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How Poetry Became Meditation in Late Ninth-Century China  
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How Poetry Became

Meditation in Late-Ninth-Century China

ABSTRACT:

In late-ninth-century China, poetry and meditation became segued—not just metaphorically, but as two equally valid means of achieving stillness and insight. This article discusses how several strands in literary and Buddhist discourses fed into an assertion about such a unity by the poet-monk Qiji (784–857). One strand was the aesthetic of kanyin (苦吟), "bitter intoning," which involved intense devotion to poetry to the point of suffering. At stake too was the poet as "fraternal"—one who helps make ordered chaos a microcosm that mirrors the impersonal natural forces of the universe. Jiao Dao (姚鼐, 1727–1815) was crucial in popularizing this sense of kanyin. Concurrently, an older layer of the literary-theoretical tradition, which saw the poet's spirit as running the cosmos, was also given new life in late Tang and mingled with kanyin and Buddhist meditation. This led to the assertion that poetry and meditation were two games to the same goal, with Qiji and others turning poetry writing into the pursuit of enlightenment.

KEYWORDS:

Buddhism, meditation, poetry, Tang dynasty

Sometime in the early-tenth century, not long after the great Tang dynasty (618–907) collapsed and the land fell under the control of regional strongmen, a Buddhist monk named Qiji 蕭漁 wrote a poem to another monk. The first line reads: "Poetry is meditation for Confucians. 詩書儒者禪." The line makes a curious claim: the practice

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1 From "Reading the Reverend Qiji's Collection" 蕭漁上人集, see Peng Dingguo 俞正, ed., comps., Quan Tang shi 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996, hereafter QTS) 34.8, pp. 9609–10. This poem is also attributed to the monk Shangyan (上巖, ca. 841–ca. 950). It is more likely from Qiji, since the earliest extant source for it, Zengang congji 舛庚公集 (2002 ed.), specifically Yang No. 楊乃 and Li Xingning 李星鈴, eds., Zenggang congji 舛庚公集 大學版 (Taipei: Shang shu, 1983–95) 10, p. 60a, attributes it to him. Moreover, Qiji would have been older in age to Qiji, whereas Shangyan was quite old by the time Qiji had become famous, and thus it is more likely that such lavish praise was written by Qiji's contemporary than by his senior. Duanzi for Tang poets generally follow those in Zhou Xiaofu 周孝沖, ed., Tangshi zaijian zidinghuang 蕭漁上人集 (Nanjing: Pengzhou chubanshe, 2005).
Poetry and meditation could help explain each other, since both were rooted in acts of self-cultivation that reflected privileged insight into the world. Poetry and meditation were analogous ways of seeing.

But this equation between poetry and meditation was neither inevitable nor unchanging. It emerged in the second half of the Tang dynasty and transformed soon thereafter, as the result of specific developments in the history of literary and Buddhist practices. As Qian Zhongshu 任鏡 (1911–1988) once noted, Tang and Song poets held profoundly different attitudes toward the relationship between poetry and meditation. Whereas Song poets took the relationship to be metaphorical, the Tang poets who mention the relationship “all combine into one mind the poetry and the mind of Buddhism 聚於一心”, 打成一片.” That is, during the Tang dynasty, the relationship between poetic and Buddhist practices was not metaphorical; it was equal. It is the purpose of the present essay to expand on Qian Zhongshu’s off-hand remark and explain exactly how several poet-monks (shijing 什經) of the late Tang came to assert the fundamental unity of meditation and poetry.

While there have been many surveys of the relationship between Buddhism and poetry, many attempts to understand the “Buddhist thought” of lay Tang poets, few have traced the internal logic of...
the equation between poetry and meditation. Those who have examined it in detail have usually done so from the perspective of the Song dynasty (960–1279) period,8 after Chan Buddhism had developed into a full-fledged institution and many assumptions about the Tang period had changed.8 Those who have focused on the Tang period tend to see it either as building toward this Song culmination,9 or as fundamentally incapable of positing a serious reflection on the relationship between Buddhism and literature.10 This essay, by contrast, takes seriously the claims of poet monks who lived through the collapse of the Tang and

8 See Lyman, The Buddha and the Good Life; James Primas, Buddhist Poets and Chinese Poems: Song Dynasty Monastic Literary Culture, Ph.D. diss. (Stanford University, 1995); Christopher Byrne, "Patrons of Science: Hongyi Zhanji (1397–1457) and the Practice of Poetry in Song Dynasty Chan H出道, Ph.D. diss. (McGill University, 2005); Doug Hoyt, Poetry and Chan Vocation: From Xuedou Chongguan (960–985) to Women Bintian (1180–1257), Journal of Song-Yuan Studies 40 (2010), pp. 30–71; and Beatrice Grant, Mind La Revival: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Shi Shi (Hsien-li: Hsiung Lin P’ei, 1974). De Sengho takes a synchronic approach in the poetry-mediation section; drawing from nearly every corner of the classical tradition of poetry criticism, he nevertheless lays the Song and Tang periods because of the relative scarcity of materials in the Tang (Hsueh, 1975, Tang Sung shih, pp. 101–120).


11 The most important of these strands was the aesthetic of kinyou (["bitter intoning" or "paining enactment of verse"]): kinyou featured an intense devotion to poetry, to the point of physical and mental suffering. The legacy of Jia Dao 賈師 (729–805) was crucial to establishing and popularizing this particular sense. At the same time, an older layer of the literary theoretical tradition, which saw the poet as one who sent his spirit to roam the cosmos, was also given new life in the late Tang as it mixed with the kinyou aesthetic and Buddhist meditation. This ultimately led to the assertion that poetry and meditation are not just analogous (as asserted in the Song), but fundamentally the same two gates to the same goal. The poet-monk Qi (804–937) was the recipient of Qichao’s poems, discussed above, articulated this view most clearly, a view that had roots in one of his heroes of nearly a century earlier, namely, the ex-monk Jia Dan. By asserting this fundamental unity, Qi and others could turn the writing of poetry into a means of understanding the fundamental nature of all reality, on par with Buddhist enlightenment.

The PAINSTAKING COUPLET
The ninth century saw the ascent and flourishing of the tradition of Buddhist poet-monks (shikō). This term initially referred to members of a specific community of letter-minded monks based in the Jiangnan 江南 area and centered around the monks Lingyin 敬信 and Jiaoxuan 偈玄 (728–782), Jiaoxuan 藉玄 (720–797), and others.11 Although originally seen as

12 The first extant reference to a poet-monk can be found in Jiaoxuan’s poem, "Replying to Paring with Shunno, Poet-Monk of Xingning." In the poem, I respond to the singsong of the venerable monk’s drum of going home":  "Gao Ding" ("Tsubosuke’s Drum") (Ji ‘ai 726, p. 1072), which displays text in parentheticals as world-character auto-commentary. For more, see Ichibara Köchirō, "Chi To shōjō ni ikaren Kansu no shonin to tenshin," Shūgaku 16 (1973), pp. 17–34. For this reason, it is incontestable to use in the term "poet-monk" to refer to verse-making monks of the Six Dynasties or early Tang, as in Demwu, "Tsushin no kakkō," Burton Watson, "Buddhist Poet-Monks of the Tang," The Eastern Buddhist 23.2 (1993), pp. 29–29, and Bao Deyi (2010), and Steparagus, Nan bosetsu gajū 般若心經 (Chongqing: Jiexie shengyou chubanshe, 2012).
odities for combining interests in Buddhism and poetry, they became
an established part of the literary scene as their fame spread beyond
their homeland, to the capital, and to the rest of the Tang empire. The
reasons for the ascendance of poet-mosks are many. Among the most
significant are the following: the migration of literati to Jiangnan fol-
lowing the An Lushan Rebellion of 755-763, the flourishing of Bud-
dhism under empress Xianzong of the Tang (r. 820-820), and Xuanzong
of the Tang (r. 741-780), the development of Buddhisthaema lineages to
become the doctrinally innovative schools of Chan, and the cultural and political
uncertainty created by the Huang Chao Rebellion (847-848) and
collapse of the Tang (907). By the time that the major representatives
of this poetic tradition, Guanxin (782-932) and Qiji, were active in
the late-ninth and early-tenth centuries, the poet-mosk had become a
respected role in medieval Chinese literary culture, and literati and
monks alike had established elaborate genealogies for them, found
their precursors in the early-medieval period (220-589), and sung their
praises in verse and prose. 17
At the same time a new trend in poetry was emerging in the val-
orization of kaisin, particularly in a certain sense of that term that crys-
tallized around Jia Dao. Abundant evidence for this trend can be found
not only in poetry of the late Tang (to be discussed below) but also in
poetry manuals written at this time. These manuals (shige 詩格, literally
“poetry frameworks” or “poetry standards”) originated in the sixth cen-
tury but reached their heyday in the tenth. They are comprised mainly
of exemplary couples classified by various poetic techniques and
rules, which may or may not be accompanied by prose explanations.
Many were written by poet-mosks or their associates, 18 and they obsess
over Jia Dao. 19 In the poet-mosk Xuzhong’s 朱仲 (late-ninth to early-
tenth c.) Handmirror of Streams and Categories 華滋河思, Jia Dao is the
most frequently quoted of any poet. 20 Qi Ji, in his Exemplary Forms of Feng
and Sea Poetry 河海詩法, cites Jia Dao more often than anyone else.
21 In the Essentials of the Way of the Elegantez 和風曲otland by Xu
Yin, Jia Dao is cited third-most (8), after two other self-described kaisin
practitioners, Qi Ji (4) and Zhao He 河 (11). 22 Li Dong 李嶺 compiled
an entire manual from only Jia Dao’s couplets. 23 Another manual, titled
Secret Meanings of the Two “Swans” 二間留意, was attributed to Jia Dao.
Although almost certainly not written by the master himself, it was likely
compiled by one of his many admirers at the start of the tenth century
and attests to the high regard for his name at that time. 24
The central concern of the poetry manuals is the art of the indi-
vidual couplet and its achievement via kaisin. The term first gained a
technical sense in the work of Meng Jiao 萬 (751-814). 25 To Meng,
kaisin was the vocal recitation of one’s own verses during the process
of composition and revision, a process undertaken for the sake of per-
sonal success in the imperial bureaucracy, often via the examination
system 學科). His concept of kaisin as the painstaking preparation for the
exams, which functioned as a test of one’s ability to contribute to the
greater good, dominated as long as there was general faith in the
examination system.
Stirred at Night, Distilling My Sorrows (病態自終)
Meng Jiao 萬

"Stirred at night, still haven’t stopped by
dawn." 26

Liu Yuansheng 李原生, ed., Shina shi ya changsheng: Han Feng, Tang Song changsheng zhi nian yun ciwen ji [Please don’t divide, li shi, 
17 Shige reviews, pp. 351-377.
18 Shige references, pp. 377-378.
19 This manual is fitted in the Song dynasty’s imperial catalogues but no longer survives. See
20 This manual is fitted in the Song dynasty’s imperial catalogues but no longer survives. See
21 The following discussion draws on Li Jianqu 李建强, Zhongguo Song kaisin shi jia yanjiu [The
Development of Chinese Poetry Standards in the Song Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhu shenti yu yu 
wenhua jiaoshi, 1994), pp. 5-10.
22 The following discussion draws on Li Jianqu 李建强, Zhongguo Song kaisin shi jia yanjiu [The
Development of Chinese Poetry Standards in the Song Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhu shenti yu yu 
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24 The following discussion draws on Li Jianqu 李建强, Zhongguo Song kaisin shi jia yanjiu [The
Development of Chinese Poetry Standards in the Song Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhu shenti yu yu 
wenhua jiaoshi, 1994), pp. 5-10.
Such stakes meant that it was necessary to constantly revise one’s poems until each line was phrased perfectly. Liu Deren 甄德仁 (early- to mid-ninth c.), also working through the night, describes the process.

From “Events on a Summer Day” 事件五月事

“Yielding to the evening, I seek rest
My neighbors dislike my voice.
Liu Deren sat for the examinations multiple times over a twenty-year period but extant evidence implies that he never passed. Despite his repeated failures, he felt the compulsion to keep working at it, to keep going over his writings, reading them aloud until they sounded just right. In one poem, he describes how he “cuts to the bone in search of new lines [削骨求新句].” Elsewhere, he is ashamed for not having achieved anything despite how weary those same bones have grown.

Presented to Vice-Director Cai on Taking the Examinations: z of 4 與試日 Individuals Affairs 札 (英二)

Liu Deren 甄德仁

Like being sick or stupid for twenty autumns –
Seeking a name, it’s hard to achieve one,
but it’s even harder to rest.

Looking back at my flesh and bones, I
should surely be ashamed.

I’m cloaked in coarse hemp robes yet my
head is white.

When one’s sense of success is based on obtaining an official career after passing the examinations (politely referred to as “achieving a name 得名,” line 4), failure is devastating. Shame and poverty follow (lines 5–6). The poet, whether out of modesty or hyperbole or rhetorical norms, describes himself as a pitiable old man, ruined by his own bull-headed attempts to make a name for himself. To Liu Deren and many others in the early- and mid-ninth century, official success was a measure of self worth. At best, failure meant remaining on the margins of elite culture; at worst, it meant an utter negation of one’s very purpose in life.


29 Yijing’s Tales of the Augustan Age, 411.


31 "Bearing my Feelings, Presented to One Who Knows Me" 与某知我 呈 (QLS 544, p. 509b)

32 QLS 544, p. 509b-510a; Vice-Director Cai Cai You 嘉祐 (mid-9th c., younger brother of chancellor Cai Gong 嘉貞).
Thomas J. Maranegg

This strain of kaijin – associated with Meng Jiao and success in officialdom – continued into the tenth century, but it did not become the dominant one. Rather, it was Meng’s associate Jia Dao who became most fully identified with the kaijin aesthetic. The *New Tang History’s* assessment of Jia Dao, for example, refers explicitly to kaijin as part of his legacy.25 His very person is defined by this term, as attested by many of the poems memorializing him.26 In his own verse, Jia Dao, too, identified his very self with kaijin.

Jia Dao 賈島

三月正數三十日,
二月二日我寄詩
黃鶴今夜平江道
水木齋圖供高枕

The Last Day of the Third Month, Sent to Judge Liu 三月晦日寄所思

In the third month, right on the thirtieth day,
In the breeze and sunlight, you part with me, a kaijin person.
Together with you tonight, we need not sleep.
It’s still spring before the coming of the morning bell.

Here, kaijin describes Jia Dao’s very being. It is not just a stage in his life, the discomforting time between preparing for an official career and achieving it. It is his entire being. Although Jia did take the examinations and failed, he did not give up. He rarely used the rhetoric of kaijin. Instead, he effectively separated it from the narrative of a successful career. Like earlier kaijin poets, Jia frequently complained of poverty. But the cause of his poverty was not that it was a commitment to poetry as an end in itself, not as a means to an end, that caused this suffering.

Jia Dao fundamentally changed the meaning of kaijin by dissociating it from official success and tying it to the writing of poetry itself. The poverty, suffering, and failure in his life are presented not as an ironic contrast to his obsession with poetry, but as precisely the result of his commitment to poetry.27 This comes through in the way Jia lets his readers know that he has put an enormous amount of effort into his lines. One poem, for example, contains the following, seemingly unremarkable couplet:

From Jia Dao  interleaved

Seeking out the venerable Wu 側近可敬人

A few breaths: a person beside the trees.

Here is appended an annotation in verse supposedly written by Jia himself 注: 二年三年得一吟歌廢 聽鴉不盡風

As soon as I intoned them, a pair of tears fell from my eyes.

If the one who knows my tone does not appreciate them

I will go back to lie down in my old hills.

The claim to intensity (measured by time rather than physical breakdown) is used to prove the sincerity of the poet’s pursuit of aesthetic truth, with a recognition of his worthlessness.28 One thinks of the stories of bodhisattvas pursuing enlightenment over countless eons of rebirth. The poet is the ascetic, willing to put aside material comforts in order to attain a long-term benefit.29 By reorienting the kaijin rhetoric of passion toward poetry itself, and away from official success, Jia Dao fundamentally wrote new ideals for the late-ninth and tenth-century poets to strive for.

25 On the connection between suffering (du shou) and poetry (shici) in Jia Dao’s aesthetic, see Xi’an Chi 關中, *Meng jia shih* (Beijing: Zhonghua shupu, 1957), pp. 286–287.


27 On the date and circumstances of Jia Dao’s baptism, see Bai Shijian 白石堅, *Jia Dao shi ji jiaojie* (Beijing: Renmin wenxian chubanshe, 2000), pp. 512–513.

28 On the date and circumstances of Jia Dao’s baptism, see Bai Shijian 白石堅, *Jia Dao shi ji jiaojie* (Beijing: Renmin wenxian chubanshe, 2000), pp. 512–513.

29 For more on kaijin poetry as a return on a temporal investment, see Owen, *Spending Time On Poetry,* p. 162.
Kaiyin covered a range of phenomena and approaches to poetry, and these referents shifted over the course of the late Tang and afterward. The Jia Dao strain, which separated kaiyin from a bureaucratic career, became especially widespread in the late-ninth and tenth centuries, in part due to the literati's waning faith in political stability and, hence, in officialdom and the examination system. If getting a jinshi degree was not a sure path to success, if talented poets routinely failed, and if the unworthy were promoted due to corruption and factionalism, why bother with officialdom at all? Thus, by the very end of the ninth century, the idea of poetry as an end in itself—rather than as a means to a successful career—became much more popular than it had been.89

At the center of the term kaiyin are two interrelated concepts: the intensity of one's devotion to poetry, especially its details, and the resulting toll on the body of the poet. The physical pain of kaiyin came from the intensity with which poets worked on their craft. Multiple poets claimed that the process of composing poems ruined their hair. Such an intense passion for poetry meant an attention to detail. The tenth-century poet Liu Shaoya reportedly likened careless composition to murder, saying: "A pentametric poem is like forty worthy men. If you misplace one character, you're a butcher. Five hundred to ten hundred men, misplace one, and they're dead."90

Many poets, like Jia Dao, identified themselves with kaiyin. Some even went so far as to proclaim that the writing of poetry was the very purpose of life. Du Xunhe (846–904), another member of the elite who failed the exams many times, portrays himself this way repeatedly. In the opening of one poem he announces: "My Way is in

87 If metrical records can be trusted, Jia Dao was by far the most popular poet of the period. See Thomas Mathias, "Networks of Exchange Poetry in Late Medieval China: Notes Toward a Dynamic History of Tang Literature," Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture, 1 (2003), pp. 205–217.


89 On this point, see Li, Tongbao, Wexin biyue (Shanghai: Diansheng jianwu chubanshe, 2006), pp. 205–216; and Tao Qingwen, "Tangshi shijie guanyu xinshao" (Zhejiang gongshuyuan shuju, 2003), pp. 205–216.

to examination candidates. But the Jia Dao strand was more attractive, for it proffered ideals similar to Buddhist monasticism: living in poverty and austerity, turning away from self-cultivation practice, and sacrificing one’s body out of intense devotion to texts.⁶⁵ The Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith 大乘起信論, a text that Guanzixu studied and preached on for three years, also advocates a practice of zeal similar to kind in that expected to lylyu discourses — a person’s resolution and effort are crucial to Buddhist doctrine, just as they are to one’s literary reputation.⁶⁶ So did the Treatise on the Essentials of Guarding the Mind 守心要論, a set of practical instructions on meditation attributed to Huiyuan 弘忍, in which the patriarch says:

Make effort! Make effort! Although it may seem futile now, your present efforts constitute the causes for your future enlightenment.

Do not let time pass in vain while only wasting energy. The siqra says: “If foolish sentient beings will reside forever in hell as if pleasantly relaxing in a garden. There are no modes of existence worse than their present state.”⁶⁷ We sentient beings fit this description. Having no idea how horribly terrifying this world really is, we never have the intention of leaving! How awful!⁶⁸ Hence our efforts.

The exertion of effort, fighting against deluded complacency, becomes here the basis of salvation. It is through striving that one achieves...
Reading the Poetry Collections of Lin Deren and Jia Dao: z of a 湯姆麻根

Guoxiu 国休

Laboring in thought, you once bumped into the governor.26
Often you spoke of blocking closeness with the state.26
How can one put a price to an ornithomys branch branch?27
From lowly alleys, you never rose above poverty.
With a sick horse, it’s hard to turn snow into boiling water.27

When gates have been deserted, few are the people there.
Mine own chanting, too, is bitter.
I knit my brows for you.

As with most poems about two people, this one begins by alternating between its two topics, with line 1 about Jia Dao and line 2 about Lin Deren. These are allusions to anecdotes about the two. In each case, the stories tell us how complete absorption in craft paradoxically leads to political power: Jia Dao once bumped into Han Yu while contemplating the best word for a line of poetry, leading to Han’s patronage of Jia, and Lin’s exclusion made him seem so authentically committed to purity that a prince once devoted enormous state resources to finding him. The middle couplets contrast this with the poverty and loneliness characteristic of the Quin poetry, pairing concrete imagery (ornithomys

26 Hu, Guoxiu zhengzhi, p. 188-7. Qingshu, p. 191.
27 This refers to a well-known anecdote about Jia Dao, in which Jia is so absorbed in his choice of words for a couplet (whether to say “borrowing” or “knocking on the door”) that he wanders oblivious through the streets of the capital and runs into the metropolitan governor Han Yu, who finally tells him to pick “knock.” For the original anecdote, see He Guangyan (ed.), Biji de zhengzhi (México: D.F., 1990), p. 66; for a translation and discussion, see Chen, Zhe Liang xue, pp. 197-98.
28 This line refers to an anecdote related to Lin Deren, in which Lin, despondent after failing the examinations for twenty years, decided to hide away in the mountains. When word got out, an imperial editor sent a thousand chariots to find him, but none was successful. See Fu, Tung ci ci ci jingpin, vol. 5, pp. 194-95.
29 Ornithomys branch; symbol of success in the examinations. This line is meant to evoke Lin Deren’s ambition toward his own craft.
30 This line refers to Lin Deren’s difficulty in finding a government job due to his lack of connections with the imperial court. “Turning snow into boiling water” (yinshu) had been a metaphor for the difficulty of overcoming obstacles since at least the 4th c. See, e.g., Han Yu, "Composing the Nine Chapters in the Yan River," in The Nine Chapters in the Yan River (1st c.), pp. 299-305. "Converting snow into boiling water" (zhubingzhishui) has the meaning of "beyond what is possible or possible in the world."

branch, boiling water on snow) with more general abstractions (poverty, "few are the people"). The final couplet shifts its linguistic approach, using first- and second-person pronouns instead of implying them. In doing so, the speaker is stating his connection to the poets as directly as possible. Guoxiu can best honor their legacies by getting down to work and writing with the same dedication to craft.

Against the increasingly common layin ideal at the turn of the tenth century, Qiji wrote his own response poem on “Cherishing Intoxing.” While Qiji himself was as committed as anyone to the layin aesthetic, one can imagine that he wrote this poem in order to rethink the dying metaphor, or perhaps to put a little non-dualism into practice.

Cherishing Intoxing 護亭

Qiji 赤己

Will I truly be able to fix my thoughts and that the gate to meditation?
This Idiac adherent is once again vexed by the poetry demon.30
Leaning for a moment against the slaters, I follow the falling light;
Unable to sleep, gusts of snow continue until the last watch.
Zhongdu has not been drenched in his earlier tendencies;
Zhi Dun would have been better off had he not been aware of his future lives.
Their writings, passed down, have met an essential mirror31
Who ought to understand this feeling of idle singing.

Poetry here is seen not as an investment, a craft which requires ultimate devotion, but rather as a distraction. It is an outside force, made manifest as the “poetry demon 毒诗” — a metaphor comparing the desire to write poetry to the demon Māra who attempted to break Śākyamuni’s concentration under the Bodhi tree, a metaphor which

31 "Essential mirror" refers to a mirror with great discernment. In this case, Qiji is referring to himself as one who understands Jeanne and Zhizun.
first gained currency in the middle years of Tang. The use of "poetry
demon" is precise here. Qiji’s desire to write poetry interrupts his at-
tempts at meditation; thus, Maia succeeds here where he failed with the
Buddha. The poet’s gaze traces the last lights of dusk as they reach out
from the horizon, his mind is filled with thoughts of past poet-monks,
keeping him from sleep. He cannot focus. The poem is not his life’s
purpose, but the distraction from the tasks of his everyday life – medi-
tating, sleeping. This everyday life is described as ease of “idleness 靈,”
that is, not engaged in the business of serving the state. In doing so,
Qiji adopts the terms of mainstream political discourse, not the terms
of the poet outside. He is just a lazy writer after all.

But the consequence of this rhetorical move is that Qiji thereby
justifies his own idleness. He is unproductive in his normal affairs not
because he is simply lazy, but because he has been attacked by an
outside force. His desire to write poetry is not self-motivated love of
fame, it is the result of a haunting. He cannot control it. This portrayal
of poetry reflects the fine art of the couplet found in Yuan discourse,
wherein lines are things that are “sought 求” and “attained 試”; poetry is
external, and the poet, whether “affectionate 爲” or “painstaking 謹” in
his pursuit of it, is at the mercy of larger forces.

Nevertheless, when Qiji writes about the composition of poetry, he
normally adopts the common terms of post-Hsung Chao poetics and
stresses the kind of craftsmanship and intensity associated with Yuan.
In an elegiac poem written upon Guanxu’s death, he praises the older
monk for precisely this quality.

From Qiji, “Hearing that Guanxu Panted from This World” 閩permissions

The term used here for craftsman, jiàng 匠, literally means “carpenter”
and implies that the poet brings to language the same kind of attention
to shaping Linguistic details as a carpenter does to wood. Writing is a
specific kind of labor, the kind of painstaking crafting and polishing
performed by an artisan. Elsewhere, Qiji stresses the intense devotion
and physical breakdown of the Yuan ideal.


242 Wang, Qiji shi ji jicheng 2, pp. 91–96; Pan, Qiji shi chuan 2, pp. 101–3; QY 9.3, pp. 94–95.

243 Wang, Qiji shi ji jicheng 2, pp. 91–96; Pan, Qiji shi chuan 2, pp. 101–3; QY 9.3, pp. 94–95.
understood as a merituous act within a different discursive system. One venerates layman masters like Jia Dao instead of Buddhhas. One intones poems instead of scriptures or spells. The structures of the actions are the same; only the content is different. Both systems require complete devotion to their practice.

THE STILL POET

The attention to detail and intense devotion to poetry which coalesced in Jia Dao is also related to an ideal of absorption: a person can fully devote himself to a singular goal if he is also able to block out extraneous thoughts or sensory input. This involves a kind of mental strength beyond the abilities of most humans. Poets must have an extraordinary capacity for concentration and visualization if they are to take part in the process of fashioning 造化, of shaping and re-creating the patterns of the cosmos in their literary works. Though this idea of a poet's concentration had deep roots in the classical literary tradition, its fullest flowering came when it cross pollinated with the practices of Buddhist meditation.

The classical precedent for the poetic ideal of absorption was Lu Ji's 虚靖 (461-530) "Fei on Literature" ("Wen fei" 文賦). This text, anthologized in the supremely influential Wenxian 文獻 (Selections of Refor ed Literature), would have been well known to any Tang poet.26 Lu Ji describes how the poet takes a visionary journey in preparation for the act of composition.

In the beginning, the poet both

Withdraws sight, suspends hearing.

And deeply contemplates, seeks broadly, 

Letting his spirit race to the eight limits, 

Letting his mind roam ten thousand spans. 

Then, at the end, 

His feelings first glimmering, become ever brighter.

And things, clear and resplendent, reveal one another.27

26 Qu, for example, praisd Guanlu's "work by comparing it to the Wenxian: "He strove for equality with the Crown Prince of Liang. 'To be esteemed like [those poets of the Wenxian] is to take [literature] to the next level.' " I'm grateful to Joshua Trachten for these insights.


28 Xiao Tong, comp., Wenxian 文獻 (Shanghai: Shanghai jigu shuhuasha, 1980) 17, p. 93; translation adapted from David K. Rowley, trans. and annot., Wen Xuan 文選, vol. 13 (Reading the Classics, 1997).
and exhausts your intelligence, [wherein] you must forget your person
心解，必动自心，"as the author writes in the passage just preceding
this one.}\textsuperscript{22} The mind, through the kind of tool in which one lets go his
very self, can be trained to take hold of the images of the cosmos and
recreate them in a poem.

As early as the late-eighth century, Tang poets began to make ex-
plcit analogies between the kind of concentration espoused in poetic
theory and the increasingly popular Buddhist practices of meditation.

From Yang Jeyuan's "Given to My Cousin Miaoqiu"

敲門扉，誰在敲門？
Knocking on stillness? comes out of distant
contemplation,

敲門扉是敲門？
Finding the marvelous originates in com-pre-
hending meditative wisdom.

The first line of Yang's couplet synthesizes two sections of the "Fix on
Literature." The sort of spirit journey we examined earlier is said to be the
basis of another one of the poet's activities described in Lu Ji's "The
poetry tests the void and non-existence in demand of its existence. / Knocks
upon stillness and silence, seeking a tone. / 轉據無中求音，用寂寞的求言."
That is, the act of poetic creation, which seems to emerge out of noth-
ing, is in fact the product of a spirit journey. The second line of Yang's
couplet draws on the jargon of Buddhism in order to come at the same
point from a slightly different angle. Intense mental concentration, dis-
volved from sensory input, is what leads to new insight.

Later writers made this same point, that poetry requires the same
kind of concentration as Buddhist meditation, using the language of
laying:

From Yao He's "Sent to Jia Dao"

When madness erupts, you chant (jia) as if weeping,

When sorrow comes, you sit as in meditation.

Pei Yue's "Fragmentary couplet"

Ataining a couplet: about to achieve success.
and striking. The poet describes the scene in vivid detail, painting a picture of the poet's solitary walk along the path.

Liu Yuxi blends together the classical expressive theory of the "Great Preface" (Da nan) in the Book of Odes (Shijing) with the idea of the poet as a seer and with Buddhist concepts of quietude and emptiness. The classical discourse maintains that things arise from a mind that encompasses all possibilities. That mind is the province of those with a superior control of their mind. For this reason, Buddhists have a potentially privileged relationship to poetry. They are experts in the mind, having honed it over many years of practice, cleansing it of desire's interference. In this way, the world of their poems and the mediating perception (jing) refers to both are pure. Sun Gungxian (d. 968) once praised Guanxin for precisely this quality: "His perceptual awareness (jingyin) was outstanding and unique, impossible to match.""Moons' ability to concentrate is to settle their minds, can be applied directly to poetry. There is no noise distracting the images as they enter the monks' minds, nor as they come out in words. Therefore, the monks' works are "refined and striking." In modern parlance, we might say that Buddhist monks have a transferable skill set. A calm mind, imbued with the images of the ten thousand things that constitute the entire world, is precisely what is required of a poet. "It is, after all, fashioners of worlds."

Liu Yuxi, "Introduction to "Sleeping by the Temple Hall of Dharmacakra Master Honjog on an Autumn Day and Hearing Him of the Janggok," Songxiang jingyin chuan’an (T’ang Shih among Ch’an Poems); and Guanxin's "Perfection to the White Lotus Collection" (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) (in Chinese 967) pp. 57-59. Guanxin’s "Perfection to the White Lotus Collection" (Jingyin jingxi ben shi). According to a different part of this introduction, it was written in eight years by Guanxin on the north of Yueju (September-October 814). Cf. Liang, "The Sudden and the Gradual," p. 72.


Among reasons for the Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection, one monk describes how the poet and the master were "discussing the Way, how form (Shih) fused with the mind and consciousness to phenomena can reveal the truth (Jingyin)." According to the poet, "The mind and consciousness are the same, as are their essence. (Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection) (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) p. 57. On one other aspect of the Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection, see Yi Chu’s poetry, "Hai Xiang sheng Huo Qi ji Wo Yanglong" (Sea Dragon sheng Qi ji Wo Yanglong) (Sea Dragon sheng Qi ji Wo Yanglong). The Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) p. 57. For a more thorough discussion, see Sun Yuxi’s poetry, "Perfection to the White Lotus Collection" (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) (in Chinese 967) pp. 57-59. For a more thorough discussion of the Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) pp. 57-59. For a more thorough description of the Jingyin to the White Lotus Collection (Jingyin jingxi ben shi) p. 57.

All dharmas are Buddha dharmas, and all dharmas are liberation. Liberation is truth, and all dharmas never leave truth. Walking, standing, sitting, and lying — all these are inconceivable functions, which do not wait for a timely season.67 Everything is Buddha. Everything is truth. Everything is the Buddha. Everything is the truth.

Given the fact that the ultimate and the mundane are perfectly interfused, completely dependent on one another, one need not sit in silence to meditate. Activity is any posture can give one access to the "inconceivable," that is, enlightenment which is beyond thought. The doctrine of the inseparability of principle and phenomena gave rise to the practice of non-meditation as meditation, something that came to be seen as a hallmark of the Hongzhou communities. Such doctrines left much room for an advanced practitioner to engage with the arts, and would have been convenient justification for a poet-mono

Qiji, Qiji discusses poetry and meditation as the two distinct but complementary activities on which he spends most of his time. He opens several poems with lines like, "Outside of meditation, I seek poetry's wonders," and "Outside of monasticism, the pleasure of idle chanting is purest," and "Outside of the moon, the moon shines."

In these lines, this Buddhist practice is portrayed as primary, his poetic practice secondary. Other times he reverses the terms. Another poem opens, "When I've no taste for chanting poems, I take up sutras of the year's pattern.

In exchanges with other poet-mono, he describes their activities in a similar manner: "In addition to the work of sutras and katas, you also take on the task of poetry," and "he writes of the otherwise unknown Buddhist saint. In a quatrains to a certain "Venerable Guan", he echoes the kaya language of Pei Yue."

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69 "Sent to My Brother Lin Hsiang" (Wang, Qiji shiji jiehua). pp. 559-60. Pan, Qiji shiji xia 6, p. 287-88. QJX 184, p. 204.
70 "Written by Chance at the Isles of Jing" (Wang, Qiji shiji jiehua). p. 478.
71 "Written by Chance at the Isles of Jing" (Wang, Qiji shiji jiehua). p. 478.
72 "Given into the Venerable Han" (Wang, Qiji shiji jiehua). pp. 570-71. Pan, Qiji shiji xia 7, pp. 399-402. QJX 184, p. 204.

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Qiji portrays poetry as his primary vocation and meditation as a welcome respite from it [line 2]. These two activities constitute the majority of his daily life [line 1], taking pleasure in them and little else [lines 3-4]. Poetry is labor, and his hard work pays off. He achieves two of the ideals described earlier: poetic perfection on par with the *Odysse* (line 5) and an emphasis on the real images of the cosmos [line 6]. The latter, moreover, is only possible because his spirit has attained purity and thus become capable of going on the kind of spiritual journey described by Lu Ji’s “Poem on Literature.” The poem concludes by explicitly relating his poetic and religious practices. Contrary to what one may assume, the sensuous “riverside flowers” and “fragrant grasses” often depicted in poetry do not harm his unattainted mind [lines 7-8]. Qiji may be safely depicting himself as having achieved an advanced level of detachment, in which the practitioner is permitted to enjoy one’s sensory experience. That is to say, poetic and religious practice are not oppositional. In fact, it is precisely because of Qiji’s advanced meditative practice that he may so boldly in his literary works.

In poems written to his literary hero Zheng Guo, Qiji further develops this relationship between poetry and meditation. One quatrain

116 “No wrong” refers to poetry; in *Adlards’s A Dictionary of Chinese*, “Confucius describes the Book of Odes as having ‘no wrong’ in them.”

117 *Real images* refers to the essentially significant *images* that make up both the phenomenological world and the world of a poem. In his poem “Stirred by a Whim in Mid-Spring” (in Zhongjuan, Qiji equates these with the impermissibility of *name*.” In a single breath, unspooling, it combined real images. Where are the ten thousand spirit Disappearing into the Impermanent, the ever-changing, the disappearing of the finite? (Weng, *Qiji shiji juan*, p. 945, *Poem in Mid-Spring* [Jue bu cun jiu jing], pp. 945, 946.) Qiji was found enough of this couplet to fit it in as an example of “Great Imagery.” It is in the opening of his poems treatise, “Exemplary Forms of Pinyin and Six Poems” (in Zhongjuan, pp. 945-946).

118 “Field of my inner self” is a reference to the Book of Rites *Yijing* (I Ching), in *Changhao Songyan shi* [Shi shi jian, p. 948) in the Book of Rites *Yijing* (I Ching). In the Book of Rites, people are given the intermetrical plates of the sage kings. They created ritual to glorify them. They laid out righteousness to plant them. They instituted learning to teach them. They ordered it in humaneness to reflect them, and they employed music to give them power. (From Sizhi Yang yi gu jing wu [On the Five Elements], p. 948.) And, they belong to the sage kings’ lineage and, like them, it is impossible to be independent of the Great Imagery.

119 If we take Qiji’s *Conversations on the Way* to *Wangyi* seriously, we can see how this echoes the teachings of the former Lige sheng* (p. 77-153), who is said to have once preached: “All知识... (see: *Wangyi*).

HOW POETRY BECAME MEDITATION

puts the two practices in parallel with each other, implying their fundamental unity.

*Sen to Director Zheng Guo* 告慰问信中

Qiji 許記

I have recently come across a craftsman of poetry in the human realm,

And I once met a mind-stamped master beyond the birds. 119

There is nothing so singularly marvelous besides these two gates —

Beneath a riverside pine, I trace my thoughts alone.

Poetry and Buddhism are “two gates” [line 3], that is, two approaches to the same end goal. In Buddhist writings, this phrase is often used to describe two seemingly contradictory approaches that are fundamentally interrelated and conditioned upon each other, such as the Lesser Vehicle and Greater Vehicles 大乘, or arising and ceasing 生滅 and true nothingness 真如. Qiji, in his own poetry manual, describes poetry’s forty gates, which are various moods, attitudes, and realms — such as “satisfaction 畢然” (no. 7), “turning one’s back on the times 逆時” (no. 8), “divinity 神” (no. 9), and “purity 濁” (no. 40) — through which the poet must enter in order to attain his couples. They are all distinct approaches which lead to the same goal — a well-wrought poem. The gate metaphor, so Qiji, is pluralist. It stresses that there can be many ways to enter into something. In the quatrain to Zheng Guo, poetic composition and meditation are two such gates. In the first couplet, they are embodied by the two guides mentioned in the first couplet, Zheng Guo (line 1) and an unspecified “mind-stamped-master” 大乘. In another context, when Qiji describes the highly advanced stage of practice, in which one may indulge in the scenes without risking self-abandonment. On this, see Marco Pocci, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Happy Buddha School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005), p. 221.


122 Mind-stamped master: In China, a person who has received the true transmission of the dharma is said to have been “stamped with the mind of the Buddha 待佛” (Jing). “Beyond the finity means high up in the sky.” It is possible that this refers to Tungsheng (Wu Dejun) (w. 399-383), who was very influential in the western conjunctive region where Qiji grew up and whose life overlapped with Qiji’s by about 60 years.


125 Shige Akihisa, pp. 497-498.
he has proven the deep homology between poetry and meditation (line 2). Their fundamental root is not only theoretical, but something that Qiji has witnessed in the work of Zheng Gu. He has shown that someone with a deeply cultivated poetry-mind can reach the same insights as one who has cultivated the Buddha-mind. As in the quatrains written to Zheng Gu, Qiji again asserts that poetry and meditation are two "gates" to the same goal.

The second couplet then follows logically from the first. It explains how it is possible that poetry and meditation ascertain the same thing. The enormous effort a poet like Zheng Gu must make to achieve a perfectly wrought couplet is precisely the same effort needed to reach insight through religious practice. Qiji clearly thought it a good couplet, as he included it in his own poetical treatise to illustrate "Hardship" very well, one of poetry's "Twenty Models" of the third line, moreover, draws on one of the theoretical precursors to Qiji, a passage from Jia Qian's "Models of Poetry" (ShiShi). It is also said: "Hard (Xie) thought is not necessary. When one thinks hard, he loses the substance of spontaneity." This too is wrong. If one won't enter a tiger's lair, how can one catch a tiger? When obtaining the poems world, striking couples only begin to reveal themselves when one goes to the utmost difficulty, the utmost danger. After composing a piece, observe its appearance: if it seems easy, attained without thought, this is the work of a superior hand. If a man is tired, his mind isParty to words. If he is abysmal, his mind, his words. Lines that appear effortless or spontaneous are never what they seem. That is the illusion of a master poet. As Borges once said, "Perfect things in poetry do not seem strange; they seem inevitable." Underlying this breezy surface is the solid foundation of hard work. Poetry, like meditation, requires that one brave the rocky terrain of the human mind. Only through years of training, of concentration, of labor, can one attain the sort of perceptual awareness that is the fruit of both poetic and religious practice.
Qiji elaborated this equation between poetry and meditation not only in poems written to Zheng Gu. If that were the case, one may think that he is simply adopting the terms of his interlocutor for the sake of instruction, a form of apophasis. Instead, even in poems describing his own meditation practice, he makes the same claim:

**Sitting in Stillness**

Qiji

Sitting, lying, walking, and standing
I enter meditation, still inquiring.
Over long days and months, this will
Weary my body and mind
Few things resemble silent communication.110

Huangmei's address was profound.110

On the path of old pines before my gate,
Sometimes I get up to walk in the cool shade.

The holiest claim here is the opening: poetry and meditation may be performed simultaneously. That is, the "non-cultivation" advocated in several late medieval Buddhist communities is limited not only to the four postures of sitting, lying, walking, and standing, but extends even to the composition of poetry itself. Qiji then proceeds using the same logic as the previous poem, drawing on the rhetoric of ksunye. The activity he is describing—whether that is taken to be meditation, poetry composition, or a hybrid of the two—takes a physical toll on his body.

The third couplet then draws on the technical language of late medieval Buddhist to emphasize the complementarity of language and

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110. Wang, Qijishi jiuwen (Shanghai, 1993), pp. 142–44; Pu, Qiji shi, ch. 3, p. 151; Qiji Qishi, p. 547. 111. "Silent communication," also written  "secret conversation," in the transmission of teachings from a master to a student without using language. In the Wei-Yang lineage, this was often associated with the drawing of a circle (圓) to indicate the fact that the Buddha nature encompasses and pervades all reality. A verse by a late monk, Shunan Shifu (818–833), describes the Wei-Yang lineage's most distinctive emphasis on "circles" and "silent communication" (preserved in Shunan's 823–833, Zhaokai school, 842–860, and Nandai Yuanshi, 860–875, among others). See also Shuming 1997 (1995). In Nandai, Huangmei 820–880, as well as Liu, "Wei-Yangcos Chufa guangjung shishi," pp. 163–64, and Wu, "Wei-Yangcos Chufa shishi," pp. 59–60.

110. "Huangmei" the alternative name for Hongmei Hongmei (869–904), born on one of his places of residence, Mt. Huangmei (黄梅), he is the prototypical Sixth Patriarch of Chao. His "address" refers to his teachings, most likely his advocacy of silent meditation as seen in the Treatise on the Essential of Cultivating the Mind (shengji zhi xin), attributed to him (Molak, 1670). In the context of the Dharma Realm (Tao Zhenren), comp. Qingshu 1974–1979, vol. 1, p. 746.
expertise. The word used at the end of line 1 for "equated Il" more literally means "place side by side, in parallel with," so QiJi is saying that nothing can be put in parallel with the fruits of meditation. And yet he spends the rest of the poem doing just that: he matches poetry and meditation in parallel couplets. Thus the paradox at the heart of the poem: QiJi does what he claims cannot be done.135

The middle couplets present the path that the poet-monk must tread in similar terms. The goals, given in lines 5–6, are different: in poetry, one seeks to establish a reputation; in meditation, one strives for ultimate truth. Yet both promise a kind of transcendence beyond normal human life. A poet's words live on after death, and insight into Buddhist reality leads to the attainment of nirvana. Both require long journeys of intense striving (lines 3–4), be it in the crafting of pentametric and heptametric lines or the countless rebirths on the bodhisattva path. QiJi stresses their similarity through a playful switch of words. "Suffering 陷 (line 5) can be understood as a technical Buddhist term (dshk) for the misery of life in samsara, the First Noble Truth, but here it is used to describe poetic practice, drawing on the rhetoric of Ayus. "Purified 亮 (line 4), on the other hand, is frequently used to describe austere, dignified descriptions of landscapes in poetry, but here it is used to describe the fruits of Buddhist - not poetic - practice. In this way, QiJi writes an underlying unity of literary and meditative practices into his poem, even as he denies its possibility in the first two lines. This is what poet monks do, according to QiJi: live in the tension between the two truths of mundane and ultimate reality, use words to point to practice, practice to broach transcendent principle. The poet-monk whom he meets understands this as well, and the two become so absorbed in the conversation that they lose track of their plans (line 8).

This idea of the poet-monk as the one who understands and performs the underlying unity between poetry and meditation reaches its apex in a poem about QiJi, the one which began this article. The audacious opening unfolds into an embodiment of its claim.

Reading the Venerable QiJi's Collection 报歌己上人集 136

Q8chan 檀

诗歌僧赞语 诗歌僧赞语

[Your] poems are meditation for Confucians, Their form is truly transcendent.

135 If we follow the earliest edition, Zanping 助赞集 (see fn. 1, above), in reading shi, not shing, in line 1, we come out with essentially the same paradox: poetry is used to "show" the same truths as meditation, despite the line's claim.

136 QTS 6, pp. 65f. - 145
as it was to pleasing fragrances. Line 7 concludes with thought of the sensory field which integrates the other five, corresponding to the mind. Together, these six senses make up the perceiving subject, or the world, to which the properly meditative student may in some sense be compared.

In this way, the poem mirrors some of the practices described in earlier meditation manuals translated from Indic languages, which formed the basis for later practices. The practice of meditation of the Mahayana tantra (which the pioneering poet-monk Guanxu referred to as the "narrow of meditation of the path") proceeds through the six sense faculties in the same way. As Qiji methodically proceeds in his own poem through all six senses in the course of meditation, he enacts the claim of line 1, that "poetry is meditation for Confucians."

Qiji in this work brings to its fullest expression the assertion of a deep homology of religious and poetic practices. If one takes for granted the interrelation of ultimate and mundane reality, if one believes that enlightenment is the realization of this interrelation, and if one assumes that one may therefore practice meditation in the midst of any other activity, then Qiji's assertion makes perfect sense. It is a small step to go from saying, "wearing clothes, eating food, talking and responding, making use of the six senses -- all these activities are dharmic nature"

325 The Chinese word 菩提 (bodhi) is the result of a complex etymology, and can be translated as "enlightenment" or "annihilation of ignorance." In Qiji's poem, it is used to describe the state of being free from suffering and free from attachment to the world.

326 This phrase refers to the practice of "eight-lights meditation," in which the meditator mentally illuminates the various senses and the mind with light, symbolizing the illumination of the mind and the attainment of enlightenment.


328 This line is a reference to the Buddhist practice of "stilt meditation," in which the meditator walks on stilts as a way to heighten concentration and focus the mind on the present moment.

329 The phrase "to the Buddha" refers to the practice of visualizing the Buddha in the mind's eye, which Qiji alludes to in line 16.

330 This phrase refers to the practice of "meditation in the mirror," in which the meditator imagines seeing the Buddha's face in the mirror, reflecting the light of the Buddha's wisdom.

331 This phrase refers to the practice of "meditation in the center," in which the meditator focuses the mind on the center of the body, symbolizing the focus of the mind on the present moment.

332 This phrase refers to the practice of "meditation in the lotus," in which the meditator visualizes the Buddha seated on a lotus flower, symbolizing the Buddha's wisdom and enlightenment.

Conclusion

The homology between meditation and poetry came to its fullest expression in the work of a tenth-century poet monk (Qiji) after it had been hinted at for much of the ninth century. The insight that these two practices are the same is the culmination of multiple arcs in the history of Chinese poetics. On the one hand, the classical tradition, from Lu Ji's "Flowers on Literature" on down, stressed the importance of the poet's concentration and mental focus in the process of composition. On the other hand, the Juyue aesthetic, especially as it came to represent an ideal of pure poetry with Jia Dao, emphasized the importance of effort and intense devotion to the detail of character craftsmanship. When these two strands came together in the late-ninth century, and poet-momks who had spent much of their lives devoted to meditation practices encountered them, the match was obvious. Poetry and meditation became two gates which led to a greater perceptual awareness. And precisely this, the awareness of phenomena and the deeper significance of images, is the trigger which may lead one to a sudden insight into the emptiness of all things, otherwise known as enlightenment.

This is an understanding of poetry radically different from that usually stated by scholars (and poets) of Tang China. To Qiji and other poet-monks, poetry is a verbal art, certainly, as well as a linguistic exercise -- a social practice, an expression of one's mind, and all the other functions we normally attribute to poetry. But it is not only that. It is also a religiously significant practice. Moreover, Qiji avoids putting poetry and religion in a hierarchical relationship, in which one is subordinate to the other. While religious goals are seen as primary, both meditation and writing are seen as legitimate ways -- gates -- to that goal. One may even suppose that, since poets cultivate their practice without knowledge of their religious goals, they may be considered better Buddhists. A poet cannot become attached to the idea of enlightenment if he is unaware that he is pursuing it. Poetry is meditation, and meditation poetry.

This idea of poetry's and meditation's fundamental unity would not last. The poet-momks who championed this claim -- and had the most at stake in it -- soon fell out of favor. The "nine monks" (jiaozang jiuxian) of the late-tenth century, though well known in their day, were not as stylishly bold as Guanxu or Qiji. Literary tastes of the early elev-
enth century shifted away from 拔引. Ouyang Xiu 范希 (1007–1072), Su Shi 苏轼 (1037–1101), and other poetic innovators of the Northern Song period saw 拔引—which they referred to as the “Late Tang style” (*Wán Tàng lì) (晚唐时期)—as nothing more than frivolity. 198 They also dismissed the ex-monk Jia Dao and his poet-monk followers for the religious flavor of their verse, saying that it had an “air of vegetables and bamboo shoots 拔引” 199—yet even though some of these later critics used Buddhist terminology in their own discussions of poetry, 200

On the Buddhist side, the institutionalization of Chan beginning in the middle of the tenth century meant more codified rules, formal structures, and competing schools. With this came a deeper suspicion of 塔頂—letters, even as more monks wrote and preached on didactic verse (which their students wrote down in the rising genre of 记录 sayings, or *yín 言). Several Buddhist sources single out Guanxu and Qi Ji in particular for criticism, implying that their pursuit of poetic excellence lured them away from a true understanding of the Dharma. 201 The poet monks were condemned by poets and monks alike. In the process, their equation of poetry and meditation developed first into metaphor, then into cliché. 202 Despite the popularity of Chan Buddhism among Song literati and the use of verse by Chan monks, poetry and meditation operated in separate spheres. It is not even clear that Jia Xan hudong 拔引 (1021–1126) and others who used the phrase “lettered Chan 文士” sought the fundamental unity of poetry

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198 The “Late Tang style” would not find its progressive champion again until Wang Wusheng 王士性 (1634–1711), under very different circumstances, declared that 拔引 and Chan are identical 拔引一致. 202 Even there, Wang justified his statement in a very different manner from the poet-monks, describing poetic enlightenment in terms of individual intuition and spontaneity. He did not describe it as primarily the result of hard work and stillness.

Nevertheless, Qi Ji’s articulation of the identity between poetry and meditation is the beginning of this tradition: in his works we find the first clear statements about poetry and Buddhism as two gates. For that, Qi Ji should be recognized as a pioneer in the history of Chinese poetic literati. But, just as important, his view amounted to a culmination. Building on other poet-monks such as Guanxu and Jiaozan, he wove together several threads from the discourses of poetry and Buddhism—Lu Ji’s spirit journey, Jia Dao’s 拔引, and Zhongmei monks’ 謫 meditation as 謫—to create a new idea of Buddhist poetry. The equation of poetry with meditation did not appear out of nowhere, but emerged out of a poet-monk tradition that flourished beginning in the late-ninth century. Literary, religious, social, and political developments aligned to create the right conditions. Under these peculiar circumstances, Qi Ji claimed that poetry could serve as 謫 not only for Confucians, but even for Buddhist monks.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

QFS Quan Tong Shu全唐书
Shige kaisan 王应符
Zhang Bowei 张伯威
Quan Tong Wudai shige kaisan全唐五代诗文考