Univ. of California, 1993) 24-32. The word *bangshi* 邦事 ("affairs of state") occurs in no Western Zhou work but is found no fewer than eight times in the *Zhouli* (but not once in the "Kaogong ji" 考工記 section, which was added to the work in the Han dynasty; this may reflect the taboo on the personal name of the first Han emperor). *Huitong* 會同 ("feudal parleys," "court meetings") appears no fewer than forty times in the *Zhouli*, and *cha* 察 ("consider") no fewer than fifteen times. At the very least, this reinforces our sense that the Wei poems, like the *Zhouli*, are attempts to actualize the culture of the Zhou. It is also intriguing because the *Zhouli*, while said to have been submitted to the throne in the reign of Emperor Wu, does not seem to have attracted wide notice until the end of the first century; see Boltz, in *Early Chinese Texts*, 26-27.



赫赫顯爵，	So awesome, this illustrious nobility,
自我隊之。	Yet by me it is lost;
微微附庸，	So meager, this auxiliary rank,
自我招之。	Yet my mistakes have brought it.

First, there is the use of reduplicatives (i.e., the repetition of one character to form an impressionistic word), a staple of the *Shijing* style and one of the most important devices used by the Wei poems to create a *Shijing* “effect.” Here, *hehe* (“so awesome”) is classic *Shijing* high diction.<sup>31</sup> *Weiwei* (“so meager”), by contrast, is apparently the poet’s creation, and where *hehe* is a very abstract epithet, *weiwei* is an almost quotidian adjective. Many of the poems’ reduplicatives are inventions of this sort, evoking the *Shijing* while, in their artifice, highlighting their distance from it. Second, this example illustrates the Wei poems’ propensity toward repetition and echo. Repetition and echo is another central linguistic characteristic of the *Shijing*, but there it is rather haphazard, while in the Wei poems it is very regular, tending toward the parallel style used in prose. Finally, the effect of “by” (*zi* 自) and “it” (*zhi* 之) in the second and fourth lines of the passage speak to the use of grammatical particles in the Wei poems. In the *Shijing*, grammatical particles are another important stylistic element, especially the so-called “empty characters” (*xu zi* 虛字)—grammatical particles of little or no semantic value. The Wei poets have made a conscious effort to incorporate this particle-heavy language, but they show a decided preference for functional grammatical elements, like “by” and “it” here. Words like *bi* 彼 (“that”), *ci* 此 (“this”), *jue* 厥 (“his,” “its”), *yi* 以 (“with”), *suo* 所 (“for”), *fei* 非 (“not”), and *wei* 唯 (“only”) serve a dual function in the Wei poems, creating a *Shijing* effect but performing a full grammatical role.

It is often said that translation is a form of commentary, and this seems true of the Wei poems in a very specific sense. Like a translation, the poems use contemporary diction and couch their poetic effects in a prosaic framework that, with a few exceptions, is eminently intelligible. In their transparency, the poems are not so much studies in poetic style or sentiment as efforts to present a coherent picture, as a

<sup>31</sup>) See Mao 168, and seven other poems.

commentary would explicate the themes and ideas of a classic.<sup>32</sup> They are the poems of a classical scholar. At the same time, a commentary reflects the needs and capacities of its own readership, and I turn now to an examination of the poems as portraits of their age.

## The First Literati Poems

Three concerns stand out in the Wei poems, each of them intimately associated with the new literati class. First, there is the current of classical scholarship that runs through the poems, the sort of “intellectual capital” around which the literati took shape. Second, the poems share a focus on the place of the learned man in the ranks of government service, the institutional context that gave rise to the literati. Third, the poems are inseparable at every turn from the literati family that produced them, the family being both the most stable unit around which the literati gathered and a rapidly growing political force in early imperial China. Classical scholarship, government service, and the literati family—these were the three fundamental legs supporting the formation of the early medieval literati, and in the Wei poems the interstices of these elements are on display. It is in this sense that we may read the Wei poems as an allegory of the formation of the literati class.

### Poem I

韋孟 《諷諫詩》      Wei Meng, “Poem of Admonition”<sup>33</sup>

[King] Wu was wanton and disrespectful of the Way, and Meng composed a poem to admonish him. Thereupon Meng left his position, moving his family to

<sup>32</sup> That the Mao commentary, which presents the *Shijing* poems in a highly historicized framework, began to attract attention in the half-century after Wei Xuancheng's death may suggest that the Wei poems reflect a newly ascendant way of understanding the *Shijing*.

<sup>33</sup> *HS* 73.3101-105; *Wenxuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986; hereafter “Wx”) 19.916-921; Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed. *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983, 1998), 105-106. I use the *Hanshu* edition as my base text and have noted variants, listed in full by Lu Qinli, only when I judge them relevant. I have divided the poems into stanzas according to their rhyme changes, based on the rhyme classes in Luo Changpei 羅常培 and Zhou Zumo 周祖謨, *Han Wei-Jin Nanbeichao yunbu yanbian yanjiu: diyi fence* 漢魏晉南北朝韻部演變研究: 第一分冊 (Beijing: Kexue, 1958).

Zou, where he composed another piece. His “poem of admonition” (*jian shi*) reads:

戊荒淫不遵道，孟作詩風諫。後遂去位，徙家於鄒，又作一篇。其諫詩曰：

肅肅我祖，	So reverent were my ancestors,	
國自豕韋。	Their state derived from Shiwei. <sup>34</sup>	
黼衣朱紱，	With axe-pattern robes and crimson skirts,	
四牡龍旂。	Four-stallion chariots and dragon pennants. <sup>35</sup>	
彤弓斯征，	With vermilion bows we campaigned,	5
撫寧遐荒。	Pacifying the distant wastelands.	
總齊群邦，	Putting in order the various states,	
以翼大商。	In aid of the great Shang.	
迭彼大彭，	[Ruling] in alternation with the great Peng clan,	
勳績惟光。	Our merit shone bright. <sup>36</sup>	10

The rhymes are discussed in detail in Zeb Raft, “Four-syllable Verse in Medieval China” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007) 408-28, but the major points of interest are: 1) the rhyme changes in the first poem are somewhat less regular than those of the other three, and this could be taken as a sign of an earlier date of composition. 2) There are not, however, any notable differences in the use of rhyme between the poems of Wei Meng and those of Wei Xuancheng. Though this may suggest that they were composed around the same time, our knowledge of phonological change between 154 and 36 BCE is too limited to make any solid conclusion. 3) It is significant that the poems’ rhymes tend to agree with Luo and Zhou’s “Eastern Han” rhyme classes. Although this may say more about the imprecision of applying a political division (“Eastern” and “Western Han”) to linguistic and literary change, it reinforces the poems’ linguistic and conceptual affinity with the medieval literati and their literary tradition. 4) With regard to the poems’ identity as Han “translations” of the *Shijing*, it can be noted that the poems use Han rhyme, not a deliberately antiquated *Shijing* rhyme. 5) There is a degree of line-rhyme in the Wei poems that reflects the looseness of the four-syllable form in this time (e.g., Poem II lines 18-24), in contrast to the standardized couplet-rhyme of medieval four-syllable *shi*-poetry. 6) Finally, the rhyme changes do not mark coherent segments, i.e., they are not true “stanzas,” in contrast to the rhetorical deployment of stanzas both in the *Shijing* (where they are probably a vestige of that work’s musical origins) and in much medieval four-syllable poetry (where they offer needed articulation to long poems).

<sup>34</sup> Shiwei was just southeast of the Shang capital at Anyang (modern Henan province, Hua county 滑縣). Its conquest by the Shang is mentioned in the *Shijing* hymn “Chang fa” 長發 (Mao 304). It may not be coincidental that the ancestors of the Han royal house were also said to have come from the land of Shiwei; see HS 20.888, where they are identified as “the Shiwei clan of the Liu” 劉姓豕韋, and also the Liu genealogy at the end of the Annals of Han Gaozu (HS 1B.81).

<sup>35</sup> The axe-pattern robes, crimson skirts, stallions, and dragon pennants—and the vermilion bows below—are all stock *Shijing* imagery of royal authority, gifts from the Zhou king to loyal vassals; e.g., Mao 283 (“Zai jian” 載見), Mao 300 (“Bi gong” 闕宮), and Mao 303 (“Xuan niao” 玄鳥).

<sup>36</sup> The *Guoyu* 國語 (“Zhengyu” 鄭語; Sibu congkan ed., 16.3b) similarly says that Dapeng and Shiwei were “overlords” (*bolba* 伯) in the Shang. Dapeng is the name of the clan, but

至于有周，	And when it came to the Zhou,	
歷世會同。	For generations we were party to the feudal assemblies.	
王赧聽譖，	But when King Nan heeded slander,	
寔絕我邦。	Verily he smote our state. <sup>37</sup>	
我邦既絕，	Our state having been smote,	15
厥政斯逸。	The governance [of the Zhou] became thus wild.	
賞罰之行，	The processes of reward and punishment,	
非繇王室。	No longer issued from the royal house.	
庶尹群后，	The many ministers and numerous lords,	
靡扶靡衛。	They did not assist it, they did not protect it,	20
五服崩離，	The five zones of the realm fell to pieces,	
宗周以隊。	And the House of Zhou was lost.	
我祖斯微，	My ancestors thus become lowly,	
遷于彭城。	We moved to Pengcheng. <sup>38</sup>	
在予小子，	And when it came to little me,	25
勤諷厥生。	In wailing toil was my birth. <sup>39</sup>	
隄此嫚秦，	Beleaguered by that wanton Qin,	

I translate it literally ("great Peng") for the echo of "great Shang" (*da Shang*) in the preceding line.

<sup>37</sup> King Nan, literally "the shame-faced king," was the last ruler of the Zhou. His reign lasted until 314 BCE. As the Qing commentators Liu Ban 劉攽 and Qi Shaonan 齊召南 (cited at *Hsbz* 73.1b) point out, there is no evidence for the continued existence of Shiwei in the Zhou dynasty; the Southern Song scholar Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202) cited a note to the *Zuozhuan* to argue that Shiwei was abolished by King Cheng, the second sovereign of the Zhou dynasty; see his *Rongzhai suibi: sibi* 容齋隨筆: 四筆 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1978), 623. Wei Meng is doubtlessly embellishing his lineage—even the connection between his surname "Wei" with the clans of "Shiwei" is unsubstantiated. The presence of the character *bang* here is curious, given that it was the name of the first Han emperor, and thus subject to taboo. Michael Friedrich, citing the work of B. J. Mansvelt Beck, suggests that names were only taboo under the reign of a dead emperor's son, and thus may not have applied here; see "Die Ahnen und das Ich," 412-13, n. 26. Chen Zhi 陳直 (1901-1980) has advanced the more general solution that the requirements of rhyme in literary composition could trump taboos, citing these poems and some Han funerary inscriptions; see Chen Zhi, *Hanshu xinzheng* 漢書新証 (sec. ed. Tianjin: Tianjin renmin, 1979), 1. Although excavated materials suggest, albeit inconclusively, that the first section of the *Shijing* was known as *bang feng* 邦風 rather than *guo feng* 國風 prior to the Han, the word *bang* appears frequently in the *Shijing* poems, particularly in the "Ya" and "Song" sections. Thus, it may also be the case that the word simply belonged to the *Shijing* lexicon employed here, taboos notwithstanding.

<sup>38</sup> Modern Jiangsu province, Xuzhou 徐州, some 200 kilometers southeast of Shiwei.

<sup>39</sup> "Little me" (*xiaozi*, literally "little child" or "young son"), and the variation used here (*yu xiaozi*, "me, the little child"), is a special term found frequently in the *Shijing*, *Shangshu*, and the bronze inscriptions, denoting the humility and trepidation shown by a descendant in the face of his elders or ancestors. It is used throughout the Wei poems.

耒耜以耕。	I farmed with hoe and plow.	
悠悠嫚秦，	But lo the wanton Qin—	
上天不寧。	Heaven on high was not appeased;	30
迺眷南顧，	And thence cast Its eye southward,	
授漢于京。	And presented [the mandate] to the Han in the [Qin] capital. <sup>40</sup>	
於赫有漢，	Oh awesome, the Han dynasty,	
四方是征。	To the four quarters they campaigned.	
靡適不懷，	Embraced wherever they went,	35
萬國迺平。	Thus were the myriad states pacified.	
迺命厥弟，	Thence [the emperor] commanded his younger brother,	
建侯於楚。	Establishing him as a lord in Chu. <sup>41</sup>	
俾我小臣，	And he ordered me, humble minister,	
惟傳是輔。	As tutor to guide him.	40
兢兢元王，	So austere was King Yuan,	
恭儉淨壹。	Courteous, thrifty and clear-headed.	
惠此黎民，	Bestowing his graces on these commoners,	
納彼輔弼。	And taking in those men of good guidance.	
饗國漸世，	He held his fief almost a generation, <sup>42</sup>	45
垂烈于後。	And gave his brilliant legacy to posterity.	
迺及夷王，	And then it came to King Yi,	
克奉厥緒。	Who was well able to uphold his father's heritage. <sup>43</sup>	
咨命不永，	But alas, his lot was not long, <sup>44</sup>	
惟王統祀。	And you, my king, are now in charge of the sacrifices. <sup>45</sup>	50

<sup>40</sup> Han Gaozu's home, Pei 沛, was far to the south (and east) of the Qin capital at Xianyang 咸陽, hence Heaven's "southward glance." The second line refers to Gaozu's assumption of the title emperor, in 202 BCE, in Chang'an.

<sup>41</sup> This is Liu Jiao 劉交, Gaozu's younger brother, established as King Yuan 元 of Chu 楚 in 201 BCE; see *HS* 36.1922. Pengcheng was the capital of the kingdom.

<sup>42</sup> *Jian* 漸 is problematic. Li Shan's *Wenxuan* commentary defines it as *mo* 沒, "to die," and the commentary to a *Wenxuan* manuscript found at Dunhuang continues this gloss with the sensible explanation that "*jian shi* means 'almost a generation' (*jiang yi shi*). A generation was thirty years" 漸世言將一世。卅年曰世; see Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, ed., *Dunhuang Tulufan ben Wenxuan* 敦煌吐魯番本文選 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000), 39. King Yuan held the throne for twenty-seven years.

<sup>43</sup> There is a close parallel from the *Shijing* (Mao 300, "Bi gong") for this line: "And when it came to Kings Wen and Wu, / They continued the heritage of Taiwang" 至於文武，續太王之緒。

<sup>44</sup> King Yi ruled only four years, succeeded by King Wu 戊 in 174.

<sup>45</sup> Charge of sacrifices was considered the most important responsibility of a ruler.

左右陪臣， 此惟皇士。	The close aides at your side, Truly they are fine men. <sup>46</sup>	
如何我王， 不思守保。	But how is it, my king, That you do not long to preserve and protect [your land]?	
不惟履冰，	That you do not think on [the lesson of] treading on thin ice, <sup>47</sup>	55
以繼祖考。	To continue [the good governance of] your grandfather and father?	
邦事是廢， 逸游是娛。 犬馬繇繇， 是放是驅。 務彼鳥獸， 忽此稼苗。 烝民以匱， 我王以媮。	The affairs of the state you discard, As with frivolous outings you please yourself; Your hounds and mounts coursing so, They are let loose, they are driven on; You dedicate yourself to those birds and beasts, And disregard these crops and sprouts. Thus do the masses go lacking, While thus my king enjoys his ease.	60
所弘非德， 所親非俊。 唯囿是恢， 唯諛是信。	What you promote is not virtue, What you cherish not excellence; Only the hunting grounds do you expand, As only slander you trust.	65
踰踰諂夫， 詈詈黃髮。 如何我王， 曾不是察。	So beguiling are the deceitful courtiers, So earnest, the yellow-haired old men. <sup>48</sup> How is it, my king, That you have never considered this?	70
既藐下臣， 追欲從逸。	Estranging your humble servants, You follow your passions and give yourself to pleasure.	
嫚彼顯祖，	You disgrace those illustrious ancestors,	75

<sup>46</sup> The term *huangshi* here seems to be a condensation of a line from the *Shijing* poem “Wen wang” 文王 (Mao 235): “How fine (*huang*) these many men (*shi*), / Born to this kingdom” 思皇多士，生此王國。

<sup>47</sup> The metaphor of treading on thin ice comes from Mao 195 (“Xiao min” 小旻) and 196 (“Xiao wan” 小宛). The lines are cited (as *Shi* quotations) twice in the *Zuozhuan*, and once in the *Lunyu* and *Xiaojing*—suggesting that it was a popular figure in the classical tradition.

<sup>48</sup> “Yellow-haired old men,” as loyal advisors, play significant parts in the *Shi* poem “Bi gong” (Mao 300) and the *Shangshu* chapter “Qin shi” 秦誓; Wei Meng refers specifically to the latter below (lines 99-100).

輕茲削黜。	And take lightly this [risk of] demotion and dispossession.	
嗟嗟我王，	Oh, oh, my king!	
漢之睦親。	Close kin of the house of Han, <sup>49</sup>	
曾不夙夜，	Never have you worked day and night,	
以休令聞。	To make beautiful your good name.	80
穆穆天子，	So solemn, the Son of Heaven,	
臨爾下土。	He looks down upon your lands.	
明明群司，	So illustrious, the gathered ministers,	
執憲靡顧。	They uphold the laws without special favor.	
正遐繇近，	And as rectifying the distant begins with the near—	85
殆其怙茲。	How risky to rely on this [i.e., your close relation to the throne].	
嗟嗟我王，	Oh, oh, my king,	
曷不此思。	How can you not think deeply upon it?	
非思非鑒，	For if you do not think and do not reflect,	
嗣其罔則。	Your descendants will have no rule to follow.	90
彌彌其失，	And so gradually, they will grow wayward,	
岌岌其國。	And so precipitously, their state comes toppling down.	
致冰匪霜，	Verily frost leads to ice,	
致隊靡嫚。	As wantonness is the path to collapse. <sup>50</sup>	
瞻惟我王，	Observe, my king! <sup>51</sup>	95
昔靡不練。	There is nothing in this unfamiliar to you! <sup>52</sup>	

<sup>49</sup>) "Close kin" may be somewhat hyperbolic—Liu Wu was the grand-nephew of Gaozu, and thus cousin several times removed to emperors Wen and Jing.

<sup>50</sup>) The translation here is a paraphrase for an unwieldy implied double-negative. Literally, the couplet reads: "Leading to ice is [nothing if] not frost, / Leading to collapse is [nothing if] not wantonness."

<sup>51</sup>) Since *zhan* ("observe") often implies respect for a social superior, as in Mao 191 ("Jie nanshan" 節南山: "Oh mighty Commander Yin, / The people all gaze upon (*zhan*) you" 赫赫師尹，民具爾瞻), this couplet might be understood "Oh I gaze upon my king, / He is well-versed in things past." However, the following poem (line 7) has the poet "gazing" upon himself. It is more likely that the poet is using this word simply to elicit a *Shijing* sensibility.

<sup>52</sup>) The *Wenxuan* text has *shi* 時 for *xi* 昔, glossed by Li Shan as *shi* 是 ("this"), an archaic usage found frequently in the *Shijing*, and the commentator Wang Wenbin 王文彬 (cited in *Hsbz* 73.3a) holds that 昔 ("times past") is a mistaken transcription of an older form of the character 時, and thus that the *Wenxuan* reading should be the right one. If we were to take the *Hanshu* reading at face value, as it is explained by Yan Shigu, the sense of the line would be "you are well-versed in times past (*xi*)."

興國救顛，	To revive the state and rescue your imbalance,	
孰違悔過。	What recourse is better than regretting your mistakes.	
追思黃髮，	Brood upon the yellow-haired old men,	
秦繆以霸。	For with them Duke Mu of Qin ruled supreme. <sup>53</sup>	100
歲月其徂，	For the years and months fly by,	
年其逮耆。	And one quickly grows aged in years.	
於昔君子，	Oh awesome, the noble man, <sup>54</sup>	
庶顯于後。	He strives to be illustrious to his posterity.	
我王如何，	But how is it, my king,	105
曾不斯覽。	That you have not looked upon all this?	
黃髮不近，	If you will not draw close to the yellow-haired	
	old men,	
胡不時監。	Why do you not at least reflect on the times? <sup>55</sup>	

Wei Meng's "Poem of Admonition" unfolds in three distinct sections. In the first (lines 1-28), the poet recounts the illustrious history of the Wei family, from high antiquity to the present day. In the second (lines 29-50), the poet turns his attention to the house of Han, and in particular the pedigree of the King of Chu. The third and longest section (lines 59-108) is an extended harangue, the "admonition" of the poem's title. This structure presents us with two questions. First, what precedents can we find for a poem of this type, or for the individual sections of which it is composed? Second, what is the relationship between the three sections of this poem, or more specifically, how do the family history narratives in the first two sections come to bear on the admonition of the third?

We may begin with the third section, the "admonition" that is the alleged purpose of the poem. The *Shijing* does not lack poems of

<sup>53</sup>) A reference to the "Qin shi" chapter of the *Shangshu*, in which Duke Mu of Qin expresses regret for going to battle with the state of Jin without paying heed to the advice of his senior advisers, declaring (in Legge's translation) "hereafter I will take advice from the men of yellow hair, and then I shall be free from error" 尚猷詢茲黃髮，則罔所愆; see James Legge, trans., *The Shû King* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 271-72.

<sup>54</sup>) *Wenxuan* reads 赫 ("awesome") for 昔 ("in times past"). That reading genuinely seems preferable, even if Li Shan's *Wenxuan* text may also have read 昔, as collation notes to the *Wenxuan* suggest. Were we to follow the *Hanshu*, the lines would read: "Oh, the noble man of times past (xi), / He strove to be illustrious to his posterity."

<sup>55</sup>) This final line might also be read "Why do you not at least reflect on the lessons of times past [i.e., history]," or simply, taking 時 as 是, as "Why do you not at least reflect on this." "Yellow-haired old men" here probably refers specifically to the poet himself.



admonition. The closest parallel, and very possibly a direct influence on Wei Meng's poem, is "Yi" 抑 (Mao 256), in the "Daya" 大雅 (Greater Odes) section, a long harangue of a young king by what appears to be a senior minister or feudal lord. The Mao preface claims that "Yi" was composed by Duke Wu of Wei 衛武公 (r. 812-758 BCE) in criticism of the Zhou king Li 厲 (r. 857/853-842/828), "and also as a warning to himself" 亦以自警也.<sup>56</sup> Nothing in the poem supports the Mao preface's attribution of authorship, but the idea that the poem was also intended as the author's self-criticism provides a provocative link to the poems of Wei Xuancheng, and the general situation, of a lord or minister admonishing his ruler, is very similar to the circumstances of Wei Meng's poem.

Indeed, there are intriguing connections between the *Shijing* poem "Yi" and the Wei poems. The third stanza of "Yi" demonstrates the affinity well:

其在于今，  
興迷亂于政，  
顛覆厥德，  
荒湛于酒，  
女雖湛樂縱，  
弗念厥紹，  
罔敷求先王，  
克共明刑。

And now, in this day,  
You let deluded disorder arise in your government,  
Your Virtue toppled over into collapse,  
Besotting yourself in the dissolution of drink,  
Besotted in frivolous pursuit of joy,  
You pay no heed to your legacy,  
You do not broadly seek the good of the former kings,  
Nor follow their illustrious example in reverence.

Lines 54-63 of Wei Meng's poem closely echo this mode of criticism, although the Chu king's vice seems to have been hunting rather than drinking. Significantly, this passage admonishes the king by referring to the model of his ancestors ("the former kings"), urging him to change his ways for the sake of his descendants ("your legacy"). This is exactly the posture adopted by Wei Meng, who criticizes the king for "disgracing [his] illustrious ancestors" (line 75; also lines 48, 56), and declares

<sup>56</sup> Since the Mao commentary was unorthodox in Wei Xuancheng's times, and likely in limited circulation, it is technically anachronistic to invoke the Mao preface in this discussion. However, the Mao commentary is our only fully extant *Shijing* commentary, and in its larger historicist framework, if not in its details, it is probably a good representation of the Han classicist approach to the *Shijing*, especially from late Western Han times onward.

that "... the noble man, / Strives to be illustrious in his posterity" (line 104; also line 90).

This invocation of a family tradition brings us back to the first and second sections of Wei Meng's poem, in which the poet outlines his own family history. The third section is the thematic heart of the poem, the "admonition" proper, but the first two sections are no less important, because they flesh out the theme, of noble family traditions, on which the admonition will be based. And if we look for *Shijing* precedents to the opening sections of Wei's poem, we are led in another direction, also essential for understanding how Wei's poem works.

There are a number of *Shijing* poems in which the deeds of an individual and his family are at the forefront, a notable example being "Bi gong" 閼宮 (Mao 300), one of the Hymns of Lu and the longest poem in the *Shijing* ("Yi" is the second longest). "Bi gong" begins with the birth of the Zhou royal line, following it down to the conquest of the Shang and the enfeoffment of the Duke of Zhou in Lu. There, as befits a "hymn of Lu," the focus settles on the Duke of Zhou's grandson, Duke Xi of Lu 魯僖公, extolling him for reviving the fortunes of his line and receiving the blessings of his ancestors. The poem concludes with a description of what seems to be the reconstruction of the ancestral temples, emblematic of the Duke's good rule and presumably the occasion for the composition of the hymn.

Like Wei's admonition, "Bi gong" puts great emphasis on the ability of each generation of the royal line to live up to the model of its forbears. Thus, Kings Wen 文 and Wu 武, the conquerors of the Shang, are praised for "continuing the legacy of [their ancestor] Taiwang" 續大王之緒, and Duke Xi is introduced as:

周公之孫，	The grandson of the Duke of Zhou,
莊公之子。	The son of Duke Zhuang.
龍旂承祀，	With dragon pennants he comes to carry on the sacrifices,
六轡耳耳。	With his six-fold horse-reins resplendent.
春秋匪解，	In every season he performs the rites duly,
享祀不忒。	And nothing shall go awry in the ancestors' enjoyment of the sacrifices.

This is a description of Duke Xi's ascension to the throne in the feudatory of Lu, where he is to carry on the work of his forefathers, who

were invested with the mission to “Grandly enlarge your territory, / In aid of the royal house of Zhou” 大啟爾宇，為周室輔. Wei Meng presents his own family in a very similar light, carrying the same “dragon pennants” (line 4), and similarly “pacifying the wastelands ... in aid of the great Shang” (lines 5-8).

Other feudal lords, more distant from the Zhou house, are also presented in this fashion, most notably in what appears to be a discrete set of poems at Mao 259-262 (“Song gao” 崧高, “Zheng min” 烝民, “Han yi” 韓奕, “Jiang Han” 江漢). According to the Mao commentary, these four poems date from the reign of King Xuan, and they describe the investiture of feudal lords on the southern, eastern, and northern frontiers of the Zhou kingdom. All of these lords are described in terms of “continuing the legacy of his father and grandfather, / And protecting the person of the king” 續戎祖考，王躬是保 (“Zhengmin”). As in Wei Meng’s presentation of his family, these feudal lords are adorned with royal ornaments like the “dragon pennant” mentioned above, and praised for their families’ loyal service.

Just as it is important to see that the Wei poems refer to a world of classical studies that includes but is not limited to the *Shijing*, here we should be attentive to the fact that these poems are not simply “*Shijing* poems,” but more fundamentally poetic monuments—collected in the *Shijing*—to the Zhou rite of feudal investiture.<sup>57</sup> When “Han yi” says,

王親命之：	The king personally gave him his orders:
續戎祖考，	“Continue the legacy of your father and grandfather,
無廢朕命。	And do not fail my command.
夙夜匪解，	Work day and night without rest,
虔共爾位。	Revering and respecting your position. [...]”

we hear not so much a *Shijing* poem as a poeticized version of a process very familiar to us from mid- and late-Western Zhou bronze inscrip-

<sup>57</sup> See Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 73-76, which singles out “Jiang Han” and gives further examples from the *Shangshu* and the *Zuozhuan*. For more recent scholarship on the bronze inscriptions and their relation to Western Zhou culture, see Martin Kern, “Bronze inscriptions, the *Shangshu*, and the *Shijing*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou,” in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang Through Han (1250 BC to 220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143-200.

tions. The basic players are a king and a loyal subject who has performed service for the throne, and the deeds of the subject are put in the context of the loyal service his family has provided the royal house over the years. Either in the voice of the king or of the servant himself, the family history is recited and tied to the fortune of the royal house.<sup>58</sup> Wei Meng's poem, then, is not so much an imitation of a *Shijing* work as a recreation of the feudal investiture of his family, much as the *Shijing* poems were in their own time.

Recognizing the link between Wei Meng's self-presentation and the feudal system is important because it allows us to understand how Wei's account of his family background in the first section could be an integral part of his admonition of the king of Chu. By foregrounding his own family's (alleged) roots in the feudal nobility, Wei creates for himself a personal prestige akin to that of the King of Chu. This is most evident in the way his description of his family's glory,

彤弓斯征，	With vermilion bows we campaigned,
撫寧遐荒。	Pacifying the distant wastelands.
總齊群邦，	Taking control of the various states,
以翼大商。	In aid of the great Shang. (lines 5-8)

closely echoes his description of the rise of the Han:

於赫有漢，	Oh awesome, the Han dynasty,
四方是征。	To the four quarters they campaigned.
靡適不懷，	Embraced wherever they went,
萬國迺平。	Thus were the myriad states pacified. (lines 33-36)

Likewise, when Wei exhorts the king to be a “noble man ... illustrious in his posterity,” the term “noble man” (*junzi* 君子) carries a dual

<sup>58</sup>) One excellent example of this is the “Basin of Scribe Qiang” (*Shi Qiang pan* 史牆盤), in which the Scribe gives a detailed account of the royal house and follows it with an interrelated account of his own ancestry; see Wang Hui 王輝, *Shang Zhou jinwen* 商周金文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2006), 143-55 (from *Wenwu* 1978.3), and Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 1-4, 183-92, for a translation. The presentation of the family in this work, which Shaughnessy (p. 1) dates to slightly before 900 BCE, bears an uncanny resemblance to that in Wei Meng's poem. Kern observes (“Bronze Inscriptions,” 153) that Scribe Qiang's inscription presents a highly idealized version of the historical events—again not unlike the Wei poems.

valence, denoting both the sovereign of a state—the king of Chu—and the *junzi* praised by Confucius—a man like Wei Meng, learned in the Zhou traditions. By invoking the feudal relations of the classical world to establish an identity between himself and the king, Wei Meng's criticisms are no longer the remonstrations of a lowly minister, but the heartfelt advice of an elder “nobleman” to his younger counterpart.

The first section of the poem, then, Wei Meng's self-introduction, turns out to be the linchpin of the entire piece, establishing the poet as a peer of the king, by his noble pedigree, and as an exemplar, by the way he continues his family's tradition of loyal service to the throne. This personal touch effects a stronger basis for admonition than simply holding the king to the history of his own family; more importantly, it provides the rationale for the existence of this poem, which is as much devoted to the poet's self-expression and self-justification as it is to the “admonition” of the king.

In a broader context, Wei's feudal self-representation is noteworthy because it symbolizes the relationship of the new literati elite with the emperor.<sup>59</sup> Feudal bonds had disintegrated in the preceding half millennium, culminating in their abolition by the Qin empire (221-206), but the system was revived in the early Han, partly as a measure of expedience when the Han court had limited control over other powers in its empire. Though it was gradually dismantled over the course of the second century BCE, culminating in Emperor Wu's strident reorganization of the empire, the feudal ranks that persisted into the first century took on a new significance with the rise of the literati and their classical ideals. This is clear in Wei Xuancheng's first poem, to be discussed below, in which he bemoans the loss of his family fief. The Han dynasty fief was a measure of great prestige because it symbolically ennobled the literati, lifting them out of plain servitude and into a certain peerage with the emperor.<sup>60</sup> This allowed them to imagine themselves as the cultural descendants of the dukes and lords of Zhou,

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<sup>59</sup>) As this sentence implies, I strongly doubt that “Wei Meng's poems” are true products of the mid-second century BCE. However, the family history recounted in Wei Xuancheng's “Self-Rebuke” seems to be a condensation of the one given here, which leads me to suspect that the “Wei Meng” poems still antedated the compositions of Wei Xuancheng.

<sup>60</sup>) This symbolic power was especially potent given the famously low background of the Han royal house, whose founder had risen out of an undistinguished local gentry family.

living in a world of feudal bonds, not bureaucratic and imperial ones, a world in which they were full partners in the governance of China. Wei Meng's poem reflects the relationship, conceived on a classical model, that the literati elite sought to establish with the emperor and the imperial state.

## Poem II

韋孟《在鄒詩》      Wei Meng, "Poem from Zou"<sup>61</sup>

His "Poem from Zou" reads:

其在鄒詩曰：

微微小子，	So meager, little me,	
既耇且陋。	Aged and lowly.	
豈不牽位，	How could I not have been attached to my	
	position— <sup>62</sup>	
穢我王朝。	Yet there I sullied my king's court.	
王朝肅清，	The king's court, reverent and pure,	5
惟俊之庭。	It was a court for outstanding men.	
顧瞻余躬，	But I turned my gaze upon my person,	
懼穢此征。	And I feared that I would blemish this post. <sup>63</sup>	
我之退征，	In resigning my post,	
請于天子。	I asked permission of the Son of Heaven.	10
天子我恤，	And the Son of Heaven to me gave succor,	
矜我髮齒。	Pitying my paltry existence. <sup>64</sup>	
赫赫天子，	So awesome, the Son of Heaven,	
明愍且仁。	Bright, wise and beneficent.	

<sup>61</sup> HS 73.3105-6; Lu Qinli, *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 107.

<sup>62</sup> *Hsbz* 73.3b notes a variant in some *Hanshu* texts, of *xing* 幸 for *qian* 牽. This would have the lines read "Of course I was fortunate to have such a position, / But there I sullied my King's court."

<sup>63</sup> *Zheng* regularly means "military campaign" or simply "journey," but the sense here and in the following line must be "office" or "post." This may be derived from "campaign," but I can find no precedent for this usage, and neither Yan Shigu nor any of the commentators in *Hsbz* remark on it. It is a common word in *Shijing* and *Shangshu* (e.g., Mao 179), in the sense of "military campaign," and it may be that Wei Meng is just extending its usage for his own purposes here.

<sup>64</sup> "Paltry existence" is a loose rendering of "hair and teeth" (*fa chi*), a figure for the mortal body.

懸車之義， 以泊小臣。	The principle of “hanging up the cart,” Was thereby extended to this humble servant. <sup>65</sup>	15
嗟我小子， 豈不懷土。 庶我王寤， 越遷于魯。	Oh, little me, How could I not long for my old home? <sup>66</sup> Hoping that my King will come to his senses, I have crossed over to Lu. <sup>67</sup>	20
既去禰祖， 惟懷惟顧。 祈祈我徒， 戴負盈路。	And having left the temples of my father and grandfather, I can only brood, I can only look back: In such throngs, my disciples, Shouldering their packs, they fill the road. <sup>68</sup>	
爰戾于鄒， 翦茅作堂。 我徒我環， 築室于牆。	Thence we arrive in Zou, And cut reeds to make a hall. My disciples, they surround me, Building rooms along my walls.	25
我既遷逝， 心存我舊。 夢我瀆上， 立于王朝。	And though I have moved away, My old home still lives in my heart; And I dream that I'm back at Gulley, <sup>69</sup> Or standing in my King's court.	30

<sup>65</sup> “Hanging up the cart” (*xuan ju* 懸車) was a Han expression for retirement, which was properly to come at age 70. Since Wei Meng's descendant Wei Xian, the father of Wei Xuancheng, was renowned for being the first chancellor to resign his post honorably (see *HS* 73.3107, and line 25 of the next poem), this line makes for a curious coincidence, perhaps a reason to doubt the authenticity of this poem.

<sup>66</sup> Here Wei Meng expresses his humility with an adage attributed to Confucius in the *Lunyu* 4.11: “The gentleman longs for Virtue, the petty man for his hometown” 君子懷德，小人懷土。

<sup>67</sup> Wei Meng's home was in Pengcheng, the capital of the Chu king's fief. Therefore, in resigning his post, Wei Meng could not simply return “home,” but was forced into exile. Lu was an adjacent region, significant because it was the homeland of Confucius and a center for classical studies. Zou was the home town of Mencius (see *SJ* 74.2343, where the character is written 驪); though it has traditionally been distinguished from the nearby “Zou” 鄒 that was the home town of Confucius (*SJ* 47.1905), it is possible that Wei Meng has conflated them, particularly in light of the relationship he establishes with Confucius in lines 43-44 of this poem.

<sup>68</sup> This stanza presents an interesting case of borrowing from the *Shijing*. In its diction, but not thematically, this stanza appears to draw from “Han yi” 韓奕 (Mao 261): “Her many bridesmaids followed her / in throngs (*qiqi*) like gathered clouds. / Lord Han looked back (*gu*) at them, / resplendent they filled the doors” 諸娣從之，祈祈如雲。韓侯顧之，爛其盈門。 This shows the poet's fluency in the *Shijing* idiom.

<sup>69</sup> “Gulley” (*du shang* 瀆上) is glossed by Ying Shao (fl. second century CE) as a place name (thus “Dushang”), a hamlet east of Pengcheng. Yan Shigu has no comment on this line. Wang Xianqian follows He Zhuo 何焯 (at *Hsbz* 73.4a) in taking *du* literally as “to

其夢如何，	And what is my dream like?	
夢爭王室。	I dream I am debating in the King's chambers.	
其爭如何，	And what is the debate like?	35
夢王我弼。	I dream that the king accepts my aid! <sup>70</sup>	
寤其外邦，	Yet awakening I find myself in this foreign land,	
歎其喟然。	And I sigh and I moan.	
念我祖考，	I remember my grandfather and father,	
泣涕其漣。	And my tears come drizzling down.	40
微微老夫，	Such a meager old man,	
咨既遷絕。	I bemoan this relocation and separation.	
洋洋仲尼，	But now Confucius, in his glory,	
視我遺烈。	Shows me the brilliant legacy he has passed down. <sup>71</sup>	
濟濟鄒魯，	Teeming so, with good men, is the land of Zou and Lu, <sup>72</sup>	45
禮義唯恭。	To Ritual and Right they pay respect.	
誦習弦歌，	Their recitations, strings and songs, <sup>73</sup>	
于異他邦。	Are different from those of other lands.	
我雖鄙賤，	And although I am lowly and aged,	
心其好而。	My heart is still fond of it.	50
我徒侃爾，	My disciples rejoice in it,	
樂亦在而。	And in this, too, there is joy. <sup>74</sup>	

Here again we may begin by looking for precedents, but if we can trace the first Wei Meng poem back to the *Shijing*, or to the Zhou feudal

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sully," invoking a questionable reference to the use of *du* in the *Yijing* (hexagram four, "Meng" 蒙); this would make the line read "I dream that I sully my lord [with criticism]." I prefer to rely on Ying Shao's knowledge of Han geography, rendering the place name literally as "Gulley."

<sup>70</sup> *Bi* 弼 is glossed by Yan Shigu as "go against" (*wei li* 違戾), which would render the line "I dream that the King is defying me." But this is the only usage of *bi* in this sense that I have found, and I prefer to read the line with the more regular meaning of *bi*, "help," which is the sense of the word in line 44 of the preceding poem.

<sup>71</sup> "Shows me" comes from Yan Shigu's commentary, which glosses 視 as 示.

<sup>72</sup> *Jiji* 濟濟 alludes to the *Shijing* poem "Wen wang" 文王 (Mao 235): "So teeming, the many knights, / With them King Wen is at ease" 濟濟多士，文王以寧. *Jiji* is literally just "teeming," but "with good men" is implied from the term's use in the *Shijing*.

<sup>73</sup> *Xian ge* 弦歌, "singing [the *Shijing*] to string accompaniment," is a method of study prescribed in the ritual tradition. See *Liji*, "Wenwang shizi" 文王世子 (Shisanjing zhushu ed., photo-reprint of the 1815 ed., Taipei: Yiwen, 1955) 20.5a-6b.

<sup>74</sup> The sentiment and wording of these four lines draw from *Lunyu* 6.20: "Confucius



system that underlies the *Shijing*, we find nothing in the *Shijing* that resembles the “Poem from Zou.” One connection we might make is to the *Chuci* tradition. First in the *Li sao*, and then in Han works like Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (200-168) “Owl Rhapsody” (“Funiao fu” 鵩鳥賦), we find a similar narrative to the one here, of a loyal minister estranged from his wayward king and forced into peregrination.<sup>75</sup> This theme must have resonated in the hearts of the Han literati, attached as they were to the state apparatus, and vulnerable to its whimsy. In its presentation of this theme, however, the “Poem from Zou” is very distinct from the *Chuci* tradition. The *Chuci* and works in its wake are decidedly melancholic in tone, plaintive cries of wronged men. Wei Meng’s poem, by contrast, is remarkable in its equanimity. Confucius is recorded as having described the first poem of the *Shijing*, “Guan ju” 關雎, as “joyous but not to the point of excess, and sad but not to the point of injury” 樂而不淫，哀而不傷.<sup>76</sup> Insofar as it self-consciously identifies itself as a poem in the tradition of the *Shijing*, Wei’s poem might have been composed with this stricture in mind.

What the “Poem from Zou” shares with the *Chuci* tradition is a focus on the literati’s chronic estrangement from the state. This is in contrast and complement to the portrait of the literati in Wei’s “Poem of Admonition,” where the fate of the family, framed in the terms of feudal investiture, was bound fast to that of the state. In the “Poem from Zou” we might detect a move away from the family and the world of state service, and toward the secular sanctity of a scholarly tradition. In this way, the “Poem from Zou” presents an essential aspect of the Western Han literati identity: how an attachment to classical studies and classicist ideals served as a point of connection between the literati and the imperial state, while also providing an outlet by which the literati could transcend the vicissitudes of government service.

At the opening of the poem Wei Meng is still very much a part of the world delineated in the previous poem. He reaffirms his loyalty to

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said: ‘To be fond of (*hao*) something is better than merely knowing it, and to take joy (*le*) in something is better still’ 子曰：知之者，不如好之者。好之者，不如樂之者。

<sup>75</sup> The most pertinent specific example is “Ai Ying” 哀郢 (“Lament for Ying”), in the “Jiu zhang” 九章, in which the Qu Yuan persona laments his departure from the Chu capital at Ying.

<sup>76</sup> *Lunyu* 3.19.

the king and the emperor, and as he takes leave of Pengcheng, which was both his home and the capital of the kingdom of Chu, he expresses the hope that he can soon return, to his old home and to the service of the king. The description of his departure, however, hints at the shift taking place in this poem. "I can only brood, I can only look back," he laments, upset at leaving his ancestral home (line 22), but as he looks back, figuratively or literally, the family graves that he longed for have been displaced by the "throng of disciples" (lines 23-24) following him into exile. The disciples are a new family, as Zou is a new home, and both are associated with the poet's removal from political to scholarly work.

This shift is encapsulated in the striking dream sequence at the center of the poem. In his dream, Wei Meng finds himself back in Pengcheng, again in the king's chambers, lecturing his king vigorously—and in the dream his king listens. But it is just a dream, and he awakens "in this foreign land, / and I sigh and I moan. / I remember my grandfather and father, / And my tears come drizzling down" (lines 37-40). In his dream, he was back in his ancestral home, realizing his political ideals, and on awakening, his memory of that old life is still fresh, and his failure painful.

Had this been a *Chuci* composition, the poet would at this point have given himself utterly to the tragedy of his situation. But in Wei Meng's poem, the sighs and moans and tears end here, and instead of self-consolation and half-hearted self-admonition, the poet turns to a wholehearted embrace of his new home, for here he finds something as precious to him as the family tradition of service to the state had been in Pengcheng: "But now Confucius, in his glory, / Shows me the brilliant legacy he has passed down" (lines 43-44). Since the term "brilliant legacy" (*yilie*) is loaded with implications of familial inheritance, it is as if Wei Meng were now being adopted into a new "Confucian" family, giving up his family's graves but serving as a scholarly son to Confucius, with disciples for descendants. Whatever personal bonds the poet had with Pengcheng are effectively dissolved in these two lines, and where he had just bemoaned awakening in a "foreign land," he now sings praises of its Confucian atmosphere, "different from other lands" (line 48). He concludes his poem with no hint of self-pity or regret, but in a recognizably Confucian "joy" (*le* 樂). This

is the joy of the Confucian scholar, who has found that a scholarly task can supplant an official one, and that a scholarly lineage can leave a legacy every bit as strong as the political legacy of the traditional feudal family.

Before continuing, it may be worth considering how much more accessible this poem is than the preceding one. It is shorter by half, and the eloquent account of the poet's present circumstances stands in contrast to the bombastic account of glory and decline in the first poem. Yet only the first poem was anthologized in the *Wenxuan* 文選, the sixth-century anthology that became nearly canonical in the Tang, and that is likely for two reasons: because it was *the first*, and thus stood as a precedent in literary history; and because its theme—the righteous remonstrance of the loyal minister—resonated soundly in Confucian ideology. I do not think there is any harm, however, in stepping out of history for a moment to imagine what kind of medieval Chinese literature would have placed greater value on the second poem. There is a guileless gentility to the description of “cutting reeds to make a hall,” with disciples “building rooms along my walls” (lines 26-28), and the shifts of perspectives through the poet's journey and his dream lead ingenuously toward the “joy” the poet claims at the end. Even if we regard that “joy” as a mask the poet has fashioned to cover the anguish of being driven from his own home, there remains in this poem an appealing strand of quiet felicity. The poetics of the medieval period was perhaps a bit too severe and melancholic to give Wei's “Poem from Zou” proper recognition.

### Poem III

韋玄成《自劾詩》

Wei Xuancheng, “Poem in Self-Rebuke”<sup>77</sup>

Pained at having lost his father's noble rank, Xuancheng sighed and said: “What honor do I have to conduct the family sacrifices?” He composed a poem in self-rebuke (*zi heze*), which reads:

玄成自傷貶父爵，歎曰：「吾何面目以奉祭祀！」作詩自劾責，曰：

<sup>77</sup>) HS 73.3110-12; Lu Qinli, *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 113-14. There is also an excerpt of this poem, with some variant readings, in the *Dong Han ji* 東漢紀; see Zhang Lie 張烈, ed., *Liang Han ji* 兩漢紀 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002), 305-6, and Raft, “Four-syllable Verse,” 430-32.

赫矣我祖， 侯于豕韋。 賜命建伯， 有殷以綏。	Awesome were my ancestors, Enfeoffed in Shiwei. Given a mandate and established as overlords, By them, the house of Shang was put at ease.	
厥績既昭， 車服有常。 朝宗商邑， 四牡翔翔。	Their merits were illustrious, And their carriage and clothing standard. They paid court allegiance at the Shang capital, Their four-stallion teams trotting along so. <sup>78</sup>	5
德之令顯， 慶流于裔。 宗周至漢， 群后歷世。	With their fine and brilliant virtue, Their auspices flowed on to later generations. From the Western Zhou to the house of Han, For generations we served amongst the lords.	10
肅肅楚傅， 輔翼元夷。 厥駟有庸， 惟慎惟祗。	So reverent was the tutor to the King of Chu, Advising and assisting Kings Yuan and Yi. <sup>79</sup> His four-horsed-coach was in harmony, How wary, how respectful he was.	15
嗣王孔佚， 越遷于鄒。 五世壙僚， 至我節侯。	But the succeeding King was so dissolute, [And the tutor] moved on to Zou. For five generations our family was out of office, Until my father, "Lord Moderate." <sup>80</sup>	20
惟我節侯， 顯德遐聞。 左右昭宣， 五品以訓。	Oh our Lord Moderate, His brilliant virtue was known far away. He served by the side of Emperors Zhao and Xuan, <sup>81</sup> And with him the five orders of morality were elucidated. <sup>82</sup>	

<sup>78</sup>) As in the first poem by Wei Meng, the carts, clothes, and stallions are all symbols of the royal power invested in the Wei clan by the Shang.

<sup>79</sup>) The "tutor" is Wei Meng.

<sup>80</sup>) "Lord Moderate" (Jiehōu) was the posthumous honorary title given to Wei Xuancheng's father, Wei Xian.

<sup>81</sup>) Here Friedrich ("Die Ahnen und das Ich," 425 n. 73) notes that Xuan was the temple name of the emperor who died in 49 BCE—i.e., several years *after* this poem's ostensible date of composition. Thus, Friedrich translates, "To the left and right brilliance (*zhao*) was made known (*xuan*)" ("Zur Linken und zur Rechten tat sein Glanz sich kund"), but also suggests that the poem may well have been written in retrospect, when Wei Xuancheng was making his second rise under the Emperor Yuan (r. 49-33). Given the parallel in line 14, the temple names fit better here, thus arguing for a later date of composition, or at least revision.

<sup>82</sup>) The five moral precepts (*wu pin*) are mentioned in *Shangshu* "Yao dian" 堯典, where they are glossed as the fundamental familial relationships of father, mother, elder and younger brothers, and child; see *Shangshu* (Shisanjing zhushu ed.) 3.22a-b.

既耄致位， 惟懿惟奐。 厥賜祁祁， 百金洎館。	Grown aged he relinquished his post, How excellent, how splendid he was. The imperial gifts came in such succession, A hundred catties of gold, and a dwelling in the capital. <sup>83</sup>	25
國彼扶陽， 在京之東。 惟帝是留， 政謀是從。	He had been enfeoffed in Fuyang, To the east of the capital. But the Emperor retained him, To follow his political counsel. <sup>84</sup>	30
繹繹六轡， 是列是理。 威儀濟濟， 朝享天子。	In such harmony, the six-bridled team, Thus arrayed, thus in good order, His carriage and countenance so fine, He attended the Son of Heaven's courts and feasts.	35
天子穆穆， 是宗是師。 四方遐爾， 觀國之輝。	The Son of Heaven, so solemn, Esteemed him as master and teacher. The four quarters, far and near, Gazed upon this light of the state. <sup>85</sup>	40
茅土之繼， 在我俊兄。 惟我俊兄， 是讓是形。	And to inherit this fief, <sup>86</sup> Was the due of my noble elder brother. But my noble elder brother, Gave evidence of his reticence. <sup>87</sup>	

<sup>83</sup> Wei Xian's biography (*HS* 73.3107) also records the gift of a hundred catties of gold and a residence in the capital. By comparison, Ch'ü T'ung-tsu has calculated the property of an "average middle-class family" at the value of 10 catties of gold; see Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, ed. Jack Dull (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1972), 89, citing *HS* 4. According to Ch'ü's calculations of the yearly salary of a top-ranking government official, Wei Xian's retirement gift was roughly a five-year bonus.

<sup>84</sup> Fuyang was in Pei commandery 沛郡 (modern Anhui province, Suixi county 濉溪縣); i.e., in the eastern provinces. Wei Xuancheng is stressing that his father's retirement gift included a mansion in the capital because Emperor Xuan wished to continue to consult his old advisor. As Wei Xian was actually forced into retirement by the succeeding chancellor, Wei Xiang 魏相, this depiction is rather euphemistic.

<sup>85</sup> This line refashions a phrase from the *Yijing* hexagram 20 ("Guan" 觀), where the Xiang commentary 象傳 says that it is "advantageous [for such people] to be guests of the king" 利用賓于王.

<sup>86</sup> "Fief" (*maotu* 茅土) is here expressed by an allusion to the supposed enfeoffment ceremony in which earth (*tu*), whose color represents the direction of the new fief, is wrapped in reeds (*mao*) and presented to the vassal. This tradition seems traceable only to an apocryphal work attached to the *Shangshu* (the "*Shangshu wei*" 尚書緯), quoted in Li Shan's *Wenxuan* commentary to Su Wu's letter to Li Ling; see Wx 41.1852-53.

<sup>87</sup> The character *xing* 形 in this line is hard to account for; the translation follows Yan Shigu's commentary. The pattern "*shi* 是 x *shi* y" is common in the "Ya" sections of the *Shijing*, occurring three times in "Xiaoya," seven times in "Daya" and three times in "Shang

於休厥德，	Oh glorious, his virtue,	45
於赫有聲。	Oh awesome, his good name. <sup>88</sup>	
致我小子，	Thus [the fief] came to little me,	
越留於京。	And I was specially retained in the capital. <sup>89</sup>	
惟我小子，	Yet oh little me,	
不肅會同。	I was not properly solemn at an official meeting;	50
矯彼車服，	Disgracing that ceremonial carriage and clothing,	
黜此附庸。	I was demoted to this auxiliary rank. <sup>90</sup>	
赫赫顯爵，	So awesome, this illustrious nobility,	
自我隊之。	Yet by me it is lost;	
微微附庸，	So meager, this auxiliary rank,	55
自我招之。	Yet my mistakes have brought it.	
誰能忍媿，	Who can stand this shame?	
寄之我顏。	That I might bestow my face upon him.	
誰將遐征，	Who is there planning a distant campaign?	
從之夷蠻。	That I might follow him into the barbarian lands. <sup>91</sup>	60
於赫三事，	Oh awesome, the Three Counsels!	
匪俊匪作。	Only the outstanding can serve in that office. <sup>92</sup>	

song.” But in the *Shijing* “x” and “y” are always parallel, as in “They cut them, they move them” 是斷是遷 (Mao 305, “Yin wu” 殷武). Like the “*fei* 匪 ... *fei* construction below (line 62), this is an example of the Han poem’s complication of a simpler *Shijing* pattern. Alternatively, one might read *xing* as 型, “model,” producing the more regular construction “thus he was reticent (*rang*), thus he was a model (*xing*).”

<sup>88</sup>) These two lines could also be praise for the virtue of his family in general.

<sup>89</sup>) When Wei Xian died, Wei Xuancheng’s elder brother Wei Hong 弘 was the rightful heir to the family fief, but Hong was embroiled in a lawsuit at the time and the family decided that Wei Xuancheng should take his place. Wei Xuancheng objected stridently but was finally persuaded, under the threat of punishment, to accept the honor. The circumstances of his inheritance are described at length in the biography (*HS* 73.3108), and somewhat differently in a Chu Shaosun addendum to the *Shiji* (*SJ* 96.2688). The event seems to have bolstered Xuancheng’s reputation as a “deferent” brother and son, exactly the quality put on display in the present poem.

<sup>90</sup>) The “auxiliary rank” is the “Lord Within the Passes” (*guannei hou* 關內侯).

<sup>91</sup>) The wish to join a foreign campaign may be rhetorical, but it has some basis in reality. Under Emperor Wu, thousands of men in the entourage of Li Guangli 李廣利 were granted office or granted amnesty on their return from the war against Dayuan (Ferghana); see Li’s biography at *HS* 61.2704. One of Wei Xuancheng’s contemporaries, Chen Tang 陳湯, asked to join a foreign campaign in an attempt to jump-start his career after he was demoted for an offense; see *HS* 70.3007.

<sup>92</sup>) The “Three Counsels” is an archaic term, found in the *Shijing* and *Shangshu*, here referring to the office of chancellor, which Xuancheng’s father had held from 71 to 67 BCE. But judging from the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, where the term does not appear at all (except for the Wei poems), it seems to be a term that gained currency from the Eastern Han on. It would become a common literary figure in the medieval period, found nine

於蔑小子， 終焉其度。	Oh lowly, little me, How in the end can I dwell in that spot? <sup>93</sup>	
誰謂華高， 企其齊而。	Who says that Mt. Hua is lofty? Standing on tip-toe one can rise level with it!	65
誰謂德難， 厲其庶而。	Who says that virtue is hard to attain? With effort one can expect to reach it!	
嗟我小子， 于貳其尤。	Alas, oh little me, My missteps redoubled; <sup>94</sup>	70
隊彼令聲， 申此擇辭。	Having failed that fine reputation, I here put forth these reproachable words. <sup>95</sup>	
四方群后， 我監我視。	Let the many lords of the four quarters, Over me keep watch, of me take notice.	
威儀車服， 唯肅是履。	For in countenance, carriage, and costume, With due reverence should one always tread. <sup>96</sup>	75

We may evaluate this poem in terms of three levels of representation, of increasing specificity. First, as with the preceding poems, it is self-consciously placed, by diction and theme, in the tradition of the

times in the *Wenxuan*, for example, and no fewer than twelve times in the extant writings of Cai Yong. This attests to the Wei poems' affinity with the medieval literary tradition.

<sup>93</sup> The interpretation of *du* 度 as "dwell" (*ju* 居) follows Yan Shigu's gloss. It seems suspect that Xuancheng would be able to predict his rise back to high office.

<sup>94</sup> The *Qian Han ji* excerpt of this poem simplifies things by writing *bu* 不 (a negative marker) for *yu* 于 (a particle), thus "I shall not redouble missteps"; given the problematic textual history of that source (see *Liang Han ji*, 3-4), we should treat this variant with caution. This line could refer to the missteps in ritual propriety that caused him the loss of his fief, but it might also be understood by reference to the one that follows: one mistake was losing his fief, and now by writing these "reproachable words" (*ze ci*) he risks committing a second mistake.

<sup>95</sup> *Ze ci* ("reproachable words") is a modification for rhyme of the synonymous term *ze yan* 擇言, which appears in the *Shangshu* ("Lü xing" 呂刑), the *Liji* ("Biao ji" 表記) and the *Xiaojing* 孝經 ("Qing dafu zhang" 卿大夫章). The *Xiaojing* passage reads: "Speak only what is proper, do only what accords with the way; let not reproachable words come from your mouth, let not reproachable actions come from your person" 非法不言，非道不行。口無擇言，身無擇行; see *Xiaojing* (Shisanjing zhushu ed.) 2.3a. We find it in this usage in the Eastern Han, for instance in a composition by Ma Yuan 馬援 (13 CE-49); see *Hou Han shu* 24.844. The implication here is that he may be criticized for putting forth these "reproachable words" of self-explanation.

<sup>96</sup> This final stanza could be taken as a general admonition to the "many lords," that they should "reflect upon" (reading *jian* 監 as *jian* 鑒) his predicament and take care to maintain decorum in their own behavior, which is how Yan Shigu explains it; or it could be the poet's invitation to his peers to monitor his own future conduct. The last line is both a personal vow and a general injunction.

*Shijing*. Second, however, it refers to a more direct precedent, in the poems of Wei Meng—the “self-rebuke” (*zi he* 自劾) of the title might be thought of as a “self-admonition,” in recognition of the influence of Wei Meng’s “Poem of Admonition.” In other words, Wei Xuancheng’s poems are still recreations of the *Shijing*, but they now relate to a more specific model, as “descendants” of a Wei family poetic tradition.

Third, the classical worldview depicted in Wei Xuancheng’s poem is no longer the *Shijing* relic invoked for rhetorical force in Wei Meng’s poems, but a tangible political reality in which the poet was a participant. This is evident in the poem’s thematic focus on “countenance” (*weiyi* 威儀, literally “awe-inspiring countenance”). In the *Shijing*, the “coach-and-four” (*si* 駟) and other symbols of proper “countenance” are a stock motif, symbols of the Zhou nobility’s virtue in all its splendor and omnipotence.<sup>97</sup> In Wei Meng’s “Poem of Admonition,” the coach-and-four, the dragon pennants, and the vermilion bows refer back to that feudal world, but there they are truly just symbols, of the Wei family’s imagined glory in a world long past. In Wei Xuancheng’s poem, however, the symbol has reacquired its import. Not only was the fief real, but the loss of the fief—the occasion for this poem—was purportedly due to an error in precisely such “countenance, carriage and costume” (line 75).

The poem is supposed to have been written in 53 BCE, after a temple official reported to the throne that Wei Xuancheng, along with some other noblemen, had ridden a single horse up to an ancestral temple service, when by protocol he should have, as a nobleman, driven his coach-and-four. Presumably they had broken the rules out of necessity, as it was a rainy day and the ground was too muddy for a chariot; but it was still an offense in the eyes of the throne, and their marquises were all reduced one grade, to the honorary “marquis within the passes.” Wei’s career continued almost without interruption, but the poem makes it clear that losing the family fief was a severe blow. The trauma that gave rise to this poem was largely a symbolic one, but in

<sup>97</sup> Proper countenance is a major theme, for instance, in “Yi,” the *Shijing* poem discussed above for its affinities with Wei Meng’s “Poem of Admonition.” It opens with the pronouncement: “So grand is the awesome countenance (*weiyi*), / The counterpart of one’s Virtue” 抑抑威儀，維德之隅。



an age of classicist revival, the symbolic was very much a part of reality.<sup>98</sup>

Proper countenance is such a steady motif in Wei Xuancheng's poem that we might rightly take it as bit of literary artifice, woven in by the poet to hold the seventy-six line poem together. It first emerges as a focal point in the opening of the poem, where, echoing Wei Meng, Wei Xuancheng recalls his ancestral glory, "their carriage and clothing standard" (line 6) in service of the Shang. He then praises Wei Meng along these lines, for being "wary and respectful" with his "coach-and-four" (lines 15-16)—though it is unlikely that Wei Meng would have possessed such a carriage. The motif surfaces again when the poem arrives at Wei Xian, whose "carriage and countenance [is] so fine," his "six-bridled team ... thus arrayed, thus in good order" (lines 33-36).

The import of this motif becomes clear when the account of the Wei family reaches the poet himself: "Yet oh little me," he exclaims, "I was not properly solemn at an official meeting; / Disgracing that ceremonial carriage and clothing, / I was demoted to this auxiliary rank" (lines 49-52). We saw earlier how Wei Meng's "Admonition" was constructed on accounts of the poet's and the king's family history, a model to which both poet and king were supposed to conform. Here Wei Xuancheng is performing a similar contrast, but using the motif of proper countenance to instill into the model a new degree of specificity. The high ancestors, Wei Meng and Wei Xian are all associated with this motif in order to constitute a specific and circumstantially relevant ancestral tradition according to which Wei Xuancheng will "rebuke" himself.

The self-rebuke comes in due course, but the poem's concluding move is of particular interest. After swearing his intent to regain the family fief, and even attain the office held by his father, Wei Xuancheng returns to the motif of "countenance" in the poem's final lines: "Let the many lords of the four quarters, / Over me keep watch, of me take notice. / For in countenance, carriage and costume, / With due reverence should one always tread" (lines 73-76). The "many lords of the four quarters" is an archaism, and while it may in a specific sense denote

<sup>98</sup>) The *Shiji* account (*SJ* 96.2686) notes that Wei was still granted the full income of his former fief. The loss was one of prestige, not material benefit. Whether or not the ritual offense in question was merely a pretense masking a deeper political rift is unclear.

the other marquises, it is better understood as a general invitation to Wei's peers in government service. He offers himself to them as an example, or counter-example, and exhorts them to take care in their own "countenance," or to watch over him in his future conduct.

The motif of countenance, then, has not only tied the poem to the *Shijing*, to Wei Meng's "Admonition," and to the circumstances surrounding Wei Xuancheng's loss of the family fief. In the end, the classical motif enables the poem to circumscribe the greater literati community, stewards of the classical glory the Western Han was supposed to revive. This is important because it illustrates how the learned man serving the government in the first century BCE was part of a socio-political tide of men who resembled him, living in a common institutional and intellectual complex, and how his poem self-consciously recognizes such resemblance. It would be a full two centuries before a true culture of literati poetry would come into being, but when it did, it would, like Wei Xuancheng's poem, stand at the intersection of self-expression and communal recognition, establishing a sort of "I and thou" relation between peers. Thus, if Wei Meng's "Admonition" was about the relationship of a literati servant to his sovereign, Wei Xuancheng's "Self-Rebuke" directs its attention squarely on the poet himself, and on bringing the poet into communion with his fellow literati. In this way, it foreshadows an essential function of poetry to come.

#### Poem IV

韋玄成《誡子孫詩》 Wei Xuancheng, "Poem Warning My Descendants"<sup>99</sup>

Xuancheng composed another poem, making known the difficulty of repairing a flaw, and by this giving warning to his descendants. It reads:

玄成復作詩，自著復玷缺之難難，因以戒示子孫，曰：

於肅君子，	So reverent is the noble man,
既令厥德，	And his virtue so fine.
儀服此恭，	His countenance and costume are so respectful,
棣棣其則。	Dignified, in accord with principle. <sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> HS 73.3113-15; Lu Qinli, *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 114-15.

<sup>100</sup> Yan Shigu cites the *Shijing* poem "Bozhou" 柏舟 (Mao 26): 威儀逮逮，不可選也，

咨余小子， 既德靡逮， 曾是車服， 荒嫚以隊。	But alas, oh little me, My virtue was not up to this standard, And thus by this carriage and costume— I fell into wanton disgrace.	5
明明天子， 俊德烈烈， 不遂我遺， 恤我九列。	So illustrious, the Son of Heaven, His great virtue burning so high, He did not thereupon dismiss me, But gave me succor in the ranks of the Nine Chamberlains. <sup>101</sup>	10
我既茲恤， 惟夙惟夜， 畏忌是申， 供事靡隳。	Having received this succor, I thought on it night and day. In awe and fear I kept myself in check, And my service was in nothing remiss.	15
天子我監， 登我三事， 顧我傷隊， 爵復我舊。	The Son of Heaven was watching over me, And promoted me to the Three Counsels; <sup>102</sup> And noticing the pain of my fall, My old noble rank to me was restored. <sup>103</sup>	20
我既此登， 望我舊階， 先后茲度， 漣漣孔懷。	Having thus been promoted, I gaze back upon my former standing; My esteemed father dwelt here— Tears stream down, my breast full of memories.	
司直御事， 我熙我盛； 群公百僚， 我嘉我慶。	The officials and staff, Consider me lustrous and splendid. The many ministers and functionaries, Consider me blessed with good fortune. <sup>104</sup>	25

which (in this context) means “My countenance (*weiyi*) is dignified / Nothing about it could be questioned.” The image of the “noble man” (*junzi*, “gentleman”) here is in contrast to Xuancheng’s own lapses, related in the next stanza.

<sup>101)</sup> *Jiulie* 九列 refers to the Nine Chamberlains (*jiu qing*); it is not a classical expression, and with this exception we only begin to see it used in the Eastern Han. As Yan Shigu notes, this refers to Xuancheng’s appointment to the Chamberlain of Palace Revenues (*shaofu* 少府) on the ascension of Emperor Yuan to the throne in 48 BCE.

<sup>102)</sup> According to Yan Shigu, this refers to his appointment as chancellor (*chengxiang*), the post his father had held, in 42. It could also refer to his appointment as Censor (*yushi dafu*) in the preceding year.

<sup>103)</sup> I.e., the family fief.

<sup>104)</sup> In this line I follow the interpretation of Wang Xianqian (*Hsbz* 73.8b). In Yan Shigu’s reading, the poet is expressing gratitude to his staff for helping him to do a good job—to make himself “lustrous, splendid, blessed and with good fortune.” As Wang points out, his reading makes for a better fit with the following stanza.

于異卿士，	Yet those ministers and officials are different from me—	
非同我心，	We are not of the same mind.	30
三事惟艱，	For verily, the work of the Three Counsels is arduous,	
莫我肯矜。	And no one pities me for it.	
赫赫三事，	So awesome, the Three Counsels!	
力雖此畢，	Though I exhaust my strength in this work—	
非我所度，	It is not that in which I could dwell,	35
退其罔日。	And the days to my retirement are few. <sup>105</sup>	
昔我之隊，	After my lapses years ago,	
畏不此居，	I feared lest I would not reside in this post;	
今我度茲，	But today I have reached here,	
戚戚其懼。	And I am so fretful with fright.	40
嗟我後人，	Alas, my descendants!	
命其靡常，	There is no constancy to life. <sup>106</sup>	
靖享爾位，	Hold your offices conscientiously,	
瞻仰靡荒。	Always gazing up, never in dissipation.	
慎爾會同，	Be wary of your associations,	45
戒爾車服，	And be alert in your carriage and costume. <sup>107</sup>	
無矯爾儀，	Let not your conduct be undisciplined,	
以保爾域。	So that you may retain your domain. <sup>108</sup>	
爾無我視，	And do not you look on me,	
不慎不整；	In my recklessness and disorder;	50
我之此復，	For my restoration today,	
惟祿之幸。	Is due only to lucky fortune.	
於戲後人，	Oh, my descendants!	
惟肅惟栗。	Be reverent and in awe;	

<sup>105)</sup> The wish to retire clearly echoes his father's honorable retirement from the post in 67. For the use of *du* 度 here, see note 93. The enjambment between this and the preceding couplet is distinctive, contributing to the prosaic feel of the poem.

<sup>106)</sup> *Ming* ("life," "fate") might also be understood as the emperor's "command"; he is warning his progeny that the honor of the family could be revoked at any time.

<sup>107)</sup> "Associations" (*huitong*) could also refer specifically to court meetings and ceremonies, of the kind that led Xuancheng to lose the fief. It is the same word used for Zhou "feudal assemblies" in the first poem by Wei Meng.

<sup>108)</sup> Referring to the fief granted to Wei Xian, now reinstated to Xuancheng. This admonition recalls the lyrics of the capping ceremony, as recorded in *Yili*, "Shi guan li" 士冠禮, e.g., "Make your countenance (*weiyi*) respectful / and be wary and pure in your Virtue" 敬爾威儀，淑慎爾德 (Shisanjing zhushu ed. 3.8a).

無忝顯祖，  
以蕃漢室！

Disappoint you not your illustrious ancestors,  
And thereby protect the House of Han!

55

In many respects, Wei Xuancheng's "Poem Warning My Descendants" picks up where his "Poem in Self-Rebuke" left off.<sup>109</sup> As the preceding poem closed, here he opens with the importance of maintaining "reverent" (*su*) countenance, recalling his previous disgrace in this matter. As Wei Meng admonished the Chu king, and as Wei Xuancheng admonished himself, here the poet issues a "warning" to the next generation, exhorting them to live up to the honor of their family. Following in the footsteps of the feudal model set out by Wei Meng, the fortune of the Wei family is closely attached to "protecting the House of Han" (line 56).

It is the middle section of this poem that is of primary interest. On the surface, the poem is an admonition, in the tradition of the *Shijing* and of Wei Meng's first poem, but in the middle section we can detect an affinity with Wei Meng's second work, the "Poem from Zou," beginning with Wei Xuancheng's gratitude for the emperor's "succor" in granting him a new appointment (line 12), which replicates, in diction and in sentiment, line 11 of Wei Meng's poem: "And the Son of Heaven to me gave succor."<sup>110</sup> From there, the poems run in parallel, or perhaps

<sup>109</sup>) Wei Xuancheng's curious ability to predict his rise to chancellor in the preceding poem (lines 61-64) may suggest that the "Poem in Self-Rebuke" was written in retrospect, after he had gained the office and closer in time to the composition of this poem. This would account for the continuity.

<sup>110</sup>) Intriguingly, the same sort of linguistic (but not always semantic) parallels between works of an ancestor and his descendant are found in another pair of compositions from the first century BCE, the "Letter in Reply to Ren An" 報任安書 by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145/135 BCE - ?) and the "Letter in Reply to Sun Huizong" 報孫會宗書 by Qian's grandson (and Wei Xuancheng's contemporary), Yang Yun 楊惲 (?-56 BCE): 1) Sima Qian: "I was recently graced with your letter, which instructed me to take care in my comings and goings, and work for the advancement of worthy officials. In this you were most earnest and assiduous, as if you were afraid I would not take your advice, and become the object of slander from common men" 曩者辱賜書，教以慎於接物、推賢進士為務，意氣勤勤懇懇，若望僕不相師用，而流俗人之言 (*HS* 62.2725). Yang Yun: "Now you, pitying my ignorance, deign to send me a letter, instructing me in my failings—you are most earnest in your efforts. And yet, I loathe that you have not been able to understand fully the causes of my situation, but blithely follow the common way of praise and blame" 蒙賜書，教督以所不及，殷勤甚厚。然竊恨足下不深惟其終始，而猥隨俗之毀譽也 (*HS* 66.2894). 2) Qian: "Allow me to sketch out my ignorance" 請略陳固陋 (2726). Yun: "Thus do I dare to sketch out my ignorance" 故敢略陳其愚 (2894). 3) Qian: "Relying on the legacy of my forefathers, I have for twenty years had the opportunity to serve

inverse tracks, and the likeness between the two helps illuminate the message that underlies the simple “warning” of this poem’s title.

The key is the poems’ shared moment of perspective, from which the two poets emerge with different conclusions. In Wei Meng’s poem, this is the dream sequence. He has left Pengcheng, saying that “And though I have moved away, / My old home still lives in my heart” (lines 29-30); he dreams he is back home, his aspirations fulfilled, but on awakening can only “remember my grandfather and father, / And my tears come drizzling down” (lines 39-40). The past, the present, and memory of the past come together in these tears, as they do in the comparable section of Wei Xuancheng’s poem: “Having thus been promoted,” he says, “I gaze back upon my former standing; / My esteemed father dwelt here— / Tears stream down, my breast full of memories” (lines 21-24).

Reflecting on the past and the present, both poets comment on how “different” (*yi* 異) their current surroundings are. Wei Meng praises the ritual culture of his new home, calling it “different (*yi*) from other lands” (line 48). This is a happy difference, as Wei Meng embraces the scholarly culture of his new homeland and joyfully pursues his Confucian heritage. Wei Xuancheng, in contrast, complains that “those ministers and officials are different (*yi*) from me— / We are not of the same mind” (lines 29-30). This is a more caustic sort of difference, reflecting the pressures of service in the imperial bureaucracy, and the implication

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cautiously at the foot of the imperial carriage” 僕賴先人緒業，得待罪輦轂下，二十餘年矣 (2727). Yun: “But in good fortune I was able to rely on the legacy of my ancestors and attain a resident posting at court” 幸賴先人餘業，得備宿衛 (2894). 4) Qian: “Although through my weakness and cowardice I sought to live, I am still well aware of the line between staying on and departing” 僕雖怯懦欲苟活，亦頗識去就之分矣 (2733). Yun: “... all men of lofty and noble character, aware of the line between staying on and departing” 漂然皆有節概，知去就之分 (2897). 5) Qian: “Moreover, it is not easy living beneath the imperial yoke, to be of a lower sort toward whom much invective is directed” 且負下未易居，下流多謗議 (2736). Yun: “It is on such men of the lower sort that the spite of the masses comes to rest” 下流之人，眾毀所歸 (2896). 6) Qian: “Then by my speech I met with these troubles” 僕以口語遇遭此禍 (2736). Yun: “and then I met my troubles, slandered from all directions” 遭遇變故，橫被口語 (2895). Just as Wei Xuancheng surely played a role in transmitting the (alleged) compositions of his forefather, so Yang Yun played a part in the circulation of Sima Qian’s *Shiji*. Our faith in Sima Qian’s authorship of his famous letter might be reassured by the fact that there are also close parallels to the Wei poems in the emulative works of Fu Yi, Cao Zhi, and Tao Qian, mentioned below. This suggests the highly emulative, “ancestral” nature of a literary tradition.

of his complaint seems to be that he longs for the same life of retirement and scholarly endeavor that Wei Meng enjoyed.

Between these two poems, we have a view of the literati's dual commitment to government service (Wei Xuancheng) and to classical scholarship (Wei Meng). Wei Meng's "Poem from Zou" is an idealistic statement, more or less eliding the tension between these two poles of the literati identity, while Wei Xuancheng's "Warning" exposes this contradiction in the literati condition—it is a telling irony that Wei Meng's satisfaction is based on political failure, while Wei Xuancheng's distress derives from his successful rise to the chancellorship. To some degree, success for the medieval literati was failure, because government service was such a dangerous pursuit; but failure, as Wei Xuancheng makes clear in his "warning" to his descendants, will lead to the eclipse of the family fortunes.

It is this ambivalence inherent in the literati condition that distinguishes this poem from the "Poem from Zou." Wei Xuancheng has reached the highest office of the land and reestablished the Wei family's standing, but no sooner has he done so than he is unsettled. This is brilliantly reflected in lines 37-40, where the poet uses virtually the same language of fear and trembling to recall his time of disgrace ("I feared lest I would not reside in this post") and his newfound glory as chancellor of the land ("so fretful with fright"). There is to be no satisfaction for Wei Xuancheng, but perhaps literary representation was an ameliorative process. His poem is a warning, to himself as much as to his descendants, that the discomfort in the literati relationship with the state must be endured, but it is also a lyrical sublimation of that very predicament.

## Conclusion—the Literary Legacy of the Wei Poems

In the introduction to and discussions of these poems, I have sought to present the Wei poems in their full historical context. I have explained their relationship to the *Shijing* in terms of a first-century BCE classicist mindset, according to which the poems were recreations not of the *Shijing* per se, but of the Zhou world represented in the *Shijing*—the world that first-century intellectuals like Wei Xuancheng were seeking to revive—and I have argued that the Wei poems are

representative of the conditions, ideals and concerns of a newly formed "literati" class. By way of conclusion, I wish to give further consideration to how the poems fit amongst the other literary works of their age, and how the Wei poems relate to the medieval literary tradition that was to follow.

In truth, it is difficult to decide what, other than the *Chuci* and the *fu*, constitutes a viable category of "literature" in the first century BCE. There are lyrics associated with the dynastic ritual cycles, and some of the anonymous *yuefu* 樂府 ("music-bureau" lyrics) may date from this period. There are also a fair number of short songs attributed to known authors, often written in a "Chu style," like the "Song of the Great Wind" 大風歌 of the founding emperor of the Han. Then there is a sizeable measure of narrative prose, mostly of a didactic nature, but often in the realm of what we might call "historical fiction." Beyond this, there is a great body of utilitarian writing—memorials, essays, philosophical writings, etc.—that in its erudition and flourish might justly be included as "literature," although to do so would risk exploding the usefulness of the category.

Earlier, I drew a comparison between Wei Meng's "Poem from Zou" and the poetry of the *Chuci*. In fact, the *Chuci* collection seems to have been taking shape during the middle years of the Western Han, and our current *Chuci* corpus includes two works by Wei Xuancheng's near contemporaries, the "Nine Longings" ("Jiu huai" 九懷) of Wang Bao 王褒 (fl. 73-49 BCE), and the "Nine Sighs" ("Jiu tan" 九歎) of Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE). Both the "Nine Longings" and the "Nine Sighs" were written in emulation of the "Nine Stanzas" ("Jiu zhang" 九章), a series traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan but likely written much later;<sup>111</sup> taking on the voice of Qu Yuan, they expansively recount his slander at the Chu court, his estrangement from the king, and his grief at his fate. As I pointed out earlier, the contrast of the *Chuci* melancholia with the classicist austerity of the Wei poems is striking;

<sup>111</sup> One of the poems in the "Nine Stanzas" ("Huai sha" 懷沙) is included in the *Shiji* biography of Qu Yuan, and another is mentioned there by title ("Ai Ying" 哀郢); see David Hawkes, "Ch'u tz'u," in Loewe, ed. *Early Chinese Texts*, 50. Hawkes states that "probably a majority of *Ch'u-tzu* scholars [accept] two or three of the 'Chiu Chang' poems" as authentic works of Qu Yuan (p. 51), but there is no indication for the antiquity of the other seven, and no direct evidence for the association of "Huai sha" and "Ai Ying" with a historical Qu Yuan.



here I would suggest that the contrast bespeaks a more significant development.

The Wei poems are translating the *Shijing* into Han language and Han concerns. They draw on the *Shijing*, but they do not confuse themselves with that work. The *Chuci* poems of Wang Bao and Liu Xiang, by contrast, are purely imitative, identifying completely with the Qu Yuan persona they adopt and reproducing the poetry he would have written. In other words, the Wei poems are explicitly inscribed in their authors' experience, where the *Chuci* compositions are not. This is not to say that Wang Bao's and Liu Xiang's *Chuci* works could not be viewed as products of their political frustrations, but, in sharp contrast to the poems of Wei Meng and Wei Xuancheng, there is nothing in the poems themselves that speaks directly of their authors' situations. The implications of this difference are, I would argue, momentous. It augurs the rise of a historically grounded concept of authorship that, if not exactly new, would be the cornerstone of medieval literature, and medieval poetry in particular.

It should be pointed out that the Wei poems had very little direct influence on later *shi*-poetry, the genre most closely attached to the historically bound author.<sup>112</sup> We can identify three poems that were closely modeled on the Wei poems: a "Poem Conveying My Intent" ("Dizhi shi" 迪志詩) by Fu Yi 傅毅 (fl. second half of the first century CE), a "Poem in Criticism of Myself" ("Zegong shi" 責躬詩) by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232), and Tao Qian's 陶潛 (365-427) "Poem Instructing My Sons" ("Mingzi shi" 命子詩).<sup>113</sup> Beyond these three works,

<sup>112)</sup> Notwithstanding the comment of Feng Weine cited above (see note 28), which reads in its entirety: "Yan [Yu] says that [four-syllable poetry] arose with Wei Meng, because in narration and in diction Wei's poem constitutes a form of its own, and from the Han and Wei on [poets] have in their turn taken it as their model. Thus it is not inappropriate to say that [four-syllable poetry] arose from Wei Meng" 嚴云起于韋孟，蓋其敘事布詞，自為一體，漢、魏以來遞相師法，故云始于韋，非徒言也。Feng is defending the view of Yan Yu 嚴羽, who (perhaps following the view of Ren Fang 任昉 [460-508], though the Siku editors doubt whether the current *Wenzhang yuanqi* 文章緣起 can be reliably attributed to him) identified Wei Meng's poetry as the wellspring of medieval four-syllable poetry, distinguishing it from the four-syllable poetry of the *Shijing*.

<sup>113)</sup> Just like the Wei poems, these works are all included in the poets' biographies in the standard histories: *Hou Hanshu* 80A.2610-13, *Sanguo zhi* 19.562-65 and *Song shu* 93.2290, respectively. For translations of Cao and Fu's poems, see Raft, "Four-syllable Verse," 388-407. A translation of Cao Zhi's poem can also be found in Robert Joe Cutter, "Personal Crisis and Communication in the Life of Cao Zhi," in *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power*

medieval four-syllable poetry shares only the length of the Wei poems—in its style, diction and attitude, it is entirely distinct. When we turn to other genres, the closest affinities derive from the Wei poems' function as family histories and personal narratives. A connection could be made, for instance, to the medieval tradition of *fu* built on familial and personal experience, works like the "Rhapsody on Looking Back on My Life" 觀我生賦 by the sixth-century literatus Yan Zhitui 顏之推. The most direct connection might be the eulogies (*lei* 誄, *song* 頌) and in particular the funerary inscriptions (*bei* 碑, *muzhiming* 墓誌銘) that would become extremely common in the Eastern Han, genres that bear similarity to the Wei poems in both form (the four-syllable meter) and content. The eulogistic genres may have been the proper medieval avatars of the Wei poems, with the crucial difference that those works were focused on the second- and third-person description, with the lyric "I" in a supporting role.<sup>114</sup>

As for the proper literary context of the Wei poems in the first century BCE, we need look no further than the very context in which the poems have come down to us—as part of the *Hanshu* biography of the Wei family. Viewed in comparison with the other poetry, broadly defined, of their age, the Wei poems are anomalous, but in the context of Han historiography, the poems fit securely in the literary moment of their age, bearing great similarity in theme and expression to the memorials, letters, and essays which one finds throughout the biographies of the *Hanshu*. What these works share—and what separates them from contemporary *Chuci* compositions—is the centrality of an author explicitly narrating his experience and thoughts in relation to his social and political circumstances. In this above all the Wei poems stand out as the "literature" of the "literati," just as the historiography taking shape at this time also reflected the needs and concerns of this

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in *Court Culture: China, Europe, and Japan*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005), 155-60. Versions of Tao's poem can be found in James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) and A. R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming, AD 365-427: His Works and their Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>114</sup> We might also find that in their predominantly admonitory function the first, third, and fourth Wei poems resemble the medieval "admonition" (*zhen* 箴), another four-syllable verse genre.

group. In this context, it is not surprising that the Wei poems are rather prosaic.

The connection of the Wei poems with the *shi*-poetry of medieval China is foremost a matter of idea, not influence. The Wei poems are testaments to the personal experience of their poets, and, particularly in the case of Wei Xuancheng's poems, they are public testaments, to be shared with the poet's peers (and superiors). Medieval poetry, for all its differences from the Wei poems, operated on similar grounds. Within its exercises in metaphor, *shi*-poetry was supposed to contain a message from the poet, a heart-felt response to his circumstances that would resonate with his peers. If medieval poetry was less explicitly autobiographical than the Wei poems, it was still written with the literati self at its center. The Wei poems can be called the "beginning of literati poetry" because their underlying motivation—the connection of the poem to a historically instantiated author, and the use of the poem to create bonds amongst the literati—would reside at the center of the medieval tradition of *shi*-poetry two centuries later.