

## Music, Morality, and Genre in Tang Poetry

The Tang Dynasty (618–907) was a golden age for poetry and music, but many questions about the relationship between the two remain. Scholars modern and premodern have contributed a great deal by approaching these questions from the perspective of particular genres, accurately reflecting unique histories and interfaces of music and poetry in each individual case. Such an approach, however, tends to miss the relationships among genres, themselves often a result of musical factors. By examining three major genres of Tang musical poetry from the perspective of their relationships to music, as well as the interactions amongst them, this paper reveals that the interplay of literati ideals with musical realities often played a decisive role in the waxing and waning of poetic styles.

For the Confucian thinker of the Tang and earlier periods, the relationship between poetry and music (*yue* 樂) was, in some sense, simple: they were two aspects of one, indivisible art. 6th-century critic Liu Xiu 劉勰 states: “poetry is the heart/mind of music; sound is the body of music.”<sup>1</sup> Sound is the medium and poetry the message. Poetry without music is a mere memory or notation waiting to be expressed, while music without poetry is sonic form without purpose or principle. The idea that music needed a purpose other than aural enjoyment derives from another classical ideal: of music/poetry as a key element of ritual (*li* 禮) and, consequently, a key tool for achieving ethical and political order. Early Tang poet known for his “traveling songs” (歌行體) Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰 (c. 636–c. 680) claims:

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<sup>1</sup> 「詩為樂心，聲為樂體。」 Liu Xie, vol. 2, 10.

Hearing that songs lengthen words, Tingjian created the *Song of Yu*.<sup>2</sup> Hearing that hymns record virtue, Xisi [Gongzi Yu] created the *Hymns of Lu*.<sup>3</sup> ... When Shu Xiang heard poetry, he could determine the success or failure of an alliance, and when [Ji Zha of] Yanling heard music, he knew the quality of a state's ritual. When the virtue of kings fades, the sound of hymns slumbers; when the merit of noble men wanes, the way of poetry, too, becomes incomplete.

聞夫歌以永言，庭堅有歌虞之曲，頌以紀德，奚斯有頌魯之篇...叔譽聞詩，驗同盟之成敗；延陵聽樂，知列國之典彝。王澤竭而頌聲寢，伯功衰而詩道缺。<sup>4</sup>

For the traditional Confucian, then, poetry and music were two aspects of the same art, and that art itself an indispensable tool in the arts of politics and moral education.

It should come as no surprise, then, that ancient and medieval Chinese poetics and musicology overlap to a great degree, and that philosophers and politicians were interested in both. Confucian scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), for example, states that the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) “expresses all feelings and dispositions in harmony with musical pitches.”<sup>5</sup> Historian Li Yanshou 李延壽 (fl. 7th c.) claims that “writing is the weathervane of feelings and dispositions and the musical pitches of divine inspiration.”<sup>6</sup> Ideal poetry, then, was inherently musical, while inspired writing in any genre manifested a structural homology to well-ordered music.

Rhetorically, many Tang poets traced the origins of their art back to the Confucian *Shijing*; in practice, however, they owed much more to the masters of the Six Dynasties period (220–589). This resulted in a contradictory impulse for Tang poets to praise and imitate the poets of the not-too-distant past, while simultaneously lamenting their own inability to recapture the

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<sup>2</sup> A mythical melody from the time of ancient sage kings.

<sup>3</sup> Section of the *Classic of Poetry* recording hymns of Confucius's state of Lu.

<sup>4</sup> Lu Zhaolin, 341.

<sup>5</sup> 「發諸情性，諧於律呂」 Mao, 5.

<sup>6</sup> 「文章者，蓋情性之風標，神明之律呂。」 Li Yanshou, 1792.

ideal of more ancient times, the music for the *Shijing* and *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) having been lost long ago.<sup>7</sup> Broadly speaking, Tang poets inherited two major poetic forms with known connections to musical performance: the “music bureau pieces” (*yuefu* 樂府) of the Han (206 BC–220 AD) and Six Dynasties, and musical *shi* 詩 poetry, especially of the tonally-regulated “recent-style” (*jinti* 近體) developed over the course of the latter period, and reaching its height of popularity during the Tang.<sup>8</sup> During the Tang, a new musical poetic form developed called “minor melody lyrics” (*quzi ci* 曲子詞 or *ci*).<sup>9</sup> Though sharing qualities of both *yuefu* and *jinti shi*, and not viewed by contemporary poets as a wholly new style, this genre differed from the other two in having been the product of changed Tang musical realities. This article examines these three major genres in turn, arguing that medieval genres’ mutual relationships to music and morality were major causative factors in their evolution and changing relative popularity. By analyzing the complex interactions of genre, musical realities, and philosophical ideals, this paper nuances the notion of poetic evolution as a simple succession from living performance, to elite imitation, to antiquarian exercise.

### *Yuefu*: Broad and Narrow Definitions of the Folk Song Ideal

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<sup>7</sup> In an introduction to a collection of “boudoir poetry,” for example, Luo Binwang 駱賓王 (c. 638–684) summarizes: “As I have humbly endeavored to revive the way of poetry, I have looked back to the founding of our nation and to times more ancient still. The songs of Tang and the chants of Yu, these are recorded in the *Canons* of Yao, Shun, and Yu. The praise hymns of Shang and the *Elegantiae* of Zhou were performed with the bells and chimes of Chen. Later poetic expressions of sentiment flourished in the two capitals of Han, and thoughtful contemplation grew luxuriant during the Wei and Jin.” 「竊惟詩之興作，兆基邃古，唐歌虞詠，斯載典謨；商頌周雅，方陳金石。其後言志緣情，二京斯盛；含毫瀝思，魏晉彌繁。」 Luo, 221.

<sup>8</sup> See Chenqing Song and Du Xiaoqin and Li E.

<sup>9</sup> The *zi* 子 in *quzi ci* may not be a simple grammatical suffix. Rather, excerpted pieces of “grand melodies” (*daqu* 大曲), typically include it. The melody *Pozhen zi* 破陣子, for example, is an excerpt of the longer piece, *Formation Breaking Music* (*Pozhen yue* 破陣樂). The word “minor” here is meant to contrast with the “grand” of “grand melodies.” See Ren, 323–5.

*Yuefu* originally referenced an actual bureau, established in the Qin (221–206 B.C.) and famously expanded by Emperor Wu of the Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BC), devoted to collecting folk melodies and lyrics. Sometime in the Six Dynasties, it came to refer to the pieces themselves.<sup>10</sup> Though of much more recent origin than the *Airs of State*,<sup>11</sup> for Tang thinkers, the concept of *yuefu* came to represent the possibility of an idealized, intimate connection between music, poetry, and morality, eventually expanding to refer to virtually any type of musical poetry. Though today’s scholars think in terms of a progression from *yuefu* to *shi* to *ci*, for Tang poets, the distinction between poetry suited for setting to instrumental music (*yuefu*) and poetry not so intended (*tushi* 徒詩 or “acapella poetry”), was the clearer dividing line.

Narrowly construed as the name of a genre, Tang *yuefu* may be divided into three developmental periods: works of the Han and Wei, called “old *yuefu*” (*gu yuefu* 古樂府), works of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589), called “new sound *yuefu*” (新聲樂府), and experimental works of primarily eighth and ninth-century poets like Du Fu 杜 (712–770), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), who invented new *yuefu* titles they called “new *yuefu*” or “new title *yuefu*” (新題樂府).<sup>12</sup> Of these three, only the Southern “new sound *yuefu*,” what Northern Song *yuefu* historian, Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041 – 99) called “pure re melody lyrics” (*qingshang quci* 清商曲辭), traditionally subdivided into “the voices of

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<sup>10</sup> The earliest known usage of the term as name of a genre appears in Shen Yue’s *Book of the Song*. See, for example, his discussion of the poetry of Bao Zhao 鮑照 (c. 414–466), Shen, vol. 3, 1477–8 and Birrell, 5–15.

<sup>11</sup> The *Airs of State* (*Guofeng* 國風) are the part of the *Shijing* most explicitly associated with the folk stratum.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed overview of *yuefu* developmental history see Qian, “Tangren yuefu xue shuyao” and Wu, 2015.

Wu and the melodies of the West” (吳聲西曲), still had a connection to a living performance tradition in the Tang. That tradition, called “Pure Re” (*qingshang*) music, however, had already been subsumed within the larger, newer tradition of “Banquet Music” (*yanyue* 燕樂) by the Sui Dynasty, and almost entirely disappeared by Bai and Yuan’s time.<sup>13</sup> Of the three genres to be considered here, then, *yuefu* were the most disconnected from musical realities of the Tang, especially the middle and late Tang, and especially the experimental, “new title” pieces.

Han writers called *yuefu* “song poems” (*geshi* 歌詩): folk lyrics and music recorded by elites, folk lyrics set to elite music, and folk melodies for which elites wrote new lyrics.<sup>14</sup> Their titles usually end with “song” (*ge* 歌), “traveling” (*xing* 行), “traveling song” (*gexing* 歌行), or one of several other music-related terms. Their popularity during the Han and Wei (220–265) periods, especially, contributed to such innovations in *shi* poetry as the five and seven-character line.<sup>15</sup> In his “Preface” to *Old Yuefu Titles* (*Yuefu guti xu* 樂府古題序), Yuan Zhen, known, along with his friend, Bai Juyi, for his earlier experimentation with new *yuefu* forms (they are sometimes even called leaders of a “new *yuefu* movement”), describes a novel, yet archaist view of this evolution:

*Shi* poetry ended with the Zhou; *sao* poetry ended with the State of Chu. After this, *shi* poetry divided into twenty-four types known as: rhapsodies, hymns, epitaphs, panegyrics, prose, eulogies, admonitions, *shi*, traveling songs, odes, chants, examinations, laments, recitations, memorials, articles, compositions, preludes, ballads, folk songs, *ge*, melodies, lyrics, and tunes. These all descended from the original Six Principles manifested through different authorial intents.<sup>16</sup> Those last eight beginning with “compositions” all

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<sup>13</sup> For translations of Shen Yue and Guo Maoqian’s categorizations of *yuefu*, see Birrell, 206–8.

<sup>14</sup> Reference *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), “Treatise on Literature” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志), “Shifu pian” 詩賦篇. For an overview of this term, see Anne Birrell.

<sup>15</sup> As late as the Jian’an Period, Cao Pi 曹丕 notes that facility with the five-character *shi* line was rare. See Qian, “Shi lun Han Wei liuchao qiyuan shige de yuanliu ji qi yu yinyue de guanxi” (2013).

<sup>16</sup> The “Six Principles” (六義) of the *Shijing*, “Airs,” “Description,” “Metaphor,” “Image,” “Elegantiae,” and “Hymns” (風、賦、比、興、雅、頌), reference the different genres and major literary techniques therein.

developed from ritual music, such as that of the Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth and the Five Rites of Zhou. These all select lyrics to pair with music, examine tune to structure singing, count line lengths, and account for rhyme and tone, all to match the music. Differentiated further, those written to accompany zither music are called “compositions” and “preludes”; those written for folk music are called “ballads” and “folk songs”; those set to composed melodies are called “melodies,” “lyrics,” and “tunes.” All of these are lyrics written for music, not music written for poetry.

The nine genres listed after *shi* all vary by topic; though their names are different, they may all be termed “*shi*.” Of later poets who understood music, many set their lyrics to music, but they were pairing music with their chosen lyrics, not allowing music to determine the lyrics. The editor of *Music Old and New* lists all seventeen from *shi* on.<sup>17</sup> Though *yuefu* lyrics like *Military Music*, *Horizontal Pipes*, *Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth*, and *Qingshang* appear in the *Records of Music*, many other pieces, like *Mulan*, *Zhongqing*, *Four Longings*, and *Seven Laments*, clearly were not all written to accompany court music. Of later literati, few were experts in music and so no longer differentiated pieces this way. Wishing to express themselves more freely on certain topics, however, they often chose lines of unequal length, taking this for the difference between *ge* and *shi*. Liu Buque stated that *yuefu* began with the Han and the Wei, but given the stories of Confucius studying the *Composition of King Wen*, Bo Ya composing the tunes to *Flowing Waters* and *Narcissus*, Qi Dumu’s *Pheasant Flies at Morning*, and the Woman of Wei’s *Prelude on Longing*, it is equally clear that this did not begin with the Han or Wei.

So from the time of the *Airs* and the *Elegantiae*, up through the age of the Music Bureau, poetry was written to critique current events as a lesson to later generations... Of recent works, only Du Fu’s ballads, like *Grieving Over Chentao*, *Lament by the River*, *Army Wagons*, and *Fair Ladies*, take their titles from current events, no longer borrowing the old as an allegory for the new.<sup>18</sup> When we were younger, my friends Bai Juyi, Li Gongchui, and I thought this proper, and so chose not to compose any more imitations of ancient titles. Yesterday, I saw Presented Scholars Liu Meng and Li Yu, each of whom composed ten or so old *yuefu*. Of these twenty or so pieces, all included fresh content, so I chose some to write response poems. Though they use old titles, none of their sentiments are old.

《詩》迄於周，《離騷》迄於楚。是後，《詩》之流為二十四名：賦、頌、銘、贊、文、誄、箴、詩、行、詠、吟、題、怨、嘆、章、篇、操、引、謠、謳、歌、曲、詞、調，皆詩人六義之餘，而作者之旨。由操而下八名，皆起於郊祭、軍賓、吉兇、苦樂之際。在音聲者，因聲以度詞，審調以節唱，句度短長之數，聲韻平上

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<sup>17</sup> *Music Old and New* (*Gujin yuelu* 古今樂錄): a Chen-Dynasty (557–89) work now lost, but frequently referenced by other medieval sources.

<sup>18</sup> For English translations of these works, see Du, Stephen Owen, trans. (2015).

之差，莫不由之準度。而又別其在琴瑟者為操引，采民甞者為謳謠，備曲度者，總得謂之歌曲詞調，皆斯由樂以定詞，非選調以配樂也。

由詩以下九名，皆屬事而作，雖題號不同，而悉謂之為詩可也。後之審樂者，往往採取其詞，度為歌曲，蓋選詞以配樂，非由樂以定詞也。而纂撰者，由詩而下十七名，盡編在樂錄、樂府等題。除《鐃吹》、《橫吹》、《郊祀》、《清商》等詞在《樂志》者，其餘《木蘭》、《仲卿》、《四愁》、《七哀》之輩，亦未必盡播於管弦明矣。後之文人，達樂者少，不復如是配別。但遇興紀題，往往兼以句讀長短，為歌詩之異。劉補闕之樂府，肇於漢魏。按仲尼學文王操，伯牙作流波、水仙等操，齊犢沐作雉朝飛，衛女作思歸引，則不於漢魏而後始，亦以明矣。

況自風雅至於樂流，莫非諷興當時之事，以貽後代之人... .近代唯詩人杜甫《悲陳陶》、《哀江頭》、《兵車》、《麗人》等，凡所歌行，率皆即事名篇，無復倚傍。余少時與友人樂天、李公垂輩，謂是為當，遂不復擬賦古題。昨梁州見進士劉猛、李餘，各賦古樂府詩數十首，其中一二十章，咸有新意，余因選而和之。其有雖用古題，全無古義者。<sup>19</sup>

On Yuan's view, all literature, including prose genres, descends from the *Shijing*; poems later labeled *shi* can only encompass part of this idealized wholeness. Within the grouping of seventeen verse genres listed after "admonitions," Yuan distinguishes two broad categories he calls "shi" and "ge." He claims that his contemporaries, ignorant of the importance of music, have mistaken equal line lengths and unequal line lengths as the defining characteristic of these two. He argues that the real difference lies in the question of whether poetry or music comes first. Yuan claims that the broad category, *shi*, should refer to poetry which follows the traditional order as described in the *Book of Documents*: sentiment takes form in words and finds expression in song (選詞以配樂), *in that order*.<sup>20</sup> *Ge* reverses the last step: a pre-existing musical framework determines the lyrics (由樂以定詞). Yuan was not the first to make this distinction, and poets continued to worry about its implications until the seventeenth century, at

<sup>19</sup> Yuan Zhen, vol. 1, 254. 由詩以下九名 should be 由詩而下九名.

<sup>20</sup> The original quotation, endlessly revisited, is "Poetry (*shi*) expresses thoughts through words, songs (*ge*) draw out and lengthen (*yong*) those words, sounds accord with that lengthening, and pitch pipe scales harmonize those sounds." 「詩言志，歌永言，聲依永，律和聲。」 See "The Canon of Shun" (舜典) in *The Book of Documents* (尚書).

least.<sup>21</sup> In reality, the technique of weaving new melodies on the basis of such prosodic factors as line length and linguistic tone was the newer innovation, likely not dating much earlier than the fifth or sixth century, around which time, perhaps not coincidentally, Chinese poets began to become aware of the newly tonal nature of their own spoken languages.<sup>22</sup>

Yuan's larger concern here is that poets have lost the knowledge and motivation to compose socially relevant song lyrics of the sort he traces back to Wei and Han *yuefu*, and from there, to the *Airs* and *Elegantiae* (*Fengya* 風雅) of the *Shijing*. The reason Yuan insists that *shi* and *ge* not be taken as bywords for “equal line lengths” and “varied line lengths” is his desire to include many *yuefu*, including the “traveling songs” which make up a good deal of the corpus, in the category of *shi*—that is, poetic lyrics not written to pair with any pre-existing music. This may be a paradoxical defense of acapella or non-musical poetry: poets need not worry that their poems, because not explicitly written with any particular melody in mind, do not fulfill the ideal of the *Shijing*, since carefully-chosen words, in a sense, make their own music, or can easily fit into a variety of musical styles. He cites examples like the Northern Six Dynasties piece, *Ballad of Mulan*, and Du Fu's more recent experiments with the form as proof that not all *yuefu* were written with pre-existing melodies in mind, musical in their style and potential though they might be. Having established that *yuefu* may be either *shi* or *ge* (on his definitions), Yuan then attempts to trace these traditions back even earlier by citing examples of Confucius, famous zither player Bo Ya, and others drawing inspiration or intent from music and sound. Yuan therefore denies the common notion that *yuefu* began with the Han Dynasty Music Bureau, since poetic composition

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<sup>21</sup> Early-Qing philologist, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82), for example, complained, “The ancients followed poetry with music; people of today follow music with poetry.” 「古人以樂從詩，今人以詩從樂。」 See Ren, 344.

<sup>22</sup> The earliest known description of such a technique appears in a story about the final ruler of the Chen Dynasty (557–89), Chen Shubao 陳叔寶, known for his problematic indulgence in poetry. See Liu Xu et al., vol. 4, 1067. See Schuessler, “Introduction” for an overview of current thinking on the evolution of tones in Chinese languages.



in the “spirit” of *yuefu*, of both *shi* and *ge* varieties, predated it. Here we may also detect the expansion of the sense of *yuefu* to include all poetry of a certain musical “spirit,” rather than a single, historically-bound genre.

On the narrow definition of *yuefu* as genre scholars commonly use today, Yuan’s account is not accurate and further engages in a kind of rhetorical legerdemain: by associating the technique of weaving melodies out of poems with the ancient *Shijing*, and by tracing the compositional model more often associated with *yuefu* (music first) back to similarly ancient times (and associating it with the ancient, elite tradition of zither playing), Yuan attempts to merge the tradition of *yuefu* and the “lyrics first” technique with the spirit of the *Shijing*, and thereby provide an ancient pedigree for his experimentation. As Song Dynasty (960–1279) poets later describe *ci* poetry as the *yuefu* of the Song, and Yuan poets describe “melodies” (*qu* 曲) as the *yuefu* of the Yuan, here Yuan argues that *yuefu* are the *Airs* and *Elegantiae* of the Han, Wei, Six Dynasties, and Tang.<sup>23</sup>

Why were Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and other eighth and ninth-century poets interested in creating new titles for this ancient genre when poetic forms with closer ties to living music traditions were available to them? Some of the answers lie in political and musical realities of the time. Du Fu had lived through, and Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen were living during the aftermath of, the An Lushan Rebellion (安史之亂 755–63), one of the most destructive events in human history, which came on the heels of a golden age for Chinese poetry and music.

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<sup>23</sup> In a preface to *Rhymes of the Central Plain* (*Zhongyuan yinyun* 中原音韻), for example, Luo Zongxin 羅宗信, friend of phonologist and music historian, Zhou Deqing 周德清, writes: “Verily, the world commends the *shi* poetry of the Tang dynasty, the *ci* lyrics of the Song dynasty, and the *yuefu* art songs of the Great Yuan dynasty.” Sieber, 47. Interestingly, while Song dynasty poets also refer to their *ci* as *yuefu*, here a Yuan citizen uses the more modern term for that genre while referring to Yuan “melodies” (*qu* 曲) as *yuefu*. Though used narrowly to refer to a genre which flourished in the Han and Six Dynasties or broadly to refer to any musical poetry, then, *yuefu* also seems to possess something of a shifting meaning along the lines of “the musical poetry of the day.”

The court of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang (r. 713–56) was especially well known for its support of—or indulgence in—music and performing arts, including a great number of foreign arts. Guo Maoqian describes this cosmopolitan flourishing, which greatly accelerated with the large-scale importation of Buddhism in the Six Dynasties, achieved official support in the court of the Sui, and reached its zenith during Xuanzong’s Kaiyuan 開元 and Tianbao 天寶 reigns (713–56):

At the founding of the Sui, there were seven royal departments of music: the first called Western Liang Arts, the second, *Qingshang* Arts, the third, Goryeo Arts, the fourth, Hindustani Arts, the fifth, Anguo Arts, the sixth, Tocharian Arts, and the seventh, Wenkang Arts. Among his first imperial acts, Emperor Yang established the nine *Qingshang*, Western Liang, Tocharian, Hindustani, Kang, Khaśa, Anguo, Goryeo, and Ceremonial Music departments. Many instruments and costumes were collected for this purpose. At the founding of the Tang, the old Sui system of Nine Departments was adopted. Taizong added the Gaochang Music and the Banquet Music, while removing the Ceremonial Music, for a total of ten departments... referred to collectively as “Banquet Music.” Their music and lyrics were complex and varied beyond description. All the so-called Banquet melodies began with the Wude and Zhenguan reigns [618–49] and reached their height during the Kaiyuan and Tianbao reigns [713–56]. On record are 222 pieces in fourteen different keys. There was also the Pear Garden, which taught an additional eleven melodies, as well as the twenty-two melodies of the Yunshao Academy.

隋自開皇初，文帝置七部樂：一曰西涼伎，二曰清商伎，三曰高麗伎，四曰天竺伎，五曰安國伎，六曰龜茲伎，七曰文康伎。至大業中，煬帝乃立清樂、西涼、龜茲、天竺、康國、疏勒、安國、高麗、禮畢，以為九部。樂器工衣於是大備。唐武德初，因隋舊制，用九部樂。太宗增高昌樂，又造讌樂，而去禮畢曲。其著令者十部...而總謂之燕樂。聲辭繁雜，不可勝紀。凡燕樂諸曲，始於武德、貞觀，盛於開元、天寶。其著錄者十四調二百二十二曲。又有梨園，別教院法歌樂辭十一曲，雲韶樂二十曲。<sup>24</sup>

Of the various styles which make up the ten “departments” of Tang music, only the *qingshang* style, associated with the Han Dynasty “chorus harmony” (*xianghe* 相合) wind and string ensembles and the Southern dynasties’ “voices of Wu and melodies of the West,” was viewed as

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<sup>24</sup> Guo, 1107–8.

purely Han Chinese in origin. The Tang founder and Tang Xuanzong had also added the Royal Music Academy (教坊) and “Pear Garden” (梨園) actors’ stable, further increasing the resources devoted to performing arts. The “banquet music” which came to dominate the elite musical landscape of the Sui, Tang, and Song, was largely a foreign import, and lacked Confucian foundations in theory or in practice.<sup>25</sup> In practice, however, it was also the primary musical tradition for performance of elite song lyrics in Yuan Zhen’s time, whether *yuefu*, musical *shi* poems, or the newer *quzi ci*. Though poets like Du, Bai, and Yuan might experiment with new lyrics to older Han-Wei *yuefu*, or later “new sound” titles of the Southern Six Dynasties (both of which were “old title *yuefu*” from their perspective), and/or with creating entirely new patterns with topical titles (what Bai and Yuan called “new title *yuefu*”), in no case was it possible to go back to a pre-*yanyue* musical reality.<sup>26</sup>

As was their usual practice, Confucian thinkers blamed the An Lushan Rebellion on moral degeneracy—most famously that of the Emperor’s consort and her relatives, but also the over-indulgence in foreign religion, music, and performing arts. Writing during the Rebellion, statesman, poet, and military advisor Yuan Jie 元結 (723–772) critiques recent poets in the “Preface” to his *Book Box Collection* (篋中集):

Recent authors have carried on the tradition of restricting themselves in accordance with the *doṣa*<sup>27</sup> and playing at imitation of older styles, but with their focus on smooth sounds, they don’t realize they’ve neglected uprightness. Instead, they focus on writing about popular topics, harmonizing with strings, giving courtesans something to sing and dance to, and thereby give rise to disorderly sounds in private residences. But if a man of

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<sup>25</sup> For an overview of what it meant for music to be “Confucian,” in theory and in practice, see Thrasher, 25–73.

<sup>26</sup> See Hsieh 95–143 for an overview of Six Dynasties *yuefu* and their contribution to the evolution of the *jinti*.

<sup>27</sup> Sanskrit term for a poetic “defect” or “illness”; possibly the origin of the “eight poetic maladies” (*babing*) Six Dynasties and Tang poets embraced as rules for the new, regulated verse. On this theory, see Mair and Mei, 1991. For an alternative view, see Hongming Zhang (2015).

upright character, a gentleman in the spirit of the *Greater Elegantiae* were to hear or chant these words, he would surely not approve.

近世作者，更相沿襲，拘限聲病，喜尚形似，且以流易為辭，不知喪於雅正，然哉彼則指詠時物，會諧絲竹，與歌兒舞女，生污惑之聲於私室可矣！若令方直之士、大雅君子聽而誦之，則未見其可也。<sup>28</sup>

Worries about the loss of ancient music were not new, but Yuan Jie here clearly critiques the priorities of High Tang poets. He claims they were more concerned with imitating ancient styles as a game, and following prosodic conventions for the convenience of singing girls, than in crafting politically relevant, morally uplifting compositions. Yuan's priorities are reflected in his choices for inclusion in the collection: largely *yuefu* and prosodically unregulated, old-style *shi* treating serious, mournful topics. Yuan's implicit claim is that these raw, unornamented, socially relevant works are more fitting successors to the *Shijing* than the bright, melodious works of many High Tang poets. This is again not a call for non-musical poetry—amoral poetry is supposed to offend the *ear* of the Confucian gentleman—but rather a call to reorder priorities: morally upright poetry will naturally sound mellifluous to a man of good character, so the poet should focus on content over form.

To summarize the state of *yuefu* in the Tang, there were two different axes of distinction: “old titles” versus “new titles,” with “old titles,” or “imitations of old [titles]” (*nigu* 擬古), indicating pre-Tang musical-prosodic patterns, and “new titles” indicating creation of entirely new patterns with new names, as Du Fu, Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen did, largely as an experiment in prioritizing topical content.<sup>29</sup> The other was “old *yuefu*” as opposed to “new sound *yuefu*,” with “old *yuefu*” indicating primarily the *yuefu* of the Han and early Six Dynasties, the *xianghe*

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<sup>28</sup> Yuan Jie, 100.

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed overview of various attempts, during the Tang, to restore the *yuefu* genre by poets like Yuan Jie and Pi Rixiu 皮日休, see Qian, “Tangren yuefu xue shuyao” and Wu (2015), 229–243.

music for which had been entirely lost, and “new sound *yuefu*” referring first and foremost to the *qingshang quci* of the late Six Dynasties, the music for which survived as part of *yanyue* at least until the An Lushan Rebellion. *Yuefu* without the “old” prefix also came to refer broadly to any musical poetry, including *shi* or even the newer *quzi ci*. For Tang poets, “old versus new” and “lyrics first, music second versus music first, lyrics second” were clearer dividing lines than “*yuefu* versus *shi*” or “*yuefu* versus *ci*” as the terms are commonly used today.

Though both old and new *yuefu* titles *could* be, and sometimes were, set to music (as, indeed, any lyrics may technically be set to music),<sup>30</sup> of the three major forms considered in this paper, *yuefu* (on the narrow definition) was the most divorced from the musical realities of the time, having been based on a style of music which was largely lost, especially after the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, or, in the case of Bai and Yuan’s experiments, which never existed. Instead, it came to occupy a broader, idealized space as the Confucian successor to the ideal of the *Shijing* as understood by Tang poets. As the Tang wore on, the possibility of recapturing the music of the Han and Six Dynasties dwindled at the same time as the semantic range of *yuefu* broadened to encompass not just a single genre, but all kinds of musical poetry.

#### Tang Musical *Shi* Poetry: Flourishing and Decline

Conventionally, the Tang is known for *shi* poetry, especially tonally regulated, “recent-style” *shi* poetry (*jinti shi*). And with good reason: Tang poets produced a much greater quantity of poetry in this form than any other, and many, if not most of the most famous works of the

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<sup>30</sup> See Wu (2002).

period are of this style. In a monumental work on what he calls “Tang musical poetry” (*Tang shengshi* 唐聲詩) published in 1982, Ren Bantang aimed to establish the term as an update to the conventional critical reference to Tang *shi*, Song *ci*, and Yuan *qu*. As the last two terms do not imply that *ci* poetry began or ended with the Song, or that *qu* poetry began or ended with the Yuan, so Ren does not imply that musical *shi* poetry began or ended with the Tang, but rather that, like those other forms and their associated dynasties, musical *shi* poetry somehow constituted the single most important poetic development of the Tang.

At the same time as he narrows the genre to the Tang, and to pieces known to have been set to music, like Wang Wei’s 王維 (699–759) *Weicheng Melody* (*Weicheng qu* 渭城曲<sup>31</sup>), Ren also widens the scope of *shengshi* beyond the *jinti*: though the majority of Tang musical poems may be *jinti*, Ren claims, neither were all *jinti* meant for musical performance, nor all musical *shi* poems *jinti*. Ren further qualifies his definition of *shengshi*, but these distinctions are not crucial to the present study, which will refer simply to “musical *shi* poetry of the Tang,” having noted that this references any work in the broader *shi* genre—primarily, but not exclusively, eight-line *jinti* regulated poems (*lüshi* 律詩) and four-line regulated quatrains (*lüjue* 律絕)—composed for, or known to have been performed to, music. Within this broader category, which includes not only many longer regulated poems (*pailü* 排律), some six-character regulated poems and quatrains, and even a few four-character regulated and “old”-style poems (*gushi*), the most common are five and seven-character regulated quatrains of equal line length (齊言). Attempting a categorization analogous to Ren’s, Qing scholar Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) even

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<sup>31</sup> See Ren, 418–38 for a musical history of this piece, a well-known example of an acapella poem becoming the inspiration for a famous melody, or *shi* on Yuan Zhen’s definition.

described the *jueju* as “the *yuefu* of the Tang,” proving that the expansive definition of *yuefu* lasted well into the early modern period, at least.<sup>32</sup>

Having stated that not every Tang *shi* poem intended for music was a *jinti*, it is worth exploring the extent to which *jinti* rules governing line length, tonal alternation, rhyme, and parallelism were created for and/or understood as conforming to the demands of music. Ren notes that scholars’ views on the subject fall into a few groups: on one end of the spectrum are scholars and writers like Hu Shi and Zheng Zhenduo, who see the prosodic rules as a substitute for, or vestige of, music.<sup>33</sup> On this account, the precise rules of *jinti* prosody prove their *lack* of musicality. After all, older *yuefu* were understood to have been musical, yet lacked such precise rules, and it is certainly not the case that Chinese song lyrics today, from folk songs to pop music, necessarily follow any strict prosodic rules.<sup>34</sup> On this interpretation, the *lü* 律 of *lüshi* means “regulation”—a set of rules governing a poet’s word choice designed for the sake of euphony when chanted or read aloud, but not for musicality.

At the other end of the spectrum are scholars like Wu Mei 吳梅 (1884–1939) and Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887–1964), who saw the musical genres of Song lyrics and Yuan melodies inheriting the musicality of Tang regulated verse quite directly.<sup>35</sup> On this theory, the rules of *jinti* prosody, like the more complex rules governing Song lyric and Yuan melody patterns (*cipai* 詞牌 and *qupai* 曲牌) exist, first and foremost, for the benefit of singing and setting to music.

Because pitch modulations distinguish words in Chinese languages, a lyricist must arguably take

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<sup>32</sup> See Hsieh, 32.

<sup>33</sup> See Ren, 346–7; Zheng, 351–8; Hu, 144–56.

<sup>34</sup> Perry Link, however, describes how many Chinese daily life phrases, from commercial jingles to political slogans, nonetheless adhere to traditional prosodic patterns.

<sup>35</sup> See Ren, 347 and Wu Mei, 9–12.

linguistic tone into account, or risk unintelligibility in cases when the melody conflicts, and especially if words are drawn out extensively, as they are in the art of *Kunqu* 昆曲 Wu studied. On this account, the *lü* of *lüshi* refers not to “rules,” but to musical pitches (樂律). In support of this theory are early *jinti* theorists, such as Shen Yue’s 沈約 (441–513) use of decidedly musical terminology, such as “do and la” (宮羽) to describe their own efforts.<sup>36</sup> Also in support of this is the fact that Chinese languages did not actually become tonal until the late-Han or Six Dynasties period.<sup>37</sup> If Han and earlier poets did not concern themselves with tonal alternation when writing song lyrics, it is because their languages did not have tones.

To attempt a synthesis of these two views, we must first recall that poetics and musicology were not fully separate in the Tang or earlier dynasties (nor would they ever be, though assumption of the inherent musicality of poetry drops off after the Tang). As such, the notion of “prosody” as separate from music was not much developed. If Shen Yue describes linguistic tones in terms of “do and la,” it may imply that he, and other medieval poets, saw no fundamental difference between musical pitch modulations and speech pitch modulations or music and speech rhythms. Tonally regulated language *was* musical language for the same reason that music is nothing more, nor less, than artfully structured sound.

In support of the medieval conflation of quantitative meter and musical rhythm, consider the term *jueju* itself: though there are a few competing theories about the origin of the term, one possibility is that the “jue” in *jueju* (literally “cut off phrases”) actually means something more like *jie* 節, as in “node,” “segment,” or, indeed, the modern term for a musical rhythmic measure,

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<sup>36</sup> See the final paragraphs of the biography of Xie Lingyun in “Biographies, 27” (列傳第二十七), Shen, vol. 3, 1778–9.

<sup>37</sup> See Note 22.



*yinjie* 音節.<sup>38</sup> In other words, as Yuan Zhen’s description of writing lyrics for existing music (句  
度短長之數, literally “phrases structured by line length count”) hints, Tang poets saw line  
lengths as reflecting something of the musical structure of a poem. As Alan Thrasher notes,  
Chinese music tends toward non-cyclical, asymmetric melodic phrasing, a fact which may relate  
to a comparative lack of emphasis on dance and singing in unison (it is easier for singers and  
dancers to coordinate when musical phrasing is regular), and scholars like Gao Houyong have  
argued that unequal line lengths in *ci* poetry reflect a more complex, asymmetrical musical  
structure.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, then, it may not be a coincidence that “grand melody” pieces for the  
court and the more popular Tang singing and dance performance called *ta yaoniang* 踏搖娘  
generally used equal line lengths, most often of seven characters per line.<sup>40</sup> In choosing between  
prosodic features like shorter and longer line lengths or equal and unequal line lengths, then,  
Tang poets were, in their own minds and in practice, also prescribing a musical feature, such as a  
smaller or larger number of syllables per rhythmic unit, or symmetric or asymmetric melodic  
phrasing.

The assumption of musicality, especially for regulated *shi* poetry, continued well into the  
mid-Tang and beyond. The following account of Li He’s 李賀 (790–816) composition of a  
musical *shi* poem, for example, offers a sense of poets’ practice and terms:

[A Northern friend of mine] claimed to be highly proficient in long and short tunes  
(*diao*)... In the fourth month of this year, when I was a neighbor of his in Chang’an... he  
invited me to join him for a drinking party. When our spirits were high and all of us well  
in our cups, he said to me: “Li Changji! You can only write long tunes (*changdiao*). You  
can’t handle five-character song poems (*geshi*). You may force the tip of your brush to  
write something, but you’ll never come within miles of Tao Yuanming and Xie

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<sup>38</sup> See Hsieh 17–39 for a discussion of various theories on the origin of the term, *jueju*.

<sup>39</sup> See Thrasher, 78–9.

<sup>40</sup> For a description of this art form, see Duan, “Percussion Department” (*Gujia bu* 鼓架部), 12–13.

Lingyun's *shi*." After I responded, he asked for a five-character quatrain (*duanju*) on the topic of "Bearded Shen's Tartar Horn Song." When I'd finished my song, all the guests started shouting for us to sing it together. My Northern friend was delighted... and called for a singing girl to come out from behind a curtain. She paid her respects to all the guests, and I asked after her specialty. She replied, "even cadence." They sang my lyrics to music, wishing me long life.<sup>41</sup>

自稱學長調短調... .今年四月。吾與對舍於長安... .命予合飲。氣熱杯蘭。因謂吾曰：「李長吉。爾徒能長調。不能作五字歌詩。直強迴筆端，與陶謝詩勢相遠幾里。」吾對後請撰申鬚子鬢築歌。以五字斷句。歌成。左右人合譟相唱。朔客大喜。擎觴起立。命花娘出幕。裴回拜客。吾問所宜。稱善平弄。於是弊辭配聲。與予為壽。

The musical term *diao* ("tune," "key," "piece") here refers to *shi* poems: the "short" *diao* are five-character *shi* poems and the "long" *diao* pieces with seven characters per line. The resulting poem is a five-character, regulated quatrain (what Li here calls a *duanju* 斷句 or "cut-off phrase") with the title *ge*, or "song." *Ge* here does not accord with Yuan Zhen's idiosyncratic definition, as the music comes after the poem. At the same time, there is seemingly no question that a professional singer should be able to sing Li's poem without much difficulty, according, as it does, with established rules of prosody/musicality. The fact that the singer has a specialization further indicates that there was more than one way to sing a regulated quatrain.<sup>42</sup> Li's friend's choice of comparison, however, is noteworthy: Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427) and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) were poets known for their five-character, prosodically *unregulated*, old *shi* poems, and predate the firm establishment of *jinti shi* conventions. But for Li and his friend, line length seems to be a more important determinant of style than whether or not certain tonal alternations were followed.

<sup>41</sup> Translation based on Ward, 74, with slight modification.

<sup>42</sup> On the existence of multiple singing styles in the Tang, as well as the question of whether Tang-Song vocal music was all syllabic (one syllable, one note), see Ren, 174–194.

Tang poets, then, had great confidence in the inherent musicality of their poetry—arguably too much confidence. The following early-Tang story, for example, shows Tang musicians reconstructing a long-lost zither melody based on textual clues and newly composed poetry alone:

In the second year, the Minister of Ceremonial played the zither melody *White Snow*. Before this, the piece was known as a refined zither piece which ancients had sung, but its sound had ceased in recent times. Though some transmitted and studied it, they had lost the melodic details, so the minister ordered his musicians with expertise in zither and mouth organs to edit the old melody. The Minister of Ceremonial reported: “By consulting the *Book of Rites* and the *Family Sayings of Confucius*, your servant learned that zither composition melodies were suited for singing: ‘Shun played a five-stringed zither, singing the poem, *Southern Air*.’ Moreover, Zhang Hua’s *Record of Myriad Matters* states: ‘*White Snow* is the name of a melody the Yellow Emperor taught the Moon Goddess to play on the drums and fifty-string zither.’ Also, Song Yu, Minister of Chu, said to King Xiang of Chu: ‘a guest in the capital of Chu sang a song called *White Snow in Spring*, and ten or more subjects harmonized with it.’ Thus I learned that the zither melody, *White Snow*, was originally suited for choral singing, but because of its high pitch, few people sang it that way. Since the time of Song Yu, a millennium has already past, and no one knows how to sing the melody to *White Snow*. His Imperial Majesty gave me permission to fix the scale degrees of the old melody and teach it to singers. I used imperially composed *shi* on snow as the song lyrics. In *yuefu* old and new, after the end of the melody proper, there is always an additional coda (*songsheng*); the liege would sing and the ministers respond. This point is made clear in older histories. Therefore, I used *shi* on snow offered by the ministers at court, each sixteen *jie* in length, as *songsheng*; teaching them to the singers, they all rhymed perfectly.” His Majesty approved, and so commanded the Minister of Ceremonial to edit them as *yuefu*.

二年，太常奏《白雪》琴曲。先是，上以琴中雅曲，古人歌之，近代已來，此聲頓絕，雖有傳習，又失宮商，令所司簡樂工解琴笙者修習舊曲。至是太常上言曰：「臣謹按《禮記》、《家語》云：舜彈五弦之琴，歌《南風》之詩。是知琴操曲弄，皆合於歌。又張華《博物誌》云：『《白雪》是大帝使素女鼓五十弦瑟曲名。』又楚大夫宋玉對襄王云：『有客於郢中歌《陽春白雪》，國中和者數十人。』是知《白雪》琴曲，本宜合歌，以其調高，人和遂寡。自宋玉以後，迄今千祀，未有能歌《白雪曲》者。臣今准敕，依於琴中舊曲，定其宮商，然後教習，併合於歌。輒以禦制《雪詩》為《白雪》歌辭。又按古今樂府，奏正曲之後，皆別有

送聲，君唱臣和，事彰前史。輒取侍臣等奉和雪詩以為送聲，各十六節，今悉教訖，並皆諧韻。」上善之，乃付太常編於樂府。<sup>43</sup>

Already in the Tang, literati complained that their contemporaries were incapable of appreciating the refined music of the zither, preferring instead more raucous, new, often foreign instruments.<sup>44</sup> In this story, a court scholar reconstructs an ancient zither melody based on textual clues while the emperor and his courtiers compose poems (described as *shi*) to go with it. Scholars and musicians then further edit the poems and the melodies to fit one another, selecting those best suited from among a larger number of poems composed, and adding several “codas” (*songsheng*), described as sixteen “*jie* 節” in length, each. With the resulting pieces no longer extant, it is difficult to guess at the details, such as how long a *jie* might be in this case. Because of the inclusion of *songsheng*, however, they most likely belonged to the category of “pure re melody lyrics” (*qingshang quci*).<sup>45</sup>

This situation also seems to more nearly resemble what Yuan Zhen described as *ge* (poetry is selected and edited to fit music), and, if known to Yuan Zhen, might have been the sort of example he had in mind. For Yuan and Lü Cai, unity of poetry and music was the ideal. To recreate an ancient melody for an ancient instrument and then pair it with poems on an ancient topic was a gesture toward that lost unity. The fact that the anecdote describes the poems chosen for setting to zither music as *shi* (many *qingshang quci* look indistinguishable from five-character old *shi* poems) supports the idea that, for Tang poets, “creating a *yuefu*” and “creating a musical poem” meant roughly the same thing—a concept they were reluctant to abandon, since,

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<sup>43</sup> Liu Xu et al., vol. 4, 1046–7.

<sup>44</sup> See Zhang Mingfei (1993).

<sup>45</sup> Hsieh and Southern Dynasties; For more on the structural, musical, and performative elements of *qingshang quci*, see Wu (2015), 151–65.

as with Yuan Zhen, it allowed them to think of themselves as acting within the tradition of the *Shijing*.

As with *yuefu* narrowly defined, the rules governing Tang *jinti shi* prosody were developed prior to the ascendance of *yanyue*, though unlike *yuefu*, there was not a long tradition of setting *jinti* to native traditions like “pure re,” which had already become part of the larger *yanyue* repertoire by the Sui, and virtually disappeared by the mid-Tang. The tenth-century history, *Old Book of the Tang* describes the decline of *qingshang* music:

After the An Lushan Rebellion, the court no longer valued old melodies, the skills of the artists declined, and only the eight melodies *Bright Sovereign*, *Willow Companion*, *Reed Tossing*, *Spring Song*, *Autumn Song*, *White Snow*, *Grand and Imposing*, and *Moonlight Flowers on Spring River* remained for playing on pure pipes and strings. In the past there had been several hundred known musical phrases. In the time of Empress Wu [624–705], there were still forty lyrics for setting to *Bright Sovereign*, whereas the twenty-six which have been transmitted to this day are garbled and much different from the original Wu region sound. Liu Kuang (fl. Kaiyuan) thought it proper to have people from the Wu region teach the songs. He asked singing master Li about it, but Li himself was a Northerner and had already forgotten how to sing it properly. He had studied it under Master Yu Cai of Yangzhou, but now that Li himself is gone, another piece of Pure Music has gone with him. I have heard that of the Pure Music, only one Refined Song melody remains with classic lyrics and refined sound; consulting an old record, its lyrics and sound were classical and refined, indeed.

自長安已後，朝廷不重古曲，工伎轉缺，能合於管弦者，唯《明君》、《楊伴》、《驍壺》、《春歌》、《秋歌》、《白雪》、《堂堂》、《春江花月》等八曲。舊樂章多或數百言。武太后時，《明君》尚能四十言，今所傳二十六言，就之訛失，與吳音轉遠。劉旣以為宜取吳人使之傳習。以問歌工李郎子，李郎子北人，聲調已失，雲學于俞才生。才生，江都人也。今郎子逃，《清樂》之歌闕焉。又聞《清樂》唯《雅歌》一曲，辭典而音雅，閱舊記，其辭信典。<sup>46</sup>

In other words, between the eighth and early-tenth centuries, and especially in the wake of the An Lushan Rebellion, the *qingshang* music popular during the Six Dynasties had further declined from its Sui status as a small but important part of the larger *yanyue* repertoire, to

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<sup>46</sup> Liu Xu et al., vol. 4, 1067–8.

essentially lost. Therefore, though the mainstream of Tang musical poetry was the tonally-regulated *jinti shi* form developed during the Six Dynasties, the music of the Six Dynasties was gradually lost, especially after the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras. This development roughly corresponds also to the rise of *quzi ci* to be discussed in the next section.

With respect to music, then, Tang *shi* poems existed in a kind of intermediary space. Six Dynasty period *qingshang* music, especially the Wu region pieces cited above, shaped the “new sound *yuefu*,” which, in turn, gave rise to regulated quatrains through the experimentation of poets like Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414–466), Shen Yue, and Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464 – 499).<sup>47</sup> But the prosodic rules did not reach mainstream fixity until the early Tang, and evolutions in Tang music continued to shape *jinti* evolution.<sup>48</sup> During the Tang, *jinti shi* became the single most popular genre of song lyrics, but by that time, the foreign *yanyue* already dominated the musical “landscape,” elite and popular. *Jinti shi* may also have been more suited to large-scale court performance due to even line lengths, which likely correlated with a cyclical, symmetric melodic phrasing more suited to choral singing and dancing.<sup>49</sup> Evenly-structured melody, however, is more typical of Western and Central Asian music than Chinese music, and was not the mainstream of Confucian musical theory, which valued melodic complexity.<sup>50</sup>

The newer *quzi ci*, on the other hand, did descend from *yanyue*, but did so largely in piecemeal fashion: a great many *ci* melodies are in fact named after segments of larger *yanyue*

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<sup>47</sup> See Lin, 302–3 on Bao Zhao and Qian (2016) on the major contributions of Wang Yunxi 王運熙 (1926–2014) to the study of this evolution.

<sup>48</sup> In “Lun Han Wei liuchao qiyan shige de yuanliu ji qi yu yinyue de guanxi” (2013), for example, Qian argues that the shift in popularity from five to seven-character *jinti* lines which occurs during the high and mid-Tang related to musical developments of the time.

<sup>49</sup> On traditional Chinese approaches to melody, see Thrasher, 75–80.

<sup>50</sup> See Notes 42 and 49.

*daqu* compositions.<sup>51</sup> Many *ci*, were, in effect, excerpted *daqu*. Musically and prosodically, then, *jinti shi* occupies a transitional space between Six Dynasties *yuefu* and Tang *ci*: those *yuefu* most suited to court performance were adapted and codified for that purpose with the result that the original melodic complexity of *yuefu*<sup>52</sup> was lost; *quzi ci*, in turn, excerpts subsections of *yanyue* music in melodically complex fashion to recapture some of the qualities *jinti shi* had lost.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, a few poets, like Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen, attempted to recapture a Confucian ideal by creating new titles for the old *yuefu* tradition, but many others attempted to do so through *shi*, and the practice of singing and setting *shi* poetry to music for performance by, for example, the singing girl in Li He's story. This was much more the mainstream of Tang musical performance of song lyrics, even for Bai and Yuan themselves. In the title of a poem sent to Bai Juyi, for example, Yuan Zhen notes "Musicians can sing high and clear, / They sing ten or more of my poems."<sup>54</sup> Though Yuan seems proud of his poems' musicality, it seems having musicians sing one's *shi* was not rare.<sup>55</sup>

With respect to music and morality, *shi* suffered a slightly different problem from *yuefu*. Unlike *yuefu*, the practice of setting *shi* to music was alive and well in the Tang, even if it was largely to foreign-influenced music. Rhetorically, however, elite, prosodically polished *jinti shi* were lacking in the cache of "folk wisdom" associated with *yuefu* and the *Shijing*. The patterns

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<sup>51</sup> Those pieces with numbers or musical titles, like prelude (*xu* 序), often are so. For example, *Liangzhou Prelude* 涼州序. The fact that many *yanyue* pieces take frontier provinces for their names also hints at their perceived foreign, imperial, cosmopolitan status. See Note 9.

<sup>52</sup> Some scholars suggest that the "harmonies" (*hesheng* 和聲) and "codas" (*songsheng*) of "pure re melody lyrics" were forerunners of *ci* melodic complexity, though this is far from certain. See Ren, 82–90 and Cui and Jiang.

<sup>53</sup> The *shi* set to *qingshang* music, for example, may have been rendered more complex by inclusion of *hesheng* and *songsheng*: see Cui and Jiang (2017). Though the degree to which *ci* directly descends from *jinti shi* is debated. See Ren.

<sup>54</sup> 《贈樂天：樂人高玲瓏能歌，歌予數十詩》，Yuan Zhen, 244. Other versions include the character 商 after 樂人.

<sup>55</sup> On the general tendency of Tang poets, more than poets of later ages, to describe their compositions in terms of singing and music, see Qian (2004).

had been developed in elite Six Dynasties coterie, possibly to imitate the foreign sounds of Sanskrit. Most of the most celebrated pieces came from elites with ties to the capital, like Wang Wei.

Though the situation was different from *yuefu*, *jinti shi* poets again looked to the *Shijing* for ethical support. In his preface to *Collection of the Nation's Ripened Talents* (*Guoxiu ji* 國秀集), an eighth-century collection focused on recent works of tonally-regulated *shi* poetry, Lou Ying 樓穎 writes:

When creating the ritual music, Confucius rectified the *Elegantiae* and the *Hymns*, selecting from over three-thousand old poems to arrive at only three-hundred and five. They were all suitable for dancing, playing on strings, and singing, and also of high literary merit. In recent times, their excellencies Grand Secretary Chen [Xilie] and Prime Minister Su [Yuanming] sent a request to Master Rui [Tingzhang]: “In the thousand years since the *Airs* and *Elegantiae*, talented men of letters have ruined the ritual music... Since the end of the Kaiyuan, only three years of this Tianbao reign have passed. If one demoted the chaff and picked the most excellent blossoms, one might select those works suitable for pipes and strings.”

Master Rui searched Yu the Great's Book Hall, selecting pearls from the Red River and the pure lyrics of the great void, not begrudging the new nor the lowly... Amongst them are works of lonely hermits of mountains and valleys and refined men of reclusion from within the busy city. Divine pearls give off a hidden light, and only when cracking open an oyster may one find them... He longed to continue the search for folk songs of literary merit through the alleys and backways, but Lord Chen had already passed on and the papers piled up on Rui's desk without being put to print, and so he finally put down his brush. Today I edit just a few of these, ninety poets all together, for a small collection of two-hundred twenty poems to be transmitted to posterity.

仲尼定禮樂，正《雅》、《頌》，采古詩三千餘什，得三百五篇。皆舞而蹈之，弦而歌之，亦取其順澤者也。近秘書監陳公、國子司業蘇公嘗從容謂芮侯曰：「風雅之後，數千載間，詞人才子，禮樂大壞...自開元以來，維天寶三載，譴謫蕪穢，登納菁英，可被管弦者，都為一集。

芮侯即探書禹穴，求珠赤水，取太沖之清詞，無嫌近溷...其有岩壑孤貞，市朝大隱。神珠匿耀，剖巨蚌而寧周...尚欲巡采風謠。旁求側陋。而陳公已化為異



物，堆案颯然，無與樂成，遂因絕筆。今略編次見在者，凡九十人，詩二百二十首，為之小集，成一家之言。<sup>56</sup>

For Rui and Lou, poetic collection takes on the air of a treasure hunt. Lou claims that, like Confucius, Rui had scoured the countryside and the alleyways for musical, morally uplifting poetry of the people, an act compared to prying open oysters to search for hidden pearls. And like the original Han Music Bureau, Rui undertook this quest at imperial command.

Though Rui and Lou likely did succeed in bringing to light and/or preserving the works of some lesser-known poets, like Lu Zhuan 盧僎, *Guoxiu ji* is not a collection of obscure folk songs. It is a collection of mostly regulated *shi* poetry by mostly elite poets, many of them already well known at the time. It could even have been used as an examination aid, so indispensable an elite skill this form of poetry had become.<sup>57</sup> Though published during the An Lushan Rebellion, *Guoxiu ji*'s focus on mellifluous *jinti shi* is quite different from *Qiezhong ji*'s focus on somber, politically relevant *yuefu*. Rui's reported criteria were "pieces suited for setting to pipes and string music"—that is, elite music, like the pipes and strings of the old *xianghe* music of the Han.<sup>58</sup> The ambitious goal is to restore the "ritual music"—that is, morally edifying music and poetry, presumably in accord with Confucian ideals of balance.

The method of writing music to match the poems, popular since the sixth century<sup>59</sup>, made it possible for large numbers of literati poems to be set to music. This created a kind of confidence that almost any poem, especially if according with prosodic rules, could easily, naturally create its own music—a confidence which may have resulted in the huge growth in *jinti*

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<sup>56</sup> *Tangren xuan tangshi shizhong*, 126.

<sup>57</sup> See *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature* (1000 BCE–900CE), 309.

<sup>58</sup> On the possibility of vestiges of *xianghe* music surviving in Southern wind and string ensembles, see Thrasher 59–60 and Ren, 169.

<sup>59</sup> See Note 22.

composition: though *jinti* composition may seem technically demanding, it may have been much easier than composing poems for existing music. One needed only follow a few simple rules to feel confident, as Li He did, that one's poem was "musical," or, at least, fit Rui and Lou's stated criteria of musical potential. Writing a musical "old *shi*" or, as Li Bai 李白 (701–762) was especially famous for doing, bending but not breaking the prosodic guidelines, was likely a much greater challenge, since it required an understanding of where deviation would and would not interfere with music.<sup>60</sup> In another example of possible overconfidence, Bai Juyi assumes his "new title *yuefu*," though not according with the prosody of any living lyric tradition, will easily fit music:

Its lyrics simple and straightforward, metaphors easy to understand for those with interest; its words direct and incisive, with much to teach those who will listen; its subject matter deep and substantial, such that those who select it will want to pass it down, its topics unrestrained, it can be set to musical phrases and song melodies.

其辭質而徑，欲見之者易論也；其言直而切，欲聞之者深誠也；其事覈而實，使采之者傳信也；其體順而肆，可以播於樂章歌曲也。<sup>61</sup>

This is an attempt at what Bai calls "selecting poems to offer insight into contemporary politics" (采詩以補察時政).<sup>62</sup> Though Bai's commitment to clear, simple language is rightly famous, we might say this reflects an overconfidence in the power of poetry to create its own music, or in the skill of musicians to divine the intent of the poet based on word choice and prosody alone. Like Yuan Jie, Bai seems to take for granted that morally edifying poetry will naturally sound good, but what poet-scholars frame as a reclamation of ethical agency may have amounted to a ceding of artistic agency to musicians. Such overconfidence in the inherent musicality of almost any

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<sup>60</sup> In the line, 「吾愛孟夫子，風流天下聞。」, for example, the third character's use of an "oblique" (*ze* 仄) tone creates a "lone level" (*guping* 孤平) error in the character 夫. The character 天 in the next line, which would normally be oblique, however, "rescues" (救) it. On Li Bai's archaism, see Watson, 141–53 and Varsano, 141–203.

<sup>61</sup> Bai, vol. 1, 52.

<sup>62</sup> See "Forest of Strategems, 69" (策林六十九), Bai, vol. 4, 1370–1.

poetry, especially the *jinti shi*, may have slowed the development of the *quzi ci*, which were perceived as relatively foreign and vulgar. The countervailing trends were the changing musical realities, which better supported *quzi ci*, as well as a desire to break out of the five and seven-character mold and reclaim artistic control after centuries of sometimes mechanical production.

### Old Ideals, New Realities: Tang *Quzi ci*

The final major genre of musical poetry in the Tang is the *quzi ci*, or “minor melody lyric,” most famous for its subsequent flourishing in the Song Dynasty. *Ci* were the newest form of song lyric and the most tightly linked to the musical realities of the middle and late Tang. Unlike narrowly defined *yuefu* and *shi*, they were the musical product of the new *yanyue* system and belonged firmly in Yuan Zhen’s *ge* category (words follow music, a process called “filling in lyrics” (*tianci* 填詞)).

Though possessing some roots in the *yuefu* and *shi* traditions, *quzi ci* were also most divorced from the Confucian ideal as interpreted by Tang and Song poets’ reading of the *Book of Documents*. The ideal Confucian order, again, was “intent leads to words, words lead to music,” as opposed to “words fill in music, music shapes intent.” Southern Song scholar The Layman of Tongyang 鮑陽居士, for example, records:

After the Uprising of the Five Barbarian Tribes, the North was split: the Northern Wei gave way to Gao’s Northern Qi and Yuwen’s Northern Zhou, and in each case Northwestern foreigners took precedence over Chinese, with the result that their singing styles became a mixture of foreign and Chinese elements—rapid and violent, vulgar and lowly, lacking in rhythm—and the ancient *yuefu* were no longer transmitted. During the time of King Wu of the Zhou, the Tocharian pipa master Sudipo first introduced the

seven-note scale, and the scholars, Niu Hong and Zheng Yi, began to have it performed. The eighty-four keys found their first buds. Musicians of the Tang, Zhang Wenshou and Zu Xiaosun, researched and examined the music for sacrifice to imperial ancestors, and restored it to a great degree. But in the Kaiyuan and Tianbao reigns, the ruler and his ministers became overly enamored of music; Emperor Xuanzong became obsessed with foreign sounds, such that all under heaven became vulgar. Thereupon, talented men began to set lyrics to this music, which included long and short phrases, each following the melody and losing, thereby, the logic of: “sound depends on lengthening.”

五胡之亂，北方分裂，元魏、高齊、宇文氏之周，咸以戎狄強種雄據中夏，故其謳謠淆糅華夷，焦殺急促，鄙俚俗下，無復節奏，而古樂府之聲律不傳。周武帝時龜茲琵琶樂蘇祇婆者，始言七均，牛弘、鄭譯因而演之，八十四調始見萌芽。唐張文收、祖孝孫討論郊廟之歌，其數於是乎大備。迄於開元、天寶間，君臣相與為淫樂，而明皇尤溺於夷音，天下薰然成俗。於時才士始依樂工拍彈之聲被之以辭句，句之長短，各隨曲度，而愈失古之“聲依永”之理也。<sup>63</sup>

The Layman’s evaluation of the history of foreign musical influence is mixed: without such crosspollination, presumably the seven-note scale and the “eighty-four keys” might never have developed.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, he approves of archaist attempts to restore ancient musical ideals, such as late-Sui-early-Tang musicologists Zhang Wenshou 張文收 and Zu Xiaosun’s 祖孝孫 efforts to restore ceremonial music, or Lü Cai’s recreation of an ancient zither melody. He is unequivocal, however, in his condemnation of Emperor Xuanzong’s love of foreign music. The Layman blames this preference for causing all the music in the empire to become “vulgar” and distorting the normative relationship of music to lyrics.

The connection of *quzi ci* to the *qingshang* music of the Six Dynasties and Han was also most tenuous of the major musical genres of the Tang. Even famous Song Dynasty *ci* authors like the patriotic Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1155) expressed concern:

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<sup>63</sup> Tongyang jushi, 511.

<sup>64</sup> Chinese musicologists were aware of the idea of a heptatonic scale much earlier, but other aspects of their musical systems and/or symbolic world seem to have exerted pressure against abandoning the pentatonic ideal, as, indeed, many Southern traditions never did. See Nikolsky.

*Yuefu* and musical *shi* reached their height during the Tang. The great stir caused by singers like Li the Eighth of the Kaiyuan reign proves it. Since then, the sounds of Zheng and Wei<sup>65</sup> have grown more popular by the day, the popular distortions ever greater. There are already *Barbarian Bodhisattva*, *Spring Light Beautiful*, *Sand Chicken Melody*, *Water Clock*, *Dreaming of Jiangnan*, and *The Fisherman*. The numbers of such lyrics are beyond counting.

樂府聲詩並著，最盛於唐”，並舉開元李八郎唱歌轟動一時之例為證。自後鄭衛之聲日熾，流靡之變日煩，已有《菩薩蠻》、《春光好》、《莎雞子》、《更漏子》、《夢江南》、《漁父》等詞，不可遍舉。<sup>66</sup>

Even famous *ci* authors themselves seemingly worried about the replacement of orthodox music with the foreign, especially in the face of foreign invasion. Song poets, like Tang poets, did not see their own *ci* composition as something entirely novel, but rather as falling within the broad tradition of *yuefu*. At the same time, they saw these new *yuefu* (not to be confused with Bai Juyi et al.’s ultimately unsuccessful archaist revival attempts) as somehow problematic—as not fulfilling the Confucian ideal. Southern Song philosopher Xue Jixuan’s 薛季宣 (1134-1173), for example, composed a regulated quatrain titled *Reading Recent Yuefu*: “Tianbao was the era when Tocharian music was treasured, / Its lascivious sounds indulged in to this day. / Searching for the sounds of *Qin and Wei* and *Sangzhong*, / No matter their number, can’t match the *Hymns* of Zhou.”<sup>67</sup>

Such concerns redoubled during periods of political defeat, such as that of the Northern Song by the foreign Jin. For these reasons, attempts to recapture the ideal continued. To take an extreme example, Southern Song Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) even attempted reconstructions of (or recorded reconstructions of) melodies for singing the *Shijing* itself.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Sounds of Zheng and Wei” references a part of the *Airs of State* with a reputation for lasciviousness. Often used as a metaphor for degenerate, inauspicious music.

<sup>66</sup> Li, 78.

<sup>67</sup> 「天寶龜茲貴尚年，哇淫靡靡到今傳。尋思溱洧桑中調，幾許不如周頌篇。」Xue, 108.

<sup>68</sup> See Chao Pian.

Theory demanded a marriage of music, poetry, and morality, but when the music was long lost or taking an unorthodox precedence over meaning, or when music was not serving its function of strengthening national virtue, scholars tried continuously to restore what they saw as the natural balance.

#### Conclusions:

In 1958, Mao Zedong launched a campaign to collect folk songs of the common people. The watchword was “collecting airs” (采風)—an explicit reference to the ancient tradition.<sup>69</sup> As 20<sup>th</sup>-century political figures looked to the common people for a pure melding of expression and nascent political consciousness, medieval poets looked to the ancients for a primordial unity between sound, sense, and virtue.

As befits a “medieval” period, the Tang is a time of major developments and transitions in each of these, manifesting and mediating between ancient and early modern qualities. On the one hand, Tang poets cleaved to the traditional view of music, poetry, and moral education as one. At the same time, specialization of knowledge, creativity, and cosmopolitan exchange continued apace. At the same time as court musicians and scholars reconstructed ancient melodies, other poets, musicians, and performers were inventing new songs to new melodies with new musical qualities.

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<sup>69</sup> See Lydia Liu, 205.

The different major genres of Tang Dynasty musical poetry each have their own relationship to music, and to each other. The most important were “old title” *yuefu* (including the older works of the Han and Wei and the “new sound” works of the Northern and Southern dynasties), “new title” *yuefu*, musical *shi* (consisting largely, but not exclusively of *jinti shi*), and *quzi ci*.

The old title *yuefu* were based on the *xianghe* and *qingshang* music of the Han and Six Dynasties. Early Tang scholars, poets, and musicians used the latter style to attempt reconstruction of even older traditions, such as the zither melodies of the Warring States Period. Though the *qingshang* music, and with it, any music tracing its origins directly to the Han and Six Dynasties, was lost by the mid-Tang, poets like Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen nonetheless experimented with creating “new titles” they hoped might be set to music, with the aim of restoring musical poetry to its position of ethical and political relevance.

Though not a pure outgrowth of *yuefu*, nor the only source of *ci*, musical *shi* poetry, the most popular form of a medieval period, was itself an intermediate genre with respect to *yuefu* and *ci*. Though inheriting the name of *shi*, and certain features, like the five-character line from Han and even older poems (especially the “Nineteen Old Poems”), the structure of the *jinti shi* genre itself was largely a product of the Six Dynasties: Southern Dynasty “new sound” *yuefu* by poets like Bao Zhao played a major role in creating the quatrain and its characteristic features (such as an abcb rhyme pattern and the “twist” in the penultimate line<sup>70</sup>) and Six Dynasties poets like Xie Tiao and Shen Yue gradually devised the rules for tonal alternation, possibly in response

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<sup>70</sup> See Lin, 302–11 on puns and development of the later ubiquitous “open, receive, turn, close” (*qi-cheng-zhuan-he* 起承轉合) aesthetic in the Wu vocal pieces.

to importation of Sanskrit verse and a growing awareness of the newly tonal nature of their own spoken languages.

*Jinti shi* developed prior to the large-scale importation of foreign music constituting *yanyue*, yet was more often set to *yanyue* or *yanyue*-influenced music throughout the Tang, especially after the An Lushan Rebellion. This may have been a good fit because of the match between even line lengths and cyclical, symmetric musical structure. Moreover, a clearly defined set of rules for composition of musical poetry may have inspired confidence in poets without detailed musical knowledge and allowed for a rhetorical restoration of an ancient ideal—namely, that music should follow poetry and not the other way around. This tension would continue through the early modern period: even literati efforts to turn *Kunqu* into a national level art beginning in the sixteenth century arguably followed this pattern, shifting from an emphasis on fitting lyrics to music to an emphasis on using the best possible pronunciation and melodic ornament to highlight lyrics.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, *jinti shi* were not the pure product of the new *yanyue* musical system and lacked the flexibility of either Southern dynasty *yuefu*'s “harmonies” (*hesheng*) and “codas” (*songsheng*) or *quzi ci*'s wide range of possible patterns. Their strict rules also made them good material for the examination system, which further spurred the production of a large quantity of uninspired works. In the wake of the An Lushan Rebellion, their popularity with singing girls and setting to foreign music inspired poets to look elsewhere for a return to the old ideal—in the case of Yuan Jie and Yuan Zhen, to the older *yuefu* tradition. Such writers further aimed to

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, handbooks like Shen Chongsui's 沈寵綏 (d. 1645) *Essential Knowledge for Melody Setting* (*Duqu xuzhi* 度曲須知).



expand the concept of “yuefu” to include all kinds of poetry written in the spirit of the *Shijing*—that is, musical yet morally edifying poetry drawn from the spirit of the common people.

*Ci* poetry offered greater prosodic and musical variety, as well as the opportunity to compose lyrics for a vibrant musical tradition. Tang and even Song poets, however, worried about the foreign pedigree and vulgar reputation of the *ci*, as well as its divergence from the imagined ancient ideal of poetry preceding music. Moreover, writing *ci* in the Tang was likely not as formulaic as it later became, nor certainly so formulaic as *jinti* authorship had already become. For a Confucian with strong moral qualms and a weak grasp of music, *ci* may not have seemed an appealing option. Rather than immediately embracing *ci* as the *qingshang* music faded, then, some tried instead to revive older genres, like the *yuefu*, while others continued to write *shi*, as they never ceased to do, even as setting them to music became less common and more arbitrary during succeeding eras.

Many scholars have noted the historical tendency for Chinese verse genres to proceed from the level of popular music, to elite music/poetic exercise, to pure literary exercise.<sup>72</sup> Though we may discern these broad outlines in the waxing and waning of *yuefu*, *jint shi*, and *ci* described, the present study aims to nuance this picture by noting the complexity of poetry’s relationship to both music and ideology. Poets did not give up the ideal unity of poetry and music easily. They set poems to new musical styles not intended for them. They reconstructed and attempted to revive lost pieces and genres. They devised prosodic rules whereby poetry was imagined to naturally create its own music, as a certain interpretation of ancient classics implies

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<sup>72</sup> Lu Xun, for example, famously described the common view: “*ge*, *shi*, *ci*, *qu*—I believe that they are all originally products of the people. The literati took them for themselves and made them harder and harder to understand, until nothing but a fossil remained. Each time they did this, they would go looking for another, and again set to gradually strangling it.” 「歌、詩、詞、曲，我以為原是民間物，文人取為己有，越做越難懂，弄得變成僵石，他們就再去取一樣，又來慢慢的絞死它。」 “To Yao Ke” (致姚克), Lu Xun, vol. 13, 28.

it should. They even devised new methods of singing specifically to show off poetry. The waxing and waning of poetic genres, then, is not a simple matter of one historic genre replacing the other in endless succession; rather, it is a complex negotiation between the needs of the new and the longing for the old.

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