

A Sixth-century Father's Advice on Literature: Comments on Chapter Nine of *Yanshi jiaxun*

Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591+) was born in Jiankang, modern Nanjing, a descendant of those émigrés of high status who had fled the north and began in 317 to serve at the court of the Eastern Jin. Members of his family had managed to hold on to that status in the subsequent centuries by dint of their continuing ability to meet the high literary standards, even for those in that privileged group, that were required for appointment to office. Yan lived at a time of increasing political volatility. He took part in the campaign against the rebel Hou Jing 侯景, was brought as a captive to Chang'an when the Western Wei occupied much of Liang territory, and fled to the Northern Qi in a vain attempt to return to the south. He served there as a relatively high official but was brought back to Chang'an when the Northern Qi fell to the Northern Zhou, and ended his career as an official under the Sui. His career in civil and military capacities, and service both in the north and south under several dynasties, gave him familiarity with many aspects of Six Dynasties life.

Yan is important in the study of the Six Dynasties chiefly for his work titled *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*The Family Counsels of Mr. Yan*), a work that, like others of the genre, gave advice and counsel to the junior members of his family. *Yanshi jiaxun* is especially valuable because Yan was an acute observer and critic of the social and political scene of his time, to which he was able to add descriptions of incidents he had personally experienced, making this a unique social document of the late Six Dynasties period.

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One of the twenty chapters into which *Yanshi jiaxun* is divided deals with literary matters. Yan approached the subject not as a practicing literary figure of any great repute, nor as one dedicated to the criticism of literary works. For that, we would turn to Liu Xie's 劉勰 *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, or Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 *Shipin* 詩品. Rather, the chapter reveals Yan as an active participant in a culture that placed great value on literary talent, one in which everyone of any claim to learning was expected to be able to appreciate literature and, indeed, to be able to write in a variety of styles well enough to meet the standards of the time. In his chapter, then, we see what was the accepted fund of knowledge, what were the literary tastes of one person of that time and culture, and what advice he wished to pass along to his children. In that sense, Yan's chapter, titled "Literary Compositions 文章," affords us a glimpse into the presuppositions and practices of the literary world of that time.

The chapter may be divided into some eleven topics. These include genre theory, literary slips that can lead to disastrous results, the importance of being critical of one's own work, the literary contributions of the sages and, by extension, the value of literature to society, the craft of writing, what to avoid in writing, and finally, examples of what he saw as excellent poetry. Interspersed throughout are anecdotes and observations of his day. Yan's realistic approach to life prevents his high standards of scholarship and ethics as expressed in his writing from becoming a pedantic exercise: these were practical tips to his sons on how to get along in a world in which writing both prose and poetry was a precarious, yet essential endeavor. One comes away from a reading of the chapter, as is the case of the other parts of *Yanshi jiaxun*, with a deeper understanding of the time and with an added admiration for the author.

Yan opens with a discussion of genre, tracing the various categories of literary effort back to one classic or another, thus bringing to the act of writing the significance and respectability that such a pedigree would provide. He says, for example, that "epistles 書 and petitions 奏, warnings 箴, and admonitory inscriptions 銘 stem from the *Chunqiu* 春秋." Genre studies had become especially important during the Liang, with the compilation of Xiao Tong's 蕭統 (501-531) *Wenxuan* 文選 and Liu Xie's (d. 522) *Wenxin diaolong*.¹ Yan certainly knew these works and was aware of the

¹ For an excellent discussion of the growth of genre theory, see James R. Hightower, "The Wen Hsüan and Genre Theory," *HJAS* 20 (1957), esp. p. 513. Yan's phrase about these genres deriving from *Chunqiu* was cited by E. D. Edwards as an illustration of the effort on the part of the traditional scholar to find sources in the classics for every custom, every

developments in the field of study, although his categories were his own. His own list of the genres that stemmed from *Chunqiu* differs considerably from Liu Xie's: only "admonitory inscriptions" was listed by both men. Yan did not devote any space to explicating how such genres were derived from the classics. His purpose was simply to emphasize the serious nature of writing and its origins in the classics, so as to provide a backdrop for his next topic.

Yan was particularly exercised by the disturbing fact that men of high literary repute had so often come to bad ends. Starting with Qu Yuan 屈原, who "made a show of his talent to make himself known, and in so doing uncovered the excesses of his lord,"² Yan goes on to list thirty-five others who suffered serious setbacks and even death, and interestingly does so without looking at the writings of these men to discern the possible flaws in their characters that could explain such fates.³ The apparent disparity between great literature and the faults of the men who produce it had become a popular topic. Liu Xie, writing in *Wenxin diaolong*, traced an early expression of this sentiment to Cao Pei 曹丕, who remarked, "When we look at the example of literary men of past and present they do not look after the details of their conduct, and few would be able to make their way because of [good] name or [adherence to] principles."⁴ Liu Xie's own discussion closely parallels that of Yan. After the list of writers whom he criticizes, all but one of whom appear in Yan's more extensive list, Liu says writers are not alone in this and he then listed a number of high generals and chancellors who might also be criticized. His rationalization then is that if such eminent men had faults, how much less surprise should there be that men in humbler circumstances would also have faults. Personal criticism, too, is

thought; "A Classified Guide to the Thirteen Classes of Chinese Prose," *BSOAS* 12 (1948), p. 770. Zhou Fagao 周法高 points to a similar formulation in *Wenxin diaolong* (SBCK edn.) 1, p. 5a, where the same five classics are named; *Yanshi jiaxun huizhu* 顏氏家訓彙注, Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo zhuanke 中央研究院歷史語言研究所專刊 41 (Taipei, 1960; hereafter, *YSJX*), p. 52b.

² According to Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong* 1, p. 7b, this phrase was first used by Ban Gu 班固 in a preface to *Lisao*, also see Vincent Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 1983), p. 27: "Ch'ü Yüan was parading his talents and making an exhibition of himself."

³ On this same idea, see James F. Cahill, "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting," in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1960), pp. 123-30.

⁴ Liu, *Wenxin diaolong* 10, pp. 8b-9b; Shih, *Literary Mind*, pp. 264-66. Cao's remark is in *Wenxuan* (*Liuchen Wenxuan* 六臣文選; SBCK edn.) 42, p. 13a.

mitigated by the holding of high office, he says, implying that the writers in his list perhaps were more open to criticism because of their low status. Finally he cites a number of writers toward whom no such criticism has been directed.

Yan, on the other hand, is much more analytical and seeks to see in their writing some clue to their misfortune. Like Liu, he then lists a number of literary men who came to a bad end, briefly comments that even kings with literary talent were not necessarily praiseworthy rulers, and supplies a perfunctory list of men who were both talented and who had led exemplary lives, but adds that these were few in comparison. He then comments that one sees in the life of those who came to bad ends a flaunting of the individual and a lack of reticence. His conclusion is that their success in literature went to their heads, and that this led to their lack of control and subsequent loss of the prudence necessary to survive. At the end of the section he lists a few names of men who were famous for their literature and yet had avoided catastrophe.

The potential dangers that could derive from writing were to be avoided at all costs, and his advice to his sons then takes up how to approach writing. First of all, he cautions them, one should have a realistic appraisal of one's abilities, and if there is no talent, one should not even attempt to be a writer. He offers as a negative example an unnamed gentleman from Bing prefecture.

Recently in Bing 并 prefecture there was a person of gentle breeding who wrote what were laughable poetry and prose poems; and yet he made sport of and despised [the writings of] Xing [Shao] 邢邵, Wei [Shou] 魏收 and various other notables.⁵ Everyone jeered and made fun [of his poetry] but they pretended to praise and speak of it to each other. Further, he slaughtered oxen and strained wine to lure [those of] fame and reputation. His wife was an intelligent and perceptive woman; she wept and remonstrated with him but this man would sigh and say, "If one's flowering talent is not admitted by one's own wife, how much more so

will this be the case with passerbys (i.e., outsiders)." Until his death he did not realize [any of this]. To be self-aware is to be intelligent,⁶ but it is certainly difficult.⁷

Yan then applies his usual good sense to this problem and offers solid advice. He cautions that one should submit one's writings to others for advice and criticism, that one avoid dogmatism, accept advice, and be satisfied with a modicum of success, for the number of works of great worth in the history of literature are very few. "But if one does not go amiss in one's style, and the wording and intention are both worth looking at, then one can be termed a talented gentle. If one wants [one's work] to move the world and overshadow the age, then one must wait until the [Yellow] River flows clear."⁸

Yan then turns his attention to literary craft and the care that it requires. His approach is summed up in his use of the simile, that "in general, creating literary compositions is like a man mounting a spirited horse; although it has an unfettered spirit, one ought to use a bit and bridle to control it, and not allow it to run wild on the course. If one were to let it have its head it would pile up in the ditch."⁹ That is to say, control is essential.

Yan begins by using anthropomorphic analogies to explain the structure of literary composition:¹⁰

⁵ For this phrase, Zhao Ximing 趙曦明 (1705–1787), as cited in *YSJX*, p. 56b, refers to the *Daodejing* 道德經, chapter 33: 自知者明; Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 184: "To understand oneself is to be illumined." Also interesting is *Daodejing*, chapter 24: 自見者不明; *ibid.*, p. 173: "He who does his own looking sees little." Perhaps better is D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 81, "He who shows himself is not conspicuous." At any rate, the term 自見 did not have the meaning in *Daodejing* that Yan uses. Wang Shumin 王叔岷, "Yanshi jiaxun jiaozhu" 駁注, in *Dept. of Chinese, U. of Hong Kong, comp., Xianggang daxue wushi zhounian jinian lunwenji* 香港大學五十週年紀念論文集 (Hong Kong: Deluxe Printing Co., 1964) 1, p. 91, points to a quotation of *Daodejing* in Zhao Rui 趙蕤, *Changduanjing* 長短經, "內視之謂明," that no longer appears in modern editions, and the same passage in *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959) 68, p. 2233. Yan has obviously paraphrased the statement using 自見 in a way not current in earlier periods, that is to say, "to see oneself [as others see one]."

⁷ *YSJX*, p. 56b [237]; here and below, the page number in brackets refers to the edn. of Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980); the same pagination is used in the Taiwan rpt. by Mingwen shuju, 1982.

⁸ *YSJX*, p. 57a [239].

⁹ *YSJX*, p. 58b [248]. The term *guizhu* 軌躅 ("course") may mean literally the "track or mark of vehicles," as it is defined by Liu Liang 劉良, commenting on a *fu* of Zuo Si 左思, *Wenxuan* 4, p. 27a. The term may also mean the precedent or example set by a worthy of the past. By using this term, Yan was able to give additional effect to his simile.

¹⁰ *YSJX*, p. 59a [250]. Compare this with the formula proffered by Liu, *Wenxin diaolong*, section 43, j. 9, p. 46. I quote Shih, *Literary Mind*, p. 226: "It consists of feeling and ideas 情志 as the soul, of facts and meaning 事義 as the bone and marrow, of linguistic patterns 辭采

⁵ Xing Shao, cognomen Zicai 子才, has biographies in *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 36, pp. 475–79, and *Beishi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 43, pp. 1588–93. He was ranked with Wen Zisheng 溫子昇 as the best scholar of the state, and died during the latter part of the Northern Qi dynasty. Wei Shou, cognomen Boqi 伯起, has biographies in *Bei Qi shu* 37, pp. 483–95, and *Beishi* 56, pp. 2023–39. One of the outstanding literati of Northern Qi, he was also an important official and compiled many of the state documents during his stay in office, as well as writing *Weishu* 魏書. The writings of these two men were highly considered by their contemporaries, and their names were joined for this reason; see *Bei Qi shu* 36, p. 478.

meaning	<i>lizhi</i> 理志	heart
rhythm	<i>qidiao</i> 氣調	sinews and bones
facts	<i>shiyi</i> 事義	skin
flowery ornamentation	<i>huali</i> 華麗	crowning cap

Here his chief complaint is that writers in his time emphasized the non-essential, and thus the meaning, or significance (heart), suffers. Display and show reign rampant at the cost of losing the point, and his hope is that someone with outstanding talent and fame will lead the way to reform these excesses.

While Yan complained about the contemporary state of affairs in literature, he was not urging a return to a golden age of the past. On the contrary, he is equally critical of earlier shortcomings. In his opinion,

In the literature of men of the past, there was vast talent and an unfettered spirit, while the form and manner leave contemporary times far behind. But their sewing and basting were coarse and simple; they did not yet make a fine and delicate [stitch]. Our modern musical pitch is harmonious and euphonious, the paragraphs and sentences are in paired apposition, our taboos and avoidances fine and detailed, much more excellent than in bygone days. One ought to use the old structure as the root and the modern phraseology and rhymes as the branches. Both must be preserved; neither can be especially favored or discarded.¹¹

This leads to a discussion of bygone writers, including his father, whose collected writings had been lost to fire.¹² More interesting to us is Yan's discussion of what we might call literary cliques in his time, centering on the dispute between the champions of Shen Yue 沈約, on the one hand, and Ren Fang 任昉, on the other.¹³

Xing Shao and Wei Shou, eminent men at the court of the Northern

as the musculature and integument, and... the resonance of the language 宮商 as its voice and breath." Basically the same four elements are included in both lists, but the image is carried out differently. Liu had made the choice of phrasing a part of the basic structure, but Yan, by making it the cap of the piece, would seem to give this aspect less weight.

¹¹ *YSJX*, p. 59a [250].

¹² *YSJX*, pp. 59a-b [251].

¹³ *YSJX*, p. 60a [254]; this passage has been translated in full by Richard Mather, *The Poet Shen Yueh* (441-513): *The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), pp. 61-62. Shen Yue, cognomen Xiuwen 休文 (441-513) has biographies in *Liangshu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973) 13, p. 232-44 and *Nanshi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975) 57, p. 1493-14. He was a prolific writer, author of *Songshu* 宋書, and the person who first adequately ascribed the rules of tonal prosody. Ren Fang, cognomen Yansheng 彥昇 (460-508), has biographies in *Liangshu* 14, pp. 251-18 and *Nanshi* 59, pp. 1452-59.

Qi who set the standards for the practices of the time, turned out to be in opposite camps, one the champion of Shen Yue's poetry and the other, that of Ren Fang. This of course created poetic factionalism in the Northern Qi capital, where Yan served as a high official. Zu Ting 祖珽, a controversial chief minister, then told Yan that the qualities, good and bad, of Xing and Wei were paralleled in the writing of Ren Fang and Shen Yue. Aside from what those parallels might be and how they might increase our understanding of poetic principles of the time, there may well have been political rivalries involved, beyond those of literary taste. Unfortunately, Yan does not follow up this topic.¹⁴

Having spoken in rather general terms, Yan now takes up specific faults that are to be avoided in one's writings. After all, the purpose of his *Yanshi jiaxun* was to give advice to his sons. Here, Yan clearly focuses on the structural and linguistic aspects of writing, and not the more literary ones of prosody, mood, poetic vision, and so forth, for Yan was not a professional critic, nor a distinguished poet himself.¹⁵ Rather, he was a literatus, one whose writing was competent certainly, and who could be expected to turn out what was to be expected of someone of his standing; and so we gain from his comments a sense of the standards by which educated people of his time judged literature.

Many of his points stem from a fine sensitivity to the duties and sentiments concerned with filial piety. The Six Dynasties was a period in which the observance of filial piety reached almost a feverish pitch. Just the reading of the *Xiaojing* 孝經 came to be thought of as a cure for illness. Yan was

¹⁴ Cao Daoheng 曹道衡 has contributed to such a study; "Lun Ren Fang zai wenxue shi shang di diwei" 論任昉在文學史上的地位, in Deng Shiliang 鄧仕樸 et al., eds., *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue lunji* 魏晉南北朝文學論集 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1994), pp. 607-22. He writes that Ren Fang's poetry has been criticized for its excessive use of literary allusions and for being out of step with the aesthetic developments in the poetry of his time, but that his strength was in his prose, a form of writing, especially when put to practical use, that was not given serious enough consideration in the critical evaluations of later times. (I wish to thank Prof. Cynthia Chennault for referring this essay to me.)

According to Wei Shou's biography, *Bei Qi shu* 37, p. 492, the antipathy between Wei and Xing was a more general one, and the advocacy of Ren or Shen only a part of that struggle. Each accused the other of plagiarizing the earlier writer that he championed. That account goes on to say that Yan asked Zu Ting about the quarrel and the gist of Zu's answer is pretty much as Yan wrote it, but the sequence and some wording is different. There it says, "When we look at the good and bad [aspects] of Xing and Wei, they are the points of excellence and inferiority of Ren and Shen." Despite the difference in wording, Yan's text is probably the source of the anecdote. The controversy was also mentioned by Alexander Soper, "South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist Art of the Six Dynasties Period," *BMFEA* 32 (1960), p. 87.

¹⁵ His few extant poems have been translated in Albert E. Dien, *Pei Ch'ü shu* 45: *Biography of Yen Chih-t'ui*, Würzburg Sino-Japonica 6 (Bern, Frankfurt and Munich: Peter Lang, 1976), pp. 19-22.

critical of the lengths to which some went, mentioning one man who became a laughing stock when it was discovered that the sores on his face, which he claimed were from weeping at the death of a parent, and by which he achieved some social standing, were in fact self-inflicted by means of scoring his face with a castor bean.¹⁶ When we review some of Yan's examples of literary transgression of filial piety, we may feel that he was overly sensitive about the issue.

Yan's first category is the careless choice of topics and use of terms. For example, the *pojing* 破鏡 is an animal that eats its father, and so it was a poor choice as a theme of a *fu* by Wu Jun 吳均.¹⁷ Yet, the owl eats its mother, and Yan did not complain about the piece on that theme by the Duke of Zhou in the *Shijing* 詩經. To take another example, the phrase "respectfully the same 敬同" occurs in the *Xiaojing* 孝經 in reference to one's father, and so it should not be loosely used in the titles of poems that were being written to harmonize with someone else's poem.¹⁸ The last of this category must surely be considered rather trivial, and Yan may have cited them with tongue in cheek.

During the Liang period a poem by Fei Chang 費昶 said, "I do not know whether it is or is not 不知是耶非."¹⁹

Here, "ye" 耶 is a homonym of "ye" 爺 (father), and by introducing a pun, the line may be read, "I do not know if it is father or not." Yan continues:

A poem of Yin Yun's said, "Bobbing about in the cloud-mother (*yunmu*; that is, mica) boat." [The emperor] Jianwen said, "Chang did not recognize his father and Yun moreover set his mother bobbing."²⁰

During the Six Dynasties period the use of *fanqie* 反切, or dimidiative spelling, was developed in order to indicate pronunciation. Two graphs, A

¹⁶ *YSJX*, p. 67a; Teng Su-yü, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 110.

¹⁷ *YSJX*, pp. 60a-b [250]. Wu Jun, cognomen Shuxiang 叔庠 (469-520), has a biography in *Liangshu* 49, pp. 698-99, and *Nanshi* 72, pp. 1780-1. He wrote in a factual and antique style, which attracted a number of imitators. His collected works are listed under one title (twenty *juan*) in *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973) 35, p. 1077.

¹⁸ *YSJX*, p. 60b [255].

¹⁹ Fei Chang, a man of Jiangxia 江夏, near the modern Wuchang 武昌 in Hubei, is briefly mentioned in *Nanshi* 72, p. 1783, as one skilled in writing *yuefu*. Emperor Wu of the Liang once admired and praised a marching song that he wrote.

²⁰ *YSJX*, p. 60b [255-56]. Yin Yun 殷璠 has no biography in the standard histories. Lu Wenchao 盧文昭 (1717-1796) suspected that the person meant was Yin Yun 芸, (471-529), who has biographies in *Liangshu* 41, p. 596, and *Nanshi* 60, p. 1489. He wrote a poem recorded in Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711) et al., *Gushiji* 古詩紀 (Wenshutang cangban 文樞

and B, were necessary to "spell" C: the initial of A and the final, with tone, of B were joined, indicating the pronunciation of C. Yan warns against placing two graphs together whose *fanqie* combination might be seen to be a subtext. For an example, Yan drew on *Jinlouzi* 金樓子, a work by his former patron Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (emperor Xiaoyuan 孝元 of the Liang; r. 552-554) that mentions a certain writer's use of the *Shijing* phrase "beating the drums (*fagu* 伐鼓)," since it could be read as the dimidiative spelling of *fu* 父 "father." Yan has already made it clear that this would fall under the category of a careless use of terms, and one should avoid such expressions.²¹

According to Yan, a further area of caution was in alluding to earlier works in inappropriate contexts, for one needed to be sensitive to the issue of the death of one's parents or elders.

It would be a great error if when facing north to serve one's parents [there were a recitation of] the chant of "Weiyang 渭陽" penned on parting from a maternal uncle,²² or when in the courtyard caring for one's elders [there were reference to] the grief broadcast at Huanshan 桓山 when a brother was sent away,²³ I but raise this one corner; treading this road, you ought to be careful.²⁴

堂藏版, n.d.) 100, p. 12a, but it does not have the line in question. The mica boat of course was one decorated with mica. Zhao's commentary to this line, *YSJX*, p. 60b, mentions that *Chuxueji* 初學記 by Xu Jian 徐堅 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 25, p. 610, quotes *Jin gonggeji* 晉宮閣記, which mentions such a vessel. Zhou (*YSJX*, p. 60b) cites *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (SBCK edn.) 769, p. 4b, which in turn quotes Wang Zinian's 王子年 [Wang Jia 嘉 (4th c.)] *Shiyiji* 拾遺記, which described the emperor Cheng 成 of the Han as sporting with such a boat. The emperor Jianwen 簡文 was Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551), who was made heir to the Liang throne in 531 but reigned as emperor for only the last year of his life. This example of his witty criticism was cited by John Marney, *Liang Chien-wen Ti* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp. 70-71.

²¹ *YSJX*, p. 60b [255-56]. *Jinlouzi* (SKQS zhenben edn.) 6, p. 11b, cited a poem by Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414?-466) (*Wenxuan* 22, p. 24a, and *Bao shi ji* 鮑氏集 [SBCK edn.] 5, p. 4b). For the locus classicus, see *Shijing* (SSJZS edn.) 10.2, p. 11b; trans. James Legge, *She King* ([Hong Kong], n.d.), p. 287.

Kūkai 空海 (774-835), *Bunkyo hifuron* 文鏡秘府論, also concurs that *fagu* is an example with an unfortunate dimidiative spelling, but he provides the explanation given by Cui Yong 崔融 (653-706) (probably in Cui's *Tangchao xinding shige* 唐朝新定詩格) that the result could be read as *fugu* 腐骨 "rotting bones." See Konishi Jinichi 小西甚一, *Bunkyo hifuronkô* 考 (Tokyo: Dai Nihon yûbenkai kôdansha, 1953) 3, p. 145. Zhou Fagao, however, thinks that such a reading is excessive, for while the reading *b'iwat* + *kuo* > *b'uo* 腐 *b'iu* and the reverse, *kuo* + *b'iwat* > *kiwat*, standing for 骨 *kuat* are evidently close enough for the Six Dynasties period, the other examples given in *Jinlouzi*, as well as the context of the discussion by Yan, are meant to indicate the reading of 父 *b'iu*, another example of an unfilial reference.

²² *Shijing* ("Lesser Preface") 6.4, p. 10a.

²³ *Kongzi jiatyu* 孔子家語 (SBCK edn.) 5, p. 2a.

²⁴ *YSJX*, pp. 61a-b [256].

The poem "Weiyang" was written by duke Kang 康 after he had accompanied his maternal cousin, the future duke Wen 文 of Jin, to the borders of Jin. The sight of the cousin, referred to in the poem as *jiu shi* 舅氏, that is, of the family of the maternal uncle, brought to mind his dead mother. The poem therefore has the special connotation of the death of this parent.²⁵ For Huanshan, it is said that Yan Hui 顏回, a disciple of Confucius, on hearing the sounds of weeping, said such sounds were produced by separation with the living and he referred to an incident he had witnessed at Huanshan where a mother bird had made sounds of grief as its young left the nest. On inquiry, it was discovered that to pay for the funeral of his father, a man was selling one of his sons.²⁶

Another area warranting caution was writing a piece in the voice of another. While references to parents were meant to be the parents of those for whom the piece was written, still these were one's own words, and so ought to be subject to those same feelings and emotions mentioned above.

In general when substituting for another to compose a text everyone writes as if it were that person's words. That is reasonable and proper. But coming to phrases of sorrow, injury or evil misfortune, one should not hastily act as a substitute.²⁷

One of the examples cited by Yan came from Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), who once wrote on behalf of Hu Jinying 胡金盈 a Report to the Spirit on the occasion of the death of Hu's mother; the recitative portion said, "I grieve my mother's not being immortal... Why has she abandoned us and died so early."²⁸ Yan concluded that there were many such examples of authors applying to others emotions that should be reserved for one's own parents, since that which the ancients practised was to be avoided in, as he said, "our modern age."

²⁵ Zhou's commentary at *YSJX*, p. 61a, refers to an anecdote in *Bei Qi shu* 34, p. 453, in which Yang Yin 楊愔, as a boy who had already lost his mother, when asked by his maternal uncle if he had yet studied "Weiyang," burst into tears.

²⁶ Yan seems to have interpreted the person sold into slavery as the son of the deceased rather than his grandson.

²⁷ *YSJX*, p. 61b [260].

²⁸ Cai Yong, cognomen Bojie 伯喈, was a famous and influential writer of his time; his biography is in *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965) 60B, pp. 1979-2007. Hu Jinying was the daughter of Hu Guang 胡廣 (91-172), who has a biography in *Hou Hanshu* 44, pp. 1504-12. The passage cited is found *Cai Zhonglang wenji* 蔡中郎文集 (SBCK edn.) 4, pp. 10a-11b. For a more readable text, see Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843), comp., *Quan Han Han wen* 全後漢文, in idem, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1958) 79, pp. 3a-4a (p. 897); the phrase in question is in the first line of p. 4a. In place of *ran* 然 the original text has *hu* 胡 "how, why."

Another sort of error was the incorrect use of attributes, for example, Cao Zhi's 曹植 elegy on the death of his father, which made much of the idea of "eternal hibernation,"²⁹ or Pan Yue's 潘岳 "Prose-Poem on Grief over a Loss" (the death of his wife), expressing sorrow over the traces of perspiration from a hand.³⁰ The problem was that the one compared a father to an insect, and the other paired a wife with one's deceased father.

The significance of Yan's comments can only be understood in the context of the heightened, even exaggerated, sensitivity in matters relating to filial piety during the Six Dynasties period. Of even greater consequence in Yan's day was to apply to lesser persons language formerly related to emperors. For example, Pan Ni's 潘尼 "A Poem Presented to Lu Jingxuan" said, "The fifth nine; we think of the flying dragon."³¹ In the *Yijing* 易經, the fifth undivided line of a hexagram (*jiu wu* 九五) is defined as *yang* and represented by the number nine. Such a line in the "Qian 乾" hexagram of the *Yijing* reads: "A flying dragon in the sky; it is advantageous to meet a great man 飛龍在天利見大人." From this line, *jiu wu* became an allusion generally to the position of ruler, and the "flying dragon" has been taken to refer to the appearance of a sage who is to become emperor. Thus the line becomes inappropriate if addressed to an ordinary man. Yan concludes

²⁹ *YSJX*, p. 62a [261]. Cao Zhi, prince of Chen 陳, posthumously Si 思 (192-232), has a biography in *Sanguozhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979) 19, pp. 557-77. The piece is found in *Cao Zijian ji* 曹子建集 (SBCK edn.) 9, pp. 18b-20b, and Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1960) 13, pp. 1a-2a. The line in question (9, p. 20b) is 潘闕一篇尊靈永蟄 "The inner door once shut, may the venerable spirit eternally hibernate." This was a well-known gaffe. *Wenxin diaolong*, section 41, 9, p. 1a, said this use of the word suggests an insect and to make such a remark in reference to one so venerated constitutes a flaw in Cao Zhi's writing. See also Shih, *Literary Mind*, p. 217, where a line has unfortunately been dropped. Xiao Yi's *Jinlouzi* (see n. 21, above) 4, p. 13a, made the same comment without reference to *Wenxin diaolong*, which certainly must have precedence, and ended the passage by saying, "Is it not laughable?"

³⁰ *YSJX*, p. 62a [261]. Pan Yue (d. 300), a famous literatus of the Jin, has a biography in *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974) 55, pp. 1500-7. The *fu*, which is about a wife he has lost, is found in *Pan Huangmen ji* 潘黃門集, in Zhang Pu 張溥 (1602-41), ed., *Han Wei Liuchao bailsan jiaji* 漢魏六朝百三家集 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1963), pp. 26a-b. *Wenxin diaolong*, section 41, 9, p. 1b, criticizes his reference to being moved by traces of saliva when he grieves for a wife's brother. However, He Yixing 郝懿行, as cited by Zhou, *YSJX*, p. 62a, noted that neither the reference to the perspiration from the hands nor to saliva are to be found at present in Pan's collected writings. As Liu Xie adds, the passage about such traces in *Li ji* 禮記 (SSJZS edn.) 30, p. 20b, refers to one's parents and Pan has applied this emotional response to a person of less exalted rank.

³¹ *YSJX*, p. 62a [261]. Pan Ni, cognomen Zhengshu 正叔, has a biography in *Jinshu* 55, pp. 1507-16. Lu Jingxuan 盧景宣 has no biography in the standard histories. It could not possibly be Lu Bian 盧辯, whose cognomen was Jingxuan, for Pan Ni died in 311 and Lu Bian lived in the sixth century. The poem is found in *Pan Taichang ji* 潘太叔集, p. 30a, in *Han Wei liuchao bailsan jiaji*, but the line cited by Yan is no longer included.

such examples by saying, "Any who would use such words today would be an offender in the eyes of the court."³²

Yan was a stickler for accuracy and precision, and he drilled his children on this. It is thus very natural for him to turn his attention to the careless use of allusions – errors that in his opinion detracted from the value of the work. He introduced this topic by saying it was a fault of long standing, but since some texts had not survived, he does not dare to discuss those for which there is inadequate evidence. I will mention only two of his examples, those that he said are clearly in error.

The *Odes* says, "Greatly cherishing are one's brothers" 孔懷兄弟. *Kong* means "greatly," *huai* "to think of," and the line means one is thinking of another a great deal.³³ Lu Ji 陸機, in his letter to Matron Gu 顧 of Changsha, when he told of the death of Shihuang 士璜, his paternal second cousin,³⁴ then said, "It pained my heart and plucked at my brain 痛心拔腦, it was as if he were a 'greatly cherished [one]' 有如孔懷."

When one's heart is pained it then means that the matter is deep in one's thoughts; for what reason does he say "it is like" (making *konghuai* a noun). Looking at its meaning as he used it, then it would be to call one's sibling brothers the "greatly cherished ones" [which would be an error].³⁵

The *Monograph on Curious Objects* (*Yiwuzhi* 異物志) says: "The *yongjian* 擁劍 (literally, 'holding a sword') has a shape like a crab, but one nipper is flat and large." He Sun's 何遜 poem says, "The fish leaps as if it were

³² *YSJX*, p. 62b [261]. For the quotation from the Qian hexagram, see *Yijing* (SSJZS edn.) 1, p. 5a.

³³ *Shijing* 9.2, p. 13b: 兄弟孔懷. Legge, *She King*, p. 251, translates the couplet: "On the dreaded occasions of death and burial, it is brothers who greatly sympathize." *Kong* 孔 in the meaning of *shen* 甚 appears in *Erya* 爾雅 (SSJZS edn.) 3, p. 14a.

³⁴ Lu Ji (261–303) has a biography in *Jinshu* 54, pp. 1467–81. There is no record of who this cousin might have been. *Jinshu* 77, pp. 2023–24 gives the names of two, Lu Ye 曄, cognomen Shiguang 士光 and Lu Wan 玩, cognomen Shiyao 士瑤. These two men had four more brothers (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975] 73B, p. 2968), whose cognomens are not known. There is also no indication who the woman named Gu of Changsha 長沙 may have been; *Taiping yulan* 695, p. 3a, cites a line from a letter by Lu to the *furen* 夫人 of Changsha; see also *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文 97, p. 11a, in Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*.

³⁵ *YSJX*, pp. 63a–b [266–67]. Yan's point is that *kong huai* is descriptive of the relationship between brothers, and it is wrong to use it as a term for brothers. Zhou, *YSJX*, p. 63b, cites an example of the use of *kong huai* in Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 (Tang), *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林 (Guyi congshu 古逸叢書 edn.) 691, p. 8b, "to be envious toward a younger brother and willing to do any evil is to destroy the feelings of 'great cherishment.'" This use, however, would be fully approved of by Yan. A more appropriate example to illustrate this error is that of Wang, "Yanshi jiaxun jiaozhu," p. 95, and is taken from *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (T edn., no. 2102), vol. 52, j. 11, p. 75c, where *kong huai* is used parallel to *jiu zu* 九族.

holding a sword." This is to confuse fish with crabs.³⁶

Other errors to which Yan has reference are the errors of graphs, such as *wu* 烏 used for *niao* 鳥, and *yin* 銀 for *lang* 銀.³⁷

By now Yan has passed beyond filial piety and is concerned with correctness in drawing on the enormous corpus of literature available to writers of his day. Related to the above are errors in geography, for the sake of enhancing the mood of the poem, or simply piling on exotic names, despite their inappropriateness.

For example, "Grand Protector of Yanmen Ode"³⁸ by Xiao Gang, the emperor Jianwen of Liang, reads,

鵝軍攻日逐	Goose troops ³⁹ attack Rizhu, ⁴⁰
燕騎蕩康居	The cavalry of Yan ⁴¹ lay waste to Sogdiana; ⁴²
大宛歸善馬	Ferghana sends back excellent steeds, ⁴³
小月送降書	The Little Yue bring a letter of surrender. ⁴⁴

³⁶ *YSJX*, p. 63b [267]. *Yiwu zhi* was compiled by Yang Fu 楊孚 (Han). A Qing recension is included in *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), but this item is not included. He Sun, cognomen Zhongyan 仲言, has a biography in *Liangshu* 49, p. 693, and *Nanshi* 33, p. 871. The line as it appears in *Gushiji* 93, p. 12a, differs slightly, reading 魚遊若擁劍.

³⁷ *YSJX*, p. 63b [267], and p. 64a [267], respectively.

³⁸ Two *yuefu* with the title mentioned by Yan are attributed to Xiao Gang in Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (Song), *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979) 39, pp. 574–75, but it is another, said to be by Chu Xiang 褚翔 (505–548), that contains the lines cited by Yan; *ibid.* 39, p. 575. The only difference is that for *ejun* 鵝軍 Chu's poem has *rongche* 戎車. *Gushiji* 102, p. 11b, assigns the poem to Chu Xiang with no note of any problem of attribution. *Yiwu lei ju* 42, p. 6a, credits Xiao Gang, but it is a shortened version without the lines criticized by Yan. On the basis of parallelism, *ejun* suits 燕騎 better than does *rongche*, and one might surmise that two poems have become mixed at this point. However, the rhyme *-iwo* runs through the whole, lessening the chances of that possibility.

Yanmen 雁門 commandery was a border outpost north of Dai 代 in Shanxi near the Yanmen Pass.

³⁹ The term Goose Troops, *ejun*, derives from *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zhao 21) (SSJZS edn.) 50, p. 8a, which mentions two battle formations, one the "Crane" and the other the "Goose"; see James Legge, *Ch'un-t'w with the Tso Chuen* (Hong Kong, preface dated 1872), p. 689.

⁴⁰ The Rizhu 日逐 prince was a high rank in the Xiongnu hierarchy given to the younger relatives of the ruler; see *Hou Hanshu* 89, pp. 2944–45, for a complete list of the titles.

⁴¹ The cavalry of Yan is an allusion to *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (SBCK edn.) 9, p. 2b, where Su Qin 蘇秦, in outlining the military resources of Yan, includes 6,000 cavalry.

⁴² For Kangju 康居, Sogdiana, see Edouard Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue Occidentaux* (St. Petersburg: Academie des Sciences, 1900), pp. 132–47.

⁴³ For Ferghana, Dayuan 大宛, and the "blood-sweating" horses, see Homer Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1941) 2, pp. 132–35. These refer to the horses brought back by Li Guangli 李廣利 in 101 BC.

⁴⁴ *YSJX*, p. 64a [271]. The Little Yue 小月 were a portion of the Yuezhi 月氏 who broke

As is clear from these lines, places and periods were mixed together in a heavy dose of foreign and border names and peoples, a collage Yan rejected. The poet had been interested only in the exotic effect and the contrast between the last two lines: "I have sent word to my mate in the women's quarters, Do not repine at the emptiness of the cold bed." But as Yan warns, "This is like the flaw in a bright pearl or a blemish in a piece of beautiful jade. One ought to be careful of it."⁴⁵

This last begins to sound rather pedantic: does one really expect a poem to reflect geographical accuracy when that gets in the way of the mood of the poem? Perhaps Yan, himself, felt he had gone far enough in this direction, and that his children had gotten the point, because he next changed course entirely, and began discussing what he rated as excellent pieces. What one notices here is that Yan's criteria of excellence are feeling and emotional impact, and that they do not lend themselves to the kind of explicit rules with which he dealt up to this point. But what does come through here is Yan's sensitivity to the beauty of the literature, and his impatience with what he felt was carping criticism.

Wang Ji's 王籍 "Poem on Entering Ruoye Stream" says, "The cicada chirps, The woods are even quieter 蟬噪林逾靜, / The bird sings, the mountain is more gloomy 鳥鳴山更幽."⁴⁶ That is to say, such sounds only emphasized the stillness and gloom. The poem was considered superb by southern connoisseurs, emperors Jianwen and Xiaoyuan being especially taken by it. But in the north, it was felt by some "not to consist of [sensible] language; how does it serve [to demonstrate] ability?" Yan then continued, "The *Odes* says, 'The sound came of the horses neighing, Slowly moved the standards and banners.' The Mao commentary says, 'It speaks of there not being any shouting or hubbub.' I always sigh over the emotional range of this explanation. Ji's poem came from just this notion."⁴⁷

off from the main body during their trek westward, ca. 138-126 BC; *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962) 96A, p. 389r. See also W. W. Tarn, *Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1957), p. 289, for speculation as to their eventual fate. I know of no letter of submission.

⁴⁵ *YSJX*, p. 64a [271]. For the two lines, see *Yuefu shiji*, p. 575.

⁴⁶ *YSJX*, p. 64b [273]. Wang Ji, cognomen Wenhai 文海, has biographies in *Liangshu* 50, p. 713, and *Nanshi* 21, pp. 580-81. As Zhao, cited in *YSJX*, p. 64b, points out, these lines are quoted in his biographies. The poem was written while he was on Hsiao Yi's staff in Kuaiji 會稽 sometime between 514 and 526. The poem as a whole is found in *Gushiji* 96, p. 1b.

⁴⁷ *YSJX*, p. 64b [273]. The poem and commentary are in *Shijing* 10.3, p. 6a; Legge, *She King*, p. 290. The scene is of a large-scale hunt. Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 288, translates: "Subdued, the horses whining; Gently the banners wave." Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities,

In another case, Yan mentions lines of Xiao Que's 蕭愨 autumn poem: "The hibiscus droops beneath the dew 芙蓉露下落, / The willow tree is spread out against the moon 楊柳月中疏."⁴⁸ Yan said these lines did not meet with universal approval, though he mentions some who did like them. For example, Lu Sidao 廬思道, a northern scholar, and his group did not consider the poem elegant enough. He himself "loved its quiet and relaxed air as if [the scene] were before one's eyes."⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

There are not many critiques of Six Dynasties literature that have survived, and so, especially given its length and detail, Yan's chapter is an important source of information concerning the literary ambiance of that time. It has been treated by a number of scholars who have written on Six Dynasties literature, but in general, they see its importance chiefly as representative of a regional school or for its possible influence on subsequent developments.

Luo Genze 羅根澤, for example, emphasized Yan's criticism of the frivolity and superficial poetry of his time, and saw in Yan's emphasis on character and moral conduct an example of the "northern school" as contrasted with that of the south.⁵⁰ And yet, as we have seen, Yan was a northerner only very tenuously, his family having been in the south for eight generations, and the main emphasis in his chapter is not so much moral character as it is sobriety and care in the use of language.

Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 said that Yan's prescription to cure the ills of the literature of his time, to combine the structure of the past with the modern wording and rhymes, had no influence on the change from the parallel style to that of *sanwen* 散文 or prose, but his views were a harbinger of the direction in which Tang poetry developed.⁵¹

1950), p. 123-24: "(Whistling=) with light whinnies the horses neigh; long-trailing are the pennons and banners."

⁴⁸ As Zhao remarks, given in *YSJX*, p. 64b, the same lines are given in an addendum to Xiao Que's biography in *Bei Qishu*, 45, p. 628, followed by the comment that it was appreciated by those who understood sonority 知音. In *Gushiji* 120, pp. 17a-b, the title of the piece is given as "Thoughts in Autumn" 秋思. This was cited by Wang, "Yanshi jiaxun jiaozhu," p. 95.

⁴⁹ Wang, "Yanshi jiaxun jiaozhu," p. 95, cites Xu Yi 許顛 (Song), *Yanzhou shihua* 彦周詩話, who claimed that the level of workmanship of these lines was never again achieved. Lu Sidao has biographies in *Suishu* 57, pp. 1397-1404, and *Beishi* 30, pp. 1075-77.

⁵⁰ *Han Wei Liuchao wenxue piping shi* 漢魏六朝文學批評史 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946), pp. 122-25.

⁵¹ *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947), pp. 170-73.

On the other hand, Chen Zhongfan 陳鍾凡 suggested that the "Return to the Ancients" movement 復古運動 had its origin in the dissatisfaction of northerners with the superficiality and ornateness of southern literature and that Yan's writings were the first manifestation of this movement.⁵²

In all these cases, selected passages in Yan's chapter were cited, but the totality of the chapter was not brought to the attention of the reader. The Japanese scholar Hayashida Shinnosuke 林田慎之助, on the other hand, has made this chapter the focus of a detailed study, seeking the sources of Yan's views on literature and, rather than finding them in the "northern mental climate," he cites the moral bent derived from a tradition in Yan's family combined with the tragic experiences he underwent. Hayashida concludes that Yan's wish for a refined literature in which there was a harmonious synthesis of ethics and aesthetics, as Hayashida puts it, and his criticism of contemporary literature for lacking that balance, in some sense, foretold the efflorescence of Tang literature.⁵³

The studies by these distinguished scholars offer valuable insight into the literary developments of that period, but as a historian, rather than a literary critic, I would prefer more substantiation of Yan's role in these developments. For example, did Han Yu 韓愈, the central figure in the Return to the Ancients movement, cite Yan's development on his own thinking? Setting aside later developments in Chinese literature, what we see in Yan's chapter on literature are the views of a learned member of the elite *shi* 士 and an active participant in the literary activities of the time. Because these were the views of Yan himself, then in order to evaluate them we need to look at how they reflect Yan's character.

My own reading of this chapter leads me to conclusions close to those of Hayashida, although I would perhaps emphasize more the political climate in which Yan lived, combined with his own personal struggle to overcome what he saw as deficiencies in his character. Yan was orphaned at an early age and raised by his older siblings. He later blamed the faults he found in his own character on the indulgent way in which they raised him, and he used the metaphor of the grindstone to explain how he smoothed out his defects. As a young man he entered what promised to be a distinguished career, and in the opening lines of a poem in which he described that period, one can see the exuberance and optimism of youth:

⁵² *Han Wei Liuchao wenxue* 漢魏六朝文學 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1964), p. 117.

⁵³ "Gen Shisui no seikatsu to bungakukan" 顏之推の生活と文學觀, *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō*, 日本中國學會報 14 (1962), pp. 107-24.

十五好詩書	At fifteen I was fond of the <i>Odes</i> and [<i>Book of</i>] <i>Documents</i> ,
二十彈冠仕	At twenty I flicked [the dust from] the cap and [entered] service.
楚王賜顏色	The Prince of Ch'u presented me with [gifts which heightened my] service,
出入章華裡	And I went in and out the Zhanghua Terrace.
作賦凌屈原	In making rhymed-prose I aspired to surpass Qu Yuan,
讀書誇左史	In reading documents, I boasted of being better than the Scribe of the Left.
數從明月譙	Several times I partook of the banquets in the Bright Moon [Pavilion], ⁵⁴
或侍朝雲祀	And sometimes attended at the offerings in the Dawn-cloud [Temple].
登山摘紫芝	Ascending the mountains we plucked the purple fungus,
泛江採綠芷	Floating on the River, we picked the green iris.
歌舞未終曲	Singing and dancing, we had not yet ended the verse,
風塵暗天起	When wind and dust arose, darkening the Heavens.
吳師破九龍	The troops of Wu destroyed the [Imperial] Nine Dragon [Chariot],
秦兵割千里	And the troops of Qin hacked off a thousand li. ⁵⁵

The last lines refer to the abrupt and calamitous events brought on by Hou Jing's rebellion and the virtual collapse of the Liang.

Yan Zhitui's chapter on literature reflects the various themes of the *Yanshi jiaxun* as a whole: the importance of learning, attention to detail, and control of one's impulses. Thus the criteria that he brought to his cri-

⁵⁴ This refers to a pavilion in a garden built by Xiao Yi while stationed at Jiangling. See Yu Zhigu 余知古 (Tang), *Zhugong gushi* 諸宮故事, in *Shuofu* 說郛 (Wanweishan tang edn., 1646), vol. 17, p. 3b. Yan served on Yi's staff in 549-50 at the young age of nineteen. See Dien, *Pei Ch'i shu* 45, pp. 6-8. I wish to thank a reviewer of this article for pointing out that the term *mingyue* here was the name of the pavilion. That line in Yan's poem as translated by me in *Pei Ch'i shu* 45, p. 19, needs to be emended.

⁵⁵ For a full translation of this poem and explanatory notes, see Dien, *Pei Ch'i shu* 45, pp. 19-20, and notes.

tique of literature were very much shaped by his own experiences, and one may need to take care not to generalize too broadly about the acceptance of his views by his contemporaries. But, as we have seen in the lines of poetry that he cited with appreciation, there was still in his character the ability to respond with emotion and aesthetic appreciation.

From his writings, it is clear that Yan Zhitui was a cautious person all too familiar with the vagaries of life in an uncertain time. The purpose of his *Yanshi jiaxun* was to counsel his children how to maintain their favored status as potential candidates for official employment and to avoid sinking into the commoner class. For his children, as for Yan himself, social position and a career as a functionary depended as much on literary skills as on family background. It is no wonder then that Yan attached such importance to the subject of literary composition to the degree that he devoted a whole chapter to the subject. It may seem to some that Yan's comments on writing are narrowly focused and amount to little more than finicky nit-picking. But that is a judgment that ignores the context of his situation and the times in which he lived. For Yan and the greater majority of his peer group, these considerations were of much importance and could make or break one's career. Literature was at once a powerful and a dangerous tool. His approach to writing was of a pragmatic sort, founded on an appreciation of what one did or did not do in order to maintain one's credentials as a competent literatus, as someone able to hold one's own in circles where one was judged by one's literary skills. Viewed in this light, Yan's discussion, as with much of the rest of the contents of his *Jiaxun*, provides valuable insight into the life and thought of his times.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

YSJX *Yanshi jiaxun huizhu* 顏氏家訓彙注