THE CULTURE OF CANONIZATION: READING WEN TIANXIANG'S "SONG OF THE NOBLE SPIRIT"

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Part I
Text and Translation[1]

Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-1283), "Song of the Noble Spirit" 正氣歌[2]

A prisoner in the northern regime, I now sit in an earthen cell eight *chi* wide and four *xun* deep.[3] Its single-leafed door is small and low, its "white aperture"[4] short and narrow, and it's dirty and dark inside. In this summertime, all kinds of Vapors converge here.[5] Sometimes puddles of rainwater all around set my bed and little table

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[1] Text and translation have been placed at the beginning of this paper, following the format once adopted by Stephen Owen, "to avoid breaking up the discussion and to approximate the best way to approach a literary essay — with a prior knowledge of the text(s) under discussion." See his "Deadwood: The Barren Tree from Yü Hsin to Han Yü," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 1(1979), pp. 157-179. Footnotes are used in *Part I*, whereas Endnotes are used in *Part II* and *Part III*.

[2] The translation is based on the text in ‹‹文天祥全集›› [*Complete Works of Wen Tianxiang*] (Bejing: Zhongguo shudian, 1985), *juan* 14, pp. 375-376. Stanzas of the poem in the English translation, which do not exist in the original, have been made according to the change of end rhymes in the even-numbered lines. No modern punctuation marks are used for the Chinese text.

[3] *Chi* 尺, a Chinese unit of length, equals approximately1.0936 feet. Eight *chi* approximates 8.75 feet. *Xun* 尋 equals 8 *chi*, so four *xun* approximate 35 feet or nearly 12 yards.

[4] The expression "white aperture 白間," which refers to the window, is from He Yan's 何晏 (ob. 246) "Rhapsody on the Hall of Great Blessings 景福殿賦," line 144. For an English translation, see David Knechtges tr. with Annotations, *Wen Xuan* or *Selections of Refined Literature*, Volume Two (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 278-303. I have used Knechtges' rendition of the expression here. Notably Wen Tianxiang's use of the term is just the opposite ("short and narrow" 短窄) to He Yan's original use ("Bright, bright, white apertures" 皎皎白間).

[5] *Qi* 氣: "air," "breath," "ether," "exhalation," "spirit," "steam," "vapor," "vital force." For a concise description of the Chinese concept see Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 584-585. In the context here I have picked the English word "vapor," because in addition to its various definitions as "diffused matter," "state of a substance," "emotional condition," etc., it also carries an archaic sense (in plural form) of exhalations within a bodily organ, especially the stomach, that are supposed to affect one's mental or physical condition.

afloat: there lies the Vapor from Water. When mud spreads over half of the cell, what fills the air all around is the Vapor of Soil. Suddenly it gets clear and turns extremely hot: with all vents being stuffed, only the Vapor from the Sun stays. At times, when someone burns firewood for cooking in the shade under the eaves, what aggravates the torture of heat is the Vapor from Fire. The rotten smell from the storage keeps offending one's nostril: it is the Vapor of Rice. Captives of all kinds are huddled together, shoulder to shoulder; from their filthy and stinking bodies there rises the Vapor of Man. From the latrines, from mangled corpses, from the rodents, a compound of villainous smell arises: it is the Vapor of Stench. With all such Vapors flowing together in layers, few who breathe in them manage not be struck down. Yet, feeble and weak as I am, I have lived here, day in and day out, for two years, and I am quite all right. Perhaps it is because I have a way to sustain myself. How, then, would you know what I am fostering within myself? Mencius has said, "I am good at cultivating my boundless and surging Vapor."[6] Against those seven Vapors, I have one within myself. With the one holding its own against seven, why should I worry? Besides, the so-called "boundless and surging" is actually the Noble Spirit of Heaven and Earth. I hereby compose the "Song of the Noble Spirit."

> 予囚北庭 坐一土室 室廣八尺 深可四尋 單扉低小 白間短窄 汙下而幽暗 當此夏日 諸氣萃然 雨潦四集 浮動牀几時 則為水氣 塗泥半朝 蒸漚歷瀾時 則為土氣 乍晴暴熱 風道四塞時 則為日氣 簷陰薪爨 助長炎虐時 則為火氣 倉腐寄頓陳陳逼人時 則為米氣 駢肩雜遝 腥臊汙垢時 則為人氣 或圊溷 或毀屍 或腐鼠惡氣雜出時 則為穢氣 疊是數氣 當之者鮮不為厲 而予以孱弱 俯仰其間 于茲二年矣 幸而無恙 是殆有養致然 然爾亦安知所養何哉 孟子曰 吾善養吾浩然之氣彼氣有七 吾氣有一 以一敵七 吾何患焉 況浩然者 乃天地之正氣也 作正氣歌一首

	Between Heaven and Earth, the Noble Spirit	天地有正氣
	Takes its shape in a variety of forms.	雜然賦流形
	Down here, it's in the rivers and mountains;	下則為河嶽
	Up there, it's in the sun and the stars.	上則為日星
5	In Man, it's called the "boundless and surging"	於人曰浩然
	That fills up the entire space under the sky.	沛乎塞蒼冥
	When the Imperial Way stays calm and serene,	皇路當清夷
	"Infused with harmony,"[7] it exhales into a bright court.	含和吐明庭

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[6] *Mencius*, Book II A 公孫丑上, 2. I have used Owen's rendition of the expression 浩然 ("boundless and surging"). See Owen, *Reading in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 22.

[7] The expression "infused with harmony" is from Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) "Eastern Capital Rhapsody 東都賦," line 299 ("咸含和而吐氣" [In Knechtges' translation: "Are all suffused with harmony, exhale vitality."]). For an English translation see Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, Volume

	Only in times of crisis do great souls arise;	時窮節乃見
10	One by one they descend into the Hall of Fame.	一一垂丹青
	In Qi: the Grand Scribes' bamboo slips.[8]	在齊太史簡
	In Jin: Dong Hu's writing brush.[9]	在晉董狐筆
	In Qin: Zhang Liang's mace.[10]	在秦張良椎
	In Han: Su Wu's staff.[11]	在漢蘇武節
15	It was in General Yan's head.[12]	為嚴將軍頭

One, 1982, pp. 144-179.

[8] During the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 B.C.), Cui Zhu 崔杼, a powerful senior official of the Qi dukedom, assassinated Duke Zhuang 齊莊公. The Grand Scribe 太史 of the state wrote down on his bamboo slips: "Cui Zhu assassinated his sovereign." The infuriated Cui had him executed and appointed his younger brother as the new Grand Scribe, but he did the same and was also executed. Then the youngest brother of the Grand Scribe was appointed, but he did exactly the same. This time, Cui gave up.

[9] In the year of 607 B.C., Duke Ling of Jin 晉靈公 planned to have Zhao Dun 趙盾, his Chief Minister, executed. Zhao was informed of the plan and fled from the court. Before he went across the border his kinsman Zhao Chuan 趙穿 assassinated the Duke. Zhao Dun returned to resume his position without saying anything against the murder. Dong Hu 董狐, the Grand Scribe, wrote: "Zhao Dun assassinated his sovereign," and demonstrated it in court. Zhao Dun argued that it was Zhao Chuan who assassinated the duke, not him. Dong Hu retorted that Zhao Dun should bear the responsibility because, as a Chief Minister, he did not cross the border as a refugee, and on returning he did not have the murderer executed. Confucius acclaimed Dong Hu's act as that of a "true historian."

[10] Zhang Liang 張良 (ob. 186 B.C.) was a nobleman of the exterminated Han 韓 kingdom. During the First Emperor's tour to eastern China in the year 218 B.C., Zhang had a big, heavy iron mace made, hired a man of great strength to help him ambush the emperor en route in Henan. They threw the mace at the imperial carriage, but it miscarried and only smashed a reserve carriage of the emperor's.

[11] Su Wu 蘇武 (ob. 60 B.C.) was sent to the northern Xiongnu state as an imperial envoy by the emperor of Han. He refused the Xiongnu ruler's inducement to capitulate, and was kept a hostage there for 19 years. The "staff" was a bamboo rod (longer than a baton) decorated with ox-tail and held in hand by an envoy as a symbol of authority. Su Wu kept holding the staff during his captivity, even during the long years when he was forced to work as a sheep herdsman by the "Northern Sea" (Lake Baykal in Siberia). In 81 B.C., after a truce was made between the two countries, he returned to the Han court and was appointed as Supervisor of Dependent States 典屬國. For the translation of all Chinese official titles, I have followed Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Offcial Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

[12] Yan Yan 嚴顏 was a military commander under Liu Zhang 劉璋, the ruler of Shu (Sichuan), during the period of the Three Kingdoms. In a battle with Zhang Fei 張飛, a general under Liu

	It was in Attendant Ji's blood.[13]	為嵇侍中血
	It was in Zhang Suiyang's teeth.[14]	為張睢陽齒
	It was in Yan Changshan's tongue.[15]	為顏常山舌
	Or it was in the Liaodong cap:	或為遼東帽
20	An integrity purer than ice and snow.[16]	清操厲冰雪
	Or it was in a Memorial to the Throne	或為出師表
	That moved gods and spirits to tears.[17]	鬼神泣壯烈
	Or it was in the Yangzi-crossing oar:	或為渡江楫
	A heroic spirit to wipe out the savage foes.[18]	慷慨吞胡羯
25	Or it was in the thug-hitting tablet	或為擊賊笏

Zhang's rival Liu Bei 劉備, Yan was captured. When he was told to surrender, Yan said: "In our prefecture, we only have a general who'll get decapitated but no general who'll capitulate."

[13] Ji Shao 嵇紹 (253-304), son of the famous Jin poet Ji Kang 嵇康, served as a Palace Attendant 侍中 under Emperor Huidi 晉惠帝. In a battle against rebel troops, he was killed while shielding the emperor with his own body, and the emperor's robe was stained with his blood. Afterwards the emperor refused to have the robe cleaned, saying: "It's Palace Attendant Ji's blood. Don't wash it."

[14] During the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion in the Tang, Zhang Xun 張巡 (709-757) defended the city of Suiyang 睢陽. After the rebel's troops seized the city Zhang was captured. The rebel commander asked him: "I heard that when you took command in fighting, you always shouted and opened your eyes so wide that blood trickled down your face, and that you gnashed your teeth so hard as to get them broken. Was that true?" Zhang answered: "I'd really like to swallow you ruffians. What a pity I am exhausted now!" In a fury the rebel commander pried open Chang's mouth with a knife, and found that he only had three or four teeth left. Zhang was executed by the rebels.

[15] During the An Lushan rebellion in the Tang dynasty, Yan Gaoqing 顏杲卿 (692-756), governor of Changshan 常山, defended his city against the rebel's troops for 6 days and nights. The city was seized after Yan and his men ran out of food and arrows. Yan was captured and sent to An Lushan. When Yan saw An, he kept abusing him until his tongue was cut off, but he continued incoherently until his death.

[16] Guan Ning 管寧 (158-241) became a recluse towards the end of the Eastern Han dynasty. For more than 30 years he lived in the remote Liaodong 遼東 (Manchuria). Wearing a plain black cap and coarse clothing, he lived in poverty but declined all the official appointments offered by the emperors of the subsequent Wei 魏 dynasty who he despised as a usurper's regime.

[17] Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), famous statesman and commander-in-chief of the Shu-Han 蜀漢 regime during the period of the Three Kingdoms. Twice, before he led his army on a military expedition, he submitted a memorial 出師表 to the young emperor; both are great literary texts.

[18] Zu Ti 祖逖 (266-321) was a military commander of the Eastern Chin. In the year of 313, he led his troop across the Yangzi. While mid-stream Zu, by striking at his oar, vowed to restore the land occupied by the northern "alien" states.

	That broke the traitor's treacherous head.[19]	逆豎頭破裂
	This Spirit fills up the cosmos	是氣所旁薄
	And lasts for a myriad ages.	凜烈萬古存
	It penetrates the Sun and the Moon;	當其貫日月
30	Life and Death it transcends.	生死安足論
	It fixes the Borderlines of Earth;	地維賴以立
	It supports the Pillar of Heaven.[20]	天柱賴以尊
	It's the basis of the Three Cardinal Guides.	三綱實係命
	The Way and the Righteous make its roots.[21]	道義為之根
35	Alas! I happen to have lived under evil star;	嗟予遘陽九
	Indeed I, a humble slave, did little to help.[22]	隸也實不力
	The southern captive "strapped his cap in place"[23]	楚囚纓其冠
	And was sent in a cart to the far north.	傳車送窮北
	Death in a cauldron would be sweet to me as honey; [24]	鼎鑊甘如飴
40	I sought after Death, but all in vain.	求之不可得
	In the "shady chamber" the ghost fire flickers;[25]	陰房闃鬼火

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[19] In the year of 783, Zhu Ci 朱泚, who led a rebellion, summoned Duan Xiushi 段秀實 to his headquarters in an attempt to win the latter's support. Duan hit Zhu's forehead with his tablet and scolded him heartily, and was executed. A tablet 笏, usually made in jade, ivory or bamboo slip, was held before the breast by courtiers when received in audience by the sovereign.

[20] Ancient Chinese believed that the Earth was a huge square enclosed by the "Borderlines of Earth" 地維 around its four corners, and that the Heaven was held up by a huge bronze pillar 天柱 in the Kunlun Mountains.

[21] All these are Confucian concepts. The Three Cardinal Guides 三綱 are guides of three levels of social relations: sovereign / subject, father / son, and husband / wife.

[22] The term "slave 隸" is from the "Biography of Shi Bao 石苞傳" in the *History of Jin* 晉書. Guo Xuanxin 郭玄信 was sent on an imperial mission, and he requested for some carriage drivers; Shi Bao and Deng Ai 鄧艾 were assigned the job. After only a short time on the way, Guo told the two: "You will both become senior ministers 卿相 in the future." Shi Bao said, "Carriage drivers are slaves; where do the senior ministers come from?" It is used here as a self-reference as the author also served as a prime minister.

[23] Before he died in a battle Zi Lu 子路, one of Confucius' major disciples, tied up the broken straps of his cap, saying: "A gentleman dies with his cap on." The story is told in the *Zuo Commentary* 左傳 (the 15th year of the reign of Duke Ai 魯哀公).

[24] Ancient Chinese tyrants were known to have executed people by boiling them alive in a large cauldron. Right after he was captured, the author tried to kill himself by taking some poison, but failed.

[25] The expression "shady room 陰房" is from Lu Yun's 陸雲 (262-303) "Rhapsody on Ascending the Terrace 登臺賦": "步陰房而夏涼" ["I step in the shady room: it's cool in

	In spring, the courtyard is enclosed in the dark.[26]	春院閟天黑
	Ox and steed share the same stall;	牛驥同一皁
	At the chicken roost the phoenix is fed.	鷄棲鳳凰食
45	Some day, infested by foul vapors,	一朝濛霧露
	I guessed I'd turn into a corpse in a gully.	分作溝中瘠
	And yet, twice the cold and hot seasons have passed,	如此再寒暑
	A hundred kinds of disease have kept away from me.	百沴自辟易
	Woe is me! Such an "oozy ground"[27]	嗟哉沮洳場
50	Has become my Kingdom of Peace and Bliss.[28]	為我安樂國
	Do I indeed have any secret trick	豈有他繆巧
	To stay unharmed from the seizure of *yin* and *yang*?	陰陽不能賊
	I believe it's what I hold within	顧此耿耿在
	That's lofty as the white clouds ahead.	仰視浮雲白
55	Deep, deep, the sorrow in my heart is!	悠悠我心悲
	Blue Heaven: when will it all end?[29]	蒼天曷有極
	Men of wisdom, distant day by day,	哲人日以遠
	Have yet left down their model of yore.	典刑在夙昔
	In the wind, under the eaves, I unfold books and read:	風簷展書讀
60	The ancient Way illuminates my countenance.	古道照顏色

Part II
"Song of the Noble Spirit": A Close Reading

The "Song of the Noble Spirit" is a major poem while its author Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283), his great reputation as a hero, patriot and martyr notwithstanding, has

summer."] The entire line models after Du Fu's line in the poem "Palace of Jade Flowers 玉華宮": "陰房鬼火青" ["In the shady room, the ghost fire shines blue."] The expression "ghost fire" refers to will-o'-the-wisp.

[26] This line is a reversal of Du Fu's line in the poem "The Abode of Master Zan at the Big Cloud Temple 大雲寺贊公房": "天黑閟春院" ["The dark encloses the courtyard in spring"].

[27] The expression "oozy ground 沮洳" is from the first line of No. 108 ("汾沮洳") of the *Book of Songs*. Here I have used Arthur Waley's rendition ("There in the oozy ground by the Fên"]. See Waley tr., *The Book of Songs: the Ancient Chinese Book of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), p. 24.

[28] Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077), the Northern Song philosopher, gave himself the cognomen of "Mr. Peace and Bliss 安樂先生," and called his residence in the city of Luoyang the "Nest of Peace and Bliss 安樂窩," which he frequently referred to in his own poems.

[29] This line is a condensed reorganization of lines from the second stanza of No. 121 ("鴇羽") of the *Book of Songs*: "悠悠蒼天, 曷其有極" ["O blue Heaven so far away, / When will it all end?"] See Waley, p. 156.

been ranked as no more than a minor poet, arguably “a major minor poet” at best, albeit one who has received perennial attention from critics and readers alike.[30] Aside from the fact that it is one of the best known and most often anthologized poems from the Song dynasty, its importance is also demonstrated in the record of its reception in the West: only a few hundred of Chinese poems have obtained as many renditions in so many different languages.[31]

The issue of whether the popularity of the poem is justifiable in the text *per se* is complicated by the poet’s reputation as a man. As Stephen Owen has aptly observed, “Wen Tianxiang’s achievements as a writer are inextricable from the dramatic experiences of his life and death in the Yuan subjugation of the Southern Song.”[32]

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[30] The Italian critic Benedetto Croce (1866-1926) has used such expressions as “a minor major poet” (*un piccolo-grade poeta*) and “a major minor poet” (*un grande-piccolo poeta*) in discussing Italian poets in his *La Letteratura Italiana* (Vol. IV, p. 231). Cited in Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, “中國詩與中國畫” (“Chinese Poetry and Chinese Painting”), in his ‹‹七綴集›› [*Heptad*] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2nd Edition, 1994), p. 21. Qian has borrowed Croce’s terms here to call Wang Wei “a minor major poet” as compared to Du Fu, and Wei Yingwu 韋應物 “a major minor poet.” The perennial posthumous popularity of Wen Tianxiang is reflected in the history of the printing of different editions of his *oeuvre* (1296, 1451, circa. 1540, 1560, 1575, 1673, 1725, 1837, 1843, 1887, 1936, and also two undated editions, one from the early Ming and one from the late Ming). For an account of all these various editions see the “Foreword” in Zhang Yuqi 張玉奇 selected and annotated, ‹‹文山詩選注›› [*Wen-shan Poems: Selected and Annotated*] (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 12-14.

[31] For a singular book-length biographical study of Wen Tianxiang in English, see William Andreas Brown, *Wen T’ien-hsiang: A Biographical Study of a Sung Patriot* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center Publications, 1986). The “Song of the Noble Spirit” was among the first Chinese poems to be introduced to the Western public by an early generation of European Sinologists. Herbert A. Giles (1845-1935) included a partial prose rendition of the poem, entitled “Divinæ Particulam Auræ,” in his *Gems of Chinese Literature* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1922), pp. 201-202. Georges Margouliès made two somewhat different abridged French renditions, respectively entitled “Chant du grande fluide” and “Le chant de l’esprit de justice,” in his *Le kou-wen chinois* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1926), pp. 312-315, and *Anthologie raisonnée de la littérature chinoise* (Paris: Payot, 1948), pp. 224-225. Brown has reported a German version in A. Forke’s *Dichtungen T'ang und Sung-Zeit* (Hamburg, 1929); but I have not been able to find this version. Vasilij Michajlovic Alexeev made a highly acclaimed Russian translation of the poem, IIecHb IIp MoMy yxy (“Song to the Upright Spirit”), that was printed in 1946. [See L. Z. Ejdlin, “The Academician V. M. Alexeev as a Historian of Chinese Literature,” translated by Francis Woodman Cleaves, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1947), pp. 48-59.] A complete versified English version is Wong Man’s “The Spirit of Honour,” in her *Poems from China* (Hong Kong: Guji bianyishe, 1950), pp. 47-53. Another versified English version, complete with translation of the original preface, is Father John A. Turner’s “Song of Honour” in *A Golden Treasury of Chinese Poetry*, compiled and edited by John J. Deeney (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1976), pp. 280-287.

[32] Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 704.

Almost immediately after his death by execution in 1283, the apotheosis of Wen Tianxiang was completed among some of the leading poets who remained loyal to the former Song dynasty, such as Wang Yuanliang 汪元量, Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241-1318), Lin Jingxi 林景熙 (1242-1310), Xie Ao 謝翱 (1249-1295), and Liu Chenweng 劉辰翁.[33] For the very first time in Chinese history by that time, the entire "land of divinity," including the land south of the Yangzi which, during the previous Age of Division, had nevertheless been under Chinese sovereignty, was now under alien rule. These poets identified in Wen a model for their resistance, more in spirit than in reality for many of them, against the Mongol rule.

Wen Tianxiang's appeal as a man and a poet did not come to an end with this generation of loyalist poets. Instead, he has remained a perennial attraction to later generations ever since, all the way through the modern times. In particular, Wen inspired another generation of poets after the downfall of the Ming dynasty, when China was once again subjugated under the rule of the Manchu, another non-Chinese nationality.[34]

One may argue that in a culture dominated by the ethics-centered Confucianism, the acceptance of a literary text into a canon is based, not infrequently (though to various extent), on the character and personality of the author rather than entirely on its own strength. This may be especially true of the reception of Wen Tianxiang's poem by a modern Chinese reader. Considering the cultural background that China was twice subjugated in history to the rule of non-Chinese regimes, and humiliated by foreign powers in more recent times, such a reader's appreciation of a work of literature is inclined to be oriented by a nationalist passion, and he would naturally admire works from those who stood for the soul of the nation.

Is the "Song of the Noble Spirit" such a text? Has its popularity come primarily from its author's prestige as a great man? To what extent is its canonization justified by its own artistic merits? Through an *explication du texte* of the "Song of the Noble Spirit," this paper will try to explore the secret of the perennial charm of the poem.

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[33] For writings from these poets in honor of Wen Tianxiang see Liu Wenyuan 劉文源 ed., ‹‹ 文天祥研究資料集›› [*A Collection of Research Materials on the Study of Wen Tianxiang*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991). Zheng Sixiao, for example, wrote a biography of Wen Tainxiang entitled "An Account of Prime Minister Wen" 文丞相敘 (pp. 72-78), a short eulogy with preface 文丞相贊並序 (pp. 193-194), and a poem sequence in response to Wen's "Six Songs" 和文丞相六歌 (pp. 424-425). Lin Jingxi wrote a poem on reading Wen's collection 讀文山集 (p. 426). Wang Yuanliang (pp. 420-422) and Xie Ao (pp. 423-424) both wrote a number of poems in memory of Wen. Liu Chenweng wrote two eulogies, 古心文山贊 and 文文山先生像贊 (p. 192).

[34] Poets of the Ming-Qing transition period who wrote in honor of Wen Tianxiang included some of the leading poets of the age, such as Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692), Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711), and Zha Shenxing 查慎行 (1650-1720). See Liu Wenyuan, pp. 450-453.

The Poem in the Poet's Oeuvre

Most Chinese scholars have noticed the conspicuous periodic difference in the more than seven hundred texts of Wen Tianxiang's poetic *oeuvre*.[35] In 1256, the twenty-one-year-old Wen was ranked first as the *Optimus* 狀元 at the final capital examination in the civil service recruitment examination sequence. During the next two decades, Wen served as a junior courtier and at various local administrative positions, or lived a recluse's life at home during the intervals, when he was twice dismissed from court for standing up against powerful ministers.

Few of the 257 poems that Wen wrote during this period, contained in the first two volumes of his *Collection of Literary Works* 文集, show much brilliance and depth. About three fifths (a ridiculously large proportion) of his early poems were either composed for quotidian social occasions, such as birthday celebrations or funerals, or written at the request of (or in response to) Buddhist or Daoist monks, fortunetellers, and physiognomists. Many of them contain jejune discussions of Daoist thinking and the theory of *yin* and *yang*, and were perfunctorily written. The latter category of such poems led the eminent Chinese scholar Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) to make the humorous observation that the above cited professionals of the time probably used the prestige of men with the title of *Optimus* like Wen Tianxiang for their own marketing need.[36]

In the beginning year of the Deyou 德祐 reign (1275), when the northern army of the Mongol Yuan regime crossed the Yangzi, Wen made a career change from a civil official to a military general and sometimes a diplomat, traveling for thousands of leagues around the country, frequently living under dangerous situations. He was defeated and captured by the northern troops in 1278. The next year, Wen's close friend, Lu Xiufu 陸秀夫 (1236-1279) carried the last Song emperor (still a boy) on his back and committed suicide by jumping into the sea, and the Song dynasty came

[35] For discussions on the differences between Wen's early and late poems see the "Foreword" in Zhang Yuqi, pp. 3-14; also Zhang Gongjian 張公鑑, ‹‹文天祥生平及其詩詞研究 ›› [*A Study of Wen Tianxiang's Life and His Poetic Works*] (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1989); the "Foreword" in Huang Lanpo 黃蘭坡 selected and annotated, ‹‹ 文天祥詩選›› [*Selected Poems of Wen Tianxiang*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979), pp. 1-17; and the "Foreword" in Deng Biqing 鄧碧清 annotated and translated, ‹‹文天祥詩文選譯›› [*A Selection of Wen Tianxiang's Poetry and Prose: A Modern Chinese Translation*] (Chengdu: Pa Shu shushe, 1990), pp. 1-18.

[36] See ‹‹文天祥全集›› [*Complete Works of Wen Tianxiang*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1985), pp. 1-18, 19-39. (Henceforth referred to as *Complete Works*.) For a short but very colorful commentary on Wen's poetry see Qian Zhongshu selected and annotated, ‹‹宋詩選注›› [*Selected Sung Poems with Annotations*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, Revised Edition, 1982), p. 311.

to an end. Wen was transferred to the Yuan capital, and stayed in Kublai Khan's prison until his execution.

The more than four hundred poems written in the last eight years of Wen's life, contained in the three collections, *The Account of the Compass* 指南錄, *A Second Account of the Compass* 指南後錄 (which contains the "Song of the Noble Spirit"), and *Chant and Howl* 吟嘯集, make another illustration of the age-old Chinese dictum that adversity engenders true poetry.[37] Like the works of Wen's idol, the great Tang "Poet-Historian" Du Fu (712-770), these later poems make a valuable personal historical record of the tumultuous times.[38] Many of these later poems were indeed "writ in blood,"[39] displaying great emotions, insight, and rhetoric deftness. In terms of its depth, high seriousness and artistic achievement, the "Song of the Noble Spirit," written in prison in the early summer of 1281, is one of the best examples of Wen Tianxiang's later poetry.

The Poem as a Literary Text

In *The Account of the Compass*, Wen Tianxiang mixes poetry with prose in the experimental form of a poetic diary, as Owen has noted.[40] He continues to do the same in *A Second Account of the Compass*, which contains the "Song of the Noble Spirit." The poem is preceded by a prose preface, a practice that dates all the way back to Tao Yuanming's "Peach Blossom Spring," and remains popular among poets of the Song dynasty, some of whom, such as Su Shi and Jiang Kui 姜夔, have actually perfected the form into a kind of sub-generic gem in itself.

The preface of the "Song of the Noble Spirit" provides a concise but very vivid account of the background of the composition of the poem. Notably, all the seven Vapors, which the author struggles against, are described in realistic images. In its descriptive details, the short preface complements the poem well and forms an integral part with it.

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[37] See *Complete Works*, pp. 311-347, 349-382, 383-395 (*juan* XIII, XIV, and XV). The text of "Song of the Noble Spirit" is on pp. 375-376.

[38] While in prison Wen made a collection of 218 poems from re-organizing the lines from Du Fu's poetry, each capped with a title or a short preface of its own. See *Complete Works*, pp. 397-441 (*juan* 16).

[39] In discussing Chinese poetry, the eminent Qing critic Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) cited in his famous ‹‹人間詞話›› [*Remarks on Lyric Songs from the Human World*] a saying which he attributed to Nietzsche: "Of all literature I like that which is writ in blood." See Teng Xianhui 滕咸惠 edited, ‹‹人間詞話校注›› (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1981), p. 94.

[40] For Owen's selected translation of *The Account of the Compass*, interspersed with short comments, see *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, pp. 705-720. This observation is on p. 704.

Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, an important poetry critic of the Ming dynasty whose criticism is marked by a strong formalist concern, has observed that notwithstanding Wen Tianxiang's distinction and prestige as a man, "(his) poetry is meticulous in prosody 詩律實工."[41] It is quite true of many of Wen Tianxiang's later poems, including the "Song of the Noble Spirit."

The poem is in the form of the five-character old-style verse 五言古體. A poem written in this form, looser in its metrical pattern than the eight-line regulated verse 律詩, nevertheless has to follow specific generic prescriptions and norms of propriety of its own. The opening lines of such a poem, for example, are supposed to contain concepts that are "lodged deep and far," and it should "move back and forth with ease, stately and never pressed."[42] In a display of the poet's fastidious craftsmanship, the "Song of the Noble Spirit" exemplifies the expectations of a five-character old-style poem from traditional Chinese poetics.

In terms of its semantic structure, the poem may be divided into two major parts, lines 1-34 and 35-60. The first discusses the topic in general terms, and the second tells about the poet's personal experience and thoughts. The first part may be divided further into three divisions (lines 1-10, 11-26, and 27-34), forming a beginning, a middle, and an end in itself.[43]

The poem's opening lines accord with the requirement of using a concept that is "lodged deep and far" in setting the topic in the broad spatial dimension ("Heaven and Earth"). In line 5 it switches to the human world by referring to Mencius' description of the human "vital breath."[44] At the end of the first division, a temporal sense is introduced in a reference to the historical "Hall of Fame 丹青" (lines 9-10), which constitutes a natural transition into the next division.

In the second division, the poet illustrates the "Noble Spirit" with the use of allusions about twelve heroes and martyrs in history. Within sixteen parallel lines, these historical figures appear in three groups. The syntactic structure of the line, the position of the *caesura*, and the use of *anaphora* vary from one group to the other.

In the first group (lines 11-14), the four earliest historical personages are presented in chronological order. The syntactic structure of the line is "In 在 (1 character) — name of state or dynasty (1 character) — title or name of person (2 characters) — name of a thing (1 character)." Following the normal pattern for five-

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[41] From his ‹‹詩藪›› [*Preserve of Poetry*]. Cited in Liu Wenyuan, p. 384.

[42] See selections from some of the "Popular Poetics" from the Southern Song and Yuan in Owen, *Reading in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 444.

[43] Incidentally, such divisions of the text are verified by the change of the end rhymes of the even-numbered lines in the original.

[44] For Mencius' discussion of the cultivation of the "noble spirit" see *Mencius*, Book IIA, 2. In traditional Chinese cosmology, the Human is considered as one of the triad of the universe living between the other two, Heaven and Earth.

character verse, the *caesura* comes after the second character in the line (XX/XXX). In the second group (lines 15-18), the structure shifts into that of "It was 為 (1 character) — name or epithet of person (3 characters) — name of body parts (1 character)." In an irregular variation of the syntactic pattern, the *caesura* takes place after the first character (X/XXXX). For these two groups, the names of the personages precede the name of things or body parts, with the latter in the form of *synecdoche*. The third group (lines 19-26) devotes two lines to each of the four historical figures, enriched by descriptions or symbols of their famous acts, a trope close to what is known as *antonomasia* in ancient Roman rhetoric, i.e., the use of a proper name to stand for something else having an attribute associated with that name. The break-up of the line has returned to the normal pattern of "XX/XXX." The presentation of the second and third groups, which consist of eight historical figures from late Han to Tang dynasty, no longer follows a chronological order, but rather switches back and forth in time.

Such an ingenious syntactic variation greatly enhances the color and musicality of the lines. As some critic has noticed, the poem "enumerates and elaborates with a line format that approximates that of prose."[45] In fact, while the observation of more flexible and varied "rules for constructing lines 句法" is characteristic of the Song poetry in general, here in this poem it reveals Wen Tianxiang's close study of his idol, Du Fu, whose poetry became the model for the Song poets, especially those of the so-called Jiangxi School, in terms of its experimental line construction.[46] The repetitive uses of anaphora (在, 為, 或) harks back, though to a lesser extent, to another Tang poet, Han Yu 韓愈, as in his famous "Poem on the Southern Mountain 南山詩."

The sixteen lines of the second division, as subtly heralded by the expression "Hall of Fame" in the preceding line 10, constitute the climax as well as the core center of the poem by creating a lifelike, vivid gallery of the heroic men that represent the "Noble Spirit," through a concentrated, successive use of references 用事. Behind each of the twelve figures is a story that evokes in the reader's mind a world of its own in all its drama, emotion, and tension. What the poet does here with his writing brush emulates what a painter does with his painting brush for the "Hall of Fame"—one in poetry, the other in painting; one is for the mind, the other is for the eyes only. Here, one may well argue that poetry excels, as it provides more room for the reader's imagination. It is the use of references at its best.

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[45] Lü Xiaohuan 呂肖奐, ‹‹宋詩體派論›› [*The Styles and Schools of Song Poetry*] (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2002), p. 319.

[46] For a study of the poetry of the Song dynasty in terms of its relation with Tang poetry see Hu Ming 胡明, "關於宋詩" ["About the Poetry of Song"] in Yang Yi 楊義 ed., ‹‹ 1953-2003 文學研究所學術文選›› [*Selected Scholarly Essays from the Institute of Literary Studies: 1953-2003*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), Vol. 4, pp. 346-372. For a discussion of Wen Tianxiang's study of Du Fu's poetry in this article see pp. 362-363.

In the third division the poet returns to a general discussion of the "Noble Spirit." It harks back to the opening division by once again setting the human examples within the larger spatial context of Heaven and Earth, and by connecting their behavior to fundamental Confucian principles.

The second part of the poem begins with an exclamation ("Alas" 嗟), followed by the first person singular, in line 35, switching from the general to the specific, from the public to the private. In a spatial sense, the poet now shifts the focus of his poetic lens from the open world of Heaven and Earth to the enclosed world of his prison cell. Temporally, he switches from the historical past to the present, linking history to his own personal experience. In terms of the lyric voice, the third person observation, assumed in the previous lines, is now superseded by an opening of the author's heart in the first person singular. An account of his capture and transference to the north is followed by that of his misery and suffering in prison. Instead of sinking into self-pity or mourning, the poet tells how it is the "Noble Spirit" that sustains him in confronting all the difficulties.

In the last eight lines of the poem (53-60), the poet returns to world and history, and closes with an image of himself. He still sits in that enclosed world of the prison cell; but, with the "wind" blowing in from under the low eaves, a link has been provided between the enclosed and the outer world. A lonely and solitary prisoner, he is nevertheless placed in line with all those historical figures, across time and space, through the principles of the "ancient *Dao*." Heaven and Earth, rivers and mountains, the sun and the stars, all those heroes in history, the poet in prison, past and present, are thus interwoven into a unified image through the dominant and omnipresent "Noble Spirit."

Throughout the entire poem (including the prose preface) the author has used appropriate expressions from a variety of sources, from the rhapsodies of Ban Gu, He Yan and Lu Yun to lines from the *Book of Songs* and from his favorite poet, Du Fu. With no exception, these references have been integrated into the poem almost imperceptibly. To the educated reader who knows all those previous texts, the poem has become a subtle dialogue, across time and space, with all its predecessors.

Crossing and Integrating Generic Boundaries

Alastair Fowler has suggested that of the many factors determining canon formation in literature, genre (including sub-genres) is among the most decisive.[47] Living in the shadow of great masters of the Tang dynasty — the "Golden Age" of Chinese poetry, the poets of the Song had made all and sundry efforts to break new ground and to find their own voice: in choosing unprecedented topics, in constructing more elaborate parallelism, or in seeking further variation of the syntactic structure of their lines.

[47] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 216.

Compared to the Tang poets, who were at their best in speaking through visual images imbued with emotions, the Song poets had a general inclination to be cerebral and discursive. While the "Song of the Noble Spirit" reflects the new *Zeitgeist*, it has moved beyond generic boundaries in a deliberate integration of several different earlier conventions.

Wen Tianxiang found in the topic of the Mencian concept of "Noble Spirit" a challenge for the form of the five-character old-style verse. A metaphysical topic like that was not entirely new to poets of his age. During the Yongjia 永嘉 reign (307-312) of the Jin dynasty, with a revival of interest in Daoist classics (*Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*) and the rise of an intellectual movement known as the "pure talk" 清談, there emerged the subgenre of *Xuanyan* ("Mystic Talk") poetry 玄言詩, which was characterized by its proposition of Neo-Daoist philosophy. It remained popular for nearly a century, though only a few of its texts are extant today. The metaphysical in poetry found another incarnation in the *Lixue* ("Study of the Principles") poetry 理學詩 during the Northern Song period, which was initiated by Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077), a philosopher and scholar of the *Book of Changes*.[48] Both these two conventions exerted their influence in the age, even on the works of major Northern Song poets like Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105). It continued into the Southern Song, and Wen Tianxiang was certainly no exception, as evidenced especially in his early poems.

Such an influence is still felt, for example, in the first part of the "Song of the Noble Spirit," especially in its third division. While the topic may well be developed into a *Xuanyan* or *Lixue* poem, which usually carries on the metaphysical discussion through the end, Wen has managed to transcend these conventions in this poem.

In building up a gallery of historical figures, the poem has "made it new" (to use a concept of the Russian Formalists) by integrating elements of the *Yongshi* ("singing of history") poetry 詠史詩, another age-old poetic subgenre which found one of its best early examples in a sequence of eight poems by the Jin poet Zuo Si 左思 (c. 253-c. 308). There are some similarities between Zuo Si's poems and the "Song of the Noble Spirit." Both aim at creating a self-portrait. Both call forth a number of historical figures as illustration of the poet's own belief. On the other hand, Zuo Si's examples are mostly talented men neglected by the state, or those who despised officialdom, with a strong Daoist inclination, whereas Wen's are mostly celebrated Confucian heroes who stood up against despots or gave their lives for a right cause.

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[48] For a discussion of the *Lixue* poetry, also known as the *Daoxue* ("Learning of the Way") poetry 道學詩, see Chapter Nine, "The School of *Lixue* Poetry: A Collateral Branch of the Song Style 理學詩派: 宋調的旁枝" in Lü Xiaohuan's book (Note 15), and also Chapter Four, "Shao Yong and the School of Lixue Poetry 邵雍及理學詩派," in Xu Zhong 許總, ‹‹宋詩史›› [*A History of Song Poetry*] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1992), pp. 237-265.

Each of Zuo Si's eight poems centers around one historical figure only, while Wen Tianxiang's singular poem brings about an entire gallery of twelve.

Wen's poem also differs greatly from poems of the metaphysical conventions in that it remains true to the essence of Chinese *shi* poetry as "an expression of one's mind" 詩言志. It is a true lyric song in the tradition of Du Fu, because it gives a vivid record of the poet's experience, his sufferings, and his belief. One of the most frequently anthologized poems from the Song dynasty, the "Song of the Noble Spirit" has been recognized as a major text with a singularity of its own, not just because it is a poetic exemplification of the Mencian "Noble Spirit," and the Confucian principles of personal integrity and human dignity, but also, as has hopefully been manifested in the above exegesis, due to the merit of its superb imagery and structure, as well as its ingenious integration of sub-generic conventions.

Part III
Beyond the Text: A Little Panel Discussion on Canon

[Panelists: Professors Zheng Tong 童政 and Wei Mei 梅偉; Chair: Professor Zhe Zhong 鍾哲]

Zhe Zhong:

Professor Yang Ye has just provided a close reading of Wen Tianxiang's "Song of the Noble Spirit," and I think he has revealed some of the artistic maneuverings in the poem that account for its perennial charm as a canonical text. One question that Yang has not asked in the reading, but is quite intriguing, and also important — at least to me — is: What is the mechanism that works in the canonization of a literary text, and how does it work? So, using the little authority delegated to me as the Chair of this panel, I would humbly and respectfully ask our panelists to pursue this question, even though it is somewhat "beyond" the poem itself, and hopefully, at the end of this little panel, we may provide some glimpses into the culture of canonization in the Chinese tradition. Professor Tong, would you please start first?

Zheng Tong:

Thank you, Professor Zhong. I gladly concur to your choice of the topic for the panel. The "Song of the Noble Spirit" is a good example of what makes a canonical text. As much as Yang Ye has disclosed some of its artistic merits, it has become one of the most beloved poems in our tradition, in my opinion, not on those alone. The singularity of the poem lies ultimately in its being a successful poetic exemplification of the Confucian principles of personal integrity and human dignity, with their deep and solid foundation in the Chinese civilization.

From Horace's dictum of "*utile et dulce*" to Matthew Arnold's "Sweetness and Light," critics who try to establish a standard of literary excellence have looked for a balance between contents and form. T. S. Eliot has argued that while the literariness of literature may be judged by aesthetic criteria, the "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; instead, we need some kind of extra-aesthetic critieria.[49] In other words, as Austin Warren has asked: "Is the great poem the work of a poet who is a great man (or mind or personality), or is it great as a poem?"[50] I'll say that the answer to the question lies in the former. The personality of the author is certainly an important factor among such extra-aesthetic criteria. Wen Tianxiang's great personality, coupled with the great topic itself, account for what stands for Horace's *utile* and Arnold's *Light* in the poem. There, may I venture to suggest, lies the perennial charm of the poem.

The "Song of the Noble Spirit" is certainly not the first canonized poem from someone known as a great patriot. For an earlier sample we may go all the way to Qu Yuan's *On Encountering Trouble*, probably the earliest lyric song that presents a distinctive individual voice and also creates a self-portrait (or a *persona*), of someone who cultivates and maintains his "inward beauty" or personal integrity; notwithstanding all kinds of adversity and misfortune, he refuses to deviate from his principles. At the end of the poem, he implies that he is to choose death ("I shall go and join Peng Xian in the place where he abides") rather than giving up his beliefs.

Compared to Qu Yuan's poem, a cultural product long before Confucianism was established as a dominant ideology, Wen Tianxiang's poem is an open affirmation of Confucian values. Almost without exception, the historical figures in his gallery of the "Hall of Fame" are acknowledged Confucian heroes whose conduct is based on the Confucian principle of the righteous, who have chosen death rather than yielding their principles, and who have maintained their dignity and purity in their respective challenge to force or power. The continuous popularity of the "Song of the Noble Spirit" through the ages, in the Chinese tradition, is certainly evidence of how much the Confucian values, as embodied in the poem, have become an integral part of Chinese culture and the Chinese *psyche*; and without question, one cannot detach the enthusiasm with the poem through the ages from its author's image as a hero and patriot. Qu Yuan's eminent place among a small elite group at the very top of poets of all times is certainly also due to the great human values as represented in his works

In its focus on Confucian values Wen Tianxiang's poem is also in the tradition of his idol, Du Fu, whose poetry he read avidly through all his last years as a prisoner. Du Fu's place as the "Sage of Poetry 詩聖" makes another good example how and

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[49] T. S. Eliot, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1936), p. 93.
[50] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 3rd Edition, 1963), p. 244. As indicated in the "Preface to the First Edition" (pp. 7-9), Warren is primarily responsible for Chapter Eighteen ("Evaluation"), from which the quotation is taken.

why the extra-aesthetic criteria work. The word "Sage 聖" itself reveals that the very reason why he tops all Tang poets, even above such giants as Wang Wei and Li Bo, is because of his Confucian predilections and his consistent concern with the state and the people of his time. As Qian Zhongshu has observed, compared with Du Fu, who ever since the Middle Tang period has been firmly established as China's greatest poet, even Wang Wei can only be rated as "a minor major poet."

Zhe Zhong:

Thank you, Professor Tong. Professor Mei, your turn.

Wei Mei:

Wen Tianxiang's "Song of the Noble Spirit" deserves its place as a canonical text, but with all due respect, I beg to disagree with Professor Tong regarding the formation of canon. In my opinion, Qu Yuan's superb place in the Chinese tradition provides a fine illustration just to the contrary of Professor Tong's opinion. First, from the sparse extant historical record about Qu Yuan (mostly from Sima Qian's biography of him in the *Historical Records*), we know that after his death, he was already greatly admired by his younger contemporaries such as Song Yu 宋玉, Tang Le 唐勒 and Jing Cuo 景差, who all regarded him as their model, but (and that is a big but) more in literary composition than in personal conduct. In spite of Qu Yuan's reputation as a patriot, it was primarily through his works, widely read and collected in the Western Han, that he won his eminent place in the Chinese tradition. Please note that his fame is not based on "On Encountering Trouble" alone, but also on the eerily beautiful "Nine Songs" and — my favorite work of his — the singular and spectacular "Heavenly Questions," which do not necessarily reflect all those grandiloquent, high-sounding principles as Professor Tong has assigned to "On Encountering Trouble." Incidentally, even "On Encountering Trouble" would not have enjoyed its place in the canon if it had not been written in such an ingenious structure, such colorful descriptions, and such rich and varied use of symbolism.

Du Fu's paramount status as the "Sage of Poetry" also proves that poetry has to be judged primarily as poetry. In terms of its variety of style, originality, force, and exquisite diction, Du Fu's poetry is simply second to none, fully justifying his status as the "Great Synthesizer 集大成者" among poets, the king of kings. Furthermore, Du Fu is such an experimentalist in prosody and techniques, much more so than either Wang Wei or Li Bo. Note also that others who have been given the title of "Sage," such as Wang Xizhi 王羲之 ("Sage of Calligraphy 書聖") and Wu Daozi 吳道子 ("Sage of Painting 畫聖"), have also won the acclaim primarily from their superb attainments in arts, not from their personality. Who has ever heard either one of these two being talked about as great men?

But let us return to the "Song of the Noble Spirit." Professor Tong has mentioned its topic of the Mencian "Noble Spirit," but if the poem is not written with such great skills, as Yang Ye has disclosed in his exegesis, it would have amounted to nothing. Through the ages, innumerable poems on such high-flown topics have passed into oblivion. Why is Wen Tianxiang's poem still read and much beloved? In fact, the secret of why Wen Tianxiang's later poems, including this one, are so much better than his earlier ones lies in his diligent study of Du Fu's poetry, which became his major diversion while a prisoner. He in fact made a collection of poems all of which are careful and, in many ways, ingenious re-arrangement of Du Fu's lines.

Let me give you an example with an entirely different topic. How about the short prose piece "Hymn to the Virtue of Wine 酒德頌"?[51] Short as it is, and in spite of its topic which has nothing to do with Confucian values, one that may be considered by many as trivial, it is nevertheless a canonical text, even winning a place in Yao Nai's 姚鼐 canon-making prose anthology, *A Collection of Ancient Prose Classified by Genres* 古文辭類纂. As you all know, it was written by Liu Ling 劉伶, one of the most unorthodox figures among the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢" and, to my knowledge, the first known self-conscious and earnest nudist in the Chinese tradition, and I shall refrain from citing here the anecdote about how he refuses to give up his drinking habit, lest that it drives some feminists among us crazy. So far as its contents are concerned, what is advocated in the piece is hardly related, if not directly opposite to, Confucian values. But, what a little classic it is, with its bombastic and gallant style, its graceful and vivid description, and more than anything else, its flamboyant spirit which, even if the word *Noble* is not *le mot juste* to describe it, is equally "boundless and surging" as Wen Tianxiang's spirit!

Zhe Zhong:

Thank you, Professor Mei. A short response from you, Professor Tong?

Zheng Tong:

I cannot imagine, as Professor Mei has argued, that the canonization of Qu Yuan and Du Fu has nothing whatsoever to do with their sublime moral concern. As for Liu Ling's piece, I know little about prose authors so I'll pass. But allow me to give one more example among poets. Among those of the Middle Tang period, Bo Juyi 白居易 has been canonized as a major poet, as early as in his own lifetime, largely due to his

[51] For Richard Mather's English translation of the piece see John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau ed., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, Volume I: *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty* (New York: Columbia University Press and Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2000), pp. 471-472.

perseverance on representing Confucian values in his poetry. As he says in the preface to his "New Music Bureau 新樂府" (809), poetry should be composed for the sovereign, for the people, and for the affairs of the state, not for literature itself. Incidentally, among the early readers of Chinese poetry in the West, I really admire Arthur Waley for his insight and vision in focusing on Bo Juyi's poetry in his translation. It takes good and sound judgment, and also a solid basic training, to understand the canon of a different culture.

On the other hand, works from an author with dubious character can never hope to be ranked highly in the Chinese canon. Let me give you an example here, one whose personal character was just the opposite to that of Wen Tianxiang. As a playwright, the seventeenth century author Ruan Dacheng 阮大鋮 (1587?-1646) never won the same esteem as Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) before him, or Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718) afterward, even though his representative plays, *The Swallow Messenger* 燕子箋 or *Riddles on the Spring Lanterns* 春燈謎, in terms of their elegant style and exquisite rhetoric, have been considered by some to be in no way inferior to *Peony Pavilion* or *The Peach Blossom Fan*. However, due to his notoriety, first as a treacherous official who fawned on the powerful eunuch, Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢, and subsequently as a traitor to the Ming dynasty by quickly surrendering to the Manchu regime, Ruan's plays could never equal those of Tang and Kong in reputation. One may argue that the reader's psychology plays something in the canon making, but it is an undeniable fact that morality and personality are indeed important extra-aesthetic factors in the mechanism.

Zhe Zhong:

Professor Mei?

Wei Mei:

I am glad Professor Tong mentioned Bo Juyi. In my opinion, he is one of those poets (like Wordsworth among English poets) who fares far better in an anthology than in his own *oeuvre*. Reading Bo Juyi in the former is a pleasure; but reading the 3,840 poems in the latter, what a bore and, allow me to explain in a minute, what a revelation of the poet as a human being! Still, I agree that Bo Juyi deserves his place as a major poet, but he won that place, not by the numerous poems in his collection describing people's suffering, but rather by some of his fine narrative poems, such as the "Song of Lasting Pain 長恨歌" or the "Song of Pipa 琵琶行."

Citing a number of historical sources, the Qing dynasty historian and literary critic Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) has convincingly maintained that Bo Juyi's reputation, even when he was still alive, was to a very large extent built upon the "Song of Lasting Pain." Indeed, Bo is remembered chiefly by these two poems, both

deservedly canonical texts: one, a poem about romantic love, and the other, with its great description of music; both have very little to do with what Bo advocates in that preface Professor Tong just mentioned! Talking of personality, you know what kind of person Bo Juyi was? From today's point of view, he was a typical "dirty old man" in his late years. There were perhaps other poets who lived like him, but few have ever boasted about their licentious indulgence (with concubines, prostitutes, and servant maids) as Bo Juyi does, without any sense of shame which, according to Zhao Yi, reveals the essence of Bo's personality as an upstart, from his quick rise in rank and fame despite a humble background. That's why I said reading him in his *oeuvre* is such a revelation of the man himself, as he wrote so many poems talking about his debauched experience. To cite one of Bo's own lines: "Three times, loathing the aging and the ugly, I've changed my 'moth-eyebrow ones' 三嫌老醜換蛾眉."[52] There is a strong reason why he, along with his close buddy Yuan Zhen 元稹, were frequently criticized by men of letters in later ages, more for their respective ignoble personality than their poetry ("the frivolous Yuan and the vulgar Bo 元輕白俗"). Still, to return to our topic, all this does not affect Bo's status as a major poet in any way. By the way, excuse me for a digression on an unrelated topic, since you mentioned Arthur Waley, do you know that Qian Zhongshu has once made his trademark observation that Waley chose to translate Bu Juyi probably because Bo's poetry is supposed to be "understood by any regular old woman 老嫗能解"? I often wonder if Stephen Owen heard Qian's remark before he took upon himself the challenging task of working on Han Yu and Meng Jiao, two of the most difficult poets in the Chinese tradition!

I am even happier that Professor Tong mentioned Ruan Dacheng. I agree: as a historical figure he was just the opposite of Wen Tianxiang. Wen was a loyalist and a patriot; Ruan, a traitor and a villain. Cyril Birch has selected a couple of scenes from Ruan's *Swallow Messenger* and included them under the title of, quite aptly, "Bigamy Unabashed," in an introduction to Ming drama.[53] I also heard that another Western scholar has considered him to be a great playwright, and is trying to rehabilitate his reputation. Ruan strives to imitate Tang Xianzu, whose plays he adores, but his own plays simply lack the emotional depth and dramatic force as found in *Peony Pavilion*.

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[52] For a largely historicist commentary of Bo Juyi and his poetry see Zhao Yi's ‹‹甌北詩話›› ([*Oubei's Remarks on Poetry*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963), pp. 36-55. Zhao Yi was styled Oubei. For a much harsher commentary on Bo Juyi the man sees Shu Wu 舒蕪, "偉大詩人的不偉大一面," ["The Not So Great Aspect of a Great Poet"] in ‹‹讀書›› [*Reading Books*] 3(1997), pp. 110-114. The cited line is from Bo's poem "追歡偶作" ["In Pursuit of Pleasure: a Random Piece"] in the 34th *juan* of Bo's poetry collection.

[53] Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theater of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). For an introduction to Ruan Dacheng and his plays and an English translation of selected scenes from the play 燕子箋 (*Swallow Letter* in his rendition), see pp. 219-247.

In particular, Ruan's plays often push the coincidence of plot to the extent of artificiality. Take, for example, the *Swallow Messenger*, which is considered to be his best play. It tells how both Hua Xingyun 華行雲, a courtesan, and Li Feiyun 酈飛雲, the daughter of an illustrious official's family, fall in love with the male protagonist, the handsome scholar Huo Duliang 霍都梁, and eventually marry him as his two wives. It actually borrows its main plot, that of a swallow playing the role of a messenger in the marriage, from an earlier anonymous play, *The Story of the Colorful Writing Paper* 霞箋記 (there goes any claim for originality). Towards the end, when Huo is appointed as a senior official, the two wives go into a fight with each other, in competing for the conferment of honorary titles by imperial mandate. What kind of cheap melodrama is that? With all due respect, I disagree with Birch, who calls it "a triumph of comedy." How could such characters be mentioned at the same breath as Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅 and Du Liniang 杜麗娘, or Hou Fangyu 侯方域 and Li Xiangjun 李香君? Come on, Ruan Dacheng was dropped out of the canon not because of the man, however evil he was, but simply because his plays are not that great after all! Eventually, artistic values still play a dominant role in the process of evaluation and canonization in the Chinese tradition, or for that matter, in any other traditions as well.

Talking about canon, I'm reminded of something the late A. C. Graham once said. In an essay entitled "The Translation of Chinese Poetry" which precedes his *Poems of the Late T'ang*, he makes a bold observation which I would like to cite here:

> There are obvious dangers in playing at close criticism in a language and literature not one's own; it would be safer to leave such inquiries to the few Chinese, notably James Liu, whom Western critical techniques have awakened to this aspect of their poetry. However, it is rather less presumptuous to analyze a poem than to translate it; and we can hardly leave translation to the Chinese, since there are few exceptions to the rule that translation is best done into, not out of, one's own language.[54]

It is indeed a presumptuous observation as Graham himself has subtly realized. The works from Stephen Owen and many, many others have already proven Graham wrong in the first part of his comment. As regards the second half, there is no dispute Graham himself did an admirable job in that little anthology, many of his translations therein have yet to find a match in their gracefulness from any later translator, Chinese or Western. On the other hand, there are just as many mediocre translations of Chinese poetry from Western translators as from the Chinese themselves! If we expand it to some other genres of Chinese literature, then, in my opinion, even after

[54] A. C. Graham tr. with an Introduction, *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 37. Prior to the cited passage, Graham is discussing multiple meanings and ambiguity in Chinese poetry.

half a century, some of Lin Yutang's translations still remain unsurpassed in grace. But that is not why I cited this passage. We are here to discuss canon, and so, bearing in mind that Western scholar who wants to rehabilitate Ruan Dacheng, I'm going to make, possibly, an equally presumptuous remark, à la Graham: "We can hardly leave the Chinese canon to those who are not native Chinese, since there are few, if any, exceptions to the rule that canon formation is best made in, not out of, one's own language." I've been reading English poetry ever since I was a child, and one of my early favorites was A. E. Housman. Even today *A Shropshire Lad* remains one of the little books that I return to again and again. I never liked Milton, and he is still my pet aversion today. However, I know well enough that my beloved Housman is probably just a minor poet, and much as I detest Milton, I'd never challenge his place in the canon!

Zhe Zhong:

Both of you have made very strong arguments. I would like to see if we could find some middle ground — the Confucian Golden Mean. Certainly, in any culture, the canonization of a work of literature involves ideological, religious and aesthetic values, and it is difficult to exclude any of them in the process. However, my question is: do these different values all work at the same level, with the same force, and play the same role?

While listening to the two of you, I sometimes had the impression that you are talking about content and form as two separate entities, whereas I believe that we should be looking for the unity of these within any canonical text. I would argue that the best works of literature are those in which these two are inseparable from each other. As Austin Warren has observed,

> Instead of dichotomizing 'form-content', we should think of matter and then of 'form', that which aesthetically organizes its 'matter'. In a successful work of art, the materials are completely assimilated into the form: what was 'world' has become 'language'. The 'materials' of a literary work of art are, on one level, words, on another level, human behaviour experience, and on another, human ideas and attitudes.[55]

A canonical text must hold something that is profound and universal, something that can touch the heart string of its reader in a deep and emotional way, something that has to be effectively and powerfully represented in the text so that we almost forget about its form. This is the feeling I have while reading, say, "On Encountering Trouble" or Du Fu's great sequence "Autumn Meditation 秋興," and I love the "Song of the Noble Spirit" for exactly the same reason. Through Wen Tianxiang's vivid,

[55] Wellek and Warren, p. 241.

realistic description, I can identify with the author in his misery and suffering, but, inspired by all the heart-stirring tales of the gallery of figures of that "Hall of Fame," I feel that I could transcend all that misery and suffering, and soar into an open world of free will and human dignity, riding on the "boundless and surging" Noble Spirit. I am not convinced that the poem holds its perennial charm only on its superb techniques and genre-crossing aspects.

Talking about "Hymn to the Virtue of Wine," it is my favorite, too. But the power of the piece lies not in its language only. Certainly, it has little to do with Confucian values, as you, Professor Mei, has cogently argued. However, dominant as Confucianism has been through the ages, I don't need to remind you that it is only one of the "Three Teachings" in the Chinese civilization. In creating the image of that sublime drinker, "Of cold and heat he felt no fleshly pangs, of profit or desire no sensual stir," Liu Ling has provided a vivid exemplification of the "True Man 真人" as defined, in a more abstract manner, in the *Book of Zhuangzi*. In reading Liu Ling's piece, we feel like we are making a "free wandering 逍遙遊" between heaven and earth, like that legendary bird, *Peng* 鵬, that Zhuangzi has described. Please remember that Daoism, also as one of the "Three Teachings," is just as much an integral part of the Chinese psyche as Confucianism. Needless to say, we should stop thinking of Daoism and Confucianism as two opposite schools of thinking, as they share much in common. Confucius himself often shows the true spirit of a Daoist. One may even say that "Hymn to the Virtue of Wine" also exemplifies something that has a deep foundation in Confucianism as well, namely, "the pride of the cotton-clad civilian in front of kings and lords 布衣傲王侯," so well illustrated by the conduct of the Second Sage, Mencius, himself, and also illustrated by some of the heroes in Zuo Si's poems on historical figures, as Yang Ye has cited.

I detect some contradictions in your argument about Ruan Dacheng, Professor Mei. You have argued all along that aesthetic values play the decisive role in canon formation, but when you call *The Swallow Messenger* a cheap melodrama by citing some of its story, you seemed to have focused on its contents more than its form, and when you show your contempt of its personages as compared to that in *Peony Pavilion* and *Peach Blossom Fan*, I see some kind of morality- and ethics-oriented criteria creeping into your argument! By the way, Ruan Dacheng was known to have tried very hard to model his plays, both in form and in content, after Tang Xianzu. In terms of the exquisite diction and graceful style, he has made some success; his *Riddles on Spring Lanterns* has been praised as up to Tang's level in rhetoric. However, I have no quarrel with you, Professor Mei, as to the evaluation of Ruan's extant plays: they fail to be canonical texts because they lack the necessary depth and power, in spite of their rhetoric brilliancy. By the way, you may be happy to know that A. E. Housman has actually been included on an expanded list in "A Canonical

Prophecy" by none other than Harold Bloom, a major canon-maker in our own time.[56] You are surely not the only fan of *A Shropshire Lad*!

Excuse me for the digression, and let's return to our topic. Time is running out for our little panel, so I have to hurry up, but before I call it a day, I think it is very important to remind everyone that canon is not to be regarded as a closed and fixed system; rather it is an open system that adapts itself with the changing times and at different times, each kind of those values may come to the front and play a more decisive role than the others. Professor Yang Ye has mentioned at the beginning of his presentation the reaction to the "Song of the Noble Spirit" from a modern Chinese reader. I think it is very true that Chinese readers through the ages have felt attached to the poem for some of the reasons as he has suggested. In our age, to cite the late Edward Said from my favorite book of his, *Representations of the Intellectual*, we, as intellectuals, East or West, need to stay as "exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that speaks truth to power." We need to keep our moral authority as a prophetic outsider, and such a moral authority is not for sale.[57] As long as the intellectual still has the need to walk around, to have the space in which to stand and talk back to authority, a literary text like Wen Tianxiang's "Song of the Noble Spirit" will hold its charm for such an intellectual with its brilliant representation of the beauty of human dignity and the invincible human will. But, will there be a time, in the unpredictable future, when the intellectuals, the readers of poetry, no longer feel such a need as Said has described? And if so, is the canon to change when the emotion expressed in such a literary text becomes so strange and unfamiliar to us, that we shall no longer be moved and touched by it? I shall leave the question unanswered for now, as I, for one, do not have a crystal ball in front of my eyes to tell.

[56] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994), p. 553.
[57] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: the 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), p. 121.