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Collections (ji集)

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Abstract and Keywords

Ji, “collection,” is the last of the four-part Chinese bibliographical scheme after “Classics,” “Histories,” and “Masters.” Referring to collections of literary works, it is central to our understanding of the premodern Chinese conception of literature. This chapter focuses on biejī (literary collections by individual authors) and introduces the fundamental issues regarding the formation and content of a literary collection. It discusses when the term biejī first appeared, and what the early collections were; how a literary collection was constituted, circulated, transmitted, and reconstituted; what genres a literary collection might include, and more important, exclude; and in what ways a biejī is important to a historicized understanding of what constituted “literature” in the Middle Period. The coda briefly discusses the rebuilding of the lost and scattered medieval literary collections and the proliferation of specialized collections in the Song and beyond.

Keywords: literary collection (bieji), “little collection/selected works” (xiaoji), specialized collection, prose genres, wen

WITH *ji* 集, “collection,” the last of the “four-part” bibliographical scheme (see Chapter 11), we now stand at the center of classical literature: collections of literary works.

Ji bu 集部 derived from the fourth category (*ding bu* 丁部, literally Category No. 4) in Xun Xu’s 荀勗 (d. 289) four-part division of the imperial library collection, but Xun Xu’s category notably includes a mixture of *shi* 詩 (poetry) and *fu* 賦 (poetic expositions), encomia inscribed in paintings, and a cache of ancient books discovered by grave-robbers (*Sui shu* 32.906). In the fourth century, Li Chong 李充 (fl. 320s) defined the fourth category as consisting of poetry and poetic expositions; according to Zang Rongxu 臧榮緒 (415–488), Li Chong’s division subsequently became established as a “permanent rule” by the imperial library (*Wen xuan* 46.2075). In the “Monograph on Bibliography” of *Sui shu*, the *ji* section includes three kinds of collections. The first is *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Verses of Chu*), a

collection of rhymed verses attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340–278 BCE), his “disciple” Song Yu 宋玉, and later works from the Han in that tradition. The second is *bieji* 別集 (“separate collections” or collections by individual authors). The third is *zongji* 總集 (“comprehensive collections” or anthologies). In modern as well as premodern times, *Chuci* and *Shijing* have been regarded as not only the origin but also the foundation of *shi* poetry, which was the privileged literary genre throughout imperial China. Nevertheless, *Shijing* had always been firmly placed under the “Classics” (*jing*) in the traditional categorization of texts. This small but significant fact demonstrates the complexity of the traditional Chinese conceptualization of *wen*, “literature,” “literary,” or “literariness” (see also Chapter 1).

Ji is central to our understanding of the premodern Chinese conception of literature. As *zongji* or anthologies and anthology-making are given separate consideration (see Chapters 19 and 20), this essay focuses on *bieji* by introducing some of the basic issues regarding *bieji*: how a collection was constituted, circulated, transmitted, and reconstituted; what a *bieji* might include; and in what ways a collection is important to a historicized understanding of what constituted “literature” in the Middle Period.

(p. 220)

The Early History

The term *bieji* first appears in Ruan Xiaoxu’s 阮孝緒 (479–536) book catalogue known as *Qilu* 七錄 (*Seven Records* or *Seven Lists*, see Chapter 11). It forms a subsection under “Wenji lu” 文集錄 (“The List of Literary Collections”), alongside three other subsections, “Chuci,” “Zongji,” and “Zawen” (“Miscellaneous Writings”) (Tian 2014: 318). Presumably, the word *bie* is used to differentiate *bieji* (“individual collections”) from *zongji*, “comprehensive collections.” The term is used again in the “Monograph on Bibliography” of *Sui shu* 隋書 (*History of the Sui*):

The name *bieji* was first created in the Eastern Han. From Qu Yuan onward, there have been numerous authors of literary writings. Their aims and aspirations were not the same; their manners and styles were all different from one another. Gentlemen of the later times wanted to observe an author’s normative form and momentous energy, and to bring to light [*jian/xian*] his heart and mind, and so assembled [the said author’s] writings in a separate volume and named it a *ji*, collection.

(*Sui shu* 35.1081)

The above passage stresses a *ji*'s connection with the historical person of an individual author; it also stresses the later readers' desire to *jian/xian* 見—to see and to bring into manifestation—an author's "heart and mind" through compiling the author's collection. The passage uses the word *bie* twice to talk about the "difference" (*bie*) of the authors' manners and styles, and about the separate (also *bie*) assemblage of their writings. In the latter case, "separate" could refer to these individual collections' distinction from an anthology as well as to the discrete entity of each individual collection; each stands independently from one another, just as the authors themselves were all different from one another in terms of temperament and writing style. The historical person of an author and his or her writings are thus seamlessly connected.

Sui shu might have had its sources, now lost, in making the claim about the emergence of the term *bieji* in the Eastern Han. By focusing on the dating of the *term*, the *Sui shu* historian wisely stayed away from the thorny issue of the origin of the *bieji* itself: such knowledge likely could never be obtained with any accuracy, and indeed also largely depends on how one defines a *bieji*, for various definitions have led to different theories about when *bieji* first emerged. The late-Qing scholar Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗 (1843–1906) believes, for instance, that the "collections of poems and poetic expositions" by various authors recorded in the "Monograph on Arts and Writings" of Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92) *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) constitute the origin of *bieji* (Yao 1995: 629). And yet these "collections," marked as the "twenty-five *pian* 篇 [lit. 'bound bundle of bamboo slips'] of Qu Yuan's poetic expositions," or the "four *pian* of Tang Le's poetic expositions," seem no more than items on an inventory list of the imperial library. Upon the death of the prestigious Eastern Han prince Liu Cang 劉蒼 in 83 CE, the emperor issued an edict that all of the prince's writings should be gathered together and sent to (p. 221) the capital for the emperor to "look at collectively" (*ji lan* 集覽), but that was more a "package" than a "compiled/edited collection" (see *Hou Han shu* 42.1441).

The compilation of an individual author's collection that includes multiple genres, as opposed to the single-genre "collections" on Ban Gu's inventory list, dates to the mention of a female author's posthumous collection compiled by her daughter-in-law. In *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han*) compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), we find the following passage in the biographical note on Ban Zhao 班昭 (fl. 90s–110s CE), a prominent writer and scholar:

Her poetic expositions, odes, inscriptions, elegies, inquiries, commentaries, lamentations, letters, discussions, memorials to the throne, and deathbed instructions amounted to sixteen sections [*pian* 篇] altogether. Her daughter-in-law, Madam Ding, compiled them into one collection and also composed an "Encomium on the Dame."

(*Hou Han shu* 84.2792)

Ban Zhao, Ban Gu's younger sister, is thus the earliest known author who, shortly after her death, had a collection of writings compiled, *zhuan* 撰, a word indicating a measure of editorial care. Her collection seems to have been capped with an encomium (*zan* 讚) about her life and career. However, not only is it an isolated instance from this period, but *Hou Han shu* itself came from a much later time. In the fifth century, compiling a recently deceased author's writings into a *bieji* had become an established practice. It is impossible to evaluate the credibility of Fan Ye's sources, or to judge to what extent his representation of Ban Zhao's collection might have reflected a later view of how a collection came about.

The first unambiguous mentions of compiling literary collections as a self-consciously significant act are from the early third century. This was a time of new happenings and significant transitions in literary and cultural history. On the one hand, the writing of a multichapter treatise on social, ethical, and political issues, with each chapter under a subject heading and often complete with an autobiographical "self-account" (*zixu* 自序), continued to be considered the most important way of self-representation for an early medieval elite Chinese male. On the other hand, poetry and poetic expositions were gradually rising to the forefront of people's consciousness in terms of their self-representational powers. Unlike the grandiose poetic expositions of the earlier times, such as the *fu* on the imperial parks, imperial hunts, or imperial capitals, many shorter, occasional poetic expositions appeared in the third century, sometimes dashed off at social gatherings. Many poetic expositions from this period have a narrative preface that details a personal experience as the occasion of composition, such as the illness and recovery of an infant son. These details of an author's everyday life endow a poetic exposition with a sense of intimate quality. Poetry, too, gradually emerged from the formal social exchanges or the general expressions of common sentiments to become a more individualized articulation of the experience of a historical person.

Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), an eminent scholar and writer from south China and a cultural conservative, complains that his contemporaries "all treasure shallow, diminutive (p. 222) writings such as poetry and poetic expositions, but scorn the profound, beautiful, rich, and comprehensive 'masters' books'" (Ge 1997: 105). Two things are noteworthy about this complaint: one, it is significant that poetry and poetic expositions, two central belletristic genres, are defined negatively against "masters' books," i.e., the multichapter treatises mentioned above; two, the complaint highlights the fact that in the cultural stock market of the fourth century, the stock of poetry and poetic expositions was on the rise. In another instance, Ge Hong again pits the writing of "poetry, poetic exposition, and miscellaneous prose pieces" against the writing of a multichapter treatise, saying, "When I was in my twenties, I regarded the creation of those small, fragmentary writings as a

waste of time. ... Subsequently I began to work on a 'master's book' " (Ge 1997: 697). Ge Hong certainly conceived of the opposition between these two different kinds of writings partially in terms of length, as he stresses in each case the "small and fragmentary" (*xi sui* 細碎) nature of belletristic writings.

The opposition may be traced back to the early-third-century preface to Xu Gan's 徐幹 (171–218) *Zhong lun* 中論 (*Discourses on the Mean*). The anonymous preface states:

He [Xu Gan] saw that lettered men followed one another in the contemporary fad of composing pretty writings, 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 such [literary] writings as poetry, poetic exposition, eulogy, inscription, and encomium, and wrote the book *Discourses on the Mean* in twenty-two chapters.

(Yan 1987b: 55.1360; based on John Makeham's translation with modifications, Xu 2002: xxxv)

"Poetry, poetic exposition, eulogy, inscription, and encomium" are exactly what would be collected into an author's *bieji* as the genres proper to literature.

The compilation of *bieji* was closely associated with the rise of literature in the early third century. Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), the founding emperor of the Wei who acquired the apt posthumous title Wendi (Emperor Wen or the Cultured Emperor) (r. 220–226), was at the center of the changes. In a famous letter written in 218, he laments the untimely death of several of his literary friends—Xu Gan, Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217), Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217), and Liu Zhen 劉楨 (d. 217)—who had all passed away in the great plague of 217 or shortly thereafter:

Lately, I have edited the writings they left behind into one collection; and yet, as I looked at their names, I realize they are all in the register of ghosts. When I think back to our roaming in days past, it is still so vivid in my mind's eye; and yet these gentlemen have already turned into dirt—I truly cannot bear to say anything about it further.

(Yan 1987b: 7.1089)

It is not entirely clear whether Cao Pi had compiled a joined collection of the authors or individual collections. In either case, it was an act of tribute and commemoration, and we have the first explicit reference to the making of a literary collection by none (p. 223) other than the compiler himself. In his well-known "Discourse on Literature" ("Lun wen" 論文) in *Dian lun* 典論 (*Normative Discourses*), Cao Pi famously claims:

I would say that literary works are the supreme achievement in the business of state, a splendor that does not decay. A time will come when a person's life ends; glory and pleasure go no further than this body. To carry both to eternity, there is nothing to compare with the unending permanence of the literary work. So writers of ancient times entrusted their persons to ink and brush, and let their thoughts be seen in their compositions; depending neither on a good historian nor on the galloping messengers, their reputations were handed down to posterity on their own force.

(Yan 1987b: 8.1098; based on Owen's translation with slight modifications, Owen 1992: 68-69)

The pathos of the passage lies in the desire for this limited, fragile "body" (*shen* 身) to last forever, "entrusted" to one's compositions. Nor is it an embalmed corpse, because it is animated by the permanence of the author's thoughts (*yi* 意) as well. A collection, *ji*, of one's compositions is thus the best embodiment of a writer's everlasting presence.

Cao Pi's younger brother Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232), one of the greatest early medieval Chinese poets, is likewise a pivotal figure in the early history of *bieji*. Though showing a contrary attitude toward literary writings by calling them a trifling skill (Yan 1987b: 16.1140), Cao Zhi nevertheless cared enough about his writings to edit them into a collection in seventy-eight sections, and we know for certain that these writings included poetic expositions. He also appended a preface to the collection, calling it a "Former Record" ("Qian lu" 前錄), implying a "Latter Record" (Yan 1987b: 16.1143). After his death, his nephew Cao Rui 曹叡 (206-239), then the Wei emperor, ordered that duplicate copies be made of Cao Zhi's writings, including poetic expositions, odes, poems, inscriptions and miscellaneous treatises, and that the copies be stored both in and outside the court (*Sanguo zhi* 19.576). Cao Zhi had apparently made a list of all his writings himself. Years later, based on the author's own list, his son Cao Zhì 曹志 (d. 288) was able to clarify the authorship of an essay composed by a relative, Cao Jiong 曹冏. Cao Jiong had presumably placed his essay into Cao Zhi's collection because he wanted his essay to "pass on to posterity" by ascribing it to a famous writer (*Jin shu* 50.1390).

The only other mention of a collection from the early third century involves a writer from the southern Kingdom of Wu, Xue Zong 薛綜 (d. 243). According to his official biography in dynastic history, he had "composed poetry, poetic expositions, 'challenges,' and discussions in several tens of thousands of words, and named them *Sizai* 私載 (*Carried with Partiality*)" (*Sanguo zhi* 53.1254). The term *sizai* is intriguing. It originates from *Liji* 禮記 (*Records of Rituals*), in which Confucius says, "Heaven covers without partiality; earth carries without partiality; the sun and moon illuminate without partiality" (*Liji zhushu* 51.861). By saying that his writings are carried *with* partiality, Xue Zong seems to

imply that they are regarded with favoritism. Does it mean that he regarded his own compositions with special favor? Or that his writings were produced to carry his favorite ideas? It is difficult to tell with certainty. Some scholars assume that *Sizai* (p. 224) is the title of Xue's collected writings; this, too, is difficult to ascertain. It may be simply his playful reference to the compositions as textual containers that, unlike the impartial earth, "carry" just one individual's words and ideas.

Over 98 percent of early medieval literary collections, *bieji*, are no longer extant (Lu 1995: 2788). Most pre-Tang literary collections have been reconstituted in later times from anthologies, encyclopedias, commentaries, and other sources. Historian Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297) edited the collection of Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), the Shu-Han kingdom's prime minister, and presented it to the Jin emperor in 274 along with a memorial to the throne. The collection itself is now lost, but Chen's memorial, which preserves the collection's table of contents, has survived. Zhuge Liang was an eminent statesman but no literary author by contemporary standards, for which Chen Shou apologized to the emperor in his memorial. Nevertheless, Chen's memorial affords us a glimpse into the process of compiling a collection. In it, Chen states that he had "eliminated repetitions as well as overlapping titles, grouped the writings under different subject headings, and thus made a collection in twenty-four chapters" (*Sanguo zhi* 35.930). The phrasing suggests that Zhuge Liang's manuscript remains—likely all from the Shu-Han documentary archives, since Zhuge Liang was one of its most distinctive public figures—contains many duplicate versions. The headings of the collection are mixed in nature: the classification does not seem to follow a consistent criterion, as some chapters are organized in terms of genre and content, such as "Military Instructions" or "Letters to Sun Quan," whereas others are ordered by major events, such as "Southern Campaigns" and "Northern Expeditions." Nevertheless, Chen Shou's memorial shows that the compilation of a collection involves more than just gathering an author's writings together; a great deal of editorial work is called for.

The Making of a Collection

In the *bieji* section, *Sui shu*'s "Monograph on Bibliography" records 437 titles in 4,381 scrolls, noting that the lost books number 886 titles in 8,126 scrolls. About 70 percent of the extant titles are from the Southern Dynasties (317–589). The Southern Dynasties, especially the fifth and sixth centuries, saw the first flourishing of literary collections (Tian 2007a: 100–101).

The early fifth century marked a literary renaissance in south China, with a variety of literary and cultural activities encouraged by reigning monarchs and pursued by men of

letters. This was the time that saw the institutionalization of literary learning and scholarship. In 439, Emperor Wen of the Song (r. 424–453) established an Academy of Literature (Wenxue 文學) alongside the Academies of Classics (Jingxue 經學), History (Shixue 史學), and Metaphysical Learning (Xuanxue 玄學), presenting an institutional version of the four-part bibliographical system (*Song shu* 93.2293–2294). This also coincides with the creation of a new category in dynastic history, namely group biographies dedicated to literary authors entitled “Biographies of Men of Letters” (*Wenyuan zhuan* (p. 225) 文苑傳) in Fan Ye’s *History of the Later Han*, in addition to and in contradistinction to the existing category of “Biographies of Ru Scholars” (“Rulin liezhuan” 儒林列傳). This new category was subsequently adopted in later dynastic histories.

Literary anthologies—*zongji*—abounded. The great aristocratic Xie clan played an important role. Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), a famous landscape poet, compiled a *Shi ji* 詩集 (*Collection of Poetry*) in fifty scrolls. It is now lost, but judging from its spin-offs, it must have exerted a considerable influence. Most notably, his cousin Xie Hun 謝混 (d. 412) compiled a *Ji yuan* 集苑 (*Garden of Collections*) in sixty scrolls, also lost. It seems to have been an anthology made from individual literary collections. It was followed by a *Ji lin* 集林 (*Grove of Collections*) compiled by a Song prince Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444) (*Sui shu* 35.1082).

A striking phenomenon characterizing this period is the boom of *bieji*. We witness a dramatic increase in the frequency of mention of authors compiling their own literary collections (see Tian 2006). Throughout the dynastic histories from the fifth through the early seventh century, there are also numerous references to the compilation of someone’s literary collection commissioned by emperors and princes or voluntarily carried out by the author’s friends and kin. That the biographical subject’s “literary collection in X scrolls is circulating in the world” is often a standard way of ending a biography. This demonstrates social reality as well as the discursive importance of statements regarding a person’s “literary collection.” It exemplifies the idea espoused by Cao Pi that a person may live on through his literary work.

In the case of the prominent writer Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505), we see the most striking indication of the contemporary perception of a literary collection as a crucial form of self-representation. According to his biography in *Liang shu* 梁書 (*History of the Liang*), Jiang Yan had compiled a “Former Collection” and a “Latter Collection” of his own writings (*Liang shu* 14.251). The current edition of Jiang Yan’s works is believed to represent his “Former Collection.” Included in this collection is a “self-account,” which was written by Jiang Yan shortly after the founding of the Qi dynasty in 479. The autobiographical “self-account” had been a standard feature of a multichapter treatise—what Ge Hong refers to as “master’s work”—since the Han (see also Chapter 24). In it, the author typically

narrates his life history and explains the nature and purpose of his book. Jiang Yan's attachment of a "self-account" to a literary collection is a significant act. By using "self-account" in a *bieji* rather than a *zishu*, he evokes Ge Hong negatively by showing a marked difference from the earlier writer:

I, Yan, once said, "In this life a man should seek happiness by suiting his nature. Why should he exert himself too hard for the sake of a posthumous name?" Therefore, from my youth until maturity, I have never written a book. I only have this collection in ten scrolls, but I consider it more than adequate.

(Jiang 1984: 381)

Here Jiang Yan employs the same term used by Cao Pi, *zhushu* 著書 (to write a book), to describe the composition of a multichapter treatise. The tone, though apologetic, has a pride that belies its apparent humility. Jiang Yan's statement and his inclusion of a (p. 226) self-account in his literary collection are emblematic of the larger changes happening in his age.

As the editors of the eighteenth-century *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (*The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*) observed, this period saw the emergence of many of the forms and conventions (*tili* 體例) adopted by later editors of literary collections (*Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 148.3101). If we discount Xue Zong's ambiguous *Sizai*, then Zhang Rong 張融 (444–497) was the first known writer to give descriptive titles to his literary collections: *Yuhai ji* 玉海 (*Jade Sea*), *Daze* 大澤 (*Great Marsh*), and *Jinbo* 金波 (*Golden Waves*) (*Sui shu* 35.1076). Another innovator was the eminent court poet Wang Yun 王筠 (481–549), who compiled a literary collection for each of the eight successive offices he had held (*Liang shu* 33.487).

The Liang 梁 (502–557), a dynasty that ruled south China peacefully for the first half of the sixth century, represents the pinnacle of literary accomplishment in early medieval China. Consciously modeling themselves on the Cao family of the Wei, the Xiao princes of the Liang played a crucial role in cultural undertakings. After his canonization in the Northern Song (960–1127), the poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (Tao Qian 陶潛, 365–427) has often been considered "neglected" in the immediate centuries after his death, yet Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), the Liang crown prince, not only compiled Tao Yuanming's collection but also wrote a preface for it himself. This testifies to the high esteem in which the poet was held in the sixth century. In 522, Xiao Tong entrusted the famous court poet Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽 (481–539) with the task of editing a collection of Xiao's own literary writings, which already amounted to ten scrolls. Liu Xiaochuo's preface to the collection has been preserved. After Xiao Tong's untimely death, his younger brother Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551) edited his collection in twenty scrolls and presented it to the throne along with a biography of Xiao Tong. Xiao Gang's preface to the collection is extant, though

apparently incomplete. Xiao Gang also edited his sister Princess Lin'an's literary collection and wrote a preface for it. In the preface, he mentioned that he had searched for, and found, many "scattered and lost" compositions by the princess (Yan 1987a: 12.3017). These examples demonstrate that literary collections were compiled during an author's lifetime as well as after an author's death, and that the compilation of a collection was done deliberately and with care.

A collection often includes other people's writings that were written on the same social occasion or formed part of an exchange with the author's own, most notably in the case of poetry. Prominent court poet Jiang Zong 江總 (519–594) once wrote a poem in one hundred lines; many contemporaries, including Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583) and Yao Cha 姚察 (533–606), all composed follow-up poems on the same topic. Xu Ling explicitly told Jiang Zong, "I would like to find a place for my poem in your literary collection." When Jiang was compiling his collection, he found that he did not have Yao Cha's poem, so he asked Yao for a copy "to keep Lord Xu's piece company." Yao Cha declined out of modesty. Jiang then said, "If I don't have your poem, I would discard my own. If I do that, I would fail Lord Xu's request. How could you bear being the cause of two cases of loss?" At this Yao Cha relented (*Liang shu* 27.354). The anecdote gives interesting information (p. 227) about the composition and preservation of social poetry, and about how a collection was put together.

In the age of manuscript culture, any collection or text that was not carefully preserved and did not have multiple copies in multiple places could easily become lost (see Chapter 5). Tao Yuanming famously asked his friend or friends to copy out his poems (Lu 1995: 997). Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) deposited five copies of his own collection in different places to ensure conservation (*Quan Tang wen* 675.6897). The careful compilation and preservation of one's collection became a background against which writers could assert a casual attitude toward their writings, and such a casual attitude acquired a cultural cachet on its own. Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (d. 881) said in "The Biography of Master Fuli" ("Fuli xiansheng zhuan" 甫里先生傳) that he had many draft compositions in baskets and boxes, of which he "could not make a clean copy for years. When I saw them later at someone else's place, I did not believe they had been written by myself" (*Quan Tang wen* 801.8420).

Xiao Gang spoke of seeking and gathering "scattered and lost" compositions by his sister. Many compositions had successfully escaped from their authors and sometimes came back to them in a state beyond recognition after going through manifold hand-copying. The care with which authors prepared their *bieji* is countered by stories about the impossibility of exercising authorial control. Yang Junzhi 陽俊之 (fl. mid-sixth century) once tried to correct errors in his poems that he saw on sale in a bookshop, but the bookseller rudely stopped him, saying, "Who do you think you are that you should try to revise an

ancient worthy's writings?!" Yang was so pleased by being regarded as an "ancient worthy" that he apparently gave up his efforts quite happily (*Bei shi* 47.1728-1729).

Few authors would, however, fail to feel dismayed when they saw the altered appearance of their own writings. The Tang monk poet Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912) only "happened to get hold of" a complete copy of his quatrain set more than fifteen years after he first composed it, and was disconcerted to see them riddled with errors, "uncouth and vulgar" (*Quan Tang shi* 837.9425). Guanxiu revised his poems and made a "definitive" version, but this version could not supplant the other versions, "wrong" and "inferior," that were already in circulation. The proliferation of versions and variants presented a serious problem in the Northern Song, when a scholar editor tried to prepare a critical edition for circulation (often for putting into print) and found many different manuscript versions, each different from the others. Textual variants proliferated even as the editor was attempting to eliminate them, a Sisyphean task that was poignantly compared to trying to sweep fallen leaves in autumn or wiping dust from one's writing desk.

A *bieji* goes through other sorts of metamorphoses in the process of transmission in the age of manuscript culture. Readers copy out what they like from an author's collection and thus make a new "selected works," a *xiaoji* 小集 ("little collection") (see Chapter 10). The story about the Tang poet Wang Ji's 王績 (590?-644) collection is instructive. Wang Ji has been hailed as an eremitic, rustic, and ale-loving poet writing in the tradition of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263) and Tao Yuanming. After his death, his compositions were edited into a collection of five scrolls by his friend Lü Cai 呂才 (600-665), who also wrote a long (p. 228) preface for this collection. Then, in the eighth century, scholar Lu Chun 陸淳 (d. 805) made another collection of Wang Ji's writings, with a preface that states:

Every time I read his collection, I imagine what he was like and regret I am not his contemporary and close friend. Thereupon I have deleted those pieces expressing worldly ambitions, so as to preserve intact his aims to be a recluse [lit., untie his official's tassel and remove his official's cap]. If he should rise from the dead, I would not be ashamed of being his understanding friend from a different age.

(*Quan Tang wen* 618.6239)

Lu Chun's preface shows that he has made an anthology of Wang Ji's writings, a *xiaoji*. The "Monograph on Arts and Writings" of *Song shi* 宋史 (*History of the [Zhao] Song*) records a Wang Ji collection in two scrolls edited by Lu Chun (*Song shi* 208.5332). This is less than half the size of Wang Ji's original collection. Subsequently, the most popular editions of Wang Ji's collection were all in three scrolls, which many scholars speculate were expanded on the basis of Lu Chun's two-scroll collection. Only in the last quarter of the twentieth century were several Qing dynasty manuscript copies of Wang Ji's collection in five scrolls discovered and authenticated. Compared with the traditionally

popular three-scroll edition in print, the five-scroll edition represented by these manuscript copies contains nearly seventy additional poems and about two dozen extra prose pieces. A careful examination of the various editions—Lu Chun’s two-scroll anthology represented by a Ming manuscript copy, the popular three-scroll edition in print, and the five-scroll edition—shows that Lu Chun was not only editing and selecting Wang Ji’s poems on a moralistic basis but also on an aesthetic basis. He seems to have excised poems written in a “modern” style—quatrains as well as “prototypical Recent Style poems.” These “modern” poems were written in the tradition not of the much earlier poets like Ruan Ji or Tao Yuanming but of the most recent court poets, most notably Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581) (see Tian 2007b). Wang Ji’s traditional reputation of being a latter-day Ruan Ji or Tao Yuanming was very much built on an incomplete collection of his works; the selection was motivated by ideological concerns that in turn impact stylistic choices.

In the Tang, a reader might also copy down poems in a special subgenre (for instance, quatrains) out of a large literary collection if he or she happened to be interested in this subgenre. The reader would thus make a specialized anthology of an author in a particular subgenre, although in such a case it is less likely that the anthology would be taken to represent the author’s whole self in the same way that Wang Ji’s “little collection” was.

Inclusions and Exclusions

What sorts of writings does a *bieji* typically include? It is, first of all, supposed to represent all of the author’s works in classical literary genres—poetry, poetic expositions, (p. 229) other rhymed writings such as eulogies and encomiums, and essays; but it also customarily includes prose genres serving practical functions. In the case of pre-Tang, we learn about the kinds of writing typically included in a *bieji* from the extant prefaces to some of the collections. For instance, in their prefaces to Xiao Tong’s collection, Liu Xiaochuo and Xiao Gang make it clear that the prince’s *bieji* contains, among other genres, poetry, poetic exposition, encomium, letter, inscription (*ming* 銘), “seven” (*qi* 七), stele inscription (*bei* 碑), and discursive essay (*yi* 議). Jiang Yan and Tao Yuanming are among the very few early medieval writers whose collections have survived more or less intact. Even though Jiang Yan’s extant collection is in fact the “Former Collection” from his mid-career, a cursory look at its table of contents enables us to glimpse a concept of “literature” different from our modern notion. Besides the standard literary genres, we find military proclamation (*xiwen* 檄文), memorial to the throne (subdivided into *zhang* 章 and *biao* 表 according to the occasions of writing), edict drafted on behalf of the emperor

(*zhao* 詔), instruction drafted on behalf of princes (*jiao* 教), communiqué (*qi* 啟, also functioning as a thank-you note addressed to a social superior), letter (*shu* 書) and informal letter (*jian* 箋), elegy (*lei* 誄), grave memoir (*muzhi* 墓誌), conduct description (*xingzhuang* 行狀), sacrificial address (*jiwen* 祭文), biography (*zhuan* 傳), and so forth.

Among Tang writers, Bai Juyi is well known for the care he lavished on his literary collection, which consequently is conserved remarkably well (Bai 1988: 13). It includes, besides several thousand poems and a small number of poetic expositions, numerous political writings such as the edicts he drafted on behalf of the emperor. It also features some prose genres not found in Jiang Yan's collection, most notably *ji* 記 (account), namely short essays on sites, artworks, or experiences; *cewen* 策問 (civil examination questions); and *pan* 判 (legal verdicts, written in strict parallel prose). A particularly interesting inclusion is *Ce lin* 策林 (*A Grove of Examination Questions*), which includes seventy-five mock questions and answers on governance and policies.

The question of what authors include and, more important, exclude in their literary collections is directly tied to the question of what is considered “literature,” and the answer to the question must be historicized just like the notion of literature itself (see Chapter 1). The letter proves an interesting object for consideration. People have written letters in many cultures from past to present, but when does a written note serving the practical aim of communication become part of “literature”? This question is intimately related to the issue of preservation and survival when textual fragility and destruction were the norm: numerous ordinary letters fulfilling a useful purpose—inquiring after the health of a loved one; conveying news about oneself—must have been written and lost except in serendipitous cases of excavation. We can count on the fact that a vast number of such letters never made their way into an author's literary collection. They may be exemplified by Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) notes, which were casually dashed off on the most mundane and domestic subjects imaginable, and often border on incomprehensibility because of their intimate references known to few beyond the recipients and their colloquial style. Those notes are preserved solely because Wang Xizhi was the most renowned early medieval Chinese calligrapher (see Chapter 6). In other words, any letter or letter fragment we see today has been consciously saved by (p. 230) either the writer or the recipient or both for a reason beyond its immediate objective of communication. More often than not, they were included in an author's “literary collection.” A pair of letters in exquisitely crafted parallel prose, written by eminent court writers Wang Bao 王褒 (513–576) and Zhou Hongrang 周弘讓 (fl. mid-sixth century), are preserved in Wang Bao's biography in dynastic history (*Zhou shu* 41.731–733). They are most likely from either Wang's or Zhou's literary collection, or both.

The history of grave memoir illustrates the making of a *literary* genre. Unlike the tomb stele inscription (*beiwén* 碑文), which is above ground, the grave memoir is usually buried

underground; its concerns range from offering basic information about the identity of the deceased to presenting more elaborate narration and a eulogy of the life of the deceased. The latter became increasingly common, perhaps partially in response to the repeated bans on the erection of commemorative stelae at the gravesite in the third century as well as in the early fifth century. Many grave memoirs produced prior to the fifth century have been excavated in modern times; however, grave memoirs *with known authors that were preserved as texts* apparently did not begin to appear until the first half of the fifth century. In a ritual discussion held in 480 on whether to place a grave memoir in the mausoleum of the Crown Princess Pei Huizhao 裴惠昭 (d. 480), the officials in charge memorialized the emperor:

In a precedent established in the Daming Era [457–464], a grave memoir inscribed on stone was placed in the mausoleum of the deceased Crown Princess. According to our deliberations, grave memoirs are not from the ritual canon. During the Yuanjia Era [424–453], Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 [384–456] composed a grave memoir inscribed on stone for Wang Qiu 王球 [393–441]. Members of genteel clans do not have stele inscriptions or lamentations [reserved for the royalty], so a grave memoir is used instead to record the virtue of the deceased; yet, since Yan Yanzhi's time, from princes and dukes on down, all have adopted the practice.

(*Nan Qi shu* 10.158)

Yan Yanzhi was the leading court writer of his day, and Wang Qiu was a famous member of one of the top aristocratic clans; the two were fast friends (*Song shu* 73.1893). It is easy to imagine that Yan Yanzhi fashioned an exquisite grave memoir to be buried with his deceased friend while keeping a copy of it to be circulated above ground. Social standing and literary prestige were crucial factors in the rise of the grave memoir from a merely functional genre to a literary genre, which quickly became a form of cultural capital enjoyed by both the author and the family of the deceased. *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Classified Extracts from Literature*), the early-seventh-century encyclopedia, includes excerpts from about forty grave memoirs, the earliest of which is the grave memoir composed by Emperor Xiaowu of the Song (r. 454–464) for his beloved brother Liu Hong 劉宏 (434–458). The majority of these grave memoirs were, however, from late fifth and sixth century. Since *Yiwen leiju* was compiled on the basis of, among other sources, individual literary collections available to the compilers, we may assume that writers first began to keep copies of grave memoirs they composed to be included in their *bieji* around the mid-fifth century.

(p. 231) Last but not least, we should mention an author's "specialized collection" outside the author's literary collection, a phenomenon that had become increasingly common from the eighth century on (Owen 1997: 306–309). These subcollections include, among

other kinds, exchange collections or special theme collections that sometimes were “explicitly meant to be excluded.” Han Wo’s 韓偓 (ca. 844–923) *Xianglian ji* 香奁集 (*Collection of the Aromatic Cosmetic Box*) is a fascinating case. This specialized collection, as indicated by its title, contains poems of gentle eroticism, which are all excluded from Han Wo’s “regular” literary collection known as *Han Hanlin ji* 韓翰林集 (*Collection of Hanlin Academician Han*). This practice continued and was sometimes taken to an extreme in later times.

The Afterlife of a Literary Collection

Most pre-Tang *bieji* had, as mentioned before, become scattered and lost. While Tang writers took the Six Dynasties literary legacy seriously, Song writers by and large ignored pre-Tang authors except Tao Yuanming (see Chapter 21). This situation changed dramatically in the Ming, which saw a revival of interest in early medieval literature. Most of the pre-Tang literary collections we have today were reconstituted from encyclopedias, commentaries, and anthologies by Ming editors (see Chapter 22). The process of scattering and loss had already started during the sudden collapse of the Liang dynasty around the mid-sixth century. Reportedly, only one copy of Xiao Gang’s complete literary collection had survived the chaos and, after the fall of the second Liang capital Jiangling to the Western Wei army, was presumably taken to Chang’an and deposited in the imperial library of the Wei. Xiao Gang’s youngest son Xiao Dayuan 蕭大圓 (d. ca. 581 or after) did not see his father’s collection until he was appointed an academician in the northern court in the early 560s and immediately set out to make a copy of it (*Zhou shu* 42.757). When the Tang historian Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) remarked disapprovingly that Xiao Gang’s poetry was all about boudoir life (*Sui shu* 35.1090), he most likely had never read Xiao Gang’s collection in its entirety. In fact, his knowledge about Xiao Gang’s poetry might very likely have come from *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 (*New Songs of the Jade Terrace*), a wildly popular Liang anthology of poetry about women and romantic love that includes many of Xiao Gang’s poems on these topics.

In contrast with their disregard for the pre-Tang literary legacy, Song literati spent considerable energy searching for and collating manuscript copies of Tang writings (see Chapter 21). While they recognized that each copy was different, they nevertheless passionately sought the one and only “true” version representing an author’s “original intent” (see Chapter 5; also see Tian 2005: 9–55). They rebuilt Tang literary collections from partial versions, from “little collections,” and from specialized collections. In the meanwhile, however, the practice of compiling specialized collections continued, and new complications arose. A new kind of poetry, *ci* or song lyrics, fully emerged into view in the

world of letters. Although the topics of *ci* did expand to embrace many of the conventional (p. 232) literary subjects, the genre was often associated with romance, wine, and women due to its roots in popular culture and its frequent performance at parties and in the entertainment quarters in its early history. Gradually, from its humble beginning as popular songs, *ci* acquired prestige and importance as a major literary genre after the eleventh century, yet *ci* lyrics were not normally included in an author's literary collection and were circulated separately until the late twelfth century, and even then, only in selected cases.

In late imperial China, the same happened with works of vernacular literature: stories and vernacular songs (*sanqu* 散曲) tended to be excluded from an author's literary collection, and in the latter case, certainly not out of length concerns. Plays, too, often circulated separately, though there were a few exceptions. In the meanwhile, under the pressure of *ci*, classical *shi* poetry became increasingly "serious." In the notable case of Yao Xie 姚燮 (1805–1864), a famous late Qing poet, it has been noted that the Yao Xie in his *shi* collection and the Yao Xie in his *ci* collection seemed to be two different persons even when the *shi* poems and the *ci* lyrics were composed in the same period (Yao 1986: 222). Yao Xie also made a specialized collection celebrating local courtesans at the same time that he was writing poems expressing grave concerns about the British invasion and about the worsening health of his wife (Tian 2015). Only two quatrains from the specialized collection, *Shizhou chunyu* 十洲春語, made their way into Yao's *shi* poetry collection, *Fuzhuang shiwen* 復莊詩問. The chronologically arranged *shi* collection includes poems about national crisis, social sufferings, and personal woes; it was carefully edited and prepared for printing by Yao Xie himself. Segregation of genres coincides with that of experiences; writers would carefully compartmentalize their lives into many partitioned areas that were impossible to reconcile, and they accomplished this by separating these compartmentalized life experiences into different genres and different collections.

One may justifiably say that Yao Xie's model is Han Wo, who also compartmentalizes his experiences into two collections. Nevertheless, the contradiction between Yao Xie's different selves is more radical, dramatic, and troubling because of the immediacy and intensity of the national and family crises he found himself confronting. The clear dating of his writings highlights their incompatibility when we place them side by side. If the early medieval "Masters' works" showcase a consistent voice throughout the book, then a *bieji* has an innate problem because it contains various textual genres that can channel different voices of the author. When an author compiled different collections, these collections could, and often did, function as textual containers that enabled the neat segregation of an author's multiple selves. A modern literary scholar is often tempted to study these distinct textual containers—genres and collections—separately, but in the final analysis, it would behoove us to piece back together the parts and examine them in juxtaposition as a whole.

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