

QIULEI HU

## Following the Troops, Carrying Along Our Brushes: Jian'an (196–220 AD) *Fu* and *Shi* Written for Military Campaigns

### ABSTRACT:

It is widely accepted that Jian'an-period writing is best understood in tandem with society and political events. Past studies have explored the nature and function of writing, especially under the Cao-Wei regime, and future ones will do so as well. A strong focus should be cast on writing's relationship with the military. This paper argues that Jian'an writings made while following military campaigns created a discourse of cultural conquest that claimed political legitimacy and provided moral justification for military actions. More importantly, they directly participated in the struggle for and the building of a new political power; thus they were effective acts of conquest themselves. Through a close examination of Jian'an views on the significance of writing vis-à-vis political and moral accomplishments, this paper sees a new identity that literati created for themselves, one that showed their commitment to political and military goals. Literary talent – the writing brush – became a weapon that marked these writers' place in a world primarily defined by politics and war.

### KEYWORDS:

*Jian'an literati, discourse of cultural conquest, power of writing, fu about military campaigns, poems on accompanying the army*

The historical period “Jian'an 建安” (196–220 AD) refers to the last reign of the last Han 漢 emperor – emperor Xian 獻帝 (r. 189–220). It begins with Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) moving in 196 of the emperor, whom he controlled, from war-wrecked Luoyang 洛陽 to Xu 許 and ends with his son Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) ascendancy to the throne as the first emperor of the Wei 魏 dynasty in 220. The two decades witnessed the decline and collapse of the Han empire and were characterized by constant war and chaos. But they are known in cultural and literary history for an unusual amount of fruitful attention given to literary writing, or *wen* 文, on the part of skilled scholars and political actors from among the elite. It is well established by now that

➤ Qiulei Hu, The City University of New York

I WOULD like to express my profound and sincere gratitude to *Asia Major's* two anonymous reviewers for their many insightful suggestions and comments.

Jian'an-period writing and other literary activities cannot be understood in isolation from the political and social contexts. In her recent study, Xiaofei Tian rejects the widely-used term of "Jian'an literary group 建安文學集團" for its separating of literary writing from politics. She argues that Jian'an writers "were doing important cultural and political work for the Cao-Wei powers."<sup>1</sup> Further study still needs to be done in exploring the nature and function of literary writing in the Cao-Wei regime, especially its relationship with the political and military undertakings. What were Jian'an literati's own views of the relationship between writing and political achievement? How did they define their identity and role in a time of social chaos and political ambition? In what ways did they see themselves contribute to the political and military endeavors of the time? This paper looks for answers in these literati's writings composed while on military campaigns as well as their discussions on the instrumentality of writing.<sup>2</sup> It argues that Jian'an writings done while, or some time after, accompanying generals on military campaigns created a discourse of cultural conquest that claims political legitimacy and provides moral justification. More important, composed amidst the collapse of the Han and in the midst of hard-fought battles, these writings, in a certain sense that this paper argues, directly participated in the struggle for and building of a new political power and thus were effective acts of conquest themselves. Through a close examination of Jian'an literati's views on the significance of writing vis-à-vis political and moral accomplishments, the present study also reveals a new identity for literati in the Cao-Wei regime that was essential to their commitment to using the literary talent to serve political and military goals.

#### MILITARY FU AS ACTS OF CONQUEST

Historical and literary records indicate that it was common for writers to accompany troops on Cao-Wei military campaigns. Xu Gan's 徐幹 (171–218) "Fu [Written] on the Western Expedition" ("Xizheng fu" 西征賦), composed while on campaign against the rebel Ma Chao 馬超 in 211, contains the following lines:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> I thank Meow Hui Goh for suggesting the phrase "instrumentality."

<sup>3</sup> Yu Shaochu 俞紹初, ed., *Jian'an qizi ji* 建安七子集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005; hereafter, *Jian'an*), p. 152.

伊吾儕之挺力      We fellow [writers] exert our efforts,<sup>4</sup>  
 獲載筆而從師      we follow the troops, getting to carry along our  
    brushes.

A common duty for literati in the army was to draft official documents on behalf of the commander, such as proclamations of war (*xi* 檄), decrees (*ling* 令) and letters (*shu* 書). Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217), for example, was particularly known for his eloquent and razor-sharp proclamations.<sup>5</sup> Yet a large proportion of their surviving writings in the army is in the genre known as *fu* 賦 (rhyme-prose, or rhapsody). The trooping literati's contribution and function in war campaigns are less discussed, partly because of a (largely arbitrary and anachronistic) division between so-called "pragmatic" and "non-pragmatic/aesthetic" writing (*belle-lettres*). I believe that the military *fu*, often composed in a group setting, created a "discourse of cultural conquest," the political significance of which was on a cultural par with actual physical engagement in the battlefields.

While glorifying the triumph of the expedition and military prowess of its commander, Jian'an *fu* written while on military campaign often show a strong sense of pride in their *own* accomplishments – namely, the passing on of military triumph to ancestors and posterity:

*Xu Gan*, "Fu [Written] on the Western Expedition"<sup>6</sup>

庶區宇之今定      Hoping for the territory to be pacified this  
    time,  
 入告成乎后皇      We report the accomplishment to Heaven and  
    Earth.  
 登明堂而飲至      As we ascend the Bright Hall, drinks arrive,  
 銘功烈乎帝裳      we inscribe our deeds and contributions on the  
    imperial banner.

*Wang Can* 王粲 (177–217), "Fu on Floating on the Huai River"<sup>7</sup>

濟元勳於一舉      We aid the hero of great distinction [i.e. Cao  
    Cao] with one strike;  
 垂休績於來裔      bequeath the grand deeds to generations to  
    come.

<sup>4</sup> *Yiwen leiju* has "lie 劣" in the place of "li 力" in this line; Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1965) 59, p. 1069.

<sup>5</sup> Meow Hui Goh examines the function of Chen Lin's *xi* in the political environment of the time in "The Art of Wartime Propaganda: Chen Lin's *Xi* Written on Behalf of Yuan Shao and Cao Cao," in *Early Medieval China* 23 (2017), pp. 42–66.

<sup>6</sup> *Jian'an*, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> "Fu Huai fu" 浮淮賦; *ibid.*, p. 99.

The self-referentiality here conveys the confidence in the lasting power and influence of writing and in the writers' contribution to the campaign.<sup>8</sup> Despite talking about different genres of writing, these lines resonate with the definition of "Hymn" (*song* 頌) in the "Great Preface" ("Daxu" 大序) to *Maoshi* 毛詩 (the Mao version of the *Book of Odes*):

A Hymn brings beauty to the shape and appearance of great virtues; it reports the accomplishments and deeds [of those great virtues] to gods and spirits. 頌者，美盛德之形容，以其成功告於神明者也。<sup>9</sup>

The *Shi jing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) contains some of the earliest writings commemorating military triumph, in its case that of the early-Zhou rulers. Jian'an writers saw themselves as successors of the *Shi* poets in immortalizing the founding of a dynasty with their words. Given Cao Cao's political ambition and fondness for impersonating the Duke of Zhou,<sup>10</sup> these Zhou military poems became ideal models for Jian'an military campaign *fu*. A distinct aspect of the *Shi* military poems is the suppression of violence. For example, the last stanza of "Daming" 大明 ("Great Brightness," Mao no. 236) describes king Wu's attack on the Shang armies at Mu ye:<sup>11</sup>

牧野洋洋	The field of Mu ye was very wide;
檀車煌煌	The <i>t'an</i> -wood carriages were brilliant;
駟驥彭彭	The four-teams of bay and white-bellied horses went <i>pwàng-pwàng</i> ;
維師尚父	The grand-master was Shang-fu,
時維鷹揚	He was an eagle, a hawk;
涼彼武王	Bright was that Wu Wang;
肆伐大商	he killed and smote the great (people of) Shang;
會朝清明	The morning of the encounter was clear and bright.

The poem ends here, with the peace and brightness that certainly did not apply to the historical battle itself. The battle at the Pasture Ground *Mu ye zhizhan* 牧野之戰 that historically sealed the victory for the Zhou is depicted entirely through the list of the orderly troops and

<sup>8</sup> It also echoes with the common recognition of writing among Jian'an literati as a major path to imperishability (*buxiu* 不朽). I will discuss this in the last section of this article.

<sup>9</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648), annot., *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (SSJZS edn.; Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000) 1, p. 21. I use Stephen Owen's translation in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, 1992), p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> The most famous case of Cao Cao's playing the role of the Duke of Zhou is in the four-syllable "Short Song" ("Duange xing" 短歌行).

<sup>11</sup> Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 16, p. 1144. I use Bernhard Karlgren's translation: *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription and Translation* (Stockholm: The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), p. 188.

shining chariots, without the slightest hint of bloodshed. In his seminal paper on the “epic” tradition in Chinese poetry, C. H. Wang shows that in the *Shi* poems on the founding of the Zhou dynasty, which he terms the “Weniad,” “the cultivation of *wen*, or cultural elegance, is emphasized, the martial-heroic spirit is kept muted.”<sup>12</sup> This downplay, even total elimination, of chaos and destruction was inherited by Jian’an military *fu* writers.

A good example is Chen Lin’s “*Fu* on the Divine Warrior” (“Shenwu fu” 神武賦), written while on Cao Cao’s eastern expedition against the Wuhuan 烏桓 in 207. While the title praises Cao Cao’s military prowess and shrewdness, its preface stages Cao Cao as a formidable force by stressing the general’s intention lacked any violence in it; we see the following statement: “The Divine Warrior may be deemed great and grand, one who dispatches a military campaign without going to battle. 可謂神武奕奕, 有征無戰者已。”

The *fu* begins with his reluctance to launch the campaign:<sup>13</sup>

佇盤桓以淹次	He lingers for long in hesitation,
乃申命而後征	before issuing the order to launch the campaign.
覲狄民之故土	He pays visit to the former lands of the Di people,
追大晉之遐蹤	and pursues the remote traces of the Great Jin.
惡先穀之懲寇	He detests Xian Hu’s punishment of invaders
善魏絳之和戎	and praises Wei Jiang for making peace with
	the Rong people.
受金石而弗伐	He receives metals and stones [i.e. weapons]
	yet does not attack;
蓋禮樂而思終	reveres ritual and music and contemplates
	them throughout.

Lines 5–6, above, allude to two historical commanders from the ancient state of Jin 晉: Xian Hu (d. 596 BC) and Wei Jiang. Xian Hu was a Jin general whose insistence on launching an attack on the Chu army led to Jin’s defeat by Chu.<sup>14</sup> Wei Jiang was the minister of duke Dao of Jin 晉悼公 (r. 573–588 BC). His policy of making peace with the Rong people brought stability and prosperity at the Jin borders.<sup>15</sup> Through this contrast Chen Lin reiterates Cao Cao’s benevolent and peaceful intention.

<sup>12</sup> He also discusses the “ellipse of battle,” i.e. “the conscious avoidance of the mention of arms in early Chinese poetry about war” See Wang, “Toward Defining a Chinese Heroism,” *JASOS* 95.1 (1975), pp. 27 and 29–32.

<sup>13</sup> *Jian’an*, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), pp. 721–47 (Xuan 12).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 935–39 (Xiang 4).

Continuing with “*Fu* on the Divine Warrior,” Chen’s description of the expedition itself keeps violence and cruelty to a minimum and accentuates beauty and order in the military deployment:

陵九城而上躋	[He] climbs Mount Jiucheng and ascends high;
起齊軌乎玉繩	starts out and sets his path by Jade Rope. <sup>16</sup>
車軒轡於雷室	His chariots rattle in the chamber of the god of
	thunder;
騎浮厲乎雲宮	his horses gallop across the palace of the god
	of clouds.
暉曜連乎白日	The radiance connects the bright sunlight;
旒旐繼於電光	the banners extend the flashes of lightening.
旆既軼乎白狼	The flag in the front already passes Mount
	Bailang; <sup>17</sup>
殿未出乎盧龍	soldiers at the rear have not left Lulong Fortress. <sup>18</sup>

Like the portrayal of the battle in “Daming,” these lines display a remarkable absence of violence and disorder. Certainly, this quality is in large part the result of generic convention and cultural tradition. The parallel and melodic form of *fu* is perfect for delivering balance and grandeur, hence lending itself well to “brings beauty to the shape and appearance of great virtues.” Jian’an writers’ repeated employment of the genre of *fu* on this particular topic was certainly not random, but a conscious choice on their part. The confrontation in the battle field is briefly narrated in six four-syllable lines. Continuing further:

威凌天地	The power approaches heaven and earth;
勢括十衝	the force blocks ten main roads.
單鼓未伐	A single drum is not yet beaten,
虜已潰崩	the enemy has already collapsed.
克俊馘首	He restrains from cutting off their ears and heads,
梟其魁雄	and only executes the primary leader.

The shorter rhythm conveys the urgency of the situation as well as the swiftness of its resolution. Only the last line, above, addresses the inevitable ferocity incurred by the battle, yet stresses Cao Cao’s efforts to limit the violence to just one person – the leader of the enemy. Even this very brief touch on violence is evanescent and immediately eclipsed by Chen’s dazzling list of treasure obtained by Cao’s troops:

<sup>16</sup> “Jade rope” is the name of a constellation.

<sup>17</sup> Mount Bailang is located in current day Liaoning. It is where Cao Cao defeated the allied force of Yuan Shao and the Wuhuan people.

<sup>18</sup> The fortress is in Hebei. Cao Cao’s troops passed this place on the campaign against the Wuhuan. These two lines boast about the large contingent of troops at Cao Cao’s command.

爾乃總輯瑰珍	Thereupon we gather all precious treasures:
茵氈幕幄	hung-up felts and curtains.
攘瓔帶佩	We seize jades and wear pendants,
不飾雕琢	with no intention for decoration or polish.
華璫玉瑤	Splendid ornaments and jade pendants,
金麟牙鹿	gold unicorns and ivory deer.
文貝紫瑛	Patterned shells and purple crystals,
縹碧玄綠	blue sapphires and dark emeralds.
黼錦纈組	Embroidered tapestries and colored silk bands,
罽毼皮服	weaved carpets and leather garments.

The listing of precious objects imposes a sense of order and glamour on the chaotic and brutal reality of the aftermath of the battle. Due to the lack of external evidence regarding the circulation and dissemination of these *fu*, we do not know how exactly they were put to use in contemporary military contexts. But their focus on the rewarding and glorious aspects of the campaign would certainly have made an effective tool for recruitment or for rhetoric to spur on the warriors already present.

The military *fu* discussed here are preserved through the seventh-century florilegia *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, which tends to only include excerpts from texts that fit into the relevant category – in this case, the category of “military 武.” As a result, many of that work’s quoted texts are quite fragmented. Although we cannot take the absence of evidence as the evidence of absence, the absence of violence in the descriptions of war and campaigns as well as the focus on their peaceful and glorious aspects are consistent throughout the category. It suggests that a cultural history of literary and emotional pacifism made for an enduring theme among the writers there.

The emphasis on order and efficiency is also evident in Wang Can’s “*Fu* on Floating on the Huai River,” composed during the campaign against Sun Quan 孫權 (186–252) in 209, when Cao Cao’s troops crossed the Huai River after the defeat at Red Cliffs:<sup>19</sup>

白日未移	The bright sun is yet to move;
前驅已屆	the vanguard has already arrived.
群師按部	The troops are deployed;
左右就隊	left and right they take position.
軸轡千里	Ships spread as far as a thousand <i>li</i> ;
名卒億計	soldiers are counted in hundred millions.

<sup>19</sup> *Jian'an*, p. 99.

As in the “*Fu* on the Divine Warrior,” the actual battle scene is reduced to one line and “one strike 一舉,” seen in the line from this *fu* given earlier.

Joining military campaigns, writers in the Cao-Wei regime traveled through vast territories that had once belonged to the unified Han empire yet by then had fallen in the hands of Cao Cao’s various enemies. As the soldiers fought for control over these lands, their writings laid historical and cultural claims on them. For example, Chen Lin’s “*Fu* on the Divine Warrior” links the route of the expedition with a historical narrative, as we saw: “He pays visit to the former lands of the Di people, / and pursues the remote traces of the Great Jin.” Together with the allusions to the two Jin commanders, these lines identify the land of the contemporary Wuhuan people with the historical Di, where duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628 BC) took refuge for twelve years. Duke Wen later returned to the state of Jin and eventually became one of the “Five Hegemons” (*wu ba* 五霸) of the Spring and Autumn period. Chen Lin is obviously comparing Cao Cao, who also aspired to become a “hegemon,” to duke Wen. The association of the land under attack with the state of Jin therefore offers a historical and cultural basis for Cao Cao’s claim of ownership.

Similarly, Wang Can’s “*Fu* for Accompanying the Initial Expedition” (“*Chuzheng fu*” 初征賦), written during Cao Cao’s southern campaign against Liu Biao 劉表 (d. 208) and Sun Quan, highlights the culture and history of the area:<sup>20</sup>

違世難以回折兮	Escaping the worldly chaos and taking a tortuous route,
超遙集乎蠻楚	I arrive at the faraway place of the barbarian Chu.
逢屯否而底滯兮	Encountering adversity and being trapped, <sup>21</sup>
忽長幼以羈旅	I neglect my elders and juniors and travel away from home.
賴皇華之茂功	Thanks to the grand achievement of the imperial troops, <sup>22</sup>
清四海之疆宇	the territory within the four seas has been cleared.
超南荆之北境	I pass through the northern region of southern Jingzhou,

<sup>20</sup> *Jian'an*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> “*Tun*” and “*pi*” are two hexagrams meaning hardship and blockage, respectively.

<sup>22</sup> “Huang hua” alludes to “Huanghuang zhe hua” 皇皇者華 (“Flourishing are the Flowers”; Mao no. 163). The Mao commentary takes it to be a description of the imperial envoy; Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 9, pp. 658–62. In the poem, it refers to Cao Cao’s campaign against Liu Biao in the name of the Han emperor.

踐周豫之末畿	and walk on the last royal capital of Zhou in Yuzhou. <sup>23</sup>
野蕭條而聘望	The bleak field stretches as far as eyes can see;
路周達而平夷	the level road extends in all directions.
春風穆其和暢兮	Spring wind is gentle and pleasant;
庶卉煥以敷蕤	all flowers flourish and prosper.
行中國之舊壤	Trekking through the former soil of the central kingdom –
實吾願之所依	this is indeed where my wish lies.

Wang Can skillfully weaves his personal trajectory into the narration of the campaign. Wang was born into a prestigious family whose earlier members held the noble title of Duke (or, Archon) (the “Three Dukes [*san gong* 三公]”) under the Han dynasty.<sup>24</sup> He had to flee the capital after its ruin at the hands of Dong Zhuo 董卓 (d. 192) and spent sixteen (admittedly unhappy) years at Liu Biao’s court in Jingzhou, which was at some remove from the internecine wars. He was instrumental in persuading Liu Biao’s son Liu Cong 劉琮 to surrender to Cao Cao in 208, upon which he went over to Cao Cao, and joined the latter’s campaign against Sun Quan. After the battle at Red Cliffs in 209, he retreated with the troops to Cao Cao’s hometown, the county of Qiao 譙 in Yuzhou, and eventually arrived at the city of Ye 鄴 in 210. Wang Can’s *fu* delineates the entire route; and it does not focus on the military aspects. We can see, in the above, that he tosses aside the place where he had stayed for years as guest under the Liu-family as barbaric, even uncivilized 蠻, and celebrates its recovery by Cao Cao’s expedition.<sup>25</sup> The feeling of being trapped in a barbarian land is completely expelled when he sets foot in Yuzhou, the location both of the Zhou royal household and Cao Cao’s home. As a result of Cao Cao’s campaign, the proud sense of belonging once again to the “central kingdom 中國,” after having been forced out of the cultural center, has been restored.

Ruan Yu’s “*Fu* to Record an Expedition” (“Jizheng fu” 紀征賦), written during the same military campaign against Liu Biao and Sun Quan, extends the historical memory and connection further back, to the mystic reign of Yu 禹:<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> During the Eastern Han, Luoyang 洛陽, the capital of Eastern Zhou 東周, was under the administration of Yuzhou.

<sup>24</sup> Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 21, p. 597.

<sup>25</sup> It is ironic that Liu Biao’s court in Jingzhou was famous for having attracted many talented scholars and intellectuals including Wang Can himself.

<sup>26</sup> *Jian’an*, p. 163.

惟蠻荆之作讎	The barbarian Jingzhou has become a foe, <sup>27</sup>
將治兵而濟河	So he [i.e. Cao Cao] launches the campaign to cross the river.
遂臨河而就濟	As he approaches the river and is about to cross,
瞻禹蹟之茫茫	He reveres the vast and boundless trace of Yu.

Xu Gan's "*Fu* [Written] on the Western Expedition" also establishes cultural and historical connections, as the troops passed Luoyang:<sup>28</sup>

奉明辟之渥德	Receiving the abundant virtue of the wise ruler,
與遊軫而西伐	I follow his traveling chariot on a western cam- paign.
過京邑以釋駕	Passing by the capital to take rest;
觀帝居之舊制	I gaze at the architecture of the old imperial residence.

These *fu* depict Cao Cao's military campaigns not as his personal choice, but his response to the Heavenly Mandate to recover and continue the past glory of "*zhong guo*," a term vague enough to include the Zhou and Han empires as well as legendary regimes from antiquity. The linear narrative of political legacy they created was powerful in a world where multiple warlords fought for dominance under various claims of legitimacy. The same narrative is found in other Jian'an military *fu*, such as Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) "*Fu* to Narrate the Expedition" ("Shuzheng fu" 述征賦), Xu Gan's "*Fu* to Preface the Expedition" ("Xuzheng fu" 序征賦), Ruan Yu's "*Fu* to Record the Expedition," and Po Qin's "*Fu* on Writing about the Expedition" ("Zhuanzheng fu" 撰征賦).

Quite a few writers attended the campaign against Liu Biao and Sun Quan in 208 and 209. Among them, Chen Lin, Wang Can, Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217) and Yang Xiu 楊修 (175–219) all wrote a "*Fu* on the Goddess" ("Shennü fu" 神女賦). Although the beautiful goddess of the Han River had already been a popular topic of *fu* by this time, it might not appear to be the most obvious choice to write while on a military campaign.<sup>29</sup> Read in light of the claim for cultural legitimacy and his-

<sup>27</sup> This is an allusion to two lines in "Cai qi" 采芑 ("Gathering the Qi Plant"; Mao no. 178). "Impudent are you barbarians of Jing,/ to a great state you have become a foe 蠢爾荆蠻/大邦爲仇"; Kong, *Maoshi Zhengyi* 10, p. 755.

<sup>28</sup> *Jian'an*, pp. 152–53.

<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere I discuss this group of *fu* as examples of a larger literary discourse, in which Jian'an writers create an idealized female image as symbol of a new literati community. I examine in detail how the image of the goddess in these *fu* transformed the early tradition of writing about the goddess in the Han court *fu*. See Qiulei Hu, "In Search of a Perfect Match: Jian'an (196–220) Writing about Women and the Formation of a Literati Community," *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 21.2 (2019), pp. 194–223.

torical continuation, however, the preface to Chen Lin's "Fu on the Goddess" may indeed reveal a political agenda:<sup>30</sup>

漢三七之建安	In the three-seven year of the Han dynasty, during the Jian'an reign, <sup>31</sup>
荆野蠡而作讎	the barbarians of Jing are impudent to become foes.
贊皇師以南假	Joining the southern campaign of the imperial troops,
濟漢川之清流	I am going to cross the limpid current of the Han river.
感詩人之攸嘆	Moved by the chant of the [ <i>Shi jing</i> ] Poet,
想神女之來游	I imagine the goddess coming to roam.

Despite claiming inspiration from the *Shi's* "Han guang" 漢廣 ("Han River Is Broad"; Mao no. 9) in line 5, above, Chen frames his literary imagination in the reality of the military expedition against Liu Biao. The contrast made between the "barbarian" Jingzhou and Cao Cao's moral and civilized force is reminiscent of the Mao interpretation of the "Han guang:"

"Han guang" is [about] how far and broad virtue can reach. The Way of King Wen spread to the southern realm and his refined customs are carried out in the Yangtze and Han regions. It is inconceivable to violate the ritual. One sought [the girl] but was not able to get her. 漢廣，德廣所及也。文王之道，被於南國，美化行乎江漢之域，無思犯禮，求而不可得也。<sup>32</sup>

According to this interpretation, the Zhou conquest of the Yangzi and Han River regions was accomplished not (only) through military means, but, more importantly, by spreading King Wen's teaching to transform the "barbarians" who followed uncivilized customs (such as women roaming freely and seducing men). In addition to the Mao interpretation, all "*san jia*" 三家 (or, Three-schools) traditions of *Shi jing* commentary in the Han dynasty associate the poem "Han guang" with the assimilation and transformation of wild and untamed women.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>30</sup> *Jian'an*, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> The exact meaning of the phrase "*sanqi*" is not clear. Yu Shaochu suggests that it is an error for "*shiqi*" ("seventeen 十七"). The 17th year of Jian'an was 208 AD, the year that Cao Cao led his campaign against Liu Biao; see *Jian'an*, p. 410. The phrase appears in the biography of Lu Wenshu 路溫舒 in *Han shu*, which says that he studied astrology and observed that the fate of the Han dynasty was determined by "*sanqi*," i.e., every 210 years. It was approximately one "*sanqi*" from the beginning of the Western Han to the Wang Mang usurpation, and another "*sanqi*" from then up until the end of the Eastern Han; see Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 51, p. 2372.

<sup>32</sup> Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 1, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on the Han interpretations on the "Han guang," see Qjulei Hu, "Reading

Jian'an writers who wrote "*Fu* on the Goddess" applied the same narrative of cultural conquest to Cao Cao's southern campaign. In earlier court *fu*, like the "*Fu* on Gaotang" 高唐賦 and "*Fu* on the Goddess" 神女賦 attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (fl. third century BC),<sup>34</sup> the goddess, as embodiment of a mysterious natural force, is often fickle and arrogant, and shows no respect for or sympathy with her human suitors. The goddess in Jian'an *fu*, however, is much more domesticated and cultured than her earlier counterparts. Nothing speaks to her transformation better than the goddess's recital of an ode to "express her intent" in Wang Can's "*Fu* on the Goddess":<sup>35</sup>

稱詩表志	She recites an ode to express her intent;
安氣和聲	pacifies the spirit and harmonizes the voice.
探懷授心	She probes her feelings and conveys her mind;
發露幽情	reveals her hidden affection.

The untamable and unfathomable goddess empathizes with the poet and articulates her inner thoughts and feelings in *his* language. This cultural conversion of the goddess preceded and predicated the military triumph of the campaign. Zhang Cangshou 章滄授 criticizes Jian'an *fu* that were written while on, or after having been on, military campaigns for their merely promoting the success of the campaign and praising the virtue of the commander: they do not show the adverse reality of warfare. He views them as a "setback 倒退" from the ancient tradition of writing about campaigns ever since the *Shi* classic.<sup>36</sup> I would argue, however, that the function and significance of these *fu* lie precisely in their embellished and idealized representations of reality, in the same way that *Shi* poems treat the founding of the Zhou dynasty. Their purpose is not to "make contact with society and learn about reality 接觸社會, 了解現實,"<sup>37</sup> but to create a political vision: a unified empire (to be) achieved through military (*wu*) as well as civil (*wen*) means, under the leadership of a sage-ruler.

Meow Hui Goh has recently argued that Chen Lin's war proclamations demonstrate "the promised ideal of wining without bloodshed"

---

the Conflicting Voices: An Examination of the Interpretative Traditions about 'Han Guang,'" in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 34 (2012), pp. 1-13.

<sup>34</sup> Most scholars agree on the Western Han date of these two *fu*. Song Yu was most likely a literary persona rather than the historical writer of the two pieces. For a discussion on the authorship and dating, see Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1993), p. 25 n. 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Jian'an*, p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> Zhang Cangshou, "Jian'an zhuzi cifu chuanguo de chongxin shenshi" 建安諸子辭賦創作的重新審視, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 21 (1998), pp. 82-88, at 83.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

and “ultimately represent the ideal alternative of civil, non-violent means of power in the early Chinese tradition.”<sup>38</sup> Jian’an literati’s *fu* composed while on military campaigns fulfilled a similar task and carried similar political significance in their contemporary contexts. They represent the campaigns as acts of righteousness and justice, impose a sense of order and ritual propriety, downplay elements of violence and destruction, as well as claim cultural and historical ownership over the territories in question. Through the power of words, Jian’an literati contributed to the Cao-Wei cause in ways that cannot be achieved through combat. Their campaign *fu*, although no doubt panegyric in nature, were acts of conquest in and of themselves.

#### NEGOTIATING PERSONAL ADVERSITY IN THE ARMY

Aside from *fu*, Jian’an literati also wrote *shi* 詩 poetry, including four-syllable and five-syllable poems, while going on military campaigns. *Shi* poetry written in this context has its own tradition since the *Shi jing*. Such poems often include lamentations on the hardship of the soldiers, expressions of longing for home and loved ones, and condemnations of the dreadful human consequences of warfare.<sup>39</sup> The central theme is the conflict between the personal welfare of common soldiers and the public duty they serve. One of the earliest example is the *Shi jing* poem “Dong shan” 東山 (“Eastern Mountains”; Mao no. 156), the first stanza of which goes as follows:<sup>40</sup>

我徂東山	We marched to the Eastern Mountains,
惓惓不歸	we went away and did not return home.
我來自東	Now that we are coming from the East,
零雨其濛	The falling rain is darkening.
我東曰歸	When in the East we spoke of returning home,
我心西悲	our hearts yearned for the West.
制彼裳衣	Let us prepare those (civilian) skirts and robes,
勿士行枚	Do not let us serve (as soldiers) and go in ranks and
	be gagged.
蝟蝟者蠋	Those crawling caterpillars,

<sup>38</sup> Goh, “Art of Wartime Propaganda,” pp. 65–66.

<sup>39</sup> Exceptions exist, such as the “Ballad on Accompanying the Army” (“Congjun xing” 從軍行) attributed to Zuo Yannian 左延年 (fl. early-mid 3d-c.), a Wei court musician. The fragment of Zuo’s poem speaks of joy in the army; Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960) 358, p. 1775. But the description of joy is rare in this tradition. Zuo has another “Ballad on Accompanying the Army” that is entirely about hardship in the army; Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (fl. 1264–1269), *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 32, p. 475.

<sup>40</sup> Kong, *Maosheng zhengyi* 8, pp. 607–11; trans. Karlgren, *Book of Odes*, p. 101.

烝在桑野    in great numbers, they are in the mulberry grounds.  
 敦彼獨宿    Staunchly we pass the night there each by himself,  
 亦在車下    under the cart.

The Mao commentary associates the poem with the Duke of Zhou's eastern campaign to pacify the rebellion of Wugeng 武庚 and Guanshu 管叔, which lasted three years.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of the historical validity of this interpretation, the poem takes up an ordinary soldier's point of view to describe adversity and longing for home. Another renowned work in this tradition is a Han-era anonymous poem "At Fifteen I Set Off to Follow the Army" ("Shiwu congjun zheng" 十五從軍征), which recounts the tragic life story of an old soldier who joined the army at fifteen. When he returned home sixty-five years later, he no longer recognized his own town. All his relatives were dead and nature had claimed his old house. At the end of the poem, the old man cooks a meal, only to come to a tearful realization that no one is there to join him.<sup>42</sup> The extremely sorrowful tone reflects the destruction and devastation that war has educed in the lives of ordinary people, at whose expense rulers and commanders strive for their victories and glory.

The tradition of writing on the theme of "accompanying the army" is summarized in *Yuefu jieti* 樂府解題 (Tang era) as being "all about hardship and bitterness in military campaigns 皆軍旅苦辛之辭."<sup>43</sup> Cao Cao's "Ballad on Suffering the Cold" ("Kuhan xing" 苦寒行) follows this tradition closely:<sup>44</sup>

北上太行山    To the north we climb Mount Taihang.  
 艱哉何巍巍    How difficult and towering it is!  
 羊腸坂詰屈    The sheep-gut slopes are winding and narrow,  
 車輪爲之摧    on which our cartwheels broke.  
 樹木何蕭瑟    Trees are rustling;  
 北風聲正悲    the north wind blows in sorrow.  
 熊羆對我蹲    Bears crouch in front of me;  
 虎豹夾路啼    tigers and panthers roar by the roadside.  
 溪谷少人民    There are few people in the mountain valley,  
 雪落何霏霏    where the snow falls, how densely!  
 延頸長嘆息    Craning my neck, I heave a long sign;

<sup>41</sup> Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 8, p. 606.

<sup>42</sup> Lu Qinli 遼欽立, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983; hereafter, Lu) 1, pp. 335-36. The poem is also included in Guo, *Yuefu shiji*, where it is considered as a *yuefu* ballad.

<sup>43</sup> *Yuefu jieti* does not survive independently and only exists in the quotation of *Yuefu shiji*. Many scholars identify it as that comp. Wu Jing 吳兢 (670-749), *Yuefu guti yaojie* 樂府古題要解, and included in *Yuefu shiji* 32, p. 475.

<sup>44</sup> Lu 1, p. 351.

遠行多所懷	traveling afar I have much to care.
我心何怫鬱	My heart is filled with anxiety and melancholy;
思欲一東歸	I long for the return to the east at once.
水深橋樑絕	Rivers are deep, with no bridges;
中路正徘徊	I linger in hesitation in the middle of the road.
迷惑失故路	Perplexed, I have lost the previous path;
薄暮無宿棲	approaching dusk, I have no place to stay for the night.
行行日已遠	Marching on and on, we have gone further each day;
人馬同時饑	men and horses are hungry at the same time.
擔囊行取薪	We carry burdens to walk and gather firewood,
斧冰持作糜	chop at ice to make gruel.
悲彼東山詩	How sad! that poem “Dong shan,”
悠悠使我哀	it fills my heart with sorrow.

Because of the mention of the Taihang Range in the first line, this poem has been traditionally associated with Cao Cao's campaign against Yuan Shao's nephew Gao Gan 高幹 in 206. Although we do not have to take the description in a *yuefu* poem literally, Cao Cao is certainly lamenting the hardship of soldiers on expedition.<sup>45</sup> The question is why Cao Cao, a combat-inured war hero, would express such a heartfelt lamentation over the adversity caused by (possibly his own) military campaign? I believe that Cao Cao is performing the political role of a compassionate ruler who sympathizes with his subjects/soldiers, even more so than the legendary Duke of Zhou, Cao Cao's favorite poetic and political persona. In another poem “Hao li” 蒿里, he remarks on the impact of war, “Among common people, one survived out of a hundred,/thinking of this breaks one's heart. 生民百遺一, 念之斷人腸.”<sup>46</sup> This self-image, like the non-violent representation of him and his campaigns in the military-themed *fu*, which we discussed earlier, is part of the propaganda that claims moral superiority and legitimacy for his cause. His son and successor Cao Pi perfectly duplicates this image in his three poems “Written in Liyang” (“Liyang zuo” 黎陽作) that were created while on military campaign against Yuan Shao's two sons – Yuan Tan 袁譚 (d. 205) and Yuan Shang 袁尙 (d. 207). The first of the three poems laments the suffering of common people; the second expresses his commitment to launch the campaign to save

<sup>45</sup> The description of the soldier's life is traditionally understood to be Cao Cao's personal experience in the army. I agree with Stephen Owen that Cao Cao assumes the voice of the Duke of Zhou, rather than an “ordinary soldier” in this poem; Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1996), pp. 263-64.

<sup>46</sup> Lu 1, p. 347.

them; and the third extols the power and grandeur of his troops.<sup>47</sup> By acknowledging the adversity common people experienced in the war and showing commitment to bringing it to an end, the Cao-Wei commanders present themselves as peace-loving and benevolent sage-rulers and justify their military engagements.

If the Cao-Wei rulers follow the time-honored tradition of writing about personal sufferings in the army to show sympathy and compassion, Wang Can's five "Poems While Accompanying the Army" ("Congjun shi" 從軍詩) negotiate the same tradition by resolving the fundamental conflict between the public cause served by the campaign and the personal adversity of individual soldiers, as well as that between the commander/ruler and the soldier/subject, with the expression of the latter's devotion to the former's righteous cause. The five poems are preserved in the sixth-century anthology of literature *Wen xuan* 文選 (*Selections of Refined Literature*). Based on internal evidence, Li Shan's 李善 (d. 689) commentary there dates the first poem to 215, during Cao Cao's western expedition against Zhang Lu 張魯, and the remaining four to the following year, while on the southwestern expedition against Sun Quan. This group of poems has been previously examined by many scholars. Notably, Ronald Miao argues that they are not just encomiastic, but reveal "the poetic tension that arises from the triangular relationship of the persona, the lord-minister, and the conscript."<sup>48</sup> Based on a comparison with Wang Can's other poems on war, like the "Seven Sorrows" ("Qi ai shi" 七哀詩), Wu Fusheng observes "a shift in the writings of some of the Seven Masters after they came to [be associated with] Cao Cao," which involved a detachment from social reality and a focus on praising Cao Cao. He also tries to show the "challenges that Jian'an poets faced in writing their poetry," namely, the urge to express themselves vis-à-vis extolling Cao Cao and his cause.<sup>49</sup>

I read these five poems as a thoughtful reflection on literati's role in the army. I agree with Ronald Miao's reading of the conflict between public duty and private life, but I view the poems not as a revelation of this conflict but a conscious effort to solve it. In a sense they answer the concerns of Cao Cao and Cao Pi about the hardship of common

<sup>47</sup> Lu 1, p. 399.

<sup>48</sup> Miao, "A Critical Study of the Life and Poetry of Wang Chung-hsüan," Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1969), pp. 148–61, at 154. The dissertation contains annotated translations of Wang's entire collected works.

<sup>49</sup> Wu, *Written at Imperial Command: Panegyric Poetry in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY P., 2009), pp. 26–37. The comparison between the "Seven Sorrows" and "Poems on Accompanying the Army" is problematic given the differences in topic, occasion, and style. Moreover, in these poems Wang Can makes many comments on social reality and expresses his personal feelings that are not always in harmony with Cao Cao's ambition.

soldiers by aligning the latter's personal fate with the former's political ambition. This solution of the conflict is not achieved effortlessly, but through much contemplation, negotiation and interrogation over the course of the five poems. The first poem is supposed to have been written a year before the other four:<sup>50</sup>

從軍有苦樂 但問所從誰 所從神且武 焉得久勞師 5 相公征關右 赫怒震天威 一舉滅獯虜 再舉服羌夷 西收邊地賊 10 忽若俯拾遺 陳賞越丘山 酒肉逾川坻 軍中多飫饒 人馬皆溢肥 15 徒行兼乘還 空出有餘資 拓地三千里 往返速若飛 歌舞入鄴城 20 所願獲無違 晝日處大朝 日暮薄言歸 外參時明政 內不廢家私 25 禽獸憚為犧 良苗實已揮	There are bitterness and joy in accompanying the army, just ask whom you are accompanying. We are accompanying someone who is divine and martial, How could he exhaust the troops for long? The minister-lord goes on an expedition to the right of the Pass, <sup>51</sup> His great rage exceeds Heaven's might. With a single strike we extinguish the Xun barbarians, With another we subjugate the Qiang tribes. In the west we arrest the bandits at the frontier, swiftly as picking up an object. Awards in display are piled higher than hills and mountains, Ales and meats surpass rivers and isles. In the army everything is abundant and affluent, men and horses are all vigorous and plump. Those who marched on foot return on double chariots; those who left with empty hands have surplus. Expanding lands by three thousand <i>li</i> ; we go and return as quickly as in flight. Singing and dancing we enter the city of Ye; our wishes are all fulfilled with no exception. During the day we stay at the grand court, At dusk we return to our homes. Outside we participate in the timely and wise administration; inside we do not abandon familial and private matters. Birds and beasts fear to become sacrifices; fine crops have started to swing in the fields.
--	---

<sup>50</sup> Lu 1, p. 361. I consulted the trans. of the set, esp. this poem, by Hsiang-lin Shih, "Jian'an Literature Revisited: Poetic Dialogues in the Last Three Decades of the Han Dynasty," Ph.D. diss. (Seattle: University of Washington, 2013), pp. 192-95.

<sup>51</sup> The pass here refers to Hangu Pass 函谷關.

竊慕負鼎翁	Secretly I admire the old man carrying the tripod, <sup>52</sup>
願厲朽鈍姿	and wish to sharpen my decaying and blunted nature.
不能效沮溺	I cannot follow the examples of [Chang]ju and [Jie]ni, <sup>53</sup>
30 相隨把鋤犁	to take up hoes and ploughs.
熟覽夫子詩	I carefully read through Confucius's poems,
信知所言非	and truly believe what he says to be wrong.

The first line speaks directly to a tradition surrounding “bitterness” (*ku* 苦), more so than to “joy” (*le* 樂) in the army. The difference is seen, states Wang Can, in the very nature of the commander. In his case, the “divine and martial” Cao Cao is capable of swift success to spare his soldiers the ordeal. The entire battle is reduced to “one strike 一舉” in line 7 and “another strike 再舉” in line 8, expressions that appear in his “*Fu* on Floating on the Huai River” as well, which was already mentioned. The speediness and ease of the military action are reiterated in line 10 with the comparison to picking up an object. The poem then skips all hardship and violence, quite in the same way as many Jian’an *fu* written during military campaigns, to arrive at the glorious victory: “Awards in display are piled higher than the hills and mountains,/Ales and meats surpass rivers and isles./In the army everything is abundant and affluent,/ men and horses are all vigorous and plump.” The heftily-rewarded and well-fed soldiers are in stark contrast with soldiers sleeping under the cart and cooking gruel in the cold in “Dong shan” and Cao Cao’s “Ballad on Suffering the Cold.”<sup>54</sup> In particular, the last line above seems to be a deliberate negation to the line in the “Ballad on Suffering the Cold” that states “men and horses are hungry at the same time.”

In Wang Can’s poem, it is not merely the material aspects that have improved in Cao Cao’s campaign. Wang makes an emphatic point that the expedition does not intrude in its participants’ private lives: “Outside we participate in the timely and enlightened rule;/ inside we do not neglect familial and personal duties.” This couplet reveals the harmonious relationship between public duty and private life and, more than anything else, consciously negotiates the tradition about personal

<sup>52</sup> This refers to Yi Yin 伊尹, who instructed Tang 湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty, with the metaphor of cooking in a tripod. Yi was later made prime minister (*xiang* 相).

<sup>53</sup> Changju and Jieni are recluses mentioned in the *Analects*.

<sup>54</sup> Like the list of treasures obtained as a result of the campaign in Chen Lin’s “*Fu* on the Divine Warrior,” these descriptions are fit for recruiting purposes.

sufferings in the military campaign. It is only natural that the poem ends with a firm rejection of reclusion. There is no reason not to serve a worthy ruler when it will not hinder one's "familial and personal duties." The description of the campaign sets the stage for Wang Can's definition of his own role in it in lines 27 and 28. With the reference to Yi Yin, he aspires to aid the ruler to achieve the greatest political goal of all – the founding of a dynasty. Despite making self-effacing remarks on his lack of talent, Wang Can clearly perceives his role as advisory or counselor. This self-identification is reinforced at the end of Poem IV:<sup>55</sup>

我有素餐責	I bear the responsibility of "eating the bread of idleness,"
誠愧伐檀人	and indeed feel ashamed in front of those who "cut the sandalwoods,"
雖無鉛刀用	Although I do not have the use of [even] a lead knife, <sup>56</sup>
庶幾奮薄身	I aspire to devote my humble life.

The first couplet above alludes to the satirical comment on the "gentlemen" (*junzi* 君子) who do not perform their duties made in the *Shi jing* poem "Fa tan" 伐檀 ("Cutting the Sandalwoods"; Mao no. 112):<sup>57</sup>

彼君子兮	Alas, those gentlemen,
不素餐兮	they sure do not eat the bread of idleness!

Cheng Yu-yu 鄭毓瑜 reads in this allusion Wang Can's frustration over the uselessness of his literary talent in the army.<sup>58</sup> She argues that Jian'an literati deliberately distanced themselves from political and military engagements to form "a new literary class that transcends politics 超越政治的文學新階層."<sup>59</sup> However, Wang Can's next couplet declares his wholehearted commitment to the political cause with a strong sense of pride.

While the conflict between "the outside" and "the inside," or the public and the private is resolved within one poem for the 215 expedition, it takes four poems for Wang Can to find a perfect solution in the campaign against Sun Quan in the next year. Read together, these four poems delineate in meticulous detail the gradual evolution of the

<sup>55</sup> Lu 1, p. 362.

<sup>56</sup> A knife made of lead is very blunt and does not have much use in the battlefield.

<sup>57</sup> Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 5, pp. 432-34.

<sup>58</sup> Cheng, "Shilun gongyanshi zhiyu yexia wenshi jituan de xiangzheng yiyi" 試論公宴詩之於鄴下文士集團的象徵意義, in *Liuchao qingjing meixue zonglun* 六朝情境美學綜論 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1996), pp. 171-218; especially 181-82.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

author's thoughts and feelings, with many setbacks in between. In Poem II, the speaker tries to dispel his longing for home by normalizing the uncertainty and instability of life in the army and viewing them as integral aspects of human existence. The poem also reiterates the confidence in Cao Cao's capability of swift victory:<sup>60</sup>

日月不安處	The sun and moon do not stay in the same place;
人誰獲恒寧	among humankind, who could enjoy permanent peace?
昔人從公旦	In the past those who followed Duke [of Zhou] Dan,
一徂輒三齡	once gone, it would last three years.
今我神武師	Now our divine and martial troops,
暫往必速平	Temporarily go forth, it will surely pacify [the revolt] in short time.

When gloomy thoughts return in Poem III, a different reasoning is employed to ease the pain:<sup>61</sup>

身服幹戈事	My body serves the matters of shields and spears;
豈得念所私	how could the private life concern me?
即戎有授命	Going to the battlefield entails being ready to give up life – <sup>62</sup>
茲理不可違	this is an unavoidable principle.

The poet attempts, in the last line, above, to use the notion of principle (*li* 理) to subdue his unsettling concerns (*nian* 念), or to use the commitment to public duties to suppress private feelings. Yet this solution is temporary since the private and the public are still perceived in competitive and contradictory terms. It is not until Poem V that a satisfying solution is eventually found:

悠悠涉荒路	Filled with sorrow, I step on the deserted path;
靡靡我心愁	walking slowly, my heart is full of grief.
四望無煙火	Gazing into four directions I see no cooking fire,
但見林與丘	only forests and hills.
城郭生榛棘	Brushes and thorns grow on the city walls;
蹊徑無所由	there is no road to travel through.
菑蒲竟廣澤	Reeds fill the vast marsh;
葭葦夾長流	rushes hem in the long stream
日夕涼風發	At sunset chilly wind starts to blow,
翩翩漂吾舟	sending my boat to drift away lightly.

<sup>60</sup> Lu 1, p. 362.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Confucius defines a “complete man 成人” as the one who “in view of profits thinks of righteousness, and in view of danger is ready to give up his life 見利思義，見危授命”；Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980) 14/12 (p. 149).

寒蟬在樹鳴	Winter cicadas sing in the trees;
鶴鵠摩天游	cranes and swans roam against the sky.
客子多悲傷	This sojourner has much grief;
淚下不可收	his tears fall down and cannot be withheld.
朝入譙郡界	In the morning we cross the border of Qiao Com-
	mandery;
曠然消人憂	Its vastness eliminates people's worries.
雞鳴達四境	The crow of roosters can be heard at four borders;
黍稷盈原疇	millet overflows its open fields.
館宅充鄜里	Lodges and houses line up in the resident alleys;
士女滿莊墟	men and women crowd the crossroads.
自非賢聖國	If it were not in a state of the Sage and Worthy,
誰能享斯休	who could enjoy such bliss?
詩人美樂土	The Poet admires the "Land of Joy,"
雖客猶願留	even though I am a guest, I still wish to stay. <sup>63</sup>

The poet starts with an intense feeling of desolation and longing. The landscape all around him is uninhabited and hostile, covered with wild thorns and rushes. Yet as soon as the troops enter the commandery of Qiao – Cao Cao's hometown, an utterly different world unfolds in front of his eyes. In the midst of misery and destruction, it stands out as a land of affluence, peace, and prosperity. The place evokes the famous "land of joy 樂土" in the *Shi* poem "Shuo shu" 碩鼠 ("Giant Rats"; Mao no. 113).<sup>64</sup> "Shuo shu" describes the miserable life of people in the state of Wei under the ruler's exploitation and their vow to leave the place for a "land of joy" free from the greedy and cruel ruler. This "land of joy" exists only outside of current political regime and belongs to the people, as "a place of our own 我所." The imagination of such a utopia without political authority is prevalent in later tradition, its most celebrated incarnation being Tao Qian's 陶潛 (ca. 365–427) "Record of Peach Blossom Spring" ("Taohua yuan ji" 桃花源記). In the "record," a fisherman by accident discovers a secluded land where the residents lead a carefree and self-sufficient life unaffected by the war and chaos outside. Its total separation from the political frame of the day is indicated by the statement: "They do not know the existence of the Han, not to mention Wei and Jin. 乃不知有漢, 無論魏晉."<sup>65</sup>

As in "Shuo shu," individual peace and prosperity could only be possible by complete severance from political reality. Wang Can's "land of joy" forms a striking contrast with them. It bridges the gap between

<sup>63</sup> Lu 1, pp. 362–63.

<sup>64</sup> Kong, *Maoshi zhengyi* 5, pp. 436–37.

<sup>65</sup> Lu Qinli, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 6, p. 166.

public and private interests and locates the utopia right in the political regime of Cao Cao. The commandery of Qiao is described as a “state of the Sage and Worthy 賢聖國,” and this ruler is the reason, not obstacle, for the blissful lives its people enjoy. Unlike the ruler in “Shuo shu” who drives people away, Cao Cao attracts followers/guests 客 from near and far like Wang Can himself, because the service to his regime leads to the fulfillment of personal happiness. The last line of Poem V expresses the poet’s wish to “stay,” not just in Qiao, but also in Cao Cao’s service. This is Wang Can’s response to Cao Cao’s call for talent and pledge of loyalty, and also his answer to Cao Cao’s and Cao Pi’s laments on the sufferings imposed by (their) military campaigns. By now the personal and public values and interests have coalesced and the tradition of “accompanying the army” has been rewritten to be about joy rather than bitterness.

In his study of the history of literary compositions at imperial command, Wu Fusheng argues that Wang Can’s five “Poems While Accompanying the Army” demonstrate the shift in the primary function of poetry from sociopolitical to self-expressive.<sup>66</sup> Wu’s view is apparently under the influence of Lu Xun’s 鲁迅 (1881–1936) famous and even over-quoted assertion that the Jian’an period was “an era of the self-awakening of literature 文學自覺的時代。”<sup>67</sup> Although these poems do express Wang Can’s thoughts and feelings about Cao Cao’s campaign, there is a consistent effort to bring personal sentiments in compliance with and in service to the public cause. The final resolution lies not so much in the affirmation of the poet’s own feelings as in the willing submission of these feelings to a collective political endeavor under a sagely leader. Cao Cao’s and Cao Pi’s expressions of compassion toward soldiers and common people, paired with Wang Can’s alignment of personal interests with the service to the Caos, successfully resolved the central conflict in the tradition of producing writings during military campaigns and created a tight community working toward a shared purpose. The sociopolitical function of poetry, in my opinion, did not fade or disappear, but was being exerted to the maximum.

<sup>66</sup> Wu, *Written at Imperial Command*, p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> Lu Xun, “Wei Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi: jiuyue jian zai Guangzhou xiaqi xueshu yanjianghui jiang” 魏晉風度及文章與藥及酒之關係, 九月間在廣州夏期學術演講會講 (1927; rpt. idem, *Wei Jin fengdu ji qita* 魏晉風度及其他 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000]), pp. 185–98, at 188.

DEFINING A NEW IDENTITY FOR  
LITERATI IN THE CAO-WEI REGIME

Jian'an literati's active participation in military campaigns is an indication of the instrumentality of literati and their writing in the Cao-Wei regime. In order to understand their commitment to and confidence in using literary talent to contribute to the political agenda of the regime, an important question is what role did they see themselves and their writings as playing in political and military endeavors. Through an examination of their own discussions on the nature and function of writing, this final section shows that in this regard a new literati identity distinguished them from their predecessors in the Han dynasty.

Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, two of the leading literary and political figures in Jian'an, both discussed the significance of writing (*wen* 文) vis-à-vis political engagements. Cao Pi's view is clearly stated in the chapter "A Discourse on Writing" ("Lun wen" 論文) that formed a part of his *Dian lun* 典論 (*Authoritative Discourses*):

Writing is an important achievement in the governing of the state, an imperishable grand affair. The years of our lives run out in time; glory and happiness cease with one's body. The normal limits that these inevitably reach cannot compare to the sempiternity of writing. Therefore, ancient writers entrusted themselves to brush and ink, expressed their thoughts in pieces and texts. Although they did not depend on the words of a good historian, did not rely on the influence of important people, their reputations were spontaneously passed down to posterity. 蓋文章，經國之大業，不朽之盛事。年壽有時而儘，榮樂止乎其身，二者必至之常期，未若文章之無窮。是以古之作者，寄身於翰墨，見意於篇籍，不假良史之辭，不托飛馳之勢，而聲名自傳於後。<sup>68</sup>

The above passage invokes the famous statement on what it means to be "imperishable 不朽") that is seen in the text of *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (*The Zuo Tradition*): "The uppermost is to establish virtue; next is to establish deeds, next to that is to establish words. Despite a long time, they

<sup>68</sup> Wei Hongcan 魏宏燦, ed., *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu* 曹丕集校注 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2009), p. 313. I use Robert Joe Cutter's translation in "To the Manner Born? Nature and Nurture in Early Medieval Chinese Literary Thought," in Patricia Ebrey, Scott Pearce, and Audrey Spiro, eds., *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200-600* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 62, with modifications. Other translations include Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1992), pp. 68-70; Ronald Miao, "Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han," *Literature East and West* 11.3 (1972), p. 1026; and Xiaofei Tian, "A Discourse on Literature," in Victor H. Mair, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Paul R. Goldin, eds., *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2005), pp. 231-33.

do not decay; such is called being imperishable. 太上有立德, 其次有立功, 其次有立言. 雖久不廢, 此之謂不朽.”<sup>69</sup>

The ordering of the concepts, above, implies a sequence with significance: Virtue is foremost and words/writing are last. While *Zuo zhuan* makes a clear distinction between these three means to imperishability, Cao Pi combines them and places the spotlight on writing. Most interestingly, Cao Pi does not make a metaphorical comparison between writing and the governing of the state (i.e. writing is *as important as* governing the state), but equals the two. In other words, Cao Pi does not advocate “*wenzhang*” as a self-sufficient entity, but places its value in its instrumentality to the governing of the state.<sup>70</sup> This became apparent in the two examples of those who achieved imperishability through writing in the past, namely, King Wen of Zhou and the Duke of Zhou, who are first and foremost remembered for their political accomplishments.<sup>71</sup>

Among Jian’an literati, Cao Pi was not the only person who emphasized the political and moral dimensions of writing. Xu Gan also viewed writing as the ultimate manifestation and embodiment of an author’s political and moral achievements. The chapter “Valuing Words” (“Gui yan” 貴言) of his work *Zhong lun* 中論 (“*Discourses on the Mean*”) begins with the following statement:

The gentleman must value his words. If he values his words, then he brings honor to his person; if he brings honor to his person, then his way will be prized. His way being prized is the means by which he establishes his teachings. 君子必貴其言. 貴其言則尊其身, 尊其身則重其道, 重其道所以立其教.<sup>72</sup>

If words (in the context of the chapter, *yan* primarily denotes spoken words) embody a gentleman’s character and principles, and could impress and influence people around him, then written words have an added advantage to extend the impression and influence to different time and/or space. Cao Pi deemed Xu Gan’s *Zhong lun* to be the

<sup>69</sup> Yang, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, p. 1088 (Xiang 24).

<sup>70</sup> After an examination of the changing connotation of “*wenzhang*,” Martin Kern demonstrates a shift of focus in the Eastern Han from ritual performance/appearance to written texts that preserve ritual splendor of the Western Han and set the ritual standard for later generations. And “when Cao Pi calls *wenzhang* ‘the great undertaking in managing the state, he does not metaphorically elevate the status of literature but refers to the body of writings that served the needs of the government in practical matters (the discursive genres) and symbolic representation (the panegyric genres)’; Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transition of *Wen* in Early China,” *TP* 2d ser. 87.1–3 (2001), pp. 43–91, at 86.

<sup>71</sup> Wei, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, p. 313.

<sup>72</sup> I use the text and translation in John Makeham’s *Balanced Discourses: A Bilingual Edition* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2002), p. 73.

paragon of “creating one’s own discourse 成一家言,” a phrase he borrowed from Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC) to refer to writings of political and moral significance.<sup>73</sup> Writing *Dian lun* was Cao Pi’s own attempt to make his public accomplishments imperishable. It was probably the belief in the political and moral instrumentality of writing that prompted Cao Pi to send the manuscript of *Dian lun* to Sun Quan and Zhang Zhao 張昭 (156–236), his political rivals in the south, right after its completion.<sup>74</sup> By doing so Cao Pi hoped to exert his political power and influence far and wide.

The majority of the surviving recensions of *Dian lun* concern moral and state affairs, in much the same way as did *Zhong lun*. In addition to “A Discourse on Writing,” other chapter titles include those such as “A Discourse on Alchemy” (“Lun fangshu” 論方術), “A Discourse on Emperor Wu of Han” (“Han Wudi lun” 漢武帝論), “A Discourse on King Cheng of Zhou and Emperor Zhao of Han” (“Zhou Cheng Han Zhao lun” 周成漢昭論), “Villains and Slanderers” (“Jianchan” 奸讒), and “A Discourse on Making Friends” (“Jiaoyou lun” 交友論). To signify its political and moral significance, Cao Pi’s son emperor Ming (r. 226–239) ordered the carving of its entire text on stone tablets to be installed in the Imperial Temple and the Imperial Academy, thus making it “imperishable” in the literal sense.<sup>75</sup>

Cao Zhi expresses his views on writing in a letter to Yang Xiu:

Writing *fu* is a petty path and is certainly incapable of explicating cardinal principles and manifesting them to later generations. In the past, Yang Ziyun (i.e., Yang Xiong 揚雄, 53 BC–18 AD) was just a halberd-holding officer. Still he claimed that [writing *fu*] was not for a grown man. Despite my thin virtue, I hold the position of a feudal marquis. Still, I aspire to exert my efforts to serve the state above, propagate benefits to common people below, establish eter-

<sup>73</sup> Cao Pi makes the same remark on Xu Gan’s *Zhonglun* in both “Discourse on Writing” and “Letter to Wu Zhi, II” (“You yu Wu Zhi shu” 又與吳質書), see Wei, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, pp. 314, 258, respectively. This phrase was first used by Sima Qian in “Letter to Ren An” (“Bao Ren An shu” 報任安書), concerning the writing of a history that could “become the discourse of my own 成一家之言”; *Han shu* 62, p. 2735.

<sup>74</sup> *Sanguo zhi* 2, p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> *Sanguo zhi* 4, p. 117. Yet one cannot escape the irony that only a small part of *Dian lun* was transmitted over time until now; that part, “A Discourse on Writing,” survived intact because of inclusion in *Wen xuan* 文選. The latter’s compiler, Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), selected this portion from the entire *Dian lun* probably because of its advocacy for the importance of writing rather than its emphasis on writing as effective conveyance of political and moral ideas. For discussions of Xiao Tong’s literary views, see David R. Knechtges, “Culling the Weeds and Selecting Prime Blossoms: The Anthology in Early Medieval China,” in Ebrey et al., *Culture and Power*, pp. 200–44; and Wang Ping, *The Age of Courtly Writing: Wen Xuan Compiler Xiao Tong (501–531) and His Circle* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), esp. 51–103.

nal achievements and leave behind accomplishments [carved] on metal and stone. How could I *merely* have writing to be my merit and rely on *fu* to be a gentleman? If my intents are not realized and my way not carried out, then I will collect the true records of historians, examine the success and failure of current customs, determine the criteria for benevolence and justice, and create a discourse of my own. Even if I cannot store it in a famous mountain [for later generations], I will pass it on to like-minded people. This is a promise of a lifetime and not just words for today! 辭賦小道，固未足以揄揚大義，彰示來世也。昔揚子雲先朝執戟之臣耳，猶稱壯夫不爲也。吾雖德薄，位爲蕃侯，猶庶幾戮力上國，流惠下民，建永世之業，留金石之功，豈徒以翰墨爲勳績，辭賦爲君子哉！若吾志未果，吾道不行，則將采庶官之實錄，辯時俗之得失，定仁義之衷，成一家之言，雖未能藏之於名山，將以傳之同好。非要之皓首，豈今日之論乎！<sup>76</sup>

Cao Zhi's criticism against *fu* at the beginning is often taken out of context to suggest that the view is in opposition to that of Cao Pi concerning *wen*,<sup>77</sup> in particular the expression “petty path,” seen as deliberately debunking the “great achievement 大業” expressed by Cao Pi in his definition of writing. However, Cao Zhi here is not criticizing writing in general. He quotes (not included in the above passage) Yang Xiong's famous remark that the *fu* genre is “like children carving insects and seal-script writing 童子雕蟲篆刻” and therefore should “not be done by grown men 壯夫不爲。” According to Yang, the genre's problem lies in the tendency to encourage 勸 the ruler's indulgence in the same extravagant and harmful behaviors that it sets out to remonstrate against 諷.<sup>78</sup> Through Yang's words, Cao Zhi disapproves the kind of writing that pays ill service to a proper political and moral cause. This view was shared by Xu Gan, who, according to the preface to *Zhong lun*, had a clear agenda:

He saw the pretty writings of the rhapsodists, composed at the same time. Among them there was none that elucidated cardinal principles or spread the teachings of the Way, or sought the intent of the Sage, above, and rescued the folly of popular customs, below. Therefore, he gave up writing poetry, *fu*, hymns, inscriptions and

<sup>76</sup> Zhao Youwen 趙幼文, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校注 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1984), pp. 154-55, my translation. Ronald C. Miao translates the entire letter in “Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han,” in *Literature East and West* 16.3 (1972), pp. 1028-30.

<sup>77</sup> For example, Gu Nong 顧農, “Cao Pi, Cao Zhi wenyi sixiang bijiaoguan” 曹丕·曹植文藝思想比較觀, *Xuchang shizhuan xuebao* 許昌師專學報 1 (1985), pp. 37-39.

<sup>78</sup> Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶 (1878-1933), *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996) 2, p. 45.

odes, and composed the book *Zhong lun* in twenty-two *juan*. 見辭人美麗之文，並時而作，曾無闡弘大義、敷散道教、上求聖人之中、下救流俗之昏者，故廢詩、賦、頌、銘、贊之文，著中論之書二十二篇。<sup>79</sup>

Like Cao Zhi, Xu Gan's critique of "beautiful writing" was not a wholesale rejection of the value of writing and in fact affirmed its ability to uphold principles and the Way.

Cao Zhi did not exclude the important role played by writing even while keeping ambitions to succeed in political and military realms. An often neglected key word in the passage from his letter to Yang Xiu, above, is the word "tu 徒" (merely). It shows that Cao Zhi's concern was that writing of a certain type did not substantialize the author's serious attempts at public achievement. Such writings are placed in opposition to "discourse of one's own 一家之言," namely, writings of political and moral significance. As shown before, this phrase, borrowed from Sima Qian, is also used by Cao Pi to establish the paradigm of writing in his "Discourse on Writing." At last, Cao Zhi's reservations about writing as the alternative plan when political pursuits fail aligns perfectly with Cao Pi's placing the "composing of pieces and texts 著篇籍" right next to "establishing virtue and spreading fame 立德揚名" as a means to achieve imperishability.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, both Cao Pi and Cao Zhi recognized the instrumentality of writing in recording and immortalizing political and moral deeds. Both for the same reason valued the kind of writing that commemorated and promoted political and moral accomplishments over those focusing on beautiful rhetoric. Their recognition of the lasting power of writing had a material basis in the increasing use of paper as an affordable and convenient writing media toward the end of the Eastern Han, attested by a notable increase of essays on calligraphy around the Jian'an period. These include Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78-143) "Disposition of Draft Script" ("Caoshu shi" 草書勢), Zhao Yi's 趙壹 (fl. 178) "Anti-Draft Script" ("Fei caoshu" 非草書), Cai Yong's 蔡邕 (132-192) "Discourse on Brushwork" ("Lun bi" 論筆) and "*Fu* on the Brush" ("Bi fu" 筆賦), and many others.<sup>81</sup> The Cao family displayed strong interests in this

<sup>79</sup> This preface was written by one of Xu's contemporaries, most likely a close acquaintance; Sun Qizhi 孫啓治, *Zhong lun jiegou* 中論解詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), p. 395.

<sup>80</sup> Cao Pi: "Only by establishing virtue and spreading fame one could become imperishable. Next best is to compose pieces and texts 唯立德揚名，可以不朽，其次莫如著篇籍，" in "Letter to Wang Lang" ("Yu Wang Lang shu" 與王朗書), Wei, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, p. 283.

<sup>81</sup> For a detailed discussion on the increased interest in calligraphy in the late Eastern Han, see David R. Knechtges, "Court Culture in the Late Eastern Han: The Case of the Hongdu Gate School," in Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo, eds., *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 9-40, esp. 31-34.

art form. According to historical records, both Cao Cao and Cao Zhi were skilled calligraphers, although none of their works survived.<sup>82</sup> The availability of paper (in comparison to stele inscription, bamboo and wood slips, and silk) made writing a far more accessible medium for delivering one's public accomplishments to a wide audience.

The recognition of the public functionality of writing was also rooted in the political reality and in literati's role in the Cao-Wei regime. The latter half of the Eastern Han was a turbulent time for literati. During the "disaster of partisan prohibitions 黨錮之禍" of the reigns of emperors Huan 桓 (r. 146–168) and Ling 靈 (r. 168–189), literati formed tight, often linked, communities outside of the imperial court and exerted considerable influence on public opinion.<sup>83</sup> They established a role of political dissident that was quite opposite to that of court "entertainers and jesters 倡優" seen in earlier times, as especially the case of writers at emperor Wu's 武帝 (141–87 BC) court who composed at imperial command and provided light-hearted entertainments.<sup>84</sup> Thus, in late Eastern Han, leading figures like Li Ying 李膺 (d. 169) and Chen Fan 陳蕃 (d. 168) openly criticized the eunuch-dominated court and gained many followers among scholars. This posed a huge threat to imperial authority. According to *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, "All literati-officials under heaven held [Li Ying's] way to be in high esteem and despised the imperial court 天下士大夫皆高尚其道而污穢朝廷."<sup>85</sup> The consequence was devastating on both sides. Hundreds of scholars were executed, exiled, imprisoned and/or prohibited from taking government offices. At the same time, the growing factionalism and friction shook the foundation of the Han empire and precipitated its rapid decline.

In their dual capacity of literati and members of the ruling family, Cao Pi and Cao Zhi promoted a new role for literati that lay in between court jester and political dissident. Literary talent was taken as effective instrument to serve the political goals of the Cao-Wei regime. The Cao brothers' views were likely influenced by their father Cao Cao, who was known for his love of talent. He issued three edicts

<sup>82</sup> *Sanguo zhi* 1, p. 54.

<sup>83</sup> For a discussion on the historical background and major events, see Christopher Conner, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1998), pp. 86–91; and Mou Fasong 牟發松, "Xia ru lun: danggu mingshi de yuanyuan yu liubian" 俠儒論, 黨錮名士的淵源與流變 in *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 4 (2011), pp. 64–85.

<sup>84</sup> Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) criticizes Mei Gao 枚皋 (fl. 128 BC) and Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 for their ungraceful role at court; see *Han shu* 51, p. 2366, and 64A, p. 2775, respectively. Mei Gao's biog. Ban quotes his lament at being treated like a jester; *Han shu* 51, p. 2367.

<sup>85</sup> Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 67, p. 2195.

that concerned the seeking out of worthy people 求賢令; these were in 210, 214 and 217.<sup>86</sup> In a letter to a friend, Cao Zhi speaks with great pride of his father's efforts to gather talented men:

At the time, everyone claimed to hold the pearl of the magic serpent and each household claimed to cherish the jade from Mount Jing.<sup>87</sup> Our king (i.e. Cao Cao) thereupon casted a heavenly net to contain them and settled eight directions to protect them. Now they have all gathered in this kingdom. 當此之時, 人人自謂握靈蛇之珠, 家家自謂抱荆山之玉, 吾王於是設天網以該之, 頓八紘以掩之, 今悉集茲國矣.<sup>88</sup>

Cao Cao's frequently displayed zeal for talent was certainly a political gesture to gain support and legitimacy to his cause. Yet the expression of "casting a heavenly net to contain them and settling eight directions to protect them" gives away a hidden (darker) agenda to contain and control talented men so they could not be a threat to his cause. Having witnessed the rapid downfall of the Han empire firsthand, Cao Cao had to understand the potential challenge literati could pose to the political establishment. His son and successor Cao Pi also warns in his *Dian lun* about the ill consequences of "aggressive criticism 橫議" issued by the prohibited factions.<sup>89</sup> It is therefore in the ruler's best interest to bind literati's personal ambitions together with the political goals of the regime.

A well-known literary critic of Qing times, Wu Qi 吳淇 (*jinshi* 1658), made the following remark about the Jian'an literati's role in the Cao court:

The relationship between Wei rulers and the Jian'an masters is just like wealthy people [today] who provide for a few advisers who write poems to accompany their sons and read [together]. Some play games and drink alcohol with the sons, or some write letters on the sons' behalf. In reality, it was not that [the Wei rulers] cherished their talents and put them to great use. 魏氏與諸子, 不過如富貴人家養幾個作詩相公, 陪伴自己子弟讀書, 或遊戲, 或飲酒, 間亦教他代作些書札, 其實非憐其才而大用也.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Sanguo zhi* 1, pp. 28, 32. The edicts are translated in Paul W. Kroll, "Portraits of Ts'ao Ts'ao: Literary Studies on the Man and the Myth," Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 1976), pp. 17-19; and Rafe de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord: A Biography of Cao Cao, 155-220 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 367-69.

<sup>87</sup> The pearl of the magic serpent and the jade from Mount Jing are references to precious and rare treasures. Here they are metaphors for people's talent.

<sup>88</sup> Cao Zhi, "Letter to Yang Dezu," in Zhao, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, p. 153.

<sup>89</sup> Wei, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, pp. 375-76.

<sup>90</sup> Wu Qi, *Liuchao xuanshi dinglun* 六朝選詩定論, in Hebei shifan xueyuan Zhongwenxi

It is true that Jian'an literati at the Cao courts spent much time writing poems, hiring musicians, playing games, drinking alcohol, and writing letters on their rulers' behalf, but their role was in no way merely trivial or decorative, as Wu Qi suggested. Cultural and literary activities were important means to establish political authority and community in the Cao-Wei regime. As Xiaofei Tian elucidates, the writing and exchange of poetry and letters at the Cao court was an effective way for individuals to build and maintain community and networks, as well as to negotiate power and establish authority.<sup>91</sup> Between Xu Gan's and Cao Zhi's critique of *fu* that lacks political and moral significance, and Cao Cao's and Cao Pi's commitment to recruiting and controlling talents, Jian'an literati found themselves in a unique role distinctive from their earlier Han counterparts: to serve the Cao-Wei regime using talent in writing and to achieve personal imperishability through public service. Their writing devoted to military campaigns was a crucial tool to fulfill this role.

#### CONCLUSION

Legitimacy was a key issue in the struggle for power at the end of the Han. Military campaigns, for their violent and invasive nature, were especially in need of justification and legitimation. Political legitimacy had to be argued and supported through cultural, moral, and historical means, wherein literary writing as a special talent might bring unrivaled power. In his study of the political culture surrounding Cao Pi's ascendancy to power, Howard L. Goodman contends that the Han-Wei transition marks the rise to political power of scholars, ritualists, and institutional specialists. Their access to and monopolization of literary and technical skills gave them an extremely important place at court when regimes sought to assert a ruling legitimacy that would carry them forward. Such scholars had come to be on par with military advisers and campaign generals who hailed from important families and regions, and we sense no separation in aims and life-styles among them.<sup>92</sup> Cao Pi's own literary talent, he points out, played an important role in his competition for the succession.<sup>93</sup> The general rise

---

gudian wenxue jiaoyan zu 河北師範學院中文系古典文學教研組, ed., *San Cao ziliao huibian* 三曹資料彙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 352.

<sup>91</sup> Tian, *Halberd at Red Cliff*, pp. 79–158.

<sup>92</sup> Goodman, *Is'ao P'i Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998), pp. 15–18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

in political significance of writing and writers accounts for Cao Cao's diligent search for talented literati and the latter's frequent participation in Cao-Wei military campaigns. In addition to providing political and moral legitimacy to the Cao-Wei cause, Jian'an writings made while on military campaigns also bridged the gap between private and public interests and formulated a strong sense of community with shared purposes. They were effective weapons in the Cao-Wei military campaigns that made it possible for the commander to "dispatch an army without going to battle," or to achieve military triumph through civil and non-violent means.

Jian'an literati fully recognized and realized the power of writing. Defining themselves against two prominent roles literati had played earlier in the dynasty – the court jester and the political dissident, they aspired to accomplish great political deeds by serving a worthy cause. Their devotion to writing affirmed and facilitated, rather than denied or impeded, their commitment to public service and political achievements. Literary talent, or the writing brush, was their weapon to make their mark in a world primarily defined by political and military accomplishments.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Jian'an* Yu Shaochu 俞紹初, ed., *Jian'an qizi ji* 建安七子集  
 Lu Lu Qinli 遼欽立, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩