Early Medieval Chinese Texts



A Bibliographical Guide

Edited by
Cynthia L. Chennault
Keith N. Knapp
Alan J. Berkowitz
Albert E. Dien

CHINA RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 71

CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Early Medieval Chinese Texts : a bibliographical guide / edited by Cynthia L. Chennault, Keith N. Knapp, Alan J. Berkowitz, Albert E. Dien.

pages cm. — (China Research Monograph; 71)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-55729-109-7 (alk. paper)

1. Chinese literature—221 B.C.–960 A.D.—Sources. 2. Chinese literature—Criticism, Textual. 3. China—Intellectual life—221 B.C.–960 A.D. I. Chennault, Cynthia Louise, editor of compilation. II. Knapp, Keith Nathaniel, editor of compilation. III. Berkowitz, Alan J., editor of compilation. IV. Dien, Albert E., editor of compilation.

PL2284.5.E27 2014

895.109'002—dc23

2014007573

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Cover design by Mindy Chen.

Cover image: Traditionally attributed to Yan Liben, Chinese, about 600–673, *Northern Qi scholars collating classic texts* (detail), Chinese, Northern Song dynasty, 11th century, ink and color on silk, overall: 28.5×731.2 cm ($11\ 1/4 \times 287\ 7/8$ in.), image: 27.5×114 cm ($10\ 13/16 \times 44\ 7/8$ in.), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Denman Waldo Ross Collection, 31.123.

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Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍

Introduction

The Wenxin diaolong by Liu Xie 劉勰 (fl. late fifth to early sixth century) is the most important early medieval work of literary theory, acclaimed for its deep understanding, elegant diction, and singularly comprehensive approach. The Wenxin diaolong addresses a broad scope of questions, from the lofty workings of the literary imagination down to the depths of typology, illustrated throughout by perceptive, critical references to a vast number of texts through the ages that reveal Liu Xie's outstanding erudition. Although the Wenxin diaolong had already been held in high regard since the Tang, its reputation soared in the course of the twentieth century. Today, it is widely quoted as an authoritative voice in studies on Chinese literature of all periods and genres, and it has inspired more research than any other Chinese treatise on literature, giving rise to the designation "Dragon studies" (long xue 龍學). The extensive scholarly interest in the Wenxin diaolong testifies not only to the text's magnitude and complexity but also to the philological and interpretative problems posed by the author's sophisticated and often arcane parallel prose.

Among the aspects of the text that elude definitive interpretation is its subtle and without doubt intentionally ambiguous title. The words wenxin diaolong are commonly understood to express the complementary relation, or balance, of the spirit and the craft of literature. However, the exact meaning of the title's two components as well as their syntactic relationship have been interpreted in manifold ways, such as "the literary mind and the carving of dragons," "the literary mind carves dragons," "carving a dragon at the core of literature," "carving the dragon of the literary mind," "literary creativity and ornate rhetoric," and so forth.

Details about Liu Xie's life come mainly from his brief biographies in *Liang shu*, q.v., 50:710–12, and *Nan shi*, q.v., 72:1781–82. Neither source is explicit regarding family status and the years of his birth and death. Nor can we find in the postface to the *Wenxin diaolong* information about when he completed this major work, which has led to an abundance of hypotheses.

It is generally assumed that Liu Xie, styled Yanhe 彥和, was born between 460 and 480 in Jingkou 京口 near Jiankang (present Nanjing) into a distinguished but impoverished family whose members had formerly served in high ranks. The family may have been distantly related to the reigning house of the Han dynasty. Orphaned at an early age, Liu was devoted to learning. He did not marry, but

depended on the eminent Buddhist monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518), who edited such important works as the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collected notes on the production of the *Tripiţika*) and *Hongming ji*, q.v. Liu stayed with Sengyou at the Dinglin 定林 Temple on Mount Zhong 鐘 north of Jiankang for more than a decade, assisting him with the cataloging and collation of Buddhist scriptures. There is no consensus as to whether Liu was still an impressionable boy when he entered the temple or was already a young man with a solid Confucian education. Nor do we know whether his motive was utilitarian or religious. Such questions are often discussed by critics in order to claim Liu for Confucianism and to deny that he held any genuine Buddhist beliefs. It is quite certain, however, that Liu became thoroughly familiar with Buddhist scriptures, teachings, and practice during this decade, if not earlier. Like many of his contemporaries, he obviously did not assume the incompatibility of Confucianism and Buddhism.

Structure and arrangement of the text

The Wenxin diaolong is unusually extensive for a text of literary thought. Containing more than 38,000 characters, its length may be compared, for example, with the approximately 6,000 characters of the contemporaneous Shi pin, q.v. Another distinguishing feature of the Wenxin diaolong is its systematic organization that, given Liu Xie's expertise in Buddhist literature and thought, has led to the assumption that its structure was influenced by Indian epistemological and analytical models, especially the $ś\bar{a}stras$. Yet the organization of the work can actually be explained by an indigenous concept embodied in a venerated canonical book of Confucianism: the Wenxin diaolong's fifty chapters (pian) correspond to the cosmologically significant number of yarrow stalks used in divination according to the Zhou yi β (Changes of Zhou). Disregarding the last chapter, which is a postface—just as during divination one of the yarrow stalks would be left out—we see that the composition of the Wenxin diaolong is essentially tripartite. The thematic units, discussed next, are pian 1–5, pian 6–25, and pian 26–49.

In the first five *pian*, Liu expounds his basic literary concepts. He opens with a treatise about the origin of civilization, writing, and literature in the metaphysical and absolute Way (*dao* 道), to turn directly to the core of the Confucian tradition in *pian* 2 and 3, which concern the literary impact of the sages, and the overarching importance of the Confucian canonical writings as models for all later literature, the *Zhou yi* being of key importance among them. Interestingly, *pian* 4 and 5 are then dedicated to the apocrypha and the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Elegies of Chu), respectively, which had acquired quasi-canonical significance by the late fifth century. In subsequent sections of the *Wenxin diaolong*, Liu Xie constantly refers back to the notions outlined in this introductory part, called the "pivot of literature" (*wen zhi shuniu* 文之樞紐) in his postface.

- 1. Yuan dao 原道 The Way as the source
- 2. Zheng sheng 徵聖 Evidence from the sages

Zong jing 宗經 The canon as the ancestor
 Zheng wei 正緯 Rectifying the apocrypha
 Bian sao 辨騒 Distinguishing the elegies

Each *pian* in this section, as well as throughout the work, concludes with a rhymed encomium (*zan* 贊).

The next typological section consists of twenty *pian* that "discuss patterned [texts] and describe unpatterned [writings]" (*lun wen xu bi* 論文敘筆), again according to Liu's postface. *Pian 6*–25 feature an all-embracing range of literary genres and subgenres, by far superseding any former attempt at genre classification in China. Due to terminological and typological problems, the actual number of genres that are either introduced or mentioned in passing is controversial, but it is much larger than suggested by the titles of the *pian*, as some individually cover more than a dozen genres. The detailed introduction of the major genres follows a pattern described by Liu Xie in his postface: first, he traces the genre back to its origin in the Confucian canon and explains the genre's name; second, he outlines the genre's historical development from antiquity to his own day, mainly through critical references to exemplary works, and mentions subgenres.

6.	Ming shi 明詩	Elucidating lyric poetry
7.	Yuefu 樂府	Music Bureau poetry
8.	Quan fu 詮賦	Explaining rhapsodies
9.	Song zan 頌讚	Eulogies and encomia
10.	Zhu meng 祝盟	Prayers and covenants
11.	Ming zhen 銘箴	Inscriptions and admonitions
12.	Lei bei 誄碑	Dirges and epitaphs
13.	Ai diao 哀弔	Laments and condolences
14.	Za wen 雜文	Miscellaneous patterned texts
15.	Xie yin 諧讔	Humor and riddles
16.	Shi zhuan 史傳	Historical traditions
17.	Zhu zi 諸子	The masters
18.	Lun shuo 論說	Disquisitions and discourses
19.	Zhao ce 詔策	Edicts and patents of enfeoffment
20.	Xi yi 檄移	War proclamations and dispatches
21.	Feng shan 封禪	The sacrifices to heaven and earth

22. Zhang biao 章表 Declarations and petitions

23. Zou qi 奏啟 Presentations and communications

24. Yi dui 議對 Opinions and answers

25. Shu ji 書記 Written records

The third group of *pian* is dedicated to a variety of basic questions concerning the creative process, rhetoric, prosody, and so forth, summed up in Liu Xie's postface as "the analysis of feelings and the examination of coloration" (*pou qing xi cai* 剖情析采). Some of its twenty-five *pian* are among the most celebrated treatises of Chinese literary thought, such as *pian* 26 about the workings of imagination in writing, 27 about the formative power of an author's personality and its interaction with normative categories, 28 about the aesthetic concepts "wind" and "bone" as necessary qualities of a superior literary work, and 48 about questions of the reader's response to literature. Together with the five introductory chapters, this part of the *Wenxin diaolong* has been the source of greatest fascination for readers, scholars, and translators.

26.	Shen si 神思	Spirit thought
۷0.	Just 11 Just 17 100	John mought

27. Ti xing 體性 Style and personality

28. Feng gu 風骨 Wind and bone

29. Tong bian 通變 Continuity and change

30. Ding shi 定勢 Determination of momentum

31. Qing cai 情采 Actual condition and ornamentation

32. Rong zai 鎔裁 Casting and tailoring

33. Sheng lü 聲律 Prosody

34. Zhang ju 章句 Paragraph and period

35. Li ci 麗辭 Parallel phrasing

36. Bi xing 比興 Comparison and affective image

37. Kua shi 夸飾 Hyperbole

38. Shi lei 事類 Allusion and reference

39. Lian zi 練字 Elaborate characters

40. Yin xiu 隱秀 Latent and salient

41. Zhi xia 指瑕 Pointing out flaws

42. Yang qi 養氣 Nourishing vitality

43.	Fu hui 附會	Fluency and coherence
44.	Zong shu 總術	The general technique
45.	Shi xu 時序	Chronological order
46.	Wu se 物色	The appearance of things
47.	Cai lüe 才略	Survey of talent
48.	Zhi yin 知音	The one who knows the tone
49.	Cheng qi 程器	Weighing the vessel

Pian 50, titled "Xu zhi" 序志 (Exposition of my intentions) is a postface in the early and early medieval tradition of attaching an often autobiographically inspired statement to one's collection of writings. Liu's postface, while doing justice to its title in explaining his reason to write the Wenxin diaolong as well as aspects of his descriptive procedures, provides very little information about his life.

Date of composition

The date of the *Wenxin diaolong* is not known. According to one theory, Liu Xie completed the work during the last years of the Qi dynasty (479–502), toward the end of his stay with Sengyou. The *Liang shu* biography relates that Liu Xie approached Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) in the way of a hawker to present him with his book, and that Shen Yue highly appreciated its contents. The anecdote is often regarded to be dubious, though, not the least because there is no indication of the book's wider reception or influence before the Tang. Some critics believe that Liu Xie did not come from an upper-class family but was a commoner who managed to rise to imperial recognition through his connection with Sengyou and the recommendation of Shen Yue.

After the founding of the Liang dynasty (502), Liu was appointed to various minor offices at court and beyond. The most noteworthy of these positions was interpreter-clerk of the Eastern Palace (donggong tongshi sheren 東宮通事舍人) in the service of heir-apparent Xiao Tong 蕭統 (Zhaoming taizi 昭明太子; 501–531), sometime during the early Liang and probably between 506 and 513. The prince enjoyed Liu Xie's company and may have been influenced by him in the compilation of his Wen xuan, q.v. An alternate theory about the date of the Wenxin diaolong's composition presumes that the book was completed during Liu's term at the prince's residence, when he had access to an extensive library. On imperial command, Liu later resumed editorial work at the Dinglin Temple, a move commonly thought to have occurred either in the wake of Sengyou's death in 518 or that of Xiao Tong in 531. Having completed his assignment at the temple, Liu Xie asked for and was granted permission to become a monk. He took religious vows, adopted the name Huidi 惠地, and died within a year's time. Depending upon the presumed year of Liu Xie's second move to the Dinglin Temple as well as

the duration of his editorial tasks there, his death has been dated to "520 or later" or to "532 or later."

The collected writings mentioned in Liu Xie's Liang shu biography were lost by the Tang dynasty. Apart from the Wenxin diaolong, only two other texts have survived to this day. One is a stele inscription (a genre in which Liu reportedly excelled) and is titled "Liang Jian'an wang zao Shanshan Shicheng si shixiang bei" 梁建安王造剡山石城寺石像碑 (Epitaph on the stone statue [of Maitreya] erected by the Liang Prince of Jian'an at Shicheng Temple on Mount Shan). The Prince of Jian'an was Xiao Wei 蕭偉 (476–533), who erected the statue in the year 516. The other text is a Buddhist apologetic, titled "Mie huo lun" 滅惑論 (Disquisition on the elimination of doubts). It remains an open question whether Liu Xie authored the politico-philosophical text Liuzi xinlun (Master Liu's new disquisitions).

Transmission

A Wenxin diaolong in fifty pian is first mentioned in Liu Xie's Liang shu biography. Starting with Sui shu, q.v., 35:1082, the work is listed in the standard histories' bibliographical monograph as consisting of ten juan, which should not be regarded to indicate a different length of the text. The Wenxin diaolong appears to have been in wide circulation during the Tang dynasty, as it is mentioned and cited in a number of texts, among them Kūkai's 空海 (774–835) Bunkyō hifuron 文鏡祕府論 (Discussion of the secret store of the Mirror of Writing). Citations and references to the Wenxin diaolong continue after the Tang, a prominent example being the Taiping yulan (comp. 978), q.v. Although the transmission of the Wenxin diaolong thus appears to have been uninterrupted, the earliest known commentary, by Xin Chuxin 辛處信 (listed in Song shi 209:5408) is presumed lost, as are all other Song dynasty editions of the text itself. The oldest surviving woodblock print, which is slightly damaged, dates from 1355 (Zhizheng 15) of the Yuan dynasty.

Yuan kanben Wenxin diaolong 元刊本文心雕龍. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993. Photomechanical reproduction of the Yuan print stored in Shanghai Library.

Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫 (1911–2000). Wenxin diaolong cidian 文心雕龍辭典. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996. Pp. 615–799 include an annotated edition of the Yuan print ("Yuan Zhizheng ben Wenxin diaolong huijiao" 元至正本文心雕龍匯校).

Newly discovered manuscripts

The oldest manuscript version, a fragment in the form of a butterfly-bound paper booklet containing the partly damaged first fifteen *pian*, dates from the Tang. It was found in Dunhuang and is kept in the British Museum in London (catalog no. S.5478). High-resolution images of the manuscript are available online through the International Dunhuang Project, at http://idp.bl.uk/. For a study of this manuscript, see the following:

Lin Qitan 林其錟 and Chen Fengjin 陳鳳金. Dunhuang yishu Wenxin diaolong can juan ji jiao 敦煌遺書文心雕龍殘卷集校. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991. Annotated photomechanical reproduction of the manuscript, with an appendix of those excerpts from twenty-three pian that were quoted in Taiping yulan.

Principal editions

Starting with a Ming printing in moveable type, prepared by Feng Yunzhong 馮允中 in 1504, dozens of late imperial editions of the *Wenxin diaolong* have survived. The most important or widely available are the following:

Zhang Zhixiang 張之象 (1579); reproduced in Sibu congkan*.

Hu Weixin 胡維新 (1582); included in Congshu jicheng chubian*.

He Yunzuhong 何允中 (1592); included in Han Wei congshu 漢魏叢書.

Wang Weijian 王惟儉. Wenxin diaolong xungu 文心雕龍訓詁 (1611). Based on a punctuated version by Yang Sheng'an 楊升庵, among other texts, and incorporating Mei Qingsheng's 梅慶生 phonetic annotations (yinzhu 音註); frequently reprinted (6th reprint in 1622).

Gujin tushi jicheng 古今圖書集成 (1726). Various sections of this work include the complete text of Wenxin diaolong, chapter by chapter.

Huang Shulin 黃叔琳 (1674–1756). Wenxin diaolong jizhu 文心雕龍輯注 (1741). This is the most influential premodern annotated edition; based on the commentaries by Mei Qingsheng, Wang Weijian, and others; copied into the Siku quanshu (1782; Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 1478:1–70) and later printed in Sibu beiyao* and Wanyou wenku 萬有文庫 (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939).

Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805). A revision of Huang Shulin's Wenxin diaolong jizhu printed in 1833.

Commentaries

In this selection of modern commentaries, those prepared by Fan Wenlan, Yang Mingzhao, and Zhou Zhenfu are most often used as standard editions.

- Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 (1893–1969). Wenxin diaolong zhu 文心雕龍註. 2 vols. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958. Based on Fan's earlier Wenxin diaolong jiangshu 文心雕龍講疏 (1929–1931) and Wenxin diaolong zhu (1936); full text accessible online through Academia Sinica (Taipei).
- Li Yuegang 李曰剛 (1906–1985). Wenxin diaolong jiaoquan 文心雕龍斠詮. 2 vols. Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan Zhonghua congshu bianshen weiyuanhui, 1982. Extensive commentary; among materials in the appendices are a study by Liu Yusong 劉毓崧 (Qing), "Shu Wenxin diaolong hou" 書文心雕龍後, with commentary by Meng Chuanming 蒙傳銘, subcommentary by Li Yuegang; a biographical study and a discussion of important editions.

- Liu Yongji 劉永濟 (1887–1966). Wenxin diaolong jiaoshi 文心雕龍校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962 (a revision of his first edition, Shanghai: Zhengzhong shuju, 1948).
- Wang Gengsheng 王更生. Wenxin diaolong duben 文心雕龍讀本. 2 vols. Taipei: Wen shi zhe chubanshe, 1985. Appendices include a biographical essay and catalog of important editions.
- Wang Liqi 王利器 (1912–1998). Wenxin diaolong xinshu 文心雕龍新書. Bali daxue Beijing Zhong Fa Hanxue yanjiusuo tongjian congkan 巴黎大學北京中法漢學研究所通檢叢刊 15. Beijing: Université de Paris Centre d'Études Sinologiques de Pékin, 1951. Appendices include collections of prefaces and assessments, collections of references to Wenxin diaolong in premodern texts, editorial remarks on Wang Weijian's Wenxin diaolong xungu, and Yang Mingzhao's glosses on Liu Xie's biography (see later).
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