Avatars of Li Bai: On the Production of Tang Poetry and Tang Poets during the Northern Song Dynasty[1]

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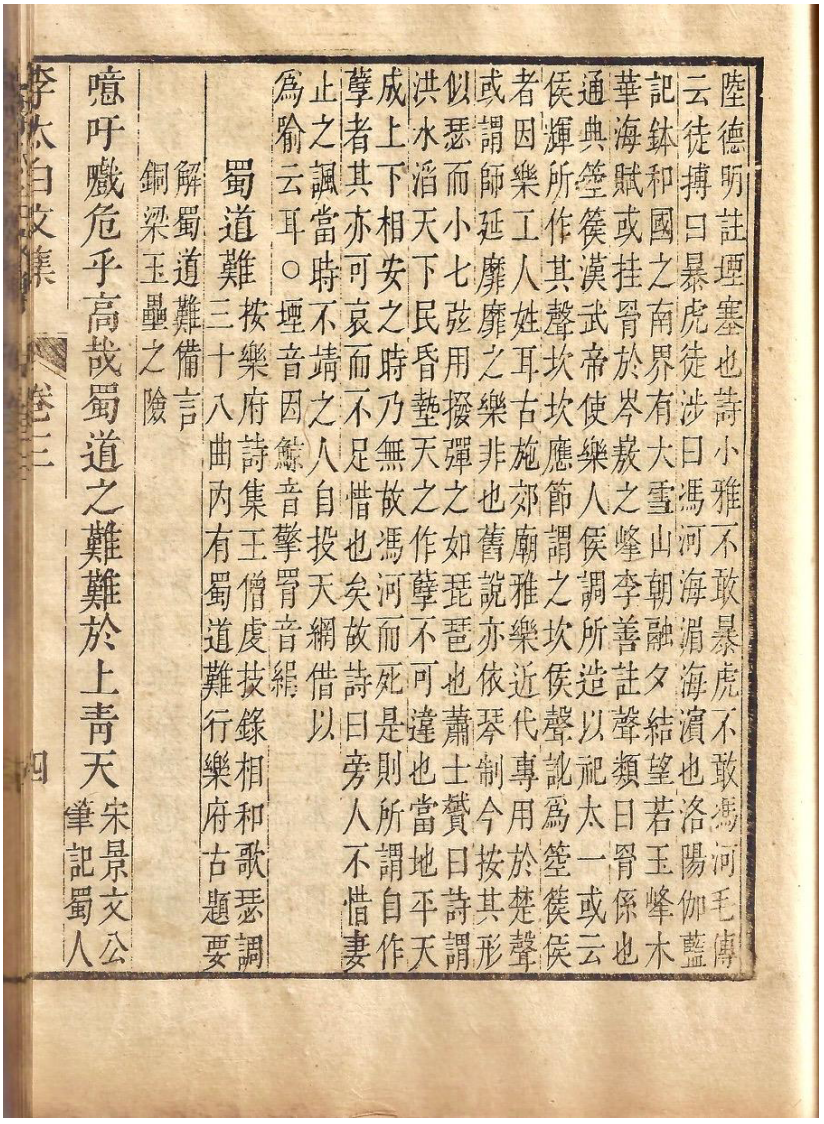
In recent years, scholarship on premodern Chinese literature has taken a sharp turn towards reception history (*jieshou shi* 接受史), historical studies of the responses of generations of readers to the works of individual writers. Though this historicist trend is in many ways a welcome expansion of traditional biographical or formal studies, in the study of the Tang it also runs the risk of reaffirming a false confidence in the stability and coherence of "Tang literature," let alone "Tang authors," as interpretative categories. At its most complex, reception history traces messy debates over significance, values, and canonicity through contrasting positions, and it reveals readers engaged in making meaning from the tradition. At its most simplistic and positivist, it reifies in a hagiographic manner the historically formed canonical identity of a given writer and reinforces a teleological narrative about the process of canonization.

In many reception studies we also find a rigid subject-object dichotomy, in which an author's corpus is presented as a unitary object only partially understood (or misread) by reading subjects over time—and the "partiality" of their response is assessed by the contemporary scholar, who implicitly claims a full, correct understanding of the whole. Furthermore, though reception history is aimed at demonstrating the continued but varying impact of a given author's corpus transmitted over time, scholars often fail to nuance the changing cultural and ideological contexts in which readers encountered the corpus, producing narratives of "response" that are often strangely deracinated from their cultural moments.[2] This tendency is especially problematic, I suggest, in studying the transmission of Tang literature over the course of the epistemic shifts of the Tang-Song transition, in which definitions of the literary and its relationship to moral and ethical value were changing irrevocably even as the material conditions of literary production and transmission were also evolving in a new era of print. The multiple cultural transformations of the tenth through twelfth centuries reshaped both



陸德明註堙塞也詩小雅不敢暴虎不敢馮河毛傳云徒搏曰暴虎徒涉曰馮河海涓海濱也洛陽伽藍記鉢和國之南界有大雪山朝融夕結望若玉峰木華海賦或挂罥於岑崟之峰李善註聲類曰罥係也通典箜篌漢武帝使樂人侯調所造以祀太一或云侯暉所作其聲坎坎應節謂之坎侯聲訛爲箜篌侯者因樂工人姓耳古旃郊廟雅樂近代專用於楚聲或謂師延靡靡之樂非也舊說亦依琴制今按其形似瑟而小七弦用撥彈之如琵琶也蕭士贇曰詩謂洪水滔天下民昏墊天之作孽不可違也當地平天成上下相安之時乃無故馮河而死是則所謂自作孽者其亦可哀而不足惜也矣故詩曰旁人不惜妻止之諷當時不靖之人自投天網借以爲喻云耳○堙音因鯨音擎罥音絹

蜀道難 按樂府詩集王僧虔技錄相和歌瑟調三十八曲內有蜀道難行樂府古題要解蜀道難備言銅梁玉壘之險

噫吁嚱危乎高哉蜀道之難難於上青天 宋景文公筆記蜀人

Li Bai's "The Road to Shu is Hard," from the 1758 edition of *Li Taibai wenji* 李太白文集, held by the Research Library at the Elling Eide Center, Sarasota, Florida.

Tang texts and Song readers, and thus the "reception" of Tang literature should be read not just within but as part of—and even a catalyst for—those transformations.

Scholars acknowledge the degree to which textual practices such as colophons, anthologies, evaluations, and editions produced different versions of Tang poets in the centuries after 907, but to date, the study of that process has been focused on individual authors rather than on the ways that these activities, taken as a whole, constituted new hermeneutic practices growing out of new intellectual and material circumstances of the Northern Song. What were the continuities within the reshaping and transmission of different Tang texts and authors from Tang to Song? How might we read across those continuities to create a larger literary historical picture of reception as a set of hermeneutic practices in the Tang-Song transition? In this essay, I begin to address these questions by decentering High Tang poet Li Bai 李白 (701-762) from the narratives of single-author reception history in order to situate him in the broader story of Song approaches to the Tang literary legacy.[3] Song writers' attempts to justify or deny Li Bai's position near the top of a Tang literary pantheon reveals critical fault lines in their struggle to define literary and historical values. The ongoing debate over Li Bai's talent and relative place in the literary pantheon during the Northern Song—which is to say, the efforts of those writers to produce a stable, canonical figure—reveals both the challenging features of Li Bai's corpus and the impact of new literary standards on the shaping of the medieval literary canon. At the same time, the material practices of collecting, editing, reorganizing, selecting, and printing Tang writers' works were becoming more culturally prestigious activities in the Northern Song and thus transforming the ways Tang works and authors were evaluated.

Li Bai became an interesting problem for Northern Song readers in at least two ways. First, much of his poetry was not easily accommodated to the sociopolitically oriented literary values that emerged in the wake of the "ancient prose" (*guwen* 古文) movement of the mid-eleventh century. Second, his checkered personal history challenged the Song tendency to write biographical narratives linking a writer's moral character to his political moment and his literary corpus, narratives that were being crafted around the two key figures of Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770). It was not that the terms by which Tang readers had championed Li Bai's reckless, energetic genius were unintelligible to Song readers—they were perfectly intelligible, if applied to a narrow set of poems. But they were insufficient to meet new Northern Song definitions of literary greatness. For Li Bai to sustain his position as one of the Tang greats in the Northern Song, his reputation and corpus had to be reexamined and redefined.

Though late Northern Song scholars labored to reconcile discrepancies

among competing versions of Li Bai, successfully producing by the last decades of the eleventh century a rationalized, fixed corpus and a sanitized biography, their efforts did not result in a triumphant twelfth-century consensus—in fact, debates over the core features of Li Bai's talent and his relative place in the Tang canon continue even today. The Li Bai story in the Northern Song began as an epistemological challenge—what were the appropriate aesthetic and historical frameworks in which to understand Tang poetry?—but ended in an ontological question: what is a Tang poet? Because Li Bai was complex, well-documented, and controversial, he provides an especially clear lens through which to see these questions unfold. Reading the history of Li Bai's interpretation alongside that of other Tang writers being reframed in the Northern Song, such as Du Fu, Han Yu, and Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814), calls into question Li Bai's exceptionalist reputation and reveals how deeply embedded he was in far-reaching Song inquiries into the meaning of the historical past and the quest for usable literary models. More broadly, this essay takes a turn away from traditional reception history and its subject-object dichotomy towards a dynamic model of transmission that foregrounds the ways that readers, imitators, editors, and anthologists made meaning from Tang literature.[4]

Our necessary starting point is a brief survey of the most influential versions of "Li Bai" produced in the last half of the Tang and the Five Dynasties era. Recognizing the polyvocality of the poet and his corpus as they stood in the ninth and tenth centuries is important for understanding the wide range of Northern Song reimaginings of the poet—some of which were positive, some negative, but none neutral. I also emphasize the degree of physical and material engagement we see among readers of his work from his death through the end of the Northern Song, though Li Bai is not unique in this regard.[5] These readers literally handled Li Bai's legacy: they collected and copied manuscripts, they wrote inscriptions for steles about him, they visited and renovated his gravesite, selected poems for anthologies, made editions of his work, and viewed paintings of him. As art historian Kathlyn Liscomb has shown in her analyses of the visual and material legacy of Li Bai, Li Bai became a "multivalent iconic figure" in art and material culture from the Southern Song onward—but that story begins in the Tang and Northern Song, even if little evidence remains of readers' material engagement before the thirteenth century.[6] This evidence reveals the proliferation of multimedia Li Bai "avatars" in what at first seems to be only textual reproduction. Where Li Bai began as an avatar in the older, Hindu sense, the "banished transcendent" (*zhexian* 謫仙), an incarnation of a Daoist deity sent down from the heavens, certainly by the late Northern Song he more resembled an avatar in today's gaming sense: an icon, an abstracted representation of a particular set of features that could be adapted to multiple

uses and contexts and adopted by readers for self-representation. For Li Bai and other Tang writers, Song readers slowly assembled verbal iconographies that included specific topics, styles, metrics, lexica, and images they saw as quintessential. Moreover, Song readers' conceptualization of Tang poets *as* avatars—Du Fu being an even more prominent example—was itself an innovative, increasingly valorized form of cultural production.

The Tang Multiplicity of Li Bai

Northern Song scholars made Du Fu—but they inherited Li Bai. Or, to be more precise, they inherited many Li Bais. The achievement of scholars in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in canonizing Du Fu as the "poet-historian" and "poet sage" has been well studied in recent years, and that scholarship has done much to illuminate the essential role of editions, printing, and paratextual practices in producing a morally paradigmatic and stable Du Fu.[7] This Northern Song making of Tang poets included other major figures, most significantly Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (768-819), and others associated with the mid-Tang interest in "antiquity."[8] Those editions of mid-Tang corpora were critical to the invention of new literary standards associated with the *guwen* prose movement of the mid-eleventh century. From one perspective, Li Bai was an outlier in Tang literary history. His fame was established during his lifetime (in part through his own production of his self-image)[9] and solidified in the eighth and ninth centuries by a series of collectors and influential admirers, as well as by writers who composed new inscriptions for his tomb, anthologists who collected his poems, and anecdote compilers who inflated his outrageous reputation with new stories.[10] These assessments of his talent and person were by no means univocal or consistent, yet nowhere do we see anxiety among Tang readers about those inconsistencies—instead, we find pleasure in circulating well-known poems and tales that featured Li Bai's outsized personality.[11]

The extant evidence from Tang quotations, anthologies, anecdotes, and later imitations suggests that Tang versions of Li Bai tended to cluster around a few popular poems and stories. For example, Li Bai's poem "The Road to Shu Is Hard" 蜀道難 has a strong claim to being one of the best-known poems of the Tang dynasty, perhaps second only to Wang Wei's 王維 (701-761) eighth-century parting poem "Song of Yang Pass" 陽關曲 and followed by Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772-846) "Song of Lasting Sorrow" 長恨歌.[12] Yin Fan 殷璠 (fl. mid-8th c.), who first collected it in his mid-eighth century anthology *Heyue yingling ji* 河嶽英靈集 (The eminences of our rivers and mountains), praised it as "marvelous beyond marvelous" (*qi zhi you qi* 奇之又奇).[13] "The Road to Shu Is Hard" crystallized key elements of Li Bai's reputation: his youth in Sichuan—the region also famous for producing Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 180-117 BCE), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 CE), and Chen

Zi'ang 陳子昂 (661-702), as Li Bai himself never ceased to remind his readers, his fame as a far traveller, fondness for grandiose gesture, and poetic experimentation. The memorable opening of the poem tied these together:

Yi-xu-xi!! So sheer! So high!	噫吁戲危乎高哉
The hardship of the road to Shu is harder than mounting to Heaven.	蜀道之難 難於上青天
Since Can Cong and Yu Fu founded Shu, how long ago—[14]	蠶叢及魚鳧 開國何茫然
Forty-eight thousand years since that time,	爾來四萬八千歲
yet from there to the passes of Qin no path links human dwellings.	不與秦塞通人煙

After thirty lines of wild description and mental journey across the precipitous landscape, Li Bai concludes with a warning and a dramatic gesture:

Though they say the Brocade City is full of pleasures,	錦城雖云樂
it's better to return home soon.	不如早還家
The road to Shu is hard, harder than mounting to Heaven—	蜀道之難難於上青天
I lean and gaze west, heaving a long sigh.[15]	側身西望長咨嗟

"The Road to Shu Is Hard" was composed to a traditional Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) title, and Li Bai's reputation as a poet in Tang anthologies was centered around *yuefu*, which were overrepresented in anthologies compared to his other verse forms. Other of his *yuefu* poems often anthologized and quoted in the Tang and later centuries include "Bring in the Wine" 將進酒, "Tune of Crow-black Night" 烏夜曲, and "Hardships of the Road" 行路難, verses that showcased respectively the roles of drinker, voyeur to romantic sorrow, and roaming bravo.[16] But certain of Li Bai's occasional verses were also frequently imitated by Song poets; perhaps the best example is the first of his four "Drinking Alone Beneath the Moonlight" 月下獨酌 poems, which vies with "Asking of the Moon, Wine in Hand" 把酒問月 as his most popular "wine" verse in the Northern Song. If we hope to understand the challenges that Li Bai posed for later readers, the fact that these three poems were so often discussed and imitated after his death should serve as a caution.[17] Their narrow sampling of his poetic oeuvre contrasts provocatively with versions of the poet we find in other, more serious Tang portraits of Li Bai that survived into the Song.

Three elements of Li Bai's life story pervade Tang accounts of him, two

of which were hotly contested and would go on to deeply influence Song readers' attitudes toward Li Bai the historical figure. The first and least controversial element is his extraordinarily wide travels throughout China, documented by the geographic references in his occasional verse; second, his brief service at Tang Xuanzong's 唐玄宗 (r. 712-757) court; and third, the question of his attitude to serving the Prince of Yong (Li Lin 李璘, d. 757) during the An Lushan Rebellion in 757. After years of youthful travel and patron-seeking, Li Bai was appointed in 742 to the Hanlin Academy at the glorious court of Xuanzong, and he remained there for roughly two years—but the extant sources do not agree on the extent and nature of his service at court, whether he was merely a literary entertainer (a drunken one at that), or whether he had weightier official duties.[18] He left Chang'an in 744, either with affection and rewards from the emperor or in disgrace after being dispatched by Gao Lishi's 高力士 and Yang Guifei's 楊貴妃 machinations. The penultimate act in Li Bai's story, when he was employed by the Prince of Yong in the prince's attempt to seize the southeast from his brother (Emperor Suzong 肅宗, r. 756-762), occurred in the least-documented period of his life. Different texts in his corpus during and after those events suggest conflicting views of his willingness to join the prince, and the question is ultimately unresolvable.[19]

The uncertainties in Li Bai's biography are further complicated by the messiness of his Tang textual legacy—and given that messiness, scholars have expressed suspicion over many poems added to his corpus during the Song. But we do have evidence of one collection that the poet himself compiled during his lifetime in a farewell preface composed in 759 for the Buddhist monk Zhenqian 真倩, in which Li Bai stated that he had made a copy of "all that he'd written in his life" for the monk. This tantalizing reference to a Li Bai hand copy is the only information we have about Li Bai's compilation efforts, and no evidence remains of the monk's copy.[20] At Li Bai's death in 762, two people had partial copies of his poetry with which they had been entrusted. One was his younger friend and drinking companion, Wei Hao 魏顥 who compiled a small two-*juan* collection, the *Li Hanlin ji* 李翰林集 (Collection of Hanlin Scholar Li) and the other was his younger cousin, the official and famous calligrapher Li Yangbing 李陽冰 (d. ca. 777) who compiled a more ambitious collection of Li Bai's work in ten *juan*, the *Caotang ji* 草堂集 (Collection from the thatched hall).[21] Though neither collection survived past the Song, the two prefaces did, and they offer us contrasting views of his life and the work. Wei Hao's preface is brief and casual, emphasizing their friendship, and his collection apparently included his own poems to Li Bai. Li Yangbing's preface, discussed below, is both serious and ambitious, to the point of being defensive about Li Bai's work and his reputation. Out of these initial verdicts on Li Bai new appreciations

and stories would proliferate over the next century and a half. But it is important to note that we have relatively little evidence about the forms in which his work circulated in the last half of the Tang, with the important exception of evidence from Dunhuang, only some of which is dateable.[22] A handful of poems on "Reading Li Bai's Collection" 讀李白集 from the ninth and tenth centuries reveal that there were "collections" (*ji* 集), in circulation, but they are not referred to by more precise titles or described in any manner.

During the Tang, versions of Li Bai appeared in a variety of literary forms, including commemorations, admirations, and anecdotes. Rather than a consistent typology of response, we find what we might call a typology of production: under certain generic conditions, particular kinds of Li Bai were produced. In the category of eulogistic commemoration, which contained texts that greatly influenced Song readers, we find the first two collection prefaces from 762, an epitaph, and three subsequent tomb stele inscriptions by relatively unknown writers.[23]

Table 1: Tang Commemorations of Li Bai

Date	Author	Commemoration title
762	Wei Hao 魏顥	"Preface to the Collection of Hanlin Scholar Li" 李翰林集
762	Li Yangbing 李陽冰	"Preface to the Thatched Hall Collection" 草堂集序
770	Li Hua 李華	"Epitaph for Former Hanlin Scholar Master Li" 故翰林學士李君墓誌
790	Liu Quanbai 劉全白	"Stele Record for Former [Hanlin] Scholar Lord Li of the Tang" 唐故翰林學士李君碣記
817	Fan Chuanzheng 范傳正	"New Tomb Stele for Lord Li, Left Rectifier of Omissions and Hanlin Scholar of the Tang" 唐左拾遺翰林學士李公新墓碑[24]
843	Pei Jing 裴敬	"Tomb Stele for Hanlin Scholar Lord Li" 翰林學士李公墓碑

These writers all shared a commitment to Li Bai's material preservation in different forms: they handled manuscripts and made decisions about their inclusion or exclusion from a collection, tended to his gravesite, including composing supplementary inscriptions on steles, and even supported his descendants. Because they explicitly linked their reputations to Li Bai's, they had a vested interest in representing him (and themselves) in the most heroic

light possible.

With the exception of including Li Bai's brief service at Xuanzong's court, which they all praise, these six commemorations appear lightly tied to political or personal history. Perhaps because he was closest to Li Bai, as a relative who cared for him in his last days, Li Yangbing reveals some anxiety about the contents of Li Bai's poetry in his overwrought praise that invoked the Classics:

> [In his youth] he only read the work of the sages, and he was ashamed to compose poems like those of Zheng and Wei; therefore his language often resembled that of celestial transcendents…. In all his work, his language was often satirical and critical;[25] since the Three Ages, after the "Airs" and the "[Li] Sao," speeding past Qu Yuan and Song Yu, surpassing Yang Xiong and Sima Qian, the one who strode alone after one thousand years was none but [Li Bai]. [26]

However excessive and even disingenuous this description of Li Bai's work may seem to contemporary readers, it opened the door to allegorical and political readings of his verse, a strain of interpretation that gained momentum in the Song. The longest Tang commemoration, by Fan Chuanzheng, was composed almost fifty years after Li Bai's death. It repeats passages from the earlier accounts but adds little historical detail; furthermore, over half of the text recounts Fan's own labor in finding, relocating, and rededicating Li Bai's grave. He summarizes the disparate elements of Li Bai's reputation as follows:

> He did not drink wine to indulge in its drunken pleasure; he took its mellowness to enrich himself. He did not compose poetry to heed literary rules; he took its chants for his own ease. He did not love divine transcendence because he wished to lightly ascend; he sought the unattainable with the unattainable, almost depleting his brave spirit to send off the remaining years of his lifetime…. In life, he was a high official at the emperor's sagely court; in death, he was a traveller on the road.[27]

The last extant Tang commemoration, from 843, comes from the hand of Pei Jing, an otherwise unknown literatus who also visited Li Bai's grave and erected a new stele inscription.[28] Pei's text is critical in these accumulating narratives because it adds—almost one hundred years after the fact—a new element of the rebellion story that described general Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697-781), hero of the An Lushan Rebellion, as instrumental in releasing Li Bai from prison after his disgrace (Pei Jing states that Guo helped Li Bai because

the poet had helped Guo out of difficulty in earlier years). While no longer regarded by scholars as credible, this story deeply influenced later views of Li Bai.

In Tang poetry and letters, we find admiration and praise of Li Bai in a different tone. Dozens of Tang poems praising Li Bai's unique poetic genius survive, composed by readers seeking to articulate their own poetic or social values, and often in an oppositional or self-promoting manner. In general, these admiring poems and discussions depict Li Bai in broad brushstrokes as the drinker and convention-defying poet above all, showing little interest in his biography or his historical moment. Du Fu's depictions of Li Bai as the drunken transcendent and his fond poems to and about the older poet (however one-sided their "friendship" might have been) convinced later readers of his esteem.[29] Mid-Tang poets Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) specifically admired Li Bai's *yuefu* (while ranking Du Fu above Li Bai).[30] Han Yu and Meng Jiao championed Li Bai's brilliance, wildness, and eccentricity as a counter-cultural, authentic moral stance.[31] And by the late ninth and early tenth century, we begin to see stylistic imitations of Li Bai in works by the poet-monks Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912) and Qiji 齊己 (860-940).

Anthologists also counted among the admirers, and they too created rather different versions of the poet through their selections. For example, several of the twenty-eight Li Bai poems in the tenth-century Shu anthology *Cao diao ji* 才調集 (Collection of the tunes of the talents) do not appear in any other extant Tang anthology. More notably, almost all of them depict romantic longing, including five poems written in a first-person female voice. The Li Bai of the *Cai diao ji*, in other words, is not only very different from the poet championed by Han Yu and Meng Jiao, but he is also very different from what we find in the eighth-century *Heyue yingling ji*,[32] the earliest Tang anthology to select Li Bai's work, or the *You xuan ji* 又玄集 (Collection of the evermore mysterious) compiled by late Tang poet Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836-910).[33] (The Li Bai poems found in the Dunhuang manuscripts tend to align with the *yuefu* poet Li Bai we find in the *Heyue yingling ji*.)

Finally, a wide range of ninth- and tenth-century anecdote and tale collections[34] preserve the most memorable Li Bai stories according to their particular interests, such as the more historical *Guo shi bu* 國史補 (Supplement to the History of the State) to the more gossipy and humorous stories from collections such as *Yunxi youyi* 雲谿友議 (Friendly discussions at Cloudy Creek) and the *Ben shi shi* 本事詩 (Stories behind poems). As we might expect, these stories tend to grow longer and more elaborate over time.[35] Here, too, we need to see Li Bai as part of a broader cultural practice of elite storytelling. As Sarah Allen has noted, these ninth- and tenth-century "tale clusters" around specific individuals "show the range of motivations and interests that different writers brought to the task of recording and

developing the stories that they collected."[36] More significantly, these tales would be consistently incorporated into later anecdotal and historical accounts of Tang figures.[37]

Scholars have long recognized that the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Tang history) biography of Li Bai is a brief (three-hundred-word) patchwork of bits from earlier prefaces, inscriptions, and anecdotes, but it is perhaps best known for arguing that Li Bai sought to be employed by the Prince of Yong, and thus deserved imprisonment. Though the *Jiu Tang shu* credits Li Bai with having "a stalwart spirit that was vast and carefree, and a soaring desire to transcend the world," it only mentions his literary work in association with his drinking.[38] In fact, drunkenness is the key theme of this short biography—the word for alcohol (*jiu* 酒) appears six times, and "drunk" (*zui* 醉) or "tipsy" (*han* 酣), four. One famous story about his being hauled into Xuanzong's presence to compose poetry while drunk locates Li Bai first in a common tavern; and an episode in which he insults Gao Lishi by ordering him to take off his boots, which appears as a terse sentence in *Guo shi bu* and in a longer version in the late ninth-century collection *Song chuang zalu* 松窗雜錄 (Miscellaneous records from the pine-filled window) also appears here. The biography concludes by adding the claim that he spent his final years drinking himself to death: "When Bai was in Xuancheng he paid a visit to [the Prince of Yong], and then followed him in to service. . . in the end he drank to excess and died of drunkenness in Xuancheng."[39] Interestingly, Du Fu's *Jiu Tang shu* biography, located just after that of Li Bai, depicts Du Fu dying in similar fashion.

We find a fascinating profusion of Li Bais across a wide range of extant ninth- and tenth-century texts, which are of course only a fraction of the quotations from his works and anecdotes that would have circulated by and about him in manuscript and by word of mouth. More importantly, though tenth-century readers expressed delight in reading his work and imitating his voice, none appeared to see the need to reconcile the record or edit the corpus. Li Yangbing's effusive eighth-century preface reveals concern about sanitizing Li Bai's biography and securing him a place in history. But beyond his preface, we have no details as to how those concerns might have played out in his organization or editing of the corpus, including deleting problematic texts. In the early Northern Song, however, scholars launched serious efforts to rationalize Li Bai's multifarious legacy.

Early Northern Song Productions of Li Bai

The many versions of Li Bai that early Northern Song literati inherited were overdetermined in some ways and internally inconsistent in others: wild drunken courtier, Daoist adept, traitor to the throne; inheritor of the tradition of the *Odes*, brilliant experimentalist, versifier of romantic songs. But

although Li Bai's case may seem extreme due to his celebrity, it exemplifies the miscellaneous and haphazard ways the broader Tang literary legacy came into the hands of Northern Song readers. Collections of Tang writers were scattered across the regions that had been the Tang empire during the tenth century, amplifying an already troublesome bibliographical reality: most literary collections were partial, even idiosyncratic, because they were manuscript copies, often made by individuals for their own use, in "small collections" (*xiaoji* 小集).[40] There were likely multiple copies of such collections in the major libraries of the capitals of the Shu and Southern Tang kingdoms, regions with high levels of literary and cultural activity, and readers who had access to those could collate competing texts and traditions, if they were so inclined. After the fall of the southern kingdoms and the transport (or copying) of regional libraries to the new Northern Song capital of Bianjing (Kaifeng), significant editorial and collecting work could begin.[41] The "Four Great Books" of the Northern Song, which included the one thousand-*juan* literary collection *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (Brilliant blossoms from the literary garden) constitute but one example of the grand scale of bibliographical work that became possible and even pressing after the 970s.[42]

But Song scholars were neither neutral nor disinterested when they edited collections. The early Northern Song case of Han Yu and his zealous editor Liu Kai 柳開 (948-1001) provides an illustrative if extreme counterpoint to that of Li Bai, underscoring the seriousness of editing as a potential ideological tool. In 971, Liu Kai, the fervent partisan of "antiquity," who had renamed himself after Liu Zongyuan, produced an edition of Han Yu's works to honor him.[43] Liu Kai's ambitions were explicitly hagiographic, as the praise of Han in his preface demonstrates:

> The Master's compositions during his lifetime, in their criticism, praise, regulation, and warning, as responses, essays, inquiries, and discourses, all purely returned to Confucius's teachings and expounded them, surpassing by far Mencius and Yang Xiong…[44]

But in the process of compiling this work (which is no longer extant), Liu Kai apparently added and corrected almost six thousand characters—and ultimately one has to wonder what "Han Yu" this edition represented. Liu's rhetoric certainly went on to influence later Song readers' advocacy of Han and his followers as heroes of antiquity. But his ambitious language also points to a new urgency in editing Tang writers' works in the Northern Song—what we might think of as an opening volley in the eleventh-century culture wars.

In the case of editing Li Bai's collection and selecting his work to

circulate, Song scholars' goals initially appear less ideological and more curatorial in nature. And yet two early Northern Song efforts reveal that Li Bai presented special problems for readers even so: Yue Shi's 樂史 (930-1007) 998 editions of Li Bai's work—one in twenty *juan,* titled *Li Hanlin ji* 李翰林集 (Collection of Hanlin Academician Li), along with a ten-*juan bieji* 別集 (separate collection of prose)—and Yao Xuan's 姚鉉 (968-1020) anthology *Wen cui* 文粹 (Literature's finest; compiled in 1011, presented to the throne in 1020, printed in 1039), which contained sixty-three of Li Bai's poems, four of his *fu,* and twenty-one pieces of prose. In quite different ways, these two works document Northern Song struggles to reshape both the poetic corpus and the biography into forms that were morally instructive or exemplary. The first responds to this challenge through expansion, the second through exclusion. Though we cannot know what Yue Shi's "Li Bai" looked like, because all Northern Song copies of his collection are lost, Yao Xuan's version in the *Wen cui* is at once familiar and subversively new. (Both of these versions of Li Bai were also compiled before the great library fire at the Song capital in 1015 and may have preserved texts that would otherwise have been destroyed—perhaps along with texts of questionable attribution that thereafter became a permanent part of the corpus.)

Yue Shi's edition of Li Bai came almost two centuries after the last recorded compilation, Fan Chuanzheng's *Li Hanlin ji* of 817, but we see no trace in the ninth- or tenth-century record of Fan's collection until Yue Shi mentions having it in 998.[45] Yue Shi was a prominent Southern Tang official before he joined the Northern Song court, and we can assume he had access to multiple Li Bai manuscripts in the south and at the Song capital. We may have a reasonably faithful copy of Yue Shi's *Li Hanlin ji* in the one Southern Song edition of that name to survive (known as the Xianchun edition 咸淳本, after the Xianchun reign period, 1265-1274, to which it has been dated—about which more below).[46] But the preface to his second Li Bai collection, the ten-*juan Li Hanlin bieji* 李翰林別集 that collects *fu* 賦, letters, encomia, and other prose texts has also been transmitted separately. That *bieji* preface provokes some questions: in it Yue Shi reveals that he has included Li Yangbing's preface to the *Caotang ji* and Fan Chuanzheng's stele inscription for Li Bai in his edition. Then he adds that he has composed a "Biography of Li Bai" 李白傳, also to include in the edition. He concludes by noting he has recently obtained three more stories (*shi* 事) about Li Bai, which he copies into the *bieji* preface.

Yue Shi's painstaking efforts to copy those anecdotes in the later *bieji* preface surely stemmed from the fact that the anecdotes work to rehabilitate Li Bai in different ways. The first anecdote gives us a new, longer version of the drunken composition story in which Li Bai appears at Xuanzong's court no longer really drunk but just "as if he were not quite recovered from a

hangover."[47] The second presents a much more detailed version of the story about eunuch Gao Lishi and his boots, which adds that Gao Lishi subsequently lied to Yang Guifei in order to get Li Bai dismissed. And the third anecdote provides a much longer version of the Li Bai-and-Guo Ziyi story than we saw in the *Jiu Tang shu*: according to this account, Li Bai keenly perceived Guo Ziyi's virtue long before Guo was famous—a vignette that works to shore up the account of Li Bai's integrity.[48] In short, the *bieji* preface documents Yue Shi's efforts to compile as much evidence as possible in defense of Li Bai's conduct. What were Yue Shi's motives? On the one hand, he had a very popular product in Li Bai, and adding more detailed anecdotes would have appealed to his readers. But all this editorial labor also indicates some concern about Li Bai's personal history and a need to control the reading of his corpus through a redemptive biographical framework. According to Li Bai's later editor Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019-1079), these biographies appeared as the first *juan* of this 998 edition—and as far as we know, this is the first Tang writer whose collection was deliberately *prefaced* by multiple biographies.

Since Yue Shi's edition was slowly replaced in the printing history of Li Bai's collection by Song Minqiu's 1068 edition, we can only guess at the impact his Li Bai might have had on Northern and Southern Song readers. However, the still-extant early Song anthology of Tang literature, *Wen cui*, later known as *Tang wen cui*, gives us another influential version of Li Bai. Where Yue Shi was concerned to historicize and defend Li Bai, Yao Xuan, the scholar who independently compiled the *Wen cui* in 1011, presented a freshly curated Li Bai as part of his more sweeping portrait of Tang literature. The *Wen cui* was the first influential period anthology of the Tang, collecting over two thousand pieces of poetry and prose from almost two hundred writers. It is not only famous for promoting *guwen* as a new prose ideal, but also infamous for having excluded all regulated verse from its poetry selections—giving us today what seems like a very strange view of "the finest" Tang poetry.[49] There is a remarkable contrast between the anthology's polemical "antiquity"-oriented preface and its contents: though the preface centers on Han Yu and his mid-Tang circle, the prose and poetry selections reveal a far more diverse range of styles and topics, suggesting early Northern Song tastes that were more catholic than later Song views. Despite the lack of regulated verse, this diversity is also found in the poetry section—although Han Yu and his followers dominate the prose pieces, Li Bai, Wu Yun 吳筠 (d. 778), and Bai Juyi head the list with the most poems. Moreover, Yao Xuan uses his selections to argue for the existence of a powerful "return to antiquity" sensibility throughout the Tang—in both the prose selections, where he invents the new category of *guwen* prose, and in the poetry, where Li Bai predominates.

With sixty-three of his poems and four *fu*, Li Bai is the single most visible poet in the *Wen cui*. This was also the first anthology (as far as we know) to select so many of Li Bai's "ancient airs" (*gufeng* 古風), selecting eleven, and to group them as a set at the beginning of a new category called "Songs to Ancient Tunes" (*gudiao gepian* 古調歌篇).[50] The evidence suggests that either Yue Shi or Li Yangbing before him had grouped together a set of poems called *gufeng*, and one or both of them may also have put the *gufeng* at the beginning of their collections. But in the *Wen cui*, the *gufeng* appear not just as important pieces in Li Bai's collection—they are presented some of the most noteworthy poems of the Tang, exemplars of what a poet concerned with "antiquity" would compose.[51]

There are a few other new and noteworthy features of the *Wen cui*'s "Li Bai": in general, Yao Xuan includes very little poetry on women, romance, or drinking in the anthology, which is also true of his Li Bai selections. As noted above, *Wen cui* also favors his *yuefu*, including twenty-eight of them, and some of his most popular pieces associated with his biography, such as "The Road to Shu Is Hard," "Tune of Crow-black Night," and "Bring in the Wine." This curation of Li Bai is designed to be appealing and inoffensive, but it also seems quite similar to earlier Tang versions. Another new feature is the selection of many Li Bai occasional poems (many more than appear in Tang anthologies) that documented his history of travel and his social ties to other poets, such as He Zhizhang 賀知章 (659-744) and Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (689-740). In contrast to earlier Tang anthology versions of Li Bai (at least among those extant), these selections have the effect of weaving the iconoclastic poet more deeply into the social fabric of the High Tang. Furthermore, Li Bai's footprint extends well beyond the poetry section: *Wen cui* also includes twenty-one of his prose texts in five different genres—and also includes Fan Chuanzheng's eulogistic inscription for Li Bai.[52] Yao Xuan gives us a much rounder, historically grounded Li Bai—he is no longer exceptional and solo, but a socially well-connected writer who composed in an "ancient" style across multiple genres. In short, he stands as an ideal Tang author who could serve as a model for contemporary writers.

Northern Song and later evidence suggests that the *Wen cui* circulated widely after being printed first in 1039—though some readers may also have had Yue Shi's *Li Hanlin ji*, the *Wen cui* would have served as a broad introduction to Tang literature, and to Li Bai, for many. The Li Bai of the *Wen cui* was constructed to support Yao Xuan's view of a Tang canon and a Tang commitment to antiquity, a view that increasingly gained traction after the mid-eleventh century. In it, Li Bai also appears more historically intelligible and plausibly integrated into the larger world of Tang literati than he had before: he appears in the anthology for the first time as a knowable, consistent, and ideal writer in significant new ways.

Impact of the Eleventh-Century *Guwen* Moment: Poetic and Historical Narratives in Conflict

To shift the focus away from Li Bai alone, we should recall that these efforts on his corpus were only two moments in the growing literati interest in the second half of the eleventh century in managing the records of the Tang past, including its literary past. To mention only a few of the most prominent Tang writers, new editions of Du Fu, Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, Meng Jiao, Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-850), and Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852) all appeared between the 1030s and 1060s, as Northern Song scholars became ever-hungrier readers, book collectors, and editors. But this eleventh-century interest in Tang literature was also unfolding in the context of the ideological battles of the *guwen* reform movement, which shaped the demands that certain Song readers began to make of Tang texts. The activist officials associated with Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052) in the 1040s sought out literary models for their efforts to reform and revitalize public prose, and they turned to Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan in particular for literary writing, *wenzhang* 文章, that could be both politically and ethically powerful.[53] Some described the mid-Tang moment as the high point of Tang literature, and Han Yu, the "Master" who propounded the "Way of antiquity," as the epitome not merely of prose but of all *wenzhang* (writing or composition). But the question of where Tang *poetry* stood in relationship to this new discourse—what we might call the challenge of writing literary history that could account for both prose and poetry—was still open.

The *guwen* scholar Mu Xiu 穆修 (d. 1032), in his postface to his edition of Liu Zongyuan's work, offered this assessment of the Tang literary pantheon in 1031:

> The literary writing of the Tang in the beginning did not depart from the style of the Sui and [Southern] Five Dynasties. In its middle period, [people] praised Li Bai and Du Fu; when they started to employ their talents, they became dominant, and yet their reputation was only heroic for their poetry, and the Way had not yet reached its completion [in them]. When Han and Liu arose, only then were they able to greatly express the writing of the ancients. Their language and their virtues adorned and substantiated each other and were not adulterated.[54]

Here, Li Bai and Du Fu are allowed to be "heroic" for their verse, but they still fall short of the true ideal that Han and Liu embodied, which included the breadth of *wenzhang*, both poetry and prose, and was focused on the revival of the Way of antiquity. In the case of Du Fu, scholars in the second half of the eleventh century advocated placing him at or near the top of the

literary pantheon by reading his poetry as record of his life and as historical chronicle—which gave him the role of unappointed "poet-historian" of his age.[55] But Li Bai proved more difficult to wrestle into this new *guwen* garb, despite the efforts of Yao Xuan in his *Wen cui* to orient him towards antiquity. Li Bai's overdetermined "greatness" thus became a new problem. In a sense, the Tang commemorators, admirers, and anecdotalists had done their work all too well: we recall that Du Fu, Han Yu, and Meng Jiao—Tang writers venerated by *guwen* partisans—had all sanctioned his brilliance. Li Bai's well-documented disdain for "low office" (*xiaoguan* 小官, as one commemorator phrased it) and his carefree life, along with his wide-ranging and heterodox interests, so well documented in the larger collection, stood as stubborn evidence against remaking him in the model of Han Yu and Du Fu.[56]

By the late eleventh century, readers had tried a wide range of strategies to reframe Li Bai's character and corpus. In general, these took one of three routes, hints of which we can find in earlier Tang versions of Li Bai: either limiting the reading and imitation of Li Bai to a handful of popular and generally inoffensive poems; or reading the corpus allegorically, as political critique of—rather than enthusiastic participation in—the excesses of High Tang culture; or rewriting the biography to more safely embed him in a didactic historical narrative centered around a few carefully defined "iconic events."[57] One could, of course, combine all three approaches—which might leave one with a corpus of five poems and a caricature poet.

Because so many different versions of Li Bai were proposed and debated in the eleventh century, I offer just a few representative voices, the most prominent of which, such as that of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), would affect subsequent generations of readers. Here is the Buddhist monk Qisong 契嵩 (1007-1072)[58] reading Li Bai's *yuefu* with allegorical gravity in his postface to his copy of the *Li Hanlin ji*. He also remarks on the debate around Li Bai's reputation:

> When reading the *Li Hanlin ji*, I saw his more than one hundred *yuefu* poems; in their intent to revere the state and rectify human relations, they brilliantly embody the Airs of the Zhou *[Classic of] Poetry*. It is not merely that they sing of feeling and nature or are casually chanted to please himself. . .[59]

Qisong then goes on to offer brief but systematic readings of ten named *yuefu* poems, including "The Road to Shu Is Hard"—but, perhaps surprisingly, none of the *gufeng*—as political or social critiques. He concludes with an attempt to improve Li Bai's reputation beyond its Tang associations:

> Recent generations explained that Li Bai had pure talent and an

> untrammeled spirit, but that he was only a "banished transcendent," and that's all—how is that necessarily so? When we scrutinize his poetry, [we see that] its form and power, talent and thought are like mountains that loom and seas that shake, completely inexhaustible…. [60]

For perhaps the first time in discussions of Li Bai's merit, Qisong exposed the negative side of being a "banished transcendent," with its twin implications of reclusion and esoterism. Taking a new view of the exceptionalist narrative, he follows the allegorical reading strategy suggested by Li Yangbing and applies it to specific poems, defending Li Bai, however implausibly, as a Ru 儒 (Confucian scholar) *manqué*. Though Qisong argued his case from specific poems, his was definitely a minority opinion among Northern Song readers.

Other Li Bai promoters, such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and his friend and fellow poet Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060), took pains to defend the poetry—and imitate it playfully—without getting entangled in the details of personal history and without reaching for allegorical readings. Later Song poets would strive for subtlety in their imitation of Tang masters; here Ouyang Xiu, whose own moniker of "Drunken Old Man" (*zuiweng* 醉翁) made him unashamed to praise Li Bai's drinking, was also happy to emulate him in an obvious fashion.

[Li] Taibai Teases Shengyu [Mei Yaochen] (alt. title: "Reading Li Bai's Collection and Imitating his Style")	太白戲聖俞 (讀李白集效其體)
The Kaiyuan went untroubled for twenty years;	開元無事二十年
The five weapons went unused and Taibai was at leisure.	五兵不用太白閒
The essence of Taibai [Venus] descended to the human world,	太白之精下人間
Li Bai sang loudly his "Road to Shu is Hard."	李白高歌蜀道難
"The hardship of the road to Shu is harder than mounting to Heaven!"	蜀道之難 難於上青天
When Li Bai touched down his brush, mists and clouds sprang forth.	李白落筆生雲煙
A thousand wonders, ten thousand steepnesses that couldn't be climbed,	千奇萬險不可攀
Yet then he looked back to see that Shu	卻視蜀道猶平川

resembled the level plain.
When palace ladies came to prop him up, he was already drunk-- 宮娃扶來白已醉
And still drunk he finished his poems—when sober, he'd forgotten. . . 醉裏詩成醒不記

***

Amid empty mountains, flowing water vainly flows with blossoms, 空山流水空流花
In a gust, he has already gone, ascending on blue auroras. 飄然已去凌青霞
Up above he looks down on petty little [Meng] Jiao and [Jia] Dao: 下看區區郊與島
dancing fireflies, soaked with dew, they chant in autumn grasses.[61] 螢飛露濕吟秋草

Imitative poems like these are often treated as a symptom of Northern Song poets' unoriginality, but this one poem, however playful, scores some serious literary-critical points. In addition to riffing on no fewer than four different Li Bai poems and anecdotes about him, Ouyang Xiu ends by placing Li Bai high above Meng Jiao and Jia Dao 賈島 (779-843), whose "bitter" (*ku* 苦) style had been wildly popular among late Five Dynasties and early Northern Song poet-imitators.[62] Ouyang Xiu's *hommage* is also technically virtuosic in Li Bai's own style, with a loose, hypotactic syntax, rhymes by couplets, and a prominent quotation of the first line of "The Road to Shu is Hard." On the one hand, poems like this paint a Li Bai stripped down to his least troublesome elements: the road to Shu, bravado, drinking, roaming amid mountains, and ascending to the heavens. And yet as imitative exercises, they also work to reinscribe Li Bai's most significant poetic innovations in the literary landscape—which is to say, they remind us of how he changed Tang poetry.[63]

Ouyang's form of emulation also reveals the potential complexity of the practice as Northern Song poets conceived it: this was not simply a text-to-text relationship (imitating a single poem), or a thematic imitation through variation (as in early medieval *yuefu* poetics),[64] but rather an adaptation of a characteristic style associated with both an individual author and a set of iconic poems.[65] We note that the alternate title of the poem was "Reading Li Bai's *Collection* and Imitating his *Style*" (emphasis mine). Certainly we find many shallower forms of Li Bai imitation in the Song, such as the exhaustive poem-by-poem imitations as well as "matching" and "returning to match" (*he* 和 and *zhuihe* 追和) poems by poet Guo Xiangzheng 郭祥正 (1035-1113). Guo was praised by Mei Yaochen as a new incarnation of Li Bai; but his

verses existed more parasitically alongside the Li Bai originals, reproducing entire titles, lines and structures from the earlier poems in his Song pastiches.[66] This type of imitation was not entirely new in the Northern Song. Tao Qian 陶潛 (372?-427) is of course the medieval poet whose particular, idiosyncratic voice was imitated influentially by Tang poets—Wang Wei and Bai Juyi being only the two most prominent examples. However, Northern Song imitations of earlier poets, particularly of Tang poets, spanned a much wider stylistic and formal range than ever seen before in the tradition, from text-to-text imitations to more general evocations of style based on lexicon, topic, formal and rhetorical techniques, and deeper knowledge of writers' biographies. This greater range of imitative practice grew out of new notions of authorship emerging over the course of the Tang-Song transition: it worked to reinforce and stabilize a Tang writer's authorial identity through a small body of representative texts in systematic, mutually reinforcing, and textual ways that are characteristic of Song hermeneutics.

Elsewhere, in one of the many "Li Bai vs. Du Fu" debates that entertained Northern Song literati, Ouyang Xiu focused on the two poets' relative talents in the traditional vein of literary evaluation that would become common in "remarks on poetry" (*shihua* 詩話) and "notebook" (*biji* 筆記) comments. To Ouyang, Li Bai was greater than Du Fu thanks to his "heaven-endowed genius and carefree abandon" (*tiancai zifang* 天才自放), a role that Ouyang Xiu at some moments also wished to play. We see a shift in Ouyang's assessment that foreshadows later Song poetic discourse: from the criteria used to evaluate the greatness of a particular *poet* to the criteria for excellent *poetry*. In the connoisseurial language of *shihua* and *biji*, Song readers sought to develop more nuanced language of analysis for their poetic practice and reading; nonetheless, this language increasingly sought to align personality and history with poetic output. This new form of literary theory and analysis, though it can touch on the biographical, exceeds the merely biographical, and from a literary perspective anticipates certain metaphysical arguments of Daoxue proponents. Ouyang Xiu may also have sensed the danger of an overly biographical reading of Li Bai, for nowhere in his poetry or prose does Ouyang—the quintessential historian—venture too far onto the historical ground for Li Bai's work.[67]

One of the most enduring Northern Song versions of Li Bai was in fact produced by Ouyang Xiu's fellow historian Song Qi 宋祁 (997-1061), in his revised biography of Li Bai in the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New Tang history). As he does with the biographies of many writers he admires, including Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, and Du Fu, Song Qi, who was solely responsible for revising the biographies, overhauled the *Jiu Tang shu* biography of Li Bai in both obvious and subtle ways, doubling its length, adding new anecdotes, and deleting critical depictions of Li Bai's conduct. This new Li Bai, while still

summoned drunk to compose for Xuanzong, is much less drunk than the Li Bai of the *Jiu Tang shu*, and only drunk at court, as a way to manage "not being used" to his potential—a subtle echo of Li Yangbing's 762 suggestion that Li Bai's drinking was in fact this time-honored form of protest or reclusion. The *Xin Tang shu* Li Bai is also undermined by Yang Guifei, thanks to Gao Lishi's scheming. Even more influential was Song Qi's addition of the Guo Ziyi story to the account of Li Bai's punishment for joining the Prince of Yong's rebellion. Finally, in the official state history of the Tang, Li Bai had his character redeemed.

But the *Xin Tang shu* biography does not end with Li Bai dying an ignominious, drunken death. Song Qi instead interpolates three new statements about his posthumous reputation that show the impact of the Tang commemorations: a description of Li Yangbing's efforts for Li Bai, which resulted in a pardon and posthumous title in Daizong's 代宗 (r. 762-779) reign; an excerpt from Fan Chuanzheng's inscription; and an anecdote from a mid-ninth century text that describes Li Bai being named one of the "Three Peerless Artists" (*san jue* 三絕) by Tang emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827-840), taken from Pei Jing's 843 inscription for Li Bai's grave. Though Li Bai's rehabilitation in the *Xin Tang shu* is not hagiographic in the manner of the revised biographies of Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan (and Li Bai did not get nearly as complete a makeover as Du Fu), it is clear that Song Qi read widely in Li Bai's biographical record to produce a more coherent and convincingly admirable version of the man.

With this new and improved account of Li Bai in the state history and the Li Bais circulating in Yue Shi's collection and in the *Wen cui*, one might think that Song scholars would see no need to reproduce him differently—yet they continue to propose new evaluations of Li Bai's relative literary worth and moral value. We see the larger debate being invoked by Su Shi, who offered a new interpretation of Li Bai's character in his "Record for the Reverse Side of Li Bai's Stele" 李太白碑陰記. In this essay, Su Shi opens with the problem of Li Bai's potential collusion with the Prince of Yong: "Li Taibai was a wild *shi* 士, and yet once he lost his integrity [by colluding with] Li Lin, the Prince of Yong—how could this be someone who 'would save the world'?"[68] Su Shi's solution to this problem is characteristic of his view of other admirable historical figures: that is, he argues for the coherence of Li Bai's conduct based on his *qi* 氣, his temperament, a quality that Su Shi elsewhere argued was essential for greatness. By casting Li Bai as a "wild *shi*," Su Shi put him in the company of other men he defined as *kuangren* 狂人 ("wild men"), activist figures who sought to put matters right.[69] Though Li Bai was unable to be "used" at court, his behavior in matters such as commanding Gao Lishi to take off his boots was consistent with his *qi* and therefore correct. Su Shi concludes:

> In the case of Taibai's following the Prince of Yong, he surely had to have been coerced. If not, the reckless wantonness and ugliness of Li Lin [who was famously ugly] were such that even a mediocre person would have recognized his inevitable defeat. For Taibai to have recognized Guo Ziyi's integrity as a person but not have been able to perceive Li Lin's eventual failure is certainly untenable. I cannot but dispute it here.[70]

One can see in Su's comments a degree of commitment that goes beyond the merely historical or biographical: Li Bai appears in this account as someone whose personality and actions were consistent, intelligible, and exemplary. Though Su Shi resolves the historical conflict with his own particular hermeneutics of character, thereby producing an even more heroic *and* coherent Li Bai, his comments point to the lingering doubts in the late eleventh century—and the new approaches to Li Bai's texts and biography that had to be crafted to settle them.

Creating a "Tang Poet": The 1068 *Collection of Li Taibai*

Up to this point, we have only encountered the ideal Li Bais that Song readers imagined—the antiquity-minded heir to the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of poetry) or the insouciant inebriated composer—but of course, they also perceived dissolute and shallow Li Bais as well. More importantly, these new Li Bais emerged from a closer reading of the poetry as well as attention to the biography, and in some cases, greater scrutiny of the corpus provoked skepticism about the status earlier readers had accorded him. The second half of the eleventh century saw many new editions of Tang writers' works, and a wider printed circulation of "Tang literature" in general in many forms, from the new biographies in the *Xin Tang shu* to "remarks on poetry" and new anthologies of Tang poetry. The most superficial of the Li Bai assessments that appeared in this engagement could be seen as indexing a shift in literary tastes from Tang to Song—deprecating Li Bai's breezy style in favor of Du Fu's moral seriousness, for example, or rejecting Li Bai's *yuefu* preferences and experimental meters for Du Fu's tightly wrought regulated verse. However, as Li Bai gained in circulation, more pointed negative assessments of the poetry appeared; the critiques of Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039-1112) and Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) were among the most famous. Su Zhe disagreed with his elder brother strongly over the merits of Li Bai, and he reversed Su Shi's argument to claim that the poetry substantiated the disrepute of the person:

> Li Bai's poetry is like his conduct as a person: he boldly expressed his lordly daring, yet he 'flowered and did not fruit' [was superficial

> without substance], loving adventures and delighting in fame, but not knowing where rightness and reason lay... Li Bai began by using poetry and wine to serve the glorious emperor and left when he met with criticism, but wherever he went, he did not change his former habits. When the Prince of Yong was going to secretly seize the southland, there is no question that Bai rose up and joined him, and thus he was exiled to his death. When we examine his poems, this is verified.[71]

Wang Anshi's disapproval of Li Bai was famously captured in his ranking Li Bai last in one of two collections of Tang poetry he compiled in the 1080s, the *Sijia shiji* 四家詩集 (Anthology of the Four Poets), in which he selected poems by Du Fu, Han Yu, Ouyang Xiu, and Li Bai, in that order (since this anthology is no longer extant, we cannot conclude more about Wang's views from selections or ordering). We have no explicitly negative remarks on Li Bai in Wang's extant corpus, but Hu Zi 胡仔 (1110-1170), in his Southern Song collection *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* 苕溪漁隱叢話 (Collected remarks from the retired fisherman of Tiao Creek), claimed to have preserved Wang's view:

> When Wang Anshi ordered his *Anthology of the Four Poets*, he placed Li Bai last, and common folk generally wondered at it. Wang said, "Li Bai's poetry approaches vulgarity, and that is why people easily find pleasure in it. Bai's knowledge was often coarse, and nine out of ten poems speak of women and wine; however, his boldest and most heroic [poems] are worth keeping/selecting."[72]

Even if this anecdote is apocryphal, it surely exemplifies a standard critique of Li Bai's reputation in the late Northern Song; furthermore, despite its narrowness, it is no more restrictive than Qisong's admiring allegorical reading of Li Bai's *yuefu* some decades earlier.

After the printing of the 1060 *Xin Tang shu*, Song readers had a new biographical lens through which to reexamine Li Bai's literary corpus. Then, the 1068 revision by the scholar, historian, and bibliophile Song Minqiu of Yue Shi's edition of Li Bai's work, the *Li Taibai ji* 李太白集 (Collection of Li Taibai), appeared as the last significant work on Li Bai in the Northern Song. Song was one of the most influential editors and curators of Tang literature and history in the eleventh century. His work focused on the Tang included writing a geographical treatise on Chang'an, the *Chang'an zhi* 長安志 (Record of Chang'an), collecting Tang-era edicts in the *Da Tang zhaoling ji* 大唐詔令集 (Collected edicts of the Great Tang), working on revisions to the *Tang History*, and editing another nine Tang writers' works.[73] Among the

Tang corpora he edited, the most prominent included those of Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-784), Du Fu, Meng Jiao, Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842), and Li Bai. Song's edition of Li Bai was one of his latest, inspired when he was posted to Shandong and began to collect traces of Li Bai's life story and his works there. In his zeal to "expand" (*guang* 廣) Li Bai's collection to its new thirty-*juan* form, Song tells us that he began with Yue Shi's twenty-*juan Li Hanlin ji* and the ten-*juan Li Hanlin bieji*, and then searched widely to locate more texts, eliminating duplicates and collating originals, eventually expanding the collection to over one thousand pieces. This edition set the collection in influential ways, and there is much to be explored in it. Song Minqiu's new edition of Li Bai's works in 1068 was then reorganized into chronological order within Song's categories by Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019-1083) in the 1070s, and finally printed in 1080.[74] Here I comment only on the ways that the new edition produced Li Bai as a "Tang poet."

If we take the Southern Song copy of the *Li Hanlin ji* as a faithful version of Yue Shi's 998 edition for comparison, we discover that Song Minqiu introduced seven new categories of poems, retitled or eliminated four others, and shifted many poems into new categories.[75] He states the following about his process: "I followed the old table of contents and modified and corrected its content and order, making sure that each [piece and category] followed one another; then I appended the *bieji* to the collection."[76] This statement leaves open the possibility that Song reordered the collection according to new or different categories, and it certainly implies that he reorganized poems within categories. Zeng Gong suggests this was the case in the postface to his chronologically ordered version of Song's edition from the 1070s:

> Once [Song Minqiu] broadened Li Bai's poetry through categories [perhaps according to preexisting categories?], he also wrote a [post]face, but he had not yet examined the order in which the poems were composed. When I obtained [Song's] edition, I then examined their chronology and arranged the poems accordingly.[77]

Why should we be concerned about the categories that Song Minqiu may have added or reorganized in Li Bai's collection? Because the organization and labeling of Song's edition stand as an argument about Li Bai as a certain type of poet: a master of certain forms, who composed in conventional and socially sanctioned contexts, and who focused on a narrow range of acceptable topics.[78] These categories simultaneously highlight and obscure features of Li Bai as poet: they attempt to promote him as an introspective, reflective writer while they disguise problematic topics as well as neatly classify poems that defy simple categorization.

The table gives the twenty-one categories Song Minqiu uses for Li Bai's

poetry, which I give in order, with numbers of poems and *juan* numbers in the third column (since some categories are split across *juan*). Here I rely on the numbers of poems included in Zhan Ying's modern edition, not those in Song's 1068 edition. The color-coding groups the categories in topically or thematically larger sets:

Table 2: Organization of poetry in the *Li Taibai ji*

Category title 類	# of poems	*Juan* #
Ancient Airs 古風	59	1
***Yuefu* 樂府**	144	2-6
Songs 歌吟	81	6-7
Presented [poems] 贈	125	8-11
Sent [poems] 寄	51	11-12
Parting 別	36	13
Farewell 送	102	14-16
Response and reply 酬答	34	16-17
Banquets on the road 遊宴	61	17-18
Ascending high and looking out 登覽	36	19
Travel on the road 行役	24	20
Reflections on the past 懷古	37	20
Poems of idleness 閒適	36	21
Harboring reflections 懷思	11	21
Being moved 感遇	33	22
Expressing reflections 寫懷	12	22
Praise of phenomena 詠物	24	23
Inscribing praise [of things] 題詠	12	23
Miscellaneous praise [of things] 雜詠	17	23
Bedchamber feelings 閨情	56	24
Mourning & grief 哀傷	6	24

Many readers since the Northern Song have critiqued the unevenness and taxonomic irregularity of these twenty-one categories—they include both form, context, and topic, and they vary wildly in size, from the large categories of 144 *yuefu* and 125 "presented" poems to the six poems of "grief" and thirty-three poems on "being moved." But we must recognize both the interpretive problems that Song Minqiu elides with broader categories and the arguments concealed in narrow ones. For example, by not subdividing the *yuefu* into topical categories (as other collections such as the *Wen cui* did), he maintains the image of Li Bai as the master of a form while veiling the diversity of his subject matter. Breaking the *yuefu* up more precisely would

expose the heterodoxy of his topics, including a fondness for romantic vignettes (many composed in women's voices or depicting women's figures in a mildly erotic fashion), Daoist themes,[79] and plenty of drinking.

But as the table suggests, we can easily regroup the twenty-one categories into six larger sets: form, social exchange, fixed topoi, "introspection" (various forms of *huai* 懷), poems on things, and feeling (*qing* 情). In the case of the categories of social exchange represented by "presented," "sent," and "farewell" poems, though of course these had been conventional in collections and anthologies for centuries, they were also undifferentiated, useful containers for uncomfortably flattering verses to patrons, sincere and eloquent addresses to Daoist and Buddhist religious figures, and exchanges with other assorted Tang men he cultivated with verse. And what of the sycophantic poem presented to the Prince of Yong in 757, the "smoking gun" verse from the Rebellion that readers even today have trouble rationalizing? It is safely nestled in the middle of the formal "songs" (*geyin* 歌吟) category. The occasional categories thus work to domesticate Li Bai's corpus in social and formal terms—presenting him as a widely traveled bon vivant with a large acquaintance, famous for his skill in song—and to disguise problematic themes or topics in other ways.

Where the large undifferentiated social and formal categories obscure, the narrower topical categories make claims: the many subcategories of reflection suggest that Li Bai is a poet whose tendency to introspection rivaled Du Fu's, as we see him engaged in "reflecting on the past," "harboring reflections," "being moved," and "expressing reflections." The relatively small number of poems in these subcategories reveal the labor needed to construct them—and we note that even sorting out the "feeling" poems cannot fully disguise Li Bai's preference for sexual passion over grief (fifty-six poems to six), however far down the list those categories appear. Though these categories appear irregular, they are in fact more logically ordered than the categories in the extant Southern Song edition of the *Li Hanlin ji*. Moreover, the *Li Hanlin ji* has only one category labeled *huai* (the monosyllabic term is itself quite unusual in category titles, which tend to use disyllabic compounds), and it contains only forty poems. What Song Minqiu's new organization reveals is a structural approach to representing a "Tang poet." Li Bai is represented as a wide-ranging genius of form and style, a socially well-connected elite male, and a poet of paradigmatic literary concerns. This is not merely domestication but homogenization, according to a model not derived from Li Bai himself but from ideals of Tang writers that Song and others were working to stabilize.

To broaden our focus beyond Li Bai one final time: when we compare this edition to other editions of Tang corpora that Song Minqiu produced with similar categories, we can perceive how his editorial practice reproduces a

specific typology of Tang poet. Examining Song's edition of Li Bai against his edition of Meng Jiao, the *Meng Dongye ji* 孟東野集 (Collection of Meng Dongye), which he had completed a decade earlier, is especially illuminating, because Song Minqiu was Meng Jiao's first and sole editor in the Northern Song, and his edition is the base edition for the one we have today. Moreover, we know from Song's preface that these specific fourteen categories were his own choices for organizing Meng Jiao's scattered and chaotic corpus.[80] As we saw with Li Bai's twenty-one categories, however, we can group Meng's fourteen into the same six larger sets, though here they appear in different order: form, introspection, fixed topoi, social exchange, poems on things, and feeling.

Table 3: Organization of poetry in the *Meng Dongye ji*

Category title 類	# of poems	*Juan* #
***Yuefu* 樂府**	64	1-2
Being moved 感興	65	2-3
Singing my feelings 詠懷	39	3-4
Traveling at ease 遊適	53	4-5
Dwelling in reclusion 居處	39	5
Travel on the road 行役	16	6
Noted and presented 紀贈	33	6
Reflections that were sent 懷寄	18	7
Response & reply 酬答	12	7
Farewell and parting 送別	67	7-8
Praising phenomena 詠物	14	9
Miscellaneous topics 雜題	35	9
Mourning & grief 哀傷	57	10
Linked verses 聯句	3	10

Despite the slightly different order, a comparison of the representation of these categories in Meng's corpus reveals a surprisingly similar construction of two very different poets' work. Though we know of Meng Jiao's admiration of Li Bai, we can hardly imagine two Tang poets whose styles, interests, and personalities were less alike, and yet we see here the same impact of these categories on individual poems in Meng Jiao's collection. Another representation of the distribution of poems demonstrates the similarities but also the relative sizes of the categories in each poet's corpus:

Table 4: Distribution of Li Bai's poetry across large formal and topical categories

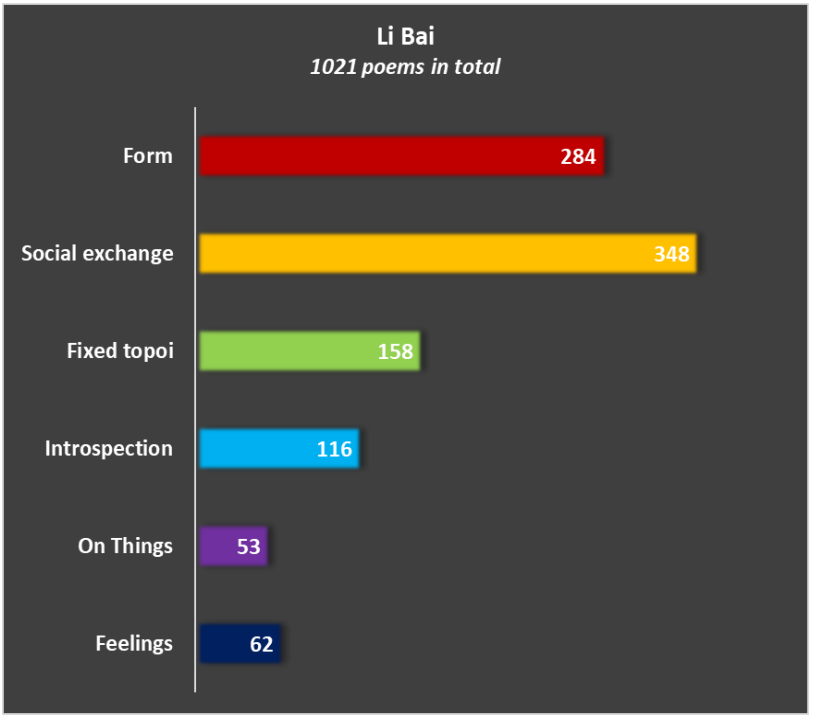
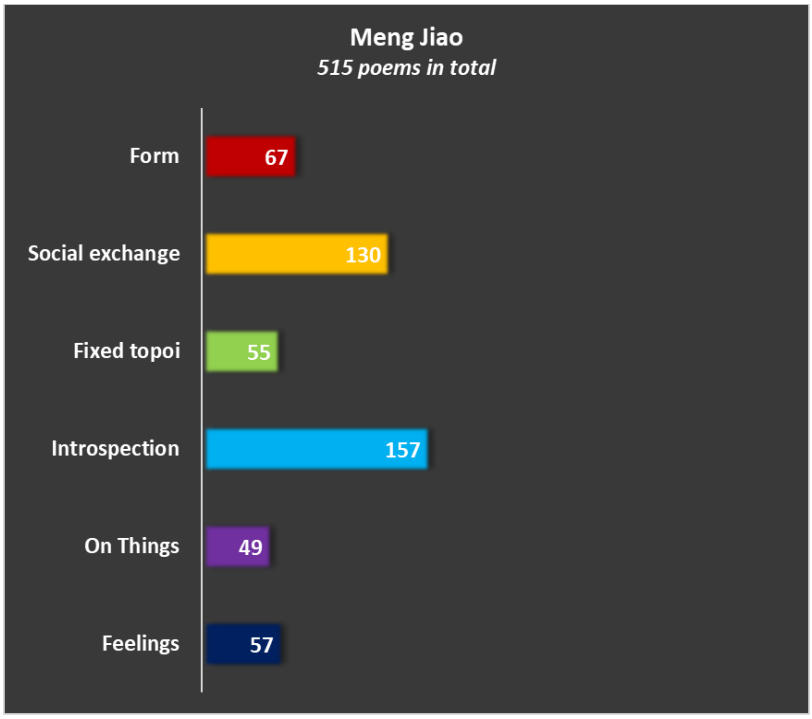


Table 5: Distribution of Meng Jiao's poetry across large formal and topical categories



Where social exchange looms larger in Li Bai's corpus, introspection carries almost twice as much weight in Meng Jiao's work as in Li's—but Meng Jiao's poetic corpus was also only half the size of Li Bai's. The larger categories are equally effective at flattening distinctive features of an individual poet's interests. In Meng Jiao's case, the unsorted *yuefu* disguise not romantic longing or drinking, but rather a constant litany of sadness, poverty, and abandonment; the "being moved" and "singing out" of feelings categories, which hark back to the models of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263) and Chen Zi'ang, among others, contain some of Meng Jiao's most despairing and violent poems, including his three poems on failing the exams; and the many poems placed in "miscellaneous topics" bear witness to the difficulty of shaping Meng's unusual poetry into intelligible, conventional categories. Grief alone takes up ten percent of Meng's total (57 of 515), whereas Li Bai has only six poems of grief out of a thousand. Despite their different proportions, Song argues for the necessity of "grief" as a category in both poet's collections.

As he did in his representation of Li Bai, Song Minqiu presents Meng Jiao as a poet who embodied certain normative literary and social values that Northern Song poets sought in "Tang literature." Through his categorization of Meng's edition, Song depicts a poet who sustained a wide range of topical and formal interests, cultivated a broad social network, and responded with introspection in the face of moral and ethical conflict. Of these three claims, only the last has a strong relationship to the contours of Meng's poetry. Of course, readers experienced the poems beyond the categories that contained them, and yet we have to imagine that the normative packaging presented these difficult texts in ways that mitigated their more disturbing features. Topics and forms were certainly not the only approaches to repackaging Tang texts—for example, in the biographical *nianpu* 年譜 (chronologically ordered) editions that became increasingly popular from the late eleventh century and flourished in the Southern Song, we see readers seeking literary coherence through a logical narrative structure, drawing cause and effect out of texts that often resisted such readings. Song Minqiu was one Northern Song scholar among many producing models of Tang writers, but over the course of the eleventh century, he became a highly influential craftsman of the Tang literary and historical record. The durability of his approach to producing a "Tang poet"—and its intellectual and cultural contexts in the Northern Song—can be attested in many other collections and scholarly representations of the Tang.

Conclusion

This narrative of Li Bai as an avatar begins and ends in multiplicity, but also with new meaning: from Li Bai the "banished transcendent" to Li Bai as an

abstracted persona, a guise that could be adopted and adapted to readers' needs. Su Shi was of course dubbed the "transcendent of Eastern Slope" (*Po xian* 坡仙), in later centuries, and it was a role he sought to play in his lifetime. In outline, a similar path to avatar identity can be traced for other Tang authors prominent in the Northern Song, especially Du Fu, Han Yu, and Liu Zongyuan. But more than those three canonical and revered figures, Li Bai is a useful case study thanks to his controversial reputation. The successive attempts to redefine him illuminate more clearly the significant changes in the reading, production, and transmission of *wenzhang* that need to be understood in the context of the transformations of the Tang-Song transition. Tang readers produced their versions of Li Bai most often through the lens of genre, in the form of commemorations, poems of praise, and lively stories, revealing little concern about inconsistency or conflicts among competing generic accounts. But from the beginning of the Northern Song, literati wrestled with Li Bai according to new hermeneutic practices developed in response to profound changes in Northern Song culture. These practices included, among others, a new commitment to bibliography that was driven by state and individual interest in libraries and book-collecting, which prompted the production and printing of editions; an increasingly ideological approach to state historiography aimed at producing exemplary figures; and enthusiasm for compiling editions and anthologies of literary texts, which were seen as culturally prestigious activities in an age of connoisseurship. Moreover, all of these practices were shaped by changing definitions of literary writing and by its diminished position in the quest for political office and the Way. By shifting our focus away from the reception of individual Tang authors and towards the emergence of new hermeneutic practices in the reading of Tang texts, we can see more clearly how Song readers produced "Tang literature" in many new guises. Li Bai may have ended the Northern Song as a new kind of avatar—but he was one among many that readers could choose to play.

Endnotes

1. The author is grateful for the research support for this article provided by the Elling O. Eide Center in Sarasota, Florida, where I stayed as a scholar in residence in June of 2018. The Eide library contains extensive material on Li Bai, thanks to the collection efforts of Elling Eide, whose scholarship and translations of Li Bai are still pertinent today. Among other works, see his collection of translations, *Poems by Li Po: Translations by Elling Eide*, which was privately printed in 1984. Thanks also go to Michael A. Fuller, who commented on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. It is useful to consider the ways in which the volumes in the Zhonghua shuju XX-*ziliao huibian* [某]資料彙編 series enable this kind of flattening in reception history: the goal of these works is to help us track responses to single authors over time, but the passages that reference a given author's works are presented without context and also as of equal significance for a writer's evolving reputation.
3. In English, see Paula Varsano, *Tracking the Banished Immortal: The Poetry of Li Bo and Its Critical Reception* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003); and in Chinese, most recently, Wang Hongxia 王紅霞, *Song dai Li Bai jieshou shi* 宋代李白接受史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010).
4. On this issue, I draw on recent scholarship on hermeneutics, particularly the lively debates in biblical hermeneutics and classical reception studies, where scholars have advocated a similar turn. See, among others, Timothy Beal, "Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures," *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011): 357-372; Emma England and William John Lynn, eds., *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); and Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). See also Sheldon Pollock's recent work on "critical philology" and its approach to the interpretive tradition: Pollock, "Philology in Three Dimensions," *Postmedieval* 5.4 (2014): 398-413.
5. For another example of a Tang poet whose collection was labored over by early Northern Song scholars, see Stephen Owen's discussion of Yang Yi's work on Li Shangyin's corpus, in *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827-860)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2006), 336-337; also referring to Wan Man 萬曼, *Tang ji xulu* 唐集敘錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 283-284.
6. Kathlyn Liscomb, "Li Bai Drinks with the Moon: The Cultural Afterlife

of a Poetic Conceit and Related Lore," *Artibus Asiae* 70 (2010): 331. See also her "Iconic Events Illuminating the Immortality of Li Bai," *Monumenta Serica* 54 (2006): 75-118.

7. Most recently, Ji Hao, *The Reception of Du Fu (712-770) and his Poetry in Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); and Jue Chen, "Making China's Greatest Poet: The Construction of Du Fu in the Poetic Culture of the Song Dynasty (960-1127)" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2016).
8. For recent reception histories of these two figures, see Yang Guo'an 楊國安, *Songdai Han xue yanjiu* 宋代韓學研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), and Yang Zaixi 楊再喜, *Tang Song Liu Zongyuan chuanbo jieshoushi yanjiu* 唐宋柳宗元傳播接受史研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013).
9. Many scholars have argued that Li Bai's favorite poetic subject was ultimately himself; whether or not we agree with that assessment for his entire corpus, certainly this and other widely read poems reveal Li Bai's deep interest in role-playing and adopting different poetic voices.
10. As measured by the textual traces in later Tang texts, Li Bai seems matched in fame only by Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen, but we do not see in the late ninth-century literary record the same traces of Yuan's and Bai's *lasting* popularity or admiration as we do for Li Bai.
11. Christopher Nugent has discussed this Tang attitude towards texts and compilations, noting that the scholarly and text-critical approaches were a Song phenomenon. See Nugent, "Putting His Materials to Use: Experiencing a Li Bai *yuefu* in Manuscript and Early Print Documents," *East Asian Publishing and Society* 5 (2015): 56-57.
12. "The Road to Shu Is Hard" played a key role in anecdotes about Li Bai's first notice at court by He Zhizhang 賀知章 and was collected in *Heyue yingling ji*, the ninth century *You xuan ji* 又玄集 (Collection of the evermore mysterious), *Wenyuan yinghua*, and *Wen cui.* There are also partial copies of the poem in the Dunhuang corpus. Modern critical opinion on its composition dates it to before the rebellion, written as a farewell piece to a friend travelling to Shu. Zhan Ying 詹鍈, ed., *Li Bai quan ji jiaozhu huishi jiping* 李白全集校注彙釋集評, 8 vols. (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 1:290; hereafter *LBQJ.* The earliest extant posthumous reference to Li's poem appears in Yao He's (early ninth century) poem "Presented to Li Yu Upon Passing the Examinations, on his Return to Shu" 送李餘及第歸蜀, but it is also the central text in the Li Bai anecdotes in the ninth century compilations *Ben shi shi* 本事詩 and *Yunxi youyi* 雲谿友議. It is not mentioned in any of the extant Tang prefaces to Li's collection or in the stele inscriptions for his renovated grave (though most of these texts do not mention specific

poems). Once tenth- and eleventh-century readers began reading the poem politically—the many versions of this story included reading it as Li Bai's prescient warning to Xuanzong or an attack on Yan Wu, on Du Fu's behalf—it was forever cemented as part of his popular biography, if not formally incorporated into Li Bai's *Jiu Tang shu* or *Xin Tang shu* biographies. For an early Song example of this reading, see Yang Sui's essay on Li's old dwelling in which Yang states that "The Road to Shu is Hard" could be used to "critique those in political power." Jin Taosheng 金濤聲 and Zhu Wencai 朱文彩, ed. and comp., *Li Bai ziliao huibian* 李白資料彙編, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1:89; hereafter *LBZL*.

13. Fu Xuanzong 傅璇琮 et al., *Tang ren xuan Tang shi xinbian* (*zengding ben*) 唐人選唐詩新編(增訂本) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 171.
14. Legendary founding rulers of the Shu state. *LBQJ*, 1:292.
15. The poem is indebted in many places to earlier compositions. For more regarding the "The Road to Shu Is Hard" tradition and its influence on Li Bai, see Paul Kroll, "The Road to Shu, from Zhang Zai to Li Bai," *Early Medieval China* 10-11.1 (2004): 227-254.
16. His *yuefu* predominate the selections in the four extant Tang and Five Dynasties anthologies that contain his verse: *Heyue yingling ji* collects seven *yuefu* out of fourteen total poems (50%); *Youxuan ji* two *yuefu* out of four poems (50%); *Caidiao ji,* twenty *yuefu* out of twenty-eight poems (70%); *Wenyuan yinghua,* seventy-two out of 242 poems (30%); and *Wen cui,* twenty-eight out of sixty-three (44%). In contemporary editions of Li Bai's complete poetry, however, *yuefu* constitute only 14% of his poetic corpus.
17. In addition to the many Song imitations of these poems, we can also note their prominence in the two influential collectanea on Tang writers, the twelfth-century *Tang shi ji shi* 唐詩紀事 and the thirteenth-century *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳.
18. For a discussion of this question, see Zhou Xunchu 周勛初, *Li Bai pingzhuan* 李白評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 97-103.
19. A recent entry in this endless debate appears in Wu Chengquan 武承權, "Yong Wang, Li Bai moufan hu?" 永王,李白謀反乎?, *Zhongguo Li Bai yanjiu* 中國李白研究 (2016): 305-326. The author notes that the Li Bai-defending arguments tend to fall into two groups: those who read the especially problematic poem, "A Song of the Prince of Yong's Eastern Campaign, in Eleven Stanzas" 永王東巡歌十一首 as veiled criticism and those who argue that the poem is a forgery or false attribution. However, Wu concludes by offering a twenty-first-century twist on the

poem: that it is a fervent expression of Li Bai's patriotism aimed at the prince, whom Li Bai truly saw as the savior of the central plain. The Northern Song argument (discussed below) that Li Bai was a person of such integrity that he could never have gone willingly with the prince is now largely abandoned.

20. This preface and its evidence have been discussed by Paul W. Kroll, in "Li Bao and Hu Ziyang: Companions of the Way," an as-yet unpublished paper presented at "The Way and the Words: Religion and Literature in Medieval China, A Conference in Honor of Professor Stephen Bokenkamp," October 7, 2017.
21. Scholars have exhaustively studied the edition history of Li Bai's collection, which I will not recapitulate in detail—there is a very clear outline and summary of the scholarship in the appendix to Zhan Ying's 1996 edition of Li Bai's work, *LBQJ* 8:4537-4672. See also Wan, *Tang ji xu lu*, 79-166; and Wang Yongbo 王永波, "Li Bai shi zai Songdai de bianji yu kanke" 李白詩在宋代的編集與刊刻, *Jilin shifan daxue xuebao* 吉林師範大學學報 2 (2014): 17-22.
22. For an analysis of these texts and the significance of their variants, see Nugent, "Putting His Materials to Use," 37-40ff. The Dunhuang copies of Li Bai's poems underscore the influence of *yuefu* on his reputation during the Tang, since almost all of the pieces in the Dunhuang manuscripts are *yuefu*.
23. All six of these, with the addition of Yue Shi's postface to his *Li Hanlin bieji* (discussed below) are included in Zhan Ying's 1996 *LBQJ* edition.
24. Note that Fan Chuanzheng adds the honorific title "Left Rectifier of Omissions," which was given to Li Bai at the beginning of Daizong's reign (762-779). Fan's father, Fan Lun 倫, had known Li Bai in earlier years. Noted in Li Bai's *Xin Tang shu* biography; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 202.5763. See also the discussion in Zhou, *Li Bai ping zhuan*, 158-160.
25. Li Yangbing's praise of his cousin's interest in *fengxing* 風興, political critique and satire, is an important early moment in the allegorical reading tradition for Li Bai's "Ancient Airs" among other poems. The placement and relative importance of the *gufeng* in Li Bai's corpus is another perennial debate in the scholarship; for a summary, see Jia Jinhua 賈晉華, "Li Bai gufeng xinlun" 李白古風新論, *Zhongguo Li Bai yanjiu* 中國李白研究 (1990): 142-148; and more recently, Xue Tianwei 薛天緯, "Guanyu 'Gufeng wushijiu shou' yanjiu de sange wenti" 關於 "古風五十九首" 的三個問題, *Zhongguo Li Bai yanjiu* 中國李白研究 (2013): 85-93.
26. *LBQJ*, 1:1-2

27. *LBQJ*, 1:11-12.
28. The inscription is his sole surviving text.
29. The topic of Du Fu's attitude towards Li Bai is a perennial scholarly favorite; for one recent example of a historical study of their interactions, see Xia Shaohui 霞紹暉, "'Shiren jie yu sha, wu yi du lian cai': Li Bai Du Fu jiaoyi kaolun" 世人皆欲殺,吾意獨憐才: 李白杜甫交誼考論, *Du Fu yanjiu xuekan* 杜甫研究學刊 117.3 (2013): 101-110. For a brief discussion of the impact of Li Bai's verse on Du Fu, see Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang* (Revised ed. Melbourne, Victoria: Quirin Press, 2013), 188-189.
30. Several texts by both writers assessed the relative merits of Li Bai and Du Fu; most influential were Bai Juyi's 815 letter on literature to Yuan "Yu Yuan Jiu shu" 與元九書 and Yuan's stele for Du Fu's grave "Tang gu gongbu yuanwailang Du jun muximing" 唐故工部員外郎杜君墓係銘. See Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, ed., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校, 8 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 5:2789-2805; Yuan Zhen, *Yuan Zhen ji* (*xiuding ben*) 元稹集(修訂本), ann. Ji Qin 冀勤, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, rpt. 2010), 2:690-694.
31. For Han Yu, see, for example, "Drunk, Detaining [Meng] Dongye" 醉留東野 and "Teasing Zhang Ji" 調張籍; for Meng, see "Summoning My Fellow Literati to Drink" 招文士飲 and "Presented to Master Zheng Fang" 贈鄭夫子魴. Han Quanxin 韓泉欣, ed., *Meng Jiao ji jiaozhu* 孟郊集校注, 2 vols. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2012), 1:270-271.
32. See Paul W. Kroll's discussion of the selections of the *Heyue yingling ji*, and his discussion of Yin Fan's approach to Li Bai in particular, in "*Heyue yingling ji* and the Attributes of High Tang Poetry," in *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture,* ed. Paul W. Kroll, 169-201 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
33. On this issue, see Stephen Owen, "The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang: The Case of Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67 (2007): 295-326; and for the nature of the *Cai diao ji* selections preferring romantic topics, see Shields, "Defining Experience: The 'Poems of Seductive Allure' of the Mid-Tang Poet Yuan Zhen (779-831)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122.1 (2002): 61-78.
34. There is no established measure for distinguishing "anecdote" from "tale" in these collections, but the contrast in complexity of plot, number of characters, and dialogue between entries in the *Guo shi bu* (averaging fifty words) and those of a longer text such as the *Guang yi ji* (hundreds of words per tale) is clear.
35. The early ninth century *Guo shi bu* account of Li Bai's drunken

composition at court—where he is commanded to compose verses at imperial command and dashes off ten stanzas with no pause or error—has only thirty-seven words and includes no quotations from Li Bai's verse. But Meng Qi's late ninth century *Ben shi shi*, which focuses on the performance and evaluation of poetic talent, provides a longer version of the story that includes details such as the fact that Li Bai had to be held up by two court officials, and Meng Qi also includes a verse that he composed in the text. For a study of these stories about the High Tang, see Manling Luo, "Remembering Kaiyuan and Tianbao: The Construction of Mosaic Memory in Medieval Historical Miscellanies," *T'oung Pao* 97 (2011): 263-300. See *Ben shi shi* 3.1 in Tao Min 陶敏 et al., ed., *Quan Tang Wudai biji* 全唐五代筆記, 4 vols. (Xian: San Qin chubanshe, 2012), 3:285 [hereafter *QTWDBJ*]; *Guo shi bu* 1.10, *QTWDBJ* 1.802. The fame of this anecdote in the late Tang is attested by Pi Rixiu's poem on Li Bai in his "Seven Admirations" 七愛 poems: "Drunk, he drafted *yuefu*; ten stanzas in a brushstroke without pause." 醉中草樂府 / 十幅筆一息. *LBZL*, 45. See the discussion of this and another Li Bai anecdote in Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2006), 238-241 and 248-250.

36. Sarah Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2014), 31.
37. See Allen's discussion of other examples of stories that influenced the *Xin Tang shu* biographies, *Shifting Stories*, 110-113.
38. Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 190c.5054.
39. Ibid.
40. Owen, "The Manuscript Legacy of the Tang," 295-326. See also Christopher M. B. Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2011), 258-275. For a discussion of how such collections might have produced variants in a corpus over time, see David McMullen's review article of Nugent, "Boats Moored and Unmoored: Reflections on the Dunhuang Manuscripts of Gao Shi's Verse," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 73.1 (2013): 83-145.
41. For the early Northern Song library-building and the collections that resulted from them, see Glen Dudbridge, *Lost Books of Medieval China* (London: The British Library, 2000), 1-26.
42. See Johannes Kurz, "The Politics of Collecting Knowledge: Song Taizong's Compilations Project," *T'oung Pao* 87:4/5 (2001): 289-316.

43. Ding Xiang Warner, *Transmitting Authority: Wang Tong (ca. 584-617) and the* Zhongshuo *in China's Manuscript Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 60-61.
44. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳, eds., *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, 360 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), 6:355-356.
45. As I noted above, Wei Hu's *Cai diao ji* collection of twenty-eight Li Bai poems gives us evidence of what may have been a very different Shu compilation. There was also an independent Shu edition of Li Bai's work produced in the Northern Song; for its printing history, see *LBQJ* 8:4540-4552.
46. In a recent article, Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 has argued that this Southern Song edition of the *Li Hanlin ji* is a faithful reproduction of Yue Shi's 998 edition and has further explored the variants among the extant Northern Song editions and the Dunhuang manuscript copies of Li Bai poems, arguing that these variants can give us insights into Li Bai's own edits to his work. See Chen, "Li Bai shige wenben duoqi zhuangtai zhi fenxi" 李白詩歌多歧狀態之分析, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 48 (2016): 110-120.
47. Yue Shi notes that he has taken one anecdote from a work entitled *Kaiyuan Tianbao hua muji* 開元天寶花木記. *LBQJ*, 1:5-6. The specific sources of the others are not given.
48. These additions are discussed in Wang, *Songdai Li Bai jieshou shi*, 41-42. However, Wang apparently finds nothing suspicious about the appearance of such detailed new stories almost 250 years after Li Bai's death.
49. See my article on this anthology, Shields, "Defining the 'Finest': A Northern Song View of Tang Dynasty Literary Culture," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 4 (2017): 306-335.
50. This speculation leaves out the possibility that the lost ninth century anthology *Tang shi lei xuan* 唐詩類選 included an "antiquity" section with Li Bai represented in this manner. However, we have no evidence to confirm or dispute that possibility, and Yao Xuan's dismissal of the other Tang anthologies in his preface, including the *Tang shi lei xuan*, would indicate that his selections were deliberately different from earlier anthologies. See Stephen Owen, "A Tang Version of Du Fu," *T'ang Studies* 25 (2008): 57-90.
51. Debate over the relative importance, original grouping, and organization of the *gufeng* in Li Bai's corpus stretches back centuries and is unlikely to be settled in this one; for a summary, see Paula Varsano, *Tracking the Banished Immortal*, 141-203. It is my view that they were largely an invention of one of Li Bai's compilers, either Li Yangbing or Yue Shi.

52. At the very least, this suggests that Yao Xuan had access to Yue Shi's *Li Hanlin ji* and the *bieji*, which contained the prose. Given what Yao states in the preface about exhaustively consulting the imperial libraries in the decades he was located in the capital (the anthology was compiled when he was in prefectural office), this seems likely.
53. For the standard account of this shift, see Peter Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
54. Zeng and Liu, *Quan Song wen*, 16:31-32.
55. For this process, see Chen, "Making China's Greatest Poet," 143-195.
56. For a study of the Song stages in the remaking of Du Fu, see Charles Hartman, "The Tang Poet Du Fu and the Song Dynasty Literati," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 30 (2008): 43-74.
57. I borrow Susan Nelson's and Kathlyn Liscomb's use of this phrase "iconic events" to describe specific anecdotes that came to represent poetic figures such as Li Bai and Tao Qian in the Song and later painting tradition. See Liscomb's discussion in "Li Bai Drinks with the Moon," 332-333.
58. For a discussion of Qisong's commitment to both the Dharma and the Ru tradition, see Elizabeth Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs: Qisong and Lineage in Chinese Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 117-120. This preface is undated in Qisong's corpus.
59. *LBZL*, 1:115.
60. Ibid.
61. Hong Benjian 洪本建, ed. and ann., *Ouyang Xiu shiwen ji jiaojian* 歐陽修詩文集校箋, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 1:148-150. The comments note several of the references but do not comment on the allusion in ll. 17-18 to "Among the Mountains, Replying to a Layman" 山中答俗人 in LBQJ, 5:2623. The poem is more commonly known as "Replying to a Question among the Mountains" 山中問答.
62. For the history of early Northern Song poetics and the charge of unoriginality, see Ronald Egan, "The Northern Song (1020-1126) ," in *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol. 1, ed. by Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, 381-464 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and many studies of Northern Song literature, including the recent dissertation by Xie Yan 謝琰, published as *Bei Song qianqi shige zhuanxing yanjiu* 北宋前期詩歌轉型研究 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013).
63. Mei Yaochen's poems on and imitating Li Bai are equally revealing of Li's reputation and stature in the mid-11th century. *LBZL*, 1:106-107.

64. See Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2006).
65. There are overlaps with Gérard Genette's definitions of "pastiche" here, and yet the Chinese case demands much further exploration before we can easily adopt Genette's taxonomy of hypertextuality to the Chinese context. See Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), esp. 98-120.
66. See Wang's analysis of these imitations, *Songdai Li Bai jieshou shi*, 137-158. Wang argues that Guo's imitations were also influential in transmitting Li Bai's image and works to a broader audience, discussing the spread of the "incarnation of Li Bai" praise of Guo, which included the later creation of an image of Guo that was installed at Li Bai's shrine at Mt. Qingcheng in Sichuan (noted by Lu You 陸游 in his *Ru Shu ji* 入蜀記). However, aside from these anecdotes about Guo's fame as a Li Bai follower, there seems to be little evidence from the 11th century (or later) that Guo's own work was widely read. Wang estimates roughly 250 of Guo's extant 1400 poems are imitations of Li Bai in some fashion.
67. In the brief remark titled "On the Relative Merits of Li Bai and Du Fu" 李白杜甫詩優劣說, collected in *Bi shuo* 筆說 in Li Yian 李遺安, ann., *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集, 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 5:1968.
68. *LBZL*, 1:162.
69. My discussion here is drawn from Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Monograph Series, 1994), 16-18.
70. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮, ann., *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, rpt. 2008), 2:348-349.
71. *LBZL*, 1:171.
72. *LBZL*, 1:140.
73. Although scholars of individual Tang writers have often discussed Song's efforts, there has not yet appeared a systematic study of Song's work *across* the corpora of different writers. For a brief introductory article, see Zhang Jia 張佳, Yang Yi 楊依, and Li Yinsheng 李寅生, "Song Minqiu bianjiao zhengli Tangren bieji kaolun" 宋敏求編校整理唐人別集考論, *Tangdu xuekan* 唐都學刊 1 (2011): 5-9.
74. For Zeng Gong's work on this edition, see Wang, *Songdai Li Bai jieshoushi*, 104-107; also *LBQJ*, 8:4539-4540. Since scholars have identified incorrect attributions in Song's edition, including some of Wei Hao's response poems to Li Bai, we are wise to approach the roughly 300-poem "expansion" with some skepticism.

75. Space does not permit a detailed comparison of the two editions here. Many of the formal and social exchange categories are similarly titled and occupy the first two-thirds of the collection, but Song Minqiu's most remarkable revisions of the *Li Hanlin ji* categories include deleting the category "Uncategorized Imitations" (*zani* 雜擬), splitting and amplifying the oddly-titled "Reflections" (*huai* 懷) category into multiple types of "reflection," as I discuss below, and his invention of a (thinly-populated) "grief" category. See Chen Shangjun, "Li Bai wenben," for his confidence in this Southern Song Xianchun-era edition as a faithful reproduction of the 998 *Li Hanlin ji*.
76. From Song Minqiu's "Postface to the Collection of Li Taibai" 李太白文集後序, which is included in *LBZL*, 1:138.
77. Postface quoted and discussed in Wan, *Tang ji xulu*, 80-81; Wang, *Songdai Li Bai jieshou shi*, 105-107; also in Zhang, Yang, and Li, "Song Minqiu bianjiao zhengli Tangren bieji kaolun," 6-7.
78. For another example of categories supplied by a Song editor, see the case of Wang Qinchen's 1056 edition of Wei Yingwu, discussed in Wan, *Tang ji xulu*, 87. Wan's larger argument that Tang poets did not themselves use topical categories for organizing their own collections is partially belied by the examples of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen (who were exceptional in their day), but supported by a powerful counter-example, the collection of Quan Deyu, which scholars believe to be largely intact and in its original order; it contains neither topical nor formal categories for Quan's verse.
79. Space does not permit a full discussion of the Daoist and Buddhist topics and themes in Li Bai's collection, but it is certain that the anti-religious *guwen* reformers found them unappealing, as my discussion suggests. For some important studies of his compositions on religious themes, see Paul W. Kroll, "Li Po's Transcendent Diction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 99-117; Ge Jingchun 葛景春, *Li Bai sixiang yishu tanli* 李白思想藝術探驪 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991); and Kroll, *Dharma Bell and Dhāranī Pillar: Li Po's Buddhist Inscriptions* (Kyoto: Scuola Italiana di Studi sull'Asia Orientale, 2001).
80. A recent discussion of the ordering of Meng Jiao's collection compares it to a few other Tang collections, including that of Li Bai. However, the author concludes that the use of topical categories versus formal categories was both "natural" (due to the fact that the majority of Meng's poems are pentametric old-style verses) and conventional (using the *Wen xuan* 文選 as model). The author also suggests that Song Minqiu's use of topical categories stemmed from his great familiarity with the

Tang shi lei xuan as well as the influence of the early Song "Four Great Books" that used topical categories to order information. This may be the case with respect to the origin of the organization, though there is no evidence for the latter claim; my concern here is for its hermeneutic impact. Fan Xinyang 范新陽, *Meng Jiao shi yanjiu* 孟郊詩研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014), 243-244. For more on Meng Jiao's collection, see Wan, *Tang ji xu lu*, 215-218, and the preface to Han, *Meng Jiao ji jiaozhu*, 1:23-25. In his preface, Song details the confused state of Meng's works that he had to collect and reorder, compiling a total of 515 poems, sorted into ten *juan*, and he lists his fourteen categories in the order they appear in the collection. Wan, *Tang ji xu lu*, 215.