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The Empire of Fame: Writing and the Voice in Early Medieval China

Hajime Nakatani

Jacques Derrida's assault on phonocentrism has altered the very ground on which one addresses the question of orality and literacy, the charged binary that controlled and continues to control contemporary debates on signification, subjectivity, and power. Derrida's by now classic reading of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* constitutes one of the inaugurating moments for his deconstructive project, in which he systematically dismantles the matrix of oppositions that structures the anthropologist's allegory of loss by writing. Derrida insists that the Nambikwara, on whom Lévi-Strauss projects the Western fantasies of originary innocence, are in fact not ignorant of the violence of difference, dislocation, and abstraction that attends upon any historical formation. And insofar as such an intersection of meaning and power is typically aligned with writing, the Nambikwara are not ignorant of a certain "writing" either, even before the advent of the anthropologist

and his gospel of phonetic technology. Derrida variously calls this extended sense of writing the “trace,” “arche-writing,” or the *gramme*. It is the inscriptive logic that strides the variety of physical media to mobilize gestures and voices, rituals and institutions, indeed all acts of marking and re-marking boundaries, toward its relentless operations of text-making.

China—the “Empire of the Text” par excellence—would appear to exemplify this global operation of the *gramme* with almost breathtaking immediacy.¹ It is not only that this civilization, through much of its history, devoted itself to its script and its archives with perhaps unparalleled single-mindedness. Such an authority of writing was itself grounded in an expansive graphic cosmology, the universal graphism of *wen* (text, texture, pattern, figure) which subsumed not only writing per se but also ritual and institutional patterning of bodies and societies as well as the forms and figures of the earth, the firmament, and everything in between. Thus enmeshed in a universe that is, as such, structured like writing, writing in the restricted sense (as Derrida would call it) simply precipitates an order preexisting its advent, an immanent order that the perspicacious sages merely rendered manifest through their invention of the script and attendant graphic institutions. The blatant tautology of this tale of origin—where writing copies a world always already conceived as writing—was the symbolic matrix for early Chinese imperial visions, the unreflected ground upon which script, world, and empire reflected the uncanny likenesses of one another.

Yet what this palpable bond between graphic vision and imperial power attests to is not a grammatological utopia. Rather, it is the fact that the globality of writing is always a globalization of writing, a historical program of scripturalization and textualization that both registers and enables specific formations of power. Derrida himself was not blind to the epochal forces that shaped his own globalization of writing. As he was quick to acknowledge, *Of Grammatology* was conceived under the aegis of a new era of writing, one in which everything from language to life as such progressively assumes the characteristics of script, code, and text.² What has since become apparent, however, is that such a relentless globalization of writing (as well as the attendant erosion of its specificity) cannot be safeguarded within the contemplative neutrality of a scientific paradigm shift; instead, it has every

bit to do with a massive and ongoing reconfiguration of societal power that pundits variously dub “informatization,” “media society,” “postmodernity,” or “hypermodernity.” Likewise, albeit against a radically different cultural and historical background, the alluring cosmology of *wen* was inscribed within a historically circumscribed program of power, the implacable universalism of an imperial regime in which to write was to order and vice versa.

It is a phase of this widening circle of imperial tautology that I want to document in this essay. If the Han Dynasty first articulated the ground parameters of what I will call the graphic regime, which it institutionalized in its system of canons, rituals, bureaucracy, and cosmology, the few centuries following its collapse are usually characterized as an era of the voice. Indeed, the diffuse and decentered rule of the early medieval gentry revolved around a loquacious network of sociability that increasingly undermined the centralized authority of the court and its system of text production. This new realm of existence was vividly captured in what may be called the “literature of the voice,” a characteristically medieval genre that anthologized the intimate countenances of the sociable man. In a recent study, Christopher Connery vigorously critiqued the phonocentric interpretations of this historical passage. In place of the romanticizing narratives of the emergent self and its subversion of the imperial state, Connery recognized in the early medieval developments the effects of an expanding imperial textuality that progressively colonized the sociable realm through textual representation and codification. The seeming authority of the medieval voice would then be but the surface effect of this generalization of literacy beyond the imperial court and its administrative-cum-cosmological apparatus that Etienne Balazs aptly called “celestial bureaucracy.”³ But to thus foreground the textual mediation of the medieval voice is not enough, for such a reading leaves largely intact the entrenched opposition between literacy and orality that the Chinese corpus prompts us to complicate. I hope to show that the emergence of the sociable voice as target of entextualization implied a far more radical generalization of writing, an annexation of the voice to an expansive realm of imperial arche-writing. The communal texture of fame and renown that will preoccupy the bulk of my discussion formed such a writing (in the gen-

eralized sense), interweaving eminent personalities and their “good names” into a sociable texture that curiously replicated the order of the canons (in the restricted sense) even as it laid claim over the authority of the latter.

The Regime of Fame

A fascination with fame and appearance indeed permeated the world of the early medieval Chinese gentry. What met the eyes was what one was worth on the cruel stage of gentry sociability, and renown was the cherished reward for successful performance. Wei Jie’s (衛玠; 286–313 CE) anecdote is exemplary of the allure of countenance and fame in this culture of appearance. When this young rising star of gentry society — whose immaculately white skin, compared by some to the milky surface of polished jade, contributed no less to his renown than did his sharp wit — fled the turmoil of the Central Plain to the southern city of Jiankang (建康), he found himself trapped amid a fervent crowd eager to catch a glimpse of this latest celebrity in town. On his untimely death shortly thereafter, it was rumored that Wei Jie was “killed by the avid gaze of the crowd” (*kansha*, 看殺).⁴

Wei Jie was one among the countless early medieval personalities whose existence was reduced to “a sheer mathematical point at the intersection of gazes,” as one perceptive historian phrased it.⁵ In the insatiable and impatient eyes of the crowd, so intense as to kill, Wei’s eminence was as immediate and tangible an attribute of his persona as his physical appearance. Wei Jie’s fame, his grace, and his riveting beauty were thus facets of a single reality — the irradiating allure of the “eminent personalities” (*mingshi*, 名士), upon which converged the gazes and voices of the early medieval world.

To some, an episode like this brings to sharp relief the culture of poise and theatricality that saturated the social world of the medieval gentry.⁶ Yet there is something about the proximity of Wei’s fame to his physical being as well as the ferocity of the crowd’s gaze cast upon him that defies the model of the theater. In this culture, fame emanates from physique, and physique lends testimony to fame with an immediacy that ignores the redoubled consciousness of the mask or the elusive pleasure of make-believe usually associated with the notion of theatricality. If, for us moderns, appearance and fame are inextricably enmeshed in the endless play of mirrors between the

consciousness of the self and the perception of others, fame in early medieval eyes achieved an almost corporeal existence, one that seized Wei Jie's body and eventually consumed it.

We should therefore be wary of imputing beneath the façade of medieval appearance and fame a “subjectivity” either expressing itself or constructed by others. The intersection of gazes remained an empty “mathematical point” precisely because there was no interiority, no psychology installed there preceding the advent of the gazes. Nor did the glamour of medieval fame lie in the eyes of the beholder; the gaze simply consecrated a fame felt to be as objectively deployed before it as the countenance, gesture, or mannerism of the eminent personality. Fame was the stuff the eminent personalities were made of, selves and others being but the functions of fame's overwhelming presence.

Social historians—especially those of the Weberian ilk—frequently attribute this positivity of fame to the characteristic ethos of an aristocratic society.⁷ Indeed, much like the European court society in the era of absolutism, the gentry society in medieval China was a loose aggregate of salons arrayed around the imperial court, forming a loquacious but sparse network of sociability that extended across the territory of the imperium even as it excluded most of its inhabitants. In his classic study of the court society of Louis XIV, Norbert Elias demonstrated the fundamental linkage between the deterritorialized but decidedly closed nature of that society and some of its most characteristic forms of knowledge: the keen observation of appearance and manners; a preoccupation with fame, honor, and the opinions of others; a typological grasp of personalities epitomized in the *caractères* literature; the art of conversation; and a literary penchant toward aphoristic display of wit.⁸

Students of Chinese medieval culture will readily recognize an uncanny likeness of their own corpus in this portrayal of early modern court society. The differences, however, are at least as instructive. Most important, early modern court society was inscribed within the *longue durée* modernizing project of subject formation.⁹ The European aristocracy's increasing embedding of knowledge in sociability was thus dialectically coupled with a process of internalization, one variously captured in the early modern topoi of the courtier and his wise rationality, his cynical detachment from the

mundane “society,” or his proverbial boredom, in whose inner cavity began to take shape the precocious figure of the modern self.¹⁰

Such an internalizing mechanism is virtually absent in the medieval Chinese case. “Instead of a sense of honor (*Ehrgefühl*),” the historian Ōmuro Mikio observed with characteristic insight, the Chinese gentry were driven by “a pathological impulse for fame (*Ruhmsucht*).”¹¹ There were practically no cultural limits to the compulsive pursuit of fame, its exponential escalation inevitably leading to a gratuitous cult of eminence. In this frivolous but intense cult, the memorable gestures and words of eminent personalities were broadcast throughout the communal body as mesmerizing signs of renown and reiterated by countless imitators. For example, the idiosyncratic behaviors and contorted rhetoric of the great poet and essayist Ruan Ji (阮籍; 210–63 CE) were instantly recognized as the model of “carefree eccentricity” (*yendan*, 任誕) and were emulated by contemporaries like Ruan’s friend Liu Ling (劉伶): “Liu Ling often indulged in wine and behaved in wild, uninhibited ways. Sometimes he would completely strip off his clothes and sit naked in his room. Someone noticed this and castigated him, to which he retorted, ‘I consider Heaven and Earth to be the roof and pillars of my house and take the rooms of my house to be my underpants and my coats. What right do you have to intrude in my underwear?’”¹² The key components of this delightfully frivolous episode—binge drinking, the cavalier disregard for propriety, and the scatology of “the world as my underwear”—were in fact all “quotations” from his more prominent friend Ruan Ji.¹³ But whereas in Ruan’s case, and perhaps also in Liu’s, those rapidly stereotyped words and deeds still retained in their quirkiness something of a personalizing vision, later imitators took the exchange values of these eminently quotable gestures largely for granted, freely appropriating these social signs to concoct their own “carefree eccentricity.” It is such a social sign that we should recognize in, for instance, the countless cases of early medieval substance abuse: Ruan Xiu (阮脩), who walked around with a string of coins attached to his staff so he could always drop by a bar and afford a glass;¹⁴ Zhou Yi (周顛), whom contemporaries called the “three-day vice president” because it took him at least three days to sober up after his habitual drinking bouts;¹⁵ or Wang Gong (王恭), who reportedly proclaimed, “It does not take remarkable talent to be an eminent personality [*mingshi*, 名士]. If one is able to be

always idle, practice heavy drinking, and be absorbed in the poem ‘Encountering Sorrow’ [*Lisao*, 離騷], he qualifies as an eminent personality.”¹⁶

Predictably, the wide currency of such readily recognizable fame-signs was accompanied by a countermovement of differentiation and distinction that, ironically, only served to further evacuate these signs of any sense of authenticity. In the fervent pursuit of gratuitous distinction that easily went out of control, a man would rush up a tree to install himself in a bird’s nest or would be noted simply for having an unusually long face. The literature of the time dutifully recorded those and other examples of what the contemporaries deemed strange (*yi*, 異) or eccentric (*qi*, 奇) demeanors and appearances. In their utter triviality, these signs of idiosyncrasy betray the core logic of medieval fame: not only was the pursuit of fame a gratuitous undertaking for the medieval gentry, but the gentry community also recognized these empty signs gratuitously—that is, without much concern for their “inner” significance. What drove the eminent personality was ultimately the urge to become the bearer of such self-justifying signs, which precisely by virtue of their lack of signification would totally and exhaustively transfigure his whole being into a corporeal vehicle for collective recognition. Then, if fame produced an “order” at all, it was one that consisted of nothing more than the complete interpellation of all members into the communal texture of renown. The allegorical significance of Wei Jie’s anecdote, if any, might have been precisely that: the climactic consummation of being by fame on the communal stage, ensued by the inevitable demise of the now dispensable body.

It was in this absolute, totalizing sense that fame formed a regime in medieval China. As the gentry’s collective self-identification as eminent personalities already implies, to claim membership in this community of eminence meant to submit oneself to the dense traffic of renown, to insert one’s distinctive gestures, countenances, words, and deeds into the flow of voices circulating through the communal body like its vital juice.¹⁷ And the communal texture of fame formed the privileged surface on which the gentry recognized the forces shaping their world—its hierarchies and typologies, centers and peripheries, alliances and dispersals, and so on. Then, if fame served the gentry’s sociopolitical interests like the pursuit of prestige or the gauging of one’s standing in the sociable universe, it was *not* because fame

supplied a transparent medium for a sociopolitical order existing outside of it. On the contrary, it was because in medieval optics, what we moderns would isolate as “society” or “politics” merged indistinguishably into a unified field of practices governed by the logic of fame. In this sense, fame orchestrated what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would call a “regime of signs” — a system of practices and interpretations distributing bodies and orchestrating their interactions around specific semiotic operations.¹⁸

Medieval fame qua regime of signs conferred a distinctive form of collective identity and coherence to the once subservient functionaries and scribes of the Han imperial bureaucracy. Historians concur that the rise of the gentry as dominant social group was one of the defining events of early medieval China. They usually attribute this turn to a set of “objective” parameters, like the decentralization of socioeconomic forces, the increasing stratification of local communities, or the diffusion of literacy.¹⁹ By focusing on fame as a regime of signs, I hope to shift my analytic focus to a more emic, that is, internal, perspective. While a sense of order may not have been the unique cause for the formation of the medieval gentry society, it certainly constituted its condition of possibility. For if, as Christopher Connery argued, the Han graphic regime served to subordinate the literate protogentry to the “Empire of the Text” as its inscribing hands,²⁰ fame qua regime was what enabled the gentry as a group to recognize itself outside the scene of imperial text production. Fame served at once to demarcate the sphere of sociability as the proper arena for the gentry class and to lend pattern and interpretability to the cobweb of interactions and associations unfolding in this new sphere.

The “Rectification of Name/Fame” (*Zhengming*, 正名)

The Chinese preoccupation with fame can be traced to at least as far back as the early Warring States period.²¹ But it is important to distinguish an enduring ethos of a society from a historically specific vision of communal order. For instance, while Confucius pronounced on fame on a number of occasions, he hardly recognized in it the privileged site for the realization of order. Central to the Confucian ethical program was instead the regulation of one’s *attitude* toward fame (e.g., when to pursue fame and when to

relinquish it, the proper ratio of interest and disinterest); fame per se was treated like any number of communal experiences that the gentleman was to manage in view of his ultimate goal of moral cultivation.

What hitherto remained a plain fact of the known world was promoted to the centerpiece of a thinking of order when, through a somewhat unexpected alliance, fame became the primary object of the “rectification of names” (*zhengming*, 正名).²² First somewhat tentatively articulated in the *Analects*, the notion of correct words as the foundation of correct governance gained philosophical cachet in late Warring States texts like *Xunzi* and *Guanzi*, where it was wedded to an emergent cosmology of the ten thousand things (*wanwu*, 萬物) and their categories (*lei*, 類). To use terms adequately is to follow the categorical structure of the universe and hence to access the patterns of its organization and transformations. *Zhengming* thus laid the normative model for an imminent imperial order with the sage-ruler at its center, coordinating the course of the world through his privileged access to words and categories. However, by the end of the Later Han (the latter half of the second century CE), key texts on *zhengming* began to shift their main target of rectification to fame. In this new understanding of the notion, communal order was to be produced through the correct “usage” of renown, thereby envisioning the new order of gentry sociability through a model once closely bound up with the empire.

But what does it mean to “rectify” fame? In what sense did fame and name form a unified object of reflection for these authors? Some have found in this the effect of an ostensible “linguistic turn” of early medieval thought. In this view, far from being a purely philosophical exercise, the medieval authors’ preoccupation with the name attests to an effort to grasp fame as discursive event, whose felicity or infelicity was to be evaluated in light of a linguistic structure of meaning.²³ Later I will discuss the validity of this “linguistic turn” hypothesis at some length. Here I want to propose an alternative, and in a sense much simpler, explanation for the medieval authors’ perplexing alignment of name and fame. In my view, the smooth transition from name to fame was enabled by the semantic peculiarity of the Chinese term *ming*, which conflates “name” and “fame” as well as “title” and “graph.” Such a lexical overlap is not as exotic as it may first appear: after all, the name of a thing and one’s “good name” share the same lexicon in

English. But for Chinese reflections, this meant far more than a mere lexical fortuity. In most Chinese reflections on name, the fact that fame and name are coterminous ipso facto signified that the two fell in the same class of phenomena. One may perhaps observe in this the symptom of an enduring indistinction in Chinese reflections between the articulation of terms and the articulation of reality. It is a phase in the historical inflections of this civilizational penchant that I want to describe here.

The apparent randomness of *zhengming's* shifting historical interpretations indeed derives from this pattern of thought. This early Chinese vision of order was applied to heterogeneous spheres and articulated divergent aims at different historical moments depending on the prevailing understanding of "name." For the Han commentators and lexicographers, name meant written character and the rectification of name meant the practice of correcting canonical commentary, thereby anchoring the order of names and of the ten thousand things in the graphic logic of writing. The conflation of name and fame marked the next phase in this history of interpretation. When early medieval authors like Xu Gan (徐幹), Liu Shao (劉邵), Wang Bi (王弼), or Liu Zhou (劉晔) recognized in fame a paradigm for their reflections on the inner workings of names, the theory of the "rectification of names" became a theory of gentry sociability.

Terminological convergence guaranteed this variegated history a semblance of matter-of-fact continuity. There is indeed hardly any indication that early medieval authors recognized in their interpretation of *zhengming* significant departures from earlier ones. As is all too familiar to sinologists, what may be called a lexical effect of continuity structured interpretive practices throughout much of Chinese history, lending ground to successive claims of an essential unity with the canonized past. Understandably, it has become fashionable among more critically minded scholars to demystify these reprised gestures of continuity and the totalizing claims they enabled (and continue to enable) about the unity of Chinese civilization. Yet notwithstanding its evident therapeutic effect, to single-mindedly emphasize discontinuity risks downplaying the distinctive patterns of permanence and change that define what we call early imperial China. The naive nominalist claim that history is a succession of permanent changes from moment to moment is as totalizing and as homogenizing a claim as its opposite. My

aim here is instead to focus on the genealogical connection between the Han and the medieval regimes, one in which the *presumption* of lexical continuity defined the specific pattern of the latter's ruptures from the former. I will argue that it was precisely the immediate superimposition of the canonical surface of the graph onto the sociable texture of fame that allowed the transfer of imperial models into domains once indifferent to an imperial vision of order, constituting them as autonomous "quasi empires."

The Persistence of the Empire

By stressing the genealogical connection between the Han and the medieval regimes, I specifically want to challenge the scenario of total rupture that continues to control sinological accounts of this historical passage. While the scenario is dispersed across numerous disciplines and articulated in view of heterogeneous bodies of material, its thrust is not difficult to recognize. The formation of the gentry as autonomous class, the aesthetic discovery of the self, the emergence of a philosophy of language—underlying these themes and theses that govern social, literary, art, and intellectual histories of early medieval China is a shared narrative of emancipation, one in which the unraveling of the archaic empire and its despotic symbolic apparatuses enables the self, society, and language to unfold their intrinsic rationalities.

Predictably, the scenario assigns the three central topoi of early medieval culture (i.e., appearance, fame, and name) to the neatly separated domains of the self, society, and language. Thus cultural historians recognize the symptoms of an emergent awareness of the individual self in the intense preoccupation with human appearance in early medieval literature and art. In this view, the gentry's culture of appearance partakes in a constellation of phenomena (e.g., the rise of lyrical poetry, the formation of an author-centered poetics, the cachet of portraiture in the visual arts) that collectively attests to a steady evolution of an aesthetics of self-expression.²⁴ Social and political historians equate the practice of reputation with the rise of "public opinion," through which society exerts its influence over official recruitment and other affairs of the state. By doing so, these scholars inscribe the practice of reputation within a continuous process whereby society achieved increasing autonomy from the imperial state.²⁵ Finally, intellectual histori-

ans posit a narrative of philosophical rationalization, one that recognizes in the prestige of name in post-Han reflections the rise of a strictly philosophical awareness of the mediative structure of language. This “linguistic turn,” they maintain, contributed to the transition from a cosmological to a properly textual model of canonical interpretation: by foregrounding the internal, formal structures of classical texts, the critical hermeneutics of Wang Bi, Guo Xiang (郭象), or Zhang Zhan (張湛) dispelled the scholastic convolution of Han commentaries, which obfuscated textual forms with their cumbersome overlays of imposed (and thus “external”) cosmological models.²⁶

What such characteristically modern reification of the self, society, and language obstructs from view is the unity and historical specificity of the regime in which the topoi of appearance, fame, and name converged. For the same set of cosmological assumptions underlying the Han regime continued to supply the unifying ground for medieval reflections. Han authors were unanimous in regarding actuality as composed of discrete *qi* categories (*lei*, 類), their mutual resonance and dissonance (*ganying*, 感應) shaping all phenomena amidst the ten thousand things.²⁷ And it was the presumption of a total commensurability between *qi* categories and names (i.e., all *qi* categories bear names, and all names name *qi* categories) that allowed the Han authors’ conflation of being and sign on the material surface of the graphs.²⁸ The medieval “turns” and “shifts” left this root vision largely intact.

The self, society, or language observed through such a cosmological prism would hardly be the self, society, or language that we know of. I begin with the first two. Although medieval reflections no doubt display an unprecedented sensitivity toward the diversity of human dispositions and the nuances of human rapports, such reflections were conducted strictly within the parameters of a vision of actuality that drew no firm distinctions between the human realm and the cosmic movements of *qi*. No special sets of characteristics demarcated the self qua peculiarly human form of identity or defined “social” interactions as distinctively “social,” because the typology and dynamics of *qi* indiscriminately governed all spheres of existence—natural, cultural, social, psychological, and political. This is in sharp contrast to the functions of the self and society in modern Western discourse, where these notions emerged as dialectical figures of reflexivity,

together regulating the subject's relation to its own corporeal existence and to its outside. Ignoring such a reflexive imperative, medieval Chinese authors instead embedded persons and their interactions in a continuous unfolding of a world-process. At the initial phase of this world-process was a self understood in its temperamental sense, the diverse dispositions (*xing*, 性) of individuals determined by their *qi* endowments (*qibing*, 氣稟). Consider a passage from Yuan Zhun's (袁准; late third to early fourth century CE) brief essay "On Talents and Dispositions" (*Caixing lun*, 才性論): "Among the ten thousand things born between Heaven and Earth, there are beautiful ones and ugly ones. Why is a thing beautiful? It is because it was born from pure *qi*. Why is a thing ugly? It is because it is born from impure *qi*. . . . Being crooked or straight depends on the disposition of the particular tree. . . . Being wise or unwise depends on the particular person's disposition."²⁹

Within a frame of thought that conflates human differences with the distinction between bent and straight tree trunks, the self is inevitably collapsed with the "stuff one is made of." Notwithstanding the temptation for modern historians to project a subjective interiority into the medieval notion of disposition, what the passage conjures is a radically nonreflexive self envisioned as part and parcel of the spontaneous unfolding of the cosmos. A person as conceived by medieval authors was then but a passing phase in the consecutive stages leading from *qi* endowment to its physiological, psychological, ethical, and communal realizations. Consider the following from Liu Shao's (劉邵; 189–c. 244 CE) seminal work *The Treatise on Personalities* (*Renwuzhi*, 人物志):³⁰

In assessing what a person is made of, one considers the five categories of things [whose *qi* form the endowments]. The tokens of the five categories of things are manifest in our bodies. Thus in the body, the bone corresponds to wood, muscles and tendons to metal, breath to fire, flesh to earth, and blood to water. These are the concretized figures of the five categories of things. As to the property of the five categories, they each have their functions. Thus one whose bones are upright but resilient is called broad-minded and strong-willed. Being broad-minded and strong-willed is the essence of benevolence. One whose breath is pure and translucent is called well mannered and composed. Being well mannered

and composed is the basis of ritual propriety. One whose body is erect and vigorous is called virtuous and steady. Being virtuous and steady is the foundation of sincerity. One whose muscles and tendons are strong and tight is called courageous and daring. Being courageous and daring is the drive for righteousness. One whose complexion is calm and relaxed is called penetrating and subtle. Being penetrating and subtle is the source of wisdom.³¹ The five properties are the permanent dispositions [of those endowed with the respective *qi*], and this is why they are called the five constants.³²

It is important to note the extraordinary immediacy with which *qi* endowment, physiology, character, and morality implicate one another in a passage like this. In rhetorical terms, the mutual imbrication of phases is established here by means of definitional formulations — “X is called Y” (X *wei zhi* [謂之] Y) or “that which is X is Y” (X *yezhe* [也者] Y *ye* [也]) — that serve to portray the world-process as a chain of tautological linkages. Indeed, tautology was the unique form of coherence for early Chinese authors, textually and cosmologically. For the totality of the world-process as portrayed by Han and medieval authors was also propelled by a similar tautology, one intrinsic to the very notion of “*qi* categories.” *Category* (*lei*, 類) in the classical understanding designated at once a discrete class of beings and the relation of similitude whereby particulars are brought together to form a *qi* category. In other words, categorical order comprised both the pattern of attraction and repulsion among particulars *and* the end-product of these interactions; order was thereby directly implicated in the tangible texture of the ten thousand things and the concrete interactions unfolding in their midst.³³ This short-circuiting of distinctions between being and becoming or between class and membership was what conferred the world-process its utter inexorability, one in which “that which exists cannot but exist, that which changes cannot but change.”³⁴ In such a process, each succession of phases is necessary because it is possible, its tautological inexorability precluding any attempt to thematize the copula or the ontological differences it straddles.³⁵

It was on such an (an)ontological continuum that Liu Shao deployed his “nine tokens” (*jiu zheng*, 九徵) of human dispositions.³⁶ The spirit (*shen*, 神),

essence (*jin*, 精), muscles and tendons (*jin*, 筋), bones (*gu*, 骨), breath (*qi*, 氣), complexion (*se*, 色), comportment (*yi*, 儀), countenance (*rong*, 容), and speech (*yan*, 言) were not signs signifying aspects of a reflexively differentiated subject (e.g., its drives and socialization; its body and subjectification; its real, imaginary, and symbolic identifications). Rather they indexed the topography of density and sparseness, potentiality and manifestation, sedimentation and expansiveness, of a material endowment whose inexorable and continuous emanation man was thought to be. Strictly speaking, Liu's tokens are not "signs" at all, since their ability to signify a person's disposition is indistinguishable from their capacity to actualize it. This interlacing of meaning and being is what makes Liu's nine tokens read more like an exhaustive list of components rather than their indexes. If the tokens nonetheless carried signifying functions, it would only be in the sense that man in his tangible existence is but the "signs" of his disposition.

Human sociability was just another phase in this cosmic process of actualization/signification. There, the logic of category/similarity (*lei*) extended beyond the confines of singular bodies, enacting a play of attraction and repulsion in strict accordance with the cosmic laws of categorical resonance and dissonance. Thus similar types (*tongti*, 同體) always recognize (*shi*, 識) each other and embrace their similarities, whereas dissimilar types (*yiti*, 異體) consistently misrecognize one another and reject their differences.³⁷ Through the aggregate effect of this dispositional chemistry, sociability served to concretize the potential order of human dispositions in the tangible texture of social distance and proximity. Through sociability, humans simply actualize what they have always been.

Even this admittedly compressed account evidences the proverbial indifference to the nature-culture divide characteristic of Chinese cosmological texts, one that gives a lie to any modernizing interpretation of the post-Han cachet of the self or of the social. But instead of reaffirming what many take to be the hallmark of a Chinese "mode of thought," I want to stress the historicity of the pattern of indistinction discernible in the early medieval authors' cosmology of the self and of society. For to assert an ontological, expressive continuity between the self or society and (natural) dispositions was ipso facto to assimilate the former to the imperial order of the latter. The process running through the successive phases of the self and culmi-

nating in the play of sociability ascertained the commensurability between the empire's cosmos and the new arena of gentry existence, stamping the latter with an imperial morphology even while granting it autonomy. Then, ironically, it was this cosmo-functional equivalence that allowed medieval authors to affirm the autonomy of the sociable sphere from the Han Empire. The medieval autonomy of "society," in other words, was a *mimetic* autonomy, one achieved by actively shaping the sociable sphere in the likeness of the empire and its cosmos.

Herein lies the epochal condition for such new figures of thought as the self or sociability to emerge on the horizon of post-Han reflections. The empire as ultimate framework for the Chinese imaginations of order owes much of its persistence to its capacity to mold in its own image even those vying with it. Scholars of religious Daoism, for example, have noted how medieval Daoism was permeated by characteristically imperial obsessions with the written text and bureaucratic hierarchy.³⁸ In view of this, the proverbial cultural, social, and religious pluralism of medieval China should perhaps be understood less as the effect of imperial decline than as the product of an almost obscene proliferation of imperial imaginations across vastly heterogeneous spheres of practice and reflection. Gentry society was the product of such an imperial imagination out of bounds, one of the handful of "quasi empires" that mushroomed on the Chinese soil in the wake of dynastic collapse.

The List as Canon

A quasi empire is not complete without its quasi canon. As suggested earlier, fame was the canon of medieval sociability, defining the shape and contour of the gentry's self-contained and self-indulgent universe. It thereby supplanted the Han Empire's totalizing monolith of graphs and symbols to emerge as apparatus of communal interpellation and interpretation, the privileged facade on which the order of names manifested itself.

But to thus juxtapose the medieval practice of fame with the notion of canonicity goes against the grain of the prevailing sinological perspective, which instead recognizes in the medieval cachet of fame the reinvigoration of public critical discourse. Historians locate the threshold of such a turn

in the late-Han “Affair of the Proscribed Factions” (*danggu zhi bian*, 黨錮之變; 167–184 CE), sometimes portrayed as one of the first and perennial moments in the Chinese history of civic dissent.³⁹ The Affair in its bare “Realpolitik” bones was but a vehement struggle over official appointments that pitched the emergent protogentry against the eunuchs who controlled court politics. What makes this naked power struggle a landmark of oppositional discourse for some are the so-called Pure Opinions (*qingyi*, 清議), which the gentry broadcast in their concerted effort to dislodge the court eunuchs’ politics of nepotism.⁴⁰

Yet unlike what the term may suggest, the Pure Opinions were not “discourses” in the full sense of the term. They were instead unadorned lists inventorying the proper names of those eminent personalities deemed worthy of official appointment, and they were sometimes accompanied by brief panegyrics dedicated to the more prominent among them. Historians usually construe these lists as full-fledged discourses, taking the proper names enumerated there as so many indexes of sociopolitical positions. But by thus discursively deploying the *contents* of the lists, such an interpretive strategy fails to acknowledge the content of the *form* — namely, the capacity of form itself to project and to command a historical community’s total vision of order. My aim is to explore this ground vision of order embodied in the list qua form.

The insistence of form is indeed what distinguishes the prominence of the list in the Chinese tradition from the more modest functions this discourse genre served in most other written traditions. In his perceptive discussion of the Chinese “art of the list,” François Jullien captures in broad strokes the form’s ground vision of actuality — what he calls its *dispositif*. He recognizes five main features to the list-*dispositif*: (1) its enumerative focus, (2) the uniformity it stamps on its components, (3) its closure and self-sufficiency, (4) its proclivity toward abstraction and codification, and (5) its hierarchical order.⁴¹ The list’s implied order, in other words, is none other than that of imperial cosmology, with its finite assemblage of blocklike *qi* categories, the immanence of its generative dynamics, its predilection for numerology, and the hierarchical arrangement of all its constituent beings. This mirroring between cosmology and form is what renders the list a canonical genre par excellence.

It is such imbrications of the list and imperial order that one should discern in the late-Han practice of Pure Opinions. Indeed, the Pure Opinions' hierarchical sequencing of names as well as their numerical finiteness and parallelisms—underscored by clustering of names like the “three lords” (*jun*, 君), the “eight heroes” (*jun*, 俊), or the “eight exemplars” (*gu*, 顧)—precipitated an essentially enumerative order, one that bears uncanny resemblance to the empire and especially to its bureaucratic hierarchy.⁴² The gentry's gravitation toward the list was thus another manifestation of their “mimetic autonomy” vis-à-vis the empire. This is why the Pure Opinions have much less in common with a discourse of civic dissent than with protoimperial canons like the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*, 易經) or the canonized Han dictionaries like the *Shuowen jiezi*, both of which prominently feature lists of graphic symbols and characters. The gentry, through their relentless effort to condense the necessarily intractable ramifications of fame to the terseness of a string of names, shaped their own discursive practices as canon, mobilizing the list's authority at once to mimic and to compete with the empire and its symbolic-graphic apparatuses.

Christopher Connery's aforementioned study is almost unique in acknowledging this fundamental continuity between early medieval discursive practices and the Han imperial regime. Connery maintains that the passage from the Han order to the early medieval one should be understood in terms of an *expansion* of the imperial textual field out of the sphere of the received and thus already written canons, wherein it was traditionally entrenched, and into the yet to be written sphere of sociability. From this perspective, the prominent visibility of the self and of sociability in medieval writings is but a symptom of a larger cultural project to entextualize the social field, a project no less totalizing than that of the Han “Empire of the Text.”⁴³ The medieval culture of appearance and fame thus partakes in a textual system that encodes personhood and sociability and annexes them to an ever-expanding “social text,” thereby ensuring their circulation as legible signs.

Despite its analytic brilliance, Connery's account is predicated on a modern conception of the text and its imbrications with power, which he projects anachronistically onto Han and early medieval regimes. In the current academic climate such projections frequently pass as legitimate application of

“theory.” But such a transferential practice of “theory” forecloses a more radical use of historical or cultural alterity — namely, to seize the opportunity to face up to the historical contingency of *both* the other sign-regimes and our own theorizations. To put it bluntly, there was no “text” in early China, and this recognition in turn highlights a corresponding, but to some far more unsettling, recognition that even our most basic conception of the text is a product of historically localized practices of reification, one that emerges at the confluence of concrete institutions, discourses, and practices.

It is necessary here to open a “theoretical” parenthesis on the contemporary theorizations of the text, not to apply them to early Chinese material or to concoct comparative typologies so much as to better gauge the distance separating the two. For early Chinese reflections ignore the distinction between the text’s inside and outside that structures our ingrained notion of the text. But it is precisely such a presumption of sharp ontological difference between text and world that leads Connery to figure the intersection between text and power in terms of “codification,” “inscription,” and “entextualization” — all of which imply a relation of radical exteriority between that which codifies and that which is codified.

Some may object that such branches of critical theory as discourse analysis, constructivism, reader response, ideology criticism, or deconstruction — all of which contributed to Connery’s analytic tool kit — are in fact so many efforts to dislodge or to blur the boundaries between text and world rather than to assert them. There is no doubt that these various critical schools have all primarily engaged the theorization of the crossing and shifting of boundaries rather than the demarcation of them. In disciplines dealing with the outsides and margins of the modern (e.g., sinology or anthropology, but also perhaps the more “familiar” cultural history of pre- and early modern Europe), the impact of these critical boundary crossings has been felt primarily in the recognition of certain resonances between nonmodern formations like the early Chinese one and the postmodern (or poststructuralist, postconventional, etc.) erosion of modernist binaries like mind and matter, subject and object, or text and world. There is indeed a growing academic literature that highlights such similarities, one that revolves around what may be called “the postmodernity of the nonmodern.” Yet whatever theoret-

ical gain this literature may represent in an otherwise philology-dominated field like sinology comes at the cost of a disturbing collapse of historical perspective, a blindness toward—this time—the modernity of the postmodern.

The literary scholar Matei Calinescu has demonstrated with admirable erudition how postmodernism is but another figure of modernity's typical gesture of self-transcendence, one that the West has not ceased to reprise ever since the seventeenth-century Debate of the Ancients and the Moderns.⁴⁴ In this schismic movement of modernity, the past to be superseded and the future yet to be attained temporize two logical moments that in fact form a single economy of reflection. In other words, what postmodernism supersedes is not the historical reality of modernism but its caricatured image, which the postmodern necessarily posits in order to assert its "post" humorous stance. The postmodern critique of the stability of the modernist text is a textbook example of this schismic movement. For its transgression of modernist boundaries is predicated on the irreducibility of the originary text-world divide, one that contemporary critiques continue to reinscribe in their very gestures of dislocation.⁴⁵

The suppression of this historical condition of the postmodern is what allows the indiscriminate mapping of pre-, non-, and postmodern formations onto a Manichean allegory of struggle between modernism and countermodernism(s). Thomas Lamarre put it well when he criticized the trend among the theoretical vanguard of Japanology to conflate Heian poetics with Barthesian *écriture*: "If Heian writing seems to dovetail nicely with *écriture*, it is because its treatment of signs is not modern [i.e., modernist]. Nonetheless, to equate kana with *écriture* leaves no room for a historical articulation of kana usage and waka practice."⁴⁶ In other words, whatever resemblance there is between an expanded notion of textuality and Heian or early Chinese regimes of signs is an artifice of contemporary criticism's own historical perspective—or, put more bluntly, an epochal reflection's narcissistic self-projection onto the screen of global history.

If an ingrained dialectic of boundary-making and boundary-crossing continues to choreograph contemporary critical musings, early Chinese reflections instead unfolded under the sign of radical immanence, one that undermines the very possibility to legislate the boundary between text and

world. This was already the case in the Han, when graphs and symbols were taken to be the privileged manifestation of the world's immanent patterns, which ancient sage-rulers observed and transcribed. A similar logic tacitly grounded the authority of the list as well. The efficacy early Chinese authors recognized in the list stemmed from its perceived capacity to capture with utmost immediacy and compactness the cosmic *dispositif*, namely, the most basic configuration of elements and forces. Consider the following list opening the fascicle titled "Occupations for Various Specialties" (*liuye*, 流業) in Liu Shao's *Treatise*: "As for occupations for various specialties of people, there are twelve of them. There is the morally upright, the legalist, the strategist, the stately type, the skillful, the admonisher, the technocrat, the opportunist, the stylist, the Confucian, the debater, and the brave."⁴⁷

Despite its beguiling plainness, a list like this is structurally dense. Here, the list breaks down into three parts, each consisting of four types. The first segment consists of the basic occupational types corresponding to the three pillars of the art of governance (morality, rule, and stratagem) and concludes with the "stately type" (*guoti*, 國體), which encompasses (*jian*, 兼) the three. The second segment lists the derivative types: at its head comes the "skillful," the derivative of the encompassing type, followed by the three secondary types. To these eight types, which form the backbone of the occupational structure of governance, is appended the final four technically specialized ones. The list's structural core is the topological coordination of the first eight types (fig. 1).

Liu Shao proceeds to unpack this dense structure of symmetry and parallelism in the rest of the fascicle. Emerging from his exegeses is a more elaborate structure of bureaucratic hierarchy, but it is also one that only deploys discursively a topology already implicit in the list. What the list's plainness and compactness signals, then, is a rhetorical state of potentiality, a latency pregnant with implications and that always already contains the shape of order to be subsequently rendered manifest in the appended discourse. Faced with such an overt case of preordained harmony, we moderns typically posit the working of the invisible hand of intentionality behind it, the authorial hand that concocts texts in anticipation of the intended outcome.⁴⁸ This is why such an effect of potentiality would strike us as a pure artifice of entextualization, a rhetorical *petitio principii* of sorts. But within the optics

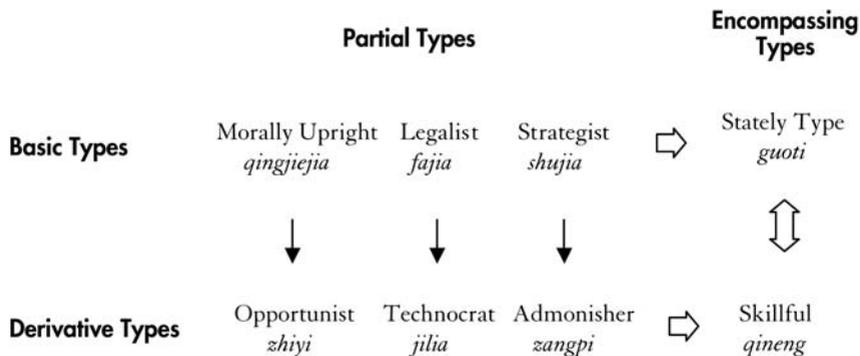


Figure 1 Structure of the Liuye list

of the early Chinese regimes of signs, the facticity of the list takes unambiguous precedence over the intentions informing it. That certain types *can* be arranged in such a fashion self-sufficiently validates the list's implications regardless of *how* its internal arrangement is achieved.

Herein lies the most radical implication of the early Chinese ontology of the list. The potency of the list consists precisely in the brutal directness with which it condenses the fabric of imperial vision. Being but a crude string of nouns, a list is hardly a text. Instead of asserting its own difference from the inchoate domain of things and articulating the world's inner workings from afar (i.e., from the other side of the text-world divide), the list crystallizes an opposite impulse — the drive to espouse the most elementary fabric of actuality, whereby the text depletes itself of its discursive duration to solidify into the compactness of things. Its extreme terseness thus expresses a yearning for a tangibility and certitude that vies with, in fact exceeds, that of the ten thousand things. But this is achieved by forsaking its autonomous existence as text or even as language, thus from the outset aborting all attempts to adjudicate whether the Chinese list is the textual reflection of a cosmological vision or, conversely, imperial cosmology is the projection of textual forms onto the screen of actuality.

My discussion of the list's content of the form comes full circle here. If form is indeed the privileged site for the list's ground vision of order as I maintain, it is because in the Chinese list, form aspires for a certain materi-

ality, a thinglike existence that would ultimately obliterate the very distinction between form and content. Form itself becomes the overt content of the Chinese list, to the effect of undermining its referential content, namely, the particularity of the items listed in it. This is why Chinese lists tend to conjoin an extreme formalism with a nonchalance about the concrete elements that go into them, an incongruous juxtaposition that Liu's list of occupations evidences, albeit in an understated manner.

It might have been such a curious admixture of order and chaos that prompted Jorge Luis Borges to concoct his fictive Chinese encyclopedia, rendered famous by Foucault's *The Order of Things*. The passage from "a certain Chinese encyclopedia" strings together bafflingly uneven categories with the only justification that they all pertain to the entry "animal": "(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable."⁴⁹ This list, notorious among sinologists, nonetheless captures well the texture of the Chinese list, where order arises from the factuality of the form rather than what comes to fill its slots. Because Borges and Foucault mistook the Chinese list for a classification system, they found themselves (somewhat wishfully) faced with nothing less than "the stark impossibility of thinking *that*"—an experience of the limit of thinkability that, for the Cartesian clarity of Foucault's French mind, and even for Borges' more cosmopolitan one, coincided with the limit of logic. Had the two actually been interested in China (which they were not), they would have recognized the rather prosaic truth that in place of the logically coherent classificatory plane, whose absence confronted them with the abyss of the unthinkable, one finds a perfectly thinkable plane that accommodates a hodgepodge of categories, that is, the plane of *qi* categories on which everything can be arranged and the cosmo-graphic order that implements the arrangement.

Form obtains a gratuitous reality on this cosmo-graphic plane—gratuitous both in the sense that it demands no justification but its own existence and in the sense that it further generates its own reality like a self-fulfilling prophecy. For to reduce things to their positions within finite sets is to sensitize them to the potentials for correspondence, combination, parallelism, parity, contrast, and so on. Form thus yields more form. The consequence

is a relentless formalism that defies not only the sense of logical coherence of a Foucault but also — to his jubilation had he known it — the demand for an anthropological coherence of man. The cosmo-graphic plane effects a global “dispersal of being” (to borrow Angela Zito’s tantalizing expression),⁵⁰ meanwhile allowing the disarticulated elements to commune directly with one another with no regard to any anthropological unity. For instance, the leitmotif running through the first part of the *Treatise* is the numerical correspondence among the twelve characterological types (*tibie*, 體別), the twelve occupational types (*liuye*, 流業), and the twelve types of talents (*caineng*, 材能). Parallelism, symmetry, and numerical parity curtail sustained recourse to a unified theory of man and his faculties, instead immediately coordinating disparate domains like characterology, ethics, technical abilities, ideological orientations, and bureaucratic functions. It is the unity of this cosmo-graphic plane that defines the work’s proper mode of coherence, one that derives solely from the correlative efficacy of its lists.

What sustains this unity — its materiality, as it were — is, ultimately, the script. So it is not surprising that Liu Shao recognized a logic of graphs at work beneath his lists of names. His elegant analysis of the hero (*ying-xiong*, 英雄) type in the eighth fascicle of the *Treatise* is paradigmatic in this regard. The analysis opens with the etymological interpretations for *each* of the two graphs making up the type-name: “That which is exquisitely beautiful among the flora is called *ying*. That which alone stands out of the flock among the fauna is called *xiong*.”⁵¹

Liu’s choice of compound terms rather than single characters here and throughout the *Treatise* is not innocent, for with binomials, partial types encompassed by a composite disposition can be isolated simply by splitting them up into the two component graphs — assuming, of course, that component graphs and component dispositions overlap. And then, etymology serves to amplify each of the component graphs again into binomials: the first graph (*ying*, 英) as “the intelligent” (*congming*, 聰明) and the second (*xiong*, 雄) as “the courageous” (or, more literally, “gut”; *danli*, 膽力). The derivative binomials are again split into their component graphs, yielding the four-unit schema of elementary types. The outcome is a hierarchical stratification of paired partial types, with hero at the apex of the pyramid (fig. 2).

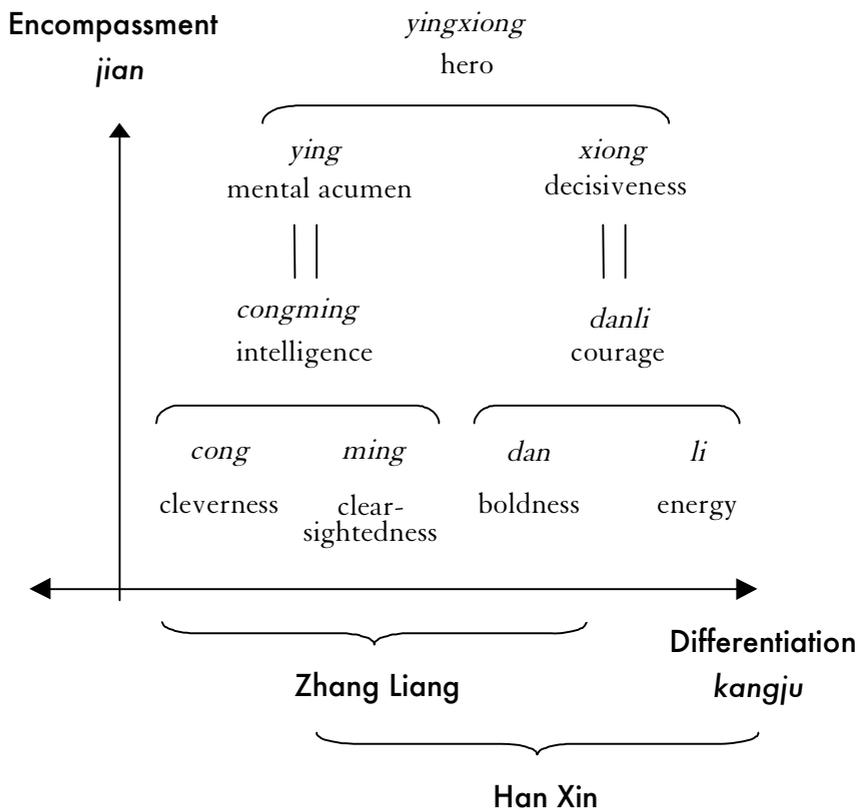


Figure 2 The “hero” ratio

Throughout this remarkably systematic discussion of what Liu aptly calls the “ratio” (*fenshu*, 分數) of the hero type, the unit of analysis remains the graph instead of the term. No doubt the manner in which the graph forms a unit is no longer that of the Han graphic regime: in early medieval reflections, the logic of graphic similitude that controlled earlier commentaries and lexicographies lost much of its appeal to early medieval authors. Wang Bi (王弼; 226–49 CE) thus ridiculed the Han predilection to see in the symbols of the *Classic of Changes* concrete pictures of things (e.g., cows, horses).⁵²

Likewise, in his essay “Inspecting Names” (*shenming*, 審名), Liu Zhou (劉晝; later sixth century CE) deployed a devastating critique of the analogical and associative approach to names, whose chain of similitude inevitably results in “making dogs to resemble people” and “caus[ing] white to become black.”⁵³ Nonetheless, the tacit assumption that the unit of writing coincides point-to-point with the unit of being persisted throughout the early medieval era and even later.

It is not only that graphs and personality types share the same boundaries. The patterns of their interaction are also identical. Liu Shao names two such patterns, encompassment (*jian*, 兼) and differentiation (*kangju*, 抗拘), which indiscriminately orchestrate the sociability of human types and the semantic relationships among terms. To begin with the former, “intelligence” is a composite type encompassing “cleverness” and “clear-sightedness” and, because of this, resonates with both. The encompassment of the two subtypes foregrounds their mutual compensation, each standing for the action and perception poles of intelligence. But seen as full types contrasted with one another, it is the difference that comes to the fore (i.e., action versus perception), the repulsive force between the two reinforcing their difference in a positive feedback loop. The three types thus form an elementary hierarchical unit, which, generalized, would define a model of human hierarchy, a *moral* hierarchy where encompassment equals completeness, and differentiation equals partiality (table 1).⁵⁴ But the same hierarchy has another and equally coherent reading as a structure of signification. In this light, encompassment designates the operation of combining (*jian*, 兼) two single graphs into binomials (e.g., *cong* [聰] + *ming* [明] = *congming* [聰明]) and that of subsuming (*jian*, 兼) binomials into single graphs (e.g., *danli* [膽力] → *xiong* [雄]). Differentiation, on the other hand, designates the paired contrasts (e.g., between *ying* [英] and *xiong* [雄]), whereby otherwise ambiguous terms achieve specific meanings. What emerges is then an algorithm of semantic scope, the exegetical syntax that concretely organizes the unfolding of Liu Shao’s writing.

It is difficult to speak of such an utter unity of meaning and being that does not even afford a provisional ontological distinction. In the same breath, graphs and people associate/compose with one another, their patterns of assonance and dissonance lending tangible expression to their dispo-

Table 1 The Hierarchy of Human Types

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Encompassment and Accomplishment</i>	<i>Character</i>
1 Sage (<i>shengren</i> , 聖人)	Encompasses all virtues in their fully accomplished forms (<i>jiande er zhi</i> , 兼德而至)	Balanced, mean (<i>zhongyong</i> , 中庸)
2 Great, virtuous (<i>daya</i> , 大雅)	Encompasses types but incompletely (<i>juti er wei</i> , 具體而微)	Virtuous conduct (<i>dexing</i> , 德行)
3 Small, virtuous (<i>xiaoya</i> , 小雅)	One accomplishment (<i>yizhi</i> , 一至)	Single-talent (<i>piancai</i> , 偏材)
4 Disorder (<i>luande</i> , 亂德)	One incomplete accomplishment (<i>yiwei</i> , 一微)	Mimicry (<i>yisi</i> , 依似)
5 Inconsistent (<i>wuheng</i> , 無恆)	One accomplishment set off by another (<i>yizhi yiwei</i> , 一至一違)	Uneven (<i>jianza</i> , 間雜)

sition/meaning. What this implies is, first of all, an animistic conception of meaning: a graph evokes something because it acts like it. It may be such a logic that underlies the notoriously elusive semantics of the classical Chinese terms for “meaning” (e.g., intention, *yi*, 意; righteousness, *yi*, 義), which so easily bleed into anthropomorphic realms. Characters have characters, and hence morality as well. But the obverse of the same equation equally applies: if writing is like sociability, so sociability is like writing. It is a choreography, where characters of self and other compose and deploy their “meanings” in a syntax of assonance and dissonance that is at once a social network. It is in this precise sense that sociability and the circulation of fame constituted a canon, the epochal surface upon which collapsed the meaning of being and the being of meaning.

What I call the medieval voice was nothing but this canonized choreographic texture. The subsequent rise of a literature of the voice only realized in actual writing (“in the restricted sense,” as Derrida would say) this always already written (“in the extended sense”) texture of dispositions, gestures, voices, and countenances that progressively enveloped the gentry and defined its intimate realm of existence. In other words, what the medieval shift implied was a massive naturalization of the graphic regime, the avail-

ability of the written in the banality of the everyday. If, as is often pointed out, the medieval gentry could afford to scoff at the artifice of the old empire's texts and rituals in the name of "nature" (human or otherwise),⁵⁵ this was because the "nature" of man, society, and the cosmos was already felt to form an extended graphic empire of which the empire in its restricted sense (i.e., as historical and institutional reality) was but a fragment. Arguably, this naturalization opened the possibility for the emergent gentry to distance themselves from the old texts and ritual gestures that so consumed the previous dynasty. But such a distance was but a side effect of an expansion of imperial tautology voraciously incorporating confines of the universe to which the writings of the empire were hitherto indifferent. The scribes of the empire may have learned to write more variedly and intimately. But they remain scribes for all that, written by the very script they inscribe.

Notes

- 1 Christopher L. Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).
- 2 Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie (Of Grammatology)* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 18–20.
- 3 Etienne Balazs, *La bureaucratie céleste: Recherches sur l'économie et la société de la Chine traditionnelle (Celestial Bureaucracy: Studies of Economy and Society in Traditional China)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
- 4 Yu Jiayi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu (A New Account of Tales of the World, with Annotations and Commentaries)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 613.
- 5 Ōmuro Mikio, *Enrin toshi: Chūsei Chūgoku no sekaizō (The Garden City: The Image of the World in Medieval China)* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1985), 344–45.
- 6 The most notable examples of this approach are Ōmuro's *Enrin toshi* and *Tōgen no musō: Kodai Chūgoku no han-gekijō toshi (Arcadian Dreams: The Anti-theater City in Ancient China)* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1984).
- 7 This appears to be the consensus of the influential Kyoto school of medieval Chinese history. See Kawakatsu Yoshio, *Rikuchō kizoku shakai no kenkyū (Studies of Aristocratic Society in the Six Dynasties)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), as well as the various studies found in Kawakatsu Yoshio and Tonami Mamoru, eds., *Chūgoku kizokusei shakai no kenkyū (Studies in Chinese Aristocratic Society)* (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1987).
- 8 Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 103–10.

- 9 See Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage: Exprimer et taire ses émotions (XVIe–début XIXe siècle)* (*History of the Face: Expressing and Hiding Emotions: Sixteenth–Early Nineteenth Centuries*) (Paris: Payot, 1994), 9–20.
- 10 On rationality and cynicism among the French courtiers, see Elias, *Court Society*, 110–16, 252–67. On the topos of boredom in the seventeenth century experience of the subject, see for example Niklas Luhmann, “The Individuality of the Individual: Historical Meanings and Contemporary Problems,” in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 324.
- 11 Ōmuro, *Enrin toshi*, 344.
- 12 Yu, *Shishuo xinyu*, 730. See also Liu Xiaobiao, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, trans. Richard B. Mather (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 374. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine. I will provide in notes the corresponding passages of major English translations when available.
- 13 Many episodes report Ruan Ji’s disregard for propriety and his love of wine. See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu*, 2, 5, 7, 727–31. See also Ruan’s biography in Fang Xuanling, *Jinshu* (*History of the Jin Dynasty*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1359–62. His scatological analogy is found in his poetic essay “The Biography of Master Great Man” (“Daren xiansheng zhuan,” 大人先生傳) in Yan Kejun, ed., *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* (*The Collected Writings of Antiquity, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties Periods*) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999), 486–92.
- 14 Yu, *Shishuo xinyu*, 736.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 743.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 763.
- 17 On the notion of “eminent personalities” in early medieval China, see Wang Baoxuan, *Xuanxue tonglun* (*Researches on the Learning of the Dark*) (Taipei: Wunan tushu, 1996), 98–111.
- 18 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux* (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Thousand Plateau*) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 140–84.
- 19 See Patricia Ebrey’s survey of this literature, “The Economic and Social History of Later Han,” in *The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Tiwchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 608–48. See also Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati, Thought, and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- 20 In Connery’s provocative words, “In the Empire of the Text, there is no dissent. To write at all is to perform allegiance” (*Empire of the Text*, 25).
- 21 Kaizuka Shigeki, “Igi: Shūdai kizoku seikatsu no rinen to sono jukyō ka” (“Ritual Propriety: Aristocratic Ideals in the Zhou Dynasty and Their Confucian Appropriation”), in

- Chūgoku kodai no denshō (Legacies of Ancient China)*, vol. 5 of *Kaizuka shigeki chosakushū (Collected Works of Kaizuka Shigeki)* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1976).
- 22 Of the numerous studies of *zhengming*, I found the following most useful: Karine Chemla and Francois Martin, eds., *Le juste nom (The Correct Name)*, vol. 15 of *Extrême-orient, extrême-occident (Far East, Far West)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1993); Chen Qiyun, *Zhongguo gudai sixiang wenhua de lishi lunxi (Historical Analysis of Ancient Chinese Intellectual Culture)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001); Carine Defoort, *The Pheasant Cap Master (He guan zi): A Rhetorical Reading* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Ishida Hidemi, “Kotoba toshintai: Kanshi shihen to Junshi seimeihen wo tōshite” (“Language and the Body in *Guanzi* and *Xunzi*”), in Ishida, *Kōkoro to karada: Chūgoku kodai ni okerushintai no shisō (Mind and Body: The Ancient Chinese Reflections on the Body)* (Fukuoka: Chūgoku shoten, 1995), 394–420; and John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
 - 23 See for example Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 111; Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*; Seki Masao, “Ryū Shō no *Jinbutsushi* ni tsuite” (“On Liu Shao’s *Treatise on Personalities*”), *Niigata daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyū (Niigata University Studies in the Human Sciences)* 11 (1956): 45–46; and Tang Yongtong, *Weijin xuanxue lungao (Studies of the Learning of the Dark in the Wei and Jin Dynasties)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957).
 - 24 Yu Yingshi’s influential study is representative of this scholarship. See Yu Yingshi, *Zhongguo zhishi jiecheng shilun: Gudaibian (Historical Studies of the Chinese Intellectual Class: Antiquity)* (Taipei: Lianjing, 1979). See also Richard B. Mather, “The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties,” *History of Religions* 9 (1970): 160–80; and Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210–263* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
 - 25 Kawakatsu, *Rikuchō kizoku shakai*, 57–71.
 - 26 Wagner’s *Craft of a Chinese Commentator* is the most sophisticated version of this view.
 - 27 For a lucid overview of these ideas, see Kiyohiko Munakata, “Concepts of *Lei* and *Kan-lei* in Early Chinese Art Theory,” in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 105–31.
 - 28 Cf. Hajime Nakatani, “Bodies and Signs in Medieval China” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2004), 35–57.
 - 29 Ouyang Xun, ed., *Yiwen leiju (Classified Anthology of Literary Writings)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 386.
 - 30 There are only a handful of studies on this important work: Tang, *Weijin xuanxue lungao*, 5–25; Zhang Beibei, “Han jin renwu pinjian yanjiu” (“A Study of Wei-Jin Character Appraisal”) (PhD diss., Taiwan University, 1982), 253–316; Mou Zongsan, “‘Renwuzhi’ zhi xitongde jixi” (“An Analysis of the System of *The Treatise on Personalities*”) in Mou, *Caixing yu xuanli (Human Talent and Profound Principle)* (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1993); and Seki, “Ryū Shō no *Jinbutsushi*.”

- 31 More accurately, *tongwei* means “to penetrate the subtleties of things and events.” I translate it as “penetrating and subtle” for the sake of stylistic consistency.
- 32 Liu Shao, *Renwuzhi jinzhū jinyi* (*Treatise on Personalities, with New Notes and Commentaries*) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1996), 19. Cf. Liu Shao, *The Study of Human Abilities: The “Jen wu chih” of Liu Shao*, trans. J. K. Shryock (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 97–98.
- 33 See Mazaki Kiyohiro, “Junshi no ‘rui’” (“The Concept of ‘Category’ in the *Xunzi*”), *Shigaku kenkyū* 134 (1976): 56–67. See also David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 254.
- 34 Zhang Zhan, *Liezi zhu* (*The Annotated Liezi*) (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1991), 1.
- 35 On the complicity between Western ontology, logic, and the copula, see Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (*Margins of Philosophy*) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 211–46.
- 36 Liu, *Renwuzhi*, 32–33.
- 37 Liu, *Renwuzhi*, 163. See also Seki, “Ryū Shō no *Jinbutsushi*,” 65.
- 38 See Jean Levi, “Rite, langue, et supériorité culturelle en Chine ancienne” (“Ritual, Language, and Cultural Superiority in Ancient China”), *Le genre humain* 21 (1990): 99–113; and Isabelle Robinet, *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of the Great Purity*, trans. Julian F. Pas and Norman J. Girardot (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
- 39 See for example Rafe de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China: The Great Proscription of Later Han, 167–184,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 11 (1975): 1–36.
- 40 Tang Changru and Kawakatsu Yoshio are largely responsible for the prevailing equation between the “Pure Opinions” and critical discourse. See Tang Changru, “Qingtan yu qingyi” (“Pure Talk and Pure Opinion”), in *Weijin nanbeichao shi luncong* (*Studies on the History of Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties*) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1962), 289–97; and Kawakatsu, *Rikuchō kizoku shakai*.
- 41 François Jullien, ed., *L'art de la liste* (*The Art of the List*), vol. 12 of *Extrême-orient, extrême-occident* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincenne, 1990), 7–8.
- 42 Fan Ye, *Houhan shu* (*History of the Latter Han*) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1996), 2187. I follow de Crespigny’s rendition of the lists (“Political Protest in Imperial China,” 23).
- 43 Connery, *Empire of the Text*, 127.
- 44 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987).
- 45 Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–112.
- 46 Thomas Lamarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 66.
- 47 Liu, *Renwuzhi*, 67. Cf. Liu, *The Study of Human Abilities*, 105.

- 48 Even the most radical of the antiauthorial theories of the text (e.g., deconstruction) ultimately presumes some form of intentionality, which it defers or refracts without by thus eliminating it. See François Laruelle, "Anti-Hermes," in *Text und Interpretation: deutsch-französische Debatte (Text and Interpretation: A German-French Debate)*, ed. Philippe Forget (Munich: W. Fink, 1984), 78–114.
- 49 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 7.
- 50 Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 97.
- 51 Liu, *Renwuzhi*, 179. Cf. Liu, *The Study of Human Abilities*, 127–28.
- 52 Wang Bi, *Wang bi ji jiaoshi (Collected Writings of Wang Bi, Critical Edition)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 609.
- 53 Liu Zhou, *Liuzi jiaoshi (Collected Writings of Master Liu, Critical Edition)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 155.
- 54 Liu, *Renwuzhi*, 36–37.
- 55 For example, Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness."