Abstracts, Arranged by Panel

THURSDAY

Session 1: Places & Spaces 1; Chair: Timothy M. Davis (BYU)
1:15–2:30 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Kexin Tang (ASU), "Beyond the Five Marchmounts: Yuan Jie and the Cultural Reimagining of Mount Nine Doubts"
In his duty as the commissioner of Daozhou 道州, the Tang writer Yuan Jie 元結 (723-772) visited Mount Nine Doubts (*Jiuyi shan* 九疑山) , where the Sage-King, Shun 舜 was believed to have died and been buried during his southern inspection tour. The visit led to the construction of a new shrine dedicated to Shun, commissioned by Yuan Jie, as well as several essays and an illustration of the mountain. Although Yuan Jie was not the first Tang writer to visit and reflect on the site associated with the Sage-King's death, his accounts offer a valuable perspective on how Tang intellectuals contemplated the empire's religious system in relation to its ancient cultural heritage, particularly in the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion. The paper explores Yuan Jie's writings on Mount Nine Doubts, examining how they engage with state ideology and local traditions while asserting the author's own political and cultural vision. In Yuan Jie's case, his commemoration of Mount Nine Doubts can be read as a challenge to the dominant sacred geography centered on the Five Marchmounts, a system reinforced under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (685-762). Ultimately, this study highlights how literary writing served as a medium through which Tang literati navigated cultural memory, negotiated political authority, and expanded the ritual geography of the empire.

Raisa Stebbins (UCLA), "Hell on Earth: Conceptualization and Localization of Hell in *Konjaku monogatari shū*'s 'Stories of Japanese Buddhism'"
While there is a significant body of research centered around hell in Buddhism, little scholarship examines intersections between hell and the human world, places where cosmology interacts with geography. I explore the localization of hell at Tateyama in the old province of Etchū, which has a long history as a cultic center dedicated to those who fall into hell. In this paper, I examine the conceptualization of hell within the "Tales of Japanese Buddhism" section of *Konjaku monogatari shū*. I will provide an overview and analysis of the word *jigoku*, hell, and highlight linkages between different stories to assess what insight these stories might provide into the *Konjaku* compiler's understanding of hell. By focusing on the three Tateyama *jigoku* tales, I discuss how the physical geography of Tateyama mapped the geography of hell and how Tateyama was placed within Buddhist cosmology, through the practice of *honji suijaku*. Finally, in an effort to understand how the Tateyama *jigoku* tales may have been used as a method of proselytization for women by evoking the female damned who are subsequently saved through the actions of a monastic intermediary, I rely on D. Max Moerman's theory of heavenly and human eyes to argue that the Tateyama *jigoku* tales reflect the localization of the hells in what I term as buddhaspace—the non-physical manifestation

of Buddhist cosmology—into a physical location, the boundary of which can only be truly perceived and crossed by a monastic intermediary.

Zhujun Ma (Brown), "Fragmented Listening, Redundant Performing: A Segmental Reading of the Precious Scrolls about the Lady of Mount Tai"

Precious scrolls are invaluable sources for studying Chinese religions, as many of them narrate hagiographies of prominent deities in length. Scholars offer close readings of the plots in precious scrolls in comparison with those in other genres to gain insight into the development of various cults of deities. However, audiences may not have full access to full-length plots because the performance of several-volume precious scrolls can take days. Moreover, existing scholarship shows that precious scrolls are performed in both private and public spaces, including pilgrimage sites, temple spaces, and locally sponsored ritual retreats. Thus, for audiences who are also pilgrims and temple visitors, their listening is fragmented and distracted in a public space that is not exclusively designed for the performance of precious scrolls. This paper proposes a segmental reading of the widely circulated, five-volume *Mount Tai Precious Scroll of the Origins of the Celestial Transcendent Sacred Mother* (*Tianxian Shengmu yuanliu Taishan baojuan* 天仙聖母源留泰山寶卷) that narrates the hagiography of the Lady of Mount Tai, one of the most popular deities in the north China plain from the late Ming and onward. Inspired by Stanley J. Tambiah's theory of ritual redundancy, I demonstrate how the repetition of important scenes in vernacular scripts (*baiwen* 白文), vernacular patterned verses, and songs (*qu* 曲) redundantly enhances the affective aspects of the performance for distracted audiences. I thus call for the possibility of reading precious scrolls in affective segments rather than full-length plots for future studies.

Session 2: Religious Culture I; Chair: Michelle Low (University of Northern Colorado)
2:45–4:00 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Rao Xiao (Irvine), "Buddhist Jokes in Early Medieval China: *Baiyu jing* 百喻經 and *Qiyan lu* 啟顏錄"

This paper investigates two types of Buddhist jokes—tentatively defined here as laugh-inducing narratives involving Buddhism—in early medieval China. The first type targets Buddhist authorities and is exemplified by the *Qiyan lu* 啟顏錄 (*Records that Crack a Smile*), a medieval Chinese jestbook. These jokes depict monks being outwitted in public settings by jesters, scholars, or even children who distort Buddhist doctrines with irony and wit. The second type is best represented in didactic collections such as the *Baiyu jing* 百喻經 (*Scripture of One Hundred Parables*), where laugh-inducing tales of fools are paired with explicit Buddhist teachings. Whereas the *Qiyan lu* treats Buddhism as the object of ridicule, the *Baiyu jing* mobilizes laughter in the service of Buddhist instruction. Despite their differences, both corpora reflect the tastes of audiences beyond the elite intellectual class and offer valuable insight into the broader reception of Buddhist ideals and its clerics in Chinese society. This study provides a preliminary exploration of how laughter shaped Buddhism's integration into early medieval Chinese culture before the rise of Chan Buddhism, where laughter and wit would come to feature more prominently in Buddhist literature.

Taoxuan Xu (CU Boulder), "Iryon's Criteria for Writing *Ch'an* Poetry in *Samguk yusa*"
Samguk yusa 三國遺事 (ca. 1282–1289) is one of the earliest historical records of the Korean Peninsula, compiled by a Buddhist monk Iryŏn 一然 (1206–1289) in the late Koryŏ period. Emulating certain conventions found in Chinese historical and Buddhist writings, Iryŏn composed *ch'an* 讚 (encomium) for the entries in *Samguk yusa.* His *ch'an* were all written in the format of heptasyllabic quatrains. Interestingly, Iryŏn did not compose a *ch'an* poem for every entry in the *Samguk yusa.* Among the 138 entries, only 43 entries had accompanying *ch'an* poems, and these poems are scattered throughout *Samguk yusa* in a seemingly random fashion without any obvious pattern. This raises an important question: how did Iryŏn decide whether to write a *ch'an* poem for an entry? In this paper, I argue that to meet Iryŏn's criteria for writing a *ch'an* poem, the entry needs to include one of the following two elements: (1) the presence of bodhisattvas' incarnations or (2) help for the rise of Buddhism. Although not every entry in *Samguk yusa* is tied with Buddhism, Iryŏn's criteria for composing a *ch'an* poem as well as the fact that most entries accompanied with *ch'an* poems are related to Buddhism reveals Iryŏn's real intention of compiling *Samguk yusa*, which is to promote the development of Buddhism in the Koryŏ period, not merely what he wrote in the postscript—to keep these stories from being lost. By exploring Iryŏn's criteria for composing a *ch'an* for an entry, we can better understand his ideology and life philosophy that he wanted to express through *Samguk yusa.* Moreover, considering the distribution of Iryŏn's *ch'an* poetry adds a new perspective on understanding and interpreting *Samguk yusa.*

Kedao Tong (Stanford), "The Question of Sentience in the Chinese Buddhist Practice of Releasing Animals"
Chinese Buddhists across time and space have saved living animals under threat by releasing them into forests, protected waters, and animal sanctuaries for merit as well as other soteriological and practical benefits. This paper examines the question of sentience in Chinese Buddhist discourses on animal release, or *fangsheng* in Chinese. In the belief that animals could consciously feel pain and fear as humans do, people are called upon to share the negative feelings and suffering of captive animals that are about to be placed on the chopping board and into boiling water. Buddhist theorists viewed human indifference to the plight of animals a moral failure, urging intervention to ease their suffering. With a focus on *fangsheng*, this paper highlights the ethical and soteriological significance of sentience in Chinese Buddhist practice by considering the following questions: What does it mean for animals to have sentience in a Buddhist context? Is the sentience of animal beings equivalent to human sentience? How does sentience matter in the specific context of animal release?

Session 3: Early Chinese Manuscripts; Chair: Matthias L. Richter (CU Boulder)
Friday, Oct. 9, 9:00–10:40 AM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Xi Zhu (Pacific Lutheran University), "Scientific Examinations Performed on Excavated Materials: Purposes, Limitations, and Concerns"
Since the 1990s, a significant number of unearthed materials dating to early Chinese periods have been discovered and subsequently published in mainland China. Such publications are typically accompanied by reports titled "Archaeological Excavation Report" (*kǎogǔ fājué bàogào* 考古發掘報

告), which are often extremely informative and useful. This is especially true for unprovenanced corpora, i.e., materials that were looted and later acquired by research institutions through the antiquities market, since the original excavation sites and archaeological contexts for these artifacts are usually unknown to the public. Scholars and students frequently rely on these excavation reports to obtain essential information about both scientifically excavated materials and those obtained through the antique trade. These reports commonly include data such as radiocarbon dating results and, increasingly, findings from other scientific examinations, including analyses of physical and chemical composition and structural properties. Yet several questions remain under-examined, especially within the field of manuscript studies: What is the exact nature of these scientific examinations? What are their primary objectives? How reliable and accurate are their results? And most importantly, why and how are they pertinent to paleographers and textual scholars? This paper examines the types of scientific examinations commonly performed on excavated materials, with particular attention to their application to unprovenanced artifacts. It explores the limitations and challenges inherent in these tests, with a focus on how misrepresentations and misinterpretations of results may impact the study of early Chinese manuscripts.

Kun You (Middlebury College), "The Dual Functions of the Title in Early Manuscript Culture: A Case Study of the Yinqueshan Excavated Manuscripts"

An increasing number of excavated manuscripts from early China (mid. 5th c. BCE – 1 c. CE) has enabled scholars to study early manuscript culture through the lens of book history. The material information has provided nuanced insights into the compilation practices and their evolution from the pre-Qin period to the Han dynasty. In this presentation, I show four types of titling practices found in the Yinqueshan corpus, a collection of manuscripts discovered in tombs enclosed during the mid-Western Han Dynasty. While collectively labelled as military and political texts by modern editors, these manuscripts are copied with various titling practices: some contain more than one title (identical but placed differently), whereas others do not contain a title at all. A close examination of the text's contents and their corresponding titling practices suggests various functions of these early "books." In addition, notable structural similarities are identified between several transmitted early Chinese texts (for example, the *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi,* and *Mozi*) and the excavated manuscripts. This provides a new perspective on how probable oral texts were transcribed and edited for reading purposes during the transition from the pre-Qin textual culture to that of the late Western Han.

Xiangyu Wang (UCLA), "Rituals of Resettlement: The *Dao Ci Bamboo Manuscripts and Urban Migration Strategies in Warring States Chu"

The Warring States period (475–221 BCE) witnessed extensive state-sponsored migration and urban resettlement as competing polities sought manpower and economic growth. This paper examines a text named *Dao Ci 禱辭 ("Prayers") concerning ritual reviving a previously abandoned settlement from the Tsinghua collection of Warring States manuscript slips as a case study of how religious practice functioned as both a "pull" incentive and a risk-management device in local migration strategies. First, an analysis of the material and formal features of the bamboo slips reveals that their durable "fill-in-the-blank" format constituted a bureaucratic technology, enabling non-specialist officials to stage Altars of Soil and Grain sacrifices at minimal administrative cost. Second, a close reading of the prayers reveals how five prayers explicitly seek to attract settlers ("使四方之群氓

歸"), while two address agricultural and public-health risks—promising divine protection against famine, pestilence, and past misrule—and one ritual targets depopulation of neighboring towns to favor the focal settlement. By framing sacrifice as recompense contingent on divine assistance ("苟使…余敢獻…"), these prayers not only legitimize migration policies but also transfer accountability to deities, reducing perceived risk for migrants. Drawing on religious-economic theory, I argue that ritual performance operated alongside coercion and material incentives to shape population flows. The **Dao Ci* thus enriches our understanding of Warring States migration by foregrounding local agency, manuscript technology, and the ideological "soft power" of sacrifice. This study demonstrates that beyond punitive resettlement and fiscal enticements, religious ritual constituted a vital pull factor in ancient Chinese statecraft.

FRIDAY

Session 4 A: Medieval Poetry I; Chair: Paul W. Kroll (CU Boulder)

9:15–10:55 AM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Christopher Elford (Washington and Lee University), "Precarious Instrument: Self-Expression and Self-Concealment in the 'Zither Lay' (Qin cao 琴操) Tradition, with a Note on its Relationship to Early Medieval Lyric Poetry"

Scholars attempting to reconstruct the emergence of lyric poetry (*shi* 詩) in the Early Medieval period have tended to focus on the earliest appearance of certain genre tags or prosodic signatures to the neglect of rhetorical and thematic analysis. This paper demonstrates that the "zither lay" tradition contains a highly sophisticated, but understudied, rhetoric of self-expression and self-concealment, one that is, in many cases, continuous with the ostensibly new tradition of early lyric poetry. The author begins by highlighting the emphasis on intermediality in zither lore, both as the traces of the mountain landscape in the wood of the zither and the zither itself as an organ capable of feeling and expressing emotion. The paper then turns to examine a series of zither lays attributed to sages and recluses each of which contains both a quasi-historical narrative setting for a particular performance and the lyrics of the song performed. In these texts, a sage or a prospective sage, faced with a moment of crisis, turns away from his living audience to address a third-party, sometimes located in the future, and speaks in a coded language in the hopes that an acute listener will be able to decode his utterance through the re-performance of the song. In conclusion, the author identifies these same rhetorical settings in the densely allusive *shi*-poetry of noted zither player Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263). This paper also touches on broader issues of transmedial aesthetics and performance theory, as well as the complicated relationship between individual authors and super-authorial literary repertoires.

Dominic J. Toscano (Oberlin), "A Tolling from the Shadows: The Poetic Legacy of Yin Keng"

Though there are many talented Southern Dynasties poets of whose work we wish more survived, one would have to be Yin Keng 陰鏗 (fl. 540s–560s), who served the Liang dynasty through its

downfall and on into the Chen, and whose extant poems number only thirty-four. While Yin enjoyed some recognition for his literary talent during his lifetime, much of his collection had already been lost by the eighth century, though the admiration of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770)—who mentions Yin reverently in three poems—inspired a sustained interest in Yin's poetry from that time onward. In this paper, I explore what remains to us of Yin's work, whose legacy far outstripped its small textual footprint, and which has much to teach us about not only the poetry of the late Southern Dynasties, but perhaps especially the literary values of the Tang poets who so admired it. As critics and scholars from later eras noted, some of that admiration surely owed something to Yin's affinity for the rules of tonal prosody that had emerged a generation prior to his birth. But I suggest the true appeal of Yin's poetry goes beyond such formal features, and lies in his keen ability to render striking moments of visual perception with restraint and lucidity, often with surprising syntactical turns, some of the very practices that would come to define much Tang poetry. Yin Keng's surviving work reveals the edges of a fascinating literary mind, one that further illuminates just how deeply the various strands of Southern Dynasties poetics entwined themselves with the development of Tang verse.

Yalin Du (Princeton), "Cutting into Perfection: The Aesthetic Evolution of Quatrain Endings before the Tang"

客心已百念，孤游重千里。江暗雨欲来，浪白风初起。

A traveler's heart has turned to a hundred thoughts;
Alone, he's about to journey yet another thousand miles.
The river darkens—rain is about to fall;
The waves turn white—wind begins to rise.

This poem by Liang-dynasty poet He Xun 何遜 is labeled in most extant anthologies as a standalone quatrain (*jueju*). However, in the Qing scholar Jiang Fang 江昉's edition, it appears under the title "A Linked Verse on Seeing Off a Friend" (*Xiangsong lianju*), suggesting Jiang Fang did not regard it as a complete poem, but rather a fragment excerpted from a collaborative exchange of verses. A glance at the reception history of this poem reveals that it was little known during He Xun's time and only gained widespread praise from the Song dynasty onward—when the criteria for a "good quatrain" had been established and codified. Thus, the debate over whether He Xun's poem is a "quatrain" or a "linked verse" reflects not merely a question of textual variation, but a subtler shift in the evolving conception of what kind of ending constitutes a "good" quatrain. What, then, defines a "complete" quatrain? What aesthetic criteria must a "quatrain" meet to be recognized as truly finished? In He Xun's era, how was a quatrain typically expected to end, and how did that differ from later conventions? Beginning with the ambiguous identity of He Xun's poem, this article traces the evolution of quatrain endings from the Six Dynasties to the High Tang, showing how later criticism and editorial practices contributed to the formation and codification of notions of aesthetically "complete" or even "perfect." It particularly reveals how editorial practices such as cutting, combining, and compiling quietly yet actively shaped the literary tradition, gradually "cutting" the ending of a quatrain into a form of "perfection."

Kay Duffy (UBC), "Reading Early Medieval Chinese Literature at the Margins of the Humanities"

In the decades since the inaugural issue of *Early Medieval China*, the question of how to define China's medieval period has been a matter of ongoing debate in textbooks, monographs, journal articles, reviews, and editor's notes. Amid ongoing efforts to propose alternate labels and periodization schemes, and despite increasingly pointed discussions of the problematics of the medieval within and beyond the academy, for many of us the appeal of the early modern endures. This paper seeks to clarify the implications of literary scholars' adherence to the "early medieval" by asking, "What has the medieval done for us lately?" In addressing this question, I focus on the centrality of texts to our work. The idea of manuscript culture features prominently in many discussions of possible parameters of early medieval China. Although scholars working on this period have productively engaged with research on medieval book culture and the sociology of texts, the locus of medieval studies at the institutional level remains resolutely western European. Such asymmetries remain among researchers situated in the disciplines and in the "areas," even as institutions have been eager to embrace consolidating frameworks such as the "global middle ages" and the "premodern." In this paper, I identify a lack of clarity in the academy about the role of language and writing in higher education as a complicating factor in our attempts to disseminate our research findings, including our efforts to render the term "early medieval Chinese literature" legible outside our scholarly enclave.

Session 4 B: Places & Spaces II; Chair: Katherine Alexander (CU Boulder)

9:15–10:55 AM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Zheyu Su (Connecticut College), "From the Center of All-Under-Heaven: Sima Qian's Departure Point for Writing and Journey"

As Sima Qian (司馬遷, ca 145－86 BCE) records, his point of departure for writing the *Shiji* (史記) was his father Sima Tan's (司馬談, d. 110 BCE) final instructions. Before inheriting this responsibility, Sima Qian had already undertaken a Grand Tour, which enriched his knowledge and worldview. Both events share the same physical point of departure: Luoyang (洛陽), his hometown, depicted in the *Shiji* as the "Center of All-under-Heaven" (*tianxia zhizhong* 天下之中). Through reading the *Shiji*, this paper argues that Sima Qian's "Center of All-under-Heaven" is not merely a geographical term but a symbol of orthodox dynastic authority. It further contends that the *Shiji* is not a text focused on rural areas or minorities, but a historical narrative based on orthodoxy – though orthodoxy may not derive from emperors or rulers, since Sima Qian prioritizes worthy individuals and families. However, as dynasties changed over time, their capitals and centers of reign shifted. Defining a fixed center of All-under-Heaven became difficult. To resolve this paradox, Sima Qian employed two tactics: First, he expanded the "center" district from Luoyang city to a broader surrounding area. Simultaneously, he developed a theory of the "move of the center," distinguishing between geographical centrality and political/civil centrality. Through these strategies, Sima Qian's *Shiji* transcends simple historical record to become a contemporary interpretation of history.

I-Chin Lin (ASU), "Urban Life and Individual Perspectives in Southern Song City Writings"
In the Southern Song period, city writing emerged as a significant component of the pen notes (*biji* 筆記) genre, particularly focusing on lived experiences in the capital city of Lin'an (modern name Hangzhou). Scholars recorded imperial ceremonies, festivals, and commercial activities, capturing the transformations of urban culture over time. The contribution of city writing to Southern Song literature, along with the personal perspectives on the capital expressed in the *biji* and other literary genres, presents a valuable area of inquiry. While these works focus on urban life, they differ in emphasis and perspective. One notable example is *The Old Man of West Lake's Record of Multitudinous Splendors* (*Xihu laoren Fansheng lu* 西湖老人繁勝錄), attributed to Xihu Laoren 西湖老人 (dates unknown). This work portrays the seasonal beauty and recreational allure of West Lake, highlighting the prosperity and peace of Lin'an. Compared with other city writings of the period, the *Fansheng lu* offers unique details about water-related activities and their role in the urban experience of Lin'an. Therefore, this paper focuses on the *Fansheng lu* in comparison with other Southern Song city writings. By studying what these authors chose to highlight, omit, or preserve, I aim to explore in what way does residents of Lin'an constructed their urban identity through shared stories, reflecting the prosperity of the past while simultaneously expressing a sense of city life.

Rachel Junlei Zhang (United States Naval Academy), "Maritime Imaginations of Luzon in the Selden Map and *Dong xi yang kao* 東西洋考"
This paper examines Chinese representations of Luzon and the South China Sea in two early seventeenth-century works: the *Selden Map* and *Dong xi yang kao* 東西洋考 (*An Investigation of the Eastern and Western Oceans*). Produced during a time of expanding European colonial activity, these sources offer rare and complementary perspectives on Chinese understandings of maritime Asia. While the *Dong xi yang kao* is a printed geographical treatise rooted in late Ming statecraft and literati knowledge, the *Selden Map*—combining Chinese landscape aesthetics with accurate, compass-guided sea routes—appears grounded in the lived experience of Fujianese maritime communities, likely compiled with the input of merchant knowledge. Using a comparative framework, this paper examines the overlapping information, linguistic features, and cultural complexities of both works, particularly in their depictions of colonial actors such as the *hongmao* 紅毛 ("red-haired" foreigners, likely Spaniards or Dutch) and *huaren* 化人 (Spaniards). Port names around Luzon, some of which overlap and appear in both sources, while others diverge phonetically, reflecting dialectal variation and differing modes of transmission. Some Luzon-related toponyms are unique to the *Selden Map*, whose annotations—largely intelligible in Hokkien—suggest an intended audience of Fujianese merchants with possible ties to Manila. Some entries may even reflect Iberian linguistic influence and Chinese literati tradition. Rather than a static artifact, the *Selden Map* emerges as a hybrid product of geography, commerce, and cross-cultural exchange. Read alongside *Dong xi yang kao*, it offers a textured and multi-layered view of Luzon's position and early modern Chinese engagements with maritime Southeast Asia.

Wenbo Chang (University of Georgia), "Talent, Play, and Identity: Yuan Drama Performers in the Early Yuan Dynasty"
Chinese theater ushered in its first golden age in the Mongol Yuan period in the form of *zaju*, also known as Yuan drama, that fascinated audiences from all walks of life. Hu Zhiyu, a prominent Han

Confucian scholar-bureaucrat who served in Khublai Khan's court (r. 1260–1294) and an afficionado of *zaju* theater, wrote prefaces for some of the most celebrated female and male performers, including Zhulian xiu, the most versatile actress in her time according to extant Yuan sources. This paper investigates how Hu's prefaces shed new light on how *zaju* opened a public space for talented performers to play with identity as a powerful means of social and cultural communication. First, the actress's excellent skills in role play that not only enable her to seamlessly erase the distinction between her social body and theatrical body, but also to construct various characters so convincing as to challenge the binaries of authenticity and artificiality. Moreover, in Hu's Confucianist ideal for humane governance, *zaju*'s all-inclusiveness of social life and social relations on stage mediated by the actress's performance creates aesthetic distance for audience relief from the real world full of pains and constraints, thus implying the audience's awareness of theatrical fictionality. In addition, Hu's prefaces also indicate that the dynamics in audience/performer relations contribute to both theatrical innovations by performers and aesthetic education of audiences. Lastly, analysis of Hu Zhiyu's writings on *zaju* performers also demonstrates the convergence and mutual influence between the culture of elite literati and that of common urban spaces in the multiethnic, multicultural Mongol Yuan society.

Session 5 A: Poetics; Chair: Meow Hui Goh (OSU)

11:10 AM –12:25 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Luke Waring (UT Austin), "The Concept of *Zhi* 志 in Han Poetry and Aesthetics"

Beginning in Eastern Zhou and developing in the Early Imperial era, certain kinds of cultural production came to be understood as expressions or revelations of *zhi* 志 (intent, meaning, purpose, ambition). *Shi* 詩 poetry, for example, is described in numerous texts as expressing the *zhi* of the person who authored, performed, or quoted it. For the most part, however, the role *zhi* played in poetry and aesthetics has been studied through the lens of meta-statements *about* poetry (such as the Great Preface to the *Odes*), rather than taking into account what poems themselves have to say on the subject. To counter this trend, I introduce and examine numerous Han literary works (several sorely understudied) that explicitly thematize or address the concept of *zhi*, or which are presented in early histories and other compendia as expressions of *zhi*. In the process, we will see that the connection between *zhi* and literary production during Han was by no means restricted to *shi* poetry, established instead in relation to a range of genres including *fu* 賦 (prose poems) and *lun* 論 (discourses). In addition, while many scholars have argued that Han aesthetics favored a vision of poetry as the spontaneous manifestation of the author's *zhi*, in fact these pieces show that the relationship between *zhi* and literary production was highly complex, with authors making varied uses of different kinds of poems as a vehicle for the negotiation of their own *zhi*, and that of others.

Sean Ang (CU Boulder), "Pulling the Reins and Omitting the Weeds: Prefatory Anxieties in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 and *Wenxuan* 文選"

Amidst lively controversies regarding the received literary canon in the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557 CE) court, writers confronted an urgent question: under the influence of an exalted canon, how could one's literary intervention ever stand out? As a paratextual device accommodating authorial

statements of intent, prefaces to Liu Xie's 劉勰 *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 and Xiao Tong's 蕭統 *Wenxuan* 文選 exhibit palpable anxieties towards this question, though a comparative reading of both prefaces from this angle remains largely unaddressed in scholarship. This paper argues that the central metaphor employed in each preface—"pulling the reins" in the *Wenxin diaolong* and "omitting the weeds" in the *Wenxuan*—reveal key differences in how each author confronts canonical influence. These differences are well-encapsulated through two concepts from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Liu Xie engages in an onerous endeavor of *tessera*: drawing upon principles from the Confucian canon, he presents both praise and antithetical criticism towards established writers, thereby completing his penetrative re-interpretation of these writings. In sharp contrast, Xiao Tong largely avoids this canon altogether: done in leisure, he seems more concerned with demarcating a canon only to select the best pieces of writing that fall outside of it, thereby completing an act of *kenosis* in his preface. Thus, alongside navigating competing conceptions of literature and relationships with other authors, Liang writers also negotiated the relationship between their works and the received canon. Rhetorical strategies were often sites of confrontation with canonical anxiety, on top of being tools of self-legitimation and reflections of authorial attitude toward literature.

Mengling Wang (Colgate Univ.), "Reconfiguring the Communication Circuit: The Editor-Commentator in Late Ming Reprints of Pre-Tang Anthologies"

My paper examines the reprinting of two important pre-Tang anthologies, the *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature) and the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace), within the burgeoning commercial print market of the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). I focus on the pivotal role played by editors who not only reproduced these texts but actively reshaped them through new layers of commentary, framing, and production. By reading the paratexts which includes prefaces, postfaces, and annotations that accompanied the reprint editions of the two anthologies, my case studies show that the editors sought to reassert interpretive authority and mobilize new communities of readers. I propose to reconfigure Robert Darnton's influential framework of "communication circuit", which theorizes the life cycle of a book in early modern Europe through a chain of discrete agents: author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader. In the late Ming context, particularly in terms of reprinting pre-Tang poetry anthologies, it reveals a collapse of these roles into the key figure with versatile functions: the editor-commentator. This paper explores how editor-commentators of Ming reprints assumed multi-functional agency: composing expansive commentaries, commissioning print runs, branding editions with their own scholarly prestige, and deploying paratexts to construct audiences and interpretive authority. In doing so, they redefined what it meant to publish, not merely reproducing texts but reconstituting them as instruments of self-fashioning and community formation. In conclusion, my paper illuminates that late Ming print culture would be better conceptualized not as a linear communication circuit but as an entangled, editor-centered system of production and meaning-making.

Session 5 B: Rhetoric & Persuasion; Chair: Xurong Kong (Kean University)

11:10 AM –12:25 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Chi Feng (Indiana), "The Shape of Sound: Musical Instruments and Prescriptive Crafts in 'Kaogong ji' 考工記"

Among the six volumes of the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Ritual of Zhou*), the "Kaogong ji" 考工記 ("Artificers' Record") stands out for its careful attention to crafts. In this canonical text on ritual governance, we find detailed specifications for making musical instruments—bells (*zhong* 鐘), chime stones (*qing* 磬), drums (*gu* 鼓), and stands (*sunju* 筍簴)—alongside descriptions of weapons, chariots, vessels, etc. While early Chinese music is often studied through cosmology and ritual, and the "Kaogong ji" has been used as a source on ancient technology, few studies have considered how the text itself reshapes the concept of craft knowledge in Early China. This paper asks what kind of knowledge the text produces. Through close readings of four instrument passages, I examine how musical production is defined through ratios, forms, and material prescriptions. I then draw on theories on prescriptive technologies, the anthropology of craft, and the writing of technical knowledge to show how the "Kaogong ji" functions as a political document. Rather than reflecting real artisanal practice, this text envisions sound as a set of technical forms to be standardized and reproduced. By displacing artisan judgment and framing authority in textual terms, it makes sound an object of rule. This approach contributes to two ongoing conversations: first, it brings early Chinese technical texts into the study of statecraft; second, it offers a perspective on craft that foregrounds textual abstraction over embodied skill, showing how early states governed sensory experience through materials.

Yafang Bao (Stanford), "From Xunzi to Ban Gu: Structural Continuity in Political Persuasion"

In a fast-paced encomium (*zan* 贊) passage in the *Han shu* 漢書, Ban Gu 班固 distills ten historical episodes into ten compact, seven-syllable lines. Each line splits into two parts: the first (four characters) names a treacherous act by a minor figure, the second (three characters) delivers a startling consequence for a high minister or the emperor himself. This rhythmically forceful yet unsettling structure delivers a potent warning against political intrigue, betrayal, and trusting glib speech. This rhetorical pattern reappears in the Xin Tang Shu 新唐書 as well as other political discourses, though its origin traces back to Xunzi's 荀子 "Chengxiang pian" 成相篇. I will explore why this structure is effective and consider it against other forms of encomiums. The connection between the writings was noted by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) in the *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆. On various occasions, he identifies works across genres that draw thematically and structurally from earlier masterpieces. Far from being a flaw, a firm grounding in tradition not only lends authority to good writing but also throws its innovations into sharper relief.

Chok-Meng Travis Chan (The Education University of Hong Kong), "'The Mandate to Rule as Bestowed by the People': Liu Zongyuan's (773–819) Demystification of Dynastic Legitimacy in 'Zhenfu' (The Tally of Rulership to be Held Steadfast) and the Disempowerment of the *Fu ming* Genre"

Fu ming 符命 ("tallies of [Heaven's] mandate to rule") is a hybrid genre between rhapsody and eulogy, exemplified by the three Han texts collected in *Wenxuan* 48 under the namesake section. The impetus behind was to defend dynastic legitimacy by demonstrating how the royal house came into procession of Heaven's Mandate and the irrefutability of its divine right to rule. Among the legitimacy devices, preternatural auspices (*zhenxiang* 禎祥) were charged with significance as visible proof of Heaven's approval. Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), an iconoclast in political philosophy of Tang, ambitiously recast his *fu-ming* writing as a manifesto on people-centered polity. He denounced the auspices and their symbolic efficacy outright, while filling the ideological vacuum this created with *zhenfu* 貞符, a coinage that he chose to title the composition. What Liu meant by "the tally of rulership to be held steadfast" is "the will of the people." Such advocacy is best captured by his own words: "The mandate to rule as bestowed by the people, the favorable tally of rulership as rooted in benevolence." While Liu redefined the criteria for dynastic legitimacy and replaced origin myths with honorable acts of the founders, this paper argues that in so doing he stripped away the fanciful depiction of auspices and grandiloquent rhetoric that came to characterize the *fu ming*, leading to later writings barely distinguishable from a historical evaluation in the hands of less-talented authors and inadvertently accelerating the decline of the genre.

Session 6 A: Cosmology, Ideology, & Political Order;
Chair: Timothy Wai Keung Chan (The Education University of Hong Kong)
2:00 –3:40 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Evelyn Emery (Princeton), "Manifesting Destiny: Cosmology, Observational Astronomy, and Military Gain in the Chapters 'Yueyu xia' 越語下 (*Guoyu*) and 'Shi' 勢 (*Guanzi*)"

The received "Shi" 勢 chapter of *Guǎnzǐ* 管子 and the "Yuèyǔ xià" 越語下 chapter of *Guóyǔ* 國語 share striking similarities, including passages of verbatim text. These parallel texts instruct that proper observation and interpretation of celestial signs will ultimately determine victory or defeat in military pursuits, which underly the establishment of political control. It is unclear if one text was based on the other, or if these texts' individual authors and compilers drew from material that once existed externally in written or verbal form. A potential source text cannot be reliably reconstructed from extant materials. However, passages with similar if not identical verbiage in each work can be examined to consider the cosmological order these societies recognized, the natural phenomenon they were observing, and how these were symbolically associated with political order. This paper examines the hierarchical yet interdependent structure of heaven, earth, and man in this cosmological order, and contemplates whether deductions from dedicated sky watching led to assumptions that man must act in accordance with anticipated celestial motion to achieve predictable results. Terms that reference the celestial pivot, circumpolar region, and planetary retrograde motion suggest how observable astronomical phenomenon were abstracted and integrated into ancient thought, manifesting in concepts of fate and destiny.

Qiran Jin (Princeton), "Reideologization: A Study on the Visualization of the Story of King Cheng (r. c. 1042/35–1006 BCE) and the Duke of Zhou (r. c. 1042–1036 BCE) in the Eastern Han (25–220)"

In Eastern Han visual art, the story of the Duke of Zhou assisting King Cheng (*Zhougong fu Chengwang*) emerged as one of the most frequently depicted historical themes in stone carvings. Yet after the Eastern Han, the story virtually disappeared from visual culture. Although the Duke of Zhou remained influential in political thought for centuries, its visualization was largely confined to the Eastern Han period. This paper investigates why this classical story held such prominence in Eastern Han visual arts. Challenging the assumed consistency of this motif in earlier scholarship, the paper conducts an intra-comparative analysis of different visual representations and proposes a more nuanced typology. Rather than a single unified theme of "The Duke of Zhou Assisting King Cheng," five distinct subthemes are identified, each carrying its own ideological implications. From an art historical perspective, this study argues that these visualizations reflect complex ideological processes. Responding to Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), it proposes a further framework of ideologization, deideologization, and reideologization. The Eastern Han representations of the Duke of Zhou are interpreted as efforts to deideologize earlier uses of the narrative—particularly those appropriated by Wang Mang—and to reideologize the same material to serve new ideological needs. Through this process, multiple layers of ideology, including imperial, local, and familial ideologies, were rebuilt and interlinked. This case study further highlights the potential of philological analysis to inform broader inquiries in art history, intellectual history, and political history.

Zhuming Yao (Boston University), "'Time Has Changed': Political Rhetoric from 'Roaming Persuasion' to 'Hypothetical Discourse'"

The end of the Warring States period saw the prompt cessation of what was known as "roaming persuasion" 游說, the business of selling clever stratagems to help the regional lords survive the interstate power struggle. The memory of those turbulent years, however, persisted long into the Han. Key figures like Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BCE) and Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284 BCE) each received a biographical account in the *Shiji* 史記, as did the numerous episodes of persuasive speech occupy the interest of Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77-6 BCE) *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策. Most remarkably, the perilous career of a roaming persuader became something of a fulfilling life one can only hope to have. In a new type of writing named "hypothetical discourse" 設論, all its surviving pieces by Han authors invoke roaming persuasion as a fast track to political eminence, one that, ironically, is now deemed unrealistic because of the "inconvenience" of the return of a sage ruler. While these "hypothetical discourses" all pronounce the irreversible end to roaming persuasion, I would like to suggest that they mark the beginning of another kind of political rhetoric whose literary and real-world success depends on the cannibalization of the roaming persuasion both as a practice and as a genre. The "hypothetical discourse" is very much a persuasion in its own right, and it persuades a broader set of audiences in a more nuanced way.

Michael Nylan (Berkeley), "Legitimate Government (Actual and Theoretical) During the Early Empires"

I propose in this paper to offer a controversial view of legitimate government (actual and theoretical) during the early empires in the area we now call "China." This paper, based on a review not only of the received sources, but also of all excavated early sources and some few unprovenanced sources, will suggest that we have badly mistaken the atypical (e.g., Han Wudi) for the norm. The paper will discuss institutional checks and balances put in place by the early empires, as well as social welfare measures, thereby suggesting that we need to put in place a new vocabulary when translating many standard terms, such as *de* 德, *sheng* 聖, and *zheng* 正, not to mention *zhongguo* 中國, *zhonghua* 中華, and *zhuXia* 諸夏.

Session 6 B: Emotions; Chair: Wendy Swartz (Rutgers)

2:00 –3:40 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Xinci Fu (UC Santa Barbara), "Annotating Emotion: How Early Tang Imperial Scholars Reacted to Writings of *Hen* 恨 in *Wenxuan* 文選"

What does "*hen*" 恨 mean as an emotion? Confucian classics and philological works often define it as resentment, and treat it interchangeably with "*yuan*"怨—an inherently destabilizing emotion within the Confucian society. However, with a focus on the Tang scholars' commentaries on texts associated with *hen* in *Wenxuan* 文選, this essay explores more pluralistic interpretations of *hen* as an emotion in medieval China. It argues that Early Tang (618-750) imperial scholars carved out a space within the literary textual tradition to articulate a more comprehensive understanding of *hen*, positioning it in dialogue with the Confucianism social norms. To elaborate on this argument, this essay presents two key perspectives: (1) The meaning of *hen* extends beyond the negative emotional categories for Tang scholars. Moreover, it could be regarded as a socially acceptable and even expected emotional response in certain contexts. (2) From the Early Tang onward, *hen* gradually evolved into a distinct type of emotion. Scholars began to describe it as functioning as an ontological force with its own mechanisms, interacting with the established Confucian framework of the "six emotions" (*liuqing* 六情).

Minshan Xia (Indiana), "The Burden of Guilt: Memorial Prayers for Early Departed Relatives in Tang China"

This paper examines the merging of literary and ritual depth in Tang dynasty prayer texts (*jiwen*) dedicated to prematurely deceased younger relatives, including daughters, brothers, nephews, and highlights that these texts differ from earlier memorial literature traditions in their emotional tone and dialogic structure. These prayers focus on guilt as the key sentiment and apply careful diction, rhetorical strategies, and manuscript design to construct scenes of intimate communication with the dead. They also reflect a Tang-era intellectual shift toward increased human subjectivity. By analyzing examples by Yan Zhenqing, Han Yu, and Bai Juyi during or after the An Lushan Rebellion, this paper shows how Tang literati engaged emotion, memory, textual and visual revision, and ritual performance to express grief, fulfill moral obligations, and establish self-image. Rather than being static records, these texts not only shaped the memorial literature and practices of later

dynasties, but also embody an ongoing process of mourning, composition, and communication, through which the literary and ritual efficacy extends beyond the original text to affect later readers as well.

Huizhi Wang (UBC), "Performing Anger: A Case Study of Wu Zhao's 武曌 'nu' 怒 in the Tang Anecdote Collection *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載"

This paper explores Early Tang perceptions of Wu Zhao 武曌 (624–705) through the lens of emotion, particularly "anger" ("nu" 怒), by examining depictions of this controversial empress's "nu" in the anecdotal collection *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載, a work rich in accounts of events from Wu's reign and likely compiled during that period. The paper first analyzes how the word "nu" is generally applied in the narratives in this collection, treating it as a rhetorical device with a performative feature that helps advance the plot through subsequent actions. More importantly, it serves as an indicator of power dynamics and moral judgments that subtly shape readers' perceptions of characters—not every case of "nu" is portrayed as justifiable. Through close reading, this paper reveals how bias is insinuated in the "nu" narratives. Situating Wu Zhao's stories within this context, this paper discusses how the narratives implicitly grapple with her contradictory positionality as a female ruler, and reflect Early Tang contemporary anxieties regarding her legitimacy within its cultural framework. The paper also compares Wu's stories in this collection with relevant official historical records, such as edicts from her reign, to present different angles on the same historical events. This highlights the rhetorical strength of anecdotal narratives in which "nu" functions as a tool for negotiating power, gender, and legitimacy in the context of Tang Dynasty China.

Guanrui Gong (UCLA), "Between Filth and Purity: The Dynamics of Cleanliness and Uncleanliness in the *Tales of the Listener*"

This paper explores cleanliness and uncleanliness—a pair of previously understudied motifs—in the *Tale of the Listener* (*Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, hereafter *YJZ*). I first consider how *YJZ*, a collection of supernatural stories, represents uncleanliness and its counterpart differently from other genres of prose, including epitaphs, accounts (*ji* 記), and prefaces and colophons. While in other genres, cleanliness is often associated with personal moral integrity, in *YJZ*, uncleanliness appears rather physical: a monastery covered with dust, sweat in summer, examination papers stained by rain, a bamboo stick filled with blood, and so on. I then analyze three stories in detail. The first story is among a group of stories on the deity Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, who has the magical capacity of staying clean in uncleanliness and transforming uncleanliness to wonderful qualities. The second story, published twice in different series of *YJZ*, weaves a cleansing narrative behind the King of the Black Wind 黑風大王, a Jurchen general who was claimed to be killed by the great Han general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142) in the *History of the Song* (*Song shi* 宋史). The third story turns to the danger of cleanliness. In this story, among other stories in which utter cleanliness often foreshadows something ominous, the site of bathing along with promising physical cleanliness becomes a site that exposes one's true filthy nature. With this paper, I hope to complicate the linear progression from uncleanliness to cleanliness and show the scholarly potential of studying the dynamic tension between the pair in premodern Chinese literature.

Session 7 A: Three on Su; Chair: Robert Joe Cutter (ASU)

3:55 –5:10 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Yijie Wang (UCLA), "Growing My Remedies: Knowing, Growing, and Being in Su Shi's Poetry of Medicinal Herb Cultivation"

In the Song Dynasty, medicinal herbs were common in gardens and kitchens. But what did herb cultivation mean for politically banished gentlemen like Su Shi? This article takes his "Five Odes of the Small Nursery" 小圃五詠 written in Huizhou 惠州 as a case study to examine Su Shi's poetics of herb cultivation. I argue that such poetics transfigured the herbal nursery into a sphere of ontological intertwinement between the poet's multifaceted self and herbal plants. Analysis unfolds along three entangled dimensions. First, the network of herbal knowledge—medicinal, agricultural, culinary, and literary—underpinned the structure of poetic composition, and became a medium through which the poet contemplated his fragility and endurance. Second, as both the impetus for literary creation and an enacted action within texts, growing expressed the poet's desire and effort to reconstruct an idealized everyday life. Third, Su Shi's poetic engagement in his existential crisis in banishment was manifested in two aspects. His somatospiritual unease of hunger and "internal heat" (*nei re* 內熱) revealed his struggle in material impoverishment and political persecution. His poetic co-existence with the herbs, however, offered a resilient mode of being within the hostile reality. Through a close reading of Su Shi's herb-planting poems with adjacent textual and material contexts, this experimental project hopes to illuminate an imbricated modality of "knowing, growing, and being" as a framework for reading herb cultivation poetry and understanding its poetic voice on existential inquiry.

Haifeng Shang (The Education University of Hong Kong), "Attaining the Way at Snowy Mountains: A Religious Interpretation of the Snow Metaphor in the Literature and Art of Su Shi"

The literary inquisition of 1079 against the Song politician Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101) had a significant impact on shaping his cultural legacy. After being exiled to Huangzhou, Su Shi, who had embraced Buddhism, sought solace in the concept of perfect enlightenment, which holds that all beings possess a pure 'Buddha embryo.' He began to frequently reference this idea in his artistic and literary works, using the metaphor of pure snow. While these connections have largely gone unnoticed by scholars of the Song and Qing Dynasties, as well as contemporary scholars, they were examined in annotations on Su Shi's work by the Muromachi period (1336-1573) Japanese poet-monk Banri Shūkyū (萬里集九, 1428-ca.1507). Banri's insightful commentaries discussed the interplay between catharsis and religious allegory in Su Shi's snow poems, prose, and murals, offering new and distinct interpretations of the legacy of one of the most revered figures of Song culture. This paper aims to explore how Su Shi's allegorical use of snow endowed a well-known series of exile literary and artistic works, traditionally associated with catharsis, with deeper religious motifs.

Ronald C. Egan (Stanford), "On the Other Rhapsodies (*Fu* 賦) by Su Shi"

Inspired by a comment on Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) *fu* by the twelfth-century scholar Hong Mai 洪邁, this paper examines the less well-known compositions in the *fu* genre by Su Shi. The focus is on the way Su Shi personalizes compositions in this form, moving from the long tradition of epideictic

display to a more intellectual or lyrical purpose. Su Shi still retains the basic structure of dialogue or debate between opposing viewpoints. But now one of those viewpoints is Su Shi's own, expressed unabashedly in his own voice rather than in that of a fictional interlocutor. Yet, surprisingly enough, this privileging of his first-person perspective does not prevent self-criticism or even self-mockery before a piece concludes. His masterful "*Fu* on a Wily Rat" 黠鼠賦 exemplifies Su's fondness for doubling-back on a direction he had seemed to be going as well as self-deprecation as a piece winds down. In conclusion, this paper returns to the best known of Su's works in this form, his two *fu* on Red Cliff, to see what this excursion into his rarely anthologized compositions in the *fu* form may contribute to our understanding of the nature and meaning of those canonical works.

Session 7 B: Medieval Poetry II;
Chair: Madeline K. Spring (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)
3:55 –5:10 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Zeb Raft (Academia Sinica), "Aspects of Presentation in Hervey de Saint-Denys's Translation of Tang Poetry"

Published in 1862, Léon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys's (1822-1892) *Poésies de l'époque des Thang* (Poems of the Tang era) was perhaps the first European book to treat classical Chinese poetry seriously. It comprises a 110-page introduction to the art of Chinese poetry, followed by translations of 97 poems by 35 poets. (Nearly half of the poem total belongs to Li Bai and Du Fu, who are placed first and are represented by 24 and 22 poems respectively.) Because he was a sinologist, not a poet, Hervey de Saint-Denys's translations have not received the attention and analysis given to those of his younger contemporary Judith Gautier (1845-1917), whose *Le livre de jade* (The book of jade, first edition 1867) partly reflects the influence of his work. Scholarly or not, however, the same question that animates inquiry into Gautier's translations can be asked profitably of Hervey de Saint-Denys as well: how did he present Chinese poetry, as he knew it, to his European readership? This study examines the rhetorical features of his translation, including the points emphasized in the introduction and in his short biographies of the poets; his deployment of stanzas and other paratextual devices; the degree to which the translations are explanatory, sometimes in open contrast with word-for-word versions given in his footnotes; his quotation of Chinese commentary on individual poems; and, last but not least, purposefully or inadvertently, his construal of the Chinese texts.

Guoying Gong (Columbia), "Poetry-In-Action: Du Fu's Negotiation of Belonging and Engagement with News Amid Crisis"

This paper explores Du Fu's (712-770) poetic engagement with news, particularly his responses to a disrupted information network in his post-rebellion works. While his poems on public affairs have long been cited as evidence of his political insight and loyalty to the empire, I emphasize their distinctive mode of writing—marked by immediacy, contingency, and agency—and argue that they should be viewed as interventions rather than mere documents, representations, or reflections. On one level, I examine the unstable ground upon which many of these poems were composed—a fluid, often unreliable web of information—highlighting Du Fu's dramatization of his struggle with

delayed or uncertain reports, including poems written in response to news that later proved false or unfounded. On another level, I draw attention to the wide range of attitudes and roles he adopts, revealing the situational nature of his responses—sometimes even taking contradictory stances on the same issue—which complicates the traditional image of him as the "poet-historian." Ultimately, I argue that Du Fu's contingent engagement with a fractured world of communication and authority arises less from fixed ideological commitments than from an ongoing search for identity, community, and belonging amid crisis and isolation. Whether composing "poetry-as-memorial" or adopting the panegyrical style of court poetry despite his removal from court life, Du Fu was writing with a broader audience in mind—seeking to participate in the social world of the cultural elite from which he had been estranged, yet to which he continued to lay claim.

Li E (Susquehanna University), "The Representation of Self and Things in Lu You's (1125–1210) Poems"

This paper explores the themes of self and things in the poems of the prolific Southern Song poet Lu You (1125-1210). Previous scholarship has examined Lu You's *ziyong* 自詠 ("Chanting on Myself") poems, or those with the word *zi* 自 ("self") in the title, which continue the poetic practice of the Tang poet Bai Juyi. These works reflect Lu You's daily writing habits and his multifaceted representation of the self, including self-projection, self-scrutiny, and self-reflection. In addition to these *ziyong* poems, this paper considers Lu You's frequent use of a distinctive syntactic pattern—the word *zi* followed by a verb or verbal phrase—to describe himself and other beings. This usage reveals his views on autonomy, naturalness, and spontaneity. The paper highlights Lu You's equal attention to self and things, as well as his engagement with both interior spaces and external surroundings. It also aims to uncover Daoist and contemporary Daoxue influences in his poetry—an area that remains underexplored in current scholarship. Although Lu You held sinecure posts for most of his life, he constructs a strong and nuanced self-image not only through autobiographical writing but also through his *ziyong* poems and his repeated use of the aforementioned syntactic pattern.

SATURDAY

Session 8 A: Strange Writing in Early Modern China; Chair: Yuming He (UC Davis)

11:00–11:25 AM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Michelle Low (University of Northern Colorado), "Uncanny Pregnancy and the Birth of a God in Late Imperial Chinese Novels"

Two late imperial novels, the 16th century *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 and the 18th century *Nüxian waishi* 女仙外史, both feature gods and demons in their stories and center historical narratives blended with the supernatural, and significant interference in human affairs by divine and demonic figures. In Chapter 2 of *Nüxian waishi*, the titular "lady transcendent," Chang'e, is born to an exemplary, yet reclusive statesman and his wife. Her gestation – lasting 15 months – is unusually long, and is one of the markers foreshadowing her future greatness as the earthly incarnation of an otherworldly being.

Likewise, Chapter 12 of *Fengshen yanyi* tells the story of the human birth of Nezha. His gestation lasts an extraordinary three and a half years. Other striking motifs the narratives share include ominous dreams the mothers have on the eve of their births, and strange lights and marvelous noises at the moment of their births. In both stories, the unusually prolonged gestations are only briefly mentioned as a point of concern by the fathers, worried that the babies might be a demon or a monster. Notably absent is the voice of the mothers or the undoubtedly uncomfortable experience of extended pregnancy. While there has been some research on miraculous births, there is little on uncanny pregnancies. This paper compares the two births of Chang'e and Nezha in these two chapters, and offers some preliminary findings about the birth of gods and other weird pregnancies in Chinese literature.

Wenfei Wang (Harvard), "Surgery and Prosthesis in Early Modern Chinese Narrative"
What did it mean to cut open the human body in early modern China? While it is widely believed that anatomy, rooted in the European tradition, never played a role in the realm of traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese writers were fascinated by incredible spectacles of surgical intervention recorded in strange tales during the time. These tales reflect how scholars theorized and imagined the treatment of individual organs and prosthesis, and thus propose an alternative vision of anatomy when the intellectual sphere was undergoing sea change in the early modern era. This paper focuses on the tale "The Biography of Zhao Xiqian" (Zhao Xiqian zhuan 趙希乾傳) in *Yü Chu xinzhi* 虞初新志 (New Tales of Yü Chu) complied by the publisher Zhang Chao 張潮 (1650-1707) in the early Qing period. While adopting the familiar trope of "slicing one's legs to save one's parents" *(gegu liaoqin* 割股療親), this tale challenges the common belief in the correspondence between the moral ideal and its designated reward by offering an uncanny version of the mutilated body. I argue that the displaced organs and attached prosthesis reflect how the grotesque anatomical imaginations intertwine with the discourse of moral normativity upon the collapse of the cosmological order. The paper not only demonstrates how anatomical imaginations in the framework of Chinese medicine negotiate with the convention of biographical writings on filiality but also how the voyeuristic gaze toward the anatomical structure reconditions the perception and epistemology of the body with the imagery of prosthesis.

Kangni Huang (USC), "The Politics of Anonymity: Textual Circulation in Late Imperial Strange Tales"
How does a text exist in our world? So much effort in literary studies has revolved around unpacking this question, tracing the production, evolution, and reception of literary writings within different contexts. At the same time, the ways in which we, as scholars, approach such a question also reveal our methodological stances. Those keen on the author's intention might attribute more agential power to the expressive desire of the human mind, whereas those focused on the material conditions of textual circulation might prioritize historical contingency over individual choices. This paper explores how strange tales from late imperial China answer the above question, as a great number of stories featuring ghosts and spirits are in fact also about textual circulation. These stories often take acts of reading and writing as the premise, or sometimes the center of, bizarre encounters. *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 (*Notes from the Yuewei Studio*) by Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805) is especially devoted to such anecdotes, many of which center on anonymous texts such as spirit

writing (*fuji* 扶乩), poems attributed to ghosts, and forgotten inscriptions. Specifically, I hope to read these narratives for their potential on theorizing the thorny question of anonymity shadowed by a culture that idolized authorship and authority.

Session 8 B: Aspects of Religious Culture II; Chair: Rao Xiao (Irvine)
11:00–11:25 AM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Shuheng Xiang (ASU), "An Inward Turn in the Discourse of the Daoist Body in Tao Hongjing's Writings"
This research note presents one piece of evidence from Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景(456-536) writings, ambiguous but generative, that inspires us to reconsider a ritual transformation of submitting the petition (*baizhang* 拜章) from early Celestial Master tradition to later Daoist practices. Namely, whether the meditation of dispatching bodily officials together with other associated spirits and divines, titled as *cunsi* 存思, recorded in the *Petition Almanac of Master Red Pine* 赤松子章曆, is originally embedded within the earlier ritual framework, as reconstructed by previous scholars. Drawing on Tao's accounts and annotations recorded in the *Concealed Instructions on the Ascent to Perfection* 登真隱訣, I argue that the rite of *cunsi* is a rather later adoption, which may indicate a shift in the Daoist ritual orientation, *i.e.*, a general tendency towards interiorization in the medieval Daoist practices. This inward turn essentially suggests that the Daoist body, as both the vehicle and goal, is an enclosed, self-sufficient system capable of generating its own transcendence. While earlier scholarship often attributes this tendency to a Buddhist influence, others have argued it reflects an internal Daoist unfolding. Yet recent in-depth studies of Tao Hongjing have complicated this binary, suggesting that scholars of Chinese religion should move beyond a simple influence-reception framework in examining interreligious exchange.

Meng Tong (UCLA), "Repentance before Ascension to Tuṣita Heaven: Revisiting the Sui-Dynasty *Maitreya's Ascension* Illustrations at Mogao Caves, Dunhuang"
The theme of Boddhisattva Maitreya and his ascent to Tuṣita Heaven is a significant and enduring motif in Dunhuang Buddhist art. Among its varied representations at the Mogao Caves, composite depictions of a cross-legged Maitreya seated in a palatial setting surrounded by narrative vignettes did not emerge until around the turn of the seventh century CE. Scholars have generally interpreted these paintings as preliminary illustrations of Buddhist scriptures, particularly the *Mile shangsheng jing* (T452 *Sutra of Maitreya's Ascension*). While this interpretive framework is not entirely incorrect, it deserves critical re-examination in light of previously overlooked visual materials and recent scholarship on Buddhist ritual practices in medieval China. This paper reconsiders these "earliest" illustrations of *Matreya's Ascension* at Mogao as conceptual diagrams of Buddhist rituals centered on repentance (*chanhui* 懺悔) and visual contemplation (*changuan* 禪觀)—two meritorious and interconnected practices essential to securing rebirth in transcendent Buddhist abodes, including Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven. Although meditation and penance were hardly new to Dunhuang practitioners, it is noteworthy that these paintings were made during a period of increasing ritual systematization, led by influential Buddhist patriarchs such as Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), Xinxing 信行 (540-594), and their disciples. Beyond codified texts, communal repentance rituals—performed by

clerical and lay communities—formed part of this vibrant and evolving religious landscape. Funded by diverse patrons and shaped by multisensory experiences, shared participation, and memory-making, these real-life ritual events likely inspired artists to integrate ritual-oriented vignettes into the iconography of Maitreya's celestial abode.

Quan Gan (Rice), "Buddhism Transformed: From the Viewpoint of Documentary Practices in Late Tang"

In this presentation, I argue that two documentary changes in late Tang accelerated the transition from "Buddhism in China" to "Chinese Buddhism." At an individual level, commemorative biographies of eminent monks became increasingly written in literary genres prescribed for Tang officials, such as the "descriptions of conduct" (*xing zhuang* 行狀). I show this with the example of the posthumous biographies of Master Bukong 不空 (d. 774). At an institutional level, Buddhist leaders used principles devised by Tang officials for imperial administration to structure monastic communities. This development becomes clear through a comparison between the "Brief History of the Monastic Community" (*sengshi lüe* 僧史略) by Zanning 贊寧 (d. 1001) and the "Comprehensive Statutes" (*tongdian* 通典) by Du You 杜佑 (d. 812). Thus, the study of documentary practices can bridge two important yet often isolated scholarly debates, namely the periodization of Buddhism in China and the "Tang-Song transition theory."

Session 9 A: Linguistics; Chair: Steve Wadley (Portland State University)

11:40 AM–12:55 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Linjia Weng (University of Washington), "The Dangerous Equation: Graphic Similarity ≠ Etymological Affiliation—A Case Study of 葉 and 世 Belonging to Distinct Word Families"

Qiu (1998) proposed the character "世" was graphically derived from "葉," citing their phonological proximity under Li's (1971) OC system. This view has been widely adopted, with scholars such as Baxter & Sagart (2014) and Pan (2024) treating "世" and "葉" as belonging to the same word family. However, their reconstructed roots differ: B&S reconstruct a root with *a, while Pan reconstructs one with *e. This paper presents six types of evidence to argue "葉" and "世" belong to two distinct word families, and argues that phonological and graphic similarity alone cannot justify an etymological relationship in OC without cross-validated phonological, semantic and paleographic evidence.

1. Rhyming in the *Shijing*: "世" rhymes exclusively with *a-type syllables, while "葉" rhymes only with *e-type.
2. Xiesheng Series: "世"-series characters appear only in MC division III; "葉"-series characters appear in divisions III and IV with lateral initials.
3. Sino-Tibetan Cognates: Words in the "葉" family align with Tibetan forms typical of OC *e-type roots (Hill 2012).
4. Min dialects: The "世" family aligns with *a-type reflexes in Proto-Min. (Weng 2023)
5. Semantic Domains: In pre-Qin texts, "世" is semantically linked to "greatness," while "葉" is linked to "flatness."

6. Paleography: Excavated materials suggest "世" originally depicted bound toes, implying punishment, whereas "葉" shows "grass" and "wood," resembling plant imagery. (Guo 2024)

David Prager Branner (Independent Scholar), "Old Chinese Rhyming and the Mǐn Dialect Group"

The first element of Old Chinese phonology ever recognized was the *yūnbù* 韻部 (rhyming categories or "rimes"). That is not surprising since it has been evident since the early middle era that ancient rhyming texts do not rhyme well in standard phonology. Many aspects of Old Chinese phonology for which analytical or reconstructive schemes have been proposed in the modern period are contentious to varying degrees, but on the whole, the *yùnbù* have remained comparatively stable, at least as categories. How various hands today understand their vocalism (the main vowels they contain) and their subdivisions has evolved, yes. But in contrast to the initials, rime codas (the endings of syllables), and the possibility of affixation, on the question of lexical incidence (which words appear in which categories) *yùnbù* are secure as a whole. No doubt that is because rhyming is involved in how they have been defined. The late Jerry Norman held an acutely distinctive point of view. During the middle years of his research life he came to doubt the value of rhyming texts in application historical phonology, feeling there was a sharp divide between what could be found in written records and "popular" language — words that have remained in living use by living people, generation after generation, for extremely long periods of time. Based on previously unpublished documents, this paper describes Norman's use of popular-language evidence from the modern Mǐn dialects in describing the Old Chinese *yùnbù*.

Richard VanNess Simmons (The University of Hong Kong), "Hangzhou Bridges in Verse and on the Map: The Lilt of the Hangzhou *ér* 兒, and the Sights and Sounds of the City's Dialect in Historical Times"

This talk looks at the city of Hangzhou 杭州 and its older dialect as a window on the nature of urban linguistic environment in Late Imperial China. Over the course of the late 20th century, the city of Hangzhou has been transformed by modern development; and the linguistic landscape of city has also undergone dramatic change. It is now a bustling twenty-first century metropolis that reaches well beyond its original historical dimensions and encompasses a large portion of what used to be the surrounding countryside. The language that was once confined to the area within the original Hangzhou city wall has spilled out into the surrounding areas; and the dialects of what were surrounding villages and towns have mingled with the city dialect both inside and outside of the footprint of the old urban realm. All of this has taken place against the backdrop of the powerful influence of Pǔtōnghuà. The outcome is a changed, ever evolving modern form of the Hangzhou dialect. Contrasting markedly with that, a snapshot of the dialect recorded in the 1980's reveals glimpses of the city's dialect of the past, the language of Old Hangzhou, or Lǎopài Hángzhōu huà 老派杭州话, a language that had evolved in the setting of traditional Chinese society. Drawing upon nineteenth century maps and traditional storyteller's verse, this communication considers the nature of Hangzhou's social and physical urban environment in traditional times and how its dialect was shaped by and responded to its contemporary milieu.

Session 9 B: Health Matters; Chair: Antje Richter (CU Boulder)
11:40 AM–12:55 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Mark Pitner (Elmira College), "What Does it Mean to Be 'Incomplete'?"
This paper will examine one entry in the early imperial Chinese legal codes, a line of code that speaks to how the imperial state regulated the power of parents over their children. It is a passage that is cited in a wide range of important studies on the history of early imperial society from family planning and infanticide to disability studies, but it is rarely examined in detail. In particular, the term *bu quan* 不全 is flatly read as "incomplete" or "not whole" and understood to mean "deformed" or "disabled". Much like the negation present in deformed, disabled, and incomplete, at first glance the meaning seems quite simple, and in most instances it is. However, when we examine the underlying meaning of the root word, the negation of it is not so simple especially in the context of the universalizing nature of legal language. This paper will examine the use of the word quan in a broad range of contexts paying particular attention to Qin and Han legal usage as well as in medical literature to better understand how to read this line in early imperial legal code.

Sean Bradley (Independent Scholar), "Intoxicating Aromatics: Is There More to *lan* 蘭 in Ancient Chinese Literature and Culture?"
Identification and translation of *lan* in Chinese literature has been a topic of discussion especially in the world of poetry. Thoroughwort, eupatory, and orchid, have all been used in modern translations depending on the authors preference for reading aesthetic or precise identification. While this discussion highlights one of the many challenges in early Chinese poetry, it ignores the varied uses of *lan* in the broader botanical literature and its early connection to another complicated botanical term, *zhi* 芷. Though the single character *lan* presents one interesting philological discussion, the multiple binomes such as *mulan* 木蘭, *peilan* 佩蘭, *shilan* 石蘭, and several others, along with its relationship to *zhi*, point to a potential understanding of *lan* that is emphasizes its role and uses in the broader context of early Chinese literature and culture.

SJ Zanolini (Johns Hopkins), "Shi Chengjin: A Health Influencer in 18th-Century Yangzhou?"
Everyday encyclopedia are an understudied source of common health knowledge. *Transmitted Family Treasures (Chuan jia bao* 傳家寶), first published in 1739, was a particularly influential and well-regarded text within this popular late imperial genre. Its author, Shi Chengjin 石成金 (1660 - after 1739), offered freewheeling, frequently witty, and always plainly stated advice about topics he deemed essential to personal and household welfare. These included everything from the proper conduct for one's gender and station in life to methods of health cultivation including sleeping, sexual hygiene, and dietary temperance. In this paper, I aim to offer three takeaway points. The first is a general argument for reading *Transmitted Family Treasures* as a key archive of elite health knowledge in the eighteenth century. The second relates to the prominence of *Transmitted Family Treasures* in making elite knowledge of healthcare practices common knowledge, taking as my example Shi's discussions of dietetics, i.e. medical theorizations of digestive physiology and food properties. I briefly situate his advice within a longer-tailed genealogy, before examining parallel textual examples drawn from other vernacular sources such as the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and later

dietetic guidebooks. Third and last, I close with reflections on Shi as a proto "health influencer," demonstrating how his approach to authorship and subsequent intellectual influence reveals dynamics common to public-facing science writing across time and space.

Session 10 A: Questioning Historiography; Chair: Michael Nylan (Berkeley)

2:30 –4:10 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Yue Liu (CU Boulder), "Cultural Dynamism at the Crossroads: Horse Consuming Strategies in the Central and East Asian Steppes, First Millennium BCE"

This study investigates horse consumption as a key indicator of pastoralist lifeways and its role in shaping cultural interactions between nomadic steppe societies and sedentary East Asian civilizations during the 1st millennium BCE. While orthodox Chinese ethics often viewed horse consumption as unacceptable, archaeological evidence reveals its presence along the peripheries of the Central Plains, particularly in two distinct ecological zones: the Altai–Tianshan Mountain corridor and the Mongolia–Gobi–Ordos steppe-desert region. Drawing on proteomic analysis of dental calculus, lipid residue studies, and osteological data-including butchery marks and head-and-hoof burial patterns-this paper compares regional strategies of horse utilization, encompassing both meat and dairy production as well as ritual behavior. The findings demonstrate that, far from being marginal, these zones constituted a dynamic arena of cross-cultural exchange. The emergence of horse consumption in these peripheral regions suggests the existence of a transmission route from central Mongolia to the Central Plains that was distinct from the traditionally emphasized Hexi Corridor of the Silk Road. This work challenges history narratives centered on sedentary civilizations by highlighting the dynamic cross-regional interactions that shaped the interconnected world of ancient Eurasia. Ultimately, the study reframes Inner Asia not as a distant periphery, but as an integral and active participant in the making of East Asian antiquity.

Yue Wu (ASU), "Trimming Memory: Competing Narratives of the Yongning Pagoda's Destruction"

This paper examines how two contemporary texts constructed sharply different meanings around the destruction of the Yongning Pagoda, a towering nine-story structure widely recognized as a symbol of the Northern Wei's imperial power and grandeur. Its catastrophic destruction in a fire on the eve of the dynasty's collapse was inevitably interpreted as a portent of the empire's fate. Despite sharing this recognition of the pagoda's symbolic weight, the *Luoyang qielan ji* (completed ca. 547 CE) and *Wei shu* (completed 554 CE) reflect the opposing political agendas of two factions competing over the empire's future. Yang Xuanzhi's *Luoyang qielan ji*, representing a literati group loyal to the Yuan imperial family during the Eastern Wei (534–550), records the citizens' profound sorrow and lingering trauma over the blaze. By recounting a later mirage of the pagoda seen over the distant ocean, Yang evokes hope for the dynasty's revival in a renewed and more luminous form. In contrast, *Wei shu*, compiled under the Gao family in the Northern Qi (550–576), reframes the same event as Heaven's will abandoning the Wei. By omitting the naturalistic context of the mirage, it depicts the pagoda "flying" eastward into the sea, signaling the mandate's transfer to the Gao family. This paper demonstrates how historical writing served as a battleground for competing claims to

legitimacy. It further recovers the suppressed perspective of the Yuan faction, whose voice, though silenced politically, persisted through later texts such as the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, *Zizhi tongjian*, and some other Buddhist narratives, revealing traces of resistance against the Gao family's imposed "authoritative" memory.

Wu Ke (CU Boulder), "Legitimizing the Illegitimate: Non-Chinese Rulers and Sinitic Tropes in the *Jin shu* 晉書"

How were non-Chinese rulers, especially those who ruled over the Central Plain, represented in Chinese standard histories? This paper delves into the contradictory portrayals of such rulers in the thirty-volume section titled "Chronological Records" (*Zaiji* 載記) of the *Book of Jin* (*Jin shu* 晉書). Unique among all standard histories, this section is devoted entirely to the biographies of non-Chinese rulers and presents a notable tension. While the paratextual framework, including prefaces and evaluative comments, underscores their otherness and illegitimacy, the narratives themselves adopt tropes commonly associated with legitimate and even exemplary Chinese emperors, such as miraculous births, auspicious physiognomy, and literary cultivation. Rather than treating this tension between paratext and narrative as a simple inconsistency, this paper argues that it reflects deeper political and cultural anxieties surrounding questions of legitimacy and identity. I identify and examine three interrelated strategies. First, the structure and paratext of the "Zaiji" reinforce a normative Sinitic order by emphasizing the rulers' status as "barbarians." Second, the incorporation of familiar imperial tropes allows for their partial assimilation into a shared historical imaginary of legitimate rule. Third, by examining the perspectives of the compilers, I suggest that these contradictions mirror the Tang court's own ambivalence, particularly that of Emperor Taizong. His direct involvement in the compilation of the *Jin shu* points to a need to legitimize his authority as a ruler of non-Chinese ancestry and to defend a flexible, dual approach to foreign policy.

Heng Du (Wellesley), "Why Did Sima Qian Rank Confucius among the 'Hereditary Houses'? A Footnote to Liao Ping 廖平 (1852–1932)"

Why is the biography of Confucius—an alleged sans culottes (*buyi* 布衣)—included among those of the aristocratic "Hereditary Houses" (*shijia* 世家) in the *Shiji*? In the Chinese scholarly tradition, this question has been debated across centuries. In this paper, I revisit the late Qing scholar Liao Ping's argument, namely what defines a "hereditary house" is not lineage or status alone, but its temporal endurance: the ability of a family or school to persist through time. By juxtaposing all chapters in *the* Hereditary Houses, I identify textual support for Liao's observation, showing that in this section of *Shiji,* Confucius and his legacy alone achieve unbroken temporal transcendence. His perdurance is cast in three distinct forms—biological lineage, discipleship, and textual transmission. Viewed from this angle, the entire Hereditary Houses section may function as a foil to Confucius as the sole true survivor of time. I conclude by situating this portrayal within the Han-period transformations in the conception of textual production and authorship.

Session 10 B: Inscriptions Through the Ages;
Chair: David Prager Branner (Independent Scholar)
2:30 –4:10 PM — Norlin Library, Room N410

Crismon Smith Lewis (Columbia), "Playful Aesthetics in Western Zhou China: Reading the Bo Gong Fu *fu* 伯公父簠 Inscription"

Throughout the Western Zhou (1045–771 BCE) dynasty, lengthy textual inscriptions on ritual bronze vessels primarily commemorated events of individual merit, such as official appointment/award, military exploits, or even successful legal suits. Such inscriptions primarily serve to champion the commissioner of the bronze object, whether in the eyes of deceased relatives and/or among living kin and peers. Yet by the late Western Zhou (857–771 BCE) period, we also begin to encounter a few inscriptions that are more reflexive in nature, as they extol the bronze vessel's metallic ingredients, the types of food it serves, as well as its ritual and social functions. In some cases, these inscribed paeans to their metallic carriers rhythmically innovate upon formulaic locutions in ways that demonstrate a curious degree of literary brilliance and poeticism. This paper will focus on one such example known as the Bo Gong Fu *fu* 伯公父簠, a small, rectangular-shaped bronze food container inscribed with an identical, 61-character text on its lid and inner base. I will demonstrate how the rhythmic text's content and linguistic elements accentuate duality, a concept doubly and playfully manifested in the physicality of the two inscriptions and the *fu*-vessel itself. I will also discuss how this and related bronzes may point to aesthetic sensibilities shared among literate elites of the late Western Zhou—one lost in early Chinese transmitted literature yet preserved in some excavated epigraphic sources.

Alexei Ditter (Reed College), "Remembering Through Poetry: Reflections on the Role of Verse in Late Medieval Chinese Entombed Epitaphs"

Late medieval Chinese *muzhiming* were conventionally composed following a dual-narrative structure: a prose preface (*xu*) followed by a verse elegy (*ming*). The interaction between these two parts of the text enabled the construction of a more comprehensive identity for the deceased, grounding them in the lived reality of their families and communities while simultaneously elevating them to the status of archetypal ancestor. In this paper, I examine three kinds of deviations from this conventional structure. First, I analyze instances where no elegy is included, exploring the justifications given for its absence. Second, I examine cases in which *muzhiming* feature multiple elegies, comparing their content with each other, as well as with the prose preface, to understand what gaps in the first elegy may have prompted the composition of a second. Finally, I explore cases where the preface is written in verse rather than prose, investigating why this choice was made and how it affected the commemoration of the deceased. Through analysis of these variations, I aim to offer new insights into the knowledge and expertise required to compose elegies, their content and significance, and their central role in the late medieval *muzhiming* as a vital component of commemoration.

Timothy M. Davis (BYU), "The Production and Purposes of Imperially Commissioned Epitaphs Written for Members of the Tang Ruling Family"

Entombed epitaph inscriptions (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) produced for members of the Tang (618–907) ruling family provide insights into the institutional processes by which imperially commissioned

epitaphs were created. Three epitaphs, produced for imperial princes during the ninth century, will be compared:

1. "The Entombed Epitaph with Preface for the Late Prince of Ji"
   唐故紀王墓誌銘並序 841 AD (16 歲)
2. "The Entombed Epitaph with Preface for the Late Prince of Mian"
   唐故沔王墓誌並序 844 AD (37 歲)
3. "The Entombed Epitaph with Preface for the Late Prince of Kui"
   唐故夔王墓誌銘並序 863 AD (20 歲)

The composition of each epitaph was assigned to a member of the Hanlin Academy 翰林院. In each case, the name and titles of these authors, as well as the names and titles of the calligraphers (including the distinct calligraphers of the seal-script graphs carved on the cover of each epitaph), are inscribed on the relevant stone—appearing just before the text of the epitaph itself. In addition, two of the four texts name the official from the imperial secretariate who actually carved the graphs into the stones. From the explicit recognition given to the courtiers involved in the fashioning of these epitaphs, we see that their production was unambiguously a group effort. This study will demonstrate how epitaphs produced according to institutional protocols and imperially sanctioned procedures were embedded in the social and bureaucratic fabric of elite Tang society. In addition, conducting close readings of the texts of these epitaphs will shed light on our understanding of how the Tang ruling family used the untimely death of its members to strengthen its legitimacy, and to shape the public perception of its values, principles, and identity during a period of political instability.

Meimei Zhang (Occidental College), "Sacred Landscapes of Yanzhou in Inscribed Texts from the Tang to the Yuan Periods"

This paper examines how inscriptions shaped the sacred landscapes of Yanzhou from the Tang to Yuan dynasties. Drawing on surviving epigraphic records from Buddhist and Daoist sites, including temple steles, cliff carvings, and renovation inscriptions, it explores how successive generations of patrons, clerics, and literati used writing to define and sanctify religious space. Although many physical monuments have disappeared, their textual traces in local gazetteers, literary anthologies, and epigraphic compilations reveal the enduring role of inscription as both a material artifact and a vehicle of religious meaning. Focusing on selected case studies across Yanzhou's multi-religious terrain, the paper analyzes how inscriptions rooted cosmic narratives in specific landscapes and mediated tensions between official authority and local religious claims. It also investigates how meanings accumulated over time as sites were rebuilt, revised, and reinscribed across dynasties. Situated at the historical crossroads of Zhejiang, Anhui, and Jiangxi, Yanzhou's largely overlooked epigraphic legacy offers new insight into how sacred geography was constructed in medieval Jiangnan through the interplay of text, memory, and environment. By tracing these developments over six centuries, the study challenges dominant models that focus solely on major pilgrimage centers or isolated rural cults. Instead, it highlights a dynamic middle ground where nature and culture, state and local actors, and textual and material traditions intersected to shape religious life in lived landscapes.

Session 11: Three on Li; Chair: Ronald C. Egan (Stanford)

2:30 –4:10 PM — Norlin Library, Room M549

Timothy Wai Keung Chan (The Education University of Hong Kong), "Writing on Whose Behalf? Li Bai's Emulation of the *Chuci* Style"

In the collected works of Li Bai (701−762) there is a poem entitled "Expressing Feelings, Written on Someone's behalf in the Chu Song Style" 代寄情楚詞體. This poem title may or may not have been given by Li himself, but the categories of "on someone's behalf" and "sending to someone" form two prominent themes in Li's works. The poem in question is not written in the ancient-style typical to Li Bai but, as the title claims, in imitation of the *Chuci* style. The present paper is a discussion of the making of this poem through a comparison with the possible models of Li's composition in the *Chuci* anthology in identifying its provenance of imagery, meter, and the later exegetic "interference" in the making of the alleged allegories. The discussion will take into account the long tradition of the allegorical reading and writing in the *Chuci* tradition to analyze Li Bai's intent in this poem and other similar ones written in the voice of the forlorn persona. It also examines in what ways Li Bai incorporates the *Chuci* meters and merges them with the *fu* genre in his compositions under the influence of the *Chuci*.

Nicholas Morrow Williams (ASU), "Li Bai's 'Rhapsody on the Great Hunt': A Manifesto on Political Modesty and Aesthetic Magnificence"

Li Bai's "Rhapsody on the Great Hunt" (Dalie fu 大獵賦) has typically been viewed as one of his earlier compositions not displaying much originality: a virtuoso imitation of the epideictic *fu* poems of the Han dynasty. On closer examination, however, it is a mature work that departs dramatically from its models and makes a grand statement of some of the ideas that guide Li Bai's whole oeuvre. The meaning of the poem is closely tied to the inherent significance of hunting, an activity which is at the same time an idle entertainment, and also a display of the martial prowess and material might of the sovereign. Just like Li Bai's own poetry, it is a matter of bravado and showmanship that is also undergirded by serious purpose. Though Li Bai's poem concludes with a repudiation of hunting as a wasteful extravagance, his denunciation segues smoothly into a celebration of the emperor as a Daoist hero-transcendent. Li Bai's enthusiasm for hunting derives from his fondness for chivalrous deeds, but also from his admiration for aesthetic spectacle. Li Bai shows that true magnificence lies not so much in the physically vast or numerous as in uniqueness of vision and expansiveness of spirit. But this aesthetic has consequences for politics as well, because the wise ruler governs a state in such a way that unique talents like Li Bai himself are able to flourish.

Paul W. Kroll (CU Boulder), "Li Bo and His Precursors"

After some historically pointed remarks about a currently modish term in literary criticism, this communication, with a nod to Borges on Kafka, looks at a few passages from writers who predated Li Bo—both within and without China—where, because of our accustomed familiarity with Li Bo's distinctive style, we can identify anachronistically a prevenient literary voice and certain mannerisms that we now regard as peculiarly characteristic of Li Bo.