

The Twilight of the Masters: Masters Literature (*zishu*) in Early Medieval China

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INTRODUCTION

In the early period of Chinese history, the notion of authorship is closely tied to the notion of sagehood. It is not that being a sage necessarily entails creating and writing (*zuo* 作), but rather that one must be a sage to create and write. In his paper “The Temptations of Sagehood, or: The Rise and Decline of Sagely Writing in Early China,” Michael Puett makes a compelling case arguing that over the course of the second century, with the spread of paper and increasing commonality of writing, the claim to sagehood no longer served as a basis for textual authority.¹ As a result of the technological advance and shifts in the cultural paradigm of writing and sagehood, writing of all kinds was produced in increasing quantity, but in this essay I shall focus on one particular type of writing known as “Masters’ Works” or “Masters Literature,” *zishu* 子書.

“The Masters” (*zhuzi* 諸子) is a Han term used to refer to pre-Qin thinkers, and the further division of the Masters into six or ten distinct groups is largely a function of Western Han imperial library cataloguing carried out by the two court bibliographers, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 B.C.) and Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–76 B.C.). Despite the messy compilation and transmission history of “Masters’ Works,” there is no disagreement on what constitute the core texts of Masters Literature among scholars of Chinese literature and intellectual history. It is when we come to the “lower limit” of this type of writing that we encounter problems. As Wiebke Denecke states, “The end of ‘Masters Literature’ is of course open to debate.”² While I fully recognize the complexities of this issue, in this essay I propose to tackle the problem from a formal perspective by emphatically pointing out a largely ignored but nevertheless crucial fact: namely, the form of *zishu*—typically entitled X-*zi* (X standing for author’s surname or an epithet) and consisting of a number of chapters on social, ethical, and political issues, each chapter under a subject heading—continued to be frequently employed throughout early medieval China. As a matter of fact, *zishu* was produced in voluminous quantity during the third and fourth centuries, and gradually lost its appeal and resonance only from the fifth century onward.

What happened? Why did people continue to write in the tradition of what Puett describes as “the great book” or “the grand philosophical treatise” even when such an undertaking

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1. This paper was presented at “Books in Numbers: A Conference in Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Harvard-Yenching Library” in October 2003. I am grateful to Michael Puett for generously sharing his paper and for his permission to cite. This paper subsequently appeared in *Books in Numbers: Conference Papers*, ed. Wilt L. Idema (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong Press, 2007), 23–47.

2. “Mastering Chinese Philosophy: A History of the Genre of ‘Masters Literature’” 諸子百家 *zhuzi baijia* from the Analects to the Han Feizi” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard Univ., 2004), 10.

could no longer be justified by claims to sagehood, nor (in most cases) could it be attributed to “revelations from divine powers”? But perhaps even more important, why did they by and large stop toward the end of early medieval China? When the form of *zishu* eventually fell from favor, did it metamorphose into some other form? And if so, what form or forms did it disappear into, and why? What large changes in Chinese literary, cultural and intellectual history did the fate of *zishu* mirror and reflect and symptomize?

1. “A DISCOURSE OF ONE’S OWN”:

THE WRITING OF *ZISHU* IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINA

Before we discuss the writing of *zishu* in early medieval China, it is necessary to delineate what should be included under the rubric of *zishu*. Earlier I have summarized the form of *zishu* as a work typically entitled X-zi, with X standing for author’s surname or an epithet. Two factors, however, should be taken into consideration when we define a *zishu* in early medieval China. First, we must consider the flexibility of title in manuscript culture. For instance, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a *zishu* by the Prince of Huainan, Liu An 劉安 (179–122 B.C.), was originally named *The Great Light* (*Honglie* 鴻烈).³ Du Yi’s 杜夷 (258–323) *Youqiuzi* 幽求子 appears as *Dushi youqiu xinshu* 杜氏幽求新書 in the bibliographic monograph (“*Jingjizhi*” 經籍志) of *The History of the Sui* (*Sui shu* 隋書).⁴ Huan Fan’s 桓范 (d. 249) *Shiyao lun* 世要論 is cited under various titles, such as *Discourse on the Essentials of Governance* (*Zhengyao lun* 政要論), *The New Book by Huan Fan* (*Huan Fan xinshu* 桓范新書), *Huan Fan’s Discourse on Today’s World* (*Huan Fan shilun* 桓范世論), *Lord Huan’s Discourse on Today’s World* (*Huan gong shilun* 桓公世論), and *Master Huan* (*Huanzi* 桓子). *Master Liu* (*Liuzi* 劉子) is also known as *New Discourses* (*Xinlun* 新論), *Master Liu’s New Discourses* (*Liuzi xinlun* 劉子新論), or *Virtuous Words* (*Deyan* 德音).⁵ In early medieval China a piece of writing—be it prose or poetry—was quite commonly referred to by different titles, and a title was also frequently assigned by a later editor or even a copyist rather than by the author himself or herself.⁶

Another factor is the use of the term *lun* 論 (discourse or discussion[s]) to refer to a *zishu*. In early medieval China we begin to see the appearance of a relatively short treatise focusing on one particular issue, such as Xi Kang’s 嵇康 (223–262) famous “Discourse on Music Having Neither Grief Nor Joy” (“*Sheng wu ai le lun*” 聲無哀樂論). This form in many ways resembles a chapter taken out of a longer treatise customarily regarded as a *zishu*. At the same time, longer treatises in book form, which typically consist of a number of chapters on philosophical, ethical and literary issues, continued to be written in the *zishu* tradition, even when they were not entitled *Master So-and-so*. Wang Fu’s 王符 (fl. early second century) *Discourses of a Hidden Man* (*Qianfu lun* 潛夫論) and Zhongchang Tong’s 仲長統 (180–220) *Forthright Words* (*Changyan* 昌言) are good examples, as Liu Xie 劉勰, the late fifth-century literary critic, clearly treated these works as part of Masters Literature. In a chapter on “Masters” 諸子 in his *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, after listing several

3. See Gao You’s 高誘 (fl. third century) preface to the *Huainanzi*. *Quan Hou Han wen* 全後漢文, 87.945 in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, ed Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958); hereafter Yan.

4. *Sui shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 34.1002.

5. Yan, *Quan Sanguo wen* 全三國文, 37.1258.

6. For textual fluidity in manuscript culture and its significance in our studies of medieval Chinese literature and culture, see Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of A Dusty Table* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005).

works from the Western Han to the Western Jin, including Wang Fu, Zhongchang Tong and Du Yi's works cited above, Liu Xie states:

Although they are named “discourses,” they belong to Masters Literature. Why? Because a “Masters’ Work” (*zi*) sheds light on myriad things, and a “discourse” (*lun*) deals with one principle. Those writings are all extensive discussions on various topics, and so should be classified as “Masters Literature.”

雖標論名，歸乎諸子。何者？博明萬事為子，適辨一理為論。彼皆蔓延雜說，故入諸子之流。⁷

Sure enough, Liu Xie devotes a chapter to “Discourses and Discussion” (*Lunshuo* 論說), and places all the shorter treatises on individual topics in this separate category. Although he locates the origin of “discourse” in the fortuitously entitled *Lunyu* 論語, the *Analects*, and therewith manages to trace the genre back to one of the Confucian classics, the very first discourse which formally corresponds to the later discourses he cites turns out to be the chapter entitled “Discourse on Treating Everything as Equal” *Qiwu lun* 齊物論 in the *Zhuangzi*.

A longer treatise in book form might also acquire a title that combines the term Master X and the term *lun*, such as Jiang Ji's 蔣濟 (d. 249) *Master Jiang's Discourse on the Myriad Affairs* (*Jiangzi wanji lun* 蔣子萬機論), or Ruan Wu's 阮武 (fl. early third century) *Master Ruan's Correct Discourses* (*Ruanzi zhenglun* 阮子正論); *Changyan* is recorded as *Zhongchangzi changyan* 仲長子昌言 in the *Sui shu* bibliography.⁸ These works are all classified as Masters Literature in the bibliography section of the *Sui History*, which, though compiled in the early seventh century, certainly reflects the classification and cataloging system of earlier times.

An anonymous preface to Xu Gan's 徐幹 (170–217) *Balanced Discourses* (*Zhonglun* 中論) places “Master Xu” directly in the line of the pre-Qin philosophers Xunzi and Mencius:

I consider Master Xun Qing and Meng Ke to have possessed sagely talents second only to those of Confucius. Celebrated as models of original learning and for continuing to elucidate the work of the sage Confucius, each of them recorded his own surname and personal name in his writings. While their surnames and personal names are still passed on today, their style names (*zi*), however, are not. . . . Would it not be even more likely that a similar fate might await Master Xu's book, *Balanced Discourses*, since his surname and personal name are not included in the title?

予以荀卿子、孟軻懷亞聖之才，著一家之法，繼明聖人之業，皆以姓名自書，猶至於今厥字不傳. . . . 豈況徐子中論之書不以姓名為目乎？⁹

The anonymous writer of the preface then proceeds to give a detailed account of Xu Gan's name, style name, native place, family background, and life story.

This preface is noteworthy on two other accounts. First and foremost, regarding Master Literature, there is a strong sense of producing something that is distinctly individual (no matter how anachronistic and wrong this view might seem from our modern perspective), as manifested in the clause *zhu yijia zhi fa* 著一家之法, literally “bring to manifestation the models of one household.” The phrase *yijia zhi fa* is a variation of the Western Han historian Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–87 B.C.) famous statement of “completing a discourse

7. Zhan Ying 詹鏐, ed., *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 17.656.

8. *Sui shu*, 34.1004, 1006.

9. *Quan Sanguo wen* 55.1360. John Makeham's translation, with slight modification; cf. his *Balanced Discourses: A Bilingual Edition* (New Haven and Beijing: Yale Univ. Press and Foreign Language Press, 2002), xxx.

that is my own” or “completing a discourse that belongs to one household” (*cheng yijia zhi yan* 成一家之言), which refers to his monumental work of history, *Shi ji* 史記.¹⁰ This again echoes the three ways of achieving immortality as laid out in the still earlier work of history, *Zuo zhuan* 左傳: namely, establishing virtue, establishing deeds, and establishing words *liyan* 立言.¹¹ Noticeably, by the third century “a discourse that is entirely one’s own” was often explicitly associated with the writing of a long treatise in book form—in other words, a *zishu*. There is a significant difference, however, between Sima Qian’s “discourse of a household,” referring probably quite specifically to himself and his father, and the third century “discourse of one’s own,” as the latter accentuates the sense of individual achievements and individual expressions which bring fame to the individual writer.¹²

Ruan Wu, the author of *Master Ruan’s Correct Discourse*, once advised Du Shu 杜恕 (d. 252), the father of the famous *Zuo zhuan* scholar Du Yu 杜預 (222–284): “Now that you have some free time, why don’t you work on ‘completing a discourse of your own’” 成一家言?¹³ Du Shu henceforth composed *Normative Discourses* (*Tilun* 體論). Both in his letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (177–230) and in his own *zishu*, the well-known *Authoritative Discourses* (*Dianlun* 典論), Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), Emperor Wen of the Wei 魏文帝 (r. 220–226), expresses appreciation of Xu Gan’s *Balanced Discourses* as “accomplishing a discourse that is entirely his own.”¹⁴ In Cao Pi’s opinion, this enterprise enables Xu Gan to stand out among the various writers of the period—the so-called “Seven Masters of the Jian’an reign (196–220)” 建安七子—and confers on him immortal fame. In contrast with Xu Gan’s case, Cao Pi laments that Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217), another of this group of writers, who died in the plague of 217, did not write a *zishu*:

Delian (Ying Yang’s style-name) was a cultured man and had always intended to transmit and create, and indeed his talent and learning were sufficient for him to write a book. His noble aims were not realized—this is truly a great pity!

德璉常斐然有述作之意，其才學足以著書，美志不遂，良可痛惜。¹⁵

Ying Yang has in fact left behind a number of poems and *fu*, but they clearly do not constitute Cao Pi’s idea of a “book.” This brings our attention to the second noteworthy feature of the anonymous preface to *Balanced Discourses*, a feature by and large representative of the common perception of the third and fourth centuries. That is, writing a long treatise in book form is consciously set apart from writings in other literary genres like poetry and *fu*

10. *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 130.3319.

11. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed., *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, Duke Xiang 24 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 1088.

12. In a recent article Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan argue that in discussing the beliefs of early China “the *Shiji*’s use of the term [*jia*] is limited to the methods of *individual* persuaders, rather than established ‘schools’ or ‘lineages.’” They proceed to translate “*yijia zhi yan*” as “an account of ‘one vantage’ or ‘one expertise,’” and cite Jens Østergard Peterson, “there is no textual support for the standard interpretation of [*yijia*] as ‘one family.’” See Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 89.1–3 (2003): 67, 69. I find the authors’ argument regarding the use of *jia* in the context of early Chinese intellectual history generally persuasive, but I wish to stress that it is misleading to insist on a single, unchanged, monolithic usage of a word or phrase in all linguistic contexts, for even a set term is open to individual manipulations and interpretations under different circumstances. In the specific case of “*yijia zhi yan*,” a phrase used by Sima Qian to refer to *Shi ji*, a work begun by the father and completed by the son, the meanings of *yijia* as “one expertise” and “one family” do not necessarily conflict with each other; instead, they coincide with each other, either intentionally or unintentionally on Sima Qian’s part.

13. *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 16.507.

14. *Quan Sanguo wen*, 7.1089, 8.1098.

15. “Letter to Wu Zhi,” *Quan Sanguo wen*, 7.1089.

as being more serious and prestigious. Interestingly, although poetry in the canonical formula is supposed to “utter what is on one’s mind” (“*shi yan zhi*” 詩言志), in the third century *zishu*, not poetry, is considered the more intimate form by means of which one passes on “a discourse of one’s own” to posterity.

The anonymous author states thus toward the end of the preface to *Balanced Discourses*:

His natural inclination was such that he constantly wanted to reduce that of which the age had a surplus and increase that in which the ordinary people of the day were deficient. He saw men of letters follow one another in the contemporary fad of writing belles lettres, but there was never one among them who elucidated the fundamental import of the classics to disseminate the teachings of the way; or who sought the sages’ point of balance to dispel the confusion of popular contemporary mores. For this reason, he abandoned the literary genres of poetry, poetic exposition, eulogy, inscription, and encomium, and wrote the book *Balanced Discourses* in twenty-two chapters.

君之性，常欲損世之有餘，益俗之不足。見辭人美麗之文，並時而作，曾無闡弘大義。敷散道教，上求聖人之中，下救流俗之昏者，故廢詩賦頌銘贊之文，著中論之書二十二篇。¹⁶

The fourth-century thinker Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) likewise praises *zishu* at the expense of poetry and *fu*. In the chapter on “Commending Comprehensiveness” (“Shangbo” 尚博) in his *The Outer Chapters of the Master of Embracing Simplicity* (*Baopuzi waipian* 抱朴子外篇), he denounces those contemporaries who “cherish and prefer shallow, scrappy writings such as poetry and poetic expositions while neglecting and scorning the profound, beautiful, rich, and comprehensive Masters Literature” 貴愛詩賦淺近之細文，忽薄深美富博之子書.¹⁷ In the last chapter, “Self-Account” (“Zixu” 自敘), he relates his own experience of writing:

When I was fifteen or sixteen, I thought that the poetry, *fu*, and miscellaneous prose pieces I had written would be circulated in the world. By the time I reached twenty, I looked at those writings again carefully and found most of them unsatisfactory. It is not that my talent had increased—it is just that I had read more widely, and became more discerning about the difference between good and bad writing. . . . When I was in my twenties, I considered the creation of those short, scrappy works a waste of time, and thought it would be better to establish a discourse of my own. Thereupon I began to work on a *zishu* (i.e., *Master of Embracing Simplicity*).

洪年十五六時，所作詩賦雜文，當時自謂可行於代。至于弱冠，更詳省之，殊多不稱意。天才未必為增也，直所覽差廣，而覺妍媸之別。 . . . 洪年二十餘，乃計作細碎小文妨棄功日，未若立一家之言，乃草創子書。¹⁸

The anonymous writer of the *Zhonglun* preface and Ge Hong both set up a clear-cut contrast between Masters Literature and literary forms such as poetry and *fu*.¹⁹ Ge Hong’s rather utilitarian preference for *zishu* might be in part owing to his critical attitude toward his juvenile attempts at poetry and poetic exposition, but the wish to “establish a discourse of my own” 立一家之言 comes directly from Sima Qian, Xu Gan, and Cao Pi. As we shall see, the same phrase is repeated in the preface to *The Master of the Golden Tower* (*Jinlouzi*

16. *Quan Sanguo wen* 55.1360. Makeham’s translation with slight modifications; *Balanced Discourses*, xxxv.

17. Yang Mingzhao 楊明照, ed., *Baopuzi waipian jiaojian* 抱朴子外篇校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 105.

18. *Ibid.*, 695–97.

19. Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), Cao Pi’s younger brother, also clearly distinguishes the writing of poetry and *fu* from the creation of a *zishu*, which he refers to as “establishing a discourse of one’s own.” See his letter to Yang Xiu 楊修 (175–219), *Quan Sanguo wen*, 16.1140.

金樓子), as the author of this work, Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–555), better known as Emperor Yuan of the Liang 梁元帝 (r. 552–55), expresses his desire to achieve immortality through writing a *zishu*.

The above discussion suggests that in early medieval China a *zishu* is perceived as a comprehensive manifestation of a gentleman's view of the world and his take on the mores of contemporary society: from the governance of state to the state of culture—*wen* 文 in the broad sense. These personal views are, moreover, meant to be “balanced,” “authoritative,” or “normative,” worthy of being upheld as models in later times. Rather than poetry, which in later times came to be regarded one of the most personal literary forms, in early medieval China *zishu* seems to fulfill the role of self-expression and self-representation, no matter how impersonal and lacking in individuality some of those *zishu* chapters on governance and ethical issues might seem to us today. To illustrate this point we need to make one final general observation on Masters Literature in early medieval China, which concerns a *zishu* author's “Self-Account” (“Zixu” 自敘).

The “Self-Account,” which relates the life of the author and explains the reasons for writing the book in question, usually appears at the end of a *zishu*. This again is a form first employed by Sima Qian in his monumental work of history and commonly known as “The Self-Narration of the Grand Astrologer” (“Taishigong zixu” 太史公自序). It serves the function of stamping one's personal seal over a piece of writing, and is appropriated by the authors of Masters Literature. Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100) appended a “Self-Account” (“Ziji” 自記) to his *Discourses Weighed* (*Lunheng* 論衡). Cao Pi wrote a “Self-Account” (“Zixu” 自敘) in *Authoritative Discourses*, and a large chunk of it is still extant. Du Shu's *Normative Discourses* contains a similar account, which only survives in two small fragments. Fu Xuan's 傅玄 (217–278) *Master Fu* (*Fuzi* 傅子) and Yuan Zhun's 袁準 (fl. 3rd century) *Master Yuan's Correct Discourses* (*Yuanzi zhenglun* 袁子正論) likewise have a “Self-Account,” though only fragments of each survive. In contrast, Ge Hong's “Self-Account” in *The Outer Chapters of the Master of Embracing Simplicity* is preserved in much better shape. We may conclude that it was common practice for the author of a *zishu* to include such an autobiographical account in his work. Xu Gan would probably have done the same if his life and work had not been cut short by the great plague of 217: the anonymous author of the *Zhonglun* preface indicates that *Zhonglun* was unfinished, and his preface detailing Xu Gan's life is clearly intended to make up for the lacuna.

In his article, “Self as Historical Artifact: Ge Hong and Early Chinese Autobiographical Writing,” Matthew Wells points out that “the most important formal feature of the ‘Taishigong zixu’ is its attachment to a larger work, the *Shi ji*.” He also argues that Ge Hong's major contribution to the form of autobiography lies in *not* using his self-account mainly as an explanation and defense of the larger project as his predecessor had done.²⁰ Because of the heavy textual losses, it is impossible to judge exactly how unique Ge Hong is in this aspect, but Wells is certainly right to call attention to the tension between the self-account and the larger work that contains it. I would, however, argue that the larger work is not a superficial cover, but instead a necessary frame for the self-account, which caps the larger work like a crown. In other words, the larger work and the final self-account must be received as *one* package of the author's “self,” as they are both essential for his sense of “self” and for his self-representation. It is remarkable indeed that Sima Qian, in writing a comprehensive history from the “beginnings” to his own time, places his “self-narration” at the end of it to seal the work off as a family property (the counting of words of the entire book—526,500

20. *Early Medieval China* 9 (2003): 77, 72–73.

in total—further ensures the unchangeable nature, the authenticity, of the property). It is even more remarkable that the form of “self-narration” is translated from a work of history to a work of Masters Literature—a move that confirms the status of a *zishu* as no more than a comprehensive history of the self.

It must be added that this “discourse of one’s own” is perceived as being open to intervention from the outside, and there is remarkably little anxiety about “filling in” for a friend or for any well-known figure in this period. Ge Hong, a fervent admirer of the two famous Lu brothers—Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) and Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303), relates the following anecdote about Lu Ji’s unfinished *zishu*:

One of my disciples had once been in the army commanded by Mister Lu, and often attended him. According to my disciple, Mister Lu had said thus before meeting his death: “Failure and success are a matter of circumstances; one’s encounters and experiences are a matter of fate. Yet the ancients prized the establishing of words as the means of achieving immortality. The *zishu* I am working on is still unfinished—this is my only regret.” The way I see it, Zhongchang Tong did not get to complete his *Forthright Words*, and Miao Xi put the final touches on it; Huan Tan did not have a chance to wrap up his *New Discourses*, and Ban Gu filled in the chapter on “The Way of the Zither.”²¹ Now why cannot some talented man help bring Lord Lu’s *zishu* to completion?

吾門生有在陸君軍中，常在左右，說陸君臨亡曰：窮通，時也；遭遇，命也。古人貴立言以為不朽，吾所作子書未成，以此為恨耳。余謂仲長統作昌言未竟而亡，後繆襲撰次之；桓譚新論未備而終，班固為其成琴道。今才士何不贊成陸公子書？²²

This sense of “filling in the missing part” of a *zishu* formally corresponds to the contemporary practice of “Writing in the Voice of / on Behalf of” 代作 in poetry.²³ As we shall see, it changes completely in the sixth century with Emperor Yuan of the Liang’s *Master of the Golden Tower*, which in many ways announces the twilight of Masters Literature. But before we come to *The Master of the Golden Tower*, we must first examine the textual losses and survivals regarding Masters Literature and ask how they change our understanding of the literary-historical and intellectual landscape of early medieval China.

2. LOSSES, SURVIVALS, LESSONS

I would like to begin this section by presenting a view of the studies of early medieval Chinese literature (here literature in the broad sense) which may be considered either gloomy or uplifting, depending on how one chooses to see it. Simply put, much of our research on early medieval Chinese literature has sailed blithely on the surface and not even begun to look beyond the tiny tip of the iceberg. This iceberg under water is the vast textual world of early medieval China which is largely lost to us but whose traces nevertheless remain in the

21. Huan Tan (fl. ca. 30 B.C.–A.D. 41) was an early Eastern Han figure. He presented his *New Discourses* to Emperor Guangwu of the Han (r. 25–57); later, Emperor Zhang (r. 76–88) commissioned Ban Gu (32–92) to complete the unfinished chapter on “The Way of the Zither,” *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 28.961.

22. This is a *Baopuzi* fragment. See Yan, *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, 117.2132.

23. For a general discussion of the penchant for “filling in the missing part” in early medieval China, see Wang Yao’s 王瑤 article, “Nigu yu zuowei” 擬古與作偽, in his *Zhonggu wenxue shilun* 中古文學史論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986), 196–211. Also see Stephen Owen’s discussion of “dai” in chapter five, “Author and Speaker,” of *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006), 214–59. As Owen observes (p. 221), “By the third century we know there was a class of poems later called *daizuo* 代作, in which the author assumed the persona of some historically known character. Often these personae were people in the present.”

form of fragments, prefaces, postscripts, bibliographies in dynastic histories, random mentions in letters, discussions, or the like. Our customary literary historical landscape is dotted by extraordinary figures standing in isolation: the Cao family, the Seven Masters of the Jian'an, the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, the Lu brothers, the three Zhangs, the two Pans, Tao Yuanming, Xie Lingyun, and so forth; in intellectual history we have Ge Hong with his massive *Inner and Outer Chapters of the Master of Embracing Simplicity*. And yet, these figures represent no more than a fraction of a world "out there." We can never reconstruct that world perfectly, but we need to confront and grasp its shadowy presence if we ever hope to understand those extraordinary figures emerging from the shadow—sometimes as mere accidents of survival. It is no longer enough to issue a verdict based on the most obvious evidence we have; it is even no longer enough to extend our gaze from "major figures" toward the so-called "minor figures." While it would be foolish to speculate on what is no longer there, it is equally foolish to draw conclusions about literary history without considering what we know had once been there. Fragments, titles without writings, reference to a vanished text—they are signposts on an imperfect roadmap, indexes of loss, an everpresent absence.

The simple fact is Masters Literature was being produced at an alarmingly prodigal rate in early medieval China. I say "alarmingly" because scholars in early medieval China seem to have been quite disconcerted by the ease with which contemporary authors produced books, aided by the widespread use of paper. The rate of literary production in this period is by no means comparable with that in later imperial times, but it was certainly an amazing "step forward" from the classic age. Su Yan 蘇彥, the late fourth-century author of *Master Su* (*Suzi* 蘇子), makes a comment on the phenomenon. He first lists the Six Classics as well as the legal codes (represented by the writings of Shang Yang 商鞅 and Han Fe 韓非) and historiography (*Shi ji* and *Han shu*); then he says:

The works of Meng Ke and his like got mixed in [the books listed above]. People can now see how easy it is to match their talent and how painless it is to surpass their concepts. Thereupon every household writes a book, and every person produces a model of his own, which leads elegant gentleman to cast aside their brushes and inkstones and gaze into the distance.

孟軻之徒，潤淆其間。世人見其才易登，其意易過，于是家著一書，人書一法。雅人君子，投筆碩而高視。²⁴

From the first section of this essay, the reader may already have a sense of how much Masters Literature had been created in early medieval China; but today all we have are bits and pieces that survive in epitomes, compilations of extracts, encyclopedias, and commentaries. Wei Zheng's 魏徵 (580–643) *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要 and Ma Zong's 馬總 (fl. late 8th century) *Yilin* 意林, which is based on the Liang courtier Yu Zhongrong's 庾仲容 (476–549) *Extracts of Masters Literature* (*Zichao* 子鈔), are two of the major sources for *zishu* from this period. Since one may easily find a record of *zishu* titles that survived into the early seventh century in the *Sui shu* bibliography, below I simply give the names of those *zishu* that are still extant, albeit in fragments, from the third and fourth centuries. They can all be found in Yan Kejun's *Quan Sanguo wen* and *Quan Jin wen*. This is not a comprehensive list, but it serves our purpose:

1. Xu Gan (170–217), *Zhonglun*
2. Liu Yi 劉廙 (180–221), *Correct Discourses* (*Zhenglun* 政論)
3. Cao Pi (187–226), *Dianlun* (carved on stone in 230)

24. *Quan Jin wen*, 138.2256.

4. Qiao Zhou 譙周 (200–270), *Model Instructions (Faxun 法訓)*
5. Xiahou Xuan 夏侯玄 (209–254), *Master Xiahou (Xiahouzi 夏侯子)*
6. Fu Xuan (217–278), *Fuzi*
7. Zhong Hui 鍾會 (225–264), *Master Zhong's Shallow Discourses (Zhongzi churaolun 鍾子芻蕘論)*
8. Jiang Ji (d. 249), *Jiangzi wanjilun*
9. Huan Fan (d. 249), *Huanzi*
10. Ren Gu 任嘏 (fl. early 3rd century), *Master Ren's Discourses on the Way (Renzi daolun 任子道論)*
11. Du Shu (d. 252), *Tilun*
12. Ruan Wu (fl. early 3rd century), *Zhenglun*
13. Yuan Zhun (fl. 3rd century), *Yuanzi zhenglun*
14. Xiahou Zhan 夏侯湛 (243–291), *New Discourses (Xinlun 新論)*
15. Hua Tan 華譚 (244–322), *New Discourses (Xinlun 新論)*
16. Zhang Xian 張顯 (fl. 260s), *Analytical Words (Xiyen 析言)*
17. Ge Hong (283–343), *Baopuzi neipian and waipian*
18. Mei Tao 梅陶 (fl. ca. 326), *Master Mei's New Discourses (Meizi xinlun 梅子新論)*
19. Sun Chuo 孫綽 (ca. 300–ca. 380), *Master Sun (Sunzi 孫子)*
20. Su Yan (fl. late 4th century), *Suzi*
21. Fu Lang 苻郎 (fl. 380s), *Master Fu (Fuzi 苻子)* 𠄎

This list, which does not include titles without writings, exemplifies the flourishing state of Masters Literature in the third and fourth centuries. Of these survivals, Ge Hong's Inner and Outer Chapters of *Baopuzi* are the longest, but even they are not complete, as evidenced by many fragmentary passages discovered from Sui, Tang, and Song encyclopedias such as *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, and *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. *Dianlun* and Fu Xuan's *Fuzi* survive in large chunks. The shortest fragment, Zhang Xian's *Analytical Words*, consists of no more than one sentence. Barring *Zhonglun*, *Baopuzi*, and the famous extract, *On Literature*, taken from Cao Pi's *Dianlun* and included in the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan* 文選, these fragmentary texts, written in straightforward and plain diction, seem to be, on the one hand, insufficiently "literary" for literary scholars; on the other hand, they also appear to lack systematic coherence and interest for intellectual historians. Hence these writings have fallen into a crack between the two modern disciplines, and little attention has been paid to them.

3. WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIFTH CENTURY, AND WHY?

Then we see an intriguing phenomenon: a change occurred in the fifth century, as the production of *zishu*, which had been lamented by Su Yan as being too prolific, suddenly underwent a decline. For the fifth century I have found only two titles: He Daoyang's 賀道養 (fl. 424–53) *Master He's Transmitted Words (Hezi shuyan 賀子述言)* in ten scrolls; and Zhang Rong's 張融 (444–497) *Master Shao (Shaozi 少子)*, alternatively known as *Discourses on Unifying the Origins* [of Buddhism and Daoism] (*Tongyuan lun 通源論*).²⁵ The sixth century fares slightly better: there we have Zhang Taiheng's 張太衡 *Master No-Name (Wumingzi 無名子)*; an anonymous *Master Mysterious (Xuanzi 玄子)*; a *Roaming in the Cassia Grove of Mysteries (Youxuan guilin 遊玄桂林)* by Zhang Ji 張譏 (513–589), which,

25. I discount Xiao Ziliang's 蕭子良 (460–494) *Jingzhuji 淨住子*, which is a Buddhist work and completely differs from Masters Literature. A part of it is preserved in the Buddhist anthology, *Guang Hongming ji 廣弘明集*, compiled by the early Tang monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667).

however, might not have been in any conventional *zishu* form. All these works are grouped in the “Daoist” category under the large rubric of Masters Literature. In the “Confucian” category we have a *Correct View (Zhenglan 正覽)* by Zhou She 周捨 (469–524), Emperor Wu of the Liang’s (r. 502–549) trusted advisor.²⁶ None of these works is extant. There are, however, two interesting survivals from the fifth and sixth centuries. One is *Liuzi*, whose author is unknown.²⁷ The other is *Jinlouzi*. The former is interesting because its content is deadly dull, which makes one wonder how it managed to weather the ravages of time. The latter is interesting both for its observance of Masters Literature conventions and for the singularities and oddities surrounding its content and the circumstances of its writing, which will be discussed in the next section of this essay. *Zishu* continued to be written from the seventh century on, but never in the same concentrated manner that had characterized the third and fourth centuries; the titles listed under the Masters Literature category in the bibliographies of dynastic histories also include works clearly not in the conventional *zishu* format. It is therefore fair to say that the fifth century represents in many ways a turning point in the writing of *zishu*.

Why did *zishu*, alive and well throughout the Eastern Jin (317–420), suddenly disappear from center stage in the fifth century? In this case it would not make much sense blaming the disappearance on poor preservation, since it is not likely that *zishu* from the third and fourth centuries should be better documented or preserved than *zishu* of the fifth century, especially when the *Sui shu* bibliography records titles that had been lost by the seventh century but were still extant in the Liang (502–557). What happened? There is no simple answer to this complicated question, but we may offer some speculations.

Chinese literary genres, like themes and motifs, are by and large accumulative. *Fu* is one of the oldest literary forms, and people were still writing it in the Qing dynasty. Poetry in the four-syllable line was already considered an archaic and stiff form in the late Six Dynasties period, but continued to be practiced throughout imperial China. Today there are perhaps more Chinese who write poetry in classical forms than those who write in the modern free-verse form. So why should *zishu* undergo such a drastic decline in the fifth century? Perhaps when a form of writing in Chinese literature largely “disappears” from view, it does not vanish into thin air, but is transformed into something else, replaced, its function fulfilled or considered to be fulfilled more adequately by some other form or forms.

Here we must take note of another remarkable phenomenon. That is, the first half of the fifth century saw an outburst of activities in literary scholarship. The large quantity of writings produced in this period is evidenced by Qiu Yuanzhi’s 丘淵之 (fl. ca. 405–430s) *Catalogue of New Literary Collections Since the Yixi Reign [405–418] of the Jin (Jin Yixi yilai xinji mulu 晉義熙已來新集目錄)*, a catalogue comprising three scrolls.²⁸ There were

26. *Sui shu*, 34.1002–3, 999.

27. Some scholars argue that the author was the literary critic Liu Xie, although no agreement has been reached. The earliest record of *Liuzi* appears in the *Sui shu* bibliographic monograph, which claims that “*Liuzi*, in ten scrolls, was extant in the Liang.” For a study of the authorship of *Liuzi*, see *Liuzi jijiao* 劉子集校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 335–96.

28. A fragment about the life of Xie Lingyun, which survives in Liu Jun’s 劉峻 (462–521) commentary on *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, shows that the catalogue was compiled after 433, the year of Xie’s death. *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, ed., Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1993), 2.159. The *Sui shu* bibliography (33.991) does not record the author’s name. The *Xin Tang shu* bibliographic monograph records the author’s name as Qiu Shen zhi 丘深之 to avoid the taboo character *yuan*, the personal name of the founding emperor of the Tang; *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 58.1498.

also the *Garden of Collections* (*Ji yuan* 集苑) compiled by Xie Hun 謝混 (d. 412), a *Collection of Poetry* (*Shi ji* 詩集) in fifty scrolls and *The Fine Blossoms of Poetry* (*Shi ying* 詩英) in nine scrolls compiled by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), a *Forest of Collections* (*Ji lin* 集林) in 181 scrolls compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444), collections of dirges, encomia and inscriptions compiled by Xie Zhuang 謝莊 (421–466), and a *Collection of Women Writers* (*Furen ji* 婦人集) by Yin Chun 殷淳 (379–438), the first of its kind as far as we know. In a word, far more single-genre anthologies can be found in the fifth century than in any previous period. In literary writing we see a revival of interest in “old poems” and *yuefu*, which was accompanied by an acute sense of the literary past, as manifested by the appearance of true historical accounts of poetry and by writing poetry in imitation of an earlier poet’s style.

So why this sudden upswing in literary activities? It might, first of all, have to do with gaining access to the Northern manuscript tradition as well as a live music tradition, made possible by the Southern military victories. It also behooves us to remember that when the Jin ruling elite crossed the Yangzi River in the early fourth century, they had not taken with them a vast collection of books or a large number of court musicians, and yet so much of the *yuefu* tradition was maintained by living musicians who passed down music and words from teacher to disciple. After the Battle of the Fei River in 383 with its Northern foe, Fu Jian 苻堅 (338–385), the Eastern Jin obtained a number of Fu Jian’s musicians.²⁹ But the greatest military triumph was achieved by Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), the founder of the Liu-Song Dynasty, in 417. During this campaign he conquered the Latter Qin and recaptured Chang’an, albeit only briefly. Among his loot were four thousand scrolls of books, and even more important, a large group of court musicians, probably well over a hundred.³⁰ The arrival of texts—in the form of books and in the form of living musicians with their *yuefu* repertoire—might very well have stimulated the interest in *yuefu* and “old poetry.” Interestingly enough, the turn-of-the-century poets who had used “imitation” *ni* 擬 (of an old poem, a *yuefu*, or an earlier poet) in their titles all had had direct relations with people who had access to the Northern textual and musical traditions.³¹ The fact that many Liu-Song emperors and princes were lovers of literature might easily be another factor that contributed to the literary renaissance in the first half of the fifth century.

The flourishing of literary activities suggests an alternative investment of creative energy, but that in itself does not adequately explain the apparent loss of interest in the writing of *zishu*, and there are certainly other possible ways of interpreting this phenomenon. If the writing of *zishu* was considered as “accomplishing a discourse of one’s own” and transmitting one’s name, then in the course of the fifth century, we witness a growing sense of making one’s literary collection (*ji* 集) a personal legacy to be passed on to posterity, and even more important, a growing sense of embodying one’s personal voice in poetry. This can be demonstrated in several ways.

First and foremost, before the fifth century there are very few mentions of an author putting together his or her own collection of writings; Cao Zhi is a notable exception. In the

29. *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 23.698.

30. These court musicians had belonged to the Former Qin and were taken by the Western Yan army in 385; later, when the Latter Yan defeated the Western Yan in 394, the musicians fell into the hands of Murong Chui 慕容垂. Murong Chui’s successor, Murong Chao 慕容超, offered them to the Latter Qin ruler Yao Xing 姚興 in an exchange for Murong Chao’s mother and wife, both detained in Chang’an. The musicians finally returned to Chang’an in 407, only to be taken south by Liu Yu in 417. *Jin shu*, 128.3179.

31. I discuss this in detail in chapter three of the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol. 1.

fifth century, however, we begin to see more and more records of an author compiling his own works. Zhang Rong, the author of *Shaozi*, was the first known author who not only edited his own literary collections but also gave his collections individuals titles. When asked why he named one of the collections *The Sea of Jade* (*Yuhai* 玉海), he replied: “Jade is a metaphor for virtue, and the sea expresses my admiration for the highest good.”³² Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505) edited his writings into “The Former Collection” (*Qianji* 前集) and “The Latter Collection” (*Houji* 後集). There are a number of other cases from the period.³³ As editors of the eighteenth-century *Complete Books of the Four Categories* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書) observed, it was during the Qi and Liang dynasties that personal literary collections flourished and many forms and conventions (*tili* 體例) adopted by later editors of literary collections were established for the first time.³⁴ A literary collection primarily consists of “poetry, *fu*, and miscellaneous prose pieces,” which, in a word, are the very writings previously regarded as “short and scrappy” and unworthy by people like Ge Hong. The care going into editing one’s own literary collection shows a much different perception of its status.

Second, poetry of the fifth century became increasingly individualized in terms of content and style in comparison with earlier poetry. Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 (365?–427) poetry has been described by scholars as autobiographical; Xie Lingyun’s poetry likewise is a record of his personal experience. Both form a sharp contrast with earlier poetry in their specificity of topics, titles, and portrayal of details. If an “old poem” from the second or third century presents a general situation, or a situation befitting one type of person (a traveler, a lonely wife, a homesick soldier) applicable to anyone who is in that situation, then Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun’s poetry strikes us as uniquely individual. This is also largely due to a distinctness of personal styles, which, for all their virtues, the Seven Masters of the Jian’an period did not possess. It is no coincidence that in the fifth century we begin to see poems “in imitation of” an earlier poet’s style (*ti* 體), such as Bao Zhao’s 鮑照 (d. 466) poems, “Imitating Ruan Ji’s Style” (“Xiao Ruan bubing ti” 效阮步兵體) and “Imitating Tao Pengze’s [Tao Yuanming’s] Style” (“Xiao Tao Pengze ti” 效陶彭澤體), or Jiang Yan’s famous “Various Forms” (*Zati* 雜體), a series of thirty “imitation” poems.³⁵ Such imitations of earlier poets’ styles bespeak a contemporary awareness of style and individual voice and a retrospective attempt to construct unique styles and voices in earlier poetry, even though the earlier poetry itself does not support such an attempt. The most telling case is Xie Lingyun’s “Imitating the Poems of the Wei Crown Prince’s Gathering at Ye” (“Ni Wei taizi Yezhong ji” 擬魏太子鄴中集), which consists of eight poems in the voices of Cao Pi, Cao Zhi, and six of the Seven Jian’an Masters. In the brief preface to each poem, Xie Lingyun offers a summary of the poet’s distinctive characteristic (either biographical, tem-

32. *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 41.730. Zhang Rong’s reply contains an allusion to the *Laozi*: “The highest good is like water.” *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋, ed. Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 8.31.

33. I give a more detailed account in chapter two of *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang* (502–557) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center Press, 2007), 77–110.

34. *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933), 148.3101.

35. The general imitation of an author’s style is different from the kind of line-by-line imitation of a specific work as in Lu Ji’s imitation of the “old poems.” See Owen’s discussion of “imitation” in chapter six of *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, particularly 260–61. For Lu Ji’s imitations of the “old poems,” see Chiu-mi Lai, “The Craft of Original Imitation: Lu Ji’s Imitations of Han Old Poems,” in *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History in Honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman*, ed. Paul W. Kroll and David R. Knechtges (Provo, Utah: Tang Studies Society, 2003), 117–48.

peramental, or stylistic); and yet, the poems themselves fail to show distinctive stylistic differences—which, however, reflects the reality of Jian'an poetry itself.³⁶

That the status of poetry seems to have risen considerably in the fifth century can be seen not only in contemporary records but also in the appearance of accounts of the history of poetry.³⁷ Pei Ziyè 裴子野 (469–530) says the following of the Liu-Song in his *Concise History of the Song* (*Song lue* 宋略) written in the late fifth century:

From the founding of the Song (420) till the Yuanjia reign (424–53), people largely devoted themselves to classics and histories. During the era of Daming (457–64) the contemporary taste turned to *belles lettres*. . . . From then on, be it young commoners or noble scions at a tender age, they all dismissed the Six Arts and dedicated themselves to singing of their feelings instead.

宋初迄于元嘉，多為經史，大明之代，實好斯文。 . . . 自是闔閭年少，貴游總角，罔不擯落六藝，吟詠情性。³⁸

And yet, it was not the devotion to poetry itself, but rather a new sense of poetry and one's literary endeavors as capable of embodying the poet's individual life and voice, that contributed to the decline in the writing of *zishu* as having been almost the sole enterprise, up to that point, of leaving behind an everlasting personal legacy. At the same time the practice of editing one's own literary collection (*ji*) became increasingly widespread and self-conscious. Thus, *ji* eclipsed *zi* and became the primary means of "preserving the self."

As a final note, it should be added that shorter treatises (*lun*) on specific contemporary issues remained a vigorous, active genre. These treatises would no doubt be included in one's literary collection. When Zhang Rong, the author who edited his works several times throughout his life and gave individual titles to his various collections, composed *Shaozi*, a title retaining the Masters Literature flavor, we may observe that the content of *Shaozi* is about a specific topic (i.e., the common origin of Buddhist and Daoist doctrines), and is not a comprehensive treatment of the author's views of society.³⁹ In the last decades of the fifth century, Liu Xie combined the traditional *zishu* form with the specialized topic of a shorter treatise and produced *Wenxin diaolong*. Composed of fifty chapters culminating in a self-account, "Narrating My Aims" ("Xuzhi" 序志), *Wenxin diaolong* inherits the form of *zishu* to the hilt, with one major exception: instead of representing the author's views of the world, it represents his views of *wen* 文 ("literature") both in broad and narrow terms.

Liu Xie had a worthy successor in the seventh century: the historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) who wrote *Shitong* 史通—*A Comprehensive Guide to Historiography*. Like *Zhuangzi* or *Baopuzi*, this ambitious work on basically "everything you ever want to know about historiography" is divided into Inner Chapters and Outer Chapters; originally fifty-two chapters in all (only forty-nine are extant), it contains a "Self-Account" ("Zixu" 自敘) that details the author's life and his reasons for writing *Shitong*. What is interesting about

36. For a detailed discussion of this group of poems, see Mei Jialing's 梅家玲 long article, "Lun Xie Lingyun 'Ni Wei taizi Ye zhong ji bashou bing xu' de meixue tezhi" 論謝靈運擬魏太子鄴中集八首並序的美學特質, in her *Han Wei liuchao wenxue xinlun: Nidai yu zengda pian* 漢魏六朝文學新論:擬代與贈答篇 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1997), 1–92.

37. For instance, Tan Daoluan's 檀道鸞 (ca. early fifth century) comments in *Xu Jin yangqiu* 續晉陽秋, cited in the *Shishuo xinyu* commentary; *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 262. Also see Shen Yue's 沈約 (444–513) famous "post-face to the Biography of Xie Lingyun" in *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.1778–79.

38. Yan, *Quan Liang wen* 全梁文, 53.3262.

39. See Yan, *Quan Qi wen* 全齊文, 19.2899.

Liu Zhiji's self-account is that he consciously traces the origin of *Shitong* back to *Huainanzi*, a work he perceives as all-inclusive, and then offers a history of the writing of specialized works, including Wang Chong's *Lunheng*, Liu Shao's 劉劭 (fl. 217–48) *Study of Characters* (*Renwu zhi* 人物志), and Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong*, culminating in his own specialized work on historiography.⁴⁰

In many ways Yan Zhitui's 顏之推 (ca. 529–591) *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓) represents another late Six Dynasties permutation of the *zishu* form. The genesis of this work is the genre known as “admonition” (*jie* 誡),⁴¹ but Yan Zhitui went beyond the tradition of admonitory writing by composing a book-length work of twenty chapters, each on a specific topic. The content of *Family Instructions* is admonitory, whereas its format comes close to that of a *zishu*, for the topics range widely and diversely from family relations and ethical issues to scholarship, learning, and literary writing. Even the last section, on his own funeral arrangements, has a precedent in Cao Pi's *Authoritative Discourses*. Yan Zhitui places the “self-account” material at the beginning of the work rather than at the end, but the intention of the opening section—explaining his reasons for writing the book and locating the writing of the book in the context of his own life—is familiar ground for anyone acquainted with a conventional *zishu*. Yan Zhitui even makes an explicit reference to the Masters Literature of Wei and Jin in this section, and consciously situates his book squarely in the tradition of Masters Literature:

The various works of the Masters of Wei and Jin Dynasties are repetitive in their principles and examples, merely imitating and echoing one another. This is like building a house within a house and putting a bed on top of a bed.

魏晉已來，所著諸子，理重事複，遞相模倣，猶屋下架屋，牀上施牀耳。⁴²

Yan Zhitui distinguishes his own book from those predecessors by a paradoxically modest claim: he does not presume to “normalize things and establish models for the world” 軌物範世 as they did, but simply wants to regulate his own household and educate his own descendants. For a work that in terms of structure and format is situated in the Masters Literature tradition, it is remarkable that the author should turn his attention from the governance of the state or the mores of society to that of one's own household. This seems to be a gesture typical of the late Six Dynasties, when clan identity and claims of individuality retained a powerful hold over a man. Yan Zhitui's criticism of the Masters Literature of the third and fourth centuries may also be regarded as representative of the late Six Dynasties opinion; it effectively explains why people had largely stopped writing *zishu*.

4. THE MASTER OF THE GOLDEN TOWER

People had largely stopped writing *zishu* in the sixth century, but there are always exceptions to prove the rule. I shall therefore end this study with a discussion of *Jinlouzi*, *The Master of the Golden Tower*, an unusual, oddball *zishu* by an equally unusual, oddball author. Xiao Yi, seventh son of Emperor Wu of the Liang, was Prince of Xiangdong 湘東

40. *Shi tong xin jiaozhu* 史通新校注, ed. Zhao Lüfu 趙呂甫 (Sichuan: Chongqing chubanshe, 1990), 613–14.

41. Paul W. Kroll gives a succinct yet comprehensive overview of admonitory writing from the Han times through the Six Dynasties in his chapter on “Personality and Poetry, ca. 100–300 A.D.,” in *China's First Empires: A Reappraisal*, ed. M. Loewe and M. Nylan (Cambridge Univ. Press). There he points out that Yan Zhitui's *Family Instructions* represents a crowning accomplishment of the genre of “admonition.” I am grateful to him for sharing the manuscript with me.

42. *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 19.

王 for most of his life, until he ascended the imperial throne in 552. His *zishu* was therefore also referred to as *The Great Light of Xiangdong* (*Xiangdong honglie* 湘東鴻烈), much in the manner of *Huainan honglie*, now primarily known as *Huainanzi*.⁴³

Xiao Yi was born on September 16, 508, to Emperor Wu of the Liang and Lady Ruan Lingying 阮令羸 (477–543). According to the *Southern Histories* (*Nan shi* 南史, comp. 659), before Lady Ruan was pregnant with Xiao Yi, Emperor Wu, a devout Buddhist, dreamed of a monk blind in one eye holding an incense burner and claiming that he was to be reincarnated as a prince.⁴⁴ As a child, Xiao Yi suffered from eye disease, and Emperor Wu, who had some knowledge of the art of healing, decided to prescribe medicine for his son. Unfortunately the remedy did not work, and Xiao Yi lost sight in one eye when he was thirteen. Feeling sorry for the boy and perhaps also guilty about his ineffective treatment, the emperor was said to have doted on him even more. Xiao Yi's physical disability plagued him all his life. His half-brother, Xiao Lun 蕭綸 (507?–551), once teased him ruthlessly in a doggerel:

湘東有一病	Xiangdong has a malady—
非啞復非聾	it is neither muteness nor deafness.
相思下雙淚	It makes him cry a single line of tears when lovesick;
望直有全功	it claims complete merit for his looking straight. ⁴⁵

Xiao Yi's wife, Lady Xu Zhaopei 徐昭佩 (d. 549), was not loved by him and reportedly reciprocated the lack of affection by only making up half her face when Xiao Yi visited her—a gesture of contempt for her husband's one blind eye (she eventually paid for this defiance with her life).⁴⁶ As he said in *Jinlouzi*, from his thirteenth year he could not read on his own and had to rely on his attendants to read books aloud to him.⁴⁷

According to *Jinlouzi*, Xiao Yi also suffered from another chronic disease. In 520 *The Genealogies of A Hundred Families* (*Baijia pu* 百家譜) was compiled by the scholar and writer Wang Sengru 王僧孺 (465–522). The Southern Dynasties maintained a strict division between the gentry and commoners, and family background proved vital in one's social privileges and political career. To know a person's genealogy well was an important skill in making official appointments, and the young Xiao Yi took it upon himself to memorize the *Genealogies*. He finally learned it all by heart, a laborious and tedious task that led to an unfortunate result: he came down with “an illness in the vital energy of the heart,” which, from his description, seems to have been a sort of panic attack accompanied by heart palpitations. He never recovered completely from this. Later in life, he suffered the loss of five sons in a short period of time (perhaps due to some sort of epidemic), which occasioned a recurrence of his childhood illness. In his own description: “Sitting, I was like an empty shell; walking, I did not know where to go. Sometimes I felt my spirit had taken off and was no longer within my body.”⁴⁸

43. *Xiangdong honglie* is recorded in the *Sui shu* bibliography as a separate title from *Jinlouzi*. However, the *Sui shu* editors did not see *Xiangdong honglie*, as they describe it as “lost.” It is very likely that *Xiangdong honglie* and *Jinlouzi* are different titles of the same work. See *Sui shu*, 34.1005.

44. *Nan shi*, comp. Li Yanshou 李延壽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 8.234.

45. Lu Qinli 邊欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 2030.

46. *Nan shi*, 12.341–42.

47. *Jinlouzi jiaozhu* 金樓子校注, ed. Xu Deping 許德平 (Taipei: Jiaxin shuini gongsi wenhua jijinhui congshu, 1969), 14.263.

48. *Ibid.*, 14.262.

Xiao Yi was an accomplished, poet, painter, and conversationalist. But the most fascinating thing about Xiao Yi was himself. He was a complex man, and much of what we know about him comes from *The Master of the Golden Tower*. In history Xiao Yi is always remembered for being slow to come to the rescue when the rebel general Hou Jing 侯景 besieged the capital city from the winter of 548 to the spring of 549; for his cold-blooded infighting with his siblings and nephews in the midst of a national crisis (which eventually cost the Liang empire and his own life); but especially for the bibliocaust in 554, on the eve of the Western Wei army's conquest of Jiangling 江陵, which he had made the new capital of Liang during his short reign. *The Summary Documents of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo dianlue* 三國典略) written by Qiu Yue 丘悅 (fl. 705–15) gives a poignant account of this lowest moment in Xiao Yi's life and in the history of the Liang dynasty—indeed one of the lowest moments of Chinese civilization:

The emperor [Xiao Yi] entered the Bamboo Hall of the Eastern Pavilion, and ordered his secretary Gao Shanbao to set fire to the 140,000 scrolls of books and charts ancient and modern. He was going to throw himself into the flames as well, but was stopped by the palace staff. He smashed his precious swords on the pillar, exclaiming with a sigh: "Civil and military culture has come to an end upon this night!"

帝入東閣竹殿，命舍人高善寶焚古今圖書十四萬卷，將自赴火，宮人左右止之。又以寶劍斫柱令折，歎曰：文武之道，今夜盡矣！⁴⁹

According to Niu Hong's 牛弘 (545–610) memorial to Emperor Wen of the Sui 隋文帝 (r. 589–604), only ten to twenty percent of these books survived.⁵⁰ If one may believe the historians who claimed that the conflagration was not an accident, but Xiao Yi's deliberate doing, then it was the largest-scale deliberate destruction of books in Chinese history.

According to the *Sui shu* bibliography, the *Jinlouzi* comprised ten scrolls. Chao Gongwu's 晁公武 (ca. 1105–80) *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志 records a version in fifteen chapters.⁵¹ The received text of *Jinlouzi* contains fourteen chapter headings, as follows:

1. The Rise of the King 興王
2. Admonitions 箴誡
3. Imperial Consorts 后妃
4. Commands for Funeral Arrangements 終制
5. Admonishing My Sons 誡子
6. Collecting Books 聚書
7. The Two Nans and the Five Hegemons 二南五霸
8. A Discourse on Princedom 說藩
9. Establishing Words 立言
10. Writing Books 著書
11. Witticisms 捷對
12. Accounts of Anomalies 志怪
13. Miscellaneous Records 雜記
14. Self-Account 自序

Jinlouzi seems to have been lost in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The received text, as we have it today, was largely assembled by the *Siku quanshu* editors between 1773 and

49. Cited in Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956), 165.5121. Glen Dudbridge has given an insightful analysis of Emperor Yuan's burning of the books and the silence of the dynastic histories on this matter, in his *Lost Books of Medieval China* (London: British Library, 2000), 41–44.

50. *Sui shu*, 49.1299.

51. See Zhong Shilun's 鍾仕倫 *Jinlouzi yanjiu* 金樓子研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 243.

1782 from quotations taken from the monstrous encyclopedia commissioned by the third Ming emperor (r. 1403–24), *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典. The *Yongle dadian* citations were themselves based on a 1343 printed edition prepared by a certain Ye Sen 葉森; this edition is no longer extant. The order of the fourteen chapters and that of the items under these chapter headings in the received text are therefore the consequence of the Qing dynasty reconstruction and may not accurately represent the original form of the *Jinlouzi*.

Though it has come down to us in fragments, we can see that *Jinlouzi* is unusual on many accounts. It is, to begin with, a work written in the traditional *zishu* form when few were still writing in such a form. Its composition spanned thirty-odd years, through Xiao Yi's entire adult life.⁵² According to Xiao Yi, he began writing *Jinlouzi* in his fifteenth year, the year after he lost sight in one eye. "When I was at the age of 'devoting myself to studies,' I took it upon myself to write and produce a discourse of my own" 年在志學, 躬自修纂, 以為一家之言.⁵³ The chapter on "Collecting Books" mentions his age again: "I am forty-six *sui* this year."⁵⁴ That would be the year 553, one year before he was tragically killed by the Western Wei army. If we think of *zishu* as a project of self-embodiment, then *Jinlouzi* was a work that had practically grown with Xiao Yi.

Not only that, but Xiao Yi also insisted on being the sole author and audience of this work; no retainer of his was allowed to read it until it was finished. In *Jinlouzi* he records a conversation between himself and one of his best friends, Pei Ziye, who had asked Xiao Yi why he worked so hard at writing this book without enlisting any help. Xiao Yi answered that those who wear coarse clothes cannot possibly understand the dense texture of pure cotton, and those used to coarse food cannot possibly understand the taste of great delicacy. "How then could any of my retainers fathom my enterprise?" He then expresses great contempt for Lü Buwei 呂不韋 and Liu An, the Prince of Huainan, who had relied on retainers to complete their works.⁵⁵ Indeed, the book *Jinlouzi* was kept in such publicly flaunted secrecy that it was mistaken by some of Xiao Yi's contemporaries for an exotic object. When Xiao Yi returned to the capital from his provincial post, visitors would frequently request to visit his "tower made of gold"—a story he noted down in *The Master of the Golden Tower* with great relish.⁵⁶

All these characterize *The Master of the Golden Tower* as a personal, intimate work, an impression reinforced by the many details Xiao Yi reveals about himself in the book. In this aspect he might very well have been inspired by Cao Pi's *Authoritative Discourses*, which provides a plethora of anecdotes about the author himself and is utterly distinct from the self-account of Cao Pi's predecessor, Wang Chong, in its lively narrative details. The *Dianlun* also includes a section on "The Crown Prince" 太子 and a section on "Funeral Arrangements" 終制. Since the extant *Dianlun* is incomplete, it is impossible to know whether Cao Pi had written a chapter on his prominent parents. In contrast, Xiao Yi not only tells the reader much about himself, but also gives an account of his father in "The Rise of the King" and of his mother in "Imperial Consorts." Each of these two chapters in their present reconstructed form lists praiseworthy emperors and empresses from the past and culminates in a biographical sketch of his own parents, Emperor Wu of the Liang and Lady Ruan Lingying. The Japanese scholar Kōzen Hiroshi may have overstated the case by

52. Zhong Shilun discusses this point in *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 4–14.

53. Confucius said, "I devoted myself to studies from my fifteenth year," *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 (Taipei: Yiweng yinshuguan, 1955), 2.16. Xiao Yi's remark is from his preface to *Jinlouzi*; see *Quan Liang wen*, 17.3051.

54. *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 6.102.

55. *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 9.155–57.

56. *Ibid.*, 13.252.

calling the account of Lady Ruan the first extant Chinese biography a son wrote of his mother,⁵⁷ but it was certainly unusual to create a space in one's *zishu* for one's royal parents.

Taking these chapters together with the chapters on "Admonitions" and "A Discourse on Princedom," which focus exclusively on earlier royalties as examples, we see that Xiao Yi was intensely aware of his unique position as a princely author. Time and again he says of himself: "I am not a trivial man in this world" 吾於天下亦不賤也.⁵⁸ This statement echoes verbatim that of the great Duke of Zhou, who was "son of King Wen, younger brother of King Wu, and uncle of King Cheng," a position to which Xiao Yi could indeed relate, as he was the son of Emperor Wu and the younger brother of the Crown Prince.⁵⁹ This is an interesting position for a *zishu* author to occupy, because even when he is talking about rulership and governance of the state, he can and does make it something personal and familial.⁶⁰ And yet, it is also a position difficult to reconcile with the role of emperor—a role eventually assumed by Xiao Yi rather fortuitously, something that the *Jinlouzi* author seems to have been rather unprepared for. As a prince, one is both part of the ruling family and capable of maintaining the aura of a "subject"—in other words, a mere individual, a princely "Master" *fuzi* 夫子, but a Master nevertheless. But could an emperor, *tianzi* 天子, ever be a Master—that is, one of the Masters, *zhuzi* 諸子? This is an interesting problem for the Master of the Golden Tower, and this problem comes to a head in a crucial chapter in *Jinlouzi*, the chapter on "Collecting Books."

The chapter on "Collecting Books" details Xiao Yi's lifelong enterprise of book collecting, beginning with his receiving a duplicate set of five Confucian Classics from his father when he was six years old in 514 (upon his enfeoffment as the Prince of Xiangdong), and ending with the year 553 when he turned forty-five years old. This is the only place where Xiao Yi explicitly mentions his age at the time of writing:

I am forty-six *sui* [forty-five years old] this year, and have been collecting books for forty years. I have acquired 80,000 scrolls of books so far. The Prince of Hejian's book collection rivaled the Han imperial collection, and I would say that mine surpassed his.

吾今年四十六歲，自聚書來四十年，得書八萬卷。河間之侔漢室，頗謂過之矣。⁶¹

This passage has aroused several questions. First, does this collection of 80,000 scrolls include the large horde of books (70,000 scrolls in all) acquired from the imperial library collection in 552?⁶² If it does, why should Xiao Yi list all the other occasions of book

57. "You erzi xie de yipian muqin zhuan" 由兒子寫的一篇目親傳. *Han Wei liuchao wenxue yu zongjiao* 漢魏六朝文學與宗教, ed. Ge Xiaoyin 葛曉音 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 8. Kōzen Hiroshi claims that Cao Zhi's elegy for his mother Empress Dowager Bian 卞 and Zong Hui's 鍾會 biography of his mother Madame Zhang 張 are lost, but in fact both pieces are extant. See *Quan Sanguo wen*, 15.1157, 25.1190–91.

58. This statement appears in the preface to *Jinlouzi*, and again in the chapter on "Establishing Words," *Quan Liang wen*, 17.3051; *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 9.156.

59. For the Duke of Zhou's speech, see *Shi ji*, 33.1518.

60. In contrast, despite being in a position of power, the Caos were not truly "royal" until rather late. Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), father of Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, became King of Wei in 216, merely four years before he died. Cao Pi succeeded him and then took over the imperial throne from the last Han emperor.

61. *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 6.102. The Prince of Hejian (r. 155–130 B.C.) was named Liu De; he was one of the sons of Emperor Jing of the Han (188–141 B.C.), and an active collector of ancient texts and a lover of learning and scholarship.

62. According to the *Sui shu*, 32.907, "After Emperor Yuan defeated Hou Jing, he had the books of the Hall of Literary Virtue (i.e., the Liang imperial library) as well as other public and private book collections sent to Jian-gling (i.e., Xiao Yi's headquarters and the new Liang capital). Those were more than 70,000 scrolls."

acquisition without mentioning his largest acquisition of all? If it does not, why? Second, as the modern scholar Yu Jiayi has observed, “He compares himself to the Prince of Hejian, whose book collection rivaled the Han imperial library collection; this clearly is something he would only have said before taking the throne [that is, when Xiao Yi was only a prince just like the Prince of Hejian].”⁶³ Yu Jiayi suspects that a copyist error had occurred in the sentences “I am forty-six *sui* this year” and “I have been collecting books for forty years,” since both statements place the year of writing this passage or this chapter in 553 (forty years being a round number for thirty-nine years from the age of six to that of forty-five), when Xiao Yi was already emperor.

Zhong Shilun argues that there is no error, because, he says, the 80,000 scrolls only represent Xiao Yi’s personal collection, which indeed surpasses the 70,000 scrolls of books transported from the capital in 552. As for why Xiao Yi does not mention the hoard from the imperial library, Zhong posits that first, the current version of the chapter is fragmentary and so the complete version, lost to us, might have indeed mentioned the acquisition; second, it would be improper to mention the “public book collection” (*gongjia tushu* 公家圖書) in a “privately produced work” (*sijia zhuanshu* 私家撰述).⁶⁴ The first reason, contrary to Zhong Shilun’s earlier argument that the 80,000 scrolls constituted Xiao Yi’s personal collection, seems to imply that the 80,000 scrolls actually included the 70,000 scrolls acquired from the imperial library, and that this is mentioned in a lost section of the chapter. The problem of such an inclusion would reduce Xiao Yi’s pre-552 collection to 10,000 scrolls, which would not warrant Xiao Yi to feel his book collection rivaled the imperial collection. Therefore, we must assume that the 80,000 scrolls constitute Xiao Yi’s own collection minus the imperial collection. The extravagant number of 80,000 scrolls can be easily explained by the inclusion of duplicate copies.

This leads us back to the question of Xiao Yi’s silence regarding the imperial collection. Zhong Shilun’s terse comment on a potential conflict between “private writing” and “public book collection” is insightful, but the point needs refinement and elaboration. Elsewhere I have discussed Xiao Yi’s book-collecting as follows:

For a monarch, book collecting was part of the state-building project. As Dudbridge puts it, “This state library became a symbol of national unity and culture, in the sense that it affirmed the ruling dynasty’s legitimate inheritance and stewardship of written culture from the past.”⁶⁵ Attaining possession of the former imperial collection was therefore no light matter. When the remains of the state library were transported from Jiankang to the new Liang capital of Jiangling, it signified the rightful transference of power, and it would have been the proper job of a state historian to record such an event.

Herein, however, lies the problem. Xiao Yi’s chapter on book collecting was part not of the dynastic history but of a work written in the tradition of the “masters.” Xiao Yi was writing not as the emperor but as the Master of the Golden Tower, a private individual, an aficionado. This distinction seems to have been behind what he chose to include in this chapter and what he did not; in such a private context, the appropriation of the imperial collection would seem almost sacrilegious. Here we see a conflict of roles between his public role as a monarch and his private role as a great book collector. It is not that a monarch could not be a book lover; rather, the motivation and purpose implicit in the activity of book collecting for these two roles were different and could even be opposed: the monarch acted as the patron of arts and the legal guardian of culture; the private collector was someone who allowed an all-consuming passion to become

63. Cited in Zhong, *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 9.

64. Zhong, *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 9–10.

65. Dudbridge, *Lost Books*, 5.

the central expression of his individuality . . . if the author and book collector Xiao Yi did not want to say anything about the acquisition of the imperial library, it was because in the clash between the public and private values, the very nature of his work prevented him from speaking as an emperor. Indeed, one must not forget that Xiao Yi had begun to write *The Master of the Golden Tower* at the age of fourteen, long before he was burdened with the throne and certainly at a time when he had never expected to become emperor. *The Master of the Golden Tower* was the work of a private individual, meant eventually to be added to the imperial book collection; as such, there was no room in it for imperial discourse itself.⁶⁶

Yu Jiayi's keen observation about Xiao Yi's self-comparison to the Prince of Hejian, so ill-befitting his then status of emperor, could only be explained in the context of a work of Masters Literature.

The chapter on book-collecting in *The Master of the Golden Tower* therefore bears a symbolic significance on several levels. The conflict between Xiao Yi's role as a Master and his role as emperor, as revealed in the analysis above, underlines the nature of *zishu* as an individual enterprise that aims to establish "a discourse of one own." More important, however, the chapter highlights Xiao Yi's role as a collector. In many ways, the book *Jinlouzi* itself is no more than a collection: of passages culled from earlier texts (including his own writings), of anecdotes, of "accounts of anomalies," of common sayings, of the titles of all the books he has written or commissioned his courtiers to write, of incidents and events from large to small in history, and even of forms and genres.⁶⁷ Scholars have either criticized Xiao Yi's method of writing as "peddling" (*baifan* 稗販) or have refuted such criticism.⁶⁸ But it seems to me that both criticizing and refuting are misguided, because such approaches fail to recognize the profound change taking place in Masters Literature. If *Huainanzi*, the work of another princely Master, aims specifically to be comprehensive and to supersede all earlier writings,⁶⁹ *Jinlouzi* never makes such a claim. It is not that Xiao Yi does not feel the painful burden of the increasingly heavy textual past; it is simply that he has adopted a completely different attitude toward past writings. He acts as the grand collector, arbiter, and editor:

Philosophers emerged during the Warring States, and literary collections first flourished in the Han dynasty. Nowadays, each family produces writings, and every person has a collection. What is beautifully written may voice one's feelings and purify customs; what is badly written proves no more than a waste of bamboo slips that will only tire the later-born. The texts of old pile up high, and more texts are being produced ceaselessly. One raises a foot and walks down the road of studying, and yet, even when one's hair is white, one has not exhausted everything. Sometimes what was valued in the past is looked down upon in the present, or what is prized today was scorned by the ancients. Alas, among the later-born gentlemen of broad knowledge, if there is one who can evaluate textual differences and similarities, edit and put in order what is chaotic and messy, so that each scroll of writings is free from blemishes, and there is no remaining task for the reader, then such a person may be well regarded as a scholar.

66. See chapter two, "Mapping the Cultural World (I): Managing Texts," in *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 77–110.

67. As Zhong Shilun points out, *Jinlouzi* contains the forms of biography, historical record, account of anomalies (*zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說), and anecdotal collection (*zhiren xiaoshuo* 志人小說) such as *Shishuo xinyu*; see *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 30.

68. Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832–1901), cited in *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 262. Kōzen Hiroshi 興膳宏. *Liuchao wenxue lungao* 六朝文學論稿, tr. Peng Enhua 彭恩華 (Changsha: Yue Lu shushe, 1986), 117. Zhong Shilun argues against these views in *Jinlouzi yanjiu*, 32–37.

69. This point has been nicely discussed by Michael Puett in "The Temptations of Sagehood," 29–30.

諸子興於戰國，文集盛於二漢，至家家有製，人人有集。其美者足以敘情志，敦風俗；其弊者祇以煩簡牘，疲後生。往者既積，來者未已。翹足志學，白首不遍，或昔之所重，今反輕；今之所重，古之所賤。嗟我後生博達之士，有能品藻異同，刪整燕穢，使卷無瑕玷，覽無遺功，可謂學矣。⁷⁰

What is born of such a role of collector, arbiter, and editor is not exactly a conventional *zishu*, but something more like the “random notes” (*biji* 筆記), which would become an extremely popular form in later times. And the person who emerges from these writings is no longer a passionately impassive Master (*zi*) who metes out “models” (*fa*) for all the ages to come, but an individual fraught with ambitions, desires, imperfections, anxieties, afflicted with and perhaps even largely defined by his disabling diseases. Thus, curiously, Xiao Yi ends the *zishu* form once and for all with a *zishu* that both conforms to the conventional *zishu* form and transforms it.

There is indication, I think, that Xiao Yi might have intended this work to continue expanding and growing along with his own life until the end of days. He says at one point:

Yan Hui aspired to be a sage, and so he died young. Jia Yi loved learning, which quickened his disease . . . Life has an end, but knowledge is endless. That one should pursue boundless knowledge within a limited life! I shall instead cultivate my nature and nurture my spirit, and “capture the unicorn” with the completion of *The Master of the Golden Tower*.

顏回希聖，所以早亡；賈誼好學，所以速隕 . . . 生也有涯，智也無涯。以有涯之生，逐無涯之智。余將養性養神，獲麟於金樓之制也。⁷¹

“Capturing the unicorn” means “stopping writing.” It is a far echo of Confucius’ writing of the *Annals*, a chronicle that ends with the year when a unicorn was captured. Elsewhere in his book Xiao Yi explicitly places himself in the direct descending line of the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, and Sima Qian, a series of “creators.”⁷² But the Master of the Golden Tower did not and could not survive Emperor Yuan of the Liang, and Xiao Yi presumably stopped writing *The Master of the Golden Tower* somewhere in 553 or 554. On January 27, 555, the emperor was suffocated with a dirt bag by the Western Wei army, but the Master of the Golden Tower, one of the last great Masters of early medieval China, had already died before that.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have explored the afterlife and eventual decline of Masters Literature in early medieval China. The age of the great philosophical book, as Michael Puett has perceptively observed, was over in the second century; and yet, the shell of the great book—the form of *zishu*—lived on for another two hundred years, and made a very different sort of claim from the pre-Qin or even the Han Masters Literature. The *zishu* of the Wei and Jin might have been largely repetitive and monotonous as Yan Zhitui deplored, but the third- and fourth-century *zishu* authors nevertheless considered their works as the sole means of “establishing a discourse of one’s own,” preserving one’s selfhood, and ensuring one’s immortality. Poetry and *fu*, though frequently and avidly practiced, were regarded as more or less insignificant skills— at least on a theoretical level. This situation was reversed in

70. *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 9.164.

71. *Ibid.*, 9.165–66.

72. He wrote: “Five hundred years after the Duke of Zhou died, there was Confucius; five hundred years after Confucius died, there was the Grand Historian [i.e. Sima Qian]. This cycle of five hundred years—how do I dare to shy away from it” 周公沒五百年有孔子，孔子沒五百年有太史公，五百年邇，余何敢讓焉！*Ibid.*, 152.

the fifth century, with the literary collection eclipsing *zishu* and with poetry being crowned as the most privileged cultural form. Against this background we see permutations of the *zishu* form, such as *Wenxin diaolong* and *Yanshi jiaxun*. But there is also *Jinlouzi*, which is a “collection” contained in a *zishu* form, and more than any other *zishu* of early medieval China announces the true twilight of the Masters Literature. The age of intellectual thought, epitomized by the pre-Qin and Han “Masters,” was superseded by the age of poetry. This state of affairs underwent another major change in the Northern Song, when the neo-Confucian philosophers declared war on literature, the pursuit of which was perceived as harming the Way. But that is the subject of another study.